

Headstone Dedication to Honor Congressman George Henry White, Early Civil Rights Leader

One of America's most distinguished early civil rights leaders, Congressman George Henry White (R-NC), will be honored with the dedication of a headstone for his gravesite at Historic Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania, on October 29, 2015.

A special unveiling ceremony will be held at 1 p.m. at the gravesite, with remarks by State Sen. Anthony H. Williams of Philadelphia (Eighth District), and noted author and motivational speaker Stedman Graham, who will speak on the impact of White's life.

Presently only a footstone marks the Eden Cemetery gravesite, including White's name and those of his son and daughter, who are buried beside their father. Funds for the new headstone were raised by the Benjamin & Edith Spaulding Descendants Foundation (BESDF), Inc., and the Concerned Citizens of Whitesboro (CCW), Inc., of Whitesboro, New Jersey.

Former Rep. White, a longtime Philadelphia resident who served in Congress from 1897 to 1901, was buried in Eden Cemetery after his death in December 1918. Elected to the U.S. House of Representatives from North Carolina's Second District in 1896 and reelected in 1898, White was the only African American member of Congress during his tenure and the last to serve in the U.S. House until 1929. After declining to seek renomination in 1900, he retired from office in 1901.

Following a sustained outbreak of lynchings in the late 1890s, Rep. White sponsored an anti-lynching bill which sought to make such mob violence a capital crime, but his bill was never enacted. He was an active leader in a number of early national civil rights organizations, including the National Afro-American Council, the U.S. Constitution League, and the NAACP. His memorable farewell address to Congress, delivered in January 1901, predicted the eventual return to Congress of African American members, fulfilled by the election of Rep. Oscar S. De Priest (R-IL) in 1928.

Vincent Spaulding, chief operating officer and project coordinator for BESDF, and Bernard Blanks of Whitesboro, president of the CCW, Inc., will represent their organizations at the ceremony. Remarks on White's historical importance and legacy will be delivered by author Benjamin R. Justesen, whose 2001 biography, *George Henry White: An Even Chance in the Race of Life*, and other books and articles have chronicled White's life and achievements.

Other speakers will include Dr. Milton Campbell, president of BESDF; Private Joseph Becton, representing the Third Infantry Regiment, U.S. Colored Troops; and Rev. Gregory M. Davis, of Fountain Baptist Church, Summit, New Jersey.

In Philadelphia, White practiced law and founded the city's first black-owned commercial bank, People's Savings Bank, in 1907. He remained active in local Republican politics, and was selected as a statewide alternate delegate to the national Republican nominating convention in 1916. He served as an assistant city solicitor in Philadelphia from 1917 until his death. His son, George H. White, Jr. (1893-1927), a Pittsburgh attorney, and daughter Mary A. White (1887-1974), a schoolteacher, are also buried at Eden Cemetery.

White's land development company founded the town of Whitesboro in Cape May County, New Jersey, in 1903, as a refuge for black Americans fleeing Jim Crow-era political repression and violence in the South.

A graduate of Howard University, White was born in Bladen County, North Carolina, in 1852. After serving as a teacher and principal in New Bern, North Carolina, White entered politics, serving in both houses of the N.C. General Assembly and winning election to two terms as solicitor of the state's Second Judicial District before running for Congress. After leaving Congress in 1901, White practiced law and pursued business interests in Washington, D.C., before moving to Philadelphia.

The inscription on White's new headstone reads in part as follows:

“Rep. George Henry White, 1852-1918, A major civil rights leader for the ages. He moved to Philadelphia, PA, and founded Whitesboro, NJ. White's prophecy in his farewell address to the U.S. Congress, January 29, 1901: ‘Phoenix-like, he will rise up someday and come again.’”

[Note: Submitted by Vincent Spaulding, COO, Benjamin & Edith Spaulding Descendants Foundation, Inc., Cary, N.C.; contact telephone, (202) 441-3589]