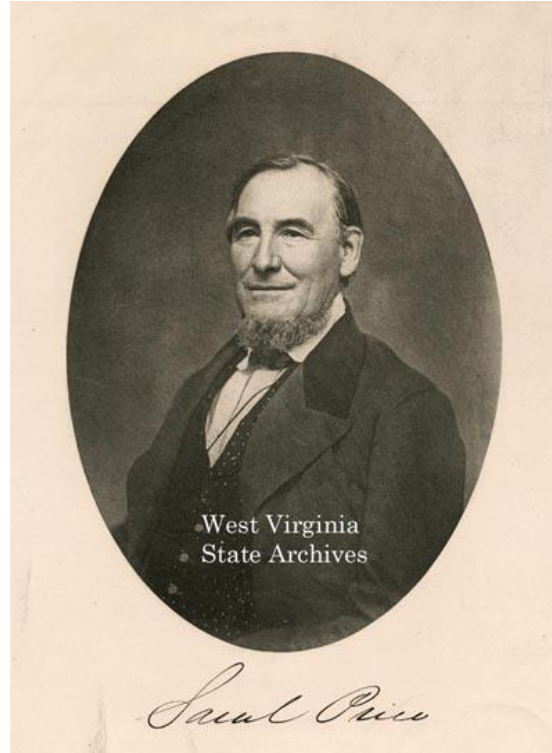


ON THIS DAY IN WEST VIRGINIA HISTORY JANUARY 28



On January 28, 1861, at a mass meeting held at the Greenbrier County Courthouse, Samuel Price was elected delegate to the Richmond Convention.

CSO: SS.8.22

Investigate the Document: Speeches of Charles James Faulkner and Samuel Price, Constitutional Convention, 1872, Sc2004-124).

1. What was the purpose of the West Virginia Constitutional Convention?
2. Why did Samuel Price believe that the delegation at the Convention held an advantage over their predecessors?
3. Describe Price's feelings about political parties.
4. What two objectives did Price feel needed to be accomplished at the Convention?

Think Critically: If you were presiding as President over a new state's Constitutional Convention, what are (3) things you would want to be accomplished? What challenges do you think you would encounter in this role? What qualities do you believe you have that would assist in you in this role? Weaknesses? What do you think life was like in West Virginia during the early stages of statehood?

OPENING SPEECHES OF THE CONVENTION.

Speech of Hon. C. J. Faulkner, Temporary Chairman of the Convention.

GENTLEMEN:—Although my occupation of this position is but temporary and only preliminary to the permanent organization of this body, yet as I have been designated to this place by a large majority of the individuals who compose this Convention, it has been suggested that it would not be in violation of good taste, but on the contrary, that it might be expected of me, to make some remarks touching this very interesting occasion which has brought us together. It is an undoubted fact that this is the first full and perfect representation of the people of West Virginia that has occurred within our history. I do not allude to this in any spirit of complaint or reproach upon the past, but simply to call your minds to the acknowledged fact that it may be the more impress you with the importance and the dignity of the high duties which now devolve upon you. It has not yet been nine years since that people whom we have the honor to represent in this assembly, acquired the distinct and separate rights of a distinct and separate political community. Our existence as a State is connected with events of transcending interest in the life of this nation. Tracing its origin to the convulsions of the late civil war, the close of that remarkable struggle gave permanency and stability to the assertion of our right to self-government.

Whatever differences of opinion may have existed at one time in the minds of some men as to the regularity of our admission into the sister-hood of States, no such question exists now. West Virginia stands at the present day recognized, without controversy or dispute at home and beyond her limits, as one of the free equal sovereign members of that great confederacy of republics whose associated power commands the respect alike of the civilized and barbarous world.

Gentlemen, this lofty position which our State has attained, as one of the acknowledged members of the Federal Union, imposes a high and corresponding obligation upon all her citizens to realize the dignity of her destiny and to speed her onward in the march of material, moral and political advancement.

The competition for pre-eminence in all the industrial pursuits of life throughout this great republic is eager, earnest and active. Unless we shape our policy and apply our energies to the same results we shall fail to perform that duty which the relation which we now bear to the political system of this country demands of us.

In territory and population we are not among the largest of our sister States. Neither are we among the smallest. We are blessed with advantages that may well excite our gratitude and thanks.—Our lot is cast in a temperate latitude.—We enjoy an invigorating atmosphere, and our territorial surface is generally diversified by mountain and vale. Such of our lands as are not adapted for tillage is hardy, brave, enterprising, incorrupt. We have abundant water power. Our boundless forests bear upon their virgin bosoms the accumulated wealth of centuries. Nature has beneficently scattered throughout our highlands the most attractive resorts of health and pleasure.—Our mineral treasure in quantity and quality is not surpassed by any area of equal extent upon this continent; and we are so happily situated between the valleys of the Ohio and Mississippi and the Atlantic seaboard, as to compel the construction through our territory of the great highways of commerce without the imposition of any burdens upon our people. These physical advantages, striking as they undoubtedly are, would in themselves be fruitless without a civil government that will give contentment to our people and invite population and capital from abroad. To attain this end, the preparation of a Constitution suited to this State, is the object for which you have been called together upon this occasion. To accomplish this result you have been selected from the great mass of your fellow-citizens by a generous and discriminating constituency. No more momentous, no more honorable duty could have devolved upon you. You are not here to pass upon any temporary measure of public policy, nor upon any ordinary act of legislative relief. You are here to lay broad and deep the foundations of the

social compact; to place upon an imperishable basis the rights of an entire people; to provide for the contingent and ever recurring wants of a whole community; to assign to the different departments of administration the functions and duties peculiar to each, and so to balance and adjust the complex machinery of your State Government, that its parts shall work in harmony, and contribute to the welfare and happiness of all the people. Now, gentlemen, these are labors worthy of statesmen.

And, gentlemen, when you shall have proceeded to make a permanent organization of your body by the election of upright, competent and energetic officers, when you shall have performed that task, which has been entrusted to you by the people, and which I am sure you will discharge with fidelity to those who sent you here, when you shall have framed an organic law under which all, without distinction, shall be secured in those fundamental privileges which of right belong to the citizens of all free governments, when every eye shall be closed through which the subtle spirit of proscription may hereafter reach its victim, when you have placed the public faith of this State upon the high and lofty basis of integrity and honor, when you have distributed the different departments of your government so as to secure wise laws and a pure and faithful administration of justice, when your county organizations shall be so devised as to render cheap and easy and familiar to the people the administration of their local concerns, when the blessings of free education, like the dews of heaven, shall be made to descend alike upon all who are born and reared upon your soil, then we may all reasonably and naturally expect to see peace and contentment dwell in every cottage, foreign labor and capital seeking fresh fields of enterprise within our limits, population imparting life and beauty to our rugged wilds and unbroken forests, our territory no longer separated by mountain barriers brought into easy and convenient intercourse by well constructed lines of communication; our coal and iron deposits pouring out in rich abundance those substantial elements of national wealth which far transcend in economical value the golden treasures of California or the glittering gems of South Africa, and our State marching steadily to that cheering and hopeful destiny which we have every reason to believe that Providence, aided by the energies of man, has in reserve for her.

Gentlemen, I do not doubt from what I have seen of the composition and character of this body from my short intercourse with it, their practical good sense, intelligence, experience, and ability, that it will discharge that high trust which has been confided to it to the satisfaction of those who have sent its members here. Let us then, proceed, gentlemen, to the permanent organization of this body—let us elect as President of this body, a man who is known and distinguished throughout our State for his ability and experience, his personal honor and high integrity. And, gentlemen, if you will permit me—one who has had a great deal of experience in legislative bodies, to assume the liberty of making a suggestion—which I do in all possible kindness—I would say let discussions be free, earnest and exhaustive; but let it not degenerate into that vain debate too common in the deliberative halls of our country, which survives the interest of the hearer and the patience of the public. The people of this State expect that great work which they have confided to your hands to be well done. They also expect it to be done promptly, without any unnecessary consumption of time and money.

Gentlemen, asking pardon for the lengthy remarks I have made, and thanking you for your courtesy and attention, we will now proceed to the permanent organization of this Convention. [Applause.]

Speech of Hon. Samuel Price, President of the Convention.

On taking the chair, Mr. Price said:

Gentlemen of the Convention:

I thank you for the honor which you have conferred upon me in calling me to preside over your deliberations. It is an honor which the ripest statesman might be proud of, and I assure you I shall cherish the honor as long as I live of being called upon by the flattering vote which I have received, to preside over this Constitutional Convention.

Gentlemen, I shall need your support at all times. I shall have to throw myself upon your indulgence and your generous support. It will be my purpose, gentlemen, to administer such rules as you may adopt for our government firmly, but so gently as to wound the sensibilities of no one. It will be my purpose, gentlemen, to administer the duties of this office to the best of my skill and ability, so as to accord to every member justice, fairness and impartiality. I feel embarrassed, gentlemen—and you may well imagine that I do—under the circumstances of this call which has been made upon me, and you must not expect an elaborate speech from me; but, with your permission, I will say a word upon the subject before us.

We have been delegated here by our constituents to amend the State Constitution, or to frame a new one. A higher trust could not be imposed upon any delegate body—to amend the great fundamental law of one of the States of the United States.

We, gentlemen, have an advantage over our predecessors. They were hastily assembled together, and many of them without any constituents in particular. They were irregularly assembled together for the double purpose of providing, in the first place, for the birth of a State, and in the second place for the government of a State. We have nothing to do with the birth of the State. This State has been aptly called "the child of the tempest" and we may say she was brought into being by means of the Cæsarean operation, and it was uncertain for some time whether she would live or not. But she has lived. She has been nursed into strong womanhood, and she now takes her place among the great stateshood of States. We have nothing to do now with the birth. We are providing for her government. And, gentlemen, in addition, we have the advantage of our predecessors in this. We have had the experience of the last few years. We have had this constitution upon trial for eight or ten years. Experience has pointed out its defects, and it is our duty, as the delegates of the people, to remedy those defects. Let us do it, gentlemen. Let us do it fairly, impartially and justly. Let us make a constitution without regard to party, without regard to section, without regard to denomination. Let it be so fair, so just, so equal in its operation that it will *excort* the approbation of every fair-minded man, without regard to his party affinity or his local residence.

If I had it in my power I would scorn to make a Constitution for a party. Parties are up to-day, and down to-morrow. That might be one reason we should not make a partisan Constitution. Another reason is—and a better one—intrinsic-

cally it would not be right [Applause.]

Let us unite our best efforts, therefore, in making such a Constitution as we ourselves will be willing to live under, and that we can transmit with confidence to our children and our children's children, to the latest generation. Let us do it at once.

Gentlemen, if we go to work at once—and I am a working man—if we go to work at once and unite our labors in an effort, sincerely and earnestly—and such I believe will be the case—I hope, gentlemen, we will falsify the prediction of many out of this body, that it is to be a perpetual body. In my opinion, six weeks ought to be sufficient to do the work properly, which may come before the Convention, and in such a manner that the results of our labors may commend themselves to the most favorable consideration of our constituency.

We have two objects to accomplish: We have in the first place, gentlemen, to make a good Constitution, and in the next place, we have to make a Constitution that the people will believe is good; because, after it passes from our hands, it will have no validity until it is adopted by them. Let us, whilst we are steering clear of Scylla, not run foul of Charybdis. Let us consider well our action that we may make a fair, elevated, impartial, just Constitution for ourselves, and such an one as we can transmit to our posterity. Gentlemen, I fear, very much fear, and I am embarrassed with the fear, that I shall not be able to realize the great confidence which you have reposed in me. But, gentlemen, whatever talent I have, whatever administrative ability I may possess for the discharge of the duties of the Chair, I pledge you, it shall be humbly, faithfully and impartially employed. [Applause.]