Julius Barnard (1769–after 1820) as Peripatetic Yankee Cabinetmaker

“Death Is Every Where Present”

The Dairy Farmers’ Union in Vermont, 1939–1942

The Lure of the West and the Voices of Home: Excerpts from the Correspondence of William Spaulding Burt

Ross Fox

J. David Book

Nicholas Clifford

Ruth Burt Ekstrom
At the end of 2010, a generous gift to VHS added to its already significant Civil War collections. The Twitchell family donated objects and documents owned or relating to their ancestor, Marshall Harvey Twitchell, the famous Vermont carpetbagger. His story was included in the PBS documentary, “Reconstruction: The Second Civil War” (http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstruction/carpetbagger/ps_twitchell.html).

Twitchell was a courageous and daring Union soldier, who served in the Vermont Brigade. He rose through the ranks from private to captain, was severely wounded in the Wilderness campaign, and finally served as an officer of the 109th U.S. Colored Regiment. After the war he worked for the Freedman’s Bureau in Northern Louisiana helping freed slaves obtain their new constitutional rights. Eventually Twitchell would marry a local plantation owner’s daughter, purchase his own plantation, and become a successful planter, entrepreneur, and politician. All the while he supported the efforts of local African Americans to vote, get paid for their work, and acquire an education. Twitchell planned on living for the rest of his life in Louisiana and persuaded his mother, brother, and three sisters and their husbands to migrate to the South. Elected to the Republican-controlled Louisiana state senate and in charge of his parish’s educational system, he became a target of white supremacists, who violently opposed post-war federally mandated efforts to provide African Americans their civil rights. In 1874 his brother, two Vermont brothers-in-law, his wife’s brother-in-law, and twenty African Americans, all Republicans, were assassinated at the Coushatta Massacre by the Democratic-party-supported White League. Shortly thereafter, violence erupted in New Orleans as Democrats tried to depose the Republican-controlled state government. Federal troops were sent in but Twitchell’s life and those of other Reconstruction Republicans, black and white, where under continued threat. In 1876 Twitchell was shot six

About the Cover Illustrations

Vermonters Working with Freedmen during and after the Civil War

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times and lost both of his arms. His last surviving Vermont brother-in-law was killed.

Twitchell’s survival ensured that Republicans maintained control of the legislature, governor’s office, and U.S. Senate in the next election. But the efforts of Reconstruction in Louisiana were coming to an end as the federal government withdrew its support. The violent struggle to protect and support the millions of freed African Americans was over as Democrats regained control in the South, and many civil rights laws were ignored by state governments or overturned by the U. S. Supreme Court.

Marshall Harvey Twitchell left Louisiana but continued to have an active and productive life. After a brief time of recovery in Vermont he was appointed in 1878 Counsel of the United States in Kingston, Canada, where he died in 1905. At the end of his life Twitchell wrote an autobiography in which he chronicled his life and defended his efforts in Louisiana during a time when historians were vilifying the Reconstruction era and romanticizing the Confederacy.

The Twitchell family gift includes a copy of the autobiography, two Civil War swords, including one given to Twitchell by the men of the 109th U.S. Colored Regiment (see back cover illustration), photographs of Twitchell and his family, letters, a scrapbook, and other miscellaneous
materials. This gift adds to the story of Vermonters who fought to end slavery and went south to help freed blacks.

Martha Johnson from Peacham went to South Carolina’s Sea Islands in 1863 to teach freed slaves in the Port Royal/Beaufort area. Her letters in the VHS library collection document her work with the freedmen until her death from yellow fever in 1871.

Martha Johnson’s 1864 Commission to teach in the South from the National Freedman’s Relief Association.
Another Vermonter who fought for freed blacks was Rufus Kinsley of Fletcher, Vermont. Kinsley began his service with Co. F, 8th Vermont and was somewhat of a rarity in the army, a radical abolitionist. Before the war Kinsley lived in Boston and was part of the city’s abolitionist community. A lap desk donated by the Kinsley family to VHS in 1992 (see front cover) contained the following note apparently written by Kinsley.

This writing case, filled with stationery and stamps, and containing a goodly number of gold dollars, was presented to Rufus Kinsley, superintendent of the May Street Sunday School [for?] Negroes, Boston on his retirement therefrom in 1857; and was by him carried through the war for the suppression of the slaveholders’ rebellion, from 1861, to 1865, where it served a very useful purpose in giving a great many hundred (late) slaves the rudiments of an education. Presented to Amy L. Gelo, Jan. 21, 1911, by her father.

Rufus Kinsley

Kinsley was vocal in his beliefs and in 1863 he was offered a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant to command Company B, 2nd Regiment, Infantry of the Corp d’Afrique. In 1864 he became 2nd Lieutenant of Co. G 74th US Colored Infantry and was in command of this company during the siege and bombardment of Fort Morgan, Mobile Bay, in August 1864. Kinsey recorded in his diary, now in VHS’s library, his efforts throughout his service with these troops to teach them to read and write and their very strong interest in learning. It was this teaching that Kinsley was most proud of when recounting his military service. Like Twitchell and Johnson, Kinsley believed it was through education that former slaves would achieve equality in America.

During the next year VHS will participate in the Civil War commemoration with the exhibit Service and Sacrifice: Vermont’s Civil War Generation. Included in the exhibit will be some of the artifacts and documents mentioned in this article. I would be very interested in learning about other Vermonters who worked with freed slaves as part of their military service or during Reconstruction.

JACQUELINE CALDER, Curator

Front cover photograph: Rufus Kinsley’s portable writing desk and note with its history.

Back cover: The men of the 109th U.S. Colored Troops presented this sword to Captain Marshall Harvey Twitchell.