



## New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

Historic Preservation Field Services Bureau • Peebles Island, PO Box 189, Waterford, New York 12188-0189  
518-237-8643  
www.nysparks.com

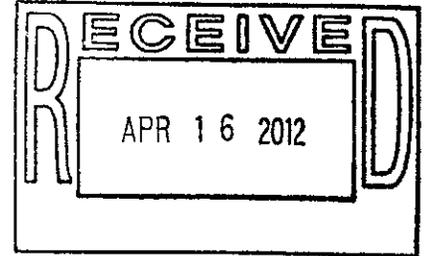
Andrew M. Cuomo  
Governor

Rose Harvey  
Commissioner

April 12, 2012

Mark Trabucco, Chairman  
Village of Owego, Historic Preservation Commission  
178 Main Street,  
Owego, New York 13827

Re: James C. Beecher House, 560 5<sup>th</sup> Ave.



Dear Mr Trabucco:

This letter is to notify you that the property listed above is being considered by the State Review Board, for nomination to the State and National Registers of Historic Places, at its next meeting on March 7, 2012. Enclosed is a draft copy of the fully documented nomination proposal and a copy of the criteria under which properties are evaluated.

Certified Local Governments are required to participate in the nomination process as follows:

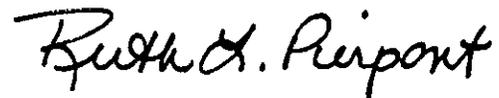
- The commission, after reasonable opportunity for public comment, shall prepare a report as to whether or not the property, in its opinion, meets the criteria for listing on the State and National Registers.
- Within sixty days of notice from the State Historic Preservation Office, the chief local elected official shall transmit the report of the commission and his/her recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Office.

In the event that the commission and the chief elected official agree that the proposed nominations do not meet the criteria for listing, the chief elected official will return the nomination materials along with the commission's report and his/her recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer, who will take no further action unless appeal is filed with 30 days.

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Please send your comments to the above address before March 6, 2012. For more information, please contact Travis Bowman at 518.237.8643 x 3259.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth L. Pierpont". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R" and a distinct "L" and "P".

Ruth L. Pierpont  
Deputy Commissioner  
for Historic Preservation

RLP:lsa

Enclosure: Frequently Asked Questions  
Criteria for Evaluation



**FIELD SERVICES BUREAU  
DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

**NEW YORK STATE OFFICE OF PARKS, RECREATION AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION**

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## **National and State Registers Criteria for Evaluation**

The following criteria are used to evaluate properties (other than areas of the National Park Service and National Historic Landmarks) for listing on the National and State Registers of Historic Places.

The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association and

- A. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
- B. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
- C. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
- D. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Ordinarily cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the State and National Registers. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- A. a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance; or
- B. a building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event; or
- C. a birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his productive life; or
- D. a cemetery that derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events; or
- E. a reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived; or
- F. a property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historical significance; or
- G. a property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance.



FIELD SERVICES BUREAU • DIVISION FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION  
STATE AND NATIONAL REGISTERS OF HISTORIC PLACES PROGRAM

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## Frequently Asked Questions about the State and National Registers of Historic Places in New York State

***What are the State and National Registers of Historic Places?*** Administered by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO), which is part of the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), the registers are the official lists of properties that are significant in history, architecture, engineering, landscape design, archeology and culture within local, state and/or national contexts. More than 90,000 historic properties in New York have received this prestigious recognition.

***What qualifies a property for listing on the registers?*** The registers criteria recognize the value of all aspects of New York's diverse culture. Properties must represent a significant historic theme (e.g., architecture, agriculture, industry, transportation) and retain sufficient integrity to illustrate their association with that theme -- specifically, properties must possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. Properties less than 50 years of age, with rare exceptions, are not considered eligible for listing.

***What kinds of properties can be included in the registers?*** Buildings and structures such as residences, churches, commercial buildings and bridges; sites such as cemeteries, landscapes and archaeological sites; districts or groups of buildings, structures or sites that are significant as a whole, such as farmsteads, residential neighborhoods, industrial complexes and cultural landscapes; and objects such as fountains and monuments.

***What is a historic district?*** A historic district is a group of buildings, structures, and sites related architecturally and/or historically and listed together on the State and National Registers. A district may include any number of properties.

***What is the process for listing a property on the registers?*** To begin, an application must be submitted to the State Historic Preservation Office for evaluation. If the property is determined eligible for listing, the nomination sponsor is responsible for providing documentation that describes the property's setting and physical characteristics, documents its history, conveys its significance in terms of its historic context and demonstrates how it meets the registers criteria. Once complete, the nomination is reviewed by the New York State Board for Historic Preservation. If the board recommends the nomination, the New York State Historic Preservation Officer (Commissioner of the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation) lists the property on the State Register and forwards it to the National Park Service for review and listing on the National Register.

***Can an owner object to having his or her property listed on the registers?*** Yes. A privately-owned individual property cannot not be listed on the National Register over the objection of its owner(s). Similarly, a historic district cannot be listed on the National Register over the objection of a majority of the private-property owners in the district. Although the New York State Register does not recognize owner objections, it is the policy of the SHPO to avoid such listings and to work openly with nomination sponsors and communities to provide information about the registers program and opportunities for comment.

***How long does it take to get a property listed?*** In New York State, the length of time required for the preparation and review of an individual nomination proposal typically varies from six to twelve months depending upon the promptness with which a complete nomination form can be prepared. Historic districts often require more time for preparation and public comment.

***What are the benefits of being listed on the registers?*** The State and National Registers are a recognized and visible component of public and private planning. The registers promote heritage tourism, economic development and appreciation of historic resources. Benefits include:

- Official recognition that a property is of significance to the nation, the state, or the local community.
- Listing raises the community's awareness and pride in its past.
- Listing is a requirement for participation in state and federal rehabilitation tax credit programs.
- Not-for-profit organizations and municipalities that own listed properties are eligible to apply for New York State historic preservation grants. Additional grants are available through other public and private sources which may also consider whether a property is listed.
- Properties that meet the criteria for registers listing receive a measure of protection from state and federal undertakings regardless of their listing status. State and federal agencies must consult with the SHPO to avoid, minimize or mitigate adverse effects to listed or eligible properties.

***Will State and National Registers listing restrict the use of a property?*** Listing on the registers does not interfere with a property owner's right to remodel, alter, paint, manage, sell, or even demolish a historic property, local zoning or ordinances notwithstanding. If state or federal funds are used or if a state or federal permit is required, proposed alterations will be reviewed by the SHPO staff – regardless of listing status.

***How can an owner get a State and National Registers plaque to display on his or her building?*** The State and National Registers program does not provide plaques. A list of manufacturers is available upon request.

***Must owners of listed buildings open their buildings to the public?*** No. There is absolutely no requirement to open registers listed properties to the public.

***Will a property owner be able to leave his property to his children or anyone else he/she wishes?*** Yes. Listing on the registers in no way affects the transfer of property from one owner to another.

***Will listing on the State and National Registers, either individually or in a historic district, affect local property taxes or zoning?*** No. Listing has no direct bearing on any of these local actions.

***How do the State and National Registers differ from local landmark designation?*** State and National Registers listing should not be confused with local landmark designation. Many communities have enacted local historic landmark ordinances that establish local commissions and review procedures for locally designated properties. These commissions are established and operated independently from the State and National Registers, although the goals are similar -- to protect and preserve properties important in our past.

***How does listing protect a building and its surroundings?*** The registers are a valuable tool in the planning of publicly funded, licensed or permitted projects. Government agencies are responsible for avoiding or reducing the effects of projects on properties that are eligible for or listed on the registers. Listing raises awareness of the significance of properties, helping to ensure that preservation issues are considered early and effectively in the planning process.

***Where can I find out more about the State and National Registers?*** For more information contact the Field Services Bureau at (518) 237-8643, visit our website at [www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/register/index.htm](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo/register/index.htm) or see the National Park Service website at [www.nps.gov/history/nr/](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/).



DRAFT

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property:

historic name James C Beecher House

other names/site number Comfort Cottage

### 2. Location

street & number 560 Fifth Ave.

not for publication

city or town Owego

vicinity

state New York

code NY

county Tioga

code 107

zip code 13827

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally.  See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the  
National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the  
National Register.

removed from the National  
Register.

other, (explain:) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**James C. Beccher House**

Name of Property

**DRAFT**

**Tioga County, New York**

County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

0

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY: Gothic Revival

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls Wood

roof Asphalt

other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation Sheet

James C. Beecher House

Name of Property

DRAFT

Tioga County, New York

County and State

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
[X] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
[X] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
previously listed in the National Register
previously determined eligible by the National Register
designated a National Historic Landmark
recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #
recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

MILITARY

Period of Significance

1867

Significant Dates

1867

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

JAMES C BEECHER

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown

Primary location of additional data

- [x] State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
Local government
University
Other

Name of repository:

James C. Beecher House

Name of Property

Tioga County, New York

County and State

DRAFT

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreage of property** \_\_\_\_\_

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	18			
	Zone	Easting	Northing	
2	18			

3				
	Zone	Easting	Northing	
4				

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Travis Bowman, Historic Preservation Program Analyst

organization New York State Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation date 2/27/2012

street & number PO Box 189 telephone 518-237-8643 x 3259

city or town Waterford state New York zip code 12188

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Douglas Weeks

street & number 560 5<sup>th</sup> Ave. telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town Owego state NY zip code 13827

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
CONTINUATION SHEET

**DRAFT**

James C Beecher House  
Tioga County, New York

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**Description**

The James C. Beecher House occupies a mid-sized village lot (.61 acres) on north bank of the Susquehanna River in the Village of Owego. It is situated on Fifth Avenue, which runs east out of the village between the former NY & Erie railroad tracks (today the Norfolk Southern) and the river.

**House**

The house is two-stories in height, rectangular in footprint and roughly symmetrical in massing. It is of frame construction, clad in vertical board and batten. It rests on a foundation of stone block, currently parged with concrete. The roof is a steeply-pitched side gable punctuated by broadly projecting high dormers; the main roof and the dormers are covered in asphalt shingles. The rooflines of both the main roof and the dormers are ornamented by a shallow moulded polychrome painted cornice.

**Main Elevation (NE)**

The main elevation fronts Fifth Avenue and is three bays in width and symmetrically composed with each bay surmounted by a steeply-pitched dormer. Fenestration consists of five rectangular, 6/6 wood-framed, double hung windows set into simple wooden surrounds and covered by aluminum storms. Lighting the upper floor of the center bay is a wood-framed, six-light wooden window with a peaked top. Unlike the other dormers, the center dormer surmounting this window (ie capping the porch) projects out from the roofline and main wall plane slightly. The main door to the house is covered by a half-height entry porch with a shed roof; the porch is supported by two vertical posts and ornamented with decorative arches and spandrels springing from carved corbels on the posts and main wall plane. The roof of the porch is varnished tongue and groove and the decking is tongue and groove painted boards. The door itself is set into a surround wide sidelights and wooden paneled transom.

**Southeast elevation.**

The side elevation is dominated by a hexagonal stacked bay. Fenestration consists of six double-hung, 4/4 wood framed windows set in a ribbon with a simple wood surround and projecting sill lighting the lower bay. Lighting the upper bay is a similar configuration of six windows, except the windows are aluminum sash replacements and the sill and surround are slightly more slender. The bay is set on a foundation of parged brick, rather than stone.

**Rear Elevation.**

The rear elevation fronts the Susquehanna River and all of the decorative elements continue onto this side. In terms of massing, there is a single-story block covered with a shed roof projecting rearwards from the main block and a small, single story, shed-roofed side block with its own entrance covering the basement stair accesses. Fenestration on the rear block consists of two wood framed, asymmetrically-placed picture windows with multi-light side lights. Fenestration on the main block consists of two rectangular, 6/6 wood-framed, double hung windows set into simple wooden surrounds and covered by aluminum storms; each window lights the upper story near the end bays and is surmounted by a steeply-pitched dormer. The side block is clad in novelty siding, rather than vertical board and battens. Fenestration on the side block consists of a single, non-historic door set into an unadorned wooden casing. The main block also has an entrance consisting of a wooden door with eight-light sidelights, all set in an unadorned wooden casing.

**Northwest Elevation.**

The side elevation has four openings. There are two small, square, single light, wood framed windows set into unadorned wooden casings. These windows are asymmetrically placed and light the basement stair block and a

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James C Beecher House  
Tioga County, New York

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laundry room on the interior. Lighting the front room on the first floor is a 6/6 wood frame window of the type already described. Lighting the upper story is a paired grouping of 6/6 wood frame windows, again of the type already described. All four openings on this elevation are surmounted by small shed coverings created from the board and batten siding.

#### Interior

On the interior, the nominated house has an asymmetric plan with a parlor, stair hall, dining room, the domestic spaces and a small front room that could have been a chamber or possibly an office/library on the first floor. The upper floor has three chambers. Based on wall construction, the floorplan appears to be intact from the construction of the house, except for the addition of two bathrooms. Finishes and materials in the house include a mixture of elements typical to the construction period (1867) and those reflecting the tastes of the early twentieth century. All of the ceilings in the house are machine split lath and plaster, though some have been covered by removable drop ceilings of pressboard; the latter treatment was apparently done to hide indoor plumbing when it was installed. Walls are also machine split lath and plaster, with the hall, lower chamber, and one upper chamber papered. Recent repairs to the downstairs chamber have revealed a hand-written note in pencil that reads "Harry Wallder/Leon Tuttle/Paper Hangers/May 28, 1918." The dining room and the kitchen have painted wainscoting and built-in shelving. Floors are wide painted boards in the public spaces—parlor, dining room, hall and lower chamber—though all but the dining room were at one point covered in early twentieth century varnished tongue and groove floors. Floors in the domestic spaces on the lower story are well-worn, wide wooden boards. Upstairs floors are all early twentieth century varnished tongue and groove examples. Trimwork throughout the house is original and includes wide moulded baseboards and simple door and window casings. The doors themselves retain integrity; they are paneled, with period hardware; doors to the chambers upstairs have hopper transoms. The stairs, balustrades, wide handrail and turned newel appears to be original. Only one fireplace was built in the house, located in the main parlor. The fireplace is brick with a moulded wood mantel and a marble hearth. Interestingly, examining the underside of the hearth reveals it is a re-purposed tombstone (the epitaph is only partially visible, but the date "1856" is readable). A lack of visible repairs to the brick chimney stack or the circular sawn support framing indicates this was likely an original inclusion. The basement has plaster walls and a poured concrete floor. The attic has no finishes.

#### Outbuildings

No outbuildings survive.

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James C Beecher House  
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Section number 8 Page 1

**DRAFT**

**Significance**

The James C. Beecher house is architecturally significant as an important and intact example of a post Civil War representation of the picturesque Gothic cottage tradition popularized by Alexander Jackson Davis and Andrew Jackson Downing in the 1840s and 1850s. The house is historically significant as the most intact and surviving known property associated with the life of Rev. James C. Beecher (1828-1886), a figure of significance in the military history of the United States. Beecher, an important Congregationalist Minister, was a member of the famed abolitionist family whose siblings included Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher. James Beecher was the Colonel and a principle recruiter of the First North Carolina Colored Troops—one of the first black regiments of the Civil War to be composed almost exclusively of freed slaves recruited in the occupied confederacy. Beecher served with distinction during the war; he was wounded twice at the Battle of Honey Hill, SC, was brevetted multiples times during the war, and his unit was noted for its bravery and merit. Beecher went above and beyond his military responsibilities when he hand his wife undertook a structured, formal and ultimately successful effort to educate his men. After the war, Beecher served in the Freedman's Bureau in South Carolina before accepting an invitation to take over the pulpit of the Congregationalist Church in Owego. Although his achievements are associated with the war, his military career and public life are not represented by other known properties. Recognizing James Beecher's accomplishments and associating a property with him will bring public recognition to one the few New York residents who commanded a black regiment during the Civil War and, one of the few men nationally who assumed a concerted endeavor to help freed slaves-turned soldiers transition into their new lives as citizens.

Integrity of the property is high. The house appears to have undergone a renovation in the early twentieth century, and some of the Victorian finishes were covered-over with elements fashionable during the Colonial Revival period. Recent (2011) flooding of the Susquehanna River has heavily damaged these twentieth century renovations, allowing the current owner to undertake a large-scale rehabilitation sensitive to the original finishes and workmanship.

**Beecher**

James Chaplin Beecher was born into one of the most influential families of the nineteenth century. James's father, Lyman Beecher (1775–1863), was a Connecticut evangelical Protestant minister who espoused controversial views on abolitionism, colonization, and various reform movements of the day. As a New Light congregational clergyman, Lyman Beecher was closely connected to the Second Great Awakening. Lyman had thirteen children, many of whom went on to become highly admired and respected ministers, authors, reformers, and abolitionists. As one period commentator noted... “[the Beechers are] more widely and favorably known than almost any other in the United States... To them questions of scholastic theology are mummeries, dry and attractionless; they are practical, living in the real present, dealing with questions which palpitate with vitality. ... They are known to the reading and religious public of the United States, by reviews, essays, sermons, orations, debates, and discourses on a great variety of subjects, chiefly of local or momentary interest.”<sup>1</sup> The description was not overly-hyperbolic; together, Lyman's children published over one hundred books and almost all of the siblings were nationally renowned and respected.

Isabella Holmes Beecher Hooker was a leader in the women's suffrage movement and one of the organizers of the National Women's Suffrage Association in 1869. She lectured nationally on the subject and testified to Congress on multiple occasions. Catharine Beecher wrote several books on health, child-rearing, religion, and education. In 1841

<sup>1</sup> “From Frazer's Magazine for November: Some Account of Mrs. Beecher Stowe's Family, by an Alabama Man” *Frederick Douglass' Paper* (Rochester, NY) 17 December 1852. [www.accessible.com](http://www.accessible.com)

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James C Beecher House  
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she authored the era's definitive guide to women's domestic life, titled *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and At School*. The 1869 update to that work, *The American Woman's Home*, was written in collaboration with her sister Harriet Beecher Stowe. James Beecher's half-sister Harriet Beecher Stowe, one of the most well-known members of the family today, wrote many of the family's books, including the celebrated work *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Harriet and James's brother Henry Ward Beecher was one the most famed abolitionists in the United States. Henry built a congregation at Plymouth Church in Brooklyn and used his pulpit there to preach anti-slavery views to huge crowds, but he was perhaps best known for sending bibles and rifles to Kansas during the "Bleeding Kansas" period. The public connected the Beecher name with the breech-loading Sharps rifle, and "Beecher's Bibles" became a period nickname for the firearm. In a letter to a party of abolitionist Kansas settlers, published in the *New York Times*, H.W. Beecher made clear that he thought both instruments were needed in Kansas:

You are the pioneers of towns and cities. You are the seed of Christianity—the germs of civilization...It is a pleasure and an honor to us to be in any way connected with such an enterprise, by furnishing the emigrant material or moral aid...A friend and Parishioner (A. Studwell, Esq.) desires me to present to you twenty-five copies of the Bible...This book will lie at the foundation of your State. It will teach you to value your rights, and inspire you to defend them...It is a shame that in America, amidst our free institutions, anything else should be needed but *moral* instrumentalities [emphasis in original]. But you need more. You will be surrounded by [pro-slavery] men who have already committed the wickedest wrongs and the most atrocious crimes...To send forth companies of men, with their families, amid those who have been bred to regard helplessness as a lawful prey to strength, would be a piece of unjustifiable cruelty. I send to you, therefore, as I promised, the arms required for twenty-five men...There are times when self-defense is a religious duty. If that duty was ever imperative, it is now, and in Kansas.<sup>2</sup>

James Chaplin Beecher entered Dartmouth College at age 16, but he was thrown out of school in 1847 after a "series of scrapes" according to a letter from Dartmouth College President Nathan Lord to James's father Lyman.<sup>3</sup> Beecher family influence got James reinstated and he graduated the next year. Upon graduation from Dartmouth James Beecher spent five years as a sailor and then an officer in the merchant marine East India trade.<sup>4</sup> In 1853 Beecher acquiesced to his father's wishes and returned to the United States to attend the Andover Theological Seminary. Beecher did not finish seminary, but he was ordained anyway in 1856, when he left for position abroad with the American Seaman's Friends Society. Beecher's new post was a barge known as the Floating Bethel, moored in China at Whampoa-Canton. The bethel was built under the direction of James's predecessor Rev. George Loomis in 1849-50. The floating church was just that—it provided a venue for religious services, was a base for missionary efforts amongst the Chinese, inspired betterment among mariners by offering them a place to read and learn, and gave comfort, food and aid to the sick and destitute.<sup>5</sup> Many evangelical churches and religious societies constructed such vessels in the mid-nineteenth century, as sailors were considered especially in need of moral influence; some examples were meant to be semi-permanent and some, like the example Beecher ministered at in China, were meant to be mobile. Domestic examples are known to have existed in New York City, Baltimore, the

<sup>2</sup> "Bibles and Rifles/Letter from Henry Ward Beecher to C.B. Lines" *New York Times* 4 April, 1856. [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com).

<sup>3</sup> "#36 3 letters from President Nathan Lord of Dartmouth College to Lyman Beecher" Abstract of letters in Beecher-Stowe family papers, 1798-1956 Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University <http://oasis.lib.harvard.edu/oasis/deliver/~sch00049>

<sup>4</sup> Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Saints, Sinners and Beechers*. (Bobbs-Merrill Co.: Indianapolis, IN, 1934), 387-8. [www.persi.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.persi.heritagequestonline.com).

<sup>5</sup> "New Floating Bethel" *New York Times*. 9 January 1871. [www.proquest.com](http://www.proquest.com); Roald Kverndal, *Seamen's Missions Their Origin and Early Growth* (William Carey Library: Pasadena, CA, 1986), 473-4.

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Great Lakes and the Ohio River and period photographs show some of these bethels were extremely elaborate architecturally. James Beecher's wife, Annie E. Morse, described seeing the Bethel in Canton for the first time:

As we neared the pleasant harbor of Whampoa my attention was attracted to a long one story American looking building on the river near the rice fields. There were steps running down to the water on either side, and close by, moored fast, were handsome sampans lined with red flannel. I could scarcely wait to get into the hall and throwing open a door upon my left discovered a fine chapel, shaded by green blinds and looking very neat and pretty. I hurried out again and throwing open another door on my right, was thoroughly amazed to behold quite an elegant dining room. In one corner there was a side board and on it a bell which I seized and rang with all the energy of a Massachusetts woman accustomed to emergencies...<sup>6</sup>

James Beecher's experience as a sailor made him an ideal candidate for the job and he had family connections to the American Seaman's Friend Society. His father, Lyman Beecher, and other New England Congregationalist ministers had started the society in 1828 to provide guidance and opportunities for spiritual and moral improvements in the lives of sailors through libraries, boarding houses and missions.

Beecher would need his experience because his work in China coincided with an especially difficult era in the region. Sailors in Chinese ports in the 1850s would have faced the usual challenges of port cities of the era, like poverty, crime, piracy and prostitution, but they would have also been exposed to a host of issues unique to China at the time. Foreigners were only allowed in Canton because the United Kingdom had forced upon the Chinese the opening of five such treaty ports after the Opium War a decade earlier (1839-42). Although several foreign nations, including the United States, had treaties with the Chinese government at the time, the situation for foreigners was still tense, and sometimes hostile, given the climate of political upheavals, civil unrest and natural disasters. Coupled with all those issues was the ever-endemic opium problem—both in terms of its use and its trade. As a Protestant minister and supporter of temperance, Beecher likely viewed opium use through an intensely moral light.<sup>7</sup> As a missionary working in a Chinese port in the 1850s, he also would have had to deal with the devastated lives of addicts firsthand. Eventually the tension of the 1850s post-Opium War China turned into outright hostility and greatly affected James Beecher's mission. After the *Arrow* incident (October 8, 1856), British officials waged a quasi-war against local Chinese officials in Canton and foreigners became targets for violence. On January 3, 1857 Beecher was compelled to abandon the Floating Bethel and leave Whampoa-Canton for the safety of British-held Hong Kong. The bethel barge was subsequently shelled by the Chinese and lost a short time later. A congressional report for the damages noted the barge was "carried away" by the Chinese on January 21, 1857, but in his own report for loss of his personal property, Beecher indicated the vessel had been destroyed.<sup>8</sup> James Beecher oversaw the completion of a second floating bethel at Hong Kong, where it remained moored until the winter of 1861. Personal issues would end James Beecher's missionary work that same winter.

As noted, Beecher's wife Annie had accompanied him to China, but she returned to the United States for medical care sometime in the late 1850s. Annie was placed in Dr. Gleason's Water Cure in Elmira, New York. The Beechers had a close relationship with the Elmira Water Cure—Harriet Beecher Stowe and her sisters Catherine and Isabella

<sup>6</sup> Annie E. Beecher, "An East Indian Dinner" *The Mexico Independent* Vol. II No. 44, 30 October, 1862. Mexico, NY. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com)

<sup>7</sup> Michael C. Lazich, "American Missionaries and the Opium Trade in Nineteenth-Century China." *Journal of World History*, Vol. 17, No. 2 (University of Hawai'i: Jun., 2006), pp. 197-223. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

<sup>8</sup> "Executive Document No. 29. Message from the President of the United State Relative to the execution of the treaty with China for the settlement of claims." (Government Printing Office: Washington, DC, 1869), 46-49. "<http://www.googlebooks.com>" [www.googlebooks.com](http://www.googlebooks.com)

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all spent time there; James's brother Thomas K. Beecher lived at the Water Cure for six years before eventually building his own house directly across the street from the facility. Gleason's Water Cure offered a quiet place that promoted a simple diet, exercise, and the breathing of "pure" air (i.e. away from the bad air of the cities).<sup>9</sup> When Annie Morse Beecher arrived at the Water Cure, however, it was determined that she was not suffering from bad air, bad food, excess in eating, or want of exercise, but from alcohol addiction. The finding could have been a serious public relations problem for the Beecher family. Not only were the Beechers very publically involved in the temperance movement, but substance addiction was also seen by many in the age as a moral failure and the Beechers were viewed nationwide as moral authorities. Rather than distance themselves from Annie, however, her in-laws treated her with compassion and kindness.<sup>10</sup> In the winter of 1860-1 James Beecher received a letter from his brother Thomas that Annie's condition had worsened and that her life was in danger. On February 26, 1861 Beecher wrote back to his brother and informed him that he was returning to the United States.<sup>11</sup> Beecher had the floating bethel towed back to Canton and boarded the *Comet*, which was bound for New York City.<sup>12</sup>

### Civil War

James Beecher arrived in New York in the late spring of 1861, near the start of the Civil War. The Beechers were among the most well-known and outspoken opponents of slavery in the United States, and unsurprisingly viewed the war in those terms. James's half-brother, Henry Ward Beecher, the prominent abolitionist pastor of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn, organized a regiment after Lincoln's call for volunteers in April of 1861. The result was the 1<sup>st</sup> Long Island Volunteers (later renumbered as the 67<sup>th</sup> New York), several companies of which were recruited from Henry's church membership; companies A, B & E were nicknamed Beecher's Pets and Beecher's Bibles as an homage to his Bleeding Kansas fame. When New York Governor Morgan Edwin D. Morgan refused to accept Henry Ward Beecher's regiment because New York had filled its quota of seventeen regiments, Henry Ward Beecher used his prominence and appealed directly to President Lincoln and Secretary of War Stanton in person to get the regiment accepted.<sup>13</sup> James C. Beecher joined the 67<sup>th</sup> NY as a Regimental Chaplain, and was with the troops when they left for Washington DC on June 20, 1861.

The 67<sup>th</sup> took part in McClellan's peninsular campaigns of 1862 including the Siege of Yorktown (April 5 to May 4, 1862), the engagements at Williamsburg (May 5, 1862), Fair Oaks (May 31, 1862) and the bloody mess of the Seven Days Battles (June 25 to July 2, 1862), including Malvern Hill, where the regiment was in a highly-exposed position.<sup>14</sup> Chaplain James Beecher was mustered out at Yorktown VA on September 8, 1862—nine days before his regiment saw action in the Battle of Antietam—but he would not remain away from the front line for long. When James Beecher left the 67<sup>th</sup>, he immediately joined up with the 141<sup>st</sup> New York in Elmira. Only one week after he left Virginia with the 67<sup>th</sup>, James Beecher was marching back to Virginia with 141<sup>st</sup>. During the summer of 1862, James's brother Thomas K. Beecher, a Congregationalist minister at Elmira, had been stumping Chemung, Schuyler and Steuben counties to help Colonel Samuel G. Hathaway Jr. raise a regiment in that district. Thomas attempted to

<sup>9</sup> Catharine E. Beecher, *Letters to The People on Health and Happiness*. (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1856), 3, as quoted on <http://www1.assumption.edu/WHW/Hatch/Beecher/MrsDrGleason.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Harriet Beecher Stowe Center, "Beecher Family." [http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/hbs/beecher\\_family.shtml](http://www.harrietbeecherstowecenter.org/hbs/beecher_family.shtml) and Milton Rugoff, *The Beechers: An American Family in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1981).

<sup>11</sup> Letter from James C. Beecher to his brother [likely Henry Ward Beecher] dated Hong Kong, 26 February, 1861. Published in *34th Annual report of the American Seaman's Friend Society*. (S Hallet Book & Job Printer: New York, NY, 1862), 19-22. [www.googlebooks.com](http://www.googlebooks.com)

<sup>12</sup> Letter from James C Beecher to his brother [likely Henry Ward Beecher] dated 8 March 1861 at Macao, China. Published in *34th Annual report of the American Seaman's Friend Society*.

<sup>13</sup> "Beecher's Regiment Plans to Celebrate Golden Anniversary of the Civil War." *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. 4 June 1911. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com)

<sup>14</sup> *The Union army: a history of military affairs in the loyal states, 1861-65 -- records of the regiments in the Union army -- cyclopedia of battles -- memoirs of commanders and soldiers*. Madison, WI: Federal Pub. Co., 1908. Volume II. <http://dmna.ny.gov/historic/reghist/civil/infantry/67thInf/67thInfMain.htm>

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enlist as a private, but Col. Hathaway felt he was better suited as a regimental chaplain. James, however, enlisted in the 141<sup>st</sup> not as a minister, but as a soldier. The change was a significant one. In the 67<sup>th</sup> James Beecher was an ex-missionary turned regimental chaplain. In the 141<sup>st</sup>, James was a combat veteran of the peninsular campaign who requested advancement as a military man. James was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel on October 14, 1862. The 141<sup>st</sup> was posted on garrison duty in Washington, DC and later saw some action in the spring and summer of 1863 before joining Grant's army in Tennessee. Unfortunately, personal issues in Beecher's life would prematurely end his service with the 141<sup>st</sup>.

In January of 1863 Lyman Beecher, the family patriarch, died; according to a *New York Times* article about the funeral, neither James, nor his brother Thomas, were able to attend because of their military obligations.<sup>15</sup> Two months after his father's death, James left the union army for a second time. He appears to have suffered a mental breakdown—family letters indicated James took a dose chloroform and morphine in an attempted suicide.<sup>16</sup> His half-sister, Isabella Beecher Hooker, went to visit him in the hospital in Washington; she wrote to her husband John that James's eyes were "lusterless," that he seemed "just like a person half under the influence of morphine" and that he was "utterly broken down & out of his head"<sup>17</sup> Beecher's wife Annie had also gone to visit him in the hospital, and Isabella Hooker noted in family letters that the relationship between James and Annie had broken down to the point of divorce discussions. Beecher's estranged wife was sent back to the Elmira Water Cure, where, unfortunately, she died in late April of delirium tremens. James Beecher was given an honorable discharge from the army by Secretary of War Stanton and sent to the Taylor's Institute of Swedish Movement Cure in New York City to deal with his mental illness. Brothers and Doctors Charles and George Taylor established a clinic in New York that specialized in using movement to cure disease, and there was also a water cure onsite. James Beecher spent two weeks at the Taylor's treatment center, and, around the same time, he also appears to have started a relationship with another woman, Frances Johnson, from Guilford, Connecticut.

In the early spring of 1863 Beecher re-entered the army, and his final assignment would be the most prominent of his Civil War career. On May 18, 1863 James C. Beecher was commissioned as a Lt. Colonel of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers, and ordered to New Bern, NC to open a recruiting station. Brigadier General Edward Augustus Wild of Massachusetts personally selected all of the officers for the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV, and made sure that each was a committed abolitionist.

The symbolism was exceptionally powerful—a member of the famous abolitionist Beechers, who gave up his ministerial duties for frontline combat, would now be recruiting a regiment of freed slaves in the occupied Confederacy and leading them into combat against their former oppressors. The First North Carolina Colored Volunteers, later designated as the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops, would be one of the first regiments composed of southern ex-slaves rather than free persons of color recruited in the North. Beecher was promoted to full Colonel on June 9 and on June 15, Beecher wrote to his now-fiancée, Frances Johnson, about his recruiting progress:

I am amazed at the promptitude of these men to learn military drill. There is an amount of muscle in this regiment which no other in the service can boast of, and if we make credible show at the end of three

<sup>15</sup> "Funeral of Dr. Beecher; The Programme [sic] of Arrangements. A Commemorative Sermon. *New York Times*. 14 January, 1863. [nytimes.com](http://nytimes.com).

<sup>16</sup> As discussed in Barbara Anne White, *The Beecher Sisters*. (Yale University Press: New Haven, CT, 2003), 95-96.

<sup>17</sup> Isabella Hooker to John Hooker 7 March 1863. Stowe-Day Foundation. As quoted in Laura E. Skandera-Trombley, *Mark Twain in Company of Women*. (University of Pennsylvania Press: Philadelphia, 1997), 89-90.

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weeks more I think the government cannot grumble at a regiment, enlisted, organized, uniformed, armed, equipped and handsomely encamped in *six weeks* [emphasis in original].<sup>18</sup>

On July 16<sup>th</sup>, Beecher wrote that his men “could make a fair fight now if need be.”<sup>19</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV was a powerful symbol to the abolitionist world and its progress was reported in period newspapers dedicated to the cause. Ex-slaves not only provided the bulk of the regiment, but also the regimental colors. On July 24, 1863 the Colored Women's Relief Association of North Carolina presented a flag to the regiment—the members of the organization paid for the flag themselves. The narrative of women raising money for the colors was reported by the [Frederick] *Douglass' Monthly*. . . “This contribution, whose unprecedented jingle would at first indicate almost anything that money, was almost all in small silver—three cent pieces, half dimes, and dimes—from the scanty savings of the slave subscribers.”<sup>20</sup> James Beecher's half-sister Harriet Beecher Stowe was equally moved by the scene. She wrote. . . “The great work of liberation, thank God, is substantially done! Thank God, we live to feel that Slavery is ended. No more coffles! no more slave-markets! no more scourging! no more fugitive slave laws! Instead, free labor! and an intelligent, well-trained black army!”<sup>21</sup> Stowe herself assisted with the sewing of the flag.<sup>22</sup>

The words Col. James Beecher spoke when he received the flag on behalf of his regiment were reported in the organ of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, *The Christian Recorder*.

Turning the reverse side of the flag to the regiment, the Colonel [James Beecher] continued: ‘In all these years of war and death, of dark clouds, lighting occasionally, at last there comes sunshine- a glorious sunshine, gilding the clouds, and over the top of it appears the magic word Liberty. Thank God, now the word has meaning. Two hundred thousand men like unto you rally now to the cry. This is the flag we fight under- fight for liberty, not for one, but for all, as God has made them. We bear it henceforth our rallying point. This flag will show us where to rally. Let it be sacred, and its influence, will grow stronger day by day. I deliver it to you as the most sacred trust that has ever passed through my hands since I was born. I will devote myself to it, and you, I believe, will follow it with a single heart and a strong mind.’<sup>23</sup>

Beecher demonstrated a spirit of optimism and zeal in spite of an uncertain fate. In the summer of 1862 the issue of recruiting and using black soldiers was still being intensely debated; not surprisingly, Confederate officials took a harsh stance on the subject. Unsanctioned efforts at recruiting black soldiers in New Orleans were met with Confederate War Department General Special Orders No. 60, which criminalized the organizing and arming of black soldiers as a felony act of inciting slave insurrection. Captured white officers in charge of black troops were to be classified as “outlaws” rather than POWs and Union Generals Hunter and Phelps were singled-out for execution by the Confederacy if captured.<sup>24</sup> After the US Congress passed the Second Confiscation and Militia Act and Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, official recruitment and organization of black troops by the Union army began. In response, on May 1, 1863, the Confederate Congress passed the following resolution:

<sup>18</sup> “The History of a Gallant Regiment.” (New England Loyal Publication Society & Hartford Press: Boston, 1864). <http://gettysburg.cdmhost.com>

<sup>19</sup> “The History of a Gallant Regiment.” (New England Loyal Publication Society & Hartford Press: Boston, 1864). <http://gettysburg.cdmhost.com>

<sup>20</sup> “A Story of Patriotism.” *Douglass' Monthly* (Rochester, NY, August 1863). <http://www.accessible.com>

<sup>21</sup> “Mrs. Beecher Stowe and the Ladies of Edinburgh” *The Liberator* (Boston, MA, September 4, 1863). <http://www.accessible.com>

<sup>22</sup> Frances Beecher [Johnson] Perkins, “Two Years with a Colored Regiment: A Woman's Experience.” *New England Magazine*, XVII, pp. 533-543; January, 1898 as reprinted on [www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncusct/regiment.htm](http://www.rootsweb.ancestry.com/~ncusct/regiment.htm)

<sup>23</sup> “Presentation of a Flag” *The Christian Recorder*. (Philadelphia, PA, August 15, 1863). <http://www.accessible.com>

<sup>24</sup> Dudley Taylor Cornish, *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army 1861-1865*. (University Press of Kansas: Lawrence KS, 1987), 159-60.

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Any commissioned officer, or acting as such, who during the present war shall command negroes or mulattoes in arms against the Confederate States, or who shall arm, train, organize, or prepare negroes or mulattoes for military service against the Confederate states, or who shall voluntarily aid negroes or mulattoes in any military enterprise, attack, or conflict in such service, shall be deemed as inciting servile insurrection or who shall incite or cause to be incited a slave to rebel shall, if captured, be put to death or be otherwise punished, at the discretion of the court.<sup>25</sup>

Although legal obstacles were removed, high ranking officials in the Union army frequently doubted the abilities of black regiments, and Beecher's regiment was at an additional disadvantage because his men were recruited from the ranks of freed slaves.

The attitude of officials towards his men were revealed when Union reverses in South Carolina saw the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV ordered to join Gen. Quincy Gilmore's forces at the siege of Charleston. Despite Beecher's assessment that his troops were combat ready, the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV were instead assigned to fatigue duty—mostly digging siege trenches. While all troops in the Union army had to endure such fatigue labor, the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV and other black regiments faced disproportionality in terms of being allowed to enter combat versus being given fatigue assignments. The constant fatigue duty would also seriously disrupt the ability to train and drill the men of the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV.<sup>26</sup> A period circular by the New England Loyal Publication Society noted that the men had “no chance to drill or learn to use the use of their guns; it was dig, dig, and they kept at it with no respite.”<sup>27</sup> The work was difficult and many men of the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV became ill; the unit went from less than ten men on the sick list to over 200 in only a month.<sup>28</sup> Beecher wrote to Frances that he wanted to “get my boys out of this accursed man trap before they are all worked to death.”<sup>29</sup> Discrimination, illness and constant fatigue duty wore on Beecher; he wrote: “I work by day and watch by night. Hardest of all is [sic] give up hope of usefulness to the government and the country.”<sup>30</sup> Despite the fatigue duty, Beecher sometimes drilled the men at night to keep them combat ready and begged to give his men a chance to prove themselves. Constant fatigue duty represented a multitude of problems for black troops. As noted, fatigue duty kept the men from training and becoming battle-ready, but while the work took a very real physical toll on the men, supporters of abolitionism and civil rights also recognized the moral and mental implications of using freed slaves only for labor. When his troops were made to set-up the camp of a white regiment, Beecher interpreted the symbolism; he lamented that “[they] have been slaves and are just learning to be men.”<sup>31</sup>

Beecher not only complained to his superiors about the fatigue duty, he also waged a war to get his men properly supplied. Like many black regiments, the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV often found themselves without proper arms, shoes or supplies. When he felt his repeated letters and requests were ignored he personally went to higher channels to appeal. Ironically, Beecher was absent from his regiment when they faced their first real test in combat because he was trying to secure them proper arms. Beecher was in Washington petitioning for supplies in February of 1864 when the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV received orders to report to Maj. Gen. Truman Seymour, who was preparing for a Union invasion of

<sup>25</sup> As reprinted in Horace Greely, *The American conflict: a history of the great rebellion in the United States of America, 1860-'64*. Vol. 2 (D. Case & Company: Hartford, CT, 1866)523-5. <http://www.googlebooks.com>

<sup>26</sup> Richard M. Reid, *Freedmen for Themselves: North Carolina's Black Soldiers in the Civil War Era* (The University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, 2008), 41.

<sup>27</sup> “The History of a Gallant Regiment.”

<sup>28</sup> Shana Renee Hutchins “Just Learning to be Men: A History of the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops 1863-66. MA Thesis North Carolina State University, 1999. <http://www.ncgenweb.us/hyde/military/ncusct/shana2.htm>.

<sup>29</sup> Col. Beecher to Frances Johnson, October 6, 1863, The Stowe-Day Foundation. As quoted in Horstman, “A History of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers.”

<sup>30</sup> Col. Beecher to Frances Johnson, October 3, 1863, The Stowe-Day Foundation. As quoted in Horstman, “A History of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers.”

<sup>31</sup> As quoted in *ibid*.

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Florida. The expedition would put the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV into combat, and despite his personal absence, Beecher's commitment to drilling, training and equipping his men was evident when they faced combat.

On February 20, 1864 MG Seymour's force, including three black regiments (the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV, the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and the 8<sup>th</sup> US Colored Troops), approached a Confederate position of 5,000 men under C.S.A. BG Joseph Finegan at Olustee (Ocean Pond), about fifty miles from Jacksonville, Florida. Seymour had marched his men 110 miles in 108 hours and double-quickened them for the last mile, hoping to catch the Confederates in a weak defensive position. Instead of storming Confederate defensive works, however, Seymour's men met an advancing Confederate line. Seymour neglected to set out flankers and Finegan surprised the Federals by pressing forward from his position and falling upon the Union line. Seymour's column held for almost three hours during an intense firefight, but eventually broke and retreated after Finegan poured in his reserves and hit the Union forces with full momentum. The blunder cost the union more than a quarter of the 5,115 men engaged, making it one of the bloodiest battles for the Union army in terms of percentage of casualties.<sup>32</sup>

With three black regiments participating, the battle also presented an opportunity for military commanders and the American public to further evaluate the conduct of black troops in combat. Neither the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV nor the 8<sup>th</sup> USCT had ever been in intense combat before, though the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV had seen some action in minor raids. Brigade Commander Col. Joseph Hawley noted in his report that the 8<sup>th</sup> USCT had never even had "a day's practice in loading in firing."<sup>33</sup> Despite their lack of training, all three black regiments acquitted themselves well in the battle, and were credited in official reports and memoirs as playing a crucial role. A *New York Times* article noted: "The last regiments to enter the field were the First North Carolina, and Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, (colored,) of MONTGOMERY's Brigade. They took a bold position at the front, and maintained their ground with commendable pertinacity."<sup>34</sup> Seymour himself reported that the "colored troops behaved creditably—the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts and First North Carolina like veterans. It was not in their conduct that can be found the chief cause of failure, but in the unanticipated yielding of a white regiment [the 7<sup>th</sup> New Hampshire] from which there was every reason to expect noble service."<sup>35</sup> Scholarly debate is still ongoing today, but several historians have credited the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts and the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV with covering the Union retreat and saving the army from complete annihilation.<sup>36</sup> A confederate participant in the battle matter-of-factly credited the black troops when he reported to the *Macon Telegraph* (GA) as a correspondent:

...we come first upon a line of white dead and wounded Yankees, next we come upon the dead and wounded negroes - the wounded think we are going to put them to the bayonet, and in every attitude of pain, terror and despair, send up the most craven appeals for mercy...Still another line of dead and wounded negroes is passed; then, here and there, a white man marks the place where they made the last stand... They left on the field three hundred dead, and about two hundred wounded... The enemy force

<sup>32</sup> Horstman, "A History of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers."

<sup>33</sup> As quoted in Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 267.

<sup>34</sup> "THE REPULSE IN FLORIDA; A Full Account of the Late Battle. OUR FORCES LED INTO A TRAP. Five Thousand Come Suddenly Upon Fifteen Thousand. Terrible Ordeal of Hamilton's Battery. Forty Men and Forty Horses Lost in Twenty Minutes. Heroic Fighting Against Overwhelming Odds. A VERY FULL LIST OF THE CASUALTIES. Our Forces Entrenching Themselves Near Jacksonville. THE MARCH." *New York Times* (New York, NY, 1 March 1864). <http://www.nytimes.com>

<sup>35</sup> As quoted in Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 268.

<sup>36</sup> See George W. Williams, *A History of Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion*, (Harper Brothers: New York, NY, 1887), 205. Reprint Forgottenbooks.org. <http://www.googlebooks.com>; Cornish, *The Sable Arm*, 269; Horstman, "A History of the First North Carolina Colored Volunteers"; Shana Renee Hutchins "Just Learning to be Men: A History of the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops 1863-66. MA Thesis North Carolina State University, 1999. <http://www.ncgenweb.us/hyde/military/ncuscst/shana2.htm>; Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment: A History of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts 1863-65*. (Boston, MA, 1884). Reprint Da Capo Press, 1995.

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consisted of seven regiments of white Infantry, and three of colored Infantry, one of mounted Infantry, and of cavalry, and thirteen pieces of artillery...They fought well. The negroes I believe stood best [emphasis mine], their fire was wild. They must have stood best, or were neglected by their ambulance corps - they predominated largely over the whites left on the field.<sup>37</sup>

Of course there was no effort by the Union army to leave behind black troops at the expense of white ones. A surgeon with the 8<sup>th</sup> US Colored Troops noted the Union position was simply overrun too quickly evacuate all the wounded:

The troops all fought bravely; the 1st North Carolina (colored) did nobly. I saw at an early stage of the fight that we would be whipped, and went round among our wounded and told them, as many as could get away, to start for Barber, and then started the ambulance crowded full. The day and the field being lost to us we started on the retreat...We were compelled to leave a few of our men behind, and they fell into the hands of the enemy. It could not be helped; I had but one ambulance to a regiment and the railroad was useless, because we had no locomotive...How the rebels have disposed of the colored men who fell into their hands we have not heard yet; but we hope that the fear of retaliation, if not the dictates of humanity, will cause them to reconsider their threat of outlawry. If not, we must act accordingly. Our men are neither discouraged nor dismayed, but ready for another fight. Your friend, A.P. HEICHHOLD, Surgeon 8th U.S.C.T.<sup>38</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV suffered heavily in the battle; 240 of the battle's 1861 Union casualties were from the regiment, including ten officers. No evidence suggests captured black soldiers were killed by the Confederates. Instead, Confederate prison camp records indicate officials attempted to ascertain pre-war ownership of the men and planned on returning them to bondage. At least one white officer at Olustee, however, is known to have been mistreated. During the battle, Major Archibald Bogle of the 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV was severely wounded and presumed dead (he was even reordered among the killed in period newspaper accounts of the battle). Bogle survived the battle and was captured by the Confederates. He was recognized as an officer of a black regiment and instead of being held and treated as an officer, he was sent to the prison camp for enlisted men at Andersonville, GA. Confederate doctors and medical staff refused to treat—or even dress—Bogle's wounds, leaving him to suffer from pain and infection. After four months he finally gained entrance to Andersonville's hospital; according to a letter Bogle wrote to Union Adjunct general Lorenzo Thomas, he had lost 100 pounds in four months.<sup>39</sup>

The 1<sup>st</sup> NCCV was remunerated as the 35<sup>th</sup> USCT in February of 1864 and remained attached to District of Florida, Department of the South until November [henceforth, the nomination will refer to the 1<sup>st</sup> North Carolina Colored Volunteers as the 35<sup>th</sup> USCT]. They participated in a series of raids and expeditions, seeing minor combat several times.

In July of 1864, James Beecher married his fiancée Frances Johnson at Jacksonville. Johnson wrote of the occasion:

<sup>37</sup> "A Graphic and Interesting Account of the Battle of Ocean Pond." *The Charleston Mercury*. (Charleston, SC., 10 March 1864.). <http://www.accessible.com>.

<sup>38</sup> AP Heichhold, "How Our Colored Troops Fought in Florida." *The Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia, PA., 12 March 1864). <http://www.accessible.com>.

<sup>39</sup> Shana Renee Hutchins "Just Learning to be Men: A History of the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops 1863-66. MA Thesis North Carolina State University, 1999. <http://www.ncgenweb.us/hyde/military/ncusct/shana2.htm>.

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It was in July, 1864, that I succeeded in getting a pass to enable me to join my affianced husband, Colonel James C. Beecher, in Jacksonville, Florida, which was then a fortified city and held by United States troops. An order had just been issued excluding women in general from the department of the South, lest their presence should interfere with the stern duties of war. I had therefore to go to Washington and present myself in person before our distinguished Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, to show reasons why an exception might be made in my favor...After months of planning to go with certain friends who would act as escort, and then hesitating to do a thing so utterly opposed to conventional ideas, the fortunes of war prevailed, and the steamer Fulton took me from New York to Hilton Head in five days' time.<sup>40</sup>

The couple spent the later summer and fall in Jacksonville, but the war called Beecher away on several occasions as his unit participated in raids and skirmishes.

#### Battle of Honey Hill<sup>41</sup>

In November of 1864, Union General William T. Sherman began his plans to march northward from Atlanta to Savannah and eventually towards South Carolina. To coordinate his efforts he asked that Union coastal defense forces in South Carolina destroy the Charleston & Savannah Railroad junction at Pocotaligo, SC. The 102 mile long Charleston & Savannah Railroad was a vital inland link in the Confederate supply chain, and it gave the rebels the ability to move men and materiel south towards Sherman's advancing front. Almost as importantly, the Confederates could move 10,000+ men *away* from Savannah and use the railroad as a means of retreat if Sherman's advance proved unstoppable. Sherman requested the rail be destroyed about the 1<sup>st</sup> of December, which necessitated Major General John G. Foster and Rear Admiral John Dahlgren to quickly assemble a force capable of the strike. Beecher's unit was ordered back to South Carolina to take part in the expedition. Beecher and 35<sup>th</sup> were assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade under the command of Brigadier General Edward E. Potter, with Major General John P. Hatch commanding the whole force. Hatch's plan was launch troop transports on the Broad River early in the morning on November 29, land at Boyd's Landing and march nine miles to the objective—the rail junction near Grahamville (present day Ridgeland). The plan failed. Heavy fog combined with a lack of maps and reliable guides delayed many of the transports, and others simply got lost. When they reached Boyd's Landing there was further delay preparing the decrepit docks there to receive men and artillery. Even with the logistical delays, the Union army was only a nine mile march from the objective and had a decided tactical advantage. The Union Coast Division had 5,500 men, army and marines, in place to destroy the target. Opposing this force was a contingent of the 3<sup>rd</sup> South Carolina Cavalry and four artillery batteries along the road to Grahamville—an effective force of only 660 men. If the Union forces had advanced onto to the target the morning of the 29<sup>th</sup> as planned, they likely would have overrun the resistance and effected the destruction of the railroad. Instead the Union army got lost. Relying on local guides, they went in the wrong direction and ended up marching until 2 am. Worse, they marched a total fifteen miles during the day and night but only advanced two miles towards their objective. The delay was not just costly, it was fatal.

The SC cavalry had reconnoitered the landing site at Boyd's and alerted the military district commander, Lieutenant Colonel Charles J. Colcock, who telegraphed for reinforcements. Colcock was the founder of the Charleston &

<sup>40</sup> Perkins, "Two Years with a Colored Regiment."

<sup>41</sup> Compiled from Lowell D. Hamilton, "The Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina: Wednesday, 30 November 1864" <http://www.dcnvhistory.org/gary/hhbattle.html>. and Leonne M. Hudson, "A Confederate Victory at Grahamville: Fighting at Honey Hill." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (Charleston, SC: South Carolina Historical Society, January, 1993), 29. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

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Savannah Railroad and intimately knew the terrain he was defending. Using the railroad, Confederate reinforcements poured in from South Carolina and Georgia—some literally arriving the morning of the battle as the Union began its seven mile march to Grahamville. Colcock had a perfect defensive position to meet the advancing Union army. Unbeknownst to the Federals, in 1862 Robert E. Lee had fortified a position along the railroad known as Honey Hill. The earthwork at Honey Hill was on the north bank of the slow-moving Euhaw Creek and sat about ten feet above the level of a wide marsh created by the creek. It was especially strong in the center with parapets for four guns, short trenches and rifle pits, but it became comparatively weak towards the flanks. It could be approached by means of a narrow causeway over the creek, but any assault along the causeway would be subject to a murderous enfilading fire from the defenders. Other avenues of approach to the works were equally undesirable. Lee's men had cleared all the trees, but the area in front of the work was about 150-200 yards of dense underbrush that had grown up since 1862; the underbrush provided a field of fire for the defenders while slowing the attackers.

Colcock used his cavalry and artillery to fight a delaying action along the Grahamville Road while he positioned his growing forces at Honey Hill. At 9:15 a.m. the Union column began to march down the Grahamville Road under artillery fire. At about 11:00am the army went around a sharp turn in the road and unexpectedly ran into the Confederate works at Honey Hill, which had been out of sight to that point.

Hatch ordered a series of small uncoordinated and unsupported attacks by successive units to storm the works. Although he had been informed by a subordinate that the Confederate earthworks were vulnerable on the flanks, Hatch continued to throw men at the center. Grape, canister and musket fire raked each unit as they tried to pass the causeway or the swamp, the 2 foot deep and 20 foot wide stream, and the dense underbrush—not surprisingly, none of the Union assaults carried the works. The 32<sup>nd</sup> USCT and 25<sup>th</sup> Ohio were the first units ordered to attempt the assault, and both were repulsed and forced to withdraw. Beecher led his 35<sup>th</sup> on the third Union assault of the day and, despite being noted for gallantry, he and his men failed to even reach the stream under the galling fire.<sup>42</sup> Leading from the front, Beecher was wounded in the assault and several of his men were killed. The 55<sup>th</sup> USCT attempted the fourth Union attack; they charged three times, making it to the causeway, but were again forced to withdraw under heavy fire. Capt. Luis F. Emilio of the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts noted that the 55<sup>th</sup> suffered over 100 casualties in five minutes.<sup>43</sup> After the 55<sup>th</sup>'s failed charges, Beecher and 35<sup>th</sup> were ordered to assault the works again. Again going forward with a cheer, they failed to even reach the stream. Beecher was wounded a second time in the second charge and again his men endured terrible losses. Although twice wounded, Beecher refused to leave the field. The 35<sup>th</sup> was sent in support of the 3<sup>rd</sup> NY Artillery and Beecher, reportedly “acting in a dazed sort of way” had to be escorted to the rear under protest.<sup>44</sup> According to a memoir written by Beecher's wife, he had been specifically targeted by the Confederates... “After the war was over Colonel Beecher met one of the colonels of the opposing force in the Honey Hill battle who said it was no wonder he and his great gray horse were hit so many times during that disastrous half-hour at noon, for the word was passed to the Confederate soldiers to aim at the officer on the light gray.”<sup>45</sup>

The Confederate line continued to defeat successive assaults in detail, concentrating their fire sequentially on a one piecemeal attack at a time. By dusk, Hatch ordered a Union retreat. The casualty reports told the story of the battle.

<sup>42</sup> General Edward E. Potter, “The Battle of Honey Hill, S.C. Report of Brigadier General Edward E. Potter U.S. Army, Commanding First Brigade.” *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882).  
<http://www.dcnhistory.org/gary/orpotter.html>

<sup>43</sup> Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*.

<sup>44</sup> Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*.

<sup>45</sup> Frances Beecher [Johnson] Perkins, “Two Years with a Colored Regiment”

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Hatch's forces totaled 754 KIA, MIA and wounded; the Confederates reported 4 KIA and 40 wounded. Neither Hatch's superiors, nor the hindsight of history, have been particularly kind to Hatch's generalship. When MG William T. Sherman toured the battlefield with Hatch months later, Sherman asked him "Hatch, why in hell didn't you flank them on their right?"<sup>46</sup> Major General Jacob D. Cox was even more critical in his 1898 work, *Sherman's March to the Sea—Campaigns of the Civil War*, Cox wrote... "It was a fresh instance of the manner in which irresolute leadership in war wasted the lives of men by alternation between an ill-timed caution and an equally ill-timed rashness."<sup>47</sup> One modern historian commented that... "The Herculean effort by the soldiers at the engagement was wasted because of inferior generalship."<sup>48</sup>

The Confederates abandoned Savannah a month after Honey Hill. The Union failure to capture the rail junction at Grahamville allowed the Confederate garrison at Savannah to escape into South Carolina, but both Savannah and Charleston would ultimately fall to Sherman's quickly advancing army. Within two months of losing at Honey Hill, many of the participants would be part of the Union force pressing Charleston. While the battle of Honey Hill had had little strategic effect on the overall war, the intensity of the battle left a lasting impression on the men who fought it. Firsthand accounts of the battle reveal the carnage that Beecher and his men endured and witnessed. Capt. Luther B Mensnard of Company B of the 25<sup>th</sup> Ohio wrote about the opening artillery assault at 9:15 am on the day of the battle:

A shot takes the captain's leg off, and knocks a wheel off one of our guns. The Captain is carried back past us, his leg dangling by a chord, his life blood spurting in jets as we cross to the other side of the road. My boys had been under fire but once before and then at long range when at Spanish Wells, and not worth mentioning, and now, they were much affected. Two or three vomited from sheer fright, while all, even the old veterans, looked very solemn.<sup>49</sup>

Capt. Emilio of the famed 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts wrote in his memoir that "Wagner [Fort Wagner, South Carolina] always seemed to me the most terrible of our battles, but the musketry at Honey Hill was something fearful. The so-called 'Rebel yell' was more prominent than I ever heard it."<sup>50</sup> Confederate General James Chestnut's regiment arrived at midnight and missed the fighting, but his description of the aftermath was printed in his wife Mary's diary, *Mary Chestnut's Civil War*... "It was the bloodiest of fights—a carnage. Before the dead were buried next day, the battlefield was awful to see."<sup>51</sup> The *Savannah Republican* reported that "some sixty or seventy bodies were counted in a space of an acre many of which were horribly mutilated by shells, some with half their heads torn off."<sup>52</sup> In his official report to the Union Army Col. Alfred Hartwell described the thickness of the confederate fire:

On turning the last angle in the road in front of the fort, the grape and canister became insupportable. Captain Crane, acting aide, was killed, with his horse; Lieutenant Hill, second acting aide, was knocked off his horse by concussion; and my own horse was killed and fell on me. The road seemed to be swept of

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> As quoted in Lowell D. Hamilton, "The Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina: Wednesday, 30 November 1864" <http://www.dcnhistory.org/gary/hhbattle.html>.

<sup>48</sup> Leonne M. Hudson, "A Confederate Victory at Grahamville: Fighting at Honey Hill." *The South Carolina Historical Magazine*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (Charleston, SC: South Carolina Historical Society, January, 1993), 29. [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

<sup>49</sup> Diary Excerpt from the Diary of Capt. Luther B. Mesnard. Civil War Archives, U.S. Army Military History Institute. As quoted in Lowell D. Hamilton, "The Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina."

<sup>50</sup> Emilio. *A Brave Black Regiment*.

<sup>51</sup> C. Vann Woodward, ed., *Mary Chestnut's Civil War* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), 684. As quoted in Hudson, "A Confederate Victory at Grahamville."

<sup>52</sup> *The Savannah Republican* 3 December, 1864. As quoted in Hudson, "A Confederate Victory at Grahamville."

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everything. I was pulled from under my horse and back by an officer and a man of the Fifty-fifth Massachusetts, and during the time was hit in the boot heel by a shot that burned my ankle, and in the side by a spent grape shot that knocked me down and partially stunned me, and lodged in the coat; also, by a spent musket ball in the back, that lodged in the shirt; in consequence of which, I regret extremely to say, I was unable to give further orders or superintendence, and was taken to the rear.<sup>53</sup>

Union Captain John J. Abercrombie wrote how he saw wounded men moving “aimlessly about on their hands and knees; some crawled on their bellies, dragging useless limbs behind them”.<sup>54</sup> Capt. Charles C. Soule, 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, wrote an account of the battle in 1884 for *The Philadelphia Weekly Times*; Soule recalled his last vision of the day’s events as he marched passed Boylan’s Church, which had been converted into a field hospital. Soule wrote...“Beside the church the surgeons had established their operating tables and the unconcealed traces of amputations were shocking to behold.”<sup>55</sup> Soule had just witnessed multiple fruitless charges, and the 55<sup>th</sup> was cut down in three of those efforts—that he would use the term “shocking” to describe the field hospital is an indication of just how horrific the conditions there must have been. It is unknown if Beecher spent time in the field hospital at Boylan’s Church, but he clearly was exposed to the horrific battlefield conditions.

The 35<sup>th</sup> would not see major combat again for the rest of the war. The regiment to garrison duty in Jacksonville in December of 1864 and remained there until March when they reported back to now-occupied Charleston. Beecher was brevetted to Brigadier General on 13 Mar 1865 and when his brother Henry Ward Beecher gave the keynote address at the ceremony raising the US Flag back over Fort Sumter, SC, Beecher was in the audience.

Beecher and the 35<sup>th</sup> lived up to the era’s standards for valor and Beecher himself was the quintessential Civil War commander—personally leading the charge into fire during battle. Beecher also undertook two roles outside of those traditional for military commanders. Firstly, as an ordained minister, Beecher acted as the spiritual leader of his men. He wrote and preached sermons and made ministering to his troops an integral part of their training regimen. Secondly, Beecher was among the small cadre of officers who undertook the education of black troops under their command, a remarkable act given the racial attitudes of the time. The effort would have been taken on independently by these enlightened officers, outside of official channels, as the Union army had no formal, overall educational program for black soldiers.<sup>56</sup> William Lloyd Garrison’s abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, published a plea by Beecher and the 35<sup>th</sup> for books:

Two days ago, I sent you a hasty account of the 1st North Carolina Volunteers. One thing I neglected to mention therein: it is, that we should be very glad if some charitable people in Massachusetts would send us some simple reading matter for our men. Many of them desire to learn to read, and, as I stated in my last, it is our intention to instruct them...Col. Beecher says he should be very happy to receive anything that the people would be disposed to send. Please state this matter earnestly to the Massachusetts people.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Alfred S. Hartwell, “Report of Colonel Alfred S. Hartwell Fifty-Fifth Massachusetts Infantry Commanding Second Brigade” *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1882). <http://www.dcnhistory.org/gary/orhartwe.html>.

<sup>54</sup> John J. Abercrombie, “Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina.” *Confederate Veteran* XXII (October 1914), pp. 452-454. As quoted in Hudson, “A Confederate Victory at Grahamville.”

<sup>55</sup> Soule, Charles, Battle of Honey Hill, *The Philadelphia Weekly Times*, May 10, 1884, and May 17, 1884. As quoted in Peter Cozzens & Robert Girardi, ed. *The new annals of the Civil War* (Stackpole Books: Mechanicsburg, PA, 2004), 464.

<sup>56</sup> Dudley Taylor Cornish, “The Union Army as a School for Negroes.” *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (Oct., 1952), 368. (Association for the Study of African American Life and History: Washington, DC). [www.jstor.org](http://www.jstor.org).

<sup>57</sup> “Col. Wilde’s Colored Brigade.” *The Liberator* (Boston, MA, 31 May 1863). <http://www.accessible.com>

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James C. Beecher's famous sister Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote with pride about her brother's regiment and the efforts to educate the men... "In each soldier's tent you may see a spelling-book for each man; in the intervals of drilling, they are cleaning their camp ground; and when all is done, they sit down and study spelling-book."<sup>58</sup> After he married Frances Johnson, the Beechers established a formal school at Jacksonville. Frances wrote a memoir of her Civil War experience... "My mornings were spent in teaching the men of our regiment to read and write, and it became my pleasing duty and habit, wherever our moving tents were pitched, there to set up our school."<sup>59</sup> The program proved successful according to Beecher. When the men enlisted only "two or three" could write their name, but "when the men came to be mustered out each one of them could proudly sign his name to the payroll in a good legible hand." Frances Beecher also noted her pupils exhibited an "eagerness to learn" and that... "Whenever they had a spare moment, out would come a spelling book or a primer or Testament, and you would often see a group of heads around one book."<sup>60</sup> Although other officers in the Union army had the sagacity to educate black troops under their command, Beecher and his wife's school at Jackson was one of only a handful of well-planned programs that scholars have pointed to for producing measurable success.<sup>61</sup> Nationally prominent Civil War historian Dudley Taylor Cornish summed up the efforts thusly... "When the whole military situation is considered—the wide-spread illiteracy of the Negro soldiers, the heavy demands on their officers' time and energy simply to prepare them for their strictly military duties and to keep them up to standard in drill, discipline, and camp police, aside from the uncounted demands of campaigning in the presence of the enemy—it is not a little amazing that any progress was made at all."<sup>62</sup>

### Freeman's Bureau

James Beecher spent the last ten months of his career stationed in South Carolina both as an Army General and a Sub-assistant Commissioner in the Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>63</sup> The dual role of civilian and military authority would place Beecher on the frontlines of early Reconstruction (1865-66), and he was embroiled in several controversies during his service. From Beecher's perspective the situation must have seem muddled. On a global scale, Congress and President Johnson had vastly different opinions about how Reconstruction should progress, as did the leaders of Freedman's Bureau and the US Army. The Freedman's Bureau was concerned, on a very human level, with the enormously important task of transforming freedpersons into citizens. The Army was concerned with the equally important task of keeping law and order in a territory full of racial, social, economic and civil unrest. Beecher had to obey orders from Gen. Daniel Sickles, his military Commanding Officer, and he had to comply with directives from Rufus Saxon (and later Robert K. Scott), the Assistant Commissioner of the Freedman's Bureau in South Carolina.

In theory, the realm of the Bureau and the Army overlapped in the execution of wage labor contracts, which allowed freedpersons to be paid for the work they formally did on a farm in bondage. Although the wage labor system did little to define the civil status of freedpersons or ex-Confederates, it was viewed by some in the Freedman's Bureau as fair system and by the Army as a method to keep law and order. Beecher came to see his main role as the execution of wage labor contracts.<sup>64</sup> In practice, however, the wage labor system was fraught with

<sup>58</sup> "Mrs. Beecher Stowe and the Ladies of Edinburgh" *The Liberator* (Boston, MA, 4 September 1863). <http://www.accessible.com>

<sup>59</sup> Frances Beecher [Johnson] Perkins, "Two Years with a Colored Regiment"

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> See Cornish, "The Union Army as a School for Negroes." and John W. Blassingame, "The Union Army as an Educational Institution for Negroes, 1862-1865." *The Journal of Negro Education*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Spring, 1965) (Howard University: Washington, DC).

<sup>62</sup> Cornish, "The Union Army as a School for Negroes," 381.

<sup>63</sup> Robert R. Singleton, "James C. Beecher and the Freedmen's Bureau" *Mississippi Quarterly* Winter, 1999 (Mississippi State University: Starkville). [Findarticles.com](http://Findarticles.com)

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

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problems. More radical Republicans viewed the system as something that allowed plantation owners who took up arms against the United States to keep both their land and their antebellum labor force. Worse, Gen. Sickles's General Order No. 1, issued in January of 1866, *required* every freedperson living on a plantation to sign a wage contract—approved by a Freedman's Bureau agent—or face eviction by the army. Beecher was now put in the position of approving a wage contract between a planter and the latter's former slaves, and removing those freed slaves by force if they refused to sign. A *New York Tribune* article painted the unfavorable scene for its readers: "The job of turning out of house and home the poor loyal freedmen, to make place for rebels steeped in treason, was given to Col. Beecher, because his name and his antecedents might make the inhumanity seem less inhuman" [emphasis original].<sup>65</sup> Of course Beecher had to evict freedpersons because he happened to be the military commander in the district, not because he was Beecher, but the incongruity of the situation must have been striking. For a Union General who had been given command of Black regiment because his staunch abolitionist principles, and who had been twice-wounded fighting the Confederates, the charges of betraying his familial principles must have been damning. When Henry Ward Beecher criticized Congress over the language of Freedman's Bureau Bill, the *Boston Commonwealth* found cause to lump the Beecher brothers together in a demonizing article:

Is it to become a family trait that the Beechers shall defend injustice, treachery and inhumanity? That its clerical members [Henry Ward] shall belittle and reproach the representatives of the people, while its military connections [James] shall drive the freedmen from their homes and gardens? The one preaching and the other practicing [sic] the morality and arts of a negro-hating President? For Lyman Beecher's name and history, God forbid!<sup>66</sup>

For his part, James Beecher believed he was doing the right thing. When freedpersons at Nathaniel Heyward's plantation, Vineyard, rejected a contract approved by Bureau agent James Beecher, military man General James Beecher notified the ex-slaves they would be evicted ten days later. Beecher wrote that he didn't blame "them in the slightest degree" and continued that "so long as they show no violence, [I] shall treat them with all possible kindness--but it is better to stop the error under which they are laboring at once."<sup>67</sup> As to how his actions would be perceived, Beecher defended himself:

I am perfectly aware that my really humane & common sense procedure will be distorted by various very stupid people into a horrible atrocity etc. etc. and a hue and cry raised for my immediate crucifixion...I want only three approvals in the line of military duty--viz.--of my own conscience, my superior officer, and God Almighty. The first and last I believe I already have.<sup>68</sup>

Beecher consistently insisted and ordered his men exercise patience with freedpersons and landowners for the sake of law and order. When criticized, he defended that his actions were being "misrepresented by some honest friends of freedmen and lied about indiscriminately by other parties." He also became increasingly at odds with his civilian supervisors in the Freedman's Bureau, who did in fact misrepresent Beecher's actions in official reports. Beecher's wife Frances shared her husband's derision of the more radical reconstructionists in her memoir... "Some trouble came also through the agents of the Freedmen's Bureau, who were not always wise. They seemed to consider it their

<sup>65</sup> "Serving Rebels" *New York Tribune* 24 March, 1866. As quoted in Singleton, "James C. Beecher and the Freedmen's Bureau."

<sup>66</sup> "Beecherisms" *Boston Commonwealth* 31 March 1866. As quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> James Beecher to Rufus Saxon, 10 January, 1866. John A. Carpenter Research Material Collection, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library. As quoted in *ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

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duty to pet the freed people, to promise them land for their own, to excuse them from labor, and to foster a spirit of distrust of their late owners." She continued... "My husband thought the Bureau should be used only as an agency to help those people to take care of themselves. He did not believe that a forty-acre lot was a necessary adjunct to freedom, nor that a man was degraded by working for wages." In a letter to his sister, Beecher echoed that sentiment... "I...addressed public meetings of whites and freed people in various parts of my district. My motto was 'Fair work for fair wages.'"<sup>69</sup> Beecher was certainly self-assured, verging on the self-righteous, and in the same letter to his sister, he took pride in his accomplishments. Regarding his actions on the Sea Island of Edisto, which had been very publically and very loudly criticized in the *Boston Commonwealth* article quoted earlier, he wrote:

[the residents] worst feelings of bitterness and laziness had been encouraged, carpet baggers had speculated among them... I set the people at work on all the plantations where the owners were not on hand, and made order that the owner of every restored plantation should first offer to his own people a fair contract, which they should accept, or leave the place to give room for others to come in. This so pleased General Sickles that he made the order general throughout his department. This has been a labor requiring intense study, hard riding, and no small amount of patience. But it has 'paid.'<sup>70</sup>

Whatever Beecher's perceived or actual successes, his career in the US Army and the Freedman's Bureau ended unceremoniously in June of 1866, when his enlistment was not re-upped; the same month saw his 35<sup>th</sup> USCT mustered out of service.

Defining Beecher's motivations and performance in the tumultuous circumstances that existed is an inexact exercise at best. In one respect, one can easily understand the criticisms leveled against him. Many freed slaves were under the impression that they would be given free land, and many of the radicals of the era would have gladly seen ex-Confederate lands seized and redistributed. Instead of the promised forty acres, the government told freed slaves they would have to sign a wage contract, working for their former master (in some cases) or face forcible eviction from the lands they were occupying.<sup>71</sup> On another level, however, Beecher fell prey, on the macro level, to the power struggle between the civilian and military authorities—a conflict simultaneously being played out on the national level between Congress and Commander-in-Chief President Johnson. The lens of history has been reasonably kind to the Freedman's Bureau, an agency generally regarded as noble in its purpose. Beecher, however, sided with the army's policy that the wage labor system maintained law and order, and that law and order, in some respects, simply superseded the higher-plane moral issues that Reconstruction ultimately failed to deal with. For critics of James Beecher though, a Beecher, by definition, should have known better.

### **Post War**

Despite some criticisms, James Beecher was still a nationally known preacher with a Civil War veteran pedigree. In the fall of 1866 he temporarily took over his brother Thomas's pulpit at Park Church in Elmira. Thomas K. Beecher left for South America in November of 1866 for health reasons, and returned six months later in May of 1867. That same month, James C. Beecher became pastor of the Owego Congregational Society. James Beecher's new church had split from the Owego First Presbyterian Church in 1849-50, and they had constructed their own edifice in 1851.

<sup>69</sup> As quoted in Frances Beecher [Johnson] Perkins, "Two Years with a Colored Regiment"

<sup>70</sup> As quoted in Frances Beecher [Johnson] Perkins, "Two Years with a Colored Regiment"

<sup>71</sup> General William T. Sherman issued Special Field Orders No. 15 on January 16, 1865; the orders, intended to deal temporarily with the refugee situation, offered tillable plots to heads of refugee families. The concept of the government handing out 40 acres and mule struck a deep resonance with the psyche of the Freepersons and, arguably, with American history. The orders were overturned the same year by President Johnson and were never official policy.

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Beecher would be the tenth pastor in the church's young history. Parishioner Alice Hutchinson related the narrative of Beecher's arrival for a church bulletin:

When he [Beecher] came to us he found that the Church people were practically strangers to each other. He and his charming and very competent wife soon had the ladies interested in preparing for a Church Bazaar. This intercourse broke down the stiffness and formality which had prevailed, and we became known as a very friendly church.<sup>72</sup>

Beecher seems to have excelled at Owego. According to Hutchinson... "Mr. Beecher selected a lovely site on Fifth Ave. and built a home which he names Comfort Cottage... Many were the occasions when he invited all the Church to come and enjoy its hospitality. Mr. Beecher was a very sociable man, and we were fond of him." Beecher and his wife Frances moved into the nominated house after its completion in 1867. The house is labeled "J.C. Beecher" on the 1869 Beers *Atlas of Tioga County* and the Beechers are enumerated in the house on the 1870 federal census for Owego. The Beechers had no children themselves, but sometime during his pastorate in Owego, James and his wife adopted three daughters, Catherine, Margaret and May. May and Margaret were twin sisters orphaned by the death of one of James Beecher's parishioners.<sup>73</sup> James Beecher preached at the Owego Congregational Church for four years; he resigned in March of 1871 to take over the pastorate of the Poughkeepsie (NY) Congregational Church.<sup>74</sup>

Beecher was noted as a popular preacher in Poughkeepsie, but his mental troubles resurfaced. He was given six weeks of vacation a year, and period newspaper articles noted that he spent them in isolated spots, and preferred as little company as possible. In 1874 the Willowmec Sportsman's club invited him to spend his vacation at their lands in the Beaverkill region of Catskill Mountains, Sullivan and Ulster counties, NY. Beecher accepted the invitation, but left his companions at the isolated clubhouse and trekked further into the wilderness. Beecher hiked to an secluded mountain lake, and according to a *New York Times* article:

Beecher says that as his eyes fell upon a scene that lay before him he felt that all of his longings were to be satisfied there. He had wished to stand in a primitive forest and commune with the wild and picturesque scenery of tumbled nature, but never before had he found it in such perfection. He encamped on the shores of the lake, which he at once—believing that he had a right of a discovered—christened Beecher Lake. He remained there, fishing and hunting, during his entire vacation.<sup>75</sup>

Upon his return to civilization, Beecher purchased several hundred acres of land, including Beecher Lake. In May of the next year (1875) Beecher resigned his position at Poughkeepsie and removed himself from public life. He lived in a tent, without his wife and children, for the winter while he worked on clearing trees and building a suitable house. A period newspaper article published a letter from Beecher in which he wrote... "I became so enamored of the spot that I decided to leave Poughkeepsie and reside here the year round. Then I built an extension, and subsequently the main habitation. I have done all the work myself, and there are associations connected with every clapboard and every shingle that is laid."<sup>76</sup> Other period articles noted that Beecher acted as "carpenter, blacksmith

<sup>72</sup> Palm Sunday bulletin for the First Pres. Union Church of Owego

<sup>73</sup> Lyman Beecher Stowe, *Saints, Sinners and Beechers*. (Bobbs-Merrill Co.: Indianapolis, IN, 1934), 387-8. [www.persi.heritagequestonline.com](http://www.persi.heritagequestonline.com).

<sup>74</sup> *Corning Journal* (Corning, New York: 9 March 1871). [fultonhistory.com](http://fultonhistory.com)

<sup>75</sup> "A Preacher's Hermitage" *New York Times*, 29 October, 1879. [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com).

<sup>76</sup> "Rev. James Beecher: Broken down by work—Interesting Details of his life" *Perry Herald* Vol. 1, No. 49. (Perry, NY: 14 December 1882). [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com)

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and glazier” and cleared the nine miles of forest from Beecher Lake to the nearest sawmill. His family arrived in the spring of 1876 and lived in tents while Beecher finished the house.

The decision to move into the isolated wilderness also apparently raised questions about his sanity. In one biographical piece, the *New York Times* read: “His singular freak in abandoning a luxurious home and remunerative charge to live in a cabin in the wilderness was to many people at the time conclusive evidence that he was not of entirely sound mind.”<sup>77</sup> The odd move apparently did not bother his wife Frances—in fact—in a published memoir she wrote that she and the girls thrived in the environment:

Hospitality flourished, as in all primitive settlements. The jar of buckwheat batter was always ready for visitors, and they were served at all hours of the day with thick, white, fluffy griddle cakes and maple syrup, such as city folks know nothing about. The talk was friendly and pleasant, as there was little sickness to discuss or worries and jealousies and rivalries to bring forward. Kindly feeling prevailed. Yet these people lived in such houses that they often had to construct a spare room by a festoon of bedquilts, and you would have said they were to be pitied for their poverty. Not at all! ‘Happiness, like heaven, does not depend upon situation,’ nor on the abundance of things a man hath.<sup>78</sup>

James Beecher and his family lived in the wilderness of Ulster County until 1881. Frances Beecher began teaching school at a schoolhouse four miles from their home and James Beecher even began informally ministering to the locals on Sundays. Beecher’s good works as a hermit missionary began to offset the rumors of his mental illness. The *Monticello Republican Watchman* noted “Mr. Beecher’s sudden withdrawal from the world produced a suspicion in many minds that he was not quite right in his mind, but he lived so quiet a life and devoted himself so earnestly to such good work that were in his power, that the suspicion soon died out.”<sup>79</sup> Reports were that James Beecher was happy; one period newspaper noted that... “Mr. Beecher rarely leaves the surroundings of his wilderness home, and says that no offer could tempt him to quit Beecher Lake for a dwelling-place among his fellow men.”<sup>80</sup> Despite that pronouncement, in the late fall of 1881 Beecher accepted his brother’s invitation to take over the Plymouth Church Bethel Mission in Brooklyn. Frances wrote... “the time came when the babes in the wood and all their lakeside friends must leave their beloved retreat and transfer themselves back to the city. The kindly influences of the long outing had made the little ones all that children should be. If it had not the same benign effect upon their elders, it was not the fault of the outing.”

Frances was writing from hindsight—the effect on James Beecher was far from benign. Less than a year after transferring to Brooklyn, James would be institutionalized. His friend Rev. Samuel B. Halliday, assistant to Henry Ward Beecher, tried to explain the situation in the papers... “From [his] quiet retreat... he was last autumn brought down here and placed in the dizzy whirl of the work of the Bethel Mission, where he was daily confronted with pictures of the utmost poverty and suffering.”<sup>81</sup> Beecher had certainly witnessed his share of suffering in China and in the war, but as Rev. Halliday continued... “Already predisposed to melancholia, this life intensified it, and the excessive labor incident to his charge was too much for a man who at his best was never that strong. He brooded

<sup>77</sup> “James Beecher’s Eccentricity” *New York Times* 30 November 1882, [www.nytimes.com](http://www.nytimes.com)

<sup>78</sup> Frances Beecher Perkins, “A Seven Year Outing” *The New England Magazine*, Volume 1022 Issue 5 (The New England Magazine Company: Boston, MA, 1900), 503-630. On Cornell University Library Making of America Collection. <http://digital.library.cornell.edu>

<sup>79</sup> “Rev. James Beecher./He Became a Voluntary Patient at the Middletown Asylum.” *Monticello Republican Watchman* VOL. 57, NO. 42, WHOLE NO. 2846. (Monticello, NY: 1 December 1882).

<sup>80</sup> “A Preacher’s Hermitage”

<sup>81</sup> “Rev. James Beecher: Broken down by work—Interesting Details of his life”

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more and more on his condition, became possessed with the idea that he was but a burden on society and his friends, and finally it was determined that rest and quiet were absolutely essential to him.”<sup>82</sup> Beecher went to the Elmira Water Cure in June of 1882 and remained there for a month. His brother Thomas then persuaded him that the Water Cure was not enough. In July of 1882, Beecher voluntarily checked himself into the State Homeopathic Asylum for the Insane at Middletown, NY. According to the period papers, James was put in the hospital...“Not that he is insane, or that he is detained there forcibly, but they thought it best that he should be under the care of physicians who have made a specialty of mental diseases.”<sup>83</sup> Henry Ward Beecher defended his brother’s decision to voluntarily enter the asylum:

The trouble with James...is simply that he was overworked. He has been buried in the woods up there in Ulster County so long that he could not stand the city work. Up there he led a quiet life, preaching all the while, too, for he was a kind of missionary to the people around there, and he could have gone on in that easy way without trouble...he had been out of work so long that he could not stand the hard, rasping labor of the Bethel and he broke down. He was intensely sympathetic; everybody's care was his care; he wanted to carry everybody's burden, and he could not, and by the end of the year he was all broken up.<sup>84</sup>

James Beecher remained at the Middletown Asylum for four years. In 1886 he transferred from the asylum back to Dr. Gleason’s Water Cure in Elmira, under the care of “special assistant.” A family biography mentioned that he was placed under the care of nephew, who may have been the special assistant, but it is not clear from the sources. On August 25, 1886, only weeks after he arrived in Elmira, the Water Cure held a shooting demonstration in which Beecher apparently participated. After the demonstration, Beecher took a loaded rifle back to his room and committed suicide by shooting himself in the head. The fact that a man with a long history of mental problems was given a loaded rifle was noted in the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* article about the suicide...“That the managers of the [Water Cure] institute should include such practice among the amusements of the inmates, and that Mr. Beecher, who had once been confined in the Middletown Asylum and whose recent condition had alarmed his friends, should be allowed to have a deadly weapon at hand, is as astonishing as any of the vagaries of the unfortunate man himself.”<sup>85</sup> Beecher was fifty-eight years old at the time of his death, and was buried beside his sister Catherine in Elmira.

### State Level Significance

James Beecher is among only a handful of New Yorkers who commanded black troops in battle during the Civil War. Overall a total of 160 black regiments served during the war, limiting the pool of candidates to less than a couple of hundred men nationwide who even had such an opportunity. The War Department credited New York with furnishing 4,125 men (officers and enlisted) to the USCT. By virtue of this volume, the potential definitely exists for New Yorkers to have had commands in the USCT, but probably the total number of regimental commanders was very small.<sup>86</sup> There were few opportunities for New Yorkers to command regiments of black soldiers in their native state as only three were raised in New York. The 31<sup>st</sup> USCT was raised on Hart’s Island, New

<sup>82</sup> “Rev. James Beecher: Broken down by work—Interesting Details of his life”

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> “Rev. James Beecher: Broken down by work—Interesting Details of his life”

<sup>85</sup> “Death of the Rev. James C. Beecher.” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* 26 August, 1886. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com)

<sup>86</sup> Harry Bradshaw Matthews, *African American Freedom Journey in New York and Related Sites, 1823-1870: Freedom Knows No Color* (Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers: Cherry Hill, NJ, 2008), 62; NYS Division of Military and Naval Affairs, “Civil War Colored Troops Units with New York Soldiers or Officers” March, 2008. <http://dmna.ny.gov>: There were 7,000 officers and ~200,000 enlisted men in the USCT overall.

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York City, in April of 1864, and the 20<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> USCT were raised at Rikers Island, New York City, in February of 1864. The 20<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> were under the command of New Yorkers, namely Lieutenant Colonel Nelson B. Bartram and Lieutenant Colonel William B. Guernsey, respectively, but the 31<sup>st</sup> USCT was organized under the command of Colonel Henry C. Ward from Connecticut. Two other New Yorkers in command of USCT regiments were located via a cursory internet search (Col. Bennett of the 21<sup>st</sup> USCT and Col Armstrong of the 9<sup>th</sup> USCT), but this is not in any way to be understood as a comprehensive list. None of the officers identified have individually listed National Register properties associated with them in New York. Beecher's contribution to the narrative is even more significant in that he led one of the first regiments composed of former slaves. While many abolitionists and progressives recognized free persons of color could and should be allowed to fight, the arming of recently-freed slaves to fight against their former masters was more problematical. This perception problem was worsened by the fact that official Confederate policy criminalized Beecher's actions and exposed him and his men to potential repercussions. When Beecher and the 35<sup>th</sup> charged the Confederate works at Honey Hill, they would have been all too aware of the actions of Confederate M.G. Nathan Bedford Forrest at Fort Pillow, TN, seven months prior. After the garrison at Fort Pillow surrendered, many accused the Confederates of perpetrating a massacre of the black troops (the controversy continues today). These types of accusations are not connected to the actions at Olustee or Honey Hill, but the possibility must have weighed in the men's minds. Beecher also may well have known about Archibald Bogle's treatment in Andersonville as well, especially as he had some time to muse on his own leg wound in between the first and second charge at Honey Hill. Instead of wilting, Beecher was recognized in official reports for his bravery under fire and brevetted in rank during the war. The bravery and actions of the 35<sup>th</sup> at Olustee and Honey Hill helped sway the opinions of both military commanders and the American public about the quality and character of black troops.

The Civil War generated a nationwide interest in memorializing the deeds of those involved. Wisconsin's Iron Brigade (2<sup>nd</sup> Wisconsin), Pennsylvania's Bucktails (13<sup>th</sup> Pennsylvania Reserve), Chamberlin's 20<sup>th</sup> Maine, Stonewall's 27<sup>th</sup> Virginia and the Louisiana Tigers all engendered state pride and spawned books, monuments, and memorabilia after the war. The USCT units were at a disadvantage when it came to post-war recognition. With the exception of the famous 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, which was immortalized after the war, most black regiments had an absence of state ties. Their officers were recruited nationally, their designation was a national one (i.e. the 35<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops) and their proponents were an underrepresented segment of the population in most postwar celebration movements.

Beecher was also noteworthy for going above and beyond his military duties and responsibilities. He was conscientious in his efforts to minister to his men and on multiple occasions noted how much preaching to men moved him. In one such letter he wrote... "Then I prayed with them. I had given no directions, but they knelt down and bowed their heads—near 700 men. It affected me beyond measure...I know not that I ever felt the reality of prayer more deeply"<sup>87</sup> Seven hundred freed slaves in Union uniforms kneeling in prayer in response to a sermon by a Beecher was an unmistakable symbol to a nation engaged in a civil war with heavy moral implications. When Beecher and his wife made successful efforts to teach his soldiers to read, the symbolism would have been even more palpable. Training freed slaves in military drill and then helping them spend their free time learning to read the Bible—literally guns and Bibles—was a dramatic amplification of the Beecher tradition that had been established in Bleeding Kansas a decade earlier. The indications are that Beecher did not undertake these efforts for the headlines,

<sup>87</sup> "The History of a Gallant Regiment."

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but out of a sincere desire to shape self-sufficient free men. Beecher and other officers who helped prepare their men for their future lives as citizens deserve the deep gratitude and praise of the nation.<sup>88</sup>

While New York State cannot “claim” the 35<sup>th</sup>, James Beecher, the leader of that unit, did choose to live the rest of his life in New York after the war. He was a nationally-recognized figure who chose to continue his very public career in Owego, and nominating his only known, intact, public-life residence in New York will bring recognition to Beecher and the 35<sup>th</sup> alike.

**The Nominated House as a representation of Beecher’s Career**

Although the Civil War was the period in which James C. Beecher obtained significance, he—like many military men—had no permanent residence during his war service. As a professional adult, Beecher did not live in the United States prior to the war because of his missionary work in China and his merchant marine service before that. During his service with the Freedman’s Bureau, Beecher did not have a permanent residence; he and Frances lived in seized plantations as duty dictated, and moved to New York when his enlistment ended. The nominated house represents Beecher’s first permanent residence in his public life in New York and his first permanent residence after achieving significance. It is evident from the church bulletin that Beecher commissioned the house, and likely had it built to his likes, dislikes and specifications. As noted, however, Beecher only occupied the house for four years before moving to Poughkeepsie.

Beecher spent four years in Poughkeepsie, but no record could be found of where he and his family lived during that period. There is no house labeled with his name on the 1876 detailed map of the city of Poughkeepsie that was published in the *New illustrated atlas of Dutchess County, New York*.<sup>89</sup> The 1887 Sanborn Insurance Map does show a dwelling directly adjacent to the Congregational Church in Poughkeepsie, and this may well have been a parsonage; this building is no longer extant, however, so a potential connection was lost if Beecher ever lived there.

The building with the longest association (five years) to Beecher would be the “rough but comfortable cottage” he built in the Catskill Mountains, which was completed sometime in 1876.<sup>90</sup> Period sources reveal that Beecher designed and built the house himself and lived until October of 1881 when he moved to Brooklyn. Notably, Beecher’s house in the mountains is still extant, but it has clearly been altered from his day. An 1879 *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle* article described Beecher’s house as “a story and a half high, with a verandah fronting the lake, and containing parlor, sitting room, kitchen, and several bed rooms.”<sup>91</sup> Today the building has the appearance of a turn-of-the-century Craftsman or Bungalow style with shingle siding, asymmetrical massing, irregular dormers, and decorative braces and trusswork. It is now composed of a three-block building—a one and half story side gable block connected to a two-story side gable block via a one and half story passage set at cross gables. The interior has also been altered from Beecher’s occupancy. Ceiling and wall surfaces have been changed; the fireplace described by Frances Beecher as an “old-fashioned yawning cavern of a fireplace, with its rough backlogs and foresticks, requiring the strength of two men to bring in” has been modified as well. Although only photographs of the current structure were examined as part of this nomination, it would appear from architectural details and period descriptions that Beecher constructed (and lived in) only the southwestern block of the current structure. This block

<sup>88</sup> Cornish, “The Union Army as a School for Negroes,” 381-2.

<sup>89</sup> *New illustrated atlas of Dutchess County, New York. / Compiled & drawn from personal examinations, surveys etc. under the personal supervision of O.W. Gray & Son and F.A. Davis, and published under the superintendence of H. L. Kochersperger* <http://digitalgallery.nypl.org>; the map does label every structure with an owner’s name, but Beecher’s name does not appear.

<sup>90</sup> Frances Beecher Perkins, “A Seven Year Outing”

<sup>91</sup> “A Former Poughkeepsian’s [sic] Home/A Pioneer of the Mountains” *Poughkeepsie Daily Eagle*. 15 November 1879. [www.fultonhistory.com](http://www.fultonhistory.com)

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is a simpler one-and-half-story form with a porch and its proportions are appropriate to an 1876 construction date. The c1890s updates to the house radically altered Beecher's simple house in the woods by changing the massing, decoration and style. The extreme remoteness of the 1876 setting has been lessened as well. In 1976 the Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji Buddhist monastery was constructed on the site and today the land is used as a monastic retreat. Beecher Lake is still there, the monastery is still surrounded by forests, and the property still retains a sense of isolation (the reason it was chosen as a monastic location), but with six twentieth century buildings onsite, the extreme seclusion, remoteness, lack of development and pastoral isolation sought by Beecher is gone. While the current structure may be National Register eligible as an example of bungalow architecture and the monastery complex itself may be eligible for its historical importance, the property does not retain integrity to James Beecher's occupation. Location is present, Beecher's setting has been somewhat compromised, and design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association to his period are all lost.

It might also be argued that the strength of association with Beecher's house in the Catskills is less than the nominated house. The nominated house represents a significant step in Beecher's public life—his formal return to a regular pulpit in an American church after the Civil War. The house in the Catskills represents the opposite—Beecher's attempt to completely remove himself from public life and the responsibilities of a regular pastorate. If his significant contribution to history had been in an area that required such isolation (conservation or a literature about the natural world), then the Catskill cottage would have a strong association; Beecher, however, is significant as a public figure and therefore a property must be associated with his public life. Although he was called back to limited service—preaching on Sundays—during in his self-imposed separation from the world, the house in the woods cannot be said to represent his productive life.