

the signers of the Declaration of Independence) delivered the charter to Prince Hall in Boston. It states, in part,

KNOW YE THAT WE, at the humble petition of our right trusty and well beloved Brethren, Prince Hall, Boston Smith, Thomas Sanderson, and several other Brethren, residing in Boston, New England, in North America, do hereby constitute the said Brethren into a regular LODGE OF FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS, under the title or denomination of the AFRICAN LODGE, to be opened in Boston...and do further, at their said petition, hereby appoint the said PRINCE HALL to be Master, BOSTON SMITH, Senior Warden, and THOMAS SANDERSON, Junior Warden, for the opening of said LODGE....

African Lodge No. 459 was officially organized on May 6, 1787.

The Book of Constitutions which accompanies each Masonic charter usually comes in the form of loose sheets, but as a personal gift to the first Black Masonic Lodge, William Moody had the book beautifully bound. The book was an object worthy of exhibition and Prince Hall proudly showed it to "some Masters of other lodges here...."

According to Masonic tradition, the General Assembly of Black Masons met in a hall on Water Street in Boston on June 24, 1791, the feast of their second patron, St. John Baptist, and formed the African grand Lodge. Prince Hall was elected Grand Master, a position which he held until his death.

Seven years later, three lodges of Black Masons met in Boston and changed the name of the Grand Lodge to the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, Free and Accepted Masons of Massachusetts. All Prince Hall Grand Lodges are direct descendants of this first Grand Lodge.

In 1869, the headquarters of the Massachusetts Grand Lodge was destroyed by fire. A number of priceless records perished in the flames. Fortunately, the charter was kept in a metal tube. Although the intense heat charred the paper, the charter itself was saved. Most Worshipful Grand Master S.T. Kendall risked his life to rescue the precious charter from the burning building. Today, the original charter is preserved between two sheets of heavy plate glass in a fire-proof vault in a downtown Boston bank.

The Spread of Prince Hall Freemasonry

IN 1797, a warrant was granted by the Massachusetts Grand Lodge for the formation of a lodge in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was composed of a group of men "all of whom had received their degrees abroad." Among these men, who were Ancient York Masons, were Absalom Jones, the first Black Episcopal priest and founder of St. Thomas Episcopal Church; Richard Allen, founder and first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church; James Forten, abolitionist; and Prince Saunders, later an important official in independent Haiti.

On September 22, 1797, Prince Hall and Wardens Cyrus Forbes and George Middleton installed the officers of the African Independent Lodge No. 1 of Philadelphia. Union Lodge No. 2 was chartered in 1810; Laurel Lodge No. 5 in 1811; and Phoenix Lodge No. 6 in 1814. In 1815, the four lodges formed First African Independent Grand Lodge of North America for Pennsylvania. Absalom Jones was elected the first Grand Master.

In 1797, also, the members of the Boston lodge who lived in Rhode Island requested a warrant to constitute a separate lodge. As Hiram Lodge No. 3 of Providence, this lodge became inactive in 1813 when most of its members emigrated to Liberia where they carried on the tradition of Freemasonry by establishing the first lodges on the mainland of Africa.

Other lodges established in the East before the Civil War included New York, New Jersey, Washington, D.C., Delaware and Maryland.

Pennsylvania Masons took the lead in establishing lodges in the West and South. New lodges were chartered in Ohio (1849) and other free states before the Civil War and in the reconstructed South. Between 1851 and 1865, new lodges were chartered in Kansas, Missouri, Michigan, Ontario (Canada) and California. Between 1866 and 1880, new lodges were

organized in West Virginia, Mississippi, Virginia, Connecticut, South Carolina, Texas, Florida, Tennessee, Illinois, Colorado, Alabama, Arkansas, Georgia and North Carolina.

Before the Civil War and after the close of the Reconstruction Period, the spread of Prince Hall Freemasonry was hampered by the attitude of southern governments that opposed the spread of secret societies among free Blacks. Most southern states had laws against the assembly of more than two Blacks without the presence of a White person. Masons were considered especially dangerous. King David Lodge No. 5 of Havre De Grace, Maryland, for example, was closed by the government and the members were arrested and fined.

The National Masonic Lodge Experiment

PRINCE HALL Freemasonry has no national organization with supreme authority. Power is vested in a state Grand Lodge. Each Grand Lodge is of-

ficially independent of all the other Grand Lodges. The local lodges in a state owe allegiance to their state Grand Lodge. The Grand Lodge meets once a year, but the Grand Master, the elected head of the state Grand Lodge, has power year round.

During the mid 1940's, Prince Hall Masons experimented with a National Grand Lodge. It was called the National Compact and was established to be a support to the state Grand Lodges. The architects of the National Compact hoped that it would end internal dissent, create a nationwide Masonic communications network and help present a united Black Masonic front to White Masons. There was no precedent in Masonic tradition for a National Grand Lodge. The attempt by the national leadership to usurp power from the state leadership, far from ending internal dissent, led to increased friction and disunity.

As the National Compact chartered new lodges throughout the country, more and more of the state Grand Lodges withdrew from the national body, declaring it un-Masonic.

(Continued on Page 18)



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