



SINCE 1841

WOODLAND

HISTORIC CEMETERY & ARBORETUM



Not-so-Secret Societies

Between the 1870s and 1920s came the ‘golden age of fraternalism’, when it was estimated that approximately 40-50% of adult male Americans belonged to at least one fraternal organization. These groups often featured initiation rituals and other elements derived from religious orders or secret societies, and their emblems are often included on members’ grave markers. In a time before life insurance, these groups functioned as social or networking clubs and often offered death benefits to their members.

Tracing their history back to medieval guilds of stonemasons, the **Masons** are among the oldest existing secular fraternal organizations.

The most recognizable symbol of Freemasonry is a square and hinged set of compasses. These architect's tools are used by the Masons to teach symbolic lessons. The builder's square, holding a perfect right angle, reminds the Mason to be “square” (honest & fair) in his dealings with others. The hinged compasses, used for drawing circles and arcs, are symbolically employed to draw a boundary between moderation and overindulgence.

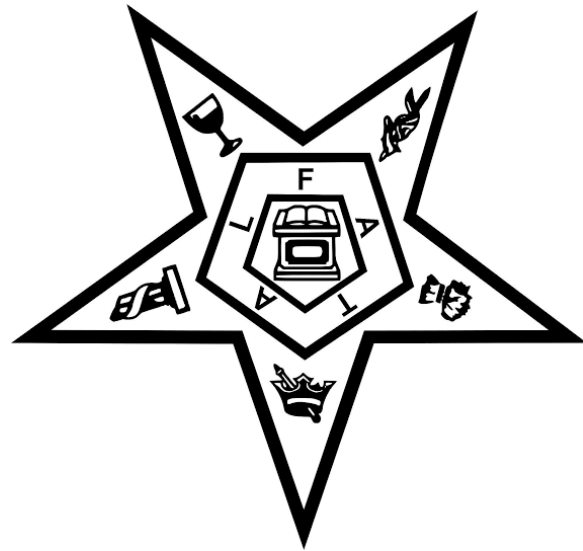


Often this symbol includes the letter “G” in its center, which can have several meanings. Sometimes “G” stands for “God”, sometimes for “geometry”—the ‘noblest of sciences’. Sometimes it stands for the “Great Architect of the Universe”—a non-denominational reference to God.

Some people are a bit alarmed when they see a pentagram with the word ‘FATAL’ inscribed within it.

Far from being a spooky or satanic symbol, this emblem identifies the woman memorialized as a member of the **Order of the Eastern Star**—the women’s auxiliary of the Masons. ‘FATAL’ is an acronym—it stands for “Fairest Among Ten-thousand, Altogether Lovely.”

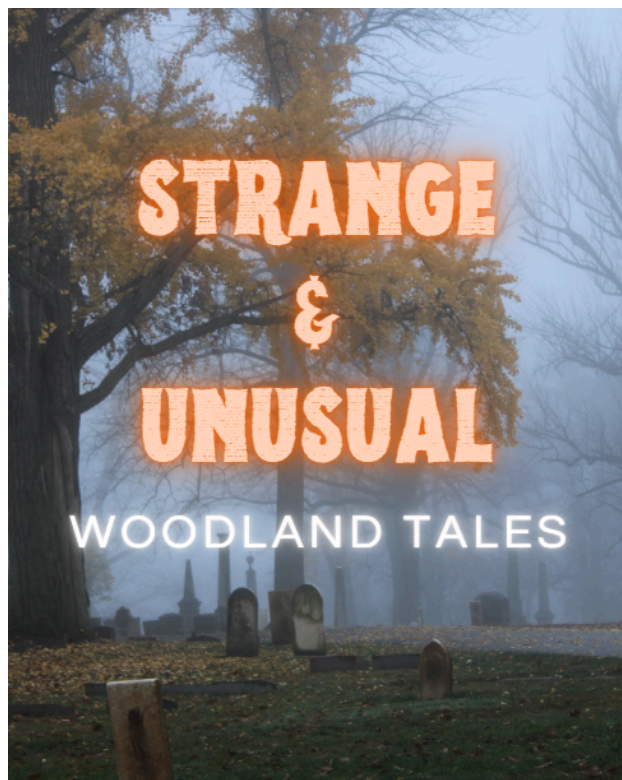
The figures inside each ray of the star are symbolic as well—they represent Adah, Ruth, Esther, Martha and Electa, five heroines of the Bible.



The American-based **Independent Order of Odd Fellows** was established in 1819, tracing its roots to the Order of Odd Fellows, which was founded in England during the 1700s. Their mission is to "visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead and educate the orphan".

Of the many symbols adopted by the Odd Fellows, the “Triple Links” is among the most commonly used on grave markers. These links sometimes encircle the letters “F”, “L”, and “T”, which stand for Friendship, Love, and Truth.

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Office Hours

Monday - Friday: 8a - 5p
Closed Saturday & Sunday

(Non-urgent) general questions:

Contact Us

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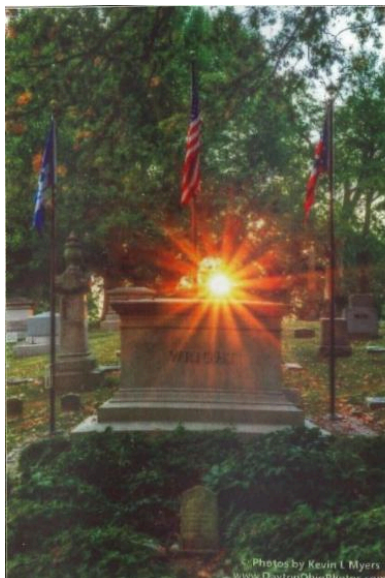
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Woodland Arboretum Foundation



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