

## **Civil War Service**

African American soldiers have served their country since the Revolutionary War. The following material is taken from local author Robert H. Behrens' work, *Salt Fork to Chickamauga*, published by the Urbana Free Library in 1988.

A number of Champaign County black men served in the Union Army. An even greater number settled here after the war, making Champaign County their new home.

The life of a black soldier was usually a hard one. Poor food, little or no medical care, hard labor, and uncaring or hostile white officers all contributed to the high death rate. Many black regiments were used primarily as laborers on such construction projects as fortifications and roads and saw little or no fighting. Others, however, saw a great deal of combat and suffered many battle casualties. If captured, both the black soldier and his white officers were usually subjected to harsh treatment. In some cases, captured black soldiers were executed or sold into slavery.

### **CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BLACKS IN THE CIVIL WAR**

The amount of available information regarding black men from Champaign County who served in the Union Army during the Civil War is very limited. In some instances the records show that a man was "colored", but in many instances, the fact that he served in a black regiment is the only evidence of a soldier's race. For these reasons, the following list of black men from Champaign County who served in the Civil War is almost surely incomplete.

#### **BLACK SOLDIERS LISTED IN THE ROLL OF HONOR AS BEING BURIED IN CHAMPAIGN COUNTY**

**Homer GAR Cemetery  
Samuel Persons Pvt. Co. F, RSCT (USCT)**

**Mt Hope Cemetery, Sidney  
Isaac Beard, Pvt. Co.C. 13th USCT**

**Mt Hope Cemetery, Urbana  
J. Anderson, Pvt. 26th US Volunteers (28th USCT)  
Jas. H. Bell, Pvt. Co. D, 29th USCT  
W.G. Blackburn, Pvt. Co.1, 50th USCT, died 20 January 1893  
Elijah Gibbs, Cpl.Co.H, 55th MA Vols  
G.W. Johnson, Pvt, Co K, 118th US Inf. (118th USCT)  
David Johnson  
John C. Louis, Sgt, Co D. 28th USCT  
Martin McDermot, Pvt US Gunboat Hastings**

John R. Merrick, Pvt. Co 1, 55th MA Vols  
 John Moss, Pvt. Co H, 55th MA Inf.  
 Ruff Phillips, Pvt. Co C, 48th MO Vol. and Drummer, 7th II Cav.  
 J.E. Riley, Pvt. Co. K, 29th USCT  
 Stephen Roey, Pvt. Co. C, 110th USCT  
 Simon Ross, Pvt. Co k, 49th USCT and Co. 1, 11th Cav.  
 Wm. Summerville, Pvt. Co G, 29th USCT  
 L.H. Walden, Pvt. Co 1, 55th MA Vols  
 Janes Walker, Pvt. Co. K , 118th USCT  
 W.P. Winn, Cpl. Co D. 18th USCT  
 Stephen Winston, Co C, 110th USCT , died 4 May, 1900

#### OLD HOMER CEMETERY

J.C. Cone, 54th US Cav (54th USCT)

#### 26th US COLORED TROOPS

The report of the adjutant general shows the following men as recruits assigned to the 26th U.S. Colored Troops.

Bryor Bell, Urbana	Enl 21 Feb 1865
Thomas Benton	Enl 21 Feb. 1865
Champaign County	

James S. Keines	Enl 8 Feb 1865
Champaign County	

#### 29th U.S. COLORED TROOPS

The 29th U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) was the only black regiment raised in Illinois. The regiment was organized at Quincy in late 1863 and early 1864 by Lieutenant Colonel John A. Bross, former captain of Company A, 88th Illinois Infantry. It was mustered into federal service on 24 April 1864. Although the regiment's commissioned officers were white, its noncommissioned officers were black men. Company A was organized in Adams County. Companies B and C were organized in Cook County, Company D was formed with men from both Cook and Adams Counties, Company E was made up with men from the state at large, and Companies F through K were composed of men from other states. The 29th USCT participated in the siege of Petersburg, Virginia, and was heavily engaged in the Crater, suffering 124 casualties - 21 dead, 56 wounded, and 47 missing. Among the dead was Lieutenant Colonel Bross. The regiment also saw action in the Appomattox Campaign. After Lee's surrender, the 29th was transferred to Texas, where it saw duty on the Rio Grande until its muster-out in November 1865. During its term of service the 29th USCT lost 2 officers and 45 men in battle, and 1 officer and 164 enlisted men died of disease, accidents, and Confederate imprisonment.

An examination of the muster rolls of the 29th U.S. Colored Troops as found in the Illinois REPORT OF THE ADJUTANT GENERAL shows the following men with addresses in Champaign County. However, the majority of the men shown on the rolls of the regiment do not have addresses listed.

#### PRIVATES

Payton Colwell, Champaign	Died at New Orleans 23 Aug 1865
J. Clemans (Clements) Homer	Co K; died at sea 2 June 1865

#### RECRUITS

All men listed were from West Urbana.

Pvt. Dennis Jackson	Enl 15 Feb 1865
Pvt George W. Johnson	Enl 15 Feb 1865
Pvt William Kelly	Enl 15 Feb 1865
Pvt Jerry Pinney	Enl 15 Feb 1865
Pvt James Walker	Enl 15 Feb 1865

#### CHAMPAIGN COUNTY MEN IN OTHER REGIMENTS

Four black men are among those who recorded their military discharges in the records of Champaign County. The Soldiers Discharge Records of Champaign County are compiled in Chapter 23, and the reader should consult that chapter for further information on the men listed below.

Elijah Gibbs	Co H 55th MA Inf
John Morse(Moss?)	Co H 55th MA Inf
Jess E Riley	Co K 29th USCT
Larkin N. Walden	Co I 55th MA Inf

#### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Information for the following biographical sketches was obtained from various sources, including United States census records, the newspaper files of the Urbana Free Library, and the public records of Champaign County. The biographical sketch of Joseph Stocks was obtained from the records of Colonel Nodine Post No. 140, GAR.

James H Bell was born on 1 May 1847 in Tennessee. During the Civil War he served in Company D, 29th USCT. In about 1867 he came to Illinois and lived in Champaign the rest of his life. He was a minister from 1872 to 1902. Bell died on his sixty-fourth birthday on 1 May 1911 of tuberculosis. The funeral was held on 4 May at the Salem Baptist Church, with interment at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Elijah Gibbs was born in Morgan County, Alabama, about 1836 and came to Champaign in 1861. During the Civil War he served in Company H, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. After the war he returned to Champaign and resided at the corner of University Avenue and Fourth Street. Gibbs died on 22 June 1876 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

David Johnson was born a slave in Prince William County, Virginia, on 11 May 1822. As a boy he was brought to Missouri by his owners, a family named Hose. About 1848 he married Harriet Harbison, and they became the parents of thirteen children. Johnson subsequently moved to Illinois and rented and worked on farms near Mattoon and Neoga. He and his family came to Champaign in 1863. During the Civil War, Johnson was a wagoner in the Union Army. At the end of the war he returned to Champaign and worked as a laborer, and after the death of his first wife, married Anna Washington. Johnson died on 9 November 1908. The funeral was held at Second Baptist Church in Champaign, with burial at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

George W. Johnson was born around 1831 in Missouri. During the Civil War he served in Company K, 118th USCT, a black regiment organized in Baltimore that participated in the siege of Petersburg and the occupation of Richmond. After the war Johnson moved to Champaign and worked as a day laborer. He died on 23 January 1885 and is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

John C. Lewis (Louis) was born around 1832 in Canada. During the Civil War he served as a sergeant in Company D, 28th USCT. That regiment was organized at Indianapolis early in 1864 and served in the defenses of Washington and the siege of Petersburg. It fought in the battle of the Crater and participated in the occupation of Richmond. The 28th also guarded Confederate prisoners at City Point, and served in Texas during the summer of 1865. Lewis came to Urbana in 1865 and worked as a plasterer. He died of dropsy on 17 September 1886 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Martin McDermit (McDermot) was born around 1847 in Arkansas. During the Civil War he served aboard the U.S. gunboat HASTINGS, a 293-ton vessel carrying eight guns. After the war he moved to Champaign County and for a time was a tenant farmer in Section 26 in Condit Township. He subsequently lived in Rantoul Township and then moved to 212 East Elm Street in Urbana. He operated a fruit stand for a time and also worked as a teamster and laborer. He died of typhoid fever at his home on 21 November 1898. Funeral services were conducted at the Bethel AME Church under the auspices of the Masonic Order and Black Eagle Post No. 129, GAR, with interment at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

John R. (Jamrs) Merrick was born around 1843-44. He served in Company I, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. After the war he came to Urbana and worked as a laborer. He was a member of Black Eagle Post No. 129, GAR, in Urbana. Merrick died on 14 January 1890 of pneumonia resulting from influenza and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

John C. Moss was born on 10 April 1842 in Columbus County, Kentucky. He served in Company H, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. After the war he came to Champaign and opened a barbershop at 51 North Walnut Street. He was a member of Colonel Nodine Post No. 140, GAR. Moss died at his home at 204 East Church Street on 14 July 1906 due to rheumatism and hemorrhage of the lungs. The funeral was held at the AME Church, with burial at Mt. Hope Cemetery.

Samuel Persons was born on or about 31 May 1844 in Ohio. He served as a sergeant in Company F, 23rd USCT. Persons moved to Homer after the war and operated a barbershop. He died on 5 July 1893 of "lung fever" and is buried in the Homer GAR Cemetery.

Ruff Phillips served in Company C, 48th Missouri Volunteers, and was a drummer in the 7th Illinois Cavalry. The 7th Illinois participated in operations in Tennessee and Mississippi, including the famous Grierson's raid. After the war he moved to Champaign, where he was employed for a time by John Moss. He died of consumption in Danville on 16 February 1879 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Jess (James) E. Riley was born in Wilkinson County, Missouri, on or about 16 March 1834. He served in Company K, 29th USCT, during the Civil War. After the war he lived in Champaign and worked as a laborer. He died on 14 June 1892 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Stephen Roey (Roy) born around 1842-45 in Tennessee, served in Company C, 110th USCT. That regiment was originally organized as the 2nd Alabama Colored Infantry and served in Tennessee and Northern Alabama doing garrison and railroad guard duty. In about 1873 he came to Champaign and was employed as a laborer. Roy died on 13 August 1893 as the result of a hernia. The funeral was held at the Second Baptist Church, with interment at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Simon Ross, born in South Carolina around 1830, served in Company K, 49th USCT. That regiment was originally organized as the 11th Louisiana Infantry (African Descent) and performed garrison duty at Vicksburg. He also served in Company 1, 11th USCT, for a time. After the war Ross came to Champaign and worked as a laborer. He died on 15 February 1883 and is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Joseph Stocks was born 1 February 1841 in Tensas Parish, Louisiana. On 9 December he enlisted at Vicksburg as a private in Company H, 50th U.S. Colored Troops. He was discharged 20 March 1866, having attained the rank of first duty sergeant. Stocks was involved in action at Bruinsburg, Snyders Bluff, Fort Blakely, and Mobile. He was wounded in his eye at Fort Blakely and was hospitalized at Vicksburg. Questioned about the hardships of his military service, Stocks described a hard march from Florida to Mobile, on which the troops were on the verge of starvation, having nothing to eat but half-cooked meat and parched corn, and on one occasion wading through neck-deep water for more than a mile. Joseph Stocks came to Champaign in about 1894, where he lived and worked as a day laborer until about 1906.

Larkin H. Walden was born about 1830 in Tennessee. During the Civil War he served in Company 1, 55th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry. He came to Champaign about 1865 and was a laborer. Walden lived at 606 East Springfield Avenue and was one of the founders of the Bethel AME Church. He died on 24 May 1900 of rheumatism and an abscess of the spine and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

James Walker was born around 1842 in Maryland. He served in Company K, 118th USCT, during the Civil War. That regiment was organized in Baltimore, Maryland, in October 1864 and participated in the siege of Petersburg and the occupation of Richmond. It also served at Brownsville and on the Rio Grande in Texas. After the war Walker came to Champaign and worked as a day laborer. He died on 1 May 1894 and is buried at Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

William P. Winn was born in Tennessee around 1846 and served in Company D, 18th USCT, during the war. The 18th USCT was organized in Missouri in 1864 and participated in the battle of Nashville. It also guarded railroads at Bridgeport, Alabama, and at Chattanooga. After the war Winn moved to Monticello, where he worked as a barber. He was also a member of the Monticello GAR Post. He died in Monticello on 26 January 1901 and is buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery, Urbana.