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A Shooting Case: The Biography of Hamilton Frisby, Corporal in the 9th USCT
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Robert Anderson, a born slave from Kentucky who first served in the 125th United States Colored Infantry and later went on to own acres of farming land in Iowa and Nebraska, attributed his ambition to his military past. In his autobiography, *From Slavery to Affluence*, Anderson writes, “It is to that determination, formed when a soldier, that I owe my independence today.”¹ Yet the pursuit of landownership is an intrinsic component to any story of self-actualization in America and bore particular significance to the African American community, who spent more than 300 years toiling on the land of white masters, deprived of any opportunity to have property that belonged exclusively to them. Hamilton Frisby, a native of Kent County, Maryland and another slave-turned-Civil-War-veteran, exemplifies the determination born out of this situation. Frisby spent his first twenty years of life enslaved, three serving in the Union Army, and the remaining fifty as a free man in Kent County, going on to become a married man, a landowner, and a representative of the Charles Sumner Post in Chestertown, an outpost of the Grand Army of the Republic.

Like Anderson, Frisby was profoundly altered by his experiences as a soldier, but his first notable experiences occurred years before the Civil War. Frisby’s speculated birth date is in January 1839,² in the small farming community of Chesterville, Maryland. Frisby was born a slave, belonging to Mrs. Catherine Davis.³ Frisby was a dowry slave, meaning that he had been passed from Catherine Davis’s maiden family and through her marriage to her husband, James

¹ Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: the Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), pp. 57.

² Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record (corporal, Co. A, 9th U.S. Colored Troops), *Compiled Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops: Infantry Organizations, 8th through 13th, including the 11th (new)*, accessed online at Ancestry.com, 18 April 2013.

³ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid*.

Davis.⁴ Should slavery have remained legal in Maryland throughout Frisby's life, his mastership would have passed on to the children of Catherine and James. The Davis family lived in Chesterville, Maryland,⁵ James working as a farmer who likely grew wheat, which was the dominant crop on the Eastern Shore as of the late 18th century, when it proved more lucrative and depleted the soil less than tobacco.⁶ Census records dated June 1860 report the Davis family owning \$6,250 worth of real estate in Chesterville.⁷ Personal property only accounted for \$2,000 worth of the estate, meaning the rest was farmland that Davis himself maintained with the aid of the family, servants, three household slaves, and an unnamed number of slaves who performed manual labor outdoors.⁸

Frisby belonged to this latter category. The farm work he performed for the Davises under bondage would shape the rest of his life economically, as he would return to farm and manual labor jobs after his time spent in service of the U.S. military, and even listed "farmer" as the occupation on his military service record upon entrance into the army.⁹ Farm labor was one of the dominant forms of work available to African American males in rural Maryland in the years immediately following the Civil War, with about 50% of black veterans serving as unskilled laborers.¹⁰ Prevalent racism prevented many African Americans like Frisby from advancing into higher-paying vocations, perpetuated by media such as the *Baltimore Gazette*, which published an article in November 1865 that included the quote, "Very few, if any, of the

⁴ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid.*

⁵ U.S. Census of 1860, Kent County, Maryland, Chesterville, 3rd Election District, page 149, family 1048, household of James L. Davis, accessed April 29, 2013.

⁶ Robert J. Brugger, *Maryland, A Middle Temperament* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), pp. 64-5.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid.*

¹⁰ Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: the Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, pp. 54.

negroes will consent to settle down to steady and persistent work.”¹¹ Former slaves such as Frisby were not encouraged to learn any trade beyond abilities instilled during their lives in bondage. Stunting the economic opportunities of the black population in this way aided former slaveowners in withholding a cheap labor source even without the institution of slavery.

Yet this belief demonstrates an underestimation of the empowerment granted by emancipation. Even without the benefits of service to the army, the abolishment of slavery allowed Frisby (and all other African Americans) two simple freedoms: mobility and the potential for landownership. In 1870, 340 blacks owned land in Kent County, with 321 of those holdings each amounting to \$100 or more.¹² Though this amounted to only 5.2% of all land owned in the county,¹³ many of these landowners—again, like Hamilton Frisby—had achieved property ownership within miles of the places where they had previously lived in bondage. This scattering of Kent County African Americans approaching self-sufficiency were the foundation of a thriving community of black citizens on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, many of whom used their status as veterans as a springboard for ongoing positions of authority.

Hamilton Frisby enlisted as a private in Company A of the 9th United States Colored Troops on January 17th, 1864, when he was approximately 22 years old.¹⁴ His commanding officer was General Bayley. Frisby’s initial recruitment took place in Camp Stanton, a post within Benedict, Maryland in Charles County on the Western Shore.¹⁵ Along with the 9th USCT, Camp Stanton was also the site of recruitment for the 7th and 19th USCT regiments,¹⁶ three of the

¹¹ *Baltimore Gazette*, November 1865, from Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the confines of white racial attitudes in post-emancipation Maryland*, (New York: Fordham University Press), pp. 11.

¹² Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the confines of white racial attitudes in post-emancipation Maryland*, pp. 50.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid.*

¹⁵ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid.*

¹⁶ “Hidden Identities: Southern Maryland Slaves & the United States Colored Troops at Camp Stanton, Maryland”, last edited 2013, http://www.csmd.edu/Library/SMSC/NPS_Soldiers/people.php

six African American regiments organized in Maryland in 1864.¹⁷ At that time, slavery was still constitutional in Maryland. Black soldiers for the state came into service until General Order 329, passed by Congress on October 3rd, 1863 to legalize the enlistment of African American slaves with consenting owners, runaway slaves, and free blacks within the five border states.¹⁸ Frisby was of this first category; both he and his master James L. Davis received a \$100 bounty for Frisby's enlistment.¹⁹ As the 13th Amendment was ratified on December 6th, 1865, almost a year before Frisby mustered out, his enlistment served as the effective end to his time in bondage.

Frisby's commanding officer in the 9th USCT was Colonel Thomas Bayley.²⁰ The regiment spent three months at Camp Stanton in order to engage in regimental organization and basic drilling maneuvers before leaving in March 1864 to be stationed in Hilton Head and Beauford, South Carolina. Hilton Head was the site of the regiment's first association with General William Birney, son of abolitionist James Birney and former colonel of the 22nd United States Colored Troops. For the majority of 1863, Birney had helped organize African American regiments for the Union.²¹ On May 24-25th, 1864, he served as general in a failed expedition up the Ashepoo River in South Carolina, during which he placed Colonel Bayley and troops of the 9th USCT in charge of a transport, Edwin Lewis. The transport traveled 8 miles up the Ashepoo

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Barbra Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland in the Nineteenth Century*, 123-126.

¹⁹ COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY (Bounty Rolls), MSA S629, Page 73 Dates: 1864-1880, Description: Slaves and Owners, by USCT Regiment, Comptroller's index to returns, and by County, MSA S629-1.

²⁰ Maryland State Archives, "History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6", Volume 2, October 22, 2009. <http://aomol.net/000001/000366/html/am366--186.html>

²¹ William Glenn Robertson, "From the Crater to New Market Heights", in *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era*, ed. John David Smith, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press), 188-189.

before being destroyed by Confederate artillery in an attack that killed 30 Union men and 74 horses.^{22 23}

The 9th saw its first real combat after moving from South Carolina to Virginia during the siege of Petersburg. On August 12th, 1864, William Birney again took charge of the regiment. He organized a brigade comprised of three USCT regiments: the 7th, 8th, and 9th. These he marched the 7th, 8th, and

The 9th saw its first real combat in August 1864. On the 12th of that month, General William Birney organized a brigade comprised of the 7th, 8th, and 9th USCT regiments to conduct an assault upon Confederate troops in Fussell's Mill, Virginia in an attempt to weaken the forces surrounding Petersburg, Virginia, which General Grant had under siege.²⁴ In a relatively small venture, General Birney moved these troops into the enclave of Deep Bottom, Virginia to join the 29th Connecticut and Tenth Corps, the latter of which had been assembled by Major General David Birney (brother of William). This march consisted of difficult terrain and extreme temperatures, ultimately requiring Birney to perform reconnaissance and delay his attack upon Confederate forces for one day. On August 16th, the 9th USCT joined the Tenth Corps, and led by Major General Winfield S. Hancock, in seizing a line of Confederate troops located to the north of Deep Bottom. Though eventually repelled by Confederate forces, the troops were successful in diluting the opposition forces surrounding Petersburg, leading Major General Hancock to praise the fighting performed by the African American soldiers, all of whom (with the exception

²² "Series I Volume XXXV Part I Page 10 of 645 – Olustee", CivilWar.com, accessed May 8, 2013, http://civilwar.com/?option=com_officialrecord&series=Series%20I&volume=Volume%20XXXV&part=Part%20I&page=10

²³ Abstract of John L. Perley's papers, William L. Clements Library Finding Aids, accessed May 4, 2013. <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/clements/mss/umich-wcl-M-2886.4per?view=text>

²⁴ Maryland State Archives. "History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6", Volume 2, October 22, 2009. <http://www.aomol.net/000001/000366/html/am366--183.html>

of the 8th USCT) had yet to experience any significant combat.²⁵ The battle, later named the Second Battle of Deep Bottom, resulted in 136 losses (including the wounded) for the Union troops. All but 12 of these casualties came from the 7th and 9th USCT.²⁶ As a response to their new respect for the 9th's ability to serve as combat troops, the regiment was dispatched for a month, beginning August 24th to perform trench duty around Petersburg, Virginia.²⁷

The regiment's next engagement occurred On September 29th, 1864, when they joined an assault upon three Confederate forts located ten to twelve miles from Richmond, Virginia orchestrated by Major General David Birney. The first of these, Fort Harrison, was stormed in the morning of the 29th first by the Eighteenth Corps, later reinforced by troops arriving from the Union's successful victory at New Market Heights the previous day.²⁸ The second and ultimate goal was Fort Gilmer, which was a five-sided stronghold guarded by veteran Confederate troops with reinforcements on hand. General Birney intended to assault the fort from both the north and east but was unsuccessful in coordinating the two simultaneously.²⁹ This meant that the Confederates had ample time to rally and repel both attempted northern attacks, which occurred in sequence and ended in what Lieutenant Scroggs of the 5th described as a "sullen" retreat, saying, "we were too exhausted and too proud to run!"³⁰

The 9th USCT were part of the concurrent eastern attack, led by Captain Edwin S. Babcock. The companies of the regiment were initially split, with four ahead to serve as skirmishers and the rest advancing the line of battle. Almost immediately after beginning their charge, the regiment was assaulted by intense Confederate artillery. Captain Babcock ordered his

²⁵ William Glenn Robertson, *ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Maryland State Archives, "History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6", Volume 2, October 22, 2009. <http://aomol.net/000001/000366/html/am366--183.html>

²⁸ Noah Andre Trudeau, *Like Men of War: Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865*, (Canda: Little, Brown and Company), pp. 294.

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 296.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

troops to the ground and then received orders that they were to renew their attack. The troops of the 9th were so badly bombed upon this second attempt that they broke ranks and retreated back to Captain Babcock before the order could be given. The regiment fell back to Fort Harrison.³¹

Seven members of the 9th USCT died during the failed assault upon Fort Gilmer, with seventy-nine wounded and eighteen additional missing.³² In its September 30th issue, the *Daily Constitution*, a Southern newspaper, published an article on the failed attack that bore the headline, “SLAUGHTER OF NEGROES AT FORT GILMER” and went on to report that the Confederate artillery could be heard all throughout the city of Richmond.³³

Hamilton Frisby was among the wounded, as he suffered a shot to the left leg during the battle.³⁴ The bullet entered on the upper portion of his calf, near the tibia, and left no visible exit wound, suggesting that it remained inside his body.³⁵ Frisby was hospitalized at the General’s Hospital at Point of Rocks, Virginia,³⁶ which was a field hospital consisting of tents. Established in May 1864, the Point of Rocks hospital served more than 5,000 wounded Union troops during the Civil War, including Frisby.³⁷ Frisby would remain hospitalized for three months following the battle at Fort Gilmer.³⁸

Hamilton Frisby returned to duty in the December of 1864. However, he was again absent from duty from July 2nd through the August of 1865.³⁹ During this time Frisby

³¹ Ibid, pp. 297.

³² Ibid.

³³ “Telegraphic”, *Daily Constitutional*, Augusta, Georgia, 30 September 1864, American Historical Newspapers database, accessed online.

³⁴ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid*.

³⁵ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 57.

³⁶ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 45.

³⁷ “Historic Point of Rocks gets its due”, Village News Online, <http://www.villagenewsonline.com/node/11692>.

³⁸ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application (corporal, Maryland), no. 512,143 in Civil War Pension Applications, Record Group 21, National Archives, Washington.

³⁹ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 51-2.

complained of general symptoms of fatigue.⁴⁰ The treatment he received while hospitalized at Point of Rocks is unknown, but his ongoing, increasing pain and later medical examinations document the fact that the bullet embedded in Frisby's leg was never fully extracted and potentially never removed at all.⁴¹ This did not become apparent until the turn of the century, meaning that Frisby remained ignorant of the severity of his debilitation for more than twenty-five years after the battle at Fort Gilmer.⁴² Regardless, Frisby returned to duty in August 1865 and was promoted to the rank of corporal that November. This rank, though noncommissioned, was only shared between Frisby and eleven other African American men in Company A of the 9th USCT.⁴³

Despite the Confederate surrender in 1865, the fact that most USCT units hadn't been assembled until 1864 meant that they continued to serve even after the war's end in order to fulfill their three-year service. Some, including the 9th, were sent west to the state of Texas. There, they were stationed on the border between the United States and Mexico in response to the French, who occupied Mexico in 1866 and put an Austrian monarch in place to serve them.⁴⁴ The USCT troops along the border between the two nations were charged with preventing foreigners from crossing the border and putting pressure on the French so that they would vacate Mexico.⁴⁵ The 9th USCT was tasked with this work until October 1866, when they departed Brownsville, Texas.⁴⁶ Their official mustering out date is November 26th, 1866.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 52.

⁴¹ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 57.

⁴² Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 57, 59.

⁴³ Maryland State Archives, "History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6", Volume 2, October 22, 2009. <http://aomol.net/000001/000366/html/am366--186.html>

⁴⁴ Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, ed. "Voices of Emancipation: Understanding Slavery, the Civil War, and Reconstruction through the U.S. Pension Bureau Files", pp. 72.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, ed., *ibid.*

⁴⁶ "The 9th U.S. Colored Troops left here today," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, Cincinnati, Ohio, 18 October 1886, p. 3, transcription accessed 21 April 2013 through American Historical Newspapers database, online.

Hamilton Frisby left the army in Baltimore, Maryland and returned to the Eastern Shore of Maryland in late 1866.⁴⁸ He remained in Kent County, which had the highest proportion of African Americans out of any other county in Maryland by 1870.⁴⁹ Rather than settling in Chesterville, the site of his enslavement, Frisby moved twelve miles away to Chestertown, a larger community located along the Chester River. There, Frisby used the funds saved from his enlistment bounty, army pay, and the lack of children or a substantial household to support allowed Frisby to save the funds to join the ranks of property-owning African Americans in Kent County, of whom there were few on Calvert Street. Frisby's first purchase was on June 20th, 1868, when he bought a lot on the north bank of the Chester River, on Scott's Point from a white man, Isaac Freeman, and his wife, Ann Elizabeth. Frisby paid \$300 for the property.⁵⁰ By February 27th, 1869, Frisby had the funds to buy an adjoining parcel of land for an additional \$80, this time from Percy and Ann Elizabeth Dixon. This smaller parcel, encompassing four hundred and sixty-nine square feet, was also located on Scott's Point.⁵¹ Others had more lucrative estates—the black farmer Samuel Derry acquired a total of twenty-eight acres, estimated to be worth \$2,000, in Quaker's Neck—but the fact that Frisby was able to buy his property in cash (as opposed to putting himself into debt, or pooling funds with other blacks to buy land) still made him relatively well-endowed for an African American man living in Kent County in the Reconstruction period.⁵² His status is made more impressive by the fact that

⁴⁷ Hamilton Frisby, compiled military service record, *ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the confines of white racial attitudes in post-emancipation Maryland*, pp. 51.

⁵⁰ Land Records, lib. J.K.H. 7, folio 529-530, Kent County Courthouse, Chestertown, MD.

⁵¹ Land Records, lib. J.K.H. 7, folio 589-590, Kent County Courthouse, Chestertown, MD.

⁵² Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the confines of white racial attitudes in post-emancipation Maryland*, (New York: Fordham University Press), pp. 48-49.

African American farm laborers in Kent County in the 1860s were paid a mere \$10-12 dollars a month on average.⁵³

By the time of the 1870 census, Frisby's property was valued at \$800. He also took a wife by common law marriage, a woman named Sarah Mariah Boyer.⁵⁴ In 1870, the pair lived together on Calvert Street, an all-black street in downtown Chestertown on which Frisby was one of the few property owners.⁵⁵ Frisby continued to work as a farmer, while Sarah served as a cook for a white family who lived on Queen Street (only a few blocks over from Calvert Street), the Taylors, whose head of household was a sailor named James F. Taylor.⁵⁶

Hamilton and Sarah Frisby became estranged from one another by 1880, Sarah taking up residence with another man in Kent County despite her marriage to Hamilton. The pair would never reconcile. In multiple documents dated post-1880, Frisby refers to himself as a widower despite the fact that Sarah outlived him.⁵⁷ Letters written by one William A. Burk, a white shoemaker living in Chestertown at the time of Hamilton Frisby's death in 1916, offer insight into the couple's relationship:

*His wife is living. But left him some time ago and Lived with another man as man and wife. Now the man she lived with is dead and so is her husband. She would not go or do anything for her husband while he was sick, and has not been on friendly terms with him for many years. They have no children.*⁵⁸

⁵³ Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the confines of white racial attitudes in post-emancipation Maryland*, *ibid.*, pp. 10.

⁵⁴ Marriage Records, Lib. APR 1865-1886, folio 44, Kent County Courthouse, Chestertown, MD.

⁵⁵ U.S. Census of 1870, Kent County, Maryland, Chestertown, 4th Election District, page 9, family 55, *ibid.*

⁵⁶ U.S. Census of 1870, Kent County, Maryland, Chestertown, 4th Election District, page 4, family 20, household of James E Taylor, line 13, showing Sarah Frisby, accessed online at Ancestry.com, 26 April 2013.

⁵⁷ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 11.

⁵⁸ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 3.

In a later letter, Burk also noted that Sarah Frisby did not attend Hamilton's funeral.⁵⁹ She did, however, file a declaration to claim his pension in June 1916, less than a month after his death.⁶⁰

Despite his three years of active service in the Union Army and various economic achievements, Hamilton Frisby's singular appearance in a state or nationally read newspaper occurred in November 1888, when the Baltimore newspaper, *The Sun*, posted a short telegraphic report of his shooting another African American man in Chestertown.⁶¹ The incident in question occurred on November 14th, 1888, 22 years after Frisby's return from service. He was approximately 50 years old at the time and under the employment of a Mrs. E.R. Wickes in Chestertown, Maryland, working a manual labor work on the Wickes estate. Though E.R. Wickes remains unidentified, she and her family are most likely relatives of Colonel Joseph Wickes IV and his heirs, one of the oldest and wealthiest families in Chestertown.⁶²

On the 14th, Frisby began the day working alongside Henry Johnson, a native of Dorchester County of unknown age. During the workday, Johnson started to antagonize him by taunting him and following him. Frisby was accompanied by a dog that he owned, which Johnson hit with a stick.⁶³ At that point, Frisby ran to the Wickes' carriage house, produced a rifle, and proceeded to shoot Johnson point-blank in the thigh of his left leg.⁶⁴

The wound proved near-fatal for Johnson, as the bullet cut almost to his bone. He was taken to the Chestertown almshouse for treatment. Meanwhile, the Chestertown sheriff, James A

⁵⁹ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 15.

⁶⁰ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 13.

⁶¹ "Telegraphic", *The Sun*, 15 November 1888, American Historical Newspapers database, accessed online.

⁶² George A. Hanson, *Old Kent: The Eastern Shore of Maryland: Notes Illustrative of The Most Ancient Records of Kent County, Maryland*.

⁶³ "A Costly Dog," *The Kent News*, Chestertown, Maryland, 17 November 1888, reel 1625, microfilm collection, accessed at the Washington College collection, Chestertown, Maryland.

⁶⁴ "A Shooting Case," *The Kent News*, Chestertown, Maryland, 17 November 1888, reel 1625, microfilm collection, accessed at the Washington College collection, Chestertown, Maryland

Casey, arrested Frisby.⁶⁵ The *Kent News* made the lighthearted speculation that his imprisonment would last approximately five months, though no recorded trial for Frisby exists in the Kent County Courthouse, suggesting that he did not receive one.⁶⁶ The *Kent News* went on to describe Frisby as “disagreeable in general”⁶⁷ and ill-liked by the Chestertown community, though the paper does not provide any contextualizing evidence to support this claim. On the contrary, Frisby’s status as a landowner (his property in Scott’s Point bordered two lots owned by white families⁶⁸) and employee of the respected Wickes family suggest that even if the Chestertown community considered him disagreeable, he held a position of relative respect and authority, at least among the black population of the region.

Further proof of this status is seen in 1887, the year before the shooting, when Frisby was chosen to be a representative of the Charles Sumner Post, No. 25, Chestertown’s outpost of the national organization, the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.).⁶⁹ The G.A.R. was exclusive to Civil War veterans from the United States Army and Navy and did not persist into the 21st century, but achieved a status as one of the most influential veteran organizations throughout the Reconstruction period. Frisby’s appointment as a representative, under Post Commander John W. Anderson,⁷⁰ documents his active participation and position of authority within the community of Civil War veterans in Chestertown. More significantly, the Sumner Post in Chestertown was one of only 22 African American posts who met with other G.A.R.

⁶⁵ Maryland State Archives, “Annual Report of the Comptroller, 1885”, Volume 249, pp. 41, October 22, 2009, <http://aomol.net/000001/000249/html/am249--41.html>.

⁶⁶ “A Costly Dog,” *The Kent News*, *ibid*.

⁶⁷ “A Shooting Case”, *The Kent News*, *ibid*.

⁶⁸ Land Records, lib. J.K.H. 7, folio 529-530, *ibid*.

⁶⁹ Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland, 1882-1929*, Library of Congress, compiled 2000. Kent County Arts Council.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*.

representatives from Maryland.⁷¹ As these meetings were relatively rare, the majority of G.A.R. activity occurred on the community level, making it the responsibility of Frisby and his comrades to perpetuate action within the post by their own chosen methods, most commonly demonstrations (frequently held on May 30th, Memorial Day) or civil rights activity.⁷² In order to be chosen as a representative for the post, Frisby would have had to be an advocate of these activities.

Perhaps most significantly for Frisby, the Sumner Post was a key motivating factor behind the fraternal sentiment that existed between the African American Civil War veterans living in Chestertown. Frisby's physical condition depleted quickly in the years following the Civil War, making it impossible for him to perform the manual labor required for him to maintain his property and standard of living. In May 1884, Frisby first filed for an invalid pension.⁷³ This process required a lawyer and the filing of extensive paperwork in which Frisby justified the necessity of the pension increase.⁷⁴ This Frisby did successfully, despite his illiteracy, stating that the gunshot wound to his left leg had led to rheumatism and "resulting disease of the heart".⁷⁵

However, on October 9th, 1905, Frisby's depleting condition led him to file for an increase to that pension, believing that his rheumatism had spread to his elbows and he had developed "giddiness".⁷⁶ This time, the Justice of the Peace was unwilling to grant Frisby the pension increase unless Frisby provided both a report from the surgeon who treated his gunshot wound and a statement from a commissioned officer of the 9th USCT who could attest to the

⁷¹ Barbara A. Gannon, "African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City", lecture at Washington College, March 1, 2002, C.V. Starr Center.

⁷² Barbara A. Gannon, "African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City", *ibid.*

⁷³ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 21.

⁷⁴ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 47.

⁷⁵ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 21.

⁷⁶ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 30.

truthfulness of his being shot at Fort Gilmer.⁷⁷ The field hospital eventually produced the required former document with difficulty,⁷⁸ as a previous note from the Surgeon General's Office stated that, "the records of wounded pertaining to the battle at Fort Gilmer...furnish no information, and records on file in this office...bear no additional evidence in this case."⁷⁹ The latter requirement, a statement from a commissioned officer who could validate Frisby's being wounded at Fort Gilmer, proved more problematic to procure. Unlike many white veterans, who had been recruited in their own towns by officers who came from and returned to the same region, the majority of commissioned officers known to Frisby had been white Northerners, many of whom returned to the North after the war. Even if Frisby knew the identities of officers capable of fulfilling his request, the likelihood of his being able to contact them was complicated by distance and, again, his illiteracy.

Thus, Frisby turned to his fellow USCT soldiers for assistance. Thomas Carmichael, a commissary (non-commissioned) sergeant in the 9th USCT and John W. Anderson, a private in Company F of the 7th USCT (the same Anderson who served as the Post Commander at Fort Sumner for 1883-1887)⁸⁰ wrote a joint letter for the Justice of the Peace that stated their involvement in Fort Gilmer and the fact that each bore witness to Frisby's being shot.⁸¹ Additionally, both Carmichael and Anderson served as witnesses when Frisby appeared before the Justice of the Peace on November 4th, 1891 to claim his pension.⁸² Their letter attesting to the validity of Frisby's service at the Battle of Fort Gilmer proved sufficient for the Justice of the Peace, making it a representative example of the black Civil War veterans of Chestertown's

⁷⁷ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 53.

⁷⁸ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 51-2.

⁷⁹ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 50.

⁸⁰ Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland, 1882-1929*, *ibid.*

⁸¹ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 55-56.

⁸² Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 18.

willingness to aid one another in their postwar lives. Frisby began collecting his pension as early as 1885, meaning that it was responsible for ability to keep the property he bought in the late 1860s until the 20th century. Carmichael and Anderson understood the necessity of Frisby's financial stability, knowing that for him—like Robert Andersen of the 125th USCT—wealth held a connotation of success and manliness that Frisby's wounds would have left him unable to sustain. The Civil War veterans of Fort Sumner strove to ensure each other's achievement in this manner, both out of personal investment and the knowledge that they all represented postwar African Americans and had the obligation of portraying them as stable, contributing members of Kent County and America as a whole.

Hamilton Frisby regularly applied for increases to his pension until his death in 1916, stating repeatedly that the pain from his rheumatism (present in both of his knees, his shoulders, and his hips according to a medical examination performed in December 1892)⁸³ made it difficult and finally impossible for him to perform the physical exertion necessary for his occupation. This struggle was further compounded because Frisby also faced a difficulty finding work at all. The 1910 census recorded his unemployment for an ongoing 30 weeks as of the June of that year.⁸⁴ Studies conducted in Rhode Island amongst representative Civil War veterans shows that African American soldiers were five times as likely to be unemployed as black civilians with similar capabilities, many of whom were facing the same physical struggles as Frisby, as well as a period of adjustment from service back to civilian life.⁸⁵ Frisby was forced to mortgage his property and rent a home on Calvert Street during the last years of his life.⁸⁶

⁸³ Hamilton Frisby, Civil War pension application, pp. 64.

⁸⁴ U.S. Census of 1910, Kent County, Maryland, Chestertown, 4th Election District, sheet no. B14, family 341, household of Hamilton Frisby, line 63, accessed online at Ancestry.com, 21 April 2013.

⁸⁵ Donald R. Shaffer, *After the Glory: the Struggles of Black Civil War Veterans*, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press), pp. 38.

⁸⁶ .S. Census of 1910, Kent County, Maryland, Chestertown, 4th Election District, *ibid*.

Hamilton Frisby died on May 23rd, 1916, in Chestertown. Despite the slights published by the *Kent News* in 1888, he was assisted almost immediately after his death by William Burk, who sent letters to the Bureau of Pensions contesting his widow, Sarah Boyer's, claim to Frisby's pension. Burk's display of knowledge of the relationship between the two, and his consideration that Frisby possessed a niece and a nephew who might be more entitled to the pension, support the idea that Frisby was not friendless even among the white population of Chestertown. His will, which was filed April 27th, 1915, left \$50 each to the aforementioned niece and nephew and \$10 to several different relatives, amounting to a total of \$140 in his estate.⁸⁷ He is buried in the M.E. Church Cemetery in Chestertown.⁸⁸

Frisby's trajectory from enslavement, to soldier, and finally Kent County resident is a representative case in the population of black veterans in the Reconstruction era working to bridge the gap between emancipation and citizenship. Some of these men, like Frisby and Robert Andersen, underwent periods of prosperity marred by subsequent economic and physical stress. Landownership was a vital component of this struggle not only because it was a sign of wealth but because it instilled a sense of manhood within the veterans and equalized them with white Americans. For this reason, Andersen's autobiography of affluence achieved by stamina learned in the military needs to be complicated by the story of Hamilton Frisby, which asserts that the community of black veterans existed not to perpetuate the benefits of military values but to transcend them, creating a network that evolved into a form of advocacy for civil liberty.

⁸⁷ Wills, EC 1, folio 189-191, Kent County Courthouse, Chestertown, MD.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

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