

Oscar James Crozier: Veteran, Convict, Family Man, Human

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I pledge that I have adhered to the Washington College Honor Code in completing this assignment.

Oscar Crozier's gravestone does not list the day he was born, nor the day he died. There is no promise that he will be lovingly remembered by his wife, daughter, and grandchildren, no epitaph describing what kind of man he was, nor any wish that he rest in peace. Instead, the dark, grainy stone is entirely occupied by a shield describing his military service: Oscar J. Crozier, Musician, Co. B., 54 Mass. Inf.¹ The sum of decades of history played out on the national as well as the individual scale, here reduced to a few words in plain, solid lettering.

Despite the simplicity of his tombstone, Crozier was a man best described by contradictions. He served honorably fighting for the Union, and served time for murder; he spent twenty years “stepping out” with different women, and twenty years married to one. Crozier's gravestone suggests that, of these many personas, he preferred that of the veteran, the man who spent two years and six months serving in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, fighting for the Union during the height of the Civil War.² Yet in the end, despite all the labels—veteran, convict, philanderer, married man, community leader, African American—he was a human being like any other, with flaws and virtues in equal measure. He was, as General Rufus Saxton said when describing the character of African-American soldiers, “intensely human.”³

Oscar James Crozier was born around 1844 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the son of Robert and Susan Crozier, the younger brother of Miriam and older brother of Albert.⁴ Although his father was described as black, Crozier himself, as well as his mother and siblings, were described as mulatto.⁵ Crozier had black hair and dark eyes, and was about 5'6” as an adult.⁶ His neighborhood was part of the Middle Ward, which was at that time the demographic and cultural heart of the city.⁷ This area held cultural significance for the black community as well: the African Methodist Episcopalian denomination began there in 1794 with the Bethel Church, which was still thriving on the corner of Sixth and

¹ Pvt. Oscar James Crozier, Find A Grave Memorial #24356680.

² 1915 approval of pension increase for Mary E. Crozier, Special Collections, (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 22.

³ General Saxton, qtd. by Thomas Wentworth Higginson in *Army Life in a Black Regiment*, pg. 245.

⁴ 1850 US Census, Philadelphia Middle Ward.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ 1897 medical evaluation of Oscar J. Crozier, Special Collections, (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 24.

⁷ William S. Hastings, “Philadelphia Microcosm,” pg. 164.

Lombard Streets during Crozier's lifetime.⁸ It is extremely likely that Crozier and his family attended service here, as their home was located a single block away.⁹ Important public buildings such as Independence Hall (then called the State House) and City Hall were also within a ten-block radius of the Croziers' home.¹⁰ As a young man, Crozier spent the nine months before his enlistment working about seven blocks away from his home as a hostler at the William Penn Hotel, a lower middle class establishment in the 300 block of Market Street, which at that time was known for its small businesses.¹¹ Crozier's early life was an active urban one, centered around the oldest and most densely populated section of Philadelphia; his home was mere blocks from the curving Delaware River, and its boats to the nation's greatest cities.¹²

In the decade before Crozier's birth, Philadelphia was home to one of the largest black communities in the country: 15,000 free blacks, about 10% of the city's population, lived and worked within the borders of the city proper.¹³ Antebellum Philadelphia was also known for its large community of abolitionists, both black and white, who were organized in influential networks such as that of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. Because of this large and fairly well-off black population, and because of the city's rich cultural history of independence and political action, Philadelphia was the antebellum capital of free black society.¹⁴

The city's black community, however, was not a completely unified, internally homogenous group. Some were “well-established, home-owning artisans and semiprofessionals” while others were “impoverished laborers” often newly arrived from “southern slavery or from emancipation in the rural North.”¹⁵ Neither was the black community itself fully integrated into the city as a whole. Despite Philadelphia's strong abolitionist activity, racism was still a force that manifested in the city's character. An

⁸ Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, “Teamed up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia,” pg. 13.

⁹ G. M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 6, Wards 2 through 20, 29 and 31*. 1875.

¹⁰ Charles Jr. Ellet, *A Map of the County of Philadelphia from Actual Survey, 1843*.

¹¹ The Evening Telegraph, “*The Crozier Homicide*,” April 30, 1867; A lithograph of a lower/middle class hotel dated December 1848. Image from the collection of The Library Company of Philadelphia; William S. Hastings, “*Philadelphia Microcosm*,” pg. 166, 169.

¹² G. M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 6, Wards 2 through 20, 29 and 31*. 1875.

¹³ Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, “Teamed up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia,” pg. 12; Corporal James Henry Gooding, *On the Altar of Freedom*, pg. 14.

¹⁴ Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, “Teamed up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia,” pg. 12.

¹⁵ Jane H. Pease's review of *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1830* in the *Journal of American History* (June 1989), pg. 243.

1838 Philadelphia law prevented blacks from voting, and remained for years despite sustained efforts to overturn it.¹⁶ And despite being firmly in the North, Philadelphia was still subject to slavery's influence: under the Fugitive Slave Act, those few runaways who reached the North could be caught and shipped back south, and blacks were often kidnapped and sold south into slavery regardless of whether or not they had previously been enslaved.¹⁷

Antebellum Philadelphia was a “hub of black abolitionist energy” and its black community was a thriving urban center with a strong cultural and political legacy.¹⁸ Growing up in the city Frederick Douglass had said would “[hold] the destiny of our people” more than any other, Crozier was likely instilled from birth with a sense of the importance of blacks acting on their own behalf to shape their own future as citizens of America.¹⁹ He would soon put this belief to the test, upon his enlistment in the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry.

VETERAN

On the 7th of February in 1863, Massachusetts' Governor John A. Andrew—having finally received federal permission to do so, after an extended campaign—granted the “first authority to recruit for a colored regiment.”²⁰ Although black forces had previously been mustered, with varying degrees of legitimacy, to fight for the Union in South Carolina, Kansas, and Louisiana, the regiment to be raised in Massachusetts would be the first “to be raised in the free States.”²¹ Because the black population in Massachusetts was not large enough to completely fill the ranks, Governor Andrew directed John W. M. Appleton to “superintend the recruiting of a regiment to be designated as the 'Fifty-fourth Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry,' composed of 'persons of African descent.’” Appleton established a rendezvous at Readville, Massachusetts, just outside of Boston, on February 21, at the newly-established Camp Meigs.²² Recruiting

¹⁶ Emma J. Lapsansky-Werner, “Teamed up with the PAS: Images of Black Philadelphia,” pg. 13.

¹⁷ Ibid., pg. 12.

¹⁸ Ibid., pg. 14.

¹⁹ Ira Berlin's review of *Philadelphia's Black Elite* and *Forging Freedom* in the *Journal of American History* (Spring 1991), pg. 92.

²⁰ James Lorenzo Bowen, *Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865*, pg. 53.

²¹ Letter of Gov. Andrew to Francis Shaw, qtd. in John David Smith, “Let Us All be Grateful...” pg. 20.

²² George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops in the War of the Rebellion, 1861-1865*,

officers were appointed from among prominent abolitionists like Major George Stearns, whose history of active service to the cause of emancipation served him in good stead in his recruitment efforts for Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania.²³ Stearns' agents would have been especially active in Philadelphia, a major base of recruitment; they are likely the ones whose speeches Crozier would have heard, and the ones who eventually convinced him and so many others to enlist. “The opportunity is given to [you] to be men,” said Frederick Douglass, and many—including Crozier—were eager to take it.²⁴

Crozier enlisted in the 54th Massachusetts on the rendezvous date of February 21 a scant fourteen days after recruiting opened.²⁵ His apparent eagerness to fight on behalf of his fellow African Americans speaks to his character, but was not a fact unique to him; 100 other black Philadelphians enlisted in the 54th in February and March. Of these men, about 50 were enrolled in Company B with Crozier.²⁶ The 54th itself was “filled to the requirement” by May 14th, only three months after it was opened, with recruits from all over the country.²⁷ Crozier enlisted for a 3-year term at the rank of Private in Company B, and was assigned as a bugler to the Drum Corps.²⁸

Governor Andrew's expectations regarding black enlistment were more than met, and he soon ordered for the creation of a second all-black regiment, designated the 55th Massachusetts.²⁹ This regiment, later commanded by Colonel Norwood Hallowell (formerly of the 54th), was considered by him to be “typical of units recruited in the North,” due to the two regiments having been filled by the same recruiters from the same locations. The 55th comprised 961 enlisted men, a vast majority of whom came from states other than Massachusetts; it included 14% who were born in Pennsylvania, as Crozier was.³⁰ Because of the many similarities between these sister regiments, it is likely that Crozier's fellow soldiers in the 54th were from backgrounds as diverse as those of the 55th. Crozier's service in the 54th exposed Crozier to a diverse sample of his

pg. 104.

²³ Ibid., pg. 121.

²⁴ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 28.

²⁵ 1909 Declaration for Pension for Oscar Crozier, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 17.

²⁶ Corporal James Henry Gooding, *On the Altar of Freedom*, pg. 14.

²⁷ James Lorenzo Bowen, *Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865*, pg. 53.

²⁸ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, image 484.

²⁹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...*, pg. 104.

³⁰ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 29.

fellow African-Americans, many of whom—for example, former slaves—he would likely not have met in the free black community of Philadelphia. Notably, Frederick Douglass' sons Charles and Lewis served in the 54th as well.³¹

This diversity of backgrounds would have likely caused at least some tension between black enlisted men as they learned to accommodate different manners of speaking, skill sets, levels of education, and family structures. More significantly, these men would have also had to reconcile their different experiences of slavery, the destruction of which was the entire reason they had been brought together in the first place. Crozier, for example, had been born free; although certainly not affluent, he had held a steady job, lived in a stable home with his family, who were also free, and been surrounded by a community of other free blacks like him. How must he have seemed to men who had been born into slavery, who had never had ownership of their own bodies, let alone property or a house? How must these former slaves, with their scars and chilling stories, have seemed to him?

Crozier's military service exposed him not only to other African Americans with diverse backgrounds, but to a variety of white commanding officers as well. Some of these men were “careerists” who applied for appointments to black regiments in order to enjoy the social and economic advantages afforded by a promotion. Still others were paternalists, whose attitudes towards blacks were not characterized by outright hostility but rather racist condescension. Despite the prevalence of these less-than-altruistic motives, many of the higher-ranking officers of the 54th and other black regiments were commissioned for their abolitionist characters.³² For example, Governor Andrew named Colonel Robert Gould Shaw the commander of the 54th because of his abolitionist upbringing, and because of the Governor's longstanding relationship with Shaw's actively abolitionist father.³³ Two of Shaw's supporting officers, Philadelphian brothers Lt. Col. Norwood Penrose Hallowell and Major Edward Needles Hallowell, were sons of a well-respected Quaker abolitionist who later converted his home into a hospital for wounded Union officers.³⁴ Maj. E. Hallowell had actually assisted in the recruitment effort in

³¹ Ibid., pg. 29.

³² Ibid., pg. 37.

³³ Ibid., pg. 19.

³⁴ Report of Col. Edward N. Hallowell, 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, on the engagement at Olustee, Florida, March 1, 1864.

Philadelphia before his post to the 54th, and when he arrived at Camp Meigs on February 21, he was accompanied by twenty-seven Philadelphians, one of whom was likely Crozier.³⁵ The man who personally enlisted Crozier into the 54th when he reached Readville was also an influential recruiter, Captain John Appleton, who would later serve as Captain of the 54th's Company A.³⁶

Even disregarding the barrier of race, the discipline of military service would have separated officers from enlisted men. Nonetheless, over two years' worth of close contact in the height of wartime would have meant that Crozier was strongly influenced by these white officers. Although he would have certainly been well-acquainted with whites who were his neighbors in Philadelphia, these well-born, well-educated officers would have been some of the first upper class whites Crozier knew personally. These men's attitudes toward blacks would have given him a perspective of what his own race looked like from the outside, just as close contact with him and his fellow blacks would have given the white officers a fuller perspective as well. The influence these two groups—white officers and black enlisted—had on each other was significant after the war as well, when the most frequently chosen name for all-black posts of the Grand Army of the Republic was Robert Gould Shaw. “By remembering the leader,” these black veterans reasoned, they also “memorialized those he led,” including Crozier and his fellow men of the 54th.³⁷ Men such as these would have been added to the honorable ranks of white Philadelphian abolitionists Crozier had heard of as a child.

Despite its auspicious beginnings, the 54th faced opposition almost immediately when it attempted to take its place in the Union's active forces. Learning that the North planned to send blacks into combat—many of whom would be fighting directly against their former masters—the Confederacy warned that its army would execute any black soldier or white soldier serving in a black regiment.³⁸ (Indeed, Sergeant Joseph Wilson of Company H would be executed in the Battle of James Island, after refusing to surrender and give up his pistol.)³⁹

³⁵ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pg. 4, 11, 19.

³⁶ Photograph of Captain J.W.M. Appleton.

³⁷ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City*, lecture at Washington College, March 1, 2002, C.V. Starr Center, pg. 10.

³⁸ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pg. 7.

³⁹ Corporal James Henry Gooding, *On the Altar of Freedom*, pg. 37.

Although every soldier, enlisted and officer, was aware of what might befall him if he should fall into enemy hands, the 54th began its southern trek on May 28, 1863, when it was ordered to South Carolina. Marching through the streets of Boston to depart by steamboat, the 54th was met with throngs of spectators who cheered their passing, applauded their regimental colors, and bade them farewell from the harbor. The regiment was also escorted by 100 members of the city police, of which force greater numbers were waiting out of view in case a riot should start.⁴⁰ This prospective threat, although it did not come to pass in Boston, was not an idle one. Two months later, white New Yorkers reluctant to be called into military service would vent their rage by violently beating and killing African Americans, and setting fire to their homes, churches, and businesses. With July's Draft Riots as warning enough, other black regiments mustered in the North would choose to sail south rather than march the massive gauntlet of New York City.⁴¹

Not all of the 54th's problems were so easily avoided, though. In the public's "cold, silent doubt," the 54th and other black regiments faced a threat much more pervasive than mere violence.⁴² It was not only fervent supporters of slavery who believed blacks were incapable of serving as professional soldiers, but also those who had no stake in the preservation of slavery and merely viewed blacks as inferior because of ingrained racism. Many feared that "the possibility of placing blacks on a social and political par with whites would challenge the nation's racial status quo" of white supremacy.⁴³ Still others "asserted that they would not fight, that their employment would prolong the war, and that white troops would refuse to serve with them."⁴⁴ However, as members of the 54th, Crozier and his fellows had a greater opportunity than most blacks to change this opinion.

With the institution of black enlistment, an increasingly large proportion of the population, black and white, was beginning to see the Civil War as a war against slavery rather than secession.⁴⁵ For African American soldiers, already in full view of the public

⁴⁰ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pp. 31-33.

⁴¹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...*, pg. 174.

⁴² George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 173.

⁴³ John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful..." pg. 10.

⁴⁴ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pg. 6.

⁴⁵ John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful..." pg. 24.

eye, this shift in opinion made it even more critical that they perform competently, professionally, and with the discipline expected of soldiers. From the beginning, Governor Andrew had said that the 54th's "success or failure [would] go far to elevate or to depress the estimation in which the character of the colored American will be held throughout this world."⁴⁶ As members of one of the first black regiments raised, Crozier and his fellow soldiers would have likely felt an enormous sense of pride, but also the heavy knowledge that their actions would strongly influence how whites saw not just their regiment but their race in general.

Once they finally reached the south, Crozier and the 54th faced yet more challenges. Rather than being sent immediately to the front lines to act, as they had been trained, as soldiers, they were assigned to discriminatory, menial duties such as "constructing fortifications, digging trenches, and loading and unloading wagons and ships...cleaning latrines and ship bunkers."⁴⁷ One of Crozier's fellow infantrymen, Thomas D. Freeman, wrote that "it is nothing but work from morning till night Building Batteries Hauling Guns Cleaning Bricks clearing up land for other Regiments to settle on..."⁴⁸ In the North, the 54th had been confronted with the racism of the public; here, they were confronted with the ruthless scorn and disdain of their fellow soldiers and their superior officers.

Unlike many black soldiers who spent most or all of the war engaged in such support work, Crozier and the 54th eventually saw action in the front lines. Their first two major engagements followed one after the other, beginning on July 16, 1863, with the Battle of James Island, South Carolina.⁴⁹ In the early morning of that day, three companies—including Crozier's, Co. B—were picketed around the Confederate battery, which was defending Charleston from an anticipated attack from James Island.⁵⁰ When day broke, the Confederate forces that had been advancing in pre-dawn darkness were surprised by these three companies, who stood their ground and kept them in check "like veterans." However, the Union forces were outnumbered, and the three companies were

⁴⁶ John A. Andrew to Francis G. Shaw, January 30, 1863, qtd. in John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful..." , pg. 20.

⁴⁷ John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful..." pg. 41.

⁴⁸ Thomas D. Freeman quoted in John David Smith, "Let Us All Be Grateful..." pg. 41.

⁴⁹ Corporal James Henry Gooding, *On the Altar of Freedom*, pg. 36.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 36-7.

forced back across a creek under cover of Union gunboat fire. Despite the retreat, the men of the 54th had performed admirably, and as they were marching down the island, “a regiment of white men gave [them] three cheers as [they] were passing.”⁵¹

This success was followed by the assault on Fort Wagner, a Confederate battery on the tip of Morris Island. Crozier was part of the forces of the 54th that led the unsuccessful charge on the heavily defended fort. The charge, led by Col. Shaw, met with heavy opposing fire that caused severe casualties, including Shaw. Although some Union men managed to breach the defenses and enter the fort, the attack was ultimately unsuccessful and ended in retreat.⁵² Yet this bitter defeat was sweetened with a greater victory, as the courageous performance of the African American soldiers quickly became a matter of public knowledge. The 54th's attack on Fort Wagner “settled then and there the question of the colored man in actual contest,” proving to skeptics that black soldiers were equally as capable of heroism as whites.⁵³ Notably, the first African American recipient of the Medal of Honor was William Carney of the 54th's Company C, who was rewarded for his bravery in retrieving the fallen State colors under heavy fire and returning them to the rear.⁵⁴ Black soldiers' performance in this battle went a long way towards changing public opinion in their favor, and the 54th became famous as an exemplar of black military prowess.⁵⁵ A month later, on August 5, 1863, Crozier was promoted to full Musician.⁵⁶

Although the glorious assault on Fort Wagner represented a significant turning point in the course of African American soldiers, obstacles remained. For over a year after their mustering in, black soldiers performed their duties ably and professionally for a mere \$10 per month. This pay was a laborer's wage, and although blacks had been promised the equal pay of \$13 that white enlisted men received, it was not until September 28, 1864—16 months after mustering in—that the 54th was paid in full. During this time, they and their commanding officers had refused to content themselves with the lesser pay, and had refused supplementary funds offered by Governor Andrew

⁵¹ Ibid., pg. 37.

⁵² Ibid., pg. 38.

⁵³ James Lorenzo Bowen, *Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865*, pg. 55.

⁵⁴ Corporal James Henry Gooding, *On the Altar of Freedom*, pg. 38.

⁵⁵ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 19.

⁵⁶ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, image 491.

on the grounds that they would be paid properly, through the army's proper channels, or not at all.⁵⁷ Crozier's money worries were compounded during this struggle by a short stint in the regimental hospital for an unspecified illness, and by the accumulation of a debt for losing equipment. In the fall of 1863, the initial charge was \$22.46; by winter, he had been able to pay a single dollar towards this charge; he spent the rest of his military career slowly paying off this debt, and by the time the war ended, he still owed three cents, as well as an additional \$4.78 for clothing.⁵⁸

If once is chance, twice is coincidence, and three times is a pattern, the Battle of Olustee cemented the proof given at James Island and Fort Wagner that not only were black soldiers not liabilities in war, they were a decided asset. “Had it not been for the stubborn fighting of these Negro troops,” wrote black Civil War veteran and historian George Washington Williams, “[General Truman] Seymour would have been routed and annihilated.”⁵⁹ The 54th fought at Olustee, a lake in northern Florida, on February 20, 1864, as part of the second brigade, which also included two other Negro regiments.⁶⁰ After half an hour of battle had led to heavy Union losses, the 54th was ordered in as a reserve support for the 8th USCT.⁶¹ The 8th USCT “served as one of the lead Union regiments and bore the brunt of the Confederate's intense...fire.”⁶² Under heavy fire, the 54th advanced “some 200 yards through a swamp, driving the enemy from some guns, and checking the advance of a column of the enemy's infantry.”⁶³ The battle was a Union failure and ended in retreat, with the brigade reporting about 203 men dead, 1152 wounded, and 506 missing. Of the 54th's “roughly 495 men,” there were 13 killed, 65 wounded, and 8 missing.⁶⁴

The Battle of Olustee was as significant as the Battle of Fort Wagner in terms of buttressing black's “reputation for steadiness and courage.”⁶⁵ Regardless of the losses stemming from “the bloody and fruitless action at Olustee,” the 54th again performed

⁵⁷ James Lorenzo Bowen, *Massachusetts in the War, 1861-1865*, pg. 56.

⁵⁸ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, images 486-489, 491.

⁵⁹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 205.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 206.

⁶¹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pp. 204-5.

⁶² John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 55.

⁶³ Report of Col. Edward N. Hallowell, 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, on the engagement at Olustee, Florida, March 1, 1864.

⁶⁴ John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 56; Return of casualties in the engagement near Olustee, Fla., February 20, 1864, commanded by Brig. Gen. T. Seymour.

⁶⁵ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 213.

meritoriously.⁶⁶ Brigadier-General Truman Seymour reported that “Colonel [Edward] Hallowell, Fifty-fourth Massachusetts, [merited] more than usual praise for [his] excellent conduct” and the 54th itself “behaved creditably...like veterans.”⁶⁷ On a more personal level, the battle was significant in Crozier's own career, and would be the first one to come to his mind years later when interviewed about his service.⁶⁸ This was likely because it was at this battle that Crozier suffered his only casualty of the war, being wounded in the left eye; the battle left him with a scar $\frac{3}{4}$ of an inch long above his eye, running just under his brow. Although it possibly caused blindness in his left eye, the wound was not serious enough to prevent Crozier from remaining in the field.⁶⁹

On the 30th of that November, Crozier and the 54th served at the Battle of Honey Hill, South Carolina.⁷⁰ In a continuation of previous patterns, this battle went poorly for the Union despite the black soldiers' skilled performance, and “several regiments of Negroes added to the laurels they had won on other fields.”⁷¹ The 54th advanced in the battle “as if on dress parade, while the enemy's guns and musketry swept the narrow gap...[the] troops fought with almost reckless bravery” although the battle was ultimately a failure, ending in Union retreat.⁷²

In March of 1863, before the regiment had even left Boston, Col. Shaw and Lt. Col. Norwood Hallowell had raised five hundred dollars to “purchase musical instruments and to instruct and equip a band.”⁷³ For regiments, providing a band was a matter of pride, and army bands were similar in size to those of today.⁷⁴ For members of an all-black regiment, whose love of music was already an integral part of their cultural experience, a band was doubly important.⁷⁵ (There also exists a noteworthy anecdote of how, the evening of the surrender at Appomattox, Union forces were serenaded by several Confederate bands, to which they replied with the music of several all-Negro

⁶⁶ Ibid., pg. 209.

⁶⁷ Report of Brigadier General Seymour, Commanding Officer, U.S. Forces, District of Florida, Explaining the Defeat at Olustee, February 25, 1864.

⁶⁸ W.A. Gannon special examination interview with Oscar Crozier, March 30, 1911, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 7.

⁶⁹ Surgeon's Certificate, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 23-24.

⁷⁰ Records of 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, “*Return of Captain James M. Watton.*”

⁷¹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 209.

⁷² Ibid., pg. 211.

⁷³ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pg. 15.

⁷⁴ Clarence Mills, “Music Education in the Army,” pg. 20.

⁷⁵ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 168.

bands.)⁷⁶

Crozier, who was assigned as a bugler to the Drum Corps immediately upon enlistment and who would remain at that post for the duration of the war, experienced the war as a musician as well as a soldier. Like many of his fellow soldiers who had been engaged in various forms of manual labor before their enlistments, Crozier had been a hostler before he joined the 54th.⁷⁷ Service in the army provided him, and many other African Americans, opportunity to learn occupations that carried more social prestige and instilled a greater sense of pride than those they had held before. Crozier, for example, became recognized as a Musician, a slightly greater rank than that of Private.⁷⁸ Because he was assigned immediately to the Drum Corps, before the 54th's regimental band existed to provide musical instruction, it is likely he already had some musical talent before his enlistment. The Drum Corps was a signaling unit, and as such was involved in the thick of battle, whereas the regimental band was a separate entity, mostly reserved for parades, marches, and funerals.⁷⁹ However, it is likely that there was some overlap in the constituent members of each group; Crozier, for one, occasionally played with the band, separately from his duties in the field. On December 31 of 1864, the only day during his service on which he was marked absent, Crozier was listed as in the field, where the regiment band had been directed by officers.⁸⁰ Given the date, it is likely that Crozier and his fellow musicians were performing to lift the spirits of their fellow soldiers on New Year's Eve. As a musician, Crozier was responsible for improving morale as well as for calling movements in battle and playing reveille.

The Battle of Honey Hill was the last notable engagement Crozier would see. After a period where he served at garrison duty in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, Crozier and his company were mustered out at Charleston on August 20, 1865.⁸¹ Unlike black Union soldiers from southern states, who were kept in service occupying the South for some time, Crozier and his fellow northerners returned home fairly swiftly after the

⁷⁶ Ibid., pg. 303.

⁷⁷ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, image 484.

⁷⁸ Ibid., image 491.

⁷⁹ George Washington Williams, *A History of the Negro Troops...* pg. 179, 65; Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment...* pg. 116.

⁸⁰ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, image 489.

⁸¹ Ibid., image 491.

war officially ended.⁸² When they reached Boston on September 2, the triumphant 54th was greeted personally by Governor Andrew, and received with ceremony and celebration by the city's citizens. American flags flew from every surface; honorary color guards were turned out to escort the returning veterans; a military band was struck up to salute them; and massive crowds of people cheered the regimental colors as they marched by.⁸³ Crozier's final actions as a soldier were to, with his regiment, “[exercise] for a few moments in the manual of arms” on the Common in front of the State House. Here, Crozier's fellow Philadelphian Edward Hallowell—who began the war as a Major, and ended it a Brevet Brigadier General—thanked the enlisted men for their brave service, commended their sacrifices, wished them well in their new lives as citizens, and fondly bid them farewell as friends.⁸⁴

While in Boston, Crozier was paid the \$100 of pay and bounty due to him, and given his papers for an honorable discharge.⁸⁵ And so, within a matter of days, the two years and six months of Oscar Crozier's military service—a period by which he defined himself for the rest of his life—was over. Yet its impact, on Crozier himself and on the nation, would last much longer. The shift in public opinion regarding blacks as humans was not total and complete, but these soldiers' courage, patience, and determination to impact the course of their race's destiny on their own behalf was immeasurably significant. Many whites who had begun the war skeptical of blacks' abilities as soldiers—and as men—watched blacks slowly reverse this thought during the long years of war. Eventually, some—not all, but some—came to regard black soldiers as “in *every respect...fully equal to any troops, and in many respects...superior to all.*”⁸⁶

There is no disputing that his service in the 54th Massachusetts made an indelible impact on Crozier's life. According to various given birth years, Crozier was anywhere between 16 and 20 years old when he enlisted, the most likely age being 19; regardless, he became an adult while a soldier, and his wartime experiences—as a soldier, as an African American, and as a man—shaped the rest of his life.

⁸² Ira Berlin et al. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, 1861–1867, Series 2: The Black Military Experience*, pg. 734.

⁸³ Luis F. Emilio, *A Brave Black Regiment*, pg. 318.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pg. 319.

⁸⁵ 1909 Declaration for Pension for Oscar Crozier, U.S. Colored Troops Pension File Collection, pg. 17

⁸⁶ Letter of Pvt. Henry Martyn Cross to his parents, qtd. in John David Smith, “Let Us All Be Grateful...” pg. 39.

After leaving Boston, Crozier returned to his mother's house in Philadelphia. He lived there, along with his mother and younger brother Alfred, in their house on Lombard Street, on the same block (if not the same building) as the house where he grew up. Like most of his neighbors in that area, who were engaged in unskilled labor or personal services, Crozier spent the next two years occupied in whatever odd jobs were available, never managing to find steady employment.⁸⁷ Whatever the specifics of his life during those initial years after the war, Crozier's experience was likely very similar to those of other African American veterans who returned to their homes and found that, despite their years of heroism, their lot was largely unchanged.⁸⁸

CONVICT

In 1867, Crozier's fortunes took a drastic turn for the worse. On the evening of Saturday, January 25, Crozier went—drunk—to the house of Amanda Minton, with whom he was romantically involved and possibly living with.⁸⁹ The two began to argue, and Crozier started beating Minton, at which point Minton's mother rushed him and demanded he leave the house. Instead, Crozier stabbed Minton twice with a pocket knife, once in the lower abdomen and once in the side under her left arm. Minton was well enough to go upstairs, at which point Oscar helped her mother and her friend dress her the wounds. Crozier stayed at the house that night, as well as all of Sunday and Monday; although Minton was able to speak to a friend on Monday evening without giving any indication she was dying, she must have worsened quickly as the night went on, as Crozier felt the need to go for a doctor.⁹⁰ At this point, Crozier was arrested, and Minton presumably was taken to the hospital, as she was still alive at the time of the arrest.⁹¹ She died that Saturday, January 26, a week after she had been stabbed.⁹²

Per the instruction of an Alderman, Crozier was kept in jail until Minton's fate was determined, at which point he was arraigned, two lawyers were assigned to him, and the case put into motion. On March 25, after consultation with his counsel, Crozier

⁸⁷ William S. Hastings, "Philadelphia Microcosm," pg. 168-9; *The Evening Telegraph*, "The Crozier Homicide," April 30, 1867.

⁸⁸ Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer, *Voice of Emancipation*, pg. 79.

⁸⁹ *The Evening Telegraph*, "Legal Intelligence," March 25, 1867.

⁹⁰ *The Evening Telegraph*, "The Crozier Homicide," April 30, 1867.

⁹¹ *The Evening Telegraph*, "A Stabbing Case," January 22, 1867.

⁹² *The Evening Telegraph*, "An Inquest," January 28, 1867.

pleaded not guilty.⁹³ When Crozier came to trial over a month later, on April 29, the court heard testimony from acquaintances of the couple who had been in the house, as well as from several doctors. These doctors suggested that the wounds inflicted were not necessarily fatal, and that it was possible Minton had died from peritonitis unrelated to the stabbing.⁹⁴ Crozier's lawyers tried in vain to argue the charge down from first degree murder to manslaughter on the grounds that Crozier had been, by all accounts, insensibly drunk when the original incident occurred. Despite their efforts, Crozier was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to 10 years in the Eastern State Penitentiary, which was only 3 miles away from his Lombard Street home.⁹⁵ At the time of his sentencing, he was 23 years old.⁹⁶

The Eastern State Penitentiary was the pioneer of the solitary confinement prison model, although since the prison intended to encourage convicts' spiritual reform, the cells were fairly large and “had individual exercise yards attached.”⁹⁷ This system, drawing heavily from the Quaker doctrine of an “inner light,” was meant to prompt religious self-reflection by giving prisoners the “opportunity to meditate on their crimes and...to correct their evil dispositions.”⁹⁸ Despite the theoretical advantages of Eastern State's isolationist system, many believed its strict policy that convicts receive no human contact whatsoever caused insanity and high mortality rates.⁹⁹ Eventually, overcrowding had caused Eastern State to abandon its one-person-per-cell policy, at least partially; in 1866 there were 569 prisoners for only 540 cells, and it can only be assumed the number of prisoners was even greater when Crozier entered the following year.¹⁰⁰ Whether or not he spent his time in isolation or with a cellmate, Crozier would have certainly had to endure the hours of boredom in a featureless stone room, the stench of must and waste, the indignity of being constantly watched, and the lack of meaningful human interaction. He would most likely not have been allowed visits or mail from his family.¹⁰¹ Although

⁹³ *The Evening Telegraph*, “Legal Intelligence,” March 25, 1867.

⁹⁴ *The Evening Telegraph*, “The Crozier Homicide,” April 30, 1867.

⁹⁵ Frederick Carroll Brewster, *Reports of equity...* pg. 349

⁹⁶ *The Evening Telegraph*, “The Crozier Homicide,” April 30, 1867.

⁹⁷ John H. Cary, “France Looks to Pennsylvania: The Eastern Penitentiary as a Symbol of Reform,” pg. 187.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 191, 192.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 200, 195.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew W. Meskell, “*An American Revolution: The History of Prisons...*” pg. 862.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 861.

the Eastern State Penitentiary did offer educational lessons, it was not guaranteed that prisoners would be able to take advantage of those services.¹⁰² Given that Crozier was born free, however, it is equally as likely that he was literate before prison as it is that he became literate while a prisoner.

Although there is no documentation for the exact date of his release, the census of 1870 reveals that Crozier was still a resident of Eastern State, so it can be assumed he served at least three years of his sentence.¹⁰³ However, even three years under the prison's strict no-alcohol policy would have been plenty of time for Crozier to sober up completely, and he would have had years of clear senses in which to reflect on how he could now call himself a drunken murderer as well as an honored veteran.¹⁰⁴

Crozier's imprisonment, while certainly partially justified, may also have been heavily influenced by racism. During his trial, Crozier's actions after he stabbed Minton—namely, his assistance in caring for her, his remaining in the house, his going to fetch a doctor when it became necessary—were not taken into account nearly as much as the testimony of the presumably white doctors who found that Minton died of wounds he inflicted.¹⁰⁵ His discharge papers, describing him as an honorable veteran, were not permitted to be admitted as evidence.¹⁰⁶ Another indicator of racism was the unfeasibly high rate of black imprisonment. Before and during Crozier's confinement, a disproportionately large percentage of Eastern State's prisoners were black: 15.5% of male prisoners were African American, despite the fact that African Americans made up only 1.9% of the state's population.¹⁰⁷ These factors, combined with numerous accounts of the city's racism in the post-war era, suggest that Crozier's was not entirely judged on the bare facts. His prison sentence must have been a chilling reminder that, although he had helped win the Civil War for the Union, Crozier could not single-handedly reverse generations of institutionalized racism, no matter how many battles he fought.

Regardless of the exact date of his release, Crozier left Pennsylvania quickly after he became a free man again. Crozier was certainly living in Quaker Neck, Kent County,

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pg. 859.

¹⁰³ 1870 US Census, *Philadelphia Ward 7 Dist 18 (2nd Enum)*

¹⁰⁴ Matthew W. Meskell, “*An American Revolution: The History of Prisons...*” pg. 856.

¹⁰⁵ *The Evening Telegraph*, “The Crozier Homicide,” April 30, 1867.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ Philadelphia Historical Commission, *Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Structures Report: Volume 1*. pg. 130.

Maryland around 1876, with a man named Mr. Watts, although no explanation is known for why he chose to move south, or how he was connected to his housemate.¹⁰⁸ A possible reason for his leaving his home city could have been the difficulty many blacks faced in trying to obtain work—although Crozier likely would have had better chances in the urban black community of Philadelphia than in the formerly slaveowning, rural Chestertown.¹⁰⁹ In the end, though, the most likely reason for his relocation is the fact that in Philadelphia, he was a known murderer.

During the twenty-odd years he spent in Quaker Neck, Crozier developed a bit of a reputation as a womanizer. “Yes Sir I Have Known Him To Run around With other Women,” said Henry Mays, a friend of Crozier's; Mays' testimony was backed up by Charles Linsey's, another friend of Crozier's.¹¹⁰ As Linsey explains, Crozier's behavior wasn't unusual: “Lots of Colored People used To Live With Each other and People Would Call Them man and Wife Who Never got married.”¹¹¹ This flexible social structure was common among black communities in Maryland, being a remnant of the pre-war society in which families often contained both slaves and free blacks, who were obliged by the demands of white masters to live apart from each other.¹¹²

The fairly large black population on the Eastern Shore meant that Crozier would have plenty of fellow African Americans to turn to in order to overcome his culture shock. Little is known of the twenty years he spent in Quaker Neck, but he lived there almost as long as he had lived in Philadelphia; by the time he moved to Chestertown, Crozier would likely have fit in well with the area's natives.

FAMILY MAN

Although it is not certain how the two met, Crozier moved to Chestertown in 1895 to court Mary Elizabeth Harris, a 25-year-old mulatto washerwoman.¹¹³ The two were married—Oscar under the mis-transcribed name of “Archer”—on August 27, 1895 at Jane's ME Parsonage by Reverend N. B. Snowden, a notable black community

¹⁰⁸ Affidavit of Charles Linsey, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 9.

¹⁰⁹ W. E. B. DuBois, “Color Prejudice,” Chapter 16 of *The Philadelphia Negro*.

¹¹⁰ Affidavit of Henry Mays, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 10.

¹¹¹ Affidavit of Charles Linsey, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 9.

¹¹² Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pp. 27-29.

¹¹³ Affidavits of Henry Mays and Charles Linsey, Special Collection (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 9 and 11; 1900 US Census

leader.¹¹⁴ Mary, who was 26 years younger than Crozier, already had an illegitimate daughter named Sarah C. Harris, who was 5 years old when the two married.¹¹⁵ This small family, although unconventional by today's standards—much older husband, young wife with a child from a previous and unmarried relationship—was not as strange in 1890s black Chestertown.

A somewhat flexible family structure was typical of black communities in former slave states.¹¹⁶ With the collapse of slave-based economic system, some blacks were obliged to look elsewhere for work; these men were helped along in their task by “labor agents” who rounded up blacks, willing or unwilling, and arranging for them to be hired by those who needed laborers.¹¹⁷ This and other necessary population movements contributed to the separation of spouses and the creation of single-parent families. Adding to this was a general lack of desire or ability within the black community itself to formally recognize marriages or divorces; as such, the notion of being man and wife was not tied to documentation.¹¹⁸ It was also common to see three generations within a house, as young married couples often lacked the independent capital to move out and start their own family in a new house. Additionally, black veterans were an attractive prospect in an impoverished black community, regardless of age, and many of these men would marry younger women so that their pension funds would stay in the community longer.

By this model, Crozier's small family was likely indicative of the family structure of his neighbors and friends. In 1898, Oscar himself wrote that “know i have no children;” as such, his adopted daughter Sarah was his only child.¹¹⁹ By 1910, Crozier's adopted daughter Sarah had married a man named James E. Rigby, of whom little is known (although he listed Sarah and their four children as his dependents in 1918, he never resided in the same house as them).¹²⁰ Sarah and her children Esther O. (b.1906), James A. (later going by Allen J., b. 1905), Henry H. (b. 1909), and Randolph (b. 1913),

¹¹⁴ August 1895 Marriage license, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 30.

¹¹⁵ 900 US Census

¹¹⁶ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pg. 156.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 159.

¹¹⁸ Affidavits of Henry Mays and Charles Linsey, Special Collection (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 9 and 11

¹¹⁹ Department of the Interior, Bureau of Pensions circular, Special Collection (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 33.

¹²⁰ 1900 US Census; United States Draft Registration Cards.

lived with Crozier until his death.¹²¹ All four children attended school, and all three adults were literate as well.¹²² Although schools for blacks existed on the Eastern Shore, they were severely underfunded because they were only supported by taxes on the blacks' own few properties; nonetheless, Randolph managed to complete four years of high school.¹²³ Mary remained occupied as a laundress, and her daughter eventually joined her in working out of their home.¹²⁴

Although the Croziers would move several times within the next twenty years, they remained within the same neighborhood of five or so streets by the Chester River that constituted the heart of the black community. In 1900, the family rented a house on Front Street, also called Water Street, almost directly on the river; in 1910, they were renting a house a block away, on Queen Street.¹²⁵ Interestingly, although the Croziers were blacks living in the still decidedly segregated black community, they did live next door to several white families on Front Street. Although one of these houses belonged to a family of working class whites, some belonged to such esteemed individuals as doctors and lawyers. As many of their black neighbors further down the street were engaged in domestic service, it's likely that these more well-to-do white families employed their black neighbors.¹²⁶ This demographic layout, however, is a reminder that, although race separated blacks and whites in almost every area of life, the two were citizens of the same town, and their lives were much less distinct than either race might have preferred.

Race relations in post-war Chestertown were as intricate and fraught with tension as they had been before the war. Free blacks living on the Eastern Shore were nearly as restricted as their enslaved fellows, needing white patronage to do so much as leave the state.¹²⁷ This trend continued after the war, although it took different shapes; many white Marylanders found it difficult to turn away from the past, attempting to hold on to what aspects of slavery they could.¹²⁸ One example of this was the lingering apprenticeship system, in which wealthy white employers enslaved the children of African Americans in

¹²¹ 1910 and 1920 US Censuses.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pg. 134; U.S. World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946.

¹²⁴ 1920 US Census.

¹²⁵ 1900 and 1910 US Censuses; Sanborn Company Map of Chestertown, 1908.

¹²⁶ 1900 and 1910 US Censuses.

¹²⁷ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pg. 37

¹²⁸ Ibid., pg. 158.

everything but name.¹²⁹ Although Crozier's adopted daughter, Sarah, attended school at least until age 10, many African Americans of her age—probably some she had personally known—were victims of this system.¹³⁰ Against this entrenched system, a vestige of true slavery, blacks had little legal or social recourse.¹³¹ Crozier, who worked as a farm laborer, as a servant in a hotel, and probably at other menial jobs as well, couldn't keep steady work because many white employers found Union veterans and their relatives “unsuitable.”¹³²

This pervasive, racist attitude combined with other restrictive legislature, such as the laws making it difficult for blacks to own the property necessary for voting enfranchisement and the law prohibiting blacks from testifying against whites in court.¹³³ This system essentially re-enslaved a black population that had known better than to expect wholehearted equality and acceptance, but that had still hoped for better than what they got.

Finding little help from the public officials in their own town, many blacks looked to the federal government for help. Initially, the “the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, familiarly known as the Freedmen's Bureau” was of some assistance in providing legal assistance for parents trying to reclaim their children from apprenticeships, black employees trying to receive their full wages from white employers, and providing for elderly ex-slaves who had no family and no one willing to care for them.¹³⁴ Yet blacks found racism even in the attitudes of their supposed white allies, whose entire worldview left them incapable of understanding blacks' life experiences and points of view. Pension examiners couldn't comprehend that when they asked for specific documentation about a black veteran's life and were answered with inexact estimations, the cause wasn't ignorance or indifference on the veteran's part but rather a general inability of the entire race to furnish exact records.¹³⁵ Crozier himself gave, at various points, birth years of 1842, 1843, 1844, and 1847.¹³⁶ Because of this

¹²⁹ Ibid., pg. 138.

¹³⁰ 1900 US Census.

¹³¹ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pp. 138-9

¹³² 1900 and 1910 Census; Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pg. 161.

¹³³ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pp. 139, 152.

¹³⁴ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pp. 148, 158.

¹³⁵ Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer. *Voices of Emancipation*, pg. 3.

¹³⁶ USCT Military Service Records, 1861-1865, image 484; 1900 US Census; 1910 US Census; 1909

inexactness, and likely also because of Pension Bureau employees' racism, blacks were often submitted to special examinations so that whites could prove the relevant facts needed to award a pension.¹³⁷

Racial tensions were by no means confined to prejudicial legislature. “Violent attacks on black people were frequent,” and part of a seemingly arbitrary system, well-understood by whites, where blacks could expect shouted insults and beatings for the slightest perceived offense.¹³⁸ Veterans like Crozier, as well as their families, churches, and schools, would have been at even greater risk, as “black soldiers were favorite targets” of the white population, many of whom had fought for the Confederacy.¹³⁹ These attacks did not come only from their wealthy former masters, however. With slavery now extinct, poorer whites—who had always resented slave owners and slaves in equal measure—were free to express their indignation against people who no longer enjoyed the immunity they had received “by virtue of being the valuable property of substantial citizens.”¹⁴⁰

Blacks received little help from either class; public officials and influential community members often took part in the violence rather than prosecute it.¹⁴¹ Lower class whites who attempted to help faced violence and economic reprisal, and whites whose positions made them able to assist their black fellow-citizens were often overturned if they attempted to enact justice.¹⁴² Although there were some whites who made efforts to help the black population—such as the lawyer who prosecuted Oscar's pension application, who also prosecuted the pension application of Henry Worrell, a veteran of the 7th USCT—these actions were equally as motivated by selfishness as altruism, and whatever their reasons for acting, these people were not the norm.¹⁴³ “The waning influence and growing complaisance of the Bureau” meant that blacks had to fall back on their connections to the army in order to receive any substantial kind of federal

Declaration for Pension for O. Crozier, Special Collections (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection), pg. 17.

¹³⁷ Elizabeth A. Regosin and Donald R. Shaffer. *Voices of Emancipation*, pg. 3.

¹³⁸ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pp. 143-5.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 145.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pg. 146.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pg. 147.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁴³ Declaration for the Increase of an Invalid Pension for Henry Worrell, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection).

assistance.¹⁴⁴

Into this tense social atmosphere stepped the Charles Sumner Post #25 of the Grand Army of the Republic, a national organization for veterans of the Civil War. Across the country, the G.A.R. was a powerful force, successfully campaigning in the late 1800s for improvement of the pension system.¹⁴⁵ In Chestertown, however, the Charles Sumner Post—one of 21 African American posts in the state—was much smaller, dedicated to working within the black community.¹⁴⁶ This post provided the black veterans of Chestertown with a tight-knit social network that used its influence to “remind [its] audience, which included the broader predominantly white community, that black soldiers['] lives heralded the freedom of their own race.” To this end, the Sumner Post—of which Crozier was a longstanding member—used the importance of Decoration Day celebrations to actively shape their own role and identity within the greater Chestertown community.¹⁴⁷ In fact, the annual parades, visits to graveyards, and speeches that took place on Decoration Day eventually became the purview of the African American community alone.¹⁴⁸ Despite their almost exclusive control of this event, however, the Post did not forget that memorializing soldiers did not belong solely to one race or the other, and that the tragedies suffered in the war were suffered regardless of skin color. In 1890, the *Kent News* described how in that year's celebration “the graves of the soldiers, black and white, Union and Confederate, were decorated with flowers” in a show of respect that speaks highly of any organization, regardless of race.¹⁴⁹

As a force for social change, the Sumner Post actively shaped whites' perceptions of them. Nationally, the G.A.R. was the “only interracial social organization in the nineteenth century;” locally, blacks from the Sumner Post “met their white comrades at Maryland state meetings as political equals to establish departmental policies and elect state officials.”¹⁵⁰ Blacks published articles in the newspaper about what they themselves preferred to be called, choosing to go by the term “Negro” because of its specificity in

¹⁴⁴ Barbara Jeanne Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground*, pg. 159.

¹⁴⁵ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic...*, pg. 1

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pg. 2.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 11.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 12.

¹⁴⁹ “Decoration Day,” *Kent News*, 3 May 1890, qtd. in Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic...*, pg. 14.

¹⁵⁰ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic...*, pg. 2.

referring to their uniquely African American culture.¹⁵¹ The members of the Sumner post “may have had little formal education[,] but they were well-versed in the history of their freedom struggle[,] and black veterans used their status as members of the GAR to ‘teach’ white America about the Civil War” through such methods as the Decoration Day parades.¹⁵² The Post also supported and was supported by the Women's Relief Corps, the first established in Maryland, probably composed of post members' wives and relatives. The WRC assisted the Sumner Post in the parades, dinners, and decorations needed for the annual Decoration Day celebrations. African American G.A.R. posts were more likely than white posts to associate themselves with a ladies' auxiliary corps, suggesting that their commitment to working for civil rights was not limited to their gender.¹⁵³

As a member of the Sumner Post, Crozier would have been actively involved in these events, and his ties to the other members of the post would have likely been the greatest influence on his later life. Common membership in the post provided these veterans with a mutual support system, and members developed close friendships with each other. Crozier, for example, was an affiant to Hamilton Frisby's 1909 pension application, even though Frisby—who served in the 9th USCT—was not in his regiment.¹⁵⁴ Crozier himself was supported by G. W. Thomas Carmichael, a veteran of the 9th USCT, in Crozier's 1897 application for a pension.¹⁵⁵ Like Frisby and Carmichael, Crozier's fellow veterans were from different regiments, although most had been born in Maryland, and many were former slaves. As he had been in the army, Crozier was again thrown in with fellow blacks whose different experiences of slavery and the war would have influenced him heavily. His own wife, in fact, was likely the descendent of former slaves, although she was born after the war ended and would have had little personal grasp of the most significant experience of her husband's life.

Crozier's G.A.R. involvement is one of the greatest indicators of the importance his service played in his life. His choice to become involved in the Sumner Post is made

¹⁵¹ *Kent News*. “The Word 'Negro.’” Saturday, June 12, 1880.

¹⁵² Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic...*, pg. 9.

¹⁵³ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City*, lecture at Washington College, March 1, 2002, C.V. Starr Center, pg. 15.

¹⁵⁴ 1909 Declaration for Pension for Hamilton Frisby, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection).

¹⁵⁵ 1897 Declaration for Pension for Oscar Crozier, Special Collections. (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection).

even more noteworthy by the fact that the post “charged [a \$]1.00 muster fee and [\$0].10 a quarter dues;” the muster fee was the cost of joining the organization, and quarterly dues provided the post with funds to buy G.A.R. Uniforms and hold events such as the annual Decoration Day celebrations.¹⁵⁶ Crozier, like many other veterans, likely “struggled to pay even these modest fees.”¹⁵⁷ Although many dropped out of the organization because they couldn't afford it, just as many—including Crozier—made an effort to stay.¹⁵⁸ The importance of their service while soldiers, and of their community action as veterans, explains why men like Crozier and his fellow veterans “struggled in the face of poverty and illiteracy to maintain these units,” even as age began to subtract from their numbers.¹⁵⁹ Crozier's dedication was rewarded in 1904 when, at the age of 60, he finally achieved an officer's rank when he served as Post Commander.¹⁶⁰

The Sumner Post was able to remain active well into the 1900s, likely due to the fact that they had raised the funds for and built the meeting hall themselves, and so felt doubly invested in the Post's survival.¹⁶¹ The post lasted until 1928, despite a drop in membership due to veterans dying of age, and although he survived until 1915, Crozier's health during the century's first years was scarcely better than his fellows'.¹⁶² In his last years, Crozier suffered from rheumatism that caused “pain of motion in all joints, very severe in the hips;” he was also blind in one eye (which he attested to the wound gained at Olustee), and suffered intense pain from atrophied muscles in his back. Interestingly, this back pain was evident as early as 1897, when a medical examination found Crozier had “cupping scars” covering the lumbar region.¹⁶³ Cupping, an ancient Chinese medicinal practice, involved using a flame to create a vacuum in a small glass cup that was then placed against the skin. The practice was thought to mobilize blood flow, and Crozier likely attempted it in order to relieve some of the pain of his atrophied

¹⁵⁶ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic: Chestertown to Oklahoma City*, lecture at Washington College, March 1, 2002, C.V. Starr Center, pg. 7

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pg. 7

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pg. 7

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pg. 2, 9.

¹⁶⁰ Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland, 1882-1929*, Library of Congress, compiled 2000. Kent County Arts Council, pg. 2.

¹⁶¹ Barbara A. Gannon, *African Americans in the Grand Army of the Republic*, pg. 17

¹⁶² Barbara Gannon, notes on *Roster of the G.A.R., Department of Maryland...*, pg. 2.

¹⁶³ 1897 medical examination of Oscar Crozier, Special Collection, (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection).

muscles.¹⁶⁴ A possible explanation for how Crozier would have known of this traditional Asian remedy is that it was transmitted through cultural diffusion to groups in Africa, whose enslaved descendents remembered the practice. It is also possible this practice came to the Eastern Shore through England, whose doctors would likely have learned of it through the country's extensive trade interactions with China.

Regardless of the source of an attempted treatment, Crozier certainly was in ill health in the last years of his life, and he passed away at 5:55 A.M. on May 1, 1915, at the age of 71, due to “cardiac asthma.”¹⁶⁵ He left his widow, Mary, who was 45 years old; his adopted daughter, Sarah, who was 25; and Sarah's grandchildren, who were between the ages of 9 and 2. Although he was only able to spend a few years of his life with his grandchildren, he raised Sarah as his own daughter for twenty years, and her impressions of the only father she knew would likely have colored her own children's knowledge of their grandfather the Civil War veteran. Crozier's youngest grandchild, Randolph, who was only 2 years old when Crozier passed away, eventually enlisted in the army during World War II, serving admirably until the end of the war.¹⁶⁶

The family moved from Queen Street to Cross Street at some point in the five years after Crozier's death, and then again to Baltimore, where they were living in 1930.¹⁶⁷ Allen, Sarah's second child and first son, was a barber; Henry, the middle brother, was possibly attending college.¹⁶⁸ The legacy of these grandchildren's quiet successes—education, employment, military service—may seem a modest one when compared to the magnificent scope of the Civil War. Indeed, historians today may find more fascination in the accounts of Crozier's military experience or his prison sentence than in his relationship with his family or the annual cemetery visits of the Charles Sumner Post. Yet there must have been points in Crozier's life—the height of battle, the darkness of a prison cell—where he doubted he would survive to have a legacy at all. Crozier's service on behalf of the advancement of his race was the defining period of his life. Somehow, though, it seems as though the memories of his descendants, the

¹⁶⁴ Subhuti Dharmananda, “Cupping.”

¹⁶⁵ State of Maryland Certificate of Death, Special Collection, (U.S.C.T. Pension File Collection).

¹⁶⁶ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs BIRLS Death File for Randolph Rigby.

¹⁶⁷ 1920 US Census, Chestertown; 1930 US Census, Baltimore.

¹⁶⁸ 1930 US Census, Baltimore.

respectful and joyous placing of flowers on his simple grave, are a legacy equally as great as his service in the 54th Massachusetts.

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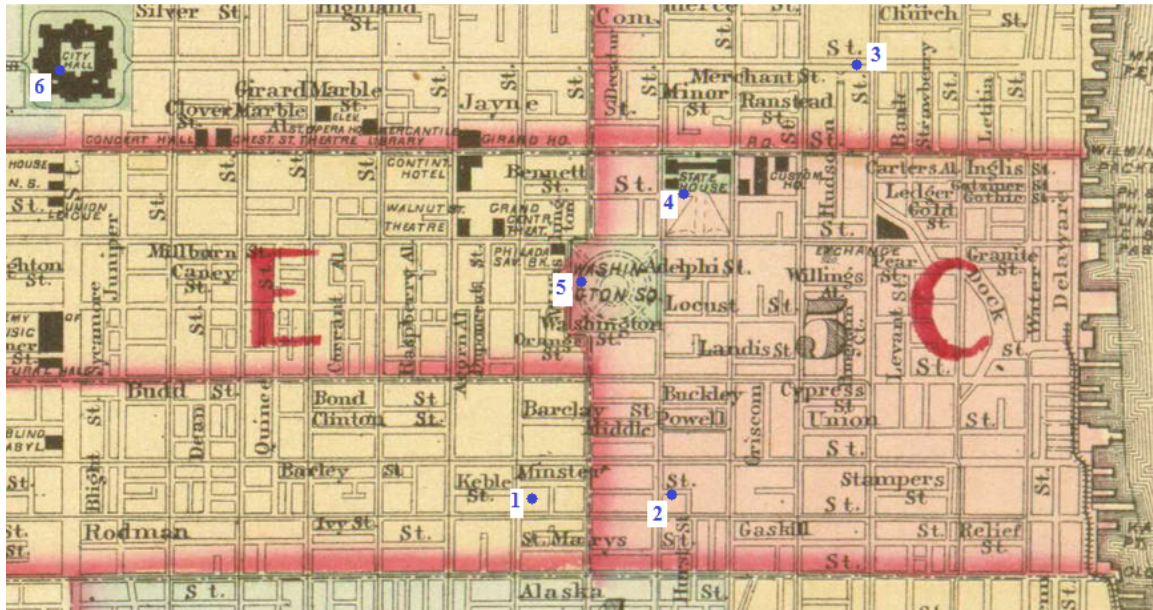
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Appendix

Crozier's Philadelphia Neighborhood

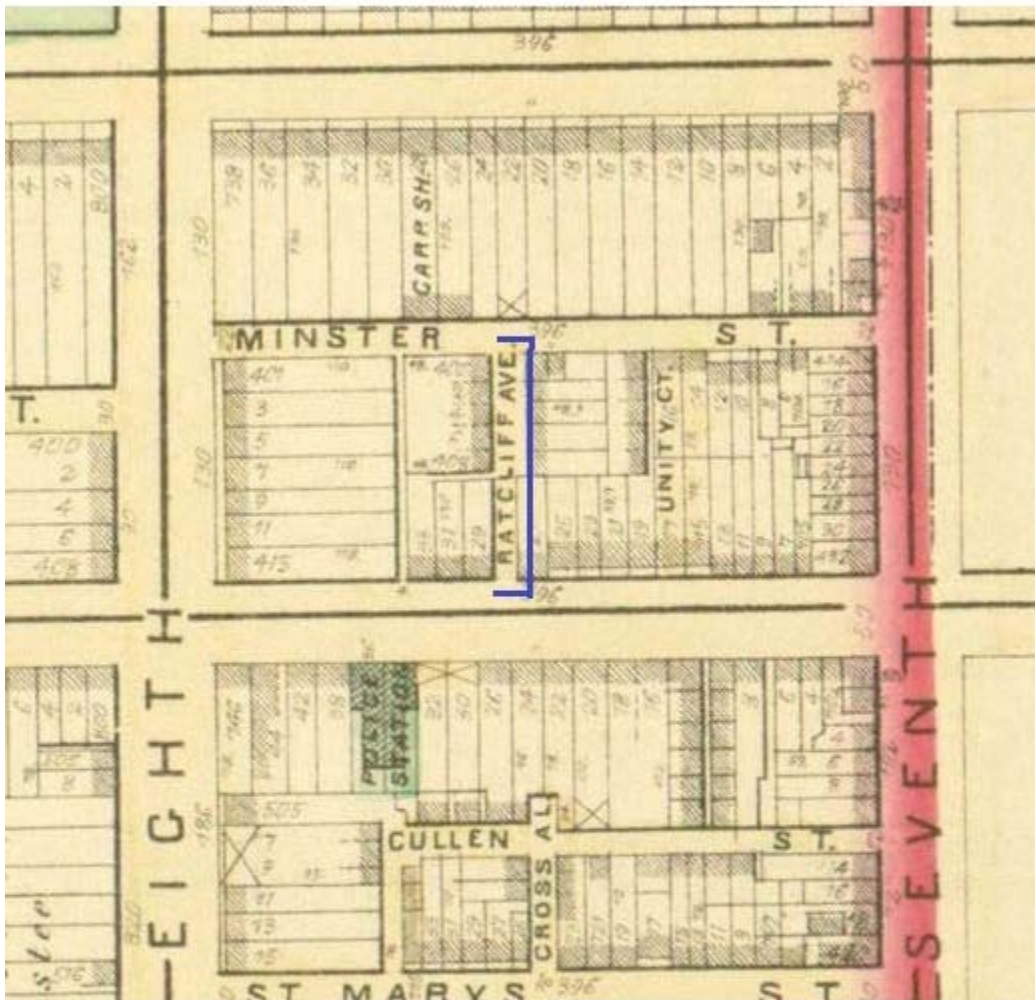


1. The Crozier House: The Croziers lived on Minster Street, a small lane in the center of the block bordered by Pine Street to the north, Lombard Street to the South, Seventh Street to the east, and Eighth Street to the West.
2. Bethel AME Church: This church, built in 1794 by Richard Allen, was the first independent African denomination in the US.
3. 300 Block of Market Street: In the mid-1800s, this area was full of small businesses, including the William Penn Hotel at which Crozier worked as a hostler.
4. Independence Hall: During Crozier's time in Philadelphia, still called the Pennsylvania State House.
5. Washington Square
6. City Hall

Hopkins, G. M. *City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 6, Wards 2 through 20, 29 and 31*. 1875. Private collection of Matt Ainslie. Accessed online at philageohistory.org.

Modified by Rachel Brown.

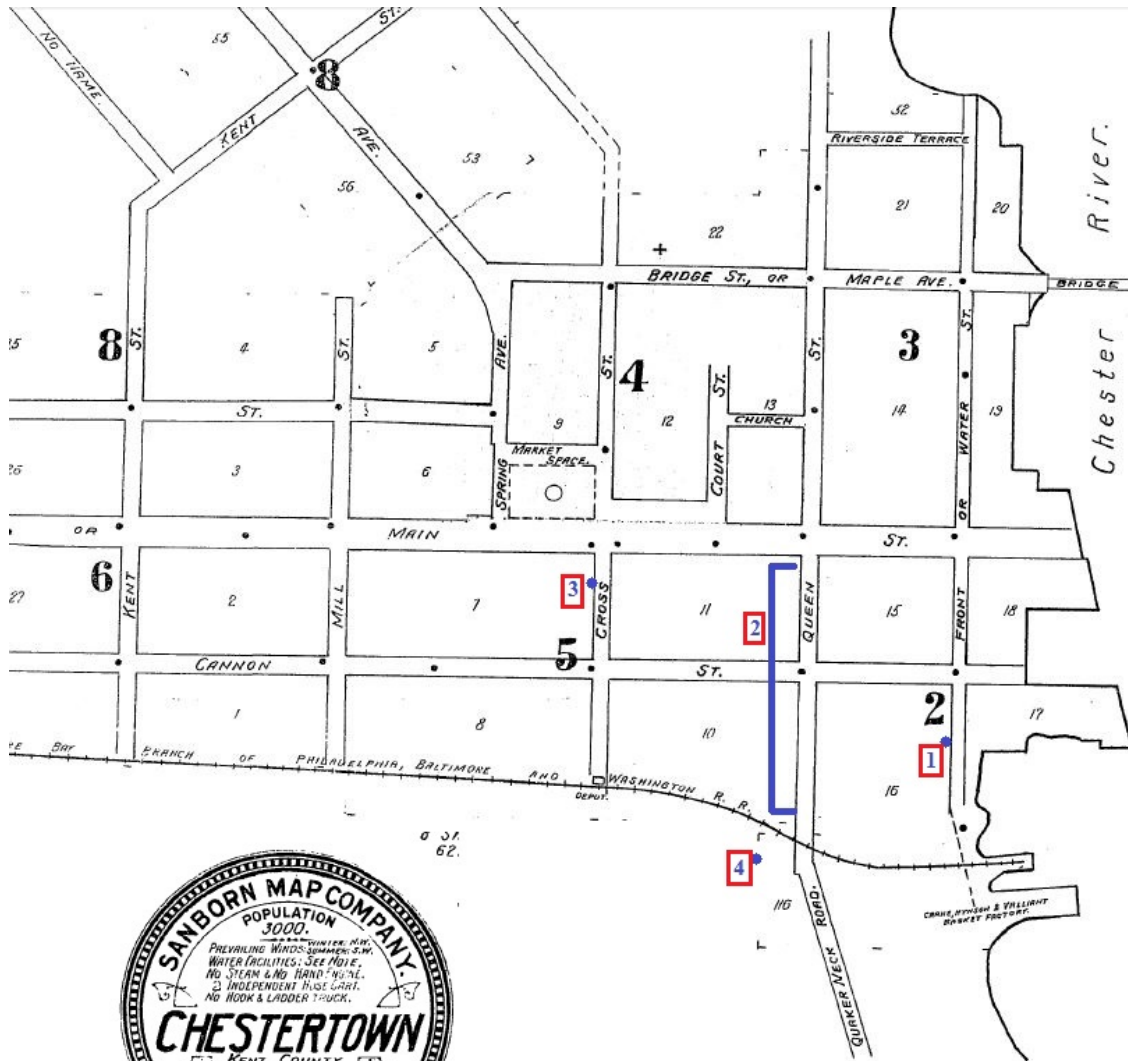
Crozier's House



Based on census information and Mrs. Susan Crozier's own description of where they lived, it's likely the Crozier family's house was on this row.

Hopkins, G. M. *City Atlas of Philadelphia, Vol. 6, Wards 2 through 20, 29 and 31.* 1875. Plate E. Private collection of Matt Ainslie.
Accessed online at philageohistory.org.

Modified by Rachel Brown.

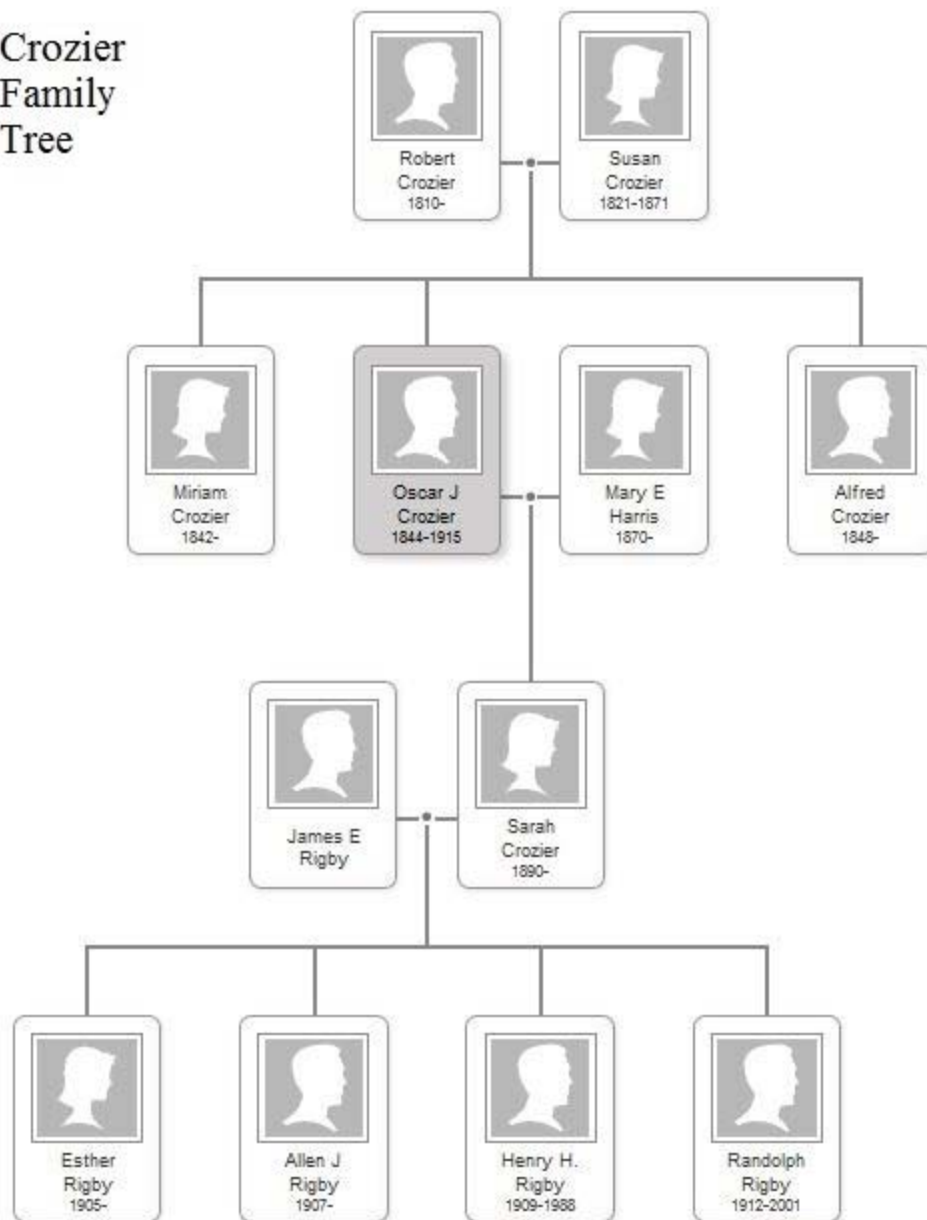


Map Division
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Library of Congress

1. 718 East Front Street: The Croziers lived here in 1900.
2. West Queen Street: Crozier's family moved here at some point after 1900, and were living there in 1910. Crozier died while living in this house.
3. 313 South Cross Street: Crozier's widow, daughter, and grandchildren lived here in 1920.
4. Jane's AME Church: Crozier and his wife were married here; the Reverend of this church was active in GAR Decoration Day celebrations; Crozier is buried in this church's cemetery on Quaker Neck Road.

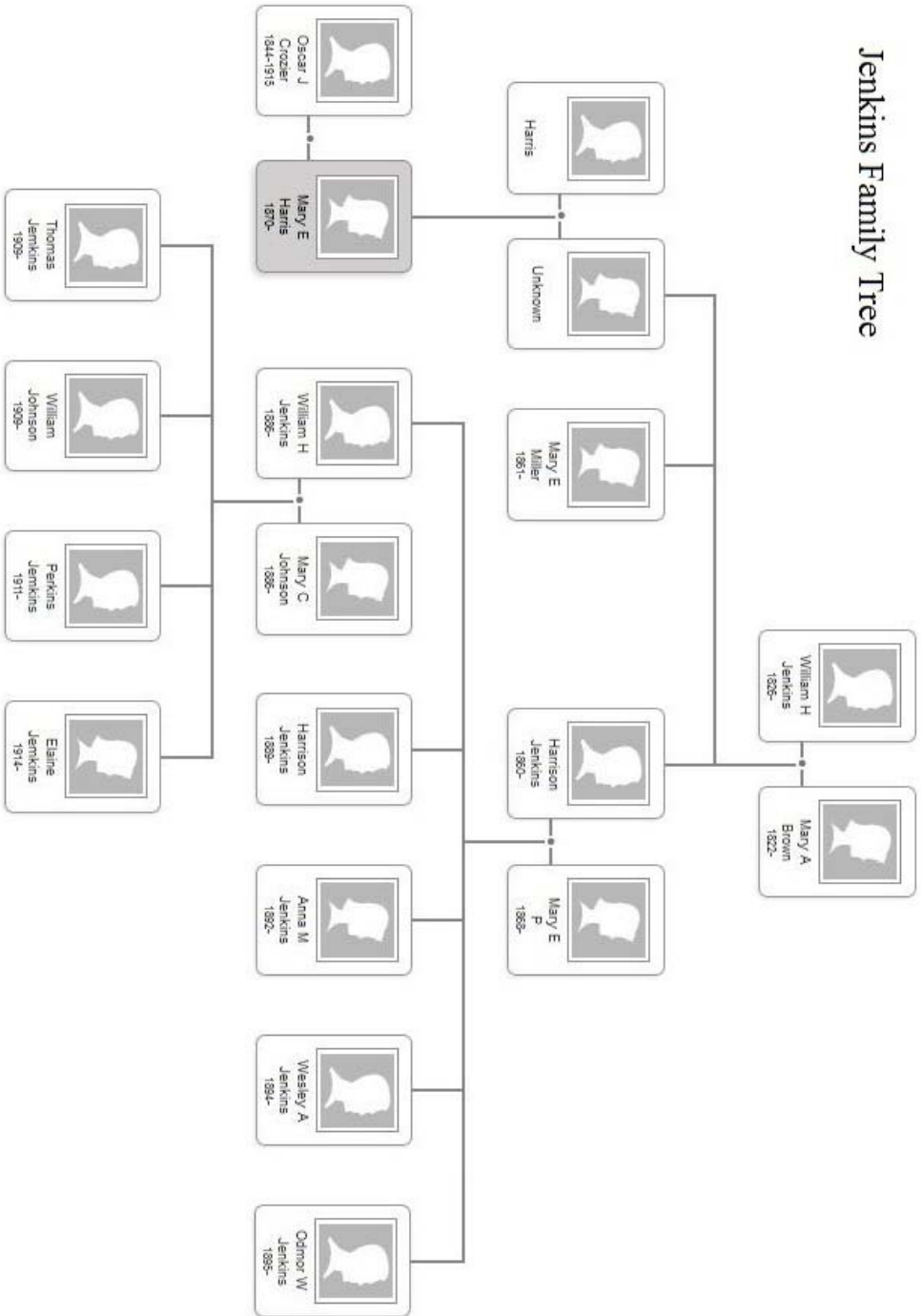
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Modified by Rachel Brown.

Crozier
Family
Tree

This family tree was constructed at Ancestry.com from data (US censuses, military records, etc) provided by Ancestry.com.

Jenkins Family Tree



This family tree was constructed at Ancestry.com from data (US censuses, military records, etc) provided by Ancestry.com.