

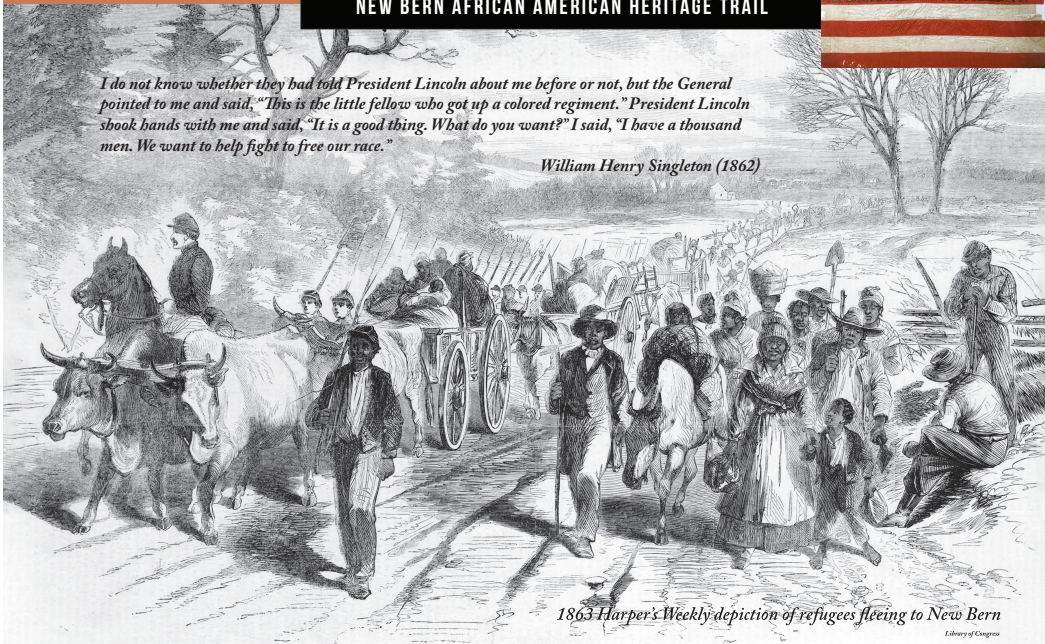
Fighting for Freedom

NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL



I do not know whether they had told President Lincoln about me before or not, but the General pointed to me and said, "This is the little fellow who got up a colored regiment." President Lincoln shook hands with me and said, "It is a good thing. What do you want?" I said, "I have a thousand men. We want to help fight to free our race."

William Henry Singleton (1862)



1863 Harper's Weekly depiction of refugees fleeing to New Bern

Library of Congress

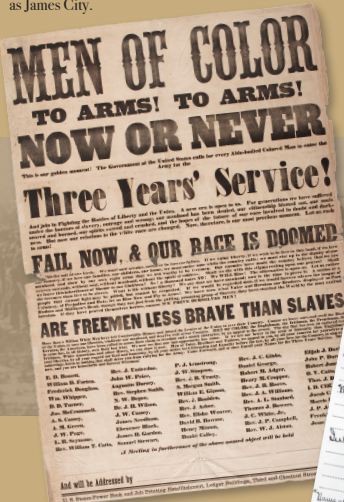
From Corn Stalks to Rifles

African Americans in New Bern played a prominent role in both the military and political outcomes of the Civil War. Countless men and women worked actively to end slavery, fight for freedom, and support the Union cause.

Following the federal army's capture of New Bern in March 1862, Union Brig. Gen. Ambrose Burnside reported that the town was "overrun with fugitives" as thousands of Black refugees fled from surrounding plantations and nearby coastal towns. By the end of the war, the African American population swelled to almost 15,000, with the majority encamped across the Trent River at the contraband settlement known as James City.



Refugees and Union soldiers outside the Hughes-Jones House on Broad St. near the office of the Provost Marshall. (Library of Congress)



Broadside recruitment poster written by Frederick Douglass and signed by fifty-four African American leaders in Philadelphia. (Library of Congress)

Nelson Harrold was mustered into the 1st North Carolina Colored Heavy Artillery in September 1864 in New Bern. He died the following year in the federal army's Foster Hospital located on the grounds of New Bern Academy. (Library of Congress)

Black Soldiers in Blue

In May 1863, the 1st North Carolina Colored Volunteers (NCCV), known as the "African Brigade," was mustered in at New Bern. The unit was later renamed the 35th United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiment and placed under the command of Colonel James C. Beecher, half-brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. William Henry Singleton served as a sergeant in Company G. Two additional infantry regiments, the 36th and 37th, along with the 1st North Carolina Colored Heavy Artillery, were also formed. More than 5,000 men enlisted as USCTs in New Bern.



John V. DeGrasse

Major John Van Surley DeGrasse was one of only three African Americans to serve as chief surgeons in the federal army during the Civil War. A commissioned officer, DeGrasse earned his medical degree from the Bowdoin College Medical School of Maine in 1849. In 1854, he was recognized as the first African American admitted to a U.S. medical association when he became a member in the Massachusetts Medical Society. Between May 1863 and February 1864, DeGrasse was stationed in New Bern as chief surgeon in the 35th USCT regiment.

Images: National Archives, Library of Congress