

DECADE MEETING IN JOY ST. CHURCH.

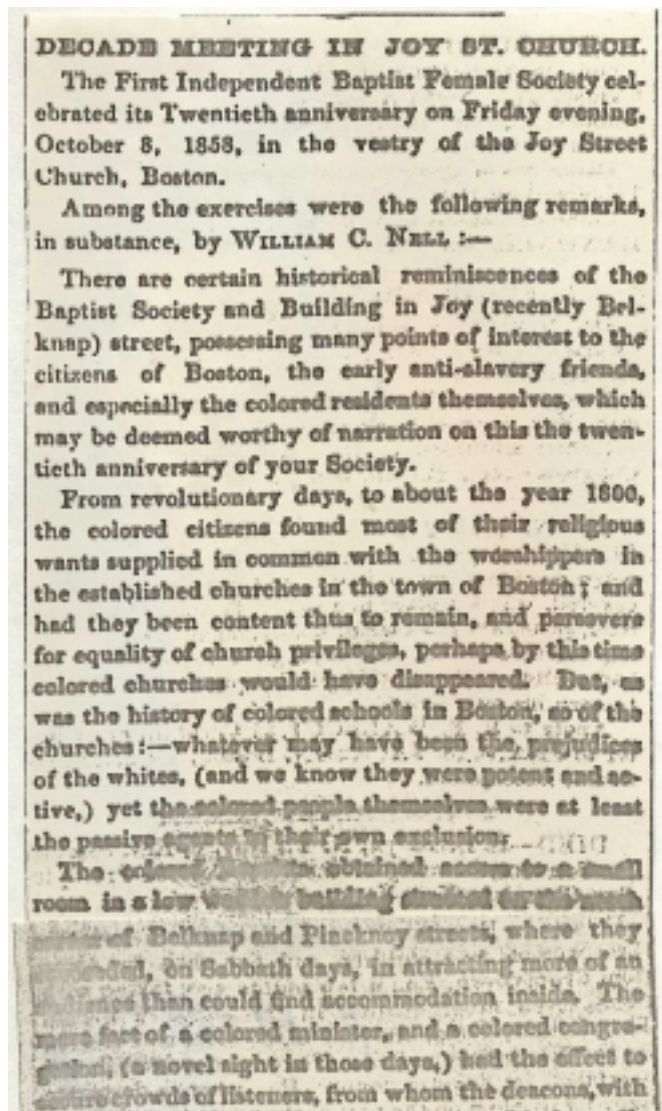
[The First Independent Baptist Female Society celebrated its Twentieth anniversary on Friday evening, October 8, 1858, in the vestry of the Joy Street Church, Boston.

Among the exercises were the following remarks, in substance, by WILLIAM C. NELL:—]

There are certain historical reminiscences of the Baptist Society and Building in Joy (recently Belknap) street, possessing many points of interest to the citizens of Boston, the early anti-slavery friends, and especially the colored residents themselves, which may be deemed worthy of narration on this the twentieth anniversary of your Society.

From revolutionary days, to about the year 1800, the colored citizens found most of their religious wants supplied in common with the worshippers in the established churches in the town of Boston; and had they been content thus to remain, and persevere for equality for church privileges, perhaps by this time colored churches would have disappeared. But, as was the history of colored schools in Boston, so of the churches:—whatever may have been the prejudices of the whites, (and we know they were potent and active,) yet the colored people themselves were at least the passive agents in their own exclusion.

The colored [citizens] obtained access to a small room in a low [walled] building [...on the south] corner of Belknap and Pinckney streets, where they succeeded, on Sabbath days, in attracting more of an audience than could find accommodation inside. The mere fact of a colored minister, and a colored congregation, (a novel sight in those days,) had the effect to secure crowds of listeners from whom the deacons, with



their hats for contribution-boxes, gathered coin sufficient to aid materially in paying the incidental expenses, besides affording a shadow of compensation for their pastor's services.

This was the same house once occupied by Colonel Middleton, the commander of that colored company complimented by Governor Hancock with a flag, and named the 'Bucks of America.' The boyhood of Patrick and John Riley, of Shadrach and Sims notoriety, was also passed in the same building.

In 1805, the church proper amounted to twenty, and they began to make exertions towards building them a place of worship. They appointed a committee, among whom was Cato Gardner, who had long been a respectable member of Dr. Stillman's church. This brother was all alive in the business. By his importunity, Dr. Stillman drew up a subscription paper, which was circulated in various places, and thus obtained about fifteen hundred dollars. Others of the church made collections to a considerable amount, and having thus received encouragement to go forward in their design, they chose a committee of white gentlemen, viz:—Daniel Wild, John Waite, Wm. Bentley, Mitchell London, Ward Jackson, and Edward Stevens, to superintend the business. Some of these gentlemen made large advances, and the house was completed in 1806.

Cato Gardner labored that he might have the house in Belknap street finished during his life. He succeeded, and soon after closed his mortal career. A marble tablet on the front of the building bears this inscription:—'A gift to CATO GARDNER, first promoter of this building. 1806.'

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At the present day, colored churches quite readily secure 'ways and means' for erecting or remodelling their houses of worship from individuals and Societies fraternizing with the American Colonization Society, whose practice is to foster and perpetuate exclusive colored institutions as an entering wedge for expatriating their 'colored brethren' to Liberia. But, thank God! there are churches now in Boston where the color of the skin is no barrier to the fullest enjoyment of Christian fellowship; and such churches should be attended by colored persons, to the utter desertion of those where their rights as human beings are trampled in the dust.

The West Church in Lynde street installed Rev. Charles Lowell as their pastor this same year, (1806,) and the following reminiscence, contributed by him to the *Boston Christian Register* of October 6, 1853, is an interesting item in the history of an old Boston pulpit:—

'When the first church edifice that belonged to the West Parish was taken down in 1806, the pulpit in which the four ministers, viz., Hooper, Mayhew, Howard, and the present senior minister were ordained and had preached, was transferred to the African Society who were then engaged in erecting a church in Belknap street, a designation of it, doubtless, most acceptable to Him who is no respecter of persons. A short time since, I heard in my retirement that the Society were about to remodel their house, and fearing that the pulpit with which so many interesting associations were connected would be destroyed, I expressed a wish to my physician (Dr. Shattuck) that the pulpit might be rescued from destruction, and

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secured by purchase to the parish to which it had originally belonged.!'

Through some procrastination, this purpose, however, was not accomplished, and the pulpit has, ere this, been consigned to the shades of oblivion, with the exception of some portions retained as relics.

Several friends now present, with myself, assembled here for most if not all the schooling we ever received, many of whom in this very room passed through the primary and intermediate classes up to what in those dark days of exclusive colored schools was dignified with the misnomer of 'higher class.' But, three years since, after a hard-fought battle, the doors of the district schools were opened to all children, irrespective of complexional differences.

But, independent of its history as a church and a school-house, this building has won for itself celebrity by the various meetings held within its walls by the colored citizens and the friends for promoting the cause of human brotherhood. Even its very basement is redolent of freedom; for in this very room where we are now assembled was formed the pioneer New England Anti-Slavery Society, in January, 1832. Soon after commenced its pulpit occupancy by Mr. Garrison, the Grimkes, and other advocates of immediate emancipation.

In 1834, when pro-slavery was so rampant in Boston that not a church could be obtained in which to hold a concert of prayer for the abolition of slavery, this church promptly responded to the letter from the Anti-Slavery Society, and communicated, through John T. Hilton, its Clerk, the unanimous vote, that 'the church was at their service whenever

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In 1840, when New Organization raised its mischievous front, urging the throwing of Garrison and the *Liberator* overboard, unless woman's voice was hushed, when woman's heart was bleeding, and the Anti-Slavery platform narrowed to sectarian dimensions and brought under the control of sectarian exclusiveness;—not so, said the colored men and women; and in this place that verdict was accordingly rendered.

The colored citizens of the olden time were wont here to celebrate, in a blended civic and military manner, the fourteenth of July, in commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts.

But, as this was but nominal emancipation, having taken place without any formal statute record, the day's observance has become obsolete, or rather superseded by that of the First of August, the anniversary of British West India Emancipation, and which for many years was duly commemorated in Belknap Street Church.

Large and enthusiastic meetings have been repeatedly rallied here to expose, denounce and protest against the iniquitous schemes of the American Colonization Society.

Mr. Garrison and other anti-slavery friends have, within those walls, received the benediction of God-speed on their missions of humanity across the Atlantic, and on returning have been greeted with the welcome of approving hearts and hands.

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Happily, the changed aspects of public sentiment render now unnecessary any such substitute for the citizen's Faneuil Hall.

Modern improvements have converted Belknap Street church and its vestry into acceptable audience-rooms, and which with the Twelfth Baptist Church on Southac street, are ample for the meetings necessary in this locality.

If these remarks had been intended to criticise the pro-slavery and sectarian position of colored churches, pastors and laity, many a painful fact could be presented. It is sufficient now to state, that the growth of anti-slavery ideas, and the consequent increasing opportunities for the enjoyment of equality among their fellow-men, are inducing the intelligent and reformatory colored people to protest against all exclusive institutions.

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