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*Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. Postage  
PAID  
Oxford, NC  
Permit No. 56*

JANUARY-MARCH 2004



MASONIC EDUCATION  
SERIES

# From Whence



# We Came

A Masonic Novel and Discussion  
Based on the  
Actual History of Freemasonry



# Where Did It All Start ?

This month begins a new series of programs in a story and discussion format.

Each story takes a piece of actual Masonic history and builds upon it.

Each story is designed to be read in the lodge in a slow and clear manner.

There is meaning and a message in every story. In some stories there is more than one.

Each story tells us something about our Masonic history and more importantly our reason for being here.

Masonry is more than just a social club. We have a documented history that is almost a thousand years old and that is where the first story begins.

In the early 1330s an outbreak of deadly bubonic plague occurred in China. Since China was one of the busiest of the world's trading nations, it was only a matter of time before the outbreak spread to western Asia and Europe. Soon death was everywhere. Fathers abandoned their sick sons. Lawyers refused to come and make out wills for the dying. Bodies were left in empty houses, and there was no one to give them a decent burial.

The disease struck and killed people with terrible speed. The Italian writer Boccaccio said its victims often "ate lunch with their friends and dinner with their ancestors in paradise."

By the following August, the plague had spread as far north as England. After five years 25 million people were dead—one-third of Europe's people. It is here we begin our story.

## From Whence We Came

The year was 1352.

October had arrived and the weather was getting colder.

At night he walked and kept warm,

but he spent the days hiding in the woods or the

occasional abandoned barn. Hopefully, he would arrive at his

destination before the snows begin, but he didn't know. He should have been there by now, but where was "there"? All he had been told was the name of a town.

A town called York.

John Lane was a skilled stonemason, a master.

He worked for years to earn the title "Freemason", a man free to travel and seek employment, but he had no papers to prove it.

All he had was his word. Normally, it wouldn't have mattered.

There were so many stonemasons he wouldn't have been questioned. But the plague had come. Nothing was "normal" any more.

People were dying by the thousands, including the stonemasons. Having any skill made a man more valuable.

A master stonemason would be a prize for any nobleman to claim.

Even if he had proof he was a free man, most of the lords and barons would just ignore it and refuse to let him leave. He would be like a slave providing services to the nobleman.

The noblemen owned the countryside and everything... and everyone in it.

John was told he would find friends in York. There were guilds there that would provide help and safety. There he would find work. But most importantly, in York was a priest who could read and write. He could tell John what was on the paper he had in his purse. He had been assured the words on the paper would help him.

But for now, the key was to keep from being seen and being trapped by some person who would turn him over to a nobleman for a reward.

John had heard people say the plague was over, but every night he could see the glare of the bone fires near the towns. He could hear the cries of the cartmen calling for the townspeople to bring out their dead. He had lost his entire family to the plague. He had watched his children's faces blacken, and smelled the stench of life draining from the sores on his wife's body.

He had heard people say it was God's revenge for man's sins. Yet, what kind of sin could two sweet children and an innocent wife commit to deserve such torture? It made no sense.

One morning John noticed more traffic along the road. He was bound to be nearing a city. Though he had no map or any way of knowing, he prayed there was a town ahead and it would be York.

John hid and hoped to overhear something that would let him know for sure. People came and went along the road all day long. Few said anything. None said anything useful.

Just before evening he saw three men in leather breeches such as he himself wore, carrying the tools of a stonemason. He walked out of the woods and toward them. One noticed him coming. “Greetings Brother,” the man said without hesitation.

“Greetings, Friend,” responded John, his voice almost trembling. “Would we be arriving in York?” he asked.

“We are. Where do you hail from, Brother?”

John wondered about the man calling him “Brother”. This man was not his brother. This man was a stranger along the road.

“I hail from Haversham, many days from here,” he responded.

“Indeed it is a far distance. I see from your breeches and leather pack you are a stonemason.

What is your business in York?”

John felt the man was being a bit forceful in his interrogation, but there were three of them and only one of him.

“I am in search of the stonemason’s guild and of a priest who can read and write.”

Suddenly, the men stopped. John started to speak, but the man motioned him to be quiet until some other travelers passed. When they were well along the road the man spoke.

“I ask you again, Sir, what is your business in York?” His voice was matter of fact and cold.

“As I said. My name is John Lane. I am from Haverasham and I wish to contact the stonemason’s guild and find a priest...”

“Yes, you want to find a priest who can read and write. Is that correct? John noticed the other two men step behind him. He felt the point of something sharp in his back.

## Discussion

1. This part of our story begins with the spread of the Black Plague. How did the plague spread? Why would it increase in Summer and decrease in the Winter?
2. John Lane was scared to be seen during the daytime. Why? Why was a stonemason valuable?
3. Why was John looking for a Priest?

## Second Meeting In January

“Where do you begin laying your stone,” the man asked.  
John felt the sharp object press harder.

“In the northeast corner of the where the building will be.”

“Why the northeast corner?” he asked.

“Sir, I have no idea other than that is what my master taught me and I did not question my master.”

“And who was your master?” Asked the man.

“I called him Master Oglethorpe. That’s all I ever knew.”

“And where is Master Oglethorpe? And his wife?”

“Master Oglethorpe has been dead these two years and I know nothing of his wife.” John felt the sharp object move away from his back. The man asking the questions smiled.



“You knew nothing of his wife because she died many years ago. She was my sister. And I have only received word of Master Oglethorpe’s death recently. He was a good and honorable man, but we have laid the bodies of many good and honorable men on the fires of late.”

“This is true, Sir, but if you are through toying with me I would ask if you can point me in the direction of the guild.”

“Brother John, you have found the guild. We three are members. I am Winslow and this is Tucker and Hubert, both highly skilled master masons. I see from your tools you are also a master.”

“Indeed, but I must ask, why the interrogation? What was your concern with me?”

“These are dangerous times, My Brother. The crops lay in waste in the fields, the animals wander off unattended. Word has that one in three have perished from the plague. In some places two in three. We ourselves have lost two good men.”

“To the plague?”

“Yes, to the plague, but not the plague you speak of. This is a new plague, Men who kidnap our skilled masons and sell them to the nobles and the priests for a few pieces of gold or silver.”

“I was aware of this. That is why I sneaked to York like a common thief. I was in fear.”

“Tis’ wise you were. Otherwise you may be sleeping with a yoke about your neck.”

“I was not aware the priests could not be trusted.”

“No, they can’t, but there is no need of worry. I don’t think you were concerned with matters of your soul. You are looking for someone who can read and write are you not?”

“Yes.”

“I can do that. A priest taught me as a child. I will help you.”

“Thank You, but one more question. You call me ‘Brother’. You are not my brother. Why do you call me such?”

“You have much to learn, My Brother. As I said, these are dangerous times.

You will find that you can rely on us for protection and we will expect to rely on you.

We will pledge our lives to your safety, but it is not without cost.

We will expect the same from you. But more about that later. Now we will go into town, but the four of us must stay no more than an arm’s length apart.

Even in town. You are not safe.

The first thing John Lane noticed when he entered the gate was the terrible stench of the city. It was almost evening and the last few rays of the sun fell on the miserable conditions of the city. Two men on a cart moved down the street and stopped long enough to

pick up a corpse destined for the fires outside the town.

Wherever the four men moved beggars pulled at their clothes and asked for a crust of bread, a coin, anything. John began to reach for his purse.

The man called Tucker grabbed his hand. “No,” he said.

“Pull out as much as a morsel,” said Master Winslow, “and they’ll be on you like vultures. Dozens will strip your body and leave you for dead.

They moved into a stable and up some stairs. Inside there were more men who all looked up when they entered the room. A tall thin man moved toward them. “This is Master Jenkins,” said Winslow.

“You vouch for him,” asked Jenkins. Winslow nodded. This is John Lane, from Haverasham. He needs our help. Master Jenkins nodded.

The four of them sat at the end of a long table. A woman brought them ale and a loaf of bread.

“You have something you want me to read,” asked Winslow. John quickly untied his pouch and pulled out a rolled piece of parchment. He handed it to Winslow who held a candle above the scroll.

“I was told the words were important. They would guide me.”

“Indeed they will,” said Winslow.

“I have heard about these words before. but I’ve never actually seen them. They are instructions for the craftsmen.”

“Instructions for laying stone. Why would someone write that?”

“No, far greater and far more important than for laying stone. They are instructions for survival and a long and honorable life.” He held the paper as if it were gold. He twisted his head to see every word.

“I don’t understand,” said John.

“You will, My Friend. You will.”

Afterwards, the woman who had brought the bread brought meat and placed it on the table. The others in the room began sitting and before each sat, he introduced himself to John. There was Brother Miller, Brother Adams, Brother Wilkins and Brother James. At the end of the table was Brother Horst and five more whose names John didn’t understand.

Master Jenkins stood and prayed to God to look over the men and their families, if any still lived. The entire time Winslow examined every word on John’s paper as if it was newfound sacred scripture. He didn’t put down the paper to eat or to speak.

During the meal, Master Jenkins asked John to stand and tell everyone who he was and from whence he came.

He shared every detail of his trip from Haversham, of people he had seen, and the activities of the noblemen he had witnessed. Every man listened to every word as if it were news of another world.

When he was finished, each man took turns telling his own story. They appeared anxious for John to know everything about them and who they were. When all but Winslow had spoken he stood and announced “Gentlemen, we are in council.”

“Immediately, the plates were removed from the table and the serving woman left the room. One man went outside the door. Another closed it, threw a massive bolt on the door shut, and sat in a chair beside it. All this was done without a word.

Master Jenkins stood.

“As is the right of every man present, and Master Winslow has decreed, we are now in council. No word spoken here shall be spoken outside this room and should any choose to do so he chooses under the penalty of death and the condemnation of his immortal soul to the depths and fires of hell.”

He raised his hand to heaven and with the words “So Sworn” brought his fist down and struck it on the table. Each man, in turn, did the same.

When each had brought his fist to the table they remained silent. Then each looked at John. After a pause, he raised his hand to heaven then brought his fist down on the table saying “So Sworn.”

## Discussion

1. The men were very cautious about the stranger, John. Was this caution warranted? Why? What harm could he have caused them?
2. Winslow is very interested in John’s paper. What could it mean? What could it be?
3. Do we see any similarities between “Being in Council” and today’s lodge meetings? What are they? What are other similarities?

Winslow rose and looked toward Master Jenkins.

“With your permission, Worshipful One, I shall speak.”

Master Jenkins nodded. John looked to the man beside him.

“Worshipful”?

The man motioned for him to be silent.

“Brothers, tonight God has looked upon us favorably with something beyond our greatest expectations. A traveler from the West, a Brother, has joined us, become one of us, and brought us the greatest gift any man could bestow.”

“For longer than any of us can remember we have attempted to live our lives in a manner of honesty and integrity not known to the average man. We have tried to live by the words and directions of those who came before us

not knowing, only guessing, exactly  
what those words should be.”

“We have all heard of these words. We try to live by them. Yet, none of us have ever seen them. Tonight, Master John has brought these words to us.” He held the paper so all could see. Suddenly, it was as if a long lost brother had returned. Some laughed. Some cried. Every man was joyful. Every man but John

Winslow looked at John. “Master John, I need your council.”

Without another word the man knocked upon the door and drew the huge bolt. The man outside the door entered and the others told him what had been said. They laughed. They smiled.

All patted John on the back and hugged him.

Winslow motioned him to a small room. He followed.

“Friend John, Brother John. Tonight you have brought to us a book for which we have searched for decades

We attempt to lead our lives by the rules of God and fairness.

Yet, until now we knew not exactly what those rules were.

In the past some had seen the book. They told us of what they had seen.

We worked from memory. Now we have the book.

We will begin instruction immediately. Tomorrow we will cease to be stonemasons. We will be Freemasons before the world.

Since Winter was coming there was little work to do. Everyone pitched in to finish the few undone jobs. The craft was told that as soon as all the work was done they would share the words of the newfound book. The craft worked with enthusiasm.

The next week craftsmen from far and wide came to the Guild Hall. They brought bedrolls and food for a week. All wanted to hear the great words of their ancestors. At exactly 11:00 on the first morning, the door slammed shut and the massive bolt was closed. They were in council.

Brother Winslow sat at the front table with the book before him. He spoke. "Brothers, Gentlemen, today we hear history. Years of searching is over." He read from the book before him.

There was not a sound as Brother Winslow read.

Article 1: The master mason must be full securely, steadfast, trusty and true, Thou shall pay thy fellows after the cost, and what they may deserve; He will take no more than what he may serve for."

Brother Gleason raised his hand. "Sir, having no schooling, I do not understand these words. They are unclear and have no meaning." Several of the brothers mumbled and nodded in agreement.

"Very well, the words are confusing. I will attempt to give them substance.

Article 1 means you will not overcharge for your work and you will also pay those you hire a fair and honest wage. You will not give or accept bribes or unfair advantage.”

Winslow studied Article 2 for a moment before he spoke. “It is the Master Mason’s duty to be present at the meeting of his fellows unless he is sick or in dire distress.”

The men nodded in agreement

Winslow studied each article before he spoke. Some longer than others.

Article 3 says that no man will take an Apprentice unless the Apprentice agrees to dwell seven years with him.

Article 4 says that no bondsman shall become an Apprentice He must be freeborn and owe no debt to another Master so that if the Master should desire to move the Apprentice shall be able to move also without a debt to pay.

Article 5 states that the Apprentice shall be of whole body, None who is deformed, mamed or lame may enter the craft whereas others must have to care for him

## Discussion

1. Discuss each article and what it means. Also, is the same required today?

Article 1. A man will be honest and true, accept no bribes or give any.

Article 2. A Master Mason must attend every meeting unless sick.

Article 3. An Apprentice must dwell (study) with the Master seven years.

Article 4. A man must be Freeborn (owe no debt).

Article 5. The Apprentice shall be whole of body.

As Brother Winslow read the items the brothers would quietly nod in agreement.

As he read each item if someone looked confused Brother Winslow would try to explain further.

Article Six says that the Master must be fair and honest in all ways toward his Apprentice and not keep him an Apprentice past his seventh year.

In Article Seven it clearly states that no Master shall keep a thief, or anyone who has committed a crime.

Article Eight says that the Master shall keep no Apprentice who shirks his duties or neglects his tasks. It says that the Master shall send him out a take on another to replace him.

The Ninth Article says no Master shall take on work he can neither start nor complete.  
He will be a strong man in charge of his craft and word.

Article Ten states that no Master shall undermine or attempt to harm another Master, his Apprentices or his work.  
He shall respect them as his own at all times.

### Discussion

1. Discuss each article and what it means. Also, is the same required today?

Article 6. A man shall be fair and honest in all his dealings.

Article 7. No Master Mason shall keep or abide a thief or wrongdoer.

Article 8. No Master shall keep a man who shirks his duties.

Article 9. A Master will finish what he starts.

Article 10. A Master will guard and protect the work of others.



Article Eleven forbids that any Mason should work at night

In article Twelve we learn not to criticize another's work in order to impress others with our own.

Article Thirteen says that the Master shall not hesitate to teach his Apprentice all things and share his knowledge completely so that when the Apprentice shall leave he will possess all the skill of the Master

In Article Fourteen we learn to take no Apprentice unless he is able to learn all we have to teach.

And in the last Article, Fifteen, we are finally taught to never swear false oaths or in any way cast the craft in an unfavorable light.

## Discussion

1. Discuss each article and what it means. Also, is the same required today?

Article 11. No Mason should practice his craft at night.

Article 12. No Master Mason shall criticize another's work.

Article 13. A Master shall be willing to teach the Apprentice all things.

Article 14. A Master will not accept an Apprentice who cannot learn.

Article 15. A Master Mason will never swear false oaths or in any way shame the craft.

It took well over a week to complete the Fifteen Articles.  
One other knew how to read and write and made a copy of the book.  
Others drew pictures to remind them of each page.  
Some drew characters, some made forms.  
All wanted to take the words of the book home to their guilds.

They worked on the words by day, and discussed their meaning by night.  
Many of the articles had been practiced for years.  
Others were new and strange.  
Yet, each, in its own way said something good.  
Something a good man must practice and live.

Before they were through men had come from far and wide.  
Brothers from Newcastle, Leeds and Oxford were there.  
Other brothers from the South and from as far away as Eastwick came.  
Each risked capture to hear the words,  
but the words were more important than the risk.

Though most could neither read nor write,  
they knew an important time was at hand.  
It would be a time when every man was vital,  
every task had need.

The world would no longer have need of an “average” man.  
They would be as common as grass in the fields and no more useful.  
No, the world would need people to guide it and show it the way.  
New lives must be led and new worlds built.  
When once there were three to take every task  
now there was two or maybe only one.

John Lane remained in York and found rooms near the Guild.  
That Spring he and his brothers went forth and built buildings.  
Some built homes for the business elite.  
Others built places for industry and newfound skills.  
The plague was over, forever they hoped.

Had the craft gained from John Lane’s book? Did they know now  
what they needed to know? John thought so, as did Brother Winslow  
and the others of the York Town Guild.

## Discussion

1. Why did the Brothers feel it necessary to study and record the Fifteen Articles?
2. Which of the Fifteen Articles are similar to the items in today's obligation?
3. Which of the Fifteen Articles no longer appear? Why? Why Not?

Note: Much of this work was drawn from the *Regis Manuscript* which was written in 1390 and *Born in Blood* by John J. Robinson and composed by the Grand Lodge Committee on Masonic Education 2004.

