



# Caribbean-American Political Action Committee

Advancing the political agenda of Caribbean Americans

As we continue to celebrate Black History Month and spotlight Caribbean Americans who have made notable contributions to America, we focus now on Thomas Prince Hall.

## Thomas Prince Hall



It is believed that Hall was born in Barbados in 1735. It is also believed that his father was an Englishman and that his mother was a free Colored woman of French descent. However, details of his early life are uncertain.

It is known that Hall moved to Boston when he was 17 years old. He is believed to have been enslaved by William Hall who presented him with his certificate of manumission a month after the Boston massacre in 1770. Prince Hall lived and worked in Medford for many years. He was briefly married to Sara Ritchie, an enslaved woman, who died shortly after their marriage. He also joined the Continental Army. Legend has it that he participated in the battle of Bunker Hill.

Hall became a minister in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Cambridge, Massachusetts. He was known for using his pulpit to preach against the evils of slavery. He worked tirelessly as an abolitionist as a leader in the free black community. He was an education advocate for African Americans, and a proponent of the back to Africa movement.

In 1775, Hall and fourteen other free blacks joined a British army lodge of Masons who were stationed in Boston. After the British departed, the men formed their own lodge, African Lodge No. 1. They received a permanent charter twelve years later. Hall became the Lodge's first Grand Master. As Grand Master, he organized lodges in Rhode Island, Philadelphia and several others in Boston. He also used his influence to push movements toward the "political advancement and liberation of enslaved people." This included the drafting of the 1777 petition for a Gradual Process of Emancipation for the enslaved.

In 1787, Hall discussed the idea of a mass exodus of ex-slaves to Africa. This was five years before the exiled Black Loyalists in Canada emigrated to Sierra Leone. In the same year, Hall petitioned the General Court to grant equal public education to blacks as well as whites, on the grounds that each paid their required taxes to the government. His petition was ignored. He continued to fight for equal public education for Free Blacks throughout the 1790s and the early 1800s. He established a school for African American children in his home in 1798 after failing to convince the Massachusetts Congress to do so.

Prince Hall, the acknowledged father of Black Freemasonry, died in October 1897, at the age of seventy-two. He is buried in Copp's Hill Burying Ground in Boston. A tribute in his name was erected next to his grave on June 24, 1835. He was survived by his wife, Sylvia (Zilphia) Ward Hall. Reports differ as to whether he had any children. Two months following his death, on January 1, 1808, the slave trade was officially ended. To celebrate the event, two hundred African Americans marched through Boston to the African Meeting House and held a service of thanksgiving.

Source: <https://www.historyisfun.org/learn/learning-center/prince-hall/https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part2/2p37.htmlhttp://www.medfordhistorical.org/medford-history/africa-to-medford/prince-hall/>