

Eugene, Nelson and Silas Crosier were very unique, Vermont characters. They did not deliberately seek to be different from others on purpose. They were just born to it. You see, these three brothers were African Americans living in central Vermont in the nineteenth century. They came from a “family” of people like themselves that numbered as many as forty-four in 1870 Bristol, Vermont.¹⁰ Each one of them served in perhaps the most unparalleled military unit of the American Civil War as a member of the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry Regiment, the same unit made famous in the 1990s Hollywood movie, “Glory” starring Matthew Broderick as Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, commanding. These three brothers were the first black soldiers found in the rosters of Addison County residents who fought in the War of Rebellion. Their stories opened up a whole new aspect of Vermont history not touched on until now – What was it like to be African American in Vermont in the 19th century?

When Vermont joined the Union as the fourteenth state, it had to draw up a constitution. Of course, our forefathers imitated what had been done in Philadelphia at Liberty Hall in their great document that became the blueprint for our national form of government. But Vermont had always been known as a state of independent thinkers and self-reliant doers. In creating its own form of self-government, these two qualities again manifested themselves. It was, at the time of its admission, the only state in the Union to specifically prohibit slavery in its constitution. It made the act of one person owning another human being as personal property illegal. By doing so, it made 1777 Vermont soil the prime destination for every enslaved man, woman and child of color. Whether you were a slave on a southern plantation or one in Connecticut, Massachusetts or New York state, you realized that if you could step into Vermont, you would be a free person. Yes, there were fugitive slave laws in effect throughout the nation, but Vermonters, as a rule, did not abide much by them. There were many Vermonters who objected to the idea of slavery based on religious and moral grounds. And those Vermonters not opposed to the “peculiar institution” on political or religious beliefs, were uncomfortable condoning it for humanitarian reasons because it seemed to rub against the grain of the coveted ethos of independence and self-reliance that ran through the veins of those pioneers who came to the northern frontier of Vermont to hew out their homes and farms from a howling wilderness. These same values, so much woven into the fabric of frontier folklore, just happened to be the same qualities of life that the African Americans who came to the hills and valleys of the Green Mountain State were seeking. They certainly did not come for the balmy weather! The black men and women who came to make Vermont their home hoped to be treated as equals and, if that wasn’t possible, to at least be left alone to work hard and support their families by the efforts of their own hands. However, most whites who signed those precious documents that created this nation, understood that the wording “all men are created equal” really only applied to some men, and certainly not to women at all.

For most of its early history, Vermont had very few African Americans living within its borders. According to the 1771 census of Brattleboro, Vermont, there was only one black living in that town. By 1790, that number had only increased to fourteen.¹¹ As long as the total numbers of blacks making Vermont their home remained small, and the clusters of African Americans in the individual white communities around the State amounted to a tiny percentage of the whole town, integration was never a threat and, therefore, not a issue among the majority of the citizens of Vermont. Although never accepted as equals by their white contemporaries,

many pioneering blacks relocating to the hills and valleys of the State found what they were looking for: freedom, cheap land and anonymity. It was rare that individuals or families of African Americans were harassed by neighbors. However, there were incidents, occasionally, that showed the darker side of human nature.

One occurred in Guilford, Vermont around 1785. Abijah Prince and Lucy Prince, both born in Africa, were former slaves from Massachusetts who had bought farmland in Guilford. The couple moved onto their farm and soon began to be the targets of a racist white neighbor. This man found cause to verbally harass and threaten the Princes. Eventually his verbal assaults turned into physical attacks as well. The Princes attempted to ignore him, but he would have none of it. Seeing his efforts to date to drive the African Americans out of Guilford, the neighbor escalated the severity of his actions. He on multiple occasions destroyed the Prince's crops upon which they depended for survival. Circumstances got so out of hand that Lucy Prince appealed to Governor Chittenden of Vermont for help in dealing with this treatment. The State ordered the Guilford selectmen to see to the safety of the Prince family. Even this action did not stop the man's haranguing of Abijah and Lucy Prince. Only when the neighbor and his thugs were arrested and prosecuted did the harassment end.^[3] This degree of malevolent treatment of African Americans was by no means common in the communities of the Green Mountain State. Blacks may have been ignored as though they were invisible, but people usually did not go so far out of their way to deliberately make the lives of black neighbors miserable. Even though the whitest state in the Union was the only one of the original colonies to forbid slavery within its borders, and did not expressly forbid interracial marriages, people of color were mostly treated as marginal citizens whose presence was tolerated but not warmly welcomed. It was one thing to pass an amendment to the Constitution declaring all African Americans free; it was quite another thing to treat them as equals.

As massive waves of immigration from Europe swelled the population of the United States after the Revolutionary War, keen competition for jobs and housing, particularly in the established urban cities and the sea coast ports of entry, inflamed the already existing prejudices against all "foreigners" including the African American population. This influx inspired some to launch an effort to leave the inner cities and strike out for less heavily populated places which might offer greater opportunities and a more accepting atmosphere. It was risky to do so, especially not knowing what sort of treatment one would get once you arrived at your destination in the northern frontier.

Beginning about 1830 and extending into the 1860s, escaping slaves from the south and central parts of the country began to steadily pass through Vermont on their way to freedom in Canada. In 1834, the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society was formed and the general population of the State began to be divided into two camps of thought – anti-slavery abolitionists and pro-slavery, pro-states' rights advocates. Although a noisy group, the abolitionist faction in Vermont had an uphill battle for wide-based support. On a speaking tour through Vermont in 1843, Frederick Douglas was quoted in a local newspaper as saying: "Her (Vermont's) proud boast that within her borders no slave had ever been delivered up to his master did not hinder her hatred to anti-slavery...in Middlebury...the opposition to our anti-slavery convention was bitter and violent...few people attended our meeting, and apparently little was accomplished."^[4] According to the 1860 Federal Census, there were 709 African

Americans living in Vermont out of a general population of approximately 315,098.^[5] Being such a miniscule portion of the entire population (.23%), it was no surprise that race relations was not a high priority for the masses.

The family story of the three Crosier boys, Eugene, Nelson and Silas actually begins with their grandparents, Amos and Rhoda Morocco. Amos was born circa 1772 in Connecticut.^[6] He arrived in the Champlain Valley and settled in Charlotte, Vermont sometime around 1800. He married a local woman named Rhoda (maiden name unknown) about 1804-05. In 1811, he bought farmland at the northern base of Mount Philo and operated a successful farm there until poor business decisions forced him to lose everything about 1839.^[7] Due to a frustratingly sparse amount of reliable data on the Morocco family, it was very difficult to confirm the accuracy of many of the details of this family's existence. For example, Rhoda's maiden name may have been "Freeman" but that could not be verified. She may have been married to an Abraham Sowers prior to becoming Mrs. Morocco, but that also remained unproven. And Amos, according to one essayist, may have come to Vermont in the company of two other blacks also from Connecticut and perhaps his brothers. All three, this source claimed, were former slaves and had taken as their surnames the last names of their former masters. Again, this information could not be confirmed.^[8] One irrefutable and well documented fact associated with the Moroccos of Charlotte was discovered. The location of their home, and the homes of those like them, was indelibly marked in the history of the town down to the present day. William H. Higbee related to his readers in his collection of essays on the history of Charlotte, Ferrisburgh and Monkton how:

"...it was no uncommon thing to count forty rollicking girls and boys as steady attendants (in School No.7) especially in the winter. And why not, for children were in order in those days, and district schools were patronized. Near the schoolhouse lived Caleb Harding with thirteen children; across the road William Higbee with twelve, John and James Palmer gave no small assistance in increasing the roll; a fun-loving delegation from Peter Van Vliet's; William Barton's family; anywhere from one to a lot full from 'Guiana' (sic for Guinea), so-called on account of the numerous colored folks who answered to the name of Morocco."^[9]

The schoolhouse burned down long ago, but "Guinea" still exists at the northern base of Mount Philo today in the form of the name of a town road that passes through the area where this African American family once lived.

Amos and Rhoda began having children while living in Charlotte on the farm. Eliza (1806-1880), Eugene, Nelson and Silas' mother, was their first born. She was followed three years later by her sister, Rhoda Olive (1809-1886) Their third, and final daughter, was Harriet born about 1816 (death date unknown). She was born in the year of no summer in Vermont when it snowed every month that year and caused severe stress on the farmers of the state.

Six years after the birth of Harriet, Amos and Rhoda's oldest daughter, Eliza, married a young man named Silas Crosier, Eugene, Nelson and Silas' father. He may have been from Connecticut also. His birth and death dates were unknown. They were reported as being married in Middlebury on June 8, 1822. Eliza would have been about sixteen. Silas' usual residence, according to his marriage certificate, was Benson in Rutland County, Vermont.^[10] There was no documentation of what Silas did for a living, but, looking at the records of other black men of the 19th century in and around Addison County, the chances were good that he was a farm laborer. Whether Silas and Eliza remained residence of Charlotte or not was unknown. I assumed that they did as they began having children soon after their marriage who supposedly were all born in Charlotte, although, again, the lack of public documents on the family made it difficult to find confirmation of even basic facts like dates of birth. Even where some documents existed, there may have been unresolved discrepancies in the data. For example, the 1850 Federal Census gave Eugene's age as eight in 1850, which made his date of birth sometime in 1842. Most Ancestry.com public family trees gave his date of birth as 1828. His draft registration records in 1863 said he was twenty put his date of birth in 1843. So, who do you believe; the census taker, the family genealogists or the provost marshal? Trying to determine how many siblings the Crosier brothers had and what their names were proved impossible to nail down precisely. Even when cross referencing was possible with multiple sources, the variations made a "best guess" the only option. The most consistent list of children for Silas and Eliza were as follows: Rhoda, 1823; Eliza S., 1827; Eugene, 1828; Judith, 1831; Horace, 1836; Nelson, 1838. In addition, the 1850 Federal Census listed: Biota (?), maybe Betsa, 1829; Abraham, 1846; Cyrus (Silas?), 1844; William, 1848.^[11] Then there was a late in life baby, Charles, born in 1852.^[12]

By 1840, Amos had been forced to sell off his farm in Guinea. When the Federal Census was taken that year, he and Rhoda and family were listed in Lincoln, Vermont. He had purchased ninety acres of land in town. Throughout the 1840s, Amos and Rhoda seemed to survive by selling off parcels of their Lincoln holdings.^[13] The Moroccos lived in Lincoln long enough to be counted in the next Federal Census as residents of that mountain town. In the 1850 Federal Census, Amos' family consisted of himself at seventy-eight years of age; his wife, Rhoda, sixty-five; Angeline Freeman, twenty; and Charles E. Nichols, four. Amos was listed as a farmer although at his age, it was doubtful that he was doing much farm work.^[14] Exactly when and of what Amos died was unknown along with where he was buried. His passing, based on available information, appeared to have occurred around 1855. And since his last known address was Lincoln, it was assumed that is where he died and was buried.

After her father and mother left Charlotte, Eliza Crosier followed them to Bristol. That was where the 1850 Federal Census listed her residence. She was forty-four years old and listed as head of household. There was no mention of Silas as a member of the household. There were, however, twelve other people listed as living with Eliza. Ten of them were her children. Two bore surnames other than Crosier. They ranged in age from twenty-five to zero. Listed as "Crosiars" (sic) were: Rhoda, age twenty-five; Eliza S., age twenty-three; "Biota" (Betsa?), age twenty-one; Judith, age nineteen; Horace, age fourteen; Nelson, age twelve; "Ugina (sic), age eight; Abraham, age four; "Cyrus" (Silas), age six; and William, age two. The other two were Henry Clark, age two, and Angene (sic) Wright, age zero. Clark had no known association to the

Crosiers that was found. Angene Wright later married Nelson Crosier after he returned home from the Civil War. No occupation was given for Eliza in the Census.^[15]

As in Charlotte and indeed almost everywhere else in Vermont, African Americans tended to huddle together in tight knit groups creating some very complex extended households consisting of blood relatives and non-family members. This common practice of congregating together stemmed mainly from the racist, segregational attitudes the African Americans faced from the white dominated community around them. Banding together into tightly knit groups provided a semblance of protection from hostile, outside and indifferent forces as well as fulfilling the basic human need of feeling accepted and understood. Together they could share their common language, customs, foods, beliefs and values. That helped to create a sense of belonging. Besides, the practice of multi-generational families living together under one roof was a common colonial American custom among the general population regardless of ethnicity. But the Federal Census did not record the names of individuals who made up a family household (other than the name of the head of house) until 1850. Before then, the census was merely a head count relating only how many people were either white or colored, male or female and into what age bracket they fell. Relationships weren't recorded until the 1880 census. Once the census identified people in the home by name, a much clearer picture of the composite of a particular family emerged. For example, in 1850, Jedidiah and Harriet (Morocco) Emery of Bristol had John Emery, Mariah Emery and Emma Freeman living in their household. Phebe Knight, in her 1860s home in Vergennes harbored a multi-racial family that included an Irishman and an African American.^[16]

In 1855, the newly widowed Rhoda Morocco moved to Bristol, buying a small parcel of land along the New Haven River just upstream from Bartlett Falls. It had on it a sawmill built by previous owners. Rhoda had mortgaged her land in Lincoln twice in the early 1850s, probably after the death of her husband, Amos. She had repaid both loans. With what equity she had left over, she paid \$180 for the Bristol property and set up new house keeping nearer the industrial center of Bristol – gateway to the Green Mountains. When the 1860 Federal Census was taken, it revealed that Rhoda Morocco headed the largest extended household found in Bristol that year. She had sixteen individuals living in her home. They represented five distinct family groups, most of them related by blood: the Moroccos, the Days, the Crosiers, the Burtons and the Nelsons.^[17] Rhoda was the seventy-eight year old matriarch and the lone Morocco in the family. The three daughters were all married. Her son-in-law, Alonzo Day, and her daughter Angeline (Freeman) Day and their two children, Eva and Arlington, made up family number two. The Crosiers made up the third clan: Eugene; Julia; Eliza S.; Selus (sic for Silas); Henry; and Calvin.^[18] Nelson was not listed in the 1860 Census because he was living with his mother and brother, Abraham, in Vergennes. His mother, Eliza, had remarried in 1856 to sixty-six year old Samuel Titus, a farmer from Ferrisburgh, Vermont.^[19] The fourth family was represented by Rhoda's grandchildren. For some unknown reason, the parents of those children were missing. Reuben Burton and Judith Crosier's four children lived with grandma in 1860. They included eight year old Ellen; two year old Sylvester; and identical twins, Fred and Frank, ages three months.^[20] The twins would not have the opportunity to grow old together. Frank would die at three years and two months on June 10, 1863 of pulmonary consumption.^[21] That would be one month before Silas was drafted into the

Union Army. The fifth family member was an enigma. His name was Edward Nelson. What family connection he had to anyone was a mystery because no history on him could be found. It was not unusual for strays and orphans to be taken in by strangers in the 1800s so he might have been one of those.

Rhoda's home along the New Haven River was limited to a small building that once was a sawmill. At some point another, second building was built. This showed up on a map of Bristol done in 1857. Whatever the accommodations, they were cramped and crowded with adults and children. If the shanty had a door, it must have been of the bar room type, swinging both ways as people came and went through it. According to the censuses, Rhoda never had an occupation with which she could support herself and all her guests. If she ran a day care center, it was for her own grandchildren. Some of the older women who lived with her were labeled as "washer woman" or "laundresses". Angeline Freeman Day, Rhoda's daughter, and her husband, Alonzo Day, owned a house on West Street in the village of Bristol. She and another woman were once arrested for running a "house of ill repute" and fined. Rhoda's home on the river was on the outskirts of town, away from the center of activity in the village. Perhaps there was more than laundry being done out there away from prying eyes of village folks. The able bodied males of the 1860 household were all "farm laborers". They would not have been around home during the day since they had to work where ever the farms were in the area. If they were not farm laborers, then they might have been "day laborers" picking up handy-man type work from day to day if available. Bristol had many water-powered manufacturing and mill work jobs to offer residents as it was an industrialized center in Addison County. This is one reason that, in 1860, there were such a high number of African Americans living in the town limits – there was an abundance of skilled and unskilled job opportunities in the factories, mills and businesses. With a strong back, most able-bodied men could find work even if only on a part-time basis. Some of those blacks living in Bristol found work such as winding the clock in the tower of Holly Hall or being a janitor in a local church. One at least became a barber and another a blacksmith, both with their own shops. Another one drove the carriage belonging to the Bristol House which ferried guests from the railroad station to the hotel and back. A few worked at the nearby Rokeby farm in Ferrisburgh owned by the Quaker abolitionist, Rowland Robinson. A minute minority, two out of thirty-eight individuals, worked as servants in white folks' homes. They took work where ever they could find it and tried to survive in 19th century Vermont the best way they knew how.

When the Civil War broke out in April of 1861, it was one hundred per cent a white man's affair. Any interests African Americans had in the event went completely ignored by everyone. During the very early months of the war, Vermont officers would sometimes bring "freed" slaves from the South home with them to Vermont giving the liberated "contraband of war" an opportunity at living as freemen in the Green Mountain State.^[21] Not until after President Lincoln's January 1863 Emancipation Proclamation in which he not only freed all slaves in the state's still in rebellion against the Union, but also expressly declared that African American males were to be allowed to enlist in the Union Army as combatants, did the Civil War become their war too. Up until Lincoln made it perfectly clear that blacks were eligible to serve in the infantry branch of the United States armed forces along with whites, blacks were only accepted into the Naval branch of the service. The Navy appeared more accepting about integration. Perhaps that had something to do with the

size of its ordinance. Although there were no black naval officers, that branch of the military consisted of over twenty-five per cent African Americans. The Army had never allowed them to serve in combat roles. If they were allowed to do anything for the cause at all, it was in the capacity of manual labor, teamsters, orderlies, servants to individual officers or hired members of burial parties. Once allowed in as soldiers in the ranks, over 180,000 blacks were added to the effective fighting units of the Union Army from 1863-1865.^[23]

In 1863, the war was entering its second year. The civilian population was dismayed and disgusted by the long casualty lists that the newspapers kept publishing after every horrendous battle. The numbers wounded soldiers and the ghastly types of wounds incurred shocked the loved ones back home. The sheer volume of maimed and broken men who returned to the home front further demonstrated the realities of war to the uninitiated. Enthusiasm for volunteering to serve at the front waned in light of the unromantic facts of war's destructive powers. Enlistments, which had started out at ninety days in 1861 had increased to two then three years since the First Battle of Bull Run. Many regiments' terms of service were expiring. The initial rush to see action, to show those Rebels the errors of their ways and put them in their rightful places, had slowed to a trickle. Replacements for the bodies lost in the field, as well as the need for additional fighting units, was urgent. Despite the Federal Government's huge, unbudgeted expenses paid in fighting this rebellion already, it was painfully obvious that more money must be thrown at it to achieve victory. Extra bonuses were offered to those who would put on the uniform. New incentives enticed the poorest of the population to join up. The Rutland Herald reported in its November 24, 1863 issue, that there were offers of payments amounting to anywhere from \$627 to \$1,027 being handed out to enlistees.^[24] Today, that would be the equivalent of \$12,925 to \$21,171.^[25] Even these measures did not provide for sufficient recruits, so, also in early 1863, the Congress passed draft legislation which could force eligible eighteen to forty-five year old men with no prior military experience to be coerced to become soldiers. By early summer of 1863. Provost Marshals in all of the Congressional Districts throughout the Union states were going from town to town in their district listing the names of eligible candidates for the draft. The first round of registrations seemed to focus on the premium nominees – those who were young and unmarried. It was interesting to find that when Captain C.R. Crane from Congressional District No. 1 came to Bristol, Vermont on June 20, 1863 for his official visit, he listed only three names as eligible draftees from a fairly large town: Eugene Crosier. Nelson Crosier and Silas Crosier – all colored, all laborers, all from the same family and all single.^[26] Crane recorded their ages as either twenty or twenty-two which was obviously inaccurate. If Eugene had been born in 1828 (the best guess year), then he would have been thirty-five. If Nelson was born in 1838, he would have been twenty-five. Silas, being born in 1844, would have been nineteen. Under the circumstances, ages were not really important in this case as long as the subject sort of looked the part. Besides, we all know “that black men all look alike” anyhow. Also, of interest was the fact that there was not a single white man listed on the June registration. The three Crosiers could not have been the only eligible candidates in Bristol, Vermont. According to vermontcivilwar.org, there were one hundred fifty-two veterans credited to the town of Bristol with one hundred twenty-five of them buried in town cemeteries.^[27] John Burbanks 2011 Secretary of the Bristol Historical Society, counted two hundred twenty-five soldiers credited to, born in or buried in Bristol. Eight of those were blacks who served in various military units of the Union armed forces: Eugene

Crosier; Nelson Crosier; Silas Crosier; Charles E. Nelson (the only man killed in action); Dennis R. Peebles; Amasa A. Peters; Charles H. Prince; and Mark Roberts.^[28]

Once placed on the list, it did not take long for the draftees to be called up to active duty. Less than two weeks after the horrific Battle of Gettysburg, Silas, the youngest of the Crosier boys at nineteen, was told to report to Rutland, Vermont. Between the staggering loss of troops in battle and the fact that all of the Nine Months men's enlistments ran out two weeks after Gettysburg, Vermont's presence on the field of combat was getting extremely sparse. Replacements were desperately needed. On July 15, 1863, Silas reported to Rutland, Vermont to begin the induction process. August 11, he was in Brattleboro for further processing. From there he was sent to New Warrenton, Virginia around August 31. In the first few weeks of his indoctrination, Silas was a member of the Second Vermont Regiment, an all-white outfit. But, by the end of August, the brass in the War Department had had enough time and luck to find a way to keep the purity of the existing white regiments in the field intact while still complying with President Lincoln's mandate to allow blacks to serve in combat roles. Ever since Lincoln had made his Emancipation Proclamation public, the Governor of Massachusetts had been working on raising an all-black regiment of soldiers. The 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry was ready to take the field by May, 1863 as the first model regiment whose rank and file were all of African American descent.^[29] This black regiment predominately from Massachusetts was, according to the white omnipotent powers in the War Department, the best place for any African American soldier to be assigned. Therefore, around the end of August, 1863, Silas received a transfer from the Second Vermont Regiment to the 54th Massachusetts. He was then sent back to Long Island, Boston Harbor by October 31 where he joined the newly formed experimental 54th. By November 23, he was an official member of Company K.^[30]

Eugene was the next Crosier to be drafted. His turn came only a few weeks after Silas was sent south in July 1863. Vermont's military authorities also placed him in the ranks of the Second Vermont at first. He was, like his younger brother, five feet seven inches tall. He had black eyes and black hair like his brother. However, his complexion was described as "light" whereas Silas' was listed as "black". He and Silas both claimed to be born in Lincoln rather than in Charlotte, and both stated their occupations to be that of farmer-laborer. Eugene's age was listed as twenty-one on his service record. He was also sent from Rutland to Brattleboro and then to Long Island for further processing like his brother, Silas. Also, like Silas, only a few weeks into his military experience, he was transferred from the all-white Second Vermont Regiment to the newly formed all-black 54th Massachusetts, whose ranks by this time were filled with volunteers from all over the New England area, not just the state of Massachusetts. By November 28, 1863, Eugene was a private in Company A of this august body of men.^[31]

The third Crosier, Nelson, was problematic. From extant documents uncovered in the research process, two different versions of Nelson's status as a Civil War veteran emerged. There were creditable sources which stated that Nelson was called to serve but either paid the \$300 commutation fee to be excused or paid for a substitute. One of Eugene's compiled service record cards does have a notation on it which said "sub for Nelson Crosier". H.P. Smith, editor of the "History of Addison County Vermont" (1886) stated that Nelson hired a substitute. John Burbank, 2011 Secretary of the

Bristol Historical Society, recorded in his compilation of “Civil War Soldiers Credited To, Born In, Or Buried in Bristol, Vermont“ that Nelson Crosier was drafted but paid the \$300 commutation fee to be excused from serving in the military.^[32] However, despite these pieces of information to the contrary, a complete set of service records from enlistment to discharge for Nelson Crosier (Crozier) was found. Given the limited amount of information available on each of these men, it was not possible to explain this apparent contradiction. The fact that service records on both the national and state level existed on Nelson, it was hard to completely dismiss his status as a veteran of the Civil War, at least at this time. His enlistment papers bear an “X” in place of his signature which indicated that he could not write. If he could not write, then he probably could not read either. Nelson was enrolled into military service by the Selectmen of Lincoln, Vermont on December 19, 1863. On January 6, 1864, the twenty-five year old, five feet six inch tall, dark eyed black recruit with black hair was assigned directly to the 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry. He did not show up in Brattleboro until January 22, 1864. By February 29, 1864, Eugene was in Jacksonville, Florida as a private in Company A of the 54th. In April, he was at Morris Island, South Carolina in the same company of the same regiment as his brother, Eugene.^[33]

The 54th Massachusetts Colored Infantry Regiment was in a class of fighting units by itself in the American Civil War. Often thought of as the first all-black regiment in the Union Army, it really was the second. It was preceded by the First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry Regiment. The 54th was the first African American infantry unit raised in the north. Even though it was designated as a Massachusetts regiment, it contained recruits from all over the New England area. Because of racist attitudes in the War Department in Washington and a general prejudice among the ranking brass in command in the field against blacks, integration of the races was not allowed. The Naval service during the Civil War was the only exception to this unwritten rule. Even though its rank and file were exclusively of African American descent, all of its officers were white.^[34]

The Regiment began recruiting in February of 1863 about a month after President Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation came out. Its headquarters was at Camp Meigs just outside of Boston. Until Mr. Lincoln’s declaration, the roles of African American men in the war effort had been limited to non-combat duties such as manual labor, teamster. Hospital steward or servant for an officer. After the Proclamation was delivered to the public, Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, instructed Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew to begin raising regiments of “persons of African descent” on January 26, 1863. The Governor handpicked Robert Gould Shaw, the son of a leading Bostonian abolitionist, to command the newly formed regiment. Other prominent abolitionists and blacks, such as Frederick Douglas, enthusiastically encouraged free blacks to enlist. Moral support for this great experiment in arming former slaves to fight was forthcoming in the form of many famous 19th century citizens such as Ralph Waldo Emerson. Material support was abundant in terms of clothing, equipment and battle flags. \$500 was easily raised for the creation of a regimental band. More recruits volunteered than could be accepted, allowing the surgeons to boast that the men of the Regiment were the most “robust, strong and healthy set of men “to ever be mustered into military service”. Most contemporary accounts of the 54th’s morale placed it as high when it left Boston on May 28, 1863 after it was mustered into the service two weeks earlier. Its first duty station outside of Boston was Beaufort, South Carolina. The men in the 54th were well aware of the fact that they were an experiment and that every eye, white and black, was watching their

every move. As soldiers, they were eager to show the world that they were men who would fight not run when the bullets started to fly. They were ready and willing to demonstrate that they would stand their ground with courage and bravery and, if need be, sacrifice the only possession they had of any value – their lives.

They longed for the opportunity to remove all doubts about their manliness despite the ill treatment they received at the hands of their own government and the threat by the Confederacy which essentially put a death sentence on their heads. In December, 1862, a month before President Lincoln issued his Emancipation Proclamation, the Confederate states passed a resolution that said two things: one, any captured black Union soldier taken alive would be sold back into slavery; and two, any white officer captured alive who was leading black troops would be executed on the spot for “inciting servile insurrection”. The men of the 54th weren’t treated any better by their own government. When they were enlisted, they had been promised the same rate of pay and allowances as offered to their white counterparts - \$13 per month for privates and a clothing allowance plus other incentives like bonuses, bounties, etc. When it came to paying on those promises, the 54th was told that they were going to be paid at the rate of \$10 per month for privates and they would have to forfeit \$3 of the \$10 for clothing allowance. On top of that, they were not eligible for most of the bonuses and bounties white soldiers were receiving period and, if they qualified for any at all, they would get only some of what white soldiers were paid. These arbitrary decisions by the War Department were blatantly racist and nearly ignited a mutiny among the newly members of the 54th Massachusetts.

Private Loudon S. Langley, a Hinesburg, Vermont black member of the 54th from Company B was also a “field correspondent” who regularly wrote articles for newspapers back home, wrote about this incident from Jacksonville, Florida on March 9, 1864:

You are aware that we (the Vermont men in the regiment) left Brattleboro Jan. 23rd, for I saw it stated in the Sentinel that almost a mutiny occurred among the colored soldier when ordered to leave for their regiment because, while the white soldiers received \$75, the black soldiers received nothing....It is also true that ‘they’ (the colored soldiers) had expected to be treated in this respect the same as white soldiers, especially as they counted on the quota of the State.

The boys (52 in number) at the time of their enlistment had been promised \$13 per month, \$302 bounty and premium, and the same allowance for clothing as white soldiers. This would have entitled each man of us to the payment of \$75 before we left Brattleboro.... Indeed, I think I may say that, if the boys had their arms, that every man of them would have died on the spot before leaving camp without

payment of their just due. As it was, they showed unmistakable signs that they had pluck, so much so that it was feared by some officers that they would have trouble with us, and so recourse was had to falsehood. We were told that, owing to our going into a regiment from another State, our \$75 had been sent to the headquarters of our regiment, where we would be paid off as soon as we arrived there! - a falsehood that even Satan himself would blush to promulgate; but the boys, willing to believe what should be true, believed all would be right, and so the difficulty ended.”^[35]

But it did not end in Beaufort, South Carolina. The Vermonters did not get their “just due” nor their proper bonuses. They were not offered equal pay and allowances to white soldiers. They had a choice to make as a regiment in the United States Army; accept whatever Washington was willing to hand them or stand their ground for what was right. For eighteen months, the 54th performed its duty but accepted no pay. As the issue of equity became a public topic of conversation, the political pressure for a fair and equitable solution mounted. It wasn’t until nearly half of the Regiment’s term of service had expired that the Government finally bowed to outside pressure and began paying black soldiers the same compensation and benefits as white soldiers. In the meantime, the 54th Massachusetts had been badly mauled in at least two major engagements, marching off to one of them (Olustee) chanting “Massachusetts and Seven Dollars A Month!”^[36] Pay and allowances were not the only issues equal and fair treatment in the military for the blacks. Advancement was another concern. No black soldier could rise above the rank of sergeant-major, the highest non-commissioned rank possible for a common foot soldier. Only one African American out of over 180,000 who served ever made that rank. When African Americans first were allowed to wear a uniform, they were used primarily for fatigue and guard duty. When they finally earned the right to be used in combat, they were always given the most dangerous and potentially lethal assignments such as in the assault on a Confederate fortress called Fort Wagner.

The 54th’s first major engagement was the Battle of Grimball’s Landing on James Island, South Carolina on July 16, 1863. This was a diversionary attack designed to draw Confederate troops away from Fort Wagner which was the Union’s real target. In this onslaught, the Regiment received high praise from its division commander Brigadier General Alfred H. Terry for “steadiness and soldierly conduct” when it stopped a 900 man Rebel charge. This recognition for their first combat experience made morale soar. However, it wasn’t until two days later, July 18, 1863, that the 54th earned its reputation for valor as a fighting unit.^[37] The all-black regiment was selected to be the lead element in the perilous, and somewhat foolhardy, frontal assault on Fort Wagner. The 600 men of the 54th Massachusetts were honored to accept the assignment that no other Union regiment was eager to take on.

The approach to Fort Wagner was limited to a sixty yard wide beach with the ocean on the east side and a swamp on the immediate west side. This bottle-neck allowed only one Union regiment at a time to rush the maid gate of the Confederate

sand castle. Meanwhile, attacking forces were completely exposed to the raking fire of every canon and musket in and outside of the fortress. At the time of the attack, the Confederate forces had nine heavy guns inside the walls of Fort Wagner and two outside. And there were approximately 1,800 small arms augmenting the fire power of the artillery gunners. When the men of the 54th reached within 150 yards of the front door of Fort Wagner, all those guns exploded practically in their faces. Huge holes were ripped open in the ranks of the charging soldiers. But the momentum of the regiment brought the survivors of the charge to the base of the walls of the bastion. Under steady fire from the Southerners at the top of the walls, the attacking Union forces had to scale the sandy ramparts. A hand-to-hand death struggle ensued for victory. After a two and one half hour death dance, the bloody struggle ended around 10:00p.m. when fresh Confederate troops arrived by boat to tip the balance for possession of Fort Wagner in favor of P.G.T. Beauregard, Confederate commander of the garrison. The Rebels claimed they buried more than 800 Union soldiers in the sand before the walls of the fort. Many of them in the mass graves were members of the 54th Massachusetts, including their Colonel, Robert Gould Shaw. Of the 600 men in the Regiment when the assault began, 270 of them became casualties: 29 were buried with Col. Shaw; 24 later died of wounds; 15 were captured; 52 were missing in action and never accounted for; 149 were wounded. Another celebrity casualty was Private Lewis Douglas, son of Frederick Douglas. The failure to capture Fort Wagner cost the Union Army 1,515 casualties.^[38]

The 54th won widespread notoriety for its gallant and heroic conduct at the walls of Fort Wagner. No longer was there any doubt in anyone's mind as to the manliness and trustworthiness of the African American soldier under fire. The men of the Regiment were praised by Governor John A. Andrew when he said, "I know not where, in all of human history, to any given thousand men in arms there has been committed a work at once so proud, so precious, so full of hope and glory." In books, music and poetry, praises were showered on the bravery and courage of the men of the 54th. Monuments were erected in honor of them. Decades after the battle, then sergeant William Harvey Carney was the first black awarded the Medal of Honor for saving the national colors from falling into the hands of the Confederates on the ramparts of Fort Wagner.^[39] Even in the late 20th century, Hollywood promoted the fame of the Regiment in a movie called "Glory".

The 54th Massachusetts, containing at least Privates Eugene and Silas Crosier, next played an important part in an engagement with the Confederates in Florida at the Battle of Olustee on February 20, 1864. The Regiment performed two critical actions during this encounter. First, it was called upon to cover the retreat of Union troops that could not hold back a Confederate advance. As their comrades retreated back to the safety of their home base in Jacksonville, the Regiment was ordered to counter-march back towards the battlefield along the railroad tracks to Ten-Mile station where a Union locomotive pulling a train load of wounded Federals had broken down. The train and its cargo were in danger of being captured by the Confederates. The locomotive could not be fixed, so ropes were attached to it and men of the 54th pulled the whole train with its loaded boxcars of casualties three miles along the rails to Camp Finnegan where a few horses were scrounged were found to help provide the power to haul the train another ten miles to safety. This feat took a total of forty-two hours to accomplish.^[40] From Olustee to the Regiment's muster-out in August 1865, it was involved in only minor skirmishes. In November of 1864, the

54^a unsuccessfully attacked Confederate militia at the Battle of Honey Hill. In April of 1865, they fought at the Battle of Boykin's Mill which became one of the last engagements of the war.^[41]

When mustered out August 20, 1865 at Charleston, South Carolina, Eugene and Nelson both took their Enfield rifled muskets with them for \$6 apiece. Since both of them had some money coming to them, taking advantage of this option available to every soldier was no hardship for either one of them. Silas was the only of the three who ended his military stint owing money to the Government. Washington calculated he owed \$33.30 for clothing allowance.^[42] Once released from active duty in South Carolina, the three Crosier brothers had to find their own way back to Vermont. Whether they traveled together or separately was unknown. By what means they traveled back home to Bristol was also unknown. It was assumed that at least part of their journey back home was by train, at least once they got north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

Based on what public records that could be accessed such as burial information and post-1860 Federal Census data, at least two brothers returned to Bristol after their discharge from the army. Eugene and Nelson both were laid to rest in Brigg's Cemetery in town. Where Silas ended up being buried was not known for sure. After August 1865, he disappeared from the public domain so his whereabouts after then were unknown. Perhaps he was among those restless young Vermonters who took Horace Greeley's advice to "Go West, young man." Or, maybe Silas, like many of his Bristol acquaintances, including several of his comrades he served with in the 54^a, went to the industrial centers of Massachusetts like Springfield or Worcester where large numbers of African Americans had congregated to work in the many growing factories of the post-war north.

Little more detail was found out about Eugen and Nelson's post-war lives. They mostly went back to their obscure lives as a minority in a predominantly white environment. Both men died when they were relatively young from inherited diseases. Nelson did not appear in the 1870 Federal Census. He was living in Monkton at the time it was taken. Why he was left out was not known. In October of 1865, two months after returning home from the war, he had married a woman named Angeline Wright. A long courtship between the two was not necessary as they both were already quite familiar with one another. When Angeline was about two months old, she was living in Eliza Crosier's home in Bristol along with, then, twelve year old Nelson Crosier. According to Vermont's Vital Records, Nelson's wedding day was October 3, 1865. He was listed as a resident of Bristol and she was from Monkton. The groom was described as twenty-two years of age (but was more like twenty-seven if he was twelve in 1850) and the bride was listed as eighteen (but would have been more like fifteen if she had just been born in 1850 as the census said).^[43] Ages didn't matter as much in 19^a century America as they do today. Whether they were four years apart in age or twelve was of little importance to the couple for their marriage would only last five years. Nelson died of "scrofula", a form of tuberculosis on May 3, 1870. His death certificate gave his age as thirty-two, listed him as single and said his birthplace was Charlotte, Vermont. An interesting note appeared on his death certificate. Up in the right hand corner was written "illegitimate" This was never verified.^[44] The one thing that was certain and could be verified was that Nelson Crosier was very dead and at a very young age.

His brother, Eugene, also remained in Bristol after his discharge from the army. He did appear in the 1870 Federal Census. He was back to his old ways of being a farm laborer. And he was living in the home of his uncle by marriage, Jedidiah Emery. He was the husband of Harriet Morocco, sister of Eugene's mother. Jedidiah was listed as head of household, but Harriet was not included as a member of it. For some reason, she was listed by the census taker as head of her own house and living by herself next door to her husband's home. The household of the seventy year old Jedidiah was as extended as all the other Morocco-Crosier-Prince arms of the family tree at various times between 1850 and 1880. Jedidiah's 1870 household consisted of thirteen individuals, fourteen if you counted Harriet, representing five different families, some of them kin and some of them not. One family was made up of Jedidiah and Harriet (fifty-two). The second family consisted of Samuel Titus, age eighty, Rhoda Morocco's second husband and Eugene's grandmother. The third group in the bunch was the Crosiers, all five of them: Rhoda, forty-seven; Judith, thirty-eight; Eugene, thirty; Henry, twenty-two; and Charles, nineteen. All the Crosier men were farm laborers. Judith and Rhoda were washer women. Then there was another twenty-four year old farm laborer named William Chapman who seemed not to be related to any of the others in the household. He was one of those occasional drop-ins who showed up at the homes of the Bristol black community members as an itinerant house guest. He supposedly had married Eliza Bradish in 1866, another temporary member of the Bristol black community who once lived in Eliza Crosier's home. William, Jedidiah and Samuel all claimed to have been born in

Virginia which pointed to the fact that they all may have been slaves at one time in their past lives. Judith Crosier was once married to a man named Reuben Burton. Living in Jedidiah's home in 1870 were three Burtons: Ellen, eighteen; Sylvester, fourteen; and David, thirty-two. Ellen, a domestic servant, and Sylvester, a farm laborer, were obviously Judith's children. Explaining who David was was a different matter. If he really was thirty-two like the census said, he could not have been Ellen and Sylvester's father (assuming, of course, that their ages as given were accurate). He would have been only fourteen when Ellen was born. Young marriages in the 19th century were not unheard of, but a fourteen year old husband and father would have been extraordinary even by that century's standards. Judith was married to Reuben, not to David. Perhaps David was an uncle to the children or maybe the census taker just got the name wrong. Regardless of the truth of the situation, he was counted as black, a farm laborer and a member of Jedidiah's 1870 household.^[45]

Next door to Jedidiah, lived Rhoda Morocco, now seventy-eight and still taking guests into her home, such as it was. Eugene's grandmother had her daughter, Eliza Morocco Crosier Titus, residing with her. She was sixty-five. She had married Samuel Titus in 1856. Why she and her husband were listed as living in separate households was unexplained. Rhoda, as usual, was "keeping house" for a living. Eliza was labeled a washer woman. Another Eliza also lived under the same roof along the New Haven River. She was Eliza Bradish, forty-two, also a washer woman and married to William Chapman (since 1866) who also lived next door in Jedidiah's household. Next door to Rhoda and Jedidiah lived three other black families: Martha James, Angeline and Alonzo Day and Henry Prince. Altogether, twenty-nine out of the forty-four blacks making Bristol their home in 1870 lived in the same neighborhood.^[46] Just like Guinea in Charlotte, African Americans banded together for mutual support, comfort and protection.

After returning home from the war, Eugene, like his brother Nelson, attempted to resume life as he had left it when he was drafted into the service. His decision to remain in Bristol and not leave for greener pastures in Massachusetts or the far West like a number of the eight colored veterans from Bristol who survived the war did, was closely associated with his sense of loyalty and obligation to his mother, Eliza Crosier who was not a well woman. There wasn't much to say about Eugene's or his brother's lives because none of them did very much with their time on earth. So, no one paid any of them much attention. They were the invisible minority. But there was one glimpse into the kind of man Eugene Crosier was that can be found in a local newspaper clipping from 1880 after he had died from Bright's Disease on December 26, 1879^[47]:

“Eugene Crosier, a well-known colored man of this town, died last Friday night. He was an honest, industrious man, and the stay and support of an aged mother.”^[48]

Eugene's mother, Eliza Morocco Crosier Titus died a month after her son, Eugene, from the same disease that took him.

NOTES

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4. Ibid., p. 4.
5. [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860 U.S. Census](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1860_U.S._Census); Men of Color, To Arms! by James Fuller, University Press, New York, 2006, p. XVIII.
6. www.ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Amos Crosier.
7. www.ancestry.com, Hightower Family Tree for Amos & Rhoda Morocco; Charlotte Town Land Records, Vol. 5, pp. 213-215 & Vol. 10, p. 527.
8. Around The Mountains by William W. Higbee, Charlotte Historical Society, 1991, Charlotte, Vermont, p. 122.
9. Ibid., p. 26.
10. www.ancestry.com. Vermont, Vital Records, Marriage for Silas Cozer (sic) & Eliza Freeman.
11. Ibid., Hightower Family Tree for Silas Crosier; Ibid., 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Eliza Crosier.

12. www.familysearch.org, Vermont, Vital Records, 1760-1954 for Crozier (sic), Charles.
13. "African Americans in Addison County, Charlotte, and Hinesburgh, Vermont, 1790-1860" by Jane Williamson, Vermont History, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010): p. 22.
14. www.ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Amos Morocco.
15. Ibid., 1850 Federal Census for Eliza Crosiar (sic); www.familysearch.org, Vermont, Vital Records, Marriage for Cosier (sic), Nelson.
16. "African Americans in Addison County, Charlotte, and Hinesburgh" by Jane Williamson, Vermont History, Vol. 78, No. 1 (Winter/Spring 2010): pp. 30-31.
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18. www.ancestry.com, 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Rhoda Morocco (sic).
19. Ibid., 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Nelson Titus; www.familysearch.org, Vermont, Vital Records, 1760-1954 for Samuel Titus & Eliza Crosier.
20. Ibid., 1860 U.S. Federal Census for Rhoda Morocco (sic).
21. Ibid., Vermont, Vital Records, Death for Frank Burton.
22. Men of Color, To Arms! by James Fuller, University Press, New York, 2001, p. XVIII.
23. Ibid., p. 53.
24. Ibid.
25. www.westegg.com/inflation. Site provides an equation for calculating monetary values between periods of time based on rate of inflation.
26. www.ancestry.com, Military Collection, 1863 Draft Registration for Eugene Crosier.
27. Civil War Soldiers credited to, born in, or buried in Bristol, Vermont, annotated list compiled by John R. Burbanks, 2011 Secretary, Bristol Historical Society (unpublished).
28. Ibid.
29. www.ancestry.com, Military Collection, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 for Silas Crosier; Wikipedia article on the history of the 54th Massachusetts Regiment.
30. Ibid.
31. Ibid., U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 for Eugene Crosier.
32. "African American Civil War Veterans From Bristol, Vermont", a list compiled by John Reynolds, 2009; "Civil War Soldiers credited to, born in, or buried in Bristol, Vermont, compiled by John Burbanks, 2011 Secretary of the Bristol Historical Society. Both lists courtesy of Reginald Dearborn, Bristol Historical Society, 2020; History of Addison County Vermont, by H.P. Smith, ed., D. Mason & Co., Syracuse, N.Y., 1886.
33. www.ancestry.com, Military Collection, U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865 for Nelson Crosier.
34. Wikipedia, "54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment." Most all of the information

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35. www.newspapers.com, Burlington Weekly Free Press, Fri., Mar. 25, 1864.

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37. Ibid.

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Nelson and Silas Crosier.

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Angeline; www.ancestry.com, 1850 U.S. Federal Census for Eliza Crosier.

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county/greene/olddiseases, "Old Disease Names Frequently Found On Death Certificates". Scofula is tuberculosis of the neck lymph glands with abscesses and fistulas.

It progresses slowly and is normally a young person's disease.

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48. www.newspapers.com, Middlebury Register, Fri., Jan. 2, 1880.