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USCT CIVIL WAR DIGEST

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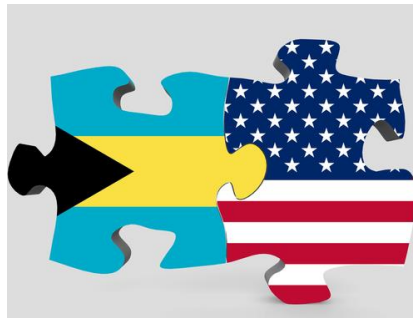
USCT Civil War Digest

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African American History Preserved in the Bahamas: Reflects the African Diaspora



Bahamas Trade Info Portal

When the historic Colored Men's Convention of 1840 occurred in Albany, New York, many of the founding fathers of the African American ethnic identity were present. The infrastructure supporting the revolutionary identity had commenced as early as the late 1700s, yet it was on firm ground by 1840. It included newspapers, fraternal groups, religious denominations, and a small cadre of classically educated male and female scholars. A motto was "uplifting the race."

A closer examination revealed that African American history was emerging as a reflection of the African diaspora and the contributions made by free and enslaved ancestors and their descendants who had association with various locations of the Americas. Unfortunately, too many of the early leaders have been left out of recorded history, making it difficult for their descendants to connect with them. The impetus for this story

began with a descendant seeking information about his ancestor who attended the 1840 Colored Men's Convention. This was done as a part of his family history research.

Professor John Usher sent an email to Harry Bradshaw Matthews, the founding president of the USCT Institute, in October 2012. While doing an online search for his ancestors, Usher linked to Matthews' 2008 text, *African American Freedom Journey in New York and Related Sites, 1823-1870*. He noticed a reference to his ancestors. Consequently, he sent the following email from Scotland:

African American Freedom Journey in New York and Related Sites, 1823-1870 Freedom Knows No Color



Harry Bradshaw Matthews

Dear Mr. Matthews,

I am trying to trace information about my great x2 grandfather Alexander Thuey. He was an elected Delegate for Troy at The Coloured Men's Convention in 1840 which took place at Albany, New York. Alexander was married to Phebe who in

the mid 1800's lived in Nassau, Bahamas with her children, Elizabeth, Mary and Alexander Van Rensselaer. Phebe and her eldest daughter Mary died in Nassau in 1862 & 1851 respectively, while my greatgrandfather Alexander Van Rensselaer emigrated to the U.K. where he practised as an engineer. I have very little information on my great x2 grandfather other than the fact that he was born circa 1800 and died between 1842 and 1845. I would very much like to learn more about his life. Is there any help you can give me as I live in Scotland and have little access to records either in the U.S.A. or Nassau..

Yours sincerely,

John Usher (Professor)

The message exposed the transnational relationship between African Americans and Bahamians at least by the mid-1800s.

The points gleaned from Usher's communication were:

First Point - Alexander Thuey was a delegate at the 1840 Colored Men's Convention. This was noted in the transcribed article in Matthews' book that first appeared in the *Colored American* newsletter of June 18, 1840, in which the Declaration of Colored Men outlined reasons for calling for the convention. Usher believed that Thuey died between 1842 and 1845.

Analysis - Included among the signers calling for the 1840 Convention were many of the founding fathers of the ethnic identity of Colored Americans of the typical branch of the Ethiopian Race. The convention may have been the first time that many of the leaders assembled at one place. Alexander Thuey was recorded as a signer of the Declaration along with more prominently noted men who have since been placed in history books. Appearing on the roster next to Thuey were Henry Highland Garnet and William Rich. Other noted leaders included Thomas Van Rensselaer and Charles L. Reason.

According to William J. Simmons' 1890 book, *Men of Mark: Eminent, Progressive and Rising*, Garnet had a revolutionary's fiber. He escaped from slavery and relocated to New York City, where he received a elementary education at the African Free School. He completed

classical studies in 1839 at the Oneida Institute in Whitesboro, New York. He soon emerged in 1842 as pastor of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy. There he was an activist of the Underground Railroad. Rich and Thuey were activist leaders and co-founders of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church.

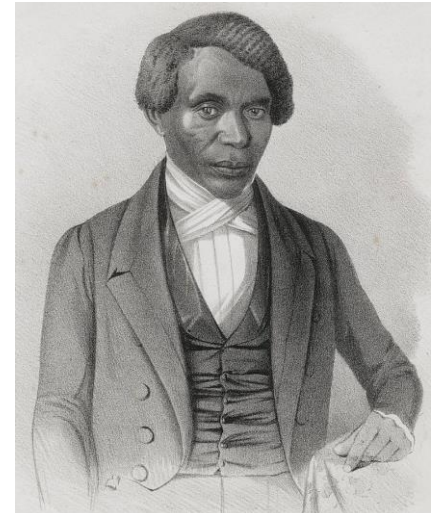


Source: Henry Highland Garnet, *Men of Mark*, William J. Simmons, 1890
Courtesy: The Matthews Collection

Van Rensselaer escaped from slavery in the Mohawk Valley in 1819. He became an activist in the Underground Railroad in New York City, where he operated a restaurant. Reason was born in New York City in 1818 to free parents from Guadeloupe and Saint-Dominique, who migrated to the United States following the Haitian Revolution. Similar to Garnet, Reason attended the African Free School in NYC where he was identified as a child prodigy in mathematics. He later studied at the Baptist Central College in McGraw, New York. Reason and Garnet were closely associated as advocates for the voting rights of free African American men.

Another article appeared detailing the August 18-20, 1840 convention deliberations. The men met at the Hamilton Street Baptist Church in Albany, New York. It was called to order by Rev. Theodore S. Wright of New York City. He was the first African American graduate of the Princeton Theological Seminary. Elected president was Austin Steward of Rochester, who had attended earlier conventions held by

his darker brethren. Chosen as vice presidents were William P. Johnson of New York City; Richard P.G. Wright of Schenectady, and John S. Raymond of Albany. Noteworthy among the three vice presidents was that R.P.G. was the father of Rev. Wright and a leader and Mason in Schenectady. Also among the Who's Who of delegates was Alex Thuey.



Source: Rev. Thomas S. Wright, *White Supremacy at the Commencement of 1836*, Joseph Yannielli
Courtesy: Princeton and Slavery Project - Princeton University

Second Point – Usher indicated that Alexander and his spouse, Phebe, and children – Elizabeth, Mary and Alexander Van Rensselaer - relocated to Nassau, Bahamas, during the mid-1800s.

Analysis – During May 28, 2016, *Genealogy Specialist-Euryalus* posted and inquiry regarding “Alexander Van Ransellar (aka Rensselaer) Thuey (1842-1902), a civil engineer, apparently of West Indian origin, who was heavily involved with the promotion, construction and opening of the railroad (in England) during the 1880s.”

“Sadly, he died in obscurity on Brighton Workhouse, but the “standard” family history sources reveal that he was born in Nassau in 1842, married Eliza Georgina Benson in 1877, and had eight children. The family lived in Stevenage, Notting Hill and later, in 15 Sidney Road, Forest Gate, while Thuey's Office was given as Palace Chambers, Westminster.

The prolems relate to the West Indian connection. It is known that an Alexander Thuey emigrated from New York to the British West Indies, which offered greater opportunities for coloured people than the

USA. It is tempting to conclude that this Alexander was the father of the engineer, but the two sets of records do not entirely add up. Alexander Thuey, a carpenter, married Phebe Van Rensselaer, and died in Nassau on 27 November 1861, aged 57, and he is buried in the Western Cemetery, Nassau. However, the online sources that I have consulted make no mention of a son called Alexander – so were there any links between the Thueys, or were there two separate families living in Nassau at the same time?

There were a stream of responses to the inquiry between 2016-2017. One contributor shared that *family search* included a document noting the “immigration from Boston to Nassau on the ‘Hudson’ 1845, including Phelis Thuey 40, Mary Thuey 15, Elizabeth Thuey 5, and Alexander 3 (stated as female) born USA 1842.”

Third Point – Usher indicated that Phebe and her eldest daughter Mary died in Nassau in 1862 & 1851 respectively, while his great-grandfather, Alexander Van Rensselaer, emigrated to the U.K. where he practiced as an engineer.

Analysis - A respondent to the 2016 inquiry from England shared the reference to the obituary for Phebe Thuey that appeared in the March 26, 1862 issue of the *Bahamas Herald*. It indicated that Phebe was the spouse of Alexander Thuey and the mother of one son and three daughters.

With the resolution of three primary points identified in Usher’s email, Matthews turned attention to the historical context of the Thuey family and its place in the African American Freedom Journey.

Research Finding 1 - It starts with the 1830 Federal Census, from which Dr. Carter G. Woodson obtained data for his 1925 classic work, *Free Negro Heads Families in the United States in 1830*. Alexander “Thewey” is identified as the head of his three-member household. He had an age range 24-36. At the time he and his family resided in the Second Ward, City of Troy, Rensselaer County, New York.

Research Finding 2 – *Black Political Thought: From David Walker to the Present*, by Sherrow O. Pinder, revealed

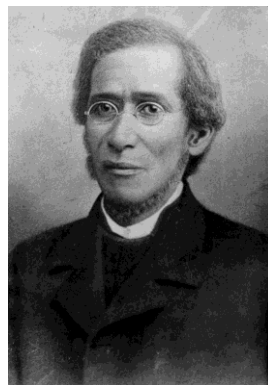
that the African Female Benevolent Society was established in February 1833 with Phebe Thuey as president and Hannah Rich as vice president.

Research Finding 3 – The book, *Troy’s One Hundred Years, 1789-1889*, by Arthur James Weise, and the *Underground Railroad in the Adirondack Region*, by Tom Calarco, indicated that the NYC Underground Railroad leader, Rev. Theodore S. Wright, officiated on November 27, 1834, the ownership of the site that would house a building for study by Colored students and others.

Research Finding 4 – The book, *Laws of the State of New York*, indicated that Alexander Thuey was authorized on May 9, 1835, by law to assume ownership for a parcel of land that would soon be used for the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church. Thus, Thuey was a leader within his community before the famed Colored Men’s Convention.

Research Finding 5 – *The Colored American*, October 14, 1837, as transcribed in Matthews’ 2008 text, profiled a meeting of the important Mental and Moral Improvement Society at the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church in Troy. The president was Daniel

Alexander Payne, with Alexander Thuey as treasurer.



Source: Rev. Daniel Alexander Payne, African American Freedom Journey in New York and Related Sites, Harry Bradshaw Matthews, 2008
Courtesy: Isaac and Lenora Clection, Ohio Historical Society

Payne graduated from the Gettysburg Lutheran Seminary in 1837 and quickly became regarded by his darker brethren as “a gift from God.” He was ordained in 1837 by the abolitionist Franckean Synod whose white leaders were connected to the Lutheran Hartwick Seminary and Academy in Otsego County, New York. The connection with Payne, the future bishop of the African Methodist

Episcopal Church, revealed that Thuey was clearly a member of the elite leaders who framed the African American ethnic identity.

Research Finding 6 – *Troy’s One Hundred Years*, referenced the 1840 establishment of the Liberty Street Presbyterian Church, with Alexander Thuey and William Rich as trustees. Rev. Henry Highland Garnet served as pastor of the church from 1841-1848. The church had continuously served as an Underground Railroad site.

The six research references above, both secondary and primary materials, revealed a dedicated couple, Alexander and Phebe Thuey, who contributed to the Freedom Journey of their darker brethren and sisters through community support, religious service and Underground Railroad involvement. He stood side to side with such noted luminaries as Bishop Daniel Alexander Payne, Rev. Henry Highland Garnet, Rev. Theodore S. Wright and R.P.G. Wright.

The African Diaspora Connection

During 1845, Phebe and her children – Mary, Elizabeth and Alexander - departed for Nassau, Bahamas.

NAME.	AGE.	SEX.	Occupation, Trade or Profession.	Country to which they are emigrating.	Country of which they are said to be natives.	Remarks relative to any other law that is to be observed during the voyage.
Theodore Wright	48	M	Minister	Boston	USA	
Phelis Thuey	40	F	Wife	Boston	USA	
Mary Thuey	15	F	Daughter	Boston	USA	
Elizabeth Thuey	5	F	Daughter	Boston	USA	
Alexander Thuey	3	M	Son	Boston	USA	
Joseph Black	17	M	Slave	Nassau	Bahamas	

Source: Report and List of Passengers bound for Nassau, 1845
Courtesy: FamilySearch.com

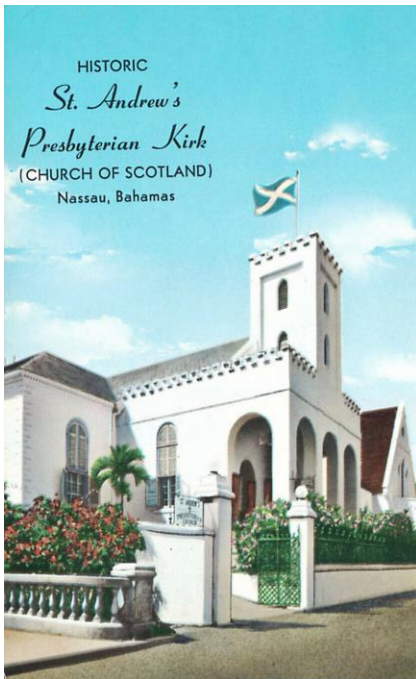
The family was accompanied on the voyage by Rev. Theodore S. Wright and his father, R.P.G. Wright. They were all identified as citizens of the United States. Also among the party was 17-year-old Joseph Black of the Bahamas.

Interesting, however, was that a respondent to the 2016 inquiry from

England, shared a birth record for Alexander the junior.

The baptism record at “St. Andrews Presbyterian Kirk (Church), Nassau - New Providence, Bahamas, for the period of 1837 to 1884, Minister for this Baptism: William Maclure Item #15.” Included:

“Alexander TUOHY, born 27 Jan 1842 Nassau, N.P. bapt. 15 May 1842 St. Andrew’s Presb. Church, Nassau; Parents: Alexander TUOHY & Pheobe Von RANSELLAER.”



Source: St. Andrews Presbyterian Kirk (Church) Nassau
Courtesy: The Matthews Collection

Analysis – Important to notice is that the spelling of the surname “Thuey/Tuohy,” has several variations among documents. But, the mentioning of Phebe/ Phoebe and her maiden name, Van Ransellaer, effectively confirm that the references are for the same family. With that said, the birth record of 1842 provided evidence that the son was indeed born in the Bahamas, thus placing the Thuey family within a transnational scenario before the ship passage in 1845 that then included three-year-old Alexander. And just as important, the Thuey family’s connection with the Presbyterian Church was also a transnational one. This begged the question, “Was the Presbyterian Church in the Bahamas being used as a sanctuary for freedom seekers from the United

States by way of the Underground Railroad?”

Sadly, On March 25, 1847, Theodore Sedgwick Wright died in New York City. *FindaGrave.com* indicated that:

“Mr. Wright became famous as a pastor in New York state. He was a founding member of the American Anti-Slavery Society, the son of the abolitionist barber and pastor, R.P.G. Wright. His NYC home served as a station on the Underground Railroad. Theodore was the first known black man to graduate from the seminary at Princeton.”

R.P.G. Wright died on May 28, 1847 at his home in Schenectady, New York, located near Troy. The father and son were interred at Vale Cemetery. *FindaGrave.com* indicates that:

“Mr. Wright had a prominent role as a free black citizen of New York. He was reportedly born in (Madagascar) Africa. He became a barber by profession. His great work in the abolitionist movement was carried on by his son, Theodore. R.P.G. Wright was active in the Freemasonry as the first known black member of St. George’s Lodge.”



Source: R.P.G. Wright’d gravesite at Vale Cemetery
Courtesy: FindaGrave.com

During October 6-9, 1847, Alexander Thuey was a delegate from Nassau, New Providence, The Bahamas, at the National Convention of Colored People and Their Friends that was held in Troy, New York. The convention was called to order by Henry Highland Garnet and it was a gathering of leading advocates of the Freedom Journey. Among the roster of delegates was Frederick Douglass, who was listed as a representative from Massachusetts. Thuey served on the

Committee on Commerce. He was also appointed to a committee of 13 to respond to a letter from brethren in Jamaica. The convention records indicated the following:

Kingston, Jamaica, April 28th, 1846.

Resolved, that we hail with great pleasure the courteous proposal from our brethren in the island of Jamaica to open a friendly correspondence with us. Resolved, that we cordially respond to the sentiments contained in the address of the Jamaica Hamic Association, believing as we do that a more intimate acquaintance with our brethren in those islands will be of mutual benefit and advantage. Resolved, that a committee of thirteen be appointed to reply to the address of the Jamaica Hamic Association, and that said committee be instructed to express to our brethren our cordial sympathy and readiness to unite with them in any proper measures for the advancement of our common cause.

Signed—J. W. C. Pennington, Randall D. Kenney, W. C. Nell, P. Harris, Charles Seth. Resolved, that the committee of West India Correspondence be, and they are hereby, instructed to report their correspondence to the next Annual Convention.

The following committee was appointed by the Convention, in accordance with the recommendation of the Report: Connecticut, J. W. C. Pennington, A. G. Beman; New York, R. D. Kenney, T. Van Rensselaer, George Hogarth, Peyton Harris, Henry H. Garnet, Nathan Johnson; Massachusetts, Moses Jackson, Wm. C. Nell; Ohio, A. M. Sumner; Michigan, Robt. Banks; Nassau, N. P., Alex. Thuey. Source: Omeka.ColoredConventions.org

Another contributor to the inquiry from England shared the “passenger manifest from New York to Nassau on the ‘Stenn Rumah’ 14 June 1859. Alexander Thuey 50, builder states born in the Bahamas, US Citizen, son Alexander Thuey age 16 born in the Bahamas and Phoebe A., daughter 24 born in the Bahamas.”

Yet, another contributor to the inquiry from England provided the following:

“Western Cemetery, Nassau, N.P.
Alexander THUEY Esq.
of these islands
Died 27 Nov 1861 Aged 57

Pheobe Van RENSSELAER
Of County Van RENSSELAER, N. Y.
His wife
Died 23 March 1862 aged 59
[Back side of Head stone]
Erected By
Their Son
A.V.R. THUEY
Assoc. Memb: Inst. C.E.A.F.G.S.
H.M.E.S.
India”



Source: Alexander and Phebe Thuey gravesites at Western Cemetery, Nassau, New Providence, Bahamas
Courtesy: FindaGrave.com

A supporting document was:

“Bahamas Herald – issue: 26 Mar 1862
DIED, On Sunday morning the 23rd instant,
Mrs. Phebe THUEY, aged 61, a native of TROY, NY
and relict of the late Alexander THUEY esq.
...She has left an affexionate son, three daughters...”

Further, to clarify the identity of the son,
another respondent shared the following
Bahamian land record:

“Vol. N10: p. 287 – dated 7 May 1904
Alexander Van Ranseller THUEY 14 Bedford Road
Guildford in the County of Surrey England Traveller
Whereas Alexander Van Ranseller THUEY Senior
formerly of Isl. Of New Providence Civil Engineer
died intestate 14 Nov 1902 Bahamas, Oct 14, 2017,
#9.

The request from Professor Usher led to a research project that spanned an eight-year period. Along the way, a sequence of events confirmed the United States and Bahamian connection to his ancestors. Unfortunately, the elders have not received the similar historical recognition that has been bestowed upon other leaders of the Freedom Journey in the United States. The 160th anniversary of Alexander Thuey’s death will occur on November 27, 2021. What will be our response?

An Era Ends, While New Visions Beckon

On May 1, 2020, Harry Bradshaw Matthews, the Founding President of the United States Colored Troops Institute for Local History and Family Research (USCTI), retired from his position of Associate Dean and Director of the Office of Intercultural Affairs at Hartwick College. With his departure being amidst the arrival of COVID-19, the momentum of the USCTI shifted gears to the neutral position. The uncertainty of the dangerous health issue caused many college and universities in March 2020, including Hartwick, to redirect faculty, staff and institutional monetary resources to face the unexpected dilemma. Impacted was the USCTI and particularly its winter issue of the *USCT Civil War Digest*. The staff members of the several offices that produced the newsletter were forced to work from home. Day to day tasks shifted from routine and expected workloads to daily challenges. Regular scheduled productions were put on hold.

Just as unexpected as COVID-19, was the Black Lives Matter racial justice movement that emerged into an international campaign. Confrontations on the front line and social media postings made the movement a household name. Thus, COVID-19 and the Movement pushed Matthews to assess the role of the USCTI, the *USCT Civil War Digest*, and just as meaningful, the role of the associated American Society of Freedmen Descendants (ASFD).

So, it began simply by asking the question, “Is the USCTI relevant to this new generation?” Further, can the USCTI help the nation with racial reconciliation? A quick reflection brought forth the reality that the USCTI during the past 22 years has been on the forefront, along with similar operations, in helping African Americans to recover from one of the more damaging and destructive consequences of the enslaved citizens in this land. Namely, the relegating of such persons into “objects of injustice.” It included denying legal family status to enslaved persons. It was not until the Federal Census of 1870 that the majority of the four million new Freedmen and Freedwomen were recorded by their own households and names.

The USCTI from its inception aimed to personalize as many of the Freedmen and their sisters, even helping to reconstruct family units. The primary target of the USCTI since 1998 has been establishing local history and family research for the 200,000 black soldiers and their 7,000 white officers of the Civil War. By extension, its sister organization, the ASFD, was at the same time established in 1998 with Sylvia Cooke Martin as the first president. In 2010, the ASFD became associated with the USCTI under the leadership of Matthews. He maintained ASFD’s original premise, namely, honoring members with distinction as they document their respective lineages in the United States, Canada and the Caribbean, frequently back into the 1800s or earlier.

Thus, as one era ends, the new visions beckon with a renewed call to arms, not physically, but mentally reshaping the perceptions of African Americans by using personal family documentations to prepare for reparations for the injustice of enslaved Americans.

The Freedom Journey for African Americans was a bumpy road. The darker brethren, their sisters and white allies – men and women – fought for the ending of slavery. Yet, in 1840 the American Anti-Slavery Society became disjointed over the issue of a white woman, Abby Kelly Foster, being appointed to the

organization's business committee. Thirty years later, the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guaranteed voting rights for black men. Women were infuriated over the wording of the amendment because they had been left out of the citizenship right to vote. It became clear that many white men and women who supported the ending of slavery did not extend that support to equal rights for black persons. It was truly a bumpy road to freedom.

In retrospect, it must be noted that the New Jersey Constitution in 1776 allowed for women and free black men to vote. It was not until 1807 that voting in that state became limited to free white males. In other states free black men with property were allowed to vote. But, the Pennsylvania Constitution Convention in May 1837, resulted in the wording "white citizens" as the requirement for voting rights. Similarly, the idea of limiting voting rights to just white men became the rule throughout the Union. It was not until the Civil War and Reconstruction that the nation reexamined citizenship rights for African Americans.

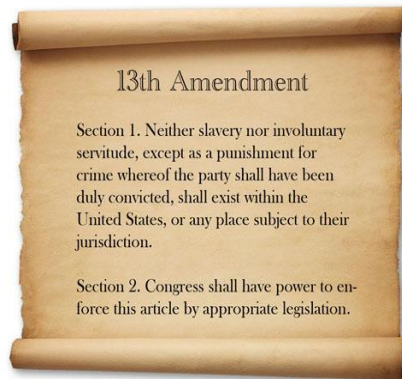
It is important at this point to recall the sequence of four particular scenarios. (1) The Emancipation Proclamation, effective January 1, 1863, was a military document designed to bring needed recruits, e.g., black men, into the Union ranks because the Confederacy was at that point winning the war. Lincoln wanted 200,000 "freed men" enlisted into his army.



Source: Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation
Courtesy: The Matthews Collection

2) Abolitionists realized that the formal ending of slavery in the United States required an amendment to the U.S.

Constitution. The 13th Amendment was certified as an addition to the U.S. Constitution on December 18, 1865. While it ended slavery, it did allow for the involuntary servitude as punishment for the conviction of a crime. President Abraham Lincoln did not live long enough to witness the certification of the amendment.



Source: Hullpost.com

(3) With the Civil War near its end in 1865, President Lincoln met with one of his most trusted generals, Benjamin Butler, to come up with a plan to relocate all of the surviving black soldiers and their families to a location outside of the United States. In General Butler's own words, he detailed the scheme designed to relocate the soldiers and their families to a colony in Columbia, South America. Before President Lincoln could approve the plan, he was assassinated by John Wilkes Booth and died on April 15, 1865. His successor, President Andrew Johnson, returned land to former slave owners, an act that led to the Freedmen and Freedwomen becoming contract laborers for the white landowners.

According to the new South Carolina Constitution the Freedmen were not provided with the right to vote. Further, the tone of the governor led to restrictive laws (black codes) that indicated that "No person of color could become an artisan, mechanic, or shopkeeper unless he obtained a license from the judge of the district court – a license that could cost \$100 or more." A case-in-point was James Parler, the granduncle of Harry Bradshaw Matthews, paying \$200 to be a self-reliant farmer in Denmark, South Carolina. Other family members – surnamed Parler, Darlington, Rice,

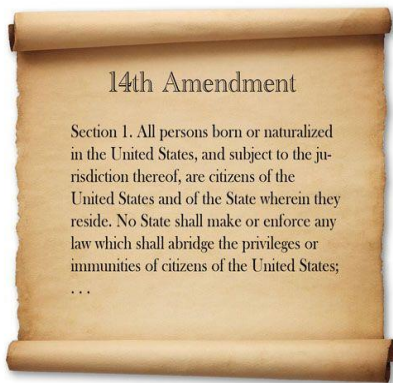
Daniels – signed labor contracts with former slave owners. Other ancestors surnamed Killingsworth were not immediately able to practice their artisan trade as cabinetmakers. The records of the latter are among the United States Freedmen's Bureau Labor Contracts, Indentures and Apprenticeship Records, 1865-1872.

In supported of the newly freed persons, Congressman Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania presented Bill H.R. 29, "Reparations Bill for the African Slaves in the United States," during the first session, Fortieth Congress, March 11, 1867. Among other issues, Stevens proposed using the confiscated lands of those who were in the rebellion to provide 40-acre lots to each formerly enslaved adult male and widow. He also called for some of the same land to be sold in order to gain \$500,000 to provide for pensions for the former soldiers and sailors, as well as providing compensation to loyal Union citizens harmed by the conflict.

The bill never became a law. The lands were returned, with few exceptions, to the former owners who had been granted amnesty by President Andrew Johnson.

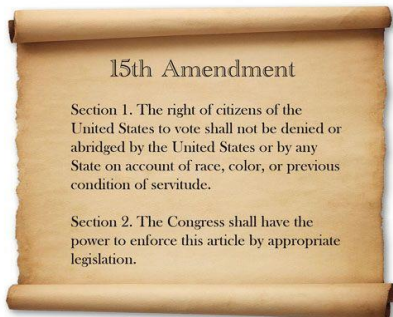
Also in 1867, the Military Reconstruction Act was passed by Congress that provided voting rights to the Freedmen in 10 former Confederate states. A very interesting fact (identified by Harry Bradshaw Matthews) was that Betts surnamed ancestors of Ms. Doria L. Ragland and her daughter, the Duchess of Sussex, Meghan Markle, were among the first African Americans to register to vote in 1867, in Madison County, Alabama. The law made it possible for the Freedmen to vote during the 1868 elections.

Next, the 14th Amendment was certified on July 9, 1868 that granted citizenship to all persons born or naturalized in the United States—including former slaves—and guaranteed all citizens "equal protection of the laws."



Source: Huffpost.com

The 15th Amendment was certified on February 3, 1870. It cleared the way for black men, in the North and the South to reclaim voting rights. Lucy Stone, who had established the New Jersey Woman Suffrage Association in 1867, supported the amendment as it was.



Source: Huffpost.com



Source: Lucy Stone presenting the case for women suffrage to Congress.
Courtesy: The Matthews Collection

Stone believed that women would win the vote soon. On the other hand, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony opposed the amendment as unfair to women. Stanton did not believe black people were her equal. Consequently, the debate split the women’s suffrage movement. As the struggle continued, including with black women, the Rev. Florence Spearing Randolph in 1915

organized the New Jersey State Federation of Colored Women. But, it must be recalled that black women had long been engaged in the planning and hosting of the Women’s Anti-Slavery Conventions of the 1830s, including Maria W Stewart and Frances E.W. Harper. It was there that the leaders emerged to serve the women’s suffrage movement.

The Nineteenth Amendment was ratified to the United States Constitution on August 19, 1920. It prohibits the states and the federal government from denying the right to vote to citizens of the United States on the basis of sex.



Source: justicebell.org

Members of Black Lives Matter, as well as current advocates for reparations for the descendants of the formerly enslaved, can use the latter records and others dealing with the marriages between the Freedmen and Freedwomen before 1870. These records can be used as documentation of lineage that will probably be required for those seeking reparations in the future.

It is noteworthy that by 1840, it was estimated that 75 percent of the darker brethren and sisters in this land had been born here. By the early 1840s, free scholars of African descent had carved out a new identity for their black and mulatto kindred. They declared their identity as “Colored Americans of the typical branch of the Ethiopian race.”

By 1860, the number of darker brethren and sisters who were born in the United States had increased to 90 percent. Further, of those born here, 10 percent

were estimated to have been of mixed ancestry – African, European and Native American. Based upon place of birth, it must be stated that the vast majority of the latter were not enslaved Africans, but rather, they were enslaved Americans of African descent.

Two hundred thousand (200,000) black men and their seven thousand (7,000) white officers fought together to preserve the Union and to end slavery. Among those ranks were darker brethren from throughout the African diaspora, including from the West Indies, Canada, and Africa (particularly from Cape Verde). And there was a cost.

Among the soldiers who died during the Civil War were more than 36,000 black men. They sacrificed their lives for the freedom of four million darker brethren and sisters.

The Civil War added to the progress when President Lincoln signed a bill on March 3, 1865 incorporating the Freedman’s Savings and Trust Company. Congress directed the Freedman’s Bank in 1867 to distribute the bounty money to black soldiers. In two years, six million dollars (\$6,000,000) were distributed to 5,000 claimants, and in the end exceeded eight million (\$8,000,000). The total deposits at the Bank increased from \$305,167 during 1866 to \$19,952,647 during 1871.

There is an old saying (paraphrasing), “In every negative there is a positive, but, it just must be found.” And so it was at the beginning of the Reconstruction Period that concluded with the election of 1876, issuing in the “Separate, but Equal” doctrine. At the time there was a negative regression of the citizenry, but out of necessity was the need to continue strengthening the African American infrastructure.

Surprisingly unknown to many is awareness that the black infrastructure had commenced between the 1790s and the 1840s and included schools, churches, fraternal organizations and businesses. Supporting it was the self-described ethnic identity that stressed the “Uplifting of the Race.”

While the ending of the Reconstruction Period ushered in increasing hardships, it did not crush the spirits of African Americans. The *1918-19 Negro Yearbook* reported that the number of African American college students had increased from 44 between 1860-69 to 1,613 between 1900-1909. In 1918, there were over 60 secret and fraternal organizations with membership over two million. During that same year, the Baptist National Conventions consisted of 21,754 churches, the African Methodist Episcopal Church had 6,636 branches, the AME Zion Church had 2,738 affiliates and the Colored Methodist consisted of 2,621 churches. Thus, when a new decade ushered in the 19th Amendment establishing voting rights for women, the African American infrastructure was on firm ground for the next steps in the Freedom Journey.

This year 2020 should be used as a time of reflection about one's identity by recalling oral history from elders, as well as being open to new interpretations based upon research. It is of vast importance that the military service of our ancestors never be allowed to be forgotten nor be allowed to be interpreted without context of the time period and its affect. Just as important, we should share with our children and other young people the importance of voting and the Freedom that our ancestors had to make to gain the right to vote. We should share knowledge of our progressive development over the centuries to instill pride in our children.

*Let us praise God a new,
Let us praise our ancestors, too,
And let us not forget a glorious
tomorrow.* Harry Bradshaw Matthews

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