

# Illinois

Contraband camps took different forms in different places. For instance, while in Memphis camps were created, often from the ground up, along or in the Mississippi River, in South Carolina many camps existed on the same plantations where blacks had been slaves. Still other camps simply consisted of a number of blacks resident at Union encampments. Especially in the case of newly-built camps, the populations were ever-changing since fugitives arrived daily, men were recruited into service, and women were often sent to work on abandoned farms or plantations. Some of what is known about these makeshift communities comes from official record while important details have been provided through the writings of various people—often associated with religious groups or benevolent organizations—who visited them. The most remarkable of these first-hand accounts is provided by Quaker Levi Coffin, who transitioned from his work on the Underground Railroad directly to fundraising for the contraband. Two other witnesses to camp life were Michigan Quaker and Underground Railroad operative Laura Haviland and John Eaton, Jr. General Superintendent of Freedmen.

## Cairo

One of the most well-known camps was located in Cairo, Illinois, in the southern-most part of the state. By June of 1861, the Union controlled this important area located at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. One contraband camp existed at Fort Defiance, also a Union base under Grant's command.<sup>1</sup> Some contraband who found themselves at Cairo had been for a time living in Ohio, taken there, with Grant's approval, by the Chaplain of the 7<sup>th</sup> Illinois. According to Coffin, some blacks were taken to and nearly abandoned in Cincinnati.<sup>2</sup> Some, but possibly not all, of these fugitives were sent (back) to Cairo by order of the Secretary of War (reversing Grant's approval). In Cairo, contraband were under the superintendence of J.B. Rogers, Chaplain of the 14<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteers. When Eaton first toured the camp in the winter of 1862, he visited blacks housed in "the old barracks." Coffin described the contraband as destitute, having inadequate shelter and clothing, and suffering from various illnesses including small pox. Food was offered at a merely subsistence level. In spite of these horrible conditions, the contraband had organized religious services, which Coffin attended. A school also was opened, by a Mr. and Mrs. Job Hadley of Indiana, acquaintances of Coffin.

According to a member of the 35<sup>th</sup> Ohio, stationed for a time at Cairo, the contraband camp was to be moved to Island No. 10 (Missouri).<sup>3</sup> Coffin confirmed this as he commented on his second visit, adding that at the new location, blacks were farming. According to General Superintendent of Contraband John Eaton, Jr. Cairo also became a refuge for poor whites.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This was separate from the Fort Defiance constructed at Clarksville, Tennessee.

<sup>2</sup> Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences*, (<http://books.google.com/books>)

<sup>3</sup> Ichabody Frisbie to his wife, April 6, 1863. Ichabod Frisbie Papers, 1862-1865, Marbl Collection ([http://marbl.library.emory.edu/findingaids/content.php?id=frisbie396\\_100191](http://marbl.library.emory.edu/findingaids/content.php?id=frisbie396_100191))

<sup>4</sup> John Eaton, Jr., *Grant, Lincoln, and the Freedmen, Reminiscences of the Civil War*, Longman, Green, and Co., New York, 1907.

## Mound City

Quaker Laura Haviland refers to a freedmen camp near the hospital at Mound City, a few miles up the Ohio River from Cairo. She wrote that freedmen there were encouraged to go to Island No. 10; however, they resisted, preferring to remain in the free state of Illinois.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Haviland, <http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/wlwrk10.txt>.