

A Guide to the Records of John Mercer Langston 1886-1887

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1886-1887

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There are no restrictions.

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Biographical/Historical Information

John Mercer Langston was born free in Louisa County Virginia in December 1829. He was the son of Ralph Quarles and his common law wife Lucy Langston. After the death of his parents he was taken to Chillicothe, Ohio where he spent his early youth.

In 1844 Mr. Langston enrolled at Oberlin College and spent a year there. He returned to Chillicothe for one year to teach and then returned to Oberlin graduating in 1849.

After graduating he attempted to study law but was rejected because he was African-American. After being denied admission to law school, Mr. Langston entered the school of Theology at Oberlin and studied with Charles Granderson Finney and others.

After completing his studies he apprenticed in law under Judge Philemon Bliss and was admitted to the bar in 1854.

During the Civil War he assisted in raising and equipping African American soldiers. He was quite active in antislavery work in both Ohio and the Northeast. In 1868, Howard University offered him a professorship and there he organized their school of Law.

In 1871 he was appointed by the President of the United States to the Board of Health for the District of Columbia. After serving for a number of years, Mr. Langston was appointed Minister-Resident and Council General to Haiti, where he served from 1877-1885.

John Mercer Langston was appointed the first President of Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute in 1886. Mr. Langston's tenure was marked by Virginia's efforts to dismantle the university as established and, rechartering along the format of the Hampton and Tuskegee Models. During Mr. Langston's term, the college department was reorganized and a law program was begun. Mr. Langston was a bright and capable Administrator and very quickly fell out of favor with the Democratic political powers in the State of Virginia. He had been very active in the Republican Party before his arrival at Virginia State and soon after at the University he was admonished about connecting the University with anything political. Langston was a famous man with a national reputation, a gifted orator and was invited to make many speeches. These were interpreted by many as political. This led to his leaving the University in 1887.

Scope and Content Information

Some correspondence addressing admission of potential students and employees. There are also several letters from state officials pertaining to Virginia State.

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