

*Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, F. & A.M.  
Washington and Jurisdiction*



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**TO:** All Worshipful Masters, Grand Lodge Officers, Past Masters, Wardens and Brethren

**SUBJ:** Prince Hall Day Celebration

Greetings Brethren from around the Globe

I hope this message encourage you on celebrating Prince Hall Day. MWGM Kenneth B. Anthony has informed the jurisdiction by way of EDICT that we must celebrate Prince Hall Day on or before September 20, 2009, per Title 71, Section 71:02 of our Masonic Code.

As Grand Lecturer, I encourage you to take an active part and celebrate this occasion with your Church, Lodge or Communities. This would give masons an opportunity to make their mark among men that are truly distinguished. We must first always remember the very first time we knelt at the altar and it was at that time and place we represented Prince Hall our founding farther

Many able Masonic historians and researchers (of which I am not one) have over the years investigated, researched, and chronicled the life of Prince Hall. Thankfully, their noble quest for information still continues. Based on the foregoing, I will not attempt to confirm nor refute the able historians' and researchers' attempt opposing points of view regarding the intricacies of the life of Prince Hall. In addition, I will refrain from biographical discourse regarding Prince Hall's point of origin. In their stead, I wish to allude to the positivism that has arisen as a direct result of Prince Hall, along with fourteen other free Negroes receiving the degrees to become Master Masons on March 6, 1775 in Boston, Massachusetts.

These degrees were given in one of the military lodges making them the first Black men in North America to acquire this distinction. It should also be noted that as a Canadian born Black man, I do take the liberty throughout of using interchangeably Negro, Colored, and Black to designate members of my race regardless of the perceived point-in-time appropriateness.

In the over two hundred years that have recently been swept into history Prince Hall has become a legend, a hero, to the enslaved masses of the 1800's and a source of inspiration to slavery's grandchildren in the 1900's. Although the earthly estate he left could be perceived as meager, he would leave a priceless legacy to Blacks across the United States, Canada, the Bahamas, the Caribbean and the world.

Prince Hall along with others spent many years dedicated to the struggle of Blacks in Massachusetts, some of who were still held as slaves. The Black community sent forth letters and petitions to the Massachusetts

Assembly advocating citizenship and participation of Colored men in government and equality in the eyes of the law for all. After nine years of continuous effort, in 1796, a proper school for Colored children was established. Prince Hall did not conduct this struggle alone, for by this time, slavery had been abolished in Massachusetts and many Blacks with leadership qualities were beginning to move into more scholarly fields of labor.

The churches and lodges had become the meeting places and a long-standing thirst for knowledge was uniting the thinking people into more and more concerted efforts for their own self-improvement. The thinking and actions of these emerging Black leaders during this period of American upheaval and unrest surely would earn for them the title of trouble makers, radical activists or worse; however, undaunted by labels, they continued to work toward improving the condition of their people.

Ironically it would be the British troops in Boston in 1775, rather than the freedom-seekers, who would open the doors of freemasonry to Blacks in North America even though Great Britain and her American colonies were still actively engaged in the slave trade. Prince Hall, as one of the leading free Black citizens of Boston, was invited to join the Irish Lodge #441 set up in one of the British General Gage's regiments early in 1775. Shortly after this, on March 6, he and fourteen other free Negroes were made Master Masons in the same lodge. It has been written that each paid a fee of 15 guineas for Entering, 7 guineas for Passing, and 3 guineas for Raising. The names of these fifteen men should be long remembered as the forerunners of Prince Hall Free masonry. They were:

*\*Prince Hall \*Boston Singer \*Buff Buffong \*Boston Smith \*Peter Best  
\*Cato Speain \*John Carter \*Prince Taylor \*Peter Freeman \*Benjamin Tiber  
\*Fortune Howard \*Richard Tilley \*Cyrus Jonbus \*Prince Rees \*Thomas Sanderson*

In May of 1776 the British troops withdrew from Boston but before leaving, the Master of the military lodge, Brother J. B. Blatt, issued a permit of dispensation to enable Prince Hall and the other Black brothers to meet as a lodge, parade on St. John's Day and bury their dead. They were not allowed to confer degrees or perform any other Masonic work.

It is generally agreed that African Lodge #1 was founded on July 3, 1776, for on March 2, 1784, Prince Hall, in a letter to the Grand Lodge of England stated, "This lodge has been founded almost eight years." In this same letter, thanks are extended to the Grand Lodge of England for the courteous reception of, and assistance to, the members of the African Lodge. A second letter dated June 30, 1784, resulted in the granting of a charter on September 29, 1784, this was duly recorded along with fees paid in transactions of the Grand Lodge of England. African Lodge #1 was assigned the number 459 on the rolls of the Mother Lodge.

Although a charter was issued in 1784, it was not until three years later that it was finally placed in the hands of Prince Hall. Finally, on December 18, 1786, Prince Hall wrote "a Captain James Scott will advance the money sent by me in Captain James Scott, brother-in-law of John Hancock, one of the signers of the American Declaration of Independence, at last delivered on April 29, 1787, three years after its signing, the precious piece of paper which has been preserved even until this day, the charter of African Lodge #459.

The receipt of his charter and the formal constitution of African Lodge #1 as African Lodge #459 brought renewed vigor to Black freemasonry. In the years that followed, other Negro lodges in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island was founded under the authority of African Lodge #459. From the first African Lodge and these other lodges, each of which eventually established its own Grand Lodge, have evolved all regular Negro freemasonry.

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As the years passed by, Prince Hall must have felt a great deal of satisfaction as he considered the changes that had been wrought in the country in his lifetime - changes that he himself had helped to bring about, but it is extremely doubtful that he ever dreamed that his name and his deeds would be remembered and revered for all time.

When he died in 1807, at the probable age of seventy-two from the ravages of pneumonia, he bequeathed to all Black men the gift of freemasonry which is still unsullied by the many former charges of illegitimacy and still serenely untouched by the former non-recognition of our white brothers.

As a proud member of African Lodge #459, and on behalf of all Prince Hall Masons in the Province of Ontario and Jurisdiction I wish to convey that we join with you in heart and in spirit during the celebrations commemorating the life and contribution of such an individual as Prince Hall. He has certainly set an example for all to follow, our founder - Prince Hall.

Fraternally,

/s/Gregory D. Wraggs  
Grand Lecturer

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