

Mike Collins  
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### Making Memorial Day: The Works of Perry Landon

Perry H. Landon was born around 1842-3. He was a shorter man of just five foot five inches tall, with brown eyes, dark complexion, and curly hair. What makes Perry Landon such an interesting figure in American history is not merely his involvement in the military. Instead, it is the fact that he enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the USCT straight out of slavery that makes him such an intriguing character. In February, 1863, the Kent News reported that the Negro Soldier Bill had passed by a vote of 88 to 55. Terms of the bill included equal rations, equipment, and clothing, and that their terms of service may not exceed five years.<sup>1</sup> Such accommodations were not made, and African Americans still suffered from inequality and unfair treatment in the armed services. Nevertheless, soldiers like Perry Landon and other members of the USCT stayed loyal to the Union Army, giving their arms and legs in battle, and even their lives. Never before in U.S. History have people of such an oppressed class rose to the rank of soldier so quickly. According to the Kent News, three thousand one hundred and ten African Americans in Maryland had volunteered for enlistment in the Union. The interesting part of this statistic from 1863 is that only a fraction of the volunteers were white men, while the majority of them were black men. The fact that almost all of the volunteers were black is indicative of their longing for freedom. In Kent County, two hundred and nine Colored Volunteers enlisted in 1863, versus a total of zero white volunteers enlisting that

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<sup>1</sup> Kent News, February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

year.<sup>2</sup> Owned all his life by a man named James Ricaud, Perry Landon faced many challenges as a new soldier. Racism in the south as well as the north hampered his spirits, just like the spirits of other African American soldiers. Landon never mentions his address, other than saying that his PO, or post office, was in Chestertown, Kent County, Maryland. He says that Chestertown is where he was born and raised and lived his whole life until the war of the states, or the war of 1861. On September 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1863, Landon enlisted in Company C of the 7<sup>th</sup> United States Colored Troops straight out of slavery. While charging on Fort Harrison, circa September 1864, Perry Landon was hit in the left forearm just below the elbow with a “minie” ball, or a rifle’s bullet.<sup>3</sup> His left hand was completely gone from the wound, and eventually his left forearm had to be amputated.<sup>4</sup>

Perry Landon was also under the command of Lieutenants Chaney and Ely, as well as First Sergeant Chas Newman. Another primary source document explains that Landon was under the command of a First Lieutenant Wright of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>5</sup> A disagreement or a change in leadership of his regiment is a sign of the high mortality rate among the USCT in the Civil War.

Perry Landon’s Captain in the 7<sup>th</sup> USCT was known as Captain Wise.<sup>6</sup> Captain Weiss as well as Lieutenant Spinney, both of the 7<sup>th</sup>, had been captured by the Confederacy and imprisoned at an abandoned tobacco warehouse. The Union prisoners

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<sup>2</sup> Kent News, December 26<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

<sup>3</sup> Washington, D.C., Kent County, Pension Application, Bureau of Pensions, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903.

<sup>4</sup> Washington, D.C., Application for an Artificial Limb, Surgeon General’s Office, September 28<sup>th</sup>, 1876.

<sup>5</sup> Declaration for Invalid Pension, Circuit Court, Clerk of the Circuit, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1865.

<sup>6</sup> Washington, D.C., Kent County, Pension Application, Bureau of Pensions, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903.

were typically moved from place to place, city to city, as their Confederate captors saw fit. Finally, in Danville, Virginia, an uprising of officers occurred. Before the escape attempt, members of the 7<sup>th</sup> regiment received daily rations of corn-bread and boiled beef. Other Union prisoners, such as officers of the 5<sup>th</sup> regiment, were granted special dining privileges because of their family ties to certain members of the Confederacy. The 5<sup>th</sup> regiment's officers had a stove on which they prepared delicious gourmet meals, making the hungrier 7<sup>th</sup> regiment jealous. Water supply was also an issue in the prisons of the Confederate states. In order to procure a day's dose of water, prisoners were allowed to walk eighty yards to the Dan River. There, they would fill their buckets with drink and carry it right back to their prison. Finally, Captain Weiss and Lieutenant Spinney of the 7<sup>th</sup> regiment united with Colonel Ralston and Captain Cook of the 9<sup>th</sup> regiment and prepared to actuate their escape plan. After returning from the river with their buckets of water, the four officers attacked the gate guard as he opened the door.<sup>7</sup> The tragedy that ensued was not part of the plan.

The four Union officers tackled the six-foot tall Confederate prison guard to the ground. However, Colonel Ralston was shot in the stomach by another Confederate guard, and died an agonizing death several days later. As punishment for their misbehavior, the Union prisoners at Danville were restricted from their usual corn bread and boiled beef. Instead, they received overly salted codfish, making their thirst even worse than before the brawl. Water supplies were also limited, and whatever water was available was spilled and wasted by the desperate crowd of thirsty men. Fortunately for the 7<sup>th</sup> regiment, they had friends from the northern states who knew of their captivity,

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<sup>7</sup> Califf, Joseph Mark, "Record of the Services of the Seventh Regiment", 1971, 52-3.

and in February of 1865 the Union prisoners received thirty containers of rations, ending their hunger once and for all.<sup>8</sup> Again, the prisoners were transported to another prison, this time in Salisbury, North Carolina. At first, according to Captain Sherman, their food supplies were ample, having plenty of bread, bean soup, and meat. That was before six thousand other captured Unionists joined the line. In one instance, a Union officer walked too close to the edge of the prison yard, called the “dead-line”. A Confederate sentry atop a high tower shot the Union man and killed him. The sentry received a sixty day vacation as punishment.<sup>9</sup>

On the morning of September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1864, the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment of United States Colored Troops marched to Fort Gilmer, Virginia, under the command of Colonel James Shaw. With the help of four other companies, the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S.C.T. tried and failed to take the fort of rebels. Many colored troops and white troops were killed or wounded in the charge. After losing too many numbers, Lieutenant Spinney held out his white hankie as a sign of surrender. Along with Captain Weiss, Lt. Spinney and their regiments were all taken prisoner by Confederates. Black troops were treated much more maliciously than the white troops after their capture. White soldiers had their valuables taken from them by the Confederates, while black soldiers were kicked, beaten, and sometimes murdered by their captors. During the fighting at Fort Gilmer, twenty members of the 7<sup>th</sup> USCT were shot dead, eighty were disabled, and one hundred and thirty six were never found. Other figures put the death toll for the Seventh at one hundred and six. After such an enormous waste of life, Major General Butler even decreed a new medal for valor be produced. On the medal, there is an engraving of black troops charging on a fort, and the

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<sup>8</sup> Califf, 54.

<sup>9</sup> Califf, 57.

inscription reads, “Ferro iis libertas perveniet”. The inscription means “Freedom will be theirs by the sword.” Ironically, the medal for courage issued by Butler has still not been recognized as a medal of courage by the U.S. Armed Forces. The Butler Medal, as it was called, was dismissed by the Department of Defense and the White House in 1981 as being an “unofficial medal”.<sup>10</sup> After being totally disabled by the bullet wound at Fort Harrison and subsequently having his whole left forearm amputated, Perry Landon was discharged from military service on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1865.

Four days after his discharge, Perry Landon filed a claim for his pension. On May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Landon and another man by the name of Charles Alexander signed the pension claim form together and sent it to Samuel M. Evans, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Baltimore County. Very rarely mentioned in any of Perry Landon’s primary source documents is the fact that he was, prior to his enlistment, a slave for life.<sup>11</sup> Only in two out of nearly twenty documents found at the archives is there a mention of his previous oppression or the name of his owner: James Rickerts<sup>12</sup> (James Ricaud). Charles Alexander may have been Landon’s brother, as the name Aleksandr Landon also appears underneath Perry Landon’s name in the Kent County Commission of Slave Statistics, 1867-1868. Both of the Landon men were slaves for life owned by Ricaud, according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century record, and both men enlisted in and served in the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment.<sup>13</sup> James B. Ricaud was elected as the president of the Union State Convention, and on May 23<sup>rd</sup>,

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<sup>10</sup> Noah Andre Trudeau, “Like Men of War, Black Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1865”, New York, 1998, 299-300

<sup>11</sup> Kent County Commission of Slave Statistics, 1867-8, Maryland State Archives.

<sup>12</sup> Declaration for Invalid Pension, Circuit Court, Clerk of the Circuit, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1865.

<sup>13</sup> Kent County Commission of Slave Statistics, 1867-8, Maryland State Archives.

1861, Ricaud gave a speech to the Union convention.<sup>14</sup> The topic of the meeting was the invasion of Sewell's Point by the troops at Fortress Monroe. General Butler's troops awaited their orders to advance on the secessionists in Virginia. James B. Ricaud was also appointed as the replacement for the Honorable Judge Carmichael. While imprisoned at Fort Delaware, the special judge for the Circuit Court of Kent County, Carmichael, was wrongly reported to have been released, but in truth the office was given to Ricaud.<sup>15</sup> Ricaud was also nominated by the Union party as one of the candidates for the seat of Judge of the Orphan's Court.<sup>16</sup>

However, some parties in the Union disagreed with Ricaud's persistent slave holding. In fact, on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1863, Ricaud and a number of other judges were arrested by a Union military unit.<sup>17</sup> Two Union ships arrived in Kent County, the Thomas Collyer and the Nellie Pentz, and on board were the 3<sup>rd</sup> Maryland Cavalry and an infantry regiment from New York. They gathered up the hypocritical Union man Ricaud, along with some of his colleagues, and loaded them onto the two Union steamboats. While in Kent County, the Union soldiers also released a number of African Americans that were locked up in the Chestertown jail. Upon their arrival in Baltimore, the judges were examined by General Schenck and decreed to be released. As quickly as they arrived at the port across the bay, they were loaded back onto the same ship and sent right back to Kent County. According to "The Sun", on January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864, Ricaud and some other legislators were appointed the responsibility of assessing and reevaluating the

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<sup>14</sup> Augusta Chronicle, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 1861.

<sup>15</sup> Alexandra Gazette, October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1862.

<sup>16</sup> The Sun, September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1963.

<sup>17</sup> The Daily Age, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

properties in Maryland.<sup>18</sup> Ricaud's dabbling in the real estate trade can also be seen in the General Index to Land Records found in the Kent County Courthouse. Ricaud sold over fifty property deeds to some of Chestertown's more famous historical figures, such as George Vickers, Samuel Chambers, and James Mansfield.<sup>19</sup> On March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1864, The Sun newspaper reported that Senator Ricaud had officially resigned from the Senate.<sup>20</sup> A senator no more, Ricaud was appointed to the seat of judge again, this time of the Seventh Judicial District Court. For Perry Landon, a wounded 7<sup>th</sup> USCT soldier who needed his pension desperately, the appointment of his former master Ricaud was ominously discouraging. Judge Ricaud did not pass a bill that would have deposited three hundred thousand dollars into the pockets of USCT soldiers' families. Instead, the neglectful Ricaud's first act as the new judge was to regulate the laws regarding hay sales in western Baltimore. His lack of interest in helping Landon and the other USCT members was indicative of the surviving racial tensions in America after the U.S. Civil War. Nevertheless, the persistent Perry Landon did indeed acquire his pension after years of filling out pension applications.

In one very lengthy pension application document, in which the prose is noticeably complex and extensive, the name at the bottom of the page is crossed out. Perhaps Perry Landon found Edwin Wood's discharge form flying in the breeze and decided to pass it off as his own. Nevertheless, the discharge application document is stamped with an emphatic "APPROVED" by the Surgeon at the end.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps Landon

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<sup>18</sup> The Sun, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864.

<sup>19</sup> General Index to Land Records, 1842-1883, Liber J.K.H., Folio 175.

<sup>20</sup> The Sun, March 10<sup>th</sup>, 1864.

<sup>21</sup> Certificate of Disability for Discharge, Headquarters Department of the East, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1865.

had had enough of war after losing his left hand and arm at Fort Harrison. Although there are many other documents in which Landon claims to be totally disabled, we have never seen his photograph. Then again, there is a document in which a doctor “Cha...” claimed to have examined Landon and deemed him unfit for service for lack of a left arm.<sup>22</sup>

As for Perry Landon’s family life, he claimed in several documents to have had two wives during his lifetime.<sup>23</sup> Perry Landon’s first wife was named Sallie Ballard, who died in the spring of 1869 in Chestertown, Maryland.<sup>24</sup> Three years later he married another woman.<sup>25</sup> His second wife’s name was Henrietta Wright. After the war, Perry Landon even had five children, William H. Landon, born Jan 23<sup>rd</sup> 1876, Theodore A. Landon, born January 16<sup>th</sup> 1878, Annie C. Landon, born October 6<sup>th</sup> 1880, Arthur G. Landon, born August 31<sup>st</sup> 1885, and Henrietta Landon, born June 15<sup>th</sup> 1889. It was while he was answering questions for a pension official that Perry Landon mentioned the names of his late wife, current wife, and five children.<sup>26</sup> Only in one other document does Landon mention their names. It was a secondary pension application, and in it the differences are subtle but profound, as there is mention of his youngest daughter, Henrietta. In the first questionnaire, he names her after his wife, but in the second questionnaire, he calls her “Ester”.<sup>27</sup> Ester and Henrietta were both born on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1889, suggesting that the two names are of the same woman. In the General Index of

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<sup>22</sup> Certificate of Disability for Discharge, USA General Hospital, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 1868.

<sup>23</sup> Pension Application, Bureau of Pensions, May 15<sup>th</sup>, 1903.

<sup>24</sup> Pension Application, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1898.

<sup>25</sup> Pension Application, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1898.

<sup>26</sup> Pension Application, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, January 15<sup>th</sup>, 1898.

<sup>27</sup> Pension Application, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions, June 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1898.



Wills, the “Executor or Administrator” of Perry Landon’s will was this youngest daughter of his. In the record from June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1931, “Elta Landing” was listed as his heiress.<sup>28</sup>

During his life, Perry Landon was a very historically significant member of the fight for freedom. Not only because of his service in the military, but also because of his service in the Grand Army of the Republic. The GAR was a collaboration of Civil War veterans who paraded around Kent County to celebrate their victorious achievements in the war. Tens of thousands of black soldiers came from around the nation to participate in the Post 25 Grand Army of the Republic Sumner Post parade. The G.A.R. was also responsible for helping black soldiers acquire their much sought after pensions. Only veterans of the U.S. Army and Navy who served in the Civil War were allowed to join, and all other war veterans were considered unworthy by the G.A.R.<sup>29</sup> However, both black veterans and white veterans from the war of 1861 were allowed to join the group, making it the only interracial social organization in America at the time. The state of Maryland also had twenty one other posts, all of which were entirely African American.<sup>30</sup> The Sumner post met with its’ “colored comrades” from other posts to deliberate on local legislations.<sup>31</sup> Barbara Gannon explains that the G.A.R. posts were relatively color blind, in the sense that they did not make much mention of the skin color of their members. That is why, Gannon thinks, it was so hard for her to find other all black posts or

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<sup>28</sup> General Index of Wills, Maryland State Archives, June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1931, Paper, F.W.S, No. 1, Folio 10.

<sup>29</sup> Barbara A. Gannon, “African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City”, lecture at Washington College, March 1st, 2002, C.V. Starr Center, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Gannon, 2.

<sup>31</sup> Gannon, 3.

interracial posts around the nation. After thoroughly investigating and researching, she claims to have found two hundred and thirty other posts comprised entirely of African American Civil War veterans. Massachusetts, Iowa, Florida, Illinois, and Pennsylvania were among the states that had all black posts, much like the one in Chestertown, Maryland.<sup>32</sup> According to the National Register of Historic Places, there were over 8,600 G.A.R. posts. Post 25 was the only post built entirely by African Americans that still exists. Another post in Beaufort, South Carolina was also built by African Americans, but it burned down in the 1980s and had to be reconstructed from the ground up. The Sumner post was constructed by twenty black Kent County men, all veterans of the Maryland U.S. Colored Troops. Another black Civil War veteran was from the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Regiment, numbering their construction team at twenty one.<sup>33</sup>

In 1890, the G.A.R. had over four hundred thousand civil war veterans in its society.<sup>34</sup> Barbara Gannon explains that in 1951 and 1956, the last surviving member of the group passed away, officially disbanding the G.A.R. However, Annie Hynson and Henrietta Landon explained in other documents from the 1950s that the last survivor died March of 1928.<sup>35</sup> Between 1890 and 1927, Perry Landon was the most active post commander of the G.A.R. Other members of the Sumner Post in Chestertown included Henry Worrell, William Broadway, as well as Oscar Crozier.<sup>36</sup> William Wesley

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<sup>32</sup> Gannon, 5.

<sup>33</sup> State Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places, Section 8, Page 2.

<sup>34</sup> Gannon, 1.

<sup>35</sup> Henrietta Landing vs. The Centennial Lodge Beneficial Association of Kent County, State of Maryland, In the Circuit Court for Kent County, Maryland, in Equity No. 3811, Depositions.

<sup>36</sup> Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland, 1882-1929*, Library of Congress, compiled 2000. Kent County Arts Council.

Broadway, the oldest living member of the Sumner Beneficial Society, was the last member to die in 1928. Following Broadway's death in March of 1928, there were no more meetings of black Civil War veterans at the Sumner Post in Chestertown, according to Perry Landon's wife, Henrietta. However, the Landon's legacy of leadership continued even after the death of their Civil War hero, Perry. Perry Landon's wife Henrietta continued to have group meetings with other surviving relatives of the Sumner veterans. Perry Landon's daughter, Annie Hynson, formerly known as Annie Landon, was among the attendees at the Sumner Post Meetings after 1928. Although they did not parade around the streets of Chestertown in their uniforms, they did hold talks and even tried to sell the property to the Centennial Lodge Beneficial Association.

With just five people remaining to comprise the GAR Sumner Post, both Annie Hynson and Henrietta Landon explained that the Centennial Lodge had agreed to purchase the property for fifteen hundred dollars, under the condition that the piece of land had a good title. That is why the last surviving members are being interrogated in the primary source document from the Kent County Circuit Court.<sup>37</sup>

The Sumner post was named after Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, who in spring of 1864 passed a bill in the Senate that decreed that blacks were allowed to ride in the same train cars as whites. The bill also stipulated that blacks and whites were equal in the eyes of law. However, racism still prevailed in Chestertown; even the authors of the Kent News were unappreciative of their black contemporaries. In one article, after explaining the passage of black-white equality laws, the author exclaims, "We warn our people to be on their guard, or they will have negro equality and negro voting before they

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<sup>37</sup> Henrietta Landing vs. The Centennial Lodge, Depositions.

are aware of it!”<sup>38</sup> Other instances of racial unrest can be seen spanning the decades before, during, and after the Civil War and the formation of the GAR. In an 1865 issue of the Kent News, the racial tensions between black and white Chestertown residents can be seen in its true light. The author writes that last Monday was Whitsuntide day, and there were more Negroes in Chestertown than he had ever seen before. One Negro grabbed Constable Adkinson by the throat and made some threats, according to the article. Another black man was accused of threatening to kill all the white people in Chestertown. A Negro woman exclaimed that a “regiment of soldiers” from Baltimore was coming to “put the white trash down!”<sup>39</sup>

Considering the racial biases and prejudices of previous articles written in the Kent News, there is no certitude that these reports are accurate. Perhaps the general consensus among certain newspaper article writers was that the Negroes needed to be portrayed in a less civilized light than the whites for some irrational reason. Despite their courageous service in the fields of battle, soldiers of the USCT were still attacked by certain prejudiced parties. Even in later decades, such as the 1880’s, a violent altercation between whites and blacks ended with gunfire and death. On Decoration Day in Baltimore, a black man got in an argument with his bartender over an outstanding bar tab. According to the Kent News, a riot ensued and the black man was shot dead by the police.<sup>40</sup> Much like the police brutality reports of today, such as the Rodney King case, there was much police brutality towards African Americans in the 1800s. Decoration Day was supposed to be a day of peace and remembrance of the fallen soldiers of the Civil

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<sup>38</sup> Kent News, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1864.

<sup>39</sup> Kent News, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1865.

<sup>40</sup> Kent News, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1880.

War. Members of the Charles Sumner Post often marched to the Chester Cemetery, where they placed decorative flowers on the gravestones of their fallen brothers.<sup>41</sup>

Perry Landon died on May 11<sup>th</sup>, 1927 at 6:30 in the morning.<sup>42</sup> In the Petition for Letters of Administration, it states that Perry Landon passed away without leaving any last will and testament. However, while investigating the archives in the Kent County Courthouse in Chestertown, a well-trained historian can discover Landon's last will and testament, as well as his administration account. In the General Index of Wills at the Maryland State Archives, it states in Liber F.W.S., Folio 10, that his youngest daughter Etta is his chosen executor. That is also the case in his administration account found at the Kent County court house as well as in his will in Annapolis. In the administration account, it states that the residence of the late Perry Landon will go to his daughter "Elta", while one hundred dollars of Landon's must be given to the state of Maryland.<sup>43</sup> In his will, Perry Landon decreed that all of his personal belongings and property will be given to his five children, and after they die, to his grandchildren. The one caveat of Landon's will is that he asks his children to spend some of his old money on a suitable tombstone.<sup>44</sup> Not until he has been properly buried and given a decent funeral will he let his kids spend his money or inherit his house. However, Etta Landon used her savvy for paperwork to cut corners and find loopholes in order to make a few extra dollars.

Finally, in 1985, Post 25 was abandoned as a meeting hall. During a storm, the roof began to deteriorate and the vines and shrubs around the building inundated the post.

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<sup>41</sup> Kent News, June 5<sup>th</sup>, 1886.

<sup>42</sup> Petition for Letter of Administration, Date of creation June 30<sup>th</sup>, 1931, Etta Landing, daughter of Perry Landon, 7<sup>th</sup> USCT.

<sup>43</sup> Kent County Court House Administration Accounts, Folio 584-5.

<sup>44</sup> General Index of Wills: F.W.S., No. 1, Folio 10.

Then in 2002, Preservation Incorporated, a historical conservation company, took over the responsibility of taking care of the Sumner Post. The building still stands to this day, and is undergoing priming for restoration.<sup>45</sup> The restoration of the Sumner post is symbolic of the resiliency of Perry Landon and the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment. Not only did he and his dear comrades survive the Civil War, but they also built a historic house in Chestertown to remember the fallen on Decoration Day. Sometimes violent pogroms erupted on the day of remembrance. Today we call it Memorial Day, and we still honor our fallen heroes with a parade every year. Perry Landon should be proud of himself up in heaven. His participation in so many Decoration Day parades cemented the Memorial Day holiday into our American calendars. During Team Landon's first visit to the Sumner house, a black man rode by on his bicycle. The black man waved to us with his black hand, and I waved to him with my white hand outside the Sumner house. In the 1800s, such racial harmony would have eluded us. Today, millions of blacks and whites have elected a black President of the United States, and the USCT should be very proud of that, smiling down on America. Although many a tempest has weathered the house of the 7<sup>th</sup> USCT, the legend of the 7<sup>th</sup> Regiment lives on through its historical preservation.

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