

Honoring the fallen ~ Memorial Day in Steelton's African American community

Historic photos and articles

1900 Celebration

"At 10:30 a procession of colored people was formed on Adams street, right resting on Second, and moved out, in the following order: Chief marshal, Henry Berkley, aids, George Moten, Frank Jefferson and Jacob Gibson; Steelton Cornet Band, Daniel Holmes, conductor; firing squad from Post 520, of Harrisburg, in command of James Auter; hearse containing flowers; four boys dressed in national colors, carrying open Bible; eight boys and eight girls, also dressed in the nation's colors, carrying a large flag; several hundred small school children in wagons; citizen on foot, carriages containing the ministers and speakers. The route was down Adams to Front, to Mohn, to Midland cemetery. The singing was done by the school children and they also placed the flowers on the graves. Addresses were made by W. Justin Carter, Esq., of Harrisburg, and James Howard. At one o'clock the parade returned and dismissed on Adams street."

► The photograph at right was donated by Mr. Edwin Dornell, of State College, PA. Mr. Dornell notes "The photograph depicts a Memorial Day ceremony at William Howard Day Cemetery. The man in the rear, in the WWI army uniform is a Harrisburg physician, Dr. Collier. Next to him is Rev. Brown, then pastor of Steelton's Mt. Zion Church, and to his left is Rev. E. L. Green." We also note that the front row includes Dr. Charles Hoyt Crampton (second from left) and teacher Rev. Vernon R. James (extreme right).

Mr. Dornell adds "If I remember correctly there were at one time three Memorial Day parades and ceremonies in Steelton. As a member of the Steelton High School band while still a student at Hygienic, I remember marching up Lincoln Street to the then white cemetery directly across the street from William Howard

Day. Then later in the morning the black Elks band accompanied a parade to the William Howard Day Cemetery. Still later, the same Elks Drum and Bugle Corps accompanied a parade to Midland Cemetery where another ceremony was held."

◄ Calobe Jackson, Jr, donated the historic article at left, noting, "this description of the 1900 Memorial Day exercises tops them all. W. Justin Carter and James Howard spoke. Auter was the son-in-law of Jane Chester. Other notables were there. Steelton Cornet Band was in existence for many years.

"The custom of dressing marching children in colors of the flag is mentioned as far back as the 1865 Harrisburg USCT parade.

"Peter S. Blackwell and W. Justin Carter spoke in 1899, but a full description of the exercises was not reported by newspapers."

