



By Tom Riley

Butler has a rich history of fraternal organizations. *the Sons and Daughters of Liberty, the Independent Order of Foresters, the Royal Arch Masons, the Patriotic Order Sons of America and their auxiliary, the Patriotic Order of Americans, the Masonic Lodge and their auxiliary, the Order of the Eastern Star, the Knights of Columbus and their auxiliary, the Columbiettes, the Independent Order of the Odd Fellows and their auxiliary, the Rebekah Lodge, the Improved Order of Redmen and their auxiliary, the Pocahontas Lodge, the Ancient Order of United Workmen, and the Catholic Benevolent League*, all had active chapters in Butler at the turn of the 20th Century. Only the Masons, Eastern Star, Knights of Columbus, and Columbiettes still meet in 2022.

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows was the largest of these organizations. At a dinner to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Butler's Emmanuel Lodge No. 200 I.O.O.F in 1934, 750 people attended; three sittings were necessary to feed all the guests.

The story of the Butler I.O.O.F begins when George Meier, John Pinkerton, Edward Smithyman, Raymond Ridsen, Henry Mead, and Frank Treweeke petitioned the national organization for a charter. On March 5, 1884, the petition was approved and the above group with twenty-six others, became charter members of Emmanuel Lodge No. 200. The Eden Rebekah Lodge was chartered on October 28, 1888.

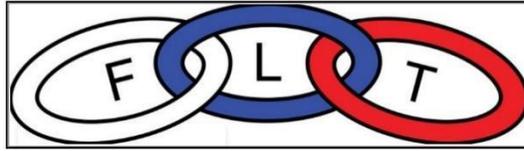
Odd Fellow lodges were first documented in 1730 in England from which many organizations emerged. By 1810, several lodges united, creating the "Manchester Unity" under the Odd Fellows name. In 1814, they elected Grand Lodge officers, standardized their organization, and persuaded other lodges to join.

For a time, fraternal societies like the Odd Fellows were suppressed in England and membership became a criminal offense. Organizations were driven underground and forced to use special handshakes, signals, codes, and passwords. The Crown feared such groups were breeding grounds for insurrection.

Several unofficial Odd Fellow lodges existed in New York City in the period 1806 to 1818. The official American Independent Order of Odd Fellows Lodge, however, was founded in Baltimore, Maryland on April 26, 1819 by Thomas Wildey, John Welch, and three associates.

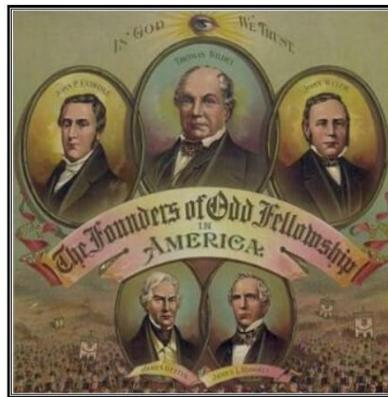
Thomas Wildey was born in London in 1782 and joined the Odd Fellows in 1804. He emigrated to the United States in 1817 and started soliciting others who had been members of the lodge in England. By his death in 1861, there were more than 200,000 I.O.O.F. members in 42 states.

When the lodge was founded, it was decided that the three most important principles by which to live should be Friendship, Love, and Truth, as represented by the three links in the emblem of the Order.



Odd Fellows believe:

- 1.) They can make the world a better place by aiding each other, the community, the less fortunate, the youth, the elderly, and the environment in every way possible
- 2.) Members should promote good will and harmony among people and nations through the principle of universal fraternity.
- 3.) That all men and women regardless of race, religion, gender, nationality, or social status should be treated like brothers and sisters.
- 4.) They can elevate the character of mankind by promoting the principles of friendship, love, truth, faith, hope, charity and universal justice.

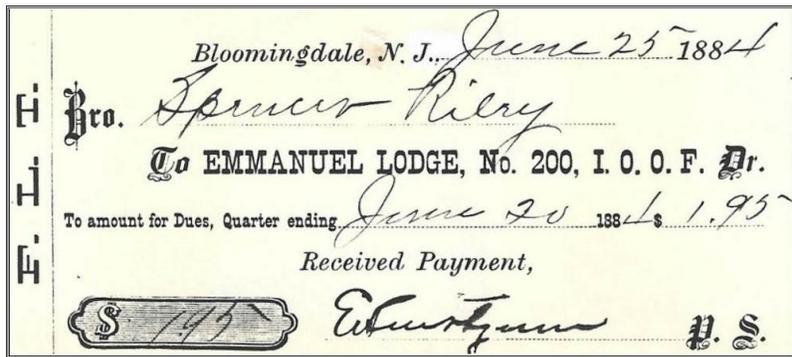


At its height, the membership of Emmanuel Lodge No. 200 I.O.O.F. approached 300. By 1950, it was reduced to about 90. The group had changed from a brotherhood of young men to a brotherhood of old men. Long-standing members passed on and others moved away to warmer climates or to be closer to relatives. In 1993, the 109-year history of the Butler Odd Fellows came to an end. The Butler Eden Rebekah Lodge No. 5 was still meeting in 2001.

The I.O.O.F. continues in the 21st century; it is one of the largest international fraternal orders in the world. The principles of the Odd Fellows remain strong, currently attracting about 600,000 members in over 10,000 lodges, in 26 countries.

The origin of the name Odd Fellows is obscure, it may be that in the 1700's it was odd for a person to care so much about his fellow man.

Three Generations of Odd Fellows



Spencer Riley may have been a charter member. (My great-grandfather)



John Ernest Riley, son of Spencer Riley (My grandfather)



Emily Riley, daughter-in-law of John Ernest Riley (My mother)

Sources: *Paterson Morning Call* March 23, 1934, *Herald News* Oct. 13, 1955, *Riley Family Documents*, *Butler in Story and Pictures*, 2001, *Odd Fellows History*, I.O.O.F. Publication

