

Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland

Commission Report

Submitted to the General Assembly, pursuant to SB 448/Ch. 434, 2024

November 26, 2024

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Commission Members

- Christopher E. Haley, Commission Chair, representing the Maryland State Archives
- Hon. Sen. Benjamin T. Brooks, Sr., representing the Maryland State Senate
- Maya D. Davis, representing the Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture
- Stacy Montgomery, representing the Maryland Department of Planning
- Tereance Moore, representing the Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area
- Ryan Patterson, representing the Maryland Commission on Maryland Military Monuments
- Nicholas Redding, representing Preservation Maryland
- Hon. Del. Gary Simmons, representing the Maryland House of Delegates

Commission Staff

- Owen Lourie, Senior Research Archivist, Maryland State Archives

Legislative mandate

The Commission to Study African American Civil War Soldiers in Maryland was created by the Maryland General Assembly by [Chap. 434, Laws of 2024](#). The commission was charged with:

- Studying the history of African American Civil War soldiers who fought for the Union Army in Maryland and
- Making findings and recommendations regarding the funding, design, construction, and location of an appropriate memorial dedicated to the African American Civil War soldiers in Maryland.

On or before December 1, 2024, the Commission shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor and, in accordance with § 2-1257 of the State Government Article, the General Assembly.

Commission Activities

The Commission met on the following dates:

September 30, 2024: Full Commission meeting

October 14, 2024: Design Committee meeting

October 29, 2024: Full Commission meeting

November 4, 2024: History and Research Committee meeting

Overview of Maryland's African American Soldiers during the Civil War

At the outset of the Civil War, in the spring of 1861, the army of the United States had no Black soldiers. This had been the case since the end of the Revolutionary War, when African American soldiers fought alongside white troops in integrated units. From that time until 1948, the United States military remained divided by race, and African American service members were often relegated to menial or noncombat duties. (By the Civil War, a small number of Blacks served in the U.S. Navy, although almost always in noncombat positions, such as cooks.)

African Americans advocated from the very beginning of the Civil War to be allowed to serve in the army. Leading abolitionist Frederick Douglass demanded in 1861 that “the slaves and free colored people be called into service and formed into a liberating army, to march into the South and raise the banner of Emancipation.” Douglass condemned the prohibition against Black soldiers as “blind, unreasoning prejudice,” and said that going to war without them meant fighting with one arm tied.

By 1863, attitudes in the North toward enlisting African American soldiers began to shift. In the wake of the Emancipation Proclamation, issued January 1, 1863, which freed enslaved people held in Confederate-controlled areas, there was greater acknowledgment that the war was a contest over the end of slavery. Furthermore, the Union Army was in great need of more soldiers. A draft was instituted in March 1863, provoking strong resistance among parts of the white population. Blacks were finally recognized as an untapped resource, and given a chance to fight for their own liberation, while demonstrating their commitment as citizens.

Accordingly, in May 1863, the federal government authorized the creation of African American units in the Union Army, designated the United States Colored Troops (U.S.C.T.). There would be no Black officers, and initially they were paid less than their white counterparts. Enslaved men could be enlisted by their owner and receive their freedom upon enlistment (while the owner would receive the enlistment bonus). In all, roughly 170,000 Black men served in the U.S.C.T., fighting as infantry, artillery, and cavalry soldiers. The U.S.C.T. made up roughly 10 percent of the Union Army's total strength. These men served despite the knowledge that they could be killed or enslaved if they were captured in battle. The most famous Black unit was the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts Regiment, featured in the 1989 movie *Glory*.

Maryland raised seven U.S.C.T. infantry regiments: the Fourth, Seventh, Ninth, Nineteenth, Thirtieth, Thirty-Ninth, and One Hundred-Eighteenth; another regiment, the Thirty-Eighth, included many men from Maryland and Virginia. More than 8,700 Black Marylanders served in the U.S.C.T. Some 2,000 of these soldiers died in combat or from disease during the war. Five Maryland U.S.C.T. soldiers received the Medal of Honor, the highest military honor, more than any other state's U.S.C.T. contingents. Those men were Sgt. Decatur Dorsey, Sgt. Maj. Christian A. Fleetwood, Sgt. James H. Harris, Sgt. Alfred B. Hilton, and Pvt. Charles Veal.

Some Maryland U.S.C.T. units saw service in Virginia in 1864-1865 in the fighting around Petersburg and Richmond, while others fought in North and South Carolina. After the war, the soldiers were stationed in various locations in the south, including Texas. They were in very fierce fighting, including the Battle of the Crater at Petersburg and Chaffin's Farm, both in 1864.

Existing Monuments to Black Civil War Soldiers

A number of existing monuments to Black Civil War soldiers have been built in Maryland and elsewhere. Some are located at cemeteries where U.S.C.T. soldiers are buried, others are outside of courthouses or other public spaces. There are also monuments in places associated with U.S.C.T. soldiers, such as the sites of training and recruitment camps, or communities or churches where some of the soldiers came from.

There are four monuments in Maryland to Black Civil War soldiers:

- Alfred B. Hilton Memorial Park (Harford County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=191938>
- Monument to U.S.C.T. soldiers from Kent County (Chestertown, Kent County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=5414>
- Thirtieth U.S.C.T. Infantry Regiment Monument (Cumberland, Allegany County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=187076>
- United States Colored Troops Memorial Statue (Lexington Park, St. Mary's County)
<https://www.slaverymonuments.org/items/show/1114>

Interpretive markers relating to Maryland's U.S.C.T. soldiers include:

- African American Soldiers from Montgomery County marker (Beallsville, Montgomery County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=86905>
- Camp Stanton, recruitment and training camp for U.S.C.T. soldiers (Benedict, Charles County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=195735>
- Charles Sumner Post, Grand Army of the Republic (Chestertown, Kent County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=156672>
- Decatur Dorsey, Medal of Honor recipient (Ellicott City, Howard County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=5756>
- Duckett Cabin, constructed by U.S.C.T. veteran Charles Duckett (Croom, Prince George's County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=183969>

- Nathaniel Hopkins, U.S.C.T. soldier, marker (Trappe, Talbot County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=154465>
- Oxford Wharf marker (Oxford, Talbot County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=34451>
- Point Lookout prison camp marker (St. Mary's County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=128950>
- Unionville marker (Unionville, Talbot County)
<https://www.hmdb.org/m.asp?m=3893>

Commission Recommendations

The commission makes the following recommendations.

1. Commissioning and installation of a physical monument

If a physical monument is to be constructed, the following factors should be considered:

- Funding for the project:
Significant funding would be needed to design, create and install a monument. The commission noted that recent successful projects of memorialization have been included as a component under the capital budget of a larger restoration or rehabilitation project.
- Selection and acquisition of an appropriate location for a public monument:
A location of proper dignity, public access, and security must be considered to be certain the monument is seen as respectful, easily visited, and safe. Funding would need to include acquisition of land where the monument was placed, as well as any alterations to the landscape necessary to accept the monument.
- Inclusive design:
Any design must be as inclusive as possible recognizing all Black soldiers who served, even if all their names are not identified, as well as inclusive in design so that the grounds and interaction with the monument is fully accessible to the public of all abilities, as required by the Americans with Disabilities Act, including the use of braille.
- Interpretive context and signage:
Text to provide the accurate historical context would need to be researched, written, vetted, and placed on proper signage around the monument.
- Perpetual care and maintenance of the artwork and the site (landscape)
Funding and a plan for the perpetual conservation of the monument, signage, and the surrounding grounds must be awarded to a responsible party. For instance, if the State of Maryland funded the monument, it would become a part of the Maryland Artistic

Properties Collection managed by the Maryland State Archives. Any new monument should be added to the inventory maintained by the Governor's Commission on Maryland Military Monuments.

2. Educational resources online to reach the widest public audience

In addition to the creation of a physical monument, the Commission recognizes that the legacy and memory of Maryland's Black Civil War soldiers should be remembered and honored through the preparation of educational and interpretive materials. It is in fact these recommendations that would be the most far reaching in both geographic and longevity for the study of African American soldiers in the Civil War. These goals can be accomplished by:

- Providing an online exhibit for those who cannot see the monument in person.
- Providing additional interpretive context that goes beyond what is on signage at the monument site.
- Providing teaching tools, including scans of primary resources, for educators in partnership with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) and Local Education Agencies (LEA).

To meet these goals, the Commission makes the following recommendations, which would require appropriate and dedicated funding and staffing resources to carry out:

- The Maryland State Archives should establish a page on their website to provide a public portal showing the finding aid of sources developed for this final report. Additional resources can be added as they are developed with dedicated funding.
- With appropriate funding, the Maryland State Archives should prioritize locating and digitizing pension files of all known African American Civil War Soldiers from Maryland, now in the custody of the National Archives, and make the digitized copies available for remote public use.
- Records pertaining to African American Civil War soldiers from Maryland held by repositories in Maryland should be prioritized for digitization and public access, with dedicated funding.
- Interested stakeholders should identify funding and partnerships with Maryland State Department of Education, Local Education Agencies, Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, and other stakeholders to develop impactful lesson plans on African American Civil War soldiers

from Maryland.

- Interested stakeholders should work collaboratively with partners to produce a traveling exhibit to be displayed throughout the state highlighting the story of African American Civil War Soldiers from Maryland, their service, recipients of the Medal of Honor, and their post-war impact across Maryland.
- The Commission furthermore recommends that interested stakeholders explore involving Maryland in the ongoing *Road to Freedom Trail* and the *U.S.C.T. Historic Trail* to identify and highlight sites in Maryland with African American Civil War heritage

Appendix: Bibliography of Sources for the study of Maryland's African American Civil War Soldiers

Listed here is a selection of primary and secondary records which can aid in the study of Maryland's African American Civil War soldiers.

Primary Sources

Guide to Military Records at the Maryland State Archives.

<https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/viewer.aspx?page=military>.

Guide to African American Records at the Maryland State Archives.

<https://guide.msa.maryland.gov/pages/viewer.aspx?page=afridesc#muster>.

Weidman, Budge. "Black Soldiers in the Civil War: Preserving the Legacy of the United States Colored Troops." National Archives and Records Administration.

<https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/blacks-civil-war/article.html>.

Fourth Regiment, U.S.C.T., battle flag, Maryland Center for History and Culture.

<https://www.mdhistory.org/resources/flag-9/>.

Sgt. Maj. Christian A. Fleetwood earned the Medal of Honor for rescuing and carrying this flag at the Battle of Chaffin's Farm, 1864.

1890 Federal Census Collection, SC 3096, Maryland State Archives.

<https://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/speccol/collection.aspx?speccol=3096>.

Includes list of U.S.C.T. veterans living in Baltimore at the time of the 1890 Census:

<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/3096/html/sc3096.html>.

U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection, SC 4126, Maryland State Archives.

<https://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/speccol/collection.aspx?speccol=4126>.

Research collection drawn from pension files of U.S.C.T. veterans.

Daniel Ingram Pension File Collection, SC 5839, Maryland State Archives.

<https://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/speccol/collection.aspx?speccol=5839>.

Pension files of Maryland soldiers who served with the U.S.C.T.

Carolyn C. Williams Collection of Robert Riley Papers, SC 3836, Maryland State Archives.

<https://speccol.msa.maryland.gov/pages/speccol/collection.aspx?speccol=3836>. Includes photographs of Robert Riley, U.S.C.T. soldier from Maryland. See Biography of Robert Riley: <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/004600/004641/html/msa04641.html>.

Maryland-Specific Secondary Sources

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Callum, Agnes Kane. *9th Regiment United States Colored Troops, Volunteers of Maryland, Civil War, 1863 - 1866*. Baltimore: Mullac Publishers, 1999.

Diggs, Louis S. *African Americans from Baltimore County Who Served in the Civil War: Maryland's Six Regiments of Slaves*. Baltimore: The author, 2014.

Fleetwood, Christian A. *The Negro as a Soldier*. Washington, D.C.: Howard University Print, 1895. <https://www.loc.gov/item/a12000751/>.

Koger, A. Briscoe. *Maryland Negro in Our Wars*. Baltimore: Clarke Press, 1942.

Maryland State Archives. *A Guide to the History of Slavery in Maryland*. 2nd. ed., 2020.

Ravanbakhsh, Heather. "African American Military Records." *The Archivist's Bulldog: Newsletter of the Maryland State Archives* 10, no. 19 (15 October 1996). <https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/refserv/bulldog/bull96/html/bul10-19.html#afro>.

Small, Clara L. and David Briddell. *Men of Color; to Arms! Manumitted Slaves and Freed Blacks from the Lower Eastern Shore of Maryland Who Served in the Civil War: Worcester County and Somerset County, Maryland*. Fruitland, MD: Arcadia Enterprises, 2010.

U.S.C.T. Civil War Digest 19, no. 2 (2017). Published by United States Colored Troops Institute for Local History and Family Research, Hartwick College, Oneonta, NY.

Wilmer, L. Allison, J. H. Jarrett, and Geo. W. F. Vernon. *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-65. Vol. 2*. Baltimore, MD: Guggenheimer, Weil & Co., 1899. Available online as *Archives of Maryland Online*, vol. 366, <https://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000366/html/index.html>.

General (Non-Maryland) Secondary Sources

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[Califf, Joseph M.] Record of the Services of the Seventh Regiment, U. S. Colored Troops. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1878.

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Cornish, Dudley Taylor. *The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861-1865*. Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1987.

Gibbs, C.R. *Black, Copper, and Bright: The District of Columbia's Black Civil War Regiment*. Silver Spring, MD: Three Dimensional Publishing, 2002.

Gladstone, William A. *United States Colored Troops, 1863-1867*. Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 1990.

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McPherson, James M. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted During the War for the Union*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1965.

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Taylor, Susie King. *A Black Woman's Civil War Memoirs: Reminiscences of My Life in Camp with the 33rd U.S. Colored Troops, late 1st South Carolina Volunteers*. New York: M. Wiener Publishers, 1988.

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Web Resources

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“Crossroads of War.” Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area. <https://www.crossroadsofwar.org/>.

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<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc5500/sc5572/000001/000000/000118/html/t118.html>.

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<https://msa.maryland.gov/msa/stagser/s1259/121/1727/html/0000.html>.

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“USCT at Monocacy Battlefield.” Monocacy National Battlefield, National Parks Service.

<https://www.nps.gov/mono/learn/historyculture/united-states-colored-troops-at-monocacy.htm>.

Medal of Honor Recipients from Maryland

Sgt. Decatur Dorsey, Thirty-Ninth Regiment (Petersburg):

<https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/decatur-dorsey>

Sgt. Maj. Christian A. Fleetwood, Fourth Regiment (Chaffin’s Farm):

<https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/christian-a-fleetwood>

<https://news.maryland.gov/ng/2022/02/10/christian-fleetwood-the-maryland-4th-u-s-colored-infantry-regiment/>

Sgt. James H. Harris, Thirty-Eighth Regiment (New Market’s Heights):

<https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/james-h-harris>

Sgt. Alfred B. Hilton, Fourth Regiment (Chaffin’s Farm):

<https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/alfred-b-hilton>

<https://www.sgtalfredbhiltonfoundation.com/home/about-u-s-colored-troops/>

Pvt. Charles Veal, Fourth Regiment (Chaffin’s Farm):

<https://www.cmohs.org/recipients/charles-veal>