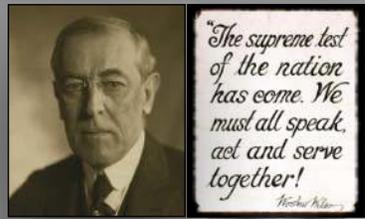


**Dutchess County's
African American Experience
During the World War
1917 to 1919...and beyond**

From the Collections of
The Dutchess County Historical Society, 2019
Prepared by Bill Jeffway, Executive Director
Melody Moore, Chair, Year of the Veteran

April 1917 call for unity suggests opportunity



When President Woodrow Wilson addressed Congress in April 1917, seeking a declaration of war on Germany, he ended with a call to the nation saying, “The supreme test of the nation has come. *We must all work, act, and speak together.*”

There was “no color line,” as they would have said at the time, when it came to sacrifice. Individuals of any race would be asked to suspend personal liberty and risk their lives. All were expected to sacrifice by buying war bonds, cutting back on coal consumption, and cutting back on food and basic staples like wheat and sugar.

It was the pressure of the scarcity of everything, including manpower and individuals who were productive in labor or the military, that created the pressure for change. The national emergency created a kind of meritocracy that opened previously closed doors to persons of color, as well as women, who stepped into new roles with a sense of urgency, and *immediately performed.*

Only two divisions, the 92nd and 93rd, had Black infantry units. Of these units, the 369th, sometimes called the *Harlem Hellfighters*, led by Putnam County’s Capt. Hamilton Fish, became one of the most decorated and celebrated of the war. There were other combat units, like the 367th, in which a number of Dutchess men served. Beyond these units, many served in vital,



Above: President Wilson, top. Left to right: Amenia’s Joel Spingarn. Great Barrington-born W.E.B. DuBois. Putnam County’s Hamilton Fish. Right: Black draftees parade through Poughkeepsie to depart for training, July 8, 1918. DCHS C. Fred Close Collection.

risky, demanding support and supply roles, as cooks, stevedores, drivers, and construction workers.

A Black Officer training school was created and some varied and tentative progress made. Outspoken, local proponents included Amenia’s Joel Spingarn, co-founder of the NAACP, and Great-Barrington-born W. E. B. Dubois, though his magazine *The Crisis*.

This national unity and proximity put racial, and other, inequities and injustices into stark relief. How could Black men be called on to die “to make the world safe for democracy” if democracy was not practiced at home?



June 1917 violence is harbinger of resistance

In late May, only a matter of weeks after President Wilson’s call for unity, violence in East St. Louis started to grow. It culminated in riots on July 3, targeting newly-arriving African Americans from the south. European immigration had virtually stopped due to the war and the growing demand for labor was accommodated by African Americans who wanted to live in the North. Several hundred Blacks were killed, thousands made homeless. One of the most vocal critics of the rioting was former President Theodore Roosevelt.

Six weeks later, on August 23 at Camp Logan in Houston, Texas, Black soldiers of the 24th Infantry Regiment encountered strictly enforced Jim Crow laws of segregation, verbal and physical abuse, and harassment by both civilians and police. They retaliated by marching on the city and killing 16 Whites. Four Black soldiers died as well. Through Court Martial, soldiers were jailed for life, and 13 were put to death by hanging.

Against this tense backdrop, Capt. Hamilton Fish arrived with Black recruits of the 369th in Spartanburg, South Carolina, in October. Soldiers were formally ordered to *make no response whatsoever* to the verbal and physical harassment that commenced quickly upon their arrival. As perhaps a sign of the difficult relationship they would have through their long political lives, Hamilton Fish approached Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt, imploring him to help get the Black servicemen back to the north. FDR took no action. It turned out that a more expedient plan was to get the troops to France earlier than planned. They went first to New York and then to France on December 17, 1917. They were among the earliest to arrive, and last to leave, in Europe.

Northern Whites, like Red Hook’s Louis Shook, had a very different experience. Serving in a different unit, going to the South Carolina training camp was a sort of curiosity. He took a number of photos showing himself meeting locals cotton fields (see photo).



View of S.C. Cotton



Above: Red Hook’s Louis Shook mingling with locals in South Carolina while training. Black soldiers at Camp Whitman, town of Beekman, Dutchess County. Courtesy of DCHS L Shook Collection and Drew Nicholson, respectively.

Both the newly-arrived & the deep-rooted serve

Some Dutchess recruits had only recently, and temporarily, taken up residence. Both the military census and mandatory in-person registration took place in June 1917, so a number of its southern seasonal farm workers were present at the time. One such example is 23-year old David A. Clark. He was working as a temporary farm hand in the hamlet of Lafayetteville in the town of Milan, leaving his parents and two sisters in his birthplace, Virginia. He departed the Poughkeepsie train station with other Black draftees on a rainy morning, October 30, 1917, never to return. Serving in the 367th Infantry, he was killed in an accidental grenade explosion September 9, 1918, just two months before the Armistice of November 11 and is buried in France (photo next page).



Georgia-born Sebie Bostic moved to Poughkeepsie for safety and employment.

Others were newer arrivals but with plans to stay. Typical of what is referred to as the “great migration,” Sebie Bostic’s father had advised him to move from their Georgia home to the north for his own safety, and for a greater chance of employment, according to family members. He served overseas, having been promoted to Corporal in 1918 and then to Sergeant in 1919. He is shown in a “street photo” with other recruits (right, DCHS Collections) and shown in uniform, from a photograph provided by his family. After the war he came to own his own store, and worked at a Poughkeepsie hotel spending the remainder of his life in that city.

By contrast, brothers Jerome and Franklin Frazier, both born in Union Vale, served their country in WW1 just as their father and uncle had served from Dutchess in the Civil War. Just as their northern-Dutchess based great-great grandfather Andrew Frazier had served in the Revolutionary War. Jerome and Franklin’s cousin Susan Elizabeth Frazier served in WW1 as the founder and president of the Women’s Auxiliary of the 369th. She is profiled later.



From left to right: Headstone of Andrew Frazier, Revolutionary War Veteran, interred Rhinebeck. Brothers Jerome and Edward Frazier, Colored Field Artillery Civil War, interred Millbrook and Bangall respectively. Brothers Jerome and Franklin Frazier, WW1, interred in Philadelphia and Millbrook (not shown) respectively. Susan Elizabeth Frazier, President, Women’s Auxiliary 369th, interred Rhinebeck. 6th generation family member James Harris Frazier, WW2, interred Poughkeepsie Rural Cemetery.

Heroic 15th Making Good

At The Battle Front in France—Johnson and Roberts Honored—No Color Prejudices Over-there.

The old 15th N. Y. Colored Infantry, now known as the 369th, is making good on the firing
DCHS Walter Patrice Collection.



THE QUILL

Multum in parvo—
The Only Afro-American Periodical Published in the County of Dutchess.

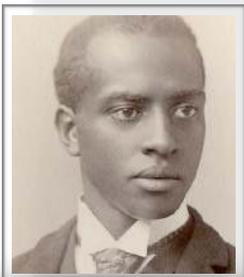
Serving proudly, pushing back fiercely

The Quill was published by Poughkeepsie’s Smith AME Zion Church. In May 1918 it thanked two of the Church’s women’s groups:

Two organizations in the interest of our soldier boys have recently sprung into existence in this city, namely: “The Soldiers Comfort Club” of which Miss Grace Deyo is president, and a unit of “The Circle for Negro War Relief” with Mrs. Maggie Wormley, president. They both have worthy aims and a splendid opportunity of doing much tangible good, and merit the hearty support of one and all. They have the best wishes of The Quill and their very laudable undertaking. We thank you.

In the same issue, *The Quill* celebrated the success of the 369th, using its old name, the 15th, New York National Guard (see above) and decried the escalation of lynchings, writing:

In 30 years, 3,000 Negro citizens of America whose patriotism has never been doubted; men, women and children have been butchered in almost every conceivable form by the lynching bee’s and but little if any serious attention accorded it by the authorities. The sport yet goes merrily on undisturbed—four or five reported lynched the past week. ... Our boys are now abroad giving their lives for America and democracy. Can it be out of place to ask of America protection for their loved ones at home?



Gaius Bolin was the son of a Dover Plains farmer. He was the first Black graduate of Williams College and had a long and distinguished legal career, including serving as President of the Dutchess County Bar Association. The year 1919 should have been a jubilant year. Combat had ceased the prior November, the Armistice was formally signed in June 1919. Instead, it was so filled with riots that it came to be known as the “Red Summer.” At its height, on August 14, Bolin wrote an open letter in the Poughkeepsie newspaper which read, in part, as follows,

“If the people of this country can afford to send the flower of its manhood, the finest men in all the world, to foreign countries to fight and suffer and die [...] they can afford to see to it that American citizenship means American citizenship, and that it means it without any kind of reservation or winking of the eye with reference to anyone who is entitled to that citizenship.”

Experiences after the war

Clarence T. Anderson

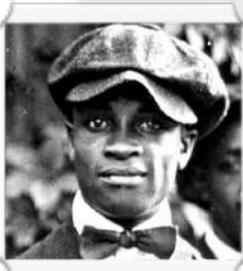


Clarence T. Anderson was born in Poughkeepsie in 1893 and remained there his entire life. He married Frieda Potter April 28, 1918, just a few months before heading out to serve as a Corporal at Fort Dix. After the war he settled into a 32-year career as a mail carrier, after which, he had become a Court Officer, and was serving as such at the time of his death. Anderson was active at the Smith AME Zion Church as member, trustee, Sunday School teacher, Assistant Sunday School Superintendent, choir member, and historian.

Even with his war service, obvious strength of presence and character and skill in the community, he did not escape discrimination. In 1941 he had ordered tickets to a play in Clinton for a group of friends. Upon arrival, although they could see the tickets pinned to a board behind the ticket agent, they were denied entry. A lawsuit followed which they lost. There are conflicting reports as to whether the loss was due to a procedural technicality or whether it was due to the endorsement of the validity of the counterclaim that they were denied entry “for their own safety.”



George Gould



George Gould was born in Poughkeepsie in 1896. In the war, he served as a musician in the Regiment Band. He played piccolo, beating out five others in an audition for the one spot in the 52-person band. Music was vital in the upkeep of moral of the troops, and relations with local civilians. He did not return from France until July 23, 1919, more than eight months after the end of fighting. When he came back, it took him five months to get a job as a bellhop at the Windsor Hotel in Poughkeepsie. In a 1979 newspaper interview with the Poughkeepsie Journal he said, “We weren’t treated very fair when we came back. They were so prejudiced.”



Susan Elizabeth Frazier

Susan Elizabeth Frazier’s father was born in the northern Dutchess Town of Milan, part of the large family of servicemen described earlier. She herself was born in and lived in New York City. She earned a national reputation when, in 1896, she became the first person of color allowed to teach White students in New York City. Although her legal action failed, her moral argument and public appeal prevailed, the story was carried in newspapers across the country. She was given a job she had for some time been denied.

She was a teacher in the public schools until her death in 1924. She founded and became President of the Women’s Auxiliary to the 369th. In 1919, in a highly fortuitous and coincidental reflection of her commitment to teaching and to veterans, she won a New York City newspaper contest as “favorite teacher,” the prize being a trip to the battlefields of Europe. While much could be written about Miss Frazier, for purposes here, it is worth noting the pressure she received to not go, and the constant pressure to segregate her from the main group.

She died in 1924 and is buried in Rhinebeck at the family plot. In 2018 local residents raised money to erect a memorial headstone at what was her unmarked grave. Comments from newspapers at the time of her trip in 1919 reflect her strong character:



...an effort was made to buy her off when it was discovered that she was one of the successful contestants. But she would not be bought. To all of the propositions, arguments and offers to prevent her sailing, Miss Frazier returned one answer—that she was standing on her rights as an American woman and would make the trip. On board the boat an effort to seat her at a separate table and a similar effort at the hotel in Paris were frustrated by Miss Frazier’s ignoring of the plan. The officer in charge of the party, in fact, was put to the necessity of apologizing to Miss Frazier...

On her memorial headstone are the words, “Her voice endures.”



Well-wishers at the Poughkeepsie train platform, July 8, 1918. DCHS C. Fred Close Collection.

Those who served
from Dutchess County
Bold italic indicates died in service

Lubin H Anderson	Everett Gatewood	Charles Peterson
Clarence T Anderson	Edward Gatewood	Clifton Pinkney
William Anderson	Joseph Goggins	William J. Rice
Peyton Anderson	William Good	Benjamin Roberts
Fred Atkins	George Gould	Bert E Robinson
Edward Atwater	Robert Grant	Richard Roe
Arthur Banks	Louis Greene	Howard M Rose
Sebie A. Bostic	John Hackett	Isaac G Saunders
Benjamin Braddock	Lewis Hardy	Edward Schoonmaker
Abraham Brandball	James J Harrison	Charles E. Schoonmaker
Raymond Bride	James E Henderson	Samuel M. Scott
Hezekiah Brown	Nelson Hill	William L. Slaughter
Charles E Cave	Walter Hintoy	Stephen H Spencer
Edward Cheek	Joseph Hughes	William G. Spencer
Clarence M Clark	Benjamin Hughes	James Surles
David A. Clarke	George S. Jackson	William H Sutton
Thomas Clarke	William O. Jackson	George Tallie
Charles Cooper	Clifton Jackson	James Taylor
James J Cruse	Edward Jackson	John W. Taylor
Oscar W Cummings	Warner Jackson	Clarence Taylor
John Cummings	Amos Lee Johnson	George N. Terrell
Oscar Cummings	Oscar Jones	James F Townsend
Lewis Davis	Samuel Jones	William H. Townsend
Howard L. Edwards	Charles L. Kittel	Millard F. Turner
Moses Evans	Fitzhugh L Mann	Isaac Tuttle
Frank Evans	John McMichael	Oscar Tyler
Lester Franklin	Melville McMillan	Charles E Vermong
Emery Franklin	Frank Moon	Philip Walter
Franklin Frazier	George J Morse	Emery Williams
Jerome Frazier	Thomas Onerby	Samuel Williams
Samuel P Freeman	John Parns	Howard Willis
Irving Frye	James Perry	Thomas E Yeargan
Charles E Garnett	Simon L. Peterson	Joseph Young
William Garrett		



Interred in France are, left to right: Isaac Tuttle, Poughkeepsie. David A. Clark, Milan at enlistment. Photos courtesy JP Donick. And James J. Cruse, Wappingers Falls. Photo courtesy Wappingers Historical Society, who were also responsible for adding Cruse's name to the local Honor Roll, it had been omitted. Research support: Rich Walling.