

Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume I

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Masonic Organization

One of the biggest misconceptions about Freemasonry is the notion that there is a single "world controlling body" that sets the rules for the organization. With the exception of the United States, Freemasonry is organized on a country level with a single recognized Grand Lodge that has sovereignty to set the rules and charter new lodges under its jurisdiction. The chief presiding officer of a Grand Lodge is the "Grand Master" who serves either a fixed or predefined term, usually a year, depending on the individual rules of each Grand Lodge.

The United States is unique in that there is no National Grand Lodge. In America, Freemasonry is organized at the state level with each state overseen by its own Grand Lodge. There have been numerous attempts in the past to create a unified United States Grand Lodge, however, these efforts have never succeeded.

The Grand Lodge of Missouri is located in Columbia, Missouri, and consists of a progressive line of eight Grand Officers and eighteen non-line officers. Each grand line officer serves an annual term—beginning with Junior Grand Steward—before progressing upward to the next spot in line, culminating to a one-year term as Grand Master. Harry S. Truman was a Grand Master of Missouri, (see article: The Truman line) serving from 1940 to 1941.

The Grand Lodge meets once yearly at a Grand Communication, where bylaws are voted on, awards are presented, officers are elected, and other affairs are presided over. Each of Missouri's approximate 336 lodges appoints three delegates to the convention for representing and voting.

Below the level of the Grand Lodge, Missouri is broken into forty-six districts grouped into seven regions. Each one of the forty-six districts is overseen by a "Deputy District Grand Master" who is appointed by the Grand Master of Missouri. Butler Lodge No. 254 is part of the 32nd District along with Crescent Hill (Adrian) No. 368, Amsterdam No. 141, and Appleton City No. 412, and is located in Region C.

Each individual Lodge is overseen by a Worshipful Master, who is elected by the Lodge members and serves a one-year term. The five elected officers of each Lodge are: Worshipful Master, Senior Warden, Junior Warden, Treasurer, and Secretary. All non-elected officers are appointed by the Worshipful Master.

The Truman Line

Harry S. Truman was arguably the most open and active of all the Masonic presidents. He is the only one of the fourteen Freemasons who were Presidents to have served as Grand Master, and there are probably more pictures of Truman in Masonic regalia than any other President.

Truman became a Freemason in 1909 and petitioned the Scottish Rite in 1911, receiving his 32nd degree in 1917. His original Scottish Rite petition can be found on display at the Scottish Rite Temple at 1330 Linwood Blvd, Kansas City.

The Advancing Line

Many Masonic lodges, including the Missouri Grand Lodge, use a system referred to as a "progressive" or "advancing" line. In this system, all officers progress upward each year and gain new responsibilities until they reached the level of Worshipful Master (at the local Lodge level), or Grand Master at the state or Grand Lodge level, serving a one-year term in each chair. In the Missouri Grand Lodge progressive line, the incoming Grand Master appoints the lowest member of the eight-man line, the "Grand Junior Steward." This lowest ranking member moves up through the line for seven years until he is elected Grand Master, where he appoints the newest member at the bottom of the line. **Note:** Although the grandmaster appoints the Grand Junior Steward, the Grand Master himself, along with the Deputy Grand Master, Senior Grand Warden, and Junior Grand Warden must be confirmed by a vote at the yearly state convention.

The Truman Line

The Truman line is a tradition that has been carried on since Truman served as Grand Master of Missouri in 1940. Harry S. Truman served as Grand Master of Missouri from 1940 to 1941. He appointed James M. Bradford to the position of "Junior Grand Steward." This was the birth of the Truman line. Following Truman's lead, James M. Bradford became Grand Master in 1949 and appointed Harold O. Grauel to the bottom of the chain to continue the Truman Line.

The following eight men have made up the Truman line: Harry S. Truman, James M. Bradford, Harold O. Grauel, Elvis A. Mooney, Fielding A. Poe, Vern H. Schneider, D. Robert Downey, Wilfred G. Soutiea, Bruce R. Austin, and this year's Grand Master, David W. Haywood who was the 2014-2015 Grand Master.

The Missouri Masonic Round-Robin

The Missouri Masonic Round-Robin is a ritual memorization competition held once a year at the conclusion of the annual Ritual Committee meeting at the Missouri Grand Lodge in Columbia, Missouri. Since its birth in 1987 until 2013, the format of the competition was the Missouri Masonic proficiency.

In Missouri prior to 1994, Freemasons advancing from the first to second degree or from the second to third were required to "give back" a proficiency, in the form of a question/answer session followed by the recital of the Masonic "obligation" (not to be confused with an oath). Candidates would have to be examined in front of the full Lodge and then be deemed "proficient" in order to receive the next degree. The examinations lasted about fifteen minutes.

The Round Robin uses the question-and-answer system of the proficiency in the competition. Competitors form into a circle, each answering a question and then asking the next. In the early rounds, a competitor is given three chances to give the correct response before he is eliminated from the contest.

At the competition level, the wording of the proficiency must be exact; it takes several judges to oversee the competition. Even the difference between the words a/an or the exclusion of an 's' or an 'ing' from a word can cause a candidate to be tapped out. Since Masonic law forbids the

proficiencies to be written out in plain English, the judges themselves must be very proficient—disagreements will occasionally occur.

Missouri is divided into seven regions, each one overseen by a regional "grand lecturer," who holds one round-robin in his region per year. The winner of each of the seven regionals is then invited to Columbia to compete in the finale, which is overseen by the State Grand Lecturer and judged by the regional lecturers. Due to scheduling conflicts, there are often times more judges than competitors.

The final competition is known to be extremely grueling and has lasted more than three hours. The winner will have his name engraved upon the round-robin trophy and his Lodge is allowed to display it for a year. Winners were no longer permitted to compete in future round-robins until a format change in 2014.

In 2013, the last year using the proficiency format, there were actually two winners when a judging dispute ended the competition early: Christopher D. Lee of Monett Lodge No. 129, and Michael Christopher Lee of Butler No. 254, were declared co-winners, each having their names engraved on the trophy, although it remained in Columbia for the year.

In 2014, Bernard Meister, Past Master of Butler No. 254, was the runner-up in the Region "C" Round-Robin, under the new format.