

Collection #  
SC 2883

**WILLIAM TRAIL, JR.  
LETTER, 1865**

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## **COLLECTION INFORMATION**

**VOLUME OF  
COLLECTION:** 1 folder

**COLLECTION  
DATES:** September, 1865

**PROVENANCE:** Swann Auction, March 2011

**RESTRICTIONS:** None

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NUMBER:** 2011.0099

**NOTES:**

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Trail, Sr. (1784–1858), enslaved from birth, was born in Montgomery County, Maryland. As a boy, he moved with the slave owners to Spartanburg, South Carolina where he was eventually sold to other owners within the state. From South Carolina, Trail escaped to the Indiana Territory in 1814. He first settled in Wayne and Fayette counties. In 1825 he married Sarah McCown (1800–1877). Sarah's family moved from Virginia to Rush County, Indiana in 1821. The Trails settled in Henry County, Indiana, during the 1830s.

William Trail, Sr. and his wife were the parents of seven sons. They were: Archibald, James, William, Jr., Joseph, Barzillai, David, and Benjamin. Four of their sons fought during the Civil War.

After the death of their brother, Benjamin (who became a sergeant major), William, Jr. and James Trail enlisted in the Union Army and David was drafted. All four of the brothers mustered in with the 28<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT), Indiana's African American regiment. Benjamin and James were assigned to Company C and William, Jr. was assigned to Company I. David, an unassigned recruit with the 28<sup>th</sup> eventually served with the 14<sup>th</sup> USCT, Company A.

According to the Indiana adjutant general's report for the state's participation in the Civil War, the Trail brothers mustered in on the following dates:

Benjamin F.	December 29, 1863
James	August 10, 1864
David	October 17, 1864
William, Jr.	February 20, 1865

Like Benjamin, James did not survive the Civil War. David returned to Indiana where he died in 1869. After the war, William, Jr. (1830–1914) married Sarah Johnson (ca.1833–1910). Four children were born to this union: Alcinda, William, Isaac, and Clara. William, Jr. farmed and the family lived and owned property in Greensboro Township, Henry County, Indiana.

Sources:

Material in the collection

Benjamin Trail Correspondence, 1863–1866 at the Abraham Lincoln Library and Museum, Lincoln Memorial University [80.2411.1 through 80.2411.11]  
<http://www.lmunet.edu/museum/collection/TrailGuide.html>

Forstchen, William Robert. *The 28th United States Colored Troops: Indiana's African-Americans go to war, 1863-1865*. Thesis (Ph. D.)--Purdue University, 1994

Heller, Herbert L. *Historic Henry County*. [New Castle, Ind.]: Courier-Times Inc., 1981-1982.

Henry County Genealogical Services "Black History of Henry County, Indiana"  
<http://www.hcgs.net/blhis.html>

*History of Henry County, Indiana : together with sketches of its cities, villages, and towns ... and biographies of representative citizens :also a condensed history of Indiana, embracing accounts of pre-historic races, aborigines, Winnebago and Black Hawk wars, and a brief review of its civil and political history.* Chicago: Inter-State Pub. Co., 1884

Indiana. Adjutant General's Office. *Report of the Adjutant General of the state of Indiana.* Indianapolis: A.H. Connor [etc.], State Printer, 1866-67 [volumes 3 and 7].

[William Trail, Jr.] *History of William Trail*, n.p., n.d.

E-mail to Wilma Moore from Thomas Hamm, Earlham College, March 30, 2011

E-mail to Wilma Moore from Kathie Ward, Newcastle, Henry County Public Library, March 31, 2011

E-mail to Wilma Moore from Richard Ratliff, Henry County Historian, April 1, 2011

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

During the American Civil War, William Trail, Jr. enlisted in the 28<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops (USCT), Company I at Richmond, Indiana, on February 20, 1865, soon after the passage of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment to the United States constitution. Three of his brothers, David, James, and Benjamin had enrolled in the same regiment—Benjamin and James in Company C and David as an unassigned recruit. David was eventually assigned to the 14<sup>th</sup> USCT, Company A.

In September 1865, William's company was stationed in Corpus Christi, Texas. On September 4, he penned a letter to his brother, David whose regiment was in Knoxville, Tennessee. He assured him of his well-being, and made inquiries of David's health. He tells David of the serious illness of their hospitalized brother, James, who had scurvy. William talks about the condition of the camp and their duties. He also explains the movement of the company. He indicates that Leartic Freeman (Company D, 28<sup>th</sup> USCT) died at Point Lookout on July 2. William talks about how remote the area is: *I tell you this is an out of the way place [-] I haven't seen a newspaper since I've been in Texas . . . and I know as little about what is going on in the US as I do about what is going on in the moon.* He speaks of things back home indicating that his wheat crop was worthless. The letter exhibits hope as the writer tells how pleased he had been to receive letters from David and from back home. He sends greetings to two soldiers who are in David's regiment and tells his brother he deserves to go home to happiness on all fronts and that he hopes to meet him there in six months.

The war formally ended on April 9, 1865. The 28<sup>th</sup> USCT mustered out of service in Texas on November 8, 1865. After leaving Texas, the regiment went to New Orleans where the soldiers boarded a steamer and travelled up the Mississippi to Cairo, Illinois. They then went by train to Indianapolis. A public parade and reception was held in their honor at Tabernacle Hall in Indianapolis on January 8, 1866.

## **CONTENTS**

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ALS from William Trail, Jr. to his brother, David,  
September 4, 1865 with transmittal envelop addressed  
to David Trail and postmarked: New Orleans,  
September 18, 1865.

### CONTAINER

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