

John T. Wilkes **1848 - May 30, 1894**

John T. Wilkes was born in Florida in 1848, just a few short years after Florida was given statehood. In his youth, John lived in south Texas and eventually moved to Fort Worth in 1875.¹

John served with the volunteer Fort Worth Fire Department with his brother, Richard "Dick" Wilkes. Both John and his brother served as Chief of the department.² John was elected to the rank of Chief in 1886 and served two terms. He was an active fireman for nearly 20 years in Fort Worth. In addition to his fireman career, John was also a business owner. He ran a livery, a stable for horses and carriages, named *Wilkes & Gauze*.³ He ran the business with his lifelong friend, George L. Gauze.⁴

John was a charter member of the Knights of Pythias - Queen City Lodge in Downtown Fort Worth. This lodge, located at the corner of Main and 3rd St., was built in 1881. The building featured a distinctive Knight in a suit of armor on the outside of the building. A replacement lodge was built on the same location in 1901 with the Knight feature remaining. The building stands today at 315 Main St. and the Knight can be seen at the top of the building, still standing guard.⁵

On May 30, 1894, John unexpectedly died after complications with a stroke. John was given a hero's sendoff as he was buried in his official Knights of Pythian uniform. His funeral featured a horse drawn procession to the cemetery with a band playing along the way even though the weather that day was described as "bad." People lined up on the sidewalks along the procession route, paying their respects to a well beloved man.⁶ John is buried in an unmarked grave next to his brother Richard. John never married and has no known children.

¹ "John T. Wilkes Dead." Fort Worth Gazette. (Fort Worth, Tex.), Vol. 18, No. 189, Ed. 1, Thursday, May 31, 1894 - Page_6 of 8. Retrieved 13 Aug 2023 ; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht109849/>

² "Burial of Richard Wilkes." Fort Worth Daily Gazette. (Fort Worth, Tex.), Vol. 12, No. 262, Ed. 1, Tuesday, April 19, 1887 Page: 8 of 8. <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht85411>.

³ "John T. Wilkes Dead." 1894.

⁴ "Funeral of John Wilkes." Fort Worth Gazette. (Fort Worth, Tex.), Vol. 18, No. 190, Ed. 1, Friday, June 1, 1894 Page: 6 of 8. Retrieved 13 Aug 2023 ; <https://texashistory.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metapht109850/m1/6/>.

⁵ "Opening Knight: Pythian Cornerstone Is Laid." Hometown By Handlebar, 5 Dec 2018. Retrieved 13 Aug 2023 ; <https://hometownbyhandlebar.com/?p=4145>.

⁶ "Funeral of John Wilkes." 1894.