

BALTIMORE'S FIRST NAACP CALLED ITSELF THE...

Brotherhood Of Liberty

In sixteen years, 1885 to 1902, it secured admission of the first colored lawyer to the bar, appointment of first colored teachers and principals in public schools, erection of first new school building for colored Children — organization of the first convention of Baptist churches.

And in addition the Brotherhood established the AFRO-AMERICAN in 1892 and the 2nd Branch of the NAACP.

By John Jasper

Everybody in Baltimore knows about the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

It was founded in 1901 and has over 300,000 members today; 20,000 of them in Maryland.

Few people know about Baltimore's first NAACP, organized June 22, 1885 — 73 years ago.

For light on a little known organization, which performed miracles in its day, the city can thank A. B. Koger who recently published a 23-page pamphlet, on the life story of Rev. Dr. Harvey Johnson.

DR. JOHNSON was pastor of Union Baptist Church, a pioneer civic leader and the founder of the "Brotherhood of Liberty."

Actually, Rev. Harvey Johnson called in four other well-known pastors for the meeting of the Brotherhood of Liberty. They were, according to Mr. Koger:

The Rev. W. M. Alexander, pastor of Sharon Baptist Church; the Rev. J. C. Allen, pastor of First Baptist Church;

the Rev. W. C. Larson, pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church, and the Rev. W. N. Braxton, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church.

WHEN THE Brotherhood was organized, there was not a single colored teacher in Baltimore City.

There was no high school for colored children.

Separate colored schools had a "white teachers Colored persons passed examinations and the school board refused to appoint them as teachers.

No new school building had ever been built for colored pupils.

Statutes forbade admission of colored lawyers to practice in Baltimore, and colored people were systematically barred from jury service.

The avowed purpose of the Brotherhood of Liberty was "to use legal means to procure and maintain the right of citizenship for colored people."

THE FIRST hearing cost Dr. Harvey Johnson personally \$145) was a hearing before the Supreme Bench, which ruled for the first time

Dr. Harvey Johnson, distinguished by his white hair and long, white whiskers, was a familiar sight on Druid Hill Avenue until 1923.

He built Union Baptist Church and pastored it for 51 years—its membership once numbered 3,028.

The old church on North Street cost \$20,000. The present church, built in 1905, cost \$57,756.

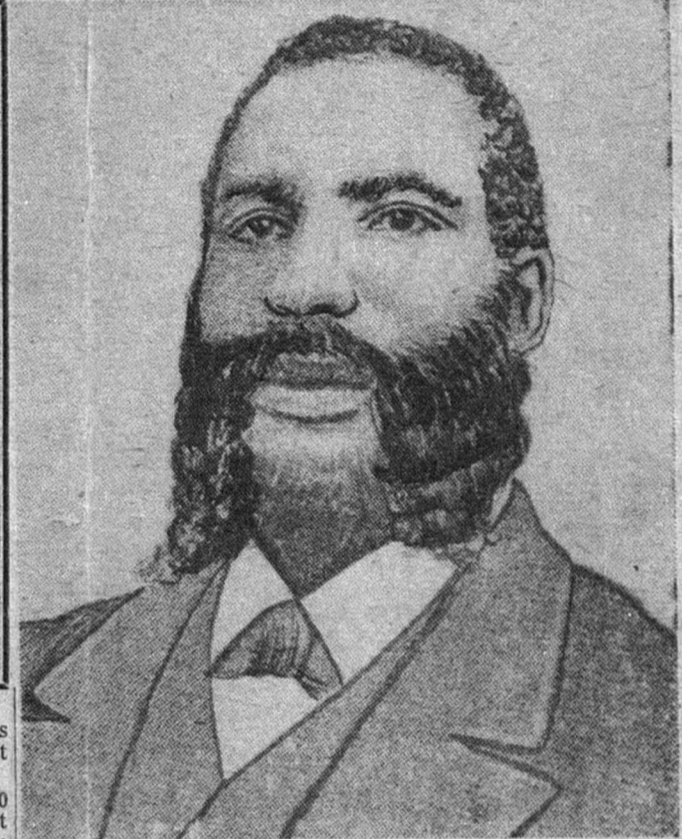
During his administration at Union, 15 Baptist churches, including First Baptist, Macedonia and Perkins Square were established.

From his congregation were ordained 11 ministers including such distinguished characters as Rev. Wm. A. Credit, founder of Downingtown, Pa., Industrial School; Rev. Wm. M. Alexander, Rev. P. C. Neal, Rev. C. H. Jones and Rev. Garnett Waller.

Memorials to him are a junior high school, Union Baptist Church and its new Harvey Johnson Educational Center.

Dr. Johnson died January 12, 1923, at the age of 79. A special granite memorial stone marks his grave in Laurel Cemetery.

A son, Harvey, Jr., one of three children, still survives.



Dr. Harvey Johnson

that a colored person could practice law in Maryland.

No qualified person could be found in Baltimore. Rev. Harvey Johnson "imported" Everett J. Waring from Howard University in Washington.

Waring was admitted to practice Oct. 10, 1855.

WITH THIS first colored lawyer to advise it, the Brotherhood petitioned and appeared before the City Council, the Board of School Commissioners and the city courts.

The school board had said, there were not enough colored kids in N.W. Baltimore to warrant a public elementary school.

North West Baltimore was then a mixed area like Forest Park is today.

The Brotherhood enrolled 300 pupils at Shiloh Baptist Church, Laurens and Calhoun Streets, and hired three teachers. That settled it, the school Board was convinced.

The first colored public school teacher and colored principal were appointed (Fannie Barbour — George Biddle).

For colored children was built at Riggs and Carrollton Avenues. It wasn't occupied immediately, because whites in the neighborhood made a determined fight to make it an all white school.

THE STATE had an infamous Bastardy Law which protected white women only. The Brotherhood used the courts to have the discrimination removed.

A colored man, Briggs, was lynched in Frederick. The Brotherhood offered \$500 for "arrest and conviction of the hoodlums."

A colored woman was raped in Baltimore June 1889, by four white men. The Brotherhood pressed for a speedy trial and obtained a settlement out of court from the families of the four rapists.

COLORED AMERICANS, exported to Navassa Island in the West Indies to collect Guano, rebelled under starvation wages and killed company officials.

Twenty-seven of them were brought to Baltimore's U.S. District Court to be tried for murder.

Two Brotherhood lawyers defended the men, won the praise of the court, secured some acquittals.

The trials and appeals, lasting several months, stirred the whole country.

The case is known now as the famous Navassa Riots.

THE REV. HARVEY JOHNSON and the Brotherhood of Liberty helped sponsor two other movements.

One failed. One succeeded. The failure: an attempt to persuade the U.S. Government to purchase the entire state of Texas and colonize it with colored citizens from the states. The success — a Brotherhood of Liberty on a national



Ralph Cook, first football coach at Douglass High School, presents a diamond brooch to Miss Fannie Barbour, first teacher in Baltimore. The presentation took place in 1934.



George Biddle, one of Baltimore's first school teachers.

scale. The Rev. Harvey Johnson was the Baltimore delegate to a conference of national leaders at Niagara, Canada in 1901. He reviewed what had been accomplished in Baltimore, and advocated a national Brotherhood of Liberty.

Historians agree, says Mr. Koger, that out of the Niagara movement came the NAACP. "What was never mentioned is that the Rev. Harvey Johnson was, very largely, father of the whole idea."

When the NAACP was finally organized, Baltimore became the second branch to be established.

The Rev. Harvey Johnson helped organize it and nominated the Rev. Garnett Waller its first president.

INDIRECTLY THE spirit of the Brotherhood affected life of the city in two other areas.

1. The white Baptist Union refused full membership to colored churches and their pastors.

The Rev. Harvey Johnson, soon after organizing the Brotherhood in 1885, founded the Colored Baptist Convention of Maryland in 1898.

2. **TO INFORM** the people of their liberties and enlist their aid in the struggle for freedom, a weekly newspaper was necessary. The AFRO-AMERICAN was established in 1892 and its first editor was a Baptist pastor and charter member of the Brotherhood of Liberty, Rev. Wm. M. Alexander.



A. Briscoe Koger