

Ancestor Profile – Stephen Francis Brayton

Stephen Francis Brayton was born March 24, 1841 in Fall River, Massachusetts, where he lived all his life, except for a year during the Civil War. In 1862, as the Civil War raged, he married Mary Peckham of nearby Tiverton, Rhode Island, where Stephen's father, Francis Brayton, was from. Five months later, Stephen left an expecting Mary behind and walked seven hours to Lakeville to volunteer for service with the *3rd Massachusetts Infantry Regiment*.

Stephen's Company C and Regiment left for Boston 5 days later where they boarded the *Merrimac* steamer bound for New Bern, North Carolina. That city had been captured by the Union seven months earlier. New Bern was a strategic position, as the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad that connected the coast with the interior passed through there. In March 1862, the Federals had captured several nearby gun positions and occupied a base that they would hold to the end of the war, in spite of several Confederate attempts to recapture it.

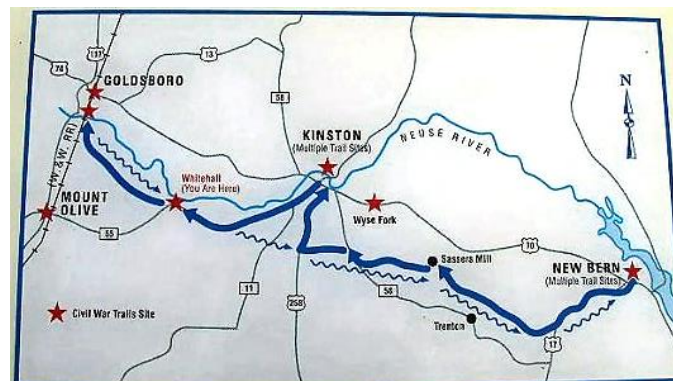
In October 1862, Stephen's Regiment reinforced the garrison under the command of Col. Charles Adam Heckman attached to Col. Lee's brigade. Meanwhile, Burnside's forces also prepared for the ill-fated assault on Fredericksburg, Virginia, almost 300 miles to the north. From their New Bern base of operations, Federal forces launched several raids and expeditions into the interior of the state.

One such raid occurred in December 1862, when Maj. Gen. John G. Foster led a 10,000-man force out of New Bern with the objective of capturing the *Wilmington and Weldon Railroad* bridge over the Neuse River at Goldsboro. The raid was in support of the *Army of the Potomac*, which was currently engaged in the *Battle of Fredericksburg*, Virginia. The railroad was an important supply line into Virginia, and its disruption would hinder the reinforcement and resupply of the Confederate army.

Right: **Maj. Gen. John G. Foster**



Maj. Gen. Foster's expedition included twelve infantry regiments from Massachusetts, including Stephen's *3rd Massachusetts*, three New York infantry regiments, two Pennsylvania regiments, and one each from Connecticut, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Also supporting them were 640 New York cavalymen and 40 pieces of artillery. This force of northeasterners left New Bern on the 11th of December for what was known as '*Foster's Raid*' or the '*Goldsboro Expedition*'. It consisted of three battles in North Carolina, including, in order: the *Battle of Kinston*, the *Battle of White Hall Ferry*, and the *Battle of Goldsboro Bridge*'.



Approximate route of Gen. John G. Foster's raid from New Bern to Goldsboro, December 1862

According to Foster's post-operation report, his forces first encountered Confederate forces, consisting of North and South Carolinians under Brig. Gen. N.G. Evans, near the town of Kinston. Evans' gray-clad line was protected by wooded cover and a swamp to its front and was anchored on the left flank by the Neuse River. Foster sent some Federal regiments around to try to flank the Confederates, while others advanced forward into the swamp. Lt. Gershom C. Winsor of the *45th Massachusetts* recalled that "*the first step into the swamp filled their shoes with black ooze...the bottom was a network of gnarled roots, covered with thick black ooze, about two and one-half feet deep – even my top boots did not keep it out*". The fighting during the *Battle of Kinston* was intense until the Confederate left was turned, forcing their retreat across the river.



Battle of Kinston, North Carolina - December 14, 1862

The next morning, December 15, Foster's Federal forces recrossed the river and took the river road towards Goldsboro. Foster left a strong guard of cavalry in Kinston, under Major Fitz Simmons, to make a demonstration on the Goldsboro Road on that side of the river.

Colonel Ledlie, 3rd New York Artillery, remained to destroy the commissary and quartermaster's stores and burn the bridge. Before leaving Kinston, he also destroyed a locomotive and a railroad monitor, among other assets. Major Simmons advanced some 9 miles towards Goldsboro, when, hearing the whistle of a locomotive, he fired three shots in the direction of the sound, upon which the train immediately reversed and returned towards Goldsboro.

On the morning of December 17, "Colonel Lee's [Federal] brigade was in advance of the main column and came upon the enemy in small force on the edge of the wood lining the railroad track. The Ninth New Jersey and Seventeenth Massachusetts were ordered to strike the railroad track and follow it up direct to the bridge, which they were to burn. Three regiments of Colonel Lee's brigade were ordered to their support (the Twenty-fifth, Twenty-seventh, and Third Massachusetts); the remaining regiment was thrown on the left to protect our flank in that quarter."

"Colonel Heckman advanced steadily up the track, fighting the enemy's infantry posted at the bridge and receiving a fire from the artillery in a monitor-car on the track of the bridge. After two hours he reached the bridge, and under a heavy fire Lieutenant Graham, Twenty-third New York Battery, acting as aide-de-camp to Colonel Heckman, fired the bridge. All who had previously attempted it were picked off, as was wounded Lieut. B. N. Mann, Seventeenth Massachusetts, who accompanied him. "

Stephen Brayton and his Company C of the 3rd Massachusetts played a significant role in this daring raid, deep into Confederate territory in the early stages of the war. His unit returned to Boston in June 1863.



Stephen was honorably discharged on June 26, 1863 at Camp Hooker in Lakeville, Massachusetts, and returned home to Mary and his now 3-month-old son, Stephen F. Brayton Jr. In 1890, Stephen Francis Brayton was granted a military pension for his service with the Grand Army of the Republic. He was still working as a machinist in Fall River in 1880. His wife Mary passed away in 1893 after giving birth to ten more children, including Clarabelle Mabel Brayton in 1882. Clarabelle was my great-grandmother.

Left: **Clara Brayton-Wall with child**



... submitted by descendant Frederick Keith Moody

Ancestor Profile – Stephen Francis Brayton *(continued)*

Trivia: Woman at the Lead

No ordinary Color-bearer, this one wore a distinctive uniform consisting of a loose, long-sleeved blouse and Union army trousers surmounted by a short skirt wrapped by a red sash with a tassel. Since Color-bearers were a prime target to begin with, was this sensible attire for a Color-bearer attached to a Union company of sharpshooters? For a time, it worked out just fine for Kady McKenzie Brownell, official Union Color-bearer, South African-born daughter of a Scottish soldier in the British Army, wife of Pvt. Robert Brownell of the First Rhode Island Detached Militia.

Just fine for a time even in combat.... combat such as First Bull Run, a Union debacle from which she had to be pulled away despite her own protests. Separated from her husband in the rout, fearing that he might have become a casualty, she was assured of his safety by future Division Commander Ambrose Burnside.

Prior to Bull Run, she had carried her company's colors at Fairfax Court House. Before that, she had 'joined' the regiment as wife of her newly enlisted husband. She became a 'daughter of the regiment,' or *vivandiere*, which meant she would be expected to serve as a combination cook, laundress, and nurse. Somehow, though, she won official appointment as a company Color-bearer.

Right: Kady McKenzie Brownell

After Bull Run, her husband mustered out of the First Rhode Islander - only to reenlist with the Fifth Rhode Island. Soon both Brownells set off - under Burnside again - on the Carolina campaign of 1862 resulting in the Union capture of New Bern, North Carolina.

Brave Kady Brownell once more faced a storm of enemy fire while carrying the colors in the lead of Union soldiers ranged behind her. This time, though, both Kady and her husband came up casualties. Of the two, it was Robert who was the more seriously hurt. After a long hospital stay, with wife Kady acting as his personal nurse, he was discharged from the army in 1863. They returned for a time to Providence, Rhode Island, but later made their home in New York. Widowed in time, Kady could thank Burnside for the pension she received for her army service. She also had been allowed to keep her sword and the colors she had carried under enemy fire... as a real-life *heroine*.

...source: Best Little Ironies, Oddities, and Mysteries of the Civil War, by C. Brian Kelly, 2000

