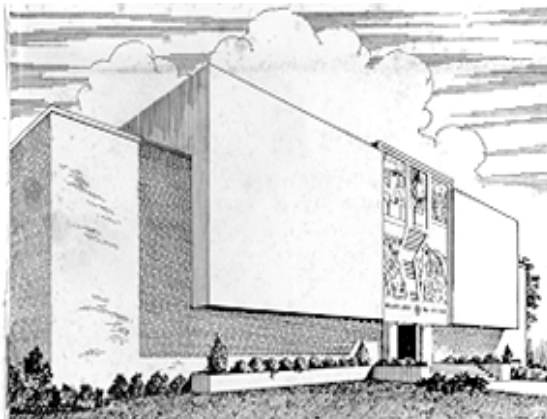


The Alpha

Holland Lodge No. 1 A.F. & A.M.
4911 Montrose Boulevard,
Houston TX 77006
(713) 529-0912
www.hollandlodge.org
February 2009
Volume 39 Number 8
Bill Sessums, Jr. P.M. – Editor



From the East

The articles mentioned in this publication have in the past been concerned with Freemasonry. There have been and continue to be other groups that have patterned their activities around those of Freemasonry.

Most of these organizations are well known and existed for many years, for example, The Odd fellows (of which Albert Pike was a member before becoming a Mason). Others, most of which originated in Scotland include the Free Fishermen, The Free Foresters The Free horsemen and The Free Potters to name a few. All of these groups shared many similarities with Freemasonry and certainly had their beginnings with the Masonic fraternity.

The Order of Free Gardeners originated in Scotland in the early fifteenth century. It was formed by working gardeners who were employed by wealthy land owners, most of whom were of the lesser nobility. These land owners developed an interest in landscape design patterned after the Renaissance architecture and of the Crown and the higher nobility. The Order of Free Gardeners were operating informally without records as early as 1602. The earliest written records were recorded in the minutes from Haddington, East Lothian dated August 16, 1676. They organized with a constitution detailing the organization of labor, the strict control of the trade, the payment of trade dues for the benevolence of the members and the supply and sale of plants. The constitution also set out educate the members in the different methods of gardening and to improve their morals. Although the Free Gardeners did employ certain rituals in their lodges little is known about them or what they actually did. It seems that the order was primarily a business arrangement. The earliest minutes indicate they were concerned with collecting funds for the support of distressed members and their dependents, dissemination of horticultural knowledge and advice and the supply and selling of plants and seeds.

At some point in time the lodge became more public by increasing its social activities by holding biannual flower shows. These shows were open to anyone who was interested in gardening (not just the lodge members). However, the best prizes remained in the hands of the lodge members, although, the judges were not connected with them.

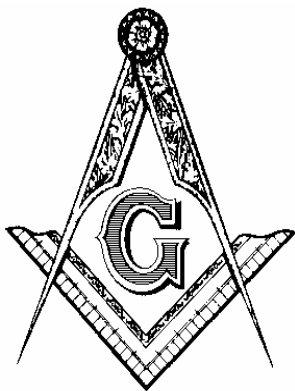
Little is known about the rituals of the order. The early minutes contain no actual proof that there was any secret knowledge taught to the new members. As previously mentioned the order in its' early stage seems to have been a business arrangement. However, later entries in the minutes of Haddington Lodge show that the order did impart esoteric knowledge to its members. The first, or apprentice degree is based on the story of the Garden of Eden and Adam's fall from grace. In this degree the candidate was taught certain words and grips after being divested of all worldly objects. He was also blindfolded and kneeling upon his left knee while receiving the obligation. The second degree links The Garden of Eden with Noah and veers off into Christianity and at that point departs from the modern Masonic work. In the third degree or the Masters' degree, "the Word" was revealed to the initiate which was "Solomon" He was also taught the Masters' Grip.

The Order also had an installation ritual as well as a funeral ritual. The regalia included many signs and symbols similar to those of The Masonic Fraternity, including aprons which were very much like those of the Masonic fraternity. The main difference was that the aprons of The Gardeners almost teach the ground in the manner of working gardeners of that time. The Order of Free Gardeners did not survive past the middle of the twentieth century. Its demise is attributed to religious and age factors. It seems that the organization was primarily a Christian one and there was also an age condition. It seems that no one over forty years of age could be admitted. The Freemason fraternity had been de-Christianized over the years and began to admit all faiths. In the early 1950's lodge membership declined to the point that the Order could no longer survive and the Lodges of Dunfermilne and Haddington legally terminated in 1953.

Jerry Brainard Jones W.M. Holland Lodge

The Next Stated Meeting
February 11, 2009
Dinner at 6:30 p.m.
Lodge opens at 7:30 p.m.

Please join us for a Dinner and
our February Stated Meeting



Stated Meetings are held on the
2nd Wednesday of each month.
Please check the website at
www.HollandLodge.org
for updates & announcements.

There are Degrees and Proficiency Exams
taking place on a regular basis...check the
website for details.

Greetings From the South...

Why Ruth?

When we were presented with the VSL we were commanded to diligently study it. This follows the various introductions of several passages of scripture we received during our progression through the Mysteries culminating in the MM degree.

One of the earliest scriptural references is to a token of sincerity taken from the Book of Ruth.

To better understand how our profession integrates its ceremonies and lessons with the Great Light we quickly learn why a diligent study is a command and not a mere admonishment.

Surely we've learned from today's age of headlines and sound-bites that the "rest of the story" is often not immediately apparent and a careful study of each of the Books from which these passages of scripture are lifted is essential. **Context is everything.**

The Book of Ruth covers a story during the period of Judges when the ancient Israelites strongly imposed a way of life that excluded all people not of their own tribal heritage.

The Book of Ruth can be easily seen as a story of protest against the exclusionary practices of the time. While it is a truly moving story of steadfast love between a widowed daughter-in-law, Ruth, and her widowed mother-in-law, Naomi, that reflects all of the good standards and values of this ancient society, it clearly was a story told to exemplify that the God of Israel was the God of all nations, that God's grace and love extends to the whole human family.

Ruth is purposely described as a Maobite. An alien to the Jewish community, and as such excluded in the eyes of that society at that time as profane, outside the Temple, an alien and a stranger.

After their husbands died, Naomi tells her daughters-in-law that she is returning to her people in Judah and that they should return to the homes of their mothers. One, Orpah, returns, but the other, Ruth proclaims "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." Now that is one serious oath!

Ruth does accompany Naomi to Bethlehem, cares for her mother-in-law, and is accepted with love by the society. She eventually meets a fellow named Boaz, marries and starts a family. Here the story could end. A happy story of love, affection, commitment and importantly, inclusion and acceptance of strangers. The moral of inclusion, we find is reinforced by the "rest of the story." Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed. Obed wed and fathered a son named Jesse. Jesse was the father of David. David, the greatest king of Israel was not a full blooded citizen of that society; his great-grandmother was a Maobite woman named Naomi.

The lesson learned in The Book of Ruth, which we are inclined to study due to its reference in our ceremonies, is not only the importance of a promise, but also that we are to foster and conciliate true friendship among those who might otherwise remain at a perpetual distance. From every country, from every sect. It could not be clearer.

Let us all take to heart and benefit from the great virtues and tenets of our excellent institution this year.

**Sincerely and Fraternaly,
Bob Welch, Junior Warden,**

From the Secretary

The Master's Fund could use some contributions. We have some brethren in serious need in the short term. Many thanks to Barry Podwin, Duncan C. Chapman, Brad Reel, Holland Lodge members as a whole and the many vendors who supported the Shriner's in their efforts to provide drivers for the transportation from airports to local hospitals in the Houston and Galveston areas. More thanks for all the help in making for a successful tailgate party at the Shriner's Blue Gray football game. Likewise that money goes to help pay for the treatment to many children.

CORD. What cord was used by the Masons during the Middle Ages?

The threefold cord was very much cherished by the Comocine Masters during the middle ages, as well as the Companions of the Royal Arch of today.

We will miss our departed Brothers

Luther B. Van Cleve II
Gilbert T. Chafin
Hunter Harang
Ralph O. Robinson Jr.
Kenneth E. Zimmerman
Edward H. Holland
James R. Barker Jr.
Leroy C. Richter