

The Honorable Order of Ley Engineers (HOLE)

Yes, they made that joke in the 19th century, too. At least, that's what the surviving records (of which, more later) suggest. With 'suggest' being the operative word: people back then would often be more delicate when writing things down.

HOLE was a secret society (started in 1845) that seemed destined for greatness: it was well-organized, reasonably benign, and had access to a highly useful magical gate system that allowed them to reliably transmit small (no more than 20 lb) packages between any two permanent portals. True, building new portals was a non-trivial exercise, but by 1860 the following network had been set up:

- Boston to New York City
- New York City to Philadelphia
- Philadelphia to Washington DC
- Washington DC to Cincinnati
- Cincinnati to Atlanta
- Atlanta to New Orleans
- New Orleans to St Louis
- St Louis to Chicago

...And that's when the American Civil War intervened, and disrupted the entire network, not to mention HOLE itself. The Atlanta-to-Cincinnati and New Orleans-to-St Louis portals were both deliberately shut down by Unionist sympathizers; and while the New Orleans nexus was back under control by 1862, the Atlanta one remained inoperable until 1866. Nonetheless, HOLE regrouped and opened up two more cities on the network by 1876:

- Chicago to Denver
- Denver to San Francisco

And then the Great Railway Strike of 1876 happened. Which was indeed *actually* cover for quite a few occult secret society wars. There's nothing like a good, generally diffuse amount of somewhat violent agitation to hide any number of grudge-settling.

Ironically, HOLE wasn't even a target: most of the other groups out there didn't mind having a reliable magical version of the telegraph in operation, particularly since HOLE was reasonable about rates and didn't ask questions about what was in the packages. Unfortunately, a brawl between two rival factions in the occult splinter of the Knights of the Golden Circle went subcritical, and the eventual magical backlash managed to fry not only

HOLE's entire network, but the spellcasting conceptual framework that made the network function in the first place. Worse, the damage, while not permanent, would not be healed in any member of HOLE's lifetime.

So the group disbanded, and scattered to the four winds. They raised families, and by the third or fourth generation none of their descendants had any idea that the patriarch that built up the family fortune was once a magical engineer. But HOLE attracted a certain sort of romantic: the kind that would, say, find an established law firm and instruct it to seek out any of his descendants in a hundred and forty years and deliver a particular package.

...And here it is, by courier. Basic history of HOLE, a list of its members as of 1876, a bunch of texts on how to find, repair, and reactivate portals - and a small sack full of \$10 gold eagle coins. Apparently that was included in order to get the eventual recipient to take this package seriously...

- © Moe Lane. All rights reserved.
- <http://www.moelane.com>
- <https://www.patreon.com/MoeLane?ty=h>