

How San Francisco Negroes Migrated to British Columbia

as recounted by James Pilton in his theses and a Society monograph of late 1970s

Blacks in California had organized to oppose racial discrimination of Blacks in voting, right to bear witness, equal access to public education and other matters. In the late 1840s through the late 1850s these same Negroes experienced setbacks in their fight. "An Act to Restrict And Prevent The Immigration To And Residence In This State Of Negroes And Mulattoes" passed both houses of the California Assembly. "...Sheriffs would be authorized to transport any and all Negroes from the state. Other Negroes were to register at risk of committing a misdemeanor and Whites could be convicted of bringing Negroes into the state with the intention of freeing them. The bill was contested and was not made into law." This discouraged many leaders of the Colored Conventions movement.

James Douglas, Governor of the then British colony in Vancouver, sought laborers and invited Blacks from San Francisco and elsewhere in California to immigrate. Jeremiah Nagle, commander of the *Commodore*, was asked to invite people to go north. There was a lot of interest as attested by the lively question and answer period held at the First Zion AME Church. Though these people had considered other possibilities (Sonora, Panama) they decided to go to BC. Between 35 and 65 persons reportedly left on April 19 or 20th aboard the *Commodore* to join the latest gold rush. In a later meeting one of the emissaries to BC returned and gave a positive report about Canada and how Blacks were treated. It was proposed to form a company which would enroll immigrants, assist with passage and transition to their new homes, dissolving once they were on their own. People were recruited throughout California.

This movement brought 300-400 California families to Vancouver Island. Among those who first immigrated in June of 1858 was Mifflin Gibbs, recently a newspaper and business man, Colored Conventionist and former abolitionist. Additionally, Negroes from other western states were recruited, all looking for a better life, arriving "every few days" by steamer.

For more information on the black exodus from San Francisco to Vancouver in the mid-1850s check out these websites or read the monograph by James Pilton, "Negro Settlement in British Columbia, 1958-1871". You can download and search a pdf at

<https://open.library.ubc.ca/soa/cIRcle/collections/ubctheses/831/items/1.0106943>

Other information on Negroes in British Columbia:

https://www.communitystories.ca/v2/bc-black-pioneers_les-pionniers-noirs-de-la-cb/story/gold/

<https://www.leg.bc.ca/content-peo/Learning-Resources/Black-History-in-BC-Fact-Sheet-English.pdf>

<https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/gibbs-mifflin-wistar-1823-1915/>

<https://stories.wf.com/fighting-slavery-public-service-mifflin-gibbs/>