

The Clerk's Black History Series

Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



Hiram Rhodes Revels (September 27, 1827 – January 16, 1901) “First Black United States Senator”

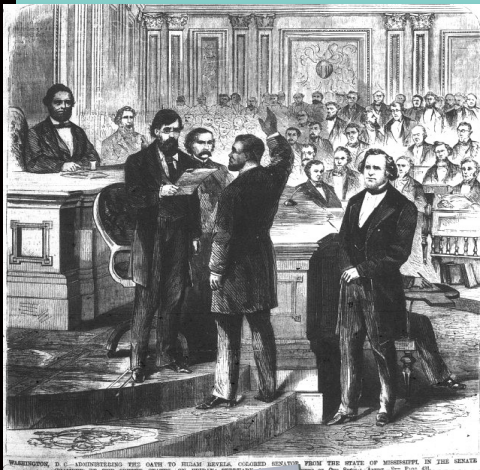


Hiram Rhodes Revels was born September 27, 1827 in Fayetteville, North Carolina to ancestors that had been free for several generations, all the way back to the American Revolution. His father was black and his mother was of Scottish descent. Hiram was home schooled by a local educated black woman. The family moved to Lincolnton, North Carolina in 1838, and Hiram trained and worked as a barber in the shop of his older brother, Elias. After Elias died in 1841, his wife, Mary, deeded the shop to fourteen-year-old Hiram.

Hiram attended Beech Grove Quaker Seminary in Indiana and Darke County Seminary in Ohio in 1844. He was ordained into the African Methodist Episcopal Church, at Allen Chapel, Terre Haute, Indiana, in 1845. Hiram traveled extensively, preaching in Illinois, Ohio, Kansas, Kentucky, Missouri, and Tennessee. In 1854, he was arrested and jailed in Missouri “for preaching to negroes.” From 1855 to 1857, Hiram took classes at Knox College in Galesburg, Illinois, graduating with a degree in divinity and theology. He then took a minister position in Baltimore, Maryland and served as principal at a local black school.

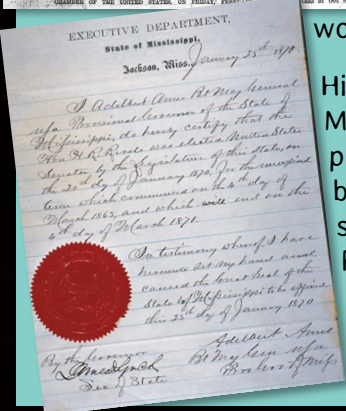
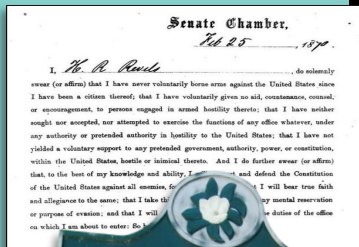
After the Civil War began in 1861, Hiram helped organize Maryland's first two black regiments for the Union Army. Two years later he joined the Federal forces to serve as a chaplain to a black regiment stationed in Mississippi.

In 1863, Hiram established a school in St. Louis, Missouri for freedmen. He left the AME church in 1865 and joined the Methodist Episcopal church; he was briefly assigned to churches in New Orleans, Louisiana and Leavenworth, Kansas. It was during this time that he met and married Phoebe A. Bass, and the couple had eight children together.



In 1866, Hiram took a position as pastor at a church in Natchez, Mississippi, and founded more schools for black youth. He was later elected presiding elder of his church and the southern portion of the state.

In 1868, Hiram was elected alderman in Natchez, and the following year he was elected to the Mississippi State Senate. On February 25, 1870, after a two-day debate, Hiram was elected by a vote of 81 to 15 in the Mississippi State Senate to finish the term of one of the state's two seats in the U.S. Senate, which had been left vacant since the Civil War by Albert Brown. With this election, Hiram became the first African American in the U.S. Senate. His term ended on March 3, 1871, and it would be 100 years until the next African American was elected.



Hiram later served as the first president of Alcorn Agricultural and Mechanical College (now Alcorn State University). He held that position from 1871 to 1874, and again from 1876 to 1882. In 1873, he briefly served as Mississippi Secretary of State. During the last several years of his life, Hiram taught theology at Shaw College (now Rust College), where he also served on the Board of Trustees. He remained active as a minister in Holly Springs, Mississippi. Hiram R. Revels died on January 16, 1901, at a church conference in Aberdeen, Mississippi. He was 73 years old.

