

## J. M. Langston speaker for emancipation day event

By JAMES SANDS

Special Correspondent

GALLIPOLIS — Many people today seem to forget that the Bill of Rights guarantees the separation of church and state and not the separation of religion and politics.

The plain fact of the matter is that religious groups have always been involved in the political process, to have their ideas heard in the political marketplace.

In Gallia history Methodist preachers formed the central committee of the Prohibition Party for many years. Some even served on the central committee of the Republican Party.

In the black community partisan political rallies were even held in churches. For instance in 1874 Republican rallies were held at the Buck Ridge Colored Baptist Church and the Harris Colored Baptist Church.

In addition the annual Emancipation Proclamation celebrations in Gallia history were always a good mixture of religion and politics. The event was usually partly planned by churches, but generally included political speeches as well.

The first Emancipation celebration that we have record of was the one held in 1876:

"On Friday the colored citizens of Gallipolis celebrated their Emancipation Proclamation by raising a flag, reading the Proclamation and an explanatory letter from President Lincoln, by Miss Gee and speeches by Capts. Reynolds and Phelps of Point Pleasant. There were over 1,200 persons present. The pole is a beautiful one and will do credit to any class or party in the world. It stands at the upper end of the city." (Gallipolis Journal).

That same year organizers of the Emancipation days advertised that Frederick Douglas would speak in

September. After twice assembling large crowds on two different days, it was decided that Douglas was detained elsewhere and so they sought J. M. Langston.

In 1881 the Emancipation celebration was held in the Kent Grove with W. H. Brown as the president of the day. The program, which began at 9:30 a.m., included music by a band, reading of the Emancipation Proclamation, prayer, and political speeches.

In 1887 the Emancipation day was moved to Vinton where the crowd was reported at between 6,000 and 10,000. The people were addressed in the morning by Kent and Rev. Willis of Morgan Township. In the afternoon the Rev. Philip Tolliver, Governor Foraker and General Grosvenor gave talks. Mr. Foraker must have told the group everything he knew and then some because his speech lasted two hours.

The 1887 Emancipation day was so successful that other Gallia communities began to fight for the honor of hosting it — "Cheshire announced her intention of holding the next Emancipation celebration in Watson's grove next year." (Journal).

In 1889 the event was scheduled for the fairground but rain forced them to the court house where the guest speaker was J. M. Langston. Wrote the Journal: "Langston has the reputation of being one of the ablest speakers of this country, and he well sustained his reputation."

Langston was founder of the National Equal Rights League in 1864 which campaigned to give blacks the vote. He was also the founder of the law department at Howard University. It is interesting that in 1889 the Emancipation celebration was broken up into two parts. In the afternoon Langston gave a general speech "that avoided all allusion to politics," but the evening speeches were "true



**BUILT IN 1874 WAS** the New Hope Baptist Church on State Route 554 near Rio Grande. The church sometimes was referred to as the Harris Colored Baptist Church because it was close to Harrisburg, but there's no assurance that this was ever an official name. In 1874 a Republican rally was held here as well as at Providence Baptist (also called Buck Ridge).

*\* Thurman Keels Mt  
\* Albert Hunt*

political speeches."

Another popular speaker at the early Emancipation days (1884) was the Rev. James P. Poindexter of Columbus, Ohio, who became the first black member of the Columbus City Council and the first black member of the Columbus Board of Education. The Rev. Mr. Poindexter was pastor of Second Baptist Church in Columbus for over 40 years. He was the organizer of the Colored Soldiers Relief Society and one of the organizers of the Mass Convention of Colored Men, a meeting attended by Gallia blacks.

Another early site for the Emancipation day was Bidwell-Porter park.

The building we feature today

was once known as the Harris Colored Baptist Church but is now called New Hope Baptist Church and the present building was put up in 1874. The church was organized about 1860 with the following as early members: Charles Howard, Truman Keels, Andy Bunch, George McDaniel, Henry McDaniel, Payden Long, Richard Long, Cephas Cooley, Washington McDaniel, Samuel Mayo, Manuel Whittan, and Albert Hunt.

Box 92, Clarksburg, Ohio 43115 is James Sands' mailing address.