



The North Carolina

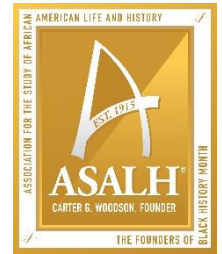
African American

Heritage

Commission



NATIONAL
UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
NETWORK TO FREEDOM



Coastal Freedom Seekers: Hotel D’Afrique, Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony & James City

Overview

As the Union entered the coast of North Carolina in the summer of 1861, and set up occupation by 1862, hopes of freedom grew stronger for many enslaved North Carolinians throughout the east. In this lesson, students will learn about freedmen’s settlements in the east, including two [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#) sites, Hotel D’Afrique and the Roanoke Island Freedmen’s Colony, as well as a [Freedom Roads Trail](#) site, the Trent River Settlement in New Bern (later renamed James City.) Through a small group reading and teaching activity, students will learn about these settlements, the people who inhabited them, and the many contributions of freedom seekers to North Carolina and the nation during a crucial time of conflict. Students will then use what they have learned and their creativity to create a historical marker honoring the significance of these settlements and the people comprising them.

Grades

8 - 11

Materials

- Coastal Freedom Seekers, reading attached
- Primary Sources, attached:
 - Primary Source A: Letter from Horace James to the Public, June 27, 1863 ([Source](#))
 - Primary Source B: Brief report of the services rendered by the freed people to the United States Army, in North Carolina by Vincent Colyer, 1864 ([Source](#))
 - Primary Source C: Letter from Sergeant Richard Etheridge and Wm Benson to General Howard, May or June 1865 ([Source](#))
- Coastal Freedom Seekers response chart, attached

Additional Resources

- [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#): The mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.
- NC African American Heritage Commission’s [Freedom Roads Trail](#): Freedom Roads is a statewide trail system that recognizes the places (from rivers to towns) that were crucial to the efforts of freedom seeking throughout the state, as well as the freedom seekers and their allies, whose stories testify to the indomitable spirit found in thousands who strove to be free and aided them in success.

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- *Freedom Roads sites include designations in the National Park Service’s [Network to Freedom Underground Railroad program](#), as well as other sites and routes recognized by historians and/or archaeologists as significant to African American freedom seeking in North Carolina.*
- [Roanoke Freedmen’s Colony](#)

Duration

60 minutes

Student Preparation

- Students must understand expectations for respectfully discussing [“hard history”](#) such as enslavement. While this history brings up difficult topics such as racism and racial violence, such history represents a part of our shared state and national history that students must understand in order to comprehend its impact on the present. To ensure students are able to respectfully and empathetically discuss such topics, teachers must ensure a foundation of civil discourse, respect and empathy in the classroom. For techniques on building such a classroom community, see Carolina K-12’s classroom management activities in the Database of K-12 Resources under the [“Activities”](#) section and specifically [Tips for Tackling Sensitive History & Controversial Current Events in the Classroom](#).
- Students should be explicitly prepared for historical terminology they will encounter throughout this lesson, such as “colored” and “Negro.” Explain that while these were terms used during the Civil War years, such terminology is considered inappropriate to use outside of quoting historical sources today.

Procedure

Rumblings of War Brings Hope for Freedom

1. As a warm-up, ask students to take two minutes to create a list of the things they feel are essential to their survival. Leave the instructions vague, but point out their interpretations may be different and might range from basic/physical needs to emotional needs. Afterwards, take a few minutes to quickly have students share some of their items, compiling a class list.
2. Tell students that in the summer of 1861, the Civil War made its way to the North Carolina coast and by 1862, North Carolina was occupied by the Union - the details of which they will read about momentarily. Point out that as the Union entered and occupied coastal areas, they encountered hundreds of enslaved people seeking freedom. Ask students to reconsider the list they made, and ask how it would compare to a list made by freedom seekers in the 1860s. Discuss:
 - Are there answers that might be universal, across time and place and status?
 - What particular needs would individuals seeking freedom from their enslavement have to survive? (Encourage students to think about the fact that most freedom seekers would not have possessions or provisions to bring with them; some would likely only have the clothing they wore. Also push students to think about the emotional, mental and spiritual needs freedom seekers, like anyone, may also have – hope, safety, security, connection, etc.)
 - How might the fight for survival impact relationships and the concept of community for those enslaved?
 - What challenges might freedom seekers face in making their way to Union occupied territories?
 - What skills and traits do you imagine a freedom seeker would need to flee for their freedom and navigate their way to Union camps?

Exploring Coastal Freedom Seekers & Settlements

3. Divide students into groups of 3 and instruct each member to assign roles A, B and C within their group. Provide each student with the attached Coastal Freedom Seekers reading and response chart. Also, provide each student one of the three attached primary sources that corresponds to their letter. Tell students that using these documents, they will be learning about three freedmen's settlements. Two of the settlements, **Hotel D'Afrique** and the **Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony** are part of the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom \(NTF\)](#) (specifically, the [Hotel D'Afrique Monument](#), Roanoke Island Freedom Colony Memorial Garden, and [Fort Raleigh National Historic Site](#).) If teachers have not done so previously, project the website for NTF and explain to students that the mission of NTF is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression.
4. Let students know that they will also learn about a third site, the **Trent River Settlement, later renamed James City**, which is part of the NC African American Heritage Commission's [Freedom Roads Trail](#). Explain to students that Freedom Roads is a statewide trail system that recognizes the places (from rivers to towns) that were crucial to the efforts of freedom seeking throughout the state, as well as the freedom seekers and their allies, whose stories testify to the indomitable spirit found in thousands who strove to be free and aided them in success.
 - Point out to students that Freedom Roads Sites *include* designations in the National Park Service's [Network to Freedom](#) Underground Railroad program, as well as *other sites and routes* recognized by historians and/or archaeologists as significant to African American freedom seeking in North Carolina.
5. Tell students that they should work together to carefully read Coastal Freedom Seekers, discussing and filling out their chart as they go. Let students know that after completing the main reading, they will focus on the primary source (A, B or C) provided to them, then take turns teaching their group members about what they learned from it. Tell students it is very important to not only offer a comprehensive summary of the primary source they read, but to specifically point out the information they learned that falls into the categories on their worksheet (skills, contributions, challenges overcome, and significance to history of freedom seekers.) As students listen to their group members, they will continue to take notes on their charts. Encourage students to not only write what they learn directly from the reading, but to also make inferences. (For instance, while the reading may not directly say enslaved people were brave, one can infer this.)
6. Teachers should use their discretion regarding how much time to provide students to work. Once each student of a group is finished, students in the group should each take a turn teaching their group members what they learned from the primary source document they read. Students should be encouraged to ask clarifying questions of each other. After all groups have finished, review and discuss further as a class:
 - What did you find most interesting about Hotel D'Afrique, Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony, and/or Trent River settlement and why?
 - Why might making the choice to run be a complicated decision for an enslaved person to make? Why do you think some enslaved people chose to run, whereas others did not?

- What challenges did enslaved people face in escaping to their freedom behind Union lines, both in the preparation, the journey, and after arrival (if they successfully arrived)? What were they risking? What skills, qualities, abilities, etc. would a person likely need to make this choice?
- What were the various ways formerly enslaved people contributed to the Union war effort? What additional contributions were likely made that aren't discussed in these readings, but that you can infer?
- As enslaved people crossed Union lines, how do you think the Confederate war effort was impacted? How do you think Confederate soldiers and supporters reacted when they learned formerly enslaved people were fighting with the Union?
- What would living conditions have been like in these settlements? (Encourage students to consider the weather in North Carolina during various seasons; the state's landscape and geography in these coastal regions; the types of wildlife present; etc.) What skills, qualities, traits, etc. would it have taken to survive and build a life in these places?
- What happened to these settlements once the War was over? What happened to those enslaved who had not escaped before the end of the War? In what ways did the Union provide, and/or not provide, for freed people during Reconstruction? In what ways did freedom seekers show incredible fortitude and provide for themselves?
- Remember that the mission of the [National Park Service Underground Railroad Network to Freedom](#) is to honor, preserve and promote the history of resistance to enslavement through escape and flight, which continues to inspire people worldwide. Through its mission, the NTF helps to advance the idea that all human beings embrace the right to self-determination and freedom from oppression. Why is it important that we know about these settlements and study the lives, contributions and resistance of those enslaved and freed? What is the significance of this history to North Carolina and the entire nation?

Create a North Carolina Historical Marker

5. Ask students how many of them previously knew about these groundbreaking settlements from our state's history. Tell students that to ensure tribute is paid to this important history, they are going to create a historical marker for one of the NC freedmen's settlements they have learned about. Before explaining the requirements of the markers, ask a student volunteer to explain what a historical marker is. (For more information, go to <http://www.ncmarkers.com>.) Teachers may also want to display an example of a historical marker from the site. Further discuss:
 - Has anyone seen any of NC's historical markers? What do they look like and where have you seen them?
 - What types of events are commemorated on these markers and why? What types of information do they typically contain?
 - What is the purpose of these markers?
6. Explain to students that to ensure the freemen's settlements they have read about are remembered, and to ensure the contributions of the freedmen who lived there are recognized, they will each create a historical marker that includes:
 - a concise summary of the history of the settlement and the people living there, as well as why this settlement is significant to North Carolina and American history
 - art work - this might be of a person/people, a landscape, a particular aspect of the settlement - such as a home or structure, something abstract, etc. (while NC's actual markers do not include art, this will allow students to be creative with their vision)

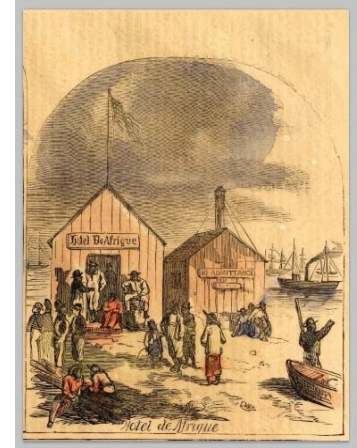
7. Let students know when their historical marker is due. It is recommended teachers display these around the room on the due date, allowing students a few minutes of time to circulate and view one another's work, which can serve as a review of the material. These also make an excellent hall display.

Coastal Freedom Seekers

Name: _____

Hatteras Island & Hotel D'Afrique

In June of 1861, the Civil War came to Hatteras Island, NC in the form of Confederate soldiers with the 7th North Carolina Troops. Their goal was to protect Hatteras Inlet, an important deep-water passageway to the Confederate supply route on the Pamlico and Albemarle sounds. The Confederates, along with enslaved people, built two forts of sand, brush and sod. **Fort Hatteras**, the larger, was right alongside the inlet, and **Fort Clark** was built less than a mile to the northeast.



Soon, Union forces arrived and in two days of battle on August 28 and 29, 1861, the Union overtook forts Hatteras and Clark and shipped surviving Confederates off to prison. Word of this victory spread quickly and prompted large numbers of enslaved people to escape from the mainland and Roanoke Island to Hatteras, with the hope that newly established Union camps would provide freedom and protection for them.

Union troops transformed a Confederate-built building near Fort Hatteras into a barracks for the hundreds of arrivals seeking freedom. Since formerly enslaved people had many skills, the Union provided food and lodging in exchange for help building fortifications and loading ships. Many of those escaping slavery were expert watermen, who helped Union soldiers with navigating the local waters. And some of the freedom seekers were able to provide strategic information regarding Confederate positions - information that led to Union victories.

The barracks became known as **Hotel D'Afrique**. It was the first "safe haven" for those seeking freedom in North Carolina, though some historians say it should be considered as more of a labor camp rather than a comfortable place of living. The original shelter was next to the inlet and flooded frequently, so in 1862 it was moved to higher ground on the soundside (from Fort Hatteras to Fort Clark.) By 1864 there were as many as 12 wooden barracks on the soundside near Fort Clark.

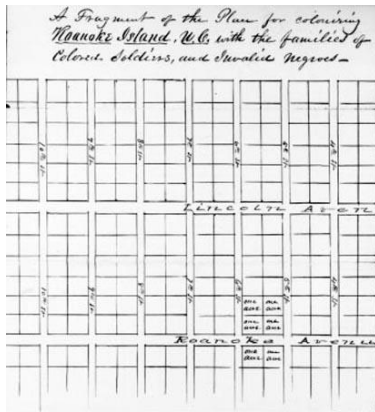
The Civil War: Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony

The Union set its sights on controlling Roanoke Island, home of four Confederate forts. Fought on February 7 and 8, 1862, the Battle of Roanoke Island ended with the Union in control of **Roanoke Island**.

At the time of the battle there were more than 200 enslaved people working at a Confederate camp on the island. Now freed, some chose to remain on Roanoke Island, while others left to try to find their relatives living elsewhere. Meanwhile, enslaved people from all around northeastern North Carolina continued to seek freedom and refuge at **Roanoke Island's "contraband camp,"** and it became clear that the Union needed a plan for organizing and caring for the incoming people.

By March of 1862, **Brig. General Ambrose Burnside** appointed a "Superintendent of the Poor," **Vincent Colyer**, of the federally occupied areas in North Carolina. Colyer was responsible for ensuring the escaping individuals and families were provided with food and basic needs in exchange for their work.

The formerly enslaved people's work and contributions became central to the Union efforts. Given the many skills they had, they assisted in everything from building forts, docks and other buildings to washing and cooking for the soldiers. Throughout the next months, more than 1,000 formerly enslaved men, women and children, as well as some of the people living at Hotel D'Afrique, made Roanoke Island their home.



The Roanoke Island contraband camp was officially designated as a colony by Colyer and named the **Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony**. The colony was eventually organized into avenues and cross streets, and plots were assigned to Black settlers. The colonists built simple homes, schools, churches, a hospital, stores, and other enterprises.

On January 1, 1863, Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, freeing millions of enslaved people throughout the Confederate territory. More than 100 Black Roanoke Islanders voluntarily enlisted in the U.S. Colored Troops, including **Richard Etheridge**, a 21-year-old formerly enslaved person who had learned to read and write, despite laws against those enslaved becoming educated.

However, with many of the newly freed men enlisted with the Union army, women and the elderly were left behind to build and take care of the colony. Also, compensation and wages from the federal government for Black men working did not always come through from the Union. There were reports of corruption and abuse at the colony, which prompted Richard Etheridge to write a letter of protest to the Freedmen's Bureau regarding the conditions.

Despite the hope that the end of the war brought in April of 1865, bad news followed for the Freedmen colonists when President Andrew Johnson declared that all land should be returned to the original title owners. On Roanoke Island, 1,114 acres were occupied and cared for by freedmen, many of whom believed the land they were living on was theirs to keep. In the years following the war, most of the colonists left or were forced out due to poor conditions and a halt on rations. There were some, however (especially those who were native to Roanoke Island before the war), who refused to leave. Richard Etheridge, who returned to Roanoke Island after the war, became an advocate for newly freed people and a leader and advocate of civil rights on the island. He tried to help thwart the effort to remove Black natives from the island. By summer 1867, however, the colony was disbanded.

Not to be deterred, in 1868, eleven former freedmen colonists (including Etheridge) bought 200 acres on Roanoke Island. They split it into 11 parcels and called the area "California." Etheridge went on to work in commercial fishing, started a family and served as a community leader. He later became the first keeper of the nation's first all-black U.S. Life-Saving Service crew at the **Pea Island Lifesaving Station**.

By 1900 there were 300 Black residents living on the island, many of them on land they owned. Their lives were not perfect, but they were free and an integral part of the island community.

Trent River Camp ("James City") in New Bern

On March 14, 1862, Union Troops broke through the Confederate lines defending New Bern and seized control of the city. Similar to Hatteras and Roanoke Islands, as word spread that Union liberators occupied New Bern, large numbers of enslaved people poured into New Bern seeking their freedom as well. **Vincent Colyer**, Superintendent of the Poor for all federally occupied areas of North Carolina, was responsible for creating a plan for these individuals.

As on Hatteras and Roanoke Islands, escaping people were immediately put to work by General Burnside building fortifications in New Bern, with many helping construct Fort Totten, which was located in the center of New Bern and which played an important part in repelling two attempts by Confederate forces to retake New Bern. Colyer paid the laborers \$8 a month and provided them with one meal a day. Many also worked loading and unloading the numerous supply ships that came to the port city on a weekly basis, as well as built a railroad bridge across the Trent River to replace the one destroyed by the Confederate soldiers when they retreated.

Freed people began to establish churches and schools with the assistance of the federal government. In New Bern, freed Blacks established the first African Methodist Episcopal Zion church in the South, and two evening schools at one time had as many as 800 pupils.

In the fall of 1862, General Burnside was transferred to the Army of the Potomac; Colyer left with him. Colyer's replacement, **James Mears**, died of yellow fever in 1863. He was replaced by **Reverend Horace James**.



In order to provide the many freedmen with places to live and secure locations for programs, James set up several refugee camps on land that had been abandoned during the war while under control of the Union forces. In the spring of 1863 Reverend James established a settlement at the confluence of the Neuse and Trent Rivers, about ½ mile south of New Bern. The site was named **Trent River Camp** and was about 30 acres in size. Reverend James was responsible for providing basic shelter, education, and medical care to freedom seekers. Because of the compassion exhibited by James in helping the freedmen better their lives, the settlement was renamed **James City**.

Meanwhile, as President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, the recruitment of Black soldiers into the Union army began in New Bern. By April of 1863, a brigade of Black troops was organized in North Carolina, eventually known as the **African Brigade**. The soldiers of that unit were highly motivated and courageous, willing to perform whatever duties were assigned to them. The African brigade demonstrated its courage and fighting ability during the two Confederate attempts to retake New Bern.

Vestiges of these settlements slowly vanished over the years, from the barracks, houses, churches, and graves. But like many other pieces of our shared history, Hotel D'Afrique, the Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony and James City are important stories of national significance.

Sources: <https://outerbanksthisweek.com/articles/finding-freedom> ; <https://www.ncpedia.org/anchor/roanoke-island-freedmens> ; *James City: A Black Community in North Carolina*, by Joe Mobley

Read the primary source assigned to you, continuing to add information to your response chart. In addition, answer:

	What does this document tell you about freedom seekers?	What does this document tell you about the person who wrote it?
Primary Source A: Letter from Horace James to the Public, June 27, 1863		
Primary Source B: <i>Brief report of the services rendered by the freed people to the United States Army, in NC</i> - by Vincent Colyer, 1864		
Primary Source C: Letter from Sergeant Richard Etheridge and Wm Benson to General Howard, May or June 1865		

Coastal Freedom Seekers Response Chart

As you read about the freedmen's settlements in the east - **Hotel D'Afrique**, the **Roanoke Island Freedmen's Colony** and the **Trent River Settlement** in New Bern (later renamed **James City**) – take notes regarding what you *LEARN* and what you can *INFER* regarding freedom seekers who used this time to carve out a new life.

Skills of Freedom Seekers	Contributions of Freedom Seekers
Challenges Faced by Freedom Seekers	Significance to History of Freedom Settlements

Reflection: In your opinion, what is most admirable and important to know regarding the ways in which enslaved individuals sought out their freedom, despite all the challenges they faced?

PRIMARY SOURCE A:

Letter from Horace James to the Public, June 27, 1863

New York, June 27, 1863

To the Public:

Four days ago, I was ordered by Major-General Foster, commanding the 18th army corps, to proceed northward as far as this city and Boston, to COLLECT MATERIALS AND IMPLEMENTS FOR COLONIZING THE FAMILIES OF COLORED SOLDIERS UPON ROANOKE ISLAND.

It might have been done through other agencies, but not so quickly. Time is an object with us, that we may save a portion of the present season for crops and gardens, and gather together within a few days, the resources which might not have been secured by correspondence alone, in as many months. This is my apology to the public, if one were necessary, for being here.

The exigency now existing in the department of North Carolina, is this: We hold possession of several important places along the coast, the principal of which are Beaufort, Newbern, Washington, Plymouth, Roanoke Island, and Hatteras Inlet. At all these points we have troops, and from them our lines extend back some distance into the country. Within these lines dwell large numbers of loyal colored people, and but few whites. Eight thousand negroes reside at Newbern, and at the other points named several thousands more. It is among these people that Gen. E. A. Wild is now enlisting his African brigade. One regiment is already full, and another is well advanced. As the work goes on, it becomes a question of more and more interest what shall be done with the families of these colored soldiers? How shall we dispose of the aged and infirm, the women and the children, the youth not old enough to enlist in the regiments? In the absence of the able-bodied men to whom they would naturally look for protection and support, it is evident that the government, or benevolent individuals and agencies co-operating with the government, must make temporary provision for them, locate them in places of safety, and teach them, in their ignorance, how to live and support themselves.

The remedy proposed to meet this unique state of things, is to colonize these freed people, not by deportation out of the country, but by giving them facilities for living in it; not by removing them north, were they are not wanted, and could not be happy; nor even by transporting them beyond the limits of their own State; but by giving them land, and implements wherewith to subdue and till it, thus stimulating their exertions by making them proprietors of the soil, and by directing their labor into such channels as promise to be remunerative and self-supporting.

The location decided upon in which to commence this work, in North Carolina, is Roanoke Island. Its insular position favors this design, making it, like the islands around Hilton Head, in South Carolina, comparatively safe against attack, and free from fear of depredation. It is an island ten or twelve miles long, by four or five in breadth, well wooded, having an abundance of good water, a tolerably productive soil, a sufficient amount of cleared land for the commencement of operations, and surrounded by waters abounding in delicious fish.

The time in which to do this work, is the present. It is desirable not to lose a single day. Two months earlier, had circumstances favored, would have been better. That there may be no longer delay in setting the project on foot, and commencing to give it a practical development, an appeal is hereby made to all the friends of the NEW SOCIAL ORDER IN THE SOUTH, and in particular to those who believe that the solution of the negro question is the turning point of the war, for prompt and efficient help in the prosecution of our designs.

The materials required are the same which any colony, designed to be agricultural and mechanical, must need at the start, viz: boards and shingles, and a steam-engine, to saw our own lumber, and grind

our own corn after the first few months, cross-cut saws and hand-saws, crow-bars, shovels, picks and spades, hoes, axes, hammers and nails, two or three sets of carpenters' tools, with extra augurs, squares, and gimlets; butt-hinges, screws, and latches; an assortment of garden seeds, padlocks, and door-locks, oil-stones and grindstones, bush scythes, water-buckets, baking-kettles and covers, tin plates, cups, spoons, pans, and basins, knives and forks, files and rasps, coopering and soldering tools, glass and putty, fish-hooks, lines, and lead, and twine for seines, a pair of platform scales, and counter scales, and a quantity of tin and sheet iron, and tools to work it. All these we need this moment. And as the government has few supplies of this sort in the department of North Carolina, and of many of the kinds none at all, we are compelled to appeal to charitable associations, and patriotic individuals, to furnish them.

To clothe and educate these people we need quantities of clothing of all descriptions, particularly for women and children, with shoes of large sizes; primers and first reading books, primary arithmetics and geographies, with slates, pencils, and stationery of all sorts.

To present this subject personally to all interested in it, during the few days of my sojourn at the North, is simply impossible. Will not the ready good sense, and eager philanthropy of thousands of warm-hearted men and women respond to this appeal immediately, and place at my control within a few days all we need and ask for?

To fight the country's battles, is our first grand duty. To lay new foundations for a just and prosperous peace throughout the recreant South, is our second. For some time to come the two processes must be carried on together. Let us fight with our right hand, and civilize with our left, till the courage, the enterprise, and the ideas of the North have swept away the barbarism and treason of the South, and made of this country ONE GOODLY AND FREE LAND.

Send contributions in cash, clothing, shoes, instruments, and supplies of every kind needed, to the undersigned at No. 1 Mercer street, New York, (rooms of the National Freedman's Relief Association.)

HORACE JAMES,
Supt. of Blacks for the Dept. of N. Carolina

[Source](#)

Primary Source B:

Brief report of the services rendered by the freed people to the United States Army, in North Carolina by Vincent Colyer (1864)

I commenced my work with the freed people of color, in North Carolina, at Roanoke Island, soon after the battle of the 8th of February, 1862, which resulted so gloriously for our country.

A party of fifteen or twenty of these loyal blacks, men, women and children, arrived on a “Dingy” in front of the General’s Head Quarters, where my tent was located. They came from up the Chowan River, and as they were passing they had been shot at by their rebel masters from the banks of the river, but escaped uninjured.

They were a happy party, rejoicing at their escape from slavery and danger, and at the hearty welcome which was at once extended to them, by the officers and men of the New England regiments, which chiefly made up the corps under Gen. Burnside’s command.

It rained hard that night, and shelter being rather scarce on that Island, I gave up my tent to the women and children, and found quarters for myself with a neighbor.

The calm trustful faith with which these poor people came over from the enemy, to our shores; the unbounded joy which they manifested when they found themselves within our lines, and Free; made an impression on my mind not easily effaced. Many of the officers, notwithstanding the rain, gathered around the tent to hear them sing the hymn, “The precious Lamb, Christ Jesus, was crucified for me.”...

Their numbers in the Department of N. Carolina, Were As Follows:

- At Newbern and vicinity, 7,500
- At Roanoke Island and parts adjacent, 1,000
- At Washington, Hatteras, Carolina and Beaufort, 1,500

In all 10,000, of whom 2,500 were men, 7,500 women and children.

The work they did.

In the four months that I had charge of them, the men built three first-class earth-work forts: Fort Totten, at Newbern — a large work; Fort Burnside, on the upper end of Roanoke Island; and Fort [?], at Washington, N. C. These three forts were our chief reliance for defence against the rebels, in case of an attack; and have since been successfully used for that purpose by our forces under Major-Generals Foster and Peck, in the two attempts which have been made by the rebels to retake Newbern.

The negroes loaded and discharged cargoes, for about three hundred vessels, served regularly as crews on about twenty steamers, and acted as permanent gangs of laborers in all the Quartermasters’, Commissary and Ordinance Offices of the Department. A number of the men were good carpenters, blacksmiths, coopers, &c., and did effective work in their trades at bridge-building, ship-joining, &c. A number of the wooden cots in the hospital, and considerable of the blacksmith and wheelwright work was done by them. One shop in Hancock Street, kept by a freedman, of which the engraving on another page gives a fair picture, usually presented a busy scene of cheerful industry. The large rail road bridge across the Trent was built chiefly by them, as were also the bridges across Batchelor’s and other Creeks, and the docks at Roanoke Island and elsewhere. Upwards of fifty volunteers of the best and most courageous, were kept constantly employed on the perilous but important duty of spies,

scouts, and guides. In this work they were invaluable and almost indispensable. They frequently went from thirty to three hundred miles within the enemy's lines; visiting his principal camps and most important posts, and bringing us back important and reliable information. They visited within the rebel lines Kingston, Goldsboro, Trenton, Onslow, Swansboro, Tarboro and points on the Roanoke River: often on these errands barely escaping with their lives. They were pursued on several occasions by blood-hounds, two or three of them were taken prisoners; one of these was known to have been shot, and the fate of the others was not ascertained. The pay they received for this work was small but satisfactory. They seemed to think their lives were well spent, if necessary, in giving rest, security and success to the Union troops, whom they regarded as their deliverers. They usually knelt in solemn prayer before they left, and on their return from these hazardous errands, as they considered the work as a religious duty.

[Source](#)

Primary Source C:

Letter from Sergeant Richard Etheridge and Wm Benson to General Howard {May or June 1865}

Genl We the soldiers of the 36 U.S. Col[ored] Regt Humbly petition to you to alter the Affairs at Roanoke Island. We have served in the US Army faithfully and don our duty to our Country, for which we thank God (that we had the opportunity) but at the same time our family's are suffering at Roanoke Island, N.C.

1 When we were enlisted in the service we were prommised that our wives and family's should receive rations from government. The rations for our wives and family's have been (and are now cut down) to one half the regular ration. Consequently three or fours days out of every ten days, thee have nothing to eat. At the same time our ration's are stolen from the ration house by Mr Streeter the Asst Supt at the Island (and others) and sold while our family's are suffering for some thing to eat.

2nd Mr [Holland] S[r]teeter the Asst Supt of Negro aff's at Roanoke Island is a througher Cooper head a man who says that he is no part of a Abolitionist. takes no care of the colored people and has no Simpathy with the colored people. A man who kicks our wives and children out of the ration house or commissary, he takes no notice of their actual suffering and sells the rations and allows it to be sold, and our family's suffer for something to eat.

3rd Captn [Horace] James the Suptn in Charge has been told of these facts and has taken no notice of them. so has Coln Lahaman [Theodore Lehman of the 103d Pennsylvania] the Commander in Charge of Roanoke, but no notice is taken of it, because it comes from Contrabands or Freedmen the cause of much suffering is that Captn James has not paid the Colored people for their work for near a year and at the same time cuts the ration's off to one half so the people have neither provisions or money to buy it with. There are men on the Island that have been wounded at Dutch Gap Canal, working there, and some discharged soldiers, men that were wounded in the service of the U.S. Army, and returned home to Roanoke that Cannot get any rations and are not able to work, some soldiers are sick in Hospitals that have never been paid a cent and their familys are suffering and their children going crying without anything to eat.

4th our familys have no protection the white soldiers break into our houses act as they please steal our chickens rob our gardens and if any one defends their-Selves against them they are taken to the gard house for it. So our familys have no protection when Mr Streeter is here to protect them and will not do it.

5th Genl we the soldiers of the 36 U.S. Co Troops having familys at Roanoke Island humbly petition you to favour us by removeing Mr Streeter the present Asst Supt at Roanoke Island under Captn James.

Genl perhaps you think the Statements against Mr Streeter too strong, but we can prove them.

Genl order Chaplain Green to Washington to report the true state of things at Roanoke Island. Chaplain Green is an asst Supt at Roanoke Island, with Mr Holland Streeter and he can prove the facts. And there are plenty of white men here that can prove them also, and many more thing's not mentioned

Signed in behalf of humanity

Richard Etheridge, Wm Benson

[Source](#)