

NV Grand Lodge Short Lecture Series
YORK LEGEND OF FREEMASONRY

Researched by R. Montana Williams, PM

The Masons Guild of York is said to date from A.D. 79 in the time of Agricola (40-93 A.D. a Roman statesman and soldier who, as governor of Britain, conquered large areas of northern England, Scotland, and Wales).

In the year 765 a renowned teacher of the liberal arts and sciences in York called Alcuin was commissioned by the Archbishop of York to oversee the building of a new church in York. He was recognized as a Chief Master of Builder (much like Master Hiram Abif).

According to the Regius and Cooke Manuscripts, the City of York, in the North of England, is celebrated birthplace of Freemasonry in the Kingdom of Great Britain. No topic in the history of Freemasonry has so much engaged the attention of modern Masonic Scholars, or given occasion to more discussion, than the alleged facts of the existence of Freemasonry in the tenth century at the City of York as a prominent point, of the calling of a Congregation of the Craft there in the year 926, of the organization of a General Assembly and the adoption of a constitution. During the whole of the eighteenth and the greater part of the nineteenth century, the Fraternity in general have accepted all these statements as genuine portions of authentic history.

However more recently this has come under debate by Masonic scholars. The legend tells during the reign of Athelstan, his brother (not his son, Edwin) called a General Assembly of the Masons at York in 926 A.D. to revive the Craft with a charter of new code of laws, formed a Grand Lodge and selected Edwin as its Grand Master. This serves as a beginning point of the transition between Operative and Speculative Freemasonry. "This craft came into England, as I tell you, in the time of good king Athelstan's reign; he made then both hall and also bower and lofty temples of great honor, to take his recreation in both day and night, and to worship his God with all his might. This good lord loved this craft full well and purposed to strengthen it in every part on account of various defects that he had discovered in the craft. He sent about into all the land, after all the masons of the craft, to come straight to him, to amend all these defects by good counsel, if it might so happen, He then permitted an assembly to be made of divers lords in their ranks, dukes, earls, and barons, also knights, squires and many more, and the great burgesses of that city, they were all there in their degree; these were there, each one in every way to make laws for the state of these nations. There they sought by their wisdom how they might govern it; there they found out fifteen articles, and there they made fifteen points."-Regius Manuscript, circa 1390.

Those articles and points include:

Fifteen Articles for the Master Mason:

1. The master mason must be worthy of the confidence of the lords; he must pay the fellows a fair wage with the lord's money.
2. Every master mason must attend a general assembly, unless he can give a good excuse.
3. The master mason shall not take on an apprentice for less than seven years and must lodge him during his apprenticeship.
4. The master mason must not take any serfs as apprentice.
5. The master mason shall take on neither bastards nor cripples (today's civil rights groups would have a field day with this one).

6. The apprentice shall be paid less than the fellows, but his salary shall increase as he progresses.
7. The master mason shall employ neither thieves nor murderers - a sensible precaution.
8. The master mason may discharge an incompetent worker and replace him with another.
9. The master mason must make sure that the foundation of the building is well-laid.
10. The master mason must never take over, or meddle with, the work of another master mason, or be fined a penalty of ten pounds (that was a lot of money back then).
11. A mason shall not work at night, except to study.
12. One shall not disparage the work of one's fellows.
13. The master mason must give his apprentice a complete education.
14. The master mason shall not take on an apprentice unless he has enough work for him.
15. The master mason must not leave his fellows astray, because he must care about their souls.

Fifteen Points for the Craftsman:

1. A man of the craft must love God and the holy church as well as his fellows.
2. Masons must be paid for holidays.
3. The apprentice must keep secret all that his master tells him and all that he hears or sees in chamber.
4. The apprentice shall not be false to his craft, nor to his master or fellows since the same law as theirs applies to him.
5. Masons must receive their salary from their master humbly. The master must discharge a mason before noon if he has no more work for him.
6. Quarrels between masons must be settled amicably, after the day's work is done or on a holiday.
7. A mason shall not sleep with the wife of a master nor a fellow's wife or concubine.
8. A master can allow a fellow to mediate between himself and other fellows.
9. Fellows must take turns serving at table, buying the food and accounting for what they spent.
10. A mason shall not support anyone who persists in wrongdoing; they shall be called before an assembly and excluded from the craft.
11. A mason must teach another, whose work is imperfect, in a friendly manner.
12. Masters, fellows, lords, and local authorities shall agree in assembly to promulgate laws for the craft and punish those who do not respect them.
13. A mason shall swear never to steal, nor be accomplice to a thief.
14. A mason must swear to be true to his master, his fellows, and his king.
15. He who disobeys the laws of the assembly shall be called before it to make amends. If he persists in his fault he shall be excluded from the craft and imprisoned, and his goods confiscated.

If you recall your obligations, you will discover many similar statements related to the fifteen articles and points outlined within the Old Charges or Regulations agreed upon during the Congregation of the Craft in the City of York in 926 A.D.

References

King Solomon. (2020). *The Regius Poem or Halliwell Manuscript: Foundations of Freemasonry Series*. Las Vegas, NV: Lamp of Trismegistus.

The Legend of Hiram. (n.d.). *Old Charges of Freemasonry: York and the York Legend*. Retrieved from <https://legende-hiram.blogspot.com/2018/09/old-charges-york-and-york-legend.html>