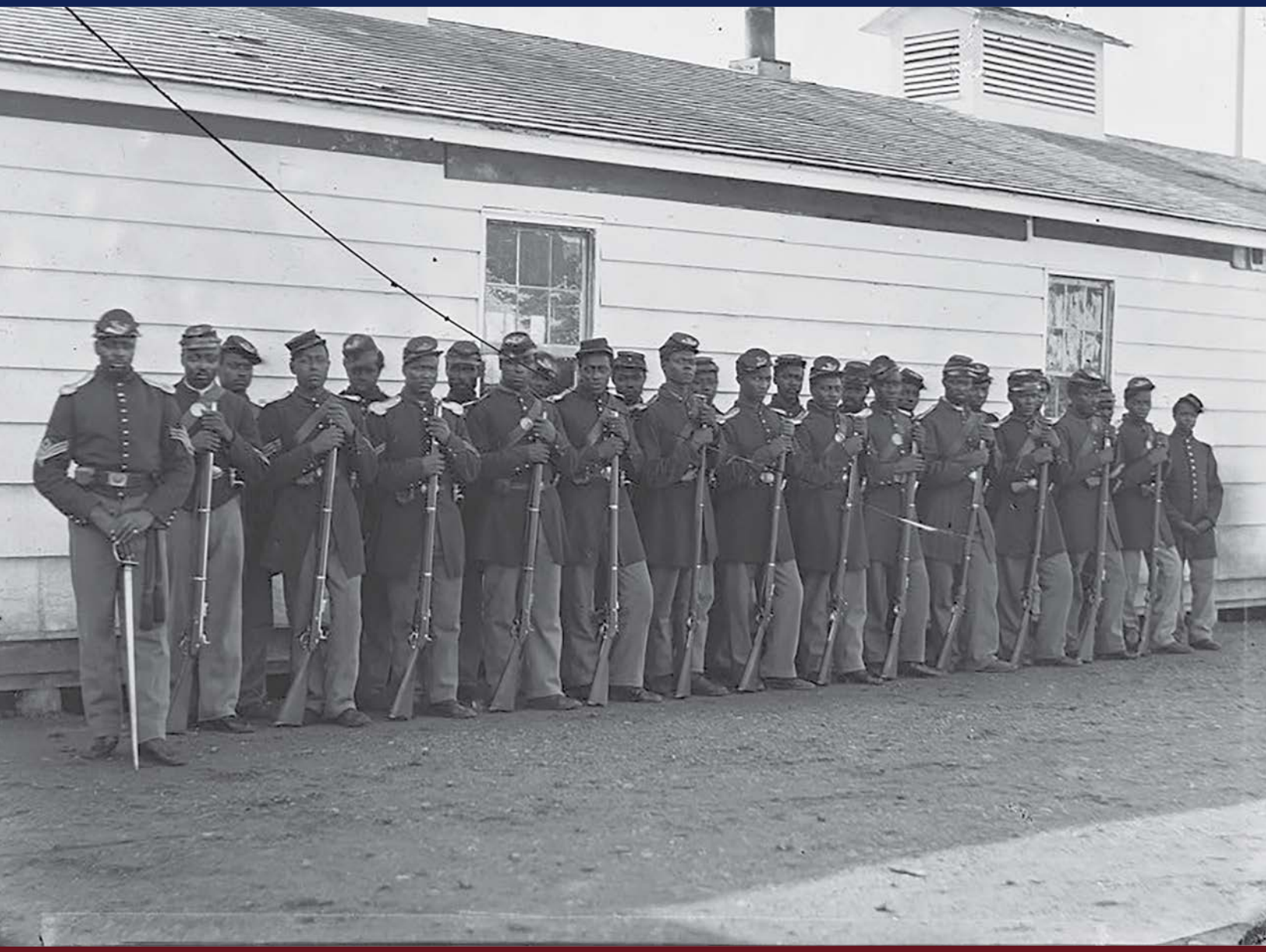
UNFINISHED REVOLUTION



MONTGOMERY COUNTY STORIES FROM THE U.S. COLORED TROOPS

By Julianne Mangin

Montgomery County, Maryland marks its 250th anniversary on September 6, 2026. To commemorate the occasion, Montgomery History presents *Unfinished Revolution*, a project to share important stories from our past that combine to tell a more complete and inclusive history of this county. The numerous authors commissioned for this project explore topics related to the history of Montgomery County that either address events that took place from the 1960s forward or fill in gaps by addressing subjects that have been underrepresented or left out of the existing published historical narrative. In embracing the theme of an "Unfinished Revolution," we bring focus to the still-unmet promise of 1776 while rotating its vision to align with our shared journey toward the future.

Montgomery History—the county's historical society—has been serving residents and the region through its research library, adult programs, educational activities, publications, exhibits, and conferences since the organization was founded in 1944. Its mission is to collect, preserve, interpret, and share the histories of all county residents and communities.

Editor: Sarah Hedlund
Editorial advisors: Ralph Buglass, Rachel Shuster

MontgomeryHistory.org

Cover image: District of Columbia. Company E, 4th U.S. Colored Infantry, at Fort Lincoln, William Morris Smith, photographer, November 17, 1865. Prints & Photograph Division, Library of Congress.

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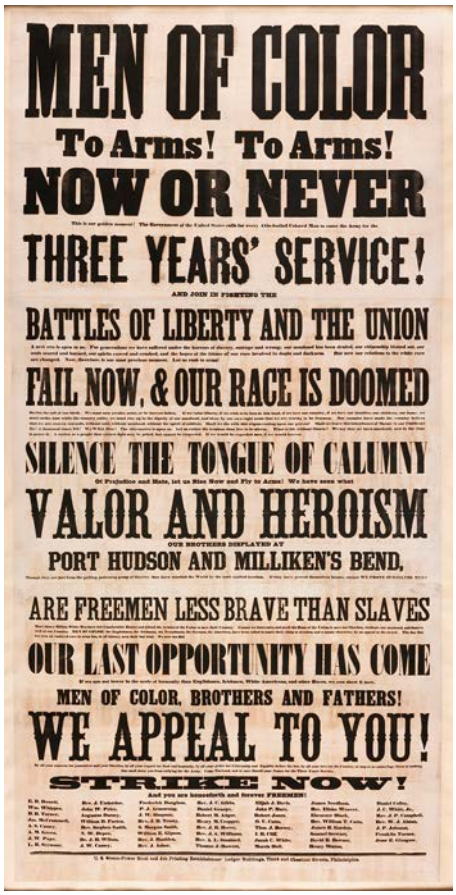
Introduction

Among the approximately 180,000 soldiers who served in the U.S. Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War were men who had a connection to Montgomery County, Maryland. Some had been enslaved in the county, while others had lived there as free people of color. They volunteered or were drafted into the Union Army once African Americans became eligible to serve. Also connected to Montgomery County were USCT veterans who had been enslaved elsewhere but chose to settle in the county after the war. Their stories shed light on their lives as enslaved people, as soldiers, and (if they survived) as veterans building new lives as emancipated people. They provide a glimpse of African American life in Montgomery County from the outbreak of the Civil War to emancipation, as well as into the early twentieth century.

The extent of the sacrifices these men made to free themselves and their families is both remarkable and heartbreaking. While some members of the USCT returned to civilian life, others lost their lives on the battlefield, in hospitals, or in captivity. Many of those who survived the war came home debilitated by the effects of war and the hard labor to which African American regiments were often assigned. After emancipation, these veterans had to find a way to start over as free people. Some of them played key roles in the formation of the African American kinship communities of Montgomery County.


MEN OF COLOR
To Arms! To Arms!
NOW OR NEVER
THREE YEARS' SERVICE!
AND JOIN IN FIGHTING THE
BATTLES OF LIBERTY AND THE UNION
FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED
SILENCE THE TONGUE OF CALUMNY
VALOR AND HEROISM
OUR BROTHERS DISPLAYED AT
PORT HUDSON AND MILLIKEN'S BEND.
ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES
OUR LAST OPPORTUNITY HAS COME
MEN OF COLOR, BROTHERS AND FATHERS!
WE APPEAL TO YOU!
STRIKE NOW!

Frederick Douglass, "Men of Color" recruitment broadside, 1863. Collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Background

Slavery was abolished in the city of Washington on April 16, 1862, by the District of Columbia Emancipation Act.[1] Enslaved African Americans from outside the city, particularly Maryland and Virginia, sought freedom by moving there. By the end of 1862, it was clear to President Abraham Lincoln that the Army needed to recruit Black men in order to win the Civil War. After the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in January 1863,[2] even more African Americans came to Washington. The proclamation included a provision allowing Black men to serve in the Union Army. Some recruitment of Black soldiers had begun prior to 1863, but it wasn't until the U.S. Bureau of Colored Troops was created on May 22, 1863[3] that recruitment efforts began in earnest at a national level.

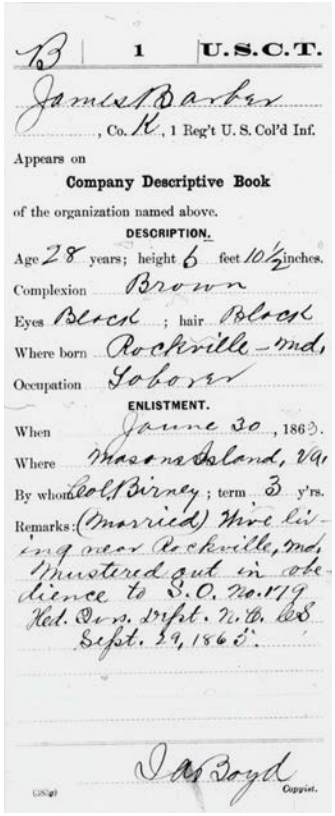
The Emancipation Proclamation only freed the enslaved in states that were in rebellion against the Union. Maryland, as a border state during the Civil War, was in an unusual situation: it remained in the Union, but slavery was still legal. The Adjutant General's Office of the War Department issued General Order No. 329,[4] dated October 3, 1863, which laid out the terms for the enlistment of African Americans in Maryland, Missouri, and Tennessee. It included compensation for slaveholders under the condition that they were loyal to the Union and they freed the men whom they sent to the Army. The general order did not include paying a bounty to the soldiers, apparently because it was thought that being given their freedom was reward enough.[5] In February 1864, the state of Maryland enacted a similar law,[6] though it allowed for compensation to both the slaveholders and the formerly enslaved people who served.

Many African American men willingly joined the Union Army despite the additional risks they faced in military service. All soldiers risked injury, sickness, or death in battle, but Black soldiers were more frequently assigned to backbreaking labor. When injured, they couldn't count on medical care equivalent to that given to white soldiers.[7] Even worse, the Confederate government had warned that Black men fighting for the Union would not be treated as prisoners of war, eligible for prisoner exchange or repatriation at the end of the war. If captured by the rebel army, Black soldiers could be sold into slavery or even executed.[8] Yet Black men joined anyway, spurred by a desire for freedom—for themselves, their families, and future generations. Many also hoped that by proving their abilities on the battlefield, white Americans would have higher regard for them after the war ended.[9]

The USCT in the Civil War Pension Records

Much information on the veterans of the USCT and their families can be gleaned from their military service records[10] as well as the records of the pensions[11] they received from the federal government after the end of the war. These valuable resources supplement information found in standard genealogical resources.

The path to compensation for Black veterans was often more difficult than it was for their white counterparts. To be eligible for pensions for themselves, their widows, and their minor children, veterans had to provide proof of their military service. They also needed to establish through birth, marriage, or death records vital statistics such as their dates of birth and marriage, the birth dates of their children, and the death date of their spouse. This was information that formerly enslaved people often couldn't provide, and it made proving their eligibility for pensions problematic. In addition, some soldiers enlisted in



13 | 1 U.S.C.T.

James Barber

, Co. K, 1 Reg't U. S. Col'd Inf.

Appears on

Company Descriptive Book

of the organization named above.

DESCRIPTION.

Age 28 years; height 6 feet 10½ inches.

Complexion Brown

Eyes Black ; hair Black

Where born Rockville Md.

Occupation Laborer

ENLISTMENT.

When June 30, 1863.

Where Mason's Island, Va.

By whom Col. Birney ; term 3 y'rs.

Remarks: (Married) Wife living near Rockville, Md. Mustered out in obedience to S.O. No. 179 Hd. Qrs. Dept. N. Va. Sept. 29, 1865.

I. A. Boyd

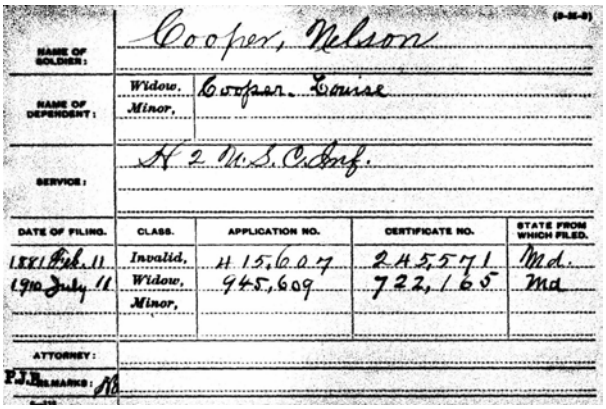
Combined Military Service Record card for James Barber

the army using aliases for fear that their former enslavers might find them and take them back. When it came time for them to apply for pension benefits, they had to prove they were the same person as the soldier who had served under a different name. In the absence of official records, pension examiners had to rely on affidavits taken under oath from family members, neighbors, and other soldiers who had served with the veteran. This created delays in compensation as well as additional costs for veterans and their widows which might be incurred while traveling to obtain affidavits, having documents notarized, and (if they were illiterate, which was often the case) having to hire people to help them fill out forms and compose responses to questions from the examiners.[12]

After the Civil War ended, the newly freed people struggled to support themselves. As one veteran's mother put it: "I am one of that unfortunate race of people, when the war closed and our freedom was given us, we were turned loose upon the cold charities of the world, uneducated and poor without anything save the clothes on our backs to make a living for ourselves and the little children and it has been a hard struggle with me. And old as I am I still have to work for my bread."[13]

Despite the arduous application process, many USCT veterans applied for, and received, a pension based on their military service. Pensions were a lifeline to people who were suffering not only from the injuries and illnesses from the war, but also the ill effects of years of grueling work, mistreatment, and lack of compensation under slavery.[14]

The good news for modern historians and genealogists is that the plethora of affidavits provided by African Americans in pursuit of their due as veterans has created a window into their lives. A careful reading of the affidavits (bearing in mind that the affiants may have provided contradictory information) sheds light on daily life, social customs, and settlement patterns among nineteenth century African Americans. There is still more to learn about the lives of veterans of the U.S. Colored Troops in Montgomery County. It is hoped that these few stories will inspire research into other veterans and, by doing so, bring their stories to light.


NAME OF SOLDIER: Cooper, Nelson
NAME OF DEPENDENT: Widow. Cooper, Louise
Minor,
SERVICE: H 2 U.S.C.Inf.

DATE OF FILING.	CLASS.	APPLICATION NO.	CERTIFICATE NO.	STATE FROM WHICH FILED.
1891 Feb. 11	Invalid,	H 15,607	245,571	Md.
1910 July 11	Widow,	945,609	722,165	Md
	Minor,			

ATTORNEY:
REMARKS: No

Pension card for Nelson Cooper

Selected U. S. Pension Laws Affecting Civil War Veterans Who Fought For The Union

Act to grant pensions, July 14, 1862 Established a pension system for Union veterans who died while serving in the war or sustained war-related disabilities. Pensions also were available to their widows (as long as they didn't remarry), children under sixteen years of age, and dependent relatives. U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 12 (1860-1861), 36th and 37th Congress, p. 566-569.

Act of August 7, 1882 Allowed a widow's pension to be terminated if she was living in an "open and notorious adulterous cohabitation" with a man. This law penalized widows who lived with men without marrying them in order to keep their pensions. U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 22 (1881-1883), 47th Congress, p. 345.

The Dependent and Disability Pension Act, June 27, 1890 This law granted a pension to any Union veteran who had served at least ninety days and had a disability that prohibited the veteran from performing manual labor, regardless of whether the disability was service-related. U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 26 (1890-1891), 51st Congress, p. 182-183.

The Civil War Service and Age Pension Act of February 6, 1907 Expanded pension eligibility to Union veterans who were sixty-two years or older and served at least ninety days, regardless of disability. U.S. Statutes at Large, Volume 34 (1905-1907), 59th Congress, p. 879.

Serving Under an Assumed Name

Phillip Eaglen, a.k.a. William Edelin (1833-1936)
Private, Company F, 43rd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 917365

Phillip Eaglen was born near Port Tobacco in Charles County, Maryland on February 16, 1833. According to his affidavit with the Pension Bureau, he was christened as William Phillip Edelin at St. Thomas Catholic Church. The name later evolved to Eaglen possibly because it sounded similar to Edelin and because he was illiterate and didn't know how to spell his own name. Unfortunately, church records prior to 1864 no longer exist, due to a fire that destroyed the church and rectory.

Eaglen was enslaved by Francis Posey of Charles County, who was born in Maryland around 1826. As of the 1850 census, Posey held twenty people in slavery, including Eaglen, his father, Simon, and other members of his family. Posey died around 1852 and his will included an inventory of the people he had enslaved at the time of his death. Phillip Edelin, as he was known at the time, was listed as being valued at three hundred dollars and his age was reported to be eight years old. If this were his real age, he would have been born around 1844, not 1833. Posey's inventory would present a problem later when Eaglen applied for an increase to his pension based on old age.

Private William Edelin, February 1865. Found in his pension record at the National Archives.

Posey's widow, Joanna, inherited her husband's property, including the people he enslaved. In 1854, Joanna Posey remarried, and by 1860, she and her new husband, Benedict Edelin, held thirty-eight people in slavery. In 1863, Eaglen fled his enslavers and made his way to Giesboro Point, a logistical port on the Potomac used by the cavalry of the Union Army for supplying horses, feed, and lumber. He worked there as a civilian laborer for thirty dollars per month, from January 1, 1864, to June 17, 1864. He decided to go by the name William Edelin, explaining in his later pension application, "Well, my 'christened name' was William Philip, but I was a refugee from my old mistress, having left her before the emancipation and I went to work at Giesboro Point, not far from my old home and I was told that if I was caught and I answered to the name 'Phillip' Edelin and acknowledged that I belonged to Benedict and Mrs. Edelin, they could take me back so I decided to take my first name William and drop the Phillip and if my mistress should come for me I would deny that I was Phillip Edelin, and would not acknowledge her as my owner. When I enlisted in the Army, I gave the name William for the same reason."

> "I was told that if I was caught and I answered to the name 'Phillip' Edelin and acknowledged that I belonged to Benedict and Mrs Edelin, they could take me back so I decided to take my first name William and drop the Phillip."
>
> *—Phillip Eaglen*

On February 16, 1865, as William Edelin,[15] Eaglen was drafted, mustered into the Union Army, and assigned to Company F, 43rd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry. His military service record shows that he was nineteen at the time and had been born in Virginia, details which he later denied. He began his service at Camp Casey in Virginia, where he received military training for a month, then he joined his regiment at City Point, Virginia, the headquarters of Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's siege of Petersburg. Eaglen's company was never involved in a major battle of the Civil War, although it engaged in skirmishes with the enemy from time to time. On April 3, 1865, the 43rd Regiment was among the troops that entered Richmond when it fell to Union forces after the Confederate Army retreated. At the war's end, Eaglen's regiment was sent to Texas to put down rebel activity there (which continued after Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender) and to assist with the enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation. He was mustered out on October 20, 1865, in Brownsville, Texas.

After he was discharged from the Army, Eaglen went to work for a year and a half as a ship's cook for Captain Faunce of Washington, D.C. After that, he worked for Mr. Williamson, an Indian paymaster in Georgetown. In 1867, Eaglen married Caroline Bell in Washington, and soon after their wedding the couple moved to Montgomery County and lived in the Rockville and Bethesda areas for the next twenty years. By the time of the 1900 census, they had settled in Lyttonsville[16] near the Linden railroad station, where Eaglen made his living as a laborer on nearby farms and doing odd jobs. His wife kept house and cared for their ten children, born between 1868 and 1887.

In 1909, Eaglen was named on a deed as a trustee of a church in Linden which was located at the intersection of Georgia Avenue and Seminary Place and originally called Sligo Methodist Episcopal Church. It had been in existence since 1825, once serving both white and Black congregants. Between 1855 and 1873, white members of the congregation left to form their own churches nearby, including Sligo Methodist Episcopal Church North and Marvin Memorial Methodist Episcopal Church.[17] Black members of the congregation continued worshiping at the original location. They adopted the name Mount Zion Methodist Episcopal Church as early as 1904, although the 1909 deed still refers to the church as Sligo.

Mount Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, Linden. Taken October 1962 by Silver Spring Volunteer Fire Department. Montgomery History, Collection SC-P-00062.

Eaglen first applied for a pension based on his disabilities on October 29, 1892. He stated that he suffered from heart disease, rheumatism, dizziness, and scurvy. He also complained of a hernia, which occurred after he was sent to Texas and was on the march from Brazos Island to Brownsville. Eaglen said that he "endured great pain rather than go into the hospital." On June 8, 1893, he was notified that his pension claim had been denied. The Pension Bureau examiner stated that Eaglen was "...not disabled in a pensionable degree under Act of June 27, 1890, subject to the opinion of the Medical Referee." This was despite affidavits from neighbors that he had had been unable to work due to his medical condition.

Eaglen appealed this decision over the next few years. His pension was finally approved around 1896. He began to receive six dollars a month (rather than the maximum twelve) because the Pension Bureau didn't believe he was fully disabled. A few years later he applied for an increase, which was granted at a rate of eight dollars a month. On February 19, 1907, he applied for an increase to his pension based on his age, which he believed to be seventy-four. Two weeks earlier, a law had been enacted to allow old age pensions to veterans of the Civil War if they were at least sixty-two years old and had served at least ninety days.

In his application, Eaglen stated, "I never knew my age until after the war, when my grandmother told me I was born February 16, 1833." However, based on the 1852 inventory of Francis Posey's estate, Eaglen would only have been sixty-three years old at the time of his application. In addition, his military service record shows that he was nineteen when he was mustered in February of 1865, which would have made him about sixty-one.

Eaglen tried to prove his age by saying that he remembered being a young boy (he did not know exactly how old) and witnessing President William Henry Harrison's inauguration parade, which featured log cabins on carts. As that happened in 1841, it would make 1833 plausible for his year of birth. As for his age recorded in the Posey inventory, Eaglen said that the Posey and Edelin families deliberately claimed ignorance of the ages of the people they enslaved, to force the appraisers to guess ages (with the hope that they would guess wrong), potentially increasing their value on paper.

According to G.A. Weldon, special examiner for the Pension Bureau, "This claimant is an intelligent, colored man, and bears a first-class reputation and I believe he is sincere in his belief that he is 74 years old, but there does not appear to be any evidence available to support his contention." Weldon went on to say, "I am of the opinion that the inventory comes as close to his age as it is possible to get, and it is probably correct." But he also said that based on his appearance, "...there is very little to indicate that he is much beyond fifty or fifty-five years of age." Weldon's report was passed on to the Pension Bureau, which rejected Eaglen's claim of being over seventy, which would have entitled him to fifteen dollars per month. Instead, the examiners determined that he was born about 1845, making him sixty-three years of age. On February 20, 1908, Phillip Eaglen's pension was increased to twelve dollars a month. He continued to reapply over the years, gradually increasing his monthly payment. By 1925, when he was nearly ninety years old (by his reckoning), he was receiving seventy-two dollars a month.

Memorial windows for Phillip and Caroline Eaglen, originally installed at Mount Zion in Linden circa 1948. Collection of Montgomery History.

In 1924, Eaglen's daughter, Olive Eaglen Curry, purchased two acres of land near the Linden railroad station. She died a year later in Philadelphia. In 1926, her widower, John Curry, sold the land to Phillip and Caroline Eaglen. Immediately after acquiring the property, the Eaglens added the names of their four surviving daughters to the deed. The longest-lived of those daughters, Mary Eaglen Potts, lived on the family property in Linden until her death near the age of ninety in 1966.

Caroline Bell Eaglen died on June 1, 1930. Phillip Eaglen lived another five and half years after his wife's death, dying of a cerebral hemorrhage on January 24, 1936. Both his obituary and his death certificate gave his name as "William Edelin." The Eaglens were buried in the cemetery at the Mount Zion M.E. Church, where Eaglen had served as a trustee, still located at the corner of Georgia Avenue and Seminary Place. In 1948, memorial stained-glass windows were installed at the church, two of which were in memory of Phillip and Caroline Eaglen.

By 1963, the effects of urban renewal and longtime neglect by county officials on the nearby historically Black community of Lyttonsville caused attendance to decline at Mount Zion. The congregants decided to sell the property and re-form as the Van Buren Methodist Episcopal Church in Washington, D.C. On November 14, 1964, the original church property was sold to Safeway, Inc., with the understanding that the human remains would be moved to another cemetery. An unknown number of the graves were removed to Maryland National Memorial Park in Laurel, Maryland. Others may have been removed to Ash Memorial Cemetery and Mutual Memorial Cemetery in Sandy Spring. The location of Phillip and Caroline Eaglen's final resting places is currently unknown.

Hard Labor at Dutch Gap

One of the ways in which African American soldiers experienced prejudice in the Union Army was how often they were used for hard labor. Some Union Army leaders didn't think that Black soldiers were capable of performing in combat as well as white soldiers. Black regiments were often assigned to hard labor projects such as digging trenches and loading and unloading supplies.[18] The project to create a canal at Dutch Gap on the James River was an example of the backbreaking work assigned to Black soldiers that sometimes had lifelong effects on their health.

Dutch Gap Canal, James River, George O. Ennis, photographer, ca. 1864. Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

Dutch Gap was a narrow isthmus (less than two hundred yards wide) which connected Farrar's Island on the James River to the mainland. Confederate fortifications on bluffs along the shore of the James took aim at Union ships trying to navigate the river. Union Gen. Benjamin Butler conceived digging a canal at Dutch Gap, thinking that creating a canal to bypass Confederate encampments would enable the Union Army to more easily navigate the river. It was difficult work, done mostly using hand labor but occasionally using black powder to break up large boulders that couldn't be removed any other way. The work was arduous, and because Confederate troops were nearby, soldiers working on the canal frequently came under fire. Several USCT regiments were assigned to digging the canal.

The canal wasn't completed until after the fall of Richmond and the Confederate surrender at Appomattox. Despite all the effort put into its construction, the Dutch Gap Canal never achieved its military purpose. In 1870, after Virginia was readmitted to the Union, the U.S. Congress approved funding to dredge the canal to a depth of twenty-five feet. The Dutch Gap Canal is now maintained by the Army Corps of Engineers and is part of the main navigation channel of the James River.

Reduced to Skin and Bones

James Barber (1835-1894)
Private, Company K, 1st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 527818

Before he enlisted in the army, James Barber was a hale and hearty man who had a reputation as a dependable worker. He was the foreman on the Wootton farm where he was enslaved. In her affidavit for the Pension Bureau, Barber's wife, Catherine,[19] said she never knew him to have any physical complaint until after he came home from the war. In addition, she said, "When my husband went into the army, his white people came to my house and cried and cried. They said they could never get another man to take his place to do as well as James could."

> When my husband went into the army, his white people came to my house and cried and cried. They said they could never get another man to take his place to do as well as James could.
>
> *—Catherine Barber*

Barber was working outside at the Wootton farm in Rockville on June 28, 1863, when he saw J.E.B. Stuart's Confederate cavalry march through Rockville. Two days later, he left to enlist in the Union Army. On June 30, he arrived at Mason's Island (now known as Theodore Roosevelt Island) and was mustered into Company K of the 1st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry. The sergeant of this company, John Tunnia, said of him, "When the company was first organized, Barber was one of the most powerful men in it. He was a large man, about 6 ft. 2 in. high and would weigh 160 or 170 lbs. He was ready for duty whenever called upon at any time and I considered him one of the most reliable men in the company." Tunnia added, "When volunteers were called to go into Dutch Gap Canal, Barber was one of the very first to pick up his gun and step to the front and say he was ready." He was sent to help dig the canal in June 1864.

In August 1864, during the second battle of Deep Bottom, in the vicinity of Dutch Gap, Barber was shot in his right hip. He was sent to a hospital at Hampton, Virginia where he recovered from the wound but continued to suffer from lingering pain in his back and spine. Nevertheless, he returned to his company, which began a weeklong march through the swamps of North Carolina from Warsaw Station to Raleigh and then back to the vicinity of Dutch Gap. During the march, he contracted a cold which affected his lungs so severely that he was sent to the field hospital in Bermuda Hundred, Virginia, where he stayed until March 1865. Due to the injury he had sustained in battle, Barber was no longer able to stand fully upright. He was given light duty for the remainder of his service and was mustered out on September 29, 1865.

When Barber returned from the war, he was so sickly and broken that his wife did not recognize him. The couple moved to Washington, D.C. soon after his return. After resting at home for several months, Barber went to work for Montgomery Blair in Silver Spring. Later, he worked for George Riggs on a farm near Bladensburg. Around 1875, the couple took jobs as servants to Allen and Emily Dodge at their boarding house in Georgetown, going to the market and doing chores around the property. Over the years, Barber's health worsened. During the last four years of his life, he could not work at all, although the Dodges continued to employ him. Catherine stated that her husband never got over the pain in his chest and his relentless cough kept him up at night.

Barber applied for an invalid pension on March 25, 1890. It was determined that he suffered from rheumatism, heart trouble, a back injury, lame feet, and general debility. He was granted a pension of twelve dollars a month almost a year later, in 1891, with his first payment accrued back to July 23, 1890. In September 1893, his pension was increased to thirty dollars a month.

Barber was treated by Dr. Edward Purcell until 1893. Purcell observed that his level of pain was "enough to kill a horse." During the last year of his life, Barber was treated by a Black man named J.D. Richardson who worked for an insurance company and owned a drug store. He would come to collect money for their premiums and treat Barber's ailments. Although Catherine referred to him as the "insurance doctor," the special examiner investigating her pension claim suspected that he was not a doctor at all. Richardson left town six months before Barber's death on November 17, 1894. The death certificate was signed by Dr. C. M. Hammett, who never saw Barber alive and based the cause of death, pneumonia, on what he'd heard from others who had seen him before he died. Catherine believed her husband had tuberculosis because he coughed so violently and brought up a great deal of sputum. She said of her husband, "He was a large man at one time but before he died, he was reduced to skin and bones. His cheeks were hollow, his eyes were sunken and his chest was all sunk in."

Catherine Barber applied for a widow's pension on December 26, 1894. She was without property and her only income was from her job as a servant. At the time she applied, she would have been about fifty-nine years old. The pension was granted at a rate of twelve dollars a month and backdated to the date of her husband's death. She continued to receive a pension until her own death on October 26, 1914, at the age of seventy-nine. James Barber is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and Catherine at Mount Olivet in Washington, D.C.

Cruel Consequences

Horace Sedgwick (1847-1865) Private, Company G, 1st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry

In 1863, at the age of fifteen, Horace Sedgwick[20] traveled to Washington, D.C. and enlisted in the Union Army. It is unknown why he decided to enlist at such a young age. He wouldn't have been drafted, and the Army could have turned him away due to his age. Nevertheless, he was mustered in on June 25, 1983, and assigned to Company G of the 1st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry as a private, with the job title, "chore boy."

C. A. Kraus, "Bird's eye view of Confederate prison pen at Salisbury, N.C., taken in 1864," J.H. Buford's Sons, Lithographers. Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress.

In August 1864, Sedgwick was sent to Dutch Gap, the same canal project to which James Barber had been detailed two months earlier.[21] On October 27, Sedgwick's company was engaged in the Second Battle of Fair Oaks, a failed Union attempt to capture Richmond. The following day, Sedgwick was listed as "missing in action." He had been captured on the Williamsburg Road, according to a "Memorandum From Prisoner of War Records" found in his military records.[22] After his capture by the enemy, Sedgwick was held in Richmond for a month, then on November 24 was transferred to the Confederate Prison at Salisbury, North Carolina.

Salisbury Prison was notoriously overcrowded. It had a capacity of two thousand prisoners, but after the Union stopped exchanging prisoners with the Confederate Army,[23] their number grew precipitously. Ten thousand captured soldiers were taken there in October 1864, the month before Sedgwick arrived. It is estimated that three thousand to four thousand prisoners died at Salisbury during the war, many from diseases such as chronic diarrhea, pneumonia, scurvy, typhoid fever, and malnutrition. This prison, as far as the U.S. military records show, was the last known location of Horace Sedgwick, who was by then only seventeen years old. If he died in prison, which appears likely, he would have been buried in a mass grave with other prisoners. These burials are in a cemetery now known as Salisbury National Cemetery run by the U.S. Veterans Administration.

A Widow Denied

Henry Turner, alias William H. Dorsey (1836-1875)
Private, Company F, 31st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 114757

Henry Turner was born around 1836 in Montgomery County, Maryland. He was held in slavery by Simon Nicholls as a boy, and later by Altha A. Hoyle in the Medley District. Turner was twenty-two when he left Montgomery County to join the military. On August 3, 1864, he arrived in Washington, D.C. and enlisted in the Union Army using the alias William H. Dorsey, volunteering to be a substitute for George B. Haywood. Turner was assigned to Company F of the 31st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry. It wasn't long before he found himself on the battlefield. The 31st Regiment, which was first organized in New York in April 1864, was already engaged in siege operations against Petersburg and Richmond by the time Turner enlisted.

On October 27, during the Battle of Boydton Plank Road, Turner's company was positioned near the South Side Railroad, which the Union Army sought to control in order to cut off supplies to the Confederate Army. Turner was shot in his right hand, permanently injuring his second and third metacarpals (the bones that connect the index and middle finger to the wrist). On November 17, he was admitted to L'Ouverture Hospital in Alexandria, Virginia, which treated African American soldiers. During his recuperation, it was determined that his injury rendered him unable to perform the duties of a soldier. He was discharged on February 23, 1865. Because he was wounded in the line of duty, he was entitled to a pension determined by the degree of disability and its effect on his ability to support himself. Officials reviewing his case decided that he was only "one half incapacitated for obtaining his subsistence by manual labor," so his pension was set at four dollars per month.

Turner returned to Montgomery County, settled near Germantown, and married Lucy Sims. Together, they had three children: Henry, Thomas, and Lucy, born in 1868, 1870, and 1871, respectively. It appears that none of these children made it past childhood. Henry's young wife died on April 11, 1872, and was buried at Saint Mary's Catholic Cemetery in Barnesville. She was only twenty-two years old.

Two years later, Turner met Lucy Nolan. At the time, Nolan already had two daughters: Julia, whose father was a man named Ward; and Eliza, whose father was Edward Everson, neither of whom Lucy had married. Since emancipation, she had been living with her mother and siblings at a farm they rented from Joseph A. Taney. Turner and Nolan married on December 15, 1874, at Saint Mary's Catholic Church in Barnesville. He took on whatever farm labor he could manage (given his mangled hand), while his wife worked as a laundress. His pension gave them some financial stability. Unfortunately, it would not last long.

In September 1875, Turner went to Washington, D.C. to get his pension money. On his way back home, he boarded a train in Rockville in the late afternoon apparently "much under the influence of liquor." His train arrived in Germantown around 2 a.m. After disembarking, Turner was struck by an oncoming train when he crossed the tracks and killed instantly.[24] In his wife's affidavit in her application for a widow's pension, she said that Turner was buried "at Germantown at Aquilla Nicholls' burying ground." Aquilla was the daughter of Turner's former enslaver, Simon Nicholls, so Turner was apparently buried on the same property where he had been enslaved as a boy. Lucy had only been married to Turner for about nine months when he died. A few months after the accident, she gave birth to twins Harriet (who lived until the age of eleven) and George (who died in infancy).

After Turner's death, Lucy moved back to the Taney farm, where her brother Robert Nolan was now head of the household. She and her daughters (Julia, Eliza, and Harriet) resided on the second floor of the house, while her siblings (Robert, Betty, Jane, and Amelia) lived downstairs. As each of Lucy's sisters married, they moved out of the Taney house. About five years after Turner died, Edward Everson (father of Lucy's daughter Eliza) moved in. He paid his rent by providing groceries for the household. He also paid her fifty cents to do his laundry. Everson lived at the Taney house until 1896, when he married Charlotte Jackson.

Lucy Turner filed for a widow's pension from the government on October 6, 1890. In her affidavit, she said that she had no personal or real property after the death of her husband and no one who was legally bound to support her. Her only means of support was manual labor. She said that she was unable to work because of pain in her feet and that she weighed over two hundred pounds.

Her claim was rejected on March 12, 1902, based on the Pension Bureau's contention that she'd lived in "open and notorious adulterous cohabitation" with Everson, a violation of the Pension Act of August 7, 1882. According to her brother's affidavit, Everson slept upstairs with Lucy and her children. Nolan said that he didn't know if they shared the same bed but said that there had been some talk of Lucy and Edward becoming engaged. However, in Eliza Everson's affidavit, she testified that her uncle Robert and her father Edward slept in the same bed downstairs and that she and her mother shared a bed upstairs. Lucy herself also testified that she had not shared a bed with Everson. On August 12, 1902, her lawyer appealed the decision. Addressing the Pension Bureau, he said, "In this case, the claimant is an old, poverty-striken [sic] and illiterate negro woman, destitute of resources." He asked for a special examiner to take on the case.

W.W. Macy was appointed the special examiner for her appeal. In the face of conflicting affidavits, he seemed inclined to give Lucy the benefit of the doubt. In a cover letter to the report he submitted to the Pension Bureau, he wrote: "I was not able to secure any direct and positive evidence as to any violation by the claimant of the Act of August 7, 1882." Nevertheless, on January 25, 1904, the bureau decreed that "inasmuch as the evidence conclusively shows that the claimant has lived in open and notorious adulterous cohabitation since her husband's death and since the passage of the Act of August 7, 1882, her claim was properly rejected." Without a pension, Lucy's only recourse was to be supported by her daughter until her death, which is presumed to have occurred before the 1910 census was taken.

Quince Orchard

John Henson Swailes (1816-1911)
Private, Company I, 29th Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 448842

John Henson Swailes[25] met his wife Annie Maria Mason around 1841 in Darnestown, where she was enslaved by James B. Beall. Henson Swailes was taken there when Beall's aging uncle, Horatio Beall, deeded all his "negroes" (including Swailes) to James, perhaps in return for allowing him to live in his home.[26] Not long after Henson's move from Horatio's farm in Colesville to James's in Darnestown, he and Annie began living together as husband and wife.[27] By the time Henson was drafted[28] into the Union Army, they had several children.

Dutch Gap, Virginia. Picket station of Colored troops near Dutch Gap canal, November 1864, photographer unknown. Prints & Photographs Division, Library of Congress.

The 29th Regiment of the U.S. Colored Infantry was raised in Illinois in April 1864 and suffered heavy losses during the Battle of the Crater on July 30, 1864. Four more companies were formed to rebuild its numbers from an additional draft of soldiers in November 1864. Henson was mustered into Company I, 29th Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, in December, with a term of service of one year.[29] He was then sent to a camp near City Point, Virginia, where General Ulysses Grant had established his headquarters during the siege of Petersburg.

During target practice near Dutch Gap in March 1865, Henson was injured by a firing cap that broke off and became embedded in his right eye. The company's orderly sergeant removed the cap himself. Henson was not sent to a hospital or seen by a doctor immediately after the accident. Blinded in one eye, Henson was ordered to camp duty until the company was discharged. It is not known whether he was with his regiment when it triumphantly entered

Petersburg on April 3, singing "John Brown's Body."[30] He was sent to the post hospital in August, but returned to his company in September, just before it was sent to Brownsville Texas. He was mustered out of the Army in November and went briefly to Illinois to be discharged. According to his comrade, William E. Young, upon arrival in Springfield, the soldiers were treated to a reception and a banquet. Afterward, Henson returned to Darnestown to reunite with Annie.

The Pleasant View Methodist Episcopal Church, Michael Dwyer, 1975. The church, and the nearby Quince Orchard Colored School (both established in 1868), were the center of activity for the Quince Orchard African American Community. Courtesy of M-NCPPC.

Henson and Annie Swailes settled in a part of Darnestown known as Quince Orchard,[31] a rural enclave of African Americans formed after the end of the Civil War. Henson worked as a farm laborer despite partial blindness. In 1876, Henson and Annie were married in Rockville, making official a relationship that had begun decades before. Between 1876 and 1897, the couple acquired several acres of land in Quince Orchard.[32]

Over the years, the pain and inflammation in Henson's right eye became debilitating. Dr. Charles H. Nourse of Darnestown treated him, and in an affidavit to the Pension Bureau, he stated that Swailes' eye had "increasing pain and disability for work from it until he was entirely unfit for labor. Now he is an old broken-down man and all that The Government can grant him is a pension and reward he justly and honestly deserves." Dr. Swan M. Burnett of Washington, D.C. said in his affidavit that he treated Henson on June 28, 1884, stating that, "He was at that time suffering from a violent and painful inflammation of the [ocular] body and an ulcer of the cornea." The afflicted eye was removed to relieve his pain. Henson's pension was approved at a rate of seventeen dollars a month, to commence on March 9, 1886.

In 1891, he applied for an increase because his left eye was failing as well, especially when he would go outside into bright sunlight. Henson's request for an increase was denied, as were two later requests in 1904 and 1905. The Pension Bureau had determined that the loss of his eye was not a progressive condition, and therefore not eligible for an increase, despite his complaint that his remaining eye was failing and that he suffered from additional medical conditions such as rheumatism and a hernia. John Henson Swailes died in Quince Orchard on March 19, 1911, of bronchial pneumonia, at the age of ninety-five.

After Henson's death, Annie applied for a widow's pension. At first she struggled with the process, perhaps because of her age and problems with memory. The special examiner from the Pension Bureau described her as "...very old and evidently either very ignorant or feeble minded perhaps both." However, Zebedee Beall, son of James Beall, said, "Hense and Maria were both very reliable and I would rather take their word for anything rather than that of many white people I know." At the end of the special examination, Annie Swailes's pension application was approved, and she began receiving twelve dollars per month starting on May 9, 1911. By the time of her death on June 28, 1922, she was receiving seventeen dollars a month. Both Henson and Annie Swailes are buried in the Pleasant View church cemetery in Quince Orchard.

Big Pines

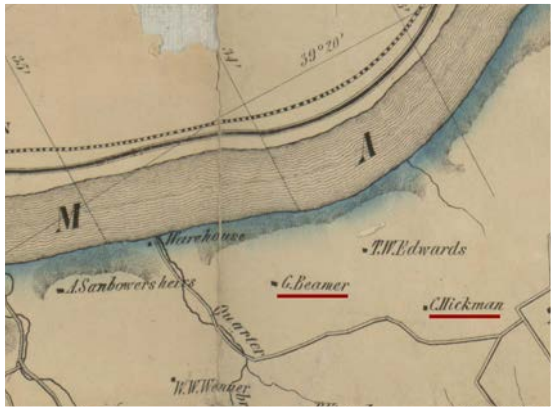
Nelson Cooper (1835-1910)
Private, Company H, 2nd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 245571

Peter Nelson (1842-1901)
Private, Company E, 43rd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry
Pension Certificate No. 715007

After the end of the Civil War, a small number of emancipated African Americans settled in Glen, Maryland, which was near Potomac. Two of the residents were veterans of the Civil War, having served in the U.S. Colored Troops: Nelson Cooper and Peter Nelson. The area, and the Black community that populated it, became known as Big Pines or The Pines, named for the large pines which proliferated the landscape. The region is classified as a serpentine barren: a rare ecological feature in which pines are one of the few tree species able to thrive.

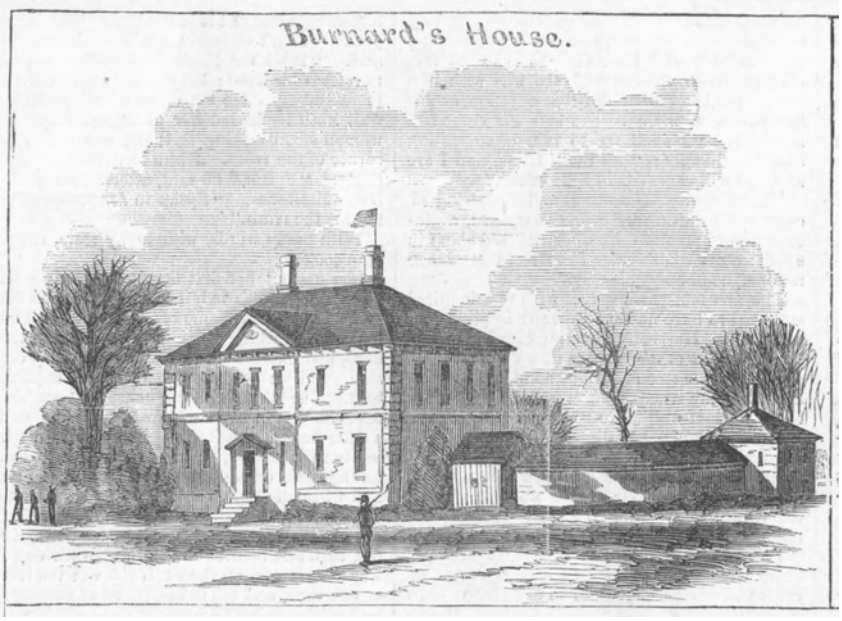
In April 1863, a few months after the Emancipation Proclamation was enacted, Nelson Cooper[33] left his native Loudoun County for Washington, D.C., accompanied by his wife, Jane, and members of her family: her mother, Jemima Downey; her sister, Mandy; and her half-sisters Kate and Martha Henderson. Martha was the youngest, about nine years old at the time of this move. They lived together in a three-story house on Delaware Avenue S.W., near the railroad tracks. By this time, Cooper and his wife had two children: Ellen and James Fenton, born in 1862 and 1863, respectively. On September 11, Cooper went to City Hall and enlisted in the U.S. Colored Infantry as a substitute for Robert Rodney, for which he was paid sixty dollars. He was mustered into Company H of the 2nd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry at Camp Casey, Virginia.

Yardley Taylor, "Map of Loudoun County, Virginia," Philadelphia : Thomas Reynolds & Robert Pearsall Smith, c1854. Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress.



Detail of map showing location of Beamer and Hickman farms in northwest Loudoun County where Nelson Cooper and his first wife, Jane Downey, were enslaved.

The 2nd Regiment was attached to the Department of the Gulf in Florida from February 1864 to July 1865. At first, Nelson Cooper acted as a scout at St. Andrews Bay and the Apalachicola River. Later, he saw action at Cedar Key, including battles at Otter Creek Station and at Station Four. On March 6, 1865, during the Battle of Natural Bridge, he was shot by a Minié ball which entered his body at the back of his left shoulder and exited through the front, rendering his arm useless. He was sent by ship to the General Hospital in Key West, where he stayed for several weeks. After leaving the hospital, Cooper was furloughed and returned to Washington for a month. Eventually, he was put on light duty as a cook at a hospital in Tallahassee and then returned to his company on June 30, 1865. He was mustered out on January 5, 1866, in Key West, then sent to Washington to be discharged.



"Burnard's [sic] House," Harper's Weekly, vol. 7, no. 315, January 10, 1863, p. 28.

Peter Nelson was born around 1842 in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. He was enslaved by the members of the Bernard family, Arthur and Alfred, on the Mannsfield plantation. Nelson's aunt and uncle, Mildred and William Brown, were also enslaved there. They raised Nelson after he became an orphan. The Browns moved to Washington, D.C. in May 1862 after enslaved people residing there were freed. Nelson, who was twenty-one years of age at the time, left Spotsylvania and went to Massachusetts to join the Union Army.

On July 29, 1864, in Taunton, Massachusetts, Nelson enlisted as a substitute for Darius M. White, for which he received a one-hundred-dollar bounty. He was mustered into Company E of the 43rd Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, which had been organized in Philadelphia. He was sent to the Richmond area, where his regiment was engaged in the siege of Richmond and Petersburg. During the cannonading of Fort Harrison on September 29, 1864, Nelson became deaf but was not treated by a doctor. After the end of the war, his regiment was sent to Texas to quell rebel activity and to enforce the Emancipation Proclamation. He mustered out of the Army in Brownsville, Texas on October 20, 1865, and was sent to Philadelphia to be discharged.

In 1866, Nelson Cooper, his wife Jane, and their children reunited and settled in Glen, joined by Jane's mother and sisters a year later. However, Jane Downey Cooper died only a few years later, around 1869. Aunt Sarah Gibson (one of the founders of the community of Gibson Grove) attended Jane's body, and she was buried on John Moore's farm in Cabin John. A few years after his wife's death, Cooper began a relationship with Louisa Warren. Beginning around 1871, Cooper and Warren lived together as husband and wife and had children, although they didn't marry until later.

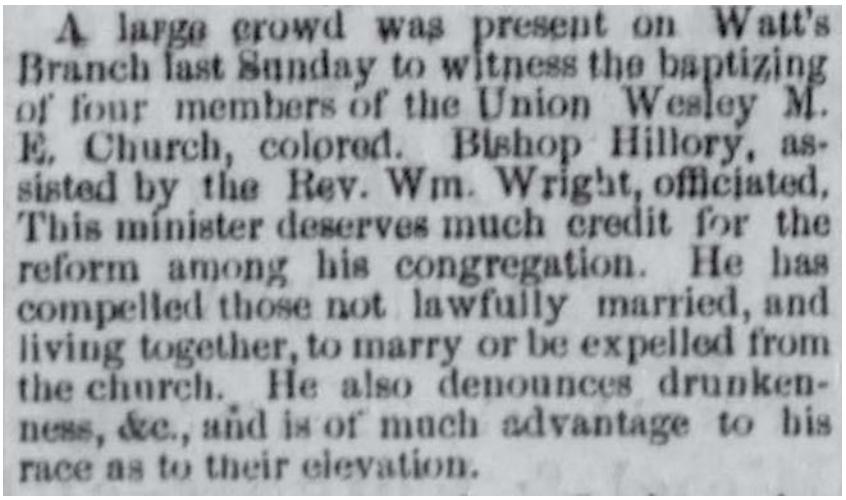
Being one of the earliest African American settlers of Big Pines, Cooper may have been looked upon, as many USCT veterans were, as a community leader. He'd fought in a war that brought freedom to Black people. His military experience might have enhanced his problem-solving abilities, which would have been valuable to a community of recently emancipated men and women.[34] In 1873, Cooper and two other trustees, Thomas Jenkins and Aaron Turner, purchased land in Glen from Reuben C. and Clara V. Creamer to be used for a church, called Union Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church. In the late nineteenth century, a road now known as Piney Meetinghouse Road was built that passed near the church. Cooper was likely one of the church's first ministers, since according to the 1880 census, his occupation was "preacher."

Following emancipation, Peter Nelson returned to the D.C. area and worked for various people in the city and in nearby Maryland. Around 1867, he was working for a Mr. Naylor, who had a large farm about three miles from Georgetown on the pike to Rockville. In March or April 1868, Nelson came to work for Wesley L. Magruder. In an affidavit, Magruder's daughter, Sarah V. Hughes, recalled when Nelson arrived at their farm. They were so short of help that she had to quit school to tend the sheep and do other farm work. Her father was on his way to Baltimore when he happened upon Nelson walking along the road between D.C. and Offutt's Crossroads (now Potomac, Maryland) looking for work. Magruder sent Nelson to his farm and gave him his red silk bandanna so that his family would know that Nelson had been sent by him directly. Nelson was well-liked by the family and Mrs. Hughes recalled that "I and my sister had a lot of fun with him." Her younger sister, Ida, used to write letters for him to the Browns, who were still in D.C.

Peter Nelson worked for the Magruder family continuously from 1868 to 1869, and off and on after that. According to Sarah Hughes, he took up with Martha Henderson (half-sister of Nelson Cooper's first wife, Jane) whom he'd met while attending a meeting in Tobytown[35] around 1874. At the time, Henderson lived in Big Pines and worked for Capt. John McDonald. Previous to that, she had worked for several families in the area, including the Offutts, Talbotts, and Trundles.

Before meeting Nelson, Henderson had a brief affair with Dan Shaw, which produced a daughter, Annie. After Nelson and Henderson began living together, Annie took on the surname of Nelson. Nelson and Henderson then had two children of their own, Amanda and Willie Alberta in 1875 and 1878, respectively. Around 1880, the couple had a disagreement (allegedly about a dress she was wearing) and they separated. During their separation, Henderson became involved with Lemuel Thomas and in February 1881, she gave birth to his child, whom she named Mimia.[36] Not long after her birth, Thomas left the area, and Henderson reunited with Nelson. Mimia's surname also became Nelson.

Around 1879, a new minister was installed at Union Wesley Methodist Episcopal Church. Rev. William H. Wright insisted that unmarried couples living together must become married or be expelled from the church. Louisa Magruder and Nelson Cooper had lived together and had several children before they married on September 8, 1879, at Rev. Wright's home in Georgetown. Peter Nelson and Martha Henderson had lived together for most of the last eight years and had two children together by the time they married on April 29, 1882, also in Georgetown.[37] One of their neighbors in Big Pines, Alfred Harding, said in his affidavit, "I remember Preacher Wright stirring us all up. He made me marry, too, and he made all us people marry ceremonially or leave the church." Rev. Wright's insistence on the institution of marriage was well-known and was even mentioned in an article in the *Montgomery County Sentinel*.[38]



A large crowd was present on Watt's Branch last Sunday to witness the baptizing of four members of the Union Wesley M. E. Church, colored. Bishop Hillory, assisted by the Rev. Wm. Wright, officiated. This minister deserves much credit for the reform among his congregation. He has compelled those not lawfully married, and living together, to marry or be expelled from the church. He also denounces drunkenness, &c., and is of much advantage to his race as to their elevation.

Montgomery County Sentinel, May 6, 1881, p. 3.

Nelson Cooper worked as a day laborer but found it difficult to maintain full employment. His shoulder wound, the result of that gunshot during the Battle of Natural Bridge, had never fully healed. He was only able to work half-time due not only to the gunshot wound he suffered but also rheumatism and heart disease. On February 11, 1881, he filed for an invalid pension from the Pension Bureau. At first, he received two dollars per month. However, as his health worsened, he filed for increases in 1883 and 1886. By 1890, Cooper was receiving twelve dollars a month. Beginning on April 15, 1891, Peter Nelson received twelve dollars a month due to "severe deafness of both ears." His deafness made it hard for him to hold a job because he always needed to have someone to communicate for him.

Peter Nelson died in Big Pines of tuberculosis on May 9, 1901. Martha Nelson was left with a log cabin and four acres of land, but she had no other assets or livestock and her husband had no life insurance, leaving her to support herself by doing laundry. She asked Captain McDonald's son, Charles, a lawyer, to help her apply for a pension, which was submitted to the Pension Bureau on February 21, 1905. It was initially rejected because she couldn't provide enough evidence of their marriage. A special examiner, A. Wenger, was assigned to her case. After taking affidavits from several witnesses, he came to a few conclusions. The first was that Nelson had not been married before he began cohabiting with Martha. None of the witnesses were aware of any prior relationship on his part. In a letter to his superiors, Wenger noted that Nelson's "relationship with the Magruder family" was "so childishly trustful and confiding, that, had he ever been married or even had any serious love affair, the Magruder girls would have got it out of him." On the subject of Peter's and Martha's years together before they married, Wenger opined, "Their failure to marry ceremonially prior to 1882 has no significance, as common law unions were the custom among colored settlements in Montgomery County up to that date."

There was conflicting information on the ages of Martha's two minor children, Robert Lemuel and Ledonia. It was difficult, at first, to prove their actual birth dates. According to Martha, "The two children were baptized in Union Wesley church, by our minister W. H. Wright (now in Baltimore Maryland), about 2 months after birth. There ought to be a record of each baptism in that church, but when we tried to get it, it could not be found. One of our ministers, Mr. Ogleton, ran away with the books and money after Ledonia was born." Nelson and Louisa Cooper both provided affidavits, and speaking of Martha's two minor children, Louisa said, "I was present and acted as midwife when each of these children was born." Unfortunately, she also couldn't remember exactly when Robert Lemuel and Ledonia had been born. Eventually, birth dates were established for the two children, based on which evidence the examiners chose to believe. Martha Nelson was approved for eight dollars per month as a widow, and two dollars per month per child under the age of sixteen. She also received a lump-sum payment dating to the death of her husband. She never remarried and continued to receive a pension until her death on June 26, 1913.

Nelson Cooper died in Washington, D.C. of chronic bronchitis on April 22, 1910. In her application for a widow's pension, Louisa Cooper was able to prove, through affidavits from family and friends (including Martha Nelson), that she and Cooper had begun living as husband and wife a few years after his first wife had died.[39]

Louisa had been married before her relationship with Cooper, but she had no direct knowledge of what had happened to her first husband, Reuben Warren, after he left to join the Army. At the time of the outbreak of the Civil War, he was enslaved by Elizabeth "Betsy" Offutt and Louisa Magruder (later, Cooper) was enslaved by neighbors of the Offutts, Thomas and Oratio Claggett. By mutual agreement of their slaveholders, Reuben and Louisa were allowed to act as husband and wife. In an affidavit filed with the Pension Bureau, Louisa referred to Reuben as her "slave husband" and stated that "No minister performed any ceremony; we had the consent of our respective owners." Louisa had three children by Warren: William, Robert, and Isaac.

According to the report of the Commissioner of Slave Statistics,[40] Reuben Warren had enlisted in a D.C. Regiment, though it is not clear which regiment that might have been. There was a Reuben Warren in Company C, 1st Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry, but he was a different man. The pension record for that soldier indicated that although he came from Montgomery County, his wife was named Sophia Williams. Near the close of the war, that soldier died in a hospital on Roanoke Island, North Carolina, of dysentery.

The Reuben Warren who married Louisa Magruder also never returned to Montgomery County. After emancipation, Louisa went to work for her "slave husband's" former owner, Betsy Offutt. Toward the end of the war, Offutt received a letter notifying her that Reuben had died in a hospital in Baltimore of yellow fever. When asked to identify witnesses who knew her when she was married to him, Louisa replied, "I cannot think of any one white or colored who knew of me living with Reuben Warren."[41] Fortunately, she was able to find enough people to swear that Reuben Warren never returned to her after the war, and that they'd heard he died in a Baltimore hospital.[42] The special examiner for her case, John W. Hall, reported that "Whether he died as she claims to have heard or not, it does appear that her relations with him were not legalized after the war as required by Maryland laws." Her pension was approved, based on her marriage to Cooper, which she received until her death on April 1, 1925.

Foundation of Union Wesley Methodist Church cemetery. Photo by author, April 2026.

Union Wesley M.E. Church in Big Pines closed around 1920 because the older generation was dying out, and the younger generation was moving to other places, such as Washington, D.C., where they might find better opportunities.[43] The church cemetery remained in use, however, because people who had left Big Pines still wanted to be buried with their families. It was the place of final rest for Nelson and Louisa Cooper, Peter and Martha Nelson, and numerous members of the community they founded. The last known burial at Union Wesley was of Gladys O. Cooper, who died on December 30, 1956, in Washington, D.C. She was the granddaughter of Nelson and Louisa Cooper.

Conclusion

Though some Union generals doubted the abilities of African American soldiers, the brave men of the USCT proved to be fierce fighters for the preservation of the Union, the abolition of slavery, and for the right to full citizenship of Black people. By telling their individual stories, we honor the sacrifices they made for the cause of freedom and to make the United States of America live up to its promise that "All men are created equal."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julianne Mangin, a lifelong resident of Montgomery County, is an independent researcher, writer, and historian. She is a retired librarian who worked at the Library of Congress from 1998 to 2011. Prior to that, she worked at the National Agricultural Library from 1984 to 1997. She holds a master's degree in library science from Catholic University. She is a member of Montgomery History's speakers bureau and has written two articles for its publication *The Montgomery County Story,* one on Aspin Hill Pet Cemetery and the other on the Montgomery County Poor Farm and Almshouse.

Endnotes

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10 War Department, Record and Pension Office, *Compiled Military Service Records for the Civil War,* https://catalog.archives.gov/id/300398, accessed February 9, 2026. Also available at Ancestry.com, *U.S., Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2007. https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1107/, accessed February 9, 2026.

11 National Archives and Records Administration. *U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2000. https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/4654/, accessed February 9, 2026.

12 Shaffer, p. 123.

13 Letter dated May 22 1883, from Eliza Edelin of Kentucky to William W. Dudley, Commissioner of Pensions.

14 Judith Giesberg, *Last Seen: The Enduring Search by Formerly Enslaved People to Find Their Lost Families* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2025), p. 163.

15 On his Compiled Military Service Record, his surname is spelled "Edlin."

16 Lyttonsville is an historic African American kinship community which began when Samuel Litton (or Lytton) purchased four acres of land there in 1853. It is located in Silver Spring, south of the intersection of Brookville Road and the CSX railroad tracks, and north of East-West Highway.

17 Eventually, these churches merged to become Silver Spring United Methodist Church.

18 Shaffer, p. 15.

19 James Barber married Catherine Johnson on January 1, 1857, at St. Mary's Catholic Church in Rockville. The church record erroneously refers to him as "James Butler."

20 Horace Sedgwick was born around 1847 in the Clarksburg district of Montgomery County, to Hester Sedgwick. Sedgwick and members of his family were free Blacks.

21 See the previous story in this article under "Hard Labor At Dutch Gap."

22 "Sedgwick, Horace, Age 18, Year 1863, 1st US Colored Infantry, A-Win," *Compiled Military Service Records for the Civil War,* https://catalog.archives.gov/id/35835679, accessed February 9, 2026.

23 Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina,* (Raleigh, North Carolina: Edwards & Broughton Printing Company, 1925), v. 2, p. 972.

24 "Killed by an Express Train," *Montgomery County Sentinel,* September 24, 1875, p. 2.

25 Andre Ferrell, "The Life of John Henson Swailes and Annie Maria Mason Swailes," updated February 7, 2022. Swailes Family, Family Files collection, Montgomery History, LC-FF-00859.

26 Montgomery County Land Records, Liber BS 10, Folio 391. (April 21, 1841) Horatio Beall to James B. Beall. This deed also included all Horatio's livestock, farm equipment, and household furnishings. He sold his Colesville farm around 1845, possibly to pay off debts or because he no longer was able to farm.

27 Accounts differ about the date the two began living together. Some indicate it may have been as early as 1842 or as late as 1853. Their ages also vary from one census to another.

28 "Draft in Maryland, Fifth Congressional District," *Baltimore Sun,* November 19, 1864, p. 1.

29 According to his military record, he was thirty-three when he was drafted; according to other sources, he may have been as old as forty-eight.

30 Victor Hicken, *Illinois in the Civil War,* 2nd edition (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press), p. 342.

31 Jason Green, *Too Precious to Lose: A Memoir of Family, Community,and Possibility (New York: One World, 2026), p. 85*

32 Ferrell, 2022, Appendix C, Landownership Records.

33 Nelson Cooper was born in December 1835 in Lovettsville, Loudoun County, Virginia where he was enslaved by George Beamer. In 1862, he married Jane Downey, who was born about 1840, also in Virginia. Her family was enslaved on a neighboring farm by Catherine Hickman and her son John.

34 Shaffer, p. 32.

35 Tobytown is another African American community located four miles west of Big Pines.

36 "Mimia" is a nickname for Jemima, which was Martha's mother's first name. Jemima Downey also was sometimes referred to as Mimia.

37 A marriage license in Montgomery County cost $4.50, which caused some couples to put off getting married or to marry in the District of Columbia, where a marriage license only cost $2.50.

38 *Montgomery County Sentinel,* May 6, 1881, p. 3.

39 The 1870 census, which was taken the year after Jane Downey Cooper died, showed Nelson Cooper living with a Caroline Cooper. She was possibly a female relative who moved in with Nelson after Jane's death to help with the children. None of the affidavits in his pension record mention her.

40 George Patterson, Commissioner of Slave Statistics, Montgomery County, *Record of Slaves in Montgomery County, Maryland at the Time of the Adoption of the Constitution in 1864*, dated 1868.

41 Betsy Offutt died in 1867.

42 In the 1870 Census, Louisa Warren was listed as living in the Rockville District in the same household as a man named Reuben Warren. Due to a seven-year age difference, he is probably not the soldier of the same name who Louisa considered her "slave husband," and who left to fight in the Union Army. It's possible that she was living at the time in a household of her late husband's family, which might have included this younger Reuben.

43 Nina Honemond Clarke, *History of the Nineteenth-Century Black Churches in Maryland and Washington, D.C.,* (New York: Vantage Press, 1983).


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