

MATERIALS ON PRINCE HALL

Hall was one of fifteen free Blacks initiated into Masonry by the Irish Military Lodge No. 441, on March 6, 1775:

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| Prince Hall | Peter Best | Cuff Bufform | John Carter |
| Peter Freeman | Fortune Howard | Cyrus Jonbus | Prince Rees |
| Thomas Sanderson | Buesten Singer | Boston Smith | Cato Spear |
| Prince Taylar | Benjamin Tiber | Richard Tilley | |

PRINCE HALL MASONS: IN THE STUGGLE TO ADVANCE

By Alton G. Roundtree

On February 22, 2011 in Honor of Black History Month Adelpic Union Lodge #14 PHA was honored to host RW Alton Roundtree at the prince Hall Masonic Temple in Harlem as he broadened our knowledge on Prince Hall Masons and their very important contributions to this country.

For Prince Hall and the Brothers of African Lode No. 459 Freemasonry was probably a means to an end. Considering Freemasonry emphasis on the “Brotherhood of Man” and the “Fatherhood of God” Freemasonry could have been an avenue to equality.

The history of Prince Hall Freemasonry is the history of the struggling, rising and advancing of blacks in America, who, in the process uplifted humanity. Masonic contributions have been prevalent for over 235 years, since March 1775 when Prince Hall and fourteen other black men were initiated into the Fraternity of Freemasonry.

Prince Hall Freemasonry has been a major contributor to freedom in the United States. Prince Hall Masons have provided community-service since March 6, 1775. The organization is one year and four months older than the United States.

Let's explore briefly W.E.B. DuBois' s involvement with Alpha Phi Alpha.

When W.E.B. DuBois convened the Niagara Conference in 1905, the predecessor to the NAACP, there were several men who would be later inducted as Alphas including Alonzo Herndon(exalted honorary in 1920) and his son Norris Herndon(Sigma Chapter, 1921), who was then a teenager at time. Alonzo Herndon established Atlanta Life Insurance Company and became Atlanta's first black millionaire. His wife was a teacher at Atlanta University with DuBois. They lived in a magnificent mansion which was the site of many Alpha functions for the brothers in Atlanta.

Any brother who has read Wesley book on Callis recalls that Callis often spoke about the work of DuBois as an inspiration. He talked about the convening of the Niagara Conference as being one of the major influences in his life. (Wesley, p. 16.) When Callis

and Eugene Kinckle Jones were researching African history at Cornell's library they were not aware that DuBouis had written in 1906 a pamphlet entitled "Old African Civilization" while he

PRINCE HALL FREEMASONRY BY BRO. GEORGE DRAFFEN OF NEWINGTON, P.J.G.D., P.M. Deputy Grand Master, Grand Lodge of Scotland garrisoned at Castle Williams (now Fort Independence), Boston Harbor on March 6, 1775,

They applied to the Grand Lodge of England for a warrant, March 2, 1784. It was issued to them as ``African Lodge #459," with Prince Hall as Master, September 29, 1784. The charter was not received until May 2, 1787. The Lodge was organized under the warrant on May 6, 1787. It remained upon the English registry until the amalgamation of the rival Grand Lodges of the ``Moderns and the ``Ancients" into the present United Grand Lodge of England. In 1813, it and the other English Lodges in the United States were erased. Incidentally, African Lodge #459 had been renumbered #370 in 1792 but the Lodge was unaware of this.

In 1797 Prince Hall issued a license to thirteen black men who had been made Masons in England to assemble and work as a Lodge in Philadelphia. Another Lodge was organized under his authority in Providence Rhode Island. In 1808 these three Lodges joined in forming the ``African Grand Lodge of Boston."

This was how African Lodge No. 1 was organized, and Prince Hall later petitioned the Mother Grand Lodge of the world, England, for a warrant that was issued on September 29, 1784, for African Lodge 459

The second Negro Grand Lodge was formed in 1815 and was called the ``First Independent African Grand Lodge of North America in and for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." The third was the ``Hiram Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania." These three Grand Lodges recognized each other formally in 1847 and formed a National Grand Lodge. Practically all Negro Lodges in the Country are descended from one of these three original Grand Lodges.

The following is excerpted from “**The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution**”, by Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, University of Massachusetts Press Published: November 30, 1989

Prince Hall

The founder of the first black lodge within the Masonic Order, Prince Hall (c.1735–1807) was a leading black citizen of Boston during the Revolutionary War era. A skilled orator, he pointed to the inherent hypocrisy of a war being waged in the name of freedom by a people that practiced the enslavement of others.

Hall supported the Revolution and may well have fought against the British. He emerged as a leader of Boston's African-American community in the years after the war. Using his position as Worshipful Master or Grandmaster of Boston's African Lodge No. 459 as a bully pulpit, he organized efforts to improve education for black Bostonians, to begin a back-to-Africa colonization movement, and to resist Northern participation in the slave trade. In the words of his Masonic biographer Charles H. Wesley, "His drive for freedom had a dual thrust. One directed against the dominating rule of a foreign power in the American colonies, and the other against the bondage of blacks."

Organized Masonic Fraternity

Records of the first third of Hall's life are sparse. The slave trade in Massachusetts was heavy during the first half of the eighteenth century, and Hall's speeches on behalf of African Americans sometimes referred to Africa as a native land, so he may have been born in Africa, but no records have surfaced to support either this idea or another early account stating that he was Barbadian by birth. The best guess as to Hall's birthdate comes from records and newspaper accounts of his death in late 1807 that gave his age as 72, and thus probably places his birth in 1735. The first documentary evidence of his existence comes in the late 1740s in a list of slaves owned by William Hall of Boston, a leather-dresser or leather craftsman. It was probably from his master that Hall took his last name.

In 1756 Hall fathered a son, Primus, who likewise was involved with the Revolution and became an influential black Bostonian. The mother was a servant named Delia who worked in a nearby household. Hall joined a Congregational church in 1762 and married another slave, Sarah Ritchie (or Ritchery, the spelling on her gravestone), the following year. After her death, Hall was married four more times: to Flora Gibbs in 1770, Affee Moody in 1783, Nabby Ayrauly in 1798, and Zilpha (or Sylvia) Johnson in 1804. He learned the leather trade from his master and was given his freedom, in the form of a certificate of manumission, by William Hall in 1770. By Gibbs he had another son, Prince Africanus.

Soon after marrying Gibbs, Hall acquired a small house with a workshop and opened a leather goods store called The Golden Fleece. He also worked as a caterer. Hall's store later became a meeting place for the Masonic fraternity he organized. What drew Hall to

Masonry in the first place is not known for certain, but fraternal organizations of various kinds served important community functions among free blacks at various stages in American history. Hall noticed that British soldiers in Boston had set up satellite chapters of Masonic lodges in their home countries, and he may have concluded that joining the Masons represented a path toward integration into the mainstream of American society. He may also have been motivated by the summary rejection of antislavery petitions by the colony's government in 1773 and 1774. In 1775, just before the outbreak of war in Lexington and Concord, Hall was one of a group of 14 free blacks who became members of a Masonic lodge set up by British troops stationed in Boston, perhaps an offshoot of the Irish Lodge No. 441 in the city of Dublin. The date was said to be March 6, 1775.

The membership seemed to confer only partial rights within the Masonic organization, however. When the British garrison withdrew just days later, the sergeant who had headed the British group gave Hall and his companions permission to meet as a lodge and to march in public and funeral processions. But the group was not officially chartered and could not confer membership or degrees on other Masons. With Hall as master and leader, the black Masons formed the African Lodge No. 1 on July 3, 1775; it was the first black order of Free and Accepted Masons anywhere in the world.

Made Drum Heads for Military

The question of Hall's actual participation in fighting against the British remains to be settled. Several histories of the large African-American presence in the American army (according to some estimates, one in every seven soldiers was black) state that he took up arms, but the name Prince Hall was a fairly common one. What can be documented is that Hall provided Revolutionary troops with leather drumheads, according to a 1777 bill of sale.

It was at around this time that Hall began to lead his fellow black Bostonians in trying to persuade the young nation to live up to its ideas of liberty and equality for all. He was one of four signers at the head of a 1777 petition demanding the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. The petition's aim, in its own words (as quoted by Sidney Kaplan in *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*), was that the "inhabitanc of these Stats" would, if slavery were abolished, no longer be "chargeable with the inconsistancy of acting themselves the part which they condemn and oppose in others." The Massachusetts legislature sent a bill introduced by sympathetic white lawmakers along to the national Congress of the Confederation, but the petition was not acted upon; slavery in Massachusetts would not be abolished until 1783, when it was ended by a state judicial decision.

Hall continued to operate his successful leather shop and to seek official recognition for his small Masonic lodge, its numbers further decimated as blacks joined the American army and were dispersed along the battlefield. In 1782 he penned a retort to a newspaper article that disparagingly referred to the lodge as "St. Blacks" and made light of its Feast of St. John observances. In 1784 Hall (as quoted by Kaplan) wrote to Masons in England that "this Lodge hath been founded almost eight years and we have had only a Permit to

Walk on St. John's Day and to Bury our Dead in manner and form ... we hope [you] will not deny us nor treat us Beneath the rest of our fellowmen, although Poor yet Sincere Brethren of the Craft." The lodge's official charter was granted, but three years passed before it was issued and brought to America. What had been known as African Lodge No. 1 was now African Lodge No. 459.

Hall by that time was a Boston property owner, taxpayer, and voter, and the change solidified his status as a community leader. As a revolt among dispossessed farmers and war veterans broke out in western Massachusetts under the name Shays's Rebellion, Hall and other blacks faced the problem of which side to support—and of whether their support would be welcomed. Hall wrote in November of 1786 to Massachusetts governor James Bowdoin offering to raise black volunteers for the effort to put down the rebellion. The offer was turned down by a state government afraid of what an armed black militia might do.

Proposed African Colony

Disillusioned by this turn of events, Hall threw his support behind a still-tiny back-to-Africa movement. In time, the idea of African colonization would gain support and result in the establishment of the nation of Liberia, but Hall brought together 12 members of his lodge to sign a petition dated January 4, 1787, that was presented to the Massachusetts House, years ahead of even the earliest actual return voyages to Africa by African Americans or African Canadians. The importance of Hall's petition lies less in its effect—it went nowhere—than for what it reveals about the deferral of African-American dreams that followed the American Revolution. Hall's petition (quoted and reproduced by Kaplan) referred to "very disagreeable and disadvantageous circumstances; most of which must attend us, so long as we and our children live in America."

With the failure of this initiative, Hall turned his attention to improving the living conditions of black Bostonians. In 1787 and again in 1796, he led drives to provide free state schooling for black Massachusetts children, which, he argued, they were entitled to inasmuch as black tax payments supported white schools. Finally, in 1800 he offered his own home for use as a school; two students from Harvard University agreed to serve as instructors.

Hall began to discuss the evils of slavery in general, and he developed into a powerful orator. In a 1797 Feast of St. John address to the African Lodge in West Cambridge (quoted by Kaplan), he spoke of the abuse black Bostonians endured on holidays at the hands of "a mob or horde of shameless, low-lived, envious, spiteful persons" who in groups of "twenty or thirty cowards fall upon one man" or tear the clothes off old women. But he looked to the slave revolt that had occurred in Haiti as a sign of hope: if liberty had begun "to dawn in some of the West-Indian islands, then, sure enough, God would act for justice in New England too, and let Boston and the World know, that He hath no respect of persons; and that that bulwark of envy, pride, scorn, and contempt, which is so visible to be seen in some ... shall fall, to rise no more."

The idea of black Masonry began to spread, especially as Hall's lodge received chilly treatment from white Masonic groups. New lodges, often bearing Hall's name, were chartered in other cities, beginning in 1797 in Providence, Rhode Island. A black Masonic lodge in Philadelphia played a key role in the evolution of independent black institutions in that city. Hall remained active until his death in Boston on April 4, 1807; his final interment the following year was attended by a large crowd of African Americans. The branch of Freemasonry he founded continued to exert a strong influence in black communities. The list of famous Prince Hall Masons in the twentieth century was a long one, and included educator Booker T. Washington, writer W.E.B. DuBois, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, author Alex Haley, bandleaders William "Count" Basie, Lionel Hampton, and Edward Kennedy "Duke" Ellington, boxer Sugar Ray Robinson, publisher John H. Johnson, and Los Angeles mayor Tom Bradley, among many others.

Books

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