

History Question of the Month

What early Butlerville resident's father was a well-known Black activist from Maryland?

Answer

Francis Hezekiah Grice, an African American, who homesteaded 160 acres of land east of Wasatch Boulevard, was one of the most interesting people to live in our City. His Father Hezekiah Grice was born September 28, 1801 in Calvert County, Maryland. He became very prominent in the Free Black Movement of the 1820's to 1860's. He was credited with being the impetus behind the establishment of the "National Negro Convention Movement", that, became the vehicle for African Americans to debate and adopt strategies to elevate the status of free blacks in the north and promote the abolishment of slavery. He was also heavily involved with the Baltimore Alliance. About 1834, Hezekiah Grice led a group of free blacks which emigrated from Maryland to Haiti. Haiti had recently won independence from France and was offering citizenship to immigrants willing to help colonize the island. Grice made several trips back to the U.S. continuing his efforts on behalf of free blacks. Finally in 1862, with the passage of the "Homestead Act of 1862", he was able to apply for and receive a U.S. passport, giving him citizenship in the U.S. which he had so desperately wanted.

His son, Francis Hezekiah was born about 1836, while the family was living in Haiti. It is not known exactly when he returned to the U.S. We know he was working in the mines near Elko, Nevada in 1870. On June 28, 1872, he became a naturalized citizen, in Salt Lake City. In 1880, he and his wife and family were living in Little Cottonwood Canyon, before applying for a 160 acre homestead in Butler. He was involved in the mining industry, owned a restaurant in Salt Lake City on Main Street between 1st and 2nd South, a prime business location. He was also an artist. He was active in politics. The Salt Lake Times reports that on June 30, 1891, he put together a Republican rally in Butler. A large number of people attended to listen to representatives of the party. A committee of three, Francis Grice, William McGhie and John Wood were appointed to establish a Republican Club for those supporting the "liberal" agenda of the National Republican Party.

A short time later, he was falsely accused of poisoning several of Charles Colebrook's horses. Although innocent, the community shamed him to the point that he left the area. He sold his property in Butler to C.W. Bennett. Francis had built a large granite house, the only house in Butler to be built completely of granite. The Bennetts never moved into the house, after purchasing the property, and it remained vacant for many years.

Francis Grice died February 2, 1893, in Salt Lake City, of Bright's (Kidney) Disease. He is buried in the Mt. Olivet Cemetery.

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