

Emily Lovett

6 May 2013

Chestertown's America

Henry Worrell – the Boy Born into Slavery who Fought for the Liberty of All.

The Civil War is a story that captivates many and is subject to many different interpretations. Some believe the war was over slavery, others believe it was over states rights, but no matter what interpretation, the service of the troops in battles for their homes are facts that cannot be ignored. In a general summary of the Civil War, there are Union troops and Confederate troops; however, there is more to these organizations than meets the eye. The formation of African American regiments during the Civil War is not only unique because people of their race were enslaved, but rather the deeper sense and development of identity among the African Americans who served and those who admired them. The fact that these men were organized, trained, and trusted gave them new credibility that could not be ignored. While the white training officers felt like they were going out on a limb trying to train them, even noting that they were as ignorant as children, the troops proved themselves.¹ One man, Henry E. Worrell of Company D of the 7th regiment of the United States Colored Troops had enlisted as soon as he could, been promoted to corporal during his service, and continued to exhibit leadership in Chestertown, Maryland after the war. The story of this man is not simply the story of an African American Civil War soldier, but the story of Henry E. Worrell, the man born to a slave mother and a free father on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, the man that was respected and got promoted during his service, the man who worked odd jobs for the rest of his life. He is a unique person with a unique story that deserves to be told.

¹ Joseph Mark Califf, *Record of the Services of the Seventh Regiment, U. S. Colored Troops*. Books for Libraries Press; Freeport, New York. 1971.

Henry E. Worrell was born in January of 1835 in Lynches Station, Kent County, Maryland.²³⁴ At the time of his birth, he had an older brother named Thomas, but the family would soon grow to include younger sisters Jane, Emily, and Alice, as well as younger brothers Alfred and Louis.⁵ His parents were Richard Worrell, a free African American man and Ellen Worrell, a slave owned by Catharine H. Wroth.⁶ Catharine was the wife of Doctor Peregrine Wroth, a graduate of Washington College who studied medicine with Dr. Edward Worrell. It can be presumed that the two were friends, with Peregrine even naming his son, Edward Worrell Wroth, after him.⁷ An interesting question that is often asked is how slaves took on their last name. In this case, Catharine owning a slave with the last name Worrell is not a coincidence because through tracing genealogy, it can be seen that Catharine and Dr. Edward Worrell were actually distant cousins.⁸ To get an idea of what life might have been like for Henry on the Wroth land, an interesting document written by Peregrine himself may shed some light. In his piece, “The Yule Log: Remembering Christmas in 18th Century Kent County”, Wroth recalls Christmases of his childhood and the role that his father’s slaves had played in it. Wroth describes the slaves as jubilant servants, who often sang and danced, even jumping high into the air and playing the banjo.⁹ It is obvious from this recollection that Wroth saw slavery through

² U. S. Census Bureau (1900). *Twelfth Census of the United States: Kent County, Maryland, 4th District*. Retrieved from Ancestry.com. Note: Verification of Worrell’s month of birth.

³ “Board of Review; Henry Worrell”. *Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions*. 9 February 1914. Note: Verification of Worrell’s year of birth.

⁴ “Declaration for Pension, Henry Worrell.” *Bureau of Pensions*. 13 December 1918. Note: Worrell’s birthplace.

⁵ “Maryland, Probate Estate and Guardianship Files, 1796-1940,” index and images, *FamilySearch* (<https://familysearch.org/pal:MM9.1.1/XXFN-BZX> : accessed 06 May 2013), Catherine H Wroth, 18 Jan 1855. Note: States Ellen is a slave and Richard is free.

⁶ Death Certificate for Henry E. Worrell, 18 December 1918, State of Maryland. Note: Lists Worrell’s parents.

⁷ Hanson, George A. *Old Kent: The Eastern Shore of Maryland*. 1876. Clearfield Company Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. 1990. 201.

⁸ Hanson, 369.

⁹ “The Yule Log: Remembering Christmas in 18th Century Kent County”. *Here on the Chester: Washington College Remembers old Chestertown*. 1858.

rose colored glasses, which does not portray him as a merciless master, but also shows that he had no real sense of institution of slavery.

While it may be surprising that Henry came from a mixed family of a free African American and a slave, this was not uncommon in Kent County. As noted by Albin Kowalewski, free labor was much more cost efficient than slave labor because the employer did not have to provide food, shelter, clothing, and the like to an employee. As wheat became the main product of farms in Kent County, the employment of free African American wage earners rose. While there were land owning African Americans during this time, it was also common for someone to make a yearlong contract to work on the land, and in some cases, live on it. In the case of free African Americans with family members still enslaved, there have been documented cases in which the freeman will buy or trade items for their family members in order to free them.¹⁰

Whether Richard had lived on the same land as Ellen or simply worked there, it likely that that is how they met, married, and had children together. Henry lived as a slave, or servant, to Catharine H. Wroth until January 1855, when he, along with his mother and brother Thomas, were freed according the Wroth's last will and testament.¹¹ While this is so, he did not receive a slave certificate to carry with him until September 16, 1858.¹² These dates mark a new chapter in Henry's life where he becomes a free man. Not soon after in 1859, he was married by Reverend George Stokes to Sophia Brown.¹³ There is no record of this union because it commenced during "slave days," but the recall of the reverend's name and the testimony of

¹⁰ Kowalewski, Albin. "Cultivating Freedom: Free Blacks, Abolitionists, Markets, and Escapes in Kent County Maryland, 1760-1860." 25 April 2007.

¹¹ Will of Catharine H. Wroth, 18 January 1855 (filed 18 January 1855). Maryland, Probate Estate and Guardianship Files, 1796-1940, Kent, W. Retrieved from familysearch.org. 10.

¹² "Declaration for Pension, Henry Worrell." *Bureau of Pensions*. 13 December 1918. Note: slave certificate.

¹³ "Henry Worrell, certificate no. 799778". *Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions*. 30 August 1898. Note:

Annie Barrett provided proof to the pension bureau.¹⁴ While there is a conflicting date of their married noted in the 1900 Census stating that they had been married for 35 years, which would make the year 1865, the evidence that follows makes the date of 1859 more likely. The couple does not appear in the 1860 census, but the next notable event was the birth of Henry and Sophia's daughter Jane in 1862.¹⁵ A year later, a new chapter in Henry's life began on September 26, 1863, when he enlists in Company D of the 7th regiment United States Colored Troops.¹⁶

The regiment was organized at Birney Barracks in Baltimore, Maryland on September 26, 1863. After some recruiting, which was not an easy task because of southern sympathizers who did not want their slaves taken away, the first six companies were organized at Birney Barracks and soon moved to Camp Stanton. Soon four more companies were organized, the last of which was mustered on November 12, 1863. Regimental organization took place, with Thomas McCarty becoming Henry's captain in Company D.¹⁷ The training that took place consisted of "two drills a day, parades, guard-duty, and recitations for officers" and they stayed at the fort until March of 1864.¹⁸ ¹⁹ After a long wait, they were finally sent Portsmouth, Virginia on March 4, 1864. On March 7, they moved to Hilton Head, South Carolina, which they departed from on March 10 and headed to Jacksonville, Florida. In August, the regiment headed north to Petersburg, Virginia and took action in fighting, losing casualties daily.²⁰ It is

¹⁴ "General Affidavit, Sophia Worrell, widow of Henry, claim no. 1134259". *Bureau of Pensions*. 24 February 1919.

¹⁵ "Henry Worrell, certificate no. 799778". *Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions*. 30 August 1898

¹⁶ U.S. Colored Military Troops Service Records, 1861-1865. p. 1323.

¹⁷ Joseph Mark Califf, *Record of the Services of the Seventh Regiment, U. S. Colored Troops*. Books for Libraries Press; Freeport, New York. 1971.

¹⁸ Califf, 19.

¹⁹ National Park Service. 7th Regiment Infantry United States Colored Troops. (<http://www.nps.gov/rich/historyculture/7th-usct.htm>)

²⁰ "156 Seventh Regiment Infantry, U. S. C. T., Maryland Volunteers". *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2*. 157. Accessed through Archives of Maryland Online.

here that Henry Worrell became injured while building a structure. According to Worrell, “while carrying [a] log to construct breastworks, my comrade who was engaged with me in same work let go hid end of a log and threw the whole weight of it upon me”.²¹ Records detail that the injuries from this accident were sustained to his right side and hip and lower back.²² After this injury, Worrell was removed from active duty by his captain and detached to serve in the wagon train until he became well.²³ For the seven months, the regiment would stay in Virginia, fighting in the Battles of Deep Bottom, Chaffin’s Farm, and Fair Oaks.^{24 25} It is in one of these battles, presumably Deep Bottom based off of the date of injury, that Corporal George D. Anderson of co. D of the 7th regiment became wounded and died September 3, 1864.²⁶ With this death, the position of had to be filled and on January 16, 1865, Henry Worrell was appointed Corporal in Anderson’s place.²⁷ The new responsibilities that Henry had as corporal included keeping soldiers in a uniform line and to guide the privates during combat while still in the life of battle.²⁸ This promotion implies that Henry was respected amongst his fellow privates and officers and had the traits of responsibility and leadership needed. The regiment remained in Virginia, participating in marches until General Lee’s surrender. In May of 1865, the regiment was moved to Indianola, Texas, where they performed garrison duty there and on the Rio Grande until October of 1866.²⁹ During this stay, the health conditions of the regiment suffered and

²¹ “General Affidavit, Invalid Pension Claim no. 903046, Henry Worrell.” *Bureau of Pensions*. 1889.

²² “Increase Invalid Pension, Henry Worrell, cert. no. 799778” *Bureau of Pensions*. 17 July 1902.

²³ “General Affidavit, Invalid Pension Claim no. 903046, Henry Worrell.” *Bureau of Pensions*. 1887.

²⁴ “SEVENTH REGIMENT INFANTRY, U. S. C. T., MD. VOL.—COMPANY D. 167”. *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2*. 167. Accessed through Archives of Maryland Online.

²⁵ National Park Service. 7th Regiment Infantry United States Colored Troops. (<http://www.nps.gov/rich/historyculture/7th-usct.htm>)

²⁶ “SEVENTH REGIMENT INFANTRY, U. S. C. T., MD. VOL.—COMPANY D. 167”. *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2*. 167. Accessed through Archives of Maryland Online.

²⁷ U.S. Colored Military Troops Service Records, 1861-1865. p.1333.

²⁸ North Carolina Museum of History, "Stories from the Civil War: Civil War Army Organization and Rank." Accessed May 10, 2013. <http://ncmuseumofhistory.org/workshops/cw/orgrank.htm>.

²⁹ National Park Service. 7th Regiment Infantry United States Colored Troops. (<http://www.nps.gov/rich/historyculture/7th-usct.htm>)

many were lost from cholera. The regiment left Texas and on November 15, 1866, the regiment was discharged at Federal Hill in Baltimore, Maryland. Henry's service lasted for three years and took him to the hot and sunny climates of Florida and Texas. Although he did not come out of his service unscathed, he survived unlike the 86 who died from injuries and the 308 that died from disease.³⁰ After his service Henry was free to go home along with his regiment, but the transition of the African American Civil War veterans was not an easy process.

While white Union veterans returned home to praise and celebration, the African American veterans, especially in the South and Maryland, faces a far different reaction. While no two veterans followed the same path, some reenlisting, some migrating to the cities, and some returning home, the challenges that they had faced before still existed with some added tension. As noted by Donald R. Shaffer in his book, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, the veterans came home to heightened hostility from whites, especially those who fought on the Confederate side. He even references a specific incident on the Eastern Shore of an African American veteran complaining how he and other veterans get shots fired at them while walking down the street.³¹ This situation is not unique, as veterans posed a different threat and fear than their free counterparts. As noted by Kowalewski, there had been a free African American population in Kent County far before the war, noting the growth between 1790-1800 by 173%.³² This being said, the veterans had earned a credibility that could not be ignored. These men had fought to keep the country together alongside their oppressors and represented the ability that African Americans had that whites wanted to ignore. These men could no longer

³⁰ "156 Seventh Regiment Infantry, U. S. C. T., Maryland Volunteers". *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2*. 158. Accessed through Archives of Maryland Online.

³¹ Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: The Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, (University Press of Kansas, 2004). 38.

³² Kowaleski, 14.

be classified with the slaves and fall victim to the same ridicule. The idea of these African Americans having and exerting power was terrifying to the whites.

Shaffer also notes the economic difficulties that African American veterans faced upon return. Even though the veterans had proven their work ethic and skills in battles, they had a higher unemployment rate than their non-veteran peers.³³ Work was hard to come by, leaving many subjected to live in poorhouses or move in with friends. This may be the reason why Henry, who had been a slave on a farm which would have made him qualified, had to work as a sailor after his return.³⁴ This information is gathered from the census 14 years after he was mustered out, but in a document recollecting his employment history after the war, he states that in 1879 he had worked on a farm and also became a sailor.³⁵ While it is true that many veterans lived in poverty after the war, it should also be noted that many others made buying land a priority.

While it is true that the veterans did not have many employment opportunities and nearly none that offered mobility, some saved their pay as soldiers to buy land. The significance of land ownership to these veterans was important because many had been born into slavery. They were property to their masters just as the land they worked on or the livestock they tended to. This path that some veterans took was liberating because they were exerting their position as free men. Henry Worrell did not take this route, but he did not live in poverty either. In the 1870 census he is not listed, but his wife Sophia resides in the home of Judge Joseph A. Wickes as a cook.³⁶ In the following 1880 census, he lives there with her and is employed as a sailor.³⁷ The

³³ Shaffer, chap. 5.

³⁴ U.S. Census Bureau (1880). *Inhabitants in Chestertown, in the County of Kent, State of Maryland*. P. 36.

³⁵ "General Affidavit, Invalid Pension Claim no. 903046, Henry Worrell." *Bureau of Pensions*. 1887.

³⁶ U. S. Census Bureau (1870). *Inhabitants in Chestertown 4th Election District in the County of Kent*. P. 45.

³⁷ U.S. Census Bureau (1880). *Inhabitants in Chestertown, in the County of Kent, State of Maryland*. P. 36.

live-in position of Henry and Sophia suggests that they could not yet afford to rent their own home, but they were better off than some others because they had jobs in town that had an opportunity for mobility.

On August 25, 1890, Henry filed a claim for his pension for injuries acquired during his service.³⁸ As noted by Donald R. Shaffer, the law required people to attest that the injuries claimed for the pension were war related, but as the affidavits show, this process was especially difficult for African American veterans.³⁹ As noted by Adam Goodheart on May 8, 2013, the process of getting credible witnesses was easier for white veterans because their regiments and companies were formed by region. There was a higher chance that white privates lived near the men they served with and could have even kept in touch with their superior officers. The organization of the United States Colored Regiment was different, recruiting from different places and bringing in white officers from other states. Although the process was harder and the affidavits are repetitive, the requirement to find credible witnesses shows who Henry Worrell knew or associated with in Chestertown and sheds light on his social network.

At this point in 1900, Henry lived at 122 Queen Street with his wife Sophia and is employed as a hostler.⁴⁰ Within the 20 years that the last census records indicate, the couple was able to earn enough money to move out of the Wickes household and rent their own home. This marks a heightened income that can be accounted by his pension payments. This new income allowed the family to move out and also employ a representative. In every affidavit for pension increase filed by Henry except for one, his lawyer is George Vernon. Based out of Baltimore, Vernon acted as a legal representative for many African American Civil War veterans. In the

³⁸ “Cert. No. 799778, Henry Worrell, Invalid” *Bureau of Pensions*. October 1907.

³⁹ Shaffer, 45

⁴⁰ U. S. Census Bureau (1900). *Twelfth Census of the United States: Kent County, Maryland, 4th District*. Retrieved from Ancestry.com.

first affidavit, one of the witnesses to verify Henry's identity is Thomas Carmichael, a fellow African American veteran who lived in Chestertown.⁴¹ If one takes a look at earlier witnesses John W. Anderson, George A. Hynson, and Thomas Hanson, it will show that these were all black or mulatto men that lived in the town.⁴² This group of men had known one another for a long time and these connections, especially the one with Thomas Carmichael, were exemplified in the creation of Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic.

The post established in 1882 by 21 veterans from the U.S.C.T. and built in 1908. Members of Union army had built GAR posts all over starting as early as 1866 to provide a fraternal organization and support for veterans with no restrictions on race.⁴³ However, noting the lack of economic opportunities for African American veterans after the war, U.S.C.T. posts were rare. Henry was one of the first officers of the post along with William T. Demby, which reiterates his characteristics of leadership and respectability that were shown when he was promoted to corporal during his service.⁴⁴ His successor was John W. Anderson, who, as noted above, attested to Henry's identity for the pension bureau. The Sumner Post was the center of the African American community in Chestertown during its time and Henry was most likely still involved, even though without a leadership position. This decline of involvement could be attributed to him having Brights Disease, which may have contributed to his employment change from labor to a servant in a private home by 1910.⁴⁵ ⁴⁶ With Henry's health deteriorating along

⁴¹ "Soldier's Application. Henry Worrell, Co. D 7th Reg U. S. C. Troops". *Bureau of Pensions*. 24 August 1890.

⁴² "Invalid. Claim for Increase. Henry Worrell, no. 799778" *Bureau of Pensions*. 24 February 1893.

⁴³ National Register Listings in Maryland, "Charles Sumner Post #25, Grand Army of the Republic." Accessed May 10, 2013. <http://mht.maryland.gov/nr/NRDetail.aspx?HDID=1482&FROM=NRMapWA.html>.

⁴⁴ Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland, 1882-1929*, Library of Congress, compiled 2000. Kent County Arts Council.

⁴⁵ Death Certificate for Henry E. Worrell, 18 December 1918, State of Maryland. Note: suffered from Brights disease for last 15 years of his life.

⁴⁶ U. S. Census Bureau (1910). Thirteenth Census of the United States: Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland, 4th District. Retrieved from Ancestry.com.

with his injuries from war, he passed away on December 18, 1918 and was buried in Jane's Cemetery in Chestertown, Maryland.

Henry Worrell's life and impact on the people he came across and the community was far greater than this biography can encompass. One may wonder why this man and these few facts about his life are important. While Henry's story is unique to himself, he is part of a bigger picture that is not often explored. The recognition that there were African American troops in the Civil War is not enough because it meant so much more. These men, in most cases, had been born into slavery. They were at one point the property of white people whose land and lives they fought to protect and, in the case of the Eastern Shore, came home to even more discrimination and tension than before. Worrell and his surviving comrades had to witness the erection of the town's Civil War monument that lists soldiers from the county who fought for the Union and the Confederacy, with recognition to the Colored Troops at all. With no monument and the Charles Sumner post still in the process of renovation, the story of Henry E. Worrell, the man born to a slave mother and a free father on the Eastern Shore of Maryland and promoted to corporal during his service was lost – until now.