

KEYSTONE'S BEGINNING

The tale of Keystone Lodge #15's beginning is a story of which heroes are made. A hero as defined by Webster dictionary is any person admired for qualities or achievements and regarded as an ideal or model. A hero is also the central figure in any important event of period, honored for outstanding qualities. In the midst of tragedy tales of heroic proportion arise. The legend of Keystone is one such tale. History tells us that in 1871 Ms. O'Leary's cow knocked over a lantern sparking what would forever be known as The Great Chicago Fire. The fire quickly raged out of control, overwhelming the locals. Even as fire departments from neighboring towns came to help, it was just too much to handle. The glow from the blistering flames could be seen from miles and miles away. The news of a burning Chicago quickly reached Aurora 40 miles away. After hearing of the devastation a group of concerned men set off to offer any assistance they could.

Upon their arrival these men witnessed first hand the fire's destruction. They witnessed with their own eyes the neighborhoods that had been whipped out after being left unassisted. The group from Aurora while traveling amongst the rubble of the city came across a group of men also aiding and assisting fire victims. In this group of men were many freemasons belonging to The Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of Illinois. The two groups joined forces and continued helping where ever they were needed. The situation eventually calmed and the men would return to their homes. The men from Aurora never forgot their experience with the group of freemasons and the groups kept in contact.

After a period of time Chicago would be rebuilt and eventually the men would be initiated into the rites of freemasonry. An ad ran in Aurora's Beacon News on October 19, 1872 announcing "A lodge of colored freemasons has been organized in this city, styled Keystone Lodge." Keystone was a fitting name for this lodge. A keystone is described as a necessity, basis, principle or foundation. It is the center piece of something that holds its other parts together. The founding members of Keystone who were well known tradesmen and business owners, wasted no time in establishing themselves in the local community; organizing social functions and performing countless community services. It has been over 140 years since Keystone was formed and still today its brothers are displaying the values of which it was formed on. For 140 years there have been two institutions in Aurora that have been rooted in the African-American community and they are the Black Church and Prince Hall Freemasonry. The brothers of Keystone have been located at 1112 Kane St. for almost 60 years in a building that was paid for and erected brick by brick by its members. With their humble beginning and solid history, the brothers of Keystone Lodge #15 are looking firmly into the future.

Spreading brotherly love where ever they go. In its 141st year the members of Keystone stand firmly on their charitable programs like reading for rides, school supply giveaways, book bag giveaways, holiday turkey and ham giveaways, Jr. Craft programs, scholarships and more.

We are humbly submitting this letter asking that the City council consider making the block between Trask and Loucks Keystone Way. As stated in the brief history above our building has been in the area for some 60 years and for this as well as the longevity of

our organization we are extremely proud and would love to insure that our history lives on. Our founding members were significant in the growth of our beloved city which was truly founded second to none. These founding members were business owners, civil war veterans, and one who's obituary in the beacon news read" was the most influential negro this side of the Mississippi" is also credited for building Aurora's first water tower. With the submission of these words we hope that you would grant our request. Thanking you all in advance for your time and consideration.

The members of Keystone Lodge #15 F. & A.M.

Written By:
Bro. Antonio Terry