

# Guide to the Forest City Lodge Collection

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### COLLECTION DESCRIPTION

Founded in 1912, the Forest City Lodge is Ithaca’s oldest Black community organization and business. It was chartered under the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World, (IBPOEW) a national organization that was founded in 1898 by Benjamin Franklin Howard. A Pullman Porter from Kentucky, Howard tried to join the all-white Elks and was denied membership due to his race, so he founded the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of the Elks of the World. Their history states: “Fraternal organizations proved popular among African Americans for the same reasons they proved popular among other Americans: providing financial, spiritual, and emotional aid, they were invaluable to the communities they served. African American fraternities, however, had the added purpose of improving self-esteem. First instituted during slavery, the membership, rituals, uniforms, and offices of these societies generated a respect not available outside the lodges. Fully committed to economic, personal, and academic advancement, fraternal organizations have played a vital role in every phase of the African American experience.” According to the Ithaca Journal, “today the IBPOEW is the largest Black fraternal organization in the world, with over half a million members and 1,500 chartered lodges.”

Forest City Lodge 180, also known as The Lodge, located at the corner of Green and Corn Streets, has been a mainstay of Ithaca’s Black community for generations; a meeting place, a restaurant and bar, and an inclusive venue for gatherings of all kinds. In 1913 a women’s auxiliary group, Cayuga Temple 54 was founded. The COVID pandemic created financial difficulties for the organization in 2020, but the community rallied around and provided critical funding to help the iconic Lodge survive.

This collection contains the Constitution and By-laws of Ithaca’s Forest City Lodge No. 180, as well as a brief history of the IBPOEW. It also contains a 2020 survey of the organization from the Ithaca Journal.

### CONTAINER LIST

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