

BROWN, Goodman (24 July 1840–4 July 1929), member of the House of Delegates, was born in Surry County, the son of Herbert Brown, a farmer, and Parthena Bell Brown, both of whom were free African Americans. His grandfather Scipio Brown received his freedom in 1804 from James Bell, of Surry County, and in 1809 married Amy Johnson, a free woman. Herbert Brown and his brother Benjamin Brown both owned property in Surry County before the Civil War. Goodman Brown worked on his father's fifty-acre farm until age nineteen and obtained some rudimentary education in a night school.

On 1 November 1862, near Cape Fear, North Carolina, Brown enlisted in the United States Navy as a cabin boy aboard the USS *Maratanza*. He was discharged at Savannah, Georgia, on 20 December 1864. Brown's whereabouts immediately before and after his Civil War naval service are not known. An unsubstantiated later account indicates that he served in the United States Army. Possibly Brown worked for the army in some civilian capacity. After the war he returned to Surry County and quickly emerged as a community leader. When the new county agent of the Freedmen's Bureau sought to identify the most respectable African American men in the county, local black residents provided him with eight names in April 1867, among them Goodman Brown, his brother Bedford Brown, and their father and uncle. Later two other members of the family, James Brown and W. T. Brown, served as overseers of the poor in Surry County. In 1872 Brown married Mary Todd Park (or Parke), of Richmond. A pioneering black teacher in Surry County, she helped him continue his education. Of their nine children, four sons and four daughters survived.

During the 1870s Brown became involved in politics. On 14 March 1881 he attended a meeting in Petersburg at which regional African American leaders resolved to support the Readjuster Party and its leader, William

Mahone. Brown corresponded with Mahone and in a letter dated 14 May 1883 identified himself as chairman of the Surry County Readjuster Committee. He used his relationship with Mahone to seek patronage positions for local men and ask that prominent political leaders be scheduled to speak in the county. After the Readjuster Party ceased to exist, Brown followed Mahone into the Republican Party. Several times Brown sought the Republican nomination to the House of Delegates from the district consisting of Prince George and Surry Counties but lost to candidates from Prince George County. In October 1887 he finally secured the nomination and despite opposition within his own party defeated Democratic candidate John Wilson by a margin of more than two to one. During the campaign newspapers identified Brown as a Mahone supporter. The Democratic Party then fully controlled the assembly, and as a Mahone Republican and an African American, Brown received the lowest-ranking appointments on the Committee on Immigration and the inconsequential Committee on Retrenchment and Economy. He did not seek renomination in 1889.

Brown had been acquiring land since the end of the war. By the time he entered the assembly he owned five tracts totaling almost 226 acres, on which he raised corn and peanuts. Brown resided in the Cobham district near Bacon's Castle. He belonged to the Mount Nebo Baptist Church after 1875 and for four decades was one of his county's leading African American men. Goodman Brown died of uremia in Surry County on 4 July 1929 and was buried near Bacon's Castle.

Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders*, 6 (frontispiece por.); family history provided by great-great-granddaughter Gertie Williams; Index to Rendezvous Reports, Civil War, 1861–1865, and muster roll of USS

Maratanza, 1 Jan. 1863, Records of Bureau of Naval Personnel, RG 24, NARA; J. F. Wilcox to O. Brown, 4 Apr. 1867, Freedmen's Bureau Records; several Brown letters in William Mahone Papers, Duke;

Richmond Daily Whig, 18 Mar. 1881; *Petersburg Daily Index-Appeal*, 22, 29 Oct. 1887; Election Records, no. 24, RG 13, LVA; birth and death dates confirmed by BVS and in obituary in *Richmond Planet*, 27 July 1929.

Source: Plunkett, Michael. "Brown, Goodman." In *The Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, Vol. 2, edited by Sara B. Bearss et al., 293–294. Richmond: Library of Virginia, 2001.



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