

Daniel M. Norton, later McNorton (d. November 29, 1918), member of the Convention of 1867–1868 and of the Senate of Virginia, was born enslaved early in the 1840s in Williamsburg. His brother Frederick Smith Norton, a member of the House of Delegates, was older by more than a decade. He was close in age to Robert Norton, another brother who was a member of the House of Delegates, and they were reportedly the sons of an enslaved woman and her owner. The identities of their parents are not known for certain, but Robert Norton provided different names for his mother on each of his two marriage records: Richard and Elizabeth without surnames in one instance, and Charlotte E. Norton in another. About the middle of the 1850s, Norton and his brother Robert escaped from slavery in Gloucester County to freedom in Troy, New York. He received medical training from a doctor there and on January 23, 1860, married Edmonie, last name unknown, in Philadelphia. Two days later, she traveled to Virginia, where he refused to go, fearing re-enslavement. They did not often live together before their marriage ended under unrecorded circumstances. They had one child who died young.

By 1865 Norton and his brother had prospered working as barbers in Springfield, Massachusetts. After the end of the Civil War, they returned to Virginia, where Norton may have had an interest in the store that his brother later operated in York County. He quickly established himself as a local leader and in February 1866 testified before Congress about conditions in Yorktown. Norton stated that although white people treated him well, other black residents were not being paid for their work and "would be in danger of being hunted and killed" if the army did not remain to

protect them. Despite his desire for a federal presence, he came into conflict with the local agents of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands. After York County residents elected him to the bureau's local court, the assistant commissioner for Virginia refused to allow him to be seated. The freedmen reelected him even though under instructions from the bureau to select a white representative. After a meeting at which the men unanimously chose Norton a third time, an army officer stopped the proceedings, which broke up with the voters chanting Norton's name and shooting their guns.

Dr. Norton, as he was often called, and his brother Robert Norton created a beneficial society called Lone Star that helped them build a political power base in York County. On October 22, 1867, voters in York and James City Counties elected Norton to the constitutional convention that Congress required each of the states of the former Confederacy to hold. With African Americans voting in Virginia for the first time, he defeated his white opponent by 1,406 votes to 216, although most of York County's white men who voted against holding a convention did not cast a vote for either candidate. Assigned to the Committees on Finance, on Education, and on Agricultural and Industrial Interests and Immigration, Norton sided with the Republican Party's radical faction at the convention. He submitted a petition from Republicans asking that the convention include a homestead provision in the new constitution to protect people's residences from seizure to pay debts. He twice used parliamentary tactics to hinder Conservative Party scrutiny of Richmond's radical leader, the publisher James W. Hunnicutt. Norton supported

the constitution's creation of a free public school system and African American voting rights, but he was not present on the day that the convention voted in favor of the new constitution.

A few weeks after the convention closed in April 1868, Norton made his first attempt to secure the Republican nomination for the House of Representatives from the district that included eighteen Chesapeake Bay and Northern Neck counties, but the scheduled election was postponed. In May 1869 he opposed the radical Republican candidate for governor in favor of the moderate Republican candidate. That month Norton addressed a convention of African Americans and advocated equality before the law but did not demand social equality. In the election that summer Norton again ran for the House of Representatives against a white Republican, Richard Small Ayer. In at least one speech, Norton emphasized his opposition to Northern Republicans and some aspects of the new state constitution, leading a supporter of the radicals to draw a gun. Ayer won the election, and Norton finished third in a field of four candidates. Both of Norton's brothers, however, won election to the House of Delegates that year.

In 1870 Daniel Norton sought the Republican Party nomination for Congress a third time. The district's Republicans again divided and the state central committee endorsed a different party candidate. Norton finished third with about 25 percent of the vote, and the split led to the victory of Conservative Party candidate John Critcher. The following year, Norton ran for a seat in the Senate of Virginia against Charles King Mallory, who had opposed secession when he was elected

to the Convention of 1861. Norton won by a vote of 2,283 to 1,435, to represent Charles City, Elizabeth City, James City, Warwick, and York Counties and the city of Williamsburg. He held the lowest-ranking seat on the Committee on General Laws.

A newspaper reported that on July 4, 1871, a large crowd watched Daniel Norton and Robert Norton lead a two-mile-long Lone Star procession of 7,000 blue-uniformed members of the association. On December 28, 1871, in Muskingum County, Ohio, Norton married Sarah A. "Sadie" Gant. They had one son and one daughter. He and his brother were both prosperous by then as well as politically influential and reportedly owned most of the property in the African American community in York County known as Slabtown, or Uniontown. In 1872 Norton was temporary chair of the Republican State Convention, but his candidacy for a seat in the House of Representatives against Republican incumbent James Henry Platt Jr. again divided the local party. Defeated in the convention, the Norton delegates walked out and endorsed Daniel Norton as an independent candidate. Republican newspapers endorsed Platt and spread rumors that Norton and his supporters had circulated counterfeit money, a charge published in the high-profile *New York Tribune*. The campaign generated interest, but Norton received a paltry fifty-five votes when Platt won reelection.

In August 1873 Norton narrowly won the nomination for his Senate of Virginia seat, but the district's Republicans fractured, and a faction supported John Montgomery Dawson, pastor of Williamsburg's First Baptist Church, who easily won the contest. Robert Norton ran for the House of

Representatives in 1874 and lost badly in a three-way race in which Platt was the regular Republican nominee. The congressional investigation of the close race included charges that Robert Norton had received campaign assistance from Conservative Party members and that during fights between the rival Republican factions in Yorktown on October 30, Daniel Norton brandished a pistol. The accounts differed about whether he pulled out his pistol in self-defense.

The region's Republican factions reached an accord in 1876, and the following year Norton recaptured his seat in the Senate of Virginia, easily defeating two candidates with 54 percent of the vote. During the two sessions he was the last-named member of the Committee on Public Institutions. When he reentered elective office, the inability of the state to pay the interest and principal on its prewar debt had divided Virginia's people and political leaders. The interest payments and the tax-receivable character of the interest coupons on the bonds produced a series of budget deficits and depleted the funds available for the popular new public school system. One faction, called Funders, advocated full payment of the principal and interest regardless of the consequences; the other, called Readjusters, hoped to restore funding to the schools by significantly reducing the interest rate and also reducing the amount of the principal to be repaid. The Readjuster Party formally organized in February 1879, by which time Norton had moved away from his early affiliation with more moderate Republicans and joined the more radical wing of the party that cooperated with the Readjusters. In November, he was reelected to the state senate as a

Readjuster with nearly two-thirds of the votes cast in his district, which had been enlarged to include King William and New Kent Counties.

Supporters of refinancing the debt won majorities in both houses of the General Assembly in 1879, pitting Readjusters and African American Republicans against the white Conservative Funder governor. During that and the subsequent assembly Norton was at the height of his political influence. A member of the Committees on General Laws, on Federal Relations, and on Public Institutions, he supported the Readjuster agenda. He introduced a number of bills, four of which the assembly passed, and he nominated two county judges whom the assembly elected.

Norton remained a controversial, sometimes divisive, political leader. At the 1880 Republican State Convention the delegates refused to let him speak, and he threatened to lead a walkout of the party's Readjusters. He attended and presided at the March 1881 convention of African Americans in Petersburg that formed a coalition with the Readjusters, but not before a loud debate in which he took part. In the general election that autumn, Readjusters again won majorities in the Senate and House of Delegates and also all of the statewide offices. In the 1881–1882 session of the assembly, Norton chaired the three-member Committee to Examine the Register's Office, nominated former Readjuster Speaker of the House Benjamin Watkins Lacy for the Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals, and presided over the Senate of Virginia on April 7, 1882. Norton also secured passage of a bill that authorized him, his brother Robert Norton, and three other men to

operate a ferry between Yorktown and Gloucester Point.

The Readjusters refinanced the debt during that session of the assembly, but the participation of African Americans in the party and in the assembly provoked a backlash among white voters. Norton won reelection in the autumn of 1883 with more than 53 percent of the vote against two candidates, including his old foe Dawson, who had been nominated by his brother F. S. Norton as the candidate of the so-called Straightout Republicans who refused to join the Readjusters. During his final four-year term in the state senate, Norton cut a lower profile. He was the lowest-ranking member on the Committees to Examine the Register's Office and on Roads and Internal Navigation during the 1883–1884 session and he was the lowest-ranking member on the Committees to Examine Treasurer's Office and on Public Institutions and Education during the final two sessions of the term. One of his few successful bills provided for an annual eight-week summer session for African American public school teachers at the recently established Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute (later Virginia State University). He was also a member of its first board of visitors, serving from March 1882 until April 1885, when the board was dismissed over financial irregularities.

Norton was a strong supporter of Readjuster Party leader William Mahone, who had probably arranged his appointment as an inspector in the

Newport News customs house about 1883. He and Robert Norton broke with Mahone about 1886, as did many other supporters of the Readjusters who resented Mahone's heavy-handed style of party leadership. Norton explained his break as the result of Mahone's opposition to a petition submitted by Norton on behalf of his constituents that called for equal rights for blacks in certain public places. In 1887, according to newspaper reports, Mahone engineered Norton's defeat when he sought the Republican Party's nomination for his seat in the state senate. Norton remained a notable opponent of Mahone within the Republican Party.

For many years, Norton served as a justice of the peace in Yorktown, holding office at least through 1917. During that time he expanded his property holdings, including purchasing the old customs house in Yorktown. By 1889 he owned sixty-eight acres of land in York County and by 1894 he had acquired fourteen and one-half lots in Yorktown. His personal wealth probably exceeded \$2,000 at the beginning of the twentieth century. For unknown reasons, Norton and his family began using the surname McNorton by the 1910 census and later in county records. After several weeks of sickness, Daniel McNorton died of interstitial nephritis at a Hampton hospital on November 29, 1918. He was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Zanesville, Ohio, the hometown of his wife.

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