

FREEMASONRY AMONG COLORED MEN IN THE U.S.A.

by Harold V. B. Voorhis - 1974

FOREWORD

The mere mention of the subject "Negro Masonry" among Freemasons brings forth more views and fables from individuals than any other Masonic subject - all out of proportion to the attention it should receive.

In the very first place, the name "Negro Masonry" is a misnomer. It should be "Masonry Among Colored Men," for there is but one Freemasonry. A Masonic body is either Regular (i.e. recognized); Irregular (not recognized); or Clandestine (without authorization). The color of the skin of the members is not a subject which enters into the picture. That it has become a separate subject in the United States is unique, because nowhere else in the world do we have such a situation. It is a subject which grew because of some Masonically odd happenings and the propagation of some erroneous beliefs and falsehoods, plus the segregation of colored men themselves from the organization which was started by white men. The advent of this unique condition was made in 1773, when a white man, an itinerant soldier, who had once belonged to a military lodge, made fifteen colored men Freemasons, in or near Boston, Massachusetts. After meeting together as a self-constituted Lodge for several years, they applied to the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns) for a Charter, which, after several more years, they did receive from that Grand Body - as African Lodge, No. 459. Under this Charter they operated as a regular Lodge until 1813, when the Grand Lodge of England annulled the Charter for non-payment of money to the Charity Fund. In the mean time some other men of color, who had been "Made" elsewhere, had set up so-called Masonic Lodges in Rhode Island, Pennsylvania, and some other places on the Eastern Seaboard - all without the benefit of Charters. Together they became known as "Masons of Color." These groups were totally clandestine and when the colored Lodge in Massachusetts lost its Charter in 1813, it became irregular. Most of them kept operating, nevertheless - the Massachusetts body, in 1827, declaring itself independent of ANY Masonic authority, which they really were already. What happened from then on is outside the pale of regular Freemasonry. That they chose to carry on, calling themselves Freemasons, was not and is not without precedent, even among white Irregular and Clandestine Freemasons. However, because some "come lately" Masonic writers, in the guise of historians, in and out of regular Freemasonry, who would not leave well enough alone, began to write and publish pamphlets, books and articles, pro and con, about the subject, chaos has developed. None of these were compiled after adequate research to screen the statements appearing hither and yon, so they reek with errors of omission and commission.

By far the bulk of the material came from a book titled "Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People of North America," written, so the title says, by William H. Grimshaw, a colored man living in the District of Columbia - published in 1903.

DOCUMENTED SUMMARY

In 1940 I entered the field of gathering the printed references about "colored Masonry." After putting out the material in book form, I revised the book in 1945 and again in 1949. Henry Wilson Coil, who compiled COIL'S MASONIC ENCYCLOPEDIA, said of my work: "In the Voorhis book, it is charged that Grimshaw's data were frequently untrustworthy, which now seems too

charitable for errors that appear to be deliberately twisted facts, invented material, and 'reconstructed' photographs used to illustrate the work. So serious were these errors that Voorhis very honorably felt obliged to withdraw his 1949 book from sale. An abnegation all to seldom indulged by preceding authors under similar circumstances."

When I realized that I had been "taken in" I arranged to check civil and Masonic records in Massachusetts, where all of the events cited in my book from 1775 to 1827 were said to have taken place. With the help of a qualified Masonic historian in Massachusetts, John M. Sherman, and another Masonic Historian, Henry W. Coil, we put together a MS: of 152 pages, plus more than 50 exhibits, documenting every facet of the subject. This took over five years, during which time much new material came to light which enabled us to verify or disprove the statements in the Grimshaw book, correct the many errors, and add further data.

At this point it may be helpful to consider who Grimshaw was and the circumstances that led to his writing the book we will discuss. William Henry Grimshaw was born in Virginia, August 4, 1847. His father was Robert Tyler (white) and his mother, Julia Grimshaw (negro), whose family name he took. From January 1, 1869 to June 3, 1889 he was employed by the Navy Department in various clerical jobs, and on December 28, 1895, he went to work as Doorkeeper, - Gallery Door, House of Representatives, where he stayed until October 1, 1897, when he was promoted to "Library Attendant, Doorkeeper in the Main Reading Room," at the Library of Congress, which position he held until the date of his retirement, August 20, 1924. Thus he was situated in a key spot for obtaining information from books and other publications during the period when he must have been preparing his book, which was dated 1903. But he was never an Assistant Librarian in the Congressional Library, as he later testified in 1920, during a Maryland Court Case. 1/

He probably received his "Masonic" Degrees in Social Lodge, No. 1, (D.C.) F. & A. M., where he presided as Worshipful Master in 1874-1875. In 1882 he was Deputy Grand Master of the (colored) Grand Lodge of the District of Columbia. In 1903 he was its Grand Librarian and in 1908, Grand Master. This Grand Lodge claims to be the third oldest Colored Grand Lodge in the United States, preceded only by the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts and the African Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania. 2/ On December 15, 1897, the Grand Master, Hamilton S. Smith, appointed a committee of several distinguished "Colored Masons" to make the necessary arrangements for the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of that Grand Lodge, and heading the list was PGM Richard H. Gleaves, who was to serve as Master of Ceremonies. The celebration took place on March 27, 1898, in the Metropolitan African Methodist Episcopal Church, and representatives from all Colored Masonic Collateral Bodies in the District participated. Among the speakers were the names of Richard H. Gleaves, Master of Ceremonies, and Thornton A. Jackson, Sovereign Grand Commander of the Negro AASR, both of whom, later, were to sign the testimonial endorsement in the front of Grimshaw's "Official History," etc., in 1903.

Since Grimshaw had begun his work in the Library of Congress only two months before the plans were begun for the 50th Anniversary celebration, and therefore he had access to important data, it is not surprising that he should have been asked to prepare its history. In the Preface to his book, "Official History, etc." Grimshaw stated that his original intention had been only to prepare a history of the Craft in the District of Columbia, but

that "upon the earnest solicitation of many Masonic friends, he has consented to enlarge the work so that it will also include the history of the Craft in each State of the Union." In the second paragraph of this Preface, he stated that in preparing the book he had two principal objects in mind. "First, that Masons and other readers might have a true official history of the Masonic Fraternity among Colored Men in the United States. Heretofore there has been no publication to which we could conveniently refer concerning the legitimacy of the order in America, consequently our detractors have taken advantage of this weakness and invariably tried to convince the world that Negro Masonry in America did not emanate from the same source as White Masonry, hence it was of a spurious kind and could not be recognized." In other words, Grimshaw's main purpose was to establish (or prove) its legitimacy. And secondly, he claimed that he felt it his duty to write the book because he had "in his possession many facts relative to the advancement of the colored people since the close of the Civil War, which might serve to enlighten the uninformed, and also inspire the younger generation to a higher development." And finally, he states that he is "fully conscious of its (the work's) literary defects, but dares not sacrifice the truth of history even for literary excellence."

And so, having made an eloquent and grandiose proclamation in favor of honesty and truth he boldly proceeds to twist the truth, to make false claims, and submit forged documents and illustrations to prove his ends.

The majority of Grimshaw's readers turned out to be much less knowledgeable of the facts of history than he, and they accepted his claims cheerfully, because the book seemed to prove what they had long wanted to believe about Prince Hall and his followers. Only one critic among his contemporaries spoke out (as far as we know) and that was where the movement had its beginning, in Boston. It was a black man, Frederick S. Monroe; the Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge, who was well enough educated and knew enough history to see through some of Grimshaw's phoney claims. In his reports on "Fraternal Correspondence" in the Proceedings of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge for 1905 and 1907 he pointed out some of Grimshaw's most glaring errors, and wrote that "We know his sketch of Masonry in Massachusetts to be full of errors and misstatements, . . . It is not a book to be placed in the hands of any uninformed Mason. . . . We can readily foresee that the Committee on Foreign Correspondence will have all they can do for the next two or three generations in extirpating the errors." How true these statements have proved to be.

In the back part of his book, (pages 370-371), Grimshaw inserted a table titled "Men Who Assisted Me," and it is a significant fact that he lists no one there from Massachusetts, although more space is given in the book to Massachusetts than to any other state: (41 pages, or 18% of the total pages on the various jurisdictions). No wonder that Monroe was miffed if he was not consulted, and then found out that the Massachusetts part was full of errors and fabrications! The Grimshaw book, with its misinformation and lies, has done more harm to the subject than any other work about Colored Masonry ever printed - both from the standpoint of the colored men and from the side of Regular Freemasonry. Regular Freemasonry should ignore the whole matter. It is nothing but a condition of Irregularity and Clandestinitism, and is outside the pale of OUR Fraternity. The main subject can be considered, however, and I herewith give a very digested run-down of it. Each statement that follows can be documented. I hope that it is not too short or leaves too many gaps to be filled in, but with the data now available, this can and should be done.

CONDENSED HISTORY.

The earliest public reference thus far discovered dealing with Colored Men in Freemasonry in America was in Draper & Folsom's Boston newspaper, The Independent Chronicle, Boston, December 30, 1782, No. 243, page 3. This article described a procession of Colored Masons who marched in Masonic regalia from the house of a Brother Glapion in State Street to the house of Prince Hall in Water Street. Several other short references to the Lodge appeared in the newspaper thereafter, but nothing was published regarding its origin until 1795, when Dr. Jeremy Belknap, founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society, conducted a survey to collect information on the history of slavery in Massachusetts. In an interview with Prince Hall, whom he refers to as "one of my informants, . . . a very intelligent black man, aged fifty-seven years," Belknap writes, "He is the Grand Master of a Lodge of free masons, composed wholly of Blacks, and distinguished by the name of 'African Lodge'. It was begun in 1775, while this town was garrisoned by British troops; some of whom held a lodge and initiated a number of Negroes." This claim, set down in writing twenty years after the event was said to have taken place, is not supported by any documented evidence, and can be classed only as hearsay. The records of the military lodge are not now extant, having been lost when they were captured by the French a few years later. In 1775, Belknap was living in Dover, New Hampshire, where he served as minister of the church from 1767 to 1787, and not being a Mason, he could not have been present as a witness anyway. Furthermore, any implication that the initiations were legitimate is denied by the reply of another respondent to the survey, the Rev. John Eliot, a Mason and Grand Chaplain of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge, who responded, in part, as follows:

"And what is still more remarkable, the White and Black Masons do not sit together in their lodges - The African Lodge of Boston, the possessing a charter from England, signed by the Earl of Effingham, and countersigned by the Duke of Cumberland, meet by themselves,-- and white Masons, not more skilled in Geometry than their black brethren, will not acknowledge them. The reason given is that the Blacks were made clandestinely, in the first place, which being known (by the English authorities) would have prevented them from receiving a charter."

It was not until December 27, 1865, that the Colored Masons put forth the claim that Prince Hall and his fourteen associates were initiated on March 6, 1775, in an Irish Army Lodge in Boston. This statement was made by Lewis Hayden, an eloquent Negro orator, who was the Grand Master of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge from 1865 to 1870. Previously, in 1858, a predecessor as Grand Master, John V. DeGrass, M.D., had delivered an address in which he claimed that Prince Hall alone had been initiated in 1775, and that a year later, the Lodge had been organized under a dispensation from this British (sic) traveling lodge. But there are no records extant to support either of these claims.

The first actual record of Freemasonry being practised by colored men in America was found on a sheet of paper in the archives of what was African Lodge, No. 459, E.C., in Boston, Massachusetts. When these early records were photographed on microfilm, in 1950, this sheet appeared as frame No. 40, under the sub-title of "Records of African Lodge, No. 1. Minutes and Accounts, 1770-1786, Boston." The document is dated March 6th, 177_ (the last digit for the year being illegible 3/) and has the heading

"By Marster Batt wose made these brothers," under which are listed fifteen names. At the foot of the page are some figures which indicate that fourteen men were made "Marsters" (sic), three Crafts and thirteen "printices". These figures are confirmed by repetition on another sheet (frame 41), which was the report of a committee, apparently to audit the accounts, and dated October 5, 1785. It shows a total expense incurred of $45\frac{1}{2}$ Guineas, which was evidently the amount that had been paid to John Batt for his services. A third sheet, in tabular form, having three columns, (frame No.16), headed "Entred a printices, Fellow Crafts and Marsters," is clearly headed, "Boston, March 6, 1778, - Maid by The Worthey and amabell - Grand Master, John Batt," but this evidently covers the period from March 6, 1778 to May 4, 1782, and we know that John Batt could not have been present at all the successive dates given, as we will show below.

It has been claimed that John Batt was the Master of a military lodge stationed in Boston before the Revolutionary War, and that the degrees were conferred on the Negroes by this lodge on March 6, 1775. However, the evidence is conclusive that it could not have happened in 1775, despite the statement of Dr. Jeremy Belknap, who had only hearsay as his basis. The old records of African Lodge make no reference to any lodge, and only to an individual, John Batt. But who was John Batt, and did he have any connection with a British Army Lodge? A diligent search of the records of the Grand Lodges of England and Ireland has disclosed the fact that there was a John Batt registered in Irish Lodge, No. 441, which was attached to the British 38th Regiment, South Staffordshire Regiment, on the 2nd of May, 1771. The records show that this regiment was in Boston in 1774; Boston, at Bunker Hill, 1775; during 1776, at Halifax, New York, Brooklyn, Long Island, Rhode Island, Fort Washington, Fort Lee and New York; thereafter, in 1777, at Nova Scotia, Philadelphia, Newport; in 1778, at Newport and New York; in 1781-2 at New York; and 1783, Great Britain.

So, if the fifteen colored men referred to who were initiated on March 6th, 1778, as the record shows, by John Batt, it could not have been done in Irish Lodge, No. 441, as the 38th Regiment of Foot was then in Newport, Rhode Island or in New York, and it would have been impossible for the Lodge to have met in Boston at that time. But what about John Batt? Could he have been in Boston, as an individual, apart from Irish Lodge No. 441? The evidence indicates that he could have been, and was, as we will now demonstrate.

An examination of the old Muster Rolls of the 38th Regiment, for the period in question, has been made for us by an English Correspondent A/, who visited the Public Record Office, where they are now kept on behalf of the War Office. (London, England). Private John Batt was serving in Major Alexander Fraser's Company of the 38th, and his name appears without comment in all the available Rolls signed at Antigua between 25.12.1759 and 23.2.1763. They were prepared every other month at that time.

For the second period for which Muster Rolls exist, the Rolls cover six-months periods. Five Muster Rolls were examined, starting with 7th May, 1774, when the Regiment came on the British Establishment in North America, and covering up to the time when Batt was discharged from service at Staten Island, New York, 23 Feb. 1777. On the Roll covering the period from 25 December, 1774, to 24th June, 1775, Batt is shown as Sgt., but reduced to private on 24th June. (following the Battle of Bunker Hill), but no explanation is given for this nor later for his discharge. It cannot be assumed that it was for disciplinary reasons, as other men were similarly treated.

After General Howe had routed Washington at the battle of Fort Washington (November, 1776), he went into winter quarters in New York instead of trying to pursue Washington's troops, which gave Washington the opportunity to reorganize his forces. Perhaps Batt, and the others who were discharged, were dropped because of age. Batt had been with the Regiment for 18 years. It is unlikely that Batt received any pension or other form of remuneration for his support, so we should not be surprised if we find him seeking employment of some kind.

After his discharge from the British Army at Staten Island, 23 February, 1777, we do not know how John Batt occupied himself until about the end of the year, when he seems to have enlisted for service as a marine on the Connecticut State Man-of-War "Oliver Cromwell," sometime during the month of December. In "A list of what is paid the officers and crew of the ship 'Oliver Cromwell' to the 16th March, 1778," there is given the name of a John Batt "Marine" (Marine) and stated that he "Run." So he was not paid. Probably enlisted after 10 December 1776, and possibly between 10 and 20 January 1778 (this is all speculative). 5/

In the lists of "Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution," (volume II, page 958), there are two names shown which are so similar that they may have been one and the same man. (John Batt. of Falmouth, enlisted for the town of Westminister, December 26, 1777 - and John Butt, reported a transient, enlisted for the town of Ipswich, February 24, 1778). During the Revolution, it has been noted that although it was illegal, some towns resorted to enlisting non-residents in order to fill their quotas, for which the volunteers received a bounty, and sometimes it was possible for a man to enlist more than once (under different towns) in order to collect duplicate bounty money. John Batt appears to have been one who accomplished this by enlisting for both the town of Westminister and the town of Ipswich.

In the records of the War Department, in the National Archives and Records Service, Washington, D.C., five compiled military service records for John Batt have been found. One of these shows that he enlisted February 20, 1778, place of residence, Massachusetts, Suffolk County, town of Boston, and that he served as a Sergeant in Col. David Henley's Regiment. The rolls exist containing John Batt's signature. The record also shows that an Adjutant Dunkerley received 12- for enlisting two men, John Patten & John Batt. The fact that Batt was immediately given the rank of Sergeant shows that his previous military service in the British Army was recognized. The record ends with the statement that he was "Deserted" on June 10, 1778. A careful search of all public and military available has failed to turn up any further information on John Batt. After having deserted he seems to have disappeared completely, without leaving a trace behind. The African Lodge records do not mention his name again either after the original date of the "initiation" on March 6, 1778.

To continue with our examination of the old record showing that fifteen Colored men received Masonic degrees on March 6, 1778, from one John Batt, which was confirmed by a second record (see page 4, last paragraph), the record shows that seven of those "initiated" were "carfted" on the same date, and two (Prince Hall and Thomas Saunderson) were made "Masters." This is a remarkable performance for one man in one day. What is probable is that he picked up a Masonic expose' and was able to convince these Colored men that he was not only a Freemason, but a Grand Master. (In those days this term was commonly used as a title for the presiding Master of a Lodge). Prichard's

MASONRY DISSECTED, published first in 1730, had already run into several editions, and there were several other expose's in circulation by 1778, another being JACHIN AND BOAZ, then in its fourth edition, having been first published in 1762. In any event, said John Batt was without any authority, even if he had been a Past Master, to confer (single-handed, no less) Masonic degrees on anyone.

None of the other Negroes than Prince Hall and Thomas Saunderson, received the second and third degrees on this late, according to the record. During the following May and June the seven who were "carfted" became "Masters." Then, before the charter which they requested had arrived, forty-six were admitted to the "Lodge". Thus they had a total of fifty-six members before they had any authority, in a body which was clandestine. They started calling themselves African Lodge, No. 1 at some unspecified date.

There is little use in recording here the details concerning the request for, and the granting and securing of a Charter from the Grand Lodge of England, dated September 29, 1784. It came as a result of a letter to a William Moody (whose identity has never been ascertained by the Grand Lodge of England) written on June 30, 1784. In the letter, Prince Hall, signing as "Master of African Lodge, No. 1," stated that the Lodge had "been founded almost this eight years and has no warrant yet but only a Permet from Grand Master Row (John Rowe Provincial Grand Master in Boston) to walk on St. John's Day and bury our dead in form." This would bring the formation date back to 1776 - but the Lodge records say that the first meeting was held on March 6, 1778. Of course they could have met before that date to discuss the formation of a Lodge, which prompted Prince Hall, in 1784, to say that the Lodge was "founded" eight years before. The Charter arrived in Boston on April 29, 1787, the delay being caused by the loss of the warrant fee, which had to be sent a second time. The Grand Lodge of England's record of the receipt of the fee of 4 pounds, 4 shillings, is dated April 4, 1787. There is nothing in the Lodge records to indicate that the Lodge was ever Constituted in Due Form, or that Prince Hall was ever properly qualified or installed as Master of the Lodge.

The so-called details about Prince Hall, found in Grimshaw's book, and dreamed up by him or Gleaves, and copied, with some additions by subsequent writers, are without any foundation whatever. There has never been found any record of Prince Hall being, as stated in the book, born in Barbadoes, West Indies, on September 12, 1748. In fact, no record has been discovered of his birth date or place. In several petitions addressed to the General Court, and other governmental or judicial bodies, it was found that Prince Hall and his associates always claimed that they were "Africans." So he was probably born in Africa, and sold into slavery. On August 31, 1807, Prince Hall signed a deposition, which was recorded in the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, that he was a leather-dresser and laborer, aged about seventy years, which would have made him born in 1737. That he was a slave is attested to by a certificate of Manumission signed by William Hall on April 9, 1770, together with three other members of the Hall family, giving Prince Hall his freedom. 6/ The document states that he had lived with the Hall family for twenty-one years. He also stated in his Deposition of August 13, 1807 that in November 1762 he was received in full communion in the Congregational Church on School Street, Boston, of which Andrew Croswell was the minister. In all six Boston newspapers which carried his death notice in December 1807 he was reported to have been seventy-two years old. This is two years different from his own statement, where he said "about seventy," and would make him born in 1735. Grimshaw says he arrived in Boston in 1765. As noted above, he was in Boston at least as early as 1749, serving the Hall family, whose name he adopted.

The Revolutionary War record cited by Grimshaw is also wrong. There were three Prince Halls who served in the Revolution, - one in Dartmouth of Wilbore's Company; one in Medford in Thatcher's Regiment in 1778, who was thirty years old and could not have been our Boston Prince Hall who was then forty-one years old; and a third who also lived in Medford, enlisted for the duration of the war on April 7, 1777, served at Valley Forge, and died in the service, December 18, 1778. We have the complete military records of these three Prince Halls, and none of their signatures match that of Prince Hall of Boston, the leatherdresser. In April 1777, our Prince Hall was still engaged in the leather business for we have a copy of a receipt that he signed for the sale of drum heads to Col. Crafts Regiment. The original is kept in the State Archives.

Grimshaw's speculation that Prince Hall was the son of mixed parents (one white and one black) is silly, as no record of his birth can be found anywhere. One thing is certain. As he was not born of free parents he could not have worked his way on a passage from Barbadoes to the Colonies at the age of seventeen, as Grimshaw claimed. He was thirty years old in 1765 anyway.

Grimshaw says Prince Hall was a Minister in the Methodist Church. But Hall testified that he was a member of the Congregational Church. There is no record that he was ever a Minister. This is another fable of Grimshaw's. Actually, Prince Hall did deliver two Masonic Charges to the African Lodge on St. John's Day, June 24th, one in 1792 and one in 1796, which some writers may have considered as sermons. Also, his letter book contains a sermon delivered to the Lodge on June 24th, 1789, by a Negro preacher, John Marrant, who was living with him at that time and was Lodge Chaplain.

Prince Hall was married five times, according to the official city records of Boston Marriages, as follows:

- | | |
|----------------------|------------------|
| 1 - November 2, 1763 | - Sarah Richie |
| 2 - August 22, 1770 | - Florah Gibbs |
| 3 - August 14, 1783 | - Affee Moody |
| 4 - June 28, 1798 | - Nabby Ayrault |
| 5 - June 28, 1804 | - Zilpha Johnson |

There is a gravestone in the Copp's Hill Burying Ground in Boston which has the following inscription: "Here lies ye Body of Sarah Ritchery, wife of Prince Hall, died Feby the 26th, 1769, aged 24 years." This stone was no doubt erected by the Richie family in memory of a faithful servant. On the back of this stone is an inscription which appears to have been added many years later, which reads: "Here lies the Body of Prince Hall, First Grand Master of the Colored Grand Lodge of Masons in Mass., Died Dec. 7, 1807." However, there is no record in the files of the Boston Cemetery Department to substantiate it. In fact, the City of Boston does not have any records extant to show where the remains of Prince Hall may have been interred. No records have been found either, which are adequate to identify the spots where Prince Hall's other four wives were buried. A book published in 1878 containing a list of the inscriptions on the gravestones in the Copp's Hill Burying Ground, by W. H. Whitmore, does not contain the Prince Hall inscription either, although it does contain that for Sarah "Ritchery". The style of the cutting and the amount of weathering that evidently took place before the Prince Hall inscription was added are indications that it was probably done many years after Prince Hall's death, and probably after Whitmore wrote his book of 1878. Furthermore, the date given for his death is incorrect. Five Boston newspapers gave accounts of

his death as on December 4th, 1807, but the cutter seems to have used the date when it was reported in the newspaper. Although the papers did mention Prince Hall as Master of the African Lodge, and that a Masonic funeral ceremony was held, they do not give any clue as to where the body was interred.

The administratrix of Prince Hall's estate, valued at \$47.22, was his widow, Sylvia Hall (Zilpha or Zilpoy). She was thirteen years younger than her husband, and died in Boston, December 3, 1836, aged 88 years. Is it reasonable to suppose that she would have requested that her husband's remains be buried in the grave of a former wife, who had died almost forty years previously, when he had been married four times since then.

There was another Boston Negro named Primus Hall, a soapboiler by trade, who was sometimes confused with Prince Hall by writers because of the similarity in spelling of the names. Primus claimed to be the son of Prince Hall by a marriage pre-dating that with Sarah Richie, which is not found in the records. He testified, when applying for a pension as a Revolutionary War Veteran, that his father was Prince Hall and his mother one Delia Walker, a Negro servant of Davenport Walker, of Boston. The tax records show that Primus lived with his father for several years during the 1780s, and they refer to him as "son of Prince Hall."⁷ He was born in 1756 and died in 1842. There is no record that he was ever a member of the African Lodge. Like his father, he worked for the improvement of his race, in particular for the education of Negro children.

There are no minutes of African Lodge, No. 459, extant between December 1788 and December 1807, a strange situation during the nineteen years which ended when Prince Hall's services terminated with his death. No minutes of the Lodge exist, and they seem to have vanished, if ever made. At the election in December 1807, Nero Prince was elected Master, but neither he nor any one else had a word to say about the departed leader whom they had known for thirty years. Minutes and other records were resumed in December 1807. The microfilm has four parts each of which duplicates or repeats parts of the rest of the record up to 1846, and in some cases errors were made, as shown in the following example.

<u>Section of</u> <u>Microfilm</u>	<u>Years</u> <u>Included</u>
E	1809-1816
F	1807-1826
G	1807-1846
H	1816-1821

In frame 85 of Section E, the following entry was made: "Boston, November 7, 1807, Prince Hall, Grand Master, Deceased." (underlining is mine) How could they have been so careless? There can be no doubt that the real date of Prince Hall's death was December 4, 1807, since that date is stated in the death notices of six different Boston newspapers. The official death records for the town of Boston were not being carefully kept at that time, and the newspaper reports are the only available source.

The first meeting of the Lodge reported in the minutes after the death of Prince Hall was on December 28, 1807, at which time ten new officers were installed. It appears that an election must have been held prior to this date, but there is no record of it. The four principal officers were listed as Nero Prince, Grand Master; James Nickson (Nickerson), S. Warden; James Dennie, J. Warden; John Shorter, Secretary. No Treasurer was mentioned.

Grimshaw stated that Prince Hall was a Provincial Grand Master, but the Lodge records do not say so and the Grand Lodge of England says that he was never a Provincial Grand Master. Furthermore, again according to Grimshaw, he is supposed to have created lodges in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania and Providence, Rhode Island. This is not so. Research covering the history of Colored Lodges in these places indicates that Prince Hall had nothing to do with their erection.

The second Master of African Lodge, No. 459, was Nero Prince, who came to Boston from New Hampshire about 1799, where he was employed as a black servant to Edward Tuckerman, a bread baker. The accounts of African Lodge show that he was raised a Master Mason on August 20, 1799. Grimshaw claimed that he was a Russian Jew, which is false, and wholly imaginary. (What Jewish parent would name a boy "Nero"—a Roman Emperor? Many Negroes did name their boys after Romans, like Prince, Nero, Cato, etc., however). The name of Nero Prince is first listed in the Boston Assessors Taking Books (Tax List) for the year 1800, where he is identified as a black servant of Edward Tuckerman, a bread-baker. The Boston Marriage Records also show Nero Prince as a Negro who married one Nabby Bradish of "Kenniker" (Henniker, N.H.), also a Black, on August 28, 1803. He went to Gloucester in 1810, became a sailor and made at least two trips to Russia with Captain Thomas Stanwood of that town. In 1812, he was employed at the Court of Russia by one Prince Putrossof, and afterwards on the household staff of the Emperor Alexander, where he served until his death, about 1833, except for a leave of absence in 1824, when he returned to Boston on a visit, and married Nancy Gardner of Gloucester, who returned to Russia with him. In 1833, she returned to Boston, on account of her health, and he had planned to follow within two years, but died soon after Nancy had departed. 8/

Although Prince Hall was often referred to as Grand Master of the African Lodge, and Nero Prince, his successor, used the same title in 1808, when he was chosen to preside over the Lodge, the other Masters of the Lodge that followed, up to 1827, used only the designation of "Master," and there is nothing in the records to indicate that African Lodge had become a Grand Lodge. The following letter, sent to the Grand Lodge of England in 1824, was found in the archives at London about 1869, and a copy sent to Grand Master William Sewell Gardner, who was seeking evidence regarding the history of the African Lodge in connection with a petition that had been presented to Grand Lodge by a group of Colored men headed by Lewis Hayden, who claimed to be Masons. This letter indicates that in 1824 the officers of African Lodge believed that they were still working under the authority of the Grand Lodge of England, and that they were petitioning for an extension of their powers, to permit them to confer additional degrees.

To the Right Worshipful, The Grand Master, Wardens, and Members of
the Grand Lodge of England

We your Petitioners, Sampson H. Moody, Peter Howard, Abraham C. Derendemed, John I. Hilton, James Jackson, Zadock Lew, Samuel G. Gardner, Richard Potter, Lewis Walker, and other Companions Who have been regularly Exalted to the Sublime Degree of Royal Arch Masons,
SEND GREETING:

Our worthy and well beloved Brethren Prince Hall, Boston Smith, Thomas Sanderson, and several Brethren having obtained a Warrant from your Honourable Body, on September 29, 1784 A.D., A.L. 5784, when, under the Government of Thomas Howard, Earl of Effingham, Lord Howard, &c., &c., &c., acting Grand Master Under the authority of His Royal Highness Henry

Frederick, Duke of Cumberland, Grand Master of the Most Ancient and Honourable Society of Free and Accepted Masons.

This Warrant allowing us to confer but the three Degrees, and Finding it injurious for the benefit of our Body by having no legal authority to confer the other four degrees. And understanding that the seven degrees is given under the Warrant from the Grand Lodge, we, therefore, humbly solicit the Renewal of our Charter to ourtherise us Legally to confer the same, as we are now getting in a flourishing condition. It is with regret we communicate to you that, from the Decease of our Well Beloved Brethren who obtain'd the Warrant we have not been able for several years to transmit Monies and hold a regular Communication; but, as we are now permanently Established to work conformable to our Warrant and Book of Constitutions. We will send the monies as far as circumstances will admit, together with the money, for a new Warrant, Should your Honourable Body think us worthy to receive the same. We remain, Right Worshipful and Most Worshipful Bretheren.

With all Due Respect, Yours fraternally,

(Signed)

SAMSON H. MOODY, W.M.

PETER HOWARD, S.W.

C, A. DeRANDAMIE, J.W.

Given under our hands at Boston, in the year of our Lord 1824, January 5th (5824)

WILLIAM J. CHAMPNEY, Secretary

It seems rather obvious that if Prince Hall had actually been a Provincial Grand Master, and a Grand Lodge organized in 1791, as Grimshaw claimed, that fact would have been known, not only to his successors as Master and Wardens of the Lodge, but also to the officials of the Grand Lodge of England, who have emphatically denied it. And so that claim by Grimshaw was just another case of pure fiction.

When the Grand Lodge of England renumbered their Lodges in 1792, Number 459 became Number 370. African Lodge minutes show no reference to the changed number. It seems that they didn't even know about it. In 1813, at the Union of the two Grand Lodges of England, African Lodge No. 370 was "struck off the list of active lodges. This was done, in this case, because of the failure of African Lodge to contribute to the Charity Fund of the Grand Lodge for sixteen years, as well as its failure to make regular returns. The only remittances ever made to this fund of the Grand Lodge of England were:

November 25, 1789	2L-2s-11
April 18, 1792	1 -1 - 0
November 27, 1793	1 -5 - 6
November 22, 1797	1 -5 - 0

In addition to the fifty-six known members which were "created before the Lodge received its Charter, we find that from 1813, when the Lodge was struck off by the Grand Lodge of England, to 1827, when John T. Hilton declared the independence of the Lodge, that fifty-seven additional Colored men were given "degrees" which made a hundred and thirteen members made clandestinely. Up to 1827, no reference is made of a Grand Lodge among Colored men in Boston, although Grimshaw claimed in 1903 that such a Grand Lodge had been formed in 1791.

We have examined the minutes of the Lodge from December 28, 1807 to June 24, 1828, - the last fourteen years being under irregular operation. (They have been copied on microfilm). There were 330 meetings held, but little was done until the advent of John T. Hilton, whose Masonic dates in the Lodge are:

E.A.	Dec. 2, 1822
F.C.	Jan. 13, 1823
M.M.	Feb. 10, 1823
J.W.	Dec. 27, 1824
S.W.	June 22, 1825
W.M.	May 29, 1826 (1830, then 1839 to 1845)
G.M.	1847-1850
Died	March 4, 1864

John Telemachus Hilton, from almost his entrance into the Lodge in 1822 until his death in 1864, was the controlling "operator" of "Colored Masonry" in Massachusetts.

A Declaration, written by Hilton, bearing the date of June 18, 1827, was published in THE BOSTON ADVERTISER of June 26, 1827, headed, "African Lodge No. 459" in which the Lodge did "positively declare ourselves free and independent of any Lodge from this day." Some years later a beautifully handwritten instrument on parchment 18 x 22 inches in size (which is still preserved) and having the same date was exhibited. It was signed by John T. Hilton, Walker Lewis and Thomas Dalton, Past Masters. Since Lewis did not become Master until 1829 and Dalton in 1831 it could not have been prepared before 1831, unless these men assumed the right to that title after receiving the "Virtual Past Master" degree in some Royal Arch Chapter. This certificate declared the Lodge free from its original charter and created "instead thereof this Charter under the head and title of African Grand Lodge No. 1, to have and exercise the same power of other Grand Lodges, granting Warrants and Charters." Actually the body continued to call itself by its original number - 459 - which it had not actually possessed for thirty-five years.

The next significant move by Hilton was the calling of a Convention to meet in Boston on June 24, 1847. It was attended by two putative Pennsylvania Grand Lodges of Colored men and some members from Lodges in New York and Rhode Island. From this meeting there resulted the formation of a National Grand Lodge, later termed the "Compact Grand Lodge." It led to all sorts of incriminations and remonstrances, and, as time went on, Lodge revolts and withdrawals which plagued "Colored Masonry." Hilton was the National Grand Master from the start through 1850. However, his ability and Massachusetts' stature were not sufficient to guide the new body on a safe course. It grew so weak that many writers have said it "folded up" in 1877, but that is not true for it still exists in twenty-seven states where they have State Grand Lodges. Even in Massachusetts, Hilton's own Grand Lodge, to which he had given the name Prince Hall Grand Lodge, withdrew from the National Compact Grand Lodge.

At this point let us summarize (in simple terms) the salient points relating to the whole subject.

- 1 - Some fifteen colored men were "initiated" at some unknown place by a British Military turncoat, without any Masonic authority whatever, nor positive evidence that he was even a Freemason.
- 2 - That a total of fifty-six colored men were taken into a so-called Lodge formed by these men before they obtained a Charter from the Grand Lodge of England in 1787 for African Lodge No. 459.

- 3 - That there is no evidence that the officers of the Lodge were properly installed in 1787 when the Lodge was organized under the Charter.
- 4 - That the Lodge was renumbered 370 in 1792, which they never noted in their minutes, probably not even knowing about it.
- 5 - That the Lodge was "struck" from the list of Lodges of the Grand Lodge of England in 1813 because they had not paid any dues to the Grand Charity Fund since 1797, sixteen years earlier, and only three times previously.
- 6 - That they continued to work from 1813 to 1827 with a Charter that had been annulled, during which time they added fifty-six more members - all during a period without Masonic authority.
- 7 - That in 1827 they declared themselves independent and then constituted themselves into a Grand Lodge, thus severing the last vestige of any Masonic authority.
- 8 - That in 1847 a national body was created called the Most Worshipful National Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons for the United States of North America (later referred to as the National Compact Grand Lodge), which caused chaos but has continued to this date.
- 9 - That in 1848 the Massachusetts State Colored Grand Lodge (subordinate to the National Grand Lodge) adopted the title Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. Except for Kansas, no other colored Grand Lodge adopted the name Prince Hall in its title before 1903.
- 10 - That there are no colored Grand Lodges which can show derivation from African Lodge No. 459, and therefore, all colored Lodges or Grand Lodges are now clandestine.

EPILOG

To show how far afield Grimshaw went in trying to glamorize things - On page 97 of his book he shows a photograph titled "Nero Prince." It is actually an 1805 picture of Thomas Smith Webb, the celebrated Masonic ritualist, now in the possession of St. John's Commandery of Knights Templar in Providence, Rhode Island (see Biography of Thomas Smith Webb by Herbert T. Leyland, published by Ohio Chapter of Research in 1965). Not only this, but on page 68 of the book by Grimshaw is another picture claimed to be of Prince Hall. It is really a retouched, well-known, portrait of George Washington.

Henry Wilson Coil wrote the following about Prince Hall: "Over a long life he was a respectable and responsible citizen, but the effort to glorify him as a Minister, a Statesman, and a war hero or paragon of any kind were as unavailing as they were unnecessary. He is to be classed as a conservative, showing good judgment and restraint in all his activities. His memory will not suffer from being de-glamorized, though the reputations of some authors may be. The extreme claims made for the Negro organization at Boston and elsewhere did not originate with Prince Hall, but in most instances long after his death."

Even after death Prince Hall suffered from misrepresentation, for the date on the tombstone in Copp's Hill Burying Ground is the date of his interment, three days after his demise.

There are some reasons why this brochure is not being printed.

1 - It is the first record of a research on the subject which was ever made IN Massachusetts, where Colored Men first became Freemasons.

2 - It is to correct the erroneous material printed in my book on the subject - now out of print, but nevertheless still found in libraries.

3 - And, at this point to show that I have no scruples, I record that I have been a member of two Lodges of Colored men: Alpha No. 116, in New Jersey and Kumen No. 133, in Niger, Africa, under the G.L.N.F. - the former Honorary and the latter, Charter.

4 - And, to be happy in stating that the data in this brochure is purely historical and has nothing to do with Freemasons of color in non-recognized bodies. I have freely attended untiled bodies and presented historical talks on Masonic subjects. In three such instances I was presented with tokens of respect (medals and an engraved plate).

H. V. B. V.

References

- 1/ - "The Most Worshipful United Grand Lodge of F&AM of Maryland vs. Wm. F. Green, G.M. of the Free & Accepted York Masons, et al. Decided June 17, 1920 - Plaintiff not entitled to injunction since evidence was conflicting. Source: Report of Cases Argued and Adjudged in the Court of Appeals of Maryland - Herbert F. Tiffany, State Reporter, vol.136: Including cases in October Term, 1919 and January and April 1920.
- 2/ - The claim that the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts pre-dates the African Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania is based upon tradition and cannot be documented. In fact, the Lodge records show that in Philadelphia, on December 26, 1815, a Lodge of Colored Men constituted themselves (clandestinely) into a Grand Lodge, under the title of "The First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America." In Boston, the African Lodge, No. 459, founded by Prince Hall, had continued to meet as a Lodge after his death its Charter had been annulled, and finding itself unable to get the Grand Lodge of England to restore the Charter, declared itself Independent in 1827, and assumed the name of "African Grand Lodge, No. 459, of Boston. (June 18, 1827) (also clandestinely).
- 3/ - Some have claimed that this record originally gave the year 1775, but if so, why would another record show 1778? If the Negroes had been initiated in 1775, there would certainly be no reason for them to be initiated again in 1778. Except for the date of March 6, 1778, when the degrees

were conferred, the earliest date on record when Lodge business was conducted was September 6, 1778, which was a receipt for the hire of a place for the Lodge to meet. Furthermore, the original document, photographed as frame No. 16, must now be considered worthless, as a reliable Masonic Research Historian, who examined in in 1955, reported that a crude figure "5" had been scrawled in that place, whereas the film, made in 1950, showed the number to be illegible.

- 4/ - Major Frederick H. Smyth
- 5/ - Record of Service of Connecticut Men in the (1) War of the Revolution. p.597.
- 6/ - Notarial Papers of Ezekiel Price (Boston Athenaeum Library)
- 7/ - Assessors' Taking Books (City of Boston, Assessor's Office)
- 8/ - See: A Narrative of the Life and Travels of Mrs. Nancy Prince, written by herself, Boston, Published by the author, 1853.