

EFFCTS OF RECOGNITION OF PRINCE HALL MASONRY

By

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In attempting to foresee the effort of any given course of action, probably it is wise, in the beginning to determine what are genuine and then work from there.

However, sometimes there is a problem.

For instance, when ore is heated, along with the molten metal is a dross that needs to be skimmed off and discarded.

So it is with written work. Far too often, in time, added opinion becomes accepted fact.

After 200 years, we find in some quarters our founding fathers are being pictured as reprobates-unheard of a few years ago.

While he was alive, Brother J. Edgar Hoover was considered the epitome of integrity. He was trusted by many presidents as well as by his countrymen. Those who wish to destroy what history will say about the character of this dedicated American already has begun, by exaggeration and innuendo, their hatchet work.

Countless other examples could be cited.

So too, is the topic this speaker will discuss with you this date.

There have been instances where intelligent men have glossed over, or argued against, facts and circumstances.

After considering several sources, I believe that you will find the following helpful in your deliberations.

PRINCE HALL MASONRY: REGULAR OR IRREGULAR?

Subsequent to getting into the effects of recognition of Prince Hall Masonry, I will relate some of the history and background as pertaining to that particular organization.

The first question you may ask is:

"Just what or who is Prince Hall"?

Prince Hall was a black man born probably in West Africa around 1735 (the date is disputed). According to one version of the story, Prince Hall, at the age of fourteen, was carried to America by slave-traders. He was sold as a chattel into the family of William Hall, a leather dresser of Boston; and his new owners called him "Prince." He worked in that household for twenty-one years. In 1770, apparently for good behaviour, his owners set him free. He had

learned his former master's trade of leather dresser and was able to earn his livelihood by that means. On March 6, in either 1775 or 1778 (the date is not clear), he was made a Mason. Within the next three years, he, along with a number of other black men, formed a Lodge that they called African Lodge No.1.

Interestingly, Prince Hall was reportedly initiated by a Sergeant John Batt of the British Army's 38th Regiment of Foot, which was stationed in Boston when the American Revolution started. There was a regimental Lodge, No.441, I.C. L-Iesus Christus (Jesus Christ), but it is not known whether Batt belonged or not. Batt was discharged from the British army in 1777, and promptly joined the rebel forces but deserted the next year. He does not come across as a man of deep principle. It has been suggested that he was a confidence man who made quite a bit of money by pretending to initiate some black men into Masonry for a fee. Quite possibly, the initiation ceremony consisted, as Coil suggests, of "sales talks, and a copy of one of the published Masonic "exposures. Some modern students have argued that these black men were really not Masons, because they had joined in such irregular circumstances.

However, the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns) issued Warrant No.459 to African Lodge of Boston on September 29, 1784. In 1792 the Grand Lodge changed the Lodge's number to "370." Because the Lodge failed to comply with the terms of its warrant by not submitting any annual returns or reports after 1798 and not remitting any Moines for the Grand Charity Fund since 1797, the United Grand Lodge of England, as the lawful successor to the Grand Lodge of England (Moderns), did in 1813, EASE African Lodge of Boston from its register of Lodges. This caused the forfeiting of the 1784 English warrant which became null and void. As proof of its intent and purpose, the Grand Lodge of England assigned the Lodge Numbers "370" and "459" to other Lodges.

Thus since 1813 the 1784 English warrant of African Lodge of Boston has been a worthless scrap of paper devoid of any Masonic authority, validity, force, or effect. Any act, deed, or effort performed in the name of African Lodge No. 459/370 of Boston since 1813 has been invalid and ultra virus (beyond the legal power or authority of an organization). Any group of men, regardless of color, attempting to claim any legitimacy or regularities since 1813 by virtue of possessing the physical 1784 English warrant of African Lodge of Boston is simply practising self-deception.

Not having any lawful and competent and regular Masonic authority since 1813, the members of African Lodge of Boston and ALL bodies claiming descent from it cannot escape the classification of illegitimate and clandestine. Witness the fact that the United Grand Lodge of England has not extended any recognition to, nor held any communication with the Prince Hall Masons for more than 175 years. The United Grand Lodge of England, also, has never extended any recognition to any of the Prince Hall Grand Lodges in the United States.

Subsequent to October, 1989, recognition of Prince Hall Masonry, in America, had been considered in only two instances.

Seventeen American Grand Lodges severed relations with the Grand Lodge of the State of Washington.

The next year, in 1899, the Grand Lodge of the State of Washington reversed its action.

In 1947, the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts recognized Prince Hall Masonry.

At least eleven American Grand Lodges reproached them and the Grand Lodges of Florida and Texas severed relations with the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts.

Two years later, in 1949, the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts retracted its action.

To date, only 7 regular Grand Lodges in the United States have effectively extended any form of recognition to any of the Prince Hall Grand Lodges. Those recognition's were effected between the months of October 1989, and August 1991.

Consequently, regular Masonry throughout the world, (Connecticut, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Colorado, North Dakota, Minnesota, and the State of Washington not included), consider ALL Prince Hall Grand Lodges, as well as any other "so-called" Negro Grand Lodges, in the United States, illegitimate and clandestine.

It's important to note that on June 26, 1827, according to a notice in the Boston Daily Advertiser, African Lodge declared its independence of any external authority. It began to call itself African Grand Lodge No.1.

**It** should also be noted that the words "Prince Hall" were incorporated into their title following a recommendation made at a conference of Prince Hall Grand Masters held in Arkansas in 1944.

Note that I have used the term, Negro Grand Lodges, and not "Negro Lodges." There exists in America, at this date, regular, predominately Negro Lodges. For instance, Alpha Lodge No.116, located in East Orange, New Jersey, which has approximately 171 members is governed by the authority of the Grand Lodge of New Jersey, F.&A.M.

Now, I will get back to the original question. How does the recognition of Prince Hall Masonry by some Grand Jurisdictions, affect regular Masonry?

I now offer for your consideration possible results of recognizing Prince Hall Masonry.

What would be some of the advantages of recognizing this clandestine group?

Well, with Prince Hall recognition, their members may be visiting our constituent Lodges, so we may have more in attendance at our meetings.

Perhaps they may contribute some of their money to our charities or to our Lodges.

Recently in Massachusetts, a Prince Hall Lodge official successfully fostered the idea of a brotherhood night with a regular lodge. A dinner followed by speakers was held, with alternate seating to increase the friendliness of the occasion. Ladies and men of the Prince Hall Order of the Eastern Star prepared the meal, and ladies of the members of the regular Lodge assisted in serving. Such social gatherings could be expected to increase.

Masonry has been accused of paying lip service to the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. Recognition may improve our image.

Recognition would almost certainly be the first step toward union of the two organizations. Thus, the size of our fraternity may increase.

However, certain negative effects may be felt.

The most obvious observation to the question of recognition is that by recognizing "Prince Hall Masonry," by decree, is inherently counterproductive. All but seven of our Grand Jurisdictions acknowledge, for the reasons aforementioned and many others, Prince Hall Masonry is clandestine, and we are by law and obligation restricted from sitting and/or communicating with clandestine Masons. When the Grand Lodges of Connecticut, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Colorado, North Dakota, Minnesota and the State of Washington recognized clandestine Masons as regular, it put the rest of the Grand Lodges in our Nation in a very precarious position.

Carl H. Claudy, a great Masonic writer, in describing the importance of the obligation, indicated even though there would be no light and no building, a man might be made a Master Mason.

On the other hand, no matter how beautiful the building with every working tool and convenience at hand, there would be no initiation, passing or raising without the obligation. Most Masons, although not wilfully, but due to human weakness, sometimes break one or more sections of their obligation.

If a clandestinely made Mason were to attend your lodge, there no doubt would be guilt on the part of some of the regular Masons in attendance. Picture in your mind the possible reactions. Some would leave. Some would be afraid of what the clandestine Mason would think, so they would suppress their emotions and remain silent - but would never return to Lodge. Others may even strongly state their feelings and objections.

In any case, the peace and harmony of the Lodge would be seriously disturbed - if the lodge, in fact, continued to exist.

Another great Masonic writer wrote that no matter that the ritual had been exposed, the deeper meanings of the symbols and allegories of Masonry would not be comprehended unless a man had been initiated, passed and raised in a just and legally constituted Lodge of Masons.

If clandestinely made Masons were to sit in a regular Lodge, the Masonic obligation would be broken and in the highest sense, the lodge would no longer be legal. This may be a hindrance on the part of the members, and perhaps especially any candidate, to ever understand deeply the symbols and allegory of Masonry .

Recognition of Prince Hall Masonry would mean that there would be two recognized Grand Lodges in a given State.

It has been the tradition in the United States to have only one regular Grand Lodge within the boundary of any one State.

The change in American tradition may involve problems.

Prince Hall Masonry is not recognized as legitimate anywhere in the world, except now in seven American States.

If regular Masonry is to recognize Prince Hall Masonry, then in justice and fairness the claims of the Grand Lodges that have broken off from Prince Hall Masonry, and even other clandestine Grand Lodges, would need to be investigated. They deserve the same consideration, for we will have set precedence by the earlier recognition.

As regular Masons, we must now, and evermore, remain extremely cautious if we wish to visit a lodge in one of the seven aforementioned Grand Jurisdictions for fear that a person who has not been regularly initiated, passed and raised, may be sitting in that regular lodge. How are we to know? It certainly is not easy to recognize as it once was.

As you know, the Grand Lodge of Louisiana withdrew recognition of the Grand Lodge of Connecticut as a safeguard for Louisiana Masons not to be inadvertently subjected to the possibility of sitting with clandestine Masons. During Masonic year 1990, the Grand Master took a different posture in dealing with the Grand Lodge of Nebraska, Wisconsin, and the State of Washington. He authored a "Statement of Position" concerning the aforementioned Grand Lodges, and it was published in the "Louisiana Freemason," our quarterly Masonic publication. This was done in an effort to effectively alert Louisiana Masons pertaining to the actions of the Grand Lodges of Connecticut and Nebraska and to reiterate our responsibilities to our Masonic obligations and our Masonic Law that both forbid us from sitting and/or communicating with clandestine Masons.

On February 19, 1991, the United Grand Lodge of England published a statement titled "Prince Hall Masonry and North American Grand Lodges" that read as follows:

"The Board has considered reports that the Grand Lodges of Connecticut, Wisconsin and the State of Washington have each recognized the 'Prince Hall' Grand Lodge operating within its jurisdiction, been recognized by it and have established reciprocal rights of inter-visitation. This means that members of Masonic constitutions not recognised by the United Grand Lodge of England may be encountered in Lodges in North America under Grand Lodges that we at present recognize.

Until further notice, Brethren of the English Constitution should not visit Lodges under the Grand Lodges named above.

Brethren from recognised Masonic jurisdictions in North America (including the four named above) continue to be welcome at our meetings. "

The following states effected their recognition of Prince Hall Masonry after the aforementioned position paper was written and before the United Grand Lodge of England paper was made cognisant of the referenced States actions. Those dates are as follows:

- (Wisconsin's action was effected June 18, 1990.)
- (Washington State's action was effected June 19, 1990.)
- (Colorado's action was effected January 28, 1991.)
- (North Dakota's action was effected June 1991.)
- (Minnesota's action was effected August 1991.)

The following definitions are taken from Albert Mackey's "Encyclopaedia of Freemasonry":

Clandestine – The ordinary meaning of this word is secret, hidden. The French word "clandestine," from which it is derived, is defined to be something done in a hiding-place and against the laws, which best suits the Masonic signification, which is illegal, not authorized.

Clandestine Lodge- A body of Masons united in a lodge without the consent of a Grand Lodge, or, although originally legally constituted, continued to work after its charter has been revoked, is styled a "Clandestine Lodge. "

Clandestine Mason- One made in or affiliated with a clandestine Lodge. With clandestine Lodges or  
Masons, regular Masons and forbidden to associate or converse on Masonic subjects.

Using Mackey's definitions, it seems clear to me that the only way a man can become a regular Mason and sit in a Lodge of regular Masons is to be initiated, passed and raised in a regular Lodge as each of us was. It seems absolutely absurd to view it in any other way.

The Grand Lodge of West Virginia obviously has similar convictions. Their Grand Master for 1991, M: W : Charles E. Forsythe, applaudably has issued two Edicts dealing with the subject. His Edicts FORBID members of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of West Virginia, A.F.&A.M., to be present in Lodges under the Grand Lodges of Connecticut, Wisconsin, Nebraska, State of Washington, Colorado, Minnesota, and North Dakota. His Edicts DO NOT prohibit members of those named jurisdictions from visiting Lodges under the jurisdiction of the Most Worshipful Grand Lodge of West Virginia, A.F.&A.M. His show of strength and concern for Masonic heritage and integrity when dealing with this controversial and sensitive matter is commendable

In summary, it is my opinion, that the ideal of recognizing clandestine Masonry is ill conceived and is inherently divisional in its effects toward regular Freemasonry. **In** these present times, as we suffer through a period of attitude apathy and lack of interest in the moral teachings of our fraternity, I repetitiously state that to intentionally cause a division in our Masonic fraternity is counterproductive and produces absolutely no merit whatsoever. These should be times, as never before in our existence, for all regular Masons to be pulling together toward a common cause. The actions taken by the Grand Lodges of Connecticut, Nebraska, Wisconsin, Colorado, North Dakota, Minnesota and the State of Washington, relative to recognizing Prince Hall Masonry as legitimate is contrary to a desired goal of working together, as regular Masons, toward a common cause. This carries with it an escalated and distinct possibility of causing an irreparable split in Freemasonry in North America.

## INFORMATON SAURCES

"A Problem For The 90's -Prince Hall Freemasonry And The Question of Regularity"  
Wallace McLeod, FPS, International Vice-President, The Philalethes Society.

"Important For Regular Masons"  
Prepared by Masonic Research Associates, Anchorage, Alaska.

"Foreign Countries"  
Carl H. Claudy, Southern Ppublishers, Inc., Masonic Publications Division, Kingsport, Tennessee.

