

**Black Gotham:
A Family History of
African Americans in
Nineteenth-Century
New York City**

Carla L. Peterson



THE LATE PETER GUIGNON

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The Friend of Eminent Men, who did His Duty as it was given Him to Do It.

The death of Mr. Peter Guignon of Wall Street, so soon after the death of Mr. Mitchell, the deceased Mrs. Guignon is known, has been a source of grief over a wide circle of the leading citizens of New York and visitors. By permission and as careful a than could be allowed, together with several other gentlemen, a friend, who knew him to be his best, who told him in the highest regard the his virtues, noble-hearted friendliness, who knew some of the best qualities of his life and character, to find of the opportunity to say a word concerning one of the finest, most patriotic and ardent spirits in the whole island of Massachusetts.

Peter Guignon was born in 1817, in the city of New York. His father was a native of the West Indies and came thence to the city of New York and resided there until his death. At the early period of his education he was sent to the old military academy, founded by the Quakers of New York City for orphaned children. He was the youngest son of that school from about the year 1835 of the new national academy which was then founded upon its site. His schoolmates were George Allen, Thomas Stetson, the three Howsons (Oliver, Patrick and Charles L.), Isaiah Duggan, J. McQuinn Smith, Samuel H. Ward, Henry Highland Garnet, George T. Downing. His standing and character in his school days can be seen that he was the friend and intimate companion of every one of these eminent boys, not only in their boyhood, but afterwards in their manhood and maturity. So strong and popular was the make-up of Peter Guignon that it was impossible for him to rank with any other than the first and best. It is said of a very eminent statesman in England, "that is never was a boy" that he passed, at nine years of age, from childhood into mature manhood. And not infrequently we see the same peculiarity in many other boys. It was thus with Peter Guignon. He never was a boy; not that he was grave; for neither was he at any period of his life studious or serious in his demeanor. On the contrary he was always cheerful, gay, even hilarious in character. But what he was always manly. When other boys were thinking of boys and girlhood there was a marked absence of femininity in his manners, speech and dress. He was prematurely manly; and at 15 and 16 years of age manifested a manly bearing, tone and deportment, seldom seen at such an age.

His boyhood was marked by the moral qualities of sobriety, bravery and generosity. According, I think, most of the occupations of his school days. I may mention the incident which was characteristic of his whole nature. One of our schoolmates was suddenly taken with a violent fever of the old school disease. All the boys were frightened and stood off as usual. James Guignon, the year before he rushed to his bedside, and under his arms, through his legs, up a high flight of stairs and attended to his necessities.

Soon after leaving school he engaged in business. At first time he went to California. Subsequently he became a druggist and apothecary and all his life was known as a man of activity and enterprise, succeeding in his mercantile ventures and establishing a character in his own community for business capacity and integrity. About the year 1855 Mr. Guignon passed through a most painful experience, which tinged with its coloring all his after life. He had married many years before, his first wife, Miss Marshall, former schoolmate, and by her he had one daughter, still living, Mrs. P. A. White. Subsequently on the death of this lady, he married the daughter of Mr. P. A. Ray, now his widow, Mrs. Cornelia Guignon. By this lady he had with other children one son, a lad who at 14 was very much like his father, full of manly energy, spirit and power. Next to these children, he lost his life, at 25 years of age, by a most painful accident. This accident was a sorrowful blow to his father with a grief from which he never fully recovered to the day of his death. But through this sorrow he was led to a deep religious experience, which gave a new and brighter coloring to his natural qualities already referred to. He became a conscientious member of St. Philip's Church, New York City, and the spiritual order of the man became quickened to a religious zeal, which made him one of the most active and valuable of his members. But only was he a vestryman of that church and a delegate for several years to the Diocesan Convention, but he took active and prominent part in all the departments of church work. He assisted in church societies, he visited the sick and dying; he looked after the poor,

he gave his money to the church charities. The religious life was consequently, in the way, not so much a change in the man as the manifestation of his natural qualities. All the spiritual gifts of the man showed themselves in the same way, his piety, his faith, his charity, his love, his gentleness, his very generous heart and noble character. His very generous heart and noble character became manifest. He had, however, a great deal of business, and his time was not so much as he would like to have been. He was not simply a friend to the cause of his acquaintance; he was a teacher, lover and protector, always ready to give what he pleased and to spend his money.

During the last few years of his life he passed through the most cruel of pain and sickness. His suffering was most severe, but his character was not changed by it. He had the whole time such a degree of mental serenity for his own and others as to be happy. It was only equalled by a spirit of noble benevolence at the feet of the Cross; great patience and infinite kindness, gentleness, and simple reliance upon the Redeemer.

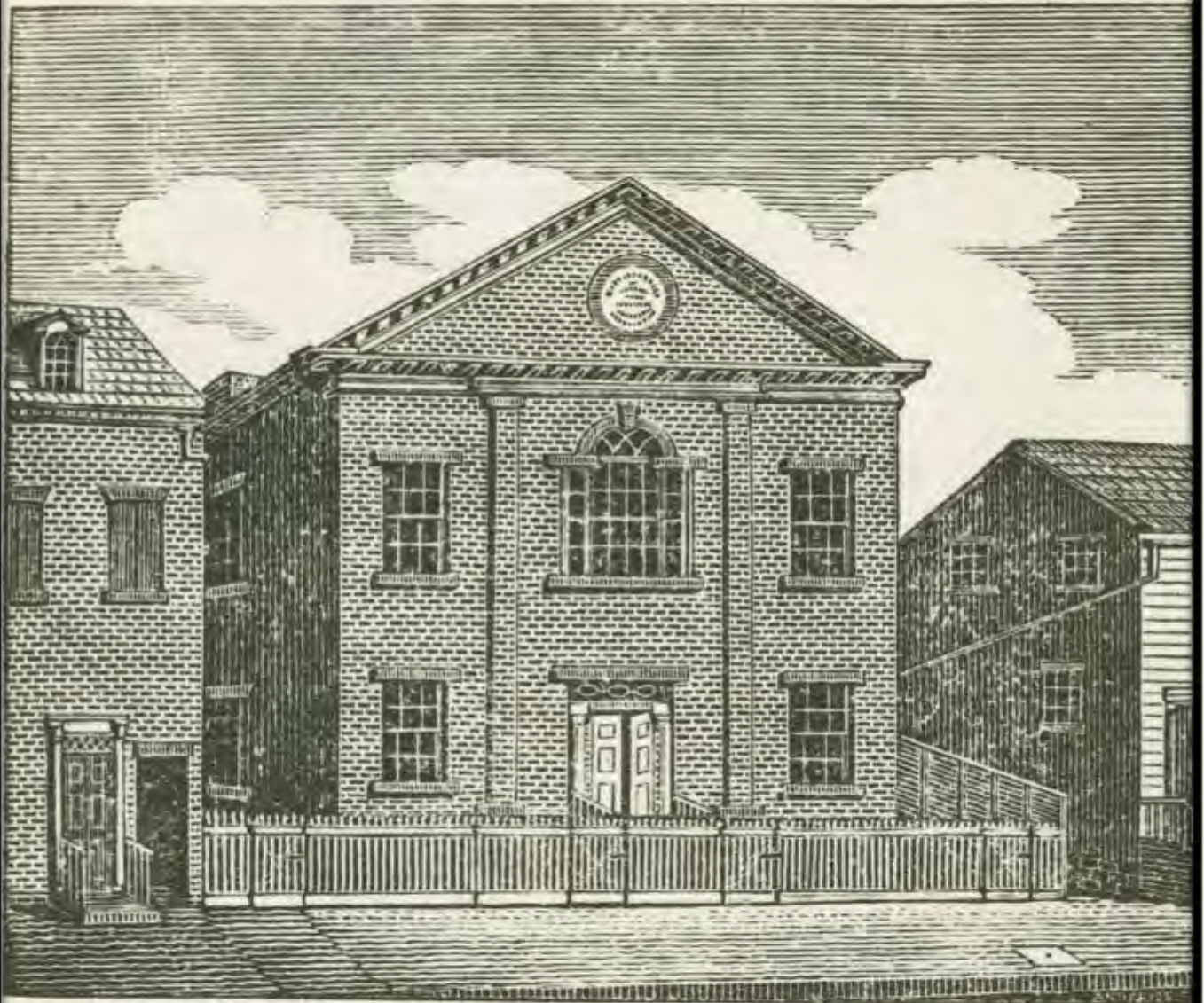
Mr. Guignon's death was a wonderful manifestation of Divine Providence for he was a martyr to suffering. He died in the arms of Jesus Christ, repudiating all earthly things, and only upon the merits of his faith. His great life was for his fellow-men, his family and his great children. It is impossible to estimate, possibly too has been a unique and singular character, which is so impossible to equal. Ask any of his many true friends for just such another character as Peter Guignon, and every one will say that no other man, with just his talents can be found in any of their circles. With our admiration, without any pronounced opinion, we possess each peculiar talents and superior qualities that every one will say. "We need shall look upon his life again." There are plenty of ordinary good men in every community, but of a class of Peter Guignon was a unique of every and striking characteristics, and with a marked individuality, which separated him from every body else.

How deep was the impact of those qualities; how the true and singular character, was printed, was evident at the funeral, which took place at his old home. There, in that large assemblage of friends could be seen men and women, and women, who had known and loved and played with him in the old school house in Mulberry street and who caught the infection of dropping a tear upon the face of a dear friend, who he viewed at the departure from the earthly and who, amid their tears, blessed God for his excellent attributes that their friend and brother had gone to Paradise.

*Understand
slipping in from
his father's
side when he was*







NEW-YORK AFRICAN FREE-SCHOOL, No. 2.

Engraved from a drawing taken by P. Reason, a pupil, aged 13 years.

Peter Wray or Ray
is the name of the Mulatto
man, who sorts out the To-
bacco for Lovillard, and
who is so great a judge
of Leaf Tobacco, and which
will do best for Snuff
and which for Cutting for
Smoking and chewing Tobacco
to find him look in the
New York Directory or ask
one of Lovillards Men
27 December 1842, he was
working for Lovillard in
his Factory in Laurens St.
New York.

© New York July 17th 1863

Mr Lyons

Sir

I have received yours from the bearer. And I cannot answer whether I can comply with it. I will see you this afternoon as I mention in the other note, as I have been excused from my Captain for that purpose. I cannot say to day what will occur to morrow. I will be at said Drug Store at 3 O. Clock P. M. this day, with Horse & Wagon.

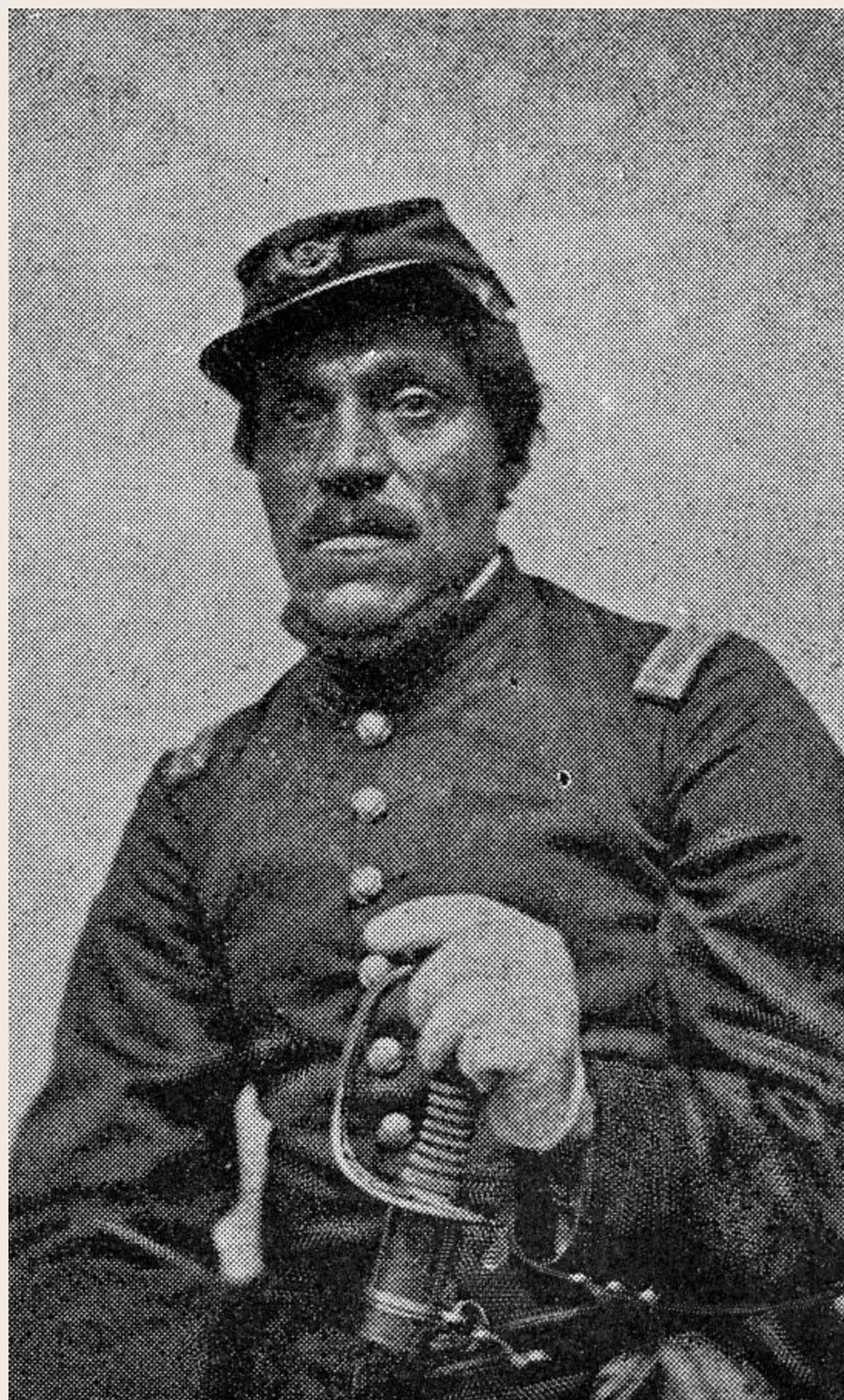
yours & c

John W. Keady

Supt. A. P. Reeds



PETER W. RAY, M. D.
NEW YORK CITY

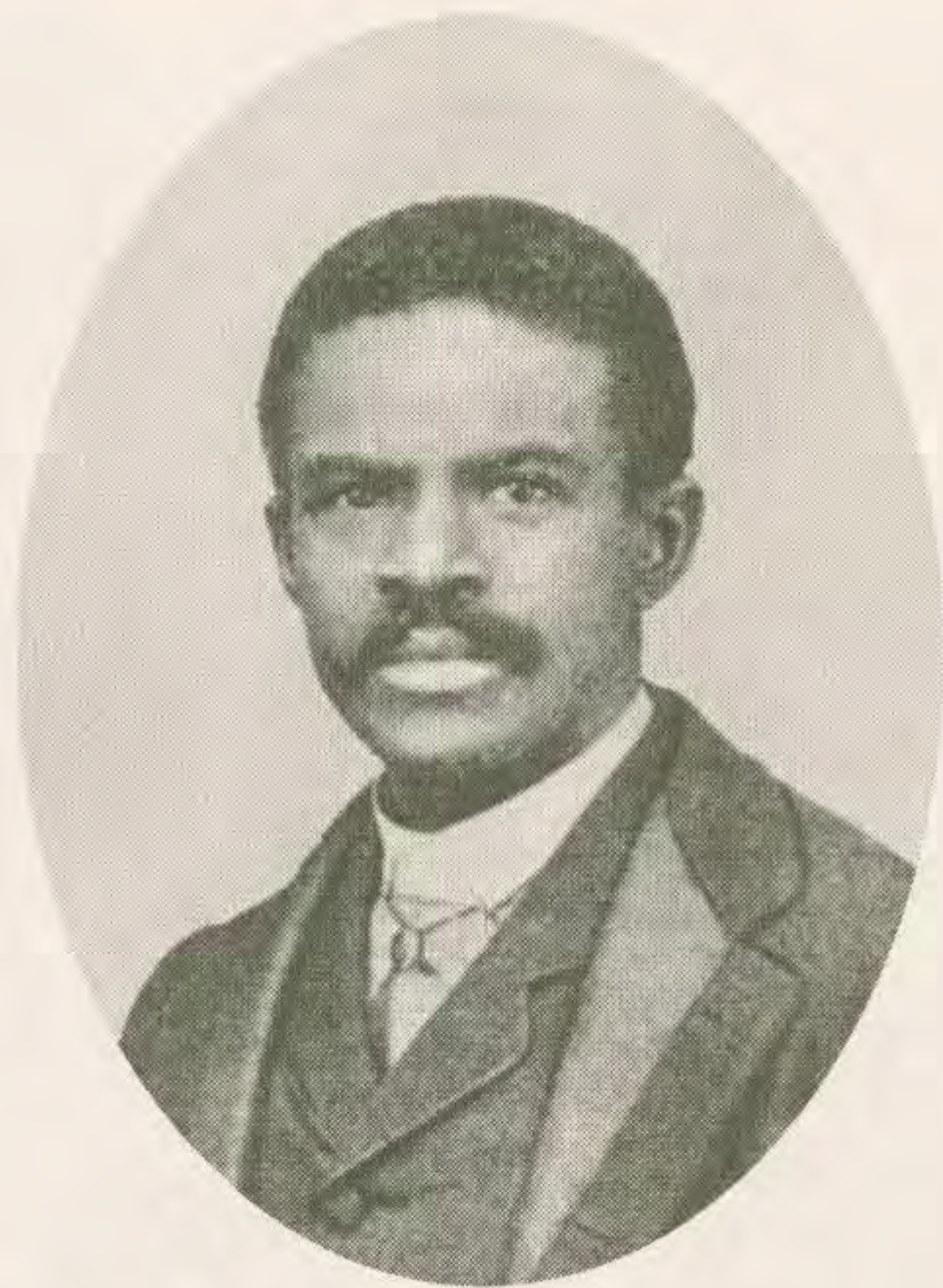








T. THOMAS FORTUNE.



*Brooklyn School Board member
Thomas McCants Stewart.*

