

MINUTES
OF THE
STATE CONVENTION
OF THE
COLOURED CITIZENS
OF
PENNSYLVANIA,
CONVENED AT HARRISBURG,

December 13th and 14th, 1848.

PHILADELPHIA.
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THE STATE CONVENTION OF 1848:

The Black People of Pennsylvania

and the Right to Vote

A Bibliographical Note

by

Maxwell Whiteman

The first united effort of importance on the part of free blacks in the United States was the convention movement. Begun in Philadelphia in 1831 free blacks met annually for the next five years to discuss the best manner in which their conditions could be improved. The various state conventions that were held later stemmed from this initial start.

In 1838 the so-called Reform Constitution of Pennsylvania disfranchised the black citizens of the state. The right to vote which they had held for forty-seven years was no longer theirs. The black people were stung by this injustice. But they refused to surrender the idea of citizenship. As a result they energetically set to work to regain the right to vote. In the coming decades they flooded the state with appeals, memorials, petitions and won innumerable whites to the support of their cause.

Three years after they were deprived of the right of suffrage, the first state convention was held at Pittsburgh in the last week of August, 1841. One hundred and forty-seven delegates attended. Between that time and 1848 they organized an Association called "The Citizens Union of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania." Its purpose was to "obtain for the colored people of the State all the Rights and Immunities of Citizenship." The Pennsylvania blacks convened, in Harrisburg to pursue this object further, but their efforts were in vain. A long and tragic war and a series of amendments to the Constitution of the United States were necessary to restore the franchise which was snatched from them. In 1870 the blacks of Pennsylvania returned to the polls. Not until 1873 did the state legislature draft a new constitution which eliminated the obnoxious restriction.

Sources: *Proceedings of the State Convention of the Colored Freemen of Pennsylvania, held in Pittsburgh, on the 23d, 24th of August, 1841* (Pittsburgh 1841) and *Memorial To The Honorable the Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, in General Assembly met . . .* (Phila., 1854). Reproduced from the copy in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

MINUTES OF THE CONVENTION.

Pursuant to a call for a State Convention of the colored citizens of Pennsylvania, for the purpose of devising the most efficient method to petition the Legislature for the elective franchise, the Convention assembled at Harrisburgh, Dauphin County, on Wednesday morning, Dec. 13th, 1848.

An informal meeting was held at the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and the Rev. George Galbraith appointed Chairman, and Francis A. Duterte, Secretary.

A motion was made by Dr. Peck, that the delegates present give their credentials into the hands of the Secretary. When the following delegates from the several different counties were enrolled as members of the Convention.

Alleghany County—John B. Vashon.

Berks County—Joseph E. Gardner, Joseph Murry, George C. Anderson.

Blair County—Daniel Williams.

Cumberland County—Wm. Webb, Edward Hawkins, Richard Johnson, Joseph Johnson, Jacob Stratton.

Centre County—Joseph St. Clair.

Chester County—Abraham D. Shadd, John N. Bond, Charles E. Clayton, Wm. Lewis.

Columbia County—Wm. Thomson.

Dauphin County—John Wolf, Henry H. Price, John F. Williams, Thomas Earley, Aquilla Amos, John Gray, Andrew Gorden, William Spence, Joseph Popel, Charles I. Dorris, Edward Thomson, George Adley, Henry Johnson, Richard C. Brown, James Popel, James Reese, Wm. H. Davis, Charles L. Robertson, Daniel Jackson, Valentine Brown.

Franklin County—Nelson H. Turpen, Jesse Bolden.

Huntington County—Isaac J. Dickson.

Juniata County—Samuel Molston, John L. Griffith.

Lycoming County—Philip Roderic.

Lancaster County—William Whipper, Leonard A. Williams, Wm. H. Wilson, Washington Webster, Robert Boston.

Mifflin County—David Roach, Jonathan Graham.

Philadelphia County—Stephen Smith, George Galbraith, James J. G. Bias, David B. Bowser, John C. Bowers, James D. Knight, Mifflin W. Gibbs, Robert Purvis, Francis A. Duterte, Isaiah Ware, James McCrummel, Samuel Van Brakle, David J. Peck, Henry Cooper, Joshua P. B. Eddy, Benjamin Moore, Robert Brown, Wm. Marten, Wm. Jackson, Perry Miller.

Schuylkill County—John Lee.

York County—Wm. Stanford, Wm. Cupit.

Resolved, That there be a committee of one from each county present to nominate officers for this Convention. The following persons compose that committee.

Allegany County,	John B. Vashon.
Berks	Joseph E. Gardiner.
Blair	Daniel Williams.
Chester	Charles E. Clayton.
Columbia	Wm. Thomson.
Dauphin	John F. Williams.
Franklin	Nelson Turpin.
Juniata	Samuel Molston.
Huntington	Isaac J. Dickson.
Lycoming	Philip Roderic.
Lancaster	Wm. Whipple.
Mifflin	David Rouch.
Phildelphia	Isaiah C. Weir.
Schuylkill	John Lee.
York	Wm. Stanford.

On motion Rev. Stephen Smith, J. G. Wolf and H. H. Price were appointed as a committee to obtain a more suitable place for the holding of the Convention.

The committee on officers reported as follows.

President—JOHN B. VASHON.

Vice Presidents—James McCrummell, George Galbraith, John F. Williams, Isaac J. Dickson, Wm. Thomson, Samuel Molston.

Secretaries—F. A. Duterte, John G. Wolf, and Wm. Whipple.

Business Committee—Wm. Whipple, Robert Purvis, David J. Peck, M. D., Mifflin W. Gibbs, J. J. G. Bias.

Finance Committee—Stephen Smith, John C. Bowers, Thomas Early, John Wolf, Samuel Van Brakle.

It was on motion resolved that the committee's report be adopted.

Mr. Vashon, the President elect, was conducted to the chair, at which time, in a short and able manner, he thanked the convention for the honor bestowed upon him.

When a motion to adjourn prevailed, to meet again at 2 o'clock.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

The Convention assembled at 2 o'clock, pursuant to adjournment. Mr. Vashon, President, in the chair. Prayers by the Rev. George Galbraith. Roll called. Minutes of the morning session read and adopted.

Mr. Charles Lennox Remond, of Mass., was introduced to the Convention, after which he made a short, but powerful address, on the subject for which we had assembled.

Resolved, That Mr. Martin R. Delany, of Rochester New York, and Mr. Remond, of Mass., be received as honorary members of this Convention.

Mr. Purvis presented a communication from Mr. Woodson, of Allegany County, which was referred to the business committee.

Resolved, That a committee of three be appointed to prepare rules for this Convention, when the following named gentlemen were appointed : John C. Bowers, Isaiah Ware, and Wm. Spence.

The committee on business reported as follows :

Resolved, That the legitimate object of this Convention, is to petition the Legislature for a repeal of the word "white," from the third article of the Constitution of Pennsylvania.

Resolved, That the people of Pennsylvania, by sanctioning the disfranchisement of her colored citizens, have violated the creed of their republican faith, and brought dishonor on their principles, and degradation, privation, and wrong on those whom they have victimized.

The motion for the adoption of the first resolution, was supported by M. R. Delany, C. L. Remond, and Dr. J. J. G. Bias, M. W. Gibbs, D. J. Peck, M. D., J. C. Bowers, Robert Purvis, A. D. Shadd, and Wm. Whipper, after which a motion was made to adjourn to meet at 7 o'clock.

EVENING SESSION.

The Convention met at 7 o'clock, Mr. Vashon, President, in the chair. Prayer by the Rev. Wm. Jones.

Roll called, and the minutes of the afternoon session read and approved.

The committee appointed to obtain a more suitable place to hold this convention, reported that they were unable to obtain the Court house, on account of it being under repairs, but that the Shakspeare saloon could be obtained.

Resolved, That the report of the committee be adopted, and they be instructed to secure the Shakspeare saloon, and have placards struck off, publishing the same throughout the Borough.

The chairman then stated that the resolution from the afternoon session was in order, when on motion of Mr. Isaiah Ware the resolution was laid on the table, for the purpose of hearing the report of the committee on rules, which were read and adopted.

The resolution which was previously laid on the table was taken up, read, and finally passed.

When on motion, the second resolution was adopted, when a motion to adjourn prevailed, to meet at the Shakspeare saloon to-morrow morning at 9 o'clock.

MORNING SESSION.

The Convention met according to adjournment in the Shakspeare saloon at half past 9 o'clock. An appropriate prayer was offered by the Rev. Mr. Turpin.

The minutes of the last meeting were read, corrected and adopted.

The resolution pending at the adjournment, was, by the president declared to be the first business in order, when, after being discussed by the following gentlemen, Messrs. Bowser, Peck, Gibbs, Smith, and Eddy, were finally passed.

The business committee then submitted the following resolution.

Resolved, That the successful prosecution of our cause, depends much on the form and manner of our advocacy, the character and wisdom of our measures, the zeal and energy of individual action; and demands that we issue an address to the voters of Pennsylvania. Also an address to the coloured citizens, requesting them to make their rule of conduct such as shall successfully vindicate their right to the enjoyment of citizenship.

A motion was made by Mr. Stephen Smith to lay the resolution on the table, to attend to the financial concerns of the Convention, after which he offered the following resolution.

Resolved, That each member of this Convention pay the sum of one dollar, for the purpose of assisting in defraying the expenses of this Convention. Before an action, the Convention adjourned to meet at half past 2 o'clock.

AFTERNOON SESSION.

The Convention met pursuant to adjournment at half past 2 o'clock. Prayer by the Rev. Mr. Sanford. President in the chair; roll called; minutes of the morning session read, corrected, and approved.

When the resolutions submitted to the business committee prior to the adjournment was brought up and discussed by the following gentlemen: Messrs. Whipper, Shadd, Bowser, Bowers, Gibbs, Weir, Remond, Delany, Bias, Dickson, Purvis, Gardiner, Eddy, Smith, Van Brakle, and Amos, after which it was read and finally passed.

The business committee presented the form of a constitution to form a State Union Society, to be called the Citizens' Union of the State of Pennsylvania, which was read and adopted.

On motion *Resolved*, That the parent society be located in the City of Philadelphia.

The following gentlemen were elected officers of the Conventional Board: President, Robt. Purvis; Vice President, Isaiah C. Weir; Treasurer, Stephen Smith; Secretary, John C. Bowers; Corresponding Secretary, D. J. Peck, M. D.; Board, J. J. G. Bias, M. W. Gibbs, S. Van Brakle, G. W. Goines, Wm. Whipper, Abraham D. Shadd, and Benjamin Moore.

Resolved, That this Convention recommend that each delegation be instructed to proceed to the formation of auxiliaries upon their arrival at home.

The following resolution was offered by Mr. Smith.

Resolved, That the thanks of this Convention be tendered to the citizens of Harrisburg, and to Mr. J. F. Markley for the kind accommodation we have received during the sittings of this Convention, in connexion with the minister and trustees of Wesley Church.

Resolved, That this Convention recommend to the Board to appoint a committee of three, to convey the petition, &c., to the members of the Legislature.

Resolved, That the Governor, and heads of department be furnished with a copy of the minutes of this Convention.

Resolved, That the business committee be, and are hereby requested to prepare a form of petition for presentation forthwith.

Resolved, That the proceedings of this Convention be printed in the North Star, Daily Republic, and all other papers friendly; also published in pamphlet form.

Resolved, That there be a committee of five, to prepare addresses; the following gentlemen compose that committee, Wm. Whipper, A. D. Shadd, I. J. Dickson, J. J. G. Bias, Robert Purvis, M. W. Gibbs, and Samuel Van Brakle.

Resolved, That the unfinished business be referred to the Conventional Board, after which the Convention adjourned sine die.

JOHN B. VASHON, *President.*

F. A. DUTERTE,	}	Secretaries.
JOHN WOLF,		
EDWARD M. DAVIS,		

APPEAL TO THE VOTERS OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA.

SIRS:—We recognise you as the arbiters of our political destiny. and your sovereignty as the source of power from which the fundamental Laws of this Commonwealth must derive their origin, power and sustenance,—and while we admit the justice and force of your national maxims, as penned by the illustrious Jefferson, “that governments long established should not be changed for slight and transient causes,” and all experience has proved, that as a people, we are disposed to suffer present evils “rather than fly to others we know not of,” yet we are constrained to believe that the object for which we claim your attention is founded on established precedents, coeval with civil government, and rendered necessary as a safeguard to individual liberty and security to the privileges of the citizen.

We, therefore, address you, as the representatives of the Colored Citizens of this Commonwealth, assembled in Convention from various Counties, for the purpose of petitioning the Legislature for a repeal of the word “white” from the 1st section of the 3d Article of the Constitution of Pennsylvania, which reads as follows:—

“In elections by the citizens every white freeman of the age of twenty-one years, having resided in this State one year, and in the election district where he offers to vote, ten days immediately preceding such election, and within two years paid a State or County tax, which shall have been assessed at least ten days before the election, shall enjoy the rights of an elector,” &c.

We rejoice that we are relieved from the task of depicting our grievances before you, for the causes which impel us to the present undertaking, are so legibly written on your Constitutional code, and embodied in your political faith, that neither revelation can enlighten nor argument embellish.

We therefore claim the exalted privilege of appealing to you from the seat of the law making power, on a subject that cannot, but be deeply interesting to you, as it is of vital importance to *us*. Because whatever has a tendency to develop the natural, intellectual and physical resources of a state or nation, augments her strength and perpetuates her power.

The constitutional provision you have made for the annual assemblage of your representatives from the various districts throughout the State for the purpose of legislating for the protection of your present and future interests affords us an illustrious example that we should not be unmindful of ours. If you, who have received and enjoyed, not only the blessings of science and civilization, but a representative form of government for three quarters of a century, still need its fostering care to lead you to a higher destiny, surely we, who have occupied the humblest positions, and from whom these blessings and privileges have been measurably withheld, may

reasonably claim the possession of their invigorating strength to inspire us in the pursuit of a laudable ambition.

We need not search among the antiquated records of the past for a successful vindication of our claims to impartial laws. These emblems, of our State's humanity are imperishably recorded in the sublime appeals of her distinguished statesmen.

We do not appear before you as the supplicants for any new form of government which is opposed to the foundation principles of republicanism; we only ask the favor of the application of your own principles to your civil code.

We can conceive of no just reason why our present action should not only enlist your sympathies, but merit your warmest approbation. You have hailed, with deafening shouts, the victorious march of republicanism from the battle fields of your own Washington to the heights of Buena Vista, the plains of Cerro Gordo, and the Halls of the Montezumas, though to attain it, armies in the spirit of conquest should rush through rivers of blood and hecatombs of human victims.

You claim that your own Independence Hall is the sacred spot where your republicanism was born, cradled and received a national baptism, and from whence the same vestal fire of freedom is encompassing the globe. You have hailed with joyful acclamation the accession of liberal France to the great family of republics, because it thrust the keystone from the arch of monarchical governments throughout Europe.

We have been witnesses to those soul stirring appeals in behalf of republicanism, in foreign lands; and the conviction forces itself upon our minds that however much you may admire and extol the progress of free principles in other states, that of your own dearest Pennsylvania must occupy the highest seat in your affections.

We do not make our appeal to you as christian sects, or political parties, but as men—christians and republicans—beseeching you to apply the same principles and practice to us as your religion and republicanism dictates should belong to others who have not forfeited their rights by crime.

The barrier that deprives us of the rights which you enjoy finds no palliative in merit—no consolation in piety—no hope in intellectual and moral pursuits—no reward in industry and enterprize. Our ships may fill every port—our commerce float on every sea, and our canvass be wafted by every breeze;—we may exhaust our midnight lamps in the prosecution of study, and be denied the privileges of the forum—we may be embellishing the nation's literature by our pursuits in science—the preceptors of a Newton in astronomy—the dictators of Philosophy to a Lock or a Bacon—the masters of a Montesquieu or a Blackstone on civil and international law—or could we equal the founder of christianity in the purity of our lives, and the power and truth of our precepts and the extent of our morals, yet with all these exalted virtues we could not possess the privileges you enjoy in Pennsylvania, because we are not "white." Is this light of the 19th century? Gracious God! is it possible, that in the absence

of crime thy Providence is made a party to our disfranchisement. Humiliating as it may be to contemplate the fact, it is written in the fundamental laws of your government, and must there remain until you, by the exercise of your prerogative, choose to remove it, the principles of your religion and republicanism to the contrary notwithstanding. We appeal to you as a body in whom are deposited the power of state sovereignty for weal or for woe—and to each of you individually desiring that if you feel that the obstruction of which we complain ought not to exist, that you will use your influence to obtain its repeal.

Our object in assembling is not only to petition the Legislature *ourselves*, but also to *solicit you to petition*. We hope that petitions on this subject will be sent to the Legislature from every City, Town, County, and Township in this Commonwealth.

We feel encouraged to petition from a prevalent belief that the position we are forced to occupy is contrary to the spirit and genius of the people of this State,—our petitions can only reach the humanity of the Legislator, while yours will instruct him in a course of action.

We can conceive of no just reason why Pennsylvania should not occupy the highest position among her sister republics. Her early history and position in this confederacy, the principles and measures of her early fathers and lawgivers, as well as the circumstances of the American Revolution, have placed her on an eminence to give laws to the world. Her soil has been the theatre of as illustrious events as ever moved the historic pen, or fired the imagination of the orator. Beneath her soil lies the ashes of the immortal dead whose fame is as imperishable as her mineral mountains. She has been the favoured child of fortune, cradled in success. Providence became her nursing mother, by throwing into her lap, with boundless profusion, not only peace and plenty, but a host of intellectual giants, to guide her during her infant pilgrimage through the rocks and quicksands of despotism. Her time-honoured sons have occupied that proud pinnacle of fame upon which the nations of the earth have gazed with awe and admiration; and now when the revolutions of time have numbered them with the past, their characters and deeds still live in the memories of the just, and whose characters are brilliant monuments to light the pathway of posterity. When the last scroll of time shall be wound up on the great windlass of eternity it will present the indestructible names of your Penns, Franklins, Rushes, Wistars, Benczets, Woolmans, Morrisises, Wilsons, Taylors and a host of others whose highest aim was justice to mankind. These men were the master builders of your Republican Edifice. If the spirits of the departed are permitted by Providence to take a survey of the scenes of their earthly glory, shall these transcendent spirits look down from their peaceful abode on your amended Constitution, and there behold a *barrier* against the exercise of civil rights, more potent than is to be found in any despotic government on the globe? We know that when adversity overshadows your prosperity, it is only of ephemeral duration—and we humbly trust that you will not suffer the GREAT SUN of your republican

Eden to be long eclipsed by a scintillating planet from *exploding monarchies*. To you has been bequeathed the important duty of preserving this government from the fate of the ancient republics. If you protect its principles, and pass them down to posterity unimpaired, you will have completed the noble structure whose corner stone was laid by your fathers; and when future generations shall be surrounded by republics like our planetary system around the great Orb of Day, the traditional historian will point to your republican model, as the *political sun* in the great firmament of nations, from whence they derive their light and heat.

No other suitable trophy can be erected to the memory of your revolutionary sires. Then, and not until then, will the martyred blood that washed your virgin soil have produced trees of liberty, from which mankind may, without distinction of complexion, pluck the heaven-born fruit. Their appeal to the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of their intentions was in behalf of *mankind*, and the true mission of republics, can never be achieved until mankind, without distinction of nation or complexion are embraced within its folds.

When your Independence Hall, on the fourth day of July, 1776, was made sacred by a consecration to the great cause of human liberty, your Morris, Rush, Franklin, Wilson, and Ross pledged themselves—their fortunes and sacred honors—for the purpose of establishing a republican form of government, with the representatives from Massachusetts, through her Adams, Paine, and Gerry—with Rhode Island through her Hopkins and Ellery, and although Vermont was not represented in that illustrious body, she may now be added to the list of those States that have succeeded in establishing universal-suffrage.

After having finished the duties assigned them by their constituents, they severally returned to their homes, and commenced spreading the live coals from the altar of freedom until the electric sparks galvanized the dead corpse of political liberty, and the people rushed in masses to their standards, while posterity caught the flame, and the proud and ever-glorious result is realized in the fact that each of these States have succeeded in establishing a republican form of government where men of all complexions enjoy an equality of rights.

It is now left for you to decide whether Pennsylvania shall be less fortunate. Must the arduous labours of your great men fail to be consummated, while those of their confederates have been crowned with triumphant success?

We make no foreign issue with you—we place ourselves on your own declaration of rights and principles. On these hang our future hope, and with them we will stand or fall. We will now leave the subject with the hope that no collateral issue may affect the justice of our claims; it being solely a question of rights springing from your own republican creed.

In soliciting an extensive circulation for this appeal, we must draft on the benevolence and liberality of the *press*; for without its favourable influence, no cause, however pure, may hope to succeed, and with it truth and justice must prove invincible.

We shall live and labour in the glorious anticipation of success; but if it should prove otherwise, and you should not consent to repeal the sentence you have passed on Providence, we shall derive the rich consolation that in making this appeal we have discharged a duty we owed to *ourselves*, to freedom, and republicanism—to posterity and to God.

WM. WHIPPER,
ABRAM D. SHADD,
J. F. DICKSON,
J. J. G. BIAS,
ROBERT PURVIS,
M. W. GIBBES,
SAMUEL VAN BRAKLE,
Committee.

Harrisburg, Dec. 14th 1848.

AN APPEAL TO THE COLORED CITIZENS OF PENNSYLVANIA.

Fellow Citizens,—Being impressed with the spirit of that great law of progress which directs mankind to seek for liberty and happiness under the protection of free institutions, we have assembled in Convention, for the purpose of exchanging our views with each other on the best method of obtaining it. And in pursuance of the object of said Convention, we have been appointed to address you on the subject of our future action.

You will discover in the report of our proceedings, that we have recommended that petitions be sent to the Legislature, praying for a repeal of the word "white" from the Constitution of this State.

The foot prints of every step we have trod, are stamped with success. The unanimity of sentiment that prevailed in the Convention, swelled the harmonious notes which announce the proud future. Our favorable reception by the citizens of Harrisburgh, and the respectful attention we received in going and returning from the Convention, proclaimed that the people were pleased with our object, and prepared to second our movements.

We have issued an address to the voters of this state, beseeching them to apply their republican principles to our cause, and blot from their Constitution the last remnants of monarchy.

We assume for our basis and corner stone, "that all just governments derive their powers from the consent of the governed," and that, as we have long been numbered with the latter, every principle of republican justice we maintain vindicates our right to be invested with the same sovereignty exercised by others.

We have launched into a new position. Our fathers sought personal freedom—we now contend for political freedom.

The Constitution, by disfranchising us, while it claims to be republican, has stricken a blow at our manhood, and not only ours, but a majority of those who people this globe.

We intend suing for our rights as *men*; where the Executive and Legislative branches of the government is the Court, and 400,000 legal voters the jury, our own conduct being the witnesses, and true republican principles the law.

No case, of equal importance, can ever be tried in this commonwealth, whether we regard the elevated character and position of the court, the number, intelligence, and power of the jury, or the incalculable interests at stake, pending on the decision. It stands on an undisputed pre-eminence, far beyond any parallel in history.

The justly celebrated *Somerset* case, that was tried in England, in the King's Bench before Lord Mansfield, on the 7th of February, 1772, when all established usages and precedents were broken down by the promulgation of a decision from the learned bench, declaring that "slaves cannot breathe in England," was but a very faint daguerreotype likeness of our own.

It is true, that if we succeed, a portion of our jurors, like Lord Mansfield, may reverse their previous decisions. It is also true, that the opinions of many of the jury, like their numbers, have undergone a change in ten years, which is favorable to our claims; either from having the question stripped from foreign issues, or causes unknown to us. Of one thing we are certain, that a large empannelment has been added to the jury, since our case was before the people, from those who were deprived by minority, from exercising the prerogative of voters. These have never had the subject placed before them, in a manner and form requiring their study and investigation. It was a wise forecast in the Convention to embody a proviso, that all future amendments to the Constitution should pass two successive Legislatures, before they were presented to the people for ratification. This measure allows all those favorable to the said amendments, a sufficient time to urge their claims on the attention of the people.

It may seem to many, as being too slow in our case, to satisfy the demands of justice; yet it is nevertheless an important safeguard to the rights, privileges, and interests of the people.

Now fellow citizens, we should feel a deep interest in this cause, and hasten its onward march, by every means in our power. For over us, and our children, its pregnant consequences, to our future welfare, hangs like a mighty incubus; shall we longer fold our arms with stoic indifference, and falter before this judgment of power, which, like some great Andes, is crushing us and our children beneath its pondrous weight; rather than rise like men possessing the spirit of freemen, and petition those in authority for its removal? In vain has been our acquaintance with letters, if we remain blind to the teachings of history.

Shall the spirit of liberty continue to inspire every nation—rock every government, and freight every breeze, and leave us like some unnatural excrescence, or motionless adamant unmoved by its power?

Shall we read, not only in books, but in the examples of those who surround us, the inestimable value that others place on the free ex

ercise of their political rights, and long remain indifferent to our own. If we do, a more powerful argument cannot be urged for withholding them. It was wielded with great effect on a former occasion, and will remain a standing obstruction to us, unless we by a bold and energetic action, cast it to the four winds.

The old adage, that "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance," is as true now, as when it was first uttered: Others will be induced to advocate our rights, just in proportion, as they discover that we set a just value on them ourselves.

Slaves have learned to lick the dust, and stifle the voice of free inquiry; but we are not slaves—our right to natural liberty, and a qualified citizenship, is guaranteed to us by the Constitution. Full, civil, and political liberty, is regarded by the ablest writers on government, as the only true safeguard to individual liberty—so that, their presence is vindicated by *necessity*.

There are many points of difference between the celebrated Somersett case, and ours. He was separated by water from those influences prejudicial to his case, and it was managed by able counsel, learned in the law, while the decision was wrung from noble Lords, after a patient investigation of the principles proclaimed in the Magna Charta of Great Britain. We are situated in the midst of our jurors, where every possible opportunity is presented for prejudging our cause. Our jurors are men from all creeds of christians, all political parties, possessing minds of every shade of thought, from the most exalted intelligence, to unpardonable ignorance; of every classification of sympathy, and every quality of prejudice, with no other standard before them, than their own ideas of republicanism, which they are not bound by oaths to support, and such is the equal distribution of power among them, that our worst enemy can nullify the act of our best friend.

The evidence that was required in the Somersett case was *language*, in our case it will be *actions*. We should resist on the very threshold of the Court this distinction in evidence, as having no foundation in established precedents, in the Judicial and Legislative branches of our government.

You may clearly discover, fellow citizens, the narrow path on which we must tread; every jurymen will be a living witness against us, if this rule of evidence be admitted, the least departure from the ground of moral rectitude, will be magnified into a base attempt to overthrow the laws, and disturb the peace of society. Our petty jealousies and bickerings, will be regarded as lawless invasions. Even drunkenness that is often characterized as the essence of fashionable folly, among the whites, will be ascribed to degeneracy in us. The tide of our vices, will not be considered to rise and fall by temptation, like those of other men, but as springing from an inherent quality of our nature.

They will describe us as being too *low* in the scale of creation to be reached by the *heavenly light*, and then denounce us for being *immoral*. They will assert our *inferiority* in the scale of creation,

and then taunt us with not having established our equality, by the *overthrow of nature's laws*. In short, we will be required to perform impossibilities, and denounced for not surmounting them.

These are a portion of the difficulties that must be met and overcome, and every argument that we furnish by our conduct, that militates against our cause, procrastinates the period when we must finally triumph.

But let no one be mistaken from what we have said respecting *condition*, or that we would make it a *standard*; it is only a *means*. If it could be made a *standard*, there would not be the remotest possibility of success by rallying under it.

But let no man falter under the supposition, that the path marked out is so narrow, that we cannot walk in it. Even if *condition* were the *standard*, the path has been trodden by one, whose life and character was a shining ornament among us for upwards of *three score* years, a *model* man, one of *nature's noblemen*. If integrity of character, connected with all the characteristics which render men good and great, could not preserve him from the ban of proscription, then it must be admitted that *condition* can present no qualifications, capable of being a passport of admission into the rights and privileges of citizenship in this state. It has been argued that we were disfranchised on the grounds of *condition*. This we deny. The *reasons* urged for our disfranchisement were *founded on condition*. Those who laboured to disfranchise us, *dared* not to make *condition* the *standard*. While they asserted our inferiority, they were too cowardly to give us a fair field to become competitors for the *prize of merit*. They were cunning logicians, and well knew that no argument founded on *condition* would meet the *false prejudices* of their constituents. They knew that the period had long since passed when it would be *possible* to *frame* a standard of *condition* that would separate the *white* from the *colored* people.

So they disfranchised us by *extinguishing justice*—*disqualifying merit*, assuming *condition* as their *reason*, and *complexion* as the *standard*. By refusing to make their *standard* the *basis* of their *reasons*, they have admitted its injustice; and by refusing to make their *reasons* their *standard* of disqualification, they have denied their validity. As our Constitution has not prescribed any *standard* of religious, moral or intellectual qualifications, we could not have been disfranchised if misfortune had not placed them in our possession. So no amendment could have passed the Convention, and been adopted by the people, having *pecuniary* qualification, that would have wholly disfranchised us. *Condition* was but the *pretext*—the *capital* on which to furnish *arguments*—a *passport* to power, and that *point* being gained, they were determined to disfranchise us, as a body, on *account of complexion*; they did not need *reasons*, because they were prepared to vote on the ground of prejudices. And if their power had been co-extensive with their *wills*, many of them would not only have *disfranchised us*, but the *poor of every nation*, and whole *political parties*, that were opposed to them in the bargain.

Therefore, our only hope of effecting a change, in the fundamental laws of this State, is through a successful appeal to the voters thereof, whose sovereign will must direct her future destiny.

We have not only shown, that they did not disfranchise us on account of our *condition*, but that they *could not*. And if further testimony be needed, we will bring to the stand, Mr. Martin, of Philadelphia county, the member of the Convention who bears the distinguished honor of having introduced the word "white" into the Constitution. He says in a speech on that subject, "Much has been done for these people—schools have been kept up—they have been instructed in all the sciences, and in the rudiments of religion, and I have known but one solitary instance of a good result, although I have lived forty years on the same spot, and have been well acquainted with all that has been done. There is a *BLACK gentlemen* in Philadelphia county, JAMES FORTEN, a sail maker, who is an exception. What is his situation? He has accumulated property, obtained a respectable standing, and in *consequence of his colour*, is noticed more than a white man would be in the same situation. I will say, therefore, that all these attempts are fallacious, and that nothing can be done to place the coloured race by the side of the whites."

We leave you after reading the above extract to decide for yourselves, whether Mr. Martin was induced to insert the word "white" from the view that our people had failed to reach that high position contemplated by their benefactors, or from a *spirit of jealousy* at the *notoriety* that followed their success, in "*consequence of their colour*." It could not have been the former, because he represents them as having "obtained the rudiments of religion, and as being in possession of *ALL the sciences*."

Such qualifications endorsed by such high authority ought not disfranchise us on *account of condition*. If he was moved by *jealousy* not arising from any act of James Forten, but from the distinguished notice he received from others in "*consequence of his colour*," then the argument against our *inferiority* becomes *exploded*. He says "he has no hatred for these people." If he means that his course towards us is friendship, we pity his enemies. But let us examine his *sense of justice*, so that we may be able to comprehend what he would *require of us*. Now, he says that James Forten, was a *black gentleman*, and the only exception among a standing population of 20,000, which of course must have doubled itself in the forty years of Mr. Martin's residence and surveillance. Does Mr. Martin make any effort, to *protect* James Forten, from the doom of all those who are *recognized* by the *same complexion*. No, after endorsing his character for "*prosperity, reputation, and gentlemanship*," he too must be *immolated*, not on *account of his condition*, but mark ye! it is his *complexion*. The *reason*, for the omission perhaps lies in the fact that he prefaced the term gentleman with *black*, and as he expresses a *jealousy* for the fear of coloured men's *popularity*, and in case they shall be permitted to vote, would have the power of *distributing offices* in the different wards." There is great reason for the impression, that Mr. Forten was a

SHINING MARK, and that Mr. Martin's object was more achieved in effecting *his disfranchisement* than in the very worst sample that could have been presented. Now when Mr. Martin's own endorsement of the condition and character of *James Forten*, would not induce him to make an exception in his favour ; it most clearly proves that *no condition*, however exalted, possesses a protecting influence. James Forten might have been the MOSES of the *Israelites*—the CHRIST of the *Gentiles*—the WASHINGTON of AMERICA, and he would have been disfranchised, so far as Mr. Martin's vote and influence was concerned.

But, let no one suppose that we undervalue any effort, for the improvement of our condition. We know that it will be capable of exerting a powerful influence on future decisions as well as it did on the past. Our object in using the names of James Forten and Mr. Martin, is to make a strong case for the purpose of *disabusing* your minds of the *false* views that have been circulated, that we were disfranchised on account of our *condition*. It would have been unfortunate for Mr. Martin if the forty thousand coloured people in the State could each have represented the same character and influence of James Forten, he would have been without a *conditional basis* on which to erect his *complexional issue*. This would be requiring too much, for *he* was a *model man*, and no nation in the whole tide of time, from the twelve tribes of Israel down to the Liberian republic, ever presented a front where the mass possessed such unsullied purity. In taking leave of Mr. Martin we are unable to say whether his views have undergone any change, but as we understand that he is still living, we are willing the public shall have the benefit of his arguments. His whole course has impressed us with the belief that he did not make the name of James Forten an exception out of respect to the *man* or his *virtues*. The exception was necessary to characterize *his own* intelligence and establish his veracity. JAMES FORTEN, though dead, his example still lives in the memory and affections of those who knew him. If we imitate his virtues, our influence will dissolve mountains of prejudice. He loved to make friends, while too many of us create enemies. The examples of all such will be like millstones around our cause, and if we fail to succeed it will be their fault.

Every man should consider that from this time forward the eyes of his jurors will be upon him, and if we would avoid any unjust cause of offence, in a case involving dollars and cents, how much more careful ought we to be where the great stake is our rights and privileges as citizens. Each one should be careful to win friends to our cause.

We should be careful to present a manly bearing by the exercise of politeness and good manners, and avoid all unnecessary display and ostentation—also profane language and invidious expressions, either in favour of or against political parties. For, if we obtain the right of citizenship it will not be through the influence of any one party ; we must look to the *justice* of the people without distinction of *party, creed, or sect*. Let us ever bear in mind that "money is the sinew of war," and that to carry this question to a successful issue, you will not only have to act with circumspection, but you will have

to tax yourselves for its support. Remember, we can make no sacrifices in this cause which will not produce an equivalent reward. Should we not obtain our enfranchisement at once, we will gain in the consolidation of our people on the great subject of our rights. The dismembered factions of sects and parties will lose their identity in the union of discordant elements. Our wasteful contributions, folly and fancy will seek a channel for investment in an exchequer from which we may draw honor, wealth, intelligence and power. Our superfluous trappings will be substituted for plain and useful apparel. Our science of music and signs will be more fully displayed in the science of letters of economy. In the dissolution of our local and affiliated societies, a base will be discovered on which to erect institutions from whose gigantic structure, national themes can be proclaimed. The seed of revolution once successfully planted, only needs the application of right instrumentalities to carry it into successful operation. With a proper direction of our resources we have within us the elements that will make us a great people.

But, if we would succeed, we must erect our standard on the *rock of principle*—and our measures should always be guided by the *highest expediency*. We must not forget from whence we started, and like the children of Israel keep our eyes directed towards the promised land; ever watchfully surveying the difficulties to be surmounted, and make our attacks on the most pregnable points. We should never waste our ammunition in skirmishing and sound, nor direct our artillery in the air. We must make the history of oppressed nations our light-houses—and never relax our efforts until we have passed the *Rubicon of Caste*, and landed safely on Pisgah's top.

We must ever keep the fact in view that we are disfranchised because we are not "white." We must endeavor to influence the voters of this State to repeal this *complexional standard*. Our cause is analogous to those which have been the foundation of revolutions for upwards of two hundred years, excepting those that had their foundation in the *religious intolerance*, while ours is *complexional*.

The Protestant reformation of the 16th century had its foundation in the *religious intolerance* of the *catholics*. Look at the history of Ireland under George III—at a period when she was furnishing England with a generation of patriots, who were weaving laurels for the brow of the British Crown, both at home and abroad—in the field and in the camp—at the bar and in the forum—while in the Parliament the Catholic religion was stricken down by Protestant power, and its devoted worshippers made to suffer in their persons and privileges, because they would not consent to abandon the idol of their faith. Look at the history of the Quakers, the Catholics and Jews of this country, have they too not been *hanged, scourged, disfranchised*, and persecuted on account of their religious faith! Have they not been obliged to seek their title to the privilege of citizenship through the dire fogs of persecution that became so tangible, that like Egyptian darkness they "*felt it*," and mark the results. Their talents have been

devoted to improvement; faithful to their creed, they have rode triumphantly over the billows of the storm. They might have knelt before the Moloch of power, renounced their faith, and by bowing at the shrine of hypocrisy have purchased a pardon with the price of their conscience. With us it is otherwise, we must suffer the "altars and Gods" to sink together.

The charges upon which we are arraigned, is a debt which hypocrisy cannot liquidate. The *divinity* that debars us from the *privileges* of Citizenship, is more DURABLE than REVELATION inscribed on *parchment*, the intuitions of prophecy embodied in *creeds*, or the unwritten evidences of our faith streaming from the fountain of our consciences. It is *emblazoned on our cheeks* by the IMPRESS of DEITY. Light from heaven irradiates it, and darkness alone can obscure it.

Others by becoming traitors to their principles, might have forsaken their faith, but we cannot abandon our *complexion*. We are forced to meet the issue, and that on *complexional* grounds. The same foe to liberty is in the field that persecuted Luther at the "Diet of Worms," and burned Michael Servetus at the stake—executed Emmet and his colleagues in Ireland—that hung the Quakers in the land of the Pilgrims—that disfranchised the Jews, and in more modern times, mobbed the Catholics. They boldly went to battle with a foe whose Godlike power shook the whole earth. They girded themselves with the weapons of truth and justice, and became invincible. The contest was long and severe, but the *great DAGON* of power and oppression fell and crumbled at the feet of a revolutionary power, that has poured more blessings into the lap of nations than any event recorded in the world's history. It is the scattered fragments of that enemy to mankind, that relentless foe to civil and religious liberty which had spent its force in wars of religious despotism that is now again resuscitated and consolidated for the purpose of executing *complexional intolerance*. It is this power, so often foiled and beaten that has stricken down our rights, privileges, and citizenship in Pennsylvania. And the most humiliating part in the whole drama, is, the contemplation that we are obliged to contend for our rights with the sons of those conquerors who shed their blood in battling with the same enemy and in defence of the same glorious principles, and whose ashes have produced trees of liberty, under which their posterity may not only be protected from the storms of despotism, but may repose in peaceful security beneath their branches. We regret that we are forced to appeal to those sects and parties that are fresh from the fires of persecution, and whose parental history is scarred with the wounds and bruises of the conquered and slain. But, we will appeal to them; they are but men, and have hearts, feelings and sympathies as other men, therefore we will appeal to them, as men whose origin and destiny are and must be inseparable from theirs. Born heirs to the same natural rights—having a just claim to the exercises of the same conventional rights, so long as we are governed by the same laws let, us implore them by their re-

spect for the past, and their love for the future, not to fetter our spirits or manacle our limbs with chains, "which neither they nor their fathers could bear," and which required ages of labour to dissolve.

We will appeal to them by their religion and republicanism not to make a foreign issue with us on the grounds of *condition*. We have marked their issue—and nailed our flag to their complexional standard, and under it we will rally, sink or swim—survive or perish, we will be found fiercely combating the enemies of equal rights, and in favor of the laws of Providence.

But let us first charge home upon ourselves. We too have admitted on our platform this abominable doctrine of *condition*; we have been allured by false ideas, we want not only language to express our detestation of existing evils, but we need new terms for the vindication of our rights. We have been advocates of the doctrine that we must be elevated before we could expect to enjoy the privileges of citizenship; we can never approach nearer the white man than we now are while he possesses all the machinery of progress. We do now henceforth and forever discard it, and deny that in the true republican sense of the term that we need to be elevated before we are enfranchised. The Almighty having clothed us with the attributes of human nature, we are placed on an equality with the rest of mankind. The declaration of American Independence, and our own State's Bill of Rights ask no more. If we admit the *fatalism* that we need to be elevated before we are fitted to possess the rights and privileges of white men, we consequently acknowledge our inferiority in the scale of creation. Let us never attempt to erect the temple of freedom on such a sandy foundation. Let us reject every attempt to dethrone the dignity of our manhood so long as the spirits of freedom runs in our veins, and we feel within us the evidences of immortality.

Let us rest our cause on the republican standard of the revolutionary Fathers, while we knock at the doors of the constitution and demand an entrance. If we are asked what evidence we bring to sustain our qualifications for citizenship, we will offer them certificates of our BIRTH and NATIVITY. If we are denied admission, let the cause of our rejection be ascribed to our complexion. Then we shall have a fair view of the question at issue, then we shall be able to see (and our friends too) that it is not our impiety—our ignorance—our immorality, or our wicked customs and habits that places us without the pale of constitutional landmarks. But that it is our *complexion alone* which furnishes the apology. If we could by a single "feat" of nature change our complexion, every objection to our full exercise of constitutional privileges would be banished before to-morrow's sun. We therefore hope that our friends will cease to place any faith in the doctrine, that our religious, literary, and moral improvement will be the means of enfranchising us. We need all these much, for our spiritual, moral and intellectual improvement for the promotion of our present and future welfare. But these are not constitutional requirements. The people of Pennsylvania, in their conventional

capacity, did not set up such a test on which to base the rights of elective franchise. To have carried out such a principle would have disfranchised a portion of the whites, while it would have clothed thousands of our people with those very privileges of which they are now denied. We are not asking the voters of Pennsylvania to elevate us; they cannot do it. All we ask of them is, that they "take their feet from off our necks," that we may stand free and erect like themselves. We prescribe for them no form of government; all we desire is that they will practice their own professed principles. In our present form of government, the will of the people is the law of the land. It is therefore the rankest form of injustice and despotism to require of those whom they have *denied the exercise of their will* in the formation of those laws to yield implicit obedience to the same. All we ask of them to perform, they have sworn before high heaven to execute. We desire to disabuse the public mind with regard to a fatal error which has long been entertained by many gifted and philanthropic minds, viz. that our religious, moral, and intellectual elevation would secure us our political privileges. We aver that it will not; we can now produce sufficient samples in these virtues and acquirements to redeem the character of a world. Sodom would have been saved with a far less proportion. No, if we had colored men who could write like Paul, preach like Peter, pray like Aminadab, iron hearted prejudice would cry out he is *black*.

If our halls of science, the bar, and the forum, reverberated with the eloquence of Cicero or Demosthenes, or to come down to modern times, if they were capable of eclipsing those master spirits of the American Senate with the power of their genius—or possessed the wealth of Cræsus or a Girard, the vulgar voice of the populace would still cry out they are a degraded people, *because they are black*. We are not among those who believe that neither religion, humanity or legislation can remove this *unholy prejudice* against our complexion. We know it to be vincible, and we feel assured that where true religion exists it cannot enter. Every human being, according to *Scripture*, who hates his brother without a cause, is totally destitute of the spirit of christianity. Our political elevation is more depending on the improvement of the white man's heart than on the colored man's mind; we need moral and intellectual cultivation as a means through which we may be able to enlist the advocacy of our friends and influence the minds of our opponents. Our present situation is a living commentary on the *principle* that governs American legislation, and controls American justice.

Finally, brethren, in conclusion we cannot part without again admonishing you that you must not fail to battle with the *demon of complexional* INTOLERANCE FIRST, and let the subject of our *condition* follow, for unless you pursue this course your labours will prove fruitless. In Massachusetts, Vermont, and Rhode Island they have slain this *monster*, and now they are enjoying the blessings of politi-

cal equality. The avenues to industry, wealth, and power now being open to them as to others, they can construct the edifice of their own fortunes, and make their condition vie with that of the most favored class of citizens.

When we take a retrospective view of the past, we have reason to believe that the republican pride of the old Keystone State will excite her ambition to occupy the loftiest position in the temple of freedom. She has already in her legislative capacity erased from her statue book the last remains of domestic Slavery, she will not long suffer her fundamental code to be tarnished with a relic of political barbarism. Until then we must labour with an untiring devotion, making Liberty our watchword and the elective franchise our ruling idea. We must collect our people from their distracting factions, and cement their dismembered elements around one common standard which will *establish union*, and consolidate their strength, and the day will not be distant when we shall be clothed with the robe of citizenship, when the constitution of Pennsylvania like the sun of *liberty* will send forth her refulgent rays of civil and political liberty on us as upon the rest of mankind.

WM. WHIPPER,
 ABRAM D. SHADD,
 J. J. DICKSON,
 J. J. G. BIAS,
 ROBERT PURVIS,
 M. W. GIBBES,
 SAMUEL VAN BRAKLE.
 Committee.

CONSTITUTION.

ARTICLE I.

The Name of this Association shall be "THE CITIZENS' UNION OF THE COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA."

ARTICLE II.

Its object shall be, to obtain for the colored people of Pennsylvania all the Rights and Immunities of Citizenship.

ARTICLE III.

It will endeavor to obtain these Rights and Immunities by holding PUBLIC MEETINGS, delivering LECTURES, circulating NEWSPAPERS and TRACTS, thereby producing such a change in PUBLIC OPINION as shall induce the LEGISLATURE when PETITIONED, and the VOTERS of the Commonwealth when presented therewith, to grant them.

ARTICLE IV.

Any person being eighteen years of age, and a citizen of Pennsylvania, or desirous of becoming a citizen, and subscribing to this Constitution, and paying into its TREASURY, or the Treasury of any of its AUXILIARIES, the sum of fifty cents annually, shall be a member of this Association.

ARTICLE V.

The annual instalment shall be paid on or before the first Monday of October in each year; and any member failing to pay it by that day shall not be allowed to vote in any of the doings of this association, or any of its Auxiliaries until it is paid.

ARTICLE VI.

County Associations, Auxiliary to this, may be formed in each of the several Counties of the State, and shall be entitled to a representation in the Annual Meeting of this Association, equal in number to the number of Senators and Representatives of such County in the State Legislature.

ARTICLE VII.

A certain portion of the funds of each Auxiliary shall be paid into the Treasury of this Association on or before the day of its Annual

Meeting, otherwise the representatives of such Auxiliary shall not be entitled to vote in said Annual Meeting.

ARTICLE VIII.

The President, Vice President, Recording and Corresponding Secretaries, and Treasurer, and seven members chosen to that office, shall constitute the EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE, a majority of whom shall constitute a quorum.

ARTICLE IX.

The several Officers of this Association shall discharge their respective duties in the usual manner, and shall continue in office until their successors are elected.

ARTICLE X.

The Annual Meeting for the election of officers, hearing the annual Report of the Executive Committee, and transacting the business of the Association, shall be held on the second Wednesday in December in each year.

ARTICLE XI.

All Agents and Lecturers in the service of this association, shall be employed and directed in their labours, by the Executive Committee, and shall be accountable to it for the faithful discharge of their duty.

ARTICLE XII.

In view of the object of this association, and the means it will be enabled to command. It shall be the duty of the Executive Committee in the commencement of the discharge of their duties, to confine themselves to the publication of such papers, and the delivery of such lectures, as shall tend to possess the colored people of KNOWLEDGE, WEALTH and GOODNESS, and thus elevate them intellectually, morally, socially, and politically to the rank of free and equal citizenship of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

ARTICLE XIII.

Whenever undue sectional influences, in the doings of this Association, are apprehended by any two of its members, any number of members, from any one County, shall be entitled to no greater number of votes, than the number of Senators and Representatives of such County in the State Legislature.

ARTICLE XIV.

This Constitution may be altered or amended by a vote of a majority of the members present at the Annual Meeting.