

Reconstruction and Early Civil Rights

In 1883, seventeen African-American men petitioned Loudoun County Judge James B. McCabe to serve as Jurors and Judges of Election. Although laws had been enacted to expand their civil rights after slavery, in actuality they were being eroded. These brave men, who owned land and businesses, were advocates in the early Civil Rights movement.

The local newspaper, *The Mirror*, published an article about the Mass Meeting held on May 14, 1883. Excerpts from the article were transcribed and published in *The Essence of a People* authored by the Black History Committee of the Friends of the Thomas Balch Library.

Delegates of the 1883 Mass Meeting

The *Mirror* of May 17, 1883 included the following:

We, the undersigned Delegates in mass meeting assembled in Leesburg, May 14th, 1883, were duly authorized by the said meeting to present this petition to the Hon. James B. McCabe, Judge of the County Court of Loudoun:

We, the undersigned colored citizens of said county would respectfully call your Honor's attention to the following facts, namely, that twenty years have elapsed since the bondage of our people in the South was removed: Then we were a people comparatively without property, without the means of acquiring it and business capacity to manage it. Then we were uneducated and but few of us could read or write. Time has changed and improved our condition. - Under the guarantees of the National and State Constitutions, and laws in execution thereof our people have made advances: our children are being educated, and knowledge is supplanting ignorance, and the little homes show we are acquiring property. Thus we have become identified with the material interests of our State, we have homes to defend, lives and liberty to protect, children educated and to be educated, and in all that pertains to the order, peace and prosperity of society, we have a common interest in the general welfare. We were in a sad condition to have conferred upon us citizenship, but we are now much better prepared to appreciate it and meet its responsibilities. We disclaim any reflection upon the administration of justice; we know that hitherto we were in such a condition as not to expect to participate in the administration of either. But we respectfully submit that that time has passed. Political society enjoins on us the same duties and requires of us the same that is exacted from its other members. For twenty years we have been trying to qualify

ourselves for the duties of citizenship, we trust it is not presumption in us, to say, our efforts have not been unfailing; we desire in the future a fuller recognition of our rights and privileges which the laws of the land have guaranteed to us, hence we respectfully petition your Honor in the future, to recognize our rights, to serve as Jurors and Judges of Election.

The Judge granted all of the above Petition except the right of being Judges of Elections. He, the Judge said he did not know that we, the colored people, had any right to ask to be appointed judges of election, but we think we have that right too. The meeting adjourned to meet at Lincoln, August 4th, 1883.

The Judge agreed with their statement, but not in the case of election judges.

Delegates

Joseph Waters, President

Born in 1847, probably on the border of Loudoun and Fairfax counties, to mother Louisa Waters. Died between 1910-1920. According to his grandson, John Berry, he was an attendant to Captain Francis L. Higginson of the 5th Colored Regiment of the Massachusetts Cavalry. After the war he settled in Leesburg. In 1870 he married Easter Harris. In 1884 he was appointed trustee of the Bailey Institute. He was a member of Mt. Zion Methodist Church.

Fielding Green, Vice President

Delegate for Unison. Born about 1843. Wife Sopha.

James A. Ball, Secretary

Delegate for Lincoln. Schoolteacher. Born in Loudoun County about 1832. Died 1888 in Mount Gilead District.

William W. Waters, Treasurer

Delegate of Leesburg. Younger brother of Joseph. Born in Loudoun County about 1849. Died 1893. Married Mary E. Gray in 1873.

Joseph Rivers, Assistant Secretary

Delegate for Lovettsville. Born free in Loudoun County about 1841. Son of Daniel and Eliza Rivers. Married Mary Carter in 1865. Farmer. Trustee of Antioch M. E. Church when the church was established in 1868. Probably moved out of Loudoun as no Rivers is found in subsequent census records.

Gregg Furr, Assistant Treasurer

Delegate for Silcott Springs. Born in Loudoun County about 1849. Son of Jerry and Ann Furr. Married Mary Ellen Jackson 1871.

James H. Bowman, Delegate for Middleburg

Born in Loudoun County about 1813. Died 1892 in Aldie. Wife Janine.

James R. Hicks, Delegate for Mt. Gilead

Born in Loudoun County about 1841. Son of Letitia Hicks. Married Lucinda Murray in 1878. Hicks was a bootmaker famous for making high quality footwear. He was also a mail carrier. First president of Loudoun County Emancipation Association (1890). Died 1933.

Thomas W. Williams, Delegate for Hamilton

Born in Mecklenburg County about 1848. Son of William and Quinn. Married Laura Hunter 1872. Trustee of Golden Hill Lodge No. 1890, Hamilton.

Alfred Grigsby, Delegate for Hamilton

Born about 1840, died 1902. Trustee of Mt. Zion M.E. Church and, with fellow trustees, bought the land on which they built the church in 1881.

William Morland, Delegate for Unison

In 1899 Morland was made a trustee of Willisville Chapel M.E. Church.

Jesse L. Moton Sr., Delegate for Leesburg

Date of birth unknown. Died 1900. Married Matilda, and after she died married Sallie Elgin. In 1874, the Old School Ebenezer Baptist Church appointed Moton a trustee. In 1884 he became a trustee of First Mt. Olive Baptist Church along with

the same minister and trustees of Ebenezer Baptist Church. In the late 1890s Moton owned a business with George Spiller called "Spiller and Moton." They were undertakers, carpenters and painters. In 1898, he was appointed trustee of the Bailey Institute. Moton was the grandfather of Marie Moton Medley-Howard.

John Brooks, Delegate for Leesburg

Born about 1855. No further information found. Probably left Loudoun County.

William Jackson, Delegate for Snickersville

Born in Loudoun County about 1846. Son of Smith and Amanda Jackson. Date of death unknown. Married Malinda Davis 1871.

John M. Neal, Delegate for Lincoln

No information available to date.

Henry Howard, Delegate for Lovettsville

Born about 1825. Wife Huldah.

The last delegate's name represented Hughesville. His name is given as "Lee B-zant." This is most likely Lee Bryant born in Loudoun County about 1850, son of Gregg and Aly/Alice? He married Eva Jones in 1873, who probably died in the next couple of years, as his children born between 1877 and 1888, had "Edith" listed as mother on their birth certificates.

The biographical information comes from cross-referencing census records of 1880 and 1900; marriage records from 1851-1880; birth records from 1853-1896; death records from 1853-1896; Will Books; Chancery records; Law Order Books and Deed Books, all of Loudoun County, and an oral history of John E. Berry by Eugene Scheel.