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Richard Theodore Greener (1844-1922): The First African American Member of the American Philological Association and Graceland Cemetery.

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When Richard T. Greener's name is mentioned these days, it is usually in regard to his career as a student at Harvard University. What is not commonly known, however, is that he was the first African American to join the American Philological Association (APA). At the meeting of the APA in Newport, Rhode Island, Greener was listed among the new members "elected" that year on Wednesday, July 14, 1875 (*TAPA* (1875), vol. 6, p. 8).

Greener was born in Philadelphia on January 30, 1844 to Mary Ann Le Brune and Richard Wesley Greener. He never knew his father. Determined to help her son obtain a good education, his mother moved to Cambridge, Massachusetts. He obtained advice from Franklin B. Sanborn about attending Oberlin, and by 1862 he was studying Latin with George Herbert Palmer for his college preparation. After studying at Oberlin, he continued at Andover. In the fall of 1865 he matriculated at Harvard. His youthful training in classics resonated through his life deeply influencing his oratorical style. It also led him to his teaching positions in the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia and later at the University of South Carolina. After earning a degree in law at the University of South Carolina, he stopped teaching and embarked on a career in politics and civil service. He maintained an interest in classics through his membership in the APA from 1875 to 1885 and through his lifelong friendship with William Sanders Scarborough (1852-1926), the third African American member of the APA and its first lifetime member. Documents from the period show us that Greener strongly encouraged Scarborough to finish his Greek textbook, *First Lessons in Greek*, (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1881), pointing out its importance to people of

African descent. In a review published in the fall of 1881, Greener said that the book was "the first venture of one of our race in the classics [sic] field . . . Professor Scarborough merits the applause of the race . . . [and] deserves the thanks of the young men for the encouragement he has given us. Macte virtute." After Greener's diplomatic appointment as the first U.S. consul to Vladivostok, Russia ended (1898-1905), he settled in Chicago. Towards the end of his life he again encouraged Scarborough in a letter saying: "You may think you are doing little, but it is something worth while to have proved [John C.] Calhoun's statement [that a Negro who mastered Greek would prove he had a soul] false, and by your own philological success alone you have lifted us all out of the ditch where he proposed we should always lie." He lived in retirement with his three cousins, Amelia, Mary and Ida Platt, at 5237 Ellis Avenue where he died on May 2, 1922. Greener was buried in Chicago's Graceland Cemetery, founded in 1860 and located at 4001 North Clark Street. His grave is in plot: section C, lot 588, grave 8.

Sources:

Michael Mounter, "Richard Theodore Greener: The Idealist, Statesman,

Scholar and South Carolinian," Ph.D. dissertation, University of South Carolina, 2002.

William Sanders Scarborough, *The Autobiography of William Sanders Scarborough: An American Journey from Slavery to Scholarship*, (ed.) Michele Valerie Ronnick (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) 77-8; 321.

Photo Credit: Taken by Dr. John T. Quinn (1963-2008) during the 139th annual meeting of the American Philological Association in Chicago, January, 2008.

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