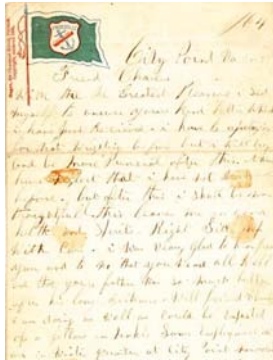


# Black soldier's letter offers rare view of Civil War

Diana Penner, *The Indianapolis Star* 12:27 a.m. EST March 5, 2013

*Missive detailing soldier's thoughts on war, racial equality could fetch up to \$8,000 at New York auction.*



(Photo: Swann Auction Galleries)

INDIANAPOLIS -- John Carter, [a prosperous African-American grocery store owner in Madison, Ind.](#), ([/apps/pbcs.dll/article](#)) before and after the Civil War, was active on the Underground Railroad, secretly ferrying slaves from the South to freedom in the North.

For more than a century, a letter written Dec. 3, 1864, by his son, Morgan W. Carter, detailing a bloody Civil War battle and outlining a vision of free blacks, also was underground.

The letter, long in the hands of private collectors and out of public view, is set to go up for auction March 21 at [Swann Galleries](#) in New York.

It is one of 550 lots in this year's Printed and Manuscript African Americana, an annual sale conceived and tended by Wyatt Houston Day.

The letter, Day said, is remarkable for its content and the elegance of Carter's prose. He estimates its value at \$6,000 to \$8,000, but he said he wouldn't be surprised if it fetches \$10,000 to \$15,000 in the auction.

Writing about one battle, Carter described "the long to be remembered field of bloodshed and slaughter. ... There many a poor fell(ow) lost thear life for thear country and thear people."

"He writes beautifully," Day said, noting that misspellings reflect Carter's likely lack of formal schooling but do not dilute the writer's ability to express himself.

In addition, Carter's letter is the only known document in which an African-American soldier describes an important Civil War battle, Day said. Carter doesn't list facts or figures, but poignantly describes the effect of the battle on the soldiers. Other letters might have been written but have been lost, or they might still exist in attics and crannies across the country, but Day said this is the first he has found in 30 years.

"If I haven't seen something, it has to be pretty scarce," Day said.

He suspects Carter wrote other letters, but none has surfaced.

Nor is there a known photograph of Carter, his father, or of his brother, John Jr.

Janice Barnes, a historian in Jefferson County in which Madison is located, was not aware of Morgan Carter's letter, but he and his father and brother are well-documented in county historical records -- up to a point.

Morgan Carter was mustered out of the Army in Corpus Christi, Texas, and returned to Madison, where he worked for his father for some time, but then his trail vanishes.

Barnes said no one has been able to find evidence of a marriage, children or census records after the Civil War for Morgan Carter. John Jr. was a teacher in [Switzerland County](#) and later in Jefferson County, but is not known to have had children.

So it's not clear if there might be descendants somewhere in the country now.

It's not unusual, Day said, for publicity about an artifact or a document like Carter's letter to generate more information about it. Also, people might realize they have similar but unrelated treasures in their possession -- Day called it the "Antiques Roadshow" phenomenon, referring to the PBS series.

Sometimes, people simply don't realize they have something of value, he said.

And, he added, understanding of the value of African-American bits of history has gained in the past 25 to 30 years. Before that, there was more emphasis on African-American memorabilia, Day said, which tended to be artifacts that reflected white views of blacks.

Carter's letter is in good condition, written on "wove paper" in ink that has mostly held up. The paper and the ink are not as acidic as with some other

documents, and that has helped preserve the letter, Day said.

Still, it must be handled with respect. Day said he washes his hands well and sometimes wears cotton gloves before handling letters such as Carter's.

He said he would love to see a museum or institution win the auction for the letter, rather than see it go into private hands.

"I would not like it to go to a private collector. It would go underground again."

Barnes agreed. "I would love to see our local historical society get it. But right now, we're kind of strapped for cash."

Still, knowing the content of the letter is a boon to the society, which has been researching the [Carter family](#).

"It puts a little more blood and bones on the few facts we've been able to gather."

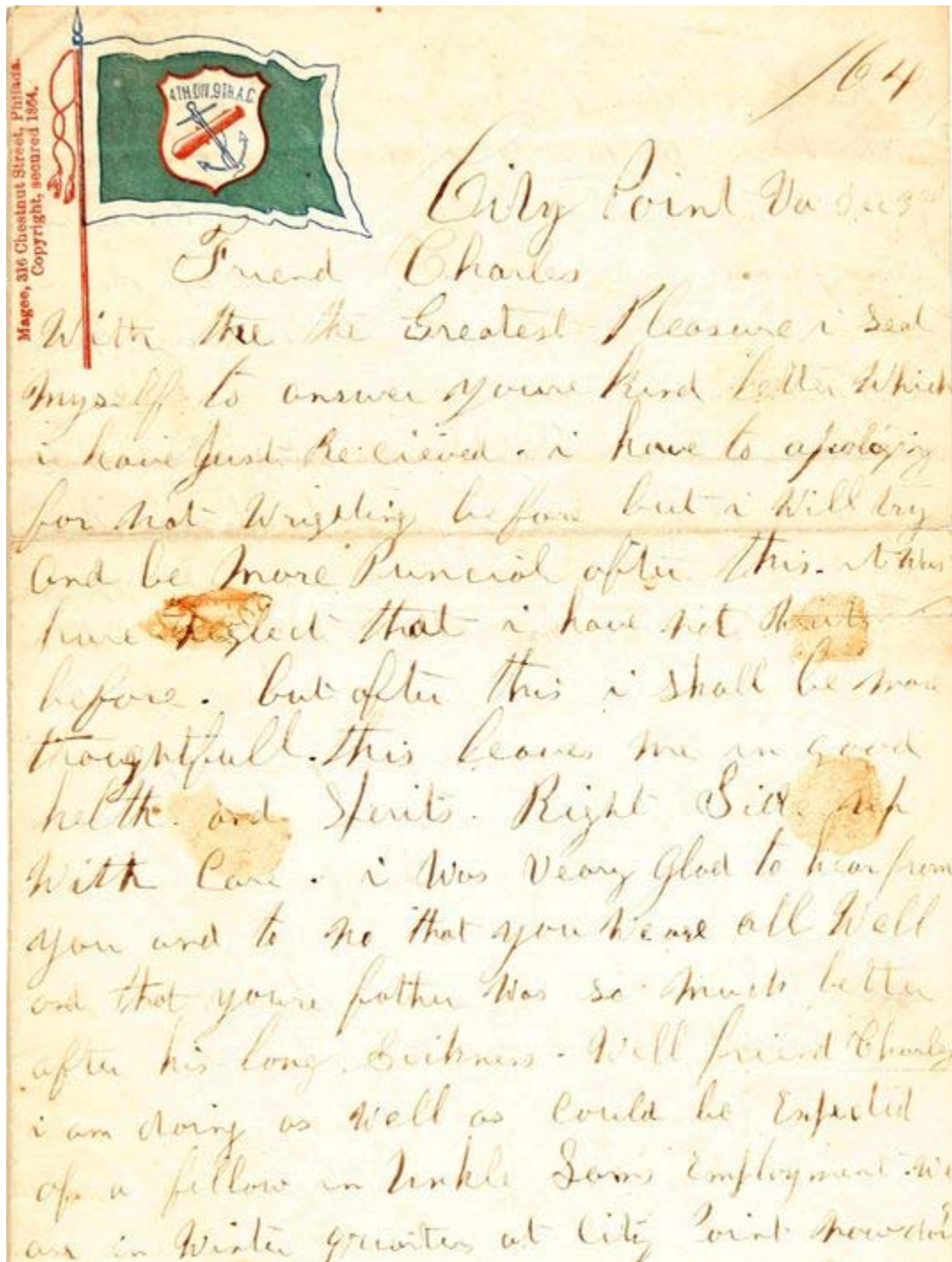
#### **Full transcript of Carter's letter**

"Well, friend Charles I am doing as well as could be expected of a fellow in Uncle Sam's employment. We are in winter quarters at City Point now, doing provost duty, which is quite agreeable after our Summer Campaign which has been quite severe on us at some times. But we are last at rest for the Winter. I have a splendid little house to myself with a fireplace in it and you can see that I am snug as you please. Only the recollection of home associations comes forcible to memory then I feel a little down hearted. But soon rally when I think on what principal I am fighting which is for the benefit of my race. I have been in a good many near close place but by the Lord's will I have escaped with life. So far I have been wounded twice, once by a piece of shell on the long to be remembered field of bloodshed and slaughter on the 31st of July (the Stoneman Raid) There many a poor fell[ow] lost thear life for thear country and thear people. But poore fellows they died a noble death and in this cause if it is necessary I will give up my life most willingly to benefit the Colored Race. You kno yourself that we have been trampled under the white man's heal for years and now we have a choice to elevate our selfs and our race and what little I can do toward it I will do so most willingly. If I should die before I receive the benefit of it I will have the consolation of nowing that the generations to come will receive the blessing of it. And I think it the duty of all the men of our race to do what they can. Well friend Charley I was very glad to here the citizens of Madison had such a good time in honor of Uncle Abe's reelection. You must remember my love to your father and mother and the rest of the family and to all enquiring friends. Will Forten and the rest of the boys send their love and respect to all as it is near time to put lights out in camp. I will say Good Night./ I remain your friend Morgan W. Carter. Direct to Sgt. Morgan W. Carter, Company G, 28th U.S. Cold. Troops, [City Point, Virginia](#). Care colonel Russell."

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Letter of Sgt. Morgan W. Carter, Company G, 28th U.S. Cold. Troops, City Point, Virginia.  
Written December 3, 1864. (Re: the Stoneman Raid, 31st of July).

“So far I have been wounded twice, once by a piece of shell on the long to be remembered field of bloodshed and slaughter on the 31st of July (the Stoneman Raid) There many a poor fell[ow] lost their life for their country and their people. But poor fellows they died a noble death and in this cause if it is necessary I will give up my life most willingly to benefit the Colored Race. You know yourself that we have been trampled under the white man's heel for years and now we have a choice to elevate our selves and our race and what little I can do toward it I will do so most willingly. If I should die before I receive the benefit of it I will have the consolation of knowing that the generations to come will receive the blessing of it”





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August 15, 1864

## **STONEMAN'S RAID.; The Raid and Capture of Gen. Stoneman--The Campaign at Atlanta--Tennessee Copperheads and the Chicago Convention. SHERMAN WAITING. HOOD'S SUPPLIES. REBEL PRISONERS. REBEL COURIER CAPTURED. CHICAGO CONVENTION. More of the Stoneman Raid. Shelling a Blockade-Runner.**

Special Correspondence of the Chicago Evening Journal.

NASHVILLE, Monday, Aug. 9, 1864.

That Gen. STONEMAN, with a portion of his command, has been captured, is now a certainty, Whether those who escaped Gen. IVERSON will succeed in reaching our lines or not, is yet problematical The public do not now understand the nature of the late cavalry raids, and therefore I will give the Explanation. On the 26th ult., two expeditions were started, one under STONEMAN direct, and the other under Gen. ED. MCCOOK, the former consisting of 1,300 and the latter of 3,200 men; the former to strike directly at Macon, and the latter to move directly in a circle around Atlanta, and as near to the city as possible, in order to deceive HOOD and prevent from sending forces out to attack STONE-

The adventures of Gen. MCCOOK are already known to you, and need not be repeated; and I have only to add, that all but 500 of his command has returned; so that, after all, the loss was comparatively trifling, while the damage done to the rebels was irreparable.

Gen. STONEMAN was directed to strike the Macon road at or near Forsyth, and to follow it up to Macon, and thence take such a direction as he chose, toward Milledgeville, if he believed it practicable.

At Forsyth, a percussion cap manufactory was destroyed, and several bridges burned in the vicinity; and we hear it upon pretty reliable authority that he reached Macon, and destroyed the bridge at that place, together with nine or ten locomotives; but of this, I am not positive.

However, I know this much, that great damage was inflicted upon the rebels by the destruction of railroads and other property.

Of the exact place at which STONEMAN was taken, I am not informed; but he is a prisoner without

doubt, together with five hundred, at least, of his command.

Gen. SHERMAN is quietly awaiting events, though he is by no means inactive. He is drawing his lines closely around the beleaguered city, which is now without railroad communication in any direction. "Billey," as Gen. SHERMAN is called by his troops, confidently believes he can compel HOOD to take the offensive again, and win another "victory" like those of the 20th, 22d and 28th. I know the situation pretty [???]vell, and believe he will succeed. HOOD cannot retreat without leaving everything behind or destroying them; and If he were to attempt to leave, he would immediately find his flank and rear annoyed by our cavalry and infantry, who would be able to move as rapidly and as lightly as the fugitives can.

Had JOHNSTON been retained in command, or had HOOD followed up the policy of that officer, an orderly retreat, in which all valuable materials could have been carried off, would have been possible.

But the late disasters -- pardon me, "victories" -- by HOOD, have put a decidedly different aspect upon affairs. The trumps are all in SHERMAN'S hands, and he is bound to play for all that is on the board, and he will win.

I know that HOOD's supplies are getting very short, and all additions to his stores must be made by wagon trains. The loss of five hundred wagons must be seriously felt just now, and the constant raids of our cavalry, even with the limited means at the command of HOOD, very dangerous. The extremities to which the rebels are rapidly being reduced by the vigilance of our cavalry, is well known to SHERMAN; he relies generally upon it to compel HOOD to assume the offensive.

I predict that HOOD will next attempt to turn our right wing, and that the attempt will be made in a few days. Everything, however, is fully prepared for his reception; indeed, the bloody repulses already suffered will be eclipsed If the rebel General really makes a serious effort to drive back our lines, and recover possession of the railroad leading from Atlanta.

Today is Tuesday, and since Sunday morning 493 rebel prisoners and 161 rebel deserters have passed through this place en route for the North. The latter will be released on condition of taking the amnesty oath. The work of these three days will serve to illustrate that of nearly all others.

A rebel courier was captured, near Atlanta a few days since. Of the contents of his dispatches I know [???]e; but there is one part which has been made public: the "victories" claimed by Hood are, privately, acknowledged as terrible defeats; and he states that he is unable to make an impression upon our lines. He says: "My losses have been heavy, indeed."

The Copperheads in this vicinity are preparing to [???]end the Chicago Convention in great numbers, though they do not intend to ask a seat. They say that Tennessee is out of the Union; that it seceded, which it had a perfect right to do; and that, therefore, they are not citizens of the United States, but of the Confederate States; but, being non-combatants, they intend to visit their Northern friends as preliminary to a treaty of amity, when the Copperheads get into power, and when the independence of the Southern Confederacy shall have been acknowledged by a peace President.  
HANDEL.

LETTER FROM LIEUT. -- COL. SMITH.

MARIETTA, Ga., Wednesday, Aug. 3, 1864.

I have occasion to thank God that I am enabled to write you from this point, or even to write at all, and am not a prisoner with those damnable rebels. I cannot go into particulars of our late raid. Suffice it to say that we got to Macon, and, after a pretty hard fight there, destroyed three trains and a large amount of Quartermaster and commissary stores, and several miles of railroad track between Macon and Milledgeville. We started back at 4 o'clock in the afternoon, last Saturday, and at dark met a skirmishing force of the enemy that had been sent after us, and skirmished with them all night. At daylight we again started, and had not proceeded two miles until we found the enemy in large force in our front and on each flank, and after we had fought them stubbornly for three hours, we found that the force that was at Macon the day before were coming directly in our rear, and in less than thirty minutes we were completely surrounded -- our force numbering about 1,900 men; the enemy's 6,000. We fought them, however, until the evening, when Gen. STONEMAN told me it was no use to have the men slaughtered, and that he must surrender, but that any of us who felt like it might cut our way out if we thought we could. I got the Kentucky brigade, and, upon consultation with Col. ADAMS, we determined to make the attempt, and went out. A large number followed, so that out of the fifteen hundred men left at the time, (four hundred had been killed, wounded and captured during the day.) at least eleven hundred escaped. We were vigorously pursued and fought our way almost all the way and arrived here to-day, after traveling about one hundred and fifty miles to keep clear of points where the enemy had forces and crossing the Chattahoochee some twenty miles above here -- swimming it. Our raid was not altogether a failure, as we did a great deal of damage. The General and about one-half of the officers were captured, with our two cannon and about 500 men, captured, killed and wounded. After we left. Col. CAPRON's brigade lost very heavily -- I cannot say how many. I presume the papers will pitch into Gen. STONEMAN. Well, let them pitch in. It started with too few men to go so far from home; but no man under heaven could have done better with what he had, I never have endured such hardships as on this trip. Not a night during the time did I sleep more than an hour, and that on the road, with my bridler in my hand. My horse had his saddle off only twice during the trip. I never was in such danger, with so little hope of achieving anything by my death, and I hope I may never be again. Men were killed by the bursting of shell, and blown all to pieces within three feet of me, and yet I was not harmed. To-morrow morning we leave here for the [???]ren[???]. R.W. SMITH.

From the Washington Chronicle.

As the public attention is now directed to our fleet at or near Mobile, the following extract from a private letter of a young man on board the United States steamer Galena, containing some interesting particulars of the destruction of the blockade -- runner at Mobile, reported to the Navy Department a few weeks since by Admiral FAHRAGUT, and an artillery duel with Fort Morgan, may not be without interest. It will be seen that the "historic Galena," formerly an iron-clad, which took such a prominent part in the memorable attack on Fort Darling, about two years ago, at which time the Confederate historian says the "sound of the guns was heard in the streets of Richmond,"

maintains her distinguished reputation:

\* \* \* \* \* The morning we came from Pen[??]cola we saw a number of our gunboats firing at some object on the beach. When we got nearer we discovered that it was a large Steamer, which had been [??]ed ashore. She lay within half a mile of Fort Morgan, and was therefore entirely under the protection of its guns. We reported to the Admiral, and got permission to go into the melee. We drew the least water of any of the large vessels, and, therefore, were enabled to go in nearer than any of them. We went within one a half miles and opened fire on the steamer, The first shot fell short, but the next went right through her. Just then we saw a puff of smoke from the fort, and directly I heard my first rebel shell whistling overhead. I ducked my head, as all the others did. The captain sang out, "Dodge them, but do not run." After that came pretty often, and we got so used to them that we did not care for them. We continued to fire on the, steamer 'till night, when we returned to the fleet. The Admiral complimented us highly for remaining under fire as long as we did. We fired sixty-two shots during the afternoon.

The next morning we went in and fired eighteen more at her, but got no reply from the fort. That night we got up an expedition to go in and burn her. We had two small steamers and three boats. But fortune was against us. The rudder of one steamer broke, and we got separated, and drifted about till morning, and then returned to the ship quite crest-fallen.

The next morning we ran in and commenced the programme by firing at the fort (Morgan.) We must have astonished the rebels, as they could have had no notion that any of our guns could throw shot into the fort. We landed seven in the fort, firing at the distance of three miles, and have heard nothing from it since.

Night before last three boats from the flag-ship went in and set the rebel steamer on fire, and burned her up; so that bone of contention is gone. She must have been a valuable ship, as she was new, and this was her first trip.