

EPITAPH

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**WELCOME TO THE
FRIENDS OF THE AFRICAN
UNION CHURCH CEMETERY
DELAWARE CITY, DE**



Dear Friends,

January is, of course, the time when people glance backward and peer forward.

The most exciting news during the seemingly endless pandemic years has been planning our documentary film. Sharon Baker at Teleduction produced a fundraising trailer for us in mid-2021 and our baby steps are on [YouTube](#) – search on “African Union Church Cemetery – Rediscovered.”

The trailer hints at our plan. We learned at year’s end we are the happy recipients of a grant of more than \$19,000 to create the story of the cemetery and the U.S. Colored Troops, so in 2022 we will be busy with that.

After many months without in-person events we welcomed visitors to the cemetery and plaza in October for the Jackson Lodge No. 19 Community Day and Trail Walk. The Masons kindly made a generous donation from the proceeds.

There were disappointments. We only had a couple in-person meetings last year. Now we’re back to Zoom. Wes Jones, Executive Director, and I couldn’t repeat our program on Polktown’s Black community for new homeowners at Ft. Dupont, but research continues and we’re always ready to connect with descendants. Our live reenactment for schools and libraries is still on hold.

And 2022 is the year we say goodbye to board member Linda Price, who is retiring. She has been a stalwart supporter since 1996, our longtime vice-president and representative of Mt. Salem U.A.M.E Church. We thank her and we’re grateful to have had the benefit of her time and dedication.

I write the letter but the entire board thanks you for helping through two difficult years. Your dues and donations are important to help support our annual budget: it would be impossible to carry on without your help. Please volunteer or join our advisory committee – email us at info@africanunioncemetery.org.

Stop by our cemetery for some rest and reflection. Check our website at www.africanunioncemetery.org, too.

Regards, Craig O’Donnell, President

**Friends of the African Union Church Cemetery
2022 Meetings**

**Delaware City Community Center
5th & Bayard Streets @ 6:30 p.m.**

March 17 ♦ April 19 ♦ July 21 ♦ September 15 ♦ November 17

**Open to the public
PLEASE JOIN US**

**We may be meeting remotely now due to COVID-19.
Check our website, www.africanunioncemetery.org, to be invited to our
meeting via ZOOM.**

Soldiers Stories

By David G. Orr

"And their deeds shall find a record

In the registry of Fame

For their blood has cleansed completely

Every blot of Slavery's shame"

"The Colored Soldiers" Paul Lawrence Dunbar

The African Union Church Cemetery (AUCC) and the adjacent Polktown community, past and present, exists as a lens in which to examine the unresolved interpretations of the Civil War and the meaning of "free" and "slave" in a slaveholding state. They recall the African diaspora and their associated rich cultures brought here, albeit under often harrowing circumstances. (Orr:2017). But they also powerfully intrude upon our present lives and witness our every-changing democracy. In this sense the cemetery and its resources act as a dynamic learning laboratory for all of us white and black, visitor and resident. They bear us as students into the past, whether the identity of the past is intimate or far removed. Polktown and its cemetery, as "untold stories" are now emerging as familiar and significant chapters in American History and all of us now can recognize a significant chapter in the history of the Delaware City area. The cemetery in particular testifies powerfully to the sacrifices African Americans made in the armed forces during the Civil War.

The study of the Polktown cemetery begins with the grave marker itself and it is this simple object which can be a signpost to so many different ways to interpret its history (Elliot: 2011). Long ago I called this the "community of objects" which is another way of saying holistic. An outline of most of the major subject areas to be consulted using a holistic approach can be seen below.

- Soldier's Name and Unit
- War Record/Muster Rolls/Commendations/Discipline
- Pension Records
- Census Records/Land Records
- Archaeological Data
- Oral History/Ethnography
- Grave Markers Manufacturers and Dates of Shipping
- Primary Historical Records (Letters, Ledgers, Diaries, Etc.)
- Secondary Historical Records (Theses, Books, Conferences, Essays, Etc.)
- Cultural Landscape
- Related African American Cemeteries

The following discussion is heavily indebted to the pension records gathered by the old Bureau of Pensions which preserved a great deal of data concerned with several of the soldiers interred in the African Union Church Cemetery. It also depends on the research conducted in the National Archives by myself with the able assistance of archivist Mike Musick who guided me through the military records housed there. Let's look at some of those USCT soldier's stories.

Lewis Taylor was a member of Company I, Sixth United States Colored Troops. He is listed in the 1860 Census

as born in Maryland and illiterate. His occupation was stated as a "day laborer". He enlisted on August 8, 1863 and was trained at Camp William Penn north of Philadelphia. His war record includes being wounded "near New Market Heights (Chaffin's Farm)" which occurred on September 28-30, 1864. He was sent to the General Hospital on the 29th of September. Before the attack on the 29th Lt. Colonel Shurtleff, the commander of the Sixth's sister regiment, the Fifth USCT, exhorted the men in a stirring speech:

"If you are brave soldiers, the stigma of diminished pay must be removed. And the greater stigma of denying you full and equal rights of citizenship shall also be swept away and your race forever rescued from the cruel prejudice and oppression which have been upon you from the foundation of the government." (Washington: 53).

Major John McMurray recounts the fight that the Sixth Regiment (and Lewis Taylor) were in:

"When we had gathered up all our men, and ascertained in one way or another, who were killed and who were wounded, we found the regimental loss to be three officers and thirty-nine men killed, and eleven officers and one hundred and fifty men wounded, besides seven men missing a total loss of two hundred and ten, out of three hundred and sixty-seven, nearly sixty percent. And all the fighting was done with musketry." (McMurray: 65).

Lewis Taylor obviously was wounded by that "musketry". This was a very heavy casualty report. He was mustered out of the army on September 20, 1865, almost a year after his violent confrontation with the enemy at Chaffin's Farm.

His widow Charlotte in her claim for a pension argued that she "depended on the labor of her own hands" and that she had no other source of income or property. She had three children by Lewis: George, James, and Lotter (sp). (For similar experiences by other African American women in post-Civil War American see Neverdon-Morton cited in the bibliography). According to his headstone file in the National Archives Lewis Taylor died on February 16, 1887. The stone was shipped to Delaware City by the contractor for the government W. H. Gross of Lee, Massachusetts (for an explanation of the Headstone Records and how they can be significant see Prechtel-Klusgens: 22-23). Charlotte herself died on December 11, 1894 (she filed the Pension affidavit on the twentieth of February 1891). Charlotte testified on May 12, 1892, that her wedding certificate was lost during a severe flood in Delaware City which occurred in the fall of 1878. Other dependents came forward to assure the authorities that she was indeed married to Taylor. Taylor's headstone which led to all this information and much more was the last to be discovered. It was buried in the thick organic mud, and its fortuitous recovery may indeed indicate others might still be lost in similar situations.

Like Taylor, Alexander Draper was a member of the Sixth USCT Regiment, Company C, and after enlisting on September 11, 1863, he was trained also at Camp William

Moving Ahead on Documentary Film

Our group takes care of cemetery upkeep as part of its mission. Beyond that, we use educational programming to connect the cemetery itself to historical events (the Civil War) and the cultural history of its neighborhood (Polktown).

The pandemic made it clear that the Friends need another way to reach audiences beyond our in-person programs for schools, libraries, and museums. For several years we have discussed how to move ahead on a documentary film that features the cemetery restoration and the experiences of the U.S. Colored Troops.

This year we met with filmmakers to get a sense of the cost and applied for grant funding. Production will be funded in part by a grant of more than \$19,000 from the National Endowment for the Humanities and Delaware Humanities as part of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act.



NATIONAL
ENDOWMENT
FOR THE
HUMANITIES

deLaware
HumanITIES



FRIENDS OF THE
AFRICAN UNION
CHURCH CEMETERY



David G. Orr interviewed at the Mt. Salem U.A.M.E. Church, Delaware City



Willis Phelps
portraying
Pvt. James H.
Elbert



Drone view of African Union Church Cemetery, along the Mike Castle Trail



Soldiers Stories - continued

Penn (Paradis). In the 1860 Census he is listed as a day laborer with an estate of twenty-five dollars. Also named is his wife Elizabeth and an infant son Lewis (sp). We learn more about Alexander Draper from Pension testimony taken on July 16, 1920, from his second wife Caroline. His pension file is extremely large and complex and begins in the 1870's with a series of annual reports on his wound suffered during the war. Draper was hit by a musket ball during one of the battles in the Petersburg Campaign (June 15, 1864, Battle of Weldon Railroad). The next day he was admitted to the City Point hospital. A detailed series of surgical descriptions of his wound made by different physicians from 1873 until 1886 survive in the Pension files. His wartime injury was described as a "gunshot wound to the left shoulder and right cheek". Its detailed description continued: "The ball passed through the shoulder near the humerus, then continued in front of the chest and upwards through the right side of the neck and came out at the lower maxilla". The patient suffers from pain in the chest and a weakened left arm. The physician then testified that Draper could not lift anything heavy. Probably as a result of this testimony he was granted an Invalid Pension of a full six dollars a month on September 11, 1863.

Caroline Draper testified in 1920 that she is the widow of Alexander Draper whom she married on March 22, 1894. Draper had a house at Fourth and Clinton Streets in Delaware City and lived there with Caroline after their marriage. Just after the war Draper and Joseph Bayard are listed in separate houses in Polktown in the 1868 Beers Atlas. Caroline had earlier been the widow of Joseph Bayard. Her half-sister Frances Young testified to the above facts. Samuel Ambrose (The minister that married Caroline and Alexander Draper) testified that he had performed the wedding

ceremony at the Union American Episcopal Church of Delaware City. Alexander Draper died the next year on April 25, 1895 (Testimony of Mark M. Brown: August 7, 1920). Brown further testified that Draper was buried in the Union American Episcopal Church Cemetery in Delaware City and that Joseph Bayard is also buried there. (This is the cemetery we call the African Union Church Cemetery today.)

All the above information came to light because we had the grave markers of these USCT soldiers. How many more stories can we tell by following the names to the various record offices? Our research is at the beginning of the beginning!

Much of the material for this article comes from an unpublished 2009 manuscript by David G. Orr, Delaware City.

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Become a member or volunteer today It's through our partnership with history enthusiasts like you that we are 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. Thank you for your support. Check out our website at www.africanunioncemetery.org

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, PO Box 4200, 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 ___ Family (family members at a single address) - \$20

___ Supporting - \$30 ___ Patron - \$50 ___ Sponsor - \$100 ___ Anchor - \$200

___ Benefactor - \$500 I would like to make a one-time donation of \$ _____ I am interested in volunteering ___

Please contact us at the above address or send us an e-mail: info@africanunioncemetery.org

