

What would Prince Hall say today?

Presented by W.B. Russell Hobson

Masonry, what is it. It is a beautiful system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols. It regards no man on account of his worldly wealth or honors and it is the internal and not the external qualifications that recommend a man to Masonry. The tenets of our profession are three fold, (1) Brotherly love, (2) relief and (3) truth, where in brotherly love we are taught to regard the whole human race as one family. The Declaration of Independence has a statement that reads. "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness."

In the Holy Bible one passage, which masons often speak about states, "How good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Lastly it has been stated that next to the word Mother, no word in our language has more meaning and music in it than the word Brother.

If Masonry meant what it states, the Declaration Of Independence meant what it stated, the Bible's passage was followed as it states, and the word brother held its true meaning, then why do we have two Grand Lodge systems.

In the next few minutes I will provide a little background of Prince Hall Masonry and the progress that has been made in Masonry today to bring the two grand bodies of masons together. Upon completion I will show you how each one of us can play a role in making Masonry be the fraternity it should be.

Even though the teachings of Masonry, the Declaration of Independence, the scriptures and the word brother all had good meaning, why was Prince Hall, a Man of short stature whose father was an Englishman and his mother a free colored woman of French extraction denied admission into a lodge?

Prince Hall was a man who had long wanted to belong to an organization with the morals and teaching that Masonry was all about but this was not to be because of the social climate of the day. But on March 6, 1775 Prince Hall along with 14 other men of color were initiated into Masonry by army Lodge #441 of the Irish Registry. After Army lodge #441 was called back to England in 1776, by their authority, African Lodge #1 was organized. On March 2, 1784 African Lodge #1 applied for a charter to the Grand Lodge of England. On September 29, 1784 a charter was executed for African Lodge #459 by the authority of the Duke of Cumberland and the Grand Master of the Mother Grand Lodge of England, naming Prince Hall as Worshipful Master. But due to circumstances the charter was not delivered to Prince Hall until April 29, 1787. On Saint John's day June 24, 1791 an assembly of the craft was called by Prince Hall, and African Grand Lodge was organized, with Prince Hall as Grand Master and Nero Prince, Deputy Grand Master. Prince Hall died in December of 1807 and on June 24 1808 African Grand Lodge was changed to Prince Hall Grand Lodge as a Memorial to Prince Hall.



If Prince Hall were alive today what would he see different and would he be satisfied with what he sees? He would note that from the start there were brothers that would treat him and others throughout the years like all masons should be treated. However, they were usually not in the position to make changes. He would also see that the legality of Prince Hall Masonry has been challenge over and over again by many. The last time it was seriously challenged was during the middle to late 1940's. A number of brothers in Massachusetts appointed a committee to report on the subject of Negro Freemasonry in Massachusetts and it's legality. The conclusion was that Prince Hall Masonry was not clandestine and in fact it had a charter from the Mother Grand Lodge and is believed to be the only charter issued from the Grand Lodge of England.

If Prince Hall would have followed me throughout my military career he would have notice many positive changes.

During my military tour of duty in Thailand, eight brothers of different jurisdictions formed a study club, then petitioned the Grand Lodge of Delaware for a dispensation to start a lodge. In order to form the lodge we had to procure a meeting place. We had to go through the base commander to obtain a meeting room on base. When the base commander found out what type of organization we were he informed us that he also was mason, not Prince Hall, but a mason and he would make sure that we had a place to hold our meeting. From this point we received our dispensation and within 3 months a charter. After we had our charter we issued a dispensation to another group of masons wanting to start a lodge on another base. They, like us, had to go through the same process. They found out that their base commander was also a mason and offered them a place to meet. By being able to set up a lodge, our lodge was able to put on a number of fund-raisers to do community work. With the profits we were able to provide a surgery for a young boy who had a deformed lip and mouth. The lodge also was able to provide paper, pencils and various other school supplies to a local school in need. These two acts of charity came about because one mason believed in other masons regardless of their backgrounds.

One of my lodge brothers in Thailand used to like to tell us about his tour of duty in Viet- nam and his R & R to Australia. While in Vietnam he met some Australian Masons and they told him that if he took his R&R in Australia to be sure and look up the local lodge. Upon arriving there he didn't inform anyone until the second day after arriving. When he informed the brothers when he had arrived and what he had been told by the Brothers in Vietnam he was immediate chastised for not informing the brothers of his arrival. He stated that he did not know how he would be accepted as a Prince Hall Mason. He was told that he was first a Mason and second a Prince Hall Mason whose charter to operate came from the Grand Lodge of England where they obtain their authority to practice. The next three days of his R& R he stated that he was treated like a V.I.P. and had the best time of his life.

Our lodge in Thailand, though only about 25-30 brothers when I left, produced a number of Grand Lodge officers to include one Grand Master of Delaware. This Grand Master during his term of office had lodges in several parts of the world that were military subordinate lodges under his jurisdiction. The last time I saw him he stated that he had just returned from a trip to Turkey to visit one of his lodges there. He stated that while there he



and his cabinet were invited to visit a Turkish lodge, and that they all enjoyed themselves by the out-pouring of brotherly love shown to them.

One final note on Thailand. On Saint John the Baptist Day in 1974 our lodge asked the Chaplain at the base chapel if we could hold Saint John Day services at the base chapel. He stated yes and then he asked if we would mind if he could wear his lamb skin and march in with us, because he was a member of Annawon Lodge #115 A.F.& A.M. in West Haven Connecticut and he wanted to celebrate with us.

During my travels I have met brothers that were Prince Hall Masons in Germany that were invited to attend a session of the Grand Lodge of France back in the 1960's and they stated that they had a good time. Myself, I have seen German brothers working with Prince Hall brothers while I was stationed in Germany and at the time I didn't know German Masons existed. A number of Prince Hall brothers that I know who were station in England told me how they were invited to English lodges quite often and this was before the Grand Lodge of England officially recognized Prince Hall Lodges in the United States.

If Prince Hall could have seen the interaction of the military brothers with brothers from around the world in foreign countries he would say Masonry is working as it should work. If he could follow me throughout my travels in Nebraska and know some of the Masonic History of Nebraska he would note great changes in Nebraska after the joint recognition of the two grand bodies on February 3, 1990.

He would notice that we were the first two grand bodies to have total recognition. This joint recognition has brought about many joint affairs. We have had several Ladies at the Table banquets, a Table Lodge, a few Masonic get together dinners, a joint corner stone ceremony at Coopers Farm, two joint third degrees etc.

Prince Hall would note that we take our recognition seriously by having a ten year anniversary banquet in Lincoln for the two grand bodies. Past Grand Masters John McHenry and Norman Hall acted as co-chairs for the night. They were our two Grand Masters at recognition. High light of the night was when Past Grand Master Charles Amidon played a tape of the phone conversation announcing the positive vote for joint recognition between the two bodies at their joint sessions.

Prince Hall would also be very happy to see both Prince Hall and Nebraska Grand Lodge Masons sitting in open lodge with each other in harmony.

During the 1990's the Master and Brothers of Lebanon Lodge #3 PHA in Lincoln invited Past Grand Master James Brown of the Nebraska Grand Lodge to give a talk on Masonry in general which I attended, to seven potential brothers. After hearing Past Grand Master Brown speak, five of them filled out petitions stating that from what they could see and the interaction of the two grand bodies along with what then knew about Masonry in general, then this was an organization that they could belong to.

Even before our official recognition one could see that there was positive interaction between the two bodies. There was always some kind of support given to Prince Hall Masons. The support might have been the use of a building or room for meetings, donating of lodge furniture or just general support.



As I come to a close I believe that Prince Hall would see the many friendships that have come about through out the state of Nebraska, the United States and world due to what we as brothers should have been doing all along. That being following the teachings of Masonry for what it stands for.

The last Emessay notes that I recall from the Masonic Service Association of North America, which dealt with recognition, stated that over half of the states had some form of recognition between the two grand bodies and about a half dozen countries around the world recognized Prince Hall Masonry.

Are we totally together in the United States? No, but each day a new barrier is broken down. Can we do better? Yes. As I close let me tell you a story of a little girl that made a difference. The story is about a little girl at a beach that was found written on a mug and used in one of Beverly Daniel Tatum (Ph.D.) books. It goes as follows:

A young girl was walking along a beach. To her amazement, she came upon thousands of starfish. Washed ashore by a storm, they were dying in the hot sun. The girl began to toss starfish back into the sea, one by one. After a while, a man approached her. "Little girl," he asked, "why are you doing this? There are thousands of starfish on the beach. You cannot possibly hope to make a difference!" The girl was discouraged, and dropped the starfish in her hand. But a moment later, she bent down, picked up the starfish again, and tossed it as far as she could into the sea. She turned back to the man. Smiling brightly, she said, "I make a difference to that one!" Inspired, he joined her. A crowd had gathered, and soon others joined in. Before long, there were hundreds of people tossing starfish back into the sea and calling out, "I made a difference to that one!" After a while, their call subsided. The girl looked up. To her amazement, she saw no starfish on the beach. Each one had been tossed back into the sea.

We too as Masons can make a difference by just teaching one by one those that do not understand the true meaning of Masonry. This way we like the little girl that saw no more starfish on the beach, maybe one day we will no longer see those masons that do not fully believe in our Masonic teachings.

Presented by W.B. Russell Hobson, Grand Historian of Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Nebraska, on June 24, 2004 at a joint meeting of Saint Johns Lodge No. 331 and Nebraska College M.S.R.I.C.F.

