



AND THE DARKNESS PRESENCE IS NOT
IN THE EAST A PLACE OF LIGHT, WHERE REIGN SILENCE AND PEACE.

WE the Master, Wardens and Secretary of
AFRICAN LODGE, No. 457 held in the Town of
BOSTON and State of Massachusetts, Do Certify, that the
Bearer hereof, our Worthy Brother *Wm. Brown*
has been regularly initiated into the *third* Degree of
MASONRY such he has been received by us, and
being a True and Faithful Brother, is hereby recommended to the
Favor and Protection of all FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS,
wheresoever dispersed.

In Witness whereof we have caused the Seal of our
said Lodge to be hereunto affixed, this 13th day of December
1816 Anno Lucis *5826* *John D. Weston M.M.*

Walker Lewis M.M.

Harold Jones M.M.

Benjamin Lee M.M.



First African-American Masonic Lodge

Masonic Initiation Document for Boston's African Lodge No. 459

Boston: African Lodge No. 459 1826 / (Anno Lucis 5826)

\$9000

One page partially printed certificate accomplished in manuscript, with woodcut and type border and masonic symbols, original silk ribbon and remnant of ink seal threaded along left margin. Signed by Worshipful Master John T. Hilton; Senior Wardens Walker Lewis and Aaron Gaul; and Secretary Isaac Barbadoes. Soiled and creased, some slight loss at folds, laid down on Japan paper, a good only example of a rare document.

The document initiates a man named New Ponders, and states that “We the Master, Wardens and Secretary of African Lodge, No. 459 held in the Town of Boston and State of Massachusetts, Do Certify, that the Bearer hereof, our Worthy Brother New Ponders [?] has been regularly initiated in the third Degree of Masonry...”

A remarkable document from Boston's African Lodge, No. 459, the first African-American Masonic Lodge, recording the signatures of some of Boston's leading black abolitionists and community leaders of the antebellum period.

“Black fraternal organizations, like the mutual aid societies, were important vehicles for community-service work.... The earliest of these was the African Lodge #459, organized in 1787. The founder of this lodge was Prince Hall, a Methodist minister who had served with the colonial army in the American Revolution.... Its programs of education and community service complemented those of the African Society and the black church” (Horton & Horton, p. 29-30). The Lodge was established under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of England after Hall's appeal to the American Masons was rejected. The Lodge declared its independence from the English Lodge in 1827 and in 1847 changed its name to the Prince Hall Lodge to honor its founder.

The African Lodge was an important site of anti-slavery demonstrations, and many of its antebellum members were associated with William Lloyd Garrison and his Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Prominent abolitionist members of the Lodge included David Walker, Lewis Hayden, James Barbadoes, and John T. Hilton. Prince Hall himself delivered one of the first anti-slavery speeches by a black in his address to the African Lodge on June 24, 1797.

This document, which initiates a new member into the third degree, is signed by John T. Hilton, Walker Lewis, Aaron Gaul, and Isaac Barbadoes. We have been unable to identify the initiate, one New Ponders, whose name does not appear on the 1828 or 1829 lists of Lodge members.

John T. Hilton (1801-1864) was an abolitionist and community leader and a hairdresser by trade. He signs here as Worshipful Master (“John T. Hilton W.M.”). Hilton was a close friend and supporter of William Lloyd Garrison, and was a member of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, the Boston Vigilance Committee, and was a congregant of Boston's African Baptist Church.

Walker Lewis (1798-1856), who signs as Senior Warden ("Walker Lewis S.W."), was an abolitionist from a prominent middle-class family. He owned residential and commercial property and was a barber by trade. With Thomas Dalton he formed the Massachusetts General Colored Association which helped David Walker publish his incendiary *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* (1829). Curiously, Lewis later converted to Mormonism. He was one of the earliest African-American Mormon priests, ordained by Joseph Smith's brother William. Lewis briefly settled in Utah before the Mormon Church's hostility to blacks drove him back to his home in Lowell.

Aaron Gaul, his occupation recorded as a swayer in the 1828 lists of members of African Lodge No. 459, signs as Senior Warden ("Aaron Gaul S.W."). He was a neighbor of David Walker on Bridge Street in Boston's West End.

Isaac Barbadoes (c. 1805-1873), tailor and letter carrier, signs as Secretary ("Isaac Barbadoes, Sect."). He was the brother of James George Barbadoes (c.1796-1841), one of Boston's leading abolitionists and a fellow African Lodge member.

Franklin A. Dorman. *Twenty Families of Color in Massachusetts: 1742-1998* (Boston, 1998); James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians* (New York, 1979).

An exceptionally rare document from the first black Masonic group, illustrating the many threads of abolitionist sentiment that radiated throughout the black community in Boston. [BTC#429760]



AND THE DARKNESS) PRESENDETH IT NOT
IN THE EAST A PLACE OF LIGHT, WHERE REIGN SILENCE AND PEACE.

WE the Master, Wardens and Secretary of
AFRICAN LODGE, No. 459 held in the Town of
BOSTON and State of Massachusetts, Do Certify, that the
Bearer hereof, our Worthy Brother *Aaron Gaul*
has been regularly initiated into the *third* Degree of
MASONRY *3000* AS such he has been received by us, and

MASONRY 8000AS such he has been received by us, and
being a True and Faithful Brother. is hereby recommended to the
Favor and Protection of all **FREE AND ACCEPTED MASONS.**
wheresoever dispersed.

In Witness whereof we have caused the Seal of our
said Lodge to be hereunto affixed, this 13th day of November
1816 Anno Lucis 5826 John D. Wilton M.M.

Walter Lewis S.P.

Harvey J. J.

Bar Harbor Secy

