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Article Summary: Theophilus Gould Steward was an industrious, learned black man who served 50 years as a transforming and uplifting member of the clergy. Sixteen of those years were in the 25th United States Colored Infantry. As an author of eight books and activist in promoting education among the military and while stationed in the Philippines, he mastered four languages and became an accomplished orator as well. He represented the best of the African-American elite of his time.

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Photographs / Images: Chaplain T G Steward

Theophilus G. Steward, Intellectual Chaplain, 25th US Colored Infantry

By William Seraile

Transforming, uplifting, and stimulating their people to seek moral regeneration and character building was an objective of late 19th century African-American scholars who embraced the "talented tenth" philosophy of the Reverend Alexander Crummell.¹ Steward accepted this philosophy as his personal motto. Born on April 17, 1843, to James and Rebecca Steward, Theophilus grew up in Gouldtown, a southern New Jersey community that dated to pre-Revolutionary War days.

Sixteen of his 50 years in the clergy were devoted to a chaplaincy in the 25th United States Colored Infantry. With the exception of a few years in the Philippines, most of his official duties were conducted on the western plains, particularly in Montana and at Fort Niobrara, Nebraska (1902-1906). Despite his theological duties, Theophilus was a prolific writer for the nation's African-American press as well as for the popular *Harper's Weekly* and *The Independent*. As an intellectual and social activist, he had close personal friendships with Frederick Douglass; Blanche K. Bruce, Reconstruction senator from Mississippi; and John R. Lynch, former Mississippi state representative. An outdoorsman, Steward enjoyed hunting and fishing in Montana and Nebraska.²

An examination of his life is merited because he represented the best of the African-American elite of the past century. While his interests ranged from Republican Party politics to college teaching, this paper will highlight his role as a chaplain in the United States Army from 1891 to 1907.

The origin of his family dates to the union of Elizabeth Adams, granddaughter of Lord John Fenwick, a major in Oliver Cromwell's army, and Gould, a man of African descent. In 1683 19-year-old Elizabeth was denied 500 acres of land in Cumberland County, New Jersey, because she failed,

according to her grandfather, “to see her abominable transgression against [God], me and her good father.” Young Elizabeth refused to repent her love for Gould, who “hath been ye ruin of her.” Although this union had a strained beginning, Steward was proud that the family name of Gould had never been smeared “in the court annals . . . by crime, or by a drunkard or a pauper.” Although many of Elizabeth’s and Gould’s descendants were poor, Steward exulted in the knowledge that “we were not children of broken down ‘daddies.’”³

Piety, frugality, and “the development of the social and spiritual nature” dominated Steward’s early years and were values that he stressed to others.⁴ James, his father, was instrumental in shaping his character. Helping to clear a swamp in 1858, Steward, then 15, complained. A few days later his father sent him to sea as a waiter. Six miserable days later, the thoroughly seasick youngster gladly returned to swamp chores. A year later, forgetting his unpleasant experience, Steward returned to sea. He was in the United States when the John Brown raid “created such excitement that he was obliged . . . in Annapolis to take passage north on a vessel that had been cleared from a point in the south.”⁵

Since the family stressed social and spiritual development, it was not surprising that Theophilus at the age of 19 chose a theological calling. As reported in his autobiography, Steward credited the Reverend Joseph H. Smith for making him think seriously about religion. “I must preach or become a castaway,” he wrote. Steward’s decision was quickly reached. “I was reading ‘Baxter’s Saints Rest’ [when] the clear light of pardon and acceptance came to me on a bright moonlight night.” He concluded, “I knew then . . . that God owned me as His child.”⁶

Steward entered his chosen profession with dedication as he pastored churches throughout the eastern United States. In 1864 the newly-ordained African Methodist Episcopal clergyman preached his first sermon in South Camden, New Jersey. Next he moved to Charleston, South Carolina, where he met his future wife, Elizabeth Gadsden, whom he married in 1866. Other callings brought the couple to Marion, South Carolina, where he was employed as a teacher by the Freedmen’s Bureau. While in Marion, and later in Georgia, he

performed missionary work. During the 1870s he preached in Delaware and pastored Brooklyn's famed Bridge Street Church. In 1883 Steward took over Philadelphia's Union African Methodist Episcopal Church, which he regarded "as the supreme test of my life" after the Reverend J. W. Beckett, a popular minister, was assigned elsewhere. Steward's description of the church building as "unsightly" later led to some difficulty with his new congregation.⁷

Not satisfied with his rapidly growing reputation as an extraordinary preacher, Steward, from 1873 to 1884, embarked on a literary career that soon added to his fame as an eloquent minister. During the years 1871 to 1873, while in Wilmington, Delaware, Steward learned French. Emulating his grandmother, who had migrated to Haiti in 1824, Steward in 1873 left for the Caribbean island. His brief stay was disappointing. His French was inadequate, his health was generally poor, and his experience with freedmen in South Carolina proved of no value to him.⁸

After returning to the United States and serving as a minister in Delaware and Brooklyn, Steward, at the age of 34, began his formal education. "I had never attended even a graded school," he wrote, nor high school, nor previously sought a college education. Nevertheless, Steward enrolled in the Protestant Episcopal Church's Divinity School in Philadelphia in 1877. "I entered the Hebrew class," he wrote, "without informing either professor or student that I had studied it before although at [that] time . . . I held a certificate of proficiency from an eccentric Hebrew author and teacher."⁹ He never explained the reason for his deception, but it probably resulted from a desire to compete with more formally trained classmates.

His decision to further his education despite the odds and risks reveals the tenacious side of his character. He believed in bettering himself. He also believed that leaders should take stands. For example, in 1882, while a pastor in Wilmington, he spoke out against the inadequacies of the city's colored schools.¹⁰

Steward capitalized on his formal and informal education to write on subjects of broad interest to him. During the mid-1870s he wrote a series of articles which he described, perhaps with some exaggeration, as "the first broad

sociological papers written with respect to the colored people of this country. They were quoted to some extent." A decade later, in 1885, he published his first theological work, an 85-page study entitled *Death, Hades and the Resurrection*. In the same year he published *Genesis Re-read* in which he dispassionately evaluated the argument between evolutionists and creationists.¹¹

While Steward would write other theological and sociological tracts, his life changed considerably in 1891 when he was appointed a chaplain in the 25th US Colored Infantry by President Benjamin Harrison. Although he did not seek the appointment, he had the staunch support of ministers and good friends such as Frederick Douglass, Blanche K. Bruce, John R. Lynch, and Postmaster General John Wanamaker, who all viewed him as a man of culture and intelligence.¹² His credentials for the position were excellent. In addition to being an outstanding minister, he was a good Republican who served as a Reconstruction registrar and judge of elections in Georgia, and "wrote the platform upon which the Republican Party of [Georgia] was organized" in 1868. From 1871 to 1873 he was manager of Delaware's state central committee and canvassed the state for President Ulysses S. Grant's reelection.¹³

Military service was not eschewed by his family. Some of his ancestors served in the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. Although hesitant about leaving the ministry, Steward knew that the chaplaincy would leave him "fairly situated for the rest of [his] days." The salary was \$1,500 yearly (then a generous sum) plus a 10 percent increase every five years. Retirees received a salary of 75 percent of income at time of retirement. He decided to accept the offer. Steward's appointment, effective July 21, 1891, received favorable coverage from the African-American press.¹⁴

Chaplain Steward arrived at Fort Missoula, Montana, on August 24. He was provided with kind assistance from the regimental commander, Colonel George L. Andrews, and his wife who invited him to be their guest until his personal quarters were ready. Mrs. Andrews took him to nearby Missoula, where he met the town's merchants. At all times, Steward and his family were well treated by other officers and their families.¹⁵

While most of Missoula's merchants respected Steward for his gentlemanly behavior, one did refuse him service. On July 25, 1894, Steward went to Missoula's Florence Hotel to visit Chaplain J. Newton Ritner. Although Ritner, a white man, was a guest in the hotel, the management refused to serve Steward in the dining room. Incensed by the mistreatment, Steward informed *The Helena Journal* and *The Missoulian* that he had dined in good hotels throughout New England and elsewhere in Montana without incident. He claimed that cultivated African-Americans were superior to others "in conversational ability and refinement." The matter was resolved when the proprietor, fearing a lawsuit or the declaration of his premises off-limits to the military, apologized in writing to Steward.¹⁶

Although he was nearly 50 years of age, Steward enjoyed life in Montana with its abundant opportunities for hunting and fishing. During his chaplaincy a 1,900-mile bicycle trip was made by the 25th Infantry Bicycle Corps from Fort Missoula to St. Louis for the purpose of testing bicycles for military use. Led by 2nd Lt. James A. Moss, the soldiers left the fort on June 14, 1897, and passed through Wyoming and the southwestern corner of South Dakota before reaching Nebraska. The cyclists camped at Crawford near Fort Robinson¹⁷ and then struggled through the Sandhills of Nebraska, "the men riding as much as possible but walking the greater part of the time The corps passed through Grand Island, Lincoln, and Table Rock in Nebraska and out of that state into Missouri on July 17 at Rulo."¹⁸

Mindful of his official duties, Steward sought every advantage at Fort Missoula to be a "fisherman among men." At the beginning of his chaplaincy he asked fellow AME ministers "to pray for me I go with the regular army . . . as a representative of the Lord Jesus Christ." Later, as he adjusted to Army life, he recognized that there were many ways to "fish" for men. He declared to the *Christian Recorder* that his ability to "ride a horse, drive mules, shoot a bird on the wing, walk long distances, and go on a rifle range and hit the bull's eye at a distance of a thousand yards" helped him with the enlisted men. Even his garden received their praise. "All this helps to preach Christ," he noted. "Work, work, work, is the special gift by which the chaplain succeeds," Steward concluded.¹⁹

Steward was a well prepared theologian who could read and speak Greek and Hebrew. Indeed, he was well read in the classics. The Reverend Dr. Goodwin, a former professor of Steward, noted in 1880 that the chaplain was one of the few students who had managed to “thoroughly master . . . the subjects and the systems of Christian theology.”²⁰

Steward’s knowledge of and interest in theology, education, and social issues provided him with topics for his writing. Throughout the 1890s he wrote essays for the *Christian Recorder* and other publications. For example, in 1891 he compared the chaplaincy to some of the pastorates he had held. “The government paymaster always has the [chaplain’s] money ready for him and his congregation never gets restless about when conference is to meet, and no picayunish preacher can go around seeking to corrupt his officary,” he wrote. On another summation, he proclaimed the chaplaincy as sacred as the office of bishop because it required “purity of life and as much tact.”²¹

A prolific writer, Steward coped with the dreary Montana autumn by writing a series of essays on “Preaching the Gospel” for the *Christian Recorder*. In these essays Steward called upon clergymen to imitate the relationship that existed between enlisted men and officers. He implored his fellow ministers to avoid “vulgarisms in the pulpit” by eschewing “bad English . . . handkerchief mopping, merciless hawking and spitting or wiping the nose and mouth with the palm of the hand.” He urged ministers to be possessors “of a solid character and a good reputation” as well as to “exalt the scriptures” because that was the “secret of power.”²²

Chaplain Steward was enamored of military life. Writing in early 1892, Steward informed the *New York Age* that more men of color were needed as officers in the regular Army. Noting that with the exception of three chaplains and two second lieutenants, nearly all of the 150 officers of the colored regiments were white, Steward exclaimed, “It has often been a surprise to me why more young colored men do not seek to enter the Regular Army as officers.” He believed that military life offered opportunities for advancement and was “decidedly superior to the external barbering and waiting and coaching [coachmen] of Eastern cities; infinitely better than concerting, jubilee singing, and jim crowing.” Praising the Army’s educa-

tional program, Steward observed, "Any soldier [who could attend school from November 1 to May 1] has a better opportunity to secure education than . . . thousands of young men in New York, much better than I enjoyed in my youth."²³

Steward's favored position in the military clouded the discrimination faced by the average recruit. His unstinting praise of opportunities there was challenged by T. Thomas Fortune, editor of the *Age*. The militant editor agreed with a contributor that the Army was "the last place where Afro-Americans should seek to distinguish themselves; because . . . they gain neither glory, nor wealth, while placing their lives at the service of a government which neither appreciates their patriotism nor rewards them as it does others for their sacrifices." The problem, as emphasized by the critic, was that the United States Military Academy was "the rankest charity cesspool of snobbery and colorphobia, outside the University of Virginia, in the Republic."²⁴

As an insider in the military, Steward often observed the effect liquor had on men. A strong supporter of temperance, he informed *Harper's Weekly* that the recent designation of the canteen as the post exchange, might be indicative of a desire by the military to eliminate beer and wine from the soldiers' midst.²⁵

Steward's presence in the military was significant as a role model. For example, writing in 1892, Chaplain Allen Allensworth of the 24th Colored Infantry informed the *Christian Recorder* that Steward made no mistake in entering the Army: "Your church needed just such a man to represent it in the army [for] . . . you have but little idea how much good for the race and cause of Christ, he can and is doing where he is, as chaplain."²⁶

Racial concerns were indeed important to Steward. In 1891, fearing that African-Americans would be left out of the Chicago World's Fair, Steward informed the *New York Tribune* that his people "could present a respectable exhibit in educational and literary work and some creditable scientific and artistic work."²⁷ In June 1893, while passing through Philadelphia after the death of his son, James, Steward informed delegates at a preachers' meeting that there should not be agitation on race notions. Speaking in a tone that was popular with the Tuskegee following of Booker T.

Washington, Steward stressed that the color line would be eliminated whenever race members sought to make and sustain themselves as equals of the best. This view was vigorously challenged by dissenting voices. Steward slowly alerted his view as the rise of lynching, jim crowism, and disfranchisement throughout the 1890s convinced him by 1898 that the "English and American white men are ever against the elevation of others. They corrupt, deprave and degrade wherever they go...because they have so many bad men among them, and their bad men are so bad."²⁸

Steward's chaplaincy in Montana afforded him opportunities to observe American Indians. In 1893, while on a two-week hunting trip, he visited a reservation where 2,000 people lived. "Many of [them] are badly mixed with white blood," he wrote. In harsh tones, considering that many in his family were capable of passing for Europeans, Steward commented, "No people are too filthy for the white man to mingle with. Instead of improving by reason of their contact with the whites, the Indians...have been immeasurably degraded."²⁹ Seeing that these "white" Indians were bigger and stronger than the "red" Indians, Steward concluded that there was no scientific proof that the mixed bloods were genetically inferior. Interesting as the "white" Indians were, he was later intrigued by the presence of a woman who appeared to belong more on the grasslands of Africa than on a reservation in Montana. "Among the Flatheads," he observed, "is a young African woman fully Indianized, speaking the language of the Indians and wearing their dress." Steward was unable to speak with her as his train was leaving the area. Adding to his view that mixed breeds were stronger or more motivated, he noted that this African-Indian "was quicker in motion and brighter in expression than any of her sisters."³⁰

Army experience helped Steward to evaluate mortality figures from the War Department, which in early 1897 published a report indicating that "the Negro soldiers are the healthiest class in the entire enrollment." Steward informed the *Christian Recorder* that the report repudiated an 1889 Army Surgeon General's report that "the death rate of a people of African descent is always higher than that of whites living in the same settlements." Steward urged his race, handicapped by the enticements of urban life, to cease living undisciplined

lives. "If all the colored people of the cities," he wrote, "could be put under military discipline the death rate would decrease fully fifty per cent."³¹

In addition to his chaplain's duties and writing assignments for the nation's African-American press, Steward provided lectures for the women near Fort Missoula and corrected manuscripts and poems for grammar an style.³²

Steward's enjoyment of western solitude was abruptly interrupted in 1898 with the sinking of the battleship *Maine* in Havana harbor. The quick declaration of war sent Steward and thousands of soldiers off the western plains, and civilians off farms and out of urban centers to uphold American honor. America's imperialistic venture was heatedly debated by editors, including the African-American ones.³³

Steward, who did not accompany his regiment to Cuba, was detached for recruiting purposes and encountered firsthand American racism. While enroute to Florida the 25th United States Colored Infantry was met with hostility. According to Steward after they left Montana on Easter Sunday, April 10, "The demonstrations were very hearty until we had passed Terre Haute, Indiana, but soon after passing this place, at 10 p.m., we were in Kentucky, and as daylight came upon us we realized that we had crossed the line that divided the world." In Nashville, Steward and his family were not permitted to use the "railroad dining saloon" to "eat with the other officers of the regiment under a Southern sky." Despite his prior Southern experiences, Steward mistakenly believed that soldiers defending their country would be given special privileges. With some bitterness he noted, "A glorious dilemma that will be for the Cuban Negro, to usher him into the condition of the American Negro." At Chattanooga, the regiment had to travel to Florida by jim crow railroad car. As reported by the *Nation*, the *Key West Herald* "had warned the Government not to let them come [because] their presence would endanger the peace." Peace was disturbed as members of the regiment had violent encounters in Tampa with both white civilians and soldiers.³⁴

After completing a temporary recruiting assignment, Steward sought to join his regiment in Cuba, but it had been transferred to Montauk Point, Long Island, where it left for Fort Logan, Colorado and then for the Philippines. Mean-

while, Chaplain Steward was traveling to Florida. From Chickamauga Park, Georgia, Steward wrote in May 1898 that war in Cuba might not exceed a naval blockade or it might be "a great and prolonged war." Certain," he added, "it is that it is much cheaper to do the right than the wrong thing. Had our nation walked in the highway of holiness, war would not now come nigh her."³⁵ Steward was referring to a book of his published in 1888. In *The End of the World*, he condemned whites for misrepresenting Christianity. He predicted that "God shall scatter the fierce nations who delight in war."³⁶ Despite this apocalyptic message, Steward saw the war as a divine mission that would "greatly help the American colored man of the South, and result in the further clearing of the national atmosphere."³⁷ He was pleased that over 100 African-Americans had been commissioned to serve in the volunteer Army.³⁸

While the 25th was off to the Philippines, Steward in 1899 was pursuing intellectual goals. As a member of the prestigious American Negro Academy, he presented to members a scholarly paper.³⁹ Instead of using his leave time as a holiday, Steward continued to work for the Army. On January 20, 1899, he informed the Adjutant General's Office that he was spending his two months leave "in the interest of the army." As a firm believer in military training, Steward lectured on the subject on January 24 in Philadelphia.⁴⁰

In 1899 he was provided with the opportunity to write a major history of the colored regiments. Bishop Benjamin W. Arnett of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, an adviser to President William McKinley on African-American political appointments, used his influence to have Steward transferred from Colorado to Wilberforce University in Ohio, with which Bishop Arnett was affiliated. Politically astute, Arnett informed Secretary of War R. A. Alger that McKinley supported the proposal and that it should be done "in the interest of ten million people." The War Department considered Steward to be "very suitable . . . to write the proposed history," and approved of the project.⁴¹

Chaplain Steward arrived at Wilberforce on March 28 and promptly began to write. Fortunately for him, "no limit was fixed as to the character of the work or the time [he] should occupy in writing." In his words, "all details were left to my

judgment and conscience." A fast writer, Steward informed the War Department on May 2 that he had "thirty thousand words nearly ready for press." He notified his superiors at the end of May, "I have the work up to the landing of the troops in Cuba." Seven weeks later, he requested "the names and records of the colored men appointed from ranks in the Regular Army to commissions in the Volunteer Army." To this request, the assistant adjutant general replied, "The current work taxes the clerical force . . . making it impracticable to enter upon work of this character at the present time."⁴²

On September 14 Steward proudly informed Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin that the manuscript had been forwarded that day to a potential publisher. The book, he noted, was incomplete because he did not have the names of all the killed and wounded in the 24th Infantry as well as the names of all commissioned officers. He promised to forward that to the publisher once he received it from the War Department. Happy with his accomplishment, Steward wrote, "The book cannot fail to be of inestimable value to the colored people of the land and is, I flatter myself, a substantial contribution to the literature of the Hispano-American War."⁴³ Although Steward requested that he be permitted to remain in the country long enough to "assure the publication in such form as will be creditable to the army," the military ordered him on October 5 to proceed immediately to join his regiment in Manila.⁴⁴

After arriving in the islands, Chaplain Steward, despite his advancing years, traveled widely in the archipelago. He visited his son, Captain Frank R. Steward, 49th Infantry, United States Volunteers, and the provost judge of San Pablo.⁴⁵ The elder Steward spoke widely with educated Filipinos. Generally he found them better organized and educated than their African-American counterparts.⁴⁶

Despite his praise, he found many things disturbing about Filipino culture. He viewed labor as "the curse of the Orient." For the equivalent of ten cents in American currency, young girls were expected to roll "one thousand paper plagues . . . in cigarette factory."⁴⁷ He was particularly displeased with the colorphobia that he encountered. He warned that "a deep revulsion will set in as soon as the Filipinos come to understand what the word 'nigger' means."

Like W. E. B. Du Bois, he was concerned with the color question. In 1900 Chaplain Steward wrote, "The great color question is dividing the world. Just as it is wicked to be *black* in America, I fear the day will dawn when it will be wicked to be *white*." Sounding more like Marcus Garvey than Booker T. Washington, Steward noted that the excluded African-American, who had "been kicked, cuffed and shot out of the white race," belonged "with the age to come." In his analysis, he concluded that "the coming people are those of Asia and Africa."⁴⁸

As a chaplain with the rank of captain, Steward squarely faced the color question. When some white soldiers purposefully failed to salute him, he went to the major and "gave him a word of instruction, and that cured everybody." On another occasion, three white soldiers rode past Steward and "indulged in some vile cursing at [his] expense." After catching up to them, he "read them a lecture [and] reported the affair to their colonel."⁴⁹

Granted a three-month leave, Steward returned to Wilberforce in June 1901. On July 11 he requested permission to take his wife and sons to Manila. He wanted his wife to come if his stay was for only a few months and his sons if his assignment was for a year or more. His request was not granted. Manila faced a severe housing shortage, and conditions were not considered peaceful enough for officers' families.⁵⁰

After joining his regiment, Steward's inquiring mind analyzed Luzon's social customs. He wrote a series of essays for *The Colored American Magazine* about tobacco consumption among women, education, and changing courtship and marriage customs.⁵¹

As chaplain, Steward had a responsibility to establish schools in Iba, Zambales Province, on the island of Luzon. From November 1900 to January 21, 1901, he served as superintendent of schools. Among other things, Steward recommended that teachers stop smoking in classrooms; that more teachers and students learn English; and that rote memorization be eliminated. He could not comprehend why a people that appreciated refined Spanish music would memorize popular American music with lyrics such as "hello, ma honey, hello, my baby, hello my rag time gal."⁵²

Steward's tenure as school superintendent ended on January

21, 1902, when a civil commission act terminated military control over the archipelago's educational system. His last proposal was the recommendation of the establishment of an American style high school with emphasis on natural science and advanced mathematics. Steward urged the residents of Iba to establish a newspaper devoted to agriculture, forestry, education, politics, and social affairs. He suggested that local officials establish saw mills and rice hulling machines to diversify employment.⁵³

Having completed its assignment, the regiment was ordered home during the summer of 1902. Steward's contribution was appreciated by Captain J. D. Leitch, who informed Washington that the chaplain's services were "marked by energy, faithfulness and strict performance of duty [and had] been valuable to the Government in their results among the natives . . . as well as among the soldiers."⁵⁴

"Hail Columbia, Happy Land," a song that Steward disliked, greeted the returning soldiers. As he gazed upon San Francisco, Steward asked, "Ought Columbia with its race phobia [to] be in all respects a happy land to me?" Letting others decide that answer, he added, "I will say, however, that keenly sensible to the ills which my people have suffered here, I nevertheless appreciate the opportunities . . . which they have been thrown. They have been . . . *pitched* into a civilization stimulating to the highest development."⁵⁵

Steward found his subsequent assignment to Fort Niobrara, Nebraska, where the 25th Infantry arrived from the Philippines in late August of 1902, to be disappointing in at least one respect: "It was a dreary post; no woods near, no good hunting grounds compared to what we had found in Montana, and no fishing at all." Although there was occasional duck hunting, he used his leisure time for intellectual pursuits, including a translation from French to English of a treatise entitled "Military Education and Instruction."⁵⁶ In 1905 he published a booklet containing two of his addresses, "The Army as a Trained Force" and "Birth of the Republic."

While at Fort Niobrara, Steward actively promoted education for soldiers and their dependents. He organized in December 1902 afternoon and evening classes for enlisted men and in February 1906 a day school for children. Both were held in the post chapel. The chaplain also offered Spanish

classes and lectured on American history, civil government, and patriotism.⁵⁷ He was an active member of the YMCA chapter organized at the fort in October of 1902.

In later years Steward recalled his four years at Fort Niobrara with some affection: "Our relations with the townspeople of Valentine were friendly and we often shared the Christian hospitality of the good Methodist families. My wife Doctor [Susan] Steward was very useful among the ladies of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, her skill in music and knowledge of medicine making her of important service to them."⁵⁸ Mrs. Steward, a former choir director at Bridge Street Church, Brooklyn, New York, was also known at the fort for her musical ability. The December 24, 1905, Fort Niobrara Christmas service featured a choir of "ten enlisted men under the training of Dr. S. Maria Steward [which] rendered an excellent program of selections."⁵⁹ Unfortunately, 18-year-old Walter Hall Steward, the chaplain's youngest son, died at Fort Niobrara in September of 1904.⁶⁰

Relations between members of the 25th Infantry and their civilian neighbors seem to have been cordial for the most part. In 1902 "Emancipation Day was publicly celebrated in Valentine. . . for the first time" with Chaplain Steward and two Valentine citizens giving "short interesting addresses."⁶¹ Steward occasionally gave sermons in Valentine churches and spoke to such local groups as the WCTU. He wrote of a September 24, 1903, march of 109 miles from Fort Niobrara to Norfolk, Madison County: "All along the route baseball games were played by our teams with the local teams of the towns we passed through. The band also frequently gave concerts in the towns in the evenings."⁶²

Steward actively campaigned against soldier visits to several so-called "hog ranches" just off the military reservation. Gambling, drinking, and prostitution flourished at the Deer Park Hotel on the north side of the Niobrara River and at Casterline's Ranch about two miles east of the post.⁶³ At least 18 shooting and knifing incidents, resulting in four deaths, occurred at these locations during the period the 25th was stationed at Fort Niobrara.

In late 1905 county officials closed all houses near the post in which gambling was permitted and liquor was illegally sold. Steward reported with satisfaction in January of 1906 that the

closing of the two neighboring hog ranches resulted in increased attendance at Fort Niobrara religious services. As post chaplain, Steward was encouraged by the "many men in the command who much appreciate a chaplain's encouraging word and who are very amenable to good influences."⁶⁴ He had previously noted, "There is a positive religious element in the garrison and a large proportion may be spoken of as God-fearing men, with whom it is a pleasure to be in contact."⁶⁵

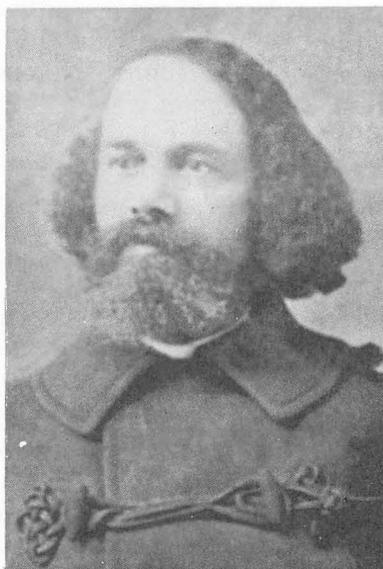
Always sought as a speaker, Steward requested leave in April 1904 to lecture on military training to the General Conference of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. In his request to go to Chicago for the May 13 lecture, Steward emphasized that conference members were "deeply interested in the welfare of their own people as well as that of the country." Steward attended the conference but a bad cold prevented him from addressing the delegates. Bishop Benjamin F. Lee read his paper, which praised the Army as the last refuge of discipline and as a place where African-Americans could achieve equality.⁶⁶

Steward had only to look at his own career to understand how insensitive the military was to African-American advancement. Hoping to take advantage of a congressional act of April 23, 1904, whereby chaplains could advance one grade to major, Steward requested that letters of recommendation be forwarded on his behalf. Despite excellent efficiency reports and his commanding officer's endorsement, the judge advocate general ruled that Steward's record did not indicate that he ever been "commended as worthy of special distinction for exceptional efficiency." Always a gentleman, Steward did not protest the decision. His son, Frank, a former captain and a lawyer in Pittsburgh, wrote to President Theodore Roosevelt without his father's consent or knowledge. Frank informed the president that only a few chaplains had been promoted although the law provided for as many as 15. The son informed Roosevelt that his father's school superintendency in the Philippines was not part of his official record. Frank requested that his father, "entirely fit and worthy regardless of race," be promoted. Possibly the denial of promotion was related to a 1903 letter the chaplain wrote describing Texas as a hostile assignment for colored soldiers. Later his fears were proved correct by the 1906 Brownsville incident. Three com-

panies of the 25th, transferred to Fort Brown, Texas, after the closing of Fort Niobrara that year, were dishonorably discharged by President Roosevelt for allegedly killing and maiming citizens.⁶⁷ Steward was a witness before the commission investigating the incident and its aftermath.⁶⁸

Steward, in declining health, left the Army at the mandatory retirement age of 64 on April 17, 1907, his birthday.⁶⁹ Chaplain Oscar J. W. Scott was his replacement with the 25th Infantry.⁷⁰ To his concerned friends Steward commented, "I am very busy, have work enough for three men today and while strength lasts I shall continue to work with my might."⁷¹

The next 17 years were spent at Wilberforce University, where he taught Spanish, Biblical theology, Christian sociology, elocution, and history. He developed the history program which had consisted only of a few "grade school" type courses when he arrived in 1907. Steward was the university's vice-president from 1908-1918. He and others fought hard to rescue the college department "from its subordinate position and [brought] it into the commanding sphere its scholastic standing deserved."⁷² The college class previously had been dominated by the preparatory and normal students to the extent that the preparatory students usually gave the



Chaplain T. G. Steward

class oration at commencement. Steward and his allies managed to organize a separate commencement for the college students. He also helped to establish the university's first debating club.⁷³

Despite his busy teaching and administrative career, Steward managed to send essays to the *Christian Recorder*. For example, in 1906 he denounced white American Christians for materialism and for diluting the Bible with constant "correcting, revising and editing." He asked rhetorically, "Who is to maintain Christianity in this country if not the Negro?" Whites were guilty of fearing the law not God.⁷⁴

In May 1907 Steward proposed that a thorough history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church be written. He suggested that a bishop be given full pay for four or more years to research and write the history in time for the 1916 Centennial General Conference. William J. Laws, president of Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas, nominated the retired chaplain to write it. Quinn noted that Steward was a scholar who "ranks with the greatest writers of the age." His selection, Quinn argued, "would crown our church with historic glory; to fail historic death." However, support for Steward did not materialize. The Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom argued that Steward should not be considered since he had recently retired from the military. Thus, Ransom concluded, "I do not at this time urge his claims." No one else urged Steward's candidacy and other names were suggested by readers.⁷⁵

Steward and his wife, Dr. Susan McKinney Steward, traveled to Europe in 1909 and 1911. The first trip was for pleasure while the second allowed his wife to present a paper at the Universal Race Congress in London. Typically his autobiographical writings emphasized his thoughts, comments, and observations.⁷⁶

Although the military overlooked him in 1904 for promotion to major, Steward, in retirement, considered himself a member of the Army. He told the *Christian Recorder* that he did not like being referred to as an ex-chaplain, since he had not "been dismissed from the army [nor] resigned." He retained his rank of captain and continued to inform the Adjutant General's office of his address, collect his pay, and live under Army regulations. "Indeed," he noted, "I expect to die in the Army."⁷⁷ Anticipating America's entry into

World War I, Steward, in the spring of 1916, wrote the War Department, "In case help is needed to recruit a large body of colored men for the army, I hereby tender my services for such work."⁷⁸

After the death of his wife in 1918,⁷⁹ Steward continued to teach at Wilberforce until January 11, 1924, when an acute attack of indigestion took his life. Following campus services with military honors, the remains of the 80-year-old clergyman-educator were transported to Gouldtown for burial.⁸⁰

The life of Theophilus Gould Steward was a rich and varied one. He achieved much in life despite the odds of color and caste. He mastered four languages, and wrote numerous essays and more than eight books. According to Reverdy C. Ransom, a prominent clergyman, Steward had "no superior" in oratory. He preached successfully to church people "who never believed it was possible they could see anything good, anything elevating in the Methodist church."⁸¹ Chaplain Steward represented the best of his race who sought to uplift the masses. His life fulfilled his personal motto: "Labor on till the close of the day."⁸²

NOTES

1. Alfred A. Moss Jr., *The American Negro Academy: Voice of the Talented Tenth* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 294, 298. Alexander Crummell and his disciple, W. E. B. Du Bois, believed that it was the moral responsibility of the few educated African-Americans (10 percent) to use their university degrees to uplift the masses of their people.

2. William Steward and T. G. Steward, *Gouldtown, A Very Remarkable Settlement of Ancient Date* (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott, 1913), p. 218; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914, Fifty Years in the Gospel Ministry*, with an introduction by the Reverend Reverdy C. Ransom (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1921); Frank L. Mather, *Who's Who of the Colored Race: A General Biographical Dictionary of Men and Women of African Descent* (Chicago: Frank L. Mather, 1915), p. 253.

3. T. G. Steward, *Gouldtown*, pp. 22, 49, 50, 95, 160-162.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 17.

5. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, foreword, p. x.

6. *Ibid.*, p. xi.

7. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 30, 65, 67, 78-83, 155, 201.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 148, 150.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 172, 181.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 146, 188; T. G. Steward, "Public Education in Delaware,"

Christian Recorder, December 7, 1882; Ronald L. Lewis, "Reverend T. G. Steward and the Education of Blacks in Reconstruction Delaware," *Delaware History*, 19 (Spring-Summer, 1981), pp. 156-178.

11. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 157, 223; T. G. Steward, *Genesis Reread of the Latest Conclusions of Physical Science Viewed in Their Relation to the Mosaic Record* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1885).

12. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, foreword, p. xv; John R. Lynch and B. K. Bruce to Secretary of War, March 21, 1891; John Wanamaker to Secretary of War, May 26, 1891; Reverend William H. Brown, *et. al.*, to Benjamin Harrison, June 30, 1891, in records of the Adjutant General's Office (hereafter AGO), file 4634ACP, 1891 (Washington DC: National Archives), Record Group 94.

13. T. G. Steward to John R. Lynch, Records of AGO.

14. T. G. Steward, *Gouldtown*, pp. 154-155; *Baltimore American*, August 13, 1891, as cited in *New York Times*, August 17, 1891, p. 3; *New York Age*, August 1, 1891, p. 1; *Christian Recorder* (Philadelphia), August 6, 1891, p. 5; *Army and Navy Journal*, July 25, 1891, p. 823.

15. T. G. Steward to John Wanamaker, October 8, 1891, Records of AGO.

16. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 283, 284, 286, 288, 289.

17. *Crawford Tribune*, July 19, 1897, quoted by Betty Loudon, ed., "Pioneer Pharmacist J. Walter Moyer's Notes on Crawford and Fort Robinson in the 1890s," *Nebraska History*, 58 (Spring 1977), p. 104.

18. *New York Times*, July 26, 1897. For a complete account of the Fort Missoula-St. Louis cycling trip, see Charles M. Dollar, "Putting the Army on Wheels: The Story of the Twenty-fifth Infantry Bicycle Corps," *Prologue*, 17 (Spring 1985), pp. 6-23.

19. *Christian Recorder*, August 27, 1891, p. 5; September 14, 1893, p. 1; August 12, 1897.

20. *Ibid.*, August 18, 1892, p. 1.

21. *Ibid.*, October 8, 1891, p. 1; August 12, 1897, p. 1.

22. *Ibid.*, November 26, 1891, p. 5; December 3, 1891, p. 3; December 10, 1891, p. 1; December 17, 1891, p. 2; December 24, 1891, p. 2.

23. *New York Age*, January 23, 1892, p. 4.

24. *Ibid.*, editorial, "Unjust Treatment of Afro-American Soldier," February 13, 1892, p. 2.

25. *Harper's Weekly*, April 9, 1892, pp. 350-351.

26. *Christian Recorder*, May 19, 1892, p. 1. The career of black Army chaplains Allen Allensworth, George G. Mullins, and Henry V. Plummer is discussed in Miller J. Stewart's "A Touch of Civilization: Culture and Education in the Frontier Army," *Nebraska History*, 65 (Summer 1984), pp. 257-282.

27. *New York Tribune*, February 12, 1891, p. 4.

28. *Christian Recorder*, June 22, 1893, p. 2; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 315, 344.

29. *Ibid.*, September 14, 1893, p. 1.

30. *Ibid.*, August 26, 1897, p. 1.

31. *Ibid.*, January 21, 1897, pp. 2-3; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 296-301.

32. T. G. Steward placed advertisements in the *Christian Recorder*. See p. 7 in the issues of November 5, 12, 26, December 3, 10, 17, 1896.

33. William B. Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers 1898-1902* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971).

34. *Independent* (New York), April 28, 1898, as quoted in Herbert Aptheker, *A Documentary History of the Negro People in the United States*, 4 vols. (New York: The Citadel Press, 1962-1974), Vol. 2 (1964), pp. 822-823; *Nation*, May 5, 1898, p. 335; T. G. Steward, *From 1846 to 1914*, pp. 303-304.

35. *Gazette* (Cleveland), May 28, 1898, as quoted in Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, pp. 25-26.

36. T. G. Steward, *The End of the World; or Clearing the Way for the Fullness of the Gentiles With an Exposition of Psalm 68:31 by James A. Handy* (Philadelphia: AME Church Book, 1888), pp. 121, 123, 135.

37. *Gazette*, May 28, 1898, as quoted in Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, p. 26.

38. Herschel V. Cashin, et al., *Under Fire With the Tenth U.S. Cavalry . . . Especially Showing the Valor and Heroism of the . . . Twenty-Fifth . . . As Demonstrated . . . Around Santiago, de Cuba, 1898, with an Introduction by Major General Joseph Wheeler* (Chicago: American Publishing House, 1899), pp. 140-142.

39. T. G. Steward, *How the Black St. Domingo Legion Saved the Patriot Army in the Siege of Savannah, 1779, Occasional Papers, No. 5* (Washington DC: American Negro Academy, 1899), pp. 1-15.

40. T. G. Steward to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, January 20, 1899, Records of AGO.

41. Henry C. Corbin to the Reverend Benjamin W. Arnett, March 1, 1899; Reverend Benjamin W. Arnett to Secretary of War R. A. Alger, March 12, 1899; T. G. Steward to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, March 28, 1899, Records of AGO.

42. T. G. Steward to Assistant Adjutant General, May 2, May 31, July 24, 1899; Assistant Adjutant General to T. G. Steward, July 29, 1899; Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, p. 307.

43. T. G. Steward to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, September 14, 1899. MS not published until 1904. T. G. Steward, *The Colored Regulars in the United States Army* (Philadelphia: AME Book Concern, 1904).

44. Special Order No. 232, Adjutant General's Office, October 5, 1899; telegram from AGO to Commanding General Department, San Francisco, California, October 5, 1899, in Records of AGO.

45. Frank R. Steward, graduate of Harvard College and Harvard Law School, practiced law in Pittsburg after being discharged from the military.

46. *Ohio Standard and Observer*, January 27, 1900, p. 2.

47. *Cleveland Gazette*, April 21, 1900, as quoted in Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, pp. 262-263.

48. *Christian Recorder*, May 17, 1900, pp. 1, 4; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 345, 348, 349.

49. *Cleveland Gazette*, April 21, 1900, as quoted in Gatewood, *Smoked Yankees*, pp. 263-264.

50. T. G. Steward to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin, July 11, 1901, Records of AGO, Major General Elwell S. Otis to Adjutant General Henry C. Corbin (cablegram), March 11, 1899; H. C. Corbin to Commander General, Department of the East (telegram), March 11, 1899; Otis to Corbin (cablegram), April 22, 1899; Corbin to Otis (cablegram), October 11, 1899, in *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain and Conditions Growing out of the Same . . . from April 15, 1898, to July 30, 1902*, 2 vols. (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1902), 2:930, 972, 1083, 1084.

51. T. G. Steward, "Two Years in Luzon," *The Colored American Magazine*, 4 (November 1901), pp. 8, 9; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 311-312, 315.

52. T. G. Steward, "Two Years in Luzon," *The Colored American Magazine*, 4 (January/February 1902), pp. 166-167.

53. *Ibid.*, 5 (August 1902), pp. 244-249.

54. J. D. Leitch to Adjutant General, January 10, 1903, Records of AGO.

55. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 353-354.

56. Adna R. Chaffee, Lieutenant General, Chief of Staff, War Department, to T. G. Steward, February 3, 1904, Records of AGO; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 354, 358.

57. *Monthly Reports of Chaplains, September, 1902-June, 1906*, Record Group 393, Records of US Army Continental Commands, 1821-1920, Fort Niobrara.

58. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, p. 356. Steward's first wife, Elizabeth Gadsden Steward, had died in 1893. Three years later, in 1896, the chaplain married Dr. Susan S. McKinney of Brooklyn, New York. *Ibid.*, pp. 280, 302-303.

59. *Army and Navy Journal*, January 6, 1906.

60. *Valentine Republican*, January 13, 1904.

61. *Valentine Democrat*, September 25, 1902.

62. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 356-357. For a description of garrison life while the 25th Infantry was stationed at Fort Niobrara, see Thomas R. Buecker, "Fort Niobrara, 1880-1906: Guardian of the Rosebud Sioux," *Nebraska History*, 65 (Fall 1984), pp. 319-322.

63. Buecker, "Fort Niobrara, 1880-1906," p. 312.

64. *Monthly Reports of Chaplains*, February 1904.

65. *Ibid.*, January 1903.

66. Bishop A. Grant, chairman of General Conference Commission, to T. G. Steward, April 8, 1904; T. G. Steward To Adjutant General, April 11, 1904; Records of AGO; *Christian Recorder*, June 30, 1904, p. 1.

67. M. D. Cronin, Captain and Adjutant, 25th Infantry to the military secretary, War Department, June 3, 1904; Frank R. Steward to President Theodore Roosevelt, July 1, 1904, Records of AGO; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, p. 359.

The Brownsville Incident caused a political flap for Roosevelt as numerous African-American editors attacked him. For example, see *New York Age*, February 21, 1907. *The New York Tribune*, August 26, 1906, p. 4, printed Steward's letters on the incident, delivered to the newspaper by his wife, who was visiting relatives in Brooklyn.

68. T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, p. 359.

69. *Army and Navy Journal*, April 20, 1907, p. 929.

70. *Ibid.*, April 27, 1907, p. 955.

71. Dr. W. T. Good, to whom it may concern, January 12, 1907; Special Orders No. 27 from J. F. Bell, Major General, Chief of Staff, War Department, February 1, 1907, Records of AGO; T. G. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 369-370.

72. A forceful personality, Steward at times publicly criticized Wilberforce. He complained that salaries were small and irregularly paid, and that teaching conditions were not ideal as "the University is frequently without cash or available credit. I need \$100 to fit up my History Room. Every other department needs help and boarding accommodations for students must be increased. Many of the classrooms are actually too small." *Christian Recorder*, September 5, 1907, p. 6; October 24, 1907, p. 3.

73. For Steward's proficiency in Spanish see comments of Professor Lucien Lequin, YWCA instructor, Dayton, Ohio, in *Dayton Daily* (1915), in letter of Steward to Adjutant General, January 11, 1915, Records of AGO; Annual Catalogue, Wilberforce University, Ohio, 1909-1910, 1912-1913, 1920-1921, 1921-1922, 1923-1924; Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 365, 366, 367.

74. *Christian Recorder*, July 26, 1906, p. 1.

75. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1907, p. 1; June 27, 1907, p. 1; July 18, 1907, p. 1; January 2, 1908, p. 1.

76. G. Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress Held at the University of London*, July 26-29, 1911 (London: P. S. King & Son, 1911); Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, pp. 508-519.

77. *Christian Recorder*, July 18, 1907, p. 1.

78. T. G. Steward to Adjutant General, April 19, 1916, Records of AGO.

79. Susan McKinney Steward was the first African-American female physician in the state of New York and the third in the United States. See William Seraile, "Susan McKinney Steward: New York's First African-American Female Physician," *Afro-Americans in New York Life & History*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 1985), pp. 27-44.

80. *The Crisis*, 27 (March 1924), p. 232; *Chicago Defender*, January 19, 1924, p. 8; Steward was survived by five sons from his first marriage: Charles, Frank, Benjamin, T. Bolden, Gustavas; his brother, William; and a sister, Alice S. Felts.

81. Steward, *From 1864 to 1914*, introduction, p. xiv.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 372.