

# Court Rules Bell Masonry Is Fraudulent

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**Decree of Judge Sample of Ann Arbor Brands the Operations of John A. Bell As Fraudulent; Issues Restraint Prohibiting Them From Using Masonic Emblems, Etc.**

## **ORDER SHOWS THAT BELL IS NOT A MASON**

Reprinted elsewhere in this issue is a copy of the decree signed by Hon. George W. Sample, Judge of the Circuit court of Washtenaw county

By the terms of this decree John A. Bell, of Grand Rapids, expelled member of North Star lodge of Masons of that city, together with every officer and member belonging to or affiliated with so-called "Bell Masonry" is declared to be fraudulent in their practice. They are restrained from acting under him or his organization and

are further restricted from ever representing themselves as Masons or from wearing the badge, buttons, emblems, decorations or insignias of a Mason.

With the signing of this decree a controversy of long standing has been settled by court restraint. It is of notable importance to all real Masons, especially to those of Michigan, because the head and founder of this fraudulent organization, John A. Bell, is a former member of a Grand Rapids lodge.

Many of the older members of the Masonic fraternity were at one time associated with Bell, before his expulsion from the order and remember the details surrounding the case. According to some of these members it is understood that after Bell was expelled from Masonry, he proceeded to set up a Grand Lodge of his own, claiming to have authority from some other source. Through misrepresentation and years of misdirected effort he succeeded in getting together several hundred followers. This organization is commonly known as "Bell Masons."

For years no particular attention was paid to Bell or his operations by regular Masons since it did not appear likely that he would ever be successful in organizing a society large enough to interfere with the practice of real Masonry. However, it now appears that by making a business out of it and by arming himself with an assortment of documents and propaganda he did succeed in setting up organizations in several communities.

It is claimed that Bell became obsessed with the belief that he was the head of a Masonic fraternity and with the courage gained by this and his zealous activities traveled over this country and in foreign lands bent on making his belief a fact. In several cities, particularly in southern states, he was arrested in his endeavors and jailed. In some of these instances his former brothers came to his relief and secured his release only to see him return to his work with greater energy.

In recent years his operations have become so flagrant as to attract the attention of Masonic bodies, especially as they were, on several occasions made the defendants in lawsuits, instituted by him or his followers.

The decree that is given elsewhere in this paper is the result of a cross-bill filed in one of these cases.

It is of interest to Masons in Michigan that the attorneys who secured this decree are Barnes and Stowers, of Detroit, who are both Past Grand Masters of Michigan. After Bell had twice gone into court and tried to enjoin their fraternity they made up their minds it was time to go to the limit with him. Bell tried to withdraw his suit, but Barnes & Stowers succeeded in establishing the legitimacy of their order to the entire satisfaction of the court as the decree shows. During the hearing Charles T. White, of Bay City, a Past Grand Master, was on the stand for two hours and a half and Bell's lawyers took him over the history of Masonry in the United States, both as to white and Colored Masons, from 1784 to date with decided credit to Mr. White and the Grand Lodge he represents.

The Masons, especially of Michigan, are highly elated over the decision of the court as it ends a disagreeable contention that could in no wise be of benefit to members of the race, either within or outside of the order.

The next setting of Union Grand Lodge of Michigan will be held in Grand Rapids in January. Charles S. Cook of Detroit is Grand Master and Harold A. Lett of Lansing is Grand Secretary.

**COPY OF DECREE SIGNED BY JUDGE  
GEORGE W. SAMPLE**

STATE OF MICHIGAN—In the Circuit Court for Washtenaw  
County—In Chancery

JOHN A. BELL, THE MOST WORSHIPFUL JOHN  
A. BELL SOVEREIGN GRAND LODGE, ET AL.

Plaintiffs,

vs.

THE MOST WORSHIPFUL UNION GRAND  
LODGE, ET AL,

Defendants.

No. 180

At a session of the circuit court for the County of Washtenaw held in the city of Ann Arbor on Tuesday, the 8th day of August, A. D. 1922.

Present, the Hon. George W Sample, Circuit Judge.

The above entitled cause coming on to be heard upon the Bill of Complaint filed in the same, and the said plaintiff by his counsel having offered no proof in support of his bill, and the case proceeding on the defendants' cross-bill; and the court having heard the testimony and the arguments of counsel and being fully advised in the premises, does find the following state of facts:

That the said plaintiff, John A. Bell, having been lawfully expelled from a regularly constituted Lodge of Colored Masons for the State of Michigan and the said John A. Bell never having been restored to Masonry by the authority which expelled him, that he is not, and can never be, a regular Mason in any organization whatsoever until he has been so restored.

And the Court further finds that any organization that he appears to be the head of is fraudulent and fraudulently organized.

Now, therefore, the Court doth Order, Adjudge and Decree that the said plaintiffs, John A. Bell, the Most Worshipful John A. Bell Sovereign Grand Lodge and any and all persons acting under him or his organizations or by their authority be, and the same are, each permanently restrained from holding themselves out as Masons or from wearing the badge, buttons, emblems, decorations or insignias of a Mason; that each of them is further permanently enjoined from adopting or using the name of Masons in association with any other name or any derivative thereof and from claiming to be a member of any benevolent or charitable organization or incorporation that uses the name of Masons that may deceive persons not members of the Masonic Order.

GEORGE W. SAMPLE,

Circuit Judge for the County of Washtenaw.

Barnes & Stowers, Attorneys for Defendants and Cross-Plaintiffs, business address, 911 Gratiot Ave., Detroit, Michigan.