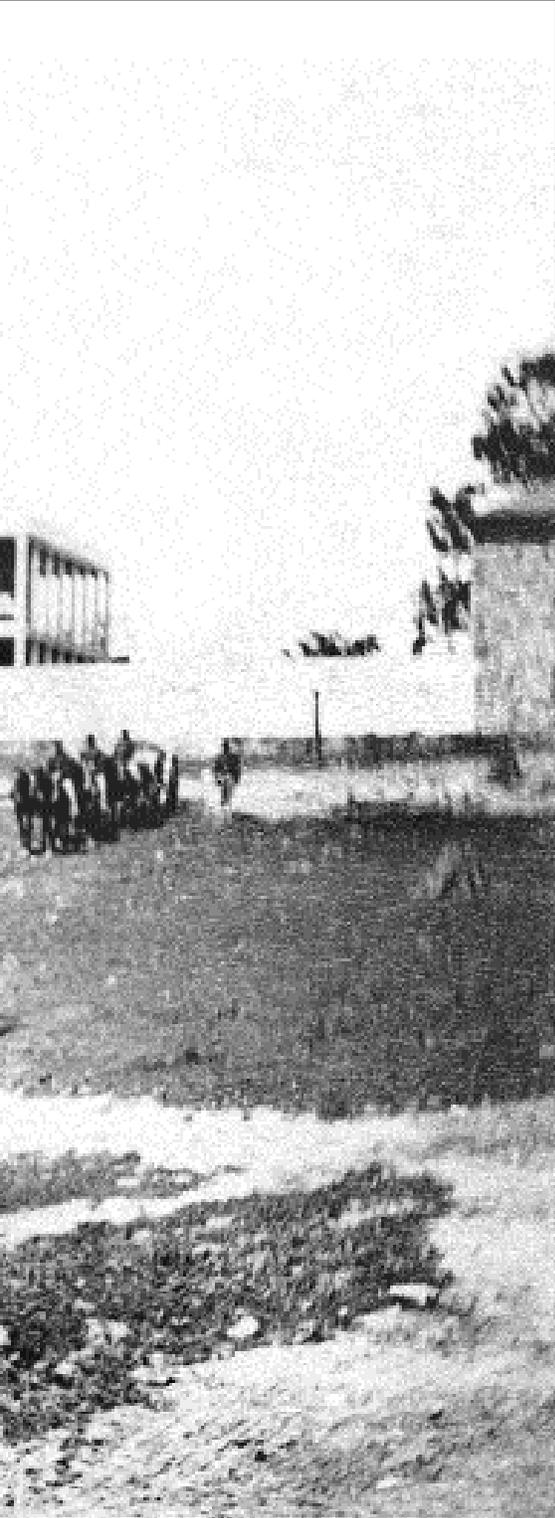


Douglas's Battery at Fort Leavenworth



The Issue of Black Officers During the Civil War

by Roger D. Cunningham



One of the two-gun sections from the Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery, formed at Fort Leavenworth in 1864. Commanded by Captain H. Ford Douglas, the complete unit also was known as Douglas's Battery.

During the Civil War, almost two hundred thousand black men served in the Union army and navy. Kansas was credited with providing just over 1 percent of this “Black Phalanx,” contributing two infantry regiments and an independent artillery battery to the war effort. The exploits of the First and Second Kansas “Colored”—the infantry regiments that capably fought in several battles in the Trans-Mississippi theater—are well recorded. The former was the first black unit to be raised in the North and the first black unit to engage in combat, and it suffered more fatalities than any other Kansas regiment. The latter organization sustained the fourth largest total of fatalities.¹

Very little has been written about the Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery, or Douglas's Battery, because it only existed for a short time and suffered no battle casualties. It did, however, enjoy the unique distinction of being the only federal unit to serve entirely under the leadership of black officers. For this reason, if for no other, the battery's brief history merits a closer examination than it has received to date.

The issue of commissioning black officers during the Civil War was part of the much larger question of whether black men should even be armed and allowed to serve in the Union army. Although black men had served in volunteer units that fought in the American Revolution and the War of 1812, they had been specifically excluded from the regular army in its 1821 regulations, and their presence in the Mexican War was almost totally limited to serving as musicians or accompanying white officers as their servants. The Militia Act of 1792 also limited the obligation of militia enrollment to “each and every free able-bodied white male citizen” between the ages of eighteen and forty-five, and most states interpreted this statute as legally preventing them from enlisting any black militiamen.²

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1. Frederick H. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (1908; reprint, Dayton: Morningside Bookshop, 1979), vol. 1, 11, vol. 2, 1735, 1736; Joseph T. Wilson, *The Black Phalanx: African American Soldiers in the War of Independence, the War of 1812, and the Civil War* (1890; reprint, New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), is written by a black Civil War veteran in 1887 and covers black military history from the American Revolution through the Civil War. Most of the men in Company B, Eighteenth U.S. Colored Infantry, also were recruited in Kansas.

2. Jack D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History: A New Perspective* (New York: Praeger, 1974), 27–30. For a more detailed summary of black participation in the militia prior to the Civil War, see Charles Johnson Jr., *African American Soldiers in the National Guard: Recruitment and Deployment During Peacetime and War* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992), 5–11.

Thus, the idea of organizing black military units was a sensitive subject by 1860, when eight out of every nine black Americans were slaves. Leaders in the South still remembered Nat Turner’s bloody 1831 slave revolt and were hesitant to arm any part of their black populace, even the 6 percent that was free. The Confederate Congress refused to sanction the use of black troops until the final weeks of the conflict, and even in the North this was not a popular concept. The government refused the service of black volunteer companies in the early days of the war, and this policy did not change until the Second Confiscation and Militia Act of July 1862 authorized President Abraham Lincoln “to receive into the service of the United States, for the purpose of constructing intrenchments, or performing camp service, or any other labor, or any military or naval service for which they may be found competent, persons of African descent.” Many Kansans still criticized Senator James H. Lane when he began organizing the First Kansas Colored a month later. Lane’s regiment was the first black unit to be raised in a Northern state, although several other black regiments were officially accepted into the Union army before it, and it was the first black unit to engage in combat—at Island Mound, Missouri, in October 1862.³

After the First and Second Kansas Colored finally were mustered into federal service at Forts Scott and Leavenworth, all of their officers were white—the standard practice throughout the war. Only 108 black men were commissioned in the Union army’s segregated black units/hospital (Table 1), seven out of ten of them being as-

3. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 241; Morris J. MacGregor and Bernard C. Nalty, eds., *Blacks in the United States Armed Forces: Basic Documents*, vol. 2 (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources, 1977), 25. Three Louisiana Native Guards regiments mustered into the Union army before the Kansans. Ironically, the first of these regiments had been sanctioned by the state’s Confederate government and raised from the free black population of New Orleans. After that city was captured, Major General Ben Butler brought the Native Guards into the Union army and increased its strength with runaway

TABLE 1. BLACK OFFICERS IN THE UNION ARMY (1862–1865)

UNIT	LINE OFFICERS			NONCOMBATANTS		TOTAL
	LT.	CPT.	MAJ.	SURGEON	CHAPLAIN	
4th USCI*				1	1	2
54th Mass	3				1	4
55th Mass	3				2	5
73rd USCI	17	12				29
74th USCI	20	10	1			31
75th USCI	9	7				16
104th USCI		1	1			2
Douglas’s Btry	2	1				3
Other Units**				7	9	16
Total	54	31	2	8	13	108

* United States Colored Infantry
 ** Five surgeons and one chaplain were assigned to hospitals rather than units.

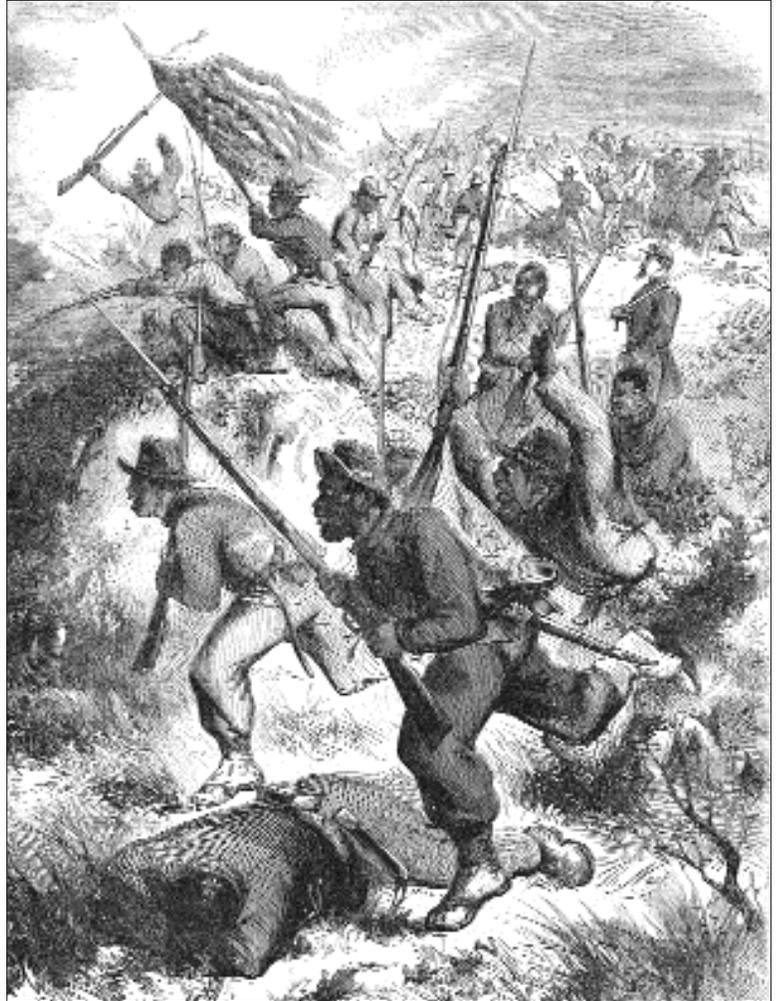
signed to the three regiments of Louisiana Native Guards (the Seventy-third through Seventy-fifth U.S. Colored Infantry). They were primarily company officers (captains and below), and only two line officers attained field rank (major through colonel)—Major Francis Dumas of Louisiana and Major Martin R. Delaney of South Carolina—while Surgeon Alexander T. Augusta was awarded the brevet rank of lieutenant colonel.⁴

Unfortunately, racial prejudice kept officer’s rank beyond the reach of most black men throughout the war and long after. The white majority, believing that black Americans were naturally inferior and should occupy a subordinate social status, found it inconceivable that black men were intelligent enough to lead soldiers and also subscribed to the false notion that black soldiers had much more confidence in the leadership abilities of white officers. This meant that many very capable black men were denied the opportunity to “wear shoulder straps,” while in some cases, less qualified white men were commissioned to serve in the black artillery, cavalry, and infantry units

slaves. See James G. Hollandsworth Jr., *The Louisiana Native Guards: The Black Military Experience During the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

4. For the number of black officers commissioned during the war, see Joseph T. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Civil War Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Free Press, 1990), appendix, and an amended list of Native Guards officers that later was published in Hollandsworth, *The Louisiana Native Guards*. Black line officers were allowed to command only black troops, although in several cases very light-skinned men with racially mixed ancestry may have served as officers in white units. For information on one such individual, Frazier A. Boutelle, see Johnson, *African American Soldiers in the National Guard*, 32–33.

This fanciful Harper's Weekly drawing of the first combat for black troops during the Civil War depicts the First Kansas Colored at the Battle of Island Mound, Missouri, in October 1862. Lieutenant Patrick H. Minor, the only black officer in the battle, later led a section of guns from Douglas's Battery during the Battles of Big Blue and Westport in October 1864.



that were designated collectively as U.S. Colored Troops.⁵

The vast majority of U.S. Colored Troops personnel served in the infantry, with fewer than one in ten serving in the artillery. The Union army comprised two kinds of artillery units: heavy (or foot) and light (or field). The former units were intended to garrison forts, while the latter were mobile, with guns pulled by six-horse teams that could accompany troops on a campaign. As a result of its excellent performance in the Mexican War, light artillery had the prestige of an elite arm. According to the *Instruction for Field Artillery*, its men were supposed to be “intelligent, active, muscular, well-developed, and not less than five feet seven inches high.”⁶

The basic artillery unit was the battery, which was authorized 3 officers—a captain and 2 lieutenants—and 141 enlisted men. The twenty to thirty cannoneers and drivers who were assigned to a “piece” (gun), its limber, and two caissons (ammunition storage vehicles) constituted a platoon, led by a sergeant. Two platoons constituted a section, commanded by a lieutenant, and ideally three sections—right, center, and left—formed the battery, which also was equipped with a traveling forge and wagon.⁷

5. In May 1863 the War Department established the Bureau of Colored Troops to manage the recruitment, training, and organization of all black regiments. All but four of the black state units that already existed—the Twenty-ninth Connecticut Infantry, the Fifty-fourth and Fifty-fifth Massachusetts Infantries, and the Fifth Massachusetts Cavalry—thereafter were redesignated as U.S. Colored Troops regiments. The First and Second Kansas Colored became the Seventy-ninth and Eighty-third U.S. Colored Infantries in 1864.

6. During the war U.S. Colored Troops personnel formed 137 regiments of infantry, thirteen regiments of heavy artillery, ten batteries of light artillery, and six regiments of cavalry. See Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 1, 39; Board of Artillery Officers, *Instruction for Field Artillery* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864), 3.

7. Francis A. Lord, *They Fought for the Union* (New York: Bonanza Books, 1960), 86. The 141 enlisted men included a first sergeant, a quartermaster sergeant, 4 sergeants, 8 corporals, 2 musicians (buglers), 2 artificers (mechanics), 1 wagoner, and 122 privates.

The six cannons in a battery could be of several different types, and Douglas's Battery used at least three of them at various times. A photograph of one of the battery's sections shows it armed with three-inch ordnance rifles. These accurate wrought-iron cannons with an effective range of about two thousand yards could be fired by a well-trained crew of men once every thirty seconds. The battery also used rifled ten-pounder Parrotts, whose characteristics were very similar to the ordnance rifles, and twelve-pounder mountain howitzers, which could be disassembled and transported by three horses or mules. Ammunition for all of these cannons included canister, explosive shell, solid shot, and spherical case (shrapnel).⁸

8. Post Return for February 1864, Fort Leavenworth, 1851–1869, Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916, roll 611, M617, RG 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.; Barry E. Thompson, Anthony Gero, and Roger Sturcke, “Independent Battery, United States Colored Light Artillery, (Douglas's Battery), 1864–1865,” *Military Collector & Historian* 35

In the regular army, twelve artillery batteries—lettered from A to M—formed a regiment. In early 1864 U.S. Colored Troops Artillery regiments began to be organized, but they were almost all heavy artillery units. Nine batteries forming the Second Regiment, U.S. Colored Light Artillery were organized around the country—three in Louisiana, three in Tennessee, and one each in Arkansas, South Carolina, and Virginia. The letter K should have been assigned to the next battery that was organized, but Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton decided not to affiliate it with the Second Light Artillery and to designate it as an independent battery instead. Since batteries often were named after their commanders, the unit was more familiarly known as Douglas’s Battery, in honor of Captain H. Ford Douglas.⁹

The history of Douglas’s Battery began at Fort Leavenworth on June 29, 1864, when Major General Samuel R. Curtis, commander of the Department of Kansas, requested permission from Secretary Stanton to organize a “negro battery officered with negroes to be commissioned by yourself.” This had never been done before, but Stanton immediately authorized Curtis to raise the battery, “to be officered in the manner proposed in your telegram, and organized according to the regulations of the service.” A subsequent letter from the adjutant general’s office informed Curtis that the officers would be appointed on his recommendation and that they could be examined or not, “as you may see fit.”¹⁰

(Summer 1983): 81; Mark M. Boatner, *The Civil War Dictionary* (New York: McKay, 1959), 610; For details on Civil War artillery, see Jack Coggins, *Arms & Equipment of the Civil War* (New York: Fairfax Press, 1983), 61–98.

9. Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion*, vol. 2, 1722–23. The letter J was never used to designate companies or batteries because it was easily confused with the letter I; Lieutenant J. R. Kemble to the Adjutant General’s Office, July 7, 1864, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889, RG 94. In a July 7, 1864, letter to Curtis, Secretary Stanton directed that the unit be designated as Company K, U.S. Colored Artillery (Light), but two weeks later, this letter was canceled. Lieutenant Matthews believed that his unit would be called Company K, Second Regiment U.S. Colored Light Artillery, and wrote that on the enlistment papers of recruits as late as August 4; Douglas’s name often is spelled “Douglass,” especially in government-compiled military service and pension records.

10. The Department of Kansas comprised the state of Kansas and the territories of Colorado (minus Fort Garland) and Nebraska; Major General Curtis to Edwin Stanton, June 29, 1864, and Major Charles Foster to Major General Curtis, July 20, 1864, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division; Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General’s Office, *The Negro in the Military Service of the United States, 1639–1886*, 2650–51, roll 3, M1858,

General Curtis reacted quickly, and on July 2 the Department of Kansas issued General Orders No. 34, which announced that Major Robert H. Hunt was appointed as its chief of artillery and would supervise “recruiting, organizing and drilling a battery of persons of African descent.” Major Hunt requisitioned three-inch rifled guns and appointed two black lieutenants—William D. Matthews and Patrick H. Minor—as recruiting officers for Leavenworth and Wyandotte. These men both had been officers in the First Kansas Colored and brought a wealth of experience to the new unit.¹¹

William Dominick Matthews had been born on a farm in Caroline County, Maryland, in 1827. His father, Joseph, was a black farmer, and his mother was the daughter of a slave and her white owner, who had freed her when he died. Matthews received no formal education, and around 1848 he moved to Baltimore and worked as a seaman until 1854. Two years later he traveled to Leavenworth and opened the Waverly House, a boarding establishment on Main Street between Shawnee and Seneca Streets that soon became a “station” on the underground railroad.¹²

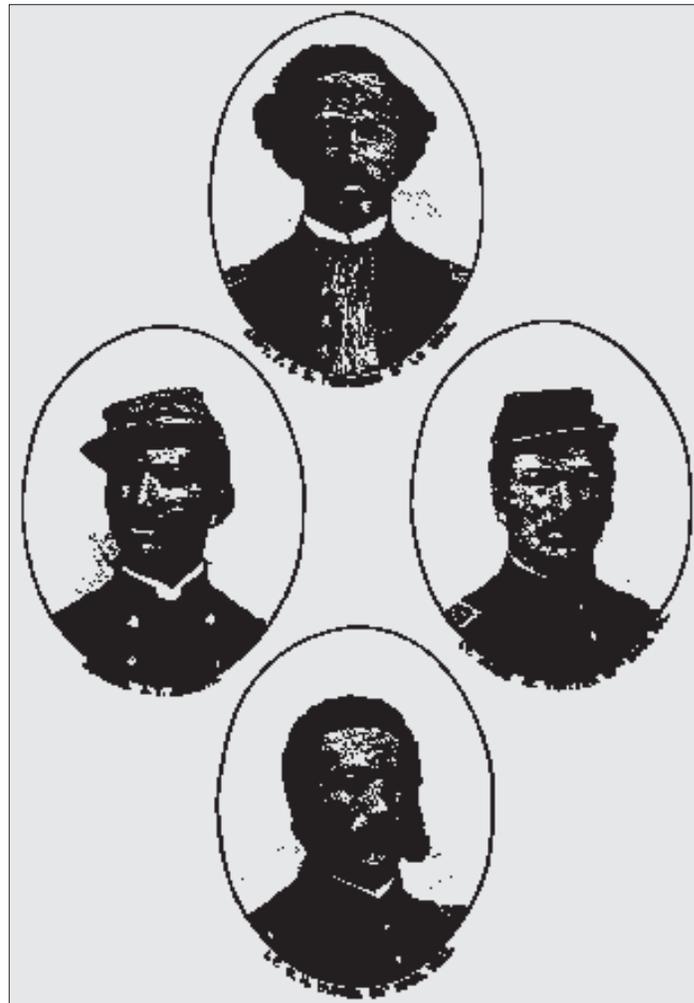
Matthews was assisted by Daniel R. Anthony—local newspaper editor and brother of Susan B. Anthony—and other prominent abolitionists in helping slaves escape from bondage in Missouri. He claimed that he organized a company to guard these ex-slaves, and when the war started he offered the unit’s services to the government but was turned down. After Senator Lane was appointed as the Department of Kansas’s commissioner for recruiting and began to raise his black regiment in the summer of 1862, Matthews was among the first volunteers. With Lane’s approval an order was issued at Leavenworth on August 18 giving him permission “to raise one company of free Colored men for the 1st Kansas Colored Volunteers to be officered by men of Colour.” Matthews convinced scores of ex-slaves to enlist in Lane’s regiment and was rewarded with an appointment as the captain of Company D, with

RG 94; Men seeking commissions in U.S. Colored Troops units had to appear before an examination board. For details, see Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 44–54.

11. *Daily Times* (Leavenworth), July 29, 1864; Major Hunt to the Chief of Ordnance, Washington, D.C., July 27, 1864, Letters Received and Sent by the Chief of Artillery, Department of Kansas, 1864–65, RG 393, National Archives.

12. *The Bee* (Washington, D.C.), April 9, 1904. In his letter accepting his commission, Matthews said that his middle name was Dominick. See Letters Received, Colored Troops Division. *Leavenworth City Directory for 1862–63* (Leavenworth: n.p., 1862), 83.

These are four of the more than one hundred talented black men who were able to secure commissions in the Union army during the Civil War. Captain Pinkney Pinchback (top) later moved into politics, and in late 1872 he served for five weeks as Louisiana's first and only black governor.



two other black men—Henry Copeland and Patrick Minor—as his lieutenants.¹³

Between August and the end of the year, the First Kansas Colored organized six companies, and on January 1, 1863, when Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation went into effect, the regiment staged an afternoon ceremony at Fort Scott, one hundred miles south of Leavenworth. Among the many speakers was Captain Matthews, who in words that were most appropriate to the occasion proclaimed:

Today is a day for great rejoicing with us. As a thinking man I never doubted this day would come. . . . Now is our time to strike. Our own exertions and our own muscle must make us men. If we fight we shall be respected. I see that a well-licked man respects the one who thrashes him.¹⁴

Unfortunately, when the regiment's companies were officially mustered into the Union army less than two weeks later, there were no provisions for black men such as Matthews to be commissioned. Hearing of this "with great regret," twenty-one of the regiment's white officers sent a letter to Lane declaring that Matthews was "among the most thorough and efficient officers in our organization; a soldier in every sense of the term, drilled, disciplined and capable." They said that he was "at all times . . . a worthy gentleman, and excellent officer" and stated their conviction that to Matthews was due "a large share of our [success] in maintaining this organization intact through the

trials and difficulties of the last five months. We therefore ask in simple justice to him & ourselves that no action be taken detrimental to his rights."¹⁵

On January 12 Matthews also wrote to Lane, reminding him of the order that had authorized him to recruit and arguing that in accordance with War Department General Orders No. 75, nothing legally prevented him from being mustered as an officer into the company that he had recruited. He concluded by saying:

It is now with you Genl to fulfil[I] the promise you gave me as it was under that promise that I got the men here[.] Therefore I but ask for Justice regardless of my Colour—as we are all fighting for the same great and glorious Cause of Union and Liberty—I

13. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; Adjutant General's Office to Samuel J. Crawford, 1882, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division. The adjutant general's office reported that Matthews had recruited a company of eighty-one men between August and November 1862, but fewer than half of them mustered into the Union army in January 1863; Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, and Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, Series II, The Black Military Experience* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 69. Copeland's brother John had been hanged in Charles Town, Virginia, in December 1859 for conspiring with John Brown to seize the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry.

14. Noah A. Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862–1865* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1999), 20.

15. Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, 334–35.

am . . . Yours as Companion and Royal Arch Mason[.]¹⁶

Matthews's friend and fellow officer Richard J. Hinton also wrote to Lane and said that Matthews deserved better treatment than what was being "dealt out to him." Hinton said that without him they could not have held the regiment together and, "I for one shall work earnestly, with all the power I can, to secure that fair play for Capt Matthews which I demand for myself." Hinton concluded his letter with a blunt postscript that accurately summarized the problem: "The whole thing amounts simply to the idea, that 'niggers' sh[oul]d not be mustered as officers and not as to any question of competency[.]"¹⁷

On January 28 the adjutant general's office in Washington sent a telegram to Major Theodore Weed, the mustering officer at Fort Leavenworth, stating that Secretary Stanton authorized him to muster Matthews into the regiment as an officer. Matthews, however, reportedly was absent on the day a white man was available to fill the last remaining captain's vacancy, leaving Matthews without a commission. After serving as a Leavenworth city policeman, he received a second chance to wear shoulder straps when he was appointed as a "colored battery" recruiting officer.¹⁸

Patrick Henry Minor had been born in 1829. He reportedly was the son of a rich and prominent white planter from Ascension Parish, Louisiana, who was socially ostracized after marrying Minor's black mother. In 1836 his father sent him north to Ohio to be educated, and along with two sisters and a brother he attended the Preparatory Department (high school equivalent) of Oberlin College, one of the first integrated institutions of higher learning in the country. After leaving Oberlin in 1848, Minor traveled to France, where he furthered his education and married. When he returned to the United States, he became the head waiter on a Mississippi River steamboat before journeying to Kansas and joining the First Kansas Colored in the summer of 1862. As a lieutenant, Minor participated in the skirmish at Island Mound, Missouri, in October 1862, but he

16. *Ibid.*, 69–70. Order No. 75 authorized governors to muster recruiters as company officers when a volunteer regiment was first formed.
17. *Ibid.*, 335–36.

18. Adjutant General's Office to Mustering Officer, Fort Leavenworth, January 28, 1863, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division; *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; *Daily Times*, July 29, 1864.

left the regiment in 1863, when he, Copeland, and Matthews were not allowed to be mustered into the Union army as officers. He worked in Leavenworth as a school-teacher until the organization of the battery offered him another chance for a commission.¹⁹

On July 6, 1864, Lieutenant Matthews's appointment orders directed him to report to Major Hunt for special instructions, and the next day he was mustered into the army at Fort Leavenworth. He established his recruiting office in the Waverly House and on July 10 enlisted his first recruit—Albert Jackson, a twenty-one-year-old farmer. Problems arose, however. On July 20 two black men "abusing" Matthews and interfering with his enlistment efforts were arrested and confined. Nine days later, to expedite recruiting, an ad appeared in the Leavenworth *Daily Times*, proclaiming in bold letters: "Colored Men Arouse! Avenge Fort Pillow!" This headline referred to a battle fought three months earlier in which Confederate forces under Major General Nathan B. Forrest had attacked a Union outpost about fifty miles north of Memphis and killed almost two-thirds of the black artillerymen defending it, some of them after they had surrendered. Outraged Northerners branded the action a massacre, and "Remember Fort Pillow!" became a U.S. Colored Troops battle cry.²⁰

If the memory of Fort Pillow did not attract the interest of potential recruits, the ad also stressed that the battery would have black commissioned officers and that pay and bounty would be the same as for white recruits. This meant that privates would earn sixteen dollars each month, while the highest ranking enlisted man, the first sergeant, would be paid twenty-four dollars. For a three-year enlistment, men were eligible to receive a three-hun-

19. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; *Daily Times*, March 30, 31, 1865; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, March 29, 1865. According to the Oberlin College Archives, the family spelled its name Miner until 1846; U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1st ser., vol. 53 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1880–1901), 457; Compiled Military Service Record of Patrick Minor, Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers who Served with the U.S. Colored Troops, roll 298, M1818, RG 94.

20. Compiled Military Service Record of William D. Matthews, roll 298, M1818, RG 94; *Daily Times*, July 29, 1864; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861–'65* (Topeka: Kansas State Printing Co., 1896), 637–40; Major Hunt to Major Heath, July 20, 1864, Letters Received by Staff Offices, 1864–1865, Department of Kansas, RG 393. The ad also could have cited a similar incident much closer to home. On April 18, 1864, six days after Fort Pillow, the First Kansas Colored lost almost one-quarter of its strength in a battle at Poison Spring, Arkansas, when Confederate soldiers killed black troops that were wounded or had already surrendered. For details on both battles, see Trudeau, *Like Men of War*, 156–69, 186–94; Dudley T. Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Negro Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865* (New York: Norton, 1966), 177.

William Matthews served as a captain in the First Kansas Colored, but he was a first lieutenant in Douglas's Battery.

dred-dollar bounty, which paid them as much as one hundred dollars initially and the remainder in two equal installments.²¹

Leavenworth provided almost 4 out of every 5 of the 208 enlisted men that Matthews, Minor, and other officers recruited for the battery between July 1864 and March 1865. Men also were recruited in Fort Scott, Wyandotte, and Quindaro. Except for Fort Scott, these cities were located on the Missouri River and attracted hundreds of runaway slaves from Missouri. One of these ex-slaves was Daniel Cooper, a laborer who had been purchased by Cornelius Cooper of Platte County, Missouri, for six hundred dollars in 1853. Cooper crossed the river and enlisted at Leavenworth on July 27.²²

Between July 25 and September 4 Lieutenant Minor enlisted eighteen recruits in Wyandotte, including eight men in one day. More than one-third of all the battery's recruits were still teenagers, a few as young as seventeen, and almost 80 percent of them were younger than thirty. Only two men claimed Kansas as a birthplace, with all but ten of the others born in slave states, primarily Missouri, Kentucky, Virginia, and Tennessee. Since most were former slaves, almost all were illiterate. Only ten were able to sign their clothing accounts, while the others drew Xs beside



21. Initially, black soldiers were paid less than white soldiers, but in June 1864 Congress equalized their pay effective from January 1, 1864. For details, see Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle*, 169–75; Personal Descriptions and Clothing Accounts [Book], Independent Battery, Light Artillery, U.S. Colored Troops, RG 94, hereafter cited as Unit Book. Almost one-third of the recruits did not receive their initial one-hundred-dollar payments, while nine others enlisted for one year and were only eligible to receive a total bounty of one hundred dollars. One man enlisted for two years for a bounty of two hundred dollars.

22. *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Kansas, 1861–'65*, 637–40. This report's personnel list contains many spelling errors, and one man is listed twice. About six out of every seven recruits were enlisted by Matthews (116) and Minor (63). Others who enlisted recruits were Captain Douglas (fourteen), Captain McCahon (eleven), Lieutenant Gill (two) and Captains Hinton and Raferty (one each). In 1866 Daniel Cooper claimed reimbursement for his ex-slave's services, certifying that he had remained loyal to the U.S. during the war. At least eleven other former slave owners, most of them from Platte County, Missouri, also filed such claims. See Compiled Military Service Record of Daniel Cooper, roll 297, M1818, RG 94.

their names that were labeled "his mark." The men represented more than a dozen blue-collar occupations, but almost 90 percent were laborers and farmers. Eighteen-year-old John Cleaver of Wyandotte was so happy to be free that he listed his occupation as "gentleman."²³

23. Unit Book; Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served With the U.S. Colored Troops, rolls 297–299, M1818, RG 94. The two "Kansans" were born in Doniphan County and the Kaw Nation. The ten men born outside the South came from Ohio (four), Illinois (two), present Oklahoma (two), Pennsylvania (one), and Canada (one). The most common occupation was laborer (102) followed by farmer (84). Other occupations with multiple representatives were cook (4), tobacconist (3), barber (3) and blacksmith (2). The only men claiming white-collar occupations were Captain Douglas (preacher) and Lieutenant Minor (schoolteacher). Cleaver's last name actually was Kleber, and he had been owned by Frederick Kleber of Westport, Missouri.

TO ARMS! TO ARMS!!

The Foe, They Come! They Come!

COLORED MEN AROUSE!

Avenge Fort Pillow!

Major-General S. B. Curtis has been authorized to raise a

COLORED BATTERY!

With Black Commissioned Officers!

Lieut. W. D. Matthews has been regularly mustered and authorized to recruit the battery. His office is in the Waverly House, two doors south of the Post Office, Main street, Leavenworth, where he will receive recruits, sweeten them and issue clothing.

Recruiting Office will be opened at Wyandotte and Lawrence—Lieut. P. H. Minor will have charge of the office at Wyandotte. The recruits will receive the same bounty, pay, clothing and protection as white Volunteers.

Bounty and Pay same as to White Recruits!

The necessities for State defense, and the duty and honor of Colored Men, require this Battery to be filled up immediately, in the next ten days if possible.

Able Bodied Men Fall in!

M. J. R. H. HUNT,
Chief of Artillery.

Lieut. W. D. MATTHEWS,
Recruiting Officer.

P. S.—All influential colored men are earnestly requested to aid in filling up the Battery. **THIS IS YOUR DUTY.** Jy14-64.

Shortly after recruiting began for the Independent Battery in July 1864, this ad appeared in the August 7 issue of *Leavenworth's Daily Times*. To motivate response, the call to arms emphasized the opportunity to avenge the Confederate "massacre" of black troops at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, a few months earlier.

About this time Major Hunt selected a new site for the unit at the fort—west of the main garrison near the graveyard—that he thought was "the most eligible place for shade and drill."²⁴

By September the battery still needed more men; Major Hunt ordered Matthews to proceed to Fort Scott to open a recruiting office. All commanding officers were requested to assist him in recruiting, but shortly after he arrived, events dictated other duties. On October 12 Matthews was assigned temporarily as commanding officer of the local "colored militia" that was being hurriedly raised from Fort Scott and Bourbon County in response to Major General Curtis's declaration of martial law. The general was reacting to the threat posed by a Confederate army under Major General Sterling Price that was moving across Missouri toward Kansas. Matthews was tasked with organizing and preparing this local black militia to help defend the Union military complex (such as the quartermaster depot and general hospital) and the town of Fort Scott.²⁵

Meanwhile, Lieutenant Minor also had been occupied with matters far more important than recruiting. In mid-October he was ordered by Major Hunt to return to Wyandotte with at least twenty battery members to help oppose the Price Raid. He commanded a section of two ten-pounder Parrott guns in Major General Curtis's Army of the Border that was hastily deployed east of Kansas City to halt Price's army. His section was attached to Captain James H. Dodge's Ninth Wisconsin Light Battery, only recently arrived from Fort Riley, and it participated in the Battles of the Big Blue and Westport on October 22 and 23. Lieutenant Minor "met the foe . . . with coolness and dash" and also accompanied the force that pursued Price as he retreated south. Price's force passed a few miles northeast of Fort Scott where Lieutenant Matthews and the local militia stood ready for an anti-

The nascent battery established its camp in Leavenworth—on the Esplanade, just north of the Planters House (the intersection of Main and Shawnee Streets). On August 1, when black Kansans celebrated the thirtieth anniversary of the emancipation of slaves in the British West Indies, the soldiers eagerly participated in the local "grand jubilee." Lieutenant Matthews and his men headed a procession that marched down Third Street, and at the subsequent festivities at Fackler's Grove, he addressed a crowd estimated at two thousand people. A few days later the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* reported that the battery had eighty men and was "rapidly improving in drill and discipline."

24. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, July 30, August 2, 7, 1864; *Daily Times*, August 2, 1864; Major Hunt to the Post Adjutant, August 5, 1864, Letters Sent, June 1864–February 1865, Chief of Artillery, Department of Kansas, RG 393.

25. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; William D. Matthews, Pension File, RG 15, National Archives; Special Order No. 53, Fort Scott, October 12, 1864, Special Orders, Fort Scott, August 1864–October 1865, RG 393. According to the microfilmed copy of the Kansas State Militia muster rolls, two militia companies at Fort Scott were organized by Matthews. Several militiamen's names match those of men who served in Douglas's Battery. See Kansas State Militia Muster Rolls, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

26. Colonel Blair served as a temporary brigade commander in the

This sketch of the Fort Pillow massacre from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Magazine depicts Southern troops executing black artillerymen, some even after their surrender.



pated attack. But Price's army avoided the post and continued on into Missouri. Minor then joined Matthews at Fort Scott, and on November 20 they were ordered to return to Fort Leavenworth, accompanied by a score of new recruits. For unknown reasons Minor was too crippled to walk or ride a horse and had to remain at Fort Scott a few more days.²⁶

Before he returned to Fort Leavenworth, Matthews was praised by Colonel Charles W. Blair, the Fort Scott commander, who informed him:

I desire to express to you my sincere thanks for the patient industry and skill with which you have discharged your various duties since I placed you on duty to assist in preparing the post for a vigorous defense against the probable attack of the enemy. You have been a model of proper discipline and subordination, strictly attentive to duty, promptly obedient to orders, and acting with a wise discretion in all matters requiring the exercise of your individual judgment.²⁷

Army of the Border and said in his official report that on October 21 the colored battery "occupied a fine artillery position in the center [of his troops], cut out expressly for the occasion," along with the Ninth Wisconsin Battery. Major Hunt reported that on October 23, during the battle of Westport, "a rifled piece manned by the colored battery, but which was sighted by Captain Dodge" struck an enemy gun and broke it across the chassis. See U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion*, 1st ser., vol. 41, pt. 1, 544, 597; Richard J. Hinton, *Rebel Invasion of Missouri and Kansas and the Campaign of the Army of the Border Against General Sterling Price, in October and November, 1864* (Chicago: Church and Goodman, 1865), 123, 145, 163; *Daily Times*, March 31, 1865; Special Order No. 88, Fort Scott, November 20, 1864, Special Orders, Fort Scott, August 1864–October 1865; Matthews and Minor to Major Hunt, November 19, 22, 1864, Letters Received and Sent by the Chief of Artillery, Department of Kansas, 1864–1865, RG 393.

27. Colonel Blair's letter appears in both *The Bee* and Matthews's pension record, but in the former, Matthews's rank was changed to captain. *The Bee* also claimed that Matthews succeeded Douglas as captain of

Lieutenant Matthews did not spend all of his time on military matters. At a January 2, 1865, meeting in Leavenworth's Laing's Hall to commemorate the second anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation, he gave a speech, but one critic judged it to be "a very lengthy harangue, portions of which were illy appropriate to the occasion." Another speaker, however, demonstrated a much higher level of oratorical skills—the *Leavenworth Daily Conservative* reported that the speech of H. Ford Douglas was "one of great beauty."²⁸

Born a slave in Rockbridge County, Virginia in 1831, Hezekiah Ford Douglas escaped to Ohio in the mid-1840s and settled in Cincinnati, where he became a barber and acquired a reputation as a skilled orator for the abolitionist cause. One contemporary described him as having "a physique so noble and a presence so attractive as to charm and interest the listener at once." After serving as a subscription agent for the *Voice of the Fugitive*, an abolitionist newspaper published in Canada, Douglas moved to Chicago

the battery, which was false.

28. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, January 4, 1865. The paper also said Douglas "is only about one-quarter black, and does not seem to comprehend the inherent prejudices of the two races. He only views the subject from the stand-point of amalgamation."

29. Robert L. Harris, Jr., "H. Ford Douglas: Afro-American Antislav-

go in 1854 and two years later became part owner of the *Provincial Freeman*, another Canadian periodical. After settling in Canada West (Ontario) he married Sattira Steele in Racine, Wisconsin, in 1857, and they returned to Chicago a year later. Sponsored by the Massachusetts Antislavery Society, Douglas lectured widely in New England in 1860, criticizing Abraham Lincoln, praising the work of John Brown and his men, and urging others to continue their crusade. In early 1861 he returned to Chicago and became a traveling agent for James Redpath's Haitian Bureau, an organization that advocated black emigration to Haiti.²⁹

In July 1862, while living in Belvidere, Douglas enlisted as a white man in Company G of the Ninety-fifth Illinois Infantry so that he might "be better prepared to play his part in the great drama of the Negro's redemption." He was offered a commission if he would swear that he was white, but he refused to do so and served as a private instead. In February 1863 his regiment was stationed at Lake Providence in northeastern Louisiana where it began digging a canal from the Mississippi River to the lake in an unsuccessful attempt to create a water route that would enable Union forces to bypass the well-defended Confederate fortifications at Vicksburg. Many of the soldiers, including Douglas, soon became sick in this swampy area's unhealthy environment.³⁰

As a result of the Emancipation Proclamation, former slaves began to flock to Union forces in Louisiana and other Southern states. Regiments of black troops began to be raised from these refugees, with many of the newly required officers and enlistees coming from the Ninety-fifth Illinois. Douglas wrote to Illinois congressman Owen Lovejoy (brother of abolitionist martyr Elijah P. Lovejoy) asking for his help in transferring to one of the new black regiments forming in South Carolina, saying that he

ery Emigrationist," *Journal of Negro History* 62 (July 1977): 217–34. Hezekiah was the son of William and Mary Douglas—a white man and a slave.

30. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; H. Ford Douglass, Pension File, RG 15. His daughter, Helen Ford Douglas, was born in Chicago in 1859. See Compiled Military Service Record of H. Ford Douglass, roll 197, M1818, RG 94; *Report of the Adjutant General of the State of Illinois, 1861–66*, vol. 5 (Springfield: Phillips Bros., 1901), 424; Benjamin Quarles, *The Negro in the Civil War* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), 210; Wales W. Wood, *A History of the Ninety-fifth Regiment Illinois Infantry Volunteers* (Chicago: Chicago Tribune, 1865), 58–61.

31. Wood, *A History of the Ninety-fifth Regiment*, 62, 69, 70; Dorothy

thought he "could render more efficient service . . . than I can in my present position." Douglas's wish was partially granted in mid-April when he received a letter from Brigadier General John P. Hawkins, the recently promoted commander of a black brigade. Hawkins informed Douglas that a man had recommended him "as a proper person to raise an independent colored company to be used as scouts and service of like nature. If the proposition is agreeable to you, I authorize you to commence recruiting your company at once."³¹

On June 7, 1863, Douglas was discharged from the Ninety-fifth Illinois to become the captain of this independent scout company attached to the Tenth Louisiana Colored Infantry, but there is no record of him receiving a commission at that time. Instead, he abandoned his military career and sometime during the next eighteen months, after passing through Chicago, he traveled to Leavenworth, became a preacher, and was given letters of introduction to Major General Curtis by several prominent citizens, including Daniel R. Anthony. On December 3, 1864, he was appointed as a first lieutenant by Major Hunt, and two days later an order from the Department of Kansas authorized him to go anywhere in the state to procure recruits for the battery.³²

Major Hunt still needed twenty more men for the unit, and on December 9 he asked Colonel Blair for help. Hunt stressed to Blair that Major General Curtis was "very anxious to complete organization & especially as it has dragged so long." Two more weeks of good recruiting yielded enough personnel, and on December 23 the battery's 3 officers and 149 men finally were mustered into the Union army. On January 1, 1865, Hunt appointed twenty noncommissioned officers (NCO)—eight sergeants and twelve corporals. The senior NCO was First Sergeant

Sterling, ed., *Speak Out In Thunder Tones: Letters and Other Writings By Black Northerners, 1787–1865* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), 322–24; Compiled Military Service Record of H. Ford Douglass, Ninety-fifth Illinois, RG 94.

32. Compiled Military Service Record of H. Ford Douglass. The Tenth Louisiana later became the Forty-eighth U.S. Colored Infantry. H. Ford Douglass, Pension File. Curtis received at least three letters regarding Douglas between November 29 and December 2. Anthony's December 2 letter said that Douglas had made an arrangement with Matthews to take a position in the battery. See Letters Received and Sent by the Chief of Artillery, Department of Kansas, 1864–65, RG 393; Special Order No. 10, Department of Kansas, December 5, 1864, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889.

33. Major Hunt to Colonel Blair, December 9, 1864, Telegrams Re-

This line drawing of Douglas's Independent Battery depicts a driver, a corporal, and one of three battery officers. The picture appeared in the *Military Collector & Historian*, summer 1983, and shortly thereafter as a color plate in the *Military Uniforms in America* series published by the Company of Military Historians.



Henry Copeland, a literate carpenter who, like Minor, had attended Oberlin College's Preparatory Department before serving as one of Matthews's lieutenants in Company D of the First Kansas Colored. Copeland also had served as a lieutenant in one of the black militia companies that was temporarily raised in Leavenworth to defend Kansas from the threat of the Price Raid.³³

On February 7 Major General Curtis informed Secretary Stanton that he had appointed Douglas as the new unit's commander, with Matthews as the first lieutenant and Minor as the second lieutenant. Curtis noted that these men had "been pretty well tried and seem well qualified for their places," and he asked Stanton to commission them in the "Independent Battery U.S. Colored Light Artillery." The adjutant general's office mailed commissions, dated February 16, and after receiving them the men wrote letters of acceptance and returned these to Washington, along with their signed oaths of office.³⁴

ceived, Fort Scott, 1864, RG 393; Douglas to Colonel Foster, July 20, 1865, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889; Unit Book. According to the Oberlin College Archives, Copeland was a student from 1858 to 1859; Henry E. Copeland, Pension File, RG 15. Copeland claimed that he remained in the First Kansas Colored until May 1863, when the regiment's organization was completed. He was the first lieutenant of Company A in the Kansas State Militia's First Colored regiment from October 10 to November 10, 1864. At least four other members of his company—Fenton Burrell, Alonzo Eddings, Isaac Thomas, and Simon Woodson—also enlisted in the battery. See Muster Roll, Company A, First Colored Regiment, Kansas State Militia Muster Rolls for the Price Raid, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

34. Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General's Office, *The Negro in the Military Service of the United States, 1639–1886*, 3569; Adjutant General's Office, *Official Army Register of the Volunteer Force of the United States Army for the Years 1861, '62, '63, '64, '65* (Washington, D.C.: 1867), pt. 8, 168. This source lists the commissioning dates for Douglas and Matthews as February 27, 1865, when they signed their oaths of office. See Oath of Office of H. Ford Douglass, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889.

35. Special Order No. 27, District of North Kansas, February 11, 1865,

When Douglas's Battery officially joined Fort Leavenworth's garrison in February, it comprised 140 officers and men, although not all of these soldiers actually were available for unit duties; fourteen men were sick, six were under arrest, five were absent (including Lieutenant Minor), and two were performing special, extra, or daily duty. The battery was armed with ten guns—two heavy, six field, and two mountain—and it had eighty-three horses to transport them.³⁵

February was a deadly month for the unit, with four men dying from pneumonia or "congestive chills" over a span of two weeks. Other diseases also caused problems. In March several men were admitted to the hospital with mumps, and on March 26 Lieutenant Minor died from dis-

General and Special Orders Received, Fort Leavenworth, 1863–1865, RG 393. This order directed Captain Douglas to report his command for duty to the post commander; Post Returns for February 1864, Fort Leavenworth, 1851–1869, Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916.

36. Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers

ease “contracted by exposure” during the Price Raid. For his funeral, two days later, the battery members “passed in procession through the streets, headed by a band of music and followed by carriages.” The *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin* reported that “it seemed as if the entire colored population of Leavenworth, with no small sprinkling of the white, lined the streets,” while the *Daily Times* remembered Minor as “a brave officer and a good man.” His death and a private’s desertion were offset by more new recruits, who increased the battery to its peak strength of 167.³⁶

An inspection of the battery on March 23 concluded that it was in good condition. Major James Ketner reported that the officers and men were well drilled and disciplined and “tolerably [*sic*] well instructed in military duties.” Their guns, small arms, and equipment were complete, neat, and clean, as were their quarters, kitchen, and “mess rooms.” The stables also were clean, and the horses were in good condition and well cared for. Ketner closed his report with the comment that the officers were “zealous” and the soldiers “orderly and obedient.”³⁷

This did not mean, however, that the members of the battery never were in trouble. Four of them appeared before a general court martial in the spring—Sergeant Henry Brown for deserting, Private Frank Spencer for allowing a prisoner to escape, and Privates Robert Sharp and John Taylor for going into Leavenworth, getting drunk, and then going to Lieutenant Matthews’s quarters and using “disrespectful language” toward him. Brown and Spencer were acquitted of their charges, but the other two men each were found guilty and sentenced to be imprisoned for one month and to lose fifteen dollars from their March pay.³⁸

Who Served With the U.S. Colored Troops, rolls 297–299, M1818, RG 94. Carded Medical Records for Miscellaneous U.S. Colored Troops, RG 94; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, March 29, 1865. Minor must have died from a lingering respiratory infection he contracted during the inclement weather that prevailed during the pursuit of Price. In 1892 Major Hunt recalled “That was a fearful campaign for both man and beast, as the weather was not only bad, but we were short of rations and corn.” Robert H. Hunt’s affidavit in Richard J. Hinton, Pension File, RG 15; *Leavenworth Evening Bulletin*, March 30, 1865; *Daily Times*, March 30, 1865; Post Returns for March 1865, Fort Leavenworth, 1851–1869, Returns from U.S. Military Posts, 1800–1916.

37. Inspector General’s Office, Department of the Missouri, to Major J.W. Barnes, April 10, 1865, Unbound Documents of the Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery, RG 94.

38. Court Martial Case Files, 1809–1894, Case OO-626, RG 153, National Archives. The results of the court martial were announced in General Orders No. 97, Department of the Missouri, April 11, 1865.

39. Compiled Military Service Record of William D. Matthews.

Lieutenant Matthews also had a money problem—it was alleged that he had taken financial advantage of his men. An angry citizen wrote Major General Grenville Dodge, commander of the Department of the Missouri, to complain that Matthews had filled Leavenworth’s draft quota “from the ranks of the oppressed negroes at \$25 a head.” Major Herman H. Heath, provost marshal for the District of North Kansas, was directed to investigate, and on March 22, Matthews explained to him in a letter:

While I was recruiting, I pressed no man into the Service for the purpose of filling the quota of the city. Nor did I at any time receive [*sic*] from any one twenty-five Dollars for such purpose. The story that I have made six thousand Dollars out of the operation [*sic*] is entirely false.³⁹

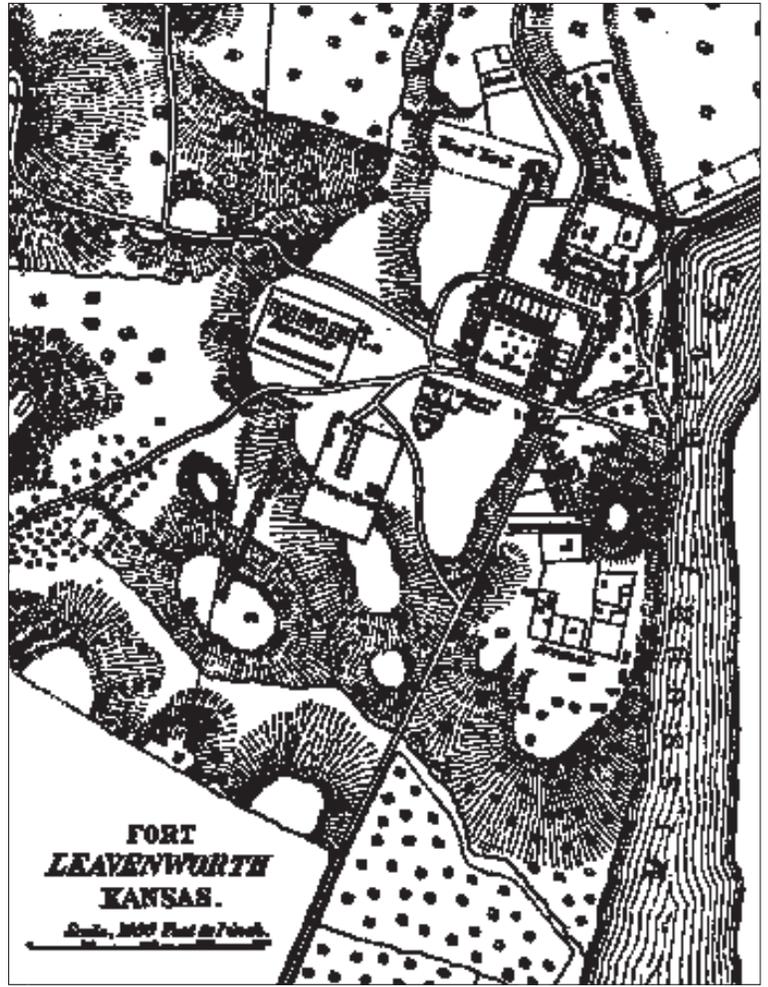
This denial evidently satisfied Major Heath, but a few weeks later Lieutenant Matthews encountered new problems with members of a recently arrived regiment of “Galvanized Yankees.” The U.S. government had decided to offer enlisted Confederate prisoners of war the opportunity to leave captivity and serve in volunteer units in the West, fighting Indians and performing other routine frontier military functions, with the understanding that they would not be required to oppose their former comrades. Six infantry regiments—the First through the Sixth U.S. Volunteers—were recruited at prison camps between January 1864 and April 1865, and several of them passed through Fort Leavenworth en route to forts along the Oregon and Santa Fe Trails.⁴⁰

Elements of the Second U.S. Volunteers were the first Galvanized Yankees to arrive at Fort Leavenworth in February 1864, and they immediately aroused local suspicions. In an editorial on “Rebel Soldiers,” the *Daily Times* opined, “We don’t like the policy—it is unsound.” A few days later, the *Daily Conservative* printed a letter complaining about the behavior of “The Rock Island Rebels”—a reference to the fact that the regiment had been recruited from the federal prison camp at Rock Island, Illinois. Companies of the Fifth U.S. Volunteers, which had been recruited from prisoners in Alton, Illinois, began arriving at the fort in March.⁴¹

40. For the story of these six regiments, see Dee Brown, *The Galvanized Yankees* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986). The officers in the U.S. volunteer regiments were not former Confederates.

41. *Daily Times*, February 24, 28, 1865; *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, March 3, 1865; Second and Fifth Regiments, U.S. Volunteer Infantry, Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Or-

Douglas's Battery spent most of its service manning guns in Fort Sully, a series of earthen fortifications atop a hill on the western side of Fort Leavenworth. Sully had been hastily constructed in October 1864 to help defend the post from an anticipated attack by a large Confederate force under Major General Sterling Price.



On April 17 Lieutenant Matthews was serving as the post's officer of the day, a situation that stirred the racist sentiments of the Fifth's ex-Confederates, causing some of them to comment on his lineage and on the recent assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. The *Daily Conservative* reported:

The expressions of "kill him, he is a d__d nigger son of a b__h," and other choice language were used, and one of them drew up his piece, saying to his comrades, "I will shoot him if any one will protect me." Others expressed their great satisfaction at the assassination of the President, and one of them exclaimed, "G_d d__n Abe Lincoln, he has gone to H__l straight."⁴²

The offenders were placed in the post guard-house, where they found themselves guarded by black soldiers. This made a bad situation even worse, and other members of the unit reportedly came to their assistance, demanding their release. Matthews later recalled that he ordered his battery to train its guns on the rebellious troops, who then were disarmed and sent back to their quarters. This may have been an exaggeration, because several officers of the regiment wrote to the *Daily Times* to complain about the *Daily Conservative's* coverage of the incident, maintaining that there were many other officers who could "bear witness to the malicious falsity of the low and cowardly attack" made upon the unit. Luckily for Matthews and his men, the regiment left the post at the end of the month.⁴³

ganizations, roll 219, M594, RG 94.

42. *Leavenworth Daily Conservative*, April 19, 1865.

43. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; *Daily Times*, April 22, 1865. Brown does not mention this incident in his book. He does point out, however, that some companies included a good number of "Galvanized Confederates"—Union soldiers who had been captured, sworn allegiance to the Confed-

When it was not clashing with Galvanized Yankees, Douglas's Battery spent most of its time manning Fort Sully, a series of earthen fortifications that had been constructed hastily on a hill on the western side of the post in October 1864 to help defend it from the threat of the Price Raid. The defeat of Price's army, however, and its retreat south to Texas left eastern Kansas virtually unthreatened, except from isolated bands of pro-Southern guerrillas operating from bases in western Missouri.⁴⁴

eracy, and then been recaptured by Union troops.

44. Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery, Compiled Records Showing Service of Military Units in Volunteer Union Organizations, roll 205, M594, RG 94; Special Order No. 18, Department of Kansas, December 17, 1864, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889. This order instructed Douglas to assume command of Fort Sully and the troops on duty there.

45. U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion*, 1st ser., vol. 48, pt.

Because of the static nature of the battery's assignment, an order dated May 1, 1865, stated that it was to be dismounted and placed on duty as heavy artillery. Later that month, Captain Douglas was ordered to turn in four Parrotts and a mountain howitzer to the Ordnance Department, which left him with only a single gun. Another inspection by Major Ketner found the battery in very good condition, with the men "well drilled and pretty well disciplined and very well instructed in the military duties and exercises pertaining to the artillery arm of the Service."⁴⁵

The unit's members obviously were still performing their military duties, but also they were eager to become civilians again, and on June 19 Sergeant Gabriel Gray sent Douglas a petition with fifty-three signatures, requesting that he use his influence to have them mustered out. Their request maintained that this would be appropriate because they had been illegally "pressed into Service" and because "The Exigencies of the war are past and . . . our services are no longer needed to put down the Rebellion."⁴⁶

The next day, just before departing for Illinois on thirty days' furlough, Captain Douglas wrote to the post headquarters to complain that most of his men were "the victims of a cruel and shameless conscription." He claimed that in mid-winter these men had been "dragged through the streets of Leavenworth from their wives and little ones who were dependent upon them for their daily bread . . . and placed on the bleak knob of Fort Sully, and there starved until from shere [*sic*] exhaustion they were compelled to swear into the service." He requested that his battery "be at once mustered out of the service."⁴⁷

2, 286; Special Orders No. 108, District of North Kansas, May 31, 1865, Department of the Missouri Special Orders, RG 393; Inspector General's Office, Department of the Missouri, to Major J.W. Barnes, June 12, 1865, Unbound Documents of the Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery, RG 94.

46. Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, 421. Sergeant Gray, one of the few literate men in the unit, signed the other men's names for them.

47. Compiled Military Service Record of H. Ford Douglass. Douglas requested his furlough on June 10 so that he could visit Chicago "to settle some business that requires my attention"; Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*, 422. It is unclear how many of the men in the battery were married. The 1865 Kansas Census for Leavenworth County lists at least a dozen married battery members, excluding officers. On January 13, 1865, the mayor of Wyandotte wrote to Major Hunt to tell him that some of the men's families were in "very destitute circumstances" and requested that the latter send them some money. See Letters Received and Sent by the Chief of Artillery, Department of Kansas, 1864–1865, RG 393.

48. Berlin, Reidy, and Rowland, *Freedom: A Documentary History of*

Captain Douglas's allegation presents something of a mystery, because there seems to be no other evidence supporting it. Almost two-thirds of the men whose names appeared on the petition had enlisted before winter (December) and at least forty-three of them had received a bounty, which suggest that the petitioners' claim of being illegally pressed into the service in mid-winter was spurious. Also, only one of the fifty-eight men who enlisted in the unit during the winter did what one would expect a coerced enlistee to do—desert—and that was two and a half months prior to the petition. Nevertheless, Lieutenant Colonel Gustav Heinrichs, the post commander, forwarded the letter to Brigadier General Robert B. Mitchell, the district commander, with an endorsement concurring that the battery should be mustered out. Heinrichs reported that the unit was of no service to the government because of internal problems related to Captain Douglas borrowing money from his men. He noted, however, that "some Good Soldierly Material [was] in this Command that Might be retained and transferred to other Regiments of that kind."⁴⁸

On July 5 brevet Colonel Charles W. Foster, of the adjutant general's office in Washington, forwarded the correspondence to the commander-in-chief, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant, with this comment:

It appears from the papers herewith that the Company was not raised by voluntary enlistment, nor by draft, but that the men were run down, seized by force, and barbarously practiced upon in various ways, until from exhaustion or terror they consented to take the oath of enlistment. The result is such as might be expected; simply a collection of dissatisfied men, without order and without discipline.

Foster also noted that the indebtedness of the officers to their men seemed to indicate that they were "men of little character and less integrity." He concluded with the recommendation that the unit be mustered "out of service" and that "the honorable muster-out of the officers be withheld until they shall have refunded all monies borrowed from the enlisted men of the command." General Grant approved this recommendation, the War Department sanc-

Emancipation, 422–23.

49. Colored Troops Division, Adjutant General's Office, *The Negro*

In 1867 the cash-poor state of Kansas finally paid the state militiamen who had responded to the Price Raid in Union Military Scrip, which later was redeemed at face value plus interest. Henry Copeland received eighty-eight dollars and several other members of Douglas's Battery received lesser amounts.



tioned it the next day, and on July 9 Major General Dodge was instructed “to cause” the battery to be mustered out.⁴⁹

On July 22 the battery’s remaining 2 officers and 139 enlisted men were mustered out at Fort Leavenworth. One officer and twelve men had already died—four from typhoid fever, four from pneumonia, and five from other causes—while fifty-seven other soldiers had deserted or been discharged for disability. Douglas and Matthews were not entitled to final pay until they had “fully discharged” their indebtedness to the enlisted men, but an investigation by Major Ketner cleared them of this charge. Ketner examined the battery’s books, questioned the men, and determined that the two officers were not indebted to them “in any sum whatever.” The latter’s final pay included whatever bounty they still were owed, minus their indebtedness to the post sutler, which ranged from one to ten dollars.⁵⁰

After Douglas and Matthews were mustered out, the former lived only a few months, dying in his Leavenworth home on November 11, 1865, after a failed attempt to run a restaurant in Atchison. Matthews raised a family in Leav-

enworth and became a respected member of the city’s large black community. By 1879 he was the grand master of the Royal Arch Masons in Kansas, and around 1891 he became the grand master of all York Rite Masons in the United States—further indicators of his leadership abilities. Matthews also joined the preeminent Union army veterans’ organization, the Grand Army of the Republic, and throughout most of the 1890s he ran an employment agency out of his residence, which in 1896 was at 228 Shawnee.⁵¹

A few members of the battery liked military service enough to join one of the six black regiments that were added to the regular army in 1866. One of these units, the Tenth U.S. Cavalry, was organized at Fort Leavenworth, and Seaborn Montgomery enlisted in its Company A in 1867. Henry Brooks enlisted in Company G that same year, and Franklin Spencer, after changing his name to Frank Perkins, enlisted in Company E in 1867 and reenlisted in Company B in 1872. One of Matthews’s two daughters, Annie, married another member of Company E, William

in the Military Service of the United States, 1639–1886, 3687; Colonel Foster to Major General Dodge, July 9, 1865, Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889.

50. Consolidated Morning Report for July 1865, roll 611, M617, RG 94. The Kansas State Historical Society’s microfilmed copy of the battery’s muster-out roll accounts for 3 officers and 175 men. Three other men died and thirty were discharged or deserted before the battery was mustered into the Union army in December 1864. Unit Book. The five other causes of death were congestive chills, “variola” (smallpox), “phthisis pul[mon]alis” (pulmonary tuberculosis), disease “contracted by exposure,” and a gunshot wound. See Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served With the U.S. Colored Troops, rolls 297–299, M1818, RG 94. Twenty-four men owed the sutler money.

51. *Daily Times*, November 12, 1865; H. Ford Douglass and William

51. *Daily Times*, November 12, 1865; H. Ford Douglass and William D. Matthews, Pension Files; *Colored Citizen* (Topeka), September 6, 1879; *Leavenworth Times*, March 3, 1906; *Hoye’s City Directory of Leavenworth, 1896–1897* (Kansas City: Hoye, 1896), 159.

52. Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans who Served Between 1861 & 1900, rolls 579, 706, 707, T289, RG 15. For the story of the Ninth and Tenth U.S. Cavalry regiments, see William H. Leckie, *The Buffalo Soldiers: A Narrative of the Negro Cavalry in the West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967). According to his pension file, Matthews and his wife had four children after the war. Herschel V. Cashin, *Under Fire With the Tenth U.S. Cavalry* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 342.

C. Beckett, who rose to the rank of sergeant and served in the Spanish–American War.⁵²

In the decades after the war, like hundreds of thousands of other citizens Matthews and more than half of the battery's veterans (or their dependents) tried to take advantage of the liberal disability pension legislation that Congress passed. Twenty of these applications were denied, including ten from mothers, siblings, or widows. In 1890 Sattira Douglas applied for a widow's pension, claiming that her husband's death had been directly related to the malaria and swamp fever that he had contracted while serving in Louisiana with the Ninety-fifth Illinois. She was unable to prove this, however, and her claim was denied.⁵³

Matthews claimed his pension for impaired sight and deafness in both ears that were the direct result of his exposure to the loud discharge of a siege gun at Fort Scott in the fall of 1864. He convinced the government to pay him twelve dollars each month as compensation for this disability. He also provided testimony for other battery members seeking pensions. Tilford Davis, a former private, sought compensation in 1890 for kidney disease, bleeding piles, a lame back, and bad eyesight, the last ailment caused by "burnt . . . powder while firing a slute [*sic*]" at Fort Leavenworth. Matthews testified on Davis's behalf, saying that the man developed piles from eating "rough food" and that the piles then caused his kidney trouble. Davis initially received six dollars for his disabilities, and by 1903 this amount had doubled.⁵⁴

For the rest of his life "Captain" Matthews, as he was known around Leavenworth, steadfastly maintained that his service with the First Kansas Colored entitled him to nine months of back pay as a captain. Over a period of more than thirty years, he used every political connection to urge the government to pay him for this service. After several failed attempts to pass bills to pay him one thousand dollars "for services rendered in recruiting, organizing, drilling and subsisting" the First Kansas Colored in

1862 and 1863, his congressmen also failed to secure Matthews an infantry captain's pay for the period August 4, 1862, to May 2, 1863.⁵⁵

Matthews finally died on March 2, 1906, after suffering from "la grippe" (influenza) for several weeks. His funeral was held the next day at the African Methodist Episcopal Church, and he was buried in Mount Muncie cemetery. The *Leavenworth Times* took special note of his passing, saying that he had been "scrupulously honest in all his business dealings and his word in a personal matter was as good as an oath." At least forty battery members outlived Matthews, including seven men who died at the Western Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers on the southern side of Leavenworth. One of the last surviving veterans was Thomas Williams, who died in Kansas City, Kansas, in 1930.⁵⁶

The story of Douglas's Battery is not a dramatic one. Like countless other units, it served in one of the Civil War's many backwaters, and those of its members who did "see the elephant"—like Lieutenant Minor and the men of his section who accompanied him to oppose the Price Raid—were only able to do so before the battery was officially mustered into the Union army. For the most part, battery members spent their time "on the bleak knob of Fort Sully," performing the dreary tasks that were part and parcel of garrison duty. As the war wound down, the greatest threat they faced was contracting one of the many lethal diseases that killed so many soldiers.⁵⁷

Unlike every other unit in the Union army, the battery never had white officers, and many of the latter probably blamed its morale problems on that very fact. Would its "Good Soldierly Material" have responded better to white leadership? Probably not. The unit's three black officers were very talented men who had impressed several senior officers and convinced Major General Curtis that they

55. *The Bee*, April 9, 1904; William D. Matthews, Pension File. Beginning with H.R. 116, which was introduced by Representative Sidney Clarke in 1869 and ending with H.R. 7751, introduced by Representative Charles Curtis in 1902, a series of at least eleven bills unsuccessfully attempted to provide financial relief for Matthews. For copies of these bills, see Letters Received, Colored Troops Division, 1863–1889.

56. *Leavenworth Times*, March 3, 6, 1906; Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans who Served Between 1861 & 1900, roll 579, T289, RG 15. Sometime after 1906 Matthews's remains were moved to the nearby Leavenworth National Cemetery.

57. Disease claimed four out of every five black soldiers who died during the war.

53. Independent Battery, U.S. Colored Light Artillery and Tenth U.S. Cavalry, Organization Index to Pension Files of Veterans who Served Between 1861 & 1900, roll 579, T289, RG 15. Pension applications were filed by 112 veterans or their dependents. In about one-sixth of these cases the men had changed their names. H. Ford Douglass, Pension File.

54. William D. Matthews and Tilford Davis, Pension Files.

In 1902 U.S. representative from Kansas, Charles Curtis, introduced the last of at least eleven bills that unsuccessfully tried to authorize pay for William Matthews's nine months of service as a captain in the First Kansas Colored.

were “well qualified for their places.” The battery’s favorable inspections, as well as Matthews’s elevation to the post of national grand master of the York Rite Masons after the war, further underscored the leadership abilities of both Douglas and Matthews and suggest that if they could not motivate their men, it is doubtful that white officers could have done any better. Also, most men enlisted in the battery with the understanding that they would be serving under officers of their own color, and the appointment of white officers might have hurt recruiting or caused even more desertions.

If Douglas or Matthews did actually try to take financial advantage of their men or coerce their enlistment—and evidence is inadequate to determine the veracity of these allegations—there is no guarantee that white officers would not have tried to do the same, especially given the high level of illiteracy in the unit. The fact that an investigation cleared both officers, however, as well as the *Times* obituary’s emphasis on Matthews’s integrity, suggest that these charges were false and that Colonel Foster was wrong to conclude that they were “men of little character and less integrity.” If they had been white, perhaps Foster would have been more inclined to give them the benefit of a doubt.

Aside from the battery’s unique leadership, it is most important to remember its clear demonstration that black men, most of them former slaves, were eager to serve in the war for their freedom, believing that, as Matthews had pointed out at Fort Scott on the original Emancipation Day, “If we fight we shall be respected.” Most of them would undoubtedly have agreed with Sattira Douglas,

57th CONGRESS,
1st Session. **H. R. 7751.**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

JANUARY 6, 1902.

Mr. CURTIS introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on War Claims and ordered to be printed.

A BILL

For the relief of William D. Matthews.

1 Do it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
2 tion of the United States of America in Congress assembled,
3 That the Secretary of the Treasury be, and he is hereby, au-
4 thorized and directed to pay to William D. Matthews, out of
5 any money in the Treasury not otherwise appropriated, the
6 pay and emoluments of a captain of infantry from the fourth
7 day of August, eighteen hundred and sixty-two, to the second
8 day of May, eighteen hundred and sixty-three.

who wrote in June 1863 that if black men did not “enroll themselves . . . to do battle for the true and right, it will only prove the correctness of the aspersion indulged in by our enemies, that we are unworthy of those rights which they have so long withheld from us.”⁵⁸ 

58. Ella Forbes, *African American Women During the Civil War* (New York: Garland, 1998), 45. Sattira, or Sattie, Douglas was as active as her husband in the struggle for civil rights and was an officer in Chicago’s Colored Ladies’ Freedmen’s Aid Society.