



“Institutions for Mutual Relief”

Notice published by African American mutual aid societies in the *National Gazette and Literary Register*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1 March 1831

TO THE PUBLIC

WHEREAS, we believe it to be the duty of every person to contribute as far as in their power towards alleviating the miseries, and supplying the wants, of those of our fellow beings who, through the many misfortunes and calamities to which human nature is subject, may become fit objects for our charity.

AND, WHEREAS, from the many privations to which we as people of colour are subject, and our limited opportunity of obtaining the necessaries of life, many of us have been included in the number dependent on those provisions made by law, for the maintenance of the poor; therefore, as we constitute a part of the public burden, we have deemed it our duty to use such means as was in our reach to lessen its weight, among which, we have found the forming of institutions for mutual relief, the most practicable and best calculated to effect our object.

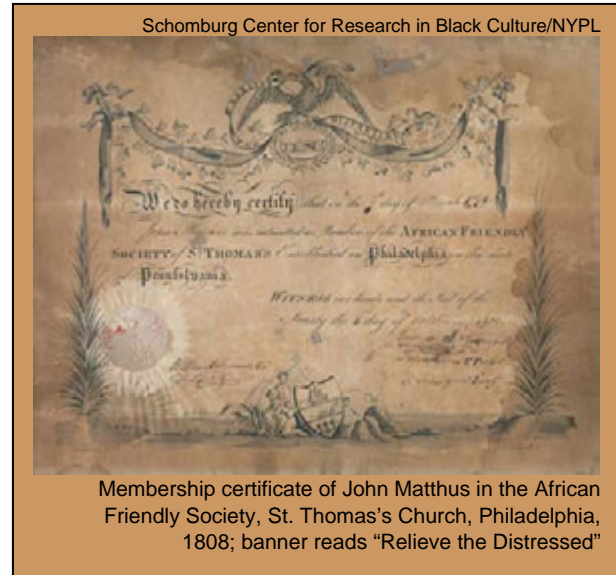
TO THESE INSTITUTIONS, each member pays a sum varying from one to eight dollars as an initiation fee, and from twelve and a half of twenty-five cents monthly. The funds are exclusively appropriated to the relief of such of its members, as through sickness or misfortune, may be unable to work; to the interments of deceased members, and to the relief of their widows and orphans., & [etc.].

THEREFORE, by contributing a trifling sum to these funds while in prosperity, we not only secure to ourselves a pension in sickness and adversity, but also contribute to the relief of our distressed brethren; and as these societies are incorporated and bodies politic in law, each member is sure of such benefits as are guaranteed by their constitutions.

BUT AS THE PUBLIC are not acquainted with the manner of distributing these benefits, nor the amount distributed, many have mistaken our object, and doubted the utility of these institutions — have thought them incentive to extravagance and dissipation, and formed merely to gratify our ostentatious desire, in consequence of which, the societies have thought it necessary, for the satisfaction of the public, to publish a statement of their expenses for charitable purposes during the last year; which, as we believe, will convince every candid person, that the above named opinions are erroneous, as most of the objects of these charities are persons whose daily earnings are scarcely adequate to their daily wants; and, many of them having large families, without some such aid they would necessarily become objects of public charity;

WHEREAS, by belonging to one or more of these institutions, they receive such aid as enables them to live, and in case of their death to be decently interred without increasing the public expense.

WE, THE SUBSCRIBERS, being appointed a committee to lay before the public a statement of the expenses of each society, for the year 1830, together with the dates of the formation, do certify the following to be correct.



Membership certificate of John Matthus in the African Friendly Society, St. Thomas's Church, Philadelphia, 1808; banner reads "Relieve the Distressed"

NEGRO SOCIETIES IN PHILADELPHIA, 1831

MALE SOCIETIES

	<i>Formed</i>	<i>Paid out from 1830 to 1831</i>
The African Friendly Society of St. Thomas	1795	\$ 76.50
Sons of Africa	1810	222.00
Benezet* Philanthropic	1812	415.19
Benevolent Sons of Zion	1822	116.99
Sons of St. Thomas	1823	43.12
Harrison* Benevolent	1823	56.06
Coachman's Benevolent	1825	212.12½
United Sons of Wilberforce*	1827	308.68
Tyson† Benevolent	1824	93.38
Beneficial Phil[anthropic]. Sons of Zoar	1826	38.50
United Brethren	1829	159.00
Humane Mechanics	1828	38.00
Union Ben't [Benevolent] Sons of Bethel	1828	178.61
United Shipley* Beneficial 1829	1829	97.07½
Citizen Sons of Philadelphia	1830	18.40
Library Benevolent	1830	70.35

FEMALE SOCIETIES

The Female Benevolent Society of St. Thomas	1793	80.84
Female Benevolent Whitesonian	1816	80.12
African Female Band Benevolent Society of Bethel	1817	428.50
Female Benezet* Society	1818	196.12½
Daughters of Aron	1819	61.12½
Female Granville* Society	1821	161.22½
Daughters of Africa's Society	1821	149.97
Female African Benevolent	1822	212.55½
Daughters of Zion Angolian Ethiopian Society	1822	103.67
Daughters of St. Thomas Society — Feb. 1	1822	250.72
Daughters of Absalom, April 5	1824	360.33
Daughters of Ethiopia	1825	131.30
Female Tyson† Society	—	132.75
Daughters of Hosea	1825	109.77
Female Methodist Assistance Soc[iety].	1827	32.50
United Daughters of Wesley†	1827	144.78
Free Daughters of Shipley*	1827	108.72
Daughters of Isaiah	1828	73.72½
Daughters of Gideon	1828	189.65
Female Clarkson* Society	1828	90.00
United Sister's Society	1828	208.75
Union Daughters of Industry	1829	39.50
Female Harrison* Benevolent Soc[iety].	1829	97.25
Female Beneficial Philanthropic Society of Zoar	1826	42.21
Benevolent Daughters of Zion	1826	75.50
Daughters of Noah of Bethel Church	1822	40.00
Citizen Daughters of Philadelphia	1830	15.00
		\$ 3616.58½
Total of male societies		2202.71¾
Total of male and female societies		\$ 5819.29¼

There are several societies of the same kind, that have not made their returns to be published, for reasons unknown to us.

John Bowers, William C. West, James Cornish, Robert C. Gordon, Sr., Benjamin Paschall, Committee

* Named after anti-slavery leaders (most Pennsylvanian) Anthony Benezet, Thomas Clarkson, William Granville, Thomas Shipley, Elijah Tyson, William Wilberforce, and, perhaps, Thomas Harrison. Most other proper names in the society titles refer to biblical personages or African regions.

† John Wesley: a founder of the Methodist Church which opposed slavery, leading many African Americans to join the church.