

# Political way paved

February 9 1992

The period of time between 1865, or the end of the Civil War, and the year 1877 is commonly designated the Reconstruction Era. During Reconstruction, federal troops attempted to enforce laws that forbade white men from



## Nearby history

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holding office if they had supported the Confederate States of America either as soldiers or as government officers.

This restriction made it possible for blacks to hold office and a number did, along with some whites who were either native or recent immigrants from northern states.

While many of those elected were honest and well-intentioned, there also were a large number who took advantage of their unaccustomed power. White resentment and black ambition placed the state in turmoil for 12 years.

The black Republican who represented Lancaster County from 1870 to 1877 was one who was highly respected for his ability and integrity, who is believed to have been the most capable black senator produced in the Reconstruction Era.

He was Frederick Albert Clinton, born March 1, 1834, on the plantation of a white lawyer named Ervin Clinton. The plantation was south of the town of Lancaster in the Mount Carmel community.

Ervin Clinton disobeyed South Carolina law by teaching the brightest of his slaves to read and write. Albert and his older brother, Isom, were taught by Clinton. Isom was to become bishop of the AME Zion Church and Clinton Junior College in Rock Hill is named for him.

Frederick Albert (he took his master's name of Clinton after the Civil War) proved an apt pupil and took on many of the day-to-day responsibilities of running the plantation. When the war was over, Ervin Clinton gave his former overseer several hundred acres of land in the Cedar Creek township. Frederick Clinton managed well and added to his gift until he had more than 1,500 acres and was known as a highly successful farmer.

## Black Republican emerged during Reconstruction.

Clinton's first venture into politics came in 1868 when he was elected as a representative to the S.C. Constitutional Convention. At the convention he was appointed to a committee to work on the part of the constitution that dealt with the executive branch.

Of special interest to Clinton was the attempt to set up a comprehensive public education program. The result was that for the first time South Carolina attempted to provide education "for the masses without attention to race or color."

Apparently it was his experience at the Constitutional Convention that convinced Clinton to set aside his farming duties and run for the state senate, where he served from 1870 to 1877. There he won the respect of his fellow senators and is thought to have represented all of his constituents fairly.

Still, Clinton was resented by some of those out of power. Once when he was running for reelection, he was speaking to a crowd gathered at the present day corner of Clinton Avenue and Barr Street in Lancaster. He was ambushed. The bullet brushed the end of his nose. He escaped on horseback and hid out for a number of nights as loyal neighbors protected him from his enemies.

Like his brother, Frederick Albert Clinton was a religious man. He helped organize Mount Carmel Campground, an institution that still flourishes. Clinton also served in the 6th Regiment of the National Guard and was commissioned a colonel in 1873.

After his senate service, Clinton retired to his farm. He died there of Sept. 21, 1890, and is buried at Mount Carmel AME Zion Church cemetery.

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Marjorie  
McMurry  
grandfather