

SYMPOSIUM

Breathing Democracy into Spaces: 1st South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent



SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2023

USCB CENTER FOR THE ARTS, BEAUFORT, SC



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE
RECONSTRUCTION ERA



Arts and Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

April 8, 2023

Dear Participants,

The First South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent initiative is crucial to a better understanding of the role of African Americans during the Civil War. I am thankful to Chris Allen, Col, US Army, Retired and Ben Hodges, LTG, US Army, Retired, for bringing this unit to the attention of the University of South Carolina. Organizing and researching started pre-COVID. With eighteen months of dancing with COVID, we were able to start the process. With a McCausland grant from the College of Arts and Sciences, and funding from Dick and Sharon Stewart for the Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era, we were able to hire USC and USCB students as research assistants as well as work with middle and high school students in Beaufort and Hampton counties. The last twelve months have been most productive with the help of partners. None of this would be possible without them.



Valinda W. Littlefield

Thank you for attending the symposium. I trust you will enjoy a glimpse of the legacies left by the First South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent, the tremendous efforts of the students to recover histories, and a potential blueprint for future collaborations.

Sincerely,

Valinda W. Littlefield
Associate Professor of History
USC, Columbia
Interim Director, USCB Institute for the Study of the
Reconstruction Era

Special Thanks To

AlphaGraphics of Beaufort
Aramark
Battery Creek High School Junior ROTC
Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce
Beaufort County School District

Beaufort Historical Society
Great Beaufort Port Royal Convention
& Visitors Bureau
Hampton County School District
USC School of Journalism
USC Southern Studies

Adam Parker
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Ben Hodges
Bryan Gentry
Candy Van Tine
Christopher Thompson
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Ed Allen
Eric Skipper
Gina Baker
Grace Cordial
Heidi Herrin

James Morrall
James Shinn
Jeremy Smalls
Joanna Angell
Juanita Dantzler
Kim Dudas
Leigh-Anne Hansell
Lori Carey
Martha Moriarty
Megan Plott
Michelle Chives
Minuette Floyd
Tim Divine

SATURDAY, APRIL 8, 2023

- 8:15 – 9:00 a.m. Registration
- 9:00 – 9:10..... Welcome by Al Panu
USCB Chancellor
- 9:10 – 9:20..... Beaufort McCausland Grant Project
Middle and High School Students' Video Presentation
- 9:25 – 9:50 “Prequel to Glory: 1st South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent”
Chris Allen and Rich Condon, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park
- 9:55 – 10:20 “Researching the 1st South: Pension Records, Land Deeds, and the GAR”
Jules Duterte, Grace Farish, Kolby Minckler, Samantha Mischke, USCB
Chair, James Shinn, Assistant Professor, History, USCB
- 10:20 – 10:40 Doing “Good Brave Work”: Harriett Tubman’s Service in Beaufort
Rev. Kenneth Hodges – Senior Pastor, Tabernacle Baptist Church
- 10:40 – 10:55 Break
- 10:55 – 11:35 “Researching the 1st South: Maps, Education, Muster Rolls and Colors”
Melissa DeVelvis, Jennifer Marler, Elizabeth Laney, and Chelsea Johnson
- 11:35 – 11:50..... Reconstruction Era National Historical Park Overview
Christopher Barr and Nathan Betcher, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park
- 11:50 – 12:00 p.m..... McCausland Gift Overview by Dean Joel H. Samuels
USC College Arts and Sciences
- Lunch on Your Own
- 1:00 – 1:20 “The Original Panther: Prince Rivers and the Lost City of Hamburg”
Stephen Berry, Gregory Professor of the Civil War Era, University of Georgia
- 1:25 – 2:00 ... “Researching the 1st South: Aligning History with South Carolina Social Studies Standards”
Colin Welsh, Logan Rogers, Claire Ouzts, Emory Farrand, Bailey Pope
- 2:05 – 2:25 “Red Pantaloons: The 1st South Carolina and the Zouave Black Atlantic”
Tom Brown, Professor of History, USC
- 2:25 – 2:50 “Researching the 1st South: Diaries, Letters, Medical Records, and Photos”
Benjamin Goff, Eboni Belton, Chelsea Johnson, Zachary Poole, USC
- Closing Remarks..... Valinda W. Littlefield
Associate Professor, History, USC Columbia
Interim Director, Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era, USC Beaufort

GUEST PRESENTERS



Stephen Berry
Professor of History
University of Georgia

Professor Berry is the author or editor of six books on America in the mid-19th century, including *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, A Family Divided by War*, the Book of the Month Club main selection for March 2008, and *Weirding the War: Stories from the Civil War's Ragged Edges*.

Berry is Secretary-Treasurer of the Southern Historical Association; co-director, with Claudio Saunt, of the Center for Virtual History; and co-editor, with Amy Murrell Taylor, of the *UnCivil Wars* series at the University of Georgia Press.

A Distinguished Lecturer for the Organization of American Historians, Berry helps lead the Digital Humanities Initiative at the University of Georgia's Willson Center for Humanities and Arts. Currently he is at work on two books: *The Black Prince: The Emancipated Life of Prince Rivers of South Carolina* for UGA Press and *Count the Dead: Quantification and the Birth of Death as We Know It* for UNC Press.



Tom Brown
Professor of History,
University of South Carolina,
Columbia

Professor Brown's most recent book, *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019) received the Tom Watson Brown Book Award of the Society of Civil War Historians. He is also the author of *Civil War Canon: Sites of Confederate Memory in South Carolina* (University of North Carolina Press, 2015) and *Dorothea Dix, New England Reformer* (Harvard University Press, 1998).

He has edited several books, including *Remixing the Civil War: Meditations on the Sesquicentennial* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011) and *Reconstructions: New Perspectives on the Postbellum United States* (Oxford University Press, 2006). He is the co-editor of *Hope and Glory: Essays on the Legacy of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment* (University of Massachusetts Press, 2001).



Rev. Kenneth Hodges
Sr. Pastor
Tabernacle Baptist Church
Beaufort, SC

Rev. Hodges is Senior Pastor at Tabernacle Baptist Church in Beaufort, South Carolina, where he has served since 1995. A graduate of Clark College in Atlanta, GA, he received a Master's of Divinity degree from Morehouse School of Religion at the Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, GA in 1986.

Rev. Hodges led an initiative to establish former Congressman Robert Smalls' Burial Site on Tabernacles' campus as a part of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. He also launched and chairs a project to construct The Harriet Tubman Monument at Tabernacle.

Hodges was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives in 2005 and served until 2016. While serving in the SC House of Representative, he introduced legislation to name the bridge over the Combahee River "The Harriet Tubman Bridge"; sponsored multiple pieces of other legislation and chaired numerous committees and subcommittees. He also led the Colleton County Legislative Delegation.

Rev. Hodges is the owner of The Gullah Geechee Visitors Center, LLC and LyBensons Gallery that specializes in Sea Island Gullah Geechee History and Art, and authentic African and African American Art.

STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

2023 SYMPOSIUM PROJECT



Joshua Dantzler



Camille Chives



Raven Chives



Christopher Thompson II



Grace Fairish



Samantha Mischke



Kolby Minckler



Jules Duterte



Art Class – AMI Kids Beaufort



USC History Class 599 – Breathing Democracy Into Spaces



James Shin Jr., PhD
Assistant Professor of History
University of South Carolina Beaufort

Coordinator and Chair
Student Panel



Melissa DeVelvis, PhD
Assistant Professor of History
Augusta University, Augusta, GA

Project Research Assistant,
1st South Carolina Volunteers



Rhonda Carey
Program Coordinator
1st South Carolina Volunteers

Coordinator
Middle & High School Student
Projects and Programs



Dr. Al M. Panu
Chancellor
USC Beaufort



Joel H. Samuels
Dean, College of Arts & Sciences
USC, Columbia

An Abbreviated History of the First South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent

By Chris Allen

Continuous African American service in the United States Army started on 9 May 1862 with the enlistment of William Bronson in the First South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent (ISCVAD). Four years later, almost 180,000 men of color had served the United States under arms. Much is known of Black armed service from May 1863 when the Bureau of United States Colored Troops was established and the famed 54th Massachusetts marched through Boston enroute to Port Royal, South Carolina. But the pioneering service of three 1862 Black Regiments (ISCVAD, 1st Kansas, & Louisiana Native Guard) is the little-known foundation upon which these regiments were built upon. The first formed of the Union's 1862 Black Regiments was the ISCVAD, known to its men as "The First South."

Men of color had served the United States under arms in the Revolutionary War and with Andrew Jackson at the Battle of New Orleans. But these examples are exceptions to the American norm. The Militia Acts of 1792 made armed service a white only affair (Naval service was separate and distinct). Though African Americans were willing to serve, Black service under arms was precluded by Federal law. Major General David Hunter and the ISCVAD caused the change.

David Hunter was an 1822 graduate of West Point with marital ties to Illinois. In 1860, Major Hunter was Fort Leavenworth's 58-year-old paymaster. Hunter wrote to warn newly elected Abraham Lincoln of the talk of his fellow officers who asserted that Lincoln would not survive the trip to the pending inauguration. Lincoln invited Hunter to join him on the train trip from Springfield, then had Hunter placed in charge of White House security for the first months of the Lincoln presidency. By July 1861, both the man, as well as David Hunter's strong abolitionist views, were well known to Lincoln. After the Union's November 1861 occupation of "Port Royal", President Lincoln overrode War Department objections to insist Major General David Hunter backfill Thomas W. Sherman as the first commander of the Union's Department of the South. Hunter assumed command of all Union Army operations in South Carolina, Georgia, and Florida from his Hilton Head Headquarters on 30 March 1862. TW Sherman and his logistician, Captain Rufus Saxton who had cared for the ~9000 abandoned "contraband", departed to report to Secretary of War Stanton.

Hunter arrived with clear intentions. On 3 April 1862, MG Hunter ordered uniforms and equipment to form 50,000 men of color into armed regiments. The degree to which these intentions were known to President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton is more opaque...but the War Department sent the requested gear in May to arrive at Port Royal in June. Hunter met with contraband leader Abraham Murchison (eventual mayor of Mitchellville) to ask if contraband would serve. On 7 April 1862, Murchison reported the names of 150 men who would immediately enlist if given the chance. The concept of forming a Black Regiment was put into motion. Though most of the Union Army occupying Port Royal wanted no part of forming a Black regiment, three Non-Commissioned Officers stepped forward to become regimental cadre. Charles T. Trowbridge was appointed acting Captain and commander of the yet-to-exist Company A on 7 May 1862. His brother John Trowbridge, and George Walker were appointed as his Lieutenants. On 8 May, MG Hunter issued orders to initiate recruitment through the occupied Sea Islands. On 9 May, Captain Trowbridge enlisted contraband William Bronson as the first soldier in the First South. Over the next years, Bronson would be promoted to First Sergeant. Every soldier of color in today's United States Army can point to First Sergeant Bronson as the start of continuous African American service under arms. Lieutenant Colonel Charles Trowbridge retains the honor as the longest serving member of a Civil War Black Regiment (7 May 1862 – 9 February 1866).

On 9 May 1862, MG Hunter issued General Order 11 declaring all enslaved people within the Department of the South to be henceforth and forever free. Fearing reaction from slave states not in rebellion, President Lincoln invalidated the order on 19 May, making it clear that such a decision would be exclusively his. But Lincoln neither relieved nor disciplined MG Hunter for pressing the limits. Nor did President Lincoln retard the ongoing formation of "Hunter's Regiment." Though not explicitly acknowledged, Hunter's Regiment was implicitly, but ambiguously endorsed.

In June, Kentucky's Representative Charles Wickliffe demanded an explanation for the presence of a "regiment of runaway slaves" in the Union Army. On 5 July 1862, MG Hunter's 23 June response was read TWICE to the entire House of Representatives. "I reply that there is no regiment of 'Fugitive Slaves'...there is, however, a fine regiment of persons whose late masters are 'Fugitive Rebels'". Hunter's full reply caused an uproar in both the House and Senate and influenced debate over the next weeks. On 17 June 1862, The Militia Act of 1862 replaced the Militia Act of 1792 as federal law. Men of color were now allowed to serve under arms. The April-June 1862 contribution of Hunter's Regiment to cause this inflection point in American History is unmistakable.

On 21 June, amongst other topics, Lincoln and his cabinet discussed MG Hunter's First South initiative. On 22 June 1862, President Lincoln privately announced his intentions to his Cabinet to issue an executive order on emancipation. Lincoln made clear that he was not yet ready to include the general arming of Blacks in such a proclamation, so the influence of Hunter's Regiment upon President Lincoln's emancipation decision is less clear. But Hunter's Regimental initiative was certainly a factor considered.

Back in Port Royal, Captain Rufus Saxton's contraband experience (Nov 1861-Mar 1862) caused his return as Brigadier General and Military Governor. Hunter's Regiment continued to drill in uniform, under arms, and under Federal leadership...but without pay. Though Hunter was clear in his authority to form a Black regiment, he had no authority to pay. Thus Hunter's persistent appeals to the Secretary of War were matched with an increase in frustration by the War Department's ambivalent non-response.

The Union Navy had expanded the Port Royal enclave to include many of the Sea Islands on the Georgia and Florida coast. The Union enclave at Saint Simons Island had become a haven for escaped slaves, subject to Confederate harassment and recapture. On 5 August 1862, Brigadier Saxton arrived to employ Captain Trowbridge's Company A in their defense. Though not formally mustered, and despite no pay, this was the first employment of Black Union soldiers during the Civil War. Company A remained on duty at Saint Simons Island until 28 October 1862. During this deployment, Company A found one of the very few literate "contraband" teaching others the fundamentals of literacy. Fourteen-year-old Susie Baker married the First South's Sergeant Edward King and became attached to the regiment for the rest of the war. After Sergeant King's passing, her second husband was a man named Taylor... Susie King Taylor's 1903 remembrances are one of the very few accountings of the First South story from the perspective of a formally enslaved person.

On 9 August, in frustration at the ambivalent posture of his direct superiors, David Hunter stood the regiment (with the exception of Company A) down. "Disbanded" is the word commonly ascribed to this period, but this is not correct. Hunter placed his project into a state of dormancy until the time when the Lincoln Administration could transition from ambiguity to certainty. That transition came on 25 August 1862 when Secretary of War Stanton asked Reverend Mansfield French and national sensation Robert Smalls to deliver the first formal approval for the establishment of Black Regiments in Port Royal to be employed in any manner the commander deems fit. Military Governor Saxton recovered Captain Trowbridge from Saint Simons Island to inform him that upon Company A, "Hunter's Regiment" would be reformed as The First South Carolina Volunteer Infantry. As Hunter's dormant regiment reformed on Camp Saxton in October 1862, LTC Oliver Beard travelled with Captain Trowbridge to Saint Simons Island where they led Company A in a series of coastal combat operations to include a brief occupation of Darien, Georgia. An early and ardent skeptic of Blacks as soldiers, the experience converted LTC Beard into an influential supporter. LTC Beard's reports from two ISCVAD November 1862 combat operations were read by the War Department and helped set the stage for the better known 1863 initiatives.

Brigadier Saxton requested his fellow Massachusetts abolitionist, Thomas W. Higginson, to accept command of The First South. On 24 November Higginson arrived at Camp Saxton, liked what he saw, and became the Regiment's Colonel. A man of letters, Colonel Higginson's prolific writing leaves a much more defined regimental history from his arrival. Without retelling the regimental history detailed in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, highlights include the first impartation of The Emancipation Proclamation, formal regimental muster, combat on the Saint Mary's River, combat in Jacksonville (the first operational employment of coordinated white and black regiments), the reception of the 54th Massachusetts in June 1863, and multiple combat operations in South Carolina's Low Country. COL Higginson was wounded on the South Edisto River on 10 July 1863. The wound caused his eventual return to Massachusetts from where he continued to champion The First South.

Captain Trowbridge rose through the regiment to become its commanding officer. On 8 February 1864, the 1SCVAD was reflagged as the 33rd Regiment of the United States Colored Troops (USCT). LTC Trowbridge and the regiment were redeployed from Morris Island to Pocotaligo on 9 December 1864 in support of the culmination of WT Sherman's March to the Sea at Savannah. After Sherman's Army passed through the First South Pocotaligo positions to advance towards Columbia, Trowbridge led the Regiment during the occupation of Savannah, then the post-war occupation of upstate South Carolina (from Hamburg to Anderson to Pickens), and ultimately the occupation of Charleston from October 1865–February 1866. Multiple First South casualties, officer and enlisted, occurred in confrontation with upstate "Un-Reconstructed Confederates" during this little-studied occupation phase. During the Charleston occupation, the regiment was visited by Ulysses Grant.

On 9 February 1866, LTC Trowbridge read his farewell address to the First South, assembled on the mass grave of the 54th Massachusetts' attack on Battery Wagner of "Glory" fame. "On the ninth day of May 1862, ... you came forth to do battle for your country and your kindred... And from that little band of hopeful, trusting, and brave men, who gathered at Camp Saxton in the fall of 1862, has grown an army of a hundred and forty thousand black soldiers, whose valor and heroism has won for your race a name which will live as long as the undying pages of history shall endure...The flag of our fathers now...beholds only freemen!"ⁱⁱ

i David Hunter, *Report of the Military Services of Gen. David Hunter* (London: Forgotten Books, 1873)
ii Thomas W. Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Army Regiment* (London: Penguin Books, 1997)



706 Craven St. Beaufort, South Carolina

On January 12, 2023, Reconstruction Era National Historical Park celebrated six years since its creation as a national monument. The park works closely with a number of community organizations to preserve sites around Beaufort County associated with the Port Royal Experiment. However, we also work with organizations, like the Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era at the University of South Carolina Beaufort, to foster intellectual curiosity and public engagement.

The dawn of widespread public education is one of the core stories of Reconstruction, and we're excited to work with the faculty, staff, and students of one of the educational institutions that served citizens of the Lowcountry during the Port Royal Experiment and Reconstruction era. By working with educational and community organizations to host programs and symposia such as this, more Americans will learn about the heroic acts of citizenship undertaken here during Reconstruction.

Officiating

Scott Teodorski, Superintendent
Reconstruction Era National Historical Park
Beaufort, South Carolina

Rev. Ernest Curtis

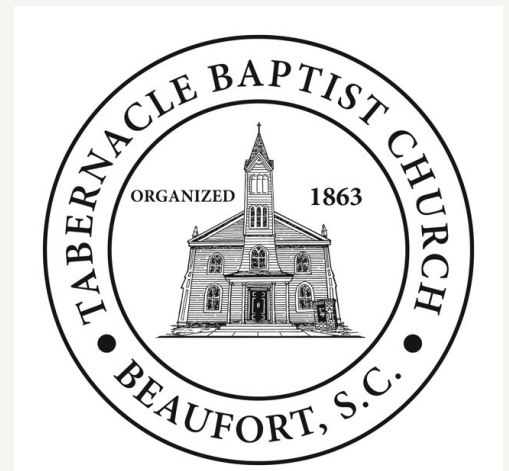
Pallbearers

Ollie Kay Ricart
Sidney Jines
Davis Duffney
Iker Guillén

OUR PARTNERS



Dick and Sharon Stewart





The Artist
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