

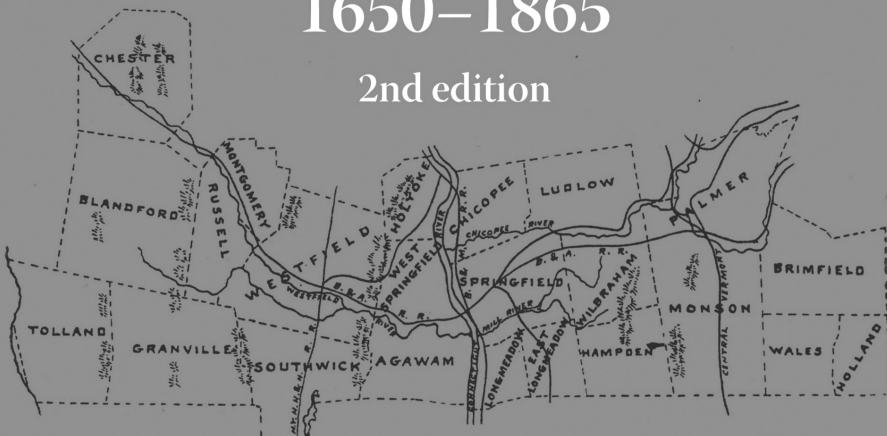
Joseph Carvalho III



Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts

1650–1865

2nd edition



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

Uncovering the Stories of Black Families in Springfield and Hampden County, Massachusetts: 1650–1865

JOSEPH CARVALHO III



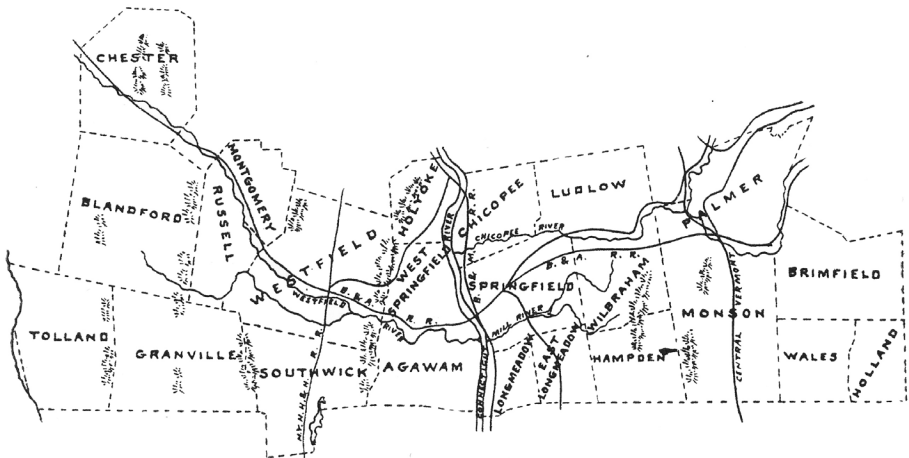
Editor's Introduction: *We are honored to offer this Editor's Choice Award to the second edition of *Black Families of Hampden County, 1650-1865* by Joseph Carvalho III. This extensively researched and expanded volume chronicles the lives of African American individuals and families who lived in the Pioneer River Valley between 1650 and 1865. As Carvalho explains in his preface:*

Hampden County, Massachusetts, was a significant center of African American life . . . Its location at the "crossroads of New England" . . . made Hampden County a haven for escaped slaves. The establishment in Springfield of the U.S. Armory in 1794 placed the city at the very epicenter of America's Industrial Revolution . . . As the seat of Hampden County . . . Springfield soon became a place where an African American community could take root and thrive. In the generations before the Civil War, Springfield became a center of anti-slavery sentiment. Regionally, colonizationist and anti-slavery societies were established by sympathetic white citizens. More importantly, the first African American church in western Massachusetts was formed in Springfield in 1844, literally providing a pulpit for African American leaders to speak freely about America's slave system. (p. i)

Author Joseph Carvalho III has relied on a wide variety of sources—including church records, ministers' journals, family papers, court records, newspapers, U.S. and Massachusetts census reports, military and pension records, city directories, and cemetery records—to piece together detailed family histories. As a result of much additional research, this revised, second edition includes significant new material and nearly doubles the size of the first edition to 400 pages. This compilation of genealogical, biographical, and historical information not only brings these individuals to life but also provides the student of regional black history with a comprehensive view of the community at a pivotal time in history.

Carvalho is uniquely qualified to conduct this research: a certified archivist, he holds masters degrees in both history and library science. He recently retired as the president and executive director (1994–2010) of the Springfield Museums in Springfield, Massachusetts, and is currently a member of the Board of Trustees of Westfield State University. He also served as associate editor of the Historical Journal of Massachusetts (1978–2003). Black Families of Hampden County, 1650-1865 was reproduced with the permission of its publisher, the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston. To order a copy (\$29.95 hardcover) visit www.AmericanAncestors.org, call 1-888-296-3447, or email thebookstore@nehgs.org

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MAP OF HAMPDEN COUNTY.

In 1636, William Pynchon and several other English colonists arrived at an area along the Connecticut River. Now known as Springfield, Massachusetts, the settlement began as a fur trading post; it had the distinct advantage of being the most northern European-controlled trading station on the Connecticut River. Under the leadership of William Pynchon (1590-1662) and his son John, European settlement engulfed the surrounding Indian lands. Throughout the 1650s and 1660s, the economic success of the township and the possibility of land ownership attracted additional settlers, one of whom was Peter Swinck.

Swinck first appears in local documents through an entry in William Pynchon's account book dated 1650.¹ As an indentured servant to William and later John Pynchon, Swinck was the first African American to live in what is now western Massachusetts. He was assigned a seat next to his white neighbors in Springfield's First Church, where his social status is perhaps revealed by the location of his seat among those at the rear of the meetinghouse. Peter was also granted land in what would become West Springfield and Agawam. Springfield town records reveal that

there is granted to Peter Swinck the vacant land that lies between the general fence that runs from the Great River to Agawam River and Goodman Mun's lot southward. This lot is granted on condition that he live til his [indenture] time be expired and that he settle his abode there.

Sometime in 1660, Peter Swinck took a wife, although they did not have a formal church ceremony. They survived the Indian attack and burning of Springfield during King Philip's War in 1675. The Swincks joined in the common effort to rebuild the settlement and, by 1685, they owned a two-acre home lot and fifty-three additional acres divided into three separate plots within the town of Springfield.²

The only other black landholder in Springfield was a man named Roco, who was brought as a slave to Springfield around 1680 and who by 1685 owned sixty acres in the town while still legally a slave of John Pynchon. On October 20, 1695, Roco purchased his freedom from Pynchon in return for twenty-five 40-gallon barrels of turpentine and twenty-one 40-gallon barrels of "good merchantable Tarr." Richard Blackleech, a former slave of Pynchon, who was a friend of fellow slaves Roco and his wife Sue, witnessed the signing of their manumission document.³

A common status did not exist for blacks in the Connecticut River settlements of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Slaves, free blacks, and black

indentured servants lived within the same Connecticut Valley communities. In 1641, the Massachusetts General Court passed the “Body of Liberties” Act, which afforded slavery “the sanctity of Law.”⁴ Freedom and slavery existed side by side. Although early local Puritan records often refer to black slaves as “servants,” the distinction was purely semantic. The meaning of the term was belied by the Hampshire County probate hearing of the Richard Fellows estate, when the court determined the monetary value of Fellows’ black “servant.” By 1680, John Pynchon simply referred to “his negroes” by their Christian names.⁵ Indeed, Pynchon had been using slave labor since the 1650s. In 1657, he had paid John Leonard for “bringing up [the Connecticut River] my negroes.”⁶

The number of slaves owned by the Pynchons is reflected in an entry in a Pynchon account book recording the death of “old Tom”: “the digging of Tom’s grave cost three pence and the indentured servants and slaves [on the Pynchon Estate] were given one quart of rum to drink to old Tom’s memory.”⁷ This was not simply a Springfield experience; slavery was used in neighboring Westfield as early as 1714, and probably existed there much earlier.⁸ The settlement of Deerfield, with its close ties to the Springfield settlement to the south, was also a center of slaveholding in the Valley.

It appears that Springfield had one of the earliest slave markets in western New England. Amos Newport, taken from the West African coast by slavers when he was a young boy, was purchased by David Ingersoll of Springfield in the 1720s. In 1729, Ingersoll sold Amos to Joseph Billings of Hatfield. For the next forty years, Newport labored as Billings’ slave. But then in a rare and “extraordinary” action in 1766, Newport sought his freedom through the Massachusetts colonial court system. A Springfield lawyer, Moses Bliss, represented Newport in his “freedom suit,” *Newport vs. Billings*, at the November 1766 and February 1767 terms of the Inferior Court of Commons Pleas. He lost his case in that lower court. His appeal to the colony’s Supreme Court of Judicature in 1768 was also unsuccessful; the case was decided upon the narrow issue of Billings’ legal “bill of sale,” presented in court. It stated “I, David Ingersoll of Springfield . . . , shopkeeper, have sold, sent over, and delivered in Plain Street Green Market a certain young Negro Boy named Teo [Amos Newport] alias Newport for consideration of fifty pounds to Joseph Billings of Hatfield. . . . March 15, 1729.”⁹ The larger issue of slavery was not even considered in the ruling.¹⁰

COLONIAL PERIOD: SLAVE MARRIAGES AND PURITAN RELIGION

The Puritan moral code of the Massachusetts Bay Colony encouraged slave owners to allow marriages between slaves. In the majority of cases in Hampshire County, marriage preceded the birth of the first child in black slave families, a fact evidenced by the numerous recorded slave marriages and births that follow in the “proper” Puritan sequence. The role of black slave parents was extremely ambiguous, however. The slave owner was the legal guardian of both slave adults and children, responsible for making decisions concerning the slave children’s education and vocation, and thus subverting the role of the natural parents. As a result, we see situations such as found in the will of widow Elizabeth Gunn of Westfield, who provided freedom for two adult slaves while committing their children to “indentured” servitude at the discretion, not of their parents, but of the white executors of her estate.¹¹

Slaveholders restricted the matrimonial choices of their slaves as a matter of course. The tendency was to allow marriages between slaves living in the same household. Although there were examples of marriages between slaves of different owners whose lands were adjacent, or whose owners were related, such cases were rare except among the slaves owned by the Ashley family members scattered throughout the Connecticut River Valley. It was not uncommon for a white settler to own only one black slave, and many of these slaves died unmarried.

Various factors were involved in the slave owners’ reluctance to allow marriages between slaves living in different households. One factor was probably concern as to the disposition of their “property.” Unless the owners lived adjacent to each other, one of the owners might have been expected to either free his slave, or purchase the intended spouse from the other owner. This presented either a monetary commitment—i.e., a loss of “property”—or an inconvenience to the slave holder. Furthermore, if the two married slaves were owned by two different masters, the owners may have been concerned as to the ownership of, and responsibility for, the resultant children. Traditionally, the children belonged to the slave mother’s owner; this was, however, not a hard and fast rule among regional slave owners. The ethical and moral questions concerning slavery were, therefore, subsumed by monetary concerns that transcended any humanitarian impulse.

This is illustrated by the method used by Bushman Fuller to obtain the freedom of his future wife, Flora, before they could marry. Flora’s owner, Rev. Joseph Perry of Windsor, Connecticut, insisted that Bushman pay him 100 bushels of wheat for compensation.¹²

Another instance was recorded in 1768 by Rev. John Ballantine of Westfield, who witnessed an attempt to sell a black slave. On this occasion, the slave successfully protested the proposed transaction. The minister wrote, "Mr. Elnothan Bush of Suffield here to talk about buying Sylva. Mr. Bush went to Suffield and agreed with [Rev. Gay] but Sylva is so averse and takes on so bitterly, the bargain is given up." Ballantine observed that "Masters of Negroes ought to be men of great humanity. They have an arbitrary power, may correct them at pleasure, may separate them from their children, may send them out of the Country."¹³

There is no record that Rev. Ballantine ever owned slaves. His comment, however, might be his rationalization of the behavior of a long list of his fellow ministers in the Valley who did own slaves: Robert Breck and Daniel Brewer of Springfield; James Bridgham of Brimfield; Nehemiah Bull of Westfield; Edward Taylor; Jedidiah Smith of Granville; Samuel Hopkins of West Springfield; Noah Merrick of Wilbraham; and Stephen Williams of Longmeadow. In Suffield, which eventually was ceded to Connecticut but was still economically and socially tightly connected to the southern Hampshire County townships, Revs. Ebenezer Gay and Ebenezer Devotion both owned slaves as well. Considering that these men were important and influential leaders in their communities, the message to their white parishioners was clearly that slavery was acceptable "in the eyes of God."¹⁴ Rev. Stephen Williams of Springfield (Longmeadow), wrote in his diary, "I



Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833) was born to a white mother and biracial father. As the first African American pastor in a Congregational Church, he served in Rutland's West Parish in Vermont for thirty years. He was also a "minuteman" who responded to the Lexington Alarm. Middlebury College granted Haynes an honorary master of arts in 1804, the first advanced degree ever bestowed upon an African American.

went to Deerfield and sold my boy Nicholas. He seemed very concerned, and surely I was grieved for him, yet, I thought it would be for his benefit to be sold to a master that would keep him to business, as well as for my profit.”¹⁵

By 1754, there were thirty-seven black men and nine black women being held as slaves in the southern district of Hampshire County, which today comprises Hampden County.¹⁶ During this period before the American Revolution, the number of free blacks grew slowly through the process of manumission, usually upon the death of their owners and in accordance with provisos in wills. The French and Indian War of 1756–1763 provided an opportunity for some slaves to achieve their freedom through military service. The war also imposed the obligation upon free black men to serve alongside their white neighbors in the local militia.

Sandy Onkemour’s service and life must have been exemplary because when he died in 1799 in Agawam, the *American Intelligencer* reported that “his funeral was attended from his house by a large concourse of people, among whom were many of the most respectable citizens in town.” Born in Africa in 1718, Onkemour was enslaved and brought to Massachusetts Bay Colony. He was bought and sold a number of times, and eventually came to be owned by Ebenezer Leonard, who ultimately manumitted him in 1760; he then assumed the surname Onkemour (Onkamer). Once free, but with only meager means of support, Onkemour enlisted in Col. John Worthington’s Regiment, “For His Majesty’s Service for the Reduction of Canada.”

Another free man of color, Samuel Deering, enrolled in Capt. Joseph Blodgett’s Brimfield Militia Company at the outbreak of the war in 1756. During the American Revolution, Deering, by then a seasoned combat veteran, served as a private in at least two militia companies. Still a rarity, free black men such as Archelaus Fletcher, Heber Honestman, Bushman Fuller, Samuel Deering, and Sandy Onkemour carved a place for themselves and their families as yeoman farmers in the communities along the Connecticut River during these years prior to the Revolution. They formed part of the small “network of self-made African American men that existed smack in the middle of a bastion of time-honored slavery.”¹⁷

Another demographic and cultural influence on the growing African American population was the intermarriage between blacks and Native Americans, which was not uncommon. As far as can be ascertained from the records, these marriages were usually between “Christian Indians” and African Americans. Local black families had ties to Natick, Stockbridge, Nipmuck, “Hassanamisco,” Mohegan, Oneida, Tuscarora, and Onandaga Native Americans—and probably others, considering that many records simply referred to the person as “Indian.” In describing the origins of the

community living near Southwick's Congamond Lakes, Clifton Johnson wrote:

These lakes or ponds received their name from the tribe of Congamuck Indians, descendants of whom still [as late as 1936] maintain their own colony in the southwest part of the town. . . . The remnants of this well-known tribe number about a hundred, but have so intermarried with whites and negroes that they have practically lost their identities as Indians and are classed as mullattoes [sic]. . . . They do some farm work and their beautiful reed baskets are a source of income.¹⁸

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: NEW OPPORTUNITIES EMERGE

For enslaved African Americans in western Massachusetts, the outbreak of the American Revolution was an important opportunity. There was an intense need for soldiers during the war, and freedom was offered in exchange for service in the various local militia units and for service in the Continental Army.¹⁹ Pelatiah McGoldsmith, for example, was purchased by the town of Palmer from Aaron Graves; the town enlisted him in the Continental Army for a term of three years, after which time he was given his freedom. Free blacks also answered the call to arms and marched alongside their white and slave compatriots. Lemuel Haynes, who later became the first black minister of the Congregational faith, marched as a free man in the Granville militia company that responded to the Lexington Alarm in 1775.

Springfield was an important mustering point for western Massachusetts militia units, and Continental enlistees introduced to the area a number of blacks who returned to settle after the war.²⁰ The Declaration of Independence espoused liberty, freedoms, and rights but was vague about the benefits that might accrue to African Americans. To Lemuel Haynes, the Declaration implied "that an African, or, in other terms, that a Negro may justly challenge, and has an undeniable right to his liberty: Consequently, the practice of slave-keeping which so much abounds in this Land is illicit." In his treatise, Haynes exposed the tragic irony of white patriots fighting for independence while owning slaves, warning, "For this is God's way of working, after he brings the same Judgement or Evils upon men as they unrighteously Bring upon others."²¹

After the victory at Saratoga in 1777, the American forces paraded a number of prisoners through western Massachusetts, passing through

Westfield along the way. Baroness von Riedesel was with the captured German contingent when she wrote in a letter:

“Negroes are to be found on most of the farms west of Springfield. The black farmer lives in a little outhouse. . . . The young ones are well fed, especially while they are still calves. . . . The negro is to be looked upon as the servant of a peasant; the negress does all the coarse housework and the black children wait on the white children. The negro can take the field in place of his master, and so you do not see a regiment in which there is not a large number of blacks. . . . There are also many families of free blacks who occupy good houses and have means and live entirely in the style of the other inhabitants.”²²

That the Baroness only exhibited a superficial knowledge and understanding of the area, and did not have a true sense of the society which she so briefly viewed, is fairly obvious. While her statements exaggerate the number of blacks, her observations are useful in providing a view that seldom appears in local records.

In all, more than forty-five African Americans from Hampden County served in the American forces during the Revolution. Most served in the regiments of the Continental Army and therefore were often enlisted for at least three years. Some of these veterans, such as Jethro Jones, saw long and arduous service in Washington’s army. They were present at actions such as the Lexington Alarm, the Siege of Boston, the invasion of Quebec, the Battle of Valcour Island, the Saratoga Campaign, the Battle of Bennington, the Battle of Monmouth, and the defense of Rhode Island, to name just a few notable recorded events. Some lived to receive their hard-earned military pensions and land grants. Archelaus Fletcher, Jr., used his pension to start a new life for himself and his family in Canandaigua, New York. For slaves who served in the Revolution, freedom must have been a personal and immediate goal. Years later, while in Springfield, William Green penned this lyric to his “Anti-Slavery Song”:

*Ye to whom a freeman’s lot
Is so dear, have ye forgot
How your sable brother fought
By your side for Liberty?*²³

THE 1780 MASSACHUSETTS CONSTITUTION AND THE STATUS OF SLAVERY

Most local black enlistments came after the ratification of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780, which has been seen as an anti-slavery document by virtue of the first article of its Declaration of Rights. Unfortunately, these rights were not widely conferred in the early years; only belatedly were they enforced owing to court decisions such as the freedom suits of Quork Walker (1781–83) and Elizabeth “Mum Bet” Freeman. As Robert Romer points out in *Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts*, slavery in Massachusetts “didn’t end in 1780,” or even after the Walker and Freeman court rulings.²⁴ Some slaveholders took advantage of the delay in enforcing the rights conferred in the 1780 constitution.

Chauncey Edwin Peck, in his *History of Wilbraham*, wrote that, after the passage of the state constitution, “It is said that some of those slaves were invited to accompany ‘massa’ on a visit to Hartford, and were privately sold and invited to go on board a sloop lying at the wharf, to have a good time, and while fiddling and dancing, the sloop dropped into the stream, spread sail, and disappeared down the river [and] they were never heard of again.”²⁵ Acts such as these were almost always left unrecorded by the perpetrators.

One of the earliest “freedom” suits after the enactment of the 1780 state constitution was filed by Tony, a 59-year-old former slave living in Westfield, against Ezra Clapp of that town. In 1781, Clapp had tried to re-enslave Tony; Tony then sued Clapp for unlawful imprisonment in the Hampshire County Inferior Court of Commons Pleas in Northampton. Tony won his case, and Clapp was required to pay Tony £2 (the court was still using British monetary units). Tony lived out the remainder of his life in freedom in that community, dying in Westfield in 1802. Clear evidence that the new state constitution provided little protection against illegal trafficking in slaves can be found in the tragic case of Ziba, “a negro servant boy” of Matthias Fuller of East Haddam, Connecticut. Fuller sold Ziba to James Shaw of Wilbraham “for life” in 1781. Shaw sold Ziba to Capt. Noah Scoville of East Haddam, Connecticut, in 1786—a full six years after the state constitution supposedly outlawed slavery.²⁶

While few extant records produce clear evidence of the full extent of these illegal acts, one document raises several questions. In the 1784 “List of the Polls” for Longmeadow, Benjamin Swetland is listed as having ninety-two blacks on his property! Even the most affluent landowners seldom employed more than three or four black laborers, and only a handful of earlier slave holders in western Massachusetts owned more than ten slaves.

Swetland's slave holdings are all the more startling when we consider that his property holdings were relatively modest: 10 acres of tillage, 6 acres of fresh meadows, 32 acres of woodland, 30 acres of unimproved land, 4 acres of unimprovable land, one house, one cow (three years old) one calf (one year old), and one swine—hardly enough to feed one-tenth of the number of individuals listed in the record.

In that same town, “Marchant” Samuel Colton, one of the wealthiest men in the region, with holdings amounting to 366 acres in Longmeadow alone, employed only three black laborers. Clearly these ninety-two blacks were not laborers on Swetland's acreage, and certainly they were not permanent residents on Swetland's land in Longmeadow. Who were they? Could Swetland have been speculating in slavery, buying Massachusetts and/or Connecticut blacks to sell them south to plantation slavery? The question is certainly speculative but the circumstances are curious. Ninety-two individuals represent approximately half of the black population in 1790 for the towns that eventually became Hampden County.²⁷

The 1780s saw a relatively large number of free black marriages, reflecting a new personal freedom that had not been afforded slaves. Recently freed blacks were, however, often poorly provided for by their former owners, and many found themselves “warned out” of town. The elderly and the infirm were often found on local pauper's lists as town charges. Many others were forced, through the lack of viable economic alternatives, to remain in the employ of former owners.



Mum Bett, also known as Elizabeth Freeman, was a slave for forty years in Sheffield, Mass. In 1781 Bett sought an abolitionist lawyer who helped her and another slave successfully sue for their freedom under the new Massachusetts state constitution.

AFRICAN AMERICAN WAR VETERANS AND SHAY'S REBELLION

African American veterans of the Revolutionary War often returned from the war to find few, or very limited, opportunities in the postwar

economy. Since few actually owned farms, however, African Americans in western Massachusetts generally did not get caught up in the fervor of Shays' Rebellion. That white neighbors were losing their farms due to crushing debt simply meant that the black farm laborers would have to seek work at another farm. Reports of the rebellion seldom (if ever) mentioned African Americans as part of the mobs that closed the courts in the western counties during the years of protest and rebellion.

Moses Sash of Worthington, an African American veteran who served in various Patriot military units for five years during the Revolution, was the notable exception. He was described in court documents as a "Captain" of the rebel army, and "one of Shays' Council." Moses was one of the leaders of the failed attack on the Springfield federal arsenal, sometimes referred to as the Battle of Arsenal Hill, on January 25, 1787; the arsenal was defended by loyal militia and a unit of regular army artillerists under the command of Gen. William Shepard.²⁸

Although there were probably a few more unnamed African Americans in the rebel army, there are only three other documented black participants: Tobias Green of Plainfield, Peter Green, and Aaron Carter of Colrain.²⁹ Across the river in West Springfield and Westfield were the homes of a number of black Revolutionary War and French and Indian War veterans. None of them joined rebel leader Luke Day, who was organizing a force on the west side of the Connecticut River. Neither did Springfield's small black population join the rebel effort. This local response, or lack thereof, mirrored the response of the entire black community in the eastern part of the state. In fact, Prince Hall, as leader of the lodge of black Masons in Boston, contacted Governor Bowdoin and offered to raise a regiment of 700 Massachusetts African American volunteers to help put down the rebellion, an offer the Governor chose not to accept.³⁰

Moses Sash, nevertheless, was committed to the cause of the "regulators," as the rebels called themselves. He assisted Shays in leading the remnants of the defeated rebel army, which was being hotly pursued by government troops, in a long retreat to the Pelham hills. Once in the hills, Moses helped Shays rally the rebel troops and organized foraging parties to gather food, ammunition, and guns. With Gen. Benjamin Lincoln in overall command, the government army steadily advanced on the rebel stronghold, many deserted; Moses stayed by Daniel Shays and helped lead the remaining rebels in the brief Battle of Petersham on February 3, 1787. Most rebels broke ranks and left the field; those that remained were forced to quickly surrender by Gen. Lincoln's superior tactics and greater numbers. Moses was captured, brought to trial, and indicted for his "offenses against the Commonwealth." Although

sentenced to hang, he was eventually pardoned by Gov. John Hancock. After the rebellion, Moses returned to his home in Worthington, where he settled down to farming and raising a family.³¹ Moving to Connecticut later in life, Moses applied for a Revolutionary War pension in 1818 and received the standard \$8 monthly allowance until his death in 1827.³²

Other local black Revolutionary War veterans received pensions or “bounty land warrants” for their years of military service. Some sold their “land warrants” to speculators; others, such as Archelaus Fletcher, Jr., who moved his family to the land he was granted in Canandaigua, New York, chose to transform their grants into homesteads and farms. A number of black veterans had served in place of, or under the name of, their former masters or white farmers who wanted to avoid military service. These veterans often had a difficult time proving their years of service.

Zebulon Wallace served in the 1st Connecticut Continental Regiment from January 1, 1780, to December 31, 1781, under the name “Holcomb.” When his wife Eleanor applied for his Revolutionary War pension in 1840, she had to include a letter from Thomas Holcomb of Granby, Connecticut, in which Holcomb honorably stated that his older brother and father “united in hiring the said Zebulon to enlist into the army, by which they were protected from the inconvenience of being frequently called away from home by draught.”³³

These pensions and land grants enabled some veterans to sustain themselves and their families through the “down cycles” in the local farming economy that occurred in the early national period. Agrarian life, whether for yeoman farmers or more precariously as landless farm laborers, was always challenging; many younger sons began to seek other means of employment.

CHANGING ECONOMIC STATUS AFTER 1790

A study of U.S. census figures reveals a number of local trends; the shift of the black population from rural agricultural areas towards commercial centers, the concentration of blacks into distinct sections of various communities, and the degree of independence from former slave owners can be monitored. Although the 1790 federal census listed numerous independent black families, fifty-four percent of the black population in what is now Hampden County were living in white households as domestic servants, farm laborers, apprentices, etc., economically dependent upon their former owners in many cases (see Tables I and II).

As John Nelson noted in his history of Worcester County, “With the abolition of slavery, a great many [blacks] remained with the families which

had owned them.”³⁴ This reflected the hard economic reality of recently freed slaves, who found very few alternatives given their property-less situation. They planted and harvested crops, cared for livestock, built stone walls, and cleared wood lots, “and when they died no tombstones were erected to mark their graves.”³⁵ When the White Church Cemetery in West Springfield was established in 1807, Sewell White wrote in his journal, “A place was set apart where persons of color were interred, but no monument has as yet been erected to mark the spot. . . .”³⁶

Some men tried their hand at a form of tenant farming. Ceasar Avery, recently freed from slavery in Preston, Connecticut, agreed in 1788 to rent land in Longmeadow from Charles Ferre, “at a place named Watchnet” including “a farm and buildings . . . goats, steers, a plough, and plough chain . . . for three years.” In payment, Ceasar contracted to give Ferre 50 percent of the produce of the land (“grain corn”). Prince Starkweather, Avery’s friend from Preston, Connecticut, witnessed the transaction.³⁷ Prince had just come to a similar agreement that year with John Bedortha of Longmeadow in which Prince was lent a “40 acre farm, yoke of oxen, one plough, and plough chain, and one milk cow” for three years in a place called “Watchaug” in Longmeadow, with Bedortha receiving 50 percent of the produce of the land.

It is unclear how well either party made out on these arrangements.³⁸ By 1790, however, Avery and Starkweather were no longer farming that land, nor were they still living in Longmeadow. No record exists of them buying their own farms in the ensuing decade, so it is safe to assume that neither man found tenant farming, which represented another form of dependence upon white land owners, financially rewarding. They lived out their lives as transient farm laborers.

By 1800, many black families established their independence; dependent individuals dropped to thirty-four percent. This percentage stayed much the same until 1820, when it dropped once again to twenty-nine percent. This percentage did not change substantially until 1850; genealogical studies, however, indicate that many individuals listed in white households were members of independent black families of that town. While these individuals worked for and sometimes lived with these white employers, they still remained vitally connected to their families who lived nearby.

Prior to the 1840s, African Americans were often hired by white farmers in Hampden County as day laborers. Families that owned substantial farm lots became independent yeoman farmers. From 1810 to 1840, Hampden County African American yeoman farmers developed strong family connections with other black families living within three discernible groups of adjacent farming communities: (1) Blandford, Granville, Tolland, Chester, and—in

Connecticut—Granby and Hartland; (2) West Springfield (including the parts of the town known as Agawam, Feeding Hills, and Ireland Parish), Southwick, Westfield, and—in Connecticut—Enfield and Windsor; and (3) Monson, Ludlow, Palmer, Wilbraham, Brimfield, Holland, Wales, and Belchertown, and—in Connecticut—Somers and Suffield.

The civil and church records of these towns document the extensive intermarrying of the black farming families who lived within these three groups of towns. Over time, these family connections became very strong indeed. During the 1840s through the 1860s, the African American farming families from the west side of the Connecticut River began to intermarry with farming families from the east side of the river. These were the families with the oldest Massachusetts and New England roots. Intermarriage ultimately created a strong support system and sense of extended family within this important group of “black Yankees.” They developed an informal subculture of “old line” New England black families, with its own self-image and identity. Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, author of *Mr. and Mrs. Prince*, referred to what she called the “Negro Network” as a “set of contacts and close relationships with other black people . . . who had found a way to establish position and property for themselves in western Massachusetts.”³⁹

These families in many cases maintained their own independent farms and subsequently parceled them out to their descendants. By the 1850s, however, even these old-line African American Yankee families found it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to maintain their extended families on their original family farm lots. As a result, children and grandchildren of the family patriarchs moved to distant farming communities to establish their own farms, or sought employment outside of agriculture.

In general, most African Americans in western Massachusetts were “farm laborers” rather than “yeoman farmers” who owned their own farm. These short-term, or seasonal, “farm laborers” and their families were by necessity highly mobile, seldom staying in one location more than three to five years, and often only for one growing season. It was a hard life, especially for mothers with young children; child mortality was high. Often the only record of a family’s brief sojourn in a particular town was the stark record of the death of an infant or young child. These mobile farming families frequently intermarried with other African American families in the farming subregions listed above.

POPULATION GROWTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES

As result of these various demographic influences, small black enclaves began to develop in many Hampden County towns. By 1850, these enclaves represented extended families whose origin in those towns could be traced back several generations. The Wallaces of Monson, the Fletchers of West Springfield (Feeding Hills and Agawam), the Fullers of Ireland Parish (Holyoke), the Brewsters and Platts of Blandford, the Powers of Ludlow, the Newberrys of Westfield, and the Masons, Sands, and Williams of Springfield were important family units within the black community in Hampden County. In some cases, place names were given to areas settled by black families, such as “Negro Hill” in Blandford, and “Jamaica” and “Hayti” in Springfield.

During this same period, African Americans living in the largest towns and cities tended to forge strong connections between those “proto-urban” locations. Marriages between individuals from Springfield, Westfield, Pittsfield, Northampton, Worcester, and Hartford, Connecticut, or newcomers from Baltimore, Maryland, New York City, Philadelphia, or Washington, D.C., were more likely than marriages between individuals living in the rural farming communities. In this way, the growing black communities in the market towns and cities of western Massachusetts began to diversify at a faster rate. The “culture” of these communities was no longer monolithically New England–based, or even “Yankee.”

By mid-century, the leadership of Springfield’s black community was decidedly from the mid-Atlantic states and “old South.” Slavery was not just a memory or an experience related by their elders, it was recent and personal—and still a very real threat. Another important aspect of this new demographic is that the African Americans from Maryland, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania often had the very “portable” skills most likely to be required for employment in the largest towns and cities of the Connecticut Valley. Barbers, cooks, teamsters, and carpenters—and those with other skills related to the building trades—found work in Springfield and Westfield. The cities also provided economic opportunities for “unskilled” laborers such as porters, waiters, hotel workers, white washers, street sweepers, etc.

In 1794, President George Washington established the new nation’s first armory in Springfield. This attracted other related and support industries and business. By the time Hampden County was established from the southern district of Old Hampshire County in 1812, Springfield had firmly established itself as the commercial hub of Hampden County. Steamboats used the navigable sections of the Connecticut River to connect the community to the

southern markets of Connecticut and northern markets in Vermont and New Hampshire. The Western Railroad eventually connected Springfield with Boston to the east in 1839 and with Albany to the west in 1841. Soon after, in 1844, the Connecticut River Railroad connected Springfield with Hartford to the south. On the eve of its incorporation as a city in 1852, Springfield had already attracted substantial business enterprise and boasted a tremendous rise in population.

The 1850 U.S. census also recorded a sizable increase in the black population in Hampden County, due in large part to the influx of blacks from Maryland, Pennsylvania, Washington, D.C., and Virginia. Owing to its increased access to the south through the recently constructed Connecticut River Railroad, and its location along the river and the availability of jobs, Springfield received most of the new arrivals to the region.

Skilled and semi-skilled blacks who had traveled north to the new city wasted no time setting up barber shops, “eating saloons,” laundries, and, in one instance, a whitewashing business. During this period, Alexander Du Bois, grandfather of W. E. B. Du Bois, worked as a steward aboard the steamboats *Connecticut*, *Hero*, and *Traveler*, which plied the waters of the Connecticut River between Hartford and Springfield; at one time, he owned a saloon on Main Street in Springfield. The unskilled found jobs as day laborers, waiters, cooks, and domestic servants.

The expanding opportunities of employment and business in Springfield also attracted local black individuals and families. The Masons, who had originally come from Monson, began to move to Springfield in the late 1830s and, by 1850, became established as a Springfield family. The most prominent nineteenth-century member of that family, Primus Parsons Mason, became “one of the chief Negro Philanthropists of our time” according to W. E. B. Du Bois, to the great advantage of the city of Springfield. Mason’s business acumen enabled him to amass a small fortune, from which his estate funded,



The New Arsenal

Springfield Armory

in 1892, the Springfield Home for Aged Men.⁴⁰ Today, Springfield's Mason Square is named in his honor.

The influx of African Americans from other states had been a continuing process since the 1780s, when Connecticut blacks began to arrive in Springfield and surrounding towns following the ratification of the Massachusetts State Constitution of 1780. (Connecticut retained slavery until 1782.) Blacks continued to arrive from upstate New York in substantial numbers until the abolition of slavery in that state in 1827; most of the New Yorkers remained in Berkshire County.⁴¹ The 1840s saw a preponderance of new arrivals to the black community from Maryland and Washington, D.C., while lesser numbers arrived from Virginia and Pennsylvania. In the 1850s, Hampden County witnessed a dramatic increase in the black population living in the developing urban center of Springfield. The Massachusetts census of 1855 listed 392 black inhabitants in the city of Springfield, ten times the total black population of the towns of Agawam, Holyoke, Longmeadow, West Springfield, Westfield, and Wilbraham.

In the early decades of the 19th century, Springfield began to occupy center stage in the history of the black community in Hampden County. The very first black organization in Hampden County was "Colonel" Aaron Nazro's company of militia, which functioned during the late 1820s and early 1830s in Springfield. In contrast to the hostile reaction the Irish militia company, "Martin's Musketeers," would receive in Springfield during the



Primus Mason (1817-92)

Know-Nothing years of the mid-1850s, Nazro's "colored militia company" was commented upon by the press in a matter-of-fact manner.⁴²

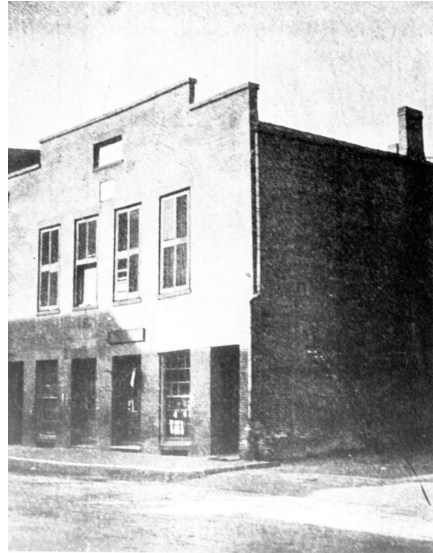
A more important step in the development of the black community in Springfield was the establishment in 1844 of the area's first African American church, the Sanford Street Church (also known as Free Church, Zion Methodist, Free Congregational Church, and, today, St. John's Congregational Church). The church became the focal point of religious, cultural, and political activism within the black community. It created opportunity for black leadership and a forum for the free exchange of

ideas among blacks in Springfield, while also serving as a rallying point for anti-slavery activity. Abolitionist John Brown was a frequent worshipper and member of the “Free Church” in its early years.⁴³

ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISM

As early as 1808, the Springfield community began to exhibit a concern for enslaved blacks. In a community effort organized by Rev. Samuel Osgood of Springfield’s First Church, sympathetic residents purchased the freedom of Jenny Williams, who had escaped from slavery in New York. In those early years, “the most active station” or haven for escaped slaves “seems to have been the home of Rev. Samuel Osgood” It was reported that “when a runaway came before daylight, he was given breakfast and put to bed in a little back room which Osgood called ‘the prophets’ chamber’ [and] at night, the man seeking freedom resumed his journey [to freedom].” It was also reported that in one year, “as many as fifty slaves were sheltered by the minister” in this way.⁴⁴

Osgood was also one of the few white Congregational ministers who presided over a significant number of African American marriages in Springfield, prior to the establishment of the African American-led Sanford Street Church, situated a mere block away from First Church on the town common (“Court Square”). He was also one of the few ministers in the region amenable to presiding over interracial marriages. Rev. John Keep of Longmeadow also demonstrated a keen interest in the welfare of local African Americans and was an outspoken critic of slavery. In 1810, while he was in Blandford, Keep convinced the white residents to organize a school for the town’s growing black community. He later became the president of Oberlin College in



Sanford Street Church

It was later renamed St. John’s Congregational Church in honor of John Brown. Ca. 1911. Courtesy of the Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield, MA.



Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883)

Truth was a nationally-known, anti-slavery and women's rights activist. She lived in nearby Florence (Hampshire County) from 1844-51.

philosophy and effectiveness, and they mirrored work being undertaken in other parts of the state. The Hampden County Colonization Society was organized on August 11, 1825, and functioned for a number of years.⁴⁷ In 1833, the Society sponsored three blacks from Springfield as colonists to Liberia, as part of a larger effort coordinated by the American Colonization Society.⁴⁸

Maria (Fletcher) Reynolds, daughter of Archelaus Fletcher, Jr., a Revolutionary War veteran from West Springfield, emigrated with her family to Liberia in that year. The Reynolds arrived in Monrovia aboard the brig *Roanoke* on February 17, 1833. They spent their first year in the émigré town of Caldwell before moving to Cape Palmas ("Maryland"), Liberia. Two of their children died of fever in that first year and, within a decade, Maria's husband, William, also died in another outbreak of disease at Cape Palmas.⁴⁹

Ohio, a college opened to students "irrespective of color."⁴⁵

Local ministers were not alone in taking risks to help blacks escape slavery. Ethan Chapin, owner of the Massasoit House, a prominent hotel adjacent to the railhead in downtown Springfield, "on more than one occasion, with knowledge of but few in the city . . . concealed on his own premises, or nearby, parties of fugitive slaves, whom he fed and cared for until arrangements were completed for sending them north" to Canada. "Uncle" Jerre and "Aunt" Phoebe Warriner, white owners of the U.S. Hotel in Springfield (sometimes referred to as Warriner's Tavern), were well-documented underground railroad "conductors." They frequently provided a safe haven for blacks escaping slavery and, if they chose to remain in Springfield, often hired them to work as waiters, maids, or laborers.⁴⁶

Local efforts to help slaves and former slaves varied in both

Enthusiasm for emigration waned after such experiences, and the local colonization movement declined in popularity and support; the Hampden County chapter of the American Colonization Society was only able to send \$60.50 “for the purchase of land in Africa (Liberia)” in 1843.⁵⁰

In 1838 a group of citizens created the Hampden County Anti-Slavery Society as an alternative. This society met at various locations throughout the county, most often in Monson, Westfield, and at the Springfield town hall. This new organization quickly overshadowed the competing efforts of local colonization advocates; enmity between the two groups also grew. That enmity was made clear at the second annual convention of the Hampden County Anti-Slavery Society on January 9, 1838, held at the First Church in Springfield. The Society voted one of its most pointed criticisms of the Colonizationists in a motion that day: “Resolved, that Colonization is a scheme of deception . . . calculated to perpetuate slavery, incapable of benefiting Africa . . . and unworthy of the patronage of the Christian public.”⁵¹

The cumulative effect of individual efforts, community and church-led initiatives, and organizations such as the colonization and anti-slavery societies, had taken root in the culture and leadership of the community. Springfield had become established by 1840 as a major haven for blacks who had escaped from slavery. From this time forward, blacks escaping slavery could rely on a growing number of former slaves who often were the first to provide food and shelter to these refugees. Escaping from his owner in Richmond, Virginia, in 1840, Robert Wright was sheltered in Springfield by James L. Smith, who had only recently escaped from slavery in the South as well.⁵²

JOHN BROWN IN SPRINGFIELD, 1846-49

John Brown, the militant abolitionist, came to Springfield in 1846 and opened a wool-grading business in partnership with Simon Perkins of Akron, Ohio. He rented part of a warehouse near the railroad depot which became a haven for runaway slaves. The *Westfield News-Letter* reported in 1847 that “the underground railroad via Springfield is doing a stiff business. . . . Five fugitives arrived by this thoroughfare on thursday [Nov. 18th] having parted with 20 comrades in New York, all from the Old Dominion [Virginia]. Friday night another freight came in consisting of a father, mother and three children on their way to Canada.”⁵³

When John Brown closed his wool business and left Springfield in 1849, he bid farewell to his fellow parishioners at the Sanford Street Church

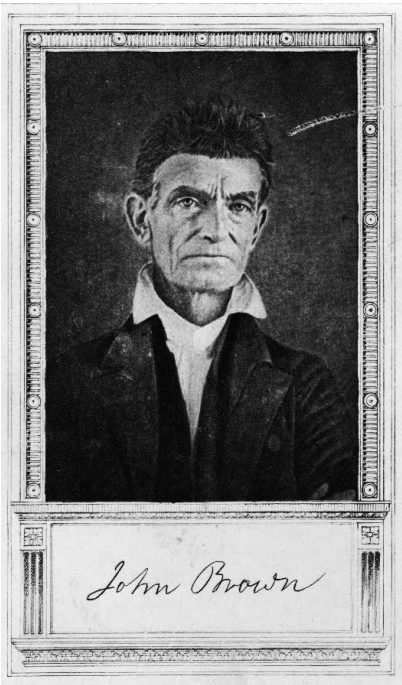
(today's St. John's Congregational Church), his many friends in the growing African American community, and his respected cohorts involved in the local anti-slavery movement. He left with full confidence that the leaders in the local black community, such as Thomas Thomas, William Montague, B. C. Dowling, J. N. Howard, William Green, and Eli Baptist, had become effective in helping individuals seeking to escape slavery in the South.

John Brown's years in Springfield, from 1846 to 1849, helped confirm his belief in the evils of slavery and the pervasive influence of the "Slave Power" on the American government. Most of all, his sojourn in this community opened his eyes and mind to the possibility of effective resistance. In Springfield, he found a community whose white leadership—from members of prominent churches, to wealthy businessmen, to popular politicians, to local jurists, and even to Samuel Bowles (III), the publisher of *The Republican*, one of the nation's most influential newspapers—was deeply involved and emotionally invested in the anti-slavery movement.

Just as important, or perhaps more so, John Brown lived within the black community, attending their church, hiring fellow parishioners for his business, and notably developing a close friendship with Thomas Thomas,

even presenting his rocking chair to Thomas' mother as a measure of respect when he left Springfield in 1849.

In this and many other ways, John Brown displayed a special affection for his African American friends in Springfield. His close association with the community provided Brown with a living example of what a free black community could be. In church and at meetings, and in his philosophical and political conversations with black friends such as Thomas Thomas, John Brown personally experienced the intellectual capabilities and leadership qualities of key figures in the black community. The passion of their rhetoric, sincerity of their prayer, and logic of their reasoning,



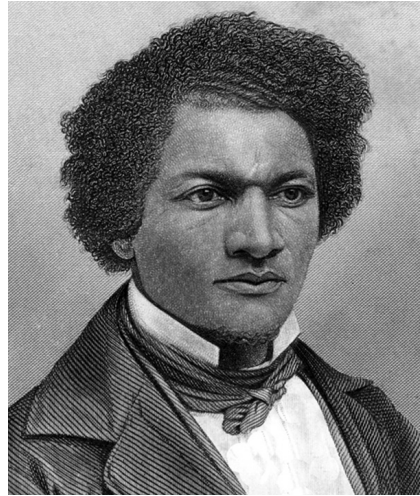
John Brown (1800-59)

inspired him to redouble his efforts against the institution of slavery.

When abolitionist Frederick Douglass came to Springfield, he met John Brown and, impressed by this remarkable man, remarked, “Though a white gentleman, he is in sympathy with the black man and as deeply interested in our cause, as though his own soul had been pierced with the iron of slavery.” Douglass spent an entire evening with John Brown—an evening that transformed Douglass’ perspective on the future direction of the national debate on slavery. Douglass wrote, “From this night spent with John Brown in Springfield, Mass. 1847 while I continued to write and speak against slavery, I became all the same less hopeful for its peaceful abolition. My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this man’s strong impressions.”⁵⁴

In 1849, Brown moved his family to North Elbe, New York, to live within its black community. He was encouraged by the growth of these African American enclaves where free blacks could live their lives away from the shadows of slavery. Passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 was proof that, for all the opinions offered on the national stage about the eventual demise of slavery through gradual means, the “Slave Power” had actually tightened its grip by giving slave owners the force of federal law. The imminent threat of slave-catchers reaching out into former safe havens like Springfield became a catalyst for action.

In his first significant action after the Fugitive Slave Act was passed, John Brown returned to Springfield, immediately seeking out his friends from Sanford Street Church—in particular, Thomas Thomas. They met to determine how to ensure that communities like Springfield remained safe havens and to establish an extra-legal counterforce to the actions of slave-catchers. From the pulpit of the Sanford Street Church, Rev. John Mars enjoined his congregation that the time had come to “beat plowshares into swords” to defend their families and their freedom.



Frederick Douglass (1818-95)

This photograph was taken around the time he visited John Brown in Springfield.

It was at this moment that John Brown, with the help and influence of his Springfield friends in the black community, drafted the founding document of the League of Gileadites, an anti-slavery militia with the goal of self-defense against slave-catchers.⁵⁵ With the enactment of the Fugitive Slave Act, the founding of such an organization clearly promoted illegal civil and, remarkably, armed resistance. John Brown left Springfield after establishing the League of Gileadites, but he left it in good hands. From that point onward, not one person was ever taken back into slavery from Springfield.

The relationships formed during John Brown's stay in Springfield influenced the dramatic actions he took in the 1850s: the massacre at Pottawatomie Creek and the famous raid on Harpers Ferry, two flash points that led to the Civil War and emancipation. The Gileadites were active right up until the Civil War. William Wells Brown, the black orator and writer, visited Springfield in 1854 and recounted that on his way to board the train for Boston, he met "ten or fifteen" blacks "all armed to the teeth" and swearing vengeance upon any slave catcher who attempted to capture them.⁵⁶ He recounted his visit to a "Gileadite House" in the mid-1850s, in which "eight black women were busy boiling a concoction they called the 'King of Pain' intended to throw in the faces of slave hunters."⁵⁷ By 1860, the existence of the Gileadites, an African American church, a burgeoning economy, and an advanced transportation system all served to bring African Americans to Springfield from the immediate vicinity as well as from slave-holding states.⁵⁸

CIVIL WAR

When the Civil War broke out, the local black population was eager to help. The federal and Massachusetts state governments, however, were not ready to enlist African Americans into the army. Some individuals saw this as a "last straw" and opted to become émigrés to Haiti, an effort encouraged by the U.S. government. The most prominent black resident of Springfield to take his family to the American émigré "colony" of Drurea, Haiti, was Eli Baptist. He was joined by Perry and Ruth Cox Adams, the "adopted sister" of Frederick Douglass; Henry Griffin and his family also accompanied Baptist's small group from Springfield. Henry Joseph James and his family met up with the Springfield contingent in Haiti.

Unfortunately, the entire contingent was left without means of support when the organizer of their group of émigrés absconded with the group's funds. Disease, bad weather conditions, poor housing and sanitation, and little or no medical services caused the experiment to fail. Many were buried

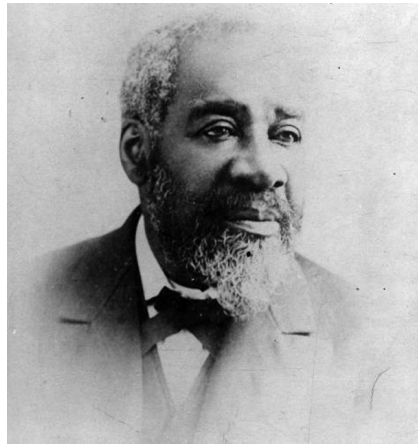
in quiet Haitian cemeteries. Those who survived returned to Springfield with Eli Baptist aboard the *Rob Murray*, landing in New York City on June 20, 1864.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, local African Americans were joining the war effort, encouraged by the leadership of Springfield's black community, in particular the ministers and organizers of the League of Gileadites. But it was only after the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, and the federal and state governments' willingness to allow blacks in combat regiments, that significant numbers of Hampden County African Americans began to enlist. Special rallies and public appeals went out to encourage new enlistments.

W. E. B. Du Bois' grandfather, Alexander Du Bois, led a committee from Springfield's black community that organized a city celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation. To black Americans, Lincoln's post-Antietam renewed war effort finally had the underpinnings of a moral cause. Henry Joseph James, for one, returned from Drurea, Haiti, and immediately enlisted in the Union army, eventually rising during the war to the rank of sergeant in the 26th U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment.

For the people of color who served, the Civil War was about slavery, and it was personal. The local community was well aware that Rev. John Mars, their former minister, had enlisted as a chaplain in a "U.S. Colored Infantry" Regiment; that appointment made him one of the first African American officers in the U.S. military, chaplains being considered officers.⁶⁰ Rev. Samuel Harrison soon after became a military chaplain for the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, becoming another of the nation's first African American military officers. Many of their parishioners elected to follow their heroic example; the collective war record is impressive.

In all, ninety African Americans from the towns and cities of Hampden County fought in the Civil War. Eighty-eight men served in a



Rev. Samuel Harrison

Rev. Harrison was a military chaplain, a member of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment, and pastor of St. John's Congregational Church in Springfield, c. 1880s.

total of thirteen different “colored” Union army units, and two men served in the U.S. Navy. Of the men who served in the army, thirty-five served in the 54th Massachusetts; twenty-six served in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry Regiment; eleven served in the 29th Connecticut (“Colored”) Volunteer Infantry Regiment; and eight served in the 55th Massachusetts Volunteers Infantry Regiment. Fighting was not left to the younger generation; 10 percent of the men who enlisted were between 35 and 45 years of age.

Of the Hampden County African Americans in the war, the largest number served in the 54th Massachusetts; fifteen of the thirty-five served together in Company A.⁶¹

That unit’s assault on the Confederate stronghold at Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina, on July 18, 1863, was perhaps the most important and devastating battle for the local African American community; with Company A leading the assault, many local men were killed, maimed, or missing. Sgt. George L. Bundy Jr. was severely wounded leading Company A up the ramparts; local recruits, and Ralsey Townsend, Sanford Jackson, Peter Johnson, and Harrison Pierce were killed; 1st Sgt. William Gray was severely wounded leading Company C. The community was both shaken and inspired to renew their support of the war. There were many local enlistments



“MARCHING ON”—THE FIFTY-FIFTH MASSACHUSETTS COLORED REGIMENT SINGING JOHN BROWN’S MARCH IN THE STREETS OF CHARLESTON, FEBRUARY 21, 1865.—(See Page 57.)

The 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment singing “John Brown’s March” in Charleston, SC on Feb. 21, 1865. Source: *Harper’s Weekly*, 1865.

to replenish the ranks of depleted 54th, including the father and brother of the fallen Harrison Pierce of Company A; Monson's Solomon Pierce, age 42, and his 19-year-old son Warren stepped in and fought side by side as privates in Company A until the end of the war. The bonds developed between the survivors of this company lasted well beyond the war years.

The number of major battles, sieges, expeditions, skirmishes, etc., in which these ninety men participated would take another volume to fully describe. The reader is encouraged to read more about the exploits of each specific regiment. It is safe to say, however, that the assault on Fort Wagner; the Battle of Olustee, Florida; the Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina; the advance on the Bermuda Hundred, Virginia; the siege of Petersburg, Virginia; and the Battle of Hatcher's Run, Virginia, would all figure prominently in the collective service records of these brave men.⁶²

After the Civil War, many of the black veterans who returned to Springfield formed a local veterans' association to maintain the associations forged during the war. Thomas Thomas' downtown restaurant became a favorite spot for these men to meet and exchange stories of their experiences. Postwar Springfield witnessed the growth of many African American institutions, including more churches of different denominations, and social organizations such as the African American Lodge of Masons and Eli Baptist's Springfield Beneficial Society.

The New England Historic Genealogical Society (NEHGS) is the country's leading resource for family history research. Founded in 1845, NEHGS collects, preserves, and interprets materials to document and make accessible the histories of families in America. Among its initiatives, the Society produces some of the most important publications in genealogy and social history including family histories, essential research handbooks, local histories, and comprehensive guides. Learn more about NEHGS at www.AmericanAncestors.org.

Sample Genealogical Entries from
Black Families in Hampden County, Massachusetts, 1650–1865

Editor's note: Note the occasional missing information. These sample entries are among the most detailed and complete.

PERRY FRANK ADAMS, born in Maryland Jan. 1, 1822, son of Joshua and Matilda (_____) Adams. He married **RUTH “HARRIET” A. BAILEY** (born in Easton, Md., in 1822) at the home of Frederick Douglass in Lynn, Mass., Nov. 11, 1847. Harriet, born Ruth Cox, was the daughter of Ebby Cox.

Harriet escaped from slavery in Easton in 1844 and traveled via the Underground Railroad to West Chester, Pa., where she was sheltered by Quakers. There she met Frederick Douglass, who was in town speaking at an abolitionist rally. Douglass invited Ruth to live with his family in Lynn, an offer she gladly accepted. She lived with them from 1844 to 1847 as Frederick's “adopted sister”; it was then that she became known as Harriet, a name she used until after the Civil War.

Harriet met Perry in Lynn in 1847. He was listed as a farmer, working in Springfield, Mass., at the time of their marriage that same year. In the 1850 U.S. census for Springfield, Perry was listed as a farm laborer. He was a friend of John Brown the abolitionist, and through this association he became one of the first members of the League of Gileadites, which was established in Springfield in 1851 (see Introduction).

John Brown presented Perry and Ruth with a “dirk” to use against slave catchers who might attempt to capture Ruth, who was an “unemancipated fugitive” from the South. Perry, Ruth, Perry, Jr., and Matilda were colonists of Drurea, Haiti, and accompanied Eli S. Baptist to the settlement. In June 1863, after the colony was decimated by disease, Perry and Harriet returned to Springfield. Perry died there March 20, 1868 (Springfield VR, Book 1868:157; *Springfield Republican*, May 27, 1905, 4). After Perry's death, Ruth and her children moved to Providence, R.I. In 1884, she moved to Nebraska with her daughter, Matilda, and her son-in-law, Rev. William Vanderzee.

Ruth “Harriet” A. Adams died in April 1900 and is buried in Wyuka Cemetery, Lincoln, Neb. (Alyce McWilliams Hall Coll., Neb. State Historical Society, Lincoln; Frederick Douglass to Harriet Bailey/Ruth Cox Adams, March 9, 1894, and 20 March 1894, Cedar Hill, Anacostia; and Harriet Bailey/Ruth Cox Adams to Frederick Douglass, May 1, 1894, Norfolk, Neb., Douglass papers, D.L.C.).

Children of Perry F. and Ruth “Harriet” A. (Bailey) Adams:

Matilda Ann, b. Mass. 1849; m. Rev. William Vanderzee (A.M.E. minister), in Providence R.I., 1878. They had four children: Anna, Perry Francis (who became a seaman on Marcus Garvey’s “Black Star” shipping line), William, and Ruth Elizabeth.

Ebby Bruce, b. Springfield, Mass., March 1852; d. there Sept. 17, 1858 (Springfield VR, Book 1858:60).

Perry Frank (Jr.), b. Mass. 1854 (1855 Mass. census for Springfield)

W

HENRY JOSEPH JAMES, born Halifax, N.C., April 12, 1825 to “free persons of color.” When he was four, his parents left the slave state and moved to Ohio, where his brother Jeremiah was born in 1830. Henry married ELIZA _____ in Ohio in 1843. Eliza was born Va. in 1828, escaping slavery in that state and reaching Ohio by at least 1842. Henry and Eliza were living in Fairfield, Butler Co., Ohio as early as 1850 with their three children; Henry’s brother, Jeremiah, was living with them at the time, and both men were working as barbers. The census taker described Henry and his family as “mulatto,” except for his Eliza, who was described as “black.” In 1850, Eliza’s health began to fail and Henry brought her and his entire family to Detroit. He hired Sarah Catherine Howard who was an American refugee living in Windsor, Ontario to care for Eliza and the children while he continued to work (oral tradition passed down to the family from Henry’s daughter Celestine, per Wesley James, Springfield). Eliza died in Detroit, Mich., ca. 1852 (Affidavit #462,772 of Agnes Wallace of Detroit, declaration for widow’s pension, Sept. 1, 1890; in possession of Wesley James, Springfield). Sarah stayed on with the family as their nanny and housekeeper for the next few years until Henry proposed marriage in 1855.

Henry, living in Urbana, Ohio, married, second, SARAH CATHERINE HOWARD of Windsor, Ontario, Canada, in Detroit July 11, 1855 (marriage certificate dated July 11, 1855, witnessed by John Yenfield and Julia Jones of Windsor, Canada; in possession of Wesley James of Springfield). Sarah was born in Falmouth, Va., in 1830 daughter of Catherine Fox, a Tuscarora Indian, and Abraham Howard, “mulatto.” Her family had escaped, through the Underground Railroad, to the free community of African Americans in Windsor, just over the Canadian border.



Celestine James (1847-1939), daughter of Henry and Eliza James. Original in possession of Wesley James, Springfield, Mass.

Shortly after Henry and Sarah's marriage, they travelled to Springfield, Mass. so that Henry could explore employment opportunities according to the account by his daughter, Celestine. Sarah became pregnant with her first child and Henry moved her and the family back to Ohio by 1856 where she gave birth to Mary Eliza. In 1859, a year before the 1860 U.S. census recorded their residence in Ravenna, Ohio, Sarah gave birth to a son, Erastus Henry, probably in Ravenna. Looking for work in 1858, Henry spent some time in Springfield, Mass. where he became familiar with its growing African American community and the community's church on Sanford Street.

He eventually moved his family there after the Civil War.

In early 1863, Henry and his entire family paid for passage to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, aboard the *Ocean Ranger*. Their daughter Elena "Lena" was born in Haiti in 1863. The colony at Ile a Vach failed, but they survived. Henry returned to the United States to raise the money to repatriate his family, enlisting in the Union army and using his enlistment bonus to buy his family passage to America. They sailed in March 1864 aboard the *Marcia C. Pay*, landing in New York City, and soon moved upstate to the Troy/Albany area.

Henry had enlisted at Albany, N.Y., Aug. 30, 1864, as a private in Company I of the newly formed 26th U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment. He fought in the Battle of Honey Hill Nov. 30; the Battle of Deveaux's Neck Dec. 6; the advance on Charleston & Savannah Railroad Dec. 7-9; the Battle of Tullifinny Station Dec. 9, and the attack on McKay's Point Dec. 22. On Jan. 2, 1865, the regiment was then ordered to Beaufort, S.C., and was on garrison duty there until August. Henry saw action at the Battle of John's Island and the Battle of James Island; his regiment was among the units occupying Charleston, S.C., after that city's surrender to Union forces. Henry's leadership qualities led to his promotion to sergeant in Company I; the regiment was mustered out at Hilton Head, S.C., Aug. 28, 1865.

After the war, Henry moved his family from Albany, N.Y., to Springfield, where he returned to his profession of barber. He died in Troy, N.Y., Aug. 18,

1881, and is buried in the Springfield Cemetery. Sarah died in Springfield Jan. 19, 1905 (MVR 84 [1905]:507).

Children of Henry Joseph and Eliza (_____) James:

Robert, b. Ohio 1844.

Celestine E., b. Hamilton, Ohio, June 27, 1847; living with father and stepmother 1860; m. James H. Thornton (b. Fredericksburg, Va., 1847, son of Oliver and Ellen (_____) Thornton) at Springfield St. John's Congregational Church Jan. 23, 1868; d. there Dec. 10, 1939 (burial lot 1933, Springfield Cemetery; *Springfield Republican*, June 28, 1918).

Henry Joseph, Jr., b. Butler Co., Ohio, 1849.



Henry James and his second wife, Sarah (Howard) James, August 1855, in Detroit. Original in possession of Wesley James, Springfield, Mass.

Children of Henry Joseph and Sarah Catherine (Howard) James:
 Mary Eliza, b. Ravenna, Ohio 1856; m. _____ Waterman 1868.
 Erastus Henry, b. Ravenna, Ohio, 1859; barber in Chelsea, Mass. in
 1890s (*Chelsea City Directory*, 1891-92).
 George, b. N.Y. 1862.

Elena "Lena," b. Ile a Vache, Haiti, 1863; m. George Thornton (b. Fredericksburg, Va., 1859, son of Oliver and Ellen (_____) Thornton); d. Springfield May 16, 1903 (Springfield City Clerk, Death Records 1903).



Elena James (1863-1903), daughter of Henry and Sarah James, born in Haiti. Original in possession of Wesley James, Springfield, Mass.

Notes

¹ "William Pynchon Account Book," 1650, located at the archives of Wood Museum of Springfield History, Springfield Museums, Springfield).

² "An Estimate of the Plantation ... in Springfield, 1685" (typescript, archives of Wood Museum of Springfield History).

³ "John Pynchon Account Book," October 20, 1695 (Wood Museum of Springfield History); various accounts with John Pynchon, and manumission document, Oct. 20, 1695, in Carl Bridenbaugh, ed., *Pynchon Papers* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1985) 2:236-37, 482-83.

⁴ Imani Kazini, "Black Springfield: A Historical Study," *Contributions in Black Studies*, 1(1977):1-14; Edwin Powers, *Crime and Punishment in Early Massachusetts, 1620-1692: A Documentary History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), 93-94.

⁵ “John Pynchon Account Book,” 1680 (archives of Wood Museum of Springfield History).

⁶ “John Pynchon Account Book,” 1657 (archives of Wood Museum of Springfield History), p. 98.

⁷ Clifton Johnson, *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, 1:173.

⁸ Louis M. Dewey, “Chronology of Westfield” (typescript, 1919, Westfield Athenaeum).

⁹ “Records of the Massachusetts Superior Court of Judicature, 1766-68” (Massachusetts State Archives).

¹⁰ Robert H. Romer, *Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts* (Florence, Mass.: Levellers Press, 2009), 168-72.

¹¹ “Last Will and Testament of Elizabeth Gunn,” July 9, 1761 (Box 65, Case #27, Hampshire Co. Registry of Probate, Northampton).

¹² Ella Merkel DiCarlo, *The Black Community in Holyoke, 1770s-1970s* (Springfield: American International College, Oral History Center, 1978), 3-4.

¹³ “Journal of Rev. John Ballantine, 1737-1774” (transcribed by Joseph D. Bartlett, 1886, Westfield Athenaeum).

¹⁴ Romer, *Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts*, 140.

¹⁵ “Diary of Rev. Stephen Williams,” Oct. 1718 (Storrs Library, Longmeadow); Johnson, *Hampden County 1636-1936*, 2:893.

¹⁶ “Census of Negro Slaves of 16 years of age or upwards - . . . in Massachusetts, 1754” (mf. at Massachusetts State Archives). Westfield listed fifteen men and four women; Springfield listed twenty-two men and five women.

¹⁷ Gretchen Holbrook Gerzina, *Mr. and Mrs. Prince: How an Extraordinary Eighteenth Century Family Moved Out of Slavery and into Legend* (New York: Amistad, 2008), 51.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, 2:975-76.

¹⁹ W.B. Hargrove, “The Negro Soldier in the American Revolution,” *Journal of Negro History* 1 (1916):110-37.

²⁰ For further information on blacks in the Revolution consult: Sidney Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the American Revolution* (Greenwich, 1973); and Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1961).

²¹ Ruth Bogin, “‘Liberty Further Extended’: A 1776 Antislavery Manuscript of Lemuel Haynes,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd series, 40 (Jan. 1983):85-105.

²² Harold Norton Jones, “Slavery in Colonial Westfield” (typescript, Westfield Athenaeum).

²³ William Green, *Narrative of Events in the Life of William Green Formerly a Slave* (Springfield, 1853).

²⁴ Romer, *Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts*, 206-22.

²⁵ Chauncey Edwin Peck, *History of Wilbraham* (Wilbraham, 1914), 310.

²⁶ *Tony Negro vs. Ezra Clapp* (Inferior Court of Common Pleas Records, Hampshire Co. Commissioners Office, Northampton) Case # 30, Vol. 13 (Sept. 1781): 204, 216; for Ziba, see Slavery documents, Conn. Historical Society.

²⁷ “List of the Polls and of the Estates, Real and Personal of the Several Proprietors and Inhabitants of the town of Longmeadow . . . 1784” (ms, Massachusetts State Archives; photostatic copy also at Longmeadow Historical Society). The script of the document is very legible and clearly appears as the number 92.

²⁸ Kaplan, Sidney, “Blacks in Massachusetts and the Shays’ Rebellion,” *Contributions in Black Studies* 8 (1986):1; and Kaplan, Sidney, *Black Presence in the American Revolution* (New York: New York Graphic Society/Smithsonian Press, 1973).

²⁹ David Szatmary, *Shays’ Rebellion: The Making of an Agrarian Insurrection* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 60.

³⁰ Sidney and Emma N. Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, rev. ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), 206; Prince Hall to Bowdoin, Nov. 26, 1786, in William Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry Among the Colored People of North America* (New York, 1903), 81.

³¹ Kaplan, 258-61.

³² “Ledger of Payments, 1818-1872 to U.S. Pensioners of the State of Connecticut” (Records of Accounting Officers, Dept. of Treasury, Record Group 217, National Archives), 226.

³³ Zebulon Wallace, “Revolutionary War Pension Application #R11083, with letters from Joshua R. Jewett and Thomas Holcomb” (National Archives).

³⁴ John Nelson, *Worcester County: A Narrative History* (New York, 1934).

³⁵ Rusty Clark, *West Springfield, Massachusetts: Stories Carved in Stone* (West Springfield: Dog Pong Press, 2004), 137.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ “Charles Ferre to Cesar Avery, March 26, 1788” (archives, Hampden Co. Registry of Deeds, Springfield), Hampshire Co. Deed Book 28:343.

³⁸ “John Bedortha to Prince Starkweather, Oct. 13, 1787” (archives, Hamden County Registry of Deeds), Hampshire Co. Deed Book 28:294.

³⁹ Gerzina, *Mr. and Mrs. Prince*, 51.

⁴⁰ W. E. B. Du Bois, ed., *Efforts For Social Betterment Among Negro Americans* (Atlanta, Ga.: Atlanta N. Press, 1909), 38.

⁴¹ Carl Nordstrom, “Transplanted Roots,” *Berkshire Eagle*, March 28, 1979, p. 23.

⁴² *Hampden Intelligencer*, Dec. 30, 1831; *Springfield Republican*, Dec. 17, 1831.

⁴³ Naomi T. Cummings, Mary C. McLean, Sylvia G. Humphrey, Martha K. Cobb, and Dorothy J. Pryor, *History of St. John’s Congregational Church* (Springfield, 1962).

⁴⁴ Johnson, *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, 1:356.

⁴⁵ Frank E. Best, *John Keep of Longmeadow, Massachusetts, 1660-1676, and His Descendants* (Chicago: The Author, 1899), 63.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Hampden County, 1636-1936*, 1:354.

⁴⁷ *Hampden Register* (Westfield), Nov 22, 1826, p. 3, col. 1-2; *Westfield Register*, June 16, 1830, p. 3, col. 2.

⁴⁸ “Roll of Emigrants that Have Been Sent to the Colony of Liberia, Western Africa, by the American Colonization Society...to September 1843,” *Congressional Record*, 28th U.S. Congress, 2nd Session, Sen. Doc. 150, serial 458; *African Repository and*

Colonial Journal, 18 (July 1842):235-36; Charles S. Johnson, *Bitter Canaan: The Story of the Negro Republic* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 69-76.

⁴⁹ *African Repository and Colonial Journal*, Sept. 1843, p. 291.

⁵⁰ *Springfield Republican*, Aug. 17, 1825; June 22, 1833.

⁵¹ “Minutes of the Annual Convention of 1838,” *Journal of the Hampden County Anti Slavery Society* (Wood Museum of Springfield History).

⁵² He was James Byer’s Servant: Robert Wright, a Colored Man of This City, Tells of His Service to the Early Springfield Merchant,” *Springfield Republican*, 8 Sept. 1894.

⁵³ *Westfield News Letter*, November 24, 1847, p. 2.

⁵⁴ Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: From 1817 to 1882* (London: Christian Age Office, 1882).

⁵⁵ Quotation from Luke 23:36; J. W. Hood, *One Hundred Years of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church...* (New York: AME Zion Book Concern, 1895), 67; list of Gileadites in F. B. Sanborn, ed., *Life and Letters of John Brown* (Boston: Roberts Brothers, 1891), 124-27.

⁵⁶ Carl Conway Helms, “Ethnohistorical Research Methodology ... Social Portrait of Springfield, Massachusetts: 1850-1880” (dissertation, Oregon State University, 1974), 84-85.

⁵⁷ *New York Independent*, March 10, 1870, p. 6; Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery* (New York: Association Press, 1909), 22-23.

⁵⁸ Joseph Carvalho III, “The Transformation of John Brown: The Springfield Years” *Republican* (Springfield); and Masslive.com, April 6, 2010.

⁵⁹ “Port of New York, Passenger List, *Rob Murray*, from Port au Prince, Haiti, to New York City, arrival June 20, 1864” (New York Passenger Lists, Ancestry.com).

⁶⁰ J. N. Mars, “Battles with Bondage: My Life for Three-quarters of a Century,” *New England Methodist*, 1 (Aug. 1879); William G. Lord, *History of Athol, Mass.* (Athol, 1953), 144.

⁶¹ At least three whites from Hampden County served as officers of black (“Colored”) regiments during the war: Watson Bridge of Springfield was the captain of Company F, 54th Massachusetts, in the assault on Fort Wagner; Charles Mutell of Springfield was a brevet captain of Company G, 55th Massachusetts; and Oren Hendrick of East Longmeadow served as a major in the 36th U.S. Colored Infantry Regiment.

⁶² See “Alphabetical list of Civil War soldiers” in the Appendix.

⁶³ For an excellent account of African Americans in Springfield after the 1850s see Jeanette Davis-Harris, *Springfield’s Ethnic Heritage: The Black Community* (Springfield: Springfield Bicentennial Committee, 1976); also Joseph P. Lynch, “Blacks in Springfield, 1868-1880: A Mobility Study,” *Historical Journal of Western Massachusetts* 7 (June 1979), 15-24.