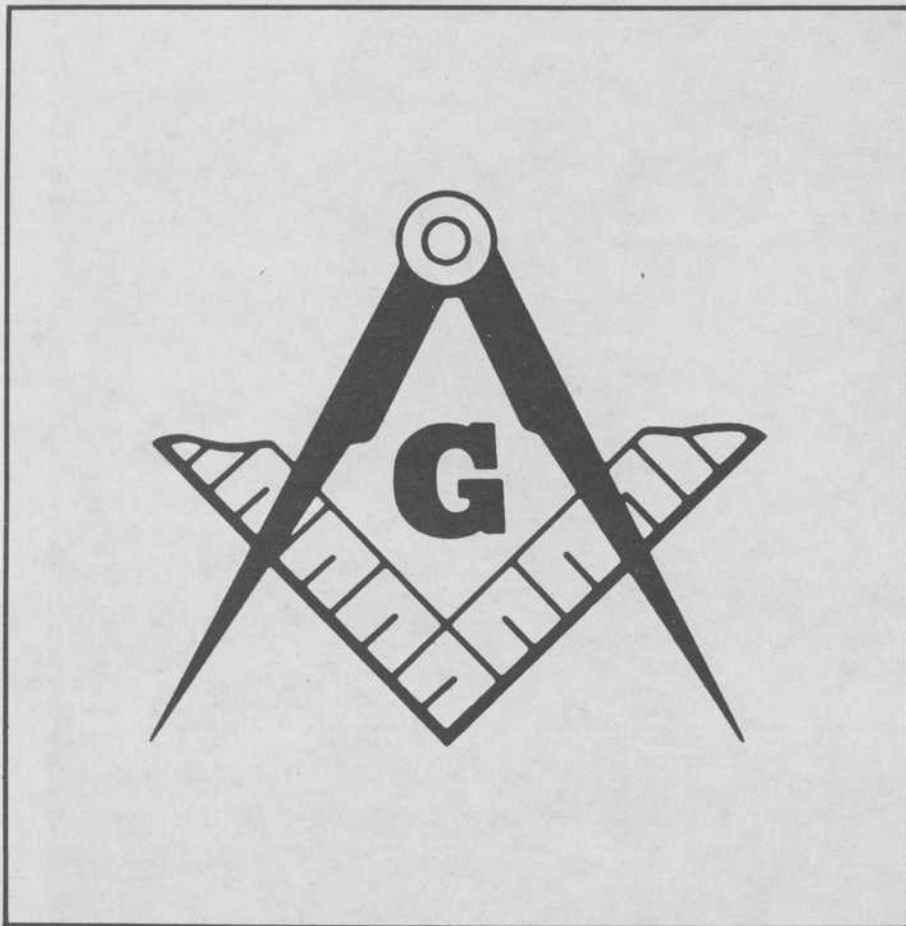## A Fresh Look At

The Community-Building Tradition of The Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Masonry

The Masons have been chosen—and are preparing themselves—to occupy a preeminent position in the national Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP). In each state, the persons to whom all in AOIP will look for sage and "wise parental" guidance in an equitable manner will be the Grand Masters and Grand Matrons of each state.

Their official role is that of senior advisers to all the state-wide Interorganizational Liaison Committees of every region in AOIP.

As we read this comprehensive ac-counting of the many activities of the Masons in each state, all of us will begin to see why these illustrious persons were chosen for this important leadership role.

The Origins

MUCH concerning the history of the Prince Hall Masons was set forth in a broad-based way in the previous issue. However, as a brief overview, the origin of the Masonic Grand Lodges may rightfully be traced back more than 200 years to the organiza-tion and establishment of the first Lodge of Black Masons in Boston, Massachusetts by Prince Hall who, with 14 other men of color, had been made Master Masons in a British Military Lodge during the Revolu-tionary War. From this nucleus, Prince Hall Masonry has radiated its influence throughout the world culminating in the establishment of Grand Lodges in Europe, Asia, British West Indies, Africa and throughout the United States.

At a period when Black Americans were denied most of their human rights, they sought ways to compen-sate for this lack of justice and equity by building their own community in-stitutions like the Black church. The founding of Prince Hall Freemasonry was a natural outgrowth of Black self-help.

All those who now enjoy the privileges, rights and benefits that membership bestows, as well as all Black Americans—particularly those associated with the AOIP focus on eradicating the "root causes" of illiteracy—can view with great pride the heritage of community-building which has been passed down to us from these illustrious pioneers.

Here follows the history of a few of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Masonry. They are but ex-amples of the road that has been traversed by all of the 43 Grand Lodges. Perhaps the future will permit us to complete the story.

The Grand Lodge of Massachusetts

THE STORY of the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts is the story of Prince Hall Freemasonry. In the May issue of the *National BLACK MONITOR* we related, in some detail, the early years of this fascinating history. The 204 years of continuous existence of Prince Hall Freemasonry make it the oldest Black organization in the United States, even older than the Black church.

All 43 Prince Hall Grand Lodges can trace their lineage to the original African Grand Lodge or Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

Prince Hall, the first Grand Master, died on December 4, 1807. He was buried in Copp's Hill Burying Ground, the Patriots cemetery. On June 24, 1895 (Feast of St. John the Baptist), Past Grand Master John J. Smith, the last surviving member of African Lodge No. 459, wearing the apron once worn by Prince Hall which is of sheep skin filled with stars, unveiled the tall, stur-dy and enduring granite monument which the Massachusetts Grand Lodge erected to honor Prince Hall, the founder of Black Freemasonry.

20th Century Grand Masters

Since Most Worshipful Grand Master Prince Hall, there have been 57 Grand Masters in Massachusetts. Those of the 20th century include William L. Reed, William H. Jackson, Frederic S. Monroe, William L. Marshall, Robert T. Teamoh, Benjamin C. Hazel, Samuel Griffin, Dr. Isaac L. Roberts, Nelson P. Wentworth, George E. Stewart, Walter L. Roberts, Dr. Horace G. McKerrow, George Warren, Morris J. Hicks, Dr. William D. Washington, Dr. James R. Lesueur, Clement F. Isaacs, Lloyd B. Miller, William E. Reed, Richard W. Richardson, Patrick E. Knight, James E. Taylor, Andrew J. Spears, Themus Perry, and Herbert A. Bourne.

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"Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps"...A Series