

John Campbell Dancy

John Campbell Dancy Jr. (1857-1920) of Tarboro was the son of a former slave who combined politics and journalism to become a leading spokesman and activist for black North Carolinians after the Civil War.

At a time when most white editors were ardent partisans of the Democratic Party of the day, Dancy was an effective editorial voice for the Republican Party.

His father was a well-known builder, but the teenage Dancy was drawn to the newspaper office. He apprenticed as a typesetter for his hometown journal, the Tarboro Southerner.

He attended Howard University in Washington, returning home when his father died. He became principal of the local school for black children. His interest in politics was whetted when black Congressman Adam Hyman made Dancy an aide and took him to Washington for a few months.

To further his political interests, Dancy launched the North Carolina Sentinel and, as its editor, editorially backed black candidates and the Republican Party generally. The newspaper was among a half-dozen black-owned journals in North Carolina during the decades after the Civil War. All concentrated their editorial attention on politics and education.

Three years after beginning the Sentinel, Dancy's writing attracted leaders of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion who invited him to come to Salisbury to edit the Star of Zion, a weekly journal that covered church affairs and black news from around the state. Dancy was editor of the influential publication for five years.

Meanwhile, he attended national conventions of the Republican Party, campaigned for the party in North Carolina and other states and, in 1891, was named Collector of the Port of Wilmington, the highest-paid federal job in North Carolina.

After Dancy's editorial days ended in the 1890s, he became one of the most notable black speakers of his day, delivering commencement addresses at Tuskegee and Livingstone and speaking from the same platform with Booker T. Washington in Carnegie Hall on the centennial of the AME Zion Church.

The final years of Dancy's active career (1901-1910) were spent as Register of Deeds for the District of Columbia, another important federal job.

By Roy Parker Jr.
January 1998