

Civil War on the South River

London Town was long extinct by the time of the American Civil War, but William Brown's house still stood. It had been acquired by Anne Arundel County and became the Almshouse, where the poor, indigent, and mentally ill were kept in deplorable conditions.

In 1828, Dr. Richard Marriott was assigned to the Almshouse as a physician, and he decried what he found. "Immoral and vicious practices have been generate in this institution," he wrote, pointing a finger at overcrowding. Dr. Marriott officially recommended the construction of a separate dormitory for African Americans, separate from the whites of the Almshouse. He thought it "necessary that a house should be erected as soon as practicable for the accommodation of the Blacks. A log house with earthen floors would answer every purpose."¹ Later inspections of the dormitory revealed it to be an especially dark stain on the "abode of misery" that was the Almshouse.²

The commission accepted Dr. Marriott's recommendation, instructing that "a log house of the following dimensions Length 40 feet width 20 feet to be built of chestnut logs prepared in the best manner and covered with Cypress shingles one chimney of brick to be placed in the middle of the house with a fire place...two rooms into which the house is to be divided."³

The conditions in the African American dormitory for this period are a matter of speculation. The "paupers" that are mentioned in the Anne Arundel County Almshouse Minute Books 1820-1871 are mostly white, with only the occasional reference to a "negro" or "colored woman." A white pauper named Nelly Warfield, described as "a maniac," was whipped by the overseer of the Almshouse in 1837, for which he received a slap on the wrist.⁴ The paupers of the Almshouse, both white and black, are most commonly mentioned when they are being "discharged." The reasons for kicking the poor out of the Almshouse are not usually listed. We can only infer what their daily life was like, and what treatment they might have endured.

Later inspections of the Almshouse found it an "abode of misery." In the same report it was stated that, "the negro quarters, if possible, were even worse than those occupied by the whites. Each room was in disorderly and dirty condition, the beds were filthy, and without sheets or pillows; indeed in several of the rooms there were no beds, nothing but soiled blankets lying in disorder on the unscrubbed and unswept floors."⁵ No changes would be made for generations, prompting another report in 1893 to declare the dormitory "a disgrace."⁶

To be admitted to the Almshouse, individuals had to be free. Unfortunately, the census of 1860 does not list the paupers who resided there. We can extrapolate ideas of who the paupers were from

¹Maryland State Archives, *Anne Arundel County Almshouse Minute Books 1820 – 1871*, Report of Physician, July 10, 1830.

² *Poor of Lost London Town*, pages 15-17, 20, 41

³ Maryland State Archives, *Anne Arundel County Almshouse Minute Books 1820 – 1871*, Report of Physician, July 10, 1830.

⁴ Maryland State Archives, *Anne Arundel County Almshouse Minute Books 1820 – 1871*, Note, December 1837

⁵ Maryland Board of Health Report, 1877

⁶ *Eighth Report of the Lunacy Commission to His Excellency the Governor of Maryland*, December 1, 1893, page 19, via Maryland State Archives, accessed December 8, 1893, <<http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc5300/sc5339/000113/013000/013150/unrestricted/20101033e.pdf>>.

the 1850 and 1870 census. Research by Rebecca Robinson into census records for 1850 show that 56% of residents were African American.⁷ Among these residents was Susan Butler, freed by her master Henry Maynadier in 1826.⁸ By 1850 she was forty years old, had no occupation listed, and was labelled as an “idiot pauper” by the census taker. African Americans at the almshouse were a diverse group, ranging in age from nine to sixty-eight years old. In the case of the Niel family, there was a husband and wife with three grown daughters in their twenties. There were also three Browns, who appear to be brothers. Thomas and James Collins, nine and ten years old, lived at the Almshouse with Kitty Collins, who was fifty-four and likely their mother or grandmother. Only one African American pauper on the 1850 census had an occupation listed: John Lee, a twenty-two-year-old carpenter. It was a community of thirty-two men, women, and children who had no opportunities to support themselves in the slave based economy of antebellum Anne Arundel County.⁹

The lack of sources on African Americans in the almshouse is surprising. Much more is known about the white residents of the South River. Ardent, fire-breathing pro-slavery secessionists made up the Almshouse’s immediate neighbors. Just down the road in Taylorsville, where the Riva Road Bridge stands today, Taylorsville House was marked with a secret message by one of the builders on the interior side of a slat: “Jeff Davis and the South.”¹⁰

Before the outbreak of hostilities, the white residents on the south side of the South River could afford to be vocal about their beliefs. General George H. Steuart owned all the land directly bordering the Almshouse. Steuart was a militia officer, and wrote a fiery letter to Washington DC’s *National Intelligencer* after Lincoln’s election in which he claimed the election was fraudulent, “because of the negro votes cast and counted for him in the states of New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts.” This was in line with his avowed support for the Dredd Scott decision, in which Marylander and Chief Justice Roger B. Taney ruled that no person of color possessed “rights which the white man was bound to respect; and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit.” Regardless of whether a man was free or enslaved, if he was African American his vote was fraudulent in the mind of Steuart.¹¹

Steuart’s disdain for African Americans brought reprisals. On the morning of April 19, 1860, a year to the day before the Baltimore riots, two enslaved men attempted to poison Steuart’s guests by “putting ground ivy in the coffee-pot.”¹² Resistance to slavery was a constant on the South River. His neighbor, Dr. William Brogden, nearly lost “a number of his slaves,” when they “had all their arrangements for a trip to Canada” and freedom. Although they were discovered, and the plan failed, the mere attempt earned them a place of note in William Lloyd Garrison’s famous abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator*.¹³

⁷ Rebecca Robinson, *The Almshouse Project*, London Town Foundation archives.

⁸ Maryland State Archives, *Manumission Records*, liber 6, no. 3, 1816-1844, pages 335-336.

⁹ Census of 1850, “Free Inhabitants in the First District of Anne Arundel County,” July 21, 1850.

¹⁰ Maryland State Archives, Maryland Historical Trust, NR – Review Form, “Taylorsville House,” Continuation Sheet no. 1, 2003, accessed December 8, 2017, <http://msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/stagsere/se1/se5/001000/001100/001178/pdf/msa_se5_1178.pdf>.

¹¹ Letter from George H. Steuart to the *National Intelligencer*, November 19, 1860, Maryland Historical Society; Cornell University Law School, Legal Information Institute, “*Scott v. Sandford*,” <<https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/60/393>>.

¹² *Alexandria Gazette*, April 23, 1860, page 2.

¹³ *The Liberator*, September 21, 1860, page 151.

Resistance was a constant on the South River. The *Baltimore Sun* reported in 1842 that four enslaved men who escaped from Calvert County took refuge on the South River. When they were discovered, they grabbed farming implements and broke furniture to make weapons. One was shot in the melee, another climbed the chimney to escape, but his pursuers lit a fire beneath him to try “smoking him out.”¹⁴ In a tragic case, an enslaved man was driven insane and stabbed his own mother to death before stabbing his enslaver “four or five times, and beat him on the breast with his fist until life was nearly extinct.”¹⁵

The tide on the South River was decidedly against the African American residents here, both enslaved and free. In the presidential election of 1860, only three people in all of Anne Arundel County voted for Abraham Lincoln. Instead, the county was narrowly won by a slim margin of twenty-four votes by Stephen Bell and his Constitutional Unionist Party, which sought to avoid the issue of slavery. Voters for Bell’s optimistic neglect of the issue were closely trailed by Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge, and his virulently pro-slavery stance.¹⁶

James Henry Dorsey, a twenty-four-year-old African American man, was born free. He may have resided in Scrabbletown, the free community that rested on the Rhode River, just a mile from Commodore Isaac Mayo’s home on the South River. In 1860, with the election looming, he made the effort to secure a Certificate of Freedom. This legal document proved his status as a free man, and gave him some protection against re-enslavement.¹⁷ The fact that Dorsey chose to get a Certificate in 1860 and not earlier may be a sign of the rising tensions around the South River between the white and black residents there.

With the election of President Lincoln, the war began. Violent riots erupted in Baltimore. Union troops from the North passed through the state, where more were recruited from Maryland’s inhabitants. Far more soldiers signed up to fight for the North than the South, but there were still tens of thousands of Marylanders willing to fight for the Confederacy. Among these was John Gill. Gill proudly proclaimed in a memoir written decades after the Civil War that he was descended from slave holders in Anne Arundel County, and that his ancestor had served in the same militia that was stationed in London Town in 1776.¹⁸

As Gill wrote, “I had never been taught to believe that slavery was a sin or a crime. All my early sympathies and associations were decidedly averse from these opinions. Therefore, when the question as to the right of these states to separate peaceably from the compact formed by their forefathers was resisted and denied by one section of the country, I not long in deciding the question myself.”¹⁹

¹⁴ “Desperate Runaway Slaves Taken,” *Baltimore Sun*, August 7, 1842, page 2.

¹⁵ “Matricide,” *Baltimore Sun*, June 10, 1839, page 2.

¹⁶ “The Election Returns,” *The Baltimore Sun*, November 10, 1860, page 2.

¹⁷ Maryland State Archives, *Anne Arundel County Register of Wills, Certificates of Freedom, 1805-1864*, page 267-268

¹⁸ John Gill, *Reminiscences of Four Years as a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army*, Sun Printing: 1904, X.

¹⁹ John Gill, *Reminiscences of Four Years as a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army*, Sun Printing: 1904, 13-14.

Escaping south from Baltimore to join Confederate forces in Virginia, Gill crossed the South River Ferry near midnight on May 1, 1861. Gill thought the ferryman, probably Samuel Duvall, "would have been delighted to go with me" but confessed that "we exchanged very few remarks about the war."²⁰

Gill would have found a more willing audience with Steuart, who later followed him by fleeing to Virginia when martial law was declared in Baltimore just two weeks later. Steuart may have passed through his plantation here on the South River as he fled to the pro-slavery forces of the Confederacy.

Steuart's immediate neighbor was another old military man, who was also strongly in favor of the secessionists. Commodore Isaac Mayo was a decorated veteran of the United States Navy, and lived in his estate of Gresham. Though too old to fight, he wrote an angry letter of resignation directly to Abraham Lincoln, that accused him of fighting against the Constitution itself and "adopting the policy of coercion."²¹ More than 100 officers were granted their requests for resignation, but Mayo's letter was so vitriolic that it was returned with the simple notation "Dismiss by order of the President, Done May 18, 1861." That same day, Mayo was found dead with a gunshot wound to the head, likely self-inflicted.²²

While the whites of the South River appear to have favored the Confederacy, there is one notable exception. Thomas H. Watkins served in the cavalry contingent of the Purnell Legion, a loosely organized collection of pro-Union Maryland cavalry, artillery, and infantry companies. Watkins mustered in as a Captain, commanding Company B, on September 20, 1861.²³ Most likely, the Watkins family were outspoken about their unionist sympathies. His father, Dr. Benjamin Watkins, was elected to attend the Union State Convention in 1864, where the delegates voted their support for the North's war effort.²⁴

²⁰ John Gill, *Reminiscences of Four Years as a Private Soldier in the Confederate Army*, Sun Printing: 1904, 18.

²¹ Isaac Mayo, *Journal of Isaac Mayo while at Sea from 1809-1819*, USS Constitution Museum

<http://www.ussconstitutionmuseum.org/collections/collections/mayo_journal.htm>.

²² Jonathan Pitts, "Commodore Mayo: A man of adventure and tragedy," *Baltimore Sun*, May 14, 2011, <http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2011-05-14/news/bs-ar-isaac-mayo-20110514_1_commodore-mayo-anne-arundel-mayo-road/2>.

²³ Maryland State Archives, *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6, Volume 1*, Archives of Maryland Online, Volume 367, page 785, accessed December 12, 2017, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000367/html/am367--785.html>>.

²⁴ "Union County Convention," *Baltimore Sun*, February 18, 1864, page 1.



Captain Thomas Watkins' pocket revolver, [The Horse Soldier collection](#)

While major landowners went South to fight, life went on. Keeping the South River Ferry, Samuel Duvall seems to have kept a low political profile. He ran his farm and ferry and kept to himself for the most part. He partnered with Colonel John Walton of Annapolis, who owned the ferry on the London Town side of the river.

Walton was more active politically. He actively campaigned against secession in Annapolis, despite being a pro-slavery man himself. Walton served as Vice President at town meetings that condemned the radicals in their midst and swore their allegiance to the Union.²⁵ Serving in the Maryland House of Delegates from 1861-1863, Walton even met President Lincoln in 1863 to campaign for the promotion of Colonel George Sangster, commandant of the camp for paroled prisoners waiting to be exchanged so they could again fight against the South.²⁶

This camp is where the community of Parole gets its name, and proved to be a dangerous source of crime. Duvall wrote for help in controlling marauding parolees who continually robbed him, and threatened to “ravish” the women and “colored servants” in his home.²⁷

For the enslaved people of the South River, the Civil War was a confusing time. The broad rhetoric of the North began in an almost neutral tone, proclaiming the conflict as an effort to maintain the Union and defend the Constitution, rather than explicitly for the emancipation of the enslaved. As the war progressed, that rhetoric became increasingly abolitionist. This was partly a means of cutting into the Confederacy’s reliance on slave labor to maintain the war effort, and to elevate the Union to a moral high ground that transcended politics.

Lost in much of this rhetoric was the condition of the enslaved in the border state of Maryland. As Maryland had voted against secession, and supplied tens of thousands of white troops to the Northern war effort, it may have appeared to the enslaved people on the South River that the war was passing them by. Almost as soon as the war began, the Union held enslaved people as “contraband,”

²⁵ Elihu S. Riley, *The Ancient City: A History of Annapolis in Maryland, 1649-1887*, Record Printing Office: Annapolis, 1887, page 284.

²⁶ Maryland State Archives, *Historical List: House of Delegates, Anne Arundel County (1790-1974)*, <<http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc2600/sc2685/house/html/aahouse.html>>; *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume 6, Wildside Press LLC, 2008, page 136.

²⁷ Letter to William Randall, January 5, 1863, Maryland State Archives.

labeling them as property seized in the war effort. This policy was a temporary emancipation from slavery, and thousands upon thousands of enslaved people fled to Union lines from their rebel masters. On April 16, 1862, all enslaved people in the District of Columbia were emancipated. Months later, the Emancipation Proclamation freed all enslaved people held within states actively rebelling against the Union. Maryland, as a state that remained within the Union and contributed tens of thousands of white soldiers to the Northern cause, still held men, women, and children in bondage.

The enslaved people of the South River were bold in their wartime resistance. In June 1863, seventy enslaved people fled from three separate properties on the South River in what appears to have been a highly coordinated effort.²⁸ They converged with a few others from Howard and Prince George's Counties as they made their way to Washington, DC. Most likely, they sought to disappear into the contraband camps that surrounded the Capital, and thus gain their freedom despite the policies and proclamations that had forgotten them.

"A number of men," the *Alexandria Gazette* wrote, "styling themselves as 'patrols,' armed" and rode between the enslaved and their potential freedom. Undeterred, the enslaved "massed themselves and pushed on." A melee ensued, and the "patrollers" began to fire into the crowd. Two men and a woman were killed, five others shot. One of the men was shot four times. Somehow, despite the violence, the enslaved still pushed on. They escaped into a contraband camp and reported the attack to the Union Army.

The 11th New York Volunteer Cavalry rode out from and arrested suspected "patrollers." When an Anne Arundel County resident recognized some of the enslaved as his property, he demanded they be returned to him under the Fugitive Slave Act, but the army refused to enforce the order.²⁹ If word of this Federal response to the claims of an enslaver made its way back to the South River, it could only have further emboldened the people held here.

It is possible that the news was changed between Washington and Baltimore to prevent such confidence. The *Baltimore Sun* reported that the enslaved numbered only fifteen, were confronted by police rather than vigilantes, and that they were all recaptured and returned.³⁰

Perhaps in retaliation for the murder of the fleeing enslaved people, Joshua Linthicum of the South River lost several buildings, including a house, farm, and smoke house to fire a few months later. His ruin was brought by a woman he had enslaved who freely confessed to the arson.³¹ The next year, William J. Rawlings' barn on the South river was destroyed by fire. According to the *Baltimore Sun* a few days later, "it is alleged to be the work of incendiarism."³²

With the death and disruption wrought by war, the North and South both turned to conscription to fill the depleted ranks of their respective armies. Every month a few South River residents were summoned to the army. There were ways to avoid service, by finding a replacement or paying your way out. On May 26, 1864, the *Baltimore Sun* reported on the names drawn for Anne Arundel County, and the list reveals an interesting dynamic. Dozens of enslaved men were drafted away from their owners. It

²⁸ *Baltimore Sun*, June 16, 1863, page 4.

²⁹ "Stampede of Slaver," *Alexandria Gazette*, June 17, 1863, page 4.

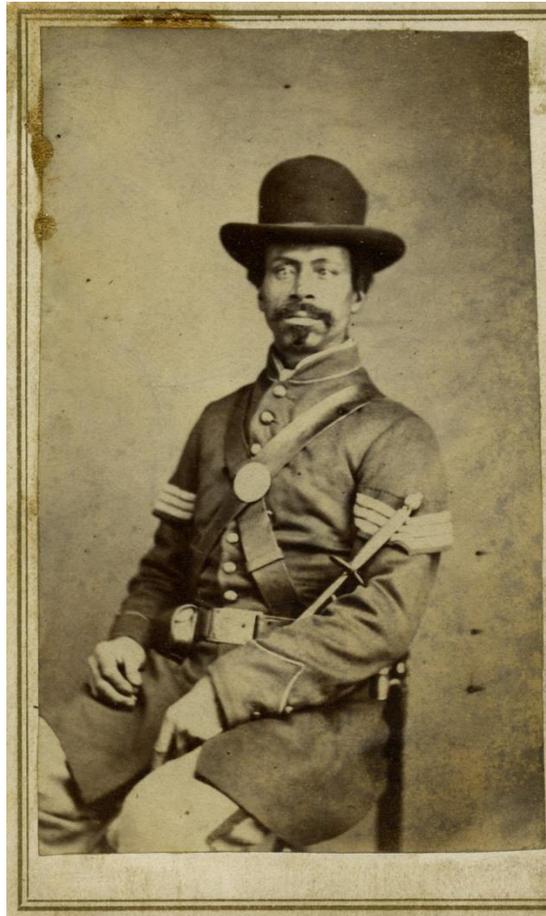
³⁰ "Arrest of Runaway Slaves," *Baltimore Sun*, June 25, 1864, page 4.

³¹ "Fire in Anne Arundel County," *Baltimore Sun*, September 18, 1864, page 4.

³² "Annapolis, April 29: A Dwelling Consumed," *Baltimore Sun*, April 30, 1864, page 4

must have been an odd sort of liberation, to be removed from slavery and thrown into war. Among the others drafted into the Union ranks was James H. Dorsey, the same free man who secured a certificate of freedom in 1860.³³ What the newspaper editors and legislators who conducted the draft didn't know was that Dorsey had already enlisted.

After Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the Union Army began to accept African American soldiers for frontline duty. These men served in segregated units, led by white officers. At twenty-eight years old, James H. Dorsey was enlisted as a corporal in Company F of the 39th United States Colored Troops.³⁴ After receiving his blue uniform, Springfield rifle, and equipment, Dorsey marched off with the 39th to the front lines in Virginia.³⁵



Sgt. Henry Gaither, 39th USCT, Gettysburg National Military Park Museum

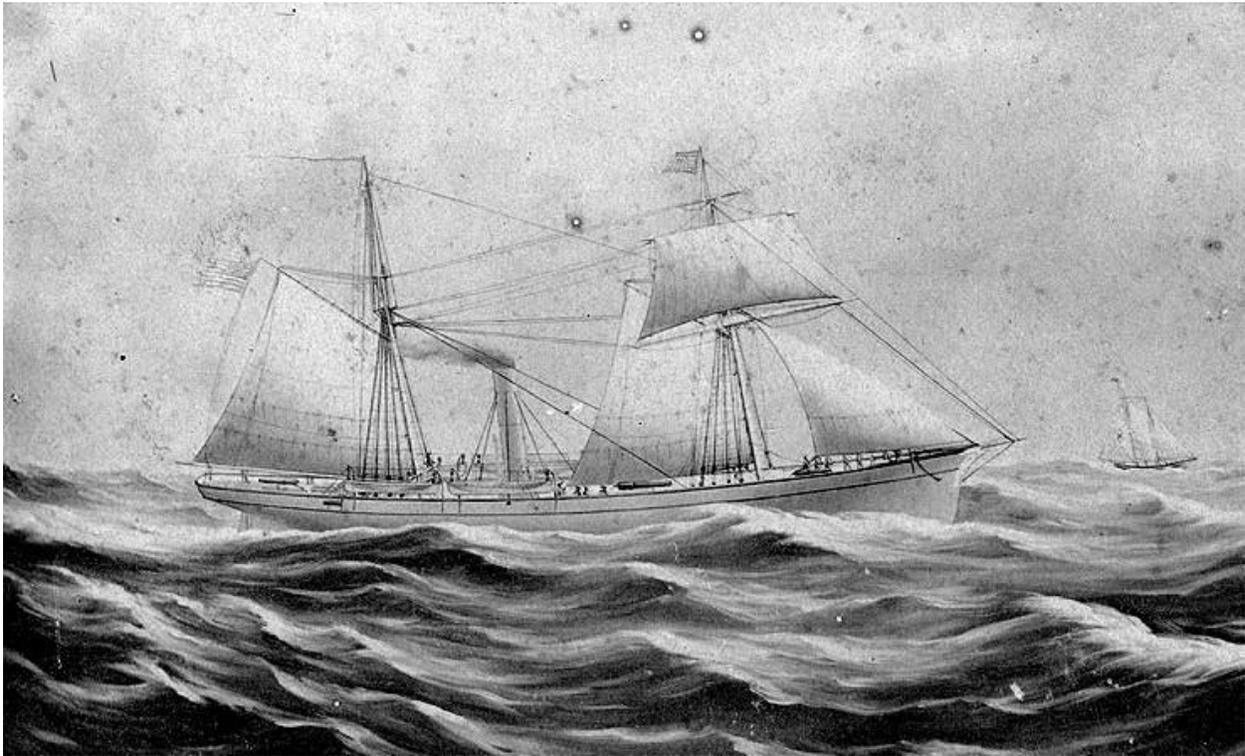
The war upended life on the South River, but wouldn't touch our shores until 1864. In July, Confederate General Jubal Early mounted an invasion of Maryland. Before pivoting for an attack against

³³ "The Draft in Maryland," *Baltimore Sun*, May 26, 1864, page 1.

³⁴ National Park Service, "Soldier Details: James H. Dorsey," *Soldiers and Sailors Database*, accessed July 31, 2017, <<https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/search-soldiers-detail.htm?soldierId=C77E6497-DC7A-DF11-BF36-B8AC6F5D926A>>; Maryland State Archives, *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6*, Volume 2, page 275, accessed July 31, 2017, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000366/html/am366--275.html>>.

³⁵ "The 39th United States Colored Troops," *Civil War in the East*, accessed July 31, 2017, <<http://civilwarintheeast.com/us-regiments-batteries/us-colored-troops/39th-united-states-colored-troops/>>.

the fortifications around Washington, DC, General Early's forces seized the Washington Branch Railroad, which ran straight into the heart of Annapolis. Without any effective entrenchments or means of defense, the people of Annapolis descended into a near panic. Hospitals emptied of their patients to man the lines, shops and administrative offices closed as their clerks and secretaries went to dig trenches, and secessionist sympathizers were rounded up to fight off the invasion. Acting Rear Admiral Samuel P. Lee ordered the *USS Vicksburg* to Annapolis "with all practical dispatch" to shore up the defenses of the city with her big guns.³⁶



USS Vicksburg, United States Navy History and Heritage Command, NH 42052

The *USS Vicksburg* was a newly launched steam boat built in Mystic, Connecticut and purchased by the US Navy to join in the blockade along the Southern coastline.³⁷ Mounting a heavy, pivoting 100-pound Parrott gun and other armaments, the *Vicksburg* was a speedy and impressive vessel that could be deployed in close shore support.³⁸

Under her captain, Lieutenant Commander Daniel L. Braine, the *USS Vicksburg* steamed into the Severn and found the city defended only by "300 invalids." Even these would be useless if a Confederate force crossed the South River behind the entrenchments. Recognizing this threat, Braine dispatched Francis G. Osborn with a small party of volunteers aboard a seized tug boat, the *Grace Titus*, to seize all

³⁶ *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion*, Series I - Volume 10, page 254.

³⁷ Mystic is now home to the largest maritime museum in the United States: Mystic Seaport. Home to over 60 historic buildings and numerous vessels, walking through Mystic Seaport will give you the feeling of walking into a Civil War shipyard to this day.

³⁸ "Vicksburg I (ScGbt)," Mark L. Evans, Naval History and Heritage Command, June 30, 2015, Accessed December 5, 2016, <<https://www.history.navy.mil/research/histories/ship-histories/danfs/v/vicksburg-i.html>>.

means of crossing the South River.³⁹ Osborn mounted a “12 pnd’r Howitzer” on the tug in preparation for a nighttime raid, and armed his men with Enfield muskets.⁴⁰

Osborn “landed with an armed force” at several locations on the South River to seize all vessels that could be used by the Confederate invaders. These included “one scow, or ferryboat, and two small boats, said to belong to one Samuel Duvall, of Taylorsville, and Colonel Walton, of Annapolis.”⁴¹ Almost in the shadow of the Almshouse, armed sailors stepped ashore from the *Grace Titus*. “The operation was conducted with the utmost quietude,” Osborn wrote in his official report, “My precautions in this respect, combined with the lateness of the hour, enabled me to perform all my duty and return without the knowledge of anyone up the river.”⁴² The inmates of the nearby Almshouse and its accompanying African American dormitory were probably never aware of the armed sailors that touched their shores.

The expected Confederate invasion never came. Jubal Early was defeated in the field before Fort Stevens, and does not appear to have ever seriously considered driving into the vulnerable port of Annapolis, much less to utilize the South River in doing so. The boats were returned, the *Vicksburg* sailed off to other battles, and the Almshouse and ferry continued their operations.

By the time the *Vicksburg’s* sailors conducted their raid, the final push of the war had been stalled. The Union army besieged Robert E. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia at Petersburg, and both sides settled into trench warfare. Among General Grant’s forces was the Purnell Legion and the 39th United States Colored Troops.

Captain Thomas Watkins and his Company B cavalry troopers were dismounted and armed as infantry to fill the trenches around Petersburg.⁴³ Serving in V Corps, 2nd Division, Watkins and his men took part in continuous assaults on the Confederate lines. Watkins may not have known that a fellow South River resident, Corporal James H. Dorsey, was in the trenches with the 39th USCT, assigned to IX Corps, 4th Division. Dorsey had already survived the horrific Battle of the Crater, and the racially motivated massacre that followed it. His comrades were butchered by Confederate soldiers. George Bernard, a soldier in the rebel 12th Virginia Regiment, later wrote of the “bloody tragedies during the first 10 minutes after our men got into the trench, many of whom seemed infuriated at the idea of having to fight negroes.”⁴⁴ Corporal Dorsey was now a hardened veteran who had seen the worst of war.

³⁹ *Official Records.*, page 270.

⁴⁰ Logbook of the *USS Vicksburg*, entry for July 13, 1864, Library of Congress; John D. McAulay, *Civil War Small Arms of the U.S. Navy and Marine Corps*, Lincoln, R.I.: Andrew Mowbray Publishers: 1999, page 172.

⁴¹ *Official Records*, 271

⁴² Logbook, *ibid.*

⁴³ “Patriotic,” *The Cecil Whig*, June 11, 1864, page 2.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Bryce A. Suderow, “The Battle of the Crater: the Civil War’s worst massacre,” *Civil War History*, 1997, via U.S. Army Ordnance Corps, accessed December 15, 2017, <http://www.goordnance.army.mil/history/Staff%20Ride/ADDITIONAL%20READING/BATTLE%20OF%20THE%20CRATER/botc_Alleged_Massacre.pdf>.



Unidentified soldier of Purnell's Legion, [Pennsylvania Civil War Soldiers and Their Uniforms](#)

Watkins' and Dorsey's paths crossed at the Battle of Globe Tavern. With failure at the Crater, General Grant sought to cut the railroad links between Petersburg and the outside world. Globe Tavern sat along the vital Wheldon Railroad, which ran to the only major seaport still in Confederate hands: Wilmington, North Carolina. The V Corps, including Captain Watkins, was ordered to seize and destroy the line. The Confederates launched a heavy assault against the Union forces, and in the melee Captain Watkins took a Confederate bullet through the scalp.⁴⁵

Badly mauled, the V Corps was reinforced overnight by the IX Corps, including Corporal Dorsey. He and his fellow African American soldiers shouldered their Springfield rifles fought for two more days over the rails leading into Petersburg.⁴⁶ I can't help but wonder if the wounded captain staggered or was carried past the corporal as Dorsey headed into the fray.

⁴⁵ *The Weekly National Intelligencer*, August 25, 1864, page 2; *Baltimore Sun*, September 15, 1864, page 4;

⁴⁶ "39th USCT," *The Siege of Petersburg Online*, accessed December 15, 2017, <<http://www.beyondthecrater.com/resources/units/union-u/union-inf/us-vol-inf/039th-usct-infantry/#fn-24576-5>>.

Watkins was evacuated to Philadelphia on the steamer *Augusta* with several other wounded Maryland officers, where he was treated at McClellan Hospital. A largely recuperated Captain Watkins returned to the South River that Fall.⁴⁷

Peace for Watkins was fleeting. During his recuperation, he had an altercation with a Confederate spy, guerilla fighter, and horse thief named John H. Boyle. Boyle had served under General George H. Steuart at Gettysburg, even earning a commendation in his fellow Marylander's official report: "I am greatly indebted for valuable assistance rendered, and of whose gallant bearing I cannot too highly make mention."⁴⁸

By the time Boyle made his way back to the South River, he was a mere horse thief, operating under the thin veil of the Confederate cause to justify his crimes. Captured by Watkins after a chase, Boyle slipped his bonds and attacked Watkins, nearly killing him. Watkins was carried to his father's home for recovery.⁴⁹ Though he made a clean escape, Boyle pursued a vendetta against the prominent Unionist, sending Watkins death threats. While stewing over his hatred of Watkins, Boyle became entangled with John Wilkes Booth and his fellow conspirators in their designs on Abraham Lincoln that would ultimately culminate in the assassination of the president. George Atzerodt, in his confession, named Boyle as one of the conspirators, and Dr. Samuel Mudd, who treated John Wilkes Booth's broken leg in the wake of the assassination believed that Boyle was one of the assassins.⁵⁰ Part of Dr. Mudd's defense was his "fears of the vengeance of that desperado."⁵¹

Six months after his escape, while Watkins sat by his hearth with a newspaper, Boyle burst into his home with a gang of partisans and shot him dead. The gang then fired at both Watkins' wife or sister, and a doctor who had come to check on Watkins' four-month-old child before making their escape.⁵² Boyle was later captured in Frederick, coincidentally on the day Lincoln died.⁵³

After months of marching and fighting, Corporal James H. Dorsey, the free African American who put his life on the line to fight for abolition, was rewarded by witnessing the final gasp of the Confederacy. On April 26, 1865, General Joseph E. Johnston surrendered to General William Tecumseh Sherman in North Carolina. Over 89,000 rebel soldiers gave up their arms and surrendered to the Union. Two weeks later, Corporal Dorsey was discharged.⁵⁴ He was suffering from "hypertrophy of heart," a

⁴⁷ *Baltimore Sun*, August 27, 1864, page 2; November 27, 1864, page 4

⁴⁸ Report of Brigadier-General George H. Steuart, Gettysburg," in *Southern Historical Society Papers, Volume 8*, ed. Reverend J. William Jones, Tufts University, accessed December 15, 2017, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:2001.05.0121:chapter=3.26>>.

⁴⁹ John Bakeless, *Spies of the Confederacy*, Dover: New York, 2011, page 89; "Serious Injury of Captain Watkins," *Baltimore Sun*, September 15, 1864, page 4.

⁵⁰ Professor Douglas O. Linder, "Trial of the Lincoln Assassination Conspirators, 1865: George Atzerodt's Confession," *Famous American Trials*, University of Missouri Kansas City Law School, 2002, accessed July 28, 2017, <<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/lincolnconspiracy/atzerodtconf.html>>; John Davidson Lawson, *American State Trials: A Collection of the Important and Interesting Criminal Trials which Have Taken Place in the United States*, Volume 8, F.H. Thomas Law Book Co., St. Louis, 1917, page 486.

⁵¹ Lawson, *American State Trials*, page 486.

⁵² *Alexandria Gazette*, March 28, 1865, page 3; "The Murder of Captain T. H. Watkins," *Baltimore Sun*, April 1, 1865, page 1;

⁵³ "Correspondence of the Baltimore Sun," *Baltimore Sun*, April 19, 1865, page 4.

⁵⁴ Maryland State Archives, *History and Roster of Maryland Volunteers, War of 1861-6*, Volume 2, page 275, accessed July 31, 2017, <<http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/000001/000366/html/am366--275.html>>.

condition that slows blood flow from the heart. For the rest of the year, Corporal Dorsey convalesced in hospitals from Carolina to Washington, DC.⁵⁵

With the war's end, Taney's wish for all men of color to be "reduced to slavery for his benefit"⁵⁶ was forever shattered, but struggles would continue against the ardent racists and powerful landowners who sought to control the African Americans of the South River and Maryland. Watkins' murderer John Boyle was pardoned for "war-related activities."⁵⁷ Boyle escaped further justice until an unknown vigilante caught up with him some fifteen years later, killing him in Jackson, Mississippi.⁵⁸ It was speculated at the time that Boyle's violent death was "just retribution" the assassination of Watkins.⁵⁹ When called in to investigate, the famous detective Allan Pinkerton said Boyle was "one of the worst men he ever knew...He regards his death as a good riddance."⁶⁰ The younger General Steuart returned to the South River and continued operating his father's plantation. He even led a military parade through Baltimore only three years after the war with militia wearing provocative gray uniforms.⁶¹

The balance in the racial spectrum of the Almshouse changed dramatically after the war. In 1850, 56% of the Almshouse paupers were African American. By 1870, African Americans made up only a third of the community.⁶² Perhaps the creation of free communities of color could absorb the less fortunate in ways that were impossible under slavery. Among these paupers were men and women who resisted slavery for decades. Lorenzo Burke fled from his master in 1844, as did Harry Scott in 1835.⁶³ Now fifty-six, Harry Scott is listed as "insane" on the 1870 census. None of the African American paupers could read or write. They had their long sought-after freedom, but the formerly enslaved were still trapped in an oppressive society in which there were few opportunities, and virtually no opportunity for advancement. Slavery tore apart families, and none of the paupers of 1870 have apparent familial connections to each other. Children under sixteen are no longer present, and the average age of black paupers has gone up considerably.⁶⁴ Conditions would continue to deteriorate. Not until the early twentieth century would any significant reformation take place.

The racial and social divisions of the Civil War on the South River are still with us today.

⁵⁵ Harewood General Hospital patient admission slip, James H. Dorsey, November 18, 1865.

⁵⁶ Dredd Scott Decision, Roger B. Taney.

⁵⁷ Cathy Randall, "Alexander's first assignment as Maryland's Attorney General, 1865," *Alexander Randall Diary Excerpts*, accessed July 27, 2017, <<http://cathyrandall.tumblr.com/post/80716954709/alexanders-first-assignment-as-marylands>>.

⁵⁸ *The Comet*, June 26, 1880, page 3.

⁵⁹ *Baltimore Sun*, July 3, 1880, page 3.

⁶⁰ *The Comet*, August

⁶¹ *Baltimore Sun*, March 27, 1868, page 1.

⁶² Rebecca Robinson, The Almshouse Project, London Town Foundation archives.

⁶³ *American and Commercial Daily Advertiser*, June 20, 1835, page 3; *Baltimore Sun*, January 3, 1845, page 2

⁶⁴ Maryland State Archives, Census of 1870, "Inhabitants in the First Election District, in the County of Anne Arundel," July 25, 1870, page 80.