Stephen Bates: Earliest Known Black Sheriff of the North

After four years of police service, Stephen Bates had no trouble convincing a few hundred voters that he should be city sheriff and was elected unopposed and by acclamation in 1879. Vergennes voters would reelect Bates as city sheriff all but six times between that first election and his death in 1907.

By Jane Williamson

The voters of Vergennes, Vermont, made an astonishing decision when they gathered on March 25, 1879, to conduct their annual meeting. They elected Stephen Bates, a Black man, to serve as sheriff of their almost entirely White city. Vergennes voters would reelect Bates as city sheriff all but six times between that first election and his death in 1907, and the city council appointed him chief of police more than a dozen times.[1] Stephen Bates was almost certainly the first African American sheriff elected in a northern state. Nationwide, many others preceded him, but they, along with hundreds of other public officials, were elected in former Confederate states during Reconstruction; in other words, by Black voters.[2] Stephen Bates, like most ordinary Americans and, especially, African Americans, left no personal papers—

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letters, diaries, or other documents—to tell us what he did, or what he thought, or who he was. The traces of his life found in Shirley Plantation records, newspaper accounts, and public documents combine to draw a remarkably full picture of Bates's life.

Stephen Bates was born enslaved at Shirley Plantation on the James River in Charles City County, Virginia, in 1842. Stephen; his mother, Phillis; and siblings, Mary, William, Nancy, and Lucy, were listed in various plantation records over the years. His father, Napoleon, was enslaved on a nearby holding and is mentioned in Shirley records, but as a carpenter hired for the year in 1848 and 1849 for a fee of $130, and for "work done" in 1851. Though enslaved in separate households, Phillis and Napoleon remained together through emancipation and until her death in 1868.[3]

Shirley Plantation was the ancestral home of the Carter family, wealthy and prominent Virginians since the early 1700s, and the plantation fell to young Hill Carter along with 106 enslaved laborers in 1816.[4] Decades of mismanagement by overseers had left the 900-acre spread in ruinous condition, so Carter fired the overseer and devoted himself to restoring it. He became an acolyte and then leader of the southern agricultural reform movement (the sustainable agriculture effort of its time), trying and adapting many methods over the decades until the Civil War changed everything.[5]

Carter engaged with other reformers to formulate best practices, on everything from keeping regular accounts to proper management of enslaved workers (he deemed both essential to success). His theories on labor management would have a direct and profound effect on the lives of the Bates family. He believed first in consistency, never reacting too harshly or being too lax in disciplining slaves. Certainty of punishment was paramount, Carter argued, not its severity. His goal was to mold a labor force that offered minimal resistance, and to do that he had to strike a balance between his interests and those of his enslaved workers. Carter believed that the best evidence of proper management was no use of the whip, though he resorted to it when he felt it necessary.[6]

Carter expressed his ideas on improving material life in the quarter to an 1827 gathering of planters:

> We should attend more to the comfort of our negroes, their quarters should be better built, & larger & the overseers should be made to attend to their cleanliness, the quarters should be white washed now & then . . . It is very false economy not to feed & clothe well for well clothed & fed labourers are doubly efficient.[7]

He also argued for allowing the enslaved some privileges, including garden plots and livestock they could tend for themselves or for market.

Why shouldn't they enjoy a few "luxuries of life … such as coffee, sugar, a garden and fruit trees"?[8]

Carter's reform views set him apart from the typical southern planter. Yet those enslaved on Shirley Plantation benefited only to the extent that he followed his own advice. Did Stephen Bates and his family wear better clothing (shoes!), eat more and more nutritious food, reside in larger and better maintained quarters? The evidence suggests they did. But even as they would have enjoyed these material improvements, they would also have understood why they were provided. It was not done so much for their benefit, as for Carter's. He sought to nurture a bound labor force that was healthy, fit, and able to work; tractable; and attached to himself and to Shirley Plantation.

Hill Carter would need such a workforce to carry out his reforms, but he initially needed a smaller one. His first step in reviving Shirley Plantation was to carve out a more manageable area of cultivation, so he worked only part of his land. This led to the sale of forty-eight enslaved laborers, nearly half of those he inherited. Carter pocketed $4,500 from sales in 1818 and another $4,500 from sales in 1821 and used the proceeds to fund his planned improvements.[9] These sales came long before Stephen Bates was born, but Carter's willingness to sell—to commit what was to the enslaved "this worst of all calamities"[10]—exposed the limits of his reformism. It's important to remember that "reform" in this context applies to agricultural practices meant to improve efficiency and profits, not to humanitarian concerns. Like most planters, Carter was willing to sell human property when the bottom line demanded it.

Hill Carter's reform plans required a robust work force; the enslaved at Shirley had to be willing to work and to work hard. Rebuilding soil tilth was paramount and meant spreading marl, lime, and manure over hundreds of acres, all onerous jobs.[11] Carter instituted elaborate crop rotations, sometimes using as many as five sequences in a year. He also spent several years—or his enslaved workers did—laboriously draining swamp land, only to abandon the project later. Carter's improved methods of cultivation meant that Shirley's laborers worked more intensely for more months of the year at more complex tasks than ever before.[12]

Enslaved laborers had many ways to show their dissatisfaction at these increasing demands—slowing the pace of work, breaking tools, absconding for short periods.[13] Gambling on a run to freedom was the most consequential, for both themselves and the planters they left behind. The earliest escape from Shirley Plantation that Hill Carter recorded came in 1825; others occurred in 1829, 1837, and 1845. Carter advertised a reward each time, and most were returned.[14] A minor rash of escapes hit Shirley in the 1850s—in 1853, 1854, and 1855.[15] Stephen Bates was en-

tering adolescence in those years and would have been well aware of the situation. Seeing some men (they were all men) take matters into their own hands and simply *leave* Shirley Plantation must have sent a powerful message to those left behind, even to one as young as Stephen.

These were the circumstances into which Stephen Bates was born and grew up. Ferreting out details of slaves' everyday lives and circumstances is always difficult and often impossible. A rich trove of documents from Shirley Plantation has survived, however, including several lists of those enslaved. Examined together, these documents divulge information about Stephen Bates's role at Shirley Plantation as he grew to adulthood.

The earliest of these documents, created in 1850 and updated repeatedly over the years, recorded births and deaths. Hill Carter also kept lists of goods distributed to the enslaved, including blankets in 1853 and again in 1855-1857 and meat in 1858. All these rosters were arranged by household, with the head listed first followed by spouses, children, and others; a solid black line separated each family (or other) group from the next. Families appeared in roughly the same order each time, suggesting a "geography" of the quarter at Shirley. John Washington's family was first in every list, and the sequence varied only somewhat after that. Phillis Bates appeared near the end of each list, with only one or two families following hers.[16]

Stephen Bates and his older brother William were not included in their mother's household on any of these lists; they appeared instead as a separate unit of two every time, suggesting they had been identified for special treatment as youngsters. Even as early as 1850, when they were only eight and fourteen years old, they were not listed in their mother's household, but followed it set off by a black line. On the 1853 record of blankets distributed, another family had come between them and Phillis's household. The two brothers moved up near the middle of the 1855-1857 blanket roster, coming immediately after the family of Anthony Pride, a senior member of the house staff. By 1858 Stephen and William had migrated *into* the Pride household, meaning they must have been personal servants.[17] Two later documents confirm this: An 1863 record of slaves who escaped during the Civil War identified William Bates as a "house servant" and a 1905 article about Stephen Bates described him as a waiter. Anthony Pride was a driver, and Stephen may have begun his work with horses, later to serve him well, under Pride's tutelage.[18]

Those who tended to the personal needs of planters and their families—cooks and waiters, valets and ladies' maids, seamstresses and nannies, grooms and coachmen—enjoyed some privileges not available to field hands and laborers. Typically, they wore better clothing, ate better food, and, of course, were spared the harsh conditions, drudgery, and gru-

eling toil of agricultural production. They were not, however, spared the lash or other punishments. And these "privileged" occupations brought their own special disadvantages. House servants had to be available around the clock, ready to cater to whatever demands were made. The ever-present supervision, or even meddling, from planters and lack of privacy in the "big house" was usually irksome and sometimes much worse.[19] Familiarity could definitely breed contempt.

Activists in the North had built a robust and diverse antislavery movement by the time Stephen Bates was born in 1842. This fundamental disagreement about slavery dominated US politics for decades and drove a wedge ever deeper between North and South. The Union broke twenty years later, and the Civil War arrived on Bates's doorstep just as he approached adulthood. One year after the first shots were fired at Fort Sumter in April 1861, tens of thousands of US troops landed at Fort Monroe on the Virginia Peninsula. Northern politicians, military officials, and the general public held conflicting views on the goal of the Civil War, but the enslaved African Americans at the center of the dispute were never in doubt: For them it could only be a war for emancipation, and many would see to it themselves if necessary.[20]

Decisions made progressively throughout 1861 and 1862 by the military, the Lincoln administration, and Congress guaranteed that refugees from slavery who made it to Union lines would not be returned, but freed. The theory of "military necessity" was used to argue that Southern human property could—and should—be confiscated just as weapons, food, horses, or wagons would be. Beginning with General Benjamin Butler at Fort Monroe in April 1861, escapees were regarded "as temporarily confiscated commodities" or "contraband," as they were commonly called.[21] Emancipation was motivated less by altruistic impulses than by the need to relieve White soldiers from hard and dangerous work as well as to deprive the Confederacy of much-needed labor.[22]

Union forces led by General George B. McClellan were sent to capture the Confederate capital at Richmond, Virginia, during the spring and summer of 1862. From the time the Army of the Potomac landed at Fort Monroe, the region's slaves, including the sixty men and women enslaved on Shirley Plantation, were well aware of the Union presence and movements.[23] Everywhere McClellan's army went, from its landing in March to its departure in August, hundreds of refugees from slavery made their way to its blue lines where they were sheltered and put to work.[24]

McClellan ultimately abandoned the planned attack on Richmond and by early July had retreated to a base camp at Harrison's Landing, a mere five miles from Shirley Plantation, which he also commandeered as a

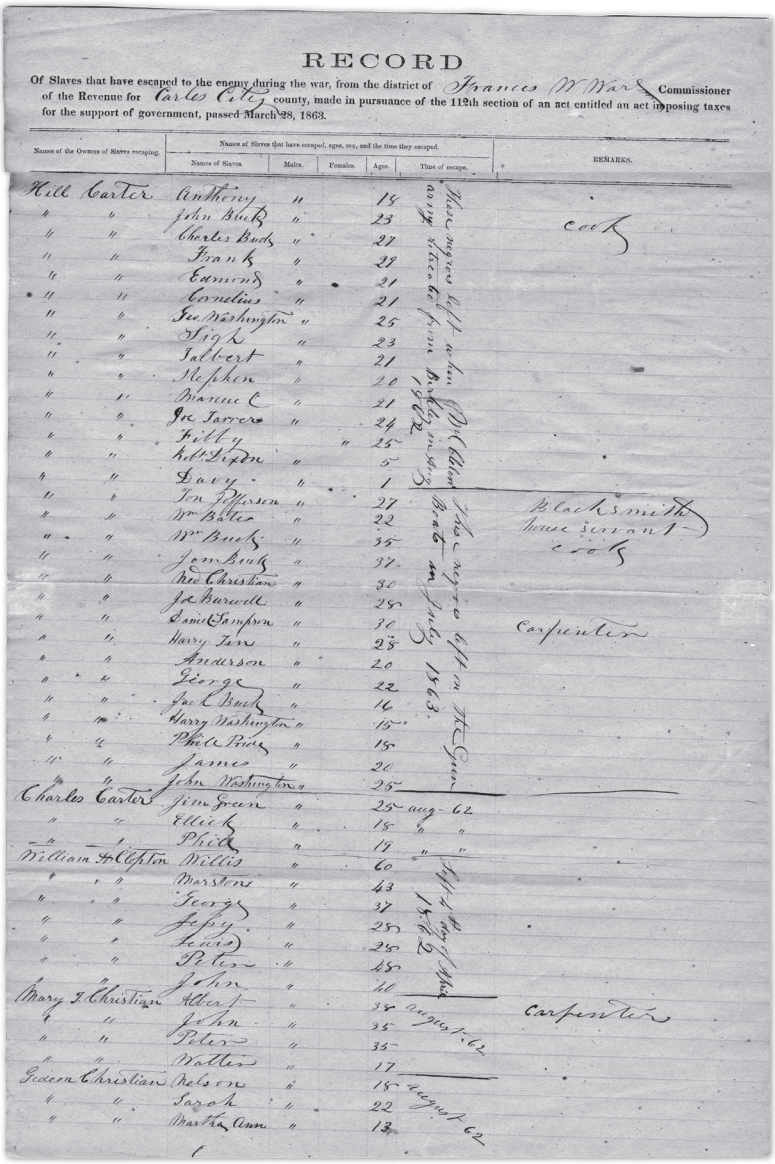
Union hospital. Thirty soldiers who had been imprisoned by Confederates were treated there, and hundreds more were nursed at Shirley after the Battle of Malvern Hill, both in July. A report in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* gushed that "Colonel Hill Carter, though a Secessionist in principle, treated our wounded as he would have treated his own sons. He made no difference between 'our own people' and Union men."[25]

Shirley Plantation had become an auxiliary base and thus offered its enslaved workers plenty of contact with federal forces and the chance to consider joining them. Stephen Bates and his brother William no doubt helped with the huge job of doctoring hundreds of wounded soldiers and probably gave up their beds to them.[26] They had ample opportunity to evaluate the Yankees and judge for themselves if they were trustworthy. Stephen evidently decided that they were. His obituary noted that he was in service to an officer at Harrison's Landing, possibly one of the wounded he helped care for. And Hill Carter noted in his plantation journal on July 14 that "15 negro men and boys ran off at different times up to this date." One of those fifteen was Stephen Bates.[27]

Bates's time in service at Shirley more than qualified him to work as aide or valet to a Union officer. Agreements between officers and refugees were usually made privately and informally and were attractive because officers often paid more than the military guidelines stipulated. Unless paid privately by the officer, male servants were to receive $8 a month.[28] We don't know who was paying Stephen Bates, but either way working for a Union officer would have been his best option—better paid and less onerous and dangerous than physical labor.

Stephen Bates was just twenty years old, but soon had a wrenching decision to make. McClellan's army was being recalled to Washington, DC, and began moving out by mid-August. Working behind Union lines five miles from home was one thing, marching away from that home for good was quite another. Try to imagine his conflicting emotions: Did he discuss it with his parents and siblings or slip away without their knowledge? Did they urge him to go or plead with him to stay?

However he made his decision, Stephen Bates "left when McClellan's army retreated in Aug. 1862," according to a state record of fleeing slaves. He did not go alone. Eleven other men, aged eighteen to twenty-nine, a twenty-five-year-old woman, and two young children also left Shirley Plantation that August.[29] And hundreds of others from surrounding plantations swelled the refugee ranks. A *New York Tribune* reporter embedded with the army commented that "the negroes of the whole region join the army in its march… now that we depart they are too sharp" to stay behind.[30]



RECORD

Of Slaves that have escaped to the enemy during the war, from the district of Frances W Ward Commissioner of the Revenue for Carles City county, made in pursuance of the 112th section of an act entitled an act imposing taxes for the support of government, passed March 28, 1863.

Names of the Owners of Slaves escaping.	Names of Slaves that have escaped, ages, sex, and the time they escaped.					REMARKS.
	Names of Slaves.	Males.	Females.	Ages.	Time of escape.	
Hill Carter	Anthony	"		19	These negroes left when Gen Pleasonton's division left Charles City in 1862	
" "	John Buck	"		23		cook
" "	Charles Buck	"		27		
" "	Frank	"		28		
" "	Edmond	"		21		
" "	Cornelius	"		21		
" "	Jos Washington	"		25		
" "	Sigh	"		23		
" "	Talbert	"		21		
" "	Stephen	"		20		
" "	Marcus C	"		21		
" "	Joe Farrer	"		24		
" "	Felty		"	25		
" "	Kit Lipon	"		5		
" "	Davy	"		1		
" "	Jos Jefferson	"		27	These negroes left on Brady's raid in July 1863.	Blacksmith
" "	Wm Bates	"		22		House servant
" "	Wm Buck	"		35		cook
" "	Jem Buck	"		37		
" "	Rec Christian	"		30		
" "	Jos Burwell	"		28		
" "	Daniel Sampson	"		30		Carpenter
" "	Harry Jas	"		28		
" "	Anderson	"		20		
" "	George	"		22		
" "	Joe L Buck	"		16		
" "	Harry Washington	"		15		
" "	Phil Price	"		15		
" "	James	"		20		
" "	John Washington	"		25		
Charles Carter	Jim Green	"		25	aug 62	
" "	Ellick	"		18	" "	
" "	Phil	"		19	" "	
William H Clopton	Willis	"		60	Left at the time of Stuart's raid 1862	
" "	Marstons	"		43		
" "	George	"		37		
" "	Jeffy	"		25		
" "	Lewis	"		25		
" "	Peter	"		48		
" "	John	"		40		
Mary J. Christian	Albert	"		38	August 62	Carpenter
" "	John	"		35		
" "	Peter	"		35		
" "	Walter	"		17		
Gideon Christian	Nelson	"		18	August 62	
" "	Sarah	"		22		
" "	Martha Ann	"		13		

Stephen Bates is listed by first name only, the tenth name, in this "Record of Slaves that have escaped to the enemy during the war." It is available online as part of the Library of Virginia digital collections through its "Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative" collection:http://digitool1.lva.lib.va.us:1801/view/action/nmets.do?DOCCHOICE=1991265.xml&dvs=1643476659588~364&locale=en_US&search_terms=&adjacency=&VIEWER_URL=/view/action/nmets.do?&DELIVER

Stephen Bates continued with the Union army, arriving in Washington, in fall 1862. It was an exhilarating if difficult place to be. Congress had jurisdiction over the District and, now controlled by Republicans, used its power to make the city a "crucible of equality during the Civil War." Congress had freed the District's slaves that April and went over the city council's head to repeal its black code as well. The thousands of refugees from slavery who flocked to the city found it a safe haven, as the Fugitive Slave Law was "a dead letter" there.[31] No surprise then that Washington became the "preeminent mecca for Black migrants" and that its Black population increased by 223 percent in the decade after 1860.[32]

Stephen Bates's movements during the following months, even years, are undocumented. How long he remained in service to the Union army after arriving in the District we don't know. As long as he did, however, he had both paid employment and housing, so it certainly eased the transition. But the army—and the officer he served—eventually moved on while Bates stayed behind.

Washington could be a welcoming place for a young man making his way to a free life. Its Black community was well organized and accustomed to taking care of itself, so when the city was overrun with escapees, it responded. The churches organized freedmen's aid societies, and residents offered whatever shelter they could spare to house freedpeople.[33] But it could also be cruel: Real estate owners recognized the opportunity and built "rudimentary shacks on unimproved land," for which they charged exorbitant rents.[34]

Bates would have been lucky to find housing with a Black family, but another option was one of the District's freedmen's camps: Duff Green's Row, a group of tenement houses on Capitol Hill, or Camp Barker, a former army barracks near Logan Circle. Camp conditions varied considerably, but as a rule were harsh.[35] Overcrowding, poor sanitation, and ramshackle shelter left residents vulnerable to disease, which took a huge toll. Harriet Jacobs, who had escaped from slavery in North Carolina two decades earlier, described conditions at Duff Green's Row, where she worked in 1862: "I found men, women and children all huddled together, without any regard to age or sex. Some were in the most pitiable condition. Many were sick with measles, diphtheria, scarlet fever and typhoid fever. Some had a few filthy rags to lie on; others had nothing but the bare floor."[36] If Stephen Bates lived at either of these installations, he would have moved on as soon as he was able.

Indeed, the superintendent at Camp Barker did his best to alleviate overcrowding and move people on by finding employment for them as quickly as possible, usually in government or private service. He was

fairly successful in 1862, when the job market in DC and Georgetown was more "fluid" than it would be later. But most of those jobs paid low wages; a few offered as much as $10 a month, but most only $2 to $5.[37]

How Stephen Bates met and went to work for Frederick E. Woodbridge is a mystery. Woodbridge, who represented Vermont's First District in the US House from 1863 to 1869, was evidently in need of a coachman[38] and may have posted the opening with Camp Barker's superintendent. Offering employment to a needy freedman was the sort of thing Woodbridge might have done: He touched the lives of several Black Vermonters over the years.

Woodbridge was not nominated for a fourth term in Congress, and when he returned to his home in Vergennes, Stephen Bates went with him. Not yet thirty years old, Bates was facing another life-changing decision. He would leave the Black community of Washington and whatever friends and networks he had built there and start fresh five hundred miles away. His move suggests the strength and importance of his relationship with Woodbridge, for he would also put a potentially insurmountable distance between himself and his family. His parents had survived to emancipation and remained in Charles City County, Virginia. His mother, Phillis, died in 1868, and Napoleon remarried in 1870.[39] Did Stephen make a farewell visit while he still could?

By 1870 Stephen Bates was in Vergennes boarding with Samuel Wilson, a retired cabinet and piano maker, who lived just across the street from the Woodbridge household. The city Bates moved to was about as unlike the one he had left as imaginable. People of African descent made up about a third of Washington's nearly 132,000 residents.[40] Vergennes, though chartered as a city, counted only 1,570 residents in 1870, of whom a mere thirteen were Black, or less than 1 percent. Bates was one of nine African Americans living in White households; the other eight were women working as domestics, cooks, and washerwomen. Two young couples, George Jackson, a barber, and his wife Pheba and George Storms, a hostler, and his wife Julia were the other four.[41]

Stephen Bates seems to have settled easily into life in Vergennes; arriving in the company and employ of Frederick E. Woodbridge certainly would have smoothed his way.[42] By June 1871 he had married Frances Mason, a cook for a retired hotelkeeper, and before long their daughter Rose Mary was born. Earlier that same year Frances Mason's sister Orphia had married young Robert Storms, who lived just a few miles away in Panton, creating something of an extended family. Stephen and Frances's son, Frederick Napoleon, was born four years later. The young family lived on North Street in a house owned by Woodbridge, which they purchased after his death in 1888. Neighbors rallied and raised $100

"as a token of their esteem and sympathy" after a fire in 1880 destroyed most of the family's belongings. Bates was an active Republican and voted in state and national elections; he was appointed to a campaign committee for the 1876 presidential election. The family attended St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where son Fred sang in the choir. And the local paper printed "news" of Bates family doings, just as it did for White folks in Vergennes.[43]

Coaching for Frederick E. Woodbridge had brought Stephen Bates to Vermont, but it would not be enough to support his growing family. His skill with horses brought him some work: He managed a business for Woodbridge's son, Frederick A. Woodbridge, that imported Percherons, and he occasionally transported horses for their owners. The Vermont Humane Society appointed him as "local agent and prosecutor of all persons guilty of cruelty to animals." He was night watchman at the Farmer's National Bank. His son's 1875 birth certificate recorded his occupa-

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FAVORI, NO. 1974, PERCHERON STUD BOOK OF FRANCE. NO. 3191, PERCHERON STUD BOOK OF AMERICA. Dapple grey, foaled May 10th, 1880; imported March 1st, 1884. FAVORI stands 16½ hands high and weighs 1650 pounds, is a horse of extraordinary breadth of quarters and stifle, with breadth of chest to match; a splendid and symmetrically shaped body, with strong and nicely formed legs; a most beautiful head and neck; is a good square trotter and a fast walker. Has been tried and is known to be a most excellent breeder and a very sure foal getter. He obtained first prize at Vermont State fair for three years.

PIERRE, Sired by Romulus from a Morgan bred mare; is a fine sample of the half blood Percheron. Stands at 2 years of age at 15½ hands high and weighs 1050 pounds; a very promising colt and will be allowed a few mares the coming season at $8 to warrant.

TERMS FOR FAVORI: $15 TO WARRANT.

Five dollars at time of service; balance when mare is safe in foal. Twenty per cent. discount on balance if paid within 90 days from time of service. $12 for season service, payable Aug. 1st.

F. A. WOODBRIDGE.

STEPHEN BATES, Manager.

Vergennes, Vermont, May 28, 1889. 10

Stephen Bates was named as manager, lower left corner, in this 1889 advertisement for Frederick A. Woodbridge's horse business; the Enterprise and Vermonter*, 21 June 1889, p 2.*

tion as laborer, as did the 1900 census; the 1880 census said he did "general work." Like other Black Vermonters, Bates patched together as many jobs as it took to make a living, including Vergennes police officer.[44]

Stephen Bates's first step on the path to sheriff came in 1875 when the three-member common council appointed him as one of several "special constables," or police officers. Nothing in the record explained how this process worked, but candidates presumably indicated their interest in the post. Bates had been in Vergennes for at least five years at that time and had evidently made himself known to councilors. What pharmacist Walter Sprague, farmer Philo Bristol, and physician Harvey Ingham discussed when making the appointment we will never know.[45] They obviously believed that Bates could do the job, however, and must not have seen his race as an impediment.

An entirely new council was elected the following year when the "Young Men's Independent" ticket made a nearly clean sweep of city offices. Whatever change the "young men" sought did not include ousting Stephen Bates—he kept his job. All but one of these six men sat on the council in 1877 and 1878, along with one new member, and Bates was appointed in both years. I was able to identify one active Republican member of each council, but all were probably party members.[46] Republican F. E. Woodbridge was one of Vermont's most prominent men, and his influence certainly would have counted. Did he speak up for his friend and coachman? Or was their known association enough? The record does not say.

Frederick E. Woodbridge's clout was certainly an asset, but not enough to sway an election. After four years of police service, Stephen Bates had no trouble convincing a few hundred voters that he should be city sheriff and was elected unopposed and by acclamation in 1879. Vergennes voters had clearly gained confidence in Bates through his years as a constable; not only did he win election, but he was also able to muster the bond required by the office. Woodbridge was elected mayor at that same city election, but when "called for" after he was declared elected was discovered not to be in attendance.[47]

The Vergennes weekly paper, the *Enterprise and Vermonter*, covered the city's March election each year, but offered minimal insight. I found no discussion of issues in advance of the meetings (though there would have been plenty of talk around town). Nominations were made from the floor, but the nominees and who put their names forward were rarely recorded. Besides the *Enterprise and Vermonter*, five Vermont newspapers from Orleans County to Bellows Falls reported on the meeting. Does that mean the election of a Black sheriff in Vermont was consid-

ered newsworthy? Possibly, but Bates's race was rarely noted. Only the *Orleans County Monitor* mentioned it, saying succinctly in a one-sentence notice: "Vergennes has elected ex-Congressman F. E. Woodbridge mayor, while his colored coachman, Stephen Bates, is the new city Sheriff."[48]

Bates was elected city sheriff for the next three years (1880-1882) without opposition and by acclamation. That changed in 1883, however. The *Enterprise and Vermonter* noted that the election "passed off very quietly" and that "no slates appeared to have been made up, and little interest was manifested." Neither the official city record of that annual meeting nor the *Enterprise and Vermonter* reported who was nominated for sheriff, but Frank T. McDonough was elected. Vergennes had another new sheriff, Henry P. Fisher, in 1884 and 1885. Again, neither the candidates' names nor the number of votes cast was recorded, only the winner. Whether Sheriff Bates had lost the confidence of voters or chose not to run, we do not know.[49]

Stephen Bates regained the post of city sheriff in 1886 and was re-elected every year until 1904, when Timothy Dillon's election signaled another three-year hiatus. As the end of the century neared, elections for city offices grew more contested. Bates received all votes cast in 1894 despite facing an opponent, and in 1897, when he had two challengers, he took 142 of 192 votes. But he only squeaked by in 1900 with 105 votes when 101 were needed to win. Sheriff Bates did better in 1902 when he bested his opponent 161 to 49. But Timothy Dillon ousted Bates handily in 1904 and 1905, 145 to 86 and 163 to 70, and then ran unopposed in 1906. Dillon, however, resigned his post in August that year, and the city council appointed Bates to fill the vacancy and made him chief of police as well.[50]

It seems that Vergennes elections were becoming more partisan; it was certainly an era of robustly contested politics.[51] The *Enterprise and Vermonter* crowed about the 1894 and 1895 elections that "Republicans made a clean sweep." And the paper went on to say in 1894: "Vergennes mounted to the crest of the Republican tidal wave that has swept over the state and is moving with irresistible force over the whole country. . . . Every officer, from Mayor on down, is a Republican, and they were elected by large majorities." The paper reported in 1896 that "a straight Republican caucus had been held" before the annual meeting and that "the Republicans put a full ticket in the field."[52] That ticket would have included Stephen Bates. All three of Sheriff Bates's successful challengers—Frank T. McDonough, Henry P. Fisher, and Timothy Dillon—were active Democrats.[53] How did the "faithful few," as one article called Vergennes Democrats, pull off this feat? They might have won an elec-

tion in a year the Republicans were not paying attention, but not three years running. Did they play the "race card"? Once again we are left guessing.

The Vergennes city sheriff did not work a regular schedule, but responded to situations as they arose and was paid for hours worked. Vergennes *Annual Reports* recorded amounts paid to Sheriff Bates, and the sheriff's rate of pay was recorded several times at twenty cents an hour. His earnings varied from a low of $15 his first year as sheriff to $308.90 (more than 1,500 hours) in 1903, which was nearly three times his next highest earnings. Most years he earned between $70 and $100 (350 to 500 hours). I found nothing to indicate a rash of crime or change in duties in 1903, which might have caused the jump in hours. But it was the very next year, 1904, that Timothy Dillon trounced Sheriff Bates at the annual election. It's tempting to wonder if he (and the Vergennes Democrats) persuaded voters that Sheriff Bates was costing the city too much money. If they did, it was unwarranted: Dillon earned $295 in 1905.[54]

The *Enterprise and Vermonter* covered crime from time to time, and if those reports reflected the actual incidence, intoxication and vagrancy were most common. The job was not usually dangerous, but Sheriff Bates could have been killed one Fourth of July. He was attempting to arrest a man "filled with something besides the spirit of '76," who threw an axe and then a flatiron at him. Fortunately, it was the iron and not the axe that hit him, and Bates was injured "somewhat." One notable effort was the arrest of two men who had robbed post offices in Morrisville, Glover, and Windsor. Bates and his deputy each received a $100 reward from the US Post Office.[55]

Life for Sheriff Bates and his family continued apparently happily and without incident as the century came to a close. Rose and Fred both excelled in school, graduating from Vergennes High School in 1889 and 1894; participated in community events; and worked summers in local businesses. Rose had moved to Massachusetts by 1891 and settled in Worcester after her marriage in 1893. Frances Bates died unexpectedly in 1897 at just forty-five years old. Her death came shortly after son Fred had joined his sister in Worcester. Alone now, Stephen sold the family home in 1900 and boarded with a widow on East Street.[56]

Stephen Bates collapsed while crossing Main Street in front of Norton's feed store in January 1907. Someone helped him into the store and called a doctor, who revived him. The *Enterprise and Vermonter* published a brief notice, saying that "Mr. Bates is subject to heart spells." He was well enough that March to be reelected sheriff and to do his job. Another spell hit him on a Sunday afternoon in June, as he sat down in a neighbor's barn to milk a cow. The *Rutland Herald* said that "He had

Vergennes High School Classes and Teams, 1893. The Black student in the back row, third from left, is most likely Fred Bates, who graduated the year after this picture was taken. Bixby Library Collection.

suffered for more than a year and on Sunday complained of not feeling well, but attended to all his duties." This time, Sheriff Bates did not get up.[57]

Coverage of his death was even broader than that of his first election as sheriff; fourteen Vermont newspapers from St. Albans to Brattleboro carried obituaries. They recounted much of Stephen Bates's remarkable life, though with plenty of room for outright error and some subtle misrepresentation. Again, only one mentioned his race, the *Vermont Phoenix*, which said, "Bates was a negro, but was born a free man." Five others also stated incorrectly that "he was born of free parents," implying, but not stating, that he was Black.[58] It's odd that what made Bates's death (and life) newsworthy—his rise from enslavement in the South to city sheriff in the North—was reported either coyly or not at all.

The description of Bates's role with the Carter family appeared in two versions. "He lived with the Carter family and had vivid recollections of Gen. Robert E. Lee, the Custises and other prominent families," is how reports in seven papers put it.[59] He "lived with" the Carters? This certainly obfuscates his role, almost making it sound as if he were a guest and spent his time hobnobbing with Virginia planters. The *Enterprise and Vermonter* obituary, while introducing a new error, was more accurate about his position: "His younger days were spent as a servant in a number of the most aristocratic southern families, including the Hill

Carter family, where he often saw Gen. Robert E. Lee and the Custises."[60] But this one, too, hints that even though a lowly servant, he was rubbing shoulders with the upper crust. What both versions tell us, however, is that Stephen Bates *knew* that stories of the Lee and Custis families would impress people—even in Vermont—and he was happy to tell them, gaining whatever goodwill it afforded. It's not hard to imagine him regaling his friends and neighbors with these tales, no doubt confusing the issue of his status; of course, that may have been exactly what he intended.

How, then, did Vergennes become the first northern city (and to this day, one of a handful) to elect a Black sheriff? Vergennes had been home to several African American families since its founding, though their number had dwindled by 1870. They belonged to local churches, and their children attended city schools; a few owned their homes. Thus Stephen Bates was not a novelty when he arrived, and he found a mostly tolerant and welcoming community.[61] (Indeed, Vergennes residents continue to hold Bates in high regard and recently erected a State Historic Site Marker commemorating his life.)

Stephen Bates may have been the first sheriff, but he was not the first African American elected to city office in Vergennes. Philip Storms had been elected pound keeper twice in the mid-1830s, by a completely different electorate of course.[62] And authorizing a Black man to tend stray livestock is quite a different proposition from empowering him to arrest you. Indeed, it's hard to imagine a more racially charged role.

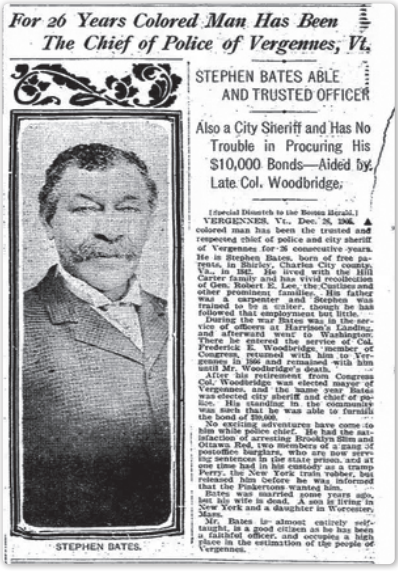
These elections occurred in dramatically different eras as well. Storms took office when Vermont's radical abolition movement, centered in Addison County, was surging through the state. Stephen Bates's career as sheriff, on the other hand, coincided with a period of violent, postemancipation retrenchment. The United States was still recovering from the Civil War and working out what sort of country it would be. Reconstruction—the effort to bring freedpeople into full citizenship—had been abandoned in 1877. Slowly, White Northerners and White Southerners were reuniting, and they were doing it over the backs and dead bodies of African Americans.[63] Vermont's tiny Black population lived far from southern scenes of racist violence; still, Vermont was part of the United States and affected by these events.[64]

Of course, credit for this "first" goes mostly to Bates himself. He gained the respect of city officials and then his neighbors through hard work, integrity, and the force of his own personality. The editors of the *Enterprise and Vermonter* knew how Vergennes residents viewed their long-time sheriff, and said so in his obituary: "During his terms of office, Mr. Bates proved an efficient and conscientious officer, and in the dis-

charge of his duties was cool and self-restrained, always avoiding trouble if possible. Mr. Bates was a self taught man and what his standing in the community was he earned through his own efforts."[65]

As I collected facts about Stephen Bates's life, I kept thinking of another Black Vermonter: Alec Turner. The similarities are striking: Both men were born enslaved on Virginia plantations, Bates on the James River in 1842 and Turner on the Rappahannock in 1845. Both grew up in proximity to White planter families; Bates was in service himself, and Turner's mother was a seamstress. Both men emancipated themselves by crossing to Union lines in 1862 and served as aides to officers. Alec Turner's postwar path to Vermont was less direct than Bates's, taking him first to Maine. He settled in the small village of Grafton, Vermont, by 1873, where he and his wife Sally raised a large family on a remote homestead.[66]

The Turner family story has survived in a much richer and fuller version, thanks to daughter Daisy Turner, the family griot, who tended her father's stories as she might have nurtured a rare orchid. Jane Beck's book on the extended Turner clan notes that Alec Turner learned as a youngster to navigate relationships with Whites "to his best advantage." His ability to "read" Whites and forge genuine connections with them helped him establish himself and his family in Grafton, where they were welcome members of the community and the only Black family in town.[67] I believe Stephen Bates had a similar talent. Convincing a city of White voters to elect a Black man as their sheriff—thereby agreeing to be arrested by him, to be touched or restrained by him—bespeaks a level of comfort, trust, and respect not often found in interracial relationships of the time (or *any* time, for that matter). The small number of Black residents in both places and their respectability also helped, keeping White fear—and racist reaction—in check.



For 26 Years Colored Man Has Been The Chief of Police of Vergennes, Vt.

STEPHEN BATES ABLE AND TRUSTED OFFICER

Also a City Sheriff and Has No Trouble in Procuring His $10,000 Bonds—Aided by Late Col. Woodbridge.

[Special Dispatch to the Boston Herald.]

VERGENNES, Vt., Dec. 26, 1905. A colored man has been the trusted and respected chief of police and city sheriff of Vergennes for 26 consecutive years. He is Stephen Bates, born of free parents, in Shirley, Charles City county, Va., in 1842. He lived with the Hill Carter family and has vivid recollection of Gen. Robert E. Lee, the Custises and other prominent families. His father was a carpenter and Stephen was trained to be a caulker, though he has followed that employment but little.

During the war Bates was in the service of officers at Harrison's Landing, and afterward went to Washington. There he entered the service of Col. Frederick E. Woodbridge, member of Congress, returned with him to Vergennes in 1866 and remained with him until Mr. Woodbridge's death.

After his retirement from Congress Col. Woodbridge was elected mayor of Vergennes, and the same year Bates was elected city sheriff and chief of police. His standing in the community was such that he was able to furnish the bond of $10,000.

No exciting adventures have come to him while police chief. He had the satisfaction of arresting Brooklyn Slim and Ottawa Red, two members of a gang of postoffice burglars, who are now serving sentences in the state prison, and at one time had in his custody as a tramp Perry, the New York train robber, but released him before he was informed that the Pinkertons wanted him.

Bates was married some years ago, but his wife is dead. A son is living in New York and a daughter in Worcester, Mass.

Mr. Bates is almost entirely self-taught. As a good citizen as he has been a faithful officer, and occupies a high place in the estimation of the people of Vergennes.

STEPHEN BATES.

Portrait of Stephen Baker, Boston Herald, *27 December 1905.*

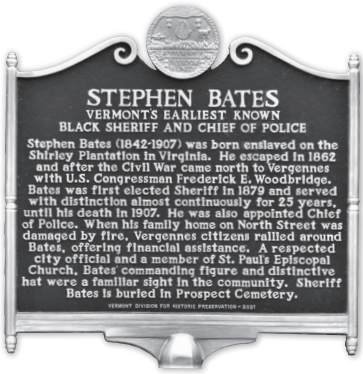
Fortunately, a photograph of Sheriff Bates was published in a 1905 article in the *Boston Herald*.[68] It's a serious and formal image, showing a man with a remarkable

presence. Bates is dressed in a suit and tie, looking straight into the camera with a somewhat steely and unsmiling gaze. His penetrating eyes, bracketed by arched eyebrows and a full mustache, certainly would have commanded the attention—and trepidation—of law breakers. He actually looks "cool and self-restrained," as the *Enterprise and Vermonter* put it. But his demeanor wouldn't always have been so chilly. It's easy to imagine that face brightening as he stopped to chat with a neighbor or friend, or softening as he soothed a skittish horse, or breaking into a smile when he played with his children.

Acknowledgments

I was privileged to join the Stephen Bates Historic Site Marker team during the winter of 2021. Vergennes and Vergennes-area residents Eloise Beil, Catherine Brooks, Susan Ferland, Alicia Grangent, Catharine Hays, Lenore Morse, Bo Price, Rebecca Rey, and Lizabeth Ryan had started work during the summer and fall of 2020. They were joined by historian Janette Greenwood of Clark University and Cheryll Toney Holley, a descendant of the extended Storms family of Addison County. Most importantly, the group included Stephen Bates's great-grandsons Larry and Nick Schuyler of Worcester, Massachusetts. The State Historic Site Marker commemorating Sheriff Bates's life was installed in October 2021. A short video on Bates's life and the site marker project, including the ceremony, is available here: https://vimeo.com/641604952/24cfd0a471.

I also have to thank Judith Ledbetter, PhD, director of the Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History in Charles City County, Virginia, who provided assistance with Shirley Plantation records.



State Historic Marker for Stephen Bates, Vergennes.

Notes

[1] Vergennes City Record Book C, 1845-1883, entries for March 25, and May 31, 1879; Book C is unpaged, but entries can be found by date. Vergennes counted only seven Black men of voting age in a population of 1,782 as reported in the 1880 census. Election results were recorded each year following the March annual meeting in five volumes of city records, titled A through E. References to Bates are found in volumes C, 1845-1893; D, 1894-1899; and E, 1900-1926. The Vergennes Common Council often appointed a chief of police or constables in its first meeting after the election; these decisions are also recorded in the volumes.

I searched through many city records but was unable to find statements of duties or job descriptions for city sheriff, chief of police, or constables. A primary difference is that the sheriff and chief

constable were elected and the police chief and constables were appointed or hired. Newspaper crime reports suggest that their duties were similar, so the distinction remains obscure.

[2] It's impossible to say that Stephen Bates was the first Black sheriff elected outside of the Reconstruction South, but a Newspapers.com search for "first Black/Negro sheriff" for 1850 to 1880 turned up nothing. The earliest record I found was for a *deputy* sheriff appointed (not elected) in Polk County, Iowa, in 1920, see *Des Moines Bystander*, 12 December 1920, 4. Eric Foner listed forty-one sheriffs chosen in several states during Reconstruction in his *Freedom's Lawmakers: A Directory of Black Officeholders during Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996), xvii.

[3] Hill Carter kept various lists of his enslaved workers over the years. Bates family birth dates were recorded in 1850; see List of Slave Births, Shirley Plantation Records, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections, University of Virginia Library (hereafter Shirley Plantation Records). The Richard M. Bowman Center for Local History (Charles City County; hereafter, Bowman Center) has provided access to some Shirley Plantation records in searchable databases. The Enslaved Ancestor Database recorded Stephen Bates's birth as 1842, son of Phillis; Phillis as wife of Napoleon and mother of Stephen and Nancy J.; Nancy's birth as 1845; Lucy as daughter of Phillis, birth and death 1849; and William as sister of Nancy. Available here: Enslaved Ancestor Database | Charles City County, VA , https://charlescity.org/learn/genealogical-databases/enslaved-ancestor-file/enslaved-ancestor-database/. Other Napoleons (or Napolion, Napolean) listed at Shirley in the database are not Stephen's father.

For hiring of Napoleon Bates, see Jennifer Ley, "The Slave's Story: Interpreting Nineteenth-Century Slave History at Shirley Plantation." MA thesis, University of Delaware, Winterthur Program in Early American History and Culture, 1995, 23. A 1905 article about Stephen Bates identified his father as Napoleon, a carpenter, see "For 26 Years Colored Man Has Been the Chief of Police of Vergennes, Vt.," *Boston Herald*, 27 December 1905, 8. Phillis Bates's death record is available on Ancestry.com.

[4] Robert James Teagle, "Land, Labor and Reform: Hill Carter, Slavery, and Agricultural Improvement at Shirley Plantation, 1816-1866." MA Thesis, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 1998, 10, 20.

[5] Ibid., 12, 14.

[6] Ibid., 21-22, 73.

[7] Ibid., 23.

[8] Ibid., 22.

[9] Ibid., 31-32.

[10] Lunsford Lane, *The Narrative of Lunsford Lane, Formerly of N.C.* (Boston, 1842); the full text is available online through Documenting the American South project at the University of North Carolina, Lunsford Lane, b. 1803. The Narrative of Lunsford Lane: Formerly of Raleigh, N.C. [etc.], https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/lanelunsford/lane.html.

[11] One of Carter's few mentions of whipping was in reference to marl; slaves apparently hated spreading it enough to resist, even if it meant the lash. Teagle, "Land, Labor and Reform," 73.

[12] Ibid., 33.

[13] Ibid, 55, 73. Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619-1877*, revised edition (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003) discusses various forms of slave resistance, 155-61. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999) explores how slaves "laid out" for short periods as a form of protest and rest.

[14] Teagle, "Land, Labor and Reform," 54, 55. For runaway notices, see *Richmond Enquirer*, 10, 14, 17, 21 April 1829, 3; *Richmond Enquirer*, 6 October 1837, and *Richmond Whig*, 7 February 1845.

[15] Daniel Saunders: *Richmond Dispatch*, 14 June 1853, 2; 15 June 1853, 3; 16 and 20 June 1853, 1. Jesse: *Richmond Dispatch*, 2, 6, and 13 June 1854, 3. William Buck: *Richmond Dispatch*, 9 July 1855, 1; 11, 14, and 16 July 1855, 4; *Richmond Enquirer*, 17 July 1855, 2.

[16] 1850 birth list: Births of children recorded in Slave Record Book—Births 1822-1864; blanket list, 1853, 1855-57; meat list 1858, container 92, Shirley Plantation Collection. Ley, "The Slave's Story," page 38, says: "In 1831, Mary Carter received a bill for a 'coat and waistcoat for servant,' whom she noted on the reverse was named Anthony."

[17] Ibid.

[18] See: "Charles City County: Record of Slaves that have escaped to the enemy during the war" [1861-1863]. Virginia Untold: The African American Narrative Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, VA, Runaway Slaves Records, 1794, 1806-1863, Accession APA 759, Box 2, Folder 2.

A 1905 newspaper article about Stephen Bates says that he was trained as a waiter, but "has followed that employment but little," "For 26 Years Colored Man Has Been the Chief of Police of Vergennes, Vt." His occupation was listed as coachman on his marriage certificate in 1870, his son's birth certificate in 1871, and the US census in 1870. It was the job Vermont Representative Frederick E. Woodbridge hired him to do in the 1860s. Whether he waited on Hill Carter at table or drove the coach that took him away from Shirley Plantation is impossible to say from the records that remain.

Ley, "The Slave's Story," 46, quotes from an 1832 letter Hill Carter wrote to his wife Mary: "Hill also had a driver for his carriages, a position held for part of the nineteenth century by 'that most unfortunate of servants, Anthony,' about whom Hill stated: 'I believe I shall never have sound horses while I have Anthony for a driver.'" Perhaps Stephen Bates was selected to replace him.

[19] See Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 105-10, for a discussion of household service.

[20] Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 38-40.

[21] James Marten, "A Feeling of Restless Anxiety: Loyalty and Race in the Peninsula Campaign and Beyond," in Gary W. Gallagher, ed., *The Richmond Campaign of 1862: The Peninsula and the Seven Days* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 134; William A. Blair, "The Seven Days and the Radical Persuasion: Convincing Moderates in the North of the Need for a Hard War," in Gallagher, *The Richmond Campaign of 1862*, 153-180.

[22] Glenn David Brasher's *The Peninsula Campaign and the Necessity of Emancipation: African Americans and the Fight for Freedom*. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2012) is an excellent recounting of the campaign and its importance in the move for emancipation. Marten, "A Feeling of Restless Anxiety," 121-52.

[23] The 1860 Slave Schedule for Shirley Plantation listed 139 enslaved workers by sex and age. By my count there were 29 men 21 years old or older and 31 women 18 or older; the remainder were children. See Ancestry.com, 1860 United States Federal Census—Slave Schedules, Charles City County, Virginia.

[24] Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, notes on nearly every page the movement of refugees from plantations to Union lines.

[25] "Onward to Richmond," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 July 1862, 1.

[26] Louise Carter Humphries described the situation in a 1905 reminiscence; she said that McClellan ordered them to "turn the servants out of their houses and put his badly wounded soldiers in," 7. From a typescript in the Bowman Center.

[27] "City Sheriff Drops Dead," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 13 June 1907; Shirley Plantation Journals, 1851-1872, n.p., entry for July 14, 1862, Special Collections, John D. Rockefeller Jr. Library, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, VA.

[28] Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys Through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 32, 40, 41. Dozens of newspaper reporters and soldiers writing home showed how common these arrangements were: "many of our officers have picked up servants here"; "a great many of the young males were hiring out to Northern officers as cooks and servants"; and slaves near Richmond "generally attach themselves to some of the officers in the capacity of servants." Brasher, *The Peninsula Campaign*, discusses this several times, see pages 95, 103, 104, 136, 161, 175.

[29] The Virginia legislature mandated a count of refugees from slavery in March 1863. The "Record of Slaves that have escaped to the enemy during the war" for Charles City County included those who left Shirley Plantation and Hill Carter. The first group of fifteen was described as having "left when McClellan's army retreated from Berkley in Aug. 1862," and it included "Stephen"—no last name—aged 20. Other Shirley records include only one Stephen, and Bates would have been 20 years old in 1862. This group of twelve adults constituted 20 percent of the enslaved adults enumerated for Shirley Plantation in the 1860 census. A second group of fifteen included Stephen's brother William, listed with his last name, age (22), and occupation (house servant). This group "left on the gun boats in July 1863." See: "Charles City County: Record of Slaves that have escaped to the enemy during the war."

[30] The quotation attributed to a *New York Tribune* correspondent appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 August 1862, 2.

[31] Kate Masur, *An Example for All the Land: Emancipation and the Struggle over Equality in Washington, DC* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 25, 27, 29, 49.

[32] Allan Johnston, *Surviving Freedom: The Black Community of Washington, DC, 1860-1880* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 107.

[33] Masur, *An Example for All the Land*, 31-32.

[34] Ibid., 69-70.

[35] One historian noted that the "disease, death, and degradation [in the camps] in some respects rivaled the conditions in the worst slave quarters." Marten, "A Feeling of Restless Anxiety," 140.

[36] Harriet Jacobs, "Life Among the Contrabands," *Liberator*, 5 September 1862.

[37] Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 121-22, 157, 162.

[38] Bates was listed as a coachman in the 1870 US federal census and on the records of his marriage and his son's birth.

[39] Marriage and death records for Napoleon and Phillis Bates can be found at Ancestry.com.

[40] Johnston, *Surviving Freedom*, 108.

[41] US Census, 1870; all information about Black Vermonters was found through searches on Ancestry.com.

[42] Woodbridge was the city's most prominent resident, as both his father and grandfather had been before him. H. P. Smith, *History of Addison County, Vermont* (Syracuse, NY: D. Mason & Company, 1886) 134, 149; F. E. Woodbridge biographical details from the Congressional Biographical Guide, www.bioguide.congress.gov/search/bio/W000708.

[43] Stephen and Frances's marriage record and the birth records of their two children can be found at Ancestry.com. I believe the clerk made a mistake on Rose's, however; the child's name was listed as "Stephen Bates," which of course was the father's name. The date on the card—October 28, 1871—jibes with other public records that included her birth date. Woodbridge's son, Frederick A., sold Stephen and Frances Bates the house on North Street after his father's death in 1888. Vergennes Land records, Volume 12, 54. Fire subscription, "Vergennes," *Burlington Free Press*, 9 July 1880. Names of voters were occasionally recorded in city records; Stephen Bates was on lists for 1870 (September 6, 1870), 1874 (September 1, 1874), 1876 (September 5, 1876), 1878 (September 3, 1878), 1880 (September 7, 1880), 1882 (September 5, 1882), and 1884 (September 2, 1884), which can be found in Vergennes Record Book C by date. Campaign committee, *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 1 September 1876, 3.

[44] The *Enterprise and Vermonter* carried an ad for Woodbridge's business on 21 June 1889, 2, that included "Stephen Bates, Manager." Newspaper notices of his transporting horses: *Rutland Daily Herald*, 4 May 1891, 2; *Argus and Patriot*, 20 May 1891, 2; *Burlington Free Press*, 19 September 1901, 6. Humane Society appointment: *Middlebury Register*, 13 March 1896 and *Rutland Daily Herald*, 7 March 1896, 3. The *Enterprise and Vermonter* 2 July 1880, 3, report on the Bates's house fire noted that he was night watchman. Frederick Bates's birth certificate can be found through Ancestry.com, as can the 1880 and 1900 census entries for Stephen Bates.

[45] A city constable was elected every year, and several "special constables," or police officers, were appointed by the common council for one-year terms. No police appointments were included in records of common council meetings in 1875 (Record Book C), but the city's *Annual Report* that year noted that Bates was paid $14 for "police services." It also listed the members of the common council, whose occupations I found in the 1860 (Bristol), 1870 (Ingham), and 1880 (Sprague) federal censuses through Ancestry. *Annual Report of the Auditors, Common Council and Other Officers of the City of Vergennes* (Vergennes: Vermonter Job Printing Office, 1876).

[46] See "Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 31 March 1876, 3, for the Young Men's Independent ticket and election results. Records of common council meetings on June 3, 1876, and June 19, 1877, in Record Book C include Stephen Bates's appointment as one of several special constables. Common council members are listed in the *Annual Report* for each year. Coverage of county Republican caucus meetings included the names of Walter G. Sprague, Henry J. Talbot, and F. W. Coe; see *Enterprise and Vermonter* 21 June 1878, 2, 24 May 1878, 3, and 21 July 1876, 3. Annual reports for 1875 to 1878 recorded amounts paid to Stephen Bates for "police services": $14 in 1875, 8; $20 in 1876, 7; $11 in 1877, 6; and $7 in 1878, 6. *Annual Report of the Auditors, Common Council and Other Officers of the City of Vergennes*, (Vergennes: Vermonter Job Printing Office, 1875-1878).

[47] It's not clear if Bates and Woodbridge meant to run together. It's possible that Woodbridge's nomination came as a surprise. Election: Vergennes Record Book C, March 25, 1879, np. "Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 28 March 1879. Sheriff's bond, "Vergennes," *Burlington Free Press*, 11 June 1907, 1.

[48] "Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*; "Out of Town Notes. Vergennes," *Rutland Daily Herald*, 28 March 1879; "Vergennes," *Burlington Free Press*, 26 March 1879; *Orleans County Monitor*, 7 April 1879; "Domestic Secular News," *Vermont Chronicle*, 5 April 1879; "Vermont State News," *Vermont Watchman and State Journal*, 2 April 1879.

[49] "Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 30 March 1883, 3. 1883 election: Vergennes Record Book C, March 27, 1883; 1884 and 1885 elections: Vergennes Record Book D, 5, 23.

[50] 1894, 1897: Vergennes Record Book D, 220, 374. 1900, 1902, 1904, 1905, 1906 elections: Vergennes Record Book E, 12, 43, 79, 98, 108.

[51] An excellent overview of the period was published recently: Jon Grinspan, *Age of Acrimony: How Americans Fought to Fix their Democracy, 1865-1915* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2021).

[52] "Vergennes Charter Election. Republicans Make a Clean Sweep," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 9 March 1894, 2. "Vergennes Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 8 March 1895, 3. "Vergennes Charter Election," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 6 March 1896.

[53] See, for example, "Democratic Convention," *Burlington Free Press*, 7 July 1904, 1, which mentions Timothy Dillon; *Democrat Argus and Patriot*, 18 July 1888, 4, which notes Henry P. Fisher was a Democratic candidate for Addison County sheriff; and the *Democrat Burlington Independent*, 4 May 1888, 1, which mentions Frank McDonough at a Democratic caucus meeting.

[54] For rate of pay, see Vergennes Record Book D, 379 (1897), Book E, 35 (1901), 48 (1902), and 98 (1905). Bates's $308.90 earnings, *Annual Report*, 1903, 6. The 1904 *Annual Report* did not record Timothy Dillon's pay as sheriff, but the next year he earned $295, so he was evidently not much of a bargain. *Annual Report of the Auditors, Common Council and Other Officers of the City of Vergennes* (Vergennes: Enterprise and Vermonter Press, 1903, 1904).

[55] "Addison County Court News," *Middlebury Register*, 19 December 1890, 5; "Deputy Sheriff Middlebrook and City Sheriff Bates Rewarded," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 3 December 1897, 5.

[56] Rose and Fred were included many times in lists of students with grade averages higher than 9, with no absences or "tardies"; see, for example, "Report of Grammar School," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 26 December 1884, 3, and "Grammar Department," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 27 June 1890, 3. Fred was a talented singer, see "A Novel Entertainment," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 8 October 1897, 3, and 12 October 1888, 3. Death of Frances Bates, see "Sudden Death of Mrs. Frances Bates," *Burlington Free Press*, 16 April 1897, 6. House sold, *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 2 June 1899, 8.

[57] *Enterprise and Vermonter*, 24 January 1907, 8; "Sheriff Bates Stricken," *Rutland Daily Herald*, 11 June 1907, 1.

[58] *Vermont Phoenix*, 14 June 1907, 3; Born of free parents: "Caught Noted Criminals," *Barre Daily Times*, 11 June 1907, 1; "Vergennes," *Burlington Free Press*,11 June 1907, 5; "City Sheriff Drops Dead," *Enterprise and Vermonter*, and *Middlebury Record*, 13 June 1907, 5; "Vergennes," *Middlebury Register*, 21 June 1907, 4.

[59] "Caught Noted Criminals," *Barre Daily Times*, 11 June 1907, 1; "Vergennes," *Burlington Free Press*; *Montpelier Evening Argus*, 14 June 1907, 4; *News and Advisor* [Northfield], 18 June 1907, 9; "Dropped Dead While Milking," *St. Albans Daily Messenger*, 11 June 1907, 3; "Dropped Dead While Milking," *St. Albans Weekly Messenger*, 11 June 1907, 8; "Sheriff Bates Stricken."

[60] "City Sheriff Drops Dead."

[61] Two recent reports: Ali Watkins, "Meet Wyoming's New Black Sheriff," *New York Times*, 22 March 2021; Todd Bookman, "In Strafford County, the First Black Sheriff," *Concord* (NH) *Monitor*, 5 November 2020. For more on acceptance of Black families in Vermont see: Elise Guyette, *Discovering Black Vermont: African American Farmers in Hinesburgh, 1790-1890* (Barre: Vermont Historical Society, 2020), and Jane Williamson, "African Americans in Addison County, Charlotte, and Hinesburg, 1790-1860," *Vermont History* 78 (Winter/Spring 2010): 15-42.

[62] Williamson, "African Americans."

[63] Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Stony the Road: Reconstruction, White Supremacy, and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019); Douglas A. Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black People in America from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008); David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

[64] Gates makes the point: "Clearly the North was a safer place for a black person to be living, but the region was never free from antiblack racism." *Stony the Road*, 15.

[65] "City Sheriff Drops Dead."

[66] Jane Beck, *Daisy Turner's Kin: An African American Family Saga* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).

[67] Ibid., 68, 98.

[68] "For 26 Years Colored Man Has Been the Chief of Police of Vergennes, Vt."