

## William H. Upton

William H. Upton was a son of William Upton, who was a Chief Justice of the State of Oregon and Comptroller of the United States Treasury under President Rutherford B. Hayes.

William H. Upton was the sixth of eleven children. He graduated from Yale College in 1877, spent three years in the Navy Department at Washington DC, and afterward graduated with honors from the George Washington University Law School. Mr. Upton returned to Walla Walla Washington in 1880 to practice law. In 1888 he became a member of the Territorial Legislature and in 1889 and again in 1892. He was then elected Superior Judge of Walla Walla and Franklin counties.

Judge Upton was Master of Blue Mountain Lodge, No. 13, F. & A. M., of Walla Walla in 1892. He was known as a Masonic scholar, becoming Grand Master of the MW Grand Lodge of Washington in 1898.

Judge Upton made many significant contributions to Masonry; his most significant was the Committee Report delivered originally in 1897 on the recognition of Prince Hall Masonry. It stands as a historic monument within the Craft; speaking to the issue of “the Level” among Mason's, despite the contrary “equality attitudes” more typical of the time. The Report was published with the title, “**LIGHT ON A DARK SUBJECT BEING, A Critical Examination of objections to the legitimacy of the Masonry existing among the Negroes of America, by William H. Upton, A. M., LL. M., Grand Master of Masons in the State of Washington.**”

This Report recommended passing a resolution Prince Hall Masons in the State of Washington; however the majority of the other white Grand Lodges in the United States and Canada withdrew Masonic relations with the Grand Lodge of Washington until the resolution was repealed. The resolution was reluctantly rescinded in June 1899. William H. Upton continued to write on this subject with conviction.

In 1900, he published an article in volume 13 of *Ars Quatuor Coronatorum* at page 56 (AQC 13:56), entitled “**Prince Hall’s Letter Book.**” The article is described by PM David L. Gray as the most informative contemporary documentation of Prince Hall’s writings<sup>1</sup>. The Letter Book itself contains 300 pages and has been bound by hand. It is handwritten likely by Prince Hall. Past Grand Master Upton’s work on the **Letter Book** is universally relied upon. Walkes, Wesley, Gray and other Prince Hall scholars use it.

His work on Black Masonry was an important chapter in Masonic history. He died on November 3, 1906. Upton's sincere interest was demonstrated by a provision in his will that no monument should be erected over his grave until “both colored and white Masons could stand over it as Brothers”. In June 1990 the Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of Washington passed a resolution recognizing the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons of the State of Washington.

On June 8, 1991, both Grand Lodges gathered to lay a marker on William Upton's grave. The DVD of the ceremony showed the full day's events. Both Grand Lodges marched down the road to the cemetery in full Masonic dress, Prince Hall members on one side of the road and Mainstream on the other. Side by side they marched in this huge long line.

And when they got to the cemetery there were speeches and prayers and hugs and recognition of William Upton's surviving family that were there that day. Guests present included Brother Joseph A. Walkes, Jr. of the Phylaxis Society. Above all, there was the ceremony of the tombstone dedication where members of both Grand Lodges using the working tools of a Master Mason declared the work of engraved stone to be square, level and plumb. And as the veil was lifted from the stone all could read these words inscribed on it.

**"This memorial commmerates the fruition of the last will and testament of William H. Upton MW Past Grand Master Wash. F & AM who desired that all Masons regardless of color, should dwell together as recognized Masonic Brethren. This was accomplished in 1990 by actions of both Grand Lodges MW GL F&AM of Wash. and MW Prince Hall GL F&AM of Wash. Dedicated June 8, 1991 AL 5991"**

