

Fire and Thunder *Massachusetts Blacks* *in the Civil War*

*“It is not light that we need, but fire;
it is not the gentle shower, but thunder
We need the storm, the whirlwind and the earthquake.”*

— Frederick Douglass

*T*he institution of slavery was a disease deeply embedded in the tissue of the newly formed American republic. It proved beyond the sagacity of the Founding Fathers to cure, and left undisturbed it festered, ready to prove fatal to the Union.

In Massachusetts, slavery was abolished not through legislative fiat, but by judicial action in the 1780s. On the national stage, slavery survived, to be destroyed only after a long and bloody civil war. While causes for the Civil War – political, economic and cultural – were varied, the essence of the fight, especially for Massachusetts, was always about slavery and the defense of human dignity and freedom. The call to this fight went out and was answered. In the press and on the streets, from the pulpit, lecture podium, and eventually the battlefield, blacks in the Commonwealth stepped forward and helped change the course of history.

Writing about people of African descent in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1863, Edward Pierce asked the question, “*Will they fight for their freedom?*” For blacks in Massachusetts, the answer was a resounding “Yes!” Theirs is a story of courage, strength, and sacrifice; a story of the quest for a nation free from slavery and a state where one day an African-American might speak words of hope and inclusion as Governor of the Commonwealth.

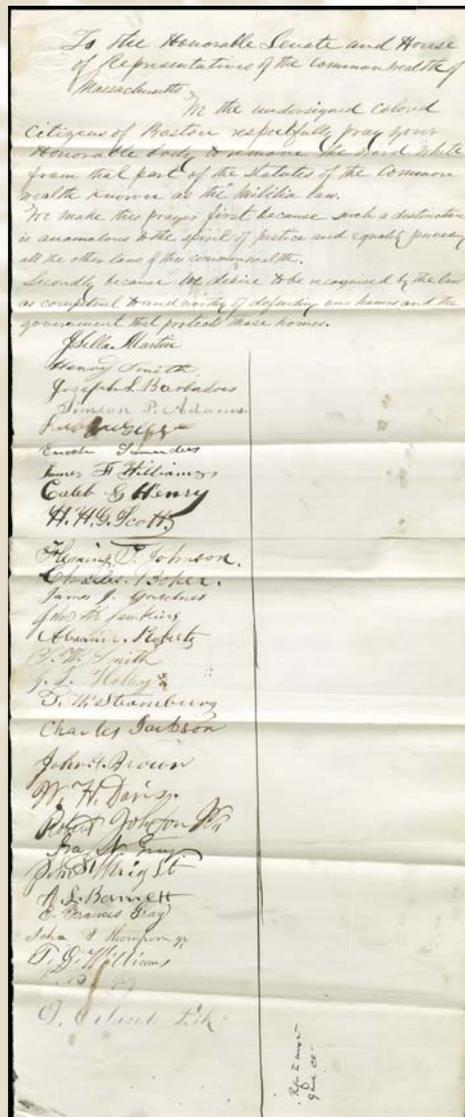
It is a story worth telling.

The First Black Regiments

“Is the present war so much higher and holier than the war of the Revolution, that the employment of black soldiers would lower its character or debase its purpose? Are our Generals so much better than Washington, and Jefferson, and Jackson, that they may be contaminated by the apparition of negro regiments in their camps?”

(“What Our Fathers Did,” Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, Sept. 20, 1862)

African-Americans had fought bravely in both the American Revolution and the War of 1812, yet when they tried to enlist at the beginning of the Civil War they were turned away. The conflict was, in the view of the War Department, a “white man’s war.” The Lincoln administration considered authorizing the use of black troops, but did not for fear of losing allegiance of the border states. When Generals John C. Fremont in Missouri and David Hunter in South Carolina attempted to emancipate slaves and train them as soldiers, Lincoln ordered them to stop. Such actions, however, fueled continued debate. Passage of the Second Confiscation and Militia Act (July 1862) and Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation (January 1863) finally allowed for the formal enlistment of black troops into the ranks of the Union Army.

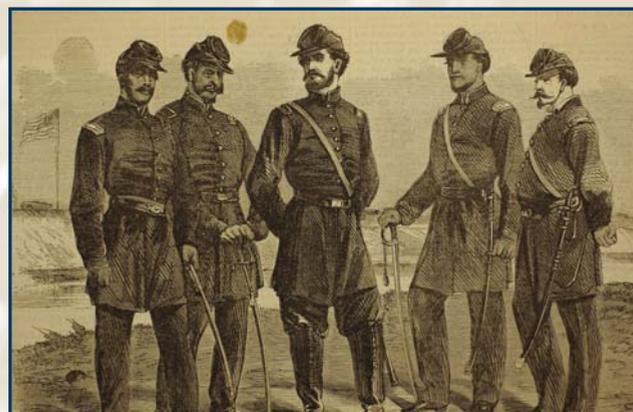


Petition to the General Court, 1861

Boston’s black community had long advocated for the right to serve in the military, and called for repeal of the laws that restricted that service. They petitioned the Massachusetts legislature for the removal of the word “white” from the state militia law in 1861, and the same year organized a black drill society in Boston. Massachusetts Archives



1st South Carolina Volunteer Infantry
One of the first black regiments raised, the 1st South Carolina was also one of the first, black or white, to see service before its official recognition as a military unit. The soldiers depicted in this image wear a uniform of regulation issue except for the red trousers which were probably used as an enlistment inducement. Painting by Don Troiani, www.historicalartprints.com



1st Regiment Louisiana Native Guards

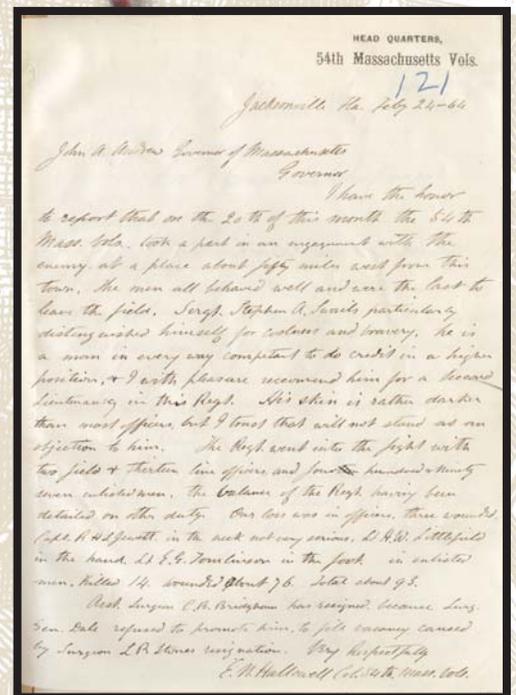
The Louisiana Native Guards, free African-Americans from New Orleans, first offered their services to the Confederacy in 1861, but without success. After Union capture of the city, General Benjamin Butler reorganized the Native Guards and mustered them into federal service. They became the 1st Louisiana Native Guards, the first officially sanctioned black regiment in the Union Army.

Courtesy of Trustees of the Boston Public Library

The 54th Massachusetts Infantry

The first African-American regiment raised in the North, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry served with honor until the end of the Civil War.

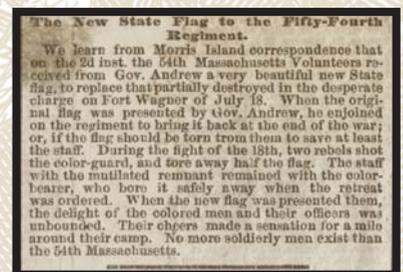
On January 26, 1863, Massachusetts Governor John Andrew was authorized to raise a regiment of African-American soldiers. Recruiting began immediately, and by May over 1000 men had enlisted in the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. Under the command of Boston native Robert Gould Shaw, the soldiers were sent to South Carolina to participate in the operations against Charleston. In July 1863, the 54th valiantly lead the assault on Fort Wagner and lost over 200 men. The regiment continued to serve in the South, and fought bravely in several more battles before returning to Boston in August 1865.



Letter describing the Battle of Olustee
The 54th Infantry fought in several other battles after Fort Wagner. This letter describes the 54th's role in the Battle of Olustee, Florida.
Massachusetts Archives



Depiction of the attack on Fort Wagner, July 18, 1863
Fort Wagner was an integral part of the defenses of Charleston Harbor. The attack on the fort failed due to poor coordination by the Union officers commanding the battle, and the 54th suffered terrible casualties in the costly assault.
Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division



"The New State Flag to the 54th Regiment"
During the assault on Fort Wagner, the regimental flag was torn from its staff and captured by the enemy. A new color was sent to replace it.
Massachusetts Archives



Sketches of the 54th Infantry in battle
These drawings were made by Captain Nathaniel Appleton, a white officer in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. Drawn while under fire at the battle of Secessionville, July 16, 1863, they provide a rare depiction of the 54th in action.
Courtesy of West Virginia Regional History Collection, West Virginia University Libraries

The Soldiers of the 54th

Over one thousand men served in Massachusetts's first African-American regiment.

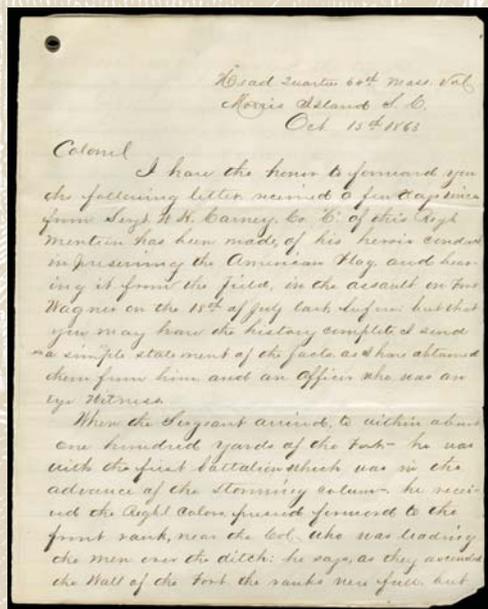
William Harvey Carney was born a slave in Norfolk, Virginia in 1840. He earned his freedom and moved to New Bedford before enlisting in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry. During the assault on Fort Wagner, Sergeant Carney saved the flag of the 54th from capture. Despite being separated from his regiment and suffering from three severe wounds, Carney refused to relinquish his hold on the colors. Returning the flag to camp after the battle, Carney was greeted with cheers, and exclaimed to his comrades, "Boys, the Old Flag never touched the ground!" His actions were recognized in 1900, when he was awarded the Nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.



Photograph of Drummer Miles Moore, 54th Massachusetts Infantry

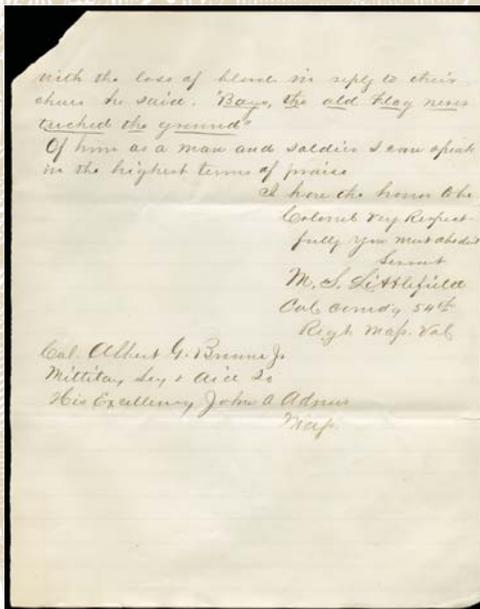
Miles Moore was only fifteen years old when he enlisted as a drummer in the 54th Massachusetts. During the battle of Fort Wagner, he served as a stretcher-bearer for the wounded. He remained in the United States Army after the war, and served with the famous "Buffalo Soldiers" on the frontier.

Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society



Letter describing the heroics of Sergeant Carney

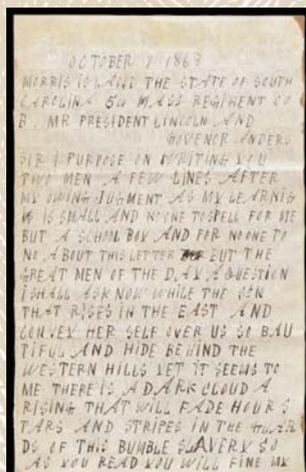
This letter from an officer in the 54th relates the heroic tale of Sergeant Carney's efforts to save the regimental flag from capture at the battle of Fort Wagner. Massachusetts Archives



Sergeant William H. Carney, 54th Massachusetts Infantry

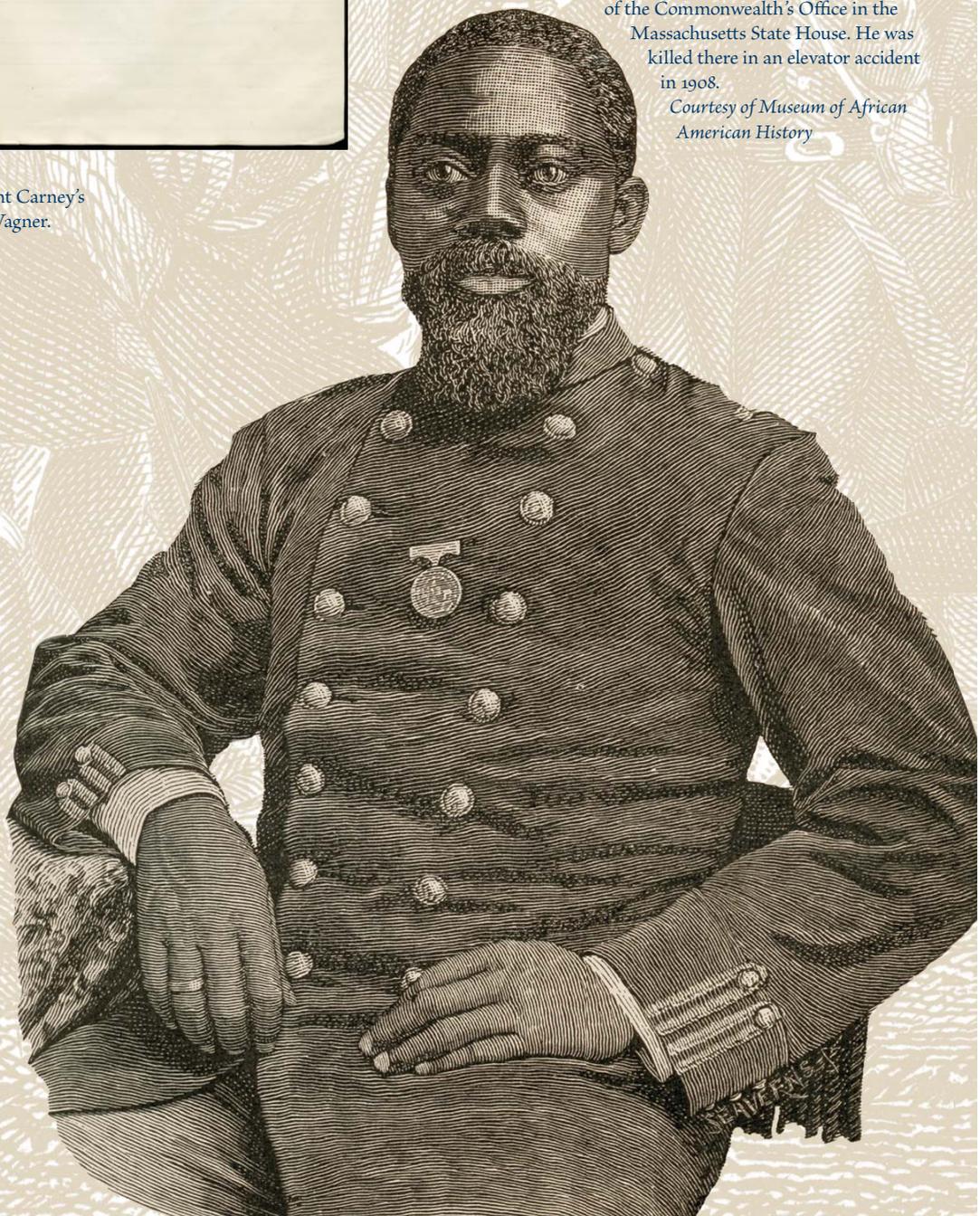
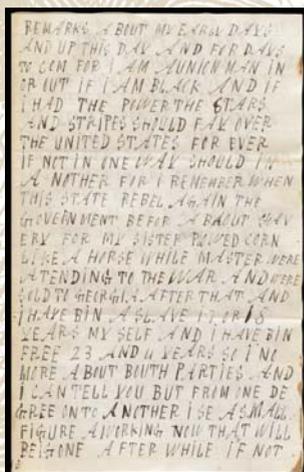
Later in life, Carney worked for the Secretary of the Commonwealth's Office in the Massachusetts State House. He was killed there in an elevator accident in 1908.

Courtesy of Museum of African American History



Letter from Private Ezekiel Barcus, 54th Massachusetts Infantry While sick in the hospital, Ezekiel Barcus wrote to Massachusetts Governor John Andrew and President Abraham Lincoln, imploring the two men to do everything in their power to bring about a quick end to the war and to eradicate slavery. Barcus died of dysentery two months after this letter was written.

Massachusetts Archives

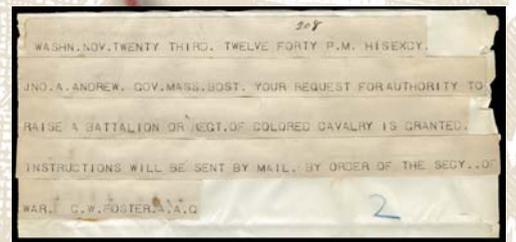


The 5th Massachusetts Cavalry

Organized to fight on horseback, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry served with distinction in Virginia and Texas.

The 5th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Cavalry was organized in the Commonwealth in early 1864.

The unit arrived in Virginia and fought in the opening battles around the Confederate stronghold of Petersburg. After performing guard duty over prisoners of war in Maryland, the 5th returned to Virginia and had the honor of being among the first troops to ride into Richmond, the captured capital of the Confederacy. After the end of hostilities in Virginia, the regiment was transferred to Texas before returning to Massachusetts for discharge in November 1865.



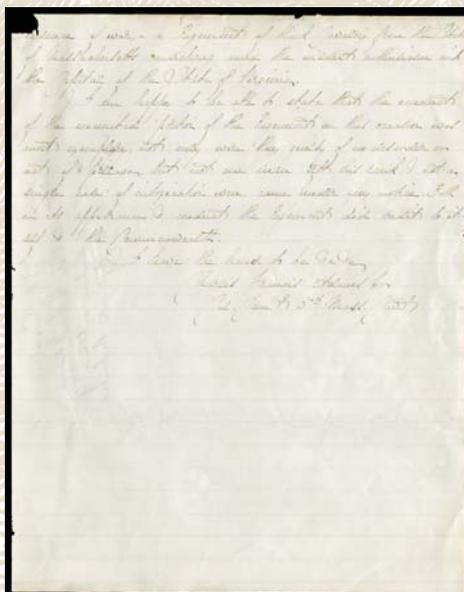
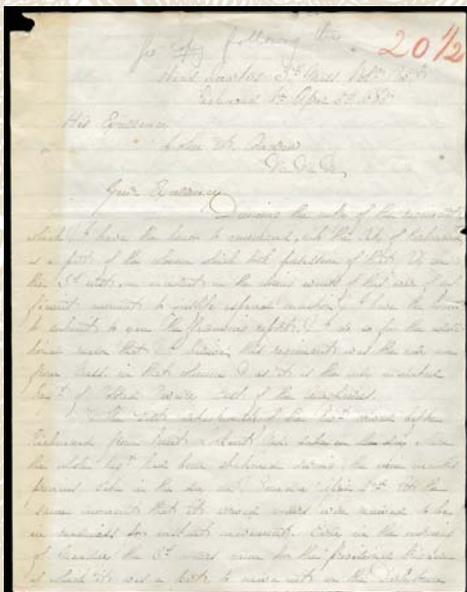
Telegram authorizing the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry
This telegram from the War Department in Washington, D.C., authorized Governor John Andrew to enlist a regiment of African-American cavalry.
Massachusetts Archives

Photograph of the ruins of Richmond, Virginia

The capture of Richmond, the capital of the Confederacy, was an important victory for the North.

When Confederate soldiers abandoned the city in 1865, they burned everything thought to be of military value, leaving much of the city in ruins.

Lawrence Collection, Courtesy of Medford Historical Society



Letter from Charles Francis Adams, Jr., describing the fall of Richmond

This letter from regimental commander Charles Francis Adams, Jr., great grandson of President John Adams, describes the honor bestowed upon the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry as it rode through the streets of Richmond.

Massachusetts Archives

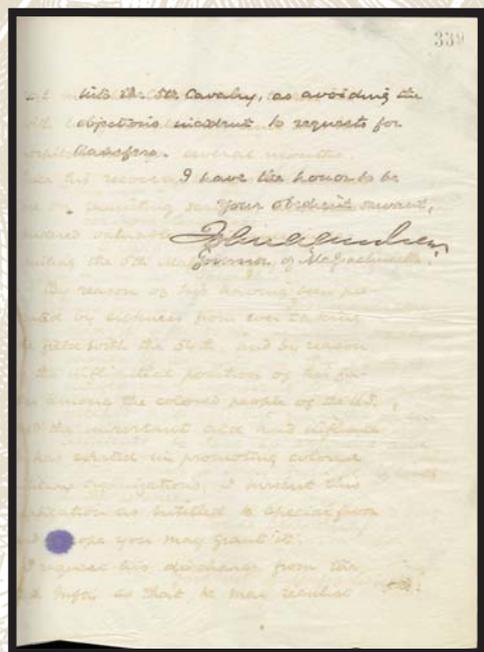
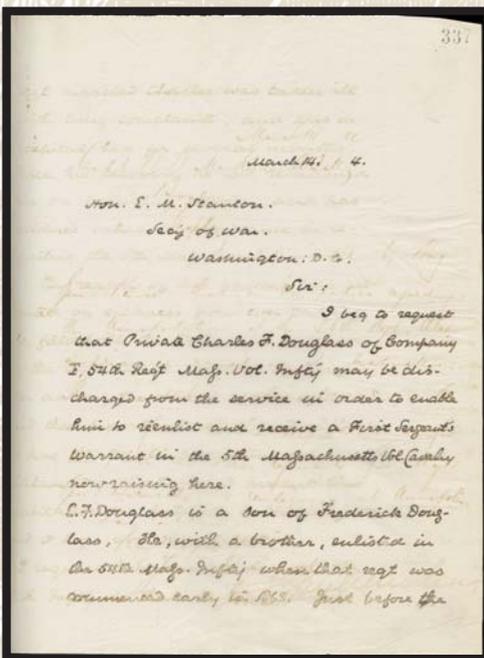
The Soldiers of the 5th

Despite being the last African-American regiment raised in Massachusetts, the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry had an impressive roster of soldiers.

Charles Douglass was the youngest son of famed abolitionist Frederick Douglass. He was said to be the first soldier enlisted in the African-American regiments from Massachusetts. After briefly serving in the 54th Infantry, he was commissioned as a first sergeant in the 5th Cavalry. After his discharge from the Army in 1865, he moved to Washington, D.C., and played for the Mutuels, one of the first African-American baseball clubs. In later life he worked as a clerk in the Pension Office, and died in Washington, D.C., in 1920.

Photograph of Sergeant Charles Douglass, 5th Massachusetts Cavalry

As a soldier in a cavalry regiment, Charles Douglass wore a distinctive uniform. This included a shortened coat, sturdy leather boots, and a heavy saber. Courtesy of Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University Archives



Letter from Governor John Andrew recommending Charles Douglass for promotion. Charles Douglass received a personal recommendation from the Massachusetts governor for his position as an officer in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. Massachusetts Archives

Descriptive Roll of 5th Regiment of the Massachusetts Volunteers. (Cavalry)													
NUMBER OF ROLL.	NAME.	REG'T.	COMP.	RANK.	AGE.	MARRIED OR SINGLE.	RESIDENCE.	DATE OF ENLISTMENT.	DATE OF DISCHARGE.	TERM.	RE-ENLISTED.	REMARKS.	REMARKS.
1	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
2	Frederick	5th	A	Private	19	2	Southwick to Plymouth	" 16 "	" " "	" "			etc.
3	Frederick	5th	A	Private	18	2	Southwick to Plymouth	" " "	" " "	" "			etc.
4	Frederick	5th	A	Private	18	2	Southwick to Plymouth	" " "	" " "	" "			etc.
5	Frederick	5th	A	Private	21	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
6	Frederick	5th	A	Private	20	2	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
7	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
8	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
9	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
10	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
11	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
12	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
13	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
14	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
15	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
16	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
17	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
18	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
19	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
20	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
21	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
22	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
23	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
24	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
25	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
26	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
27	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
28	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
29	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry
30	Frederick	5th	A	Private	24	3	Worcester	Jan 21 1865	Jan 21 1865	1 yr			Rec'd of the 5th Cavalry

Descriptive roll of the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. As with other African-American regiments from Massachusetts, over one thousand men served in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry. This roll provides personal information on soldiers at the 5th including their ages, occupations, and places of residence. Massachusetts Archives

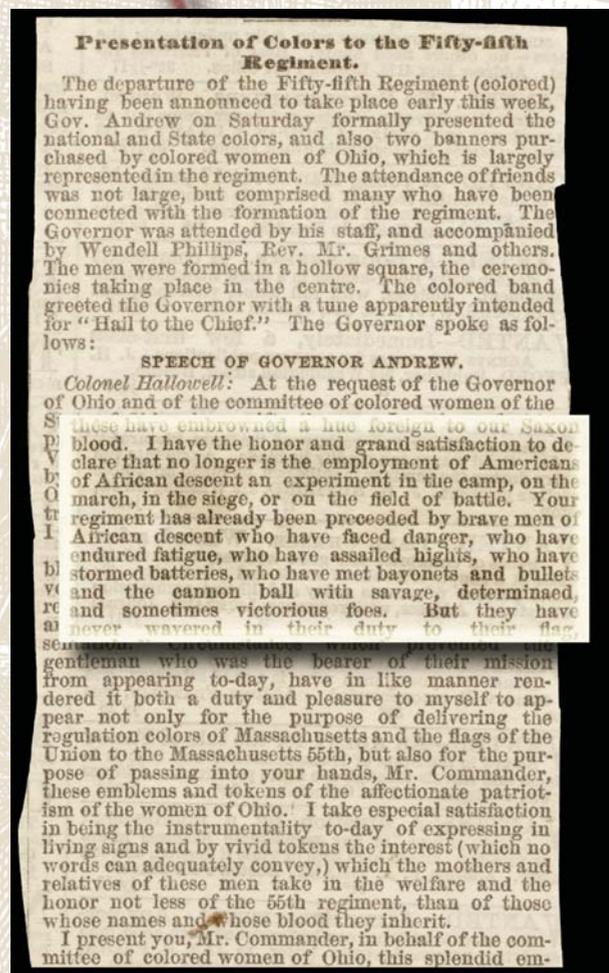
The 55th Massachusetts Infantry

Often overshadowed by the 54th, the 55th Massachusetts Infantry had an illustrious record of service equal to its predecessor.

So many men had been recruited for the 54th Massachusetts that a second regiment of African-American soldiers was organized. By the end of June 1863, the 55th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry was ready for service, and was sent to South Carolina. The regiment was employed in constructing fortifications in Charleston Harbor during the summer and fall of 1863. The 55th fought bravely in several battles, and lost over 200 men in combat. At the end of the war, the 55th was employed in policing the South Carolina countryside before returning to Boston in September 1865.



African-American Soldiers in Fort Wagner, 1863
Fort Wagner was finally captured in September 1863. Later, it was occupied by both the 54th and 55th Massachusetts infantry regiments.
Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society



Detail of "Presentation of Colors to the Fifty-fifth Regiment"
This newspaper clipping describes the presentation of flags to the 55th Massachusetts Infantry before it left for the front. After the war, the flags donated by the African-American women of Ohio were given to Governor Andrew. The national and state flags were returned to the Massachusetts State House, where they are kept to this day.
Massachusetts Archives

Company	State or Country of Birth.																																						
	Maine	New Hampshire	Vermont	Mass.	Rhode Is.	Conn.	New York	New Jersey	Penn.	Delaware	Maryland	Ohio	Indiana	Illinois	Michigan	Wisconsin	Iowa	Missouri	Arkansas	Kentucky	Tennessee	Virginia	W. Carolina	S. Carolina	Georgia	Alabama	Florida	Mississippi	Louisiana	Arkansas	North Carolina	Canada	Africa	Unknown	D.C.	Born in New State	Born in Free State	Elsewhere	
A	1		5		1	2		5			23	23	12	2			16	6																		1	23	75	0
B			3	1				11	7	1	28	1	18	1	4	2	6	1	2	4	1	1						2	1		1				1	1	19	78	1
C						1		4		2	24	11				16	5	2	19	7	1													6		50	42	6	
D			3		1		2	6	1	2	22	10	5			6	12	2	8	11	1	2					1		1			1			1	45	52	1	
E			1			2	1	5		4	24	2	4	1	1	2	18	7	22	3	2	1												1		56	41	1	
F			5		2	10		15	2	3	19	1		1		5	5	1	16	2	2	1					2						1		4	38	58	2	
G						2	1	14	2	3	22	19	5	1		1	5	4	5	11	2	1														28	70	0	
H			2	1			4	43	1	7	16	4	7			5	4	1	5							1									1		11	86	1
I			2	1		5	4	29		1	19	25	3	1		2	4	1	4															1		7	90	1	
K			1			1		7		4	25	1	2	1	2	1	4	12	4	21	4		1	2		4		4					1		3	55	41	2	
Total	1		1	22	3	4	23	8	139	13	19	22	97	56	8	7	9	66	68	24	106	30	6	6	5		9	1	1	1	3	1	11	10	382	633	15		

Regimental return of the 55th Massachusetts Infantry
This return lists the numbers of men enlisted in the 55th Regiment and gives their places of birth. More than half the states in the Union were represented in the regiment, along with Canada and Africa.
Massachusetts Archives
Document conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

The Soldiers of the 55th

The men of the 55th Infantry Regiment were a diverse mix of soldiers from all parts of the country and all corners of the globe.

An escaped slave living in Illinois, twenty-year-old Andrew Jackson Smith enlisted in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry early in 1863. During fierce fighting at Honey Hill, South Carolina, in 1864, Smith took up the regimental colors after the bearer was killed by enemy fire. Even though a third of the regiment was killed and wounded in the fighting, Smith continued to wave the flag defiantly in the face of enemy fire. His heroism would go unrecognized until 2001, when President Clinton posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor to Andrew Jackson Smith for his bravery under fire. The medal was presented to Sergeant Smith's descendants who had worked tirelessly for the recognition of their ancestor's heroic achievements.



Photograph of Sergeant Andrew Jackson Smith, 55th Massachusetts Infantry
Andrew Jackson Smith was one of only two soldiers in the African-American regiments from Massachusetts to be awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Courtesy State Library of Massachusetts, Special Collections

The 55th (colored) regiment, at Readville, is now full. They will probably have their guns today, and go South on Wednesday next. The Transcript gives the following account of one of the sergeants:—

NICHOLAS SAIB is the name of a sergeant in the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers, whose curious and even romantic history is one of much interest. He is an intelligent looking negro, perfectly black, modest and gentlemanly in his bearing, and alike remarkable for his experiences and his culture.—As we understood his story, as he told it in a brief interview, he is a native of Central Africa, born in the neighborhood of Timbuctoo. In some way he was inveigled into slavery to a party of Arabs, and found his way first to Egypt and from thence to Turkey. After awhile he reached St. Petersburg, was converted to Christianity and baptized as a member of the Greek church, dropping the name of Mohammed and taking that of Nicholas. He is now a Protestant, he says emphatically. From St. Petersburg he went to Germany and entered the service of a "Hollander," with whom he came to this country and settled in Detroit. He enlisted "because all his folks seemed to be doing so."

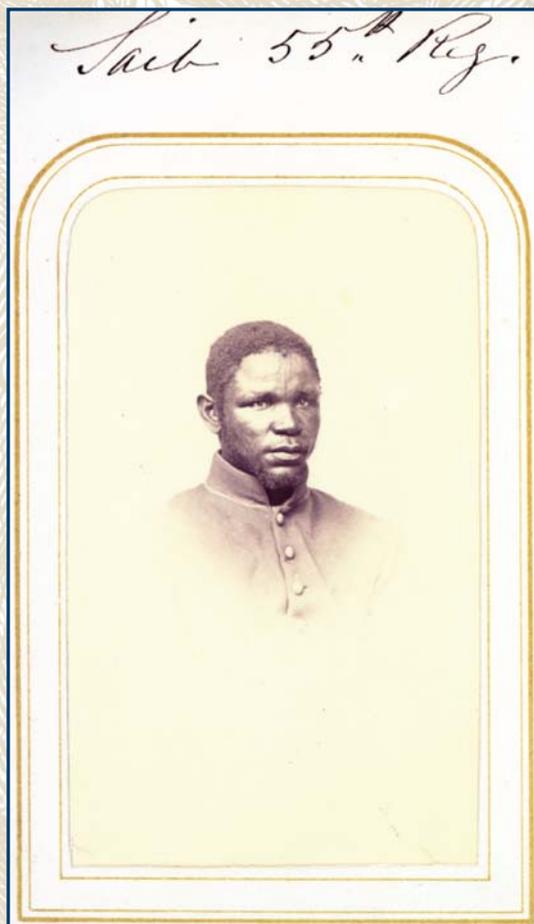
Saib speaks five languages, and can read and write three or four of them. His French is quite Parisian and his Italian correct. He gives an entertaining description of his native region, the employment of its inhabitants, and their manners and customs. They are generally Mohammedans.—Were it not for his color and position, Saib would pass any where for a person of no small acquisitions. As it is, no one can see or talk with him, without being most favorably impressed with his deportment and intelligence. He is one, but not the only one of the "persons of African descent" in camp at Readville, whose acquisitions and behavior go far to dispel ignorant and vulgar prejudices against the colored race.

A Hilton Head letter of the 17th states that Montgomery's expedition, consisting of the 54th Mass., the 2d South Carolina, and Brayton's R. I. battery, proceeded up St. Simon's Sound, Ga., and Turtle river, above Brunswick, on the 8th, and destroyed the railroad bridge over Buffalo creek.—The expedition also ascended Altamaha river on the 11th, above Darien, and captured a schooner laden with 40 bales of cotton and brought her away. The expedition then returned to St. Simon's island without the loss of a man, and awaited orders from Gen. Gilmore and the supply of certain defects of what was found necessary to its work.

Newspaper article describing Nicholas Saib
Nicholas Saib was a subject of fascination for many authors. He was featured in an article in the Atlantic Monthly in 1867, and in 1873 he published his autobiography.

Massachusetts Archives

Document conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.



Photograph of Private Nicholas Saib, 55th Massachusetts Infantry

Born Mohammed Ali Ben Saib in the Sudan, Nicholas Saib was a slave in Africa, Asia, and Europe before gaining his freedom and migrating to the United States. He was fluent in five languages, and worked as a teacher after the war.

Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society

Naval Service

Massachusetts' long seafaring tradition meant that for hundreds of years, many African Americans living in coastal areas such as Boston and New Bedford went to sea.

The Civil War Navy, unlike the Army, had a long history of being integrated, so from the beginning of the war, thousands of African-Americans enlisted as sailors. Because professional sailors of the time were often away from their home base, many blacks enlisting in Massachusetts were from other states, while Massachusetts-born sailors often enlisted in such places as Philadelphia, New York, and New London. The lack of state or racial groupings in the Navy, combined with the fact that the Union did not count sailors in its recruiting quotas until 1864, meant that sailors (especially African-American ones) did not receive the same recognition as soldiers for their Civil War service.

The undersigned, members of the Board of Aldermen of the City of New Bedford, hereby certify that the persons named in the following list were citizens of New Bedford at the date of their enlisting in the Naval Service of the United States.

George G. Gifford *John M. Hovey*
Secretary *Chairman*

Name	Residence	Date of Enlisting
John S. Allen	1	11/15/61. 30
John Allen	2	11/15/61. 30
Henry Angell	3	11/15/61. 30
Alfred Allen	4	11/15/61. 30
Benjamin Anderson	5	10/24/61. 30
John B. Burt	6	10/24/61. 30
Charles G. Burt	7	10/24/61. 30
John Burt	8	10/24/61. 30
Charles G. Burt	9	10/24/61. 30
Alexander Burt	10	10/24/61. 30
Thomas Burt	11	10/24/61. 30
James Burt	12	10/24/61. 30
John Burt	13	10/24/61. 30
Samuel Burt	14	10/24/61. 30
George Burt	15	10/24/61. 30

New Bedford naval enlistments
 A Congressional act of July 4, 1864 allowed states to receive retroactive recruiting credit for their sailors enlisted since the beginning of the war. This selection from a certified list of sailors submitted by New Bedford's aldermen includes the names of two black sailors, Benjamin Anderson and Caesar Boston. Massachusetts Archives

Certificate of enlistment, July 1, 1865

Many African-American sailors enlisted in Massachusetts were from other states, including this one assigned to the recruiting ship *Ohio* in Charlestown. Not all had seafaring experience, and in line with stereotypes of the time, many blacks were assigned to such positions aboard as steward, waiter, or cook.

Massachusetts Archives

U. S. Receiving Ship "Ohio," July 1, 1865

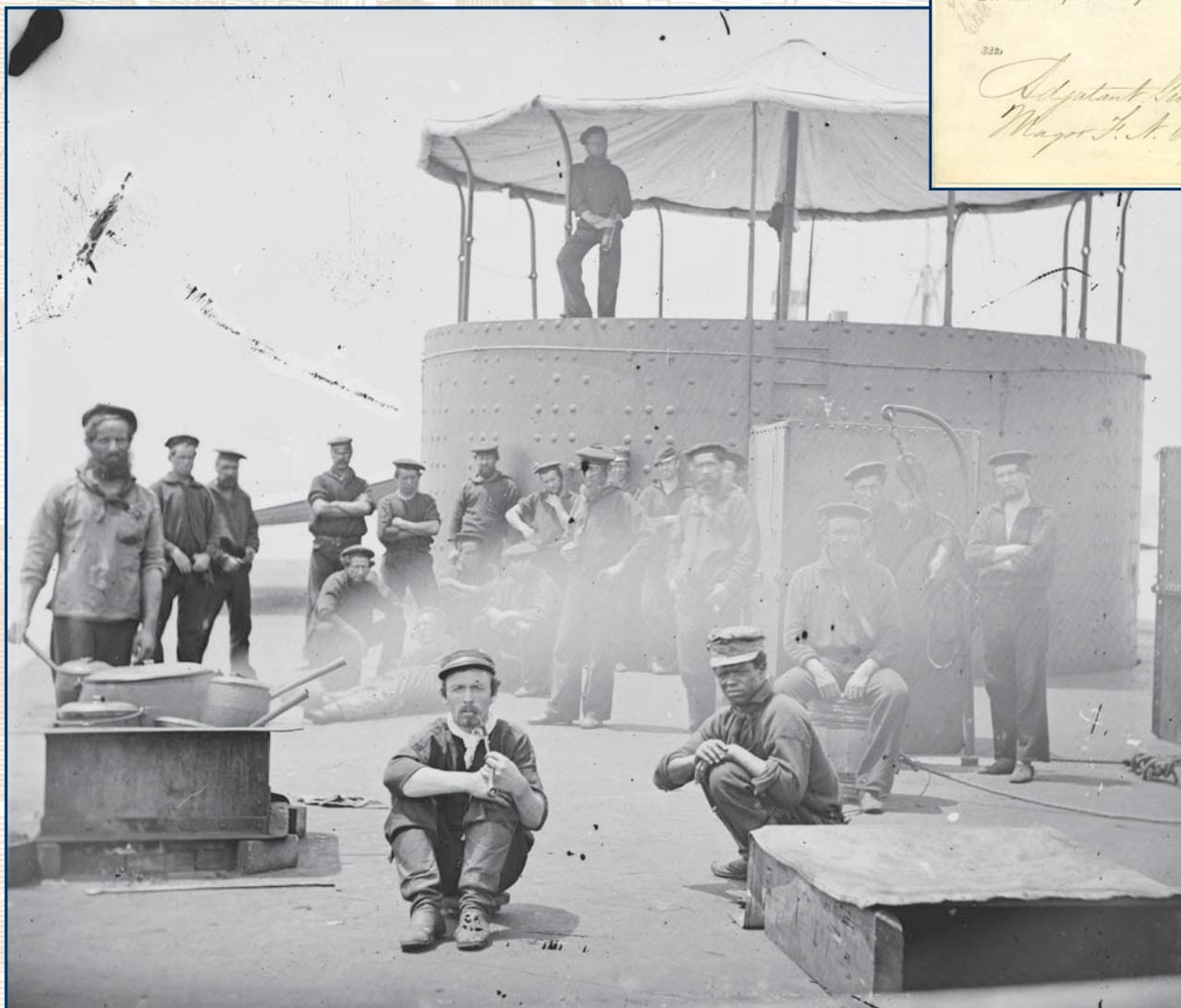
I hereby certify that I have received the Person *David Brown*, on board this Ship, whose particulars are as follows:

Age, 17 years	Complexion, <i>Negro</i>
Height, 5 ft. 7 in	Occupation, <i>Waiter</i>
Hair, <i>Negro</i>	Where Born, <i>Maryland</i>
Eyes, <i>Negro</i>	Mks. or Scars, <i>None</i>
Remarks, <i>Quota of Monitor 1st Dick Ward</i>	

Shipped *July 1st* 1865, to serve in the Naval Service of the United States for *12* years.

No other receipt has been given to my knowledge.

330 *Chas. Green*
 Captain
Adjutant General Schenck through
Major H. N. Clark A. S. M. General
Ward

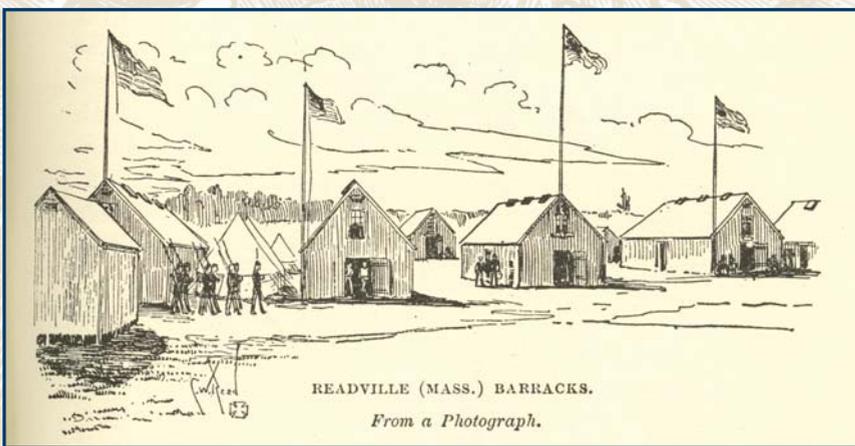
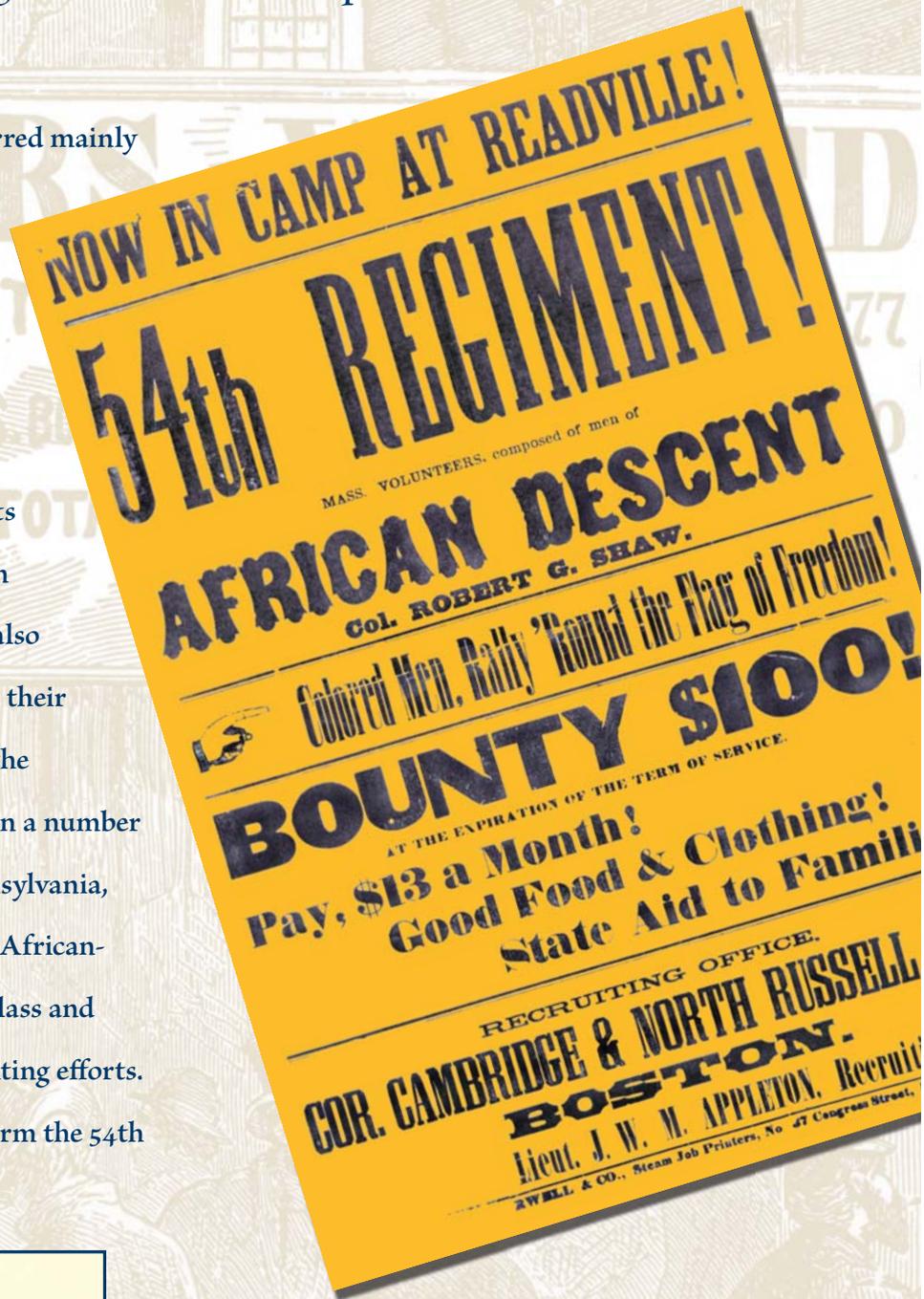


Sailors on board the U.S.S. Monitor, July 9, 1862
 One of many that had black sailors in its crew, the famous ironclad U.S.S. Monitor was photographed on the James River in Virginia. Many Civil War sailors served on rivers rather than on the open sea. Courtesy of Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

The Call to Fight for Freedom

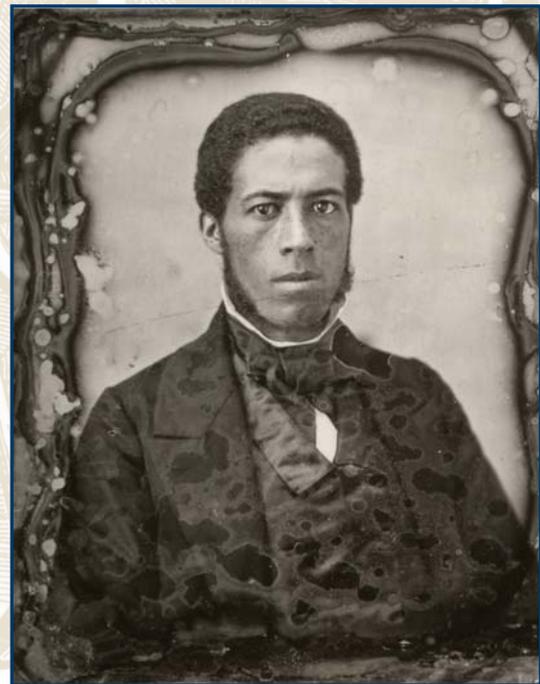
A determined and far-reaching recruitment effort provided soldiers for the black regiments.

In Massachusetts, recruitment of troops occurred mainly on a local level, with each city or town given a series of quotas to fulfill. Governor John Andrew, an early proponent of black military service, finally gained permission to establish a Massachusetts black regiment in 1863. New recruiting methods were needed, as Massachusetts itself did not have a large enough black population to fill one. African-Americans from other states also sought ways to enlist in order to seek freedom for their black brothers in bondage. Recruiting agents for the Massachusetts black regiments were established in a number of states, with most joining from New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio. Prominent members of the African-American community, including Frederick Douglass and Lewis Hayden, were involved in promoting recruiting efforts. These efforts provided not only enough men to form the 54th infantry, but a second regiment, the 55th, as well.



Barracks at Readville
Camp Meigs at Readville (then part of Dedham, now Hyde Park) was the major Massachusetts rendezvous camp where recruits were sent and regiments formed and trained, including the 54th Infantry (which left May 28, 1863), the 55th Infantry (left July 7 1863) and the 5th Cavalry (left May 5-8, 1864).
Illustration by C.W. Reed, from Hardtack and Coffee, by John Billings

54th Infantry Regiment recruitment poster
State aid was a Massachusetts program that supported families while the breadwinner was at war. While this was an attractive inducement to enlistment, the many black soldiers in the regiment from outside Massachusetts found that they were not eligible for this benefit.
Courtesy of Massachusetts Historical Society



John Mercer Langston
John Mercer Langston, an Oberlin College graduate and the first black lawyer in Ohio, was the western recruiting agent for the Massachusetts 54th and 55th regiments.
Courtesy of Oberlin College Archives

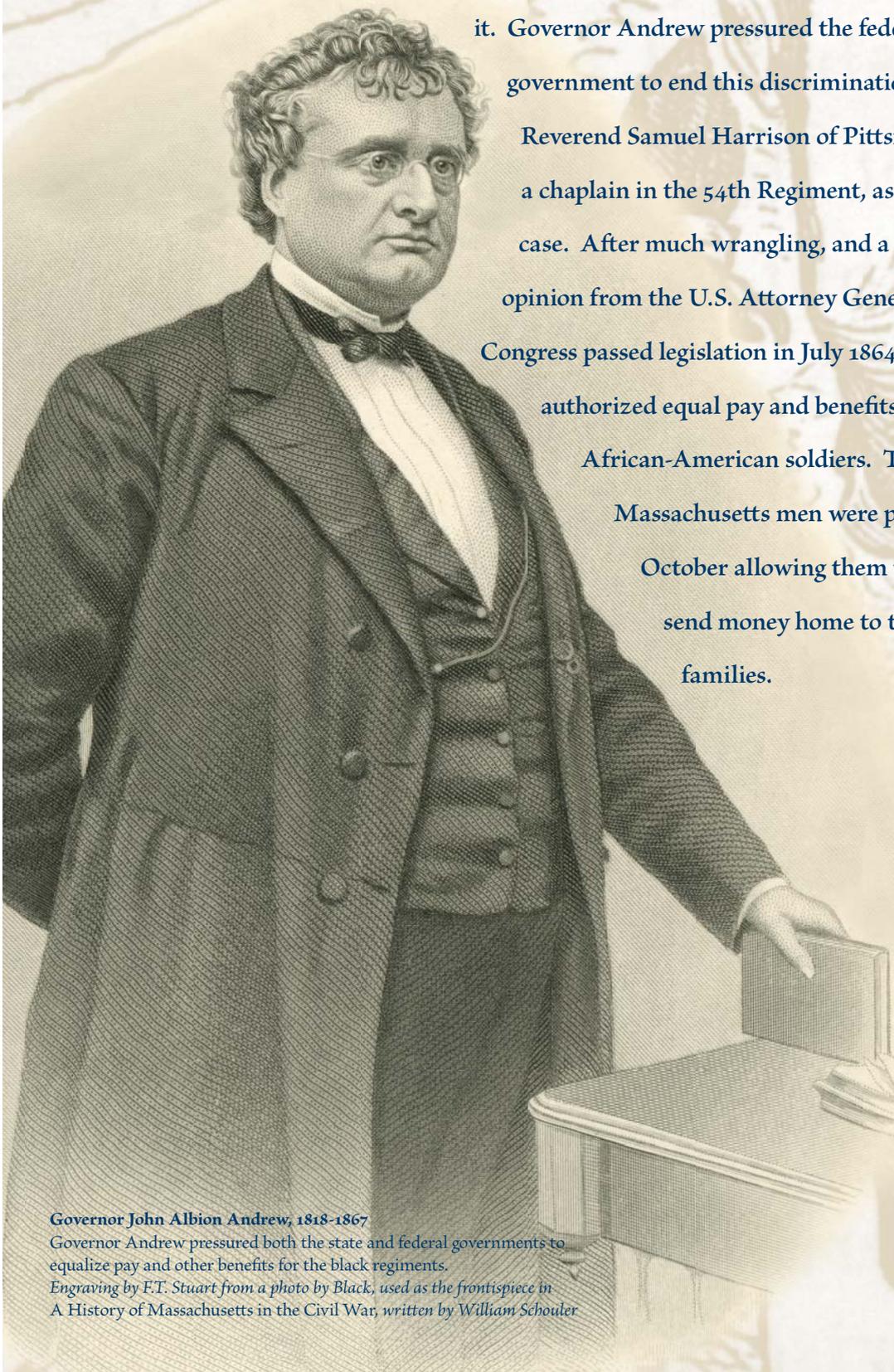
DESCRIPTIVE LIST of a detachment of Recruits for the										Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers, transferred to Camp of Rendezvous at										
this the										1863.										
day of										Nadwell Ware										
										W.P. Richmond										
										C. S. Smith										
No.	NAME.	Age.	Sex.	Race.	Complexion.	HEIGHT.	OCCUPATION.	Date of Birth.	Date of Enlistment.	By whom Enlisted.	Place of Birth.	Place of Enlistment.								
1	John A. Brown	25	M	Black	Dark	5' 8"	Hostler	1838	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
2	Michael Johnson	21	M	Black	Dark	5' 10"	Hostler	1842	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
3	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
4	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
5	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
6	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
7	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
8	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
9	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville
10	George W. Brown	20	M	Black	Dark	5' 11"	Hostler	1843	May 28 1863	By Col. Shaw	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville	Massachusetts	Readville

Enlistment roll, 1863-1864
This roll of Bristol County recruits includes descriptions of African-Americans assigned to the 54th Infantry and the 5th Cavalry. The occupation "hostler" describes one who cares for horses - an ideal background for a soldier in a cavalry unit.
Massachusetts Archives

The Struggle for Equal Pay

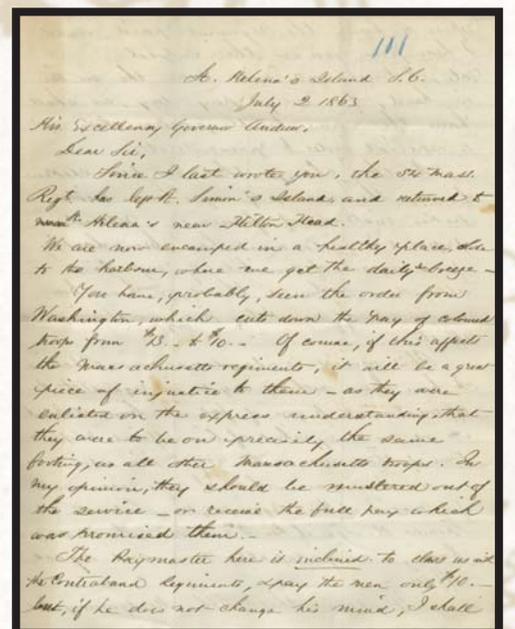
The refusal of Massachusetts African-American troops to accept pay and bounties that were less than what was given to other regiments meant that many of the soldiers went without pay for almost eighteen months.

Despite assurances given to the newly enlisted soldiers of the 54th and 55th infantry regiments that they would receive the same pay, equipment, and bounties as other Massachusetts soldiers, United States paymasters were ordered to pay them three dollars less each month. The men refused to accept the lesser amount. In November 1863, the Massachusetts legislature, at the urging of Governor Andrew, appropriated enough money to make up the difference in the soldiers' pay, but again the regiments refused to accept it. Governor Andrew pressured the federal government to end this discrimination, using Reverend Samuel Harrison of Pittsfield, a chaplain in the 54th Regiment, as a test case. After much wrangling, and a favorable opinion from the U.S. Attorney General, Congress passed legislation in July 1864 that authorized equal pay and benefits for African-American soldiers. The Massachusetts men were paid off in October allowing them to finally send money home to their families.



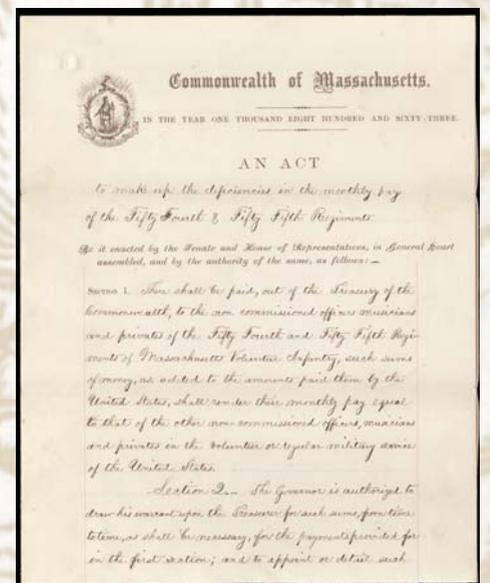
Governor John Albion Andrew, 1818-1867

Governor Andrew pressured both the state and federal governments to equalize pay and other benefits for the black regiments. Engraving by F.T. Stuart from a photo by Black, used as the frontispiece in *A History of Massachusetts in the Civil War*, written by William Schouler



Letter of Robert Gould Shaw, July 2, 1863

After Colonel Shaw received notice from the Paymaster General in Washington that his men would be paid three dollars less than soldiers in other regiments, he wrote to Governor Andrew stating that he thought the soldiers of the 54th Infantry should be mustered out if they did not receive the full pay promised to them. *Massachusetts Archives*



Act making up the deficiencies in the monthly pay of the 54th and 55th Regiments

Governor Andrew urged the General Court to pass this legislation and an accompanying resolve in November 1863, which stated, "while Massachusetts has undertaken to repair this injustice to a portion of her military contingent, she does so declaring that this duty belongs to the national government, and should be immediately assumed." *Massachusetts Archives*

The Struggle for Equal Pay

“Many of those who marched in these regiments from this Commonwealth, have been worn out in service, or have fallen in battle on James Island, in the assault upon Fort Wagner, or in the affair of Olustee, yielding up their lives for the defence [sic] of their native country, in which they had felt their share of oppression, but from which they never received justice.”

— (Governor Andrew's letter to President Lincoln, May 13, 1864)

Letter of Major James Sturgis, December 12, 1863

Major Sturgis traveled to South Carolina to pay the men the money appropriated by the Massachusetts legislature, but reported back to Governor Andrew that the soldiers would not accept the extra pay because they felt it would legitimize the discrimination of paying the black soldiers a lower rate. Massachusetts Archives

HEAD QUARTERS,
54th Massachusetts Vols.
Dec 12 1863.

Dear Sir, We reached the place this morning and learned from Colonel Williams and Colonel Richards that there were some unwilling to accept an divided pay, - I had all the Commissioned and non Commissioned officers at the same Headquarters and explained the law lately passed by our Legislature but quite in vain - I find the Regiment in excellent condition and as we shall

Letter of Andrew Sinclair, January 5, 1863

This letter, written by a private in the 55th Infantry Regiment, expressed the sentiment of the soldiers who refused the additional money raised by Massachusetts, saying that they would stay in the field for three years and still not accept the lower rate of pay. Massachusetts Archives
Letter conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts.

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Dear Sir, In reply to your letter of the 2nd inst. concerning the extra pay Major Sturgis was here and presented to me the money offered by the Legislature for the extra pay. We do not consider the State of Massachusetts under any obligation to us soldiers though we are prepared to receive any amount offered by your State in cash or in kind if it will enable us to stay in the field for three years longer in our present position. That is the ground we have always held and we will always hold. We are not soldiers of the 54th, we are soldiers of the 55th. We are not soldiers of the 54th, we are soldiers of the 55th. We are not soldiers of the 54th, we are soldiers of the 55th.

Letter of Governor Andrew, May 13, 1864

Governor Andrew's letter to President Abraham Lincoln regarding the Harrison case was printed and widely distributed, to counter complaints of inactivity on the subject. The issue of pay became increasingly important as the months passed and morale in the African-American regiments dropped. Massachusetts Archives

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.
EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT
BOSTON, May 13, 1864.

To the President of the United States:

Sir,

I respectfully call to the attention of your excellency the case of the Reverend SAMUEL HARRISON (late chaplain of the Fifty-fourth Regiment of Massachusetts Infantry Volunteers), and the communication which I had the honor to address to your excellency on the twenty-fourth day of March last, and the decision of the Attorney-General of the United States on the questions of law involved in the case, which decision was submitted by him to your excellency under date of the twenty-third day of April last, and concluded in the following words, viz.,

"Your attention having been specially called to the wrong done in this case, I am also of opinion that your constitutional obligation to take care that the laws be faithfully executed, makes it your duty to direct the Secretary of War to inform the officers of the Pay Department of the Army that such is your view of the law, and I do not doubt that it will be accepted by them as furnishing the correct rule for their action."

(Signed) EDWARD BATES, Attorney-General.

As a proper representative of Chaplain Harrison, and also of all the commissioned officers and privates of the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Regiments of

Rev. Samuel Harrison, 1818-1900

Samuel Harrison served as chaplain in the 54th Infantry for four months, but received a medical discharge for debility caused by worry over his family's financial situation. Governor Andrew used Harrison's case to advance the cause of equal pay. Courtesy of Museum of African American History

The Homefront

The black community of Massachusetts contributed much to the Union war effort — men for the regiments, workers for local training camps, and even clothing and food for the troops.

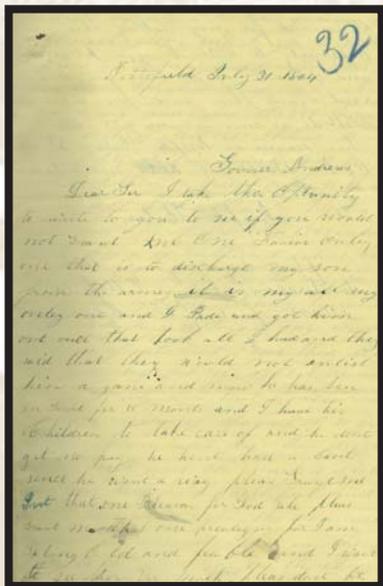
Following federal approval, the African Meeting House in Boston became a central place for recruitment from the African-American community.

In February 1863, local community members such as waiter Robert Johnson, abolitionist Wendell Phillips, and Lieutenant Colonel Edward Hallowell of the 54th Infantry Regiment spoke there, encouraging enlistment. Similar meetings occurred in New Bedford.

As enlistment increased, the community at home contributed to the war effort as best it could. Many of those who remained at home began to work as domestics and laborers at Camp Meigs at Readville. The Colored Ladies Relief Society presented a flag to the 54th Regiment as well as clothing and foodstuffs. Family members left at home struggled to support their families as soldiers went unpaid and state aid promised to their families was continually denied.



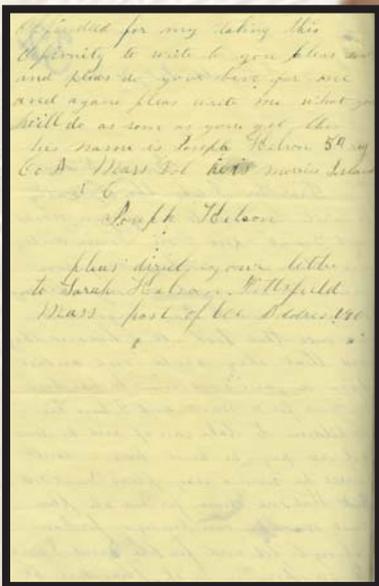
“Joe, Camp Meigs, Readville, Mass, Oct 1862”
Although not clearly identified as such, it is likely that “Joe” was one of the many Massachusetts blacks who served as laborers and domestics at Camp Meigs both before and after the recruitment of the black regiments.
Courtesy State Library of Massachusetts, Special Collections



Letter of Joseph Kelson, July 30, 1864

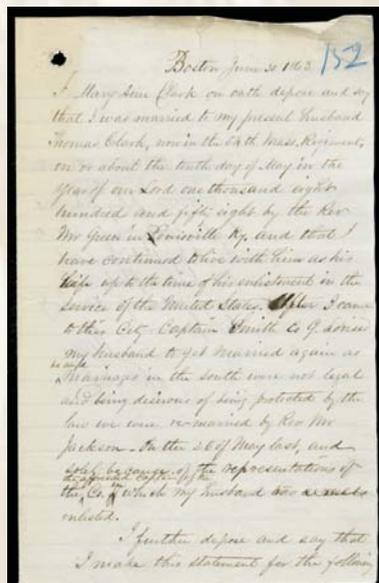
His son of the same name having reenlisted in the Massachusetts 54th Infantry, Joseph Kelson complained that the soldier received no pay and hence he himself was having difficulty supporting his grandchildren. It is unclear whether Joseph, Sr., ever received assistance from the state. His son died of disease less than a year later in Georgetown, South Carolina.

Massachusetts Archives



African-American Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts

The oldest standing African-American house of worship in the United States, it served as a center for recruitment for the Massachusetts black regiments during the Civil War.
Photograph by T. C. Fitzgerald

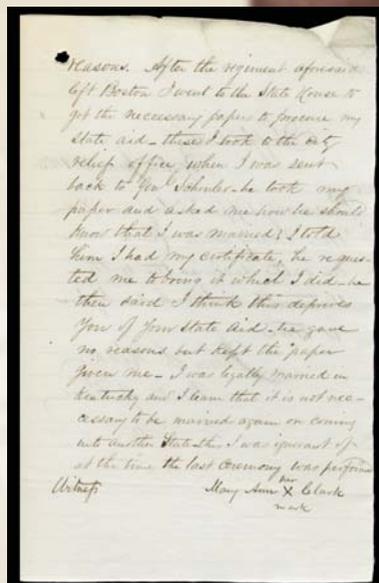


Deposition of Mary Ann Clark, June 30, 1863

In her continued effort to obtain the state aid promised to the families of enlistees of the black regiments, Mrs. Clark recounts her exasperating experiences and the constant denial of such aid by Massachusetts authorities, even though she had been married to her husband since 1858. Her request was eventually granted by the state auditor.

Massachusetts Archives

Document conserved through the generosity of the Military Historical Society of Massachusetts



The Promise Made



Study heads for the Shaw Memorial

Courtesy of U.S. Dept. of the Interior, National Park Service, Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site, Cornish, N.H.

“If they stake their lives for us, they must be prompted by the strongest motive – even the promise of freedom. And the promise made must be kept.”

—Abraham Lincoln to
James C. Conkling,
August 26, 1863



Dedication of the Memorial to the Massachusetts 54th Infantry

In 1884, Augustus Saint-Gaudens, with funds raised by an interracial committee, was commissioned to create a memorial to the Massachusetts 54th. Twelve years later some 225 veterans of the state's three black regiments assembled for the dedication ceremony.

Massachusetts Archives

*F*rederick Douglass said, “Who would be free themselves must strike the blow...”

Though they comprised less than one percent of the North's population, African-Americans who wore Union blue made up nearly one tenth of the Union forces. Despite unequal pay and treatment, some 180,000 African-American men served in the Army, another 18,000 in the Navy. Many more performed vital non-combat support functions, as did black women who served as nurses, scouts, or spies. Nearly 40,000 gave their lives.

The promise of freedom did not come easily. The end of slavery did not mean the end of prejudice and injustice. Many continued the struggle. Men like Lewis Hayden and Joshua B. Smith, ardent abolitionists before the war, later served in the Massachusetts legislature, and fought to preserve and expand hard-won freedoms. They, like countless other African-Americans through the nineteenth century and beyond, were prompted by the promise of freedom, and the belief that a promise made must be a promise kept.



William Francis Galvin, Secretary of the Commonwealth, would like to extend his sincere appreciation to the following for their assistance in making this exhibit a success:

Bernard Margolis, Earle Havens, and the staff of Rare Books and Special Collections at the Boston Public Library; Peter Drummey and the staff of the Massachusetts Historical Society; Sarah Ann Shaw and the League of Women for Community Service; Don Troiani and Historical Art Prints; Greg Schwarz of the Saint-Gaudens National Historic Site; and Andrea Still at the Massachusetts State Library, Special Collections, for providing images for the exhibit.

Susan Greendyke Lachevre of the Massachusetts Art Commission and Neil R. Kilpeck, Superintendent of the Bureau of State Office Buildings, for the loan of the replicas of the regimental flags of the Massachusetts 55th Volunteer Infantry and the artifacts from the G.A.R. Collection.

The Military Historical Society of Massachusetts for their generosity in providing for the conservation of several volumes of the Executive Letters Collection, which were consulted and featured in this exhibit.

Tom Blazej and Allison Furkey of the Graphic Communications Division for their patience and hard work in completing the design and production of this exhibit.

A special thanks to Beverly Morgan-Welch, Chandra Harrington, Marion Kilson, Tracy Gibbs, and Amber Moore of the Museum of African American History for providing images that are featured in the exhibit and for consulting with us and offering their expertise and research derived from the creation of their new exhibit, A Gathering Place For Freedom.