

“Mr. Scott Cornell, the irrepressible prospector of this place, struck it big this last week... Mr. Cornell lost his left leg during the civil war, and it is hoped he has found a bonanza.”

Yerington (Nevada) Times, December 17, 1910



GEORGE EDMONDSON, who was enslaved in Rockbridge County, escaped to West Virginia with a Union wagon train after the occupation of Lexington by Gen. David Hunter's troops in June 1864. While he enlisted in the 45th USCT in Wheeling, he was quickly transferred to a Pennsylvania regiment, the 127th, whose battle flag is pictured here. The flag bears the motto "We will prove ourselves men."

Fighting For Freedom Black Union Soldiers From Rockbridge, Part 2

Editor's note: Part 1 of this two-part series explained the circumstances for how more than 60 Black men from Rockbridge County enlisted in 14 states to serve in Union regiments during the Civil War. This part focuses on the stories of some of them. 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/>.

WILLIAM MOORE

Three Rockbridge men served in the famous 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment. While we know little about the lives of David Moore and Samuel Kenney, William Moore left a paper trail.

He enlisted after the regiment's heroic assault on Fort Wagner in July 1863 but was present during the prolonged struggle for equal rights pursued by the men of the 54th and its sister regiment, the 55th Massachusetts. They went without pay for 18 months in their determination to be compensated at the same rate as white Union soldiers. As Company D in the 55th wrote President Lincoln at the height of the protest, "We came to fight for liberty, justice & equality. These are gifts we prize more highly than gold." In October 1863 William Moore had traveled 900 miles to Boston in order to fight for those ideals, leaving a wife and young daughter behind in Indiana. He was unable to send funds home to his family until September 1864, after Congress finally authorized equal pay.

Moore, the freeborn son of Jordan and Catharine Moore, had left Rockbridge County for eastern Indiana in the late 1850s - almost 30 years after his aunt and uncle moved into the Whitewater Valley, an area settled in the first decades of the century by Quakers from North Carolina. In 1858 William Moore married Minerva Weaver in Randolph County, where antislavery activities were particularly prevalent. They lived in the Cabin Creek settlement, a large rural Black community well-known for its participation in the Underground Railroad and its fierce defense of fugitives from slave hunters.

In South Carolina in April 1865, Moore was injured by a tree limb and lost the sight of an eye. He spent the next months in army hospitals and was discharged in October from De Camp General Hospital on Davids Island near New York City. He returned to his wife and daughter, Mary, and the farm he owned - valued in 1870 at \$1,000. He and his wife were mainstays of the local AME church. William Moore died in 1879 and is buried in the Cabin Creek Cemetery.



WILLIAM MOORE, the freeborn son of Jordan and Catherine Moore, had left Rockbridge County in the late 1850s, settling in eastern Indiana, and then joined the famous 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry in October 1863.

The Tuck Brothers

Brothers Sampson and Uriah Tuck, both in their 40s and married, joined separate USCT regiments in February 1865. The back story of the Tuck family is the stuff of an antebellum novel.

Anthony Seals and his wife Susan relocated from Caroline County to the Brownsburg area about 1800. He purchased 245 acres on Kennedy's Mill Creek in 1809. By 1820 he was known as Anthony Tuck, and about that time purchased an enslaved woman Jane and her son Sampson from the Kennedys for \$600, paid in cash, bonds, and "barrels." Anthony and Susan soon separated, because he had "taken up" with Jane, according to some, or because he was a very bad drunk and abused Susan, according to others. Anthony and Jane lived together until his death in

1837, and had five children; Uriah, Andrew, John, Caroline, and Ananias.

By his will, Anthony emancipated Jane and her children, gave them his property, and, anticipating they might be compelled to leave Virginia, instructed his executor to sell the property so Jane could buy land in a "free state." Susan Tuck challenged the will, but the judge ruled she was not legally married to Anthony. Jane Tuck registered herself and six children as "Free Negroes" on March 2, 1841, and moved to Gallia County, Ohio, where she purchased a farm. She died in 1884 at the age of 88.

Sampson Tuck was born in 1819, his father unknown. He and wife Mary and three children lived in Columbus before the war. He joined the 5th USCT

Heavy Artillery and the regiment spent most of the year in Mississippi. For a time he was assigned duty at a jail in Vicksburg, and he mustered out in February 1866. Sampson Tuck died in 1907 and is buried in Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus.

Uriah Tuck was one of the few Rockbridge soldiers who were literate at the time of enlistment. He married twice, first to Mary Anderson in 1845, and after their divorce in 1876 he married Anna Starr. He served in the 16th USCT Infantry, and for a time was posted at Chattanooga. Uriah Tuck died in 1891 and is also buried in Green Lawn Cemetery.

Scott Carnal

Scott Carnal (sometimes spelled Cornell or Connell) was born in Rockbridge County about 1843. Taken to Missouri as a small child, at seven he was sold by William Early to John Campbell, in Lafayette County. In spring 1863 he fled Missouri and slavery, and enlisted in the 1st Kansas Colored, the first Black regiment organized in the Civil War, later the 79th USCT. Carnal was the first Black Rockbridge soldier to enlist.

Carnal was shot in the thigh at the Battle of Honey Springs, Indian Territory (Oklahoma) in July 1863, and discharged for disability that fall. His leg was amputated at the hip in 1874, and for the next 16 years he was in and out of disabled veterans homes, including one in Norfolk, where in 1886 he married Maria A. Cassell. They had a daughter, May, and the couple later separated.

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GEORGE EDMONDSON was one of at least 11 Rockbridge County enslaved men who in 1864 escaped with Gen. David Hunter's Union army and enlisted in West Virginia, where Edmondson settled after the war. His mother was the property of James McDowell, Virginia governor and congressman, and he grew up at Col Alto. (courtesy of William Webb)



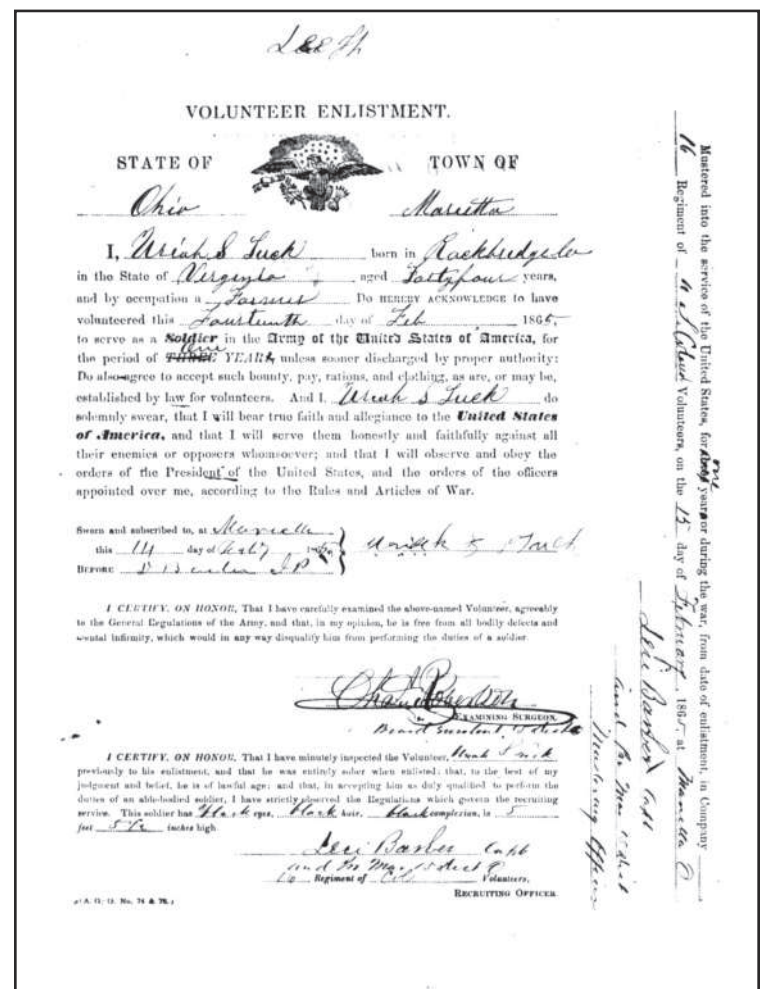
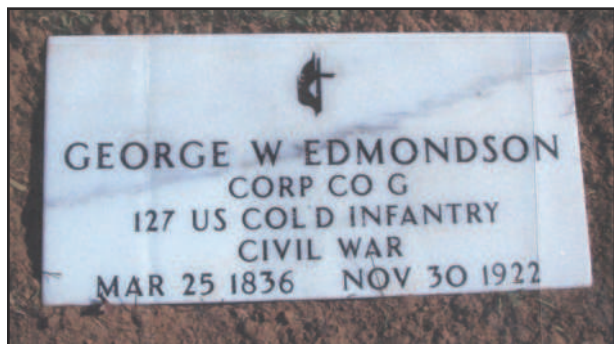
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SCOTT CARNAL (1843- 1917), whose tombstone can be found in Dayton, Nevada, was born in Rockbridge County and taken to Missouri as a child. He fled slavery and joined the 1st Kansas Colored, later the 79th USCT. BELOW is a photo of the grave marker for George Edmondson in Parkersburg, West Virginia. After the Civil War, he worked in a glass works and factory in Parkersburg.

THE HEADSTONE for David McKinley at Oak Grove Cemetery was purchased and erected by Peter Fleming in 1868. Restored by the Historic Lexington Foundation, and featured in its brochure about the cemetery, it is the first tombstone on the left when entering the cemetery from Main Street. The inscription at the bottom reads "Erected by Peter Fleming his former Slave."

THIS is the volunteer enlistment form of 44-year old Uriah Tuck, who signed his name, one of three known Rockbridge soldiers who were literate. He served in the 16th USCT Infantry and for a time was posted at Chattanooga. Tuck's mother, who along with her six children had been emancipated before the Civil War, had registered her family as "Free Negroes" in 1841. They soon after left Rockbridge for southern Ohio. He died in 1891 and is buried in Columbus, Ohio.

Soldiers

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Carnal was discharged from the veterans home in Leavenworth, Kansas, in 1892, and began an extraordinary odyssey across the west, passing for white and claiming Mexican, Cuban, and native American ancestry. From 1900 he was in mining country: first in Cripple Creek, Colorado, and later in Lyon County, Nevada. In 1910, as reported by a local newspaper, "the irrepressible prospector of this place" had "struck it big," finding a large seam of quartz. It is not known if it yielded the hoped-for vein of gold. Carnal died from cancer in June 1917, and was buried in the Dayton (Nevada) Cemetery.

Peter Fleming

Peter Fleming served in Company K of the 55th Massachusetts, rising to the rank of first sergeant. Is he the same man as Peter Fleming of Lexington?

David McKinley, an Irish immigrant, owned property on Main Street just south of Oak Grove Cemetery. McKinley died in 1854 and by his will emancipated two enslaved people, Mary and Peter, leaving each of them a house, with Peter receiving the main residence. Peter Fleming registered in July as a "free negro," described as 22, 5' 10 3/4" and in "color dark almost quite black."

Peter Fleming and Mary Ann Burr petitioned the court to remain in Virginia, and a petition in opposition was signed by many leading white citizens, arguing that "such a population" of Free Blacks, "mixing with our slaves is injurious and that nothing but evil can come from increasing the number." The judge denied the request to remain,

and both sold their real estate, with Fleming ending up in Ohio.

Peter Fleming of the 55th Mass. enlisted at Readville, Massachusetts in June 1863, age 29, 5' 10", and "dark." Born in Goochland County, Virginia, he was a teacher in Athens County, Ohio, possibly at the Albany Manual Labor Academy founded by abolitionists. Hospitalized with typhoid, he returned to duty and was wounded in the ankle at the Battle of Honey Hill in South Carolina in November 1864. Fleming was mustered out at Charleston in August 1865.

An 1868 article in the Lexington Gazette, reprinted in other papers, reported that Peter Fleming had returned to Lexington to collect a "small legacy" due him by McKinley's estate. After emancipation Fleming had "removed to Ohio, and by his industry and enterprise succeeded in making some money." Learning that McKinley's grave "was unmarked by a stone," Fleming ordered two marble slabs from "our townsman, J. J. Hileman."

Peter Fleming of the 55th Mass. married Maria Jackson, a widow with children, in 1869 in Cincinnati, and the family is listed in the 1870 census. In March 1876, a Cincinnati newspaper mockingly recounted a court hearing on charges he had threatened his wife. Newspapers reported that October that Peter Fleming was killed at 4:30 a.m. by a "switch engine" on the railroad track opposite a station-house. He was "born in Virginia, was of intemperate habits, and a whitewasher by trade, but formerly a preacher. He leaves a wife behind him." Another report claimed he was a "Sutler" at

the station-house. A sad ending for a former first sergeant of the 55th Massachusetts.

Were they the same man? They were about the same age, height, and color. Both were born in Virginia and free men in Ohio before the war. The timeline is seamless and only one census record can be found after the war. The circumstantial evidence is very strong, though as often with historical research, certainty is elusive.

George Edmondson

Thomas Jefferson, John Jordan, James McDowell, John and Jacob M. Ruff. All of these prominent men held members of the Colbert-Edmondson family in slavery. Twenty-eight-year-old George Edmondson was one of the Rockbridge men who made their way to a Union recruiting station in June 1864 by escaping with Gen. David Hunter's army after its occupation of Lexington.

Edmondson was born in Lexington in 1836, the son of Samuel and Malinda Colbert Edmondson, who were held in slavery by two different men. His mother was the property of James McDowell, Virginia governor and congressman, so that George Edmondson and his siblings grew up at Col Alto on the edge of town. He was a direct descendant of Elizabeth (Betty) Hemings, matriarch of the well-known Hemings family of Monticello. His grandfather, Brown Colbert, a Monticello nail maker until 1806, was purchased by Lexington's enterprising resident John Jordan.

In order to obtain his freedom, Colbert, described as "a pious man & first rate blacksmith," agreed

to remove to the west coast of Africa. Tragically, he, his wife, and a young son died from malarial fever in their first weeks in Liberia. The Colberts' older children remained in slavery in Rockbridge County. After James McDowell's death in 1851, George Edmondson was sold to Jacob M. Ruff, Lexington hatter and, in 1853, mayor.

When he cast his lot with the Union soldiers in 1864, Edmondson was a husband and the father of two young children. He had married Maria Watson, enslaved in Brownsburg by Preston Trotter, in 1860. Although his family never heard him speak about his service in the 127th USCT, he was careful to preserve the papers of his promotion to corporal and his honorable discharge. His participation in the grueling sieges of Richmond and Petersburg, his wounding at an engagement near Deep Bottom, his hospitalization in the far reaches of the Texas-Mexico border - all such experiences were discovered by his great-grandson Bill Webb only when he and his wife, Eva, sought out his ancestor's military records in the National Archives.

After his discharge in Texas in September 1865, George Edmondson returned to Rockbridge to retrieve his family and took them to Parkersburg, West Virginia. There he worked in a glass works and a foundry and soon owned his own home. Deprived of an education himself, he made sure his six children were educated and sent one son to Wilberforce University. When he died in 1922, George Edmondson was described as "one of the leading citizens of Parkersburg of the older generation."

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