

**“During the Civil war Mr. Mayo served in Company K, 27th Regiment U. S. Colored Troops, and at the time of his death was a member of Ransom Reed G.A.R. It was said of him that he made a good soldier.”**  
*Obituary for Samuel Mayo, Marysville (Ohio) Journal-Tribune, Jan. 22, 1912*



U.S. COLORED TROOPS (USCT) soldiers near Petersburg are photographed a week after the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg in 1864. The casualty count for Black soldiers was 1,327 and 450 captured. Many were killed after surrendering. John Logan, Isaac Paul, and other Rockbridge men took part and Thomas Clark died there.



THE MILITARY tombstone for Samuel Mayo (c.1820-1912) can be found in Oakdale Cemetery, Marysville, Ohio. Born in Rockbridge County, he was the first caretaker for the cemetery, and at his request, was buried in the Soldier's Circle.

## Fighting For Freedom

### Stories Of Black Union Soldiers From Rockbridge Finally Told

*Editor's note: This is the first of a two-part series about the Black men from Rockbridge County who served in Union regiments during the Civil War. The authors are Larry Spurgeon, Rockbridge Historical Society board member, and Cinder Stanton, retired Monticello historian. A full roster of the soldiers, biographical summaries, and a Zoom presentation from June 14, 2021, can be accessed at the RHS website: <https://rockbridgehistory.org/>.*

The ghosts of the Civil War linger in Rockbridge County, from the tombs of generals to the many CSA grave markers for soldiers who returned to quiet lives. A century and a half later the monuments and memorials are the focus of reverence, and controversy. No grave markers or memorials can be found in Rockbridge for one group of veterans. Their stories were never known, for they enlisted in distant places, in Union regiments, to fight for freedom.

This ongoing research project was sparked by the military service record for John Logan of the 5th Regiment, United States Colored Infantry (USCT). Born to a free woman of color, Logan registered as a “free Negro” in 1860, in Lexington, and three years later enlisted in Ohio. His last years were at a Soldiers and Sailors Home in Sandusky, Ohio, where he died in 1916.

More than 60 Black men from Rockbridge have been identified, serving in 31 army regiments, and two in the Union Navy. Most were farmers and laborers; others were coopers, carpenters, waiters, a blacksmith, a barber, a shoemaker, a medic, a cook, and a porter. At enlistment they ranged in age from 17 to 50, in height from 5’2” to 6’1”. A quarter were non-commissioned officers – five sergeants and 11 corporals. About a quarter died, all but one from disease. Thomas Clark of the 27th USCT was killed at the Battle of the Crater, at Petersburg on July 30, 1864.

This part describes how the Rockbridge men came to enlist in 14 states, many in the Confederacy. Nearly half were free before the war and enlisted in the north. A second group had been sold or taken by their owners to other slaveholding states. Almost a dozen men escaped from slavery when Gen. David Hunter’s Union troops swept through Rockbridge in June 1864.

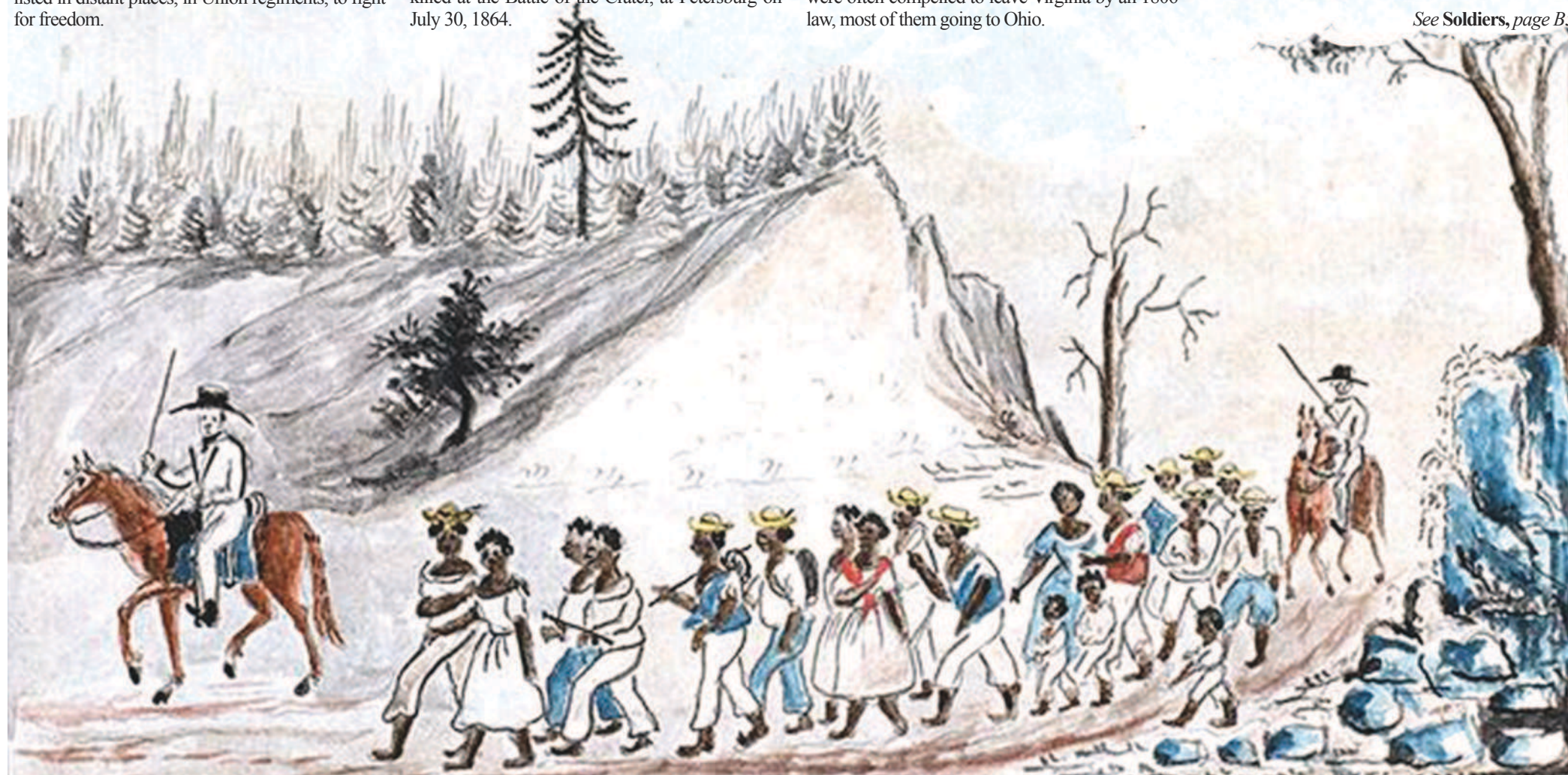
#### Free Before The War

According to the 1860 federal census, there were about 400 free Blacks and 4,000 enslaved people in Rockbridge County – respectively 2.4% and 23% of the entire population of 17,248. By then many of those who were free born had migrated north voluntarily, seeking a better life, unburdened by increasingly restrictive laws. Enslaved families who became free through emancipation, however, were often compelled to leave Virginia by an 1806 law, most of them going to Ohio.

As many as eight of the Rockbridge soldiers were born free. Because children gained legal status from their mothers, the offspring of free women were forever free. John Logan, mentioned above, was freeborn because his grandmother, Ann McGinnis, was a white woman. She had lived in Rockbridge County since the early 1800s and by 1860 more than 40 of her mixed-race descendants lived here as free persons.

Jeremiah Moore, who served in an artillery regiment, had free grandparents who moved to Rockbridge from Amherst County about 1813, and all their many descendants were freeborn. His parents, Gabriel and Elizabeth Empey Moore, took their extended family to eastern Indiana in 1830, an area with a strong Quaker presence and an active Underground Railroad.

*See Soldiers, page B5*



“SOLD TO TENNESSEE,” a watercolor by folk artist Lewis Miller (1796-1882), shows a coffle of enslaved people being taken from Staunton to Tennessee about 1853. (The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Museum, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation)



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# Soldiers

*continued from page B1*

Samuel and David Kenney were members of a free Black family with native American heritage that had arrived from Louisa County by the 1830s. They enlisted in the 54th and 55th Massachusetts and Samuel Kenney was severely wounded in the assault on Fort Wagner. Interestingly, all the Rockbridge-born enlistees in those two famous regiments seem to have been born free.

The men freed from slavery before enlisting are much harder to trace than the freeborn men, who appear in a variety of public records. We know the back stories of just a few of them because they are mentioned in the wills of men and women who were emancipators. These documents reveal the strategies that were necessary to avoid the worst effects of the 1806 removal law, which required all slaves freed after that date to leave the state of Virginia within a year.

Isaac Paul, a soldier of the 27th USCT who died in the war, was freed in infancy. Esther Paul bequeathed freedom to his large family in 1828. Knowing her neighbors would not look kindly on a dozen additional free people of color in their midst, she left her estate to Isaac's grandmother, Sarah Paul, to enable her to buy "a settlement in some one of the free States." By 1830 the Pauls were in Ohio.

Robert Allen, also of the 27th USCT, became free because his mother, Hannah, was emancipated by the will of David Templeton in 1824. Hannah Allen had what is known as an "abroad" marriage, a common occurrence in Rockbridge County. Her husband was enslaved by someone other than Templeton. How could Hannah Allen be freed without separating her from her husband? Probably in consultation with Hannah herself, Templeton arranged for more than 20 local white citizens to sign her petition for permission to remain in Rockbridge. She was granted a rare exemption by the Virginia legislature and stayed for two more decades, until all her family members finally gained their freedom. They then left for the border of Pike and Ross counties in Ohio, a magnet for free and freed Blacks leaving Virginia and the same area where the Pauls had settled. Thomas Clark, who died at the Crater, also lived here, as did Madison Hemings, the son of Sally Hemings and Thomas Jefferson.

This close-knit rural community of color included successful land-owning farmers, conductors on the Underground Railroad, and people making persistent efforts to provide an education for their children, something that had not been possible in Virginia.

The more than 20 Rockbridge men who enlisted in Ohio served through some of the most grueling months of the war, especially the long campaign to capture Petersburg and Richmond,

which included the horrific Battle of the Crater and the hard-fought Battle of New Market Heights. Five Rockbridge men fought with the 5th USCT in this battle, in which the Black troops distinguished themselves for their bravery and four men in this regiment earned Medals of Honor.

## Taken South And West

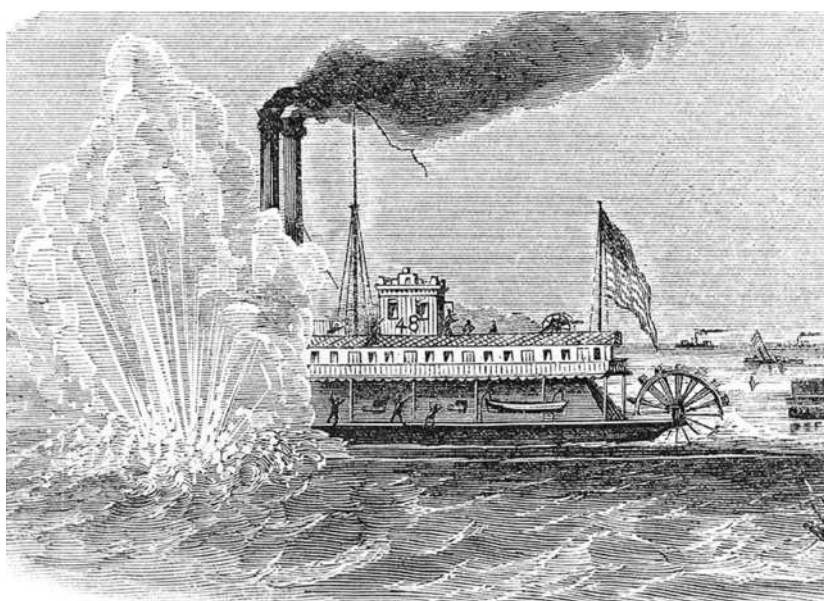
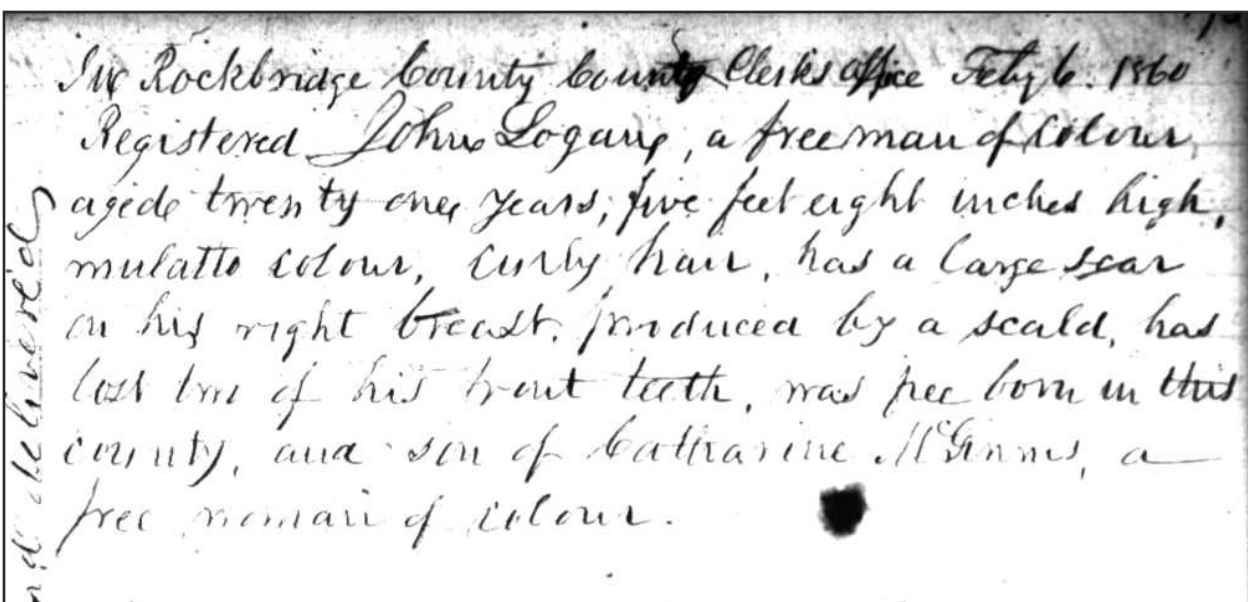
As the Virginia economy transitioned from tobacco to wheat, slaveowners had a "surplus" of enslaved people. In the half century before the Civil War hundreds of thousands of enslaved people in the upper south were sold or taken to plantations in the Deep South. The number of people taken from Rockbridge is unknown, but in 1836 nearly four dozen enslaved people were sold by Washington College to Samuel Garland of Lynchburg, who took them to Hinds County, Mississippi. Governor and Congressman James McDowell Jr. of Lexington owned 15 enslaved people in Mississippi at his death in 1851.

Six Rockbridge soldiers enlisted in Mississippi, another six in Tennessee, others in Arkansas, Louisiana, and North Carolina. Most fled to the Union army as it moved through the places where they were enslaved, as the dates of enlistment show. Charles Williams, at 50 the oldest Rockbridge soldier, enlisted April 10, 1863, at Helena, Arkansas, under Union control since 1862. Williams joined the 1st Arkansas Volunteer Infantry Regiment (African Descent), soon designated the 46th USCT. The regiment was sent to Texas in 1865 and Williams died of disease in May on Brazos Santiago Island.

The Mississippi campaign by the Union army began in April 1863, near Grand Gulf, where Emmanuel Washington and Horace Lacy enlisted. From there General Grant's army moved east and captured the capital of Jackson on May 14, then turned west towards Vicksburg, the ultimate prize. The long siege ended with a Union victory on July 4, 1863, the day after Pickett's Charge at Gettysburg. Two Rockbridge men enlisted at Vicksburg, Alfred Holmes, on July 5, and Andrew Logan, a medic, in October. Both died there of disease.

From the fall of 1863, a series of General Orders were issued to increase recruitment of Black soldiers in "border states" - slaveholding states that remained in the Union. These promised emancipation to the enlistees and "a just compensation" up to \$300 to their "loyal" owners. Two Rockbridge men enlisted in Kentucky, and a half dozen were among the thousands of Missouri slaves who escaped to Union lines to join the fight for the Union and an end to slavery. One of them, Scott Camal, escaped to the new free state of Kansas, and became the first Rockbridge soldier to enlist.

Two other runaways, Samuel McCorkle and John Beal, had been enslaved



DESTRUCTION OF THE TIN-CLAD No. 48, APRIL 1, 1865.

ABOVE is John Logan's registration in Rockbridge County as a "Free Negro," February 1860. He would serve in the 5th Regiment, USCT, during the Civil War. AT LEFT is an image of the USS Rodolph striking a mine in Mobile Bay, Alabama, in 1865. Joseph Wilson, 33, joined the Union Navy in August 1863, and served on two ships, including the USS Rodolph. Several men were killed in the destruction of the Rodolph. Wilson's fate is unknown.

by Rockbridge resident William McCorkle, who relocated to Carroll County, Missouri, in the 1850s. Samuel McCorkle joined the 1st Missouri Colored Infantry (later the 62nd USCT). Hospitalized twice in New Orleans, he was promoted to corporal and then demoted. After mustering out in Texas, he returned to Missouri to live with his family on his own farm and died in 1915. In 1866, the administrator of William McCorkle's estate filed a claim for \$300 for the loss of John Beal, a dubious one since McCorkle had served in the Confederate army. Congress ended the compensation program in 1867, and neither McCorkle's heirs nor many former Missouri owners received any funds for the men they had held in bondage.

## When Hunter Came

The turbulent four-day occupation of Lexington by Federal troops in June 1864 gave many enslaved people in Rockbridge an opportunity to break the bonds of slavery. "The servants are flocking away," noted one VMI faculty

wife. At least 11 Black men from Rockbridge, who later enlisted in Union regiments, left with an army wagon train, which carried sick and wounded soldiers, Confederate prisoners, and a great number of no-longer-enslaved men, women, and children to Union-held towns in West Virginia. For two weeks nearly 200 wagons lumbered up and down mountains, passing by the Sweet and White Sulphur Springs, dodging bullets fired by bushwhackers, and often changing course to avoid well-defended Confederate breastworks.

One of the men who made his escape by this route, Jackson Baldock, said years later: "I ... was owned by William Paxton. I ran away during the war and enlisted at Cleveland O. about month after ..." He served with Robert Allen and Isaac Paul in the 27th USCT, but most of the escaping men enlisted in the West Virginia regiment, the 45th USCT, within a week or two of their arrival at Union posts in Grafton, Webster, and Wheeling, determined to fight for freedom and the

union. The motto of their regimental flag was "One Cause, One Country."

This regiment was at the heart of the Petersburg siege, was present at Appomattox for the surrender, and endured post-war months on the bleak Texas-Mexico border. It appears that none of these men, whose ages ranged from 19 to 28, returned to live in Rockbridge, although one, Benjamin Wade, remained a Virginian, living on his own farm in Fairfax County. After the war, Jackson Baldock settled in a farming community near Cincinnati.

Another man who chose liberty when the Union troops came to Lexington was George Edmondson, a descendant of Monticello's Hemings family. After mustering out of the army in Texas, he returned to Rockbridge to collect his wife and children and took them back to West Virginia to live.

The stories of several Rockbridge soldiers, including Scott Camal and George Edmondson, will be told in Part 2.

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