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NEGRO GOVERNORS.

By HON. ORVILLE H. PLATT.

[Read November 21, 1898.]

THE habits, manners and customs of those who have preceded us, possess a strange and fascinating interest. Especially is this true in the case of our immediate ancestors, those who founded and developed our nation and state, and this interest increases as advancement and development go on. All that pertains to the characteristics, methods and mode of life, either public or private, of those who established and conducted the government of Connecticut in its earlier period, not only stimulates our curiosity, but challenges our respect. These manners, habits and customs, so strange and curious now, were natural in their time. A Connecticut citizen in the colonial period, who, like Rip Van Winkle, could have gone to sleep to awake only at the present time, would be much more astonished at prevailing conditions than we are at the conditions which existed in the colonial period.

One of the most curious of the early customs in Connecticut was the election parade with its festivities. It was not as at present an inauguration parade attending the induction into office of a newly-elected governor, but a parade connected with the outgoing of the governor whose term was closing. The records give but an imperfect account of these election parades and it is impossible now to picture them with accuracy. We know little of them except as we retain the tradition of the election sermon and the election cake, things which appeal to both sides of our nature, the spiritual and the physical.

Before the union of the Connecticut and New Haven Colonies, Hartford was most prominent as the seat of colonial government. Each colony had its governors, but our knowledge of what transpired in the Connecticut Colony seems more perfect and complete than in regard to New Haven Colony.

The "election," by which is meant the ascertainment of the vote and the proclamation of the result, was held on the second Thursday of May. In the very early days of the Connecticut Colony, when it consisted of only three towns, Hartford, Windsor and Wethersfield, all the voters went to Hartford to deposit their votes. As the Colony became enlarged by the formation of new towns, the inconvenience of this method led to the practice of voting in the several towns, sealing up the votes, sending them to Hartford, opening the boxes and counting the votes there, and a proclamation of the result. How and where this proclamation was made is now a matter of conjecture only. Probably from the window of the room or building in which the General Court met, and after the State House was built, from a window of the State House. The ballots were thrown into the yard, and the newly elected governor took the oath of office and assumed its duties without other ceremony. But on the day preceding this action, the election parade occurred. The old governor, who usually resided in some other town, was met on his road to Hartford by a company of militia, and escorted to the building where the General Court held its sessions. From this building, and from the State House after it had been erected, a procession, consisting of the Governor and other State officials, the clergy and prominent men residing in Hartford and gathered from the whole State, proceeded to the First Congregational Church, where an election sermon was preached by some distinguished minister who had been selected for that purpose. In the evening at the same church there was singing, or as it was called, a "concert," at which the old fashioned psalms and tunes of those days were employed. People came from all portions of the Colony to attend these election formalities and festivities, and as houses of public entertainment were insufficient to accommodate those who attended, the citizens of Hartford kept open house for the entertainment of their friends, the two most prominent features of which entertainment seem to have been cake and cider.

The good mothers of those days were famous housewives, and their emulation in cake making resulted in a formula for election cake. The receipts which I have obtained differ

slightly and only slightly. I copy one which was given to me by a great-great-granddaughter of Captain Joseph Wadsworth, who hid the charter in the oak :

"ELECTION CAKE.

2 quarts of flour,
1½ lbs. butter and lard (one-half each),
1 lb. raisins (stonéd),
1½ lbs. sugar,
3 nutmegs,
1 pint milk,
4 eggs,
1 gill of rum,
1 teaspoonful of soda,
1 gill of yeast,
Citron or not at pleasure.

Directions.

Make a sponge of the flour, half the butter and sugar, which have been well mixed, the milk and yeast. When light, add the other half of the ingredients, and let it rise again ; then put in the soda and rum, and put it into pans to rise ; then bake."

Whether the election cake and cider were always publicly dispensed is perhaps uncertain, but it is certain that the State paid for the cake and cider on such occasions, for in 1771, as appears by the Colonial Records, Vol. 13, page 507, Ezekial Williams, Esquire, exhibited his account for sundries for preparing cake, cider, cheese, etc., for election, and for attending the Assembly, etc., amounting to £23 and 3s. lawful money, which was allowed in Council. Among the items are :

" For raisins, mace, cloves, etc., for cake,	£2.	10s.	9d.
Mrs. Ledlie for making &c.	£2.	0s.	8d.
For flour,		5s.	10d.
Sixteen dozen pipes at 8d.		10s.	8d.
Tobacco and candles,	£1.	10s.	
Two barrels of cider and portorage,	£1.	4s.	
One man to attend drawing of cider &c,		3s.	
18 lbs. of cheese at 4d.,		7s.	6d."

The other items being for attendance on the General Assembly and sundries.

Of the festivities which occurred at the houses of public entertainment, then called taverns, we know but little. There was doubtless dancing and drinking, for we find, as stated by

Mrs. Earle, one minister wrote sadly "that election day had become a time to meet, smoke, carouse, and swagger, and dishonor God with the greater bravery."

When this custom of the election parade commenced, we are not informed. Probably from the founding of the colony in 1639 there was some parade, but the records are silent. In 1768 there was some misbehavior in the Hartford military company, designated for escort duty, which appeared in fantastic dress and turned the parade into one of the "antique and horrible" sort. The General Assembly took notice of the disrespect and indignity shown them, the result of which was that the officers were exonerated and the members of the company signed an humble apology and implored the forgiveness of the General Assembly, which was granted. Thereupon the Governor's Foot Guard was organized and chartered to perform duty as escort to the Governor on election day. Its uniform was substantially the same as worn by it at the present time.

The last election sermon was preached in 1830, and it is probable that the practice of an inauguration parade with an escort for the newly-elected, instead of the old governor, was instituted at about that time, the features of which have been continued to the present day.

It is said that the negro is an imitator and a mimic. This is undoubtedly true to a certain extent. As a slave, the negro took on much of the style, manner and social characteristics of his master. The bearing of the negro was like that of the family in which he served. There was as much aristocracy in those days among the negroes as among the white people. If deference and respect were accorded to the master, his slave insisted upon the same deference and respect from his fellows. With his native fondness for show, it was, therefore, perhaps natural that he should imitate his master in political affairs, to the extent of electing officers and copying the features of the election parade and festivities. Politics in those early times, equally with religion, absorbed the attention of our forefathers. There was neither mugwump nor agnostic then, and party and religious spirit ran high. The negroes having no voice in political affairs, naturally enough, fell into the curious

habit of holding elections of their own, after the manner of their white masters. If we could understand the intense interest in public affairs which characterized our early history, we should not wonder at the origin of a custom which gave the negro an opportunity to become a politician, an opportunity which, from all that we can learn respecting their elections, he improved to the utmost. There was rivalry and electioneering methods surpassing even the political contests of the present.

When the custom originated, it is impossible to determine. That it prevailed for some time before the Revolution, is clear, and it is probable, I think, that it commenced about 1750. Negroes increased rapidly between 1730 and 1750, and at the latter date numbered, as slaves of course, about 3,500. Prior to that time they were scarcely sufficient in number to have established such a custom. Many of them came with their masters to the election in Hartford, and it is probable that the first elections of negro governors were held in Hartford by the votes of those who had come with their masters to the election ceremonies. As the practice was repeated year after year, the negroes seem to have acted in their respective towns in the same manner as white people, and sent the result to Hartford, where it was formally declared. This was usually done on the Saturday succeeding the State election. Whether there was actual balloting, sealing up of the votes and transmission of the same, or whether some less formal method of ascertaining the sense of the negroes in the different towns prevailed, cannot now be definitely settled. At first the celebration of this event seems to have been without parade, by an entertainment or supper, for which the master of the slave thus elected governor paid. Later, in imitation of the inauguration parade, the Governor elected rode through the streets at the head of a marching procession of negroes, with music and all the accompaniments of a real gubernatorial inauguration.* It is quite probable that an inauguration parade, that is, a parade for the escort of the newly-elected governor, obtained with the negroes much earlier than with the whites. If, as I have suggested, our parade for the seating of a newly-elected governor did

* See frontispiece *Connecticut Magazine*, June, 1899.

not commence before about 1830, the negroes may, perhaps, claim that we copied that feature from them, for their parades were always, as well before as after 1830, in honor of a newly chosen governor. The black Governor thus elected sometimes appointed a Lieutenant-Governor, Sheriffs and Justices of the Peace in different parts of the State, and the government of the negroes by their own officers was thus in a degree established. As in real elections of those early times, they seem to have selected their best and ablest men for office, and while the Governor and other officials had no legal power, they exercised considerable control over the negroes throughout the State. The Governor directed the affairs of his people, and his directions were obeyed. The Justices tried cases, both civil and criminal, rendered judgments and executed punishments. In the eyes of the negro it was undoubtedly quite as great a distinction to be thus elected to office, as in case of their masters it was to be honored by election to places of public trust. This custom was undoubtedly encouraged by the white citizens as a means for the well ordering of the negro population, and the masters frequently called upon the colored officials to settle disputes arising among the negroes, and to punish them for delinquencies.

Hon. Isaac W. Stuart, in his *Sketches of Hartford in the Olden Time*, says :

“The person they selected for the office in question was usually one of much note among themselves, of imposing presence, strength, firmness and volubility, who was quick to decide, ready to command, and able to flog. If he was inclined to be a little arbitrary, belonged to a master of distinction, and was ready to pay freely for diversions—these were circumstances in his favor. Still it was necessary he should be an honest negro, and be, or appear to be, ‘wise above his fellows.’ When elected, he had his aids, his parade, and appointed military officers, sheriffs, and justices of the peace. The precise sphere of his power we cannot ascertain. Probably it embraced matters and things in general among the blacks,—morals, manners and ceremonies. He settled all grave disputes in the last resort, questioned conduct, and imposed penalties and punishments sometimes for vice and misconduct. He was respected as ‘Gubernor,’ say many old gentlemen to us, by the negroes throughout the State. and obeyed almost implicitly.

His parade days were marked by much that was showy, and by some things that were ludicrous. A troop of blacks, sometimes an hundred in number, marching sometimes two and two on foot, sometimes

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mounted in true military style and dress on horseback, escorted him through the streets, with drums beating, colors flying, and fifes, fiddles, clarionets, and every 'sonorous metal' that could be found, 'uttering martial sound.' After marching to their content, they would retire to some large room which they would engage for the purpose, for refreshments and deliberation. This was all done with the greatest regard for ceremony. His ebony excellency would pass through the files of his procession, supported by his aids, with an air of consummate dignity, to his quarters, and there receive the congratulations of his friends, and dispense the favor of his salutations, his opinions and his appointments. One of these occasions, in Hinsdale's tavern, on the site now occupied by Hon. H. Barnard, is well remembered by an old gentleman now living, who informs us that Quaw, a negro then belonging to Col. George Wylls, enacted the Governor at this time to great satisfaction, and was one of the stiffest and proudest 'Darkies' he ever saw."

Such elections were had in Connecticut for a century at least, for, though most allusions to the practice seem to place the date of its discontinuance at about 1820, I am sure from inquiries I have made that it was continued until a much later period. I think the custom originated in Connecticut. It prevailed in Rhode Island equally perhaps with Connecticut, but if it obtained at all in the other New England states the traces of it are very slight. Mrs. Alice Morse Earle says that "there were such elections on the Massachusetts coast," and Thomas Bailey Aldrich refers to them in New Hampshire in his book *An Old Town by the Sea*, an account of the ancient town of Portsmouth. He says, "They (the negroes), annually elected a King and Counselors, and celebrated the event with a procession," and gives an amusing account of a trial before "King Nero," which not being completed at noon, "Cato" the prosecuting attorney proposed that the delinquent should be whipped, and the trial proceed after dinner, so "King Nero" ordered ten lashes for justice so far as the trial had progressed, and ten more at the close of the trial if he should be found guilty. The negroes assembled at the court seemed to approve the sentence, saw the first whipping, and then went home to their mid-day duties.

I cannot find any mention of the practice in Massachusetts other than the foregoing statement by Mrs. Earle. They had indeed what was called a "Nigger Lection," but the term originated from the fact that at the annual election parade negroes

were permitted to assemble with others on the Common, buy gingerbread, drink beer, and indulge in all sorts of diversions, while on the day when the Ancient and Honorable Artillery had a formal parade and chose its officers who received their commissions from the Governor on Boston Common, the negro was not permitted to appear.

The most particular accounts of the custom which I have been able to find have reference to such elections in Rhode Island, where the method of election seems to have been quite different, and where, although the officer elected was called King, his jurisdiction seems to have been confined to a single town. Thomas R. Hazard, in his *Recollections of Olden Times*, page 120, says :

“Updike, pages 177-79, speaks as follows of these negro merry-makings: ‘In imitation of the whites, the negroes held an annual election on the third Saturday in June, when they elected their governor. When the slaves were numerous each town held its election. This annual festivity was looked for with great anxiety. Party spirit was as violent and acrimonious with them as among the whites. The slaves assumed the power and pride and took the relative rank of their masters, and it was degrading to the reputation of the owner if the slave appeared in inferior apparel, or with less money than the slave of another master of equal wealth. The horses of the wealthy landholders were on this day all surrendered to the use of the slaves, and with cues, real or false, head pomatumed and powdered, cocked hat, mounted on the best Narragansett pacers, sometimes with their master’s sword, with their ladies on pillions, they pranced to election, which commenced generally at 10 o’clock. The canvass for votes soon commenced, the tables with refreshments were spread and all friends of the respective candidates were solicited to partake, and as much anxiety would manifest itself, and as much family pride and influence was exercised and interest created, as in other elections, and was preceded by weeks of ‘parliamenting’ (parliamenting.) About one o’clock the vote would be taken by ranging the friends of the respective candidates in two lines under the direction of a chief marshal with assistants. Guy Watson, who distinguished himself in the black regiment under General Greene, at Red Bank, and also at Ticonderoga (and in the capture of Prescott, Updike might have added,) acted as chief marshal after the Revolution until the annual elections ceased. There was generally a tumultuous crisis until the count commenced, when silence was proclaimed, and after that no man could change sides or go from one rank to the other. The chief marshal announced the number of votes for each candidate and in an audible voice proclaimed the name of the governor elected for the ensuing year. The election treat corresponded in extravagance in proportion to the wealth of the master. The defeated candidate was,

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according to custom, introduced by the chief marshal and drank the first toast after the inauguration, and all animosities were forgotten. At dinner the Governor was seated at the head of the long table, under trees or an arbor, with the unsuccessful candidate at his right and his lady at his left. The afternoon was spent in dancing, games of quoits, athletic exercises, &c. As the slaves decreased in number, these elections became more concentrated. In 1795, elections were held in North and South Kingston, but in a few years, one was held in South Kingston only, and they have for years ceased.

The servant of the late E. R. Potter was elected governor about the year 1800. The canvass was very expensive to his master. Soon after the election, Mr. Potter had a conference with the Governor, and stated to him that the one or the other must give up politics, or the expense would ruin them both. Governor John took the wisest course, abandoned politics and retired to the shades of private life.

Notwithstanding what Mr. Updike says, I feel pretty sure that the colored people of South Kingston held their elections long after slavery was abolished. I think I can remember when the last came off, which was after the war with Great Britain in 1812. It took place in the Potter Woods on Rose Hill, when I think Aaron Potter, who was brought up in the Hon. Elisha R. Potter's family, was elected governor, and Abram Perry, who was born under my father's roof, officiated as chief marshal."

Another account is as follows :

"At this time (1756,) there were in Newport over 1800 negroes settled inhabitants, principally slaves, besides many more, the slaves of such as had a temporary residence only. Those creatures of mimic and imitation were generally allowed their own time and amusements on the day of the annual election, when the freemen from all parts of the Colony had the right to reserve their votes in the several towns, and come and put them in on the day of election at Newport, for the Governor, Deputy Governor, Assistants, etc. This was a great day for all kinds of amusements. The military parade in escorting the Governor to the Colony house—the throng of people of every description who followed and made up the procession—the political combatants, ready, as soon as the procession was over, to drive their political bargains, on both sides, busily mingled with the crowd to influence the voters, and aid the cause of their several candidates, filled and choaked up the parade, on Queen street, leading up to the Colony house, insomuch that there was no getting through but by opening a passage with both hands and thus crowd slowly along. In the latter part of the day, when the votes had been received and counted, the crowd became again excessive, anxious to know the result, which when declared, a general rush of the dominant party took place, to obtain a place in the procession to honor their favorite and fortunate candidates on their return to the Governor's lodgings. At this time many a broken head and bloody nose witnessed that the minority although beaten were not conquered.

This crowd, bustle and confusion, together with the general hilarity and dissipation of the day, gave great delight to the young and animated sons of Africa—they amused themselves with personal rencounters &c., such as cudgeling, jumping, wrestling, playing at the various games, and on the musical instruments of their native country; besides dancing, fiddling and drinking.

The blacks, observing the pride which their masters took in their Charter Government, and the ambition with which they strove and contended with one another for honor, office and preferment, conceived the project of imitating the whites by establishing a subordinate jurisdiction and jurisprudence of their own. The old negroes aided in the plan, but not without the approbation of their masters, who foresaw that a sort of police managed wholly by the slaves would be more effectual in keeping them within the bounds of morality and honesty, than if the same authority were exercised by the whites.

Their election took place some time in June, and every negro who had a pig and sty at that time was allowed to vote, and none other. They met on their day of election and went through the ceremony of escorting the Governor to the place appointed, which in fair weather was frequently under a large spreading tree which stood in the place where the Liberty Tree now stands at the head of Thames street, where seats were provided for the incumbents of office, and a table for the Secretary &c. Each freeman put in his ballot when his name was audibly called and then recorded. On the votes being counted and the election declared, a general shout announced that the struggle was over—and here, contrary to their masters' practice, the vanquished and victors united in innocent and amusing fun and frolic—every voice upon its highest key, in all the various languages of Africa, mixed with broken and ludicrous English, filled the air, accompanied with the music of the fiddle, tambourine, the banjo, drum, &c. The whole body moved in the train of the Governor-elect, to his master's house, where, on their arrival a treat was given by the gentlemen newly elected, which ended the ceremonials of the day.

The judicial departments consisted of the Governor, who sometimes sat in judgment, in cases of appeal. The other magistrates and judges tried all charges brought against any negro, by another, or by a white person. Masters complained to the Governor and magistrates of the delinquencies of their slaves, who were tried, condemned and punished at the discretion of the Court. The punishment was sometimes quite severe, and what made it the more effectual, was that it was the judgment of their peers, people of their own rank and color had condemned them, and not their masters, by an arbitrary mandate.

The punishment was by bastinado, with a large cobbling board, the number of strokes ordered by the sentence. Execution was done by the high sheriff or his deputy—and what made it more salutary in restraining the immorality, infidelity, petty larceny, or other delinquencies, was the sneers and contempt of their equals.

This practice of holding negro elections was continued without interruption until the British troops took possession of Newport in the year 1776."

I have quoted thus fully from Rhode Island sources for the reason that I find no description in Connecticut annals so full and precise. It is quite probable that the election proceedings differed in different localities.

Prof. Fowler, in *Dawson's Historical Magazine*, Vol. 23, says, "Negroes had their annual election of Governor, some of whom were called Kings in remembrance of the Kings of Guinea."

I have already quoted from Mr. Aldrich that Kings were elected in New Hampshire. I had supposed until recently that Prof. Fowler's suggestion that the elected Governors who were of royal Guinea birth were called Kings, was accurate, but I find upon inquiry that at one of the later elections in Connecticut both a Governor and King were elected on the same day. In what respects the offices or their duties and privileges differed, I have been unable to ascertain.

I believe, as I have already said, that at first all the elections were held at Hartford, the jurisdiction of the Governor extending throughout the State, but in later years elections were had in different parts of the State, the official jurisdiction embracing a county or an arbitrary group of towns, sometimes only a single town. As the negroes were most numerous in New Haven County the practice prevailed in this section much later than in any other portion of the State. In the old town of Derby including Seymour, or Humphreysville as it was formerly called, it continued until a period easily within the recollection of persons living.

The names of many of these negro Governors have been preserved in local tradition and in town histories. Quaw has already been spoken of in the quotation from Isaac W. Stuart, who mentions also Peleg Knot who belonged to Jeremiah Wadsworth. Boston, who belonged to a Mr. Nichols, who held office for many years, "was buried with funeral honors, his cocked hat and sword laid upon his coffin, which was carried into the South Congregational Church where Dr. Flint pronounced a funeral eulogy." In Norwich the grave-yard contains a stone with this inscription—"In memory of Boston Trowtrow, the Governor of the African tribe in this town, who died 1772." Another Norwich Governor, Sam Hun'ton,

slave of Governor Samuel Huntington, is described by Miss Caulkins as "after his election, riding through the town on one of his master's horses, adorned with painted gear, his aids on each side, *a la militaire*, himself puffing and swelling with pomposity, sitting bolt upright and moving with a slow majestic pace, as if the universe was looking on. When he mounted or dismounted, his aids flew to his assistance, holding his bridle, putting his feet into the stirrup, and bowing to the ground before him. The Great Mogul in a triumphal procession never assumed an air of more perfect self-importance than the negro Governor."

Another noted official was Caesar, who is spoken of as from Durham and also Wallingford, in which town I think he lived in his old age and died. He was one of the Kings and many are the traditional anecdotes of King Caesar. Professor Fowler writes of him thus :

"The last of the dynasty in Durham was Caesar, whom I have often seen. On election day he wore what seemed a kingly crown, 'the round and top of sovereignty.' And from his admiring subjects he received their voluntary homage. He wore a sword, but whether a 'dagger of lath' or of steel, I do not remember. He was escorted by an indefatigable drummer, and a fifer of eminence. After the election ceremonies were finished, all the negroes rejoiced in the feast. The whole was a farce, but it had its attractions. It was something like the Saturnalia of the Romans, the Carnival of the Catholics, of the past time of High Jinks, in which Pleydel personated a monarch, as described in Guy Mannering. This, I believe, was the expiring effort of negro royalty in Durham. Caesar, not long after, like Charles the Fifth, abdicated his crown, and retired in the 'mild majesty' of private life, and 'troops of friends' in old age."

An extract from Hinman's "American Revolution" has been often referred to, and is so interesting that I venture to quote it at length. Before doing so however, a word of explanation may be necessary with reference to Governor Skene, who figures in the transaction.

Philip Skene the elder distinguished himself in the British army before he came to America in 1756 with his regiment, which was engaged in the region of Lakes George and Champlain, Crown Point and Ticonderoga, of which fort he became Commander in 1759. He acquired a large tract of land at the head of Lake Champlain and founded a settlement which was

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called Skenesboro, renamed Whitehall in 1788. He exchanged out of his regiment and, retiring to Skenesboro, devoted himself to building it up. He went to England in 1774 and was there appointed, and received the title of, Lieutenant Governor of Ticonderoga and Crown Point. His son, Major Philip Skene, was left in charge of Skenesboro during his father's absence, and at the time of the capture of Fort Ticonderoga, Skene the younger was brought with the prisoners taken at Ticonderoga and Skenesboro, to Connecticut. Gov. Skene, returning from England about that time, was suspected by the Continental Congress of designs inimical to the Colonies. It was reported that he had authority to raise a regiment in America, and upon the ground that he was a "dangerous partisan of administration," a committee of which John Adams was chairman, was appointed to examine his papers. Upon the report of the committee he was released from arrest and permitted to go at large anywhere within eight miles of Philadelphia. But at a later date under a resolution of the Continental Congress, he was sent to Wethersfield or Middletown, Connecticut, "there to be confined on his parole, and not to go out of the bounds prescribed to him by Governor Trumbull," so that at the time of the occurrence to be referred to, both Governor Skene and his son were held as prisoners in the neighborhood of Hartford.

The extract is as follows :

"At this early period of the war (May 11th, 1776), the Americans were jealous and alarmed at the rustling of every leaf, and watchful of every movement. At this time, Cuff was Governor of the blacks in Connecticut. He had held the office for ten years, and on the 11th of May aforesaid, he resigned his office to John Anderson, a negro servant of Skeen, which resignation and appointment were in the words and figures following, viz :

"I, Governor Cuff of the Niegro's in the province of Connecticut, do Resign my Governmentshipe to John Anderson, Niegor Man to Governor Skene.

And I hope that you will obeye him as you have Done me for this ten years past, when Colonel Willis' Niegor Dayed I was the next. But being weak and unfit for that office di Resine the said Governmentshipe to John Anderson.

I: John Anderson having the Honour to be appointed Governor over you I will do my utmost to serve you in Every Respect, and I hope you will obey me accordingly.

JOHN ANDERSON, Governor

over the Niegors in Connecticut.

Witnesses present,

The late Governor Cuff, Hartford,
Quackow,
Petter Wadsworth,
Titows,
Pomp Willis,
John Jones,
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May, 1776. At this appointment, the citizens of Hartford became alarmed; Gov. Skeen was at once suspected of being concerned in his negro's election, with some design upon the citizens of the State. Therefore the Governor and Council of the colony convened at Hartford, took the subject into solemn consideration, and appointed a committee to investigate the subject, of which Jesse Root Esq., was chairman; the committee took with them a constable and immediately repaired to Gov. Skeen's lodgings, found his door locked, and the governor absent. One of the committee remained to guard his room, while others proceeded after him, and found him returning home; and brought him before the committee, and on enquiry whether he had carried on any correspondence with our enemies, he answered he had sacredly kept his engagements in his parole, and had no papers but his own private papers, and offered his keys to the committee to examine his papers. He was asked if he had any previous knowledge of the negroes electing his servant Governor of the negroes, or had any hand in effecting said election—which he denied, except a few words that passed between a Mr. Williams and his negro, which he supposed was mere sport, and had no hand in bringing it to pass, directly or indirectly. He was enquired of if he gave his negro money to make a feast for the negroes—he answered that he gave him a half-joe to keep election, but that he knew nothing of the treat at Knox's; that on Friday he heard his negro was chosen governor, and was fearful it might excite jealousy, and even avoided speaking to him to avoid suspicion, and declared upon his honor he had no papers about him.

The committee then proceeded to examine the negro governor, who stated that one Sharper, a negro man, first mentioned to him about being governor, and that he informed the negroes, if they would elect him, he would treat them to the amount of \$20, and it had cost him \$25, but declared that no regular officer or soldier had spoken to him on the subject; that there was no scheme or plot, and that he had done it as a matter of sport, and intended no injury to the country, but had the curiosity of seeing an election; that he had been informed the negroes chose a governor annually, and thought he would set up for it. He stated that he got his \$25 by going in a vessel on the lakes, where he had certain perquisites of his own.

The committee made many other enquiries of Gov. Skeen and his servants, together with the Captain, (Delaplace). And ex-Governor Cuff stated that he had been advised to resign his office to Skeen's negro by some of his black friends and some of the regulars, and that he appointed him without an election, as some of them declared they would not have

a tory for a governor. One Friday night after the election, the negroes had a dance and entertainment at Mr. Knox's in Hartford, at an expense of 50s., which was paid by others, and Gov. Skeen's negroes were not allowed to pay any thing. This bill was paid by Majors French and Dermet; which facts were stated to the Governor and Council by Jesse Root Esq., Chairman, May 22nd, 1776."

Regarding the choice of Anderson, an entry in the Journal of Major French, one of the Ticonderoga prisoners, under date of Thursday, May 9th, 1776, says:

"The election of a governor etc. came on, when the old one (Trumbull) was re-elected; he marched in great state, escorted by his guards in scarlet turned up with black, to the State House, and from thence to the meeting house. The next day the Negroes, according to annual custom, elected a governor for themselves, when John Anderson, Gov. Skene's black man, was chosen; at night he gave a supper and ball to a number of his electors, who were very merry and danced till about three o'clock in the morning."

It will be observed that the inscription on Trowtrow's tombstone in Norwich, speaks of him as being governor of the African tribe in that town, and it is evident that the elections which at first gave the governor jurisdiction over the negroes throughout the State became localized, and thus their official jurisdiction was diminished. So Prof. Fowler, when he speaks of Caesar, who was Governor about 1820, as being the last of the dynasty in Durham, doubtless refers to a local and not a State election.

The practice of electing negro governors was probably discontinued except in New Haven County about the year 1820, from which fact Stuart, in writing his sketches of *Hartford in the Olden Time*, inferred that it was discontinued entirely at or about that date, though as I have already remarked, it was continued in New Haven County to a much later period.

After I had collected most of the material for this paper, Miss Jane DeForest Shelton of Derby published a very interesting article in *Harper's Monthly*,* in which she has gathered up the recollections of many of the older inhabitants of that locality, and I am partially indebted to her for such information. She thinks that "before 1800 the high office and attend-

* March, 1894.

ant festivities had drifted to the old town of Derby." It is probable that negro governors with limited areas of jurisdiction were elected at an earlier period than 1800, and it is also quite certain that such elections were held in other sections than Derby much later than the year 1800. Many governors were elected at New Haven as well as at Derby, though the very latest elections were undoubtedly at the latter place. But I quote from the article referred to, what Miss Shelton says about the governors elected in Derby.

"The first governor from Derby was Quosh, a native African, stolen when a boy and sold to the slave-traders. He was a man of immense size and herculean strength. Quosh was the slave of Mr. Agar Tomlinson at Derby Neck, the owner of a large estate and a number of slaves. These latter were quartered in a small house in touch with that of his master, and under the immediate control of Quosh. When he was called to assume the high office of Governor, his dignity and self-importance were so sensibly affected that it was commonly said that Uncle Agar (Mr. Tomlinson) lived with the Governor." Quosh held the office many years, and was a decided power over his following. His ability and faithfulness to his master are vouched for by the will of the latter, probated in 1800, by which Quosh and his wife, Rose (formerly the slave of Rev. Mr. Yale), were given their freedom, their little house, the use of a certain track of land, a barn was to be built, he was to have a yoke of oxen, a good cow, and necessary farming implements. Quosh then took the name of Freeman, but as "Governor Quosh" is best remembered.

Little Roman (his wife's name was Venus), who was so short that his sword dragged on the ground, was Lieutenant Governor under Quosh, and Eben Tobias in turn held the higher office. His son, Hon. Eben D. Bassett, was well educated, and during the civil war exerted himself successfully in enlisting colored soldiers. Through President Grant's administration of eight years he served creditably as our minister to Haiti.

Seymour, originally called Chusetown, and later Humphreysville, had a noted governor in Juba Weston; he having been owned by the family of General Humphreys, was 'quality' among the colored people. Juba served a number of years, and his sons, Nelson and Wilson, were likewise honored, Wilson Weston being the last Governor, a few years before our late civil war.

The formalities of the election have not come down to us, save in one instance, when it was by test of wind and muscle, the successful candidate being he who first climbed a steep and almost unscalable sand bank. Eben Tobias, decked with feathers and flying ribbons, won that day, and it was in his drilling of the escort that the command "Fire and fall off" was literally interpreted by some of the men throwing themselves from their horses.

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The white customs were carefully followed. The people assembled at Derby, Oxford, Waterbury, or Humphreysville, as was ordered, the Governor and his escort in uniforms—anything but uniform—that were hired or borrowed, or improvised for the occasion, according to fancy or ability. Mounted on such steeds as could be impressed into the service—remnants of their former selves—they mustered outside the village, and with all the majesty and glitter of feathers and streaming ribbons and uniform, with fife and drum, made their way by the main thoroughfares, sometimes stopping to fire a salute before a squire's house, to the tavern which was to be the center of festivity. Then the Governor, dismounting, delivered his speech from the porch, and the troops "trained." Then the clans gathered with more and more enthusiasm for the election ball. Families went entire, a babe in arms being no drawback, as the tavern-keeper set apart a room and provided a caretaker for them. Sometimes more than a dozen little woolly-heads would be under surveillance, while the light-hearted mothers shuffled and tripped to the sound of the fiddle. New Haven and Hartford, as well as intervening towns, were represented. Supper was served for fifty cents each, and they danced and feasted with a delight the more sedate white man can hardly appreciate, spinning out the night and often far into the next day. To their credit, it must be recorded, that although they were not strict prohibitionists, their indulgence was limited. The influence of the Governors was for moderation, which was generally observed.

A newspaper notice of more than fifty years ago strikes the key-note of the great day.

ATTENTION, FREEMAN!

There will be a general election of the colored gentlemen of Connecticut, October first, twelve o'clock noon. The day will be celebrated in the evening by a dance at Qarner's tavern, when it will be shown that there is some power in muscle, catgut and rosin.

By order of the Governor,

From Headquarters.

Quosh Freeman's only son, Roswell, often called 'Roswell Quosh' was also one of the Governors. He was very tall, very thin, and very dark, by profession a fox-hunter, therefore called 'the farmer's benefactor,' and the board on which he dressed the fox skins shows a record of 331 foxes killed."

Hon. Eben D. Bassett writes me his recollections of negro governors as follows:

"My father was the great-grandson of an African Prince. His father Tobias, or Tobiah, was 'raised' in the family of Capt. Wooster of Derby, fought in the war of independence, and was recognized as a man of tact, courage and unusual intelligence for a person of his time and condition.

My father was a mulatto, born in the family of Squire Bassett of Derby, the day of the battle of Trafalgar, October 21st, 1805.

He inherited somewhat more than his father's natural intelligence, and was of the very finest physical mould, being over six feet tall and admirably proportioned. He was besides, ready of speech and considered quite witty. Indeed, his witty sayings were rife all over the region where he was known; they are even still quoted, and within two years I have heard them used by speakers at the reunions of our Republican League in New Haven. He died in 1869.

Under the circumstances herein referred to, it was altogether natural that he should be, as he actually was, brought forward and 'elected' one of the so-called 'Negro Governors' of Connecticut. I remember that he held the office two or three terms, and I remember, too, how Sundays and nights he used to pore over books on military tactics and study up the politics of the State."

Mr. Bassett also says:

"At first the 'Negro Governor' was chosen for the whole State. But in my day that 'official' was elected for different localities. I think that then the election was more by *viva voce* vote and caucus, than by ballot. The affair was always accompanied with a farcical military display, a big dinner and a ball. It generally ran through two days. These features certainly existed much later than 1836-1837, for I was born in 1833."

I had hoped to be able to fix with accuracy the date when the last negro governor was elected in Connecticut, but I find difficulty in doing so. Old persons who remember the fact that a particular negro was governor, naturally fix the date of the occurrence, and that being their latest recollection, infer that the practice was discontinued at about that period. My inquiries convince me that negro elections were certainly kept up in the neighborhood of Derby until the year 1856. I feel quite confident that I myself witnessed a parade for the inauguration of a negro governor in Broadway, New Haven, in the spring of 1851, the year in which I first came to New Haven County. It may have been some other negro parade or celebration, but all the characteristics of the inauguration parades, as they are described by writers and old persons who witnessed them, were present on that occasion. The principal personage was on horseback, dressed in what might be called a somewhat fantastic uniform, accompanied by aides, preceded by a band of music and followed by a procession of negroes partly on horseback and partly on foot.

People in Woodbridge and vicinity remember an election parade there, probably about the year 1838 or 1839, which from certain circumstances attending it, they incline to think was the inauguration of the last negro governor elected. Before this the old Quinnipiac Hotel in New Haven, kept by Col. Standleton Pendleton, for whom Henry L. Hotchkiss was a clerk, had frequently been the place at which the election supper and festivities were had. Hotchkiss moved to Woodbridge and kept a hotel at that place. His suppers there became popular, so that for some years the election festivities were in Woodbridge. On the occasion to which I refer, the Governor-elect is said to have ridden a cream-colored horse with white mane and tail, belonging to Samuel Barrows. The white boys and young men interfered with the parade, shouting "Cuff, Cuff; Nigger, Nigger," and at last undertook to pull the Governor off his horse. This brought about a serious scrimmage in which the negroes got the best of it, one of the attacking parties being thrown into a near-by pig pen. Prosecutions followed, the result of which I have not been able to ascertain. It is said that Jonathan Stoddard and Silas Mix were attorneys in the case. The general impression in Woodbridge, occasioned doubtless by the fact that this particular action is definitely fixed in the memory of the people there, is that after these circumstances the negroes ceased to elect governors, but this must be a mistake, as Mr. Bassett would have then been at most only six years old.

The recollections of Mr. C. S. A. Davis, obtained before his death, are extremely interesting. I quote from a letter written by him to Hon. N. D. Sperry, December 25th, 1893.

He says:

"I received your letter by due course of mail, but I am afraid that I cannot give you the information you seek. From my earliest recollection the negroes met at Humphreysville and elected their Governor and other officers. About the year 1820 they met at Lewis Alling's, about four miles from New Haven, but he gave them so poor a dinner that they never went there again, but went back to Humphreysville and elected their officers for quite a number of years. They elected Jubal Weston, Governor in the year 1825; after electing their Governor they elected William Lamson of New Haven, King, and he was after that called King Lamson. I remember the date from the fact that it was the year that the Eagle Bank failed. About the year of 1832 or 1833, they elected

Quash Piere of New Haven, Governor. He was a mulatto from the West Indies, and was brought to New Haven by Captain William Pinto; he was so elated with his election that he had a gold-headed cane made and had engraved on its head 'Quash Piere, Governor of Connecticut;' during the year he went one night to steal chickens taking his cane with him, but he got scared and ran, leaving his cane in the coop, so he was arrested and fined, and then the negroes called a convention and deposed him and elected Thomas Johnson of New Haven, in his place. He was at that time a carman in the employ of Timothy and Stephen Bishop, merchants, on State Street. In the year of 1837, when I was the trying magistrate of New Haven, there were eleven negroes brought before me for playing poker. They all pleaded guilty and I fined them four dollars each and costs, as the statute required, and they all paid the fine and costs, among the number was Governor Johnson, and I think he was the last Governor that was ever elected by the negroes, as the custom was given up about that time."

King Lamson* to whom Mr. Davis refers, was well known in New Haven both favorably and unfavorably. Favorably as the contractor who repaired Long Wharf, and unfavorably as the proprietor of the place known as "The Liberia."

Miss Shelton, in the article from which I have quoted, concludes that the practice was discontinued only a few years before the civil war. She has kindly given me the grounds upon which she forms this conclusion. In passing; however, I may say that the recollection of Mr. Bassett must bring the practice down into the forties, and Mr. Othniel I. Martin of Wallingford tells me that he distinctly remembers negro suppers at Woodbury, the hotel at that place having become very popular with the negroes, in the years 1842, 1843, 1844 and 1845. He seems to be, and is I think, accurate in his memory.

The older persons in Derby who have any recollection of the subject agree that two sons of the elder Governor Weston, "Jubal," "Juba," or "Jube," as he was called, were also Governors. Their names were Nelson and Wilson, and it is the universal belief in that vicinity that Wilson Weston was the last Governor. The widow of the elder Governor Weston is still living, but her recollection of dates is indistinct. Miss Shelton says that the widow Weston when a girl lived with her aunt, Mrs. Sanford, and from dates within her knowledge, could not have married before 1830. It is not reasonable to suppose that her two sons Nelson and Wilson would have been

* N. H. Col. Hist. Soc. Papers, V., 98.

as a mulatto from the Captain William Pinto; gold-headed cane made verner of Connecticut; ens taking his cane with e in the coop, so he was convention and deposed t, in his place. He was y and Stephen Bishop, when I was the trying groes brought before me fined them four dollars y all paid the fine and and I think he was the es, as the custom was

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electd governors until they were about 25 years old; Mrs. Barber, daughter of Mr. DeWolf, now living in Seymour, came there in 1856 and says that she distinctly remembers an election which took place soon after her arrival; at that date Wilson Weston, agreed by all to have been the last Governor elected, was about 25 years of age. It is also quite well established that there was an election supper in 1856 at the hotel which had been long known as Mosher's hotel, in Humphreysville. John H. Mosher, for many years proprietor of that famous tavern, died in August, 1855, and the hotel was leased for the year 1856 to Mr. James Bradley. It is quite certain that an election supper was served during the term of Mr. Bradley's lease. It is thus settled as well as anything depending on recollection of dates can be settled, that there was an election of negro Governor in the year 1856. It is probable though not certain that such election was the last one in the State.

The dignity of the office seems to have gradually decreased until the later elections carried with them very little of authority and were significant only as they furnished an opportunity for a parade of lessened proportion and splendor, a supper, a dance, and a jolly good time for the negroes.