

## **WHY BOTHER WITH OVERSEAS RECOGNITION?**

*by Tony Pope*

For over two centuries, Prince Hall Masons have been labeled clandestine, insulted, ignored, denied entry to other lodges, and virtually confined to a Masonic ghetto. Yet Prince Hall Masonry survived, expanded, maintained the principles of Freemasonry, and—whenever the opportunity arose—extended the hand of friendship and forgiveness to its detractors. Often, that hand was rejected outright or, if accepted, it was subsequently withdrawn as the result of peer pressure or outright blackmail. But perseverance eventually resulted in *partial* success.

Half the Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Affiliation are now firmly recognized by the ‘mainstream’ Grand Lodge in the same geographical area.<sup>1</sup> Some Prince Hall Grand Lodges have gone further, and obtained recognition elsewhere in North America, or from the ‘home’ or ‘mother’ Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland. A few have extended the exchange of recognition further afield, eastwards to Europe, south to Latin America and west to Japan, the Philippines, Australia and New Zealand. But it is evident that most Prince Hall Grand Lodges have little interest in wider recognition. Why should they bother with overseas recognition? This essay will attempt to answer that question, both generally, and then specifically in relation to Australia and New Zealand.

The immediate advantages of recognition are most readily experienced at home, in the same geographical area. Brethren of the Prince Hall and ‘mainstream’ Grand Lodges in the same State can visit each others’ lodges, observe the similarities and differences in their work, and experience that warm fraternal feeling, attested to by many such visitors. The Grand Lodges can join together in community work more fully than before, exchange information, and—most important—the Prince Hall brethren are no longer confined in a Masonic ghetto. They can take their rightful place as true brothers, confident of the support of the brethren of the *other* regular Grand Lodge, and they can share the educational resources of that Grand Lodge, such as its libraries and museums. Recognition, too, can be an aid in limiting the recruitment of (in particular) African-Americans into bogus organizations.

If all of these advantages are gained by a ‘local’ exchange of recognition, what is the point of chasing recognition further afield?

Well, for a start, not all Prince Hall lodges and Grand Lodges are located in a single State or Province in North America. Some have one or more lodges in another US State or Canadian Province, many have lodges overseas, and three are based entirely outside USA and Canada.<sup>2</sup> The brethren of these lodges and Grand Lodges need overseas recognition, simply to obtain the advantages outlined above.

But, perhaps more importantly, ‘local’ recognition does not bestow true equality with the ‘local’ mainstream brethren. Any US ‘mainstream’ Mason is free to visit almost any ‘mainstream’ lodge throughout the USA, Canada, and the rest of the world. The only restriction imposed is that his Grand Lodge must be in amity with the Grand Lodge where he wishes to visit. There are nearly 150 Grand Lodges in the ‘mainstream’ group, most of which have a recognition list of more than 100 Grand Lodges worldwide.

Most Prince Hall Masons do not yet enjoy that degree of freedom. They can, of course, visit most (if not all) lodges in the Prince Hall Affiliated group of Grand Lodges,<sup>3</sup> and lodges of any ‘mainstream’ Grand Lodge with which they are in amity. In certain instances, they may also be permitted (by special arrangement) to visit lodges which have not been formally recognized. But to a very real extent, doors are still closed to the traveling Prince Hall Mason, which are open to his traveling ‘mainstream’ counterpart. This freedom is important, not only for the pleasure of visiting outside one’s jurisdiction, but also for the fraternal assistance which may be given in an emergency, and for the educational value. One of the things a

traveling Prince Hall Mason may learn from experience, not merely by reading it or being told, is that most mainstream Grand Lodges outside the United States have never considered that race, or the color of his skin, is any indication of whether a man is a suitable candidate for Masonry. He will learn, also, that there are many variations in the work, and many different customs and usages, all designed to achieve the same noble purpose. Surely, the broader a Mason's perspective, the more value he is to his brethren, his lodge and his Grand Lodge.

There remains a further reason why Prince Hall Grand Lodges should vigorously pursue recognition overseas. In North America, nearly half the Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Affiliation,<sup>4</sup> and well over half of all Prince Hall Masons, still lack 'mainstream' recognition in their own State or Province. They are still considered clandestine by many, are still in the Masonic ghetto, and in most cases are likely to remain so, unless peer pressure assists in influencing a change of heart. While those North American 'mainstream' Grand Lodges which have recognized only their 'local' Prince Hall counterparts are content with that gesture, and while those Prince Hall Grand Lodges which have achieved only 'local' recognition press no further with the quest for equality, they are failing to render fraternal assistance to our segregated brethren below the Mason-Dixon Line, and in those two enclaves further north.

The MW Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Connecticut, with a recognition list of 30 or more 'mainstream' Grand Lodges,<sup>5</sup> is arguably not only a PHA Grand Lodge, but also itself a 'mainstream' Grand Lodge, by virtue of the number of 'mainstream' Grand Lodges in amity with it. Connecticut, then, is pointing the way. It is only when sufficient Prince Hall Grand Lodges have really substantial recognition lists within 'mainstream' Masonry at home and abroad, that those Prince Hall Grand Lodges may themselves be considered to be in the 'mainstream' group—an identifiable sub-group, retaining its own identity within the larger group—and thus influence the whole group from within. In this way, the stand-off group of non-recognitionists, a mere 20 or so Grand Lodges, itself becomes the minority!

It might be thought that Australia and New Zealand are too geographically remote and demographically small to be of interest or importance to Prince Hall Freemasonry. Perhaps that judgement might have been accurate half a century ago, but circumstances have changed considerably in recent years. Many Americans come to the Antipodes, as tourists, as sportsmen, and as serving members of the armed forces. In all these categories, there are undoubtedly substantial numbers of Prince Hall Masons. Most of the Australasian Grand Lodges are willing—indeed, eager—to welcome Prince Hall visitors to their lodges, even if there is no formal treaty of recognition. And most of the Australasian Grand Lodges have taken steps to exchange recognition with Prince Hall Grand Lodges—but in more than a few instances, their approach has been ignored by the Prince Hall Grand Lodge. Nevertheless, they are still interested in exchanging recognition.

The seven Grand Lodge of Australasia form a recognizable subset of the 'mainstream' group of Grand Lodges, with frequent conferences of Grand Masters and Grand Secretaries, and a joint committee for fraternal relations. The research lodges also confer under the supra-jurisdictional Australian & New Zealand Masonic Research Council (ANZMRC), whose president happens to be chairman of the fraternal relations committee. The Council sponsors lecture tours throughout Australia and New Zealand by overseas Masonic scholars, which provide a cross-fertilization of ideas between Britain, North America, Southern Africa and Australasia.

It can be seen, therefore, that an exchange of recognition with the Grand Lodges of Australia and New Zealand is worthwhile, for the benefit of individual traveling Prince Hall Masons, and for the Fraternity as a whole. Some of the Australasian Grand Lodges may continue to actively pursue recognition, while others—while still willing to resume negotiations—may, because their earlier approaches were ignored, wait to be approached by Prince Hall Grand Lodges. It would be a pity to waste this residual good will, and fail to experience 'how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.'

## Sidebar

### Australia & New Zealand

Australia and New Zealand are independent countries within the British Commonwealth of Nations. They were settled from Britain early in the 19th century, and gained full independence early in the 20th century. In each of these countries, Freemasonry was derived from English, Irish and Scottish lodges, from 1820 onwards, and Masonic independence was gained between 1884 and 1921.

There are six Grand Lodges in Australia, based largely on the political boundaries of the six states which comprise the Commonwealth of Australia. Three of the six extend their jurisdiction beyond state boundaries, and one (Queensland) has lodges in the independent country of Papua New Guinea. New Zealand has lodges on Pacific islands, including one in Pago Pago, American Samoa. The three 'home' Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland still have lodges in Australia and New Zealand, but are not permitted to charter new lodges there. Dual and plural membership is quite common, and all jurisdictions are in amity with each other. Brief notes on lodges of all these jurisdictions are given below.

#### New Zealand

The Grand Lodge of New Zealand was formed in 1890. It has exchanged recognition, or is in the process of doing so, with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Massachusetts and Connecticut. There are also a substantial number of English, Irish and Scottish lodges in New Zealand.

#### New South Wales

The United Grand Lodge of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, formed in 1888, is in amity with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Colorado, Illinois and Indiana, and has sought to exchange recognition with 12 others.

#### Queensland

The United Grand Lodge of Queensland, formed in 1921, also has lodges in the independent country of Papua New Guinea. Queensland is in amity with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Indiana, Oregon and Washington and has sought to exchange recognition with *all* the others. There are two English lodges in country towns in Queensland.

#### South Australia

The Grand Lodge of South Australia and the Northern Territory Incorporated is the oldest Grand Lodge in Australasia, being formed in 1884. It permits selected lodges to work 'foreign' rituals, namely Schroeder (German), Goudieloch (Scottish), Carver (English), and Italian. There is also a lodge with an Irish warrant. South Australia has exchanged recognition with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Massachusetts, Connecticut and Minnesota.

#### Tasmania

The Grand Lodge of Tasmania was formed in 1890, and is in amity with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Massachusetts, Connecticut, California & Hawaii, Washington and Wisconsin.

#### Victoria

The United Grand Lodge of Victoria was formed in 1889, and has exchanged recognition with the Prince Hall Grand Lodges of Connecticut and Indiana. Victoria has one English lodge.

#### Western Australia

The Grand Lodge of Western Australia was formed in 1900. It has not exchanged recognition with any Prince Hall Grand Lodge. There are 15 Scottish lodges in Western Australia, and one English lodge.

# *Australasia*

*Showing location of Grand Lodges*



- 1 Specifically: Alta, AK, AZ, CA&HI, CO, CT, DC, IL, IN, IO, KS, MA, MI, MN, NE, NV, NM, OH, OR, PA, RI, WA, WI.
- 2 MW Prince Hall Grand Lodges of the Bahamas, the Caribbean, and Liberia.
- 3 The 45 listed in the 5th edition of the *Prince Hall Masonic Directory* (including Liberia), *plus* the MW Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Alberta (founded 1997), and soon the MW Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Hawaii (to be consecrated in June 2001).
- 4 Namely: AL, AR, DE, FL, GA, KY, LA, MD, MS, MO, NJ, NY, NC, OK, Ont, SC, TN, TX, VA, WV.
- 5 Alberta, British Columbia, Connecticut, District of Columbia, England, Germany, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Ireland, Maine, Manitoba, Massachusetts, Minnesota, Nebraska, Netherlands, New Brunswick, New Hampshire, New Zealand, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Rhode Island, Saskatchewan, Scotland, South Australia, Tasmania, Venezuela, Vermont, Victoria, Washington, Wisconsin, with at least three more pending (New South Wales, New Zealand, Queensland).