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Rosa Brown Bracy, The Negro Disciples of Christ

Rosa Brown Bracy

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THE NEGRO DISCIPLES of CHRIST

ROSA BROWN BRACY, General Secretary

When Barton J. Stone, Racon John Smith and John Ganneb preached, "The Gospel of Jesus Christ," in Kentucky and established the Old Cain Ridge Church, there were Negro slaves who heard the message, believed the report and confessed Christ as Lord and Savior. They were baptized into Christ and became members of the Old Cain Ridge Church.

Some of these Negro men were apt scholars, they heard the call to preach and were ordained to the ministry. These men went out preaching the word and as a result Churches of Christ were established.

The first foreign missionary sent out by The Disciples of Christ was a Negro preacher, Alexander Cross. He was sent by the Cain Ridge Church to carry the Gospel to Africa.

The establishing of churches which were the meeting places for Negro disciples, gave rise to the thought of co-operation for adequate development. Thus followed District and State organization.

Records from the pen of J. D. Smith gave information of an attempt to organize a National Convention as early as 1885. A second attempt was made in 1898, at which time, according to the statement of J. G. Keys, now living at Coila, Mississippi, Malcolm Ayers of Kentucky, was elected as president. This meeting was held in Nashville, Tennessee, and of course the illustrious Preston Taylor was present as host and active participant in the program.

It was in 1917, when the third at-

tempt was made to organize the National Convention. This meeting, also held in Nashville, Tenn., was effective to the extent that we have met annually since the organization. Preston Taylor was elected as the President and served until his death in 1931.

The purpose of the Convention was "to provide an avenue for co-operative self-expression and development of Churches of Christ that our best contribution might be made to our posterity and to the world."

The Convention was incorporated and given a charter under the laws of the State of Tennessee, the city of Nashville, to function as a Benevolent and Missionary Institution in 1925.

The presidents who have served and whom we delight to remember are:

Preston Taylor	1917—1931
Henry L. Herod	..	1931—1935
B. C. Calvert	1935—1936
J. N. Ervin	1936—1938

In the National Convention of 1938 with the newly elected President L. H. Crawford at the helm, the convention set out to build a super structure on the foundation which had been laid by our Fathers.

Rosa Brown Bracy was called to serve as the General Secretary. With authority given by the convention and the cooperation of the Executive Committee a program was outlined which included the voted items of the convention in which we resolved to do three things:

1. To establish a headquarters office.

2. To pay off the Preston Taylor monument debt.
3. To create a consciousness of responsibility towards doing for ourselves some things which are needful to be done and which can be done only by us. These are expressed in the following items:

- (a) An Informed Leity. An adequate religious journal is a necessity for this development.
- (b) A Prepared Ministry. The Henry Herod Scholarship Fund, a means to the end.
- (c) An Informed, Inspired Leadership. The P. H. Moss Scholarship fund — The answer.
- (d) A Beautiful Sunset. Light in the evening tide for our aged ministers, their wives and members of the church.
- (e) A Peaceful World. The United Christian Missionary — Our agency.

AN INFORMED LEITY

An Informed Leity will produce a visionary God fearing people. An adequate religious journal is a necessity for this development.

Forty seven years ago this need was apparent and the Gospel Plea, as the organ of the State of Mississippi, with K. R. Brown as its first Editor, made its appearance. For sometime it was published in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Later the Southern Christian Institute, Edwards, Mississippi, established a printing office. The Gospel Plea was printed from this office and when it met with financial difficulties, the school bore

the burden and soon it became the responsibility of Mr. Lehman and the school.

In 1917, when the National Convention was organized, we looked upon the Gospel Plea as (Our Plea). The convention gave much consideration to this instrument for it was the prevailing opinion that a paper which was a mouthpiece for Negro Disciples could scarcely reflect the true spirit and soul of the Negro unless produced by a Negro. This question caused much storm and sentiment in the convention until in Louisville, 1927, the name of the paper was changed from Gospel Plea to Christian Plea. The editor was changed from J. B. Lehman (white), to Vance G. Smith and the office from Southern Christian Institute, Edwards, Miss., to St. Louis, Mo.

The Christian Plea has weathered many storms, the U. C. M. S. and the National Convention in cooperation, sustaining it.

In 1939, the National Convention resolved to make the "Plea" one of its major objectives. Into its budget \$1,000.00 has been placed to secure and improve it. Mrs. Preston Taylor gave the Plea a new home. Dr. Myrle Epps accepted the Editorship and we are glad to say that the Christian Plea is without doubt, the best we have ever produced.

A PREPARED MINISTRY

The need for a prepared ministry is also apparent. If the Church of Christ is to advance within our group.

We are fortunate to have had as one of our leaders, Henry Herod, a scholar, a minister of rare ability. He, with Preston Taylor and W. H.

Dickerson, had the vision and made plans for a forward going Negro Church, which resulted in the organization of the National Convention.

Henry as a boy of 8, expressed a desire to become a minister. He had a conviction that if he must *preach*, he must be *prepared*. He never wavered from that conviction. He was the first student at the New Castle Bible School, a school established by Preston Taylor, Malcolm Ayers, B. J. Merchant, Alexander Campbell, R. E. Hathaway and the leaders of that day cooperating. He later studied at Berea College, Hiram College and Butler College from which he was given a degree from the School of Liberal Arts. He became the pastor of the Second Church of Disciples of Indianapolis, Indiana. He so lead and directed this church that it became the most outstanding influence for social up-lift and interracial cooperation in the city of Indianapolis.

His influence was not limited to his home town. It reached out into the state—out into the nation—out into the world.

He was not interested in houses and land. His greatest interest was in *Life*, and he gave His life that the life of those around him and in the world might be full.

At the time of his death, Henry Herod was serving as the Pastor of the Second Christian Church in Indianapolis, Indiana, as Superintendent of Flanner House, a Social Service Institution. He was a member of the Board of the Federal Council of Churches of America; a member of the Board of Directors of the United Christian Missionary Society and the President of the Na-

tional Convention of Disciples of Christ of America.

The Convention desires to honor his memory by building a Stronger Christian Ministry for tomorrow, through the establishing of a Minister's Scholarship Fund of \$10,000 which will bear his name.

Plans are now under way to make a drive in this direction. Persons or groups desiring to honor the memory of this great man and at the same time build for the future are asked to give pledges or cash. At the end of 10 years we hope to have the entire \$10,000 to place in trust that the interest there-from may go on eternally developing the ministry and blessing the world.

AN INFORMED LEADERSHIP

Patrick Henry Moss—what a man! Meek and humble, yet powerful. It was said of P. H. Moss, even as it was said of Christ, "He went about doing good." An apostle of Christian Education, a pioneer who blazed a trail and inspired many to walk therein. Seven years a Pastor. Seven years a teacher of the Bible and 21 years a National Director of Religious Education of Negro Disciples. Serving under the United Christian Missionary Society and its predecessor organization, the American Christian Missionary Society and endorsed by the National Convention of Negro Disciples of America.

It is fitting that the National Convention should commemorate His memory by raising a fund which shall bear his name to inspire and train Christian Leaders.

The convention voted to set aside a *Day*, a Sunday near his birthday which shall be known as *P. H. Moss Day*. On this Day, Bible Schools,

Christian Endeavor Societies and Young Peoples Groups of the church, will be given the privilege to study the life of P. H. Moss and give an offering to his memory which will contribute to the establishing of a fund for training religious leaders.

It took P. H. Moss twenty years to make his contribution of life and service. What matters it if it takes us twenty years to complete this fund? So long as each year we give freely. This year we hope to put \$500.00 into this fund.

A BEAUTIFUL SUNSET

The fourth objective of the National Convention is the building of the *Ida D. Taylor Home* on Greenwood Park, Nashville, Tennessee.

The Woman's Convention in Tulsa, Oklahoma, 1936, after an expressed desire by Mrs. Preston Taylor that we make use of the gift of her husband, our president, the late Preston Taylor, voted to establish a home for Girls interested in Higher Education. The Women were enthusiastic over this project. When we became aware that this would bring about a conflict with the United Christian Missionary Society because this was not an item within the budget of the organization, the women withdrew. It was then in the Convention in Dayton, Ohio that the Convention proper became interested and voted to undertake the Home as a National project.

The United Society That Year raised the Standard of the Jarvis Christian Institute from that of a Junior College to a Senior College rank. The National Convention with a spirit of absolute co-operation with

the United Society decided to withdraw from the field of Education and meet a long neglected benevolent need within our group by establishing a home for Aged and Orphans of the church. Our first emphasis, however, is on the need of the Aged.

The home is to be known as the *Ida D. Taylor Home*. *Ida D.* the widow of Preston Taylor, Past President of Our National Woman's Convention, member of the Joint Executive Committee of the National Convention, Treasurer of the Christian Plea Committee, and the Brotherhood's big sister.

The first special gift to this fund of \$20.00 was given by the Oklahoma Woman's Convention of Disciples of Christ with Mrs. Sallie Pirtle as president.

This year we hope to raise \$2,300.00 that we may begin the foundation for this building.

A total goal of \$6,000.00 for this year. May each member of the church count it a privilege to give \$1.00 or more that he or she may share in this worthwhile program.

A PEACEFUL WORLD

Jesus Christ came to give Peace to all the world.

The National Convention is a Missionary Convention—It accepts as its avenue out into all the world — The United Christian Missionary Society and urges its churches to full co-operation. Not only must we do the things which we have so long neglected, but we must continue to do and increase our participation in the work the church is doing around the world.