

# HISTORIC PRINCEVILLE



## *From Slavery to Freedom Hill*



During the Civil War, thousands of slaves escaped to U.S. Army lines, and more than thirty African Americans from Edgecombe County enlisted in the 35th, 36th, and 37th U.S. Colored Troops, 14th U.S. Colored Heavy Artillery, and U.S. Navy. After the war, former slaves sought refuge at a U.S. Army camp located here on the plantations of John Lloyd and Lafayette Dancy. The freedmen called their settlement of huts and shanties on the Tar River floodplain Freedom Hill.

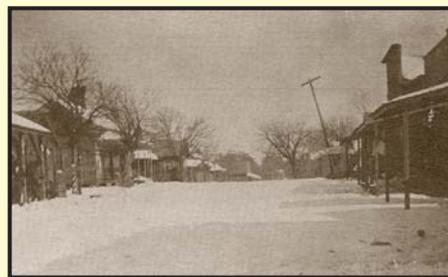
Freedman Turner Prince, a carpenter born into slavery in 1843, acquired a lot here in 1873, built a house, and constructed other permanent dwellings for the residents. By 1880, the population was 379; occupational categories included laborer, laundress, washerwoman, carpenter, blacksmith,



**"Coming into the Lines,"** by combat artist Edwin Forbes, shows escaped slaves passing two Union soldiers. – Courtesy Library of Congress



**Brothers in Arms**  
– Courtesy Library of Congress



**Princeville residential area in the snow, early 20th century.** – Courtesy N.C. Office of Archives and History



**Princeville grocery store, commercial area, early 20th century.** – Courtesy N.C. Office of Archives and History

grocer, seamstress, and brick mason. In 1885, the North Carolina legislature incorporated the town, which its occupants named Princeville in their carpenter's honor. Princeville was the first all-black town and independently governed African American community incorporated in the United States.

The town struggled to survive during the Jim Crow era, defeating efforts early in the twentieth century to annex it to Tarboro. Princeville's population increased to 636 by 1910, then declined as black Southerners migrated north. The population later rose to 2,100 in the 1990s.

Princeville's location has subjected it to frequent flooding. A levee completed in 1965 protected the town until 1999, when Hurricanes Dennis and Floyd overtopped it in the worst flood on record here. Princeville's residents soon began rebuilding their historic community, repairing houses and constructing new homes, a town hall, a park, and an African American history museum.