

Now & Then in Ripon ... Looking back with the Ripon Historical Society

‘Make Way for Liberty: African Americans in the Civil War’ holds connections to Ripon & Green Lake

Last Fall, the Ripon Historical Society’s free public events included author Jeffrey Kannel, who was the author of the book “Make Way for Liberty: African Americans in the Civil War,” published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press in 2020.

Following his presentation Kannel did a book-signing for those who purchased a copy.

Hundreds of African-American soldiers and regimental employees represented Wisconsin in the Civil War, and many of them lived in the state either before or after the conflict.

The number of African-American soldiers were smaller than other ethnicities, but collectively they served in five or more regiments across the United States.

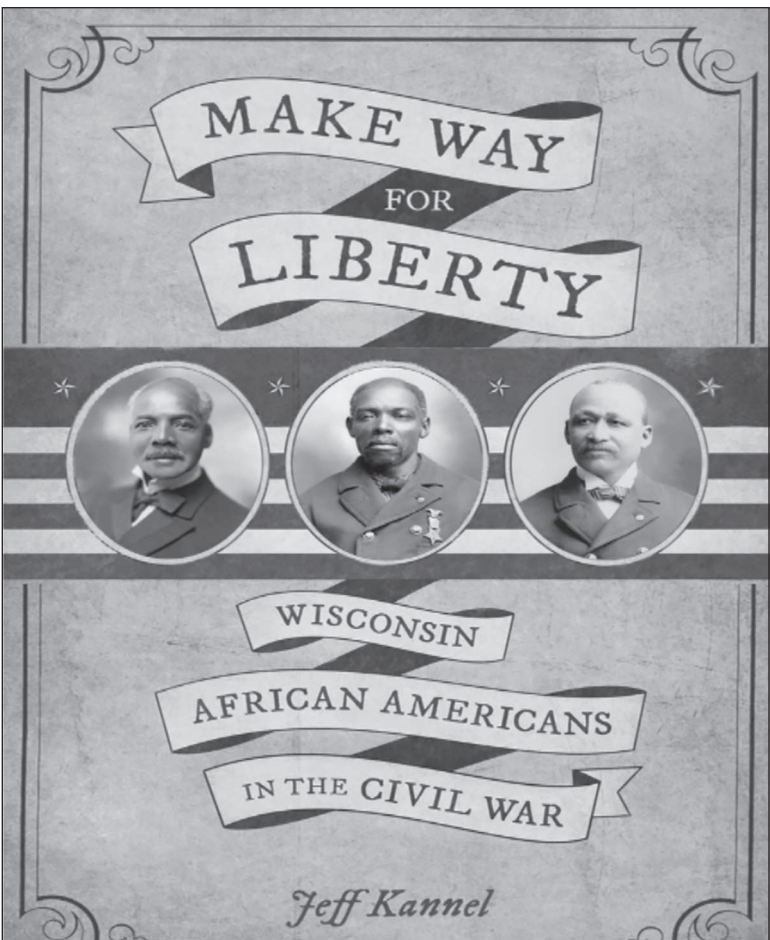
One of the reasons African Americans stepped up to serve was they knew their effort could help free slaves in southern states that seceded and insisted upon slavery, if the war was won by the North. And that winning would lead to the abolition of slavery and the eventual Emancipation Proclamation in these southern states, which seceded from the nation.

Kannel spent 10 years researching data and stories for this book, which included the following soldiers in the Ripon and Green Lake area:

► **Jackson Hill, 18th USCI** — On his bed card while in a military hospital in St. Louis, he stated that his wife, “Charlett Hill,” lived in “Reppon WI.” He enlisted in 1864 in La Crosse and was a resident of Fond du Lac in 1870 and 1880. In the admission book from the Milwaukee Soldiers’ Home (1893), he said that his mother was Mrs. Washington Skinner of Fond du Lac.

► **James Olmstead, 18th USCI** — Enlisted August 1864 in Fond du Lac, with service credited to Ripon. He was a substitute for William H. Robinson of Ripon. On his service muster out form, it lists his post-service address as Ripon. No further information exists after his service.

► **Shepard Sheldon (Shel-**



“MAKE WAY FOR Liberty: Wisconsin African Americans in the Civil War” was published by the Wisconsin Historical Society Press in 2020 and may be purchased online. submitted photo

**ton), 18th USCI** — Resident of Ripon in June 1863, when he registered for the draft. He was a steamboat worker and enlisted August 1864 in La Crosse.

Shelton made the following statement in a pension application: “For a year or so before enlistment I lived at Rippon Wis., was ‘steamboating,’ had no home there (in Ripon) at all, except that I lived with a man named ‘Taylor,’ given name not remembered ... I knew Dave Gores, and Tim Mapes, and Ex. Gov. Horner there.” No evidence could be found that Shelton came back to Wisconsin after the war; he lived in many other places.

► **Edward Foster, 49th USCI** — Enlisted in 1864 in Fond du Lac; service credited to 2nd ward Ripon (not a substitute). Died from consumption while in service.

► **Lewis Green, 49th USCI** — Enlisted August 1864 in Fond du Lac; credited to 2nd ward Ripon. He died in service March 14, 1865 at Vicksburg Hospital.

► **Edward Hall, 49th USCI** — Registered for draft June 1863 in Ripon, age 20, occupation “col’d barber.” He enlisted August 1864 in Fond du Lac; credited to 2nd ward Ripon. His foster mother was Jane E. Williams. He stated that he had lived with her since age 10 and that he lived in Ripon and Oshkosh from 1865-69, and then Chicago.

In the 1860 census for Ripon, he is listed in the household of C. L. and Jane E. Williams. C. L. also was a barber. In 1880 and 1900, he was listed as living in Chicago with wife Minnie; occupation barber in both censuses. In 1880, they had a 10-year-old adopted daughter, Mary Burrell, living with them, who was born in Wisconsin

and may have been the daughter of another black veteran (Stephen Burrell).

► **John Battise (Battice, Baptist), 65th and 67th USCI** — Employed by Capt. George W. Carter of 4th Wisconsin Regiment. He came to Wisconsin with Carter and worked for him. Draft registration lists town of Metomen, June 1863. He enlisted September 1864 in Fond du Lac. Battice was discharged in 1865 and came back to Fairwater. Carter, a lawyer in Ripon, wrote multiple letters supporting Battice’s pension application. He never got a pension. On his admission to Milwaukee Soldiers’ Home in 1896, he listed Carter as his “nearest relative.”

► **Calvin Bostwick, 17th USCI** — Born in Calumet County; mixed race black and native. Bostwick enlisted February 1865 in Fond du Lac and is credited to town of Alto. Lived in Calumet County after the war. He had two brothers who also served.

► **Levi Shur (Lemuel Sheer), 49th USCI** — Enlisted September 1864 in Fond du Lac. Sheer was credited to town of Alto. No information about post-war residence was found. Employed by Wisconsin regiments or officers.

► **Joseph Collins, 4th WI Cavalry** — Enlisted September 1864 in Clinton, La. His service is credited to Ripon. However no evidence could be found that Collins ever lived in Wisconsin.

► **Edward Drake, 4th WI Cavalry** — Enlisted August 1864 in Baton Rouge, La. His service was credited to Ripon, but no evidence that he ever lived in Wisconsin could be found.

► **Henry Sink and Ebenezer Morgan** — Both registered for the draft while living in Rosendale in June 1863. Sink served in Co. F, 29th USCI, was wounded in the Battle of the Crater and lived in Fond du Lac and De Pere after service. Morgan also lived in Stockbridge before his service in the 49th USCI. After service, he lived in Rosendale, Stockbridge and Fond du Lac. Both men are buried in Rienzi Cemetery in Fond du Lac.

► **Sgt. Lloyd T. Bryon, Co F, 29th USCI** — Was born free in Pennsylvania. He was a barber with his half-brother in Plover in the 1850s, according to the census. Draft registration occurred June 1863 in Berlin, where he was a barber. Bryon was supposed to be the best educated man in his company and did record keeping usually done by white officers. He did not return to Wisconsin after the war and left his wife, Hannah, behind in Wisconsin. His half-brother, William Clegget, remained in Appleton. Clegget stated that Hannah was living in Oshkosh, but moved to Chicago with Jane E. Williams.

**Crediting**

By the time Black men were accepted into the Army, every man’s service was credited to a locality. For each man credited to a locality, it reduced that community’s draft quota. Crediting was often a political decision made by provost marshals or officials in Madison.

In some cases, like Hall, service was credited to his actual place of residence. In the case of substitutes, service was credited to the place of residence of the man whom the substitute was serving instead of. In the case of the two men who were employed in the 4th Wisconsin Cavalry, it was rare that their service was credited to a locality, but in these two cases it was so.

At the end of the Civil War almost 200,000 African Americans had fought for the Union in the hope of freedom for all.

For more information or further reading, the book “Make Way for Liberty” may be purchased online via [www.Amazon.com](http://www.Amazon.com), [www.Thriftbooks.com](http://www.Thriftbooks.com) or [www.eBay.com](http://www.eBay.com)

The Ripon Historical Society is the oldest continually operating historical society in Wisconsin. It is open Fridays and Saturdays 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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