

Order Of Eastern Star National Temple

The block-long beaux arts facade of the historic Perry Belmont Mansion could easily be mistaken for a European palace or a Gilded Age library. And given its location in the embassy- dense Dupont Circle neighborhood in Washington, D.C., most people assume it houses some wealthy diplomatic office, perhaps hailing from Switzerland, or the court of King Louis XIV. The truth about its past is far more unexpected.



The house was built as a second residence by wealthy congressman Perry Belmont in 1909 for a cool \$500,000 (more than \$12 million in 2016 dollars). Contemporary reporters noted the 55,000-square-foot structure made the White House look tiny. But Belmont lost much of his wealth in the stock market crash of 1929 and was forced to sell his palatial D.C. abode at a ruinous loss and retire from the gilded social scene.

A group of Freemasons called the Order of the Eastern Star swooped in and purchased the monumental house during the Great Depression for a bargain of \$100,000. The OES rechristened it an “International Temple” and elevated tours to an official rite of passage for senior members.

The OES once counted 500,000 worldwide members, but fraternal orders diminished in popularity decades ago. Now, the elderly group has fewer than 15,000 members. But through the years, the Eastern Star has held onto the property deed for their extravagant temple. Three of their senior-most leaders live there rent free to this day.

The “Most Worthy Grand Matron,” the Patron, and their Secretary are sitting on one of the underreported real estate coups in the city, a fully paid off property that dwarfs Jeff Bezos’ nearby \$23 million museum-turned-private residence. The OES know fully well what a gold mine they have, and don’t expect the group to give up the flame anytime soon.

Know Before You Go

Officially the International Temple is only open to members of the OES and other affiliated Masonic groups. However, if you call in advance and ask nicely, chances are high that they will also accommodate curious members of the public. The tour number is 202-667-4737.