An address at the Prince Hall Cemetery Memorial Day 2001 delivered by

 James Gibbons

Masons, residents, friends and guests present here today, good morning! I feel honored to be once again addressing you on this, the first Memorial Day of the third millennium, as I was last Memorial Day at the end of the second millennium.

As a representative of an organization, that was founded in 1897 to preserve the history of the town of Arlington, I am happy to speak to members of an organization that traces its beginnings to the initiation of Prince Hall and fourteen other men of Boston by Army Lodge No. 441, of the Irish Constitution on March 6, 1775.

1775 was not a happy time for the people of Menotomy (now Arlington) and
the British Army was one of the main irritants. Forty-four days after the initiation of Prince Hall and the others, the British Army made its move to crush the spirit of rebellion with decisive blows - seizing military stores in Concord and trying to capture John Hancock and Sam Adams who were known to be in Lexington.

The patriots knew the British plans and sent Paul Revere and others to spread the alarm to every village and farm. I am here today to tell you what happened in Arlington that day.

It was nearly two o’clock in the morning when the British Regulars entered
Menotomy, passing the home of Samuel Whittemore, of whom we spoke last year.

On the same road the Committee of Safety held a meeting on the previous day and three members stayed overnight at Menotomy’s Black Horse Tavern. They were surprised by the troops. One of the three was Elbridge Gerry, destined to be a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a future Vice President of the United States. They were able to escape by hiding half dressed in an old cornfield.

It was in Menotomy that the British commander realized that his quick strike into the countryside was not going to be easy or quick. Residents were awake and gathering. He sent back to General Gage for reinforcements. It proved to be a wise move.

The British moved on to Lexington and their historic meeting on the town green. Menotomy’s minutemen gathered at daybreak and followed them to Lexington ready for whatever was to come.

The story of Lexington where seven patriots fell and the story of Concord Bridge, where in the first volley, two Patriots and two Regulars were killed, is well known.

The British started their return to Boston about midday, but no longer did they enjoy a superiority of 800 able men.

Each tree seemed to have a rifleman and stonewalls had several riflemen. The minutemen fought individually and extracted a high toll. The British fought as a trained army sending out flankers that cost the minutemen dearly. The fight continued back into Lexington with less able Regulars and more and more Minutemen all the time.

In Lexington the reinforcements had arrived - 1200 fresh men and canons. The Regulars were able to rest while holding off the Minutemen with canons. The reinforcements had less supplies than when they had started out, because the old men of Menotomy, under the leadership of David Lamson, a man of African heritage, captured a wagonload of supplies, as it passed through Menotomy.

United, the British forces were able to send out stronger flanking parties. This enabled the retreating troops to pillage and fire homes as they retreated. In one house a woman was in bed with a new baby with three children hiding under it when the Regulars broke in. They ordered her out. One of the children was discovered, but was not harmed. They took what valuables they could carry, and set fire to the house. The children put the fire out.

Further down the road was the Jason Russell House where the flanking Regulars killed Jason Russell and 11 other men. Minutemen from Beverly and Danvers saw action at this location. The house still stands and can be seen with its bullet holes.

So, it went and suffice it to say that on that day there were more fatalities in Arlington of Regulars and Minutemen, than there were in Lexington and Concord combined.

I don’t know what happened to Prince Hall and the other 14 Masons on that day. But, here you are carrying on the good works of your organization. The same organization Prince Hall began. So, I know he also must have chosen to be an “American” and to pursue the freedom of self-government in a free society.