USCT Salutes National Museum of AAHC

On October 21 and 22, Hartwick College welcomed nearly 50 participants for the annual United States Colored Troops Institute for Local History and Family Research (USCTI) Student Mini-Conference. The event honored the National Museum of African American History & Culture (NMAAHC), which opened in September in Washington, DC.

The cornerstone of the conference was the presentation of research by USCTI members who have documented evidence of a military ancestor who was enlisted during any of the conflicts between the Civil War and the Korean War. Further, these ancestors also have been confirmed to have a connection to the African American Freedom Journey of the 1870s and 1880s. Representatives of these families were presented the USCTI’s American Society of Freedmen Descendants (ASFD) Gold Medal.

“I am humbled by the growth of the USCTI Mini-Conference, particularly by the level of primary research that students are presenting about their respective family history, as well as local research,” said Harry Bradshaw Matthews, Hartwick College associate dean, director of the Office of Intercultural Affairs, and founding president of the USCTI. “We are also attracting older participants from multiple states who are serving as role models for our students.”

As part of a challenge by the NMAAHC for local organizations to host related events around the country through the remainder of the year, the USCTI also featured an exhibit supporting the museum’s “Lift Every Voice” theme. The exhibit highlighted the Freedom Journey of early African Americans, including slaves, along the Susquehanna River, as well as prominent figures like Frederick Douglass and Harriet Tubman.

Other weekend highlights included a presentation shedding new light on the local connection to the Underground Railroad.

“We knew that Oneonta and Otsego County were early, active participants in anti-slavery movement,” Matthews said. “But we have now officially identified an escaped slave, Rev. Alexander Hemsley (a.k.a. Nathan Mead, a Maryland slave), who made his way via the Underground Railroad to Otsego County in 1837. Prior

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to this discovery, we had documented slaves reaching the area through the Underground Railroad in 1860."

Hemsley would eventually move on to St. Catharines, Ontario, where he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the church that embraced Harriet Tubman. Reverend Hemsley is immortalized in Benjamin Drew’s 1856 text, A North-Side View of Slavery, The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada.

9:30 a.m. Presentation Three: Oneonta and Otsego County’s Connections to Locales of the Upper Susquehanna River [Dean Matthews]

Ms. Dorage explores the process of researching family history through her online blog: Vintage Faces of the Catskills. The blog, which started out as a display of old photographs, wound up being a very personal narrative, one that connects her family’s history to that of generations of blacks living in upstate New York during the 1800s. She reveals two Civil War ancestors. vintagesfacesupstateny.blogspot.com

10:15 a.m. Presentation Four: Is it Possible that My White Ancestor was an Abolitionist? [Rachel Casler, American Society of Freedmen’s Descendants Gold Medal Recipient]

Ms. Casler, Hartwick College Class of 2017, expands the research of her ancestors in Upstate New York and reveals her continuing research to document her connection to the anti-slavery Hamlin Clan. She also shares her family lineage to soldiers of the Civil War, World War I and World War II.

10:30 a.m. Presentation Five: Documenting My South Carolina Roots [Steven Smith, American Society of Freedmen’s Descendants Gold Medal Recipient]

Mr. Smith, Hartwick College Class of 2019, documents his ancestry through the lineage of July Woods of the slavery era and verifies his great grandfather in the Army’s Quartermaster Corps during WWII.

10:45 a.m. Presentation Six: Documenting My Virginia Slave Ancestor In My Bi-Racial Roots [Imani Anderson, American Society of Freedmen’s Descendants Gold Medal]

Ms. Anderson, Hartwick College Class of 2017, shares her findings identifying by name her slave ancestor in Halifax, VA and tracing her Anderson line to her paternal granduncle’s enlistment in the Navy during World War II. She also shares the role of her maternal white great-grandfather of World War II.

11 a.m. Presentation Seven: Documenting the Transnational Reality of the Clark-Park-Whilby Roots in Jamaica, United States with a Burial in Egypt [Jordan Skeete, American Society of Freedmen’s Descendants Gold Medal Recipient]

11:15 a.m. USCTI Alumni Advisory Council’s Business Session and Presentation to Current Hartwick Students and USCTI Mini-Conference Participants

12:15 p.m. Lunch and Libation Ceremony of the Ancestors

2:00 p.m. Lift Every Voice: The Freedom Journey of the Upper Susquehanna.

In celebration of the opening of the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., a history display was held in the Celebration Room of the Shineman Chapel House. Rare items were exhibited from the Pamela L. & Harry Bradshaw Matthews Collection for the Preservation of African American Freedom Journey Classics.

5:00 p.m. Awards Dinner and Recognitions

The Mini-Conference included the following sessions and participant recognitions.

Friday, Oct. 21, 2016

4 - 4:45 p.m. Registration, Office of Intercultural Affairs, 410 Dewar Union

5 p.m. Dinner and Recognition of Founding Members, Harriet Tubman Mentoring Project: Family Researchers, Chesebro Room, Dewar Union

6 p.m. Preliminary Conversation Regarding the Timeline for Presenters and mini-conference schedule

Saturday, Oct. 22, 2016

8 a.m. Buffet Breakfast, Chesebro Room, Dewar Union

9 a.m. Opening Session, Celebration Room, Shineman Chapel House

9:15 a.m. Presentation One: Oneonta and Otsego County’s Place in the Freedom Journey. [Harry Bradshaw Matthews]

Dean Matthews presents the chronological Anti-slavery and Underground Railroad events that verify Freedom Journey connections to locales of the Upper Susquehanna River.

9:30 a.m. Presentation Two: The Value of Cemeteries in Family Research [Darlene Colón].

USCTI V.P. & Senior Fellow of the American Society of Freedmen Descendants Ms. Colón shares the importance of using cemetery records to identify and confirm family connections to ancestors of the 1800s.
Fast forward to World War I, when Buffalo native Private Jesse Clipper of the 317th Engineers was wounded at the front in France. After several weeks of hospitalization, he returned to the front only to be gassed and forced back into the hospital. It was there that he died in 1919. His remains rest in peace in Oise-Aisne American Cemetery in France.

Once again fast forward, this time to April 19, 1989 when 47 sailors lost their lives in the explosion on the Navy battleship U.S. Iowa. Among them was the seaman apprentice Sailor Nathaniel Clifford, Jones, Jr. of Buffalo.

The remembrance of the three above-mentioned military men was made possible by concern citizens of Buffalo and Erie County, New York. They set a standard for the November 1 event, “Remembering Deceased African American Veterans of Western, New York,” as a military and civilian tribute to more than 1,500 African American veterans who served in all five branches of the military.

The names of the warriors were inscribed on an eleven-panel exhibit, a wall of honor, along with descriptions that placed the military service of the veterans within historical context.

The historic event in Buffalo was three years in the making, spearheaded by Fern E. Beavers, Madeline O. Scott and the Links, Incorporated – Erie County (NY) Chapter.

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The names and deeds of the veterans were compiled with the cooperation of local churches, organizations and families. By the spring of 2016, a partnership was established to finalize the project. The VA Western New York Healthcare system, Minority Veterans Program Committee, Remembering Our Veterans (ROV) interest group and the Buffalo Genealogy Society of African Diaspora all contributed to the November event.

VALE CEMETERY SITE OF JUNETEENTH CELEBRATION IN SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK

The historical burial site of Vale Cemetery in Schenectady, New York was the scene of the 2016 Juneteenth Celebration commemorating the celebration of the ending of the Civil War in Galveston, Texas on June 19, 1865.

The Hamilton Hill Arts Center joined Vale Cemetery Trustees and others celebrants, including Walter Simpkins who portrayed Moses Viney, a fugitive from slavery who escaped from Maryland to Schenectady during the 1840s. He became associated with Union College and the abolitionist forces in Schenectady.

The United States Colored Troops Institute participated in the Juneteenth event with the USCTI President, Harry Bradshaw Matthews, as keynote speaker. He was joined by other dignitaries from the New York State Legislature and the Congress.

Similar to the USCTI, the Vale Cemetery is a member of the National Park Services National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Among the numerous African Americans buried at Vale is Richard P.G. Wright, who was a leading activist at the 1840 Convention of Colored Inhabitants of New York that was held August 18-20 at the Hamilton Street Baptist Church in Albany, New York.

Matthews shared with the audience at the Juneteenth event the names of 84 notable delegates who attended the 1840 convention from Albany, Troy, Schenectady, and Lansingburgh. Included among the participants were the senior Wright and his son, the Rev. Theodore S. Wright, the first African American graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary in 1829.
women whose voices helped shape the dialogue of political action and cultural identity. Further, extradition cases reveal shared agitation and deliverance by married couples fighting for freedom, such as Veta Smith Tucker’s details of the 1807 story of Peter and Hannah Denison, and Karolyn Smardz Frost’s recounting of the story of Thornton and Lucie Blackburn, who were the focus of the Blackburn Riots of 1833 and the related US Supreme Court case. Debbie Marty shares how Adam and Sarah Crosswhite were entangled in a fight in 1846–47 for their freedom in Marshall, MI, and then later in Canada. There is also Afua Cooper’s account of Mary Elizabeth Miles, whose lifework was expanded through marriage with Henry Bibbs, the activist and editor of the Bibb’s Voice of the Fugitive. The story of Caroline Qualls’ escape at 16-years-of-age is also shared by Kimberly Simmons and Larry McClellan.

Lastly, A Fluid Frontier includes a section devoted to sources and resources that can provide guidance to historians and genealogists who are interested in placing others within the historical context of the Underground Railroad, local history, and family research.

Harry Bradshaw Matthews USCT Institute
Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY 13820

KOREAN VETERAN HONORED BY USCTI VIA NEW RESEARCH

On a bright sunny day in August, Harry Bradshaw Matthews had the opportunity, indeed, the privilege, of interviewing Colonel Robert G. Stewart II (Retired) of the famed 555 Parachute Infantry Battalion. Also known as the Triple Nickle, the division has a storied past.

The Colonel shares an interwoven lineage of West Indian, African American and Native American heritage. According to his oral history, he was born on April 12, 1936 in the Long Island community of Port Jefferson Station. His father was Jake Sells, who married Sophie Stewart, the sister of five future soldiers of World War II. This portion of the oral history was intriguing. Research by the United States Colored Troops Institute revealed the accuracy of the oral history.

Sophie’s family was located in the 1940 census for Port Jefferson, New York. The head of the household was 71-year-old Robert

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Stewart. His wife Edna was 58 years of age. The couple’s children were Charles (35), Sophia (23), Martha (19), Harold (17), and Jessie (15). Living next door was 30-year-old Edward and his 27-year-old wife, Edith. It became apparent from the census that Colonel Stewart’s oral recall was on firm ground. Realizing that Charles would have been born in 1903, a search was made for the 1920 Census resulting in much luck. Setauket was the locale in Brookhaven County where the family resided.

In 1920, 50-year-old Robert J. Stewart was once again recorded as the head of the household with “Nassau, W.I.” as his place of birth. Others in the household were Edna F., George F., Charles E., Alfred H., Adela, Arthur K., Archie E., Walter J., Sofia, John B. and a boarder named Robert J. Smith.

The birthplace of Colonel Stewart’s grandfather, Robert J., led to the speculation that the great-grandfather of oral history, James Frederick Stewart, was born around 1850 in Nassau, New Providence, The Bahamas.

Additionally, when researching Sophie’s brothers, one can find accurate military documentation.

**ONEONTA NATIVE CAPTURED IMAGES OF AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS OF WWII**

The United States Colored Troops Institute salutes Army Sergeant Marshall H. Bull of the 96th Signal Photo Company during World War II. The native of Oneonta, New York, the site of the USCTI, played a significant role in photographing soldiers of the 92nd Division, aka, “The Buffaloes.” Sergeant Bull was involved at numerous battles and campaigns in Northern Appenines, Rome, Sicily, Naples, Faggia, Po Valley and Arno. In March 1945, *The Oneonta Daily Star* published an Associated Press photo of Sgt. Bull receiving the Bronze Star from Major General Edward M. Almond, the commanding general of the 92nd Division.

According to the 1930 Census for Otsego County, the future officer was 10 years-of-age, residing with his parents, Steven and Anna Bull, and his twin brother, Douglas. His parents were respectively a railroad worker and school teacher in Oneonta.

After his military service, Bull settled in Upton, NY, working in the photography department at Brookhaven National Laboratory. He later relocated to Chatham, Barnstable, MA, where he died on March 13, 2006. A tombstone bearing his name is in the family plot at the West Oneonta Cemetery.

In memory of Sergeant Bull, the following images from the World War II Museum pay tribute to his contribution.


Sgt. Verdun Cook (left) and Pvt. Robert Stokely (right), both of the Public Relations section, 92nd Div. Hq's. 5 DECEMBER 1944 – 5TH ARMY. Courtesy: F. Caddell, Sr. Photo Collection of the National World War II Museum

Sgt. Ted Shearer, Public Relations Section, Hq's. Co., 92nd Division, works on one of the illustrations for the current issue of ‘The Buffalo’, weekly paper of the 92nd Infantry Division. Shearer is well qualified for his job, being formerly employed as a staff artist by continental syndicate. 5 DECEMBER 1944 – 5TH ARMY, REGGIO. Courtesy: F. Caddell, Sr. Photo Collection of the National World War II Museum

**ANTI-SLAVERY DESCENDANTS FIND COMMON GROUND VIA CNY LOCAL HERO IN PORTRAITURE**

Janet Wentworth Erickson, an accomplished artist, adjunct lecturer at SUNY Oneonta, and a descendant of Massachusetts abolitionist William Jackson, shares with the public the 2016-17
connections to ancestors of the 1800s. Freedmen Descendants Ms. Colón shares the importance of Underground Railroad events that verify Freedom Journey. Dean Matthews presents the chronological anti-slavery and place in the Freedom Journey. [Harry Bradshaw Matthews]

Presentation One: Oneonta and Otsego County's 9:15 a.m.

Opening Session, Celebration Room, Shineman

Presenters and mini-conference schedule

Preliminary Conversation Regarding the Timeline for Room, Dewar Union

Tubman Mentoring Project: Family Researchers, Chesebro

Dinner and Recognition of Founding Members, Harriet

Dewar Union

4 - 4:45 p.m.

Slavery, The Refugee: or the Narratives of Fugitive Slaves in Canada

A North-Side View of church that embraced Harriet Tubman. Reverend Hemsley is where he joined the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the Hemsley would eventually move on to St. Catharines, Ontario, through the Underground Railroad in 1860."

to this discovery, we had documented slaves reaching the area 2 DECEMBER 2016 USCT Civil War Digest

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Participants of the 2016 USCTI's Student Mini-Conference Awards Dinner and Recognitions

Pamela L. & Harry Bradshaw Matthews Collection for the Shineman Chapel House. Rare items were exhibited from the a history display was held in the Celebration Room of the African American History and Culture in Washington, D.C., In celebration of the opening of the National Museum ofUpper Susquehanna.

2:00 p.m.

12:15 p.m.

Lunch and Libation Ceremony of the Ancestors

Mini-Conference Participants

and Presentation to Current Hartwick Students and USCTI

10:45 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

10:30 a.m.

Presentation Seven: Documenting the Transnational role of her maternal white great-grandfather of World War II. She also shares the enlistment in the Navy during World War II. She also shares her family ancestry through the lineage of July Woods of the slavery era and verifies his great grandfather in the Army's Quartermaster

ancestry. vintagesfacesupstateny.blogspot.com

Ms. Dorage explores the process of researching family history and her continuing research to document her connection to the research of her ancestors in Upstate New York and reveals roots.

He emerged as a businessman, politician, Congressman and a member of the Anti-Slavery Liberty Party that merged with the Free Soil Party. Erickson stated that “these associations with abolitionists and his own political and social justice convictions led to William's home being used as an Underground Railroad stop. Today, the homestead is designated by the National Park Service as a site of the National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom.

Erickson received her MFA in painting from Brooklyn College and BFA in illustration from Parsons School of Design. She lived and worked in New York City for many years.

After receiving numerous honors and awards, Erickson was invited in 1995 to join the faculty of the National Academy School of Fine Art in New York City where she taught figure drawing and painting for almost a decade. In 2005, she joined the Art Department of SUNY Oneonta, where she currently teaches drawing.

The Community Heroes in Portraiture will be exhibited in the Project Space Gallery, SUNY Oneonta. The Opening Reception will be on Thursday, January 19, 2017, 5-7 PM. Weekday visiting hours will be 11 a.m. – 5 p.m. extending from January 18 to February 17, 2017. Weekend visits by appointment can be made by sending an e-mail to cnycommunityheroes@gmail.com.

Erickson, on the other hand, is a descendant of William Jackson, (1783-1855). As Erickson explains, her great x 4 paternal grandfather owned the Jackson Homestead and Museum in
USCTI Institute & ASFD Membership 2016-17~Join Us.

ALABAMA – James C. Johnson
CALIFORNIA – Kristin M. Dorage, Barbara Leone, Tammy Ball Williams
CONNECTICUT - Andrew S. Bowman
FLORIDA - John O. Lindell
GEORGIA - Audrey Quick Battiste, Linda Dorage, Gloria Matthews
ILLINOIS – Angela Layne, Darnell Layne, Northwestern University Library
INDIANA - Allen County Public Library, Andrew Bowman, Charles Pionedexter
KENTUCKY – John Taylor, Jr.
MARYLAND – Yvonne Captain, Charles Hawley, Sylvia Cooke Martin, Burt V. Mitchell, Harold F. Nelson, Houston D. Wedlock
NEW JERSEY – Keisha M. Clarke
NEW YORK (continued) Edythe Ann Quinn, Madeline O. Scott, Jesse E. Stevens, SUNY-Oneonta, Hon. Lucindo Suarez, Roxanne J. Suarez, Spann Watson, Judith Wellman, Norma Williams, Shamar Yee
MICHIGAN – Donald S. Vest
NORTH CAROLINA - Melissa Swaby
SOUTH CAROLINA – John R. Gourdin
TENNESSEE – Roverta Reliford Russaw
WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rev. William E. Calbert, Patsy M. Fletcher, Military Road School
WEST VIRGINIA – Bob O'Connor
WASHINGTON, D.C. – Rev. William E. Calbert, Patsy M. Fletcher, Military Road School Preservation Trust
WISCONSIN – Brigitte Fielder, Wisconsin Historical Society
THE BAHAMAS – D. Gail Saunders

STUDENT ASSISTANTS – 2016-17
Imani Anderson – USCTI Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor
Rachel Casler – USCTI Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor, PALS/SOSU/BU
Valerie Diaz – USCTI Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor, PALS/SOSU/BU
Sasha Hugh – USCTI/Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor, PALS/SOSU/BU
Sheryl Hugh – USCTI Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor; PALS/SOSU/BU
Tajera Morgan – USCTI Intern/Harriet Tubman Mentor, PALS/SOSU/BU

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