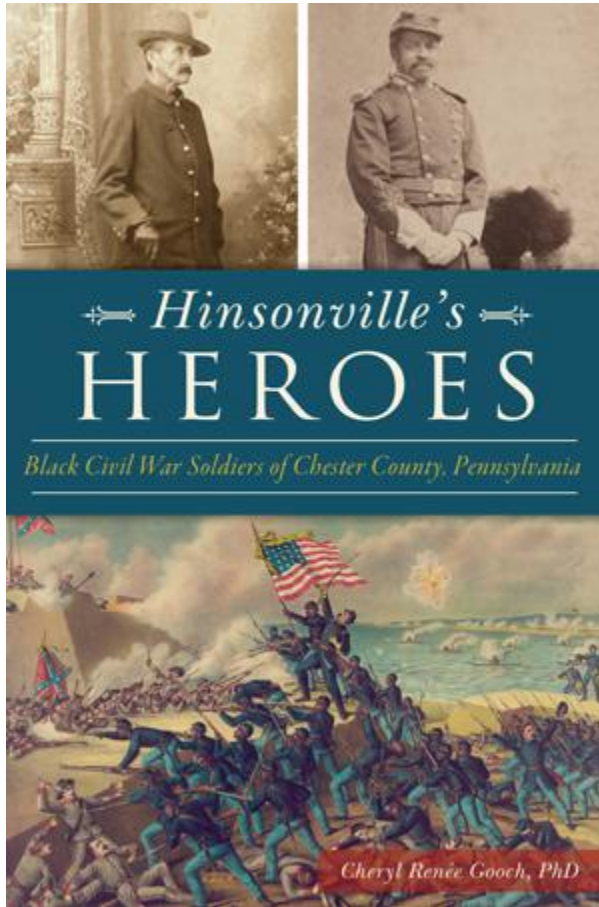


Hinsonville's Heroes Review



*“O give us a flag, all free without a slave
We’ll fight to defend it as our fathers did so brave.
The gallant Comp’ny A will make the rebels dance
And we’ll stand by the Union if we only get a chance.”*

Give Us a Flag – lyrics: an anonymous soldier of the 54th Massachusetts. Music: B. Holmes, C. McWirther

The men of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment sang this song as they marched away from Camp Meigs (Readville) to enter ships in Boston Harbor heading for Glory in South Carolina. One of them was Private Albert G. Walls of Hinsonville, Pa. Unlike his neighbors and cousins William, Wesley and George Jay along with James and Josiah Cole, Albert Walls would never see Hinsonville again.

Author Cheryl Renee Gooch has given us an insight into the lives of these men, along with 11 others, in her new book *“Hinsonville’s Heroes: Black Civil War Soldiers of Chester County, Pennsylvania”* (History Press-2018)

Hinsonville was a small farming village six miles above the Mason-Dixon Line. If you travel north on US Rt.1 from the Maryland-Pennsylvania border and follow the signs to Lincoln University, you will see Hosanna AUMP Church. Located outside the gates of Lincoln U, the church is the last original Hinsonville building and it's cemetery serves as the final resting place for a number of the 'heroes' and members of their families.

This antebellum village of a dozen or so families of freemen, freedmen and those who 'walked' to their freedom were always conscious of the precarious state of Blacks in the United States. Living in an area where one could easily be kidnapped into slavery, villagers assisted in the Underground Railroad, supported the 1854 founding of Ashmun Institute (Lincoln University) and, apparently, assisted in fighting slave catching during the 1851 Christiana (Pa.) riot. It is no wonder, therefore, that these heroes rushed to sign up to fight for the Union following the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863.

Dr. Gooch used government pension and other records to reveal the story of the soldier's lives after the war. Not surprisingly, many of the soldiers and their families encountered racially motivated roadblocks in attempting to receive the pensions that were promised them after the war. Many suffered from physical and mental problems as a result of their service to their country. The plight of George Jay is especially upsetting. It would be another century before posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) would be fully recognized.

Many of the *Hinsonville's Heroes* lives had a direct impact on the world well beyond their actual earthly time. One such trooper was Robert George Fitzgerald. Fitzgerald, like his brothers Richard and William and his cousin Tillman Valentine, began working for the Union Quartermaster Corps in 1861, earning up to \$35.00 monthly. In January 1864, when he enlisted as a private in the 5th Massachusetts Cavalry, he took a serious pay cut (\$7.00 when it should have been \$13.00.) A regular diarist, Fitzgerald's own words provided the guide for Dr. Gooch to present his life as a cavalryman during the war and as a student, freedman school founder/teacher and as a North Carolina businessman after the war. His home in Durham, N.C. was designated a National Historic Landmark in 2017 because his granddaughter partially grew up in the house. The Rev. Dr. Pauli Murray-Civil and Women's rights activist, lawyer, author and 1st Black woman priest in the Episcopal Church- translated and published her grandfather's dairy.

Dr. Gooch's book is only a little over 150 pages; however, her revelations of these men's lives is so powerful that you will occasionally have to put the book down in order to recover from your emotional rollercoaster. *Hinsonville's Heroes: Black Civil War Soldiers of Chester County, Pennsylvania* is a must read.

Robert L. Ford, President

Baltimore Civil War Roundtable (BCWRT)