



Jacob Lawrence, *The John Brown series*, 1941.
(Courtesy The Detroit Institute of Arts.)

The Guns of October

by Hannah N. Geffert from *John Brown Mysteries* by Allies for Freedom, 1999

WE WERE FACED with a mystery. Allies for Freedom, a coalition of researchers named for the late Professor Benjamin Quarles' pioneering book *Allies for Freedom; Blacks and John Brown* (1974), became aware of a cache of weapons that had some relationship to Harpers Ferry (Jefferson County, West Virginia).

While renovating the family home, Charles Cephas of Catonsville, Maryland, found five antique guns, two of which were stamped with the words "Harper's Ferry." He spoke with Judith Cephas (no relation) at a community gathering, asking if she knew any John Brown scholars who were interested. Allies for Freedom was born.

When we contacted Mr. Cephas in July, 1998, he and his mother, Mrs. Lucille Woodland Cephas, agreed to talk with us and allow us to photograph the guns. During our initial phone conversation, Mr. Cephas said that he found the weapons in the attic of his maternal great-grandfather's home in the historic Winters Lane community. Although two of the long guns had plates indicating that they were made at the arsenal at Harpers Ferry, the family had no ties to the Jefferson County area. Mr. Cephas then shared a very interesting piece of information: his ancestor, Philip Woodland, was among the founders of the Grace African Methodist Episcopal Church of Catonsville, just a few doors away from the family home.

A tie to the Grace A.M.E. Church had enormous significance. When John Brown was arrested, in his captured trunk was his July, 1859, handwritten letter to John Kagi stating "Mr. Thomas Henrie had gone from Hagerstown" and a "trusty man" was needed. Thomas W. Henry was an itinerant minister — twice pastor of the St. James A.M.E. Church in Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, and recent pastor of the antecedent congregation of Grace, the Mt. Gilboa A.M.E. Church, which is located on the historic

property of Benjamin Banneker, called "Africa." The Reverend John R. Henry (Thomas Henry's son) served as the first minister of the A.M.E. congregation founded in 1868 in Catonsville, then called St. Johns. Like his father, John R. Henry was suspected of conspiring with John Brown.¹

Although John was not forced to flee Maryland as his father had been, the younger minister was likely to have a more direct connection of support for John Brown. He was stationed at St. James A.M.E. in Havre de Grace (well-known for Underground Railroad activity) at the time of the raid, and was seen in Harrisburg, where Brown's friends were attempting to stage a rescue, in the following weeks.

The house on Winters Lane was built in 1874. It has been continuously in the family's possession since Philip Woodland lived there as early as 1880. What was also interesting was that the house had been the place where traveling ministers stayed when in the area, naturally including the first minister of the congregation, Reverend John R. Henry, who was still an active minister well into the 1900s. Deed records show this house and others nearby changing among family members in cooperative venture.

Another connection between the Woodlands and the Henrys was their tie to St. Mary's County, Maryland. The censuses of 1840 through 1860 reveal Woodland households near that of Thomas Henry's brother, Robert Barnes. Many Woodlands were veterans of U.S.C.T. units that formed in Maryland, as well as members of the A.M.E. Church. We now had a base from which to examine crosscurrents of migration before and after the Civil War.

There were other things about the Woodland family and the guns that fit with a pattern of African-American support of the raid. During the interview we learned that Sarah Woodland started a library for Catonsville blacks in the same schoolhouse and church that was deeded in perpetuity to the community by the Freedmen's Bureau, the original St. Johns A.M.E. location at Winters Lane and Edmondson Avenue.

Additionally, the Woodland men were Prince Hall Masons. Our group research signifies that John Brown was building alliances with free blacks who were willing to fight for freedom and were connected with the abolition and emigrationist movements. These free Africans were members of the independent black congregations, were part of the Underground Railroad, and were Prince Hall Masons. They were consistent delegates to Black Conventions which met throughout the free states to petition on behalf of the enslaved, and to declare independence when the Dred Scott decision removed their tenuous citizenship. John Brown knew that this black infra-structure existed because of his own organizational activities for self-defense among fugitives, and recruited support among its most militant members.

We knew there was a relationship between John Brown and Baltimore residents in 1859 — the largest free black community in the country. There were also many people with Baltimore connections who had contact with Brown, including Frederick Douglass, the Reverend Hiram Revels, the Reverend William J. Watkins, and his niece, the novelist and poet Frances Watkins. William Watkins and Frances Watkins were heavily implicated with Brown; so much so that William Watkins was suspected of conspiracy and subject to arrest by Virginia immediately after the raid on Harpers Ferry.²

Could the guns found in the Woodland home in some way be connected to the raid? There are five guns — four long guns and a pistol. Could the rifles have been taken from Harpers Ferry arsenal on October 17, 1859? Could the shotgun and pistol be those which the captured raider John Cook who testified had been left in the hands of slaves on the Maryland side of the Potomac River? If any of these possibilities proved true, we would have artifacts which tied the Woodlands directly to the raid and to Harpers Ferry. The other two long guns were also of interest. One was an ante-bellum era double-barreled shotgun of foreign make and average quality. The other was quite unusual. It was a fowling piece (bird gun) of pre-war vintage and of foreign make. It was a very expensive, top-of-the-line weapon. On the stock of the gun were the carved initials "G.W." or "J.W.", followed by an "O" which

may be an initial too. And there was one more interesting marking on the fowling piece. The gun had a small brass or gold plate with an elegantly engraved initial — “W” — indicating the original owner.

To authenticate the weapons, we went in January 1999 to the National Rifle Association’s firearms museum in Fairfax, Virginia. We learned from the curator, Doug Wicklund, that the 1855 model Harpers Ferry rifles were stamped 1860. They were assembled just months too late to be taken from the arsenal at the time of the raid. But each had a rack number in close sequence, indicating they had been stored closely together and therefore were possibly issued to members of the same military unit in the Civil War. The Remington pistol was a 44 caliber, percussion-cap, standard 1863 army issue. Our speculations about a direct relationship to armed slaves in the John Brown raid were wrong. The curator at the National Firearms Museum, Doug Wicklund, was impressed by the pieces as a *collection*, but did not speculate on that meaning.

It was up to Allies for Freedom to develop the paths of the mystery. Why were there two Harpers Ferry rifles with rack numbers (indicating armory storage) in close sequence.

Why was there an expensive fowling piece among the collection of a family of modest means? What was the brass plate with a “W” on the edge of the stock?



photo by Jimica Akinloye Kenyatta

What did the presence of the pre Civil War shotgun and a standard-issue 1863 Remington army pistol tell us about Philip Woodland, who was a coachman for wealthy whites in Baltimore and Catonsville? Could we tie these weapons and the Woodland family to Harpers Ferry? Was there a relationship between the Woodland family and known allies of John Brown? We would have to intensify our research.

We began our with the online Soldiers and Sailors database of the National Archives to see if we could locate Woodlands who had connections to the Catonsville house, and who might shed some light on the two Harpers Ferry rifles. We hoped that we had found an explanation for the presence of at least one of the 1860 rifles. There was a Philip Woodland who had served in the 38th United States Colored Troops, who were recruited in St. Mary’s County. Could this be our Philip Woodland, settled with his family in Catonsville at the end of the 19th century?

Volunteer research among the military records at the National Archives by Catonsville librarian Julie DeMatteis revealed that the soldier Philip Woodland died in the Civil War. So he could not be the great-grandfather of Charles Cephas, whose grandfather Charles C. Woodland was born in 1883. Closer now, we looked again in the Soldiers and Sailors database and found twenty-three named “Woodland” who served with the Union Army. Six of the Woodlands were in the 19th U.S.C.T., a regiment composed of Africans from Maryland’s tidewater and eastern shore regions, and were garrisoned in

Harpers Ferry to recruit slaves in the area into the Union army. Among the Woodlands who served in the 19th was William H. Woodland, found to be the brother of Philip Woodland of Catonsville. While the Woodlands who served in the 19th were not all direct line relatives, there is every reason to believe that they knew each other, and were “kin.” Three of these Woodlands, including William, transferred to the Navy on the same day, April 17, 1864.³ After his service at Harpers Ferry and the Shenandoah Valley, William H. Woodland served on four ships of the United States Navy., which did not have segregated units.

Which leads us to a possible origin of the fowling piece — a possible connection with John Brown’s raid. During the raid, on the night of October 17, 1859, Osborne Anderson and Charles Tidd were in the party assigned to capture the slave holder Lewis Washington, the great-grand nephew of George Washington, and take him as a hostage. By the order of John Brown, Anderson (representing the African race) received the sword. The group also confiscated a pair of pistols presented to George Washington by Lafayette, a wagon, a carriage (whose enslaved coachman Jim would die in the Shenandoah River), and two guns — a double-barreled shotgun and a foreign-made fowling piece. The fowling piece was never found. The wagon which was taken from the Washington plantation to Maryland was pointed out by returning slaves who made the choice to remain in Virginia rather than chance being hunted with the fleeing survivors.

The first Lafayette pistol was captured with John Brown. On the first anniversary of John Brown’s raid, October 16, 1860, the second Lafayette pistol was returned by mail to Lewis Washington by the head of the Kansas Emigration Committee, Thaddeus Hyatt of Boston, who had been jailed in Washington, D.C., for refusing to testify before the Senate Committee investigating the Harpers Ferry raid. He acquired it from the escaping raiders in Maryland who successfully eluded pursuit and traveled several weeks to western Pennsylvania and Ohio, where they found friends. One of them was John Brown’s son Owen.

If the Harpers Ferry rifles belonged to members of the 19th, there are two theories as to how these weapons came into their hands, according to interviews in July, 1999 with Mark Snell, Director of the George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War at Shepherd College, and Eric Johnson, an interpretive ranger and weapons expert with the Harpers Ferry National Historical Park. One theory, according to Wicklund and Snell, is that while the 19th was in Harpers Ferry recruiting slaves, they confiscated the weapons from townspeople who had taken and distributed guns for protection and concealment in 1860, soon after John Brown’s raid. Another theory, Johnson’s, is that the guns were issued to them while members of the Union Army. Black troops were routinely issued guns thought to be inferior. Model 1855s had “Maynard Tape Systems” as part of their firing device. This system proved to be unreliable and was replaced in subsequent models.

It is possible that the two Harpers Ferry rifles and the Remington pistol belonged to one of the Woodland veterans of the 19th or other Colored units, such as John C. Woodland in the 7th Infantry. We will never know for sure, as the records of the Harpers Ferry armory were burned at the beginning of the Civil War. However, it is most likely that these guns had been in the possession of members of the United States Colored Infantry before being placed in the care of Philip Woodland.⁴

Could the fowling gun found in Catonsville be that belonging to Lewis Washington? The double-barreled shotgun from the Washington plantation had been buried by a slave and then recovered, Lewis Washington told a Senate investigating committee six months after the raid. Osborne Anderson and Charles Tidd escaped, separately, meeting with great surprise in Cleveland in November. Might one of them still be holding the Washington gun? It was Charles Tidd who armed the enslaved and free Africans in Maryland. He had discarded two Sharps’rifles and a drill manual for a guerilla army given him by John Brown outside Chambersburg while escaping, probably to avoid discovery after John Cook (a leader of the hostage raiding party) was captured at Mont Alto.⁵

Could this be the missing fowling piece, last seen “in the hands of a Negro” on the Maryland side of the river? What we do know is that the fowling piece is similar to the description of the missing Washington gun, that a “W” on a brass plate to indicate ownership is consistent with the practice of some of the Washingtons in Jefferson County. It is highly unlikely that the Woodlands would have spent such a sum on a personal weapon, although it could have been a gift from a wealthy German merchant in Maryland, Gustav Lurman, Sr., for whom Philip Woodland worked as a coachman.

More likely is the story told by a relative of Lewis Washington who lived in Beallair, Jefferson County, West Virginia, part of the new state created from secessionist Virginia in the Civil War. When the 19th U.S.C.T. came through the same areas that John Brown took hostages, the famous fowling piece was taken.

The Woodland family has a history of civic activism. Just after the Civil War, the Woodland home in Baltimore was located at 38 Orchard . John C. Woodland, likely cousin of Philip and Williams Woodland and a leader of a Baltimore veteran’s group of the GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), was also associated with an entrepreneurial Christian (mainly Baptist) lodge-based organization, the United Galilean League of Fishermen. The African American Community Association of Jefferson County, West Virginia, is restoring a building in Charles Town that dates from 1890 ownership by the United Galilean League of Fishermen. Completion is anticipated early in the 21st century.

In the 1890s, Mrs. Sarah Lee Woodland founded one of the first libraries open to blacks in Baltimore in the schoolhouse and church on Winters Lane, where their daughter, Mary, was now a teacher. Two other Woodland children, Colvert and Charles, also became school teachers. Catonsville Woodlands were among the early members of the rapidly-growing NAACP, with its strong community base.

Leroy Graham, author of *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital*, believes that armed self-defense organizations were returning at the turn of the century because of the rise of lynchings and state sanctioned segregation. Charles Cephas, Jr. remembers his grandfather, Charles Woodland having the Remington pistol in his desk. It is not a stretch of imagination to believe the patriarch of this family would gather such a collection for the purpose of protecting his family and community, as well as preserving history. Philip may have owned the shotgun even before the Civil War, when it was illegal for him to do so, for such protection.

Allies for Freedom believes that the weapons, taken collectively and placed in the context of 19th century Baltimore, can be assessed. The guns were left for another generation to find and to tell a story of those brave African Americans who were willing to fight for freedom. They were left to honor John Brown, as a reminder of his sacrifice. The collection in its setting reveals that here was a family who were actively engaged in the Civil Rights movement of the 19th and early 20th centuries.

There is one more intriguing piece of information which bolsters our conclusions. Lucille Woodland Cephas was apologetic that she could not remember more. The old folks did not talk too much about the old days and she had been the youngest. She wished that her older brother were still alive because he knew more. But she did remember some of the stories that had been handed down in this proud family. And she remembered something else. Even though travel was expensive and very difficult for African Americans when she was a child, there was one place that her parents nevertheless felt was important for the family to visit: Harpers Ferry.

The Woodlands of Maryland

by Jean Libby and Hannah N. Geffert, based on research by Julie DeMatteis

The issues surrounding African American support for John Brown in 1859 brought a single family into focus because it was in their family home where potential artifacts of the John Brown raid were discovered. The Harpers Ferry rifles relate to family members in the Civil War, and were probably retained because of John Brown's association with the town. The older civilian weapons are still under study. Examining the puzzles of genealogical relationship are larger than a single family because of the nature of slavery in Maryland, bounty payments to slaveholders and slaves during the Civil War (but not for free enlistees and draftees), and the emancipation of all those legally enslaved in the state on November 1, 1864.

The Woodland family in America were centered in St. Mary's County, Maryland, but were also found in Charles, Prince George's and Calvert counties. Our research focuses on the generation which was born in the 1830s to 1840s, and moved to Baltimore during the 1850s and 1860s. Their marriages in the next generation mingled other notable free African Maryland families, specifically the Butlers, a black family that extended into many Maryland counties in considerable numbers on the censuses. The name Woodland as a surname appears in slave records, an event that signifies that there were often manumission conditions, in previous agreement with the slaveholders, which was common in Maryland.

The Woodlands of Maryland were bound to a closely related group of St. Mary's County and Charles County farmers and physicians. Those family names were Barber, Yates, Harris, Reeder, and Gardiner. As there was only one instance of a white Woodland who married into their group, it does not seem likely that the name generated from a white plantation unless it was during the Colonial period. It is more likely that the name "Woodland" was chosen by the family to recognize each other, and that it refers to a location, an actual woodland, in their occupations of the early 1800s. The occupation of two generations of the specific Woodlands of our study in Baltimore soon after the Civil War was as wood sawyers. This type of clan identification, based also upon occupation, is culturally West African.

As persons with the name Woodland gradually became free, the family identity grew. It may be seen by the following fugitive advertisement for Lewis Woodland of Charles County on December 2, 1859, that such family identification was a survival technique. The group of slaveholding families were trading the Woodlands among each other without regard to families remaining together. Records of Lewis Woodland's parentage were kept so that he could be quickly searched for:

\$150 REWARD. Ran away from the subscriber, living in Piccawaxen, Charles County, Md., on the night of the 1st instant, a NEGRO MAN, who calls himself Lewis Woodland. He is the property of V. Barber, under 22 years of age, of medium height say about 5 ft. 8 to 9 inches, and of a light black or chestnut color. He has relations in St. Mary's County, a father at Colonel Forbes, in Prince George's, a mother at Mr. Jonathan Y. Barber's in Calvert, and he may endeavor to pass in either direction.

I

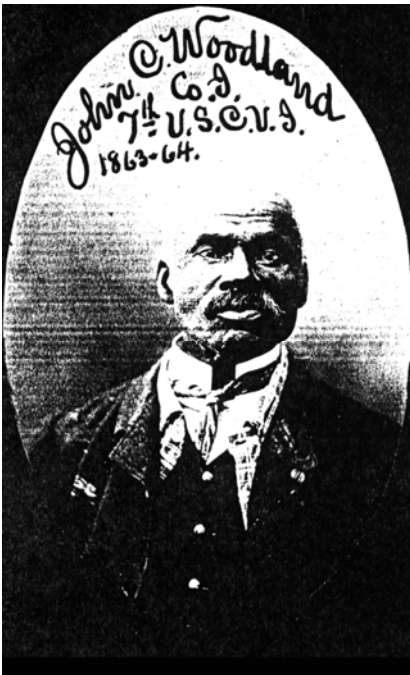
I will give fifty dollars for his apprehension in either Charles or St. Mary's county, one hundred dollars if taken in Prince George's or Calvert county, or one hundred fifty dollars if taken elsewhere. In either case to be secured so that I can get him again. H. R. Harris, Allens Fresh Post Office, December 2, 1859.

The related male Woodlands of our study were among the "relations in St. Mary's County" that Lewis was expected to seek. One, John C. Woodland, was enslaved to "V. Barber", Violetta Harris Barber, the widow of Dr. Luke Philip Barber. According to his pension file statement, made in 1899, he was "born in Charles County, near Allens Fresh P.O. on Jan'y 8, 1839, and was a slave under Dr. Philip Barber. At the age of 13 years I was taken to St. Mary's Co Md., and lived near Oakville P.O. as a slave under

Elizabeth Reader (daughter of Dr. Philip Barber). I enlisted in the army in Sept. 1863 When I returned from the army in Nov 1866, I went to St. Mary's Co Md and located near Chaptico P.O. remained there about three years & came to Balto Md in 1869."

The census of 1870 in Baltimore shows Philip Woodland, age 30, his wife Sarah, 25 (who was the daughter of Charles C. Lee of St. Mary's County), their three children ages 7, 4, and 2. Three adult males named Woodland were in the household: Cornelius, 65 (the father of Philip), Washington, laborer, 41, and John, a hod carrier, 25. Philip was a coachman (his lifelong occupation), and Cornelius a sawyer.

John Woodland in the census was six years younger than the date which John C. Woodland named as his birth, but there is a connection of occupation: a young man named Cooper Hawkins lived in the house, and his business was driving a cart, which is the occupation that John C. Woodland and others cite in his pension file, operating a delivery business and laying carpets.



John C. Woodland was the head of a USCT veterans group, and active in the United Galilean League of Fisherman, who assisted his widow, Susan Hawkins Woodland, when he died at Riggs Avenue in Baltimore (a Catonsville Woodland family property) in 1917.

In 1880, Cornelius Woodland was living at 35 Greenwillow Street, with another son, William H. Woodland, his wife Mary E., and six children. Both were woodsawyers. In the most remarkable document of our research, Philip Woodland testified to the Pensions Board in 1891 that "William H. Woodland who was my brother, and this claimant Mary Edwards _____ were married by Rev. Mr. Wylie In St. Mary's Co Md in 1854. I remember the exact date as it just one year after I came to Balto and that was in 1853." Therefore the Woodland brothers had freed themselves long before the bounty application by the slaveholder.

William H. Woodland was a veteran of the 19th Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, organized at Camp Stanton in Benedict, Maryland. According to his military records, he was thirty-three when he enlisted, a free man and a farmer. Five other men named Woodland were in the 19th Infantry, which recruited for slaves in Charles Town, and Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in late March, 1864.

It is evident from this document that his move to Baltimore in 1853, when he was thirteen years old, was a key event in Philip Woodland's life. Philip was not in the military in the Civil War; his marriage to Sarah Lee took place about 1863. Who his employer was as a coachman in Baltimore until after 1870 is not yet known, but in the 1870s he moved to Catonsville and was listed in the census of 1880 at the estate of the widow of Gustav Lurman, Sr., a wealthy antislavery German immigrant merchant who had a business on Franklin Street in Baltimore with Henry Oelrichs in 1860.

The census data are combined with military records, wills, death certificates, and other sources researched by Julie DeMatteis of the Baltimore County Public Library in Catonsville. Interpretation of these data with the interview of Charles Cephas and Lucille Woodland Cephas as consistent with manumission for brothers William and Philip Woodland before general emancipation in Maryland in November, 1964, is by the editor, Jean Libby, the author of "The Guns of October" Hannah N. Geffert, and researcher, Julie DeMatteis. John C. Woodland was manumitted by presidential order upon enlistment in the 7th Colored Infantry in an area where great physical resistance was made by the slaveholders, including the murder of a white recruiting officer.

References

¹ Jean Libby, editor, *From Slavery to Salvation: The Autobiography of Rev. Thomas W. Henry of the A.M.E. Church* (1994); "Reverend Thomas W. Henry of Hagerstown" *Negro History Bulletin* 41:4, 1978.

² Frances Watkins wrote to Brown while he was in jail and collected funds from women's groups for the aid of Brown's family, which she personally presented to Mrs. Brown in Philadelphia in November, 1859. Through a Baltimore cousin, Rev. George T. Watkins, the family also directly tied to Rev. Thomas W. Henry, a widower whose youngest son was boarding at the Watkins Academy at the time of the John Brown raid.. The Convention of Colored Men of Ohio, in November, 1858, which John Brown attended seeking recruits included William Watkins and Frances Watkins. Leroy Graham, *Baltimore: The Nineteenth Century Black Capital* (1988) is most detailed on the Watkins family and on the ties of Masonry and other fraternal organizations with African American leadership.

³ The slaveholder Dr. Thomas Barber, in St. Mary's County, listed William, Philip, and Washington on the Maryland Slave Statistics prepared in 1867. Barber received a \$100 "compensation" for the loss of William, although none for Philip (who "left" on the same day William enlisted in the 19th Infantry, January 5, 1864), or Washington, who "left" in May. According to his widow's pension application, the soldier lived near Charlotte Hall Post Office when he enlisted in January, 1864.

The bounty to slave recruits, and compensation for slaveholders in Maryland for their manumission is described in John C. Blassingame, "The Recruitment of Negro Troops in Maryland" (*Maryland Historical Magazine*, v. 58, no. 1, March, 1963). Free persons who enlisted or were drafted were not given this bounty.

Charlotte Hall, Allens Fresh, and Chaptico are located in Charles and St Mary's counties. The 1st, 7th and 19th Colored Infantries formed in Benedict (Camp Stanton). (*Johnson's New Illustrated Family Atlas of the World*, 1865.)

4. James H. Rickard [Late Captain 19th U.S. Colored Troops] *Services With Colored Troops in Burnside's Corps* Providence: 1894.

⁵ [Chambersburg] *Valley Spirit*, November 2, 1859.

In Towson, Maryland, at the book launch of *John Brown Mysteries*, September 1999



Jimica (Allies for Freedom) Cephass family Charles Cephass, wife & son Louis Diggs
Mrs. Lucille Woodland Cephass (Allies for Freedom)