

# LITTLE RIVER MUSEUM

*Little River Improvement Club*

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***The Little River Museum: a 501-c-3  
Summer weekends and appointments 707-937-2009***

***Fall 2022***



Dear Neighbors (Near and Far):

This year's newsletter is devoted to our unique building, constructed to the **Golden Mean** in 1885. Using lumber donated by the Little River Mill, volunteers built a meeting hall for the **Independent Order of Good Templars**, a fraternal organization founded in 1840 dedicated to temperance.

The Golden Mean is a popular concept dating to Aristotle's time, and refers to the principle which holds that virtue lies between the extremes of good and evil.

Jump to 2010, when a man with a briefcase handcuffed to his wrist appeared at the museum. Inside the locked briefcase was a standard ledger book with the original minutes for the first years (1885-1887) of Good Templar meetings. He wanted \$20,000 and wouldn't say how he happened to have it, but it was real.



***What is this thing?***

***It's the peep hole on the door to the Grand Hall. It slid aside and if the correct password was provided, the member was allowed to attend entry.***

Finally realizing we barely had enough money to pay the electricity bill, he agreed to allow John Birchard, noted Mendocino photographer, to photograph the ledger page by page, and John generously volunteered to do the work.

What secrets did the ledger hold?

It seems in those early years, the Good Templars were a social organization which met every other week to bring the community together for an evening out. Names like Pullen (master carpenter), Callie Coombs, John Rice, Van Damme, Annie Coombs, Sampson, Marsan (blacksmith), Stevens, and other families whose names and houses are still present in Little River and Fort Bragg today appear throughout. Ole Hervila (Little River Inn) and Thomas Petersen (ship-builder) built the benches used for seating.

They came to order, read the minutes, approved new members, paid bills (\$5 to have the organ tuned, \$15 to the janitor), tabled repairs to the fence, had refreshments, and were entertained:

*Song by Sr. Christie Thomsen, declamation by Sr. Annie Dilling, reading by Bro. Miller, song by Sr. Christie Thomsen, song by Brother Semple entitled "White Wings".*

You can listen to Brother Semples song at:  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vDjeQwjygg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vDjeQwjygg)

The Good Templars met until 1920 when Prohibition was declared. Their goal accomplished and automobiles having been invented, the local chapter disbanded and joined the Masons in Mendocino. They left the building to the Little River Improvement Club which had been meeting there. The Improvement Club purchased the building from the county in the 1930's for \$1.



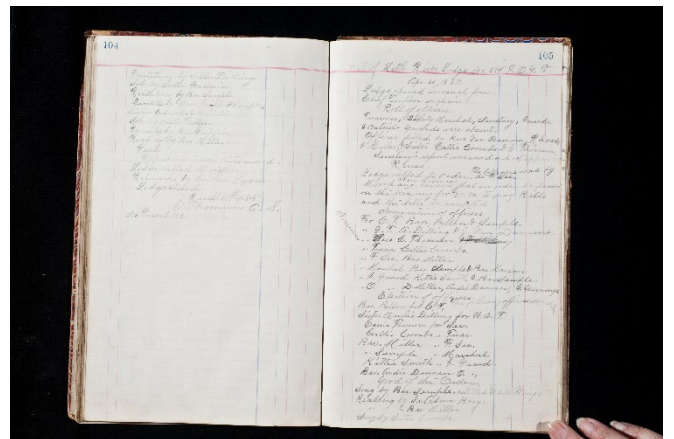
*Francis Jackson put the domed ceiling in our Hall in the 1940's. The interior isn't what the exterior implies.*

Improvement Club is the 1880's term for community center, and the building went on to house the first telephone switchboard, the library, in WWI and WWII it was the nightly center for the homeland security volunteers who patrolled the headlands and beaches watching for enemy planes or submarines—several sightings are reported in local lore, including a rowboat that came ashore on Van Damme Beach and was sent back to it's submarine.

The Improvement Club met monthly and held fundraisers and donated to charitable organizations and local families in need, they played Bingo and drank tea. The building housed Warren Zimmer's Gallery. Their last president was Elma Bryant who served until she was 105 years old.

The community, with a major boost from the Little River Inn, was able to lift the building as one whole piece and place a cement foundation under it in 2010. Elma and Ronnie James, oversaw

the building's transition to a museum which serves the community as a meeting place exhibiting everything from our Native American Pomo roots to a genealogy research center and our library of books written by local historians. We are especially proud of the detailed map and census of the Little River Pioneer Cemetery which includes the locations of our founding pioneers and civil war as well as more recent veterans.



**A special thank you to Sarah Boone.** Transcribing the Good Templar minutes required learning an old manner of cursive, a magnifying glass, and a huge amount of patience and tenacity. Digital copies are available in gift shop.

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**A very big thank you to Susan Warner** for expanding our web page and managing the history information segments on our Facebook page.

We made it through the pandemic and continue to add to our library, genealogy files, and exhibits. We consider you, the community, our membership. We hope you'll use the enclosed envelope to help us continue our work.

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Little River Improvement Club & Museum

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