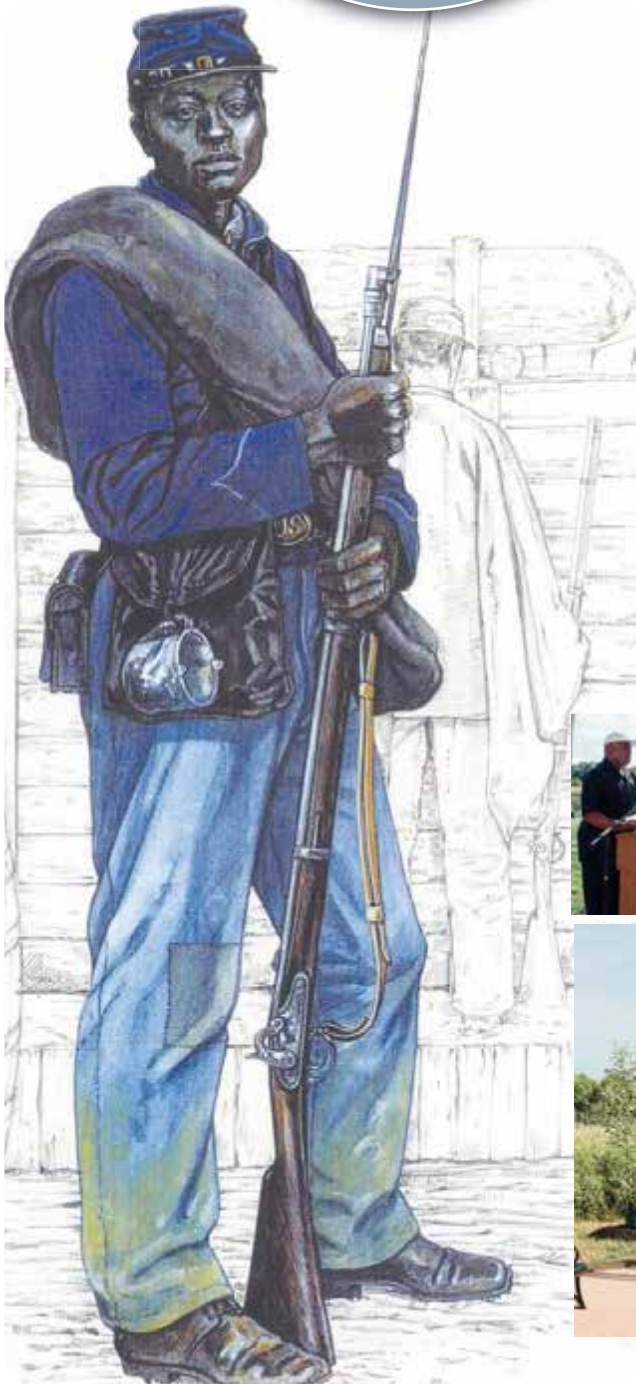


**WELCOME  
TO THE  
FRIENDS OF THE  
AFRICAN UNION  
CHURCH  
CEMETERY**



Dear Friends,

It is with great pleasure that I share the heartfelt thanks of the Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery, its longtime board members and supporters. What we have accomplished this year, with the Grand Opening of the African Union Church Cemetery and Plaza, is truly a testimonial to what can be done when people come together for the good of each and everyone. The discovery, conservation and preservation of the African Union Church Cemetery, owned by the Mount Salem UAME Church, is a testament to love and the human spirit coming together to honor American history. The cemetery restoration has given us a reason to come together. It's been 27 years and here we are going into 2017 with a memory, preserved for future generations, to be observed in a location which can be visited while enjoying the scenic Michael Castle Trail along the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal.

May this coming year be a blessed one for each and everyone.  
Thanks again for your support.

Willis Phelps, Jr.  
President



# Dedication of the African Union Church Cemetery

By: David G. Orr

This was truly a momentous day for many different groups of people. First, for the descendant community and their relations and friends, including the church congregation, the event must have triggered a broad array of emotions. For them these individuals are now resting in a hallowed swath of green, not lost in a forest of marsh grass. They will now be properly revered for their struggle and triumph. For the immediate community it was an event that educated, enlightened and celebrated a too long forgotten chunk of the past. For the State it was partially recognition, partially appreciation, for the culture which created this site. For the nation and beyond, it will become an important witness for the high price freedom can exact. It was also an act of redemption for all of us. For those of us who struggled to see this day through by active participation in two decades, or more, of planning and hard work it was a present given from another time and place. It now is there, properly honored and consecrated, as a wave of powerful memories felt differently by so many of us overflowed. But as Lincoln once remarked after another cemetery dedication in the fall of 1863 it was "consecrated far beyond our poor power to add or detract" by the soldiers and their community. Five of those buried here were members of the United States Colored Troops. What would they say had they voices in our ceremony? What "dreams deferred" would they discuss? What hopes and loves and regrets would they bring forth? We shall never really know for that is the way with those who have died in relative obscurity. But they are obscure no more! Their participation in a violent conflict which tore this republic asunder and still resounds today will not be lost again. We silently give thanks to

this heroic Delaware City Quintet and this gratitude will grow as long as this place endures. The civilians interred in this cemetery are also recognized by us in our commemoration as their lives kept the sense of community which is at issue now.

It is customary for people to speak at the dedication of cemeteries which contained the bodies of soldiers. Unlike the soldiers spoken about by Pericles and Lincoln, these five soldiers survived their war. I hope that they were revered and thanked by their own community, and were not "bewildered before they died". I hope also that the ones who did not survive battle, for example, the bloody repulse at Olustee, Florida, were still fresh in the memory of James Elbert, who was a veteran of that horrible confrontation. For my own part, this cemetery honors those individuals as well. I believe that the recognition of these men indeed honor all who served in the United States Colored Troops. And that memory will never die and we all can study it, learn from it, and most significantly, be the better for it.

"In this great and fearful struggle of the nation with a wicked rebellion, we are anxious to perform the full measure of our duty both as citizens and soldiers to the Union cause. We consecrate ourselves, and our families, with all that we have on earth. Our souls burn with love for the great government of freedom and equal rights....for neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of the Union".

**Reference:** Petition of the Colored Citizens of Nashville to the Union Convention of Tennessee. January 1865.

## ~ Restoration of the African Union Church Cemetery ~



# History of Cranberry

By: Wes Jones

Heading south on Route 9 from Delaware City leads you over the small bridge spanning the Branch Canal; on the right is a turnoff to a road with several houses. This area is known as Polktown, but in the 1830s, and to long-term residents today, this area is known as Cranberry.

Where did this name come from? No-one knows, but it is shown on a map of the original Chesapeake & Delaware Canal (now the Branch Canal) that dates from 1829 or so, about the time the canal was finished. The map shows Cranberry Marsh on the north side of the canal (Figure 1).

Delaware City got its start in 1801 when John Newbold purchased a tract of land that became known as Newbold's Landing. What really put this area on the map was the completion of the Chesapeake & Delaware canal in 1829. This was not the huge canal with big bridges that we see today, but a 60-foot-wide waterway (Figure 2) that split Cranberry Marsh in two.



Figure 1  
Circa 1829 Map of early C & D Canal  
(now the Branch Canal) showing Cranberry Marsh.

moved to Fort DuPont which it occupied from 1876 – 1931. (URS) Funds from the Freedman's Bureau financed a school that opened in 1867, located along the south bank of the canal (Sheppard). A 1919 survey of schools in Delaware mentions this school for African-Americans in Polktown: "The rear of the school building is 30 feet from the edge of the canal along which boats are continually passing. Upon no part of the school ground at the time of the survey was it possible to walk without wading through water or mud. Two new toilet outhouses had recently been struck down in the mud alongside the edge of the marsh." (Strayer). The school was located on Old Dutch Neck Road with the front facing the road and the back facing the canal. Current property records show a lot owned by the "Commissioners Of The Colored Free School Of Delaware City;" this is probably the location of the school. The school is shown in Figure 4. The school was in use until 1922 when it was replaced by the school at Dragon Run.

Today, while older residents remember a thriving community, just a handful of houses remain in this area, and several are unoccupied.



Figure 2  
The C & D Canal in 1907 (Cecil)

People flocked to this new port and the town grew quickly. We know that as early as the 1830s the community of Polktown was established as the home of free black people. Before the eastern end of the canal was moved south to Reedy Point in 1927, Old Dutch Neck Road ran through Polktown, connecting Delaware City to the modern Dutch Neck Road near Icehouse Point. Property records from this time show familiar names such as Boyer, Draper, and Polk.

In 1835 land for the African Union Cemetery was purchased from the Newbolds, across the canal from Polktown proper, in Cranberry Marsh. Old maps (Figure 3) show a church building on the site from 1846 – 1876, until the church



NOTE--Marsh to the left with Canal boat back of it  
Figure 4  
The old school in Polktown. (Strayer)

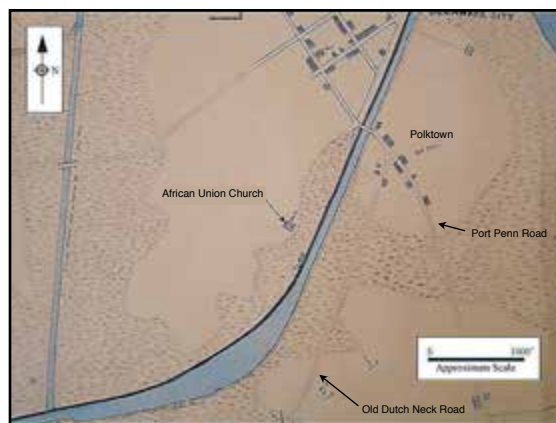


Figure 3  
Polktown in 1868. Port Penn road runs south to Port Penn,  
while Old Dutch Neck Road runs to the southeast. (URS)

## References

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- Strayer, G. D., General Report on School Buildings and Grounds of Delaware, Bulletin of the Service Citizens of Delaware, October 15, 1919 (<https://archive.org/details/generalreportonsostra>, Accessed on 02/13/2017)
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# Voices of the Past ~ a Free Traveling Program

By: Laura Lee

The Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery needs help promoting our wonderful FREE traveling education program to schools, community groups, and churches. Our outreach program shares the history of this forgotten hallowed ground and the United States Colored Troops buried within.

"Voices of the Past" shares the story of the once-forgotten cemetery and the local United States Colored Troops buried there. Living historian and storyteller Willis Phelps brings to life Private James Elbert, who served with the USCT during the Civil War and was nearly executed for desertion only to be found innocent. Accompanied by a facilitator that sets the stage for his presentation, the program is tailored for school children or the general public. The student version includes hands-on experience with

archival documents that help to piece together the story of these men and the cemetery, and teachers are also provided post-visit classroom activities facilitating actual use of the historic documents on a sort of 'history scavenger hunt'.

The program is appropriate for and available to both schools and community groups and is funded courtesy of State of Delaware Grant in Aid. Reviews of the program are outstanding and it is a unique opportunity to see 'where history comes from' by being able to actually handle copies of 19<sup>th</sup> century military records, pension records and the like.

For more information, contact program coordinator Laura Lee at AUCCPrograms@gmail.com or call 302-750-5042. Please share this info with your community group, teachers you know, and local churches. We appreciate the support getting the word out about this super educational resource!



**Become a member or volunteer today** - it's through our partnership with history enthusiasts like you that we're able to continue "Making History Matter". Membership support helps the Friends care for the cemetery, and provides our education programs with the resources to serve more school students and other interested organizations. Volunteers are vital to the Friends group. If you are interested in volunteering your time, please contact us. In the coming year, the Friends will be hosting a membership event - details will be mailed / emailed to you. Thank you for your support - Tracy Beck, Membership Chair.

## Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery Membership Application

Submit this form with your check made payable to: Friends of the AUC Cemetery

Mail to: Friends of the AUC Cemetery, C/O 407 Clinton Street, PO Box 4159, Delaware City, DE 19706

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_ E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_

*E-mail for Friends Group ONLY. We will not share your e-mail address.*

### Membership Categories:

**Memberships are valid for 1 year**

- Individual (one person only) - \$10
  - Supporting - \$30
  - Benefactor - \$500
  - I am interested in volunteering
  - Family (family members at a single address) - \$20
  - Patron - \$50
  - Sponsor - \$100
  - Anchor - \$200
- I would like to make a one-time donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Please contact us at the above address or send us an e-mail: [info@africanunioncemetery.org](mailto:info@africanunioncemetery.org)

The Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery is a 501 (c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax deductible.

