

Lesson Plan: African-American Enfranchisement in Wisconsin

Wisconsin Historical Society Citizen Petition and Access Project

Enduring Understanding

Citizens faced with challenges brought about by government actions use the petition process in order to draw attention to policies they either favor or wish to see changed without fear of retribution. Embedded in the First Amendment of the United States Constitution, the right to petition is seen as part of the foundation of any democratic system of government.

Essential Questions

- What were a few of the obstacles that people of color faced in Wisconsin in the 19th century?
- What were some of the opinions surrounding African-American freedom and suffrage in 19th century Wisconsin?

Language Note

Primary source materials such as petitions, letters, and diaries capture history as it happened, and many customs, terms, social mores, and attitudes that are considered offensive now were commonplace at the time. Please read through the primary source material before assigning it to your class.

Content Objectives

- Students will understand the obstacles African-Americans faced in 19th century Wisconsin related to voting, freedom, and protections for families of African-American soldiers.
- Students will be able to articulate the various concerns expressed in 19th century petitions as they relate to African-American enfranchisement.

Wisconsin Common Core Standards Addressed

- Grades 3-5
 - SS.Inq4.a.i Communicate conclusions from a variety of teacher provided presentation options.
 - SS.Inq4.b.i Evaluate the strength of a claim, evidence, and communication using criteria established by both teacher and student.
- Grades 6-8
 - SS.Inq3.c.m Analyze the extent to which evidence supports or does not support a claim, and if it does not, adjust claim appropriately
 - SS.Inq4.b.m Analyze and evaluate the logic, relevance, and accuracy of others' claims, taking into consideration potential bias.

Vocabulary Building

Explicit vocabulary building will be conducted through instruction and a vocabulary list which will be distributed to each student.

Context Building

This lesson is designed to be built into a larger unit on the struggles of African-Americans in the United States and Wisconsin. Additional context is provided in the document titled “Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson”.

Comprehensible Input

The language of the petitions has all been scaffolded to a more digestible vernacular. Students will be able to interact with copies of the original petitions as well as the adapted transcriptions. Working in groups will allow students to support each other in the learning process and come to collaborative conclusions. There are both audio (lecture, discussion) and visual (petitions, map) elements to this lesson.

Materials

- Indicated petitions
- Adapted petition transcriptions
- Handout: Vocabulary
- Handout: 19th Century Petition Questions
- Notebook paper
- Writing utensils
- Map of Wisconsin with indicated petition locations
- Answer Key

Lesson Summary

This lesson should take approximately 50 minutes and is designed for grade bands 3-5 and 6-8, but it can be adapted for other grade levels.

- Students will be asked to analyze seven different petitions from the 19th century that relate to the struggles of African-Americans in Wisconsin. They will work in small groups to come to their own conclusions and then they will have a full class discussion to synthesize their thoughts.
- Citizens faced with challenges brought about by government actions use the petition process in order to both draw attention to policies they either favor or wish to see changed without fear of retribution.

Procedure

- Warm-up: Start the class by asking students to respond to the prompt: *What do we mean when we talk about freedom in the United States? What are some rights that we have in America?*
- When students have finished writing their responses, ask willing students to share. Facilitate a discussion based on the responses.

- Transition into introducing the context-building materials from the document titled “Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson”. Allow student input and discussion to create a working understanding of the context.
- Introduce the vocabulary and go through it with the students. Ask them to create their own sentences to demonstrate understanding of the words.
- Divide the class into seven groups and give each group the document titled “19th Century Petition Questions”.
- Position each of the seven petitions and their adapted transcriptions at a different table around the classroom. Each group will start at each of these tables.
- In their groups, students will answer the questions that correspond with that station. They will have 5 minutes at each station, rotating clockwise as the time expires. They will read the adapted transcription of each petition and answer the questions that correspond to it.
- After every group has gotten to every station, come back together as a class.
- As a class, go through their answers, asking what they came up with and leading critical discussion about their answers.
 - As you discuss, show the map of Wisconsin on the projector and indicate where each petition takes place. Have students indicate where they live in relation to the petition locations.
- Final discussion question: *Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?*

ADAPTED TRANSCRIPTIONS

STATION 1: Box 6, Folder 8

Petition of 58 inhabitants of the town of Salem praying for a repeal of so much of the law regulating general and other elections, as prohibits colored persons from exercising the right of suffrage

We, the citizens of Salem, ask that you **repeal** the act that **restricts** people of color from voting. We also ask that you repeal any related law that limits rights based on skin color.

Link to petition:

<https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/2848/rec/1> STATION

STATION 2: Box 7, Folder 5

Petition of Benjamin A. Hughes and 12 other colored men inhabitants of Racine County praying that color shall not be the test of the right of suffrage

As people of color, we feel that the laws that restrict our voting rights based on the color of our skin are **unjust, oppressive**, and in **violation** of Democracy. We ask that everyone, regardless of skin color, be allowed to vote.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/3679/rec/4>

STATION 3: Box 41, Folder 10

The Petition of Heuston and 168 others to extend the Business of Sec. 1 of Chapter 117 of the annual laws of 1864 to the Families of Colored Soldiers who have been credited to the state

We request that the Volunteer Aid Fund be **extended** to the families of African American soldiers so that their families have **access** to the same protections as white soldiers.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/7543/rec/2>

STATION 4: Box 19, Folder 5

Petition of Sundry persons praying for an extension of the right of suffrage to Colored Citizens

We, the people of Lansing Outagamie County, request that the right to vote be extended to the African-American population.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6191/rec/12>

STATION 5: Box 24, Folder 6

Petition of M.D. Holbrook and 167 others

We, the people of Waukesha, ask that you vote against Douglas' Nebraska Bill. This bill seeks to break up the Missouri **Compromise** and allow enslavement in free **territories** in the United States. Please vote against this and any other bill that would seek those outcomes.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6783/rec/17>

STATION 6: Box 25, Folder 11

A Petition of Hiram Taylor and 45 others praying for a prohibitory liquor Law - The same Petitioners ask this body to pass resolutions instructing our representatives and senators in Congress to use their best endeavor to secure the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Law

We, the people of Sugar Creek, believe that the **fugitive** slave law is **immoral**. It violates **Habeas Corpus** and the right to a fair trial by jury. Additionally it attempts to take away the rights of an entire population. We ask that you do all you can to repeal this law.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/6857/rec/1>

STATION 7: Box 42, Folder 9

A Petition of S.P. Jones and 101 other Colored Citizens of the State of Wisconsin asking for the right of suffrage

We, the African-American citizens of Wisconsin, request to be **granted** the right to vote for people of color over the age of 21 in the next general election. We pay taxes and we sign up for military duty like everyone else so it seems fair that we should be allowed to decide how our taxes are spent and how our services are used.

Link to petition: <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/petitions/id/7905/rec/4>

Vocabulary

1. Access - Permission
 - a. She was granted **access** to the computer files she needed to complete the work.
2. Compromise - Agreement
 - a. Instead of fighting, the two sides agreed to a **compromise**.
3. Extended- Opened up for more participation.
 - a. In 2020 the Boy Scouts of America **extended** membership to girls.
4. Fugitive - Escapee
 - a. Freedom seekers were wrongfully seen as criminal **fugitives** in 1850s America.
5. Granted- Allowed
 - a. He asked to be **granted** permission to go home after he was wounded in battle.
6. Habeas Corpus- the requirement that someone under arrest be brought before a judge for a fair trial.
 - a. Her immediate arrest without a trial was a violation of **Habeas Corpus**.
7. Immoral – Wrong, evil
 - a. The soldier felt he was participating in an **immoral** war.
8. Oppressive- creating hardship through government control
 - a. The refugee immigrated to America to escape her **oppressive** government.
9. Petition- a written request to the government
 - a. A **petition** was written asking for a new bridge.
10. Repeal- To get rid of
 - a. The law was **repealed** after the people protested.
11. Restricts- Limits, does not allow
 - a. The Constitution **restricts** anyone under the age of 18 from voting.
12. Territories - Governed geographic area
 - a. The Minnesota and Wisconsin **territories** would eventually become states.
13. Unjust- Not fair
 - a. The student thought that it was **unjust** they were punished and no one else was.
14. Violation - offensive; wrong
 - a. His criminal behavior was in **violation** of society's laws.

Petition Questions

STATION 1

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 2

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 3

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 4

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 5

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 6

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?

STATION 7

1. Who wrote the petition?
2. What are they asking for? Why?
3. What are the reasons they give for why they should be allowed to vote?

CONCLUSION

1. Which petition was the most interesting to you? Why?
2. What is one thing you learned from these petitions?
3. Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?

Petition Questions Answer Key

STATION 1

1. Who wrote the petition?

The citizens of Salem

2. What are they asking for? Why?

Repeal the act that restricts people of color from voting.

Why? It unjust/unfair

STATION 2

1. Who wrote the petition?

People of color

2. What are they asking for??

That everyone, regardless of skin color, be allowed to vote

Why the laws that restrict voting rights based on skin color are unjust, oppressive, and in violation of Democracy

STATION 3

1. Who wrote the petition?

Heuston and 168 others

2. What are they asking for?

That the Volunteer Aid Fund be extended to the families of African American soldiers

Why? So that their families have access to the same protections as white soldiers

STATION 4

1. Who wrote the petition?

The people of Lansing, Outagamie County

2. What are they asking for?

That the right to vote be extended to the African-American population

Why? It would be fair/equal

STATION 5

1. Who wrote the petition?

The people of Waukesha

2. What are they asking for?

To vote against Douglas' Nebraska Bill

Why? The bill sought to break up the Missouri Compromise and allow enslavement in free territories in the United States

STATION 6

1. Who wrote the petition?

The people of Sugar Creek

2. What are they asking for?

Repeal the Fugitive Slave Act

Why? It is immoral. It violates Habeas Corpus and the right to a fair trial by jury. Additionally it attempts to take away the rights of an entire population.

STATION 7

1. Who wrote the petition?

African-American citizens of Wisconsin

2. What are they asking for?

Request to be granted the right to vote for people of color over the age of 21 in the next general election.

Why? It would be fair/equal

3. What are the reasons they give for why they should be allowed to vote?

They paid taxes and signed up for military duty like everyone else

CONCLUSION

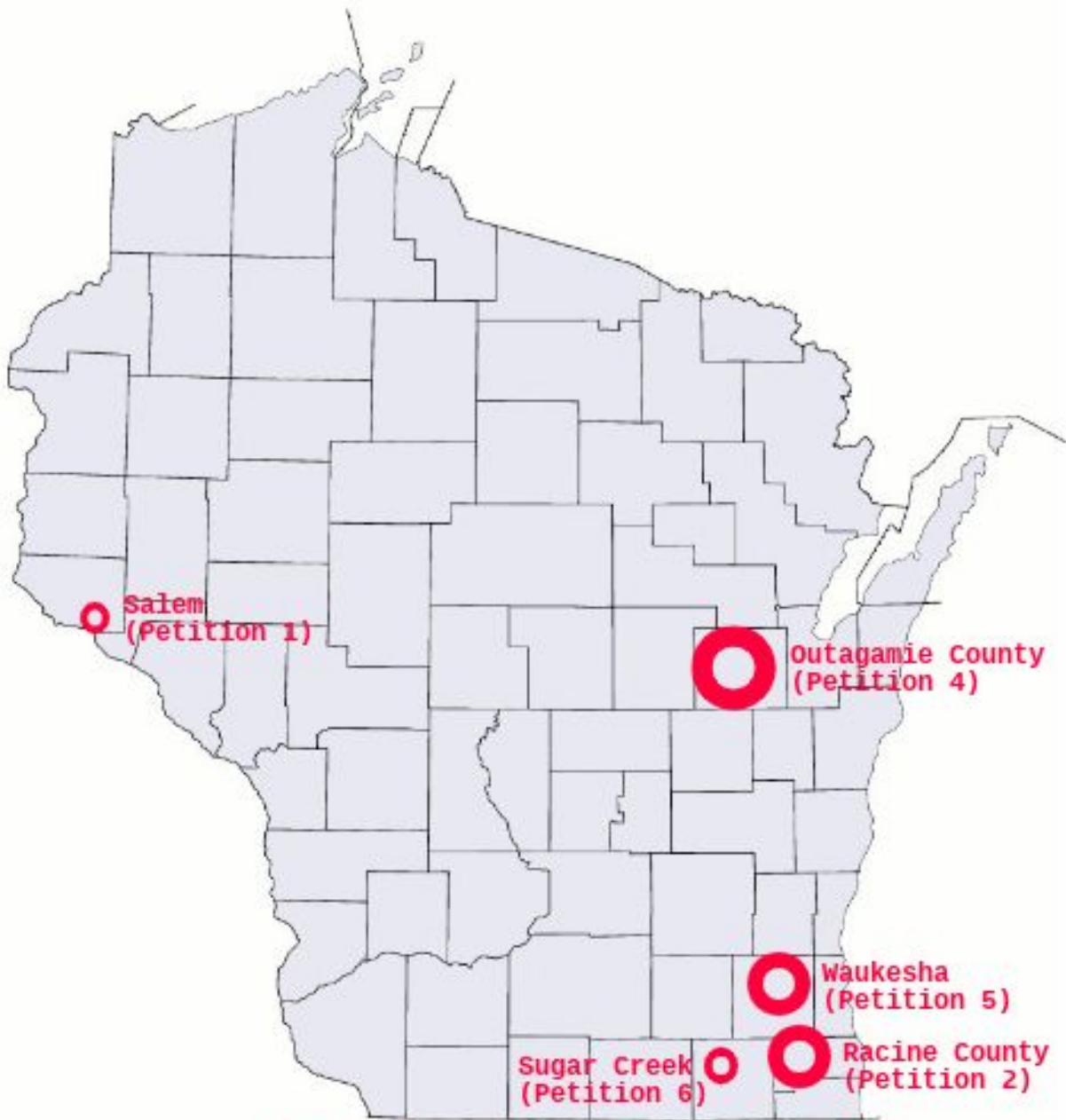
1. Which petition was the most interesting to you? Why?
2. What is one thing you learned from these petitions?
3. Why is it important for everyone to be able to vote? What are some of the rights that everyone should have in America? What are some of the responsibilities?

Important Information for Teachers to Address in this Lesson

- **What is a Petition?** A formal written request presented to a civic authority or organized body (such as a territorial legislature or a municipal court), signed by petitioner(s) to show support for a cause or a concern.
- **Language:** The titles of these petitions refer to African-Americans as “colored”. This is an unacceptable term to use. Although “African-American” is still widely accepted, there has been a recent push to stress the person before the identifier (Examples: People of color, people with disabilities etc.). This type of language continues to change as society changes so be sure to use the accepted language at the time you are teaching this lesson.
- **African-American Suffrage:** The 1846 constitution would have created a referendum on the matter of African Americans suffrage in Wisconsin, but it was rejected when put before voters the next year. The 1848 constitution remained silent on this and other controversial issues, so following its ratification a special referendum was held in 1849. This article explains how, despite a majority of voters approving Black suffrage in 1849, the right to vote was consistently denied until 1866, when Ezekiel Gillespie carried the issue to the state Supreme Court. Not until the Wisconsin legislature ratified the 15th amendment to the U.S. constitution in 1869 were the voting rights of African American men finally assured. Black women, like all women, were denied the right to vote until 1920.
 - Taken from: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=991>
 - Although every citizen over the age of 18 now legally has the right to vote, voting access continues to be an issue for many low-income citizens who do not have access to the necessary identification or proof of address.
- **Fugitive Slave Act:** The case of Joshua Glover brought the issue of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 to the fore in Wisconsin. For their assistance in helping Glover seek freedom in Canada, abolitionists Sherman Booth and John Rycraft were taken into custody for violation of the Fugitive Slave Act. In 1854, the Wisconsin Supreme Court declared the act a violation of the constitution, clearing Booth and Rycraft of charges. The main reasons for the decision are summarized on the second page of the transcript.
 - Taken from: <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/turningpoints/search.asp?id=170>
 - For variation in the lesson, the Sherman Booth papers are available online at: <https://search.library.wisc.edu/catalog/999464067702121>

- **For more context building:**

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS502#later>



*Station 3 and Station 7 are unspecified

1846
 Petition of 58 inhab-
 -itants of the town of
 Salem praying for
 a repeal of so much
 of the law regulating
 general and other
 elections, as prohibits
 colored persons from
 exercising the right
 of suffrage
 - W. Thompson
 Ref'd to Com on
 Judiciary
 May 24.

STATION 1

To the Honorable Legislative Assembly
 of the Territory of Wisconsin
 The undersigned citizens
 of Salem would respectfully petition your honor-
 able body to repeal so much of section 12th, page
 28 of the Revised Statute, of the act entitled an
 act to provide for and regulate General Elections
 as is prohibitory of the Colored man's exercising the
 elective franchise - and all other laws that limit
 a man's right by the color of his skin, and your
 petitioners as in duty bound will ever pray.

Miss W. Hayes Ephraim Wilcox Isaac Buttrick Frank Johnson John Barber Thomas Johnson Isaac Brown Jas. Loom James Burke James Story Francis Carwood Wm. St. Charles John Kelley Augustus Washburn James W. Vanalstine	Eleonora B. Paddock Geo. Cro Harriet W. Patten J. J. Kinney Catherine Lansing Susan C. Quinn Harriet Quinn Elizabeth Barber Louisa Hummer Jane Story Maryella Nurse Catherine Carwood Louisa C. Bennett John Stittell Joanna Vanalstine
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John H. Thompson
and 12 other colored men
inhabits of Racine County
praying that Colours shall
not be the test of the right
of suffrage. Resolved to send

Resolved to cause a
bill to be introduced
in the Wisconsin Territorial
Legislature
to give the
colored people
the right of suffrage.

Resolved to send
a bill to the
Legislature
to give the
colored people
the right of suffrage.

July 21, 1845.

STATION 2

To the Council and House of
Representatives of the Territory of Wisconsin

The undersigned inhabitants of Racine
County Wisconsin Territory would
respectfully represent to Your Honorable body
that while we are bound to obey the laws
and aid in maintaining the Government of the
Territory we are nevertheless by existing laws not
permitted to exercise the elective franchise
on account of our colour which discrimination
we deem unjust oppressive and in violation of
the fundamental principles of all republican
constitutions. We therefore humbly petition
Your Honorable body to amend the laws
of this Territory that Colours shall not be the test
of the right of Suffrage and as our duty
bound we will ever pray

Benj. A. Hughes

William Taylor

David H. Brown

James L. Smith

Stephen J. Smith

James J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

John J. Smith

A Petition of
 Miriam Taylor
 & forty five others
 praying for a free
 military legion law

In some petitions
 ask this body to
 pass resolutions
 instructing our repre-
 sentatives & senators
 in Congress to use
 their best endeavors
 to secure the repeal
 of the fugitive slave
 law

1833

STATION 6

James Taylor
 Henry Baker
 Andrew Barker
 F.P. Barker
 J. Barker
 N. Barker
 James Graham
 William Davenport
 Wm. Van Hook
 Thomas Fox
 John H. Barker
 Lemuel Williams
 John Wilson
 George W. Stone
 Dudley Garrison
 W.H. Bell
 S.C. Cook
 A. Loring
 R. L. Linn
 J. W. Ell
 W. H. Stone
 Wm. H. Stone

James Taylor
 Henry Baker
 Andrew Barker
 F.P. Barker
 J. Barker
 N. Barker
 James Graham
 William Davenport
 Wm. Van Hook
 Thomas Fox
 John H. Barker
 Lemuel Williams
 John Wilson
 George W. Stone
 Dudley Garrison
 W.H. Bell
 S.C. Cook
 A. Loring
 R. L. Linn
 J. W. Ell
 W. H. Stone
 Wm. H. Stone

James Taylor
 Samuel Barlow
 John H. Barker
 Henry Baker
 Dudley Garrison
 W.H. Bell
 S.C. Cook
 A. Loring
 R. L. Linn
 J. W. Ell
 W. H. Stone
 Wm. H. Stone

James Taylor
 Samuel Barlow
 John H. Barker
 Henry Baker
 Dudley Garrison
 W.H. Bell
 S.C. Cook
 A. Loring
 R. L. Linn
 J. W. Ell
 W. H. Stone
 Wm. H. Stone

STATION 7

Mem. to St. S.
 A Petition of the
 People and
 100,000 of Colored
 Citizens of the State
 of Wisconsin asking
 the right of suffrage
 to the colored people
 of Wisconsin
 By the People
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To the Honorable, the Senate and Assembly of the State of Wisconsin, at Madison Assembled.

The undersigned Colored Citizens of the State of Wisconsin, respectfully petition your Honorable bodies, and ask that the necessary legal steps be taken, and provision made in accordance with the Constitution of this State, to submit the question of granting the right of suffrage to Colored Men of the age of twenty-one years, to the voters of this State at the next general election. We respectfully submit that by Law we are taxed and liable to Military Duty as other men. It seems to us but justice that we should have a voice in determining how the taxes should be expended, and how and when our services shall be rendered.

Dated January 14th, 1865.

NAMES	NAMES
Wm Jones	Wm Davis
J H Mc Gray	Geo H Gray
B. Morrison	E. Gullis pie
J. Burns	Wm Clay
O. Richardson	Wm J. Watson
Robert Ellis	George Adams
Halter S. Carroll	Thomas Sampson
Wm H. Jenkins	Allen French
NAB Platt	Henry Jones
Wm Colwell	John Clifton
Cyrus Livingston	Mat Ridley
J. Smothers	Alex Anderson
Samuel Anderson	Boyd Cole
Samuel Hendley	Joseph Wallace
George Spittit	Stephen Post
Charles Spangler	Henry Moore
Alfred Mosbey	Michael Walker

John W. Birney	Samuel Johnson
A. D. Cromwell	Edward White
Ezra Johnson	Robert Edmund
James Johnson	James Croner
Chas. P. Hillman	Michael P. Hillman
Jackson Gibson	Nathan Smith
Anthony Gibson	Jefferson Davis
Edward Rankin	Peter Robinson
Frank Conway	Charles H. Wallace
John Carter	Williams S. Reel
Samuel Thompson	David Mitchell
Anthony White	Albert Best
Abraham Holland	William Henry
James W. Brooks	Henry Moss
W. A. Dixon	James P. Williams
William Root	William Courtney

Joseph Ellmore	Walter Bright
John Bailey	Christopher Skinson
William Gammell	Leve Dillon
Leoman Benjamin	Bart Johnson
Charles La Croix	Benjamin Day
William Paggott	Richard Moore
W. Lee	David Becker
John Harper	John Hately
Henry Young	Samuel Moore
James Woodruff	William Murick
John Holman	Horace Harpfield
Elizabeth Richardson	Joseph A. Barker
John J. Jr.	John Suther
Martin Smith	James P. Johnson
Agatha Cotton	John Bolden
Alfred Tidball	William Campbell
Abraham Parsons	James Johnson
John W. Hamilton	George Clark

102 names

STATION 7 (CONT.)