

The Restoration of Amity between the United Grand Lodge of England
And the
Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

April 12, 2007

Masonic scholars have written many and varied stories about the life and legacy of our founder and first Grand Master Prince Hall, and also the history of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge Jurisdiction of Massachusetts, but the most widely accepted is documented in the Prince Hall Information guide book, and I will use some of those excerpts and conclude with the recognition process that involved the United Grand Lodge of England and the M.W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and also the Resolution approved by the United Grand Lodge of England, on December 14, 1994.

Prince Hall is recorded as being born in 1738; His place of birth is unclear as birth records in those days were very vague. He was a servant owned by William Hall, who was a leather dresser by trade, which he taught to Prince Hall.

After twenty one years of service, Prince Hall was set up in the leather business by William Hall, and given his freedom on April 12, 1770.

His place of business was on Water Street in the north end of Boston at the sign of the Golden Fleece. (*The name of his place of business*).

Prince Hall was also a successful property owner, which earned him the right to vote. He furthered his education by diligent reading, and self education, and believed that it was the duty of every citizen to exercise the right of franchise.

His aim in trying to join the Masonic order was to bring his people together in a community of interest, a band of concern and sympathy for each other,

After repeated attempts to join a Lodge of Caucasian Masons in Boston, Massachusetts, Prince Hall and fourteen other men of Color, applied for membership in a Caucasian Army Lodge #441 of the Irish registry, attached to the 38th British Foot Infantry and were accepted.

The history of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge shows, that Prince Hall and fourteen men of Color were made Masons on March 6, 1775 at Castle William Island in Boston Harbor, in Army Lodge #441, which marked the first time that black men were made Masons in America.

About a year later, (since the conflict between England and America had commenced), the British Foot Infantry left Boston along with its Lodge, leaving Prince Hall and his associates without a Lodge; but before the Lodge left, Worshipful Master J.B.Batt gave them a Permit to meet as a Lodge and bury their dead in manner and form: This Permit however, did not allow them to do any Masonic work or to take in any new members.

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Under this Permit, African Lodge was organized on July 3, 1776 with Prince Hall as Worshipful Master, and it was not long, before this Lodge received an additional "Permit" from Provincial Grand Master John Rowe to walk in procession on Saint John's day.

On March 2, 1784, African Lodge #1 petitioned the Grand Lodge of England (the premier Grand Lodge of the world) for a Warrant or Charter to organize a regular Masonic Lodge, with all the rights and privileges thereunto prescribed.

The Grand Lodge of England issued a Charter on September 29, 1784 to African Lodge #459, the first Lodge of Blacks in America.

In 1797, Prince Hall organized a Lodge in Philadelphia Pennsylvania and one in Providence Rhode-Island; these Lodges were designated to work under the Charter of African Lodge #459

In December 1808, one year after the death of Prince Hall, African Lodge #459 (Boston), African Lodge #459 (Philadelphia) and Hiram Lodge #3 (Providence, Rhode-Island) met in a general assembly of the Craft and organized African Grand Lodge sometimes referred to as African Grand Lodge #1.

In 1847, out of respect for their founder and first Grand Master Prince Hall, they changed their name to Prince Hall Grand Lodge, The name it carries today.

In 1848, Union Lodge #2, Rising Sons of St. John's #3 and Celestial Lodge #4 became the first Lodges organized under the name Prince Hall Grand Lodge.

From these beginnings, there now are 5,000 Lodges and 47 Grand Lodges who trace their lineage to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Jurisdiction of Massachusetts.

June 2, 1988, Grand Master Richard A Claytor of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, of Massachusetts sent a letter to the United Grand Lodge of England, stating in part that he was writing on behalf of some 300,000 Prince Hall Masons, 42 jurisdictions, 5000 Lodges, who trace their lineage to a Charter issued African Lodge # 459, on September 29, 1784, by the Grand Masters Command and signed by R. Holt, D.G.M., and witness by WM. White, GS: -Our legality has been proven many times over he stated and yet we are denied the full rights of Masonry; we have the only charter issued from the Mother Grand Lodge to this country and we are still not recognized as Masons and closed by stating "I humbly ask that you consider placing Prince Hall Masonry in your directory of free Masons"

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September 21, 1988, a reply was sent to Grand Master Richard A Claytor, stating, that your letter of June 2, 1988, has now been considered by our Board of General Purposes; as you may know, the main bone of contention, as far as this Grand Lodge is concerned, relates to the origin of the Prince Hall movement, descended from African Lodge #459 formed in Boston in 1784 and then numbered 459 on the roll of the Grand Lodge of England. The warrant, like any other warrant issued to a private Lodge, gave no power to the members of that Lodge to form other Lodges; also the policy of our Grand Lodge is to recognize not more than one Lodge as having Jurisdiction in any country, state or territory, therefore we cannot extend recognition to you, while we continue to recognize the State Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. I am sorry to reply in terms which will cause you disappointment.

Signed-(M.B.S. Higham).Grand Secretary.

The 73rd Annual Session of the Prince Hall Conference of Grand Masters was held in Nassau, Bahamas, May 12-15, 1992 and many items of interest were discussed including the subject of recognition: It was also disclosed that some Prince Hall Grand Lodges and State Grand Lodges were recognizing, and even be visiting each other.

M.W Grand Master Daniel Lunsford of the Jurisdiction of Washington stated that he had petitioned the United Grand Lodge of England for recognition and was informed that before reacting to his petition it would make contact with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, (the Mother Jurisdiction of Prince Hall Masonry.)

Nicholas B. Locker was born on the island of Montserrat British West Indies and came to the United States of America in 1952, He was initiated a member of John J Smith Lodge #14 in 1974 and served as Worshipful Master in 1982.

After serving in several stations in the Grand Lodge, he was elected Most Worshipful Grand Master at the 201st Annual Session of the M.W. Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Jurisdiction of Massachusetts which was held in December 1992.

On January 15, 1993, the recognition process between the United Grand Lodge of England and the M.W Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts took on a more serious and positive tone, as Grand Master Nicholas B. Locker received a letter and a recorded telephone message from Very Worshipful Brother Michael Higham, Grand Secretary of the United Grand Lodge of England. The call was returned on January 18, 1993 and the Grand Secretary expressed his desire to meet to discuss the possibility of recognition.

Grand Master Locker called a meeting of his Past Grand Masters at the home of Past Grand Master Andrew J Spears to brief them of the situation and seek their advice.

February 15, 1993, Grand Secretary Higham called to set a date for a meeting and stated he would come to Boston.

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February 28, 1993, Grand Master Nicholas B Locker accompanied by his Deputy Grand Master Edgar R Mclean and Grand Historian Raymond T Coleman met with Grand Secretary Higham at the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston Massachusetts to discuss the possibility of recognition between the two Grand Lodges.

Grand Secretary Higham was brought up to date and made notes of the changes of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, since the Charter was issued by the United Grand Lodge of England on September 29, 1784; this he needed to make a concise and factual report to his Board of General Purposes: The Grand Secretary insisted that Prince Hall return the Warrant #459 and seek reconsideration from the Grand Lodge of England to recharter another African Lodge, but Grand Master Locker made it clear that Prince Hall would not under any circumstances, consider any thing of that nature, that it traced its heritage through African Lodge # 459, warranted by the Grand Lodge of England and its position would not change; also the Prince Hall Grand Lodge is a regular and legitimate Grand Lodge and therefore should be recognized;. Grand Secretary Higham again stated that the main bone of contention as far as the Grand Lodge of England is concerned, relates to the origin of the Prince Hall movement:- The word regular / irregular became the key to the success or failure of the entire process.

April 7, 1993, Grand Master Locker received a letter, containing a position statement issued by the Grand Lodge of England, and this position statement was read at the Prince Hall Grand Masters Conference which was held in Somerset, New Jersey, in May 1993.

On October 20, 1993, Grand Master Locker sent a letter to the United Grand Lodge of England stating in part, "As Grand Master of the Mother Grand Lodge of Prince Hall Masons, I feel that it is incumbent on me to make every effort to bring closure to this matter in a manner that is acceptable and beneficial to both Grand Lodges and more particularly to the brethren we represent, but doubt a solution will be forthcoming in the near future, because of the difference of opinion, relative to the issue of regularity."

May 1994, Grand Master Nicholas B Locker made a progress report at the Prince Hall Grand Masters Conference in Houston Texas.

August 25, 1994, Grand Secretary Higham called Grand Master Locker to say that he will be coming to Boston in September and will give him a call.

September 18, 1994, Grand Secretary Higham called from the Park Plaza Hotel in Boston Massachusetts, He stated, that his Board of General Purposes had found a way to move beyond the issue of irregularity and will make an announcement in the near future,

November 24, 1994, Grand Master Locker received written documents from Grand Secretary Higham, stating that a resolution will be considered by the United Grand Lodge of England at the December 14, 1994 Session, stating that, "notwithstanding its unusual

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formation the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts should be considered as regular and be recognized.”

December 11, 1994, Grand Master Locker made that announcement to his Grand Lodge in Session.

December 14, 1994, Resolution Approved.

The Grand Lodge of England’s news letter stated that this recognition applies only to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and applications for other Prince Hall Grand Lodges may follow and each must be considered on its merit.

The State Grand Lodge of Massachusetts was in Session at the time, and received word of the historical vote, and Grand Master David Lovering made the announcement to his Grand Lodge to a standing ovation.

December 16, 1994, Grand Master David Lovering sent a letter to Grand Master Nicholas B Locker, congratulating him and the Prince Hall Grand Lodge on this historical occasion and extended an invitation to meet.

December 23, 1994, Grand Master Nicholas B. Locker accompanied by Past Grand Masters Richard A Claytor and Chester R Isles met with Grand Master David Lovering and many of his Past Grand Masters in his office at the Masonic building on Tremont Street to celebrate the occasion.

December 27, 1994, Grand Master Nicholas B Locker installed his successor R.W. brother Edgar R McLean and completed his two year term as Grand Master.

Presently twenty seven (27) Prince Hall Grand Lodges have been recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England.

“Recognition opens the door to visitation and this must be controlled by the Jurisdictions involved. Many Jurisdictions have established guidelines or compacts; they form committees of qualified brethren, (from both Grand Lodges) to work together, to determine what is beneficial and useful. This agreement should be signed by both Grand Masters (*e.g. Colorado*)”

On June 12, 1996, following recognition on December 14, 1994, brethren from the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts visited the United Grand Lodge of England for the first time and Past Grand Master Nicholas B Locker was a member of this historic delegation and visit, and was appointed to the position of “Representative of the United Grand Lodge of England at the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.”

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Past Grand Master Nicholas B Locker has received many Accolades and distinguished Medals of Honor, for his contribution to the recognition process.

The Phylaxis Society honored him in their national publication as “Phylaxis man of the year 1995” and on March 9, 2003, the Phylaxis Society again presented him the Jno G Lewis Jr. Medal of Excellence and a certificate for meritorious service to the Society, at their annual Session in Oakland California.

The United Supreme Council “Northern Jurisdiction” presented him the Gold Medal Achievement Award at its annual Session in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, May 28, 2001 There he was described as a man who brings with him an impressive background which includes a life of service, dedication and commitment; ever mindful of the need for service, he has blazed new and important paths, and opened many doors of opportunity: We have benefited from his strength and vigor through adversity; He is a proven leader and visionary who have concern for his brothers and a continuous zest for life.

In closing I want to thank the Bermuda Installed Masters Lodge #9271 for this great honor and opportunity, to come before you, “along with Very Worshipful brother Michael Higham” to make this important presentation, It is my hope that you will have a better understanding and clearer vision of the stages of the recognition process.

It is an honor and a privilege to be of service to masonry in general and the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in particular. Service is a God-given function of life: and through service mankind does reap the blessings of creation.

Each of us is a descendant of some past traveler who has cleared the way and opened doors of opportunity, so we can have a place in this world.

Prince Hall will always be revered, honored and respected for the many tokens of good will and affection he has given to Masonry and Mankind.

Making a difference is what makes us different.

Finally my brethren, let us be united and practice with assiduity the sacred tenets of our order; Today it becomes our duty as well as our obligation to give thanks and praise to the Father of all men and masons for the faith that the past have taught us and the hope that the present have brought us.

God Bless you, God keep you, God Loves you and so do I.

Respectfully an Fraternally

Nicholas B Locker P.G.M.

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References

Prince Hall Information Guide

Prince Hall Grand Masters Conference (*proceedings*,) 1992, 1993 &1994

Prince Hall's Mission---by. Joseph Walkes Jr.

Other Supporting Documents