CATALOG

Scanned in the Innovation Hub

You never know what you might find when you open a military pension file. Among the valuable details about family history, we are endlessly fascinated by the remarkable stories, personal letters, and even unique letterhead found within military pension files.

Approved Pension File for Terrick Compton, Father of Private William Compton, Company H, 2nd New York Cavalry Regiment (WC-230113). National Archives Identifier 122168257

Did you know you can help uncover these stories by digitizing records in our Innovation Hub in Washington, DC? If you are vacationing in our nation's capital, stop by the National Archives and scan with us! You can scan military pension records, bounty land files, and more. You take home a digital copy of your scans, while we upload a copy to the Catalog, attributed to you. Learn more about how you can make access happen in our Innovation
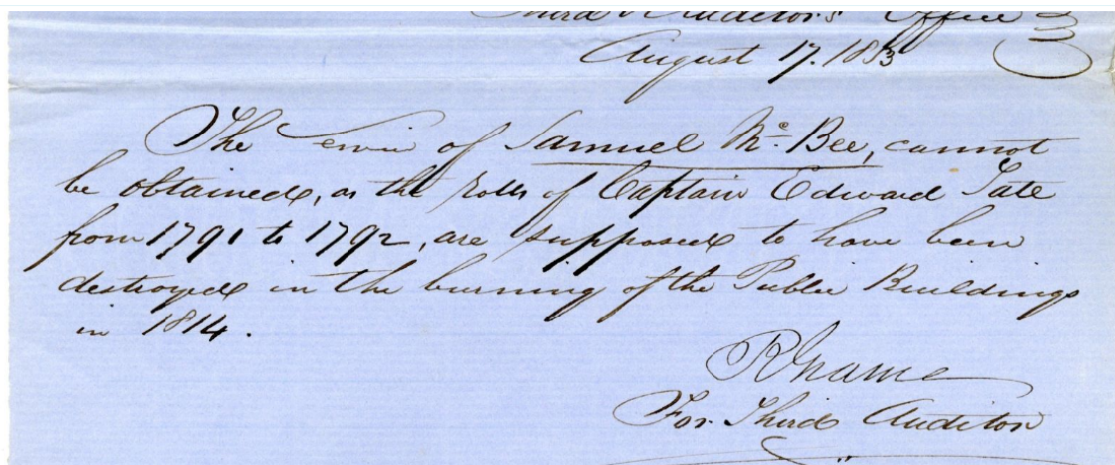
[Hub](#).

Outside the DC area? You can still contribute by transcribing records online in the National Archives Catalog. Learn more on our [citizen archivist dashboard](#).

Today we share some interesting finds from pension files recently scanned in our Innovation Hub. Many thanks to Catherine Brandsen, Innovation Hub Coordinator, for sharing these stories!

Substitute Soldier Agreement

The Pension Bureau couldn't find proof of [Samuel McBee's service](#), after records were destroyed in the burning of a building in 1814.

Instead, Samuel McBee's pension file contains what appears to be a makeshift contract detailing the terms under which McBee agreed to serve as a substitute for his brother Israel, when Israel was drafted. Neither of them seem to have signed it but it's clear that it was being used as a legal document.

This interesting document shows what Israel was to do for Samuel while he was gone, including harvesting corn (and then paying back Samuel's debts with the corn), finding a horse that had run away, and a payment of ten pounds. In theory the US was on the dollar by 1793, but Israel and Samuel tallied their debits and credits in British pounds. You can find the list of Israel's credits on the back of the document in the Catalog.

So this document really served its purpose twice: in 1793, it got Samuel ten pounds, his debts paid, a silk handkerchief and a pair of shoes; and then in 1853 it got him 160 acres of land.

Letterhead from the Front

Within a stack of letters in the [Civil War pension file for William Compton](), you will find some unique and beautiful letterhead:

Here is General McClellan on a horse, dodging a smoking bomb, pointing the way with his saber:

Elmer Ellsworth, the first Union officer to die in the Civil War. His death became a rallying

cry for Union soldiers:

These letters (and the rest of the file) were scanned in our Innovation Hub. In addition to the interesting letterhead, you can also find some firsthand accounts of the military actions and movements that William took part in his pension file.

Transcribe these pension files!

In-person volunteer scanning opportunity! Buffalo Soldiers Pension Files

June 20, 2019 9:00 am – 4:00 pm

Innovation Hub, National Archives, Washington, DC

We're launching a project to digitize Buffalo Soldiers pension files so they'll be available to everyone via the National Archives Catalog, and you can help! We're having a scan-a-thon on June 20 to work on scanning these files all day. At noon, Archives 1 Reference Services Branch Chief Trevor Plante will give a talk about the Buffalo Soldiers.

You can also drop into the Hub and scan on another day. All you need to participate in this project is a National Archives research card.

*Henry O. Flipper, the first Black officer to lead soldiers of the 10th Cavalry. [National Archives](#)
[Identifier 2668824](#)*

Following the success of the United States Colored Troops' actions during the Civil War, the U.S. Army created African American peacetime regiments: two cavalry regiments (the 9th and 10th) and four infantry regiments (the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st, later reorganized into the 24th and 25th). These regiments served in the Great Plains and American Southwest, participating in military campaigns against outlaws and hostile Native American groups, and performing other duties such as escorting the U.S. mail.

The National Archives holds approximately 400 pension files of Black soldiers who applied for a military pension based on their service in campaigns between 1866 and 1892.

Pension files can be a great source of genealogical information such as names of family members, home addresses, and details about the pension applicant's life. These files can also be useful for historians, students, and others who are interested in firsthand evidence of the experiences of nineteenth-century African American soldiers and their families.

Come get your hands on history by helping us scan these files! Email innovationhub@nara.gov so we can reserve a scanning station for you.

Following the scan-a-thon, these records will be added to the National Archives Catalog. Look for a transcription mission of these records in late summer!

Interested in more projects from the Innovation Hub? We invite you to participate in our latest crowdsourced scanning projects:

- Indian Scout Pension Files, 1866-1892

- Coast Guard logbook project

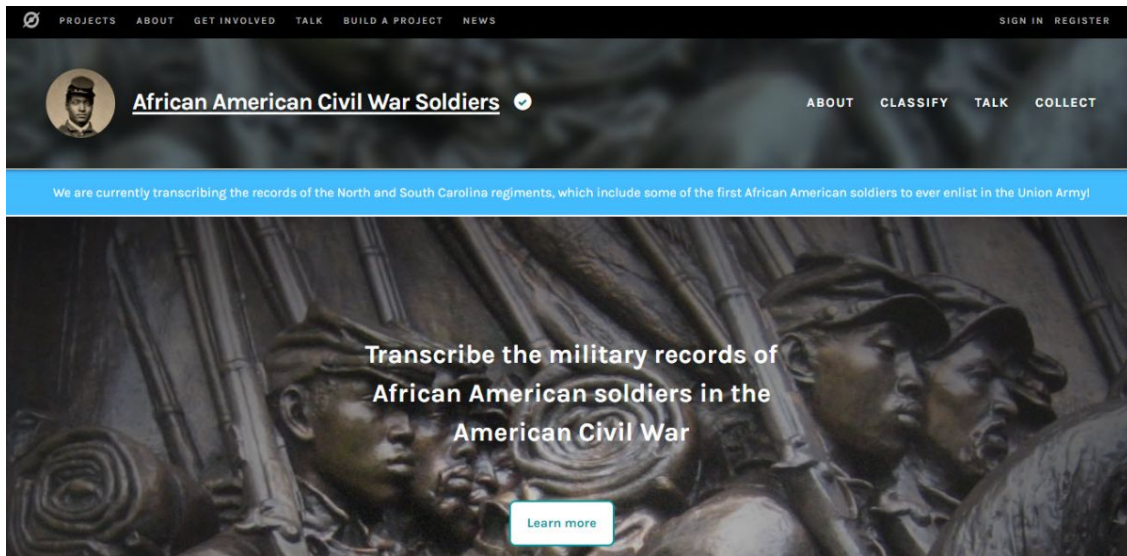Questions? Want to learn more? Email us at innovationhub@nara.gov

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African American Civil War Soldiers

The African American Civil War Soldiers project has a new site on the crowdsourcing platform Zooniverse to complete the transcription of the military records of Black men in the Union army, beginning with the famous 54th and 55th Massachusetts regiments. Read on to see how you can get involved!

Last year Zooniverse volunteers transcribed the records of a sample of 40,000 members of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), the African American soldiers who fought for their freedom in the American Civil War. A new project site is now available to transcribe the records of the rest of the USCT and make them all freely available to scholars, genealogists and members of the public. The remaining soldiers are divided up based on their state of enlistment, and each new batch of records will be launched state-by-state.

African American Civil War Soldiers ✓

ABOUT   CLASSIFY   TALK   COLLECT

We are currently transcribing the records of the North and South Carolina regiments, which include some of the first African American soldiers to ever enlist in the Union Army!

Transcribe the military records of
African American soldiers in the
American Civil War

Learn more

Visit usct.cc to learn how to transcribe these records helps to preserve these mens' records and build an invaluable database for African American genealogists and historians.

Questions or comments? Email us at catalog@nara.gov.

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