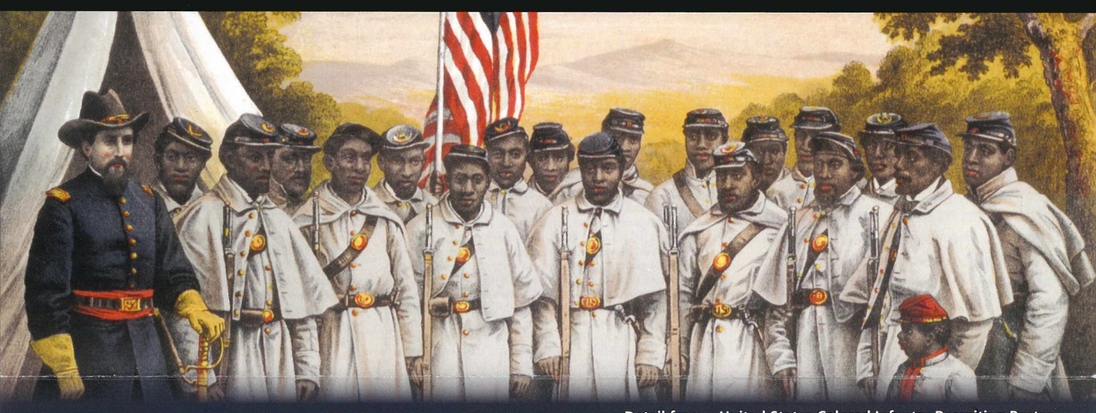
African American Experiences
at Monocacy

Monocacy National Battlefield
Maryland

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Detail from a United States Colored Infantry Recruiting Poster
Library Company of Philadelphia

African Americans in the Monocacy Region

The first African Americans in the Monocacy region were most likely slaves who had escaped from plantations in the eastern part of Maryland. So many sought refuge in the backwoods that as early as 1725, the state offered rewards for the capture of runaway slaves west of the Monocacy River. As the region developed, planters brought enslaved laborers with them. In the first census of 1790, slaves accounted for almost 12% of the total population in Frederick County.

Slavery, however, was less a part of the agricultural economy in the mid-Maryland region than in the eastern part of the state. Farmers in the Monocacy region, many of whom were German migrants from Pennsylvania, practiced a diversified agriculture based primarily on wheat production rather than the more labor-intensive tobacco production of eastern Maryland.

Slavery reached a peak in Frederick County in 1820, with almost 7,000 enslaved people counted in the census. But thereafter the number of enslaved declined and the population of free African Americans increased. By 1860, on the eve of the Civil War, almost 5,000 free African Americans lived in the county compared to about 3,200 enslaved African Americans.

During the Civil War, African Americans in Frederick County reacted to the crisis in a variety of ways. Some stayed where they were and weathered the war as best they could. Others, including many of the remaining enslaved, took advantage of the opportunity and left the region forever. War, ironically, presented African Americans with new opportunities for earning money. Many profited by selling bread, garden items, and other food to the streams of soldiers passing through the county. A few found jobs with the Union Army, mostly as teamsters, cooks, and blacksmiths. Still others joined the army when African American enlistment was allowed in 1863. At least four hundred African Americans from Frederick County joined the Union Army during the final two years of the war.

Enslaved Labor at Monocacy

In the decades leading up to the Civil War, most of the farmers and plantation owners on the land that became the Monocacy National Battlefield owned enslaved laborers. James Marshall, the successful Scottish merchant and entrepreneur who built the stately, circa–1780 brick house known today as Thomas House, owned 16 enslaved laborers in 1800. When he died in 1803, he left most of his slaves to his heirs. Only one of Marshall's slaves is known to have been freed: for her "faithful & good services," an enslaved woman named "Mulatto Jane" was given her freedom in 1800. Marshall also rewarded her with "a good Bed and bed Cloaths also Twenty pounds current Money and a Suit of new clothes."

Christian Keefer Thomas, who purchased the Thomas Farm in 1860, was a slaveowner as well. Several historic documents make reference to enslaved labor at the farm, and a letter written on December 6, 1862 by Peter Vredenburg of the 14th New Jersey Regiment recalls a "musical party at the Thomas'...toward midnight the darkies...came in and after partaking of a supper squared themselves for dancing...It was real plantation."

The remaining Monocacy farmers, John Best, John Worthington, and Daniel Baker, also owned enslaved laborers prior to and during the Civil War.

Read more below about the enslaved people who toiled on a plantation at the site of today's Best Farm.

John Worthington

L'Hermitage

In 1793, a French planter family, the Vincendières, came to Frederick County after escaping a slave revolt in their native Saint Domingue (present-day Haiti). They established a 748-acre plantation called *L'Hermitage*, and from 1794 until 1827, when they sold the property, they were among the largest slave holders in the county.

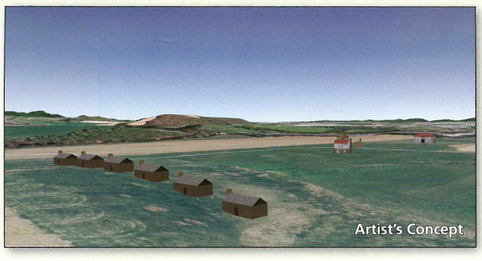
Extensive historical and archeological research has shed some light on what life was like for the enslaved people at *L'Hermitage*. Archeologists uncovered the remains of six house foundations and other features, which formed a "village" that housed up to ninety enslaved individuals who worked at the plantation.

Each house was likely constructed of log and had fenced gardens or animal pens to the rear, as well as a communal outdoor kitchen. Artifacts excavated at the site provide some clues about the daily lives of the enslaved people, including what they ate and what kinds of tools and other objects they used.

Historic documents indicate that the Vincendières treated their slaves with extreme brutality. An eyewitness account written in 1798 gave the following description:

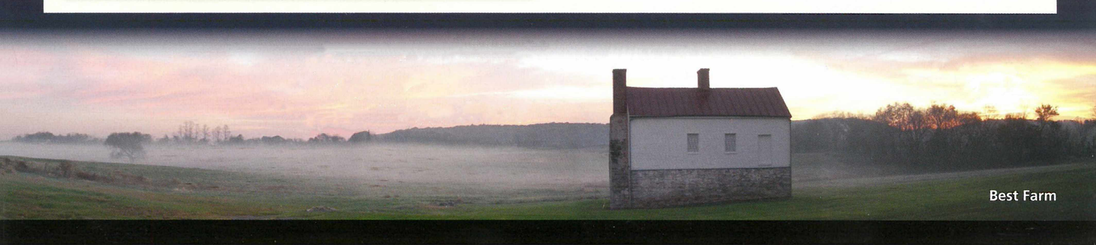
> *One can see on the home farm instruments of torture, stocks, wooden horses, whips, etc. Two or three Negroes crippled with torture have brought legal action ... [The Vincendières] foam with rage, beat the Negroes, complain and fight with each other.*

Court records confirm that members of the Vincendière household were accused of mistreating their slaves on at least seven occasions. The charges range from what are termed "cruel and unmerciful" beatings, to not providing adequate food and clothing. Most of the cases were dismissed, but they are indicative of the living conditions and punishment that the *L'Hermitage* enslaved population endured.



Artist's Concept

Some of the artifacts excavated at the slave village site include (from left to right), oyster shell, a blue glass bead, ceramics, coins, and a pendant.



Best Farm

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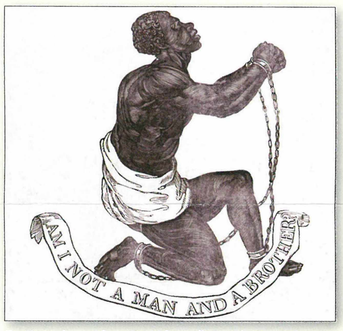
Resisting a Cruel Institution and Pursuing Freedom

Wherever slavery existed, there were efforts on the part of the enslaved people to escape this brutal and dehumanizing institution. Some enslaved individuals in the Monocacy region ran away, while others attempted to gain their freedom through the court system. During the Civil War, some individuals gained liberty by joining the Union Army.

Information about those who sought freedom in the Monocacy region can be found in a variety of ways. When enslaved people escaped, their owners often posted advertisements for their return in local newspapers. These advertisements often provide physical descriptions and other personal details. Legal documents such as court proceedings and wills also provide insight into treatment of slaves as well as changing opinions on the institution of slavery in Maryland. Slaveholders occasionally voluntarily granted enslaved individuals freedom, either as a provision of the slaveholder's will, or through legal manumission.



Following the Battle of Antietam in September 1862, President Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. The Proclamation freed enslaved individuals only in the ten states then in rebellion, and as a result did not apply to slaves in Maryland.

Times were changing, however, in Maryland. In 1864, the state's constitution was revised, and just two weeks prior to the Battle of Monocacy, delegates passed a resolution to end slavery in the state. Voters approved the new constitution in October, and on November 1, 1864, slavery was officially abolished in Maryland.

Attempting Escape ...

RAN away from the subscriber, living near the middle ferry on Monocacy, Frederick county, about two weeks ago, a negro fellow named JERRY, about 25 years of age, a very stout well made negro, about 5 feet 7 inches high. He was bought of Doctor Davidge last spring, who formerly lived in Annapolis, where this negro was raised, who, in his masters absence to Britain, was hired out to work at brick-making both at Annapolis and Baltimore-town; at one or other of those places it is supposed he may be found. It is supposed that he carried off with him a bay horse and bridle; the horse is about fourteen hands high, and branded on the left buttock something like L. Whosoever takes up the said negro and puts him into gaol in Baltimore or Anne-Arundel county, shall receive SIX DOLLARS REWARD, and if brought home and delivered to me TWELVE DOLLARS.

J. DELAVENCENDIERE.

Frederick county, December 1, 1795.

Forty Dollars Reward.

Runaway in March 1809, from the plantation known by the name of L'hermitage, the property of Miss V. Vincendiere, near Frederick-Town; a French Negro Man called FRANCOIS, and only known by the name of Cuyou. He is of common size, rather of a red colour, small eyes and deep heavy browed, big lips and large mouth, he has two of the incisive teeth wanting, speaks broken English and slowly, his tone of voice is harsh; he has been seen at Annapolis, some time ago, it is expected that he has got into the seafaring business. Whoever will secure said negro in any of the gaols of this State, or bring him back either to his Mistress on the plantation, or to the subscriber, corner of Frederick & Second-sts. Baltimore, shall receive the above reward. P. LAFONT.

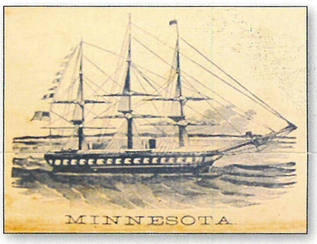
N. B. Masters of vessels and other persons, are forwarned not to receive said negro on board, or give him shelter, as the law will be enforced against any person so offending.

Enslaved individuals were valuable property and slaveholders often offered rewards for their return. These two advertisements were posted by the Vincendière family for the return of Jerry and François.

Granted Freedom ...

Caroline Ridgely was born at *L'Hermitage* between 1805-1815. She had at least three children: Augustus, Cornelius, and Cornelia. Caroline and Cornelia were freed by Victoire Vincendière in 1844 and moved to Baltimore where Caroline worked as a washerwoman. Her son Augustus was freed in 1857 by Victoire's nephew, Enoch Louis Lowe. Augustus also lived in Baltimore and made his living as a waiter until his death in 1879.

Caroline's other son, Cornelius, was freed in the early 1850s and in 1857 enlisted in the United States Navy at Norfolk, Virginia. During the Civil War, he served on the *U.S.S. Minnesota* as a steward. After his discharge from the Navy, he worked as a barber at the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. In 1866, Cornelius married Delia and lived in Annapolis where they raised six children.



U.S.S. Minnesota Official Letterhead

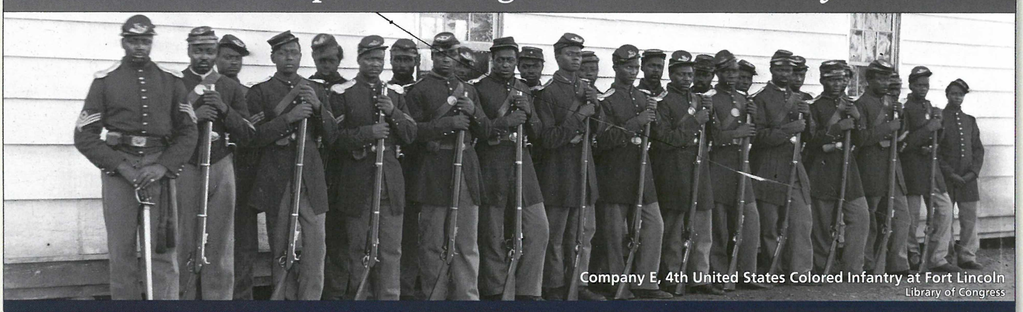
Petitioning the Courts ...

Jean Payen de Boisneuf

Pierre Louis was brought to Maryland from Saint Domingue by Jean Payen de Boisneuf, a member of the Vincendière household. In March 1794, Pierre attempted to escape but was caught in Philadelphia and returned to *L'Hermitage* in compliance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793.

In 1798, Pierre Louis petitioned the Frederick County court for his freedom. He was successful in his claim that Jean Payen was not his legal owner. Payen appealed the verdict, but it was denied by the General Court of the Western Shore and Pierre Louis was freed. Pierre continued to reside in Frederick County at least until the 1820s.

A U.S. Colored Troops Recruiting Station at Monocacy



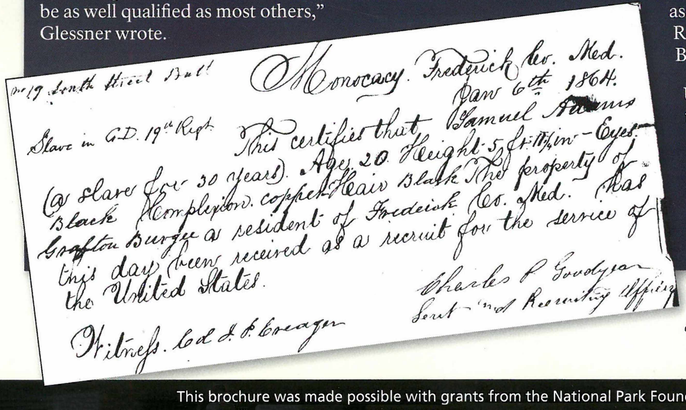
Company E, 4th United States Colored Infantry at Fort Lincoln
Library of Congress

In 1863, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton authorized the establishment of recruiting stations for U.S. Colored Troops (USCT); one such recruitment station was established at Monocacy Junction. In a letter dated November 4, 1863, Captain William Glessner expressed an interest in becoming the recruiting officer for the Monocacy Station. "I saw … that an order was ishewed [sic] by the war department for the establishment of a recruiting depot at Monocacy Junction for the recruiting of soldiers of the African race. I have a desire to become the recruiting officer for that station, for which I think I would be as well qualified as most others," Glessner wrote.

Slaveholders in Maryland were allowed to enlist slaves in the USCT, and were entitled to "compensation for the service of labor of said slave, not to exceed the sum of $300." In order to be compensated, however, a valid "deed of manumission and release" had to be filed, "and any slave so enlisting shall be forever thereafter free."

On December 31, 1863, a Frederick County slaveholder named Grafton Burgee enlisted his slave Samuel Adams at Monocacy Junction. Burgee signed an oath of loyalty to the Constitution and the Government of the United States as well as a "Deed of Manumission and Release of Service" for Samuel Adams. Burgee was paid $300 on October 15, 1864.

Upon his enlistment, Samuel Adams took the name William S. Adams. He was a Private in Company D of the 19th Regiment, U.S. Colored Infantry and saw action at Petersburg, Virginia in July 1864. His service record indicates that he mustered out at Brownsville, Texas on January 15, 1867.


Monocacy. Frederick Co. Md.
Dec 6th 1864.
This certifies that Samuel Adams
Slave in C.D. 19th Regt.
(a slave for 30 years). Age 20 Height 5 Feet 8 Inches Eyes
Black Complexion Copper Hair Black The property of
Grafton Burgee a resident of Frederick Co. Md. Has
this day been received as a recruit for the service of
the United States.
Charles P. Goodyear
Lieut. & Recruiting Officer
Witness. Ed. L. Gregory

NATIONAL PARK FOUNDATION
HEART OF THE CIVIL WAR 150th ANNIVERSARY
MARYLAND HERITAGE AREA

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