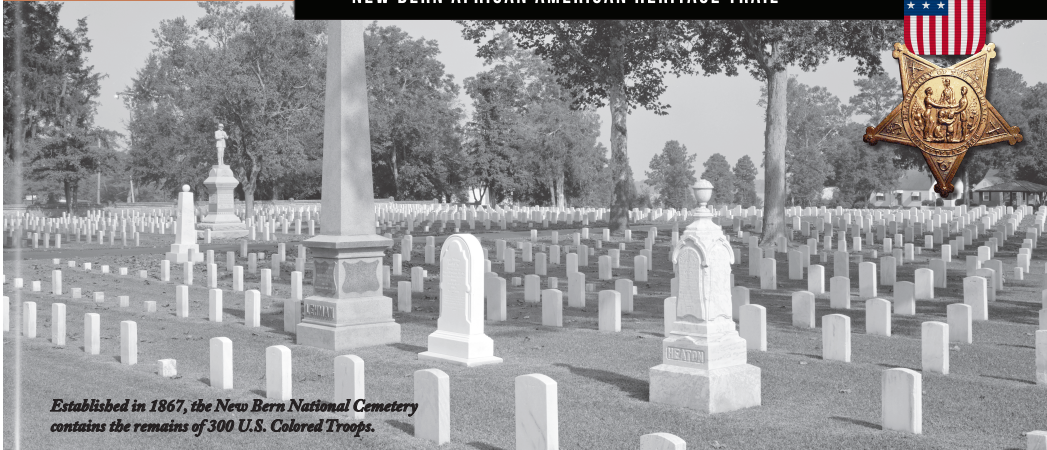


Grand Army of the Republic



NEW BERN AFRICAN AMERICAN HERITAGE TRAIL



Established in 1867, the New Bern National Cemetery contains the remains of 300 U.S. Colored Troops.

Beecher Post

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) was founded in 1866 as a fraternal organization that gave Union veterans a platform for sharing their common wartime experience. Hundreds of local chapters were created across the country by the end of the nineteenth century. Initially, membership included both White and Black veterans. By the 1880s, however, the organization was racially segregated. Over 500,000 Union veterans were members.

A group of Black veterans established a new GAR chapter in New Bern in June 1886. Post #22 was named after Colonel James Beecher, the half-brother of famed *Uncle Tom's Cabin* author Harriett Beecher Stowe and the commanding officer of the 35th United States Colored Troops (USCT) regiment.



Colonel James Beecher

The chapter was organized by Philip J. Lee, a 35th USCT veteran from James City. There were twenty-seven charter members, including Allen G. Oden, a veteran of Company H, 36th USCT, and Isaac Powell, Company B, 37th USCT. By 1897, the chapter had grown to thirty-three members, when a post headquarters was built on Carmer Street. New Bern's three Black Masonic lodges—King Solomon's, Morning Star, and Zaradatha—assisted ceremonially with laying the cornerstone.

The lodge building was left untouched by the Great Fire in 1922. Sometime during the Great Depression, however, the post was abandoned. The WPA resurrected the structure in the late 1930s for use as the Beecher Colored Recreation Center. When Craven Terrace was built in 1941, the recreation center was demolished.



35th USCT reunion in Plymouth, N.C., c. 1902

Images: Library of Congress, National Archives

The 1913 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of New Bern shows the location of the GAR Hall on Carmer Street, just north of Broad. The building was located on the edge of Craven Terrace.



● TRAIL SIGNS

Isaac Powell

Born in Washington, North Carolina, Isaac Powell enlisted in the federal army in December 1863 at age eighteen. As a member of the 37th USCT, he saw action in numerous campaigns in Virginia, including Petersburg and the battles around Richmond in 1864. Powell was also in several North Carolina engagements, such as Fort Fisher and the capture of Wilmington in 1865. His regiment was present at the surrender of the Confederate army at Bennett Place on April 26, 1865, bringing an end to the Civil War.

In 1893, Isaac Powell was appointed the Beecher post commander, a position he held for sixteen years. His stature within the GAR rose, and, in 1906, he was elected Commander of the Department of Virginia and North Carolina. Powell was the only African American to hold that position over the combined Black and White posts in the South.