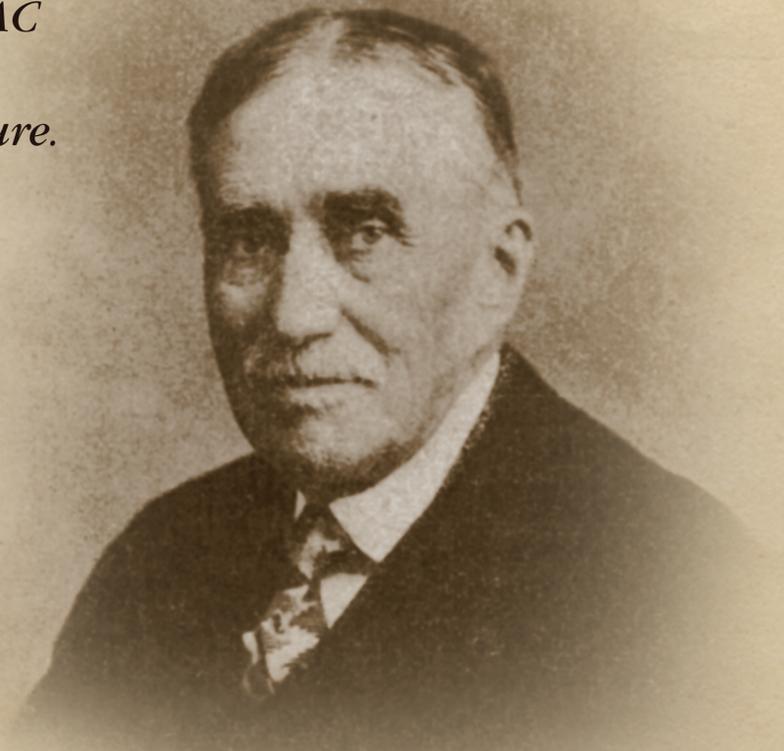


George Mellen Prentiss King

Dr. George Mellen Prentiss King became principal of the MAC preparatory school and instructor of rhetoric in late 1859, but his abolitionist perspective may have shortened his tenure.

Dr. King was born in 1833 in Portland, Maine. He graduated from Colby College in 1857 and attended one year of seminary before being called to a Baptist pulpit. The following year, he arrived in Maryland and was hired at MAC as the preparatory school principal and rhetoric instructor. He did not return for the next academic year. Instead, he accepted a call to a church in Rhode Island, where he remained for the rest of the Civil War.

In 1865, he moved to Richmond to work for the United States Christian Commission, an aid society formed in the aftermath of the First Battle of Bull Run. In 1869, two separate colored schools in Washington, D.C., both being operated by Baptist organizations, were merged under the name Wayland Seminary, and King, already principal of one, was appointed to the combined presidency. He held that position for the next 28 years. Wayland's mission was to train African-Americans for the Baptist ministry, but its educational programs were comprehensive, and women were admitted on an equal footing with men. The Freedmen's Bureau provided some of its early funding.



Wayland alumna Nellie Plummer Arnold wrote glowingly of King's commitment to "the most unpopular cause...the elevation of the Negro by developing a Christian character through education and contact with his white brother." Nellie, whose father, Adam Plummer, was a highly trusted slave of MAC founder Charles Benedict Calvert, related in her

memoirs that King's departure from MAC was directly tied to his support for abolitionist John Brown. Known later for his outspoken nature, King could easily have run afoul of prevailing campus sentiment.

Other alumni of Wayland Seminary include Booker T. Washington, founder of Tuskegee Institute, famous pastor Adam Clayton Powell, Sr., and Nellie's brother, Henry Vinton Plummer, the first African-American clergyman to be commissioned as a chaplain in the regular Army. Washington wrote of the "lasting impression" left by King's character and credited King's elocution training for his own success in public speaking.

Not only was King an inspiring spiritual leader, he was also a creative fundraiser. In the 1870s, he developed a travelling music program to supplement a new building fund. The group was well-received in Northern cities.

In 1899, Wayland Seminary merged with the Richmond Theological Institute to form Virginia Union University. King became a faculty member at the new institution and remained there until his death in 1917.

