Mebane, George Allen [1]

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b. 4 July 1850

George Allen Mebane was a Black educator, legislator, editor, businessman, and writer. He was born at the Hermitage in Bertie County [2] to enslaved parents. His father was Allen Mebane. Nothing is known of his early life except that his parents were refugees to McKean County, Pa., in the latter part of 1864. Young Mebane served in the Civil War [3] as a mess boy in Company A, Eighty-fifth New York Regiment of Volunteers. While living in McKean County in the towns of Prentissvale and Eldred, he attended the common schools for fifteen months.

Returning to Bertie County in 1871, Mebane for a time was a schoolteacher, probably in Windsor, and held a first-class teachers' certificate. Over the course of his life he taught for at least fifteen years in three counties.

Twice he was elected as a Republican [4] to represent the Third District (Bertie and Northampton counties) in the state senate (1876–77 and 1883). He won his first campaign by 2,161 votes and the second by 1,200. Senator Mebane served on the committees of education and corporations and claimed credit for introducing a Sunday prohibition law [5]. In reaction to laws sponsored by white legislators to restrict relationships between Black men and white women, Mebane proposed a bill to prohibit white men and Black women from cohabitating. The bill was killed in committee. Around this time Mebane also was an editor of the Black-owned newspaper, *Carolina Enterprise*, along with E. E. Smith [6] and John H. Williamson. Soon after leaving the senate, he was elected register of deeds of Bertie County and operated a provisions store in Windsor.

In 1885 Mebane proposed writing a book entitled "The Prominent Colored Men of North Carolina." Covering the period from 1860 to 1885, the study would include biographical sketches of over two hundred prominent Black businessmen and politicians, as well as a description and history of those institutions in the state aiding Black people. He even went so far as to send out a detailed questionnaire to the prospective subjects of the sketches to obtain information on whether their parents had been free or enslaved people before the war, the extent of their schooling, their occupations, and the amount of property they owned. Although there is no evidence that this book ever was completed, Mebane did publish two other works in 1900. His article, "Have We an American Race Question? 1. The Negro Vindicated," which appeared in *The Arena*, a national publication, used data from the 1890 federal census and other statistical material to document the progress Black Americans had made in education and to refute the claim that they committed a disproportionate number of crimes. Mebane also edited a pamphlet, *"The Negro Problem" as Seen and Discussed by Southern White Men in Conference at Montgomery, Alabama, with Criticisms by the Northern Press*, which analyzed the issues raised at the Montgomery race conference.

In May 1888 he challenged Henry P. Cheatham [7] for the Republican nomination for the Second Congressional District. The district convention resulted in a split nomination for the two Black candidates, which might have ensured the election of the incumbent white Democrat [8], Furnifold Simmons [9]. Although perhaps for political reasons, a prominent Democratic newspaper praised Mebane and his candidacy. Mebane decided to drop out of the race in late September. According to some accounts, the Democrats offered him money to stay in the campaign, while others say the Republicans paid him to leave. Whichever version is correct, and both may be true, Mebane's withdrawal enabled Cheatham to win a narrow victory; thereafter the Republicans won a majority of the campaigns in the district through the end of the century.

In 1893, his political career behind him, Mebane was an incorporator of the Elizabeth City Colored Normal and Industrial Institute [10]. After moving to Elizabeth City sometime during the mid-1890s, he served as the school's financial agent and general superintendent.

On 11 Feb. 1877 Mebane married Jennie Mills Sanderlin, the daughter of Robert Sanderlin. They had at least three children.

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Biographies [12]
Black and African American People [13]
Educators [14]
Writers, journalists, and editors [15]
Authors:
Kenzer, Robert C. [16]
Origin - location:
Bertie County [17]
Windsor [18]
Pasquotank County [19]
Elizabeth City [20]
Elizabeth City State University [21]
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1 January 1991 | Kenzer, Robert C.

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