

George Fayerman (d. October 24, 1890), member of the House of Delegates, was born free, probably of mixed-race ancestry, about 1830 and was the son of Phoebe Fayerman and George Fayerman, who may have emigrated from Haiti. He identified Louisiana as his birthplace, but information attributable to his family suggests that he may have been born instead near Montego Bay, Jamaica, and that he may have arrived in the United States about 1865. He received some education and reportedly could converse in French as well as English.

Having settled in Petersburg shortly after the Civil War, Fayerman began earning his living as a butcher and became active in local politics. On April 1, 1867, following the passage of congressional Reconstruction legislation placing Virginia under military rule, he and other black leaders organized the Republican Party in Petersburg. At a mass meeting called a week later to endorse the Reconstruction acts, he urged the 2,500 African Americans present to take their new voting rights seriously and to support the Republicans. On April 11, Fayerman called on a gathering of black Republicans to unite as a political party and not to disappoint the Northern men who had fought on their behalf. He was one of three men appointed secretary of the fractious Union Republican State Convention held in Richmond on April 17 and 18. The resulting party platform called for equal political and legal rights, more-equitable taxation, and a system of free public schools. Fayerman served as secretary of other Republican meetings, including one held in August 1867 to reorganize and shore up party harmony, and at the state convention held in May 1868.

In March 1869 Fayerman attended a two-day state convention in Petersburg at which delegates battled over the selection of the party's gubernatorial candidate and ultimately divided into camps of radical Republicans and moderate True Republicans. In the general election held on July 6, 1869, Fayerman ran a close second in a field of four candidates and was one of two men elected to represent Petersburg in the House of Delegates. The True Republican–Conservative coalition triumphed statewide, however, and in November 1869 Fayerman attended a convention of African Americans and radical whites who, in an unsuccessful attempt to have the recent election declared illegitimate, petitioned Congress to schedule new elections.

Fayerman withstood two challenges to his seat in the legislature, the second of which questioned his United States citizenship. At a short session that met in October, Fayerman voted to ratify the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the Constitution as required by Congress before Virginia could be readmitted to the United States. During the two sessions that met in 1870 and in 1870–1871, Fayerman sat on the Committee on Counties, Cities and Towns. In 1870 the General Assembly approved a bill creating the state's first public school system. Fighting to secure their equal rights of citizenship, Fayerman and most of the African American delegates had attempted to strike out the requirement that schools be racially segregated. After their measure was overwhelmingly defeated, he joined other bold legislators in casting a symbolic vote against passage of the school bill that he almost certainly favored.

Fayerman introduced bills, petitions, and resolutions, including one requesting that the Committee for Courts of Justice be instructed to report a bill guaranteeing equal civil and political rights to all citizens. On March 28, 1871, Fayerman voted with the majority of Republicans and many Conservatives in favor of a bill that provided for the payment in full of the antebellum state debt, then totaling more than \$47 million. The Funding Act proved disastrous and was later regarded as one of the state's most ill-advised pieces of economic legislation.

Fayerman did not stand for reelection in the autumn of 1871, and in October of that year he sustained severe injury when confronting an employee he suspected of stealing. In May 1873 he was elected to Petersburg's common council. Fayerman won again in 1874, but he did not attend council meetings regularly. In June 1875 the council resolved to declare his seat vacant and on 1 July accepted his resignation.

By 1879 Fayerman had aligned with the Readjusters, a coalition led by former Confederate general William Mahone that proposed to pay only a portion of the public debt while using the remaining funds to bolster public schools and provide other needed services. Fayerman attended a

convention of black Virginians that met in March 1881. As a member of the Committee on Address, he helped draft the unanimously adopted resolution of support for the Readjusters. In August at the Republican State Convention in Lynchburg he sat on the Committee on Organization. After the Readjusters merged with the Republican Party in April 1884, Fayerman continued to attend party meetings and nominating conventions. In 1888 he followed Mahone's lead in opposing the successful congressional bid of John Mercer Langston, an African American Republican.

On December 30, 1868, Fayerman married Roberta Branch, a native of Petersburg. They had two daughters and three sons, one of whom was the first graduate of the college department of the Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (later Virginia State University). During the 1870s Fayerman operated a livery stable and by the 1880s had established a grocery. From at least 1883 until 1885 he also served as a gauger for the Internal Revenue Service. George Fayerman died at his Petersburg residence on October 24, 1890, from an illness described variously as consumption and as typhoid fever. He was buried in Blandford Cemetery.

Contributed by Donald W. Gunter for the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, a publication of the Library of Virginia.

Sources Consulted

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especially 39–40, 133, 157, 207, 244, 666; will and estate inventory in Petersburg Hustings Court Will Book, 7:433–434, 10:233, 244–245, LVA; Bureau of Vital Statistics Death Register, Petersburg (with birthplace of Jamaica and death date of Oct. 24, 1890), LVA; variant death date of October 20, 1890 on gravestone; biography with birth year of 1830, variant death date of 1891, and undocumented middle initial L. in Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Office Holders in Virginia, 1865–1895* (1945), 16; William D. Henderson, *The Unredeemed City: Reconstruction in Petersburg, Virginia, 1865–1874* (1977); William D. Henderson, *Gilded Age City: Politics, Life and Labor in Petersburg, Virginia, 1874–1889* (1980); *Petersburg Index*, Apr. 9, 12 1867 (misidentified as William), Oct. 28, 1871, May 23, 1873; *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Apr. 18 (surname appears as Faysman and as Ferryman), 19, Aug. 2, 1867, Nov. 26, 1869; *Richmond Daily Enquirer and Examiner*, May 7, 1868; *Petersburg Daily Appeal*, July 2, 1873; *Petersburg Index and Appeal*, July 2, 1875; *Richmond Daily Whig*, Mar. 16, 18, Aug. 11, 1881; *Petersburg Daily Index-Appeal*, Oct. 27, 1890 (birth "near Montiego bay in the island of Jamaica" in 1830 and variant death date of "Friday night," Oct. 24, 1890).



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