WILLIAM H. SCOTT EXHIBITION OPENS JAN. 23
Little-known African American pushed for early civil rights

Emory University’s Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library (MARBL) presents the papers and personal effects of an African American leader who brought early attention to the issue of civil rights.

“Slave, Soldier, Citizen: The Journey of William H. Scott,” an exhibition curated by Randall K. Burkett, curator of African American Collections, will be open in MARBL from Jan. 23 until Aug. 8.

The exhibition opening and reception will be from 1:30 to 3:30 pm on Fri., Jan. 23, in MARBL. The opening will be followed by an address from King Week keynote speaker Julian Bond, chairman of the NAACP, at 4 pm in Cannon Chapel. King Week is being celebrated at Emory Jan. 19 through 27.

Scott (1848-1910) grew up in Virginia in his master’s house and didn’t realize he was a slave until he was eight years old. He immediately began plotting his escape and found an opportunity in 1862, when Union troops moved into the area. Major Loring Muzzey of the 12th Massachusetts Regiment was looking for a bright young slave to educate, and he and the regiment took Scott under their wing. He spent three and a half years as Muzzey’s aide-de-camp, witnessing some of the worst battles of the Civil War.

Scott became a teacher, owned a bookstore in Washington, DC, and was ordained a Baptist minister. He was politically active throughout his adult life. He founded the Massachusetts Racial Protective League in 1896 and was one of the 29 original members of the Niagara Movement, the predecessor to the NAACP.

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“As a teacher, historian, preacher, and political activist, he was a fearless advocate for full citizenship rights at a time when, increasingly, those rights were being crushed by Northern indifference and Southern intransigence,” says Burkett.

The exhibition includes photographs, sermon manuscripts, broadsides and pamphlets documenting all aspects of Scott’s life. Among the highlights:

- A sword Scott snatched from a dead Confederate officer during a lull in the Battle of Fredericksburg.
- Recordings of Scott’s sermons read by Reverend C. T. Vivian, one of Atlanta’s eminent civil rights leaders.
- Tintypes and photographs including a portrait of Muzzey, a photo of young Scott in his Union uniform, and many family portraits.

Scott’s achievements came to light when one of Burkett’s students in Massachusetts wrote his senior thesis about the original members of the Niagara Movement and located Scott’s grandson, Henry T. Scott. The grandson bequeathed the family papers to Burkett with the request that his grandfather’s story be brought to public attention.

The exhibition is free and open to the public during normal library hours. MARBL is located on the 10th floor of the Woodruff Library on the Emory University campus, 540 Asbury Circle, Atlanta, GA 30322. Cannon Chapel is located at 515 Kilgo Circle on the Emory campus.

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Emory University (http://www.emory.edu/) is one of the nation’s leading private research universities and a member of the Association of American Universities. Known for its demanding academics, outstanding undergraduate college of arts and sciences, highly ranked professional schools and state-of-the-art research facilities, Emory is ranked as one of the country's top 20 national universities by U.S. News & World Report. In addition to its nine schools, the university encompasses the Carter Center, Yerkes National Primate Research Center and Emory Healthcare, the state’s largest and most comprehensive health care system.