

VICTORIA LODGE OF EDUCATION AND RESEARCH  
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**A SHORT HISTORY OF PRINCE HALL FREEMASONRY**

by

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Prince Hall Masonry began legitimately in Massachusetts in the 18th century, and has existed since, particularly in the United States, Liberia, Continental Europe, South America and in some parts of Canada. It has always been regarded as irregular and clandestine, but in this age of civil rights, the winds of change are blowing.

In 1733, the first white Lodge in the United States was warranted. Forty-two years later, in 1775, Prince Hall, a black man and 14 other coloured men from Boston petitioned Army Lodge No. 441 for membership. Army Lodge was of Irish registry. Its Master was a Joseph Batten. All petitions were favorably received and Hall and his companions were regularly initiated, passed and raised. Army Lodge granted them a warrant which empowered them to meet as Masons, assemble as Masons, hold church parades and otherwise conduct themselves as Masons but they could not make Masons, only a Charter from a Grand Lodge would give them this great Masonic right. It should be noted that the granting of a warrant by the Military Lodge was in keeping with Masonic practice of that time.

Prince Hall was born of an English father and Mulatto mother in Barbados. He was well educated and eventually became a minister. His early trade was that of a leatherworker. He was a devout Christian and a family man. Official records were not accurately kept on blacks in those days, but it is now generally

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accepted that he was born in 1738, if this is fact, he would have been 37 years of age when he was made a Mason.

Prince Hall petitioned Dr. Joseph Warren, Provincial Grand Master of Massachusetts, for a regular charter. Warren was favourably disposed to granting the petition. Unfortunately, other Americans did not share Warren's enthusiasm for Black Freemasonry. This new nation, born in a struggle for liberty and which espoused basic freedoms for all, was to consider black men as inferior and many refused to sit in Lodge with men of colour. Having been rebuffed in America, Hall then petitioned the Grand Lodge of Ancients in England. On September 29, 1784, a charter was granted under the hand of the Duke of Cumberland. This legally constituted Lodge was numbered 459 and was called African Lodge. African Lodge thereafter functioned as a Mother Lodge. That is to say, it assumed authority to establish other Lodges, much as indeed it had been founded several years earlier by the Irish Army Lodge.

African Lodge was formed in 1791, one year before the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts. African Lodge formed two additional Lodges in Philadelphia and Providence. Prince Hall died in 1807. The next year, the name of African Grand Lodge was changed to "Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge Free and Accepted Masons", as a memorial to Hall.

From these three Lodges and that first Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Prince Hall Masonry flourished through the United States. But these were times of fervor and passion, slavery and war. Grand Lodges were relatively new and in a fluid state. Freemasonry went by ancient law and custom, so, when the system of

territorial jurisdiction came into being it really complicated things for Prince Hall Masonry. Most arguments put forward against the legitimacy of Prince Hall Masonry have long been put to ground by a vigorous research carried on by reputable Masonic scholars, both black and white. Notwithstanding that, scholars and jurisprudence committees and Grand Lodge committees have agreed that Prince Hall is regular, Yet the problem endures - recognition is denied - and it is apparent that the denial is one of race - not Masonic - and herein lies a great tragedy. Prince Hall Masons in the United States are considered to be irregular, that is, not recognized and by some thought to be clandestine, It must be remembered that, in Masonic terms, something that is regular does not automatically mean that fraternal recognition goes with it, A clandestine Lodge is a Lodge that is not legally constituted, where as a non-recognized Lodge is often legal.

Black Masons came into Canada during the American Civil War days. they came primarily into the Province of Ontario. In that province the 18th Prince Hall Grand Lodge was formed, which has the legal title of "Grand Lodge of Ontario". It has 18 subordinate Lodges on its register. The Lt. Governor of Ontario, the Honorable Lincoln Alexander is a 33rd Degree Prince Hall Mason.

Black farming families trekked into western Canada and settled in the four western provinces. These black people brought Prince Hall Masonry with them. In 1921 there were four Prince Hall Lodges operating in Alberta, Bow River Lodge No.19 in Calgary; Pride of Alberta No.20 in Edmonton; Stalwart Lodge No. 22 in Drumheller and Time and Patience No. 23 in Judkins,

Many black Masons who were members of these older Lodges have left an impression in Alberta history . Lionel Jones obtained the Charter for Pride of Alberta Lodge. His son, Jesse Jones, became a renowned teacher and athlete and was elected Secretary of his Lodge. Jesse, a son Lionel, is a distinguished judge. Jesse was made a citizen of Sports History by the City of Edmonton. Some other prominent black Masons in Alberta were Joe "Kid" Cotten, a successful boxer and farmer; Dr. John Cobb; and Dr. Amos Walker.

During the depression years of 1937, 1938 and 1939, the four Prince Hall Ledges in Alberta surrendered their Charters to their Grand Lodge due to the economic situation and the decline in their numbers.

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In 1967, to celebrate the Canadian Centennial, some of the members of the original Lodges, requested the re-dedication of the Charter for Pride of Alberta in Edmonton. The Grand Lodge approved the request and with Regent Lodge No.5 of Winnipeg acting as host, the Grand Lodge Officers initiated 25 new Masons and then re-dedicated the Charter. The Lodge continues today and has now formed a second Lodge in Edmonton and one in Calgary . The Lodges operate in the York Rite. They use the Daggett Ritual which is written in cipher. The signs, grips, words and due-guards are the same as ours. All other differences are very minor.

These three Alberta Lodges are under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Minnesota, but the earlier Lodges were under the jurisdiction of the Grand Lodge of Washington.

I am not aware of any past history of Prince Hall Masonry in British Columbia. The only Prince Hall Lodge presently meeting in Vancouver is True Resolution Lodge No. 16, which is under the jurisdiction of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Washington and they practice the same ritual as do the Ancient Lodges of British Columbia. They meet the first Saturday of each month except

July, in the Lodge Hall of Park Lodge No. 63 at 4474 Rupert Street.

Some of you may say of Prince Hall Masonry, "If they are regular and legitimate, why don't we recognize them?" It is not that easy. If the Grand Lodge of British Columbia were to recognize the Minnesota Prince Hall Grand Lodge - what response would we get from the Grand Lodge of Minnesota and other American Grand Lodges? Would they continue to recognize us - we cannot be sure. Our current position is that Prince Hall Masons would have to sever all ties with Prince Hall Masonry and then take all three degrees in our Lodges.

Whatever your feeling toward black men who are Prince Hall Masons and their Craft, you cannot currently sit in Lodge with a Prince Hall Mason. Our Grand Lodge does not recognize that body of Masons. The traditional view held in Canada is that the situation is wrong, but it is an American domestic problem. Fortunately in Canada there is no Masonic colour barrier. To have one would be a violation of the spirit of Freemasonry and we have many black Masonic brethren in the Craft.

In spite of all the controversy over Prince Hall Masonry and the concern as to how to handle the situation, the Grand Lodge of Quebec is presently in the preliminary stages of recognizing Prince Hall Masonry and the Grand Lodge of Canada in Ontario, is reviewing its relationship with Prince Hall Masonry. These Grand Lodges together with the Grand Lodge of Nebraska - which has given visiting privileges - are working to joining with Prince Hall rather than destroy this old order.

Since preparing this paper on Prince Hall Freemasonry, our Grand Master, M.W. Brother Douglas R. Grant, has issued the following ruling for the guidance of the members of this Grand Lodge during the 1990 -91 Masonic year -

"Whereas this Grand Lodge recognizes the Grand Lodge F.& A.M. of Washington and whereas the Grand Lodge of Washington has extended visitation rights to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of that State, I therefor, rule that a member of the Grand Lodge of British Columbia may attend a Lodge under the Grand Lodge of Washington, if he so wishes, even though there may be a Prince Hall Mason in attendance".

Since the Grand Lodge of British Columbia has not extended any form of recognition to any Prince Hall Lodges, it is still not permissible for a member of this Grand Lodge to attend a meeting of a Prince Hall Lodge nor is it permissible for any Prince Hall Mason to attend a meeting of any Lodge in this Jurisdiction.