

The Clerk's Black History Series



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Alexander Lucius Twilight

First African-American to Graduate from a U.S. College

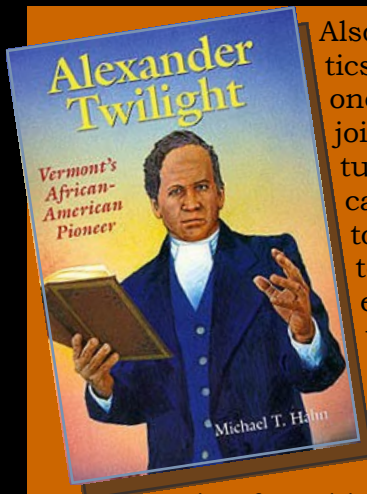
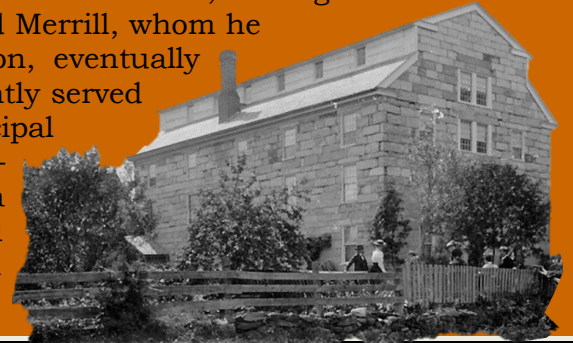
First African-American elected to Public Office

(September 9, 1795 - June 19, 1857)



Alexander Lucius Twilight was born on September 23, 1795, in Corinth, Vermont. Alexander Lucius Twilight was one of six children born to a fair skinned mother, Mary Twilight and a mixed race father, Ichabod, who had served in the American Revolution. The Twilights were one of the few African-American families living in the area at the time. At an early age, Alexander Twilight worked as an indentured servant on a nearby farm. While on the farm, he learned some of basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. At the age of 20, in 1815, he enrolled in the Orange County Grammar School (also known as the Randolph Academy) in Randolph, Vermont and managed to complete his entire secondary education in six years. In 1821, Twilight enrolled at Middlebury College, located 30 miles east of Randolph. Two years later, he made history when he became the first African-American to graduate from a U.S. college, earning a bachelor's

degree from Middlebury in 1823. After completing his degree, Twilight was offered a teaching position in Peru, New York, a small community located in the northeastern part of the state, serving in that role for several years afterward. While in Peru, he met Mercy Ladd Merrill, whom he married in 1826. Twilight also had a strong interest in religion, eventually receiving credentials to become a preacher. In 1829, he concurrently served as the Brownington Congregational Church's minister and principal of the Orleans County Grammar School, later known as Brownington Academy also designing and helping the school construct a granite building named Athenian Hall (now known as the Old Stone House Museum). The structure housed classrooms and served as a dormitory.



Also a pioneer in Vermont politics, Twilight made history once again in 1836 when he joined his home-state legislature, becoming the first African American to win election to public office. He continued to thrive in his varied roles, educating and preaching until the late 1840s. During this same time, Twilight developed conflicts with both his school and church that ultimately led him to re-

sign from his posts. He went on to teach in Quebec, Canada, for several years.

In 1852, Alexander Twilight returned to Brownington to work as a minister and to run the academy. He gave up his church duties after only a year into his new role, but stayed on at the school until a stroke forced him into retirement in 1855. He died two years later, on June 19, 1857, in Brownington.

