

2024 SYMPOSIUM

# Breathing Democracy into Spaces

1<sup>ST</sup> SOUTH CAROLINA VOLUNTEERS OF AFRICAN DESCENT



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE  
RECONSTRUCTION ERA



Arts and Sciences  
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

Sponsored by a McCausland grant from The College of Arts and Sciences at the University of South Carolina, Columbia



## INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE RECONSTRUCTION ERA



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 and Reconstruction Era. 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 a McCausland grant from the College of Arts and Sciences, and funding from Dick and Sharon Stewart, we can host a second *Breathing Democracy into Spaces* symposium. We have worked with USC and USCB students in four classes researching the 1<sup>st</sup> South. In addition, Rhonda Carey, and artist Hank Herring, worked with AMI Kids on an art infused history piece to be exhibited during the symposium. The support of partners has made this research endeavor exciting and rewarding!!! We have been able to provide information on the unit to very appreciative individuals as well as institutions. We have also, along with others who work on the 1<sup>st</sup> South, created immeasurable interest in the topic.

Thank you for attending the symposium. I trust that you will enjoy a glimpse of the legacies left by the First South Carolina Volunteers. Their experiences and the tremendous efforts of the students to recover histories provide a potential blueprint for future collaborations. We ask the audience to please join us in helping uncover rich and invaluable stories of those often not included in the narrative of American History.

Sincerely,

*Valinda Littlefield*

Valinda W. Littlefield

*Valinda W. Littlefield, Ph.D., is associate professor, History, at the University of South Carolina and Interim Director, USCB Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era (ISRE). She received a B.A. in History and a B.A. in Political Science from North Carolina Central University and a Ph.D. in History from the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign. Dr. Littlefield specializes in late nineteenth and twentieth century African-American History. Her current research focuses on African American rural southern women schoolteachers during the Jim Crow era. She is a co-editor of South Carolina Women Their Lives and Times, a three-volume account of SC Women published by University of Georgia Press. She is also editor of 101 Women Who Shaped South Carolina, published by USC Press.*

*Littlefield has provided leadership in a wide variety of committee roles at USC as well as community service. She served as co-chair of the Presidential Commission on University History and as co-chair of USC 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Desegregation Commemoration Committee. She has been involved in several large oral history projects since coming to South Carolina, including Gadsden and Georgetown. She currently serves as the oral historian on South Carolina Rosenwald Schools for a WeGOJA Rosenwald Trail project. Littlefield serves or has served on the boards of the S.C. Historical Society, S.C. State Museum, the SC Authors' Academy, One Columbia, and the S.C. Council for African American Social Studies.*



April 20, 2024

Dear Esteemed Guests,

As the Mayor of the City of Beaufort, it is my great pleasure to extend to you, a warm welcome to our historic seaside community for the 2024 Symposium, Breathing Democracy into Spaces: 1st South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent.

The symposium holds significant historical and cultural importance, as it commemorates the invaluable contributions and sacrifices made by the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, a pioneering regiment of African American soldiers, during the tumultuous era of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

As the symposium delves into discussions, presentations, and reflections on this pivotal period of our nation's history, let us not only honor the bravery and resilience of those who served in the 1st South Carolina Volunteers, but also engage in meaningful dialogue about the enduring legacy of Reconstruction and the impact on our society today.

I am confident that this symposium will serve as a platform for education, enlightenment, and inspiration, fostering greater understanding and appreciation for the struggles and triumphs of those who fought for freedom and equality.

On behalf of the citizens of Beaufort, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to USCB's Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era for their dedication to preserving and sharing this important chapter of our shared heritage.

Warmest regards,  
Philip Cromer  
Mayor, City of Beaufort



## 2024 Symposium Agenda

### **Friday April 19 (6pm-8pm)**

6:00pm - 6:10pm Welcome – Kim Dudas

6:15pm - 6:50pm *Researching the 1<sup>st</sup> South* Panel Discussion - USCB Undergraduates, Zuri Fleuinord, Alexander Fox, Timmia Habersham, Thayne Mina, Micah Smith, Allante Williams

6:55pm - 7:10pm – Update - Reconstruction National Park Ranger – Chris Barr

7:15pm - 8:15pm - Reception and Viewing of Exhibit

### **Saturday April 20 (9am-4pm)**

8:00am - 8:50am - Registration, exhibit and displays open

9:00am – 9:30am - Welcome, SC 1<sup>st</sup> Park Updates, and Recognition of Partners  
Eric Skipper, Phil Cromer, Joel Samuels, Rhonda Carey

9:35am - 10:25am – Discussion with Descendants of 1<sup>st</sup> SC Volunteers - Ed Allen, Elijah Washington, Jane Ball-Groom, Julia Groom, Gerald Dawson - Elizabeth Laney, Moderator

10:30am - 11:00am -- Wyatt Erchak, Carnegie Mellon -- ‘*He said he ran away to the army*’ / ‘*He told me that he had been a sailor*’: *The Fluid Soldiers of the First South*

### **11:00am – 11:15am Break**

11:15am - 11:50am – *1<sup>st</sup> South Pension Records, Injuries and Land Deeds* - USC Graduate Students, Mark C. Canavera, Dylan T. Kobus, Zachary A. Lemhouse, Brent K. Meyers

11:55am – 12:20pm -- Mollie Barnes, USCB -- *Paper Heroines: Laura Towne, Charlotte Forten, and the Complexities of Women’s Relief Work Diaries*

### **12:20 – 1:00 pm Lunch Provided**

1:05pm - 1:30pm - O. Vernon Burton, Clemson University - *The Emancipation Proclamation*

1:35pm – 2:00pm – *1<sup>st</sup> South Emancipation, ‘Familial’ Connections, and Disabilities*, USC Graduate Students Adedoyin E. Adekunle, Angelica Williams, Kyle T. Chin

2:05pm – 2:40pm – MAJ Tom McShea, West Point - *Recruiting by Liberation: A Geospatial Analysis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina (34<sup>th</sup> USCT) Muster Roll*

2:45pm – 3:15pm – Ben Hodges, LTG, US Army (RET), Chris Allen, Colonel, US Army (RET)  
*Sergeant Robert Sutton and Our Quest for the Florida Connection*

3:20pm – 3:55pm -- Updates -- 1<sup>st</sup> South Carolina -- Valinda Littlefield, Elizabeth Laney and Chelsey Johnson, Kimberly N. Morgan

### **4:00pm – Closing Remarks**

## Descendant Stories



**Joseph Edward Allen** attended Robert Smalls High School and the Cincinnati College of Mortuary Science, graduating in 1970 with a certificate in Mortuary Science. He completed his internship with Leevy Funeral Home in Columbia, South Carolina. Allen returned home in 1972 to become the Director of Transportation for the Beaufort-Jasper Comprehensive Health Services, Incorporation, where he stayed for two years. Allen became the first director of the then newly created Beaufort County Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and the first African American EMS director in the state of South Carolina. He served in this role for 33 years, retiring in August 2007. And all the while during this not-so-small obligation, he also worked as a licensed funeral director and embalmer. Allen's retirement from Beaufort County EMS created an opportunity for another full-time commitment when he transitioned to County Coroner. In November 2008, Allen was elected the first African American Coroner of Beaufort County, South Carolina since the Reconstruction Era. He served in this capacity for 12 years and oversaw the building of the first county-owned Coroners' Office and Morgue in 2010.



**Rev. Dr. Elijah Washington, MD** was born in Sheldon, SC. He graduated from Robert Smalls High School in 1959, Morehouse College in 1963 and worked as a high school teacher in Jasper County for one year. He entered Meharry Medical College in Nashville, Tennessee in 1964 and graduated 1968. Washington served in the US Navy where he completed an internship and later served as a general medical officer. In 1972 he began his training in Obstetrics and Gynecology at the College of Medicine and Dentistry in Newark, New Jersey and completed it in 1975. Over the next several years, he was employed by Beaufort-Jasper Comprehensive Health Services until he worked in private practice for ten years. He closed his private practice and returned to Beaufort-Jasper-Hampton Comprehensive Health Services and retired in 2005. Dr. Washington received his Doctor of Ministry Degree at Bethany Theological Seminary in Dothan, Alabama in 1992. He served as pastor of Mount Calvary Baptist Church in Lobeco, South Carolina. He currently serves as pastor of First African Baptist Church, St. Helena Island, South Carolina. He is married to the former Joyce B. Brown of Beaufort, S.C.



**Jane Ball-Groom** is a dedicated human services worker and community development advocate with more than 40+ years in cross-functional and results-oriented program development. Her core strengths of visionary thinking, strategic planning, and effective collaborating are embedded in her philosophy of "purpose culminating into positive community impact." She is an accomplished grants writer, motivational speaker, civil rights advocate, and author. Ms. Ball-Groom founded, incorporated, and directed two non-profit human resource organizations, one of which she currently serves as Executive Director, celebrating 23 years of service to individuals living in marginalized communities in rural North Carolina. Her work in planning and implementing innovative workforce, life skills, and empowering training strategies has assisted more than 450 individuals. Programs include community-based initiatives like EMERGE Career Ready boot camps, Arts Ancestry Connecting Roots, Inspire Creative Writing, Golden Journeys, and HOPE Rural Healthcare. She is the recipient of numerous professional certificates and awards, including the Oakley Hall Literary Award and the Delta Sigma Theta 2023 Women in Leadership recognition.



**Julia Marie Groom** is the Program Coordinator for Wake Invests in Women (WIIW) at Wake Technical Community College in Raleigh, North Carolina. Prior to joining WIIW, she managed two high school STEM career academies for the Wake County Public Schools System and was a Technology and Science teacher. Her public-school teaching experience started in Vance County Schools in Henderson, North Carolina as a middle school science teacher. She also served as a Human Resources Development | Adult Basic Education instructor for Vance-Granville Community College. Julia has a passion for motivating and helping others which was a catalyst to co-develop an empowerment | employment training program called EMERGE (Empowerment, Mentoring, Resources, to Gain Employment), which received funding from the Workforce Investment Act. Julia co-developed this innovative program with her mother Emily. Julia holds a masters in School Administration from North Carolina State University and a BA in Political Science from North Carolina Central University.



**Gerald Dawson** is a native of Beaufort County and received his education from Beaufort County schools. Dawson is a Beaufort County Council member from District One. He has worked as a paramedic with Beaufort County EMS. Mr. Dawson is also a retired USPS letter carrier and an associate minister of Mount Carmel Baptist Church of Dale, South Carolina. His community involvement includes Past President of the James J. Davis Elementary School Parent-Teacher Organization, Instructor with Parris Island Ministries Campus Crusade for Christ. Member of the Governor's Comprehensive Strategies for Prevention (G-CAP). As a County Council member, he serves on the Community Service and Land Use and the Finance, Administration, and Economic Development Committees. Dawson also serves as the County Council liaison for Burton Fire District Commission, Construction Adjustments and Appeals Board, Historic Preservation Board and Department of Veterans Affairs.

## Guest Presenters



**Wyatt Erchak** is a research scholar with the [Freedom on the Move](#) project and doctoral candidate at Carnegie Mellon University where he studies nineteenth-century American history, slavery, revolution, and warfare across the Atlantic world. His dissertation, “Private Wrongs: A Hidden History of the American Civil War’s First Black Union Regiment,” is the first bottom-up study of the First South Carolina Volunteers, the original Black unit of the Union Army to be raised in the Deep South, whose ranks predominantly consisted of formerly enslaved soldiers. It documents their fluid identities and the continuity of wartime actions from prewar lives and labor as they pioneered the destruction of slavery from below, arguing that the First South’s Civil War was personal and ideological: a war within the war. He holds degrees from Skidmore College and the State University of New York at Albany.



**Mollie Barnes** is Associate Professor of English at the University of South Carolina Beaufort and Vice President of the Margaret Fuller Society. She has published nearly a dozen articles and book chapters on nineteenth-century women writers, most recently in *ESQ: A Journal of Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture*, *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers*, and *College Literature*. Her book — *Paper Heroines: How Women Reformers Wrote One Another’s Lives in the Sea Islands, 1838–1902* (University of South Carolina Press, forthcoming 2025) — studies the ways women documented their own and one another’s lives in diaries and biographies, focusing especially on the intersection of race and gender. She was awarded a 2023 National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Stipend to support research for this project.



**Orville Vernon Burton** is the Judge Matthew J. Perry Distinguished Professor of History and Geography and Professor of Global Black Studies, Sociology and Anthropology, and Computer Science at Clemson University. Burton taught for 34 years at the University of Illinois, where he is emeritus University Distinguished Teacher/Scholar. Burton has served as president of the Southern Historical Association and of the Agricultural History Society. He is the prize-winning author and scholar of more than twenty books and nearly three hundred articles. *The Age of Lincoln* (2007) won the *Chicago Tribune* Heartland Literary Award for Nonfiction and was selected for Book of the Month Club, History Book Club, and Military Book Club. His co-authored *Justice Deferred: Race and the Supreme Court* (2021) was deemed “authoritative and highly readable” by Randall Kennedy of Harvard Law School. In 2016, Burton received the Governor’s Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities from the South Carolina Humanities Council, and in 2021 he was awarded the Benjamin E. Mays Legacy Award. In 2022 he was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. Collegium of Scholars at Morehouse College and received the Southern Historical Association’s John Hope Franklin Lifetime Achievement Award.



**Ben Hodges**, Lieutenant General (RET), the former Commanding General of U.S. Army Europe (2014-2017), currently serves as NATO Senior Mentor for Logistics and as a Distinguished Fellow with GLOBSEC. He serves *pro bono* on several civic advocacy boards. He consults for companies on Europe, NATO, and the European Union, and is co-author of *Future War and the Defense of Europe*, published by Oxford University Press. Hodges is a regular presence in U.S. and international media. He offers insight and analysis on NATO, U.S. and European security, the upcoming U.S. election and its implications, human rights, and other geostrategic topics. He was most recently Senior Advisor to Human Rights First, a non-profit, nonpartisan international human rights organization based in the United States.



**Christopher Allen**, Colonel (RET), US Army Special Forces, made his career as a United States Army officer serving in Korea and Vietnam. Allen graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point in 1980. He served at the tactical level in Germany during the Cold War and in the Middle East during the First and Second Gulf Wars. Allen also served in Washington, D.C. at the Army institutional level, with the U.S. Embassies in Kabul and Baghdad, and multiple tours with the Office of the Defense Representative in Pakistan and U.S. Special Operations Command. Allen retired from uniformed service in 2009 but returned to government service as a Department of Defense Civilian in direct support of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Allen committed to making the Lowcountry his home and became a disciple of Dr. Larry Rowland and a student of Dr. Steve Wise. He has served as a Beaufort History Museum docent, on the Santa Elena Foundation Board of Directors, as a National Park Service Reconstruction Era National Park Ranger, and is currently the Vice President of the Beaufort County Historical Society.



**MAJ Tom McShea**, US Army, was born in Cornwall, New York and graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2010. He was commissioned as an Armor officer and was first assigned to 1-32 Cavalry, 1st Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Bastogne), 101st Airborne (Air Assault) at Fort Campbell. There he served as a Scout Platoon Leader, Troop Executive Officer, and deployed to Kunar, Afghanistan as a combat advisor to an Afghan National Army reconnaissance company. Following Career Course, CPT McShea was assigned to 2-1 Cavalry, 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 4th Infantry Division at Fort Carson. There he served as the Squadron Planner and completed two Troop commands over 22 months. Following command, CPT McShea entered the University of Georgia and graduated in 2020 with an MA in American History. He is currently an instructor in the American History Division at the United States Military Academy. His area of research and teaching include, The American Civil War Era, The Hudson Valley and New York City History and GIS.



**Elizabeth Laney** is a professional historian, genealogist, and public speaker. She has always had a passion for history and interpretation, which she honed while working at historic sites such as the Frederick Douglass National Historic Site, Drayton Hall Plantation, Charles Towne Landing, and Redcliffe Plantation. Laney holds bachelor's degrees in Anthropology and History, a master's degree in museum studies, and is currently working on her second master's degree at the University of South Carolina. She has been published in the *Journal of the South Carolina Historical Association*, the *Journal of the Georgia Association of Historians*, and *Ancestry Magazine*. She is currently the Graduate Assistant for the Institute for the Study of the Reconstruction Era at USC Beaufort.



**Kimberly N. Morgan** is a professional genealogist specializing in African American research and genetic genealogy. She is the Lead Genealogist for the PBS television series, "Finding Your Roots", where she often works closely with Lead Genetic Genealogist CeCe Moore. She is also a Contract Genealogist for the US Army's Past Conflict Reparations Branch. Over the past two decades, Ms. Morgan has worked with clients to include the Smithsonian Channel, the International African American Museum, and archeological firms on a variety of projects.



# 2024 Symposium Presentations

## Wyatt Erchak

*He said he ran away to the army' / 'He told me that he had been a sailor': The Fluid Soldiers of the First South.*

When the first Black Union regiment appeared, its ranks were predominantly filled by formerly—and recently—enslaved men, and at formation its existence lacked explicit authorization. Some of its soldiers were never considered as such and thus condemned to historical silence, while at the same time many were much more: guerillas, sailors, pilots, spies, laborers, and a great deal between. This paper considers the fundamental fluidity of the “First South” to explore diverse paths walked by its soldiers as freedom seekers and freedom fighters who sought ways to serve the cause, themselves, and their networks. In the stories of these individuals both inside and out of proper military structures told primarily in their own words, we can glimpse a different, hidden history of the Civil War.

## Mollie Barnes

*Paper Heroines: Laura Towne, Charlotte Forten, and the Complexities of Women's Relief Work Diaries*

My presentation studies the diaries of two women activists—Laura Towne and Charlotte Forten, the white teacher who founded the Penn School and its first Black teacher, respectively—who wrote side-by-side in the same house, perhaps even in the same room, while they lived on St. Helena Island and served as relief workers for the Port Royal Relief Commission. My archival research reveals many references to Forten in Towne's diaries that were edited and extracted by Rupert Sargent Holland, her white male editor; his edition is the only way to access Towne in print outside the Penn School Papers special collections. I demonstrate that recovering and close reading these entries—and the diaries in full and in conversation with one another—shows just how complicated Sea Islands relief work was, especially when we factor the intersectional dynamics of race, class, and gender.

## O. Vernon Burton

*The Emancipation Proclamation*

The Emancipation Proclamation captured the public imagination with the idea of burgeoning freedom. According to historian John Hope Franklin, it had a major effect on the course of the war. “At home it sharpened the issues of the war and provided a moral and humanitarian ingredient that had been lacking.” As a war measure, it was very effective as southerners had to put even greater emphasis on controlling their enslaved workers. Although it would take several years and the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the Constitution to make it official nationwide, the end of slavery was now U. S. policy, and as a justice measure as well as a war measure. Frederick Douglass wrote, “We shout for joy that we live to record this righteous decree.” This talk discusses the history behind the Emancipation Proclamation and the meaning we ascribe to it today.

## LTG US Army (RET), Ben Hodges & Colonel, US Army (RET) Chris Allen

*Sergeant Robert Sutton and Our Quest for the Florida Connection*

The 1862 First South was a regional regiment. About 50% of the men were "contraband" from coastal South Carolina, 25% were from coastal Georgia, and 25% were from coastal Florida. As a native Floridian, Ben wanted to explore his state's connection to the Union's first-formed black regiment. In 2023, Chris and Ben found their way to the Alberti Plantation, from which Robert Sutton self-emancipated in 1862, found his way to the Union contraband enclave at Saint Simons Island, to enlist in the First South at Camp Saxton in November 1862. Colonel Higginson leveraged Robert's knowledge of the Saint Mary's River in the conduct of a series of raids into the heart of the Confederacy in January 1863. Chris will illuminate Sergeant Sutton as a soldier, then Lieutenant General Ben will share his personal embrace of Floridians like Robert in particular, and the First South Carolina Volunteer Infantry (African Descent) in general.

## MAJ Tom McShea

*Recruiting by Liberation: A Geospatial Analysis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina (34<sup>th</sup> USCT) Muster Roll*

The talk examines recruiting patterns in the 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina, highlighting how recruiting to fill out the regiment was often a primary or secondary objective of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> South Carolina operations.

# Student Presenters



**Timmia Habersham**



**Micah Smith**



**Thayne Mina**



**Zuri Fleuinord**

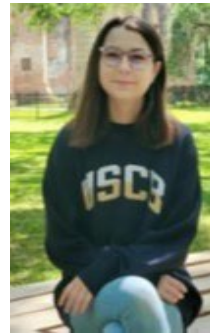


**Alexander Fox**



**Allante Williams**

**AFM B201, Introduction to African American Studies  
Dr. Najmah Thomas**



**HIST B492 American Ideas  
Dr. James Shinn**

**Grace Fairish**

**Poster Session:**

This 2023 USCB History Class project was created by Grace Farish and Samantha Mischke examining property ownership of 1st South Carolina Regiment soldiers in downtown Beaufort. Property records from the 1860 were compared to lists of service members' pension records containing personal information including home addresses. The two students embarked on a physical exploration of several neighborhoods to photograph homes previously owned by 1st SC soldiers. The photos of the homes were paired with the individuals' ownership records, current and historic maps, labeled with the soldiers' names and overlaid into a graphic display.



**Brent Meyers**



**Adedoyin Adekunle**



**Dylan Kobus**



**Angelica Williams**



**Chelsea Johnson**

**Undergraduate Research Assistant  
USC Columbia**



**Kyle Chin**



**Kathryn Greenburg**



**Zach Lemhouse**



**Mark Canavera**

**HIST 599, Breathing Democracy into Spaces  
Dr. Valinda Littlefield**

## Arts Infused Learning AMI Kids Beaufort



After learning lessons about the 1SCVAD and their contributions and impact during the Civil War, students examined themes centered in personal stories and individual character. With newly acquired knowledge of West African Adinkra symbolism, they explored themes such as valor, bravery, freedom, and brotherhood. The students collaborated on the design and build of a unique art project which is an infusion of a mix of creative elements, and history lessons that represent the legacy of these great men and those who “served” with them.



Hank D. Herring.

“We are only limited by our imaginations. I believe, art should stir the soul and ignite the imagination”.

### About the Artist

Hank D. Herring is the owner of the Green Herring Art and Framing Studio, on Bay Street in Beaufort, SC. Hank learned about art at an early age from watching and being instructed by artistic family members and school art programs.

Hank served in the Marine Corps for twenty years working as a machinist. This allowed him to learn more creative ways to manipulate metals, plastic, glass, and composite materials into art. This helped Hank make a correlation between found objects and life lessons that he expresses in his art. His work with rescued materials illustrates that “beauty can be found in most anything”.

Hank mentors in public and private schools, and has served as a teaching artist for the Kennedy Center’s Teaching Artist Program and the Low Country Arts Integration Project with Beaufort County School District. He served as a board member for the South Carolina Arts Alliance (SCAA) and as a consultant on local arts organizations’ special projects.

His work has been featured in museums and galleries throughout the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Japan, and Australia.



## ADMINISTRATORS, FACULTY AND STAFF



Dr. Al M. Panu  
Chancellor  
USCB



Eric Skipper  
Executive Vice Chancellor  
for Academic Affairs USCB



Joel H. Samuels  
Dean  
College of Arts & Sciences  
USC



Kim Dudas  
Assistant Vice Chancellor  
for Academic Innovation  
USCB



James Shinn Jr., PhD  
Assistant, Professor of History  
USCB



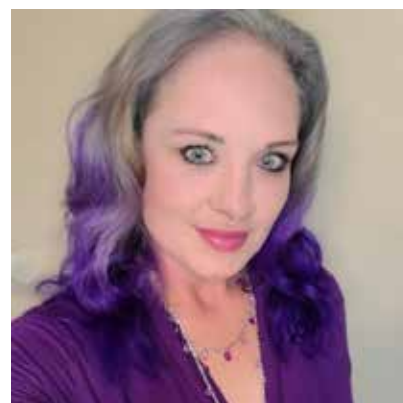
Najmah Thomas, PhD  
Associate Professor, Public Health & Human Services  
USCB



Timothy M. James, PhD  
Professor of History  
USCB



Rhonda Carey  
Coordinator - Projects & Programs  
ISRE



Anna Ard-Roberts  
Administrative Assistant  
ISRE & Academic Affairs





A YEAR IN PICTURES

## **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 (1SCVAD). 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 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts marched through Boston enroute to Port Royal, South Carolina. But the pioneering service of three 1862 pioneering Black Regiments (1SCVAD, 1<sup>st</sup> 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 1SCVAD, 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 1SCVAD 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".<sup>1</sup> 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 Suzy 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. Suzy 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 1SCVAD November 1862 combat



operations were read by the War Department and helped set the stage for the better known 1863 initiatives.

Brigadier Saxton's 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 54<sup>th</sup> 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 33<sup>rd</sup> 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 54<sup>th</sup> 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!"<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> David Hunter, *Report of the Military Services of Gen. David Hunter, U.S.A, during The War of the Rebellion made to the U.S. War Department, 1873*, New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1873, Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/reportofmilitary01hunt/page/n7/mode/2up>, pp. 22-23.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, Boston: Fields, Osgood & Co., 1870, Hathi Trust: <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100768968>, pp. 292-294.



# READING GUIDE

*1st South Carolina Volunteers of African Descent*

## *Susie King Taylor* **REMINISCENCES OF MY LIFE IN CAMP**

An African  
American  
Woman's  
Civil War  
Memoir



INTRODUCTION BY CATHERINE CLINTON

## FIRST HAND ACCOUNTS

### *Reminiscences of My Life in Camp*

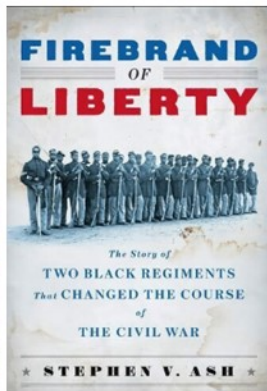
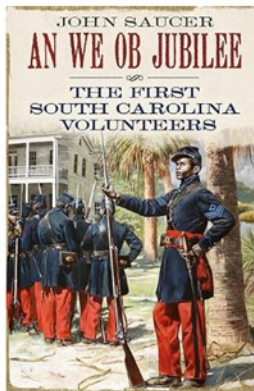
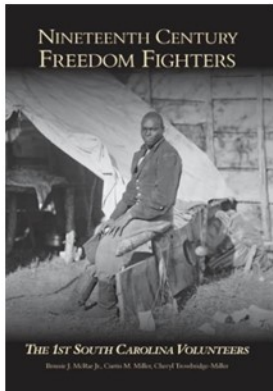
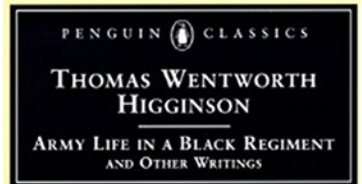
Susie King Taylor (available for free online)

### *Army Life in a Black Regiment*

Thomas Wentworth Higginson

### *"Wartime Letters from Seth Rogers, M.D."*

by Seth Rogers, 1st SC Regimental Surgeon  
(available for free online)



## BOOKS ABOUT THE 1ST SOUTH

### *Nineteenth Century Freedom Fighters*

Bennie J. McCrae, Cheryl Trowbridge  
Miller & Curtis Miller

### *An We Ob Jubilee* by John Saucer

### *Firebrand of Liberty* by Stephen V. Ash

## SCHOLARLY DISSERTATIONS

### *"Wounds that Bind: A Comparative Study of the Role Played by Civil War Veterans of African Descent in Community Formation in Massachusetts and South Carolina, 1865-1915"*

Lisa Y. King, Howard University Dissertation  
available through Proquest.com

### *"Private Wrongs: A Hidden History of the American Civil War's First Black Union Regiment"*

Wyatt Erchak, Carnegie Mellon University Dissertation  
Forthcoming 2025

## LOCAL HISTORIES

### *Sea Island Diary: A History of St. Helena Island*

Edith M. Dabbs

### *Gawd Dun Smile Pun We: Beaufort Isles*

Marquette L. Goodwine

### *They Served: Stories of the US Colored Troops from Hilton Head, SC* The Heritage Library, Hilton Head

# A SPECIAL THANK YOU

## **USC College of Arts & Sciences McCausland Grant**

## **Dick and Sharon Stewart Foundation**

Alpha Graphics of Beaufort  
AMI Kids Beaufort  
Aramark  
Beaufort Regional Chamber of Commerce Beaufort  
Community Partnership  
Beaufort Convention & Visitors Bureau  
Beaufort Historical Society  
City of Beaufort  
Beaufort Grand Army of the Republic Hall  
Greater Beaufort Port Royal  
Holmes Catering  
Second Founding of America  
South Carolina Council for the Social Studies South  
Carolina Council for African American Studies  
South Carolina Historical Association  
Spring Hill Suites Beaufort  
USC Communications and Marketing  
USC Press

Ed Allen  
Anna Ard-Roberts  
Chris Barr  
Gina Baker  
Claudia Benitez-Nelson  
Nathan Betcher  
William Bleach  
Grace Cordial  
Lori Carey  
Rhonda Carey  
Anthony Carey  
Dawn Dawson-House  
Tim Devine  
Bryan Gentry  
James Gibbons  
William Gibbons  
Leigh-Anne Hansell  
Bonnie Hargrove  
Hank Herring  
Rev Kenneth Hodges  
Shalama Jackson  
Matthew Kingdom  
Elizabeth Laney  
Scott Marshall  
Councilman Mitch Mitchell  
Martha Moriarty  
Rufus Pinkney  
Megan Plott  
Alvesta Robertson  
James Shinn  
Andrea Sisino  
Jeremy Smalls  
Larry Thomas  
Najmah Thomas  
Candy Van Tine  
Dr. Elijah Washington  
Kathleen Williams  
Sonya Zatalokin

# 2024 Symposium Partners



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA BEAUFORT

History Department | African American Studies

Marketing & Communications | Center for the Arts



Green Herring





