

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 78

Commemorating the 150th anniversary of the swearing in of the first African American legislators to serve in the General Assembly.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 6, 2020

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 24, 2020

WHEREAS, the first African American members of the General Assembly, elected in 1869, were sworn into office 150 years ago in February 1870; and

WHEREAS, during the era of Reconstruction in the wake of the American Civil War, as a condition of readmission to the United States Congress, states in the South were required to reform their governments and establish new constitutions; in Virginia, despite an existing prohibition in the state constitution, African American men were allowed to vote in the election of delegates to the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868; and

WHEREAS, the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 created the Virginia Constitution of 1869, also known as the Underwood Constitution, which formally guaranteed the right to vote in Virginia to African American men, enabling African American men to elect the first African American representatives to the Senate and the House of Delegates in the election of 1869; and

WHEREAS, in the decades that followed in Virginia, in response to fear of the power afforded to African American citizens by their representation in government, African American voters were disenfranchised by Jim Crow laws, designed to make the polls inaccessible to them, and by a new state constitution in 1902, which allowed the General Assembly to enact laws again disenfranchising African American voters; from 1890 until 1969, no African Americans were elected to the General Assembly; and

WHEREAS, the first African American legislators to serve in the General Assembly performed their public service in the face of great prejudice, animosity, and intimidation; in the time that they were able to offer their service to the Commonwealth, they enabled the expansion of rights to African American citizens, including many who were formerly enslaved; and

WHEREAS, the first African American legislators sworn in as members of the General Assembly in 1870 are as follows:

House of Delegates

William H. Andrews, born around 1839 in Virginia, was a teacher and represented Isle of Wight and Surry Counties in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and Surry County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 until 1871.

William H. Brisby was born free in New Kent County in 1836 to Roger Lewis, an African American, and Miranda Brisby, a Pamunkey Indian. He taught himself to read and write and learned blacksmithing as a trade. Mr. Brisby worked as a blacksmith, farmer, and lawyer. He worked on the construction of the Richmond and York River Railroad. He was a landowner and his chief interests were the study and practice of law. William H. Brisby represented New Kent County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 until 1871, serving on the Officers and Offices at the Capitol Committee. He later served on the New Kent Board of Supervisors from 1880 to 1882 and was a justice of the peace from 1870 until 1910. Mr. Brisby claimed to have helped Union prisoners of war escape from Richmond during the American Civil War, stowing them away in his cargo transports.

Henry Cox was born free in Powhatan County in 1832. A shoemaker, he became a landowner early, purchasing 37 acres in 1871. He represented Chesterfield and Powhatan Counties in the House of Delegates from 1869 to 1877, serving on the Officers and Offices at the Capitol Committee. Mr. Cox was part of a delegation that met with President Ulysses S. Grant to solicit his support for the Civil Rights Act.

Isaac Edmundson, a property owner with little education, was born in 1846. Mr. Edmundson represented Halifax County in the House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

Ballard T. Edwards, a bricklayer, plasterer, and contractor, was born free in Manchester in 1829 of black, white, and Native American ancestry. His mother was a teacher, and he too taught at a night school for freedmen after the American Civil War. He was a delegate to the 1865 Virginia Black Convention, and during Reconstruction he held office as overseer of the poor, justice of the peace, and assistant postmaster at Manchester. He represented Chesterfield and Powhatan Counties in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871, where he proposed a measure banning racial discrimination by railroad and steamboat companies. A leader in the Manchester First Baptist Church, Mr. Edwards was also active in the Masons.

George Fayerman, a storekeeper, was born free in Louisiana in 1830 to George and Phoebe

Fayerman. His father fled from Haiti to Louisiana during the slave insurrection led by Touissant l'Overture. Mr. Fayerman was literate in both French and English. After the American Civil War, he came to Petersburg, where he established a grocery store and became an official of the Union League and a delegate to the 1867 state Republican convention. Mr. Fayerman served in the House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871, where he sponsored civil rights legislation. He served as overseer of the poor from 1872 to 1874 and as a member of the Petersburg City Council from 1874 to 1876.

Charles E. Hodges was born in 1819 to well-to-do African American Virginians. His family moved to Brooklyn, New York, in the 1830s after his brother William was accused of forging free papers for slaves, leading to the prosecution of his father. Charles Hodges was a minister. He became involved in the abolition movement and the struggle for African American suffrage in New York State and was a delegate to the National Black Convention in Philadelphia in 1855. Returning to Virginia after the American Civil War, he served in the Virginia House of Delegates, representing Norfolk County from 1869 to 1871. Three of his brothers were also involved in Reconstruction politics.

John Q. Hodges, the brother of officeholders Charles, William, and Willis Hodges, was born to a prosperous Virginia free African American family that was forced to leave the state for Brooklyn, New York, in the 1830s after his brother was accused of aiding fugitive slaves. The date of his birth is unknown. John Hodges represented Princess Anne County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

Benjamin Jones, a farm manager, was born into slavery in 1834 or 1835. The overseer on his master's plantation before the American Civil War, Mr. Jones was sent to the North for education in 1865 by his former owner and was given 35 acres of land. He represented Charles City County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871, where he introduced legislation to make gambling a felony. According to the U.S. Census in 1870, he owned \$600 in real estate.

Peter K. Jones, a native of Petersburg, was born in 1838. He worked as a shoemaker and carpenter. Mr. Jones was a delegate to the 1865 Virginia Black Convention and represented Greenville and Sussex Counties at the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868. He served in the Virginia House of Delegates, representing Greenville County from 1869 to 1877.

Robert G. W. Jones, a farmer, mail carrier, and music teacher, was born free in 1827 in Henrico County. He moved to Charles City County before 1860, where he acquired considerable landholdings. In 1865, he purchased 500 acres for \$900. In 1870, he bought 70 acres for \$179, and finally, in 1876, he purchased 31 acres for \$300. He organized the first music classes in Charles City County and represented the county in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

James F. Lipscomb, a farmer and merchant, was born free in Cumberland County in 1830 to a family whose freedom was first granted in 1818. Although he was born in poverty, he learned to read and write and rose by his own efforts from the position of a hack driver in Richmond to the owner of a canal boat on the James River and finally to the ownership of three farms in Cumberland totaling 510 acres. He built a 12-room house and eight smaller dwellings, which he rented out to his farm tenants. After ending his eight-year career in the General Assembly, Mr. Lipscomb opened a general country store, which was later operated by his grandson. He represented Cumberland County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1877.

J. B. Miller, Jr., a teacher, was elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1869 as a Radical Republican to represent Goochland County from 1869 to 1871.

Peter G. Morgan, born a slave of African, Native American, and white ancestry in 1817, in Nottoway County, was a storekeeper and shoemaker. He represented Petersburg in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871. He served on the Petersburg City Council from 1872 to 1874 and was a member of the Petersburg School Board.

Frederick S. Norton, a shoemaker, was the brother of Virginia legislators Robert Norton and Daniel M. Norton. The dates of his birth and death are unknown. Mr. Norton represented James City County and Williamsburg in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

Robert Norton was born a slave in Virginia. The date of his birth and death are unknown. Robert Norton and his brother Daniel ran away to the North around 1850. He returned to Virginia in 1865, established himself as the leading African American merchant in Yorktown, and served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1872 and from 1881 to 1882, representing Elizabeth City and York County. He ran unsuccessfully as an independent candidate for U.S. Congress in 1874.

Alexander Owen, a rock mason, was born into slavery in 1830 or 1831 to Patrick and Lucy Hughes Owen. Mr. Owen represented Halifax County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871. He did not own property according to the U.S. Census of 1870, but he used his legislative salary to purchase 54 acres of land.

Caesar Perkins was born a slave in 1839 in Buckingham County, the son of Joseph and Clarey Mosely. He adopted the name "Perkins" from the name of his last master. Mr. Perkins, a brick mason,

farmer, storekeeper, and minister, was self-educated. He made bricks on his farm, built homes, promoted education, and organized churches, serving as pastor for them. He entered politics and represented Buckingham County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871 and from 1887 to 1888. Although from 1890 to 1903 he lived in Clifton Forge and from 1903 to 1910 he resided in Richmond, he spent the greater part of his life in Buckingham County.

Fountain M. Perkins was born in 1816. He was a minister and farmer. As a Virginia slave, Perkins was educated by his owner's wife and worked as a plantation overseer. He attended a school run by a Northern teacher after the American Civil War. Mr. Perkins organized Baptist churches in Louisa County, was a landowner during Reconstruction, and served in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

William H. Ragsdale, the son of R. Edward and Fannie Ragsdale, was born a slave in 1844. He became a teacher. He purchased 122 acres of land in Charlotte County in 1871 for \$1,400. Mr. Ragsdale represented Charlotte County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

George L. Seaton was a contractor and grocer. He was born free in 1826 in Alexandria to George and Lucinda Seaton. His father was a carpenter, and he taught the trade to his sons, George and John. The Seaton family were successful business owners. George Seaton represented Alexandria in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

William N. Stevens was born in 1850 to a Petersburg family that had been free for three or four generations. Mr. Stevens was a lawyer and represented Sussex County in the House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871, and the district of Dinwiddie, Greensville, and Sussex Counties from 1871 to 1879 and in 1881 and 1882 in the Senate of Virginia. He wrote to Charles Sumner in 1870 on behalf of the Civil Rights Act: "We are as much today the victims of this hateful prejudice of caste as though we were not men and citizens."

John Watson was born in Mecklenburg County and served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and in the House of Delegates in 1869. Mr. Watson was active in promoting schools and churches in the county. He died while in office.

Ellis Wilson, a farmer and minister, was born into slavery in Dinwiddie County in 1824. He spent his entire life in Dinwiddie County as a minister and community leader. In 1870 and 1871, he purchased four tracts of land comprising 624 acres. He represented Dinwiddie County in the Virginia House of Delegates from 1869 to 1871.

Senate of Virginia

James William D. Bland, a carpenter, a cooper, and a U.S. tax assessor, was born free in Farmville in 1844. He represented Prince Edward County and Appomattox in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and in the Virginia Senate from 1869 to 1870, where he served on the Senate Committee for Courts of Justice. At the Virginia Constitutional Convention, Mr. Bland proposed a resolution requesting military authorities to direct railroad companies to allow convention delegates to occupy first-class accommodations, which many railroads had refused to do. He also introduced a measure guaranteeing the right of "every person to enter any college, seminary, or other public institution upon equal terms with any other, regardless of race, color, or previous condition." He was considered to be the voice of compromise and impartiality in an age of turmoil and partisanship. James Bland was one of 60 persons killed in 1870 when the second floor of the State Capitol collapsed.

Isaiah L. Lyons, a native of New York born in 1842 or 1843, may have come to Virginia before the American Civil War, as the U.S. Census of 1870 lists him as living with a New York-born wife and a 12-year-old son born in Virginia. He represented Surry, York, Elizabeth City, and Warwick Counties in the Senate of Virginia from 1869 to 1871. In the Virginia General Assembly, Mr. Lyons did not oppose segregated schools; rather, he insisted that African American schools should have African American teachers. Mr. Lyons was a member of the First Baptist Church in Hampton. He died while a member of the Senate on February 21, 1871. After his death, the Virginia General Assembly awarded his wife \$52 to cover funeral expenses.

William P. Mosely, a slave born in Virginia in 1819, was a house servant and operated a freight boat. He obtained his freedom before the American Civil War and became well educated. Mr. Mosely was a delegate to the Virginia Black Convention of 1865, represented Goochland County in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868, and served in the Senate of Virginia from 1869 to 1871. He ran for Congress as a Republican in 1880 but was defeated by the Readjuster Party candidate.

Francis "Frank" Moss was a farmer and minister who was born free in 1825 in Buckingham County. Mr. Moss served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and served in the Virginia House of Delegates, representing Buckingham County from 1874 to 1875. He represented Buckingham County in the Senate of Virginia from 1869 to 1871.

John Robinson was born in 1822. He was a lawyer and graduate of Hampton Institute. He represented Cumberland County in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 and in the Senate of Virginia from 1869 to 1873. He also worked as a mail carrier and operated a saloon and

general store during the 1870s. The date of his death is unknown.

George Teamoh, a carpenter, was born a slave in Portsmouth in 1818. An accomplished orator, he was a delegate to the Virginia Black Convention of 1865 and was a Union League organizer. He served in the Virginia Constitutional Convention of 1867-1868 but generally remained silent. He wrote, "Agricultural degrees and brickyard diplomas were poor preparation for the complex proceedings." He supported the disenfranchisement of former Confederates. Mr. Teamoh served in the Senate of Virginia from 1869 to 1871, where he supported the formation of a biracial labor union at the Gosport Navy Yard. Later, due to party factionalism, he was denied re-nomination to the Senate of Virginia in 1871 and ran unsuccessfully for the Virginia House of Delegates. He was an advocate of African American self-help, was a founder of Portsmouth's first African American school, and was active in African Methodist Episcopal church affairs in the city; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth is indebted to these first African American legislators, and the people of the Commonwealth continue to benefit from their contributions and their legacies; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, that the General Assembly commemorate the 150th anniversary of the swearing in of the first African American legislators to serve in the General Assembly; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate transmit a copy of this resolution to the Chairman of the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus, the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the Chairman and Executive Director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, the Executive Director of the Virginia State Conference NAACP, and the Executive Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, requesting that they further disseminate copies of this resolution to their respective constituents so that they may be apprised of the sense of the General Assembly of Virginia in this matter.