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Chestertown's America

Thomas Carmichael, full name George Washington Thomas Carmichael, was born in Talbot County, Maryland on November 25, 1831 to Peter and Matilda Carmichael.¹ Thomas was born free, as his name is listed in the United States Census record for 1860 and he is documented as having freedom papers, which list him as born free. The importance of the 1860 Census record is that African slaves would have been listed under their master's name, and would only be marked as a line. At some point, Thomas went north to Chestertown to find work, as a sailor. Possibly leaving his parents in Talbot County, or they traveled along with him and lived outside of Chestertown. During which time it can be assumed that he rented a house, since he would be away at times and he was not listed as owning any livestock. Any African who owned livestock stayed around town to care for their animals, even if they did not own land.² Around the late 1850s, Thomas met Alphonsa Sheppard, and changed professions to Laborer so that he could stay in Chestertown to be near her. They were married under the old way, called the "old constitution" which was an informal system of marriage that came from slavery. They would essentially be husband and wife, but not with a ceremony or a government granted license, but with a mutual

¹ DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS (Death Record, Counties) Kent County, 1910-1951, S1179, State of Maryland Death Certificate for Geo. W. Thomas Carmichael, December 23, 1916, Certificate No. 22778.

² Richard Paul Fuke, "Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-Emancipation Maryland." 52-61.

consent to live together and be accepted by the community.³ Even when free Africans were able to legalize their marriage after the war, Thomas and Alphonsa did not, and it was at a time where free Africans who decided to remain in an informal marriage was rare.⁴ Their reasoning for choosing to stay in an informal marriage and not legalizing it was due to it not being essential in their lives.⁵ By deciding to stay in Chestertown, Thomas needed freedom papers to move around freely without being suspected of being a slave, though he was born free. In order to obtain his papers, Thomas did work as a laborer and was possibly employed by Anna M. LeEarle, a white woman who helped sign for him to receive his papers on May 22, 1855.⁶ It might have been difficult to find work in Chestertown as an African, and so Thomas probably did not have enough money to purchase land so he and Alphonsa lived with her Mother, Eliza Robinson. Who interestingly enough owned an estate worth 200 dollars and 50 dollars in personal estate, and was also a school teacher. Which was quite rare for a Mulatto woman to be teaching in 1860. But due to being a school teacher, Eliza taught Alphonsa how to read and write and also taught Thomas, and then later on taught their son George B. Eliza also was employing an African woman, who was living with her as well.⁷ Having the chance to learn to read and write, helped Thomas when he went to war.

³ Donald Shaffer, "After the Glory: The Struggles of African-American Civil War Veterans." 103.

⁴ Shaffer, "After the Glory: The Struggle of African-American Civil War Veterans." 114.

⁵ Shaffer, "After the Glory: The Struggle of African-American Civil War Veterans." 117.

⁶ Jerry M. Hynson, *Maryland Freedom Papers*, Vol. 2 Kent County (Maryland: Family Line Publications, 1997), 38. Record for Thomas Carmichael, born free and raised in Kent County. Received his papers, by help from Anna M. LeEarle, on May 22, 1855 at age 24.

⁷ 1860 United States Federal Census, June 6, 1860, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland, Ancestry.com

But soon the war encroached on Chestertown, with the 9th Regiment Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, Maryland Volunteers making camp in Camp Stanton, Benedict, Maryland.⁸ The 9th Regiment stayed there from November 11th to 30th, gaining colored men who wanted to join the army.⁹ As a free African and wanting to help with the war effort, Thomas felt it important to enlist into the army, as Colored Regiments were being created. With the passage of the Emancipation Proclamation, Africans gained more freedom that led to the creation of Colored Regiments and they could now be a part of the army. Thomas enlisted for three years into the 9th Regiment Infantry United States Colored Troops on January 17th 1864, at the age of 32. Before Thomas actually served in the army, he was promoted to Commissary Sergeant on January 18th, and was mustered in five days later.¹⁰ His duties of a Commissary Sergeant were of a wholesale grocery clerk and a warehouse man for the Regiment's rations and property, and he would be responsible for taking care of the rations, and storing them so that they did not spoil, get lost or stolen, and also issuing them properly. As well as doing all the requisite paperwork to account for everything that passed through. Thomas' duties were not like a chief cook or a pot washer, and he was not responsible for the company's or garrison's kettles, mess pans, knives, forks, and ladles.¹¹ He would have to write out rations to men in the regiment and other items that went through. Thomas was very likely assigned to the position of Commissary Sergeant due to

⁸ History of the Ninth Regiment Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, Maryland Volunteers. History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2. Archives of Maryland Online, Volume 366, Page 183.

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1861-65 record for Thomas Carmichael. Date of Muster January 18, 1864 record for Thomas Carmichael, Ancestry.com

¹¹ Civil War Reenactors Discussion Forum, U.S. Army Regs. "Extracts from Acts of Congress". <http://www.cwreenactors.com/forum/showthread.php?1316-Commissary-Sergeant&s=bae69555d4f66a93a9a46f33151f46cb>

knowing how to read and write, which gave him a better standing in the army and a bit more authority but also a bit of difficulty if any white regiments were to come along. As any level of white soldier might test Thomas' authority in matters concerning his position, even a white private. From his military service record, a short description of his appearance is given. Describing him as five feet six inches with black eyes and hair, and a griffe complexion, and giving his occupation as a sailor.¹² According to the dictionary, griffe can be the offspring of a black and a mulatto or of mixed black and American Indian ancestry.¹³ When Thomas enlisted, he and Alphonsa had George B (February 1859), Elizabeth "Lizzie" May (June 1861), and possibly David James who was born in 1864.

The next section of Thomas' life was luckily documented by the military, telling the 9th Regiment's movements. From January to early March, the Regiment trained and did drills until they were ordered to Port Royal, South Carolina. Where they arrived on March 7th by steamship, and stayed in South Carolina until late July. While staying, they were ordered around, first to Port Royal Island and remained there for a month. Then on to Hilton Head Island, and where they then took part in the Ashepoo Expedition, which was commanded by General Birney. Then by late June they returned to Beaufort, on Port Royal Island, and remained there doing camp duty. Thomas and the Regiment supposedly participated in battle at John's Island against the Confederates on July 7th through the 9th. After the battle, the Regiment returned to Beaufort by Folly Island and then to Bermuda Hundreds in Virginia by early August. Where they fought against the Confederates. It was on the night of August 16, 1864 that Thomas Carmichael was marching and walked into a

¹² U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1861-65 record for Thomas Carmichael. Ancestry.com.

¹³ Griffe, Dictionary.com

deep rut, which injured his left ankle. His injury happened after the first day of the Battle of Fussel's Mills, Virginia also known as the Second Battle of Deep Bottom, which Thomas participated in.¹⁴ From military records, the 9th Regiment Infantry was the last regiment to hold its position and then fall back because of enemy fire. When Thomas became injured, Joseph Whaley, from the same regiment took him back to camp in his Commissary Wagon.¹⁵ The next day, Thomas was probably back with the rest the men and battling the Confederates. After the battle, they traveled to the Bermuda Front and then to the trenches in front of Petersburg, Virginia. The 9th Regiment next saw action in late September, when they took part in the assault on Fort Gilmer, in Richmond. They took up a position near Fort Harrison, where they remained until October 13th to 27th where they engaged in skirmishes with the Confederates again. During the winter months, there was no action, and the regiment probably drilled and tried to keep warm during the months. The next records for the regiment began in 1865, with the entry into Richmond and marching to Petersburg for camp and then on to City Point, Virginia. Then from the beginning of April to June 7th they traveled from City Point to Brazos Santiago, Texas in hot conditions. The regiment then traveled to Brownville, Texas and remained there until the beginning of October. If there was any problem with white Southerners, the African men did not retaliate from the verbal and physical abuse but rather let Union authority figures try to deal with the Southerners.¹⁶ From July to August and September to October, Thomas' Field and Staff Muster Roll lists him as absent and gives a reason of being in confinement

¹⁴ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, War Department retained to Commissioner of Pensions, Testimony of Isaac Rider and Joseph Whaley, June 1897.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Shaffer, "After the Glory: The Struggles of African-American Civil War Veterans." 26.

awaiting trial at Brownville, Texas since August 3, 1866.¹⁷ But on the Company Muster Roll for September and October, Thomas is recorded as transferred and demoted back to Private in Company C of the 9th Regiment. So as Thomas was awaiting trial in Brownville, Texas the rest of the regiment traveled to New Orleans and set up camp at Greenville, Louisiana and Thomas' result of the trial was a demotion. By mid November, they were ordered to muster out and they traveled by steamer to Baltimore.¹⁸ Thomas Carmichael was then discharged from the army as a Private on November 26, 1866, in New Orleans, Louisiana.¹⁹ He then makes his way back home to Chestertown. Where shortly thereafter his son Benjamin is born around 1866.

Even though Thomas was demoted down to a Private, he still was getting paid from the military and from his last payment, \$300 on April 6, 1867; he used it to buy land in Chestertown.²⁰ When Thomas found land that he could afford, he purchases it at \$100 from Jacob and Kitty Toomy, who were free Africans. Thomas is then able to produce the money a year later, and the purchase is recorded.²¹ The property that Thomas' purchases ran along the South West side of Fish Street, present day Maple Avenue, at Jane Bentleys South East line on Fish Street and then South East of Fish Street 27 feet to the Willis line and to the graveyard wall, which is now the location of the Kent County Court House

¹⁷ U.S. Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1861-1865, Staff and Field Muster Roll July to August, September to October 1866

¹⁸ History of the Ninth Regiment Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, Maryland Volunteers.

¹⁹ Nine Regiment Infantry, U.S.C.T., MD. Vol. – Company C, History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 2, Archives of Maryland Online, Volume 366, Page 190

²⁰ COMPTROLLER OF THE TREASURY (Bounty Rolls), 1864-1880, Volunteers, Thomas Carmichael, SR 4438, MSA SM183-1, page 163. Roll of 9th Regiment United States Free Colored Troops.

²¹ KENT COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT (Deeds) 1842-1883, J.K.H no. 7 Folio 255. 1868 Carmichael G.W. Thomas of Jacob Toomy et ux. August 9, 1867, July 31, 1868.

parking lot. Then North West alongside the graveyard wall 27 feet to Bentleys line and then North East with Bentleys line to the beginning, forming about a twenty seven front from Fish Street to the graveyard wall.²² By the 1870s, the entire family has moved into the house, and their last child, Mary Margarett Ann is born in 1869.²³ Sadly, this is the last time that the family is documented as being all together, and then Thomas starts to have problems with his war injury. But still he worked, as a laborer, as Alphonsa kept house and Eliza taught the children to read and write and looked after them. When ten years pass by, Thomas and Alphonsa are recorded as living apart from each other, with Alphonsa living on Water Street with the children and Thomas living with the Demby family on Cannon Street, and they are surprisingly marked as married.²⁴ Even though they were not living together, in their minds and in the community's, they were still married to each other. Especially since there was also the practice of informal divorce, where the end of living together meant the end of a marriage, instead of a legal decree.²⁵ Around this time Thomas' injury continues to plague him and he is having a hard time working, but he has the community of Africans living in Chestertown helping him. A few years pass, and their eldest son George B. Carmichael marry Hattie A. Johnson, both of Chestertown, Kent County. The actual marriage takes place on July 6, 1882, at Mimi's Gospel in Chestertown with William Frisby as the minister. The marriage license records the marriage for May 14, 1883, and tells

²² KENT COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT (Deeds) 1842-1883, J.K.H no. 7 Folio 255. 1868 Carmichael G.W. Thomas of Jacob Toomy et ux. August 9, 1867, July 31, 1868. Description of the Deed of the Land Record.

²³ 1870 United States Federal Census, June 6, 1870, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland. Ancestry.com.

²⁴ 1880 United States Federal Census, June 14, 1880, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland. Ancestry.com

²⁵ Shaffer, "After the Glory: The Struggles of African-American Civil War Veterans." 106.

George's profession is a fisherman and Hattie's is with housework.²⁶ Thomas' injury starts to really bother him while he is working, so he submits a pension application, to receive a monthly pension.²⁷ Thomas puts in the request on April 11, 1889 to having a pension.²⁸ When his request is received, the Commissioner of Pensions asks the War Department to check all of their records about Thomas Carmichael. The information found is the date of enrollment, the remark of being reduced to the rank of Private, but no record of a disability only a mentioning of being in action at Deep Bottom, Virginia.²⁹ At this point Thomas cannot do much manual labor and is confined to his bed in John B. Jones house, where he has been staying for the last ten years.³⁰ It is not definite as to why he does not stay with his family, it could be he does not want his children to see the way he looks or that traveling to stay at his house is too far. In giving him a better chance of getting a pension from the army, a few of Thomas' neighbors write to the Commissioner of Pensions, William Lochren, to certify the extreme immobilization his injury is putting him in. Both his neighbor John M. Anderson and John B. Jones, who he is staying with, write on February 6, 1895 telling of Thomas' condition.³¹ In Jones' letter, he tells that Thomas has been "suffering with very cold veins of the right leg and injury of the left ankle and disease of the

²⁶ KENT COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT (Marriage Record) Marriage between George B. Carmichael and Hattie A. Johnson, 1865-1888, MdHR 12-090

²⁷ U.S., Civil War Pension Index: General Index to Pension Files, 1861-1934, Record for Thomas Carmichael. Ancestry.com.

²⁸ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, History of Claim, January 18, 1896, record for Thomas Carmichael.

²⁹ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, War Department retained to Commissioner of Pensions. June 19, 1889.

³⁰ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Letter from John B Jones to William Lochren Commissioner of Pensions, February 6, 1895, record for Thomas Carmichael

³¹ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Letter from John M. Anderson to William Lochren Commissioner of Pensions, February 6, 1895, record of Thomas Carmichael

back to some extent,"³² and that he had been helpless and at times unable to walk without assistance and depends upon his neighbors and friends for support. That Thomas is at sometimes confined to his bed for weeks, and has to crawl up the stairs to get to his room. All this from Jones' personal knowledge from being with Thomas, seeing him every day, and from contributing to his support in the way of food and clothing, as well as by personal acquaintance with Thomas by knowing that his disabilities are not from inflicting himself.³³ From Thomas' neighbor's involvement, his pension claim gets processed on January 18, 1896 and he starts receiving a pension of six dollars per month, due to varicose veins of the right leg and disease of the heart. Whereas, Thomas had listed his disabilities as injury to left ankle, lame back, varicose veins, and vertigo.³⁴ Within the same month, one of Thomas' neighbor's wives, Peter Elizabeth Demby, writes an affidavit giving a statement of knowing Thomas for forty years and that he has become partially disabled from earning and supporting himself through manual labor for twenty years. Because of his disabilities he "has had no permanent home for years staying the longest where he fared the best"³⁵ and has not been able to do any labor for the last five to six years. Around December 24, 1893, Thomas came to stay in the Demby home until 1894, where Peter Elizabeth Demby "complained to the grand army post that that I was not able to feed and take care of him."³⁶ To which they rented him a room at fifty cents a week, but had no stove to cook food with,

³² U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Letter from John B Jones to William Lochren Commissioner of Pensions, February 6, 1895, record for Thomas Carmichael

³³ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Letter from John B Jones to William Lochren Commissioner of Pensions, February 6, 1895, record for Thomas Carmichael

³⁴ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, History of Claim, January 18, 1896, record for Thomas Carmichael

³⁵ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, General Affidavit in the Case of Thomas Carmichael, January 29, 1896, Affidavit of Peter E. Demby's, Filed by Milo B. Stevens & Co. Solicitors of Claims.

³⁶ Ibid

and returned to the Demby house in order to eat. Because of the state that he was in, Thomas was sick twice in 1894 and was brought to the Demby home. From Thomas becoming sick and returning to the Demby's, the Commander purposed to pay Mrs. Demby fifty cents a week and ever since that arrangement Thomas stayed with them. Then within two years, in 1896, "his clothes was rages...I complained and Mr. Landing gave him 2 undershirts Dec. 24, [18]97. He lives entirely on charity he has no one that is legally bound to support him he is a physical wreck from disease of back and ankle and heart trouble."³⁷ Giving a statement of the condition of Thomas, gives an image of a hardworking man, who came into hard times and is relying upon his friends for help. Even though Thomas does not go to his wife, but to his community. With Peter Elizabeth Demby's statement is James A. Jones statement. Who writes of being personally acquainted with Thomas and knowing him for twenty years and that Thomas is in a destitute state with no means of support and "dependent upon others who are not legally bound to take care of him,"³⁸ as well as that it is impossible for him to perform any labor, which has made him unemployed and has been out of work for a while. Because of the state that he is in, Jones often assists Thomas by loaning and bringing him money.³⁹ Within four months, Thomas receives a notice telling him his pension has been rejected. Originally it was rejected back in January but it took a while to get through the system. The cause of rejection was due to no pensionable disability from the alleged injury of the left ankle, since the date of filing claim. Not even

³⁷ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, General Affidavit in the Case of Thomas Carmichael, January 29, 1896, Affidavit of Peter E. Demby and James A. Jones, Filed by Milo B. Stevens & Co. Solicitors of Claims

³⁸ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, General Affidavit in the Case of Thomas Carmichael, January 29, 1896, Affidavit of James A. Jones, Filed by Milo B. Stevens & Co. Solicitors of Claims

³⁹ Ibid

the testimonies from four of Thomas' neighbors help, as they are deemed vague and indefinite, and are not sufficient to convert the findings of the Board of Surgeons by who Thomas was examined by.⁴⁰ The four neighbors that assist Thomas are all free Africans, with one being a woman. When it seems that Thomas will not get a pension, his pension gets reissued in March 1898 and it starts up with ten dollars, being mailed to him November 23.⁴¹ In reality, in addition to fighting to get his pension the first and second time, the Commissioner of Pensions, in the beginning, was a lot tougher on African pension requests. After Thomas' fight for his pension, which he receives monthly, his disabilities still make it hard for him to get around and it does not seem that he sees his wife anymore. Alphonsa, as well, does not seem to think Thomas is even alive as in 1900; they both are listed as widows, even though they are living in the same town and are not far from each other. Thomas is at this point living with the Demby's on Cannon Street.⁴² Whereas Alphonsa is living with her two oldest children and granddaughter on Water Street, and on the census a scratched out mark on the number of years married.⁴³ Around 1904 another of Thomas' children gets married, but it is only the date of issuing and filing out the marriage license, between Elizabeth "Lizzie" Carmichael and William Wesley Boyer. The actual marriage date was August 28, 1909, held in Chestertown and ministered by John R.

⁴⁰ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Department of the Interior: Bureau of Pensions, Rejection of Pension, May 9, 1896, record for Thomas Carmichael

⁴¹ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Pension Issued for Thomas Carmichael, March 21, 1898

⁴² 1900 United States Federal Census, June 8, 1900, Ancestry.com, record for Thomas Carmichael.

⁴³ 1900 United States Federal Census, June 4, 1900, Ancestry.com, record for Alphonsa Carmichael.

Holland.⁴⁴ As Thomas approaches old age, his pension also increases to twenty dollars a month.⁴⁵ He is still living by himself, as it becomes 1910, on Maple Avenue.⁴⁶ As Alphonsa is still living on Water Street with her son George B. and daughter Mary Miller and had a lodger.⁴⁷ Then on December 23, 1916 Thomas dies from acute siltation of the heart, and his death certificate has Elizabeth Boyer, his daughter, as an informant.⁴⁸

In Thomas Carmichael's life, he helped others and when he himself needed it, he could ask on the help of friends and neighbors to help him. The people, who mostly supported him, were Africans free and former slaves and a few white people. Such as Anna M. LeEarle who trusted his morals and signed for his freedom papers. In all, Carmichael's life sounds similar to a white soldier's background, but how it stands out is that he was born free, worked hard and chose to enlist into the army. To make a difference in his life and in his children's lives, he chose to enlist to fight for something he believed in and something that he could fight for. Then when the war was over, and he was on the winning side, to him, it was not a huge deal as he just went on with the rest of his life. His next battle was with his right to have a pension, for he fought in the war, and he should deserve to have a pension especially since it gave him an injury. In the end, Thomas Carmichael

⁴⁴ KENT COUNTY CIRCUIT COURT (Marriage License Index Record) 1895-1915 S.G.F. No. 1 p. 26. Issuing date 27 August 1904, actual marriage date 28 August 1909.

⁴⁵ U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, Pension Issued for Thomas Carmichael, November 20, 1907

⁴⁶ 1910 United States Census, April 21, 1910, 4th District 1st Precinct, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland, Ancestry.com, record for Thomas Carmichael.

⁴⁷ 1910 United States Census, April 15, 1910, 4th District 2nd Precinct, Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland, Ancestry.com, record for Alphonsa Carmichael.

⁴⁸ DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS (Death Record, Counties) Kent County, 1910-1951, S1179, State of Maryland Death Certificate for Geo. W. Thomas Carmichael, December 23, 1916, Certificate No. 22778.

won his battles over receiving a pension. So, as to why George Washington Thomas Carmichael was important, it was not just because of being promoted to Commissary Sergeant, but rather that he enlisted which made one more spot in fighting in the army than one less spot needed by an African or white man.

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