

Butler Lodge Short Takes Volume VII

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Butler Lodge No. 254

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*A compilation of Masonic articles courtesy of Butler Lodge No. 254 in Butler, Missouri.
Publication dates are approximate.*

Butler Masonic Lodge Celebrates 150 Years

On July 25 at 7:30 PM, Butler Masonic Lodge No. 254 kicked off its 150th anniversary year by hosting a public, non-alcoholic ceremonial toast at the site of their original Lodge hall, located on the second floor of the Hannah & Mintures store which previously stood in Butler square at the corner of Ohio and Main Street. This toast was the first of several events leading up to the anniversary of the Lodge's official chartering on October 15th, 1868.

Butler No. 254 was actually Butler's second Masonic Lodge – the original, Bates Lodge No. 88, was destroyed, along with all of its records, in 1863 when the infamous General Order No. 11 evacuated the territory and burned the city. Four years later, Dr. John H. Frizell and carpenter John Steel petitioned The Grand Masonic Lodge of Missouri to open a new Lodge in Butler. The petition was granted on July 1st, 1867, and on July 25th Butler Lodge (Under Dispensation) was instituted by Past Master Samuel Wade, acting on behalf of the Grand Lodge of Missouri. The Lodge was granted its official charter, along with its designation "254," on October 15th, 1868.

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Butler Lodge No. 254 has had many homes over the years, often sharing space with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows. In 1967, the Lodge jointly purchased a property with the Independent Order of Oddfellows (I.O.O.F.) on West Dakota Street and held their meetings there until the Lodge was destroyed by fire in 1992. Luckily, most of its records, furniture, and charter were saved. In 1994, the Grand Lodge of Missouri dedicated a new Lodge hall on N. Orange Street, where the Lodge still holds its regular meetings to this day.

Going Dark

Butler Masonic Lodge No. 254 "goes dark" between June and September each year. Despite the misleading phrase of the name, this is not a secret ritual or a dissent into the Dark Side of the Force as in the Star Wars movies. Going dark during the summer months is a Masonic tradition that dates back to the beginning of the fraternity in 1717. Despite the implications, going dark serves a simple and practical purpose.

Just as pre-industrialized Masonic meetings were often held on full moons (so members would have light by which to see their way home), "going dark" was observed during the height of the summer because Lodge rooms were simply too hot to conduct meetings. Another reason for "going dark" is that during the summer months farmers constantly needed to be in their fields, and would find it difficult to travel miles to regularly scheduled Lodge meetings. Despite the invention of air conditioning, "going dark" in the summer remains tradition in most parts of the United States and Europe. In Missouri, the practice is not entirely obeyed; Grand Lodge bylaws stipulate Lodges that do not meet at least twice a month (such as Amsterdam Lodge 141) will not "go dark". Butler Lodge No. 254 normally goes dark after its second meeting in June and is celebrated with an open family dinner and the rewarding of its yearly scholarship. It is also the last stated meeting before elections of new officers in September.

Poinsettia Night

Part of the duty of a Freemason is to look after the widows and orphans of deceased brethren. In honor and recognition of Masonic widows, Butler Lodge No. 254 sets aside the second Thursday of December as "Widows Remembrance Night" or "Poinsettia Night." On this day, members of Butler Lodge deliver poinsettias to the widows of their deceased brethren, and inquire about their general welfare.

Poinsettia Night has become a very special tradition through the years. Ronald L. Nissen, former Master of Butler Lodge No. 254 explains: "We started [what would be known as] the poinsettia project in 1983. I proposed to the group that we should do something for the widows. At that time it was fruit baskets. We met at Robert Miller's floral shop and put them together, then distributed them. After a few years, we realized that the ladies in the rest homes were not getting that much use out of the fruit, as they seemed to spoil really fast in a rest home environment, so we switched to flowers."

Past Master of Butler Lodge No. 254 Cary Bolton remembers the switch from fruit baskets to flowers:

I remember the night when we were discussing the yearly "Widows' Remembrance night", and we decided, and voted to switch to delivering a poinsettia plant instead of the fruit baskets that had been delivered in previous years. I joined this Lodge in 2002, and they had been delivering fruit baskets well before that. I helped deliver fruit baskets for a year or two before we switched to the flowers. I remember the first year we delivered them. We had a lot of compliments, and many said that they would rather be remembered with a poinsettia at Christmas rather than a basket of fruit. It gave them something to brighten up their home for Christmas.

Although only small things, the flowers have brightened the lives of many Masonic widows, and given a measure of warmth to the delivering brethren. "We always get a great feeling when we deliver flowers to the widows," says one Brother. "They sometimes don't remember that we are bringing anything. It brings a tear to the eye when I think about these fine ladies, and the men we honor by doing this little act."

"Freemasonry isn't just a fraternity," says another, "Freemasonry is family; and family doesn't stop when one of us passes on. Family is for life, and the Masonic widows are an important part of that life."