

'I WISH WE HAD A HUNDRED THOUSAND COLORED TROOPS WE WOULD PUT AN END TO THIS WAR'

The 54th Massachusetts Regiment was the first black regiment raised in the North during the Civil War. Frederick Douglass, of Rochester, was prominent in recruiting men to enlist. His own sons did, and Douglass successfully found several volunteers from the Syracuse area in March of 1863.

The 54th engaged in a bloody attack on Fort Wagner near Charleston, S.C., on July 18, 1863. Douglass' son, Lewis, participated in the brave, but failed, assault.

Lewis had been courting the daughter of Syracuse's Underground Railroad stationmaster, the Rev. Jermain Loguen, for more than a year. Two days after the battle, he wrote a short letter to his "Dear Amelia" back in Syracuse, briefly describing the "terrible" experience and assuring her that he fortunately "escaped unhurt from amidst that perfect hail of shot and shell."

But knowing that Amelia was familiar with some of the black soldiers from Syracuse in the unit,

Lewis also writes: "DeForrest of your city is wounded. George Washington is missing, Jacob Carter is missing, Chas Reason wounded. Chas Whiting, Chas Creamer all wounded."

Washington, a former seaman and Reason, a laborer, both from Syracuse, would be hospitalized but die within a few days. The other Syracuse men recovered.

Lewis closed his letter:

"My Dear girl, I hope again to see you. I must bid you farewell should I be killed. Remember if I die I die in a good cause. I wish we had a hundred thousand colored troops we would put an end to this war. Good Bye to all. Your own loving Lewis."

Lewis also survived and on Oct. 7, 1869, would marry Helen Amelia Loguen at the Loguen family home, which once stood at the corner of Pine and East Genesee Streets in Syracuse.

— From Dennis Connors,
curator of history,
Onondaga Historical Association



Courtesy of Onondaga Historical Association

HELEN AMELIA LOGUEN, of Syracuse, married Lewis Douglass, son of Frederick Douglass.