

## Caucasian Prince Hall Lodge

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by Joseph A. Walkes, Jr.

Portions of this article were taken from "A Chronological History of Prince Hall Masonry 1788-1932" by Harry A. Williamson, by permission of the "Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations." Bro. Walkes thanks the foundation for allowing him to use portions of the material.

One of the most interesting facts to come to light, is to be found in the minute book of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York, under the proceedings for the year 1871. Here is found a Lodge of German Jews working under the authority of this Prince Hall Grand Lodge.

This Lodge, sometimes designated as both "Downshire" and "Progress" No. 12, was located in New York City and warranted February 3, 1870. Its members were all Hebrews of German extraction. The only American born Black member was Brother Albert Wilson, its Secretary, who at the same time was Secretary of the Grand Lodge.

It is recorded that from February to December of 1870, this Lodge held 12 regular communications. The well-known Prince Hall Masonic scholar, Harry E. Davis, of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Ohio, and author of "A History of Freemasonry Among Negroes in America," states that the warrant was recalled, as these Brethren returned to Europe at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. Harry A. Williamson in his "A Chronological History of Prince Hall Masonry 1784-1932" adds that those members remaining ultimately transferred their membership to the Caucasian Grand Lodge of that state. In support of this statement, Bro. Williamson records the proceedings of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge for 1874 as:

"Progress Lodge No. 12, New York City changed to Shakespear Lodge No. 750 under the Jurisdiction of the New York Grand Lodge (white)."

Williamson and Davis quote in a further record pertaining to the above statement, information was obtained in 1910, through one of these members, B. Le Vene, then a member of Wm. McKinley Lodge 840, under the jurisdiction of the Caucasian Grand Lodge of New York. He stated that he had been a member of the Prince Hall Lodge and that the first two degrees were re-conferred on him when he transferred his membership to the Caucasian body, but not the third as his raising under the Prince Hall Jurisdiction was deemed sufficient.

Williamson states that the records of Downshire No. 12, as noted in the minutes of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge read: "Downshire Lodge No. 12, organized February 3rd (Thursday), 1870. We are in possession of reports from this Lodge under dates of November 30, 1870, September, October, and December, 1871. An appeal addressed to the Grand Lodge September 7, 1870, is signed in the handwriting of the following Brethren: W.M. Abraham Levy; S.W.D. Jones; J.W. Acting, Julius Cohn.

In the Williamson Prince Hall Masonic collection housed in the New York Public Library, is a report sheet submitted to the Prince Hall Grand Lodge in 1870, showing the following named members: 1. Abraham Levy; 2. Dramin Jones; 3. Abram Newfeldt; 4. Tobias Cohen; 5. Herman Holzwasser; 6. Davis Cerciwitz; 7. Jacob Goldfarb; 8. Henry Rosenthal; 9. Marcus Rosenthal; 10. Zundel Hebstein; 11. Morris Isaacs; 12. Max Levy; 13. Abraham Newmark; 14. Samuel Lener; 15. John Delvert; 16. Simon Goldstein; 17. Solomon Goldstein; 18. Morris Goldstein; 19. Henry Levy; 20. Julius Cohn; 21. Sol. Alexander; 22. Moritz Brookman; 23. Meyer Rosenthal; 24. Ossac Wasseioug; 25. John Brown.

Additional facts from the records read as follows:

"Twelve (12) regular communications, three (3) initiations, two (2) crafting - - - one raised. Rejected one (1) - - - Mr. Nathc Israel. Reinstated two (2) Bros. Sol. Goldstein and John Cooper. Affiliated one (1) Bro. John Bowles, initiated Bros. Aaron Oppenheim, William Rosenthal, Jacob Levy. Buried one (1) Samuel Laner."

The above statistics are from the report of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York of September 1, 1871, and are without parallel in Prince Hall Masonic history.

Follow Up From April 1987  
Letter To The Editor

By Daniel M. Semel, D.D.G.M.

On page 15 of your April, 1977 magazine an article entitled "Caucasian Prince Hall Lodge" by Joseph A. Walkes, Jr. chronicled the transformation of Progress Lodge No. 12 (Prince Hall) into Shakespear (sic) Lodge (Grand Lodge of Free

& Accepted Masons of the state of New York). As a Past Master and Historian of Shakespeare Lodge No. 750 F. & A.M. I can add significant details to the saga of Shakespeare's founders.

First of all I must however point out that the pre-1969 histories of Shakespeare Lodge fail to record the pre-petition status of its early members. It can be assumed that the founders wanted to keep their clandestine past a secret. Another obstacle to learning the full story is the fact that the first 5 years of Shakespeare's minutes were mysteriously lost or destroyed. Early Shakespearians had a penchant for masonic trials and this loss occurred during a masonic trial involving Shakespeare Lodge & the Grand Lodge of Pennsylvania in 1881, but that is another story.

It wasn't until the mid 1960's that I chanced upon the same information which Brother Walkes published. I then began to delve into our lodge records and have published some of the material in our notices. Since there now seems to be an interest on the part of your readers I am happy to supply more information to them.

There is considerable confusion surrounding the exact name or names of the prior lodge but I shall quote a letter hereafter which clearly establishes "Progress No. 12" as the correct and final name. Shakespeare Lodge was formed in 1874 in what was then the Eighth Masonic District. It is currently part of the Sixth Manhattan District. The petitioners came from a number of regular (white) lodges and almost all immediately withdrew to return to their original lodges. Clearly the petitioners accommodated those they initially raised. It is the latter group which formed the nucleus of Shakespeare, and I shall confine myself to these brothers most of whom had been members of Progress No. 12. This has been confirmed by comparing the surviving records of Progress No. 12 and the earliest records of Shakespeare Lodge.

In his April 1977 article Brother Walkes lists 25 men who were members of the "black" Grand Lodge in 1870. Using his numbers, the records of Shakespeare disclose the following about these men:

(1) Abraham Levy - He was raised in Shakespeare on May 14, 1874 and remained in good standing until his death in 1902. He had been Worshipful Master of Downshire No. 12 ("black" Grand Lodge) in February 1870. Shakespeare's petition was granted on February 16, 1874 and the lodge was constituted on June 22, 1874.

(2) Dramin Jones - A merchant, born in Poland in 1841, he was raised in Shakespeare on May 13, 1874. He was named Junior Warden of Shakespeare in its charter which was issued on June 16, 1874. He had been the Worshipful Master of Progress No. 12 (black Grand Lodge) just one year earlier. He was dropped from Shakespeare in 1882 for NPD, restored and died in 1903.

(3) Abraham Newfield - A jailor born in Poland in 1835, he was raised in Shakespeare on July 20, 1874.

(4) Tobias Cohen - Raised in Shakespeare on June 20, 1874, NPD February 7, 1878.

(5) Herman Holzwasser - No such name appears in Shakespeare's records. One, Rudolph H. Holde, a Prussian bookkeeper born in 1850 and a founder of Shakespeare, gained considerable fame in Freemasonry and was identified with the earlier lodge.

(6) Davis Cerciwitz - no record

(7) Jacob Goldfarb - Simply listed as number 23 in Shakespeare's ledgers.

(8) & (9) Henry Rosenthal and Marcus Rosenthal - no one by either name appears in Shakespeare's records but an Isidore Rosenthal was one of the earliest raised (May 13, 1874) and went on to become lodge Treasurer.

(10) Zundel Hebstain - no record

(11) Morris Isaacs - no record

(12) Max Levy - Bernard, Abraham, Aron, Samson, Simon and Harris Levy but no Max.

(13) Abraham Newmark - Simply listed in Shakespeare's records as number 33.

(14) Samuel Lener - He died before Shakespeare was formed.

(15) John Delvert - no record

(16) Simon Goldstein & (17) Solomon Goldstein - S. Goldstein and S. Goldster are listed as number 24 and 25 on Shakespeare's rolls.

(18) Morris Goldstein - not listed but there had been numerous Goldstein's over the years.

(19) Henry Levy - no record but see 12 above.

(20) Julius Cohen - a J.H. Cohen, a German painter, was raised on April 27, 1874 and dropped for NPD in 1883, while a Julius Cohn is listed as number 15 on Shakespeare's records and was acting Junior Warden of Downshire Lodge.

(21) Sol Alexander - no record

(22) Moritz Brookman - no record but a common first name among Shakespeare's early members.

(23) Meyer Rosenthal - no record

(24) Ossac Wasseioug - no record

(25) John Brown - no record

At least 8 of the 25 men on the 1870 list joined Shakespeare. Undoubtedly more members of Progress No. 12 joined who were not on the 1870 list. It would appear that the following members of Shakespeare also came from Progress No. 12 though I have yet to definitely confirm this by comparison with Williamson's records:

J.J. Raphael, a 34 year old bookkeeper born in New York.

Aaron DeHaan, a 30 year old clothier born in New York.

Ammi C. Cheever, a 23 year old oil finisher born in New York.

Theodore Tobias, a 35 year old clothier who was born in Germany.

Emanuel DeRoy, a 32 year old diamond broker born in Germany.

Louis Solomon, a 22 year old merchant born in New York.

Joseph C. Wolff, a 24 year old lawyer born in Besargon, France.

Williamson & Davis record that one "B. LeVene", a member of William McKinley Lodge stated in 1910 that he did not receive a 3rd degree in Shakespeare because his Prince Hall raising was deemed sufficient. This is extremely doubtful especially since all clandestine masons so far traced through Shakespeare did in fact receive their third degree. However there may be some truth to this report because William McKinley Lodge was formed in 1900 by some disgruntled members of Shakespeare who lost yet another masonic trial. While there is no B. LeVene listed on Shakespeare's books there are a multitude of Levines and interestingly one of the Shakespearians who broke off to form William McKinley was a Nathaniel Levene.

Perhaps the oddest and most important piece in the jigsaw puzzle is a letter written by Albert Wilson, the black member of Progress Lodge. This handwritten letter, a copy of which I found in our archives was written in 1885 and is as follows:

"December 1st 1869

At a quarterly communication of the M.W. United Grand Lodge, Bros. Manning, McDougall and Mars were appointed a committee to visit Hamilton Lodge U.D., as the members of said had applied for a warrant of constitution.

January 24th 1870

At a special communication the prayer of the petitioners was granted. Also another petition to change the name from Hamilton to that of Downshire - reason given in consequence of the bad odor surrounding the name of Hamilton.

On Thursday, February 3, 1870, Downshire Lodge, No. 12 - was duly constituted by Bro. Wm. H. Anthony, D.G.M., G.M. acting - (Abraham Levy, W. Master)

At the annual communication in June 1873, the name of said Lodge was changed to Progress Lodge No. 12, Bro. Dramin Jones, W. Master.

A few months prior to the dedication of the Temple 23rd street and 6th Avenue, a motion was made by the Secretary of Progress that a sum of money be drawn from the treasury for a specific purpose, many of the members not being in the clique, demand to know what the object was - no explanation was made however and the motion was carried, whether it was because I was present at the meeting or that the purpose for which the money was for, was to be kept a secret from

certain of its members, I did not clearly see through at the time, but however as subsequent events proved a large number was not enrolled in the new lodge - for I was solicited to organize them into a lodge on the east side of the city.

And in the grand procession on the day of the dedication, Progress now Shakespeare Lodge had the lead as the youngest lodge.

The date of their joining the G.L. of N.Y. I have forgotten, but the printed proceedings will give it.

I would like very much to have a conversation with you about this whole affair as I think the United Grand Lodge was rather shabbily treated.

Hoping that these items will be of some service to you and to purpose you have in view,

I am very fraternally

Yours obedient servant & c

Albert Wilson

To

M.W.P.G.M. & C & C  
Dr. P.W. Ray, 33 degree

New York, Sept 22 85"

While this letter discloses some inconsistencies with Walkes' article it also falls victim of error. Nevertheless it does clarify the 3 names, Hamilton, Downshire and Progress by which the predecessor organization was known. It discloses that Albert Wilson was clearly not the Secretary of Progress when the motion was made to withdraw the money. It also refers to the "black" Grand Lodge as "United Grand Lodge" not Prince Hall G.L.

Where it really muddies the waters is in the purported cause for the withdrawal of many of the members. It places the date a few months prior to the temple dedication. This could not be so since the temple was dedicated June 3, 1875 and Shakespeare was constituted almost a year and a half before. Moreover Shakespeare did not march at the head and was not the youngest lodge at the time of the parade.

However Albert Wilson's 10 year old recollection may not be far wrong. I ran across an unsubstantiated story to the effect that the white members of Progress No. 12 only learned of the clandestine character of their lodge when they tried to take part in the festivities and fund raising activities which took place a few years before the temple dedication. This is plausible and would dovetail with Wilson's otherwise accurate letter. Wilson's letter may also offer an explanation why more of the list of 25 did not join Shakespeare. He states that many were not part of the withdrawing clique and he was asked to organize the large number which remained. Perhaps this is when he became Secretary of Progress.

It is 103 years since the "white" founders of Shakespeare quit their black brother (or brothers) in Progress No. 12. Shakespeare Lodge has prospered and, with more than 500 members, it is now the largest Lodge in the largest district in the Grand Lodge of New York. Progress Lodge is no more.

In its 100th Anniversary year Shakespeare Lodge sponsored the formation in New York city of a new lodge many of whose founders are black. That lodge, Allied Lodge No. 1170 F & A.M., has since been chartered. It was constituted on May 21, 1975 by the Grand Master, M.W. Arthur Markewich, himself a Past Master of Shakespeare Lodge. Allied Lodge is the smallest and youngest lodge in the Sixth Manhattan District. It is a healthy lodge and counts among its brethren men of different races, creeds and colors. I should know, since I had the distinction to be its first Master under dispensation and then again under charter. The story has come almost full circle.

Forgive my prideful pun but Shakespeare Lodge and Freemasonry in general have made some "Progress" in the past 100 years.

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