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## Milo Freeland Day

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Saturday, April 20, 1996

East Canaan, Connecticut

sponsored by  
Tri-Corners History Council

## *Program*

11:00 AM Veterans Parade to Hillside Cemetery  
led by Color Guard of Company A of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Re-enactors.

11:30 AM Rededication Ceremony at Grave Site of Milo Freeland

## *Ceremony Program*

National Anthem by Salisbury Band

Welcoming Remarks

by Whitney North Seymour, Jr., Secretary, Tri-Corners History Council

Reading of Prizewinning Student Poems

by Rachel Singer, first runner-up

and

Amy Justman, first prizewinner

Presentation of Poetry Prizes

by Barbara Clow, Chair of Judges Committee

Special Presentation to research historian Walt Arbo

by Andrew Roraback, State Representative, 64th District

Battle Hymn of the Republic by Salisbury Band

Unveiling of Milo Freeland Gravestone by Walt Arbo

Rifle Volleys by Firing Parties

Taps

*Band Concert by Salisbury Band*

*Bring-your-own Picnic*

1:30 PM Free videotape showing of Glory in Assembly Room of North Canaan Congregational Church

## *Special Thanks to*

Walt Arbo for showing that one person can really make a difference in preserving our heritage.

Canaan Fire Police volunteers for keeping us orderly and safe.

Barbara Clow, Robert Hawkins and Patricia Redd Johnson for judging 182 poems in the student poetry contest.

Leonard Dube and his fellow veterans.

East Canaan Cemetery Association for their cooperation in making this event possible.

Scott E. Heth and the Salisbury Band for giving spirit and enjoyment to our parade and band concert.

Burt McKay of PrintMaster for his printing skills on the poetry contest flyer sent to 2,000 schools and colleges.

Rev. Fred Meade for use of the facilities of the North Canaan Congregational Church.

Bob Palmer of Newkirk-Palmer Funeral Homes for arranging all of the details of the new Freeland gravestone.

Vic Reiling for serving as Parade Marshal and arranging for use of the Salisbury Rotary bandstand.

Laura Riva for handling all the administrative details like clockwork.

Catherine G. Roraback, Esq. for her legal services in obtaining necessary permissions to replace the gravestone.

Carol and Jay Trotta and Gabriel Seymour for sparkplugging Tri-Corners involvement in this project.

Benny White and Company A of the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, Re-enactors, for traveling all the way from Boston to participate in this ceremony.

The state and local veterans organizations who have participated so enthusiastically.

All the generous contributors whose voluntary gifts have made possible the replacement gravestone, the poetry contest, and these events.

## Prizewinning Student Poems Written for Rededication Ceremony

### Milo Freeland: A Colored Man

by Amy Justman

Black  
His skin like midnight  
Separating him from one group  
And joining him with another  
Their skin and hair like coal  
Concealing the diamonds inside.

Blue  
The uniform the man gave him at the site  
"Boy, you're a Union soldier now,"  
Said with condescension and hidden fear.  
The scrap cloth felt like fine silk on his legs  
And he had never had a jacket quite so elegant.

Grey  
The uniforms of the Confederate boys  
Out to kill men they had never met.  
Eyes filled with horror and loathing  
At men with the same dusky skin as the cotton  
picking slaves  
Now facing them with the cold, black guns of a  
Union soldier.

Red  
The blood streaming in the hot Carolina sun  
Red on black and white, blue and grey,  
Soaking through slowly and softly  
As boys lay motionless in the cool grass.

Green  
The color of the land surrounding the house he  
returned home to  
He ran with his boys, strong like their father.  
They pass him left and right as he caught his  
breath  
Weary from the battles of the South.  
He looked out across the horizon  
Acres of fertile soil  
Free soil.

### Nation's Son

by Rachael Singer

*A lonely man stands on the road,  
Staring blankly into space  
I find him very curious  
And slow down my pace.*

*He doesn't seem to fit in here.  
He seems so out of place.  
His clothes are torn and dated  
And there is dirt upon his face.*

He says "I am the forgotten Hero  
Of my people long ago.  
I am the one who went to sign up  
When no one else would go.

I was born in Sheffield Mass.  
A poor and desperate fellow  
And if you had asked me who I was  
I woulda said 'no one special.'

Little did I know it then  
What was to happen later on.  
I was to be the first of my kind  
To sing the enlistment song.

On a cold February morning,  
My life forever changed.  
I enlisted in the Union Army  
And the world was never the same.

I was only one of many  
In the mighty Fifty-four,  
And we all knew we were doing  
Something never done before.

We fought from city to city  
In the rebellion of 61,  
And we vowed we would continue to fight  
Until the Union Army had won.

Our first battle was at Fort Wagner  
And on that fateful day,  
We lost the lives of many men  
Who were in Company A.

But that did not stop us  
From fighting our heroic fight,  
We marched ourselves to victory  
On many other nights.

And soon the war had ended  
And I returned to my home.  
My spirit was victorious,  
Though I was covered in loam.

I lived a life of peacefulness  
Until the day I died.  
I never forget what I had done,  
And I remembered it with pride.

But over time, the stories faded  
As stories tend to do,  
So that is why I stand here now  
Telling my tale to you.

I want you to remember me  
And all that I have done  
In those battles so long ago  
When my people's freedom was won."

*Then his ghostly figure fades  
And soon is out of sight  
But I'll never forget the lesson  
That is taught to me this night.*

*His story has instilled in me  
What history has lacked  
And that simply is,  
If we want change, we must act.*

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## About Milo Freeland

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On January 1, 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation abolishing slavery and authorizing African Americans to serve in the United States armed forces. The Governor of Massachusetts was the first to organize a regiment of soldiers of African descent the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry and in early February, 1863, issued a call for recruits.

On February 16, 1863, Milo J. Freeland, age 23, of Sheffield, Mass., reported for duty, becoming the first of 200,000 African Americans to serve in the Union Army. Enlistment took real courage. African American soldiers faced double hazards: possible wounding or death in combat, and almost certain death if captured by Confederate troops.

Frederick Douglass, the escaped slave and leader in the Abolition movement, made speeches and published articles recruiting volunteers for the 54th, which included his own son, Lewis Douglass, who became the regiment's first Sergeant Major.

In June, 1863, the 54th Massachusetts arrived in South Carolina, and on July 16 was engaged in combat against Southern white troops. On July 18, 1863, the 54th led an attack against Fort Wagner, an impregnable Confederate installation guarding the approach to Charleston harbor. Under point blank cannon fire the 54th stormed the fort and suffered severe casualties. 1,515 Union men fell; 37 of the casualties in Freeland's own Company A. The heroism of the 54th in the Fort Wagner engagement was recently portrayed in the motion picture, *Glory*. The 54th fought two more battles before the war's end, earning them the respect of all Union soldiers.

After the war, Milo Freeland returned home where he and his wife raised five children, four boys and a girl. At the age of 43, he suddenly died of pneumonia. He was buried in a small plot at the back of Hillside Cemetery in East Canaan, Connecticut, located just south of the Massachusetts border. A white marble gravestone was erected at the site, inscribed with these words:

*Milo J. Freeland  
died  
April 16, 1883  
Aged 43  
A member of Co. A  
54th Mass. Voll's.  
The first Colored Man  
enlisted from the North  
in the rebellion of 1861*

With passing years the grave of Milo Freeland was neglected and forgotten. The gravestone was broken. Part of it disappeared. Then one day just a few years ago a young man out walking his dog came across the grave and became curious about the inscription on the broken stone. Through lengthy research Walt Arbo learned of Milo Freeland's patriotism and courage as the first of his race to volunteer for military service to preserve the Union and end slavery. He set out to get the grave restored and to replace the stone, matching the original. With the help of local volunteers his efforts are now being crowned with success. The new Milo Freeland gravestone will be rededicated on April 20, 1996, 113 years after his death.