

## AFRICAN AMERICAN COLLECTION

By Samuel W. Black, Director of African American Programs

### Jubilee of Freemen

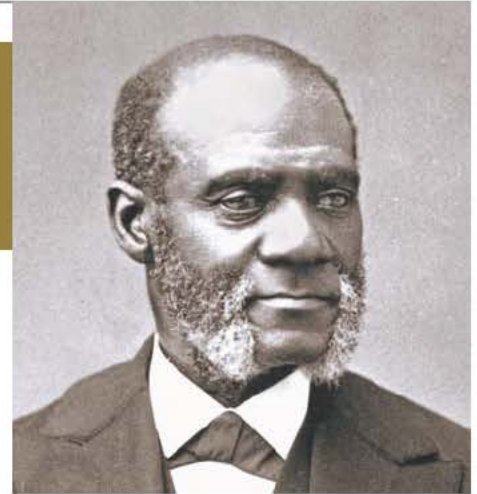
*"It is said that we are ignorant; admit it. But if we know enough to be hung, we know enough to vote. If the Negro knows enough to pay taxes to support government, he knows enough to vote; taxation and representation should go together. If he knows enough to shoulder a musket and fight for the flag for the government, he knows enough to vote.... What I ask for the Negro is not benevolence, not pity, not sympathy, but simply justice."*  
~Frederick Douglass, 1865

One of the most important episodes of American history was the culmination of the Civil War and the ratification of the 15th Amendment to grant voting rights to African American males in Pennsylvania and throughout the nation. At no time in U.S. history has such a large number of people had their status transitioned almost overnight. This newfound freedom resulted in a radical shift in democratic ideas nationally and internationally. For African Americans in Pittsburgh, the 15th Amendment was a long-time coming to receive justice and the restoration of a right that had been taken away 31 years earlier.

All men in Pennsylvania could vote until the new constitutional assembly of 1838. By

Henry Highland Garnet, founding pastor of Grace Memorial Presbyterian Church, Executive Committee member of the National Equal Rights League, and U.S. minister to Liberia.

University Library, University of North Carolina Chapel Hill.



1839, not even sympathetic legislators or the governor could prevent the mostly eastern but definitely rural legislators from stripping suffrage from Black men. Learned men such as Martin R. Delany, Lewis Woodson, Abraham D. Lewis, John B. Vashon, Halston Vashon, Samuel Bruce, George Parker, and John Peck had the skill, knowledge, and fortitude to serve in the legislature but after 1839 were stripped of their right to vote. Not until the ratification of the 15th Amendment would the right of suffrage be returned to Black men in Pennsylvania.

Between 1839 and 1870, a tumultuous struggle ensued for Pittsburgh African Americans around the issues of citizenship, freedom, and suffrage while still fighting slavery. In August 1843, most of the African American leaders in the region convened at the Allegheny County convention of colored men. They did not attend the national meeting in Buffalo, New York, that same month where Henry Highland Garnet gave his famous "Address to the Slaves of the United States of America." Instead of joining Garnet, Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, Charles Ray, Charles Lenox Remond, and hundreds more, Pittsburghers convened a meeting to discuss the suffrage issue and options for freedom that included migrating to an isolated and self-governed commune in rural Ohio.

Lewis Woodson was one of the proponents of this self-determined idea based on independent communities for African Americans. Lewis espoused that his "return to land" idea would provide "for greater liberty of movement and richer realization of living."<sup>1</sup> Woodson came to Pittsburgh in 1831 from

Chillicothe, Ohio, as a minister of the AME Church. He immediately began to organize the community in Pittsburgh, helping to form the Western Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, the African Education Society, the Moral Reform Society, and Temperance Society. He was a mentor to Martin R. Delany and helped lay the groundwork for activism in the African American community. The *Pittsburgh Memorial* listed 79 names of Allegheny County African American men, and Woodson was one of them.

In 1864, African American men convened in Syracuse, New York, to form the National Equal Rights League. Its first meeting held in Cleveland, Ohio, on September 19, 1865, further defined the mission of the organization and almost immediately began to organize state chapters. In Pennsylvania, the state chapter (PERL) was headed by William Nesbit of Altoona and George B. Vashon of Pittsburgh. One of the charges of the NERL was to use its state chapters to lobby legislatures and congressmen to ratify the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments to the U.S. Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

Upon ratification of the 15th Amendment on February 3, 1870, Allegheny County members of the PERL set out to organize a parade. Called the Jubilee of Freemen, the event was quite possibly the first and largest parade by African Americans in the country. Dignitaries from politics, military, business,

# Liberty Triumphant! Justice Enthroned!

THE BRIGHT SUN OF LIBERTY RISES IN OUR POLITICAL SKY!

GLORY TO GOD IN THE HIGHEST, AND ON EARTH, PEACE TO MAN.

Let us rejoice, O, Enfranchised People of Pennsylvania, that the Nation's Later Birth of Freedom, and the People's Gain of their own Sovereignty shall never Wane nor Perish from Earth!

Men of Western Pennsylvania, we call upon you—to cordially invite you to join with us in celebrating the

## JUBILEE OF FREEMEN



## RATIFICATION of the FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT IN ALLEGHENY COUNTY, APRIL 20th, 1870.

### IN PITTSBURGH, ON TUESDAY, the 26th day of APRIL, 1870.

THE PROCESSION WILL FORM AT 12 O'CLOCK, NOON, ON WATER ST. THE RIGHT TURNING ON SMITHFIELD, and will be commanded by the following gentlemen: Geo. D. Ware, Chief Marshal. Staff: Robert Jackson, A. J. Barboza, Robert Davis, Jas. W. Owens. Aids: T. R. Yeach, G. S. Woodson, Alex. Willis, Henry Stanfield Garnet, Robert Bell, Lafayette Massey, S. J. Wilkerson, Jr.

LINE OF MARCH.—The procession proceeds by the Grand Western Road, will leave the Smithfield street at Third, up Third to Jones, up Jones to Fifth avenue, up Fifth avenue to Pittsburgh, up Fifth to Fifth, along Fifth to Water, down Water to Smithfield, along Smithfield to Seventh avenue, along Seventh avenue to Ninth street, down Ninth street to the bridge, across in Allegheny City, up Anderson street to Cedar avenue, up Cedar avenue to Liberty street, up Liberty to Sixth street, down to Sixth street, down to Water, up Water to Third, down Third to Water, down Water to Smithfield, along Smithfield to Seventh avenue, along Seventh avenue to Ninth street, up Ninth street to Liberty street, up Liberty to Wood street, and thence.

ORDER OF PROCESSION.—Police, Music, Chief Marshal, Staff and Aids, Military, Cavalade, Executive Committee of Pennsylvania, and invited guests in carriages, visiting delegations. BIRMINGHAM DIVISION.—Chief Marshal—Sheppard Waters; Aids: Thomas H. Jackson, Emanuel Jackson, Emanuel Herold, Wm. Williams, John Fank, Music, Citizens on foot, Cavalade, Car representing the Loyal States that Ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, containing Fifty Ladies, drawn by six horses, and driven by Mr. Isaac Jackson; Societies, Citizens on foot, Carriages, Wagons. ALLEGHENY DIVISION.—Chief Marshal—Henry C. Pulpruss; Aids: Thomas H. Lytes, Wm. H. Stockton, Solomon Niman, Nathaniel Hadden, John S. Williamson, Mortimer Diney, James Parker, Richard Crowley, Wm. Carney, Charles Francis, James Marselles, John Hogan, James Whiting—Bedford, Music, Fife, Horns, Drums, Societies, Citizens on foot, Carriages, Wagons. PITTSBURGH DIVISION.—Music, Division Marshal—A. Aids, Chief Marshal—Emuel Googles; Aids: John Little, A. B. Lloyd, Alfred Hawkins, George Massey, Sr., Wm. Miller, Thomas Gatewood, F. J. London, Wilson Watson, W. H. Simpson, Edward Bailey, Singleton Gray, Paris Hurley, Robert W. Mahony. FOUNTAIN, HORSING, MUSIC, SOCIETIES, CITIZENS ON FOOT, CARriages, Wagons, Fife, Horns, Drums, Societies, Citizens on foot, Cavalade, Car representing the Loyal States that Ratified the Fifteenth Amendment, containing Fifty Ladies, drawn by six horses, and driven by Mr. Isaac Jackson; Societies, Citizens on foot, Carriages, Wagons. PITTSBURGH DIVISION.—Music, Division Marshal—A. Aids, Chief Marshal—Emuel Googles; Aids: John Little, A. B. Lloyd, Alfred Hawkins, George Massey, Sr., Wm. Miller, Thomas Gatewood, F. J. London, Wilson Watson, W. H. Simpson, Edward Bailey, Singleton Gray, Paris Hurley, Robert W. Mahony. 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The Procession will halt in its transit through Allegheny, in the Diamond, where the Grand Ratification Meeting will take place.

The programme of which will be published in due season. The addresses will be conducted under the auspices of the following named gentlemen:

VICE PRESIDENTS.—Malcolm Jones, Edward Bailey, Geo. B. Kael, Barney Mahoney, Chas. Jones, Paul J. Carson, Moses Howard, Foster Frank White, Wm. J. Mason, Prof. R. K. Simpson, Rev. S. J. Wilson, Rev. Jas. I. Franklin, Rev. S. Scott, Rev. J. B. Clark, Rev. Alex. Clark, Peter Jackson, Paul Baker, Dr. Samuel Matthews, W. H. Masick, Bro. N. H. Williams, Rev. W. H. Hays, Rev. Charles Briggs, Rev. D. W. Adams, Rev. Aaron Cook, Rev. Christopher Witham, Chas. Jackson, Rev. W. H. Brown, A. J. Elliott, Henry W. Jones, Henry Jackson, Joseph Mahoney, Sam'l Delany, H. McCongh, Dr. C. H. Hany, Alexander Gordon, Beverly Preston, Wm. B. Fink, Hon. P. H. Pession, Dr. R. T. Coffey, James Reed, Esq., Dr. James King, Esq., J. J. Long, Esq., M. J. Craig, Dr. R. K. Taylor, James Watkins, Esq.

SECRETARIES.—Wm. H. Thomas, D. W. Alwood, Lewis Woodson, Jr., H. S. Garnett, A. D. Johnson, John S. Williamson, Robert Jackson, James F. Harris. SPEAKERS.—Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Hon. Thomas H. Marshall, Rev. T. T. Hildreth, Prof. R. K. Simpson, Hon. Judge Kaysereck, Rev. Abram Cole, Hon. James L. Graham, Rev. Wm. H. Hays, Hon. Mr. Honorable, Jacob C. Brown, Esq., Rev. Dr. A. R. Bell, Will H. Thomas, Esq., Rev. Dr. S. S. Williams, James King, Esq., Wm. C. Morland, Esq., Dr. George McCook, Rev. S. J. Wilson, Rev. C. H. Hays, Rev. D. W. Adams, Rev. Aaron Cook, Rev. Christopher Witham, Chas. Jackson, Rev. W. H. Brown, A. J. Elliott, Henry W. Jones, Henry Jackson, Joseph Mahoney, Sam'l Delany, H. McCongh, Dr. C. H. Hany, Alexander Gordon, Beverly Preston, Wm. B. Fink, Hon. P. H. Pession, Dr. R. T. Coffey, James Reed, Esq., Dr. James King, Esq., J. J. Long, Esq., M. J. Craig, Dr. R. K. Taylor, James Watkins, Esq.

DEBENT RICHARD H. GARNETT, Chairman of State Exam. Com. S. A. BRAL, Secretary.

# UP FRONT

Jubilee of Freemen poster hung in the barbershop of Granville S. Woodson and later passed on to Byron Writt Woodson, who donated it to the History Center. HNC Collections, 2013.47.1.

tells much about Black Pittsburgh during the Reconstruction era. The names read like a who's who of the abolitionist movement, and include the sons of anti-slavery activists; there is also a marked absence of women in the organizing of the event and the PERL. From the 1870 Jubilee of Freemen poster we know that Lewis Woodson's son Granville, Henry Highland Garnet's son Henry Stanfield Garnet, and Martin R. Delany's brother Samuel Delany were politically involved. We also know that under the leadership of Henry Highland Garnet, the 1870 Jubilee of Freemen was a well-organized public pronouncement of the euphoria and accomplishment of African Americans and their allies in the freedom movement.

The Woodson family is inseparable from the history of African Americans in Pittsburgh. Lewis Woodson was part of those arguing for the salvation of Black suffrage in 1838 and welcomed the restoration of it in 1870. The Jubilee of Freemen poster is just one indication of the family's understanding of its place and role in that history and opens a window into a period of African American history in Pittsburgh.

Logo: Spirit Form Freedom Corner Monument, Pittsburgh, Pa., © artist Carlos F. Peterson.

<sup>1</sup> Laurence A. Glasco, ed., *The WPA History of the Negro in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2004); Samuel W. Black, ed., *The Civil War in Pennsylvania: The African American Experience* (Pittsburgh: Senator John Heinz History Center, 2013), 161.  
<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings of the First Annual Meeting of the National Equal Rights League held in Cleveland, Ohio, October 19, 20, and 21, 1865* (Philadelphia: E.C. Markley & Son, 1865).  
<sup>3</sup> "Grand Gala Day: The Colored Jubilee," *Pittsburgh Post*, 30 April 1870, 5.

religion, education, fraternity, and the bar helped organize and facilitate the event. On April 23, 1870, hundreds gathered at three locations, in the cities of Birmingham (now the South Side), Allegheny, and Pittsburgh. The *Pittsburgh Post* reported, "Early in the morning the busy note of preparation was sounded, and the newly franchised of every hue, and stature, and sex, moved briskly about, as if the fate of empires was in their keeping."<sup>3</sup> Each division of the three rivers included bands, dignitaries, chariots, wagons, and various groups on horseback. The Birmingham and Pittsburgh division met at Water and Smithfield Streets and traveled to the Allegheny division that was convened at Diamond Square. Over 725 people participated in the procession. The route from Allegheny commenced at Liberty

and Wood Streets and crossed into Pittsburgh. The event was so important that two posters advertising the event—one from the 1870 procession and another from the 1873 procession—were saved by the descendants of Thomas Woodson and donated to the Heinz History Center in 2014 by fifth-generation Woodson, Byron Writt Woodson of Philadelphia. The posters were kept in the barbershop of one of the organizers, Granville S. Woodson. In the 1870 procession, Granville S. Woodson served on the PERL executive committee and as an aide to Chief Marshal George D. Ware. Woodson thought enough of the historic event to save the posters and the family respected their shared history by passing the posters from one generation to the next. The information each poster contains