

**1863. William H. Carney, Sergeant Company C, 54th Massachusetts, Volunteers**

Source: Aptheker 484-485

Dear Sir,

Complying with your request, I send you the following history, pertaining to my birth, parentage, social and religious experience and standing; in short, a concise epitome of my life. I undertake to perform it in my poor way:

I was born in Norfolk, Va., in 1840; my father's name was William Carney; my mother's name before her marriage was Ann Dean; she was the property of one Major Carney, but, at his death, she, with all his people, was by his will made free. In my fourteenth year, when I had no work to do, I attended a private and secret school kept in Norfolk by a minister. In my fifteenth year I embraced the gospel; at that time I was also engaged in the coasting trade with my father.

In 1850, I left the sea for a time, and my father set out to look for a place to live in peace and freedom. He first stopped in Pennsylvania-but he rested not there; the black man was not secure on the soil where the Declaration of Independence was written. He went far. Then he visited the empire State-great New York-whose chief ambition seemed to be for commerce and gold, and with her unceasing struggle for supremacy she heard not the slave; she only had time to spurn the man with a sable skin, and make him feel that he was an alien in his native land.

At last he set his weary feet upon the sterile rocks of "Old Massachusetts." The very air he breathed put enthusiasm into his spirit. O, yes, he found a refuge from oppression in the old Bay State. He selected as his dwelling place the city of New Bedford, where "Liberty Hall" is a sacred edifice. Like the Temple of Diana, which covered the virgins from harm in olden time, so old Liberty Hall in New Bedford protects the oppressed slave of the 19th Century. After stopping a short time, he sent for his family, and there they still dwell. I remained in the city with the family, pursuing the avocation of a jobber of work for stores, and at such places as I could find employment. I soon formed connection with a church under charge of the Rev. Mr. Jackson, now chaplain of the 55th Mass. Volunteers.

Previous to the formation of colored troops, I had a strong inclination to prepare myself for the ministry; but when the country called for all persons, I could best serve my God by serving my country and my oppressed brothers. The sequel is short-I enlisted for the war.

I am your humble and obedient servant,

WILLIAM H. CARNEY  
Sergeant Co. C, 54th Mass. Vols.

The Liberator, November 6, 1863.