

"The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia,"
by Joseph A. Borome. *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 92
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The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia

DURING the eighteen-thirties the slavery issue in America took on a new character and life. Northern abolitionists, inspired by successful British example, organized rapidly on local and regional levels and stepped up their proselytizing and propagandizing.¹ In southern states antislavery societies died away, criticism of the "peculiar institution" was stifled, and elaborate arguments justifying its perpetuance proliferated. As sectional lines hardened, more and more black bondsmen fled from their masters to areas of freedom. When frustrated in their search, agents hired to apprehend them were not above seizing any Negro who fitted the bill of description, despite personal liberty laws passed by several states to safeguard free Negroes. In view of increasingly serious troubles of this sort, associations were formed in northern communities, largely on Negro initiative, to protect fugitives as well as free Negroes from slave catchers and kidnappers. One of the earliest of the decade, perhaps the very first, was started in New York City in 1835. It soon boasted some one hundred members and the indomitable David Ruggles as secretary.² Two years later Philadelphians followed suit at the persuasion of Robert Purvis.³

¹ Frank Thistlethwaite, *America and the Atlantic Community, Anglo-American Aspects, 1790-1850* (New York, 1963), 108, 110.

² Charles H. Wesley, *Neglected History; Essays in Negro History by a College President* (Wilberforce, 1965), 83; Vernon Loggins, *The Negro Author; His Development in America* (New York, 1931), 79-80; *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Jan. 4, 1844. Ruggles himself stated that the New York organization was established by Negroes (*National Enquirer*, Jan. 14, 1837), but Roi Ottley and William J. Weatherby, eds., *The Negro in New York: An Informal Study* (New York, 1967), 83, have it formed by Negroes and whites.

³ Organized societies to help fugitive slaves were not unknown in the history of eastern Pennsylvania. In 1786 George Washington mentioned one of Philadelphia Quakers. Wilbur H. Siebert, *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (New York, 1899), 68. In 1837 a vigilance committee existed in Buckingham. Among its members was William H. Johnson, a leading abolitionist of Bucks County. *National Enquirer*, July 27, 1837; Robert C. Smedley, *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* (Lancaster, 1883), 358.

Purvis, twenty-six years of age, was a wealthy Charleston-born mulatto who had committed himself to the antislavery cause in 1830. He had contributed to the launching of Garrison's *Liberator*, helped form the American Anti-Slavery Society at Philadelphia's Adelphi Hall in 1833, traveled to Great Britain and the Continent partially on an abolition mission, joined the American Moral Reform Society in 1835, and, two years later, journeyed to Harrisburg for the founding meetings of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. That same year his razor-edge victory in rescuing a hapless victim from the clutches of slave captors convinced him that the time had come to form a group to help the runaways.

In the summer of 1836 four slave brothers, whose last name was identical to that of Dorsey, their master, took "French leave" from Liberty, Frederick County, Maryland. Reaching Philadelphia under assumed names, they found their way to Purvis' door. His reputation as a friend of fugitives was well known, and his house at Ninth and Lombard streets contained a hidden basement room, reached by a trap door, for emergency concealments.⁴ Since Thomas wished to remain in town, Purvis carried William, Charles, and Basil to the large farm he owned on the Neshaminy in Bucks County, three miles from Bristol. Hiring Basil himself, he found employment for the other two brothers with nearby farmers. But fate had an unpleasant surprise in store. The owner of the brothers learned of their whereabouts and promptly engaged a slave catcher. After Thomas had been seized in Philadelphia, Mr. Dorsey and friends then surprised Basil as he was plowing in a remote corner of the Purvis property on July 17. He put up a stout fight, but soon, handcuffed, his arms scratched, and his torn clothing hanging in strips, was bundled off in a carriage to a Bristol jail for the night. The next day, about noon, his captors hurried him into the courtroom at Doylestown, hoping to get commitment papers from Judge John Fox. To their surprise, an indignant Purvis stood there awaiting them. Having learned of the abduction, he had hastened William and

⁴ On one occasion he harbored so many fugitives that the authorities became openly suspect. Appraised of the fact, Purvis hurried all the slaves under cover of darkness aboard a friend's small steamer which plied up and down the Delaware River. An hour before scheduled it sailed away, leaving regular passengers stranded but bearing the Negroes to freedom. Unidentified newspaper clipping of August, 1890, Archibald H. Grimké Papers, Howard University Library. For data on Purvis see Joseph A. Boromé, "Robert Purvis and His Early Challenge to American Racism," *Negro History Bulletin*, XXX (1967), 8-10.

Charles Dorsey to Canada, galloped to Doylestown and hired its best lawyer, Thomas Ross. The young advocate proceeded to argue so adroitly that the Judge postponed the hearing for two weeks. Purvis busied himself. He rounded up local Negroes and secretly bound them to a rescue plan in case of an unfavorable decision. He sought out the noted Philadelphia criminal lawyer David Paul Brown and, begging for his advisory services, drew \$50.00 from his pocket, a fee Brown refused while, at the same time, accepting the case. Purvis wrestled with his conscience when master Dorsey offered to sell Basil for \$500, for Purvis was opposed to compensated emancipation. But he finally prepared to pay the price, even when the cynical owner raised it to \$800 and then \$1,000. At that point, however, Basil himself put a stop to the bargaining. On August 1 when, before a crowded courtroom, Judge Fox opened the proceedings, lawyer Ross called on the claimant's lawyer, A. M. Griffith, to prove that Maryland was a slave state. Unable to produce more than a compilation of Maryland laws published by Virgil Maxey, which Ross objected was not authoritative, Griffith asked for a postponement. Out of patience with Griffith, the judge discharged Basil, saying the claimants might seek another warrant for his arrest from another magistrate. Purvis hustled Basil out of the courthouse to his buggy. As they were about to drive off, the slave party was upon them, waving the new warrant and trying to seize the horse. Purvis cracked his whip, the horse reared, and the buggy shot out of sight amid the applause of onlookers. Purvis conveyed Basil to his mother's house in Philadelphia. When the slave owner offered a \$400 reward, Purvis took Basil to New York, where he left him with Joshua Leavitt, editor of the *Emancipator*, who sped Basil on to New England and a lifetime of peaceful existence.⁵

Viewed in the light of the increasing number of runaways, who were flocking to Philadelphia, the hazards of the Dorsey case pointed up to Purvis the need for a vigilance committee. Individual financial

⁵ Smedley, 356-361; Siebert, 85; *Philadelphia Press*, Aug. 3, 1890; *National Enquirer*, July 27, Aug. 3, 10, and 17, 1837; *Colored American*, Sept. 2, 1837. The further story of Thomas is not without interest. Once he had reached Maryland he was put on board a ship at Baltimore destined for the New Orleans slave market. Philadelphians raised his purchase price of \$1000 and he was freed, to become a famed Philadelphia caterer. Smedley, 356; William E. B. DuBois, *The Philadelphia Negro, a Social Study* (Philadelphia, 1899), 35.

resources and physical efforts had to be supplemented quickly. Other abolitionists were of like mind, the affair having taught them "the importance of exertion," as William H. Johnson put it.⁶ Therefore, in August, 1837, the very month of Basil's discharge, they met to organize the Vigilant Association of Philadelphia.⁷ Its primary aim was "to create a fund to aid colored persons in distress."⁸ Members were to pay twenty-five cents on joining, contribute a minimum of seventy-five cents annually, and elect by ballot a Vigilant Committee of fifteen persons. This committee, in turn, would appoint from its number a president, a secretary, a treasurer, subcommittees, and a salaried agent to collect funds. At their first session, the members chose for president the prominent Negro dentist James McCrummell, and for secretary and treasurer, respectively, the Negroes Jacob C. White and James Needham. While the work of the committee was to be shrouded in secrecy, the existence of the Association was to be publicized.

By April, 1838, membership in the Association had grown, but help to an increasing number of fugitive slaves had created a greater need for funds. Meeting publicly in Zoar Church in Broom Street, the Association passed a resolution to publish its proceedings in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, organ of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, to which some members belonged. It hoped by this sort of advertising to bring in more individuals and money.⁹ The burning of Pennsylvania Hall in May by an antiabolitionist mob emboldened rather than intimidated the foes of slavery, and by July the Association was strengthened by a valuable auxiliary in the Female Vigilant Association, founded, as the general public was informed, to "act in concert" and assist in fund raising.¹⁰ On the ladies' vigilance committee of fifteen sat President Elizabeth White, Hetty Reckless, and Elizabeth Colly. Before the close of the year, they and their associates had raised money through such means as a West Indian Emancipation Day (August 1) public meeting and a December fair.¹¹

⁶ *National Enquirer*, Aug. 10, 1837.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Aug. 31, 1837.

⁸ *Ibid.*, Sept. 7, 1837.

⁹ *Pennsylvania Freeman*, Apr. 26, May 10, 1838.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, July 5, 1838.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, July 26 and Dec. 27, 1838.

On May 31, 1839, nine days after Edward Prigg was indicted in York County for kidnapping the fugitive Margaret Morgan of Maryland in defiance of Pennsylvania's law of 1826, the Vigilant Committee held a reorganization meeting. It elected founder Robert Purvis as president, added a vice-president in the person of Edwin H. Coates, "a real friend of colored people," retained Needham as treasurer, and accepted the Negro tailor Robert B. Ayres as secretary, thus relieving Jacob C. White of double duty so that he might devote more time to his role as agent.¹² For this exertion, plus a systematic recording of all cases handled, White was awarded an annual salary of \$250. The Vigilant Committee now numbered for practical purposes the four officers, the agent, and twelve members.¹³

With an energetic and executive-minded Purvis at the head, matters were more methodically handled (even a finance committee was set up), and the Committee's business proceeded apace. Fugitives were screened to eliminate imposters, boarded in private homes of the city and countryside, clothed, given medical attention, provided with legal counsel, and spirited northward. In six months' time (from June to mid-December, 1839), the Committee, through its agent, dealt with more than fifty cases and sent to freedom forty-six fugitives, mainly from Virginia and Maryland.¹⁴ Most, going by way of New York, reached Canada, with two destined for Trinidad and one for Liverpool. Edwin H. Coates confided to Maria Weston Chapman of Boston in December, 1839: "I have within a month or thereabouts sent ten or twelve 1000 dollars worth of that kind of goods to Victorias domains, and expect to send some twenty 1000 dollars worth more in about a month from this time."¹⁵ This statement testified to the initial application of the committee members

¹² Martin Robison Delany, *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (Philadelphia, 1852), 35.

¹³ Minute Book of the Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia, 1839-1844, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. A list of the chief officers appeared in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 20, 1839. Interestingly enough, the later published diary of Samuel J. Levick, *Life of Samuel J. Levick* (Philadelphia, 1896), carries nary a hint as to his membership.

¹⁴ Only one fugitive originated from as far south as New Orleans.

¹⁵ Edwin H. Coates to Maria Weston Chapman, Dec. 15, 1839, Weston Papers, Boston Public Library. Coates was confident that the south would lose her slaves within three or four years unless she emancipated them, for the runaways were "like sheep jumping over a fence w[h]en one goes the[y] all follow."

who gave freely of their time and sometimes of their money; to the firm direction of Robert Purvis; to the efficiency of agent Jacob C. White, who once put down his barbering tools for more than a fortnight that he might escort a family of eight into Canada; and to a working relationship with the New York Committee of Vigilance that rose above rapidly deepening differences between Negro New Yorkers and Negro Pennsylvanians on general antislavery policy.¹⁶

During 1840 and 1841, the expenditures and labors of the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee increased. To channel every possible penny to their essential purpose and to expedite cases, the members decided to eliminate the salary of the secretary (aggrieved, Robert B. Ayres resigned) and to substitute for the paid agent an "acting committee" of three substantial men, the organizing of whose efforts devolved upon Robert Purvis. The members also got up such schemes to tap the pocketbooks of the public as collections in Negro churches, a "soiree," and a concert. With Edwin H. Coates and other whites voted off the committee toward the close of 1840, meetings were transferred to the house of Purvis, who had sought to strengthen the body by bringing in his brother-in-law Robert B. Forten, and his fellow South Carolinian the Reverend Daniel A. Payne of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The tempo of action rose. From an average of two cases a week in the spring of 1841, it reached an average of three and a half cases by early fall.¹⁷ Group diligence, however, began to dwindle. Then, a few months after the satisfying ruling of the United States Supreme Court in *Prigg v. Pennsylvania*, came a rude shock. On August 1, 1842, the city of Philadelphia experienced one of the worst race

¹⁶ The Pennsylvanians, believers in Garrisonianism, held to a universal moral reform philosophy. The New Yorkers, fast drifting from the Garrison camp, wanted the adoption of practical and realistic measures that would raise up the down-trodden Negro rather than mankind in general. By 1841 the two groups would be poles apart and for more than ten years men like James McCrummell would avoid participation in national Negro conventions. Howard Holman Bell, "A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1861" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1953), 49-50, 53, 56, 169.

¹⁷ From June 23 to September 2 the Vigilant Committee handled thirty-two cases, and from September 2 to October 11, seventeen. The year 1842 brought even more impressive figures: between January 20 and June 9, forty-six cases; and between June 9 and September 8 one hundred and seventeen. Minutes of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. These figures not only suggest that more slaves ran away

riots in its pre-Civil War history.¹⁸ White hoodlums attacked Negroes parading in honor of Emancipation Day in the West Indies. When the marchers retaliated in kind, the doubly incensed assailants fell upon the Negro residential section, especially between Fifth and Eighth streets, murdering and wounding individuals and pillaging stores. The next day the mobocrats swarmed over a wider area. On both days Purvis' dwelling was one of their targets. Not only had the Vigilant Committee that met within his walls broadcast its exploits in the newspapers, but the abolitionist activities of its proud and sharp-tongued president were no secret, what with his membership in national and local antislavery societies and involvement in the underground railroad. During the first day of the riot he sat on the staircase of his house facing the front door, armed with guns and pistols and prepared to shoot the first intruder. As the howling rabble swirled about outside, two large fires in the neighborhood attracted their attention and drew them off. But the following day they were back in force. This time Purvis was saved when Father Patrick Moriarity, a Catholic priest, appeared to rebuke them. Finally, when

in warmer months, they raise the question whether more slaves fled the south in the eighties than in the eighteen-fifties, when a stronger fugitive slave law went into operation—this despite the usual view of an ever-rising tide of runaways, coupled with such sensational episodes as the Shadrach and Jerry rescues of 1851, and the Burns' affair of 1854. In his documentary account of a later Philadelphia committee, William Still listed about eight hundred fugitives assisted between 1852 and 1860. On Still's listing see Larry Gara, "William Still and the Underground Railroad," *Pennsylvania History*, XXVIII (1961), 34. This, roughly averaged, amounted to less than two a week. Purvis himself estimated that the Vigilant Committee formed in 1837 sent north an average of one fugitive a day during its lifetime, which ended about 1852. Siebert, 10, 346. This gives the palm to the eighteen-forties and is worthy of investigation. Purvis was eighty-five years of age when he gave his approximation, and he did so without documents, for soon after the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 he had destroyed the records of escaped slaves whom he and his co-workers had helped, fearing for his family because of such potentially incriminating evidence. Granting the human tendency for innocent exaggeration, Purvis had an extraordinary memory and his mind remained alert until the last months of his life. He died Apr. 15, 1898, in his eighty-eighth year. His calculation may contain more truth than fiction. Larry Gara, "The Underground Railroad: Legend or Reality," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, CV (1961), 337-338, deals effectively with the tendency of aging abolitionists to magnify the number of fugitive slaves they had assisted.

¹⁸ R. R. Wright Jr., *The Negro in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1912), 178; DuBois, 29-30.

Sheriff Lewis Morris called to say he could no longer guarantee protection, Purvis went to his country home in Bucks County to await the subsiding of the tumult.¹⁹

The affair crippled the Vigilant Committee and shook Purvis to the core.²⁰ Within a few months he acquired a sizeable property in Byberry, adjoining the Friends Meeting House grounds. Thither he removed his household, turning his back on residence in the city of Philadelphia for some thirty years. With his departure to Byberry, and his hand withdrawn, the Vigilant Committee, which could ill afford to exacerbate the public temper by concerted and advertised action, lapsed into desuetude.

On December 28, 1843, an attempt was made to revive it at a public meeting in the First Presbyterian Church, where Charles W. Gardiner was pastor. Guided by Gardiner, the Committee was to consist of faces old and new, among the latter the Negro minister Alexander Crummell, Hetty Reckless—an obvious grafting from the apparently defunct auxiliary—and J. Miller McKim, a salaried employee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society.²¹ But Gardiner was no Purvis, nor was the pall of the 1842 riot easily dispelled.²² More likely, too, the Vigilant Committee suffered from the quarrels among Pennsylvania abolitionists that were matched by Negro feuds which crippled chances of state-wide Negro co-operation until

¹⁹ *Philadelphia Press*, Aug. 3, 10, 1890. His Lombard Street dwelling had been besieged before. One night, following the appearance of a newspaper article he had written against levying a special tax to pay the state debt, a mob gathered. Although he was alone, the mob withdrew under the impression that several Negro men were inside, and vented its anger by burning a Negro church in the vicinity. *Philadelphia Press*, Apr. 16, 1898.

²⁰ It was bad enough, he thought, that blame for the riot was thrown upon the Negroes. What plunged him into anger and despair all the more was "the apathy and inhumanity of the *Whole* community . . . Press, Church, Magistrates" which pitilessly disclosed the Negroes' "utter and complete nothingness in public estimation." Purvis to Henry C. Wright, Aug. 22, 1842, Garrison Papers, Boston Public Library. A portion of this letter, which appeared with slight alteration in the *Liberator* of Sept. 9, 1842, is given in Herbert Aptheker, ed., *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States* (New York, 1951), 220.

²¹ Ira V. Brown, "Miller McKim and Pennsylvania Abolitionism," *Pennsylvania History*, XXX (1963), 56-72, does not treat of this particular activity.

²² Buried beneath the resultant avalanche of Negro discouragement were numerous Negro self-improvement organizations and projects. Among them were the Demosthenian Institute, founded Jan. 10, 1839, at the house of John P. Burr, and its newspaper, the *Demosthenian Shield*, issued as of June 29, 1841, by Purvis and others. [William D. Wilson], *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia, by a Southerner* (Philadelphia, 1841), 107.

at least 1848.²³ Certain it is that the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, which had praised the efforts of the Committee at its annual meetings of 1841, 1843, and 1844, ceased doing so. As a body, the Vigilant Committee gave way increasingly to individual endeavors. By 1852 it had disintegrated,²⁴ but before long circumstances called forth a replacement.

Within a year of its passage in 1850, Pennsylvania had "furnished more victims to the Fugitive Slave Law than all other states of the Union."²⁵ Heart-rending episodes multiplied as Negroes were dragged back to southern slavery after having lived many years in the state, where they had married, raised children, and bought property.²⁶ The response of Philadelphia abolitionists to this situation came on December 2, 1852. At a meeting in the rooms of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, a new vigilance committee was created that owed not a little in outline to the older one. Heading the General Committee of nineteen, lending the weight of his name as the most eminent Negro in Pennsylvania, was the father of the 1837 association, Robert Purvis. His role, however, was not to be a notably busy one. Although he could count on a few veterans like Jacob C. White and John D. Oliver, far more burden fell on the four members of the Acting Committee, especially its chairman, the tireless adopted Philadelphian William Still.²⁷ The assistant since 1847 to J. Miller McKim at the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, Still was probably, as McKim was assuredly, associated with the first vigilance committee.

²³ Bell, 184, mentions the Negro feuding, an issue not explored, however, in Clarice Albert Richardson's useful "The Anti-Slavery Activity of Negroes in Pennsylvania" (unpublished M. A. essay, Howard University, 1937).

²⁴ In 1851 it may have played a part in the Christiana tragedy, for, according to William Still, it sent a messenger to warn the Negro William Parker that Edward Gorsuch of Maryland was on his way to claim two of his runaways whom Parker was hiding. When Gorsuch and his party appeared and met with some one hundred armed Negroes, they refused to leave without the slaves. Fighting ensued. Gorsuch was killed, his son was seriously injured, and the fugitives escaped. William Still, *The Underground Rail Road* (Philadelphia, 1872), 349; Siebert, 280.

²⁵ Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, *Annual Report* (Philadelphia, 1851), 11.

²⁶ Edward R. Turner, *The Negro in Pennsylvania, Slavery-Servitude-Freedom, 1639-1861* (Washington, 1911), 242.

²⁷ Of course Purvis may have assisted the work of the Acting Committee. His name, however, does not appear in the journal of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee (1852-1857) in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The second vigilance committee, in alliance with the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society, lasted about a decade. Dissolved at the time of the Emancipation Proclamation, it had profited with respect to method and organization from the experience of its predecessor. How much so, however, has not been readily known, for when Still published his lengthy compilation, *The Underground Rail Road* in 1872 he dwelt on the second committee, giving but a passing mention of the first. Still regarded the second committee as "synonymous with the underground railroad."²⁸ In 1883, taking a similar view, Robert C. Smedley's *History of the Underground Railroad in Chester and the Neighboring Counties of Pennsylvania* spoke of the railroad as having come into existence "about 1838."²⁹ Repeating this information with some qualification in his *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom* (1899), Wilbur H. Siebert added the fact that Purvis had destroyed records he had kept of the operations of the first vigilance committee. In time, the year 1838 became the accepted date for either the organization of the first Philadelphia vigilance committee or for the organization of the underground railroad.³⁰ The Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia, born in 1837, like that of its contemporary in New York was credited with having existed. Exactly how it performed remained unclear. Without documentary proof it was impossible to do more than deduce that of those vigilance committees which sprouted, after Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, in populous New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, as well as in smaller communities like Syracuse and Springfield, some may have been revivals or reconstitutions of earlier bodies.

In 1933, the centenary of the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society in the City of Brotherly Love, Leon Gardiner, a cultivated Philadelphia Negro, presented a number of items to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, including a notebook entitled "Minute Book of the Vigilant Committee of Philadelphia." Until at least 1887 it had been in the possession of Jacob C. White, Jr.,

²⁸ Gara, "William Still," 37.

²⁹ Smedley, 355.

³⁰ Thus, as respective examples, Larry Gara, *The Liberty Line, the Legend of the Underground Railroad* (Lexington, 1961), 99, and Irving S. and Nell M. Kull, *A Short Chronology of American History 1492-1950* (New Brunswick, 1952), 108.

whose father had served that committee in various capacities.³¹ Gardiner found it with other materials in the cellar of a church about to be demolished. This precious book, embracing affairs of some five years, is of manifold value. It shows how the earlier committee served as a model for the later and more famous one. It provides some statistics of fugitives helped—scarce information in general and especially for the period covered—statistics that confirm an early and fairly heavy flow of fugitives to Canada. It substantiates clearly the existence of a working arrangement between vigilance committees in two important cities, New York and Philadelphia; and it details the type of tasks patiently performed by men who often labored far from the limelight of dramatic incident. In revealing their names, some white and many black, the Minute Book adds to the knowledge of those “forgotten characters. . . the Negro members of the various vigilance committees,” and helps to identify as Negroes such vigilance committee and underground railroad workers as James Joshua Gould Bias, cited in Siebert’s directory.³² Lastly, it constitutes the sole extended record of a vigilance committee that existed before the Federal Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 inspired the activities of later vigilance committees—committees which are documented in such sources as William Still’s book on Philadelphia and Theodore Parker’s collection of papers, presented to the Boston Public Library, on the operations of that city’s association.

In preparing the following notebook for publication, certain changes in punctuation and capitalization have been made in the interest of easier reading, but lapses in spelling have not been corrected except in a few cases where missing letters have been sup-

³¹ A prominent man in his time, White is unknown today. He was a delegate to the first annual Negro convention held in Philadelphia in 1831; a member of the American Moral Reform Society; a founder of the Gilbert Lyceum, a Negro literary and debating society of 1841; the founder, and from 1847 on, the manager of Lebanon Cemetery; and the owner of a highly successful barbering business at 100 Old York Road. So completely has his name vanished that, except for a passing reference in such specialized publications as Henry M. Minton, *Early History of Negroes in Business in Philadelphia* (1913), it escapes notice even in a work so full of citations to individuals as Aptheker’s volume (see footnote 20). A picture of White appears in William Still’s book on page 400.

³² Gara, “William Still,” 33; Siebert, 434, 439. Siebert does not indicate Purvis as a Negro but that fact is rather more commonly accepted these days.

plied within brackets. The document is divided into two parts “Record of Cases attended to for the Vigilant Committee of Phila by the Agent”; and the Minutes of the Committee of the Vigilant Association.

The City College of New York

JOSEPH A. BOROMÉ

Record of Cases attended to for the Vigilant Committee of Phila by the Agent

No. 1. June 4, 1839 Man arrested by Constable Hog[g] and committed to prison at Woodbury, N.J. without trial, or without any hearing whatever, removed from prison at Woodbury, and imprisoned at Camden, N.J. Mr Browning procured as council obtained a writ of habeas corpus from Judge Ford.

June 25th This writ was served upon the keeper of the prison as is usual or in compliance with the law in such cases; the keeper refused or could not comply with the writ, not having the man in his custody. A writ has been served upon the constable who refuses to comply with it and bring the man to a hearing. This is certainly one of the most aggravating cases on record in the U.S., perhaps the first instance of a keeper of a prison or constable has refused to obey the writ of habeas corpus; the constable above named has the keys of the prison and the man arrested by him still held a prisoner under pretence of being a fugitive from slavery. Thus are the supreme laws of the state of N.J. held at defiance by a petty constable; w[h]ether or not N.J. will suffer her laws to be trampled upon with impunity by one sworn to support them time will show. We have made arrangements for prosecuting the case.

No. 2 & 3. June 27th Two men. One sent to the Committee by Wm Whipper, Col[umbi]a, from Vir., light complexion, an interesting young man, sent to Morrisville, from thence to N.Y. for Canada; the other was employed some few weeks at Fallsington, at Mr Chas Hoags, since left for Canada. The expence attending these two cases was \$4.83.

No. 4 & 5. July 3rd Two cases formerly from Vir., lived with Warner, been here about 10 years, one rather lighter complexion than the other. Brothers, Henry and Isaiah sent to C Hoag, Fal [lsingto]n to go from thence to Canada. Expenses incurred \$3.82.

No. 6. July 6th One case. Man from Vir. reported by S. H. Gloucester, at Patterson, Wood St., Schuylkill 6th & 7th St., sent to Vigilant Committee of N.Y. Note to W^m P. Johnson. expences \$3.25.

No. 7. July 10th Man sent to E. Coates by C. Wise, from N. Orleans. Sent to N.Y.V. Committee. This man was stout made, rather light complexion, intelligent, has several acquaintances here, one coloured man named Cambwell. expence \$2.00.

No. 8. July 16th Woman as [sic] J.J.G. Bias from Petersburg, Vir. Sent to N.Y.V.C. Note to W^m P. Johnson. expence \$2.50.

No. 9. July 17th Woman from Vir. Sent to N.Y.V.C. Reported by J.J.G. Bias. Has a father in this city, of whom it is reported that he refused his daughter help in the time of her great need. expence \$3.00.

No. 10. July 19th Man from Eastern Shore of Myd. Sent to P——s, W[illow] G[rove]. expence 50 cts. reported by Healy

No. 11. July 27th Thompson Tambuc to N.Y. None [note] to V.C.N.Y. expence 25 cts.

No. 12. July 29th Woman from Vir, stout make, dark complexion, at Burlington, reported by Jos Parrish (name Mary Ann Tillman). Sent to N.Y.C.V. Note to W^m P.J. expence \$3.17.

No. 13. July 29th Case attended to by J.J.G. Bias, from W[ashingto]n County, Myd. expence \$9.50. (omitted in agent's report)

August 2nd Amount of ex. up to this date \$34.60.

No. 14. August 5th A gentleman from My^d, recommended by E Needles & E Coates, his object being to assist some person or persons in distress, advanced \$2.00.

No. 15. 15th Woman from Del. May^d, reported by J.J.G. Bias, sent to N.Y. Note to C.V.

expence	\$2.00
porter	.25
	<hr/> 2.25

No. 16. 15th Woman from Blue Ridge, Vir, 5 [sic] years, light comp^d, elderly, reported by E Coates, sent to Canada in company

with Martha White, Pearl St. Phil, Jane Thompson. Note to C.V. ex[pences] \$3.00.

No. 17. August 15th Boy. A letter intercepted, directed to the number of a house on Shippen St., in which resided a man by the name of Day. From the contents of the letter there is no doubt he intended selling the boy. We had this man taken before Alderman Hutton, who, at once, decided that this man had no right to send the boy out of this state, Day having stated before the alderman that he only intended binding him out. He was taken away and sent to the poor house.

No. 18. 20th [Pasted-in newspaper clipping headed "Reported for the World"]

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS—Before Judge King

Tuesday, August 20, 1839

Slave Case—This morning, at 10 o'clock, according to adjournment, James, the alleged slave, with his counsel, C. D. Gilpin and G. Griscom, Esqs., the claimant, Wm. Maxwell, attended by his counsel, Wm. Alleston, Esq., appeared before Judge King, who, on the testimony of Dr. James Height and Francis Cann, residents in Kent County, Maryland, decided that according to the Constitution and laws of the United States, Mr. Maxwell had clearly established his claim to the services of James. He accordingly took possession of his property, and the Court adjourned.

The witnesses testified that James was about 30 or 31 years of age; that they had known him for many years; that he ran away in 1828 from Mr. Maxwell, and that they had no doubt of his being the same person, whom from 1823 to 1827 they had been accustomed to see and know as the slave of Mr. Maxwell. As soon as the decision was given by the Judge, James was handcuffed, and in that condition will undoubtedly be conveyed to Maryland.

No. 19-20. Two men from Vir, lived with Mason, dark compⁿ, reported by Robt Ayres. Sent to W[illow] G[rove], P for Can^a.

toll [and] inci.	.87
carraiges	3.00
	<hr/> \$3.87

No. 21. Sep. 10 Particular case, female at W[illow] G[rove]. The Female Vigilant Com^{te} contributed to the case. \$10.00

No. 22. Sep. 24th Woman from [a] h[ote], reported by J.J.G. Bias, sent to Picks

carriage	\$2.50
toll	.70
	<hr/> \$3.20

Oct. 7th Meeting for V. Association at Clarkson Hall, \$2.00.

No. 23. Oct. 7th Female reported by Mr. Tambroug. Sent to W[illow] G[rove]. expence toll .49.

No. 24. Oct. 5th Webster, or Ph—s, light complex. Attended to by Healy & Coates, sent to N.Y.

Oct. 10th Woman representing herself to be in distress discovered an imposter. Dark complexⁿ, rather small, pock marked, said she had been shot and very inhumanely treated. expen[ces] Gray Ferry 18¾.

14th Paid for Revd Dan Scott's ch[urch] for V.C. address by C. C. Burleigh \$1.50.

No. 25. Oct. 15th Man, dark complexion from Bal^e, sent to N.Y. for Trinidad. Note to W^m. B. Johnson. expence \$2.62.

No. 26. Oct. 17th Man light complexion from Vir. sent to N.Y.C.V. for Can^a. Note Williams, Junior. ex. \$2.45.

No. 27-28. 18th Two cases, man & woman from My^d sent to Quakertown, to J. Leas—n. ex. two week board 3 carriage 3 toll inc[idental] \$7.09.

No. 29-30. 27th Two boys from Kent sent to Byberry, one 16, the other 10, by E. Coates. ex. carriage toll \$3.75

No. 31. 28th Woman from Vir. emancipated on condition of going to Liberia. Sent to Byberry, to J. Townsend. ex. carriage 2.50 toll [and] inc[idental] 56 \$3.06

No. 32. Nov. 1st Boy light complex. from Bal^e, attended by E Coates

No. 33-40. Nov. 5th Eight persons from Vir, a very interesting family, sent to Canada accompanied by the agent. ex. ballance of carriage hire \$2.00.

No. 41. Nov. [10] Man attended to by Gloucester & Ayres in the absence of agent; from Vir. sent to C.V.N.Y. Note from S. G[looucester]. expence \$3.00.

No. 42-43. Nov. Two cases, one from Bal^e, the other from Kent attended to by E. H. Coates in the absence of agent. exp carriage \$4.00.

No. 44-45. Nov. 29th Woman from Vir, dark comp., sent to W[illow] G[rove], man from Vir, light comp., Canada note to C. V. N. Y.

man's exp.	2.25
carriage	3.00
toll inc[idental]	.80
	<hr/> 6.05

No. 46-47-48. Dec. 4th Three cases, Men from Bal^e, two rather light comp., the other dark. Sent to V.C.N.Y. through Attleborough, by M[ardon] W[ilso]n. expence \$4.00.

No. 49. 4th W^m Smith from Vir sent to Trinidad.

Samuel Williams from Coflumbija, imposter. This man was brought to E.H. Coates and feigned himself deaf & dumb, but not succeeding to his satisfaction, he made a second call representing himself a slave. He was however detected and finally acknowledged the fraud, but from the statement made by him, believing him in want, we gave 20 cts to help him on his way and furnished him with some food. 20 cts.

7th Imposter. This was a man of dark complex. representing himself a slave from Vir. He was rather tall and stout built, large whiskers. exp. for carriage \$3.00.

No. 50. Dec. 10th Man from My^d sent to C.V.N.Y. through Attlebo^h. Note. M[ardon] Wi[ls]o[n] ex \$3.00.

No. 51. Dec. 18th Man from Bal^e reported by J.J.G. Bias, introduced by M^r. G. Sent to N.Y., note to C.V. ex \$2.00.

Dec. 8th Poor man from Mont^y, lost his wife .25.

No. 52. Jan. 1st 1840 Man from Kent County My^d. Sent to N.Y.C.V. Note. Reported by Mr Williams. Boat. ex. \$2.00.

No. 53-54-55. Jan. 4th Three cases, two from Bal, the other from Vir, exp. carriage 5 dol. other ex 2, toll 75 cts. \$7.75.

No. 56. Jan. 20th Case, man from city sent to N.Y.V.C., reported by Mr Peters. ex. \$3.00.

Feb. 15th Postage .71.

No. 57-58. Feb. 19th Two cases, man & wife, sent to N.Y.C.V.,
 ex to Messenger Colly 6.50
 postage &c. 5.00
 \$11.50

[No.] 59. Feb. Woman, Filbert & 11 st. furnished clothes

[No.] 60. March 2nd Man sent to country by E. Coates

[No.] 61. March 2 Man sent to N.Y. from Little Elk, reported
 by [blank]. ex. \$2.50

[No.] 62. March 3 Man sent to N.Y.C.V., reported by J.J.G.
 Bias. ex. \$2.75.

March Postage 14 ————— 25 .39
 Mrs B ————— \$5.00
 9th Richard Harding arrested, discharged
 ex. D. Colly 75 cts

Minutes of the Vigilant Association

At a special meeting of the committee of the Vigilant Association held at the house of James Gibbons in Pine Street above Sixth May 31st 1839

James Gibbons in the chair

The committee appointed to attend to the case of Boyd Speriman reported progress, when it was on motion resolved that the report of the committee be accepted. On motion resolved that the committee appoint to wait on J. C. McCrummil [*sic*] and Jacob C. White be continued and that the said committee be and are her[e]by authorised to wait on J. C. McCrummill in relation to a woman said to be in his possession. On motion resolved that we now procede to an election for officers for the committee and association to serve for six months. On motion resolved that Robt B Ayres & James Gibbons act as judges for the election.

Whereupon the following named persons were duly elected officers of the association and standing committee. Robert Purvis—President, Edwin Coats [*sic*]—Vice President, James Needham—Treasurer & Robert B Ayres—Secretary.

Standing Committee

James Gibbons	George H. Stewart
James J. G. Bias	Joseph Healy
Walter Proctor	Shepherd Shay
Stephen H. Gloucester	Westwood F Keeling
Ralph Smith	Samuel Hastings
& Daniel Colly	Samuel Levick
Agent—Jacob C. White	

Resolved that a committee of 3 persons be and is hereby appointed to select a suitable person as counsel for this association. Whereupon Robert B Ayres, J.J.G. Bias and Jacob C. White were appointed that committee.

Resolved that Stephen H. Gloucester, James Gibbons & Shepherd Shay be a committee to draft a set of by laws for the government of the Standing Committee.

Resolved that the above committee fix the salary for the secretary and agent.

Adjourned
 Jacob C. White Secretary v.c.

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee held at house of Edwin Coats June 10th 1839, the object of the meeting being stated to be which was the best course to persue in order to raise funds, restore confidence and carry out the objects of this committee. On motion Resolved that a financial committee of five persons be appointed to procure funds for this association. Whereupon motion, Robert Purvis, Edward Needles, Joseph Healy, Samuel D. Hastings & Samuel Levick were appointed that committee. Resolved that the names of the officers of this association, the Standing committee & Financial [committee] be announced in the publick papers.

Resolved that those persons who entertain strangers of a certain description shall be compensated therefor. Resolved that the salary of the agent shall be 250 per year to commence on the first of June last.

Adjourned
 Jacob C. White, Sec. pro.

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Sunday afternoon June 16th '39, the object of the meeting being stated by Jacob C. White to be relative to a man in distress in Camden, New Jersey.

The President in the chair

Members present, Daniel Colly, Jacob C. White, Stephen H. Gloucester, James Gibbons, Westwood Keeling, James Needham, Shepherd Shay.

Resolved that a committee of two persons be and are hereby appointed to assist the agent in behalf [of] a suffering person in Camden jail. Whereupon motion, Robert Purvis & Shepherd Shay were appointed that committee.

Adjourned

Robert B Ayres Secy

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Monday evening July 17th 1839 at the house of Edwin Coats. The Vice President in the chair. The minutes of the previous meeting read and adopted. On motion resolved that Edward Needles be and is hereby elected one of the committee in place of Westwood Keeling resign[ed]. Resolved that Rowland Johnson be and is hereby elected one of the committee in place of Walter Proctor resign[ed]. Resolved that the committee appointed to fix the salary of the agent & secretary be discharged. Resolved that the agent's salary shall be two hundred & fifty dollars per year to commence [e] from the first of June last. Resolved that the Secretary shall receive twenty six dollars per year for his services to commence from the first of June last.

Resolved the committee appointed to wait on James C. McCrum be and are hereby discharged from that duty. Resolved that a committee of three persons be appointed to revise a portion of the constitution. Where upon motion Rowland Johnson, Samuel J. Levick & Charles W. Gardiner were appointed that committee. Resolved that Robert B Ayres will be paid for two books for the use of the committee, the amount of said bill one dollar & five cents. Resolved that Ralph Smith's bill be paid for sundries ending with the case of Levin Gillis, the amount of said bill.

Adjourned

Robert B Ayres Secy

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Friday evening August 2nd 1839 at the house of Edward [sic] Coats. Edwin Coats in the chair

Members present

Jacob C. White
James Needham

Daniel Colly
Robt B Ayres

The agent made his report [see Record of Cases 1-13] the amount col[lect]ed since the last meeting—	\$33.58
The agent bill for two months services.	\$41.66
Expences for sundry cases.	\$34.60
Resolved that we adjourn to meet on the We[d]n[e]sday in September next.	
Resolved that Jacob C. White's bill be paid for services	\$41.66
Resolved that Edwin Coats bill be paid for one week and medicine for case.	\$2.12½
E[x]pences since the last meeting.	\$78.38½

Adjourned

Robert B Ayres Secy

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Sept. 11th 1839 at the house of Edwin H Coats

Robert Purvis in the chair

Members present

J. C. White
E. H. Coats

J. Needham
Joseph Healy

J. Gibbons

The house being called to order by the chairman the house proceeded to business. The minutes of the preceding were read and adopted. The agent made his report [See Record of Cases 14-21]. Col[lect]ions [had come] from Junior A.S. Society by the hand of Samuel J. Levick—\$5.62½; from David Burton—\$0.50; ditto E. Needles—\$5; from John D Oliver—\$1; from Henry Smith—\$1; Westwood Keeling—\$1; Aug 23rd Bethel Church by the hand of Ignatius Beck, two dollars & fifty three cents; from Morris Hall—\$0.50; Female Vigilant Committee—\$10; from George H. Stewart five dolls; James Gibbons—\$0.50; James Needham—\$0.50; E H

Coats, thirty cents; Joseph Healy—\$8; Jacob C White, five dollars—making in all \$46.45 which was paid over to the treasurer, J. Needham.

The agent presented his bill for one month's services twenty dollars and eighty-three cents which was ordered to be paid \$20.83.

George H Stewart on account of other engagements sent in his resignation which was excepted [*sic*].

On motion resolved Edwin H. Coats was appointed one of the soliciting committee in the place of Geo. H. Stewart res[ig]ned.

Adjourned

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held at the house of E H Coats on Jan^y 8th 1840. The house being organized in the usual manner the minutes of the previous meeting were read and adopted.

Members present

James Gibbons, Robert Purvis, Daniel Colly
Jacob C White, Ralph Smith & Edwin H
Coats, James Needham

The agent made his report, when it was on motion Resolved that the agent's report be accepted [*see Record of Cases 22-49*].

On motion Resolved that the sum of sixty dollars be presented to E H Coats to make up his loss sustained by an individual, under the care of the Committee. On motion resolved that the bill presented by the agent for services be paid. The amount of said bill \$83.33. Resolved that Edwin H Coats and Jacob C White be and are hereby appointed a committee to have circulars printed for the use of the committee.

On motion resolved that the resolution which . . . gives the Secretary a salary be reconsidered. Resolved that the Secretary salary be rescinded. Resolved that the treasurer's account be laid over to the next meeting. Resolved that Robert Purvis and Stephen H. Gloucester be and are hereby appointed to wait on the Secretary in relation to his salary

Adjourned

Robert B Ayres Secy

Edwin H Coats report on January 8th 1840, 1[st] month 13th 1840, money received from the 11th of the 9th month 1839 to the 13th of the first month 1840.

John Child	\$2.00	C C Jackson	\$1.00
Mary P. Acgun	1.00	Cash	.50
Joshua Hallowell	1.00	Jas A Wright	1.00
Henry Grew	2.00	Daniel Neal Sen ^r	1.00
Rudolph Justice	1.00	Cash	3.00
Ester Justice	2.00	A Colan	1.00
Samuel Truman	1.00	Cash collected at anti-	
John M Cavender	3.00	slavery meeting.	.75
Nathan Thorn	3.00	Elizabeth Urls	5.00
John Atkinson	1.00	Elizabeth Shain	1.00
Cash	1.00	Sarah Pearson	1.00
Cash	2.32	Peter Whright	1.00
Cash	.50	William Biddle	1.00
Cash from one not		Cash	1.00
antislavery	5.00	M Vaux	5.00
Delwin & Sarah Parrish	4.00	Cash	.12½
Jonathan Pickering	2.00	Cash	.50
T S Cavender	1.00	Joseph Wood	5.00
James Lindsey	1.00	Cash	.50
Cash from a friend	1.00	Isaac Michener	1.50
Cash from a friend	1.00	J White	1.00
Cash	1.00	Cash from a friend	3.00
Cash	.25	Rudolph Justice	1.00
David Ellis	5.00	Cash	1.00
Elizabeth Bunting for		William Marrott	1.00
S Mott	5.00	Sarah Curtis	2.00
Robert E Evans	1.00	Edwin H Coats	2.00
Clementina Green	1.00	Cash from a young woman	4.00
Cash from a friend	.50		
Cash from a friend	.50		95.94½

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Monday afternoon Dec^m 14th 1840

Members present

R Purvis, S Gloucester, Jacob C. White, James J. G. Bias, J. Needham, D.A. Paine [*sic*], C W. Gardiner, John D. Oliver.
The minutes of the proceeding meeting was read when, on motion, the committee on the secretary's case was continued.

When Jacob C. White, late agent made his report.
Resolved that the late agent's bill be paid—the agent's resignation was excepted.

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Thursday evening Dec^m 17th 1840

Robert Purvis in the chair

Members present

Jacob C. White	James Needham
J.J.G. Bias	S.H. Gloucester

The following persons were chosen to fill the places of Edwin Coates, S. D. Hastings, Ralph Smith, D. Colly, S. Levick, J. Gibbons, Geo. H Stewart, & Joseph Healy, viz. Robert Forten, D. A. Payne, C. W. Gardiner, D. Oliver, Geo. Rice, Johnathan Tudas & [Daniel] Scott.

The committee on Robert B. Ayres' case reported that they had made settlement with him for the sum of ten dollars, and given him an order for that amount, Mr. Ayres holding in his hands three dollars and 11 cts collected for the Vigilance [Committee], of which they had no knowledge at the time, and which since was not included in the settlement. The committee's report was received, after which Mr. Ayres stated that his settlement with the Committee included the 3 dols & 11 cts held in his hands, which, with the ten dollars order made 13 dollars 11 cts the amount of settlement; this statement of Mr. Ayres was denied by the committee. Mr. S. H. Gloucester, one of the committee to settle with Mr. Ayres, moved the following resolution, seconded by J. C. White. Resolved that a committee be appointed to wait on Mr Ayres and procure from him such collections as he acknowledges to have received for the Vigilant Committee and to take such steps as they may think proper, and report, carried. Stephen H. Gloucester and J. C. White were appointed to carry out the above resolution. Robert Ayres resigned the secretaryship which was accepted. Jacob C. White was appointed secretary. S. H. Gloucester, J. J. G. Bias & Johnathan Tudas were appointed a committee to procure a place for a public meeting of the Vigilant Association, and have an address for the benefit of the Vigilant Committee.

Robert Purvis, J. J. G. Bias & L. Johnson were appointed an acting committee for one month.

Adjourned, after which Mr. Ayres wished to have the loan of one of the book[s] of the Committee; the Committee reorganized and Mr. Ayres asked for the book, which request was not granted.

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Phil., April 25th 1841

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee of Phil.

Robert Purvis, President, in the chair

Committee on Robert Ayres' case reported, report received, committee discharged.

The committee appointed to procure an address were not present. A donation of \$10 was received from Mrs. Mott.

R. Purvis reported that 11 cases had been attended [to] since last meeting of the Committee, the expences were 18 dols 50 cts. Collected 18 doll, leaving a balance of 50 cts for Mr. Purvis which he gives the committee.

Messrs Purvis, Gardiner, & Payne were appointed to make all the arrangements for a soiree to be held at such time & place as they may designate for the benefit of the Committee.

Members present R. Purvis, Cha^s. W. Gardiner, Daniel A. Payne, James Needham, Robert Forten, J. C. White.

Adjourned

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Phil., June 12th 1841

A special meeting of the Vigilant Committee was held at the house of Mr. Robert Purvis.

President in the chair

Minutes of last meeting read and approved.

The Committee appointed to make arrangements for a soiree, for the benefit of the funds of the Vigilant Committee, reported that they had attended to the duty of said appointment, & that every effort was made to render the meeting profitable & entertaining to the public as well as beneficial to the oppressed. The proceed amounted to 42 dollars & 45 cents, which was received by the treasurer.

R. Purvis reported that 14 cases had been attended to since last meeting, and that 6 cases was still on hand. 8 dollars & 75 cents was received from Chas. W. Gardiner & 3 dollars & 82 cts collected by Hetty Reckless. Voted that the present acting committee, Robert Purvis, J. J. G. Bias & L. Johnson, be and are hereby releaved from their duty with the thanks of this Committee for the prompt and efficient manner they have attended and disposed of the cases comming under their notice. Resolved that J. D. Oliver, D. A. Payne & Shepherd Shay compose the acting Committee for 3 months, and that Robert Purvis & J. J. G. Bias be associated with them as an advisory committee with full power to dispose of all cases comming under their care & may call the Vigilant Committee together on cases of immergency.

Robert Purvis was appointed to take proper notice of an advertisement which appeared in the "Public Ledger" offering a reward for a fugitive from slavery. The advertisement alluded to was in the Ledger of the 9th inst. The sum of 25 cts was pd in by a member of this Committee, Mr Payne.

Present, Robert Purvis, J. J. G. Bias, D. A. Payne, Johnathan Tudas, Lymus Johnson, [Daniel] Scott, George D. Rice.

Adjourned to meet on Monday next the 14th inst.

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Phil., June 14th 1841

As a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee of Phil, held at the house of Mr. Robert Purvis.

Stephen H. Gloucester called to the chair

Resolved that a committee of 3 be and are hereby appointed to solicit collections from all the churches, on the 4th of July next, for the benefit of the funds of the Vigilant Committee, & the same are further appointed to make suitable arrangements, for the first of August. Committee J. D. Oliver, S. H. Gloucester & Robert Purvis, who are also appointed to revive the auxiliaries to the Vigilant Committee.

Acting Committee reported one case attended to since last meeting, expences 9 dollars.

Adjourned to meet Wednesday evening 23d inst.

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Phil., June 23d 1841

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee of Phi^a held at the house of Mr. Robert Purvis.

President in the chair.

The committee appointed to take notice of an advertisement in the Public Ledger (see Minute 12th inst) reported that upon mature deliberation he had concluded that it was best that this committee should not notice said advertisement & gave his reasons which were considered conclusive.

The Acting Committee reported two cases attended to, expence 17 dollars 50 cts. Robert Purvis reported \$15 collected by him through Mr Ed^d. M. Davis. J. D. Oliver reported \$5.80 expended, not including 17 dollars, 8 dols 50 cts. There was an interchange of views in relation to disconnecting the committee from the association; no deffinite action.

A very interesting case was before the committee & occupied much of their attention for the evening.

Members present, Robert Purvis, J. J. G. Bias, D. A. Payne, [Daniel] Scott, George Rice.

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Phil., Sep 2nd 1841

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Association, held at the house of Mr. Robt Purvis.

President in the chair

Minutes of last meeting read and approved.

The Acting Committee reported the amount collected \$65.75, balance in hand \$1.25. Cases attended to 32.

Treasurer reported that he had received from Mr. Collins, the Bethel Ch collection \$13; also collection taken at the 1st Pres Ch 7th below Shippen, at the celebration of abolition of slavery in the British W. I. by the Sabbath School 2nd August 1841, amount of collection \$7.20.

Mr. Oliver stated that David Kline had spoken disrespectful of this committee at a public meeting. Whereupon it was resolved that J. D. Oliver and D. A. Payne be and are hereby appointed to wait

on said Kline and request him to meet the committee and substantiate said charges.

Adjourned to meet on Wednesday next
Jacob C. White

Phil., Oct 8th 1841

Vigilant Com^e met.
Few present

Adjourned to meet on Monday next 11th inst.
Jacob C. White

Phil., Oct 11th 1841

Vigilant Committee met as per adjournment at the house of Mr. Rob^t. Purvis.

President in the chair.

Minutes of last meeting approved.

Messrs Oliver & Payne reported that in discharge of their duty they had waited on Mr. Kline, and that he refused to meet this committee or to give any satisfaction. The report was accepted and the committee think it inexpedient the [*sic*] prosecute the matter any further, thinking it unworthy of further notice.

The Active Committee reported that they had collected \$48.48, having in hand 3.72½. Cases attended to 17.

Messrs Oliver & Payne by request consent to serve for 3 months longer on the Active Committee. S. H. Gloucester was appointed to fill Mr. Shay[']s] place, his time having expired and he being unwilling to continue his services.

Jacob C. White, Sec.

Jan 19th 1842

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Committee met at the house of Mr. Rob. Purvis.

President in the chair

Minutes of last meeting read & approved.

Robert Purvis was appointed a committee to wait on Cha^s. W. Gardiner and make arrangements with him to give an antislavery lecture & take a collection for the Vigilant Committee.

J. C. White stated that he had in hand \$3.97, the collection taken

at the concert of Page, in December, at the 1st Pres Ch 7th St, paid over by Chas W. Gardiner.
Adjourned to meet on Monday evening the 24th inst.

Jacob C. White

Jan. 24th 1842

No business transacted, owing to the smallness of the members present. Present, Rob. Purvis, J. D. Oliver, & J. C. White.

Phi., Dec 28th

Meeting com. Mr C. W. Gardiner chosen Pres.; J. C. White Sec; Acting Com. W^m. A. Burleigh, James McCrummill, Peter Lester; Advisory Com. Robert Purvis, C. W. Gardiner, J. C. White; Com. to devise means, Purvis, R. Forten, James McCrummill.

Phil., Dec 28th 1843

At a public meeting [*see entry following*] called for the purpose of reorganizing the Vigilant Committee the following persons were chosen to compose that committee with power to fill vacancies—Robert Purvis, C. W. Gardiner, J. J. Bias, J. D. Oliver, Rob^t Forten, Lymus Johnson, J. C. White, Peter Lester, James McCrummill, Alex Crummell, D. A. Collins, W^m. A. Burley [*sic*], [Walter] Proctor, Hetty Reckless, J Miller [McKim].

The committee met immediately after the adjournment of the public meeting and organized by choosing Chas. W. Gardiner Pres.; J. C. White Sec; Peter Lester Treasurer; W^m. A. Burleigh, James McCrummill & Peter Lester Acting Committee; Robert Purvis, C. W. Gardiner, J. C. White Advisory Committee; Robert Forten, James McCrummill Committee to devise means.
Adjourned to meet on Monday afternoon at 3 o'clock at the house of C. W. Gardiner 7th below Lombard.

At a public meeting held in the colored Presbyterian Church on Thursday evening the 28th of December 1843—Charles Gardiner being in the chair & J. M. McKim secretary—the following preamble & resolutions were unanimously adopted.

Whereas it is our duty to "remember them that are in bonds as bound with them" & to aid them by all moral & peaceable means to make their escape from oppression; and whereas in the increasing spread of antislavery truths & the multiplied facilities for accom-

plishing their purpose the number of toil-worn fugitives from Southern injustice & slaveholding cruelty has increased to such an extent as to make it necessary for their friends in this city to adopt more liberal & systematic measures to aid them in their efforts to escape, therefore

Resolved, that it is proper to revive & reconstitute without delay the Vigilance Committee of Phil^a.

Resolved, that it be recommended of the different religious denominations of this city to form associations auxiliary to the Vigilance Committee or to adopt such measures as they may deem suitable for the purpose of raising funds to enable that committee to aid in his escape the flying bondsman.

In accordance with the first resolution, a committee of fifteen, consisting mainly of persons who had been members of the old committee were appointed as "the Vigilance Committee of Phil^a". Their names are Rev. Charles Gardner, Robert Purvis, Robert Forten, Jn. D. Oliver, J. J. G. Bias, Limas Johnson, Hester Reckless, Jacob C. White, Peter Lester, Jas. McCrummel, Rev. Alex^r. Crummell, [D.] Collins, W^m. A. Burleigh, Rev. M^r. Proctor.

J. J. G. Bias & Jas. McCrummell were appointed a committee to make inquiries in regard to an alleged case of arrest of fugitives from slavery, notice of which had been read from the Daily Phil^a. Press, & the meeting then adjourned.

J. M. McKim, Secs.

Phil^a., Dec. 28/43

Jan. 1st 1844

At a meeting of the Vigilant Committee held on Monday afternoon at the house of C. W. Gardiner.

Present C. W. Gardiner, Rob^t. Purvis, Rob^t. Forten, W^m. A. Burleigh, J. C. White. No business done further than an interchange of views in relation to the efforts of the committee.

J. C. White, Sec.

Phil Feb. 19th/44

At a special meeting of the Vigilant Com held at the house of Mr. J. J. G. Bias.

The Pres stated the object of the meeting to be the consideration of a communication which appeared in the "Weekly Elevator" of

the 17th inst. charging the Vigilant Com^{tee} of Phil^a. with withholding from a Mrs. Harriet Bayley a collection which was taken for her benefit, also charging an individual, name blank, with saying that he had left the money at home and promising to send it to said Mrs Bayley but neglecting so to do & said communication being over the signature of Jacob B. Young, sec. of the Union Vigilant Harmonic Association. After a short conference on the subject it was thought advisable to appoint a committee to investigate the matter. W^m. A. Burleigh & J. C. White were appointed.

Adjourned to meet at the call of the Pres.

Members present C. W. Gardiner, James McCrummill, J. J. G. Bias, Peter Lester, Robert Purvis, W^m. A. Burleigh, J. C. White.

Phil, March 11th/44

At an adjourned meeting of the Phil Vigilant Committee

Met at the house of Mr. J. J. G. Bias.

The committee appointed to investigate the charges made against the Phil Vigilant Committee in a communication, which appeared in the 'Elevator' of the 17th ultimo, made report.

The purpose of which was that the said Mrs. Bayley, was under the charge of the committee, and left Phil^a in company with Mr Douglass, that Mr. J. J. G. Bias met them at the boat and is no doubt the person alluded to as stating that he had left the money at home. The letter of which this extract was taken was addressed to Mr. Adams of the city. Mr. A refused to show the letter, but said that it was not a correct extract from the letter. Jacob B. Young, sec^y of the 'Union Vigilant Harmonious Association', was waited on but declined to give any information relative to said extract.

This report elicited pertinent remarks from several members of the Com^{tee}. Mr. J. J. G. Bias the person who went to the boat to see Mrs. Bayley off was present. Mr. B denied saying to Mrs. Bayley that he had left the money at home and promising to send it on. Mr. Bias says that he stated to Mr. Douglass that he had no funds belonging to the Com^{tee} nor had he any of his own with him, he would lay the matter before the Com^{tee} and he had no doubt they would forward the money.

Mr. Bias also made a statement showing that the money in his hands were properly appropriated prior to Mrs. Bayley leaving Phil^a.

He received from anti slavery meeting \$2, from Rev^d. Cha^s. W. Gardiner \$9, making \$11; expended for three cases \$10.75.

Mr Bias' statement being satisfactory to the committee, the following Resolution was unanimously adopted—

Whereas a communication published in the 'Elevator' 17th Feb. said to be an "extract from a letter from Mrs. Harriet Bayley" charging the person who was at the wharf the morning she started with having made false representations to her with regard to pecuniary aid, and whereas Mr. J. J. G. Bias was the person who went to the boat to see Mrs. Bayley off, and whereas we have full & satisfactory evidence that Mr. Bias had no money of the Com^{tee} to apply to such purpose and therefore could not have made any such representation & pretenses,

Therefore resolved that We the Phil^a Vigilant Com^{tee} deem it our duty to relieve Mr. Bias from the unfavorable impression which this imputation is calculated to excite in the public mind, as far as is in our power.

Resolved that we tender Mr. Bias our sympathies under the suffering which this charge may have occasioned.

The Secretary was instructed to address a letter to Mr. Douglass on this subject.

Members present: C. W. Gardiner, Alex Crummell, James McCrummell, W^m. A. Burleigh, J. J. G. Bias, Peter Lester, J. C. White, Mr. Torry. Peter Brook was present.

Phil., March 20th/44

At a special meeting of the Phil Vigilant Committee held at the house of the Rev. C. W. Gardiner. The object of the meeting being to hear some propositon from Mr. Torry.

The document refered was then read after which it was resolved that this committee have full confidence in the fidelity and faithfulness of Mr. Torry in his labour in behalf of suffering humanity.

Phi., July 25th/44

At a special meeting of the Phi Vigilant Com^{tee} held at the house of Rev. C. W. Gardner.

Voted that G. W. Bolivar be substituted in place of Rob Purvis, and Mr. [Rowland?] Johnson in place of Lymus Johnson.

G. W. Bolivar, Johnson & Crummell were appointed a committee for the next three months.

Appendix

PARTIAL LISTING OF PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

† Known to be Colored

* Probably colored

† Robert B. Ayres	tailor
† James Joshua Gould Bias	dentist
* William A Burleigh	member, 1842 Committee to Celebrate West Indies Emancipation
Edwin H. Coates	tailor
† Alexander Crummell	minister
† Robert B. Forten	farmer
† Charles W. Gardiner	pastor, First Presbyterian Church
† Stephen H. Gloucester	Philadelphia editor of the <i>Colored American</i> and elder of Central Presbyterian Church
Samuel D. Hastings	merchant and corresponding secretary of Philadelphia County Anti-Slavery Society
Joseph Healy	member, executive committee to get subscriptions for the <i>Pennsylvania Freeman</i>
* Lymis Johnson	porter
Rowland Johnson	member, Junior Anti-Slavery Society
Westwood F. Keeling	confectioner
* Peter Lester	shoemaker
Samuel J. Levick	member, Junior Anti-Slavery Society and its Committee for Improving the Moral and Intellectual Condition of Colored People
† James C. McCrummell	dentist
James Miller McKim	agent, Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society
† James Needham	treasurer, Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons
Edward Needles	druggist
John D. Oliver	oyster dealer
† Daniel A. Payne	clergyman, African Methodist Episcopal Church
† Walter Proctor	pastor, Bethel Church
Hester Reckless	member, Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society
* George D. Rice.	porter
† Daniel Scott	minister, Union Baptist Church
Shepherd Shay	clothing dealer
Ralph Smith	carpenter
* Jonathan Tudas	volunteer captain who led 500 Negroes to build redoubts at Gray's Ferry during War of 1812
† Jacob C. White	barber and hair dresser