

Camp William Penn 1863

In 1863, Cheltenham received national attention when it was chosen as the site for Camp William Penn, the country's first Federal recruiting and training camp for black soldiers. The Militia Act of July 17, 1862 was the first Federal law enabling the president to call black men into military service.

The first installation was located on land owned by Jay Cooke, a well-known abolitionist and Civil War financier. The camp was soon moved to a better site donated by Edward Davis. The larger parcel provided space for barracks, officers' quarters, stables, and support facilities. The site was a more suitable one because of its proximity to Philadelphia and the North Pennsylvania Railroad depot. Unlike Philadelphia, Camp-town's Quaker and abolitionist residents welcomed the black recruits and provided friendship, religious guidance, and accommodations for visiting families. The Camp William Penn gate and gatehouse remain today.

Camp William Penn and the Civil War

'Our Civil War was at first a war for the Union. As such, the war was viewed as a "white man's war." Those blacks who came forward were rudely turned away . . . as Union defeat after defeat piled up, . . . the remorseless logic of war, as well as the pleadings of abolitionists, led first to use of blacks as "Contraband" labor units, then as full scale military units.

Northern blacks yearned to get into the fight. Their motives were complex, but revolved around a desire to "Prove" themselves worthy of citizenship. They knew that the war meant the death of slavery, but not necessarily the birth of freedom or equality. They hoped to prove, to the racist white population in the North, their worth in the crucible of battle.'

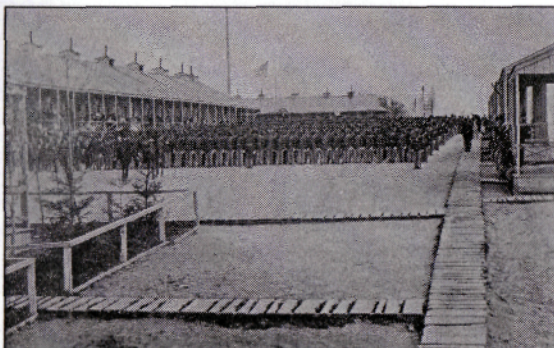
Steve Conrad

On January 1, 1863 with the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lincoln paved the way for the recruitment of blacks into the federal army.

Camp William Penn was the largest Federal training camp established for black soldiers. A total of 11 regiments, the 3rd, 6th, 8th, 22nd, 24th, 25th, 32nd, 41st, 43rd, 45th, and 127th, totaling 10,940 men, and 200 black and white officers were trained here under Camp Commander Lieutenant Colonel Louis Wagner. 1,056 casualties were suffered by the men of Camp William Penn.

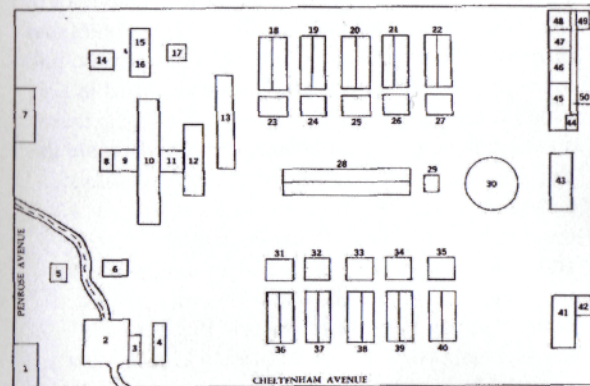


3rd Regiment USCT Flag. Original painted by David Bowser.



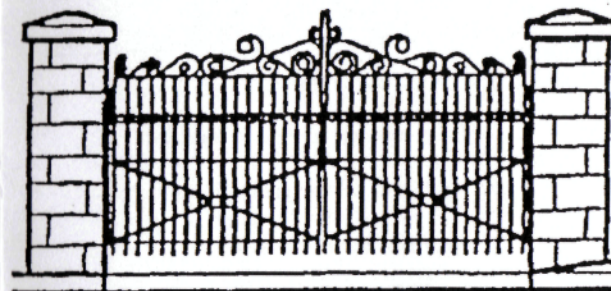
Troops assembled at Camp William Penn shortly after the death of President Abraham Lincoln.

Map of Camp William Penn 1863



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|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. shooting gallery | 13. regimental | 31-35. line officers |
| 2. bathing house | quartermaster | quarters |
| 3. ice house | 14. sink | 36-40. barracks |
| 4. daguerreotype | 15. prison | 41. church & school |
| gallery | 16. guard house | 42. post sergeant |
| 5. blacksmith shop | 17. sutler | 43. post headquarters |
| 6. wash tub | 18-22. barracks | 44. carpenter |
| 7. target | 23-27. line officers | 45. post headquarters |
| 8. laundry | quarters | 46. post commissar |
| 9. kitchen | 28. field officers | 47. forage room |
| 10. base hospital | quarters | 48. stable |
| 11. dining room | 29. garden | 49. stables |
| 12. base hospital | 30. fountain | 50. sheds |
| | 51. regimental quartermaster | |

This map was drawn in 1863 by John McArthur, Jr., the noted architect of the Philadelphia City Hall.



This gate is the only remaining physical structure associated with the original camp