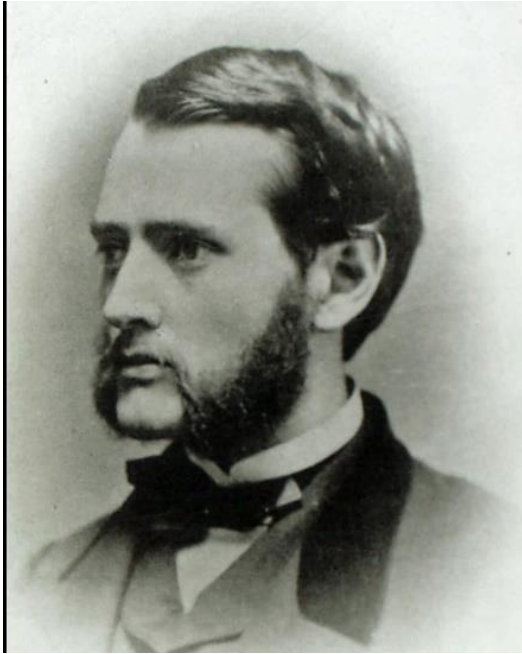


JAMES PIERREPONT BLAKE



1839-1865

Born: Mar. 8, 1839 in New Haven, CT

Died: Dec. 25, 1865 at Edisto Island, SC
in a boating accident

Appointment(s):

US Freedmen's Bureau (FB)
Freedmen's Bureau Agent
Hilton Head & Port Royal
Jul. 1, 1863

New England Freedmen's Aid Society (NEFAS)
Teacher at Hilton Head
(adopted by Roxbury Chapter FAS)
May 1864

Superintendent of Schools,
Edisto Island, SC
May 1865

James Blake was born March 8, 1839 in New Haven, Connecticut to Eli Whitney Blake (1795-1886) and Eliza Maria O'Brien (1799-1876). James had five sisters and six brothers. Their father Eli was named after James' Uncle Eli Whitney, the inventor of the cotton gin. James, like four of his five brothers, attended Yale University in 1862 and was admitted to the bar in 1864¹. Having suffered from polio as a child, James was physically disabled and disqualified to serve in the US Army.

James' father helped him receive an appointment as US Freedmen's Bureau Agent in the Commissary in charge of distributing US Army supplies among the freedmen on Hilton Head, South Carolina, where he arrived aboard the 'Oriental' on July 1, 1863².

In May 1864, he was appointed by the New England Freedmen's Aid Society as a teacher on Hilton Head Island. He also was adopted late in 1864 by the Roxbury chapter of

¹ *The Massachusetts Teacher*, Vol 19, Series 3, No 1, Mar 1866, pp 108.

² *Ibid*, p 122.

- Hester, James Robert, ed. *A Yankee Scholar in Coastal South Carolina: William Francis Allen's Civil War Journal*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1986 reprint, note #25.

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the New England Freedmen's Aid Society as a teacher to the freedmen in Port Royal [Hilton Head]³. It appears that he was promoted to Superintendent of the Schools by December of the same year, since he wrote a letter to Miss Stevenson, Secretary of the Education Committee of the Freedmen's Aid Society dated December 19, 1864. He reported that he had visited freedmen schools on St. Helena's and Port Royal Island to distribute materials and had found them to be operating smoothly and very successfully. In May 1865, he was appointed as the Superintendent of Schools on Edisto Island⁴. This is where he drowned on Christmas Day 1865 on a trip along the St. Pierre Creek along with two teachers, Miss Ellen S. Kempton from New Bedford, Massachusetts and Miss Stanton of Lowell, Massachusetts⁵.

They were all buried in the Presbyterian Church Cemetery on Edisto Island, but back in a corner because they were 'Yankees'.⁶

In Memorium

They were lovely and pleasant in their lives, And in death they were not divided. The stern, curt telegram announcing, with its painful but unavoidable brevity, the death, by drowning, of our three valued friends, was received too late for any other notice than of the shortest form in the January number of the "Freedmen's Record." None but those who know the strong and tender relation of sympathy which exists between the Committee on Teachers and most of those teachers whom they select and supervise, can appreciate the shock it caused in this office: not to a soulless Committee, intent only on business; but to those who hold themselves as guardians and friends of the many noble and self-sacrificing young women and young men whom they send forth, with joy and pity, to the deep satisfactions and the many privations and trials of this great work, -- hardships from which no care at home can shield them; but the brave endurance of which, by the greater number of them, wins and secures our loving reverence. ELLEN S. KEMPTON and ELMIRA B. STANTON have been unfalteringly faithful to the high and holy purpose under whose impulse they left the endearments and protection and delights of home, a single-hearted, pure resolve to consecrate their time, their talents, and their superior position to the benefit of a long-injured race. With that sweet piety which recognizes a child of the Universal Father in every lowliest human being, they both entered on their work : no difficulties discouraged, no privations fretted them; but their latest letters to us are

³ New England Freedmen's Aid Society. *Freedmen's Record*, Vol I, No 1, 'Teacher's List'. Jan 1865, p 3, 61; Vol I, No 3. March 1865, p 28, pp 31 – 32.

- Epstein, Dena J. *Sinful Tunes and Spirituals: Black Folk Music of the Civil War*. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, Sep 2003, p 172.
[Letter from Blake 19 Dec, 1864 from Hilton Head].

⁴ New England Freedmen's Aid Society. *Freedmen's Record*, Vol I, No 5, May 1865, p 86 [appt as Supt on Edisto Island]; Vol I, No 6, June 1865, p 101.

⁵ *The American Missionary*, Vol XIX, No 3, March 1866, "Editor's Department", p 108.

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filled with the same glad enthusiasm which they manifested in the beginning. JAMES P. BLAKE had also served under this Society in South Carolina, and lately established himself as a lawyer in Charleston, believing he might in that way largely benefit the oppressed freedmen, whose sufferings have called out his indignant pity and earnest activity. His eloquent and pathetic appeals to the North in behalf of the thousands of men, women, and children who, following in the wake of Sherman's resistless course through Georgia, were cast adrift in those winter days among the Sea Islands, almost naked, famished, and frozen, aroused the pity, and secured the aid, which saved innumerable lives. Christmas, 1865, was a fair and genial day over the creek of St. Pierre in Edisto Island: the guiding moon silvered the placid waters, while the small, insecure boat, too heavily laden, bore the three friends homeward from the neighboring plantation. An anxious listener on the bank heard the sound of their mirthful voices, marked the interruption of a sentence, the pause, and then the sounds of anguish: the Father's last Angel had folded all beneath his protecting wing, and borne them to the beautiful home, and to the "Well done, good and faithful servants." No dirge sounding amid cathedral walls from grand-toned organ could have been so impressive and fitting as the plaintive native songs of their loving, weeping pupils, moving in a funeral train, almost as simple in all its arrangements as the Puritan obsequies on Plymouth Rock in 1621. Tenderest sympathy for the bereaved homes whose deep loss is keenly felt by us; sweet, enduring memories of the faithful teachers, the beloved friends, -- these fill our hearts. That life is not to be reckoned short which has borne fruit so beautiful; nor that death untimely which calls the faithful soul to higher duties.

