

CHESTER TIMES – November 12, 1909 – FOLCROFT'S COLORED CITIZENS PETITIONING FOR BOROUGH – First Time in History of the State That Negroes Ever Made an Effort to Form a Municipality of Their Own

"Shall Folcroft be incorporated as a borough or shall it remain Folcroft precinct of Darby Township?" This is the question which is agitating the minds of the colored population of a settlement called Hook, in Folcroft. For several weeks past the colored citizens of that place have been holding meetings and discussing the matter of applying to the Court for a charter incorporating Folcroft into a borough. So far as could be learned there is not a single white citizen Folcroft who will favor the proposition, and, in fact, it will be fought bitterly when the proper time arrives. On Tuesday evening there was a meeting in Madison's Hall, Folcroft, and there were present more than sixty persons, among the number being but two white men. The meeting was presided over by David Kinsey, one of the leading colored men of Folcroft. The matter of forming a borough was discussed at length, and all times present were unanimously in favor of applying for a charter to incorporate Folcroft as a borough. A petition was passed through the audience and was signed by nearly every one present.

WANT BETTER STREETS – A Times reporter interviewed a number of the colored residents of the place yesterday on the subject of a borough and they were all very enthusiastic, and felt that when they apply for a charter that the court will grant their prayer. The colored man claim that they pay a large percentage of the taxes of the township of Darby, and that the money is spent in other parts of the township and that they are being neglected as far as good roads are concerned, and they believe that by having the township incorporated into a borough that the taxes would be more equally distributed.

Robert Kelson, a prominent colored citizen, who is a contractor, said yesterday that the object of forming the borough was to get better streets, which they do not now enjoy, and besides that, Folcroft is sufficiently large to become a borough and be self-sustaining. There are now in the precinct more than 12100 houses and a great number of these are owned by colored people, and many more are being built by members of the race at this time. He also said that the colored people desire to make it a town for colored people to reside in, and that at the present time they are the majority.

BUILDING HOMES – From the appearance of things surrounding Hook, which is a part of Folcroft, the colored man's statement seems to be correct, as many new homes are being erected by the more progressive colored people and these are being inhabited by colored families. Most of the stores are conducted by colored people and there is a large brickyard which is being operated by William Balue, a colored man. The colored man also said that Folcroft had nearly 300 voters, while Horntown precinct had but 71 votes, which has been the same number of votes polled for many years and most of these are dead ones when the vote is being counted. Glenolden precinct has only 16 votes. "Why should we not receive some recognition?" he asked. He also said that they wanted their own school and own government, ruled by colored people. He said that eight per cent of the taxes came from Folcroft and are used in other parts of the township. Among the prominent colored citizens interested in the formation of a new borough are: J. B. Randolph, a local preacher; J. W. Madison, a contractor and builder; Ephriam Robinson, John W. Ewing, James Bennings, John Dowdy and others.

As far as is known this is the first time in the history of this State that colored people ever made an effort to have a borough of their own, but that it will not be smooth sailing for them is indicated by the fact that the white citizens are going to oppose the plan with all their strength and influence.

WHITE CITIZEN'S VIEW – It was a hard matter to get an interview with any of the white citizens yesterday as most of them are business men and professional men, with their business in Philadelphia. They all have handsome homes that are located along the Pennsylvania railroad. One of these white citizens who was seen yesterday but who did not want to be quoted, said that there is no doubt that the colored people are making a hard fight to have Folcroft incorporated into a borough, but that their plans will be opposed and before they would allow the colored men to take a part of their properties into a borough they would apply to get into Glenolden borough. This citizen also said that the colored men

were in a majority when it comes to voting and that therefore they would have the entire municipality governed by their own race, which would never do and that it would not be tolerated. He also said if the colored men want a borough why don't they take in their own settlement and not take in the part where the white people live. He believed if they did this they would not be so bitterly opposed.

This citizen also said that it is not the truth that the colored men pay a large proportion of the taxes of the township, but that many of them who own houses of property do not pay their taxes, and that their properties have to be liened, and that they are not building any extra fine dwellings.

However, the project is being watched by both sides and some interesting developments are looked for. It is expected that when the meeting is held by the colored men on next Monday night that more definite plans will be formed, as the colored people are going to engage an attorney.

Among the prominent white citizens residing in Folcroft are: J. H. Anderson, chief clerk of the second vice president of the Pennsylvania Railroad; C. F. W. Boone, cashier of the Evening Telegraph; William Wright, a furniture dealer; William Allen, a grocer; Postmaster C. B. Shaw; Edward Rice, a plumber, and other prominent Delaware County men.

KEITH LOCKHART COLLECTION