

The United Grand Lodge of New York and The National Grand Lodge

By

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Introduction

There have been many episodes of debates regarding Independent (States Rights) Grand Lodges and Nationals (Compact). However, none have been more interesting than that of the disposition of the United Grand Lodge of New York and whether or not she was a member of the Most Worshipful National Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Ancient York Masons. Why is this history important and significant? It is significant with regards to the foundation of Independent Freemasonry amongst men of color. If the United Grand Lodge of New York was a member of the National Grand Lodge, it was the landmark point at which Independent (States Rights) Grand Lodges ended and all were under the "Masonic Union" of the M. W. National Grand Lodge, and any Independent Grand Lodges formed thereafter could be viewed as illegally formed. This author will present documentation from the years in question that clearly shows the United Grand Lodge of New York was indeed a member of the National Grand Lodge.

The Establishment of the United Grand Lodge of New York

The most recent published literature on the subject of New York History was published by Ezekiel Bey, the Grand Historian of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York F. & A. M. entitled *The Hour Glass: African American Freemasonry In The State of New York 1812-2012*. In the book, Ezekiel Bey stated the United Grand Lodge of New York was established in March of 1848. He provided no source of the Grand Lodge's establishment.

On March of 1848, Boyer Lodge # 1 along with Celestial # 2, Rising Sun # 3 and Hiram # 4 came together and organized under the name United Grand Lodge, F and A. M., of the State of New York. The officers of the United Grand Lodge were James Barnett, Grand Master; Jacob R. Gibbs, Deputy Grand Master; Alexander Elston, Senior Grand Warden; Arnold Ricks, Junior Grand Warden; Charles A. Horton, Grand Treasurer; and Ransom F. Wake, Grand Secretary. ¹

Joshua Woodlin, National Grand Senior Warden in 1855 published the following on the establishment of the United Grand Lodge of New York:

¹ Bey, E., *The Hour Glass: African American Freemasonry In The State of New York 1812-2012*, 2012, New York, page 31.

Formation of the United Grand Lodge for the state of New York. Six subordinate Lodges formed A.D. 1848, A.L. 5848, did elect and install the following named brethren for the ensuing Masonic year, in union with the National Grand Lodge.

Bro. James Barnett, R.W.G.M.	Jacob R. Gibbs, D.G.M.
Alexander Elston, G.S.W.	Arnold Hicks, G.J.W.
Ransom Wake, G.T.	Jacob Francis, G.S.
James B. Webb, S.D.	Charles Bryce, J.D.
C. Johnson, S.S.	George W. Hilton, J.S.
Charles Horton, G.M.C.	Samuel Byrd, G.S.
Thomas Benjamin, G.P.	T. Eddy, G.T. ²

It has been debated in social media and e-list circles that the United Grand Lodge was NOT a subordinate member of the National Grand Lodge at its inception. This position is in contradiction to the literature on the disposition of the United Grand Lodge. The National Grand Session for the year of 1848 was held in New York, the territorial jurisdiction of the United Grand Lodge of New York. Woodlin declared the session as a “confirmation” of the “National Grand Lodge Union”³. The planning of the New York National Grand Lodge Session was coordinated via several New York Newspapers. The most debated article appeared in the New York Herald Newspaper and reads as follows:

GRAND MASONIC FESTIVAL BY THOMAS DOWNING, Thomas L. Jennings and George L. Downing. A Grand Masonic Festival will be given on Tuesday, the 27th, during the day and evening, at German Hall, Elizabeth Street, above Grand. When all the Banners and Implements of the Order will be exhibited. The Masons in Town will be present with their Regalia and Jewels. Tickets One Dollar each, to be had at Thomas Downings¹, Broad street, Thomas L. Jennings, Anthony-street, George L. Downing, 690 Broadway, P. A. Bell, 412 Broadway, Dunlap and Cary, 162 Church at St. Charles, 164 Church, and at H. W. Brown, 35 Anthony-street.

GRAND MASONIC CELEBRATION OF THE NATIONAL Grand Lodge - Arrangement of procession -
On Lispenard St., front facing towards West Broadway Hiram Lodge, No.4, of Brooklyn
Rising Sun, No.3, of New York
Celestial, No.2, do.

² Woodlin, J., *The National Masonic Union: A History Of The Origin Of Ancient Freemasonry Among The Coloured Citizens In The United States of America*, 1855, Burlington, New Jersey, page 30

³ Woodlin, page 25-26

Boyer, No.1, do.
United Grand Lodge, State of New York.

On Beach street -
Union Lodge, No.2, of Boston Rising Sons of St. John, No.3, do. Celestial, No.4, do.
Prince Hall Grand Lodge, for State of Massachusetts

On Walker street -
Athenian, No. 24, of Philadelphia Christian, No. 12, do.
Prudence, No. 11, do.
---, No. 10, do.
Mount Lebanon, No.9, do. ---, No.8, do.
Sheba, No.7, do.
Widow Son, No.6, do. Harmony, No.5, do. Union, No.4, do.
Phoenix, No.3, do.
Laurel No.2, do.
Grand Lodge for State of Pennsylvania

On North Moore street
National Grand Lodge
Prudence Royal Arch Chapter, of Philadelphia Celestial, do. of New York
King Hiram, do, of Philadelphia
Friendship, do do
King Solomon, do do
St. Johns, do do
Union, do do
Richmond, do do
Jerusalem, do do
Zion, do do
St. Andrews, do do
Rising Sun, Grand H. R. A. Chapter of State of Pennsylvania First Independent African
Grand H. R. A. Chapter of North America St. George's Encampment of Knight's Templars
Union Encampment of Knights Templars.

The several Lodges will please form as above, at 10 o'clock, A.M. By order of the Grand Marshal. For route and further particulars see Tribune.⁴

It has been debated by New York Historians, Social Media Bloggers and many others that an article with a listing of the United Grand Lodge of New York being in the parade line up of the National Grand Lodge does NOT prove that they were members of the National Grand Lodge. In reference to the above article in the New York Herald, Ezekiel Bey, Grand Historian of the Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge of New York wrote:

⁴ New York Herald Newspaper, June 26, 1848, page 3, column 2

The newspaper clipping was merely an ad; as it was the norm in those days of advertising events. In particular, this event was to show all the Lodges and Grand Lodges who may have been in favor of the National Grand Lodge's establishment, and celebrated together for the unification. However, the newspaper document is not proof that the United Grand Lodge of New York or its Lodges ever marched or participated in a parade as published by those who wish to tell a false story. This ad was to inform those who may want to celebrate. There is no proof that the United Grand Lodge of New York celebrated this affair.⁵

Ezekiel Bey glaringly FAILED to cite a source for this statement. He also cited no source from 1848, that would give any sort of corroboration to his over-reaching opinion. The following sources paint quite the opposite position. Another article related to the PLANNING of the National Grand Lodge Session appeared in the New-York Tribune newspaper.

Notice.- There will be a celebration of the NATIONAL GRAND LODGE OF FREEMASONS in the city on Monday, the 26th inst. In the Broadway Tabernacle, on which occasion there will be a procession of all the Lodges of the fraternity that constitute the Union. There will also be several addresses delivered, declaration of sentiment read- and presentation of a splendid banner to the National Grand Lodge by her subordinates from various parts of the United States. For route, &c. see the New-York Daily Tribune of Saturday and Monday next.

B. B. - On Tuesday, the 28th, there will be a musical festival and entertainment during the day and evening at the German Hall I honor of the National Grand Lodge and her subordinates.

THOMAS DOWNING, Sen'r)
THOS. D. JINNINGS,) Com'tee
GEO T. DOWNING,)⁶

The above article was entered into the literature by Henry Wilson Coil , Sr. and John MacDuffie Sherman in their Missouri Lodge of Research published book entitled, " A Documentary Account of Prince Hall and Other Black Fraternal Orders".⁷ Coil and Sherman, has been privately as well as recently in print by supporters of an opposing position as enemies of the position that United Grand Lodge was not a part of the NGL.⁸ This researcher took it upon himself to verify the existence of the above article published by Coil and Sherman. The ARTICLE does exist. The following is an image of said article.

⁵ Bey, E. page 38

⁶ New York Tribune Newspaper, June 21, 1848, page 3, column 3

⁷ Coil, H & Sherman, J. *A Documentary Account of Prince Hall and Other Black Fraternal Orders*, 1982, Missouri , page 153

⁸ Bey, E. page 32

Notice.—There will be a celebration of the **NATIONAL GRAND LODGE OF FREE MASONS** in this city on Monday, the 26th inst. in the Broadway Tabernacle, on which occasion there will be a procession of all the Lodges of the fraternity that constitute the Union. There will also be several addresses delivered, declaration of sentiment read—and presentation of a splendid banner to the National Grand Lodge by her subordinates from various parts of the United States. For route, &c. see the New-York Daily Tribune of Saturday and Monday next.

N. B.—On Tuesday, the 28th, there will be a musical festival and entertainment during the day and evening at the German Hall in honor of the National Grand Lodge and her subordinates.

THOMAS DOWNING, Sen'r. }
 THOS. D. JINNINGS, } Com'tee.
 GEO. T. DOWNING, }

This researcher, in reading the above article, decided to take the Coil and Sherman discovery even further. The above mentioned article made reference to the fact that more information would be published in a later edition of the newspaper. In researching those future dates, a very important notification was discovered and the text is displayed as follows.

Celebration of the National Grand Lodge of Free Masons, on which occasion Br. John T. Hilton, M. W. G. M. of Boston, Mass. Will preside and Br. James Bird of Philadelphia, D. G. M. to be celebrated in the city of New York, at the Broadway Tabernacle, on the 26th inst. On which occasion there will be a Procession and presentation of a Splended Banner to the National Grand Lodge, by the subordinate Lodges, several addresses delivered and declaration of sentiment read.

Bro. JOSEPH H. DOYER of Philadelphia, G. S. Kt. Grand Marshal of the day.

Bro. THOMAS DOWNING of New York, G. S. Kt. Assistant Marshal.

ORDER OF EXERCISES

1. On the arrival of the Procession at the Tabernacle, there will be a Voluntary on the organ.
2. Prayer by the M. W. G. Chaplain of the N. G. L. - Br. Jas. Bird
3. Singing by the Choir.
4. Declaration of sentiment, read by Br. George T. Downing, Jr.
5. Singing by the Choir.
6. Presentation of Banner to N. G. Lodge by Br. Samuel Van Brackle, D. D. Grand Master, in behalf of the subordinates, to the M. W. G. G. M. John T. Hilton, of the N. G. L. who will reply.
7. Singing by the Choir.
8. Introductory Address by a Brother.
9. Singing by the Choir.

10. Address of the N. G. Lodge, by Rev. Bro. Samuel Chase of Baltimore, Md.
11. Singing by the Choir.
12. Address of the United Grand Lodge of the State of New-York, by Bro. Wm. G. Poyer, R. W. G. D. C. of U. G. L. State of New York.
13. Singing by the Choir.
14. Collection from the Brethren.
15. Closing remarks by R. W. G. R. of U. G. L. State of New-York- Br. Joseph W. Smith
16. Singing by the Choir.
17. Prayer and Benediction by the M. W. G. Chaplain of the U. G. L. State of N. Y. - Rev. Br. John P. Thompson.

ROUTE

The Lodges will form in West Broadway at 10 o'clock, A. M. and proceed down Barclay-st. down Barclay to Greenwich-st. down Greenwich to Recotr-st. up Rector to Broadway, down Broadway to Bowling-green, around Bowling-green to Beaver-st. down Beaver to Broad-st. up Broad to Wall-st. up Wall to Broadway, up Broadway to Park west side, through the Park to Centre and Chambers sts. Down Chambers to Broadway, up Broadway to the Tabernacle.

After service, the Lodges will form in order and proceed up Broadway to Fourteenth-st or Union -square down down Fourteenth to Fifth-avenue, down Fifth-avenue to Waverly-place, through Waverly-place to Sixth-avenue, through Sixth-avenue and Carmine-st. to Hudson, through Hudson to Canal-st. up Canal to West Broadway, and dismiss.

Tickets of admission 121/2 cts. To be had of Carey & Dunlap 162 Church-st; H. W. Brown, 35 Anthony-st. Hall & Harris, 464 Church-st.; Levi Bryan, Lispenard-st.; Phillip A. Bell 412 Broadway, and at the Tabernacle.

N. B. Should the weather be unfavorable, the above will be postponed to the first fair day.

THOS. DOWNING)	Committee
THOS. L. JINNINGS R. Ah. M)	of
GEO. T. DOWNING R. Ah. M)	Arrangements

N. B. On Tuesday, the 27th, there will be a Masonic Festival and entertainment in the German Hall in Elizabeth-st. Doors will be open at 11 o'clock and continue throughout the day and evening for both ladies and gentlemen, the committee being under the impression that many may prefer the day to the evening. Price of tickets \$1 each, including refreshments.⁹

The planning of the 1848 New York hosted Session of the National Grand Lodge was continued in another New York Newspaper article.

⁹ New-York Tribune Newspaper, June 24, 1848, page 3, column 2

GRAND MASONIC FESTIVAL BY THOMAS DOWNING, Thomas L. Jennings and George L. Downing. A Grand Masonic Festival will be given on Tuesday, the 27th, during the day and evening, at German Hall, Elizabeth Street, above Grand. When all the Banners and Implements of the Order will be exhibited. The Masons in Town will be present with their Regalia and Jewels. Tickets One Dollar each, to be had at Thomas Downings', Broad Street, Thomas L. Jennings, Anthony-street, George L. Downing, 690 Broadway, P. A. Bell, 412 Broadway, Dunlap and Cary, 162 Church at St. Charles, 164 Church, and at H. W. Brown's 35 Anthony-street.¹⁰

The above referenced articles illuminates that New York Masons were very active in the planning of the 1848 National Grand Lodge Session. The program of the National Grand Lodge included many presentations by United Grand Lodge of New York members. George T. Downing, son of Thomas Downing, whom both served on the National Grand Lodge Festival Committee, identified himself as a Royal Arch Mason.¹¹ This appears to be corroborated by several published reports on the life of George T. Downing.¹² To return to the 1848 National Grand Lodge Parade as reported by Thomas Downing, there appears to be two Royal Arch Grand Chapters both from Pennsylvania. A Royal Arch Chapter in New York, the state of George T. Downing, appeared to be under the jurisdiction of Rising Sun Grand Chapter of Pennsylvania.¹³ The Chapter was Celestial Chapter of New York. The name matched the Blue Lodge of the same name under United Grand Lodge. Taken into consideration of the planning by the committee for the National Grand Lodge Celebration, whereby, according to the Parade lineup by direction of the Grand Marshal Doyer of Pennsylvania assisted by New York Mason Thomas Downing and George T. Downing, another New York Mason who read the Declaration of Sentiments of the National Grand Lodge, it is highly unlikely that United Grand Lodge would have such a prominent role in the National Grand Lodge consummation Session if they were NOT a member of the National Grand Lodge. There have been banter on Social Media and Blogs, but there has been no publications (in print), that has cited a single source from 1848 challenging the above sources of the activity of the United Grand Lodge in 1848 at the National Grand Lodge Session which they appeared to have hosted.

The National Grand Lodge Session of 1849

The National Grand Lodge Session of 1849 is of extreme importance to the evidence of the United Grand Lodge of New York and its membership in the National Grand Lodge. National Grand Master John T. Hilton called the National Grand Lodge Session.

¹⁰ New York Herald Newspaper, June 26, 1848, page 3, column 3

¹¹ New-York Tribune Newspaper, June 24, 1848, page 3, column 2

¹² Washington, S. A. M., *George Thomas Downing: Sketch of His Life and Times*, Newport, R. I. , page 9

¹³ New York Herald Newspaper, June 26, 1848, page 3, column 2

SPECIAL NOTICE-THE NATIONAL GRAND LODGE OF THE UNITED STATES to all of her State Grand Lodges and their Subordinates, sendeth her most fraternal salutation. All officers and members of N. G. L. are hereby reminded of an adjourned meeting to be at the Masonic Hall. South ELEVENTH St., Philadelphia, June 21st, ensuing. A general and punctual attendance is requested, with proper credentials for admission.

Done at the National Hall, city of Boston, this 25th day of May A. L. 5849, A. D. 1849. By order

JOHN T. HILTON, M. W. G. M
WM. E. AMBUSH, R. W. G. Sect'y¹⁴

The National Grand Lodge had problems with its subordinate Grand Lodge, the United Grand Lodge of New York and while in Session it published the following.

UNION, HEALTH, STABILITY, -To all whom it may concern comes greeting-
Whereas, the maternal GRAND LODGE of the United States have heard with deep regret that the United Grand Lodge of the State of New York has refused to comply with the provisions of their charter, also of the constitutional authority of the National Grand Lodge to which they hold their authority, therefore, The Most Worshipful National Grand Lodge of (color) of these United States of North America, of free and accepted A. Y. M., met in Grand Assembly the 25th day of June, A. D., 1849 A. L., 5849, at the Masonic Hall, South ELEVENTH Street, Philadelphia. Do, by these presents make known that the United Grand Lodge of the State of New York, her warrant is hereby expelled from the Masonic Union and fraternity, together with her officers and all others that may continue with the said expelled United Grand Lodge of the said State, for the violation of the 1st, 9th, and 11th articles of the Constitution of the Most Worshipful National Grand Lodge, and against the declaration of sentiments passed in open Convention, June, A. L. 5847.

Published by order of the National Grand Lodge.

JONATHAN DAVIS
JOSHUA WOODLIN Committee
R. BROWN¹⁵

IMPORTANT NOTE: It cannot be overstated the importance of the above source entered into the literature. So-called non-published experts on the NGL, on social media purport the illusion that, somehow, in a manner less than integral, that Joshua Woodlin, who wrote "The National Masonic Union", which documented the above, six years later, somehow could not be trusted. The above source, entered into the literature, corroborates Joshua Woodlin.

¹⁴ Public Ledger Newspaper, Philadelphia, June 2, 1849, page 1

¹⁵ Ibid, June 26, 1849, page 2

TWO ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE OPPOSITION(w/ Answers):

Q: Is there proof the United Grand Lodge of New York held a Warrant from the National Grand Lodge?

A: YES! The above source from the National Grand Lodge, at the time in question, clearly states that the United Grand Lodge of New York “refused to comply with the provisions of their charter”. Any attempts in non published social media banter would not stand the test of literary cross examination and only rallies a base on non-published novices.

Q: Does the citation of the violation of the 9th Article of the National Grand Lodge Constitution prove that the United Grand Lodge of New York never held a National Grand Lodge Warrant?

A: NO! The expulsion of the United Grand Lodge warrant is what placed them in violation of the afore mentioned article. Again, Any attempts in non published social media banter would not stand the test of literary cross examination and only rallies a base on non-published novices.

The previous two sources entered into the literature present a compelling case, illustrating the United Grand Lodge of New York membership in the National Grand Lodge pales in comparison to the following. In the following, in the own words of the Deputy Grand Master of United Grand Lodge of New York, closes the case for this author and solidifies his position.

NOTICE, TO ALL WHOM IT MAY CONCERN,- The UNITED GRAND LODGE of the State of New York, has this day resigned all connection with the so-called National Grand Lodge, now holding its session in Philadelphia, of Free and Accepted Colored Masons.

In behalf of the United Grand Lodge of the State of New York.

JACOB R. GIBBS, R. W. D. G. M.¹⁶

It would be rather intriguing and incredible to believe that any so-called experts on the subject would even attempt to explain away the new literature. The actions of the National Grand Lodge could be seen as strong by the fact that the National Grand Lodge was able to establish a new Lodges free of the rebellion of United Grand Lodge less than five months after their expulsion. At the Session of the National Grand Lodge Held in New York, the R. W. Union Grand Lodge of New York was established.¹⁷ Some so-called researchers will insist, away from printed articles and publications, in hyperbolic saturations on language, to BELIEVE what he

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Woodlin, page 36

“presents”. **Facts do not have to be believed.** This author made his case by simply, contrary to what others believe, by citing sources and introducing literature from 1848-1850, solidifying his position. These so-called researchers will tell you this is contrary to what Alexander Elston stated. Alexander Elston was an appointed National Grand Lodge officer who was expelled with United Grand Lodge of New York. His report was allegedly made a month after he was expelled.¹⁸ Those from the opposing position hold to their guns because they long for the hope that there were Independent Grand Lodges outside of the National Grand Lodge of Free & Accepted Ancient York Masons when there clearly was not.

¹⁸ Comparison of Expulsion and the report as published in Lux et Veriatis 7 years later.