

Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery Address 2018

Welcome masons and families. Welcome to historical society members. And welcome to members of the public who have come to witness this annual ceremony.

We gather in this burial place every Memorial Day to enjoy fine speeches and pageantry. That is entirely appropriate because Memorial Day is a day of remembrance – we remember those who have fallen in the service of their country. This day was originally called “Decoration Day”, and it was the day when people would visit the cemeteries of Civil War soldiers and decorate the graves of those who had died fighting the war. Therefore, the theme of the day is “remembrance”.

The concepts of remembering and forgetting are mirrors of each other. Last year I spoke of the many unanswered questions surrounding this burial ground. These questions represent things which have become forgotten with the passage of time. The questions revolve around the many decades when this cemetery fell into obscurity – when it was forgotten. The time of forgetting stretches from roughly the 1890s until the 1980s.

This year I want to ask another question. We know that Prince Hall himself became a Methodist minister in Cambridge in 1792, and accordingly was adept at giving fine speeches. Of course, he was also Grand Master of the African Masonic Lodge, which gave him even more opportunities for public speaking. I am aware of two of his Masonic speeches: One was given in Charlestown in 1792, and the other was given in Menotomy in 1797.

You might ask, where is Menotomy? Please remember that Menotomy was the original name of the ancient village which eventually became present-day Arlington. Therefore, Prince Hall's speech was given right here, in present-day Arlington. The title of the Arlington speech is “A CHARGE, DELIVERED TO THE AFRICAN LODGE, JUNE 24, 1797, AT MENOTOMY”. The title of the speech hints at something I would love to know more about: Evidently, there was an African Masonic Lodge right here in Arlington in 1797. So here's my question: Where was the lodge? I have poked around a little bit, but have found nothing suggesting where those masons actually met. I would love to know more about this lodge and its meeting place, but those details may be forgotten to history.

Lastly, on the subject of history, I'd like to remind you that at the 1868 Arlington town meeting, a motion was made by William Parmenter that the Prince Hall Mystic Cemetery Association be allowed to locate and maintain a cemetery in the Northeasterly part of the Town. This motion was voted on and approved. Since this is 2018, that means this cemetery was legally approved exactly 150 years ago. Today we celebrate

the sesquicentennial anniversary of this cemetery. It is a special place which enjoys a long history.

Thank you for listening, and I wish you all the best of health and happiness on Memorial Day.