

Wider Horizons

by *Bro Tony Pope, FPS*

Our late Brother Joseph A Walkes Jr had a dream that, as a Prince Hall Mason, he should be free to visit any Masonic lodge, anywhere in the world, and be welcomed as a true and lawful Brother. He achieved great things in his lifetime but, sadly, this particular ambition remains a dream.

Despite the advances made towards Masonic equality, approximately half of all Prince Hall Masons still cannot lawfully visit a mainstream lodge in their own State and, of the other half, many who have in-State recognition cannot lawfully visit North American mainstream lodges outside their own State. In that respect, they are still not free. And most Prince Hall Masons cannot lawfully visit most mainstream lodges elsewhere in the world.

This is a complex problem and there is no quick fix, but there are solutions to parts of the problem. Let us look first at worldwide visitation, next at multiple recognition in North America, then at the former slave States where in-State recognition is denied, and finally at wider horizons for Prince Hall researchers.

Defining the terms

The words *regular* and *regularity*, *recognize* and *recognition*, and *mainstream*, as used by English-speaking Freemasons, are sometimes misused or misunderstood, so it is as well to define them for the purposes of this article.

Regularity: Every Grand Lodge considers itself to be regular, and judges others by its own standard or code. If two or more Grand Lodges have similar criteria of regularity, they generally regard each other as regular and may choose to associate with each other. However, the inclusion of the word *regular* in the *name* of the Grand Lodge is no guarantee that other Grand Lodges find it to be regular.

Recognition: If two Grand Lodges find each other to be regular, and meet any additional criteria they consider essential, they may enter into a treaty of recognition (or *amity*) with each other, thus conferring benefits and privileges on each other's members.

Mainstream: When a group of Grand Lodges associate with each other, often they adopt a name for the group. For example: Grand Lodges of Prince Hall Affiliation (PHA). The oldest group of all, which traces its beginnings back to the early 1700s, has no official name for its group, perhaps because it was the first. It includes the United Grand Lodge of England, the Grand Lodges of Scotland and Ireland, the six Grand Lodges in Australia, and more than 150 other Grand Lodges around the world—including at least 51 in the USA. Informally, this worldwide group is often referred to as *mainstream*, because of the antiquity of its association and the number of Grand Lodges involved. When reference is made to 'US mainstream Grand Lodges' this is really shorthand for 'US Grand Lodges of the (worldwide) mainstream group'. As recognition between mainstream and PHA Grand Lodges increases, the term 'US mainstream Grand Lodges' becomes less and less precise, because a PHA Grand Lodge with multiple mainstream recognitions itself becomes part of the mainstream group—while maintaining its identity as part of the sub-group of regular Grand Lodges called PHA.

Universal Freemasonry

Most, if not all, mainstream Grand Lodges outside of North America accept that Prince Hall Affiliated Grand Lodges are regular, and are willing to exchange recognition with a PHA Grand Lodge that has in-State recognition. They only need to be asked.

A number of them have not waited for formal recognition, but have instructed their lodges that *all* Prince Hall Masons may be admitted—subject to production of a current dues card and passing the usual tests for visitors—regardless of which PHA Grand Lodge they come from, even if they lack in-State recognition. The six Grand Lodges in Australia and the Grand Lodge of New Zealand are among that number. A few Grand Lodges have gone further and made unilateral declarations of recognition of all PHA Grand Lodges, or of those with in-State recognition, or those which are recognized by the United Grand Lodge of England.

These decisions reflect creditably on the Grand Lodges concerned, but are only effective if PHA Grand Lodges permit intervisitation without formal recognition. A formal recognition treaty, one on one, between a PHA Grand Lodge and a mainstream Grand Lodge, is the more effective procedure. This is what the mainstream Grand Lodges do among themselves. Each Grand Lodge goes through this process with all of the other mainstream Grand Lodges, and they keep long lists of the Grand Lodges with whom they have exchanged recognition.

Not all mainstream Grand Lodges recognize all of the others. For example, in Italy there are two Grand Lodges which are considered 'mainstream': the Grand Orient of Italy and the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy, who do not recognize each other. Australian and US mainstream Grand Lodges recognize the Grand Orient of Italy, while the UK Grand Lodges and some European Grand Lodges recognize the Regular Grand Lodge of Italy. Therefore, if members of a mainstream Grand Lodge intend traveling beyond their own jurisdiction, they consult the list of which Grand Lodges they may visit. So they, too, are not completely free in this respect, but they do have a much wider choice of where to visit than PHA Masons have at present.

Multiple recognition

It is twenty-five years since the historic exchange of recognition between the two regular Masonic powers in Connecticut. Soon similar agreements were reached in other States. By December 1990, recognition had been exchanged in Nebraska, Washington and Wisconsin, with Minnesota following suit early in the following year.

Washington brethren not only visited each other's lodges—and returned with glowing accounts of the warm fraternal welcome they had received—but also legislated to allow brethren to do degree work for each other's jurisdiction, and in 1991 both Grand Lodges joined together for a ceremony to place a marker on the grave of PGM William Upton, author of *Light on a dark subject*.

Connecticut Masons continued to work together in 'Brothers in Action', and the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Connecticut led the way for exchanges of recognition outside the State, both in North America and overseas. Within ten years they were in amity with more than thirty mainstream Grand Lodges in North America, Europe and Australasia.

The first problem with out-of-State recognition arose in Idaho and Oregon in 1991. Because the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Oregon had a lodge in Idaho, it exchanged recognition with the mainstream Grand Lodge of Idaho. This upset the mainstream Grand Lodge of Oregon, which promptly withdrew recognition from the mainstream Grand Lodge of Idaho. The disagreement was resolved by a change of Grand Master and a recognition treaty between the two Masonic powers in Oregon.

The real breakthrough came in December 1994 when the United Grand Lodge of England finally recognized its legitimate offspring, the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Massachusetts, and intimated that it would look favorably on applications from other Grand Lodges descended from African Lodge of Boston. Thereafter, many PHA Grand Lodges exchanged recognition in-State, and with the 'home' Grand Lodges of England, Ireland and Scotland.

Then most of them rested on their laurels, and sought no further recognition; they had achieved recognition, and thus equality. But had they? Could their members visit mainstream lodges in other States and Countries, or the libraries of those other mainstream Grand Lodges, or call upon them for assistance? Well, possibly so, but with no such guarantee as of right.

In those States where recognition has been exchanged, particularly if the event was fifteen, twenty, or twenty-five years ago, there will be many new members who have no personal knowledge or recollection of the event. For them it may be an issue buried in the past, like voter enrolment or de-segregation in schools, particularly if there is little or no fraternal interchange between mainstream and Prince Hall brethren in that State. It may pose the question: Was the effort worthwhile?

Even in States where co-operation has been enthusiastic, the results may be disappointing. May I give an example within my personal experience? In 2007 I spent nearly three months in Washington State. This was seventeen years after recognition had been achieved, followed by full cooperation between the two Grand Lodges. I visited several mainstream lodges, and encountered no Prince Hall visitors. I saw a few black faces in the lodges, but they belonged to mainstream Masons. And when I visited a PHA lodge, the only white faces were mine and that of the brother who took me there. I hasten to add that I was warmly welcomed in all the lodges, PHA and mainstream, but my point is that there was no intervisitation except my own. My experience

was the same on the Eastern seaboard: mine was the only white face in a PHA lodge in the District of Columbia, and I saw no PHA Masons in the mainstream lodges in DC and Virginia. The only times I found Prince Hall and mainstream Masons meeting together was informally, such as in multi-jurisdictional Masonic research societies in Ontario and Maryland.

I realize that such anecdotal evidence could be misleading, in assessing the situation as a whole, but what other evidence is available? There appears to have been no research on what has happened since recognition. There is a clear need for information to be gathered, in relation to each Grand Lodge that has implemented recognition between mainstream and PHA, and collated and reported. Only then can we assess the extent of intervisitation, and of multiple recognitions. And only then can we see which Grand Lodges with in-State recognition are taking full advantage of their opportunities, and which need to be persuaded to extend recognition beyond their own boundaries—step two in achieving Brother Joe’s dream.

When in-State recognition is denied

Approximately half of all PHA Masons are denied in-State recognition, and may continue to be denied it for many years. True acceptance cannot be forced by laws or threats, and token acceptance—if it could be achieved by those means—would bring no great benefit. What, then, can be done?

The current general practice among mainstream Grand Lodges is that recognition is accorded to only one regular Grand Lodge within a particular geographical area unless that Grand Lodge consents to the recognition of another regular Grand Lodge in the same area. So there are only two ways that a mainstream Grand Lodge could recognize a PHA Grand Lodge which is denied in-State recognition: it could withdraw recognition from the mainstream Grand Lodge of that State, and then recognize the PHA Grand Lodge; or it could ignore the general practice and recognize the PHA Grand Lodge without withdrawing recognition of the mainstream Grand Lodge.

Either action might result in unpleasantness for the ‘recognizing’ Grand Lodge and, human nature being what it is, a mainstream Grand Lodge is unlikely to make the first move towards such recognition. The most that it is likely to do of its own initiative is to declare that it considers all PHA Grand Lodges to be regular, and is prepared to admit PHA visitors even if they do not have in-State recognition.

Some mainstream Grand Lodges have taken this ‘soft’ option, as mentioned earlier in this article. The most recent to do so is the Grand Lodge of Turkey, in May 2013, authorizing the Grand Master to consent to visiting by the brethren of any Grand Lodge which is recognized by a Grand Lodge in amity with the Grand Lodge of Turkey (called the ‘brother of my brother’ policy). Thus, at the very least, if Turkey has exchanged recognition with one PHA Grand Lodge, the Grand Master may consent to visits by brethren of any or all PHA Grand Lodges. It could be argued further, that if Turkey has exchanged recognition with one mainstream Grand Lodge that recognizes one PHA Grand Lodge, then *all* PHA Masons have this benefit. But, of course, it only has practical effect if a PHA brother’s own Grand Lodge permits him to visit under those circumstances.

Some years ago, the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia sent a letter to 50 mainstream Grand Lodges around the world, asking for recognition. The six Grand Lodges in Australia received such letters, and three of them—South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria—responded favorably and exchanged recognition with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia, while retaining recognition of the mainstream Grand Lodge of Georgia. The world did not end, not with a bang, and not with a whimper! There do not seem to have been any repercussions at all from England, from Georgia, or anywhere else. It would be useful to know which other Grand Lodges accepted the invitation to exchange recognition with the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia, whether Georgia brethren have visited in those jurisdictions, whether brethren from overseas have visited PHA Georgia lodges, and what benefits have been derived from recognition. Here is a fine subject for research and a report to this magazine.

Surprisingly, the other PHA Grand Lodges in a similar position have not followed Georgia’s example. Perhaps they cannot see any immediate benefit for Georgia, or for themselves. Surely they are aware that united action can achieve more than individual action. With sufficient ‘overseas’ recognition, some mainstream American Grand Lodges might also gather the courage to recognize the PHA brethren who are denied in-State recognition—yet another step towards achieving Brother Joe’s dream.

Wider horizons

The research of Brother Walkes and his contemporaries was concerned mainly with the origins of Prince Hall Masonry, its legitimacy, and the problem of bogus Masonry. There is still a need for reliable histories of some Prince Hall Grand Lodges, and the problem of bogus Masonry has not disappeared, but there is no longer a requirement to prove the legitimacy of the Prince Hall fraternity—it is accepted worldwide, thanks largely to the work of those dedicated researchers. This provides an opportunity for researchers to widen their horizons.

With recognition comes access to mainstream Masonic libraries and greater opportunity to confer with mainstream researchers. This access, together with the modern freedom to roam the world wide web and consult the treasury of information available there, can provide new perspectives and fresh ideas. The Prince Hall researcher is now free to become a specialist in whatever Masonic subjects take his fancy, or to be a generalist with the whole of Freemasonry as his subject.

For an illustration of the range of topics available, take a look at just a small part of the P-S Review of Freemasonry website, www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/freemasonry.html, the ten papers from Australia and New Zealand in the 'Special Project 2009'. Not all of these papers will appeal to you, but just look at the variety! Then, if you have not done so before, explore the rest of this rich resource, with the wealth of ideas it contains, and see that this variety is not confined to a handful of researchers 'downunder', but extends worldwide.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate that 'recognition' is not a single act that has either happened or cannot happen, but is an ongoing process which should be pursued to the fullest extent possible.

In the case of Grand Lodges that have achieved in-State recognition, there is need to extend recognition by seeking it further afield, until the maximum possible recognition has been achieved, and to continue to nurture this happy alliance for the benefit of brethren generally.

The situation is not entirely hopeless for those Grand Lodges which—through no fault of their own—do not enjoy in-State recognition. The Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Georgia has shown the way, and some overseas Grand Lodges have co-operated, to exchange recognition with those who place true brotherhood above petty laws and the possibility of repercussions. Again, the maximum possible recognition should be sought, and the resulting friendships should be maintained and not neglected.

The article calls on Prince Hall researchers to examine the subject of recognition as it applies to Prince Hall Grand Lodges today, and report their findings. It also urges them to extend their interests and develop their talents beyond Prince Hall Masonry to Freemasonry in general.

It is a plea to Prince Hall Freemasons to continue to do what they have done in the past, to go more than halfway, in order to regain what is rightfully theirs—full acceptance and membership in the worldwide fraternity of mainstream Freemasonry.

About the author