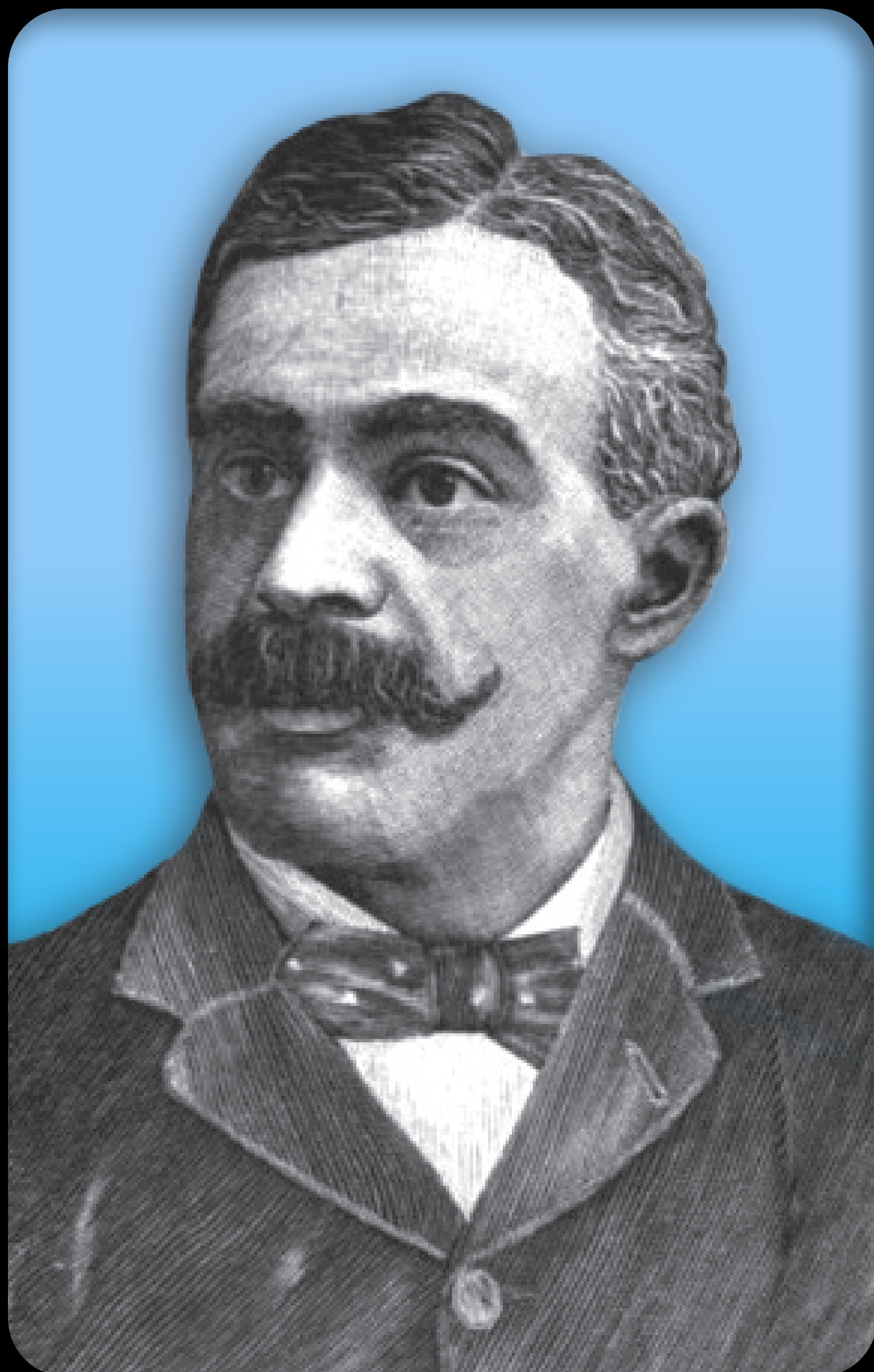


James Campbell Matthews

First African American Elected Judge in New York State



Early Life

James Campbell Matthews was born November 6, 1846. Shortly after his birth, the Matthews family moved to Albany, NY where his father opened a barber shop.

In 1861, his mother and father passed away and he was taken in by two Quaker women; Phebe Jones and Lydia Mott.

His education came under risk in his youth with the opening of the segregated Wilberforce school as this caused him to be removed from his previous school. However, with the help of Hon. William A. Rice, he was able to earn a scholarship to the Albany Boys' Academy.

Career

While working as a clerk at the Congress Hall Hotel, Mr. Matthews began attending Albany Law School and became the first African American to graduate from the institution.

In his time as a lawyer, he worked to desegregate Albany public schools and he was active in many African American political organizations.

President Grover Cleveland appointed Mr. Matthews as recorder of deeds for Washington DC on March 9, 1886, a position formerly occupied by Frederick Douglas, however the senate rejected his appointment. President Cleveland then appointed him to serve while congress was in recess. Despite his competent completion of his duties, when the senate reconvened, they rejected his appointment a second time.

After his time in Washington, Mr. Matthews returned to Albany and was elected Judge of the Albany Recorder Court, the city's primary criminal court, becoming the first African American Judge in New York State and only African American in the country to hold such a high judicial position.

Later Life

After losing reelection, he returned to practicing law as an attorney until his retirement in the early 1920s.

James Campbell Matthews passed away November 1, 1930 and is buried in Albany Rural Cemetery.



**New York State Unified Court System
Third Judicial District**