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**The American Negro Academy.**

**OCCASIONAL PAPERS NO. 9.**

## **The Early Negro Convention Movement.**

**BY JOHN W. CROMWELL.**

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## **The Early Negro Convention Movement.**

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With the period immediately following the Second War with Great Britain, begins a series of events which indicate a purpose of the nation to make the condition of the free man of color an inferior status socially and politically. That this was resisted at every step, revealed the national aim and purpose.

The protest against prescription in the Church which had asserted itself in several instances as at St. James P. E. and Bethel in Philadelphia, Zion in New York, culminated in the organization of two independent denominations—in 1816 at Philadelphia, in 1820 at New York.

The American Colonization Society was organized in 1816 with the hidden purpose of strengthening slavery by ridding the country of its free black population. In 1820 the passage of the Missouri Compromise permitted the westward extension of slavery and as far north as 36° 30'.

Local legislation, harmonizing with this national action against extending the domain of freedom and making the country undesirable for the colored freeman, followed. Two years after the enactment of the compromise, "the martyrs of 1822" went bravely and heroically to their fate in South Carolina. In 1827, the Empire State completed its work of emancipation of the slave began 28 years before, and saw the birth of "Freedom's Journal," the first Negro newspaper within the limits of the United States, edited by John B. Russwurm and Samuel E. Cornish. In 1831, Virginia was convulsed and the entire Southland shocked by the Insurrection of Nat. Turner. In the State of Ohio along the Kentucky border, the feeling against the free Negro had become acute. Mobs occurred, blood was shed and the people were compelled to look to some spot where they could abide in peace.

It was in these stirring times that the Convention movement which means the marshalling of the moral forces within the Negro came into existence. The forces which it evoked were conserved and correlated until the dynamics of Civil Revolution had wrought desolation and destruction far and wide, sweeping away forever what had been a basis of the social and political strength of the Nation.

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Prior to this time, there had been a local convention held in Philadelphia, January, 1817, to protest against the action of the American Colonization Society that had been organized to remove systematically from this country all the free colored people in the United States. A glance at the list of the officers of this, the pioneer deliberative convention of colored people of which we have as yet any date, shows that the men who led in this meeting as in the movement of which this paper is a study, were among the foremost colored citizens whose names have come down to us from that distant past. James Forten was President, and Russell Parrott, the assistant to Absalom Jones at St. Thomas, P. E. Church, was the Secretary. Prominent also in this anti-colonization convention, were Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, Robert Douglass, Francis Perkins, John Gloucester—the first settled pastor of a colored Presbyterian Church—Robert Gordon, James Johnson, Quanmany Clarkson, John Summersett and Randall Shepherd.

The convention which assembled in 1830 and was the first conscious step toward concerted action, was in no sense local either in its conception or its constituency.

The prime mover was Hezekiah Grice, a native of Baltimore, where he was born just one hundred years ago. In his early life, Grice had met Benjamin Lundy, and in 1828-9, William Lloyd Garrison, editors and publishers of "The Genius of Universal Emancipation," published at that time in Baltimore.

In the spring of 1830 he wrote a circular letter to prominent colored men in the free states requesting their views on the feasibility and imperative necessity of holding a convention of the free colored men of the country, at some point north of Mason & Dixon's line, for the exchange of views on the question of emigration or the adoption of a policy that would make living in the United States more endurable. For several months Grice received no response whatever to this circular. In August, however, he received an urgent request for him to come at once to Philadelphia. On his arrival there he found a meeting in session, discussing conflicting reports relative to the openings for colored people as emigrants to Canada. Bishop Richard Allen, at whose instance he was in Philadelphia, subsequently showed him a printed circular signed by Peter Williams, the rector of St. Phillips Church, New York, Peter Vogelsang and Thomas L. Jennings of the same place, approving the plan of convention. This approval decided the Philadelphians to take definite action, and they immediately "issued a call for a convention of the colored men of the United States to be held in the city of Philadelphia, on the 15th of September, 1830."

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When the time came the Convention assembled in Bethel Church, the historic building in which was laid the foundation of the A. M. E. denomination. The convention was organized by the election of Bishop Allen as President, Dr. Belfast Burton of Philadelphia and Austin Steward of Rochester, N. Y., as Vice Presidents, Junius C. Morell, Secretary, and Robert Cowley, Maryland, Assistant Secretary.

Seven States were represented by duly accredited delegates as follows:

PENNSYLVANIA—Richard Allen, Belfast Burton, Cyrus Black, Junius C. Morell, Benjamin Paschall, James Cornish, William Whipper, Peter Gardiner, John Allen, James Newman, Charles H. Leveck, Frederick A. Hinton.

NEW YORK—Austin Steward, Joseph Adams, George L. Brown.

CONNECTICUT—Scipio Augustus.

RHODE ISLAND—George C. Willis, Alfred Niger.

MARYLAND—James Deaver, Hezekiah Grice, Aaron Willson, Robert Cowley.

DELAWARE—Abraham D. Shadd.

VIRGINIA—Arthur M. Waring, William Duncan, James West, Jr.

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In addition to these there were honorary members as follows:

PENNSYLVANIA—Robert Brown, William Rogers, John Bowers, Richard Howell, Daniel Peterson,

Charles Shorts.

NEW YORK—Leven Williams.

MARYLAND—James P. Walker, Rev. Samuel Todd, John Arnold.

OHIO—John Robinson.

NEW JERSEY—Sampson Peters.

DELAWARE—Rev. Anthony Campbell and Dan Carolus Hall.

They may well be called the first “forty immortals” in our Valhalla.

The question of emigration to Canada West, after an exhaustive discussion which continued during the two days of the convention’s sessions, was recommended as a measure of relief against the persecution from which the colored American suffered in many places in the North. Strong resolutions against the American Colonization Society were adopted. The formation of a parent society with auxiliaries in the different localities represented in the convention, for the purpose of raising money to defray the object of purchasing a colony in the province of upper Canada, and ascertaining more definite information, having been effected, the convention adjourned to reassemble on the first Monday in June, 1831, during which time the order of the convention respecting the organization of the auxiliary societies had been carried into operation.

At the assembling of the Convention in 1831, which was fully reported in “The Liberator,” the officers elected were, John Bowers, Philadelphia, President, Abraham D. Shadd and William Duncan, Vice Presidents, William Whipper, Secretary, Thomas L. Jennings, Assistant Secretary.

The roll of delegates, reveals the presence of many of the pioneers. Hezekiah Grice did not attend—in fact he was never a delegate at any subsequent convention, for two years later he emigrated to Hayti, where he became a foremost contractor. Richard Allen had died, after having completed a most remarkable career. Rev. James W. C. Pennington, who for forty years bore a conspicuous place as a clergyman of sound scholarship, was a new figure and thenceforth an active participant in the movement.

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This convention aroused no little interest among the foremost friends of the Negro and was visited and addressed by such men as Rev. S. S. Jocelyn of New Haven, Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison. In the “Life of Arthur Tappan,” written by his brother Lewis Tappan, we find the following:

“A convention of people of color was held in Philadelphia in 1831 of delegates from several States to consult upon the common interest. It was numerously attended and the proceedings were conducted with much ability. A resolution was adopted that it was expedient to establish a collegiate school on the manual labor system. \* \* A committee appointed for the purpose made an appeal to the benevolent. \* \* \* New Haven was suggested as a suitable place for its location \* \* \* Arthur Tappan purchased several acres of land in the southerly part of the city and made arrangements for the erection of a suitable building and furnished it with needful supplies in a way to do honor to the city and country \* \* \* The people of New Haven became violently agitated in opposition to the plan. The city was filled with confusion. They seemed to fear that the city would be overrun with Negroes from all parts of the world \* \* \* A public meeting called by the Mayor September 8, 1831, in spite of a manly protest by Roger S. Baldwin, subsequently Governor of the State and U. S. Senator from Connecticut, adopted the following:

“Resolved, by the Mayor, Aldermen, Common Council and freemen of the city of New Haven, in city meeting assembled, that we will resist the establishment of the proposed college in this place by every lawful means.”

The attempt at the founding of a college in Connecticut was abandoned. It is hardly necessary to more than mention the Prudence Crandall incident that disgraced the name of Connecticut at the same period.

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What was a kind of National Executive Committee, and known as the Convention Board, issued the calls for the convention from time to time.

When the next convention was held in 1832, there were eight States represented with an attendance of thirty delegates, as follows: Maryland had 3; Delaware, 5; New Jersey, 3; Pennsylvania, 9; New York, 5; Connecticut, 2; Rhode Island, 1; Massachusetts, 2.

Beginning June 4th, it continued in session until the 15th. The question exciting the greatest interest was one which proposed the purchase of other lands for settlement in Canada; for 800 acres of land had already been secured, two thousand individuals had left the soil of their birth, crossed the line and laid the foundation for a structure which promised an asylum for the colored population of the United States. They had already erected two hundred log houses and 500 acres of land had been brought under cultivation. But hostility to the settlement of the Negro in that section had been manifested by Canadians, many of whom would sell no land to the Negro. This may explain the hesitation of the convention and the appointment of an agent whose duty it was to make further investigation and report to a

subsequent convention.

Opposition to the colonization movement was emphasized by a strong protest against any appropriation by Congress in behalf of the American Colonization Society. Abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia was also urged at the same convention. This was one year before the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society.

There were fifty-eight delegates present when the convention assembled June 3, 1833. The states represented were Pennsylvania, Maryland, New Jersey, Delaware, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New York. Abraham D. Shadd, then of Washington, D. C., was elected President, Richard D. Johnson of Philadelphia and John G. Stewart were Vice Presidents, Ransom F. Wake of New York, was Secretary with Henry Ogden, Assistant, and John B. Depee of Philadelphia, Clerk.

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The usual resolutions and addresses to the people were framed and adopted. In addition to these, the law of Connecticut, but recently passed, prohibiting the establishment of literary institutions in that State for the instruction of persons of color of other states was specifically referred to, as well as a resolution, giving the approval of the mission of William Lloyd Garrison to Europe to obtain funds for the establishment of a Manual Training School.

The emigration question was again thoroughly discussed. A committee was appointed to look into the matter of the encouragement of settlement in Upper Canada and all plans for colonization anywhere were rejected.

A general convention fund was provided for a schedule showing the population, churches, day schools, Sunday Schools, pupils, temperance societies, benevolent societies, mechanics and store-keepers. A most significant action was one recommending the establishment in different parts of the country of FREE LABOR STORES at which no produce from the result of slave labor would be exposed for sale.

The next year, 1834, the convention met in New York, June 8th, with Henry Sipkins as President, William Hamilton and John D. Closson, Vice Presidents, Benjamin F. Hughes, Secretary and Rev. H. Francis, Assistant Secretary. There were seven states represented and about 40 delegates present. The usual resolutions were adopted, one commending Prudence Crandall to the patronage and affection of the people at large; another urging the people to assemble on the fourth of each July for the purpose of prayer and the delivery of addresses pertaining to the condition and welfare of the colored people. The foundation of societies on the principle of moral reform and total abstinence from intoxicating liquors was advocated. Moreover, every person of color was urged to discountenance all boarding houses where gambling was admitted.

At the same convention the Phoenix Societies came up for special consideration and were heartily commended. These planned an organization of the colored people in their municipal sub-divisions with the special object of the promotion of their improvement in morals, literature and the mechanic arts. Lewis Tappan refers to them in the biography previously referred to. The "Mental Feast" which was a social feature, survived thirty years later in some of the interior towns of Pennsylvania and the West. Rt. Rev. Christopher Rush of the A. M. E. Zion, was the president of these societies. Rev. Theodore S. Wright, the predecessor of Rev. Henry Highland Garnet at the Shiloh Presbyterian Church, New York, and who enjoys the unique reputation of claiming Princeton Seminary as his Alma Mater, was a Vice President. Among its directors were Boston Crummell, the father of the founder of the AMERICAN NEGRO ACADEMY, Rev. William Paul Quinn, subsequently a bishop of the A. M. E. Church, and Rev. Peter Williams. These names suggest that the Phoenix Society movement was not confined to any special social clique, but was a somewhat wide spread institution. Unfortunately, there was lost during the excitement of The New York Draft Riots of 1863, nearly all the documentary data for an interesting sidelight on the Convention movement, through the study of these societies.

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With 1835, the Convention returned to Philadelphia, June 1-5, was the time of its sessions. There were forty four delegates enrolled, with Reuben Ruby of Maine, as president, James H. Fleet of the District of Columbia, and Nathan Johnson Vice Presidents, John F. Cook of the District of Columbia, was Secretary, Samuel Van Brackle and Henry Ogden were the Assistants.

Speaking of its proceedings, "The Liberator" says: "Its pages offered abundant testimony of the ability of this body to set before the Nation a detail of the wrongs and grievances to which they are by custom and law subjected, and they also exhibit a praiseworthy spirit of manly and noble resolution to contend by moral force alone until their rights so long withheld shall be restored."

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Among other specially notable things, Robert Purvis and Frederick A. Hinton were appointed a committee to correspond with dissatisfied emigrants to Liberia and to take such action as would best promote the sentiment of the colored people respecting the work of the Colonization Society. The students of Lane Seminary at Cincinnati were thanked for their zeal in the cause of abolition. Temperance reform was advocated in a stirring address to the people. The free people of color were recommended to petition Congress and their respective state legislatures to be admitted to the rights and privileges of American citizenship, and to be protected in the enjoyment of the same.

William Whipper advocated that the word 'colored' should be abandoned and the title "African" should be removed from the name of the churches, lodges, societies and other institutions.

In 1836, in the columns of "The Liberator" appear calls for two conventions; the regular annual convention was called to meet in Philadelphia, June 6, by Henry Sipkins of the Convention Board, and the urgent language of the call implies doubt in the interest of the people or the probability of their prompt response to the calls. William Whipper issued the call, through the same medium, for the Convention of the American Moral Reform to meet August 2, 1836, also in Philadelphia. It is worthy of remark that careful perusal of the files of "The Liberator" fails to disclose a comment on the proceedings of either convention. But the perusal of the officers of the American Moral Reform shows the influential man of the Convention Movement at their helm. James Forten, Sr., the revolutionary patriot, was the President, Reuben Ruby, Rev. Samuel E. Cornish, Rev. Walter Proctor and Jacob C. White, Sr., of Philadelphia, were Vice Presidents, Joseph Cassey was Treasurer, Robert Purvis, Foreign Corresponding Secretary and James Forten, Jr., Recording Secretary.

The address was drawn up by William Watkins of Baltimore, who two decades later was an able colleague of Frederick Douglass in the conduct of "The North Star."

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In 1837, the convention of the American Moral Reform was again held in Philadelphia, August 19th, in which William Whipper, John P. Burr and James Forten, Jr., were leading spirits. At the adjournment, an extra meeting was held in St. Thomas P. E. Church, at which an address on Temperance was delivered by John Francis Cook of Washington.

Sufficient has now been stated to show that the convention movement was now deeply rooted in the thought of the disfranchised American. The fact that there was a lull does not at all disprove this contention. The conventions were great educators, alike of the Negro and the American whites. They taught the former parliamentary usages and how to conduct deliberative bodies. They brought to light facts pertaining to the Negro's status which tended to establish that he was thrifty and steadily improving as a moral and economic force; while the American whites had in them an object lesson from which they learned much. In his "Autobiography of a Fugitive Negro," Samuel Ringgold Ward says: "A State or a National Convention of black men is held. The talent displayed, the order maintained, the demeanor of the delegates, all impress themselves upon the community. All agree that to keep a people rooted to the soil who are rapidly improving, who have already attained considerable influence and are marshalled by gifted leaders, (men who show themselves qualified for legislative and judicial positions), and to doom them to a state of perpetual vassalage is altogether out of the question."

The work of unifying the race along right lines now proceeded with the holding of state conventions. There was a state Temperance Convention of the colored men of Connecticut, held at Middletown, 1836, followed by a call for a New England Convention at Boston in October. Reference to its proceedings shows a prior convention held at Providence, R. I., in May. At the Boston convention a ringing appeal was made to the people, for total abstinence from all intoxicants, and almost immediately thereafter, local meetings were held for the purpose of putting in practical operation the principles enunciated. Not only in New England, but in the Middle and Western States, local conventions were held during the next decade.

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The following extracts from a letter from the veteran educator, Peter H. Clark, shed a flood of light upon this early movement:

J. W. CROMWELL,  
Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR SIR:—

The people of Ohio held conventions annually for more than thirty years. Usually they printed their proceedings in pamphlets.

\* \* \* \*

A peculiarity of the Ohio conventions was that they were meant to improve the condition of the colored people of that State. The conventions of those residing in the more eastern States were simply anti-slavery conventions, and their memorials and protests were aimed at slavery. The first conventions of the men of Ohio were self-helpful. By their own sacrifices and with the help of friends, they purchased lots and erected school houses in a number of towns, or they organized schools and located them in churches.

Active in this work were the Yancy's, Charles and Walter, Gideon and Charles Langston, (brothers of John M.), George Carey, Dennis Hill, and chief among them, David Jenkins. Walter Yancy was the agent of these men, travelling and organizing societies and schools, collecting funds, etc.

As a result of this self-helping movement, a number of farming communities were established, some of which accumulated large areas of land, and in Cincinnati, The Iron Chest Company accumulated funds and in 1840 erected a

block of buildings which still stands.

Later, the action of the Convention was directed against the Black Laws of Ohio. These were repealed in 1849, and colored children were permitted to share in the benefits of the school funds, though in separate schools. The same legislature elected Salmon P. Chase to the United States Senate. The movement thus detailed was the result of a bargain between the Democrats of Ohio and the Free Soilers.

Afterwards the force of these conventions was directed against discriminations against colored people which still existed on the statute books. Sometimes this force took the shape of petitions, memorials, protests, and after the organization of the Ohio Equal Rights League, it took the shape of legal proceedings, etc.

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One of the most memorable of these conventions was held in 1852, when John M. Langston delivered the best speech of his life, defending the thesis, "there is a mutual repellency between the white and black races of the world."

The materials for the speech were collected by Charles Langston, but John made the speech. Time has vindicated the position taken by Mr. Langston in that memorable address. It was the beginning of the Emigration Movement in which Dr. Martin R. Delaney afterwards became prominent.

Effective national conventions have not been numerous in the past fifty years.

One of the most notable met at Rochester in 1852. Frederick Douglass presided and I had the honor of being the secretary.

It was reported that Mrs. Stowe desired to give a portion of her earnings from "Uncle Tom" for the founding of a school for the benefit of the Afro-American, and this convention was called to formulate an advisory plan.

The plan when formulated, was practically what Mr. Washington realized many years afterwards at Tuskegee.

If you knew Mr. Douglass, you perhaps know that the last years of his life were devoted to an attempt to found such a school.

The Rochester movement came to naught, but its influence upon the colored people of the country was wide spread, chiefly because of the character of the men who composed it.

Its proceedings were published in the "North Star," and so far as I know, nowhere else. The file of that paper was destroyed with Mr. Douglass' Rochester house, and, unless in the Congressional Library, no copy now exists.

The convention at Syracuse, 1864, was another note-worthy assemblage. Its was the formulation of a plan of organization known as the National Equal Rights League. The rivalry between Mr. Douglass and Mr. Langston prevented the wide usefulness of which the organization was capable.

Ohio, Pennsylvania and Illinois organized auxiliary State leagues, and in each State much good was done. Mr. Langston, president elect of the National Organization, never called it together. \* \* \*

I have written at length and yet have not answered your questions as to men whose names deserve to be embalmed in your proposed book.

It will take time and thought for the compilation of such a list. The men who officiated in the conventions of which I have written, were mostly small men, great only in their zeal for the welfare of their people.

I am, Sir,  
With respect yours,  
PETER H. CLARK.

St. Louis, Mo., Dec. 21, 1901.

Within these ten years from 1837 to 1847, a new figure appears on the scene, a man, though not born free like Paul, yet like the chief captain, obtained it at a great price. The career of Frederick Douglass was but preliminary prior to his return from England, and his settlement at Rochester, N. Y., as editor of "The North Star." By a most remarkable coincidence, the very first article in the first number of "The North Star," published January, 1848, is an extended notice of the National Colored Convention held at the Liberty Street Church, Troy, New York, October 9, 1847. Nathan Johnson was President, Dr. James McCune Smith, Peyton Harris, New York, James W. C. Pennington, Connecticut, were Vice Presidents, Wm. H. Topp, Albany, N. Y., Charles B. Ray, New York City, and William C. Nell of Boston, were Secretaries. The business committee with Henry Highland Garnet, Chairman, Charles B. Ray, Leonard Collins, Massachusetts, Willis A. Hodges, N. Y., and Lewis Hayden, then of Michigan.

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There were 67 delegates. From New York, 44; Massachusetts, 15; Connecticut, 2; Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Vermont, Kentucky and Michigan, 1 each.

The presence of one delegate, Benjamin Weeden, from a large constituency, Northampton, Mass., whose credentials stated the fact that a large number of white citizens sympathizing with the objects of the call had formerly expressed their endorsement of the movement, was a signal for hearty applause.

A most spirited discussion arose on the report of the Committee of Education as to the expediency of the establishment of a college for colored young men, which was discussed pro and con by arguments that can not be surpassed even after a lapse of more than half a century. The report gives unstinted praise to the chairman of the committee for his scholarly style, his choice diction, his grace of manner, and this statement excites no surprise when we learn that this chairman was Alexander Crummell.

The next year, September 6, 1848, between sixty and seventy delegates assembled at Cleveland, Ohio, in the National Convention, the sessions alternating between the Court House and the Tabernacle. Frederick Douglass was chosen President, John Jones of Illinois, Allen Jones of Ohio, Thomas Johnson of Michigan and Abner Francis of New York, were Vice Presidents, William Howard Day was the Secretary, with William H. Burnham and Justin Hollin, Assistants. At the head of the business committee stood Martin R. Delaney, and with him as associates, Charles H. Langston, David Jenkins, Henry Bibb, T. W. Tucker, W. H. Topp, Thomas Bird, J. P. Watson and J. Malvin. The line of policy was not deflected. As in previous conventions, education was encouraged, the importance of statistical information stated and temperance societies urged.

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As showing the representative character of the delegates, the diversity of occupations, employment and the professions followed, the fact was developed that there were printers, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, engineers, dentists, gunsmiths, editors, tailors, merchants, wheelwrights, painters, farmers, physicians, plasterers, masons, college students, clergymen, barbers, hairdressers, laborers, coopers, livery stable keepers, bath house keepers and grocers among the members of the convention.

But of all the conventions of the period, the largest, that in which the ability of its members was best displayed in the broad and statesmanlike treatment of the questions discussed and the practical action which vindicated their right to recognition as enfranchised citizens, and the one to which the attention of the American people was attracted as never before, was the one held in the city of Rochester, N. Y.

With greater emphasis than at prior meetings, this convention set the seal of its opposition against any hope for permanent relief to the conditions under which the colored freeman labored by any comprehensive scheme of emigration. Because of this, it directed its energies to affirmative constructive action.

In the enunciation of a philosophy able, far-sighted and statesmanlike, contained in the address to the American people, we behold the wisdom of a master mind—one then at the prime of his intellectual and physical powers, Frederick Douglass, the chairman of the Business Committee.

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Among the important things done by the convention might be enumerated. It says:

“We can not announce the discovery of any new principle adopted to ameliorate the condition of mankind. The great truths of moral and political science upon which we rely, and which press upon your consideration, have been evolved and enunciated by you. We point to your principles, your wisdom and your great example as the full justification of our course this day. That all men are created equal; that life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness is the right of all; that taxation and representation should go together; that the Constitution of the United States was formed to establish justice, promote the general welfare and secure the blessings of liberty to all the people of the country; that resistance to tyranny is obedience to God—are American principles and maxims, and together they form and constitute the constructive elements of the American government.”

1. The plan for an industrial college on the manual labor plan, was approved, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, who was about to make a visit to England at the instance of friends in that country, was authorized to receive funds in the name of the colored people of the country for that purpose. The successful establishment and conduct of such an institution of learning, would train youth to be self-reliant and skilled workmen, fitted to hold their own in the struggle of life on the conditions prevailing here.

2. A registry of colored mechanics, artisans and business men throughout the Union, was provided for, also, of all the persons willing to employ colored men in business, to teach colored boys mechanic trades, liberal and scientific professions and farming, also a registry of colored men and youth seeking employment or instruction.

3. A committee on publication “to collect all facts, statistics and statements. All laws and historical records and biographies of the colored people and all books by colored authors.” This committee was further authorized “to publish replies to any assaults worthy of note, made upon the character or condition of the colored people.” This was in keeping with what had actually been done by the colored people of the State of New York the year previous,

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after its Governor, Ward Hunt, had substantially recommended the passage of black laws which would have forbidden the settlement of any blacks or mulattoes within its borders and placed further restrictions on those at that time citizens. The charge of unthrift against the Negro was utterly disproven by a comparative statement showing that in those places in which the conditions were the worst, New York, Brooklyn and Williamsburg, the Negro had increased 25 per cent in population in twenty years and 100 per cent in real estate holdings.

In thirteen counties the amount owned by colored persons was ascertained to be \$1,000,000.

	CAPITAL IN BUSINESS.	REAL ESTATE EXCLUSIVE OF INCUMBRANCE.
New York	\$755,000	\$733,000
Brooklyn	79,200	276,000
Williamsburg	4,900	151,000
	----	----
	\$839,100	\$1,160,000

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The convention crowned its work by a more comprehensive plan of organization than those of twenty years before.

A national council was provided for to be "composed of two members from each state by elections to be held at a poll at which each colored inhabitant may vote who pays ten cents as a poll tax, and each state shall elect at such election delegates to state conventions twenty in number from each State at large."

The detail of this plan shows that the methods of the Afro-American Council of 1895, is an almost exact copy of the National Council of 1853. The chairman of the committee which formulated this plan was Wm. Howard Day and other members were Charles H. Langston, George B. Vashon, William J. Wilson, William Whipper and Charles B. Ray, all of them men of more than ordinary intelligence, information and ability.

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But those who saw only in emigration the solution of the evils with which they were beset, immediately called another convention to consider and decide upon the subject of emigration from the United States. According to the call, no one was to be admitted to the convention who would introduce the subject of emigration to any part of the Eastern Hemisphere, and opponents of emigration were also to be excluded. Among the signers to the call in and from the States of Pennsylvania, New York, Michigan, Indiana, Canada and California were: Rev. Wm. Webb, Martin R. Delaney, Pittsburg, Pa., Dr. J. J. Gould Bias of Philadelphia, Franklin Turner of the same city, Rev. Augustus R. Green of Allegheny, Pa., James M. Whitfield, New York, William Lambert of Michigan, Henry Bibb, James Theodore Holly of Canada and Henry M. Collins of California.

Douglass in his paper "The North Star," characterized the call as uncalled for, unwise and unfortunate and premature. As far too narrow and illiberal to meet with acceptance among the intelligent. "A convention to consider the subject of emigration when every delegate must declare himself in favor of it before hand as a condition of taking his seat, is like the handle of a jug, all on one side. We hope no colored man, will omit during the coming twelve months an opportunity which may offer to buy a piece of property, a house lot, a farm or anything else in the United States which looks to permanent residence here."

James M. Whitfield of Buffalo, N. Y., the Negro poet of America, and one of the signers of the call, responded to the attacks in the same journal. Douglass made a reply and Whitfield responded again, and so on until several articles on each side were produced by these and other disputants. The articles were collected and published in pamphlet form by Rev. and Bishop James Theodore Holly of Port au Prince, Haiti, making a valuable contribution to literature, for I doubt if there is anywhere throughout the range of controversial literature anything to surpass it.

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I am indebted to Bishop Holly for further information respecting this convention. In a private letter he says:

"The convention was accordingly held. The Rev. William Munroe was President, the Rt. Rev. [William] Paul Quinn, Vice President, Dr. Delaney, Chairman of the Business Committee and I was the Secretary." \* \* \*

"There were three parties in that Emigration Convention, ranged according to the foreign fields they preferred to emigrate too. Dr. Delaney headed the party that desired to go to the Niger Valley in Africa, Whitfield the party which preferred to go to Central America, and Holly the party which preferred to go to Hayti."

"All these parties were recognized and embraced by the Convention. Dr. Delaney was given



a commission to go to Africa, in the Niger Valley, Whitfield to go to Central America, and Holly to Hayti, to enter into negotiations with the authorities of these various countries for Negro emigrants and to report to future conventions. Holly was the first to execute his mission, going down to Hayti in 1855, when he entered into relations with the Minister of the Interior, the father of the late President Hyppolite, and by him was presented to Emperor Faustin I. The next Emigration Convention was held at Chatham, Canada West, in 1856, when the report on Haiti was made. Dr. Delaney went off on his mission to the Niger Valley, Africa, via England in 1858. There he concluded a treaty signed by himself and eight kings, offering inducements for Negro emigrants to their territories. Whitfield went to California, intending to go later from thence to Central America, but died in San Francisco before he could do so. Meanwhile [James] Redpath went to Haiti as a John Brownist after the Harper's Ferry raid, and reaped the first fruits of Holly's mission by being appointed Haitian Commissioner of Emigration in the United States by the Haitian Government, but with the express injunction that Rev. Holly should be called to co-operate with him. On Redpath's arrival in the United States, he tendered Rev. Holly a Commission from the Haitian Government at \$1,000 per annum and traveling-expenses to engage emigrants to go to Haiti. The first ship load of emigrants were from Philadelphia in 1861.

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"Not more than one-third of the 2000 emigrants to Haiti received through this movement, permanently abided there. They proved to be neither intellectually, industrially, nor financially prepared to undertake to wring from the soil the riches that it is ready to yield up to such as shall be thus prepared; nor are the government and influential individuals sufficiently instructed in social, industrial and financial problems which now govern the world, to turn to profitable use willing workers among the laboring class."

"The Civil War put a stop to the African Emigration project by Dr. Delaney taking the commission of Major from President Lincoln, and the Central American project died out with Whitfield, leaving the Haitian Emigration as the only remaining practical outcome of the Emigration Convention of 1854."

The Civil War destroyed many landmarks and the National Colored Convention, confined to the free colored people of the North and the border States, was a thing of the past.

Just after one of the darkest periods of that strife, when the dawn was apparent, there assembled in the city of Syracuse, the last National Colored Convention in which the men who began the movement in 1830, their successors and their sons had the control. The sphere of influence even in that had somewhat increased, for Southeastern Virginia, Louisiana and Tennessee had some representation. Slavery was dead; the colonizationists to Canada, the West Indies and Africa had abandoned the field of openly aiming to commit the policy of the race to what was considered expatriation.

Reconstruction even in 1864 was seen in the South peering above the horizon. The Equal Rights League came forth displacing the National Council of 1854, yet with the same object of the Legal Rights Association organized by Hezekiah Grice in Baltimore in 1832. John Mercer Langston stepped in the arena at the head of the new organization, but under more favorable auspices than was begun in the movement of 1830. A study of its rise, progress and decline, belongs to another period of the evolution of the Free Negro.

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This survey of the early Negro Convention Movement has been rapid, the treatment broad, the sketch is but an outline; lights and shadows will be supplied by more detailed study, but the perspective will reveal clear and distinct these four facts:

1. The Convention Movement begun in 1830, demonstrates the ability of the Negro to construct a platform broad enough for a race to stand upon and to outline a policy alike far-sighted and statesmanlike, that has not been surpassed in the seventy years that have elapsed.

2. The earnestness, the enthusiasm and the efficiency with which the work aimed at was done, the singleness of purpose, the public spirit and the intrepidity manifested, encouraged and inspired such men as Benjamin Lundy, William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, S. S. Jocelyn, Arthur and Lewis Tappan, William Goodell and Beriah Green to greater efforts and persistence in behalf of the disfranchised American, accomplishing at last the tremendous work of revolutionizing the public sentiment of the country and making the institution of radical reforms possible.

3. The preparatory training which the convention work gave, fitted its leaders for the broader arena of abolitionism, and it can not be regarded as a mere coincidence that the only colored men who were among the organizers of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1853, Robert Purvis and James G. Barbadoes, were both promoters and leaders in the Convention Movement.

4. The importance of industrial education in the growth and development of the Negro-American is no new doctrine in the creed of the representative colored people of the country. Before Hampton and Tuskegee reared their walls—aye, before Booker T. Washington was born, Frederick Douglass and the Colored Convention of 1853, had commissioned Mrs. Stowe to obtain funds to establish an Agriculture and Industrial College. Long before Frederick Douglass had left Maryland by the Under Ground Railroad, but for the opposition of the white people of Connecticut, and within the echo of Yale College, would

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### Transcriber's Notes:

Variations of "Hayti" and "Haiti" are presented as in the original text.

In the original text, the reference note to the table on page 18 does not contain a Volume Number.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE EARLY NEGRO CONVENTION  
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