

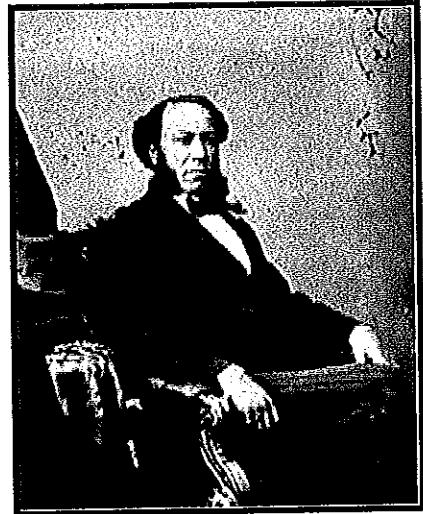
Joseph Hayne Rainey

United States Representative

Republican of South Carolina

Forty-first -- Forty-fifth Congresses

Joseph Hayne Rainey of South Carolina was the first black to be elected to the House of Representatives and take his seat. He was born to slave parents in Georgetown, South Carolina, on June 21, 1832. Rainey's father Edward purchased his family's freedom and taught his son the barber's trade. In 1846 the Rainey family moved to Charleston. Rainey may have lived for a time in Philadelphia, and it was there that he married a woman named Susan in 1859. During the Civil War South Carolina drafted him to provision food and serve passengers on a Confederate blockade runner and to work on the fortifications of Charleston.



In 1862 he and his wife escaped on a blockade runner to Bermuda, where slavery had been abolished in 1834. They settled in St. Georges, where Rainey resumed barbering. He used his acquaintance with sailors and blockade runner to keep in touch with events in South Carolina.

The Rainey's returned to the state in 1866 and moved to Georgetown the following year. Joseph Rainey soon became a member of the executive committee of the South Carolina Republican party and was a representative from Georgetown at the 1868 South Carolina Constitutional Convention. He was elected to a four-year term in the state senate in 1870 and was chairman of the finance committee.

After Congressman Benjamin F. Whittemore resigned in February 1870 amid charges that he had sold appointment to the United States military academies, First District Republicans nominated Rainey, who defeated Democrat C.W. Dudley in a special election and was sworn into the Forty-first Congress on December 12, 1870. He joined the Committee on Freedmen's Affairs and held his seat through the Forty-third Congress. He spoke in favor of Senator Charles Sumner's civil rights legislation that outlawed racial discrimination in juries, schools, transportation and public accommodations. Rainey insisted that unless civil rights measures were enacted he would not support amnesty bills permitting former Confederates to participate in political life. Rainey was also a warm supporter of the acts authorizing the president to call on the military to protect black voters from the threats and violence of the Ku Klux Klan.

In 1872 Rainey was reelected to the Forty-third Congress without opposition. During debate on the Indian Appropriation bill in May 1874 Rainey replaced Speaker James G. Blaine in the chair and became the first black representative to preside over a House session. A member of the Committee on Indian Affairs, he had a special interest in the subject being discussed that day. In 1874 Rainey won a narrow reelection victory over Samuel Lee, an Independent Democrat. Lee asked the House Committee on Elections to void 669 Rainey ballots, but it held in May 1876 that Rainey had been duly elected. In the Forty-fourth Congress Rainey served on the Invalid Pensions Committee and the Select committee on Centennial Celebration and Proposed the National Census of 1875. He strongly condemned the July 4, 1876, massacre of black militiamen at Hamburg, South Carolina.

In 1876 Rainey defeated Democrat John S. Richardson, who claimed that he was entitled to the seat because of voter intimidation exercised by federal soldiers (sent to the state in response to the Hamburg massacre), by armed black political clubs and by the black militia. Richardson also claimed that his election had been certified by the governor. Rainey maintained that only the South Carolina secretary of state, who had certified his election, had the legal right to authorize the winner in a congressional race. While the case was being considered Rainey entered the Forty-fifth Congress in 1877 as a member of the Invalid Pensions Committee and the Select Committee on Enrolled Bills. He defended the use of federal troops in South Carolina during the election of 1876. He opposed an amendment to the charter of the Freedmen's Savings and Trust Company (Freedmen's Bank) that would have allowed half of its deposits to be invested in commercial paper monies.

The Committee on Elections finally concluded in May 1878 that so many election irregularities had taken place in the First District that the seat should be declared vacant, but the full House referred the report back to the Committee, ensuring that Rainey would retain his seat. Rainey, however, was defeated by Richardson in 1878 as the Democratic party solidified its control in post-Reconstruction South Carolina. After leaving his seat on March 3, 1879, Rainey received promises of Republican support for the position of Clerk of the House of Representatives, but Democratic control of the Forty-sixth Congress ruled out his appointment. Instead Rainey became an internal revenue agent in South Carolina for two years.

When the Republicans regained control of the House in 1881 he spent time in Washington trying to secure his promised appointment, but his name was not placed in nomination. He remained in Washington and established a brokerage and banking firm. After the collapse of his firm, he managed a coal wood yard before he returned to South Carolina, poor and in ill health. To provide their family with support, Susan Rainey opened a womens' hat business in Georgetown, where Joseph Rainey died on August 2, 1887.