

Carroll Yesteryears

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Forgotten for Decades, Black Veterans Are Finally Honored

By Diane Boettcher and Mary Ann Ashcraft

When Private Phillip “Gus” McLane enlisted in the United States Colored Troops (USCT) during the Civil War, he was set free from slavery. His enslaver, John Gorsuch, received \$300 from the Federal Government. McLane was wounded during the Second Battle of Petersburg, participated in both expeditions to Fort Fisher and fought in the Carolinas Campaign. The gunshot wound in his left side caused him pain until his death at the age of 83. In 1929 he was buried in an unmarked grave in Ellsworth Cemetery outside Westminster, Maryland.

This spring his grave has finally been marked with a headstone provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Working with the VA, supporters of Ellsworth Cemetery have obtained a total of nine headstones to honor the military service of seven Civil War soldiers like Phillip McLane plus two World War I veterans. The Community Foundation of Carroll County, which owns and administers Ellsworth, partnered with Pritts Funeral Home to receive the VA-provided headstones. A group of volunteers installed the stones in May, bringing names to graves that went unmarked and forgotten for decades, some more than a hundred years. The diverse group included people from the Carroll County Genealogical Society, the Historical Society of Carroll County, the Pipe Creek Civil War Round Table, the Navy Federal Credit Union, the Uniformed Services University, and the Westminster City Council as well as members of the local chapters of the Boy Scouts of America, the Catholic War Veterans, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Sons of Union Veterans of the Civil War.

Historic Ellsworth Cemetery was established in the late 1870s by African American veterans of the Civil War. It has served as a final resting place for Black residents of Carroll County ever since, especially those from the Westminster area. Over the years, the cemetery fell in and out of repair with various organizations occasionally maintaining the grounds. By 2021 only about 100 headstones remained, but recent ground-penetrating radar surveys have discovered another 182 unmarked graves in the one-acre cemetery.

Thomas Greul has been maintaining the cemetery for nine years, leading volunteers from the Knights of Columbus at St. Bartholomew Roman Catholic Church in Manchester. He first visited Ellsworth in 2013 seeking to place flags on veterans’ graves for Memorial Day but was unable to locate headstones because the weeds and grass were so high. He recalls thinking, “These men sacrificed so much to defend a country that denied them citizenship, and they have been forgotten. They need to be remembered. They need to be honored.” Greul admits he was moved to tears when the first set of headstones from the VA arrived in February 2022. “After all these years working on the cemetery, to see the headstones means so much.”

In 1863 when the U. S. Army began accepting Blacks to fight in the Civil War, the federal government recognized that Maryland, a slave state surrounding the capital, could not be allowed to secede. To ensure it stayed in the Union, the government agreed to pay Maryland’s loyal slave owners up to \$300 for each enslaved man they freed who then enlisted. John Gorsuch, who had enslaved Phillip McLane from the age of five, freed him and therefore was entitled to receive the

government's compensation after signing a loyalty oath. Phillip, on the other hand, received \$7/month for his military service, standard pay for Black soldiers in 1863.

Three of the seven Civil War veterans with new headstones served in the 4th USCT, a regiment primarily composed of recruits from Baltimore and the surrounding counties. Prior to enlistment about half of the men of the 4th were enslaved, while the other half were freeborn. Edward G. Longacre published *A Regiment of Slaves: the 4th United States Colored Infantry, 1863-1866* which covers the story of McLane's unit.

On June 11, 2022, at 11 a.m. the public is invited to a ceremony at Ellsworth Cemetery for the unveiling of the nine new headstones. Ellsworth is located just off Route 140 east of Westminster. Turn at the traffic light at Market Street and Route 140. Make a right-hand turn immediately at the Wawa and follow Leidy Road as it winds up the hill. Parking will be available across from the cemetery.

Descendants of some veterans will be on hand to honor their ancestors. Ms. Jacqueline Dorm is the 3x great granddaughter of Private John Wesley Cole. Many of her family members are laid to rest at Ellsworth Cemetery. "I would come here with my grandmother when I was a child," Ms. Dorm said. "She would show me where our family were buried. It's heartwarming to finally have headstones so they will be remembered."

Columnists Diane Boettcher and Mary Ann Ashcraft have researched the contributions of Carroll County's Black soldiers to the Civil War effort. More information:
<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100067421190864>



Image: Newly-installed granite headstone for Phillip McLane at Ellsworth Cemetery on the outskirts of Westminster. Courtesy of Diane Boettcher.