

By the Kansas Historical Society

For Your Own Freedom, And Your Country: William Matthews Recruits Volunteers

William Matthews was one of Leavenworth's leading citizens. He ran a successful boarding house that also served as a stop on the underground railroad. He worked with noted abolitionist Daniel R. Anthony (the brother of suffragist Susan B. Anthony) to free slaves from captivity in Missouri and help them escape to freedom in Kansas.

At the onset of the Civil War, African American men were not eligible to hold combat positions in the United States army. They were stopped by a 1792 law that restricted blacks from service. It wasn't until a series of acts and Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863 that they were allowed to join the army as full soldiers.

Even before the Emancipation Proclamation became law Matthews and other black men joined volunteer regiments in Kansas. These regiments were for black soldiers only, yet nearly all of the officers were white. Matthews was the exception. General James Lane, a white man, named Matthews a lieutenant (even though he did not have the authority to do so) and gave him the chance to recruit members for his own regiment.

The First Kansas Colored Volunteer Infantry was a well-known regiment that was organized before the Emancipation Proclamation. It was the first black regiment in the Union to see combat. Black regiments across the country served honorably, but due to discrimination most were given boring and unpleasant assignments. The troops were also paid less than white soldiers.



Lieutenant William Matthews

The federal government hesitated to commission black officers. Matthews was not officially commissioned until the war was nearly over, even though he served the Union with distinction. Matthews was well respected, and the troops elected him to be leader of their regiment.

Racial integration of United States troops didn't happen until after World War II, nearly 90 years after the conclusion of the Civil War. Volunteers like Matthews took the first steps to creating an integrated military.

LEAVENWORTH DAILY CONSERVATIVE, 6 AUGUST 1862

WAR FOR THE UNION! AND FOR FREEDOM.

WANTED!

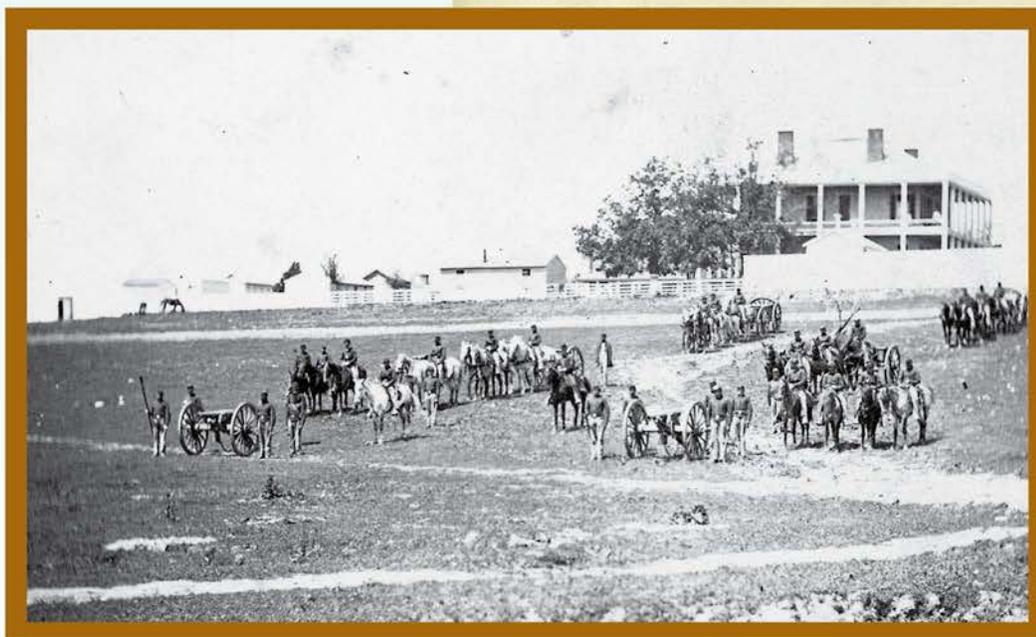
ONE THOUSAND COLORED MEN! FOR THE SERVICE OF THE U.S.

Each recruit will receive \$10 PER MONTH! And subsistence, and will be armed, drilled, and enrolled as SOLDIERS to aid in suppressing this slaveholder's rebellion. Every colored man enlisting, who may have been claimed as a slave, will receive, in addition to his rations, a CERTIFICATE OF FREEDOM!! For himself, and freedom for his Mother, Wife and Children.

Rally, then, for your own Freedom and the Country.

Apply to the Recruiting office, 62 Delaware Street.

J.M. Williams, Capt. 5th K.V. Commissioner of Recruiting,
Northern Dist., Kan.



Colored Battery, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1864

