

**Caesar Perkins** (March 1839–September 22, 1910), member of the House of Delegates, was born into slavery in Buckingham County, and was the son of Joseph Mosely and Clarisse Mosely. Later accounts indicate that he chose to keep the last name of his former owner, William H. Perkins, who had been a member of the House of Delegates in 1853–1854. The circumstances of when and how Perkins achieved his freedom are not known. About 1861 he married a woman named Susannah or Susan (surname unknown). They had two daughters.

Perkins obtained an education. In 1867 he helped secure rations for freedpeople through the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, and later that year the local Freedmen's Bureau agent included Perkins on a list of prominent whites and blacks who were considered suitable for public office in Buckingham County. An advocate for educating former slaves, Perkins and other trustees of Fork Union Baptist Church purchased in 1868 a two-thirds-of-an-acre lot in Buckingham for the church and a school. Perkins eventually earned a divinity degree and was ordained a Baptist minister by 1877, when he was pastor at Zion Grove Baptist Church. He served several churches in the vicinity during the 1870s and 1880s and was treasurer of the Slate River Baptist Association late in 1880s. He continued to serve as a trustee of Fork Union into the twentieth century.

Perkins's political career began on July 6, 1869, when he and James H. Noble defeated Conservative Party candidates by about 225 votes out of the 2,600 cast for each of Buckingham County's two seats in the House of Delegates. Across the state, however, the Conservative coalition was largely victorious, and in November 1869 Perkins attended a convention of Radical Republicans called to reorganize and

strengthen the party. During the brief October session of the assembly Perkins voted in favor of Virginia's ratification of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments to the United States Constitution, required for readmittance into the Union. When the General Assembly reconvened early in 1870, Perkins was appointed to serve on the Committee of Claims. He remained on the committee during the final session, which met from December 7, 1870, until March 31, 1871. On March 28 he voted with the majority in favor of a bill that provided for the payment of the antebellum state debt, which totaled more than \$45 million. The Funding Act proved disastrous and was later regarded as one of the state's most ill-advised pieces of economic legislation.

On August 16, 1870, Perkins purchased for \$1,675 the 628 acres in Buckingham County where he had been raising corn, oats, tobacco, and wheat on the farm he rented. In January 1873, however, he signed over his considerable amount of personal property to lien holders to secure the remainder of the purchase price. He also operated a store in Buckingham Court House and in June 1871 received a license to sell alcohol there. In 1872 he was licensed to keep two ordinaries in the county. Perkins was a supervisor for the Maysville township before resigning in October 1872 and was an assistant assessor for Buckingham later in the decade.

Perkins continued his political activity, attending the 1870 and 1872 Republican State Conventions and the 1872 Republican National Convention that renominated Ulysses S. Grant as the party's candidate for president. In January 1873 the governor named Perkins one of the curators responsible for overseeing the recently established land-grant educational fund for Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute (later Hampton University). In August 1875 he attended a convention in Richmond of

African Americans who had gathered to address the lack of economic opportunities in the state.

By 1880 Perkins supported the Readjusters, a biracial coalition that sought to reduce and refinance payments on the state's crippling public debt to fund public education and other services, and he was named a canvasser for the party's independent ticket that supported Democratic presidential nominee Winfield Scott Hancock. In 1881 Perkins attended the Readjuster State Convention in Richmond and served on the Committee on Credentials. Three years later the Readjusters formally merged with the Republican Party and Perkins was named to its state committee and as an alternate delegate from the Sixth Congressional District to the 1884 National Republican Convention.

In November 1887 Perkins was elected by a vote of 2,157 to 1,830 to a second term in the House of Delegates, representing Buckingham and Cumberland Counties. During the single session that met from December 8, 1887 until March 5, 1888, he sat on the Committee on Labor and the Poor and the Committee on Manufactures and Mechanic Arts. He voted to direct Virginia's congressional delegation to support repealing the internal revenue taxation system, or at least repealing taxes on tobacco and distilled spirits. Perkins supported appropriating funds for improvements at the State Female Normal School (later Longwood University), in Farmville, and at the Central Lunatic Asylum (later Central State Hospital), for African Americans. During the winter he attended a Republican meeting that organized a state chapter of the Republican League, which directed local chapters in an effort to advance the party's platform and elect more candidates to state and local offices.

Following his second term, Perkins remained involved in Republican Party affairs. He attended state conventions in 1888 and 1892, sitting on the Committee on Credentials on each occasion. In 1888 he was elected a delegate to the Republican National Convention, but disagreements about the party's leadership led to the seating of an alternate delegation from Virginia. Perkins generally supported former United States senator William Mahone, who had led the Readjuster Party and had become a Republican Party leader, but he opposed Mahone's proposal not to field any Republican candidates in the 1894 congressional election in response to the General Assembly's passage of the Walton Act, which served to disfranchise many African American and white Republican voters. As a member of the party's state committee Perkins attended the contentious meeting at which a new state chairman was chosen after Mahone's death in 1895.

By 1891 Perkins had moved to Clifton Forge, where he acquired property and operated a brickyard for the nearby Iron Gate Land and Improvement Company. He suffered financial difficulties and his property was sold at public auction in 1896. While living in Clifton Forge, Perkins helped establish Second Baptist Church (later Main Street Baptist Church), of which he was pastor, and facilitated the transfer of property to the church in 1897. He later returned to Buckingham County, where he farmed on land he owned there. In February 1897 Perkins and his daughter sold a storehouse and a half-acre lot in Maysville for \$600.

At the Tenth District Republican Convention held in Staunton in 1898, he supported Robert T. Hubard as the congressional candidate. Newspaper reports charged that Hubard and Perkins conspired to pay \$5.00 and travel expenses to African American delegates for their votes for

Hubard. The accusations did not stop Perkins from supporting Hubard again in his unsuccessful bid for Congress in 1900. At a Republican meeting in Buckingham two years later, Perkins spoke about the recently passed Constitution of 1902, which severely restricted African American voting. The *Richmond Dispatch* reported that Perkins favored the constitution because he believed it could reduce fraud. He also urged black men to acquire enough property to be eligible for voting, believing that honest registrars would qualify anyone, regardless of race, who achieved the criteria established by the new constitution.

On March 9, 1896, Perkins's wife died following a brief illness. On December

14, 1899, he married Lucy J. Claiborne, a widow, in Richmond. Perkins joined the Colored Knights of Pythias, a fraternal and benevolent association for African Americans, and in November 1904 he helped establish a chapter in Buckingham. He later became the District Deputy Grand Chancellor for the county and organized additional lodges there. He donated a house and lot to the Maysville school district in August 1910.

On September 22, 1910, Caesar Perkins died of heart disease at a Richmond residence after a lengthy illness. He was buried on his property near Dillwyn, in Buckingham County.

Contributed by Dustin Landon Robinette for the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*, a publication of the Library of Virginia.

#### Sources Consulted

Month and year of birth in United States Census Schedules, Alleghany County and Buckingham County, 1900, Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), Washington, D.C.; Reports on Prominent Whites and Freedmen, March–May 1867, in Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the State of Virginia (1865–1869), Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105, M1048, NARA, Washington, D.C.; Marriage Register, Richmond City, 1899, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Health, Record Group 36, Library of Virginia (LVA); Alleghany County Deed Books 17, 18, 19, 20, 24, 29; Buckingham County Deed Books 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15; Buckingham County Court Minute Book 1, p. 447, and Book 2, pp. 8–9, 41, 147; Slate River Colored Baptist Association *Minutes*, 1877, 1881, 1887, 1889; 1869 election in "Returns of Election of July 6, 1869," General Orders and Circulars, Headquarters, First Military District, 1869 (1870), 7; 1887 election in Secretary of the Commonwealth, Election Records, Accession 26041, no. 24, State Government Records Collection, LVA; Richmond City Department of Health Death Certificate, 1910, no. 2079, Library of Virginia (with variant birth date of March 1828); Luther Porter Jackson, *Negro Office-Holders in Virginia, 1865–1895* (1946), 33 (portrait on 68); *Richmond Daily Dispatch*, Aug. 20, 1875; *Roanoke Times*, May 6, 1892; *Richmond Planet*, June 16, 1894; Apr. 27, 1895; May 9, 1896; Nov. 26, 1904; May 5, 1906; *Staunton Spectator and Vindicator*, Oct. 27, 1898; *Richmond Dispatch*, Sept. 10, 1902; *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Aug. 31, 1910; *Richmond Planet*, Sept. 24, 1910; *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, Sept. 26, 1910.



**LIBRARY OF VIRGINIA**