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In Recognition of Armistead Stokolas Nickens

HON. ROBERT J. WITTMAN
OF VIRGINIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, February 23, 2024

MR. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the Honorable Armistead Stokolas Nickens, one of the first African Americans to serve in Virginia's government.

On December 16, 1871, Armistead Nickens took the oath of office as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates, making history as the first African American elected official in Lancaster County history. Armistead Nickens would go on to win a second term in 1873 as well; however, his life of honor did not begin here.

Born in July 1836 to parents Armistead and Polly Weaver Nickens, young Armistead was welcomed into an African American family that had been free for several generations. By 1860, Armistead Nickens worked as a sawyer until he moved back to Lancaster County in 1866 and worked as a farmer. Sometime later, a local agent of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands identified Armistead as a respectable local man who had been loyal during the Civil War.

By the time of his initial election in 1871, not only was he the first African American to hold elected office in the county, but one of very few until late in the twentieth century. Nickens served on the Committee on Militia and Police in both his first and second terms as a member of the Virginia House of Delegates. During his time in office, Armistead Nickens lobbied for a bridge to be constructed over the Rappahannock in Tappahannock, Virginia. Although no construction took place during his tenure, twenty-one years after his passing, the Downing Bridge opened to the public.

Upon finishing his career in the Virginia House of Delegates, Armistead Nickens is credited with the construction of a school for the county's African American children in 1876. He was also one of five trustees of Saint John's Colored Baptist Church in 1890 and reportedly hauled logs and laid bricks during construction of Calvary Baptist Church. Nickens was ordained as a deacon in that church on June 11, 1892. Nickens died at his home in April of 1906, and was buried in the family plot in Lancaster County.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to join me in recognizing the immense accomplishments of the Honorable Armistead Stokolas Nickens.