Caine, Alexander
(1842–8 Dec. 1915)
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was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, to Louis Caine and an unknown mother. It is unclear whether he was born free or enslaved, but his ability to read and write suggests that he had access to some education. By early 1862 he was living on Locust Street in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and working as a barber. He enlisted in the United States Navy on 28 January 1862, for a period of three years. He was five feet, four inches tall, with dark brown hair and gray eyes, and his enlistment officer described him as a “mulatto.” He entered the navy as a landsman—a rank given to inexperienced sailors—and received a salary of twelve dollars per month.

Caine served aboard the U.S.S. St. Louis, a sloop of war commissioned in 1828. The ship sailed toward Spain in February 1862 and spent the next two years crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean. Caine and his crewmates patrolled the Azores, the Canary Islands, and the West African coast in search of Confederate commerce raiders. The St. Louis arrived in Charleston, South Carolina, in November 1864, and spent the rest of the war blockading Confederate ports. On 30 November 1864 the crew took part in the Battle of Honey Hill, an unsuccessful attempt to cut off the Charleston and Savannah Railroad as part of General William T. Sherman’s March to the Sea. Military records, however, suggest that Caine did not take part in the battle.

Although Caine survived the war, he endured a variety of illnesses and injuries. He contracted piles in 1862 and suffered from the ailment throughout the war. In January 1863 he spent two days in the ship’s hospital recovering from diarrhea. That March he received treatment for gonorrhea, which doctors insisted he had not contracted in the “line of duty.” Five months later, as the St. Louis sailed through the Canary Islands, a fight broke out between crewmates John Lynch and James Draper. Caine, caught in the middle of the scuffle, suffered a blow to the forehead that cut him to the bone. Caine's three-year enlistment ended in January 1865, and he received his discharge on 14 February 1865.

Caine returned to Philadelphia and apparently resumed his work as a barber. Then, on 31 October 1865, he reenlisted in the navy and joined the U.S.S. Franklin. In June 1867 the ship hosted President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of State William Seward before embarking on a goodwill tour of Europe. It became the flagship of the European Squadron, with naval hero David G. Farragut residing onboard during its tour. Over the following year Caine and his crewmates visited every major European port, including Lisbon, Gibraltar, Trieste, Istanbul, St. Petersburg, and Stockholm. The Franklin left Gibraltar on 18 October 1868, and arrived in New York on 10 November. Caine was discharged from the navy four days later on 14 November.

Caine returned to Philadelphia, and by 1870 he was boarding with a Black woman named Sarah Davis. He remained in the city for the rest of his life, never marrying or fathering children. By the late 1890s he had joined the Citizens’ Republican Club, a social and political organization for the city’s Black elite. Its members included lawyers, bankers, businessmen, and politicians, and many became champions in the
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struggle for equal rights. The club also patronized the arts and arranged social events for the local African American community. In 1897 Caine helped organize a grand reception for the club, with an orchestral concert followed by dinner and dancing.

Caine applied for a pension in 1902, complaining of piles, rheumatism, and “senile debility.” The following year he began receiving six dollars per month. His health, however, steadily deteriorated, and he was eventually unable to “earn a support by manual labor.” Officials increased his pension four times, and by 1912, he was receiving twenty-five dollars per month. He died in Philadelphia just after midnight on 8 December 1915, of myocarditis and “senile debility.” An obituary in a local newspaper invited “relatives and friends” as well as “members of the Citizens’ Republican Club” to attend the funeral, which took place on 10 December. He was buried at Soldiers’ National Cemetery—present-day Philadelphia National Cemetery—later that day.


**Bibliography**


