

**PRINCE HALL  
THE  
Pioneer of Negro Masonry  
Proofs of the Legitimacy  
of Prince Hall Masonry**

BY

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**PRINCE HALL, THE PIONEER OF NEGRO  
MASONRY**

BRETHREN, it is my purpose to-day to give you in a few simple words a brief sketch of our illustrious Grand Master, Prince Hall, the founder of Negro Masonry in America, and also some proofs gathered from the record establishing the legitimacy of Prince Hall Masonry as now exemplified by Prince Hall Masons, wherever their influence extends.

You will, of course, not expect many details bearing upon the life history of Prince Hall, because that is a closed book. We know that Prince Hall lived--and that he was born in Barbados, B. W. I., Sept. 12, 1748: we know that he died in the year 1807, after a long life of usefulness and service to his race; that he was a seafaring man and possessed more than the average intelligence of Negroes of that period, for he could read and write and think coherently about most things, and this is evidenced by the wisdom and good sense contained in all his addresses and charges delivered before "African Lodge 459" from time to time. He was employed as a steward on one of the many vessels plying between Boston and England. Judging from the character of his fragmentary addresses which have been handed down to us, he was a high minded, Christian

gentleman, a loyal and patriotic race man and a conscientious and practical Mason, who endeavored to live up to all the ideals and tenets of the order.

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There is not much to be told of his private life, what we know of him is largely tradition. It is most unfortunate that we cannot know more about this wonderful man, beyond what we gather from the very meager accounts of his activities as the Master of African Lodge No. 459.

I think this is the proper time and place to emphasize the great importance and need of keeping historical records and correct biographical sketches of the important men in the order, the dates of their birth and death, and wherever possible, their photographs, so that in the coming years the boys of to-day, who will be the Master Masons of to-morrow, will have the data at hand from which to write the history of Negro Masonry in the centuries to come. It would be a good plan for each subordinate lodge in the order to elect or appoint some member who is intellectually qualified to keep such a record of its doings in chronological order, *stressing* the more important business of their lodges and all events occurring within the circle, of real historical value. This data should be turned over to an editor-historian, selected by the Grand Lodge to compile for the official records of the order. It should be a clear, concise and accurate yearly review of all the important work accomplished by Negro Masons in this state. Particular attention being paid to spelling of names, and correctness of dates and the circumstances or occurrences recited therein.

In these respects many Negro organizations are woefully lacking in system and detail. Records of importance in many instances have been loosely kept on scraps

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of paper, which have not infrequently been lost or mislaid, and as a result nothing definite could be stated when the accuracy of any happening was questioned or disputed.

The way to make history is to make it, and the *exact* way to make it is to follow the rule adopted by all organizations that *have* made history worth the reading, and that is to record it in books especially designed for the purpose, omitting no detail worth preserving. The men assigned to this task should be men with a taste for and love of the work committed to their hands, and they should be paid

for it, the better to insure the faithful and intelligent performance of their labors.

In Prince Hall's days there were no such opportunities as are enjoyed by us today for keeping the record straight. Slavery then existed in nearly all the New England Colonies, and in all the Southern Colonies, and educated Negroes were as rare as honeysuckles in December, because the master class feared the educated Negro more than they did rattlesnakes. Some of the slave states of the South made it a crime, punishable by imprisonment or death, to any Negro who knew how to read and write, and who imparted this knowledge to others of his race.

Prince Hall was a free man, but he had to be careful and *more* careful because free Negroes were regarded with more suspicion by white men than were their slaves. Prince Hall understood the psychology of white men, and so he appreciated and realized the value and need of circumspection and prudence, and the force and power of

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tactfulness in utterance and action. The men who were associated with him in the little club in Boston, which afterward was to become *famous as* African Lodge F. A. M. No. 459, were all of them men of humble circumstances, earning their daily bread as servitors in the families of well-to-do whites, as cooks, waiters, butlers, or as draymen, porters, and day laborers.

They looked upon Prince Hall as their spiritual leader, for he was, as his speeches show, a highly moral man, a good man. His talks to his colleagues in the little room in which they met on Sunday afternoons, were filled with wise counsel and moral truths, and with earnest admonitions to them to quit themselves like men, despite the insults of the white ruffians who sometimes molested them on their way to those meetings. He tried to convince them that they were of finer moral fibre than their assailants, and so could not afford to descend to their level by engaging in personal encounters with these white bullies.

He counselled forbearance, which he intimated was not cowardice, but prudence; since these roughs of the white race, who frequented the public square and waylaid members of the club, calling them "Niggers" and sometimes striking them, were more in number than the Negroes, and that they were themselves the real cowards, and feared to meet the Negro man to man in a fair fight. This is true of the rough element of the white race everywhere. It is

especially true of white men in the South today, where it takes from 50 to 200 of them to lynch or burn one Negro. Prince Hall was wise in urging his followers not to precipitate a riot by resenting the

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insults of these wolves, who were just as savage and barbarous in those early days as their descendants are today.

But there was another element of white men in Boston in those days, who were just as antagonistic to Negroes, though less openly so, as were these white toughs, cabin boys and sailors who lounged in the public square in that city, and taunted the black men led by Prince Hall, who were then engaged in laying the foundation of Negro Masonry in America, and these were of the so-called better class, who had not quite recovered from the shock given them, when the Grand Lodge of England granted to this little band of earnest Negroes a warrant, thus recognizing the Negro as a man and a brother. This antagonism took the form of questioning the legitimacy and regularity of Prince Hall Lodge, of raising a doubt in the minds of members of the fraternity as to the soundness of the legal Masonic status of this Negro Lodge, whose founder had cleverly put it over his white brethren by obtaining from the same source as they, authority to organize according to Masonic usage a lodge of Negroes in Boston, and by the same token to grant warrants to any other body of Negroes who might in future desire to be set apart as a Masonic lodge in any part of America.

Now, St. Andrews Lodge, white, of Boston, from 1752 to 1760, without any authority from the Grand Lodge of England, had held meetings as a Masonic Lodge, and had entered, passed and raised its members to the various degrees which "was shockingly illegal and irregular." This lodge furnished to the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts its first provincial Grand Master in the person

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of Joseph Warren, the famous hero of the battle of Bunker Hill and this lodge is responsible for the age-long libel which impugned the legality and regularity of Prince Hall's warrant, and Prince Hall Lodge's standing as a Masonic unit. The white men of culture of that period, while perhaps not quite as pronounced as they are at the present day in their feelings toward the Negro, felt keenly the action of the Grand Lodge of England in making and placing black men on a *par* with them in the Masonic fraternity. It hurt, and so they began to discredit

the Prince Hall Masons, to spread the rumor, that its warrant was not regular, but tainted. For years the Prince Hall Masons were the victims of this subtle and vicious attempt of white Masons to read it out of the fraternity, but it is still in the position among regular Masons in which the Grand Lodge of England placed it in 1784.

Now let us for a moment look into the Masonic record of the author of these attacks on Prince Hall Masonry, (the white St. Andrews Lodge No. 82, of Boston). It appears from the record that in January, 1776, this Lodge made a formal tender to St. Johns Lodge of the same city, to be received by it whenever it might be agreeable to St. Johns Lodge, that there might be a happy coalition. But St. Johns Lodge rebuffed it in four votes.

(1) Claiming that the nine persons (naming them) who were the only ones named as Masons in the Charter to St. Andrews Lodge, *were not at the date of their application for it, or at the date of constitution Free and Accepted Masons.*

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(2) That applying as such *was an imposition* on the *Grand Lodge of Scotland.*

(3) That they are *irregular* Masons, and all persons who have since been added to them in their fraternity. This, of course, included Gen. Joseph Warren, who was made in the Scottish Lodge in 1761.

(4) That as members of such irregular lodge, some attempting to visit their regular lodges, had been refused this liberty and that by vote of the Grand Lodge, visits of their members to said irregular lodge has been prohibited, therefore, this answer is given to the written request to visit your lodge: *THAT THE FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS* under this jurisdiction cannot visit said fraternity. This verdict against the spurious St. Andrews Lodge, was sent to the proper officers of that lodge, and to the Grand Lodge of England, by St. Johns Lodge of Boston who knew the facts of the bastardy of St. Andrews Lodge and was itself *irregular* as I, shall presently show. This St. Andrews Lodge, I repeat, had tabooed African Lodge No. 459 as *irregular* and therefore outside, he pale of free and accepted Masonry. I think you have noted as I have proceeded with the story, that St. Andrews Lodge did not come into court with clean hands.

Thus it is shown that its own title was cloudy, tainted, and that its members had not even attained to the dignity of becoming Masons, in the way and manner prescribed by the ancient laws of the order, and that there [illegible]re it was not

competent to pass upon the legality of the act of the Grand Lodge of England in making Prince

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Hall and the body of men associated with him, regular Free and Accepted Masons, by granting them a warrant as a further evidence of the confidence it reposed in him and his associates to guard sacredly and safely the great trust imposed upon them as Master Masons. The title of Prince Hall Lodge, and of all the Lodges emanating from it, under its warrant is as clear as the noonday sun, and as valid as any warrant held by any Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, anywhere in the world. And this, I will now proceed briefly to demonstrate, by citing the deliberate opinion of a man recognized by white Master Masons throughout the world as an authority on Masonic jurisprudence, a distinguished author of Masonic works, but a white man from the ground up--Albert Pike. "Our folks," said he, "only stave off the question, by saying that Negro Masons are clandestine. Prince Hall Lodge *was as regular a lodge as any lodge* created by competent authority, and had a perfect right as other Lodges in Europe did, to establish other Lodges, making itself a Mother Lodge. That is the way the Berlin Lodges, the Three Globes, and Royal York became Grand Lodges."

I think there is no middle ground between rigid exclusion of Negroes, or recognition and affiliation with the whole mass. I am not inclined to meddle in this matter. I took my obligations to white men, not to Negroes, when I have to accept Negroes as brothers or leave Masonry, I shall leave it. I am interested to keep the ancient and accepted right uncontaminated in our country, at least by the leprosy of Negro Association."

Again in 1868, in an address in St. Louis, Mo., he said "God pity the man who will not lay on the altar of Masonry

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every feeling of ambition, every feeling of ill will in his breast toward a brother Mason. Freemasonry is one faith, one great religion, one great common altar around which all men of all tongues and all languages can assemble. And Masonry will never be true to her mission until we all join hands, heart to heart, and hand to hand around the Altar of Masonry, with a determination that Masonry shall become at some time worthy of her pretensions--no longer a pretender to that which is good, but that she shall be an Apostle of peace, good

will, charity and toleration."

Now what does this make Albert Pike, one of the pillars of white Masonry?

Grand Master Griswold, in his address to the Grand Lodge of Minn., some forty odd years ago, said: "After a somewhat careful investigation of this matter, I am satisfied that the so-called irregularities attending the organization of the first Colored Grand Lodge in this country were fewer in number and of less importance than those pertaining to some other American Grand Lodges, Grand Lodges now venerable with age, to whom we look with feelings of reverence, who have been mighty powers in giving tone to American Masonry, who stand today deservedly in the lead and from whom we trace our Masonic descent. The facts are brethren, that with reference to these matters *we are living in glass houses*, and it is not, in my opinion, at all wise for us to engage in the sport of throwing stones."

Reviewing the attitude of St. Andrews and other white lodges towards Prince Hall Masons, the Grand Lodge of

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Illinois, in its report in 1876, said among other things: "We believe and we think we have shown in former reports that the original legitimacy of African Lodge, *out of which Prince Hall Grand Lodge grew, is beyond question, and that its members were robbed of their just rights, when the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts was formed in 1792.*"

Another distinguished white Mason, Theodore S. Parvin, of Illinois, observes: "I have read the opinions of Pike and Lewis in the pamphlet you sent me. My opinion is, that the Negroes can make as good a show for the legality of their Grand Lodge as the whites can. It is only a matter of taste and not of laws. I am satisfied that all the world outside of the United States will ere long recognize them and I think we had much better recognizethem, than to blend them into our organization."

On the call for papers by a Commission of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, it was shown that Prince Hall had been duly appointed Provincial Grand Master for lodges of black men in America by exactly the same English Grand Lodge, which had appointed Henry Price sixty years previously Provincial Grand Master for lodges of white men in America, and that he was corresponded with by the authorities of such English Grand Lodge and recognized in that official

capacity, as long as any other English appointed Grand Master for any portion of the United States. Prince Halls title to legitamcyis clearer than St. Andrews, which was only a body of *rump* Masons and had obtained its charter by fraud; or St. Johns organized in 1733, which was an unauthorized and irregular body until legalized in 1737, when Tomlinson received

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his deputation from the Grand Master of England. James William Hugham, Masonic Historiographer of England, confirms this when he says "Boston Lodge is the first that we can find mentioned in any list of Lodges under the Grand Lodge of England, and that in the list of 1738." The original deputation by which authority it is claimed the first lodge of white Masons was constituted cannot be found, and it is not known so far as records show, *that Henry Price was* deputized a provincial Grand Master in 1733. In fact, he is stigmatized by Norton, of Massachusetts, who is recognized as a careful historical investigator, as a swindler and imposter, as the following correspondence discloses.

London, England,  
November 29, 1768

To Henry Price, Esq.  
Boston, Mass.

I cannot account for it why, in the list of Provincial Grand Masters, the name of Price does not appear. The earliest record on my book for that part of America is 1736, of the deputation of Robt. Tomlinson.

THOS. FRENCH, Grand Secretary.

In Dove's history of the Grand Lodge of Virginia, he says, speaking of the introduction of Masonry in Massachusetts:

"They commenced their organization by the interposition of provincial Grand Masters, and at once and immediately

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by patent (not to be found) from the Grand Lodge of England, *granted* to R. W. Henry Price in 1733, opened a Lodge in Boston called the St. Johns Grand Lodge, on the 30th day of July; though their first regularly installed and invested Grand Master was R. W: Robt. Tomlinson, April, 1737."

This seems to prove that Henry Price acted without any authority, and that for thirty-five years St. Johns Lodge of Boson existed without a warrant.

Now, brethren, if this Lodge could exist for this period without a warrant, then could not African Lodge, with equal grace and freedom from criticism, have existed from 1775 to 1787 without a warrant, and especially so, when in 1878, the Grand Lodge of England legalized and confirmed its existence by granting it a *warrant direct from the fountain head*, while St. Johns Lodge only received its charter from a Provincial Grand Master?

I think, brethren, I have cited sufficient proof, to convince any skeptic that Prince Hall Masonry is *not only legitimate, but also that its claim to legitimacy antedates that of those Lodges of white men* which questioned the legitimacy of its warrant and the regularity of Prince Hall Masonry, although at the time they were themselves not officially recognized by the Grand Lodge of England, nor regarded as regular and legitimate branches of the order.

New York, June 5, 1921.