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Civil Rights Fighter
Philanthropist

NOTED NEGRO'S IN RHODE ISLAND

GEORGE HENRY

1816-1900
Birth date in his book 1819--1900

Birth date in Heathman about biography

George Henry was born in Virginia in 1819 of slave parents and spent most of his early years in slavery. Not being satisfied with farm work he went to sea in 1831 as a cook on a coastal schooner, the Llevelyn, which was engaged in running timber from Virginia to Baltimore. The knowledge acquired of different grades of timber became so great that when the aqueduct was built across the Georgetown River, the selection of all the piles was left to him entirely.

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On his last trip as skipper he left the ship in Baltimore, going to Philadelphia and on to Providence in 1847, leaving the land of slavery. He soon found a position on a vessel plying between Providence and New York left the sea and followed other pursuits. He became sexton of St. Stephen's Church on George Street where he stayed for 25 years. In the meantime he married Mrs. Hester Jones, a widow with two children.

In 1855, he entered a very bitter contest for public school rights becoming identified with politics. With Dowing and Jefferson he initiated and maintained a long fight for equal school privileges in R. I. ending successfully in 1871. 1866

In 1872 he was drawn for the jury in the Supreme Court for five weeks, being the first Negro to serve on a R. I. Jury.

On the repeal of the intermarriage laws; which John F. Toby, Chr. of the House Judiciary Committee, opposed, Mr. Henry worked hard on account of his stand and remarks to defeat him in three successive elections with other leaders of the Negro race.

A few years later he led an assault on the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, forcing them to give somewhat near equal benefits to colored people.

He was associated with the Young Men's Friendly Assistant Society, Franklin Lyceum, Rising Daughters of Zion, the Union League, the Park Association and was one of the founders of the Burnside National Guards. He was a member of St. Stephen's Church.

In 1894 he presented to Ives Post #13, G.A.R. Department of R. I., an immense volume designed to contain personal war sketches. This book cost \$100.00, and the sketches were compiled and written by William A. Heathman, Esq., also a personal sketch of the donor on August 4, 1894. Mr. Heathman was Post Historian.

Ann. Evening Bulletin January 24, 1900