

WHO WAS PRINCE HALL?

Prince Hall was reputedly born in Bridgetown, Barbados in 1748, the son of an English father and a free, coloured mother of French African extraction. At age 17 he worked his passage to Boston on a trading ship where he found work in the leather trade, a skill he learnt from his father. Within eight years he had earned enough to marry, buy land, build a home and, most importantly, be registered as a voter in Boston. This proves that the accusations of his detractors, that he was a slave, were wrong. Besides working in the leather trade, he was a preacher in a Presbyterian Church.

In 1775, a few weeks before the first shot was fired in the eight year long American War of Independence at Lexington (not too far from Boston), Prince Hall and 14 other Negro men were initiated as Freemasons in an Irish Constitution Lodge attached to the British Forces then stationed on Castle William Island in Boston Harbour. The British infantry regiments in Massachusetts, under the command of General Gage, had 14 military lodges attached and the Irish Lodge No. 441 was one of them.

Within a year, the 38th 1st Foot Infantry moved on from Boston, taking with them the Irish Lodge No 441. Prince Hall and his Negro Brethren were given a permit to continue to meet as a lodge in Boston but not to be able to initiate candidates. They named their lodge the African Lodge with Prince Hall as its Master. In 1784, once the War had ended and Massachusetts became one of the States of America, Prince Hall asked the English (Moderns) Lodge in Boston to forward an application for a Lodge Charter to their Grand Master. This Charter arrived three years later and the African Lodge No 459 was consecrated and they proceeded to work degrees.

Communications and despatches to England were difficult and the African Lodge's returns and fees failed to arrive in England. Likewise, the English Grand Lodge failed to respond to them. When the English and the Scottish Provincial Grand Lodges in Massachusetts merged to form the Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, Prince Hall declared his Lodge as the African Grand Lodge (1791) with himself as Grand Master. Prince Hall died in office in 1807 and the African Grand Lodge brethren changed the name to MW Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts in 1808, in his honour.

In 1813, when the Antients and the Moderns Grand Lodges amalgamated to form the present day United Grand Lodge of England, African Lodge (and several other American and overseas lodges), having not furnished returns, were excluded from the Roll of the new United Grand Lodge. No one told African Lodge until 1824. The then Prince Hall Grand Master declared the Grand Lodge *free and independent* in 1827 and the African Lodge became No. 1 on its register.

They went on to sponsor five other Prince Hall Grand Lodges in Pennsylvania, New York, Rhode Island, South Carolina and Georgia. Those five over the next 100 years sponsored Prince Hall Grand Lodges throughout America, Canada, the Caribbean, Belize (Central America) and Liberia (West Africa). There are now 47 Prince Hall Grand Lodges with over 5000 lodges working under their Charters.

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