



Stingray Point Contraband Historical Highway Marker Dedication



Detail of a Civil War sailor in "The Spirit of Freedom," a sculpture at the African American Civil War Memorial, Washington, D.C.

July 17, 2021 | 11:00 A.M.

17147 General Puller Highway
Deltaville, Virginia

Sponsored by
Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society

The Stingray Point Contraband Story

In July of 1861, the USS *Mt. Vernon* was on blockade duty in the Chesapeake Bay as a part of the Union Navy's Atlantic Blockading Squadron. On July 15, a *Mt. Vernon* lookout observed an unoccupied boat adrift near the Stingray Point Lighthouse in the Chesapeake Bay east of the mouth of the Rappahannock River off the coast of southeastern Middlesex County, Virginia. Oliver S. Glisson, the captain of the *Mt. Vernon*, sent an armed boat out to investigate. Six Black men were found to be occupying the lighthouse. Glisson reported that the men "appear to be very much frightened and state that the people on shore are about arming the negroes, with the intention of placing them in the front of the battle."

Commander Glisson informed Flag-Officer Silas H. Stringham, the commander of the Atlantic Blockading Squadron, that he had taken the men on board and inquired as to what should be done with them. The six men, all enslaved in Middlesex County, were John Hunter, Samuel Hunter, and Miles Hunter who were enslaved by Joseph Moore; Peter Hunter, who was enslaved by S. Crittenden; Alexander Franklin, who was enslaved by Robert R. Carter; and David Harris, who was enslaved by Jeremiah Harron (an apparent misspelling of Harrow). Earlier, in May of 1861, General Benjamin Butler, the commanding officer at Fort Monroe in Hampton, Virginia, in order to circumvent the requirement of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 that runaways were to be returned to their enslavers, used international law to declare that enslaved persons as the property of the enemy were subject to confiscation as contraband of war.

Flag-Officer Stringham forwarded Commander Glisson's query to Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy. Welles responded that although it was "not the policy of the government to invite or encourage this class of desertions ... To return them would be impolitic as well as cruel, and as you remark, 'they may be made serviceable on board our storeships,' you will do well to employ them." It is this contraband of war theory together with the passage of the First Confiscation Act in August of 1861 that paved the way for the enlistment of Black men in the Navy.

The six men, who came to be known as the Stingray Point Contraband, enlisted in the Navy on September 16, 1861. Alexander Franklin, David Harris, John Hunter, Miles Hunter, Peter Hunter, and Samuel Hunter were among the first group of formerly enslaved men to enlist in the US Navy at Hampton Roads. Their enlistment took place nearly a year before black men could enlist in the U.S. Army and almost two years before the formation of the Army's United States Colored Troops.

The Stingray Point contraband event attracted national attention. A full report of the incident appeared in the July 20, 1861, issue of the *New York Herald*. The extensive narrative fully describes what happened at Stingray Point, naming the men and their enslavers, and even reporting that the Hunters were brothers.

Contemporary Civil War scholars have recognized the importance of the Stingray Point Contraband to the national narrative. Barbara Brooks Tomblin begins her 2009 book, *Bluejackets & Contrabands: African Americans and the Union Navy*, with a two-page description of the Stingray Point Contraband incident.

David Harris is the only one of the Stingray Point sailors whose post-Civil War story is known. Harris returned to Middlesex County, became a landowner and business man, raised a family, and made significant contributions to his church and community. Researchers have not been able to determine the post-Civil War fate of the other five men.

Program

Invocation

The Reverend Keith L. Parham

Statement of Occasion and Libation

Bessida Cauthorne White, President

Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society

Greetings

Wayne Jessie, Chair

Middlesex County Board of Supervisors

Joseph S. H. Rogers, Education Programs Manager

American Civil War Museum

Historical Overview of Blacks in the Union Navy

John V. Quarstein, Curator Emeritus

The USS Monitor Center at The Mariners' Museum

Musical Selection

"Oh, Freedom"

George Robinson

The African-American History Context

Sylvia Cyrus, Executive Director

Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)

The Historical Marker Program

Karice Luck-Brimmer, Board Member

Virginia Department of Historic Resources

Introduction of Stingray Point Descendants

Unveiling of the Marker

Descendants of Contraband Sailor David Harris

Closing Remarks

Benediction

The Reverend Samuel Williams, Jr.

Official Navy Record

U. S. S. MOUNT VERNON,
Rappahannock [River], July 15, 1861.

SIR. I have to report that this morning at daylight we observed a boat adrift near Stingray light-house, and soon after discovered a man in the light-house. We manned a boat, armed her, and sent her with an officer to pick up the boat and to ascertain who was in the light-house.

At 8:30 the boat returned, bringing with her six negroes who had deserted from the shore during the night and taken shelter in the light-house, casting their boat adrift to avoid detection.

They appear to be very much frightened and state that the people on shore are about arming the negroes, with the intention of placing them in the front of the battle. Their taking this course has caused much excitement amongst the negro population, who are deserting in every direction. Two other boats made their escape last night, in the hope of being picked up by some vessel passing in the bay.

I have rationed these negroes on board of this vessel, until I receive orders from you as to their disposal. They inform me that there is not a Union man near the entrance of the river. A few weeks since they murdered the only Union man near Stingray Point. His widow, Mrs. George Wilson, with three little children, are yet on the farm near the point; they are apparently unmolested.

These negroes further inform me that ammunition is very scarce and that the 500 men in Mathews County have not two rounds of cartridges with them. These men are about 10 miles from Stingray Point, and are the nearest armed force in this vicinity.

Enclosed I forward you a list of these slaves, together with a list of the names of their owners.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

O. S. GLISSON,
Commander, U. S. Navy.

Flag-Officer SILAS H. STRINGHAM,
Commanding the Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

[Subenclosure.]

List of slaves.	Owners.
John Hunter ..	Joseph Moore
Samuel Hunter }	
Miles Hunter }	
Peter Hunter ..	S. Crittenden
Alexander Franklin ..	Robert R. Carter
David Harris ..	Jeremiah Harron

Official Navy Record

U. S. S. MOUNT VERNON,
Rappahannock [River], July 17, 1861.

SIR: I have to report that three more slaves, named, respectively, Lewis Ransom, Robert Brookes, and Albert Hutchings, belonging to John H. Dunlavey, of Mathews County, Va., gave themselves up this morning.

Will you please inform me how I shall dispose of these men and how I shall act in future when they come on board? They say that if they should be returned they would be murdered.

We are all well on board and everything is quiet off the Rappahannock.

I am, sir, very respectfully, your obedient servant,

O. S. GLISSON,
Commander, U. S. Navy.

Flag-Officer SILAS H. STRINGHAM,
Commanding the Atlantic Blockading Squadron.

Instructions of the Secretary of the Navy to Flag-Officer Stringham, U. S. Navy, commanding Atlantic Blockading Squadron, regarding fugitive slaves.

NAVY DEPARTMENT, July 22, 1861.

SIR: Your dispatch No. 70, in relation to certain negroes who have fled from Virginia and are on board the *Mount Vernon*, asking what disposition shall be made of them, is received.

It is not the policy of the Government to invite or encourage this class of desertions, and yet, under the circumstances, no other course than that pursued by Commander Glisson could be adopted without violating every principle of humanity.

To return them would be impolitic as well as cruel, and, as you remark, "they may be made serviceable on board our storeships," you will do well to employ them.

I am, respectfully, your obedient servant,

GIDEON WELLES.

Flag-Officer S. H. STRINGHAM,
Comdg. Atlantic Blockading Squadron, Hampton Roads, Virginia.

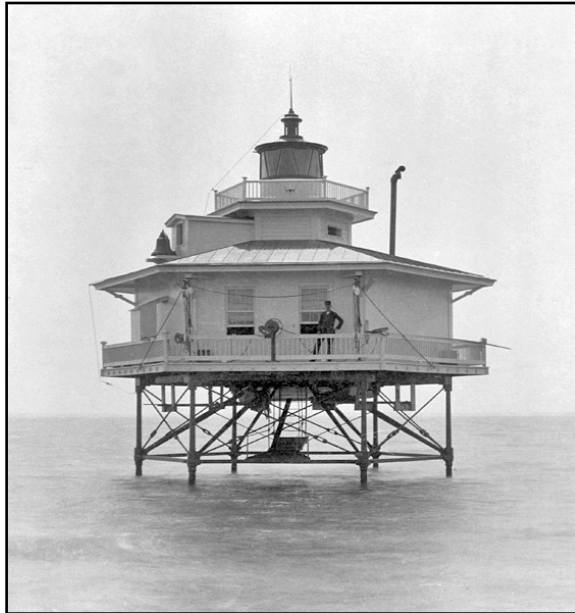
Navy Payroll Record

GENERAL PAY AND RECEIPT ROLL of

Contrabands, in the custody of the

NO.	NAMES	RANK	COMMENCEMENT OF THIS SERVICE	EXPIRATION OF PAY IN THIS SETTLEMENT	TEEN FOR WHICH PAID		PAY PER ANNUM IN MONTHS	AMOUNT OF PAY IN THIS SETTLEMENT		AMOUNT ALLOWED FOR EXTRA ALLOWANCES		CREDIT FOR TEEN MEN'S AND BOYS' CLOTHES		AMOUNT DEDUCTED FOR OTHER DEBTS		TOTAL CREDIT FOR PAY, BATTLES, ETC.		AMOUNT ADVANCED BY SUBSTITUTION OFFICERS		AMOUNT CREDITED		AMOUNT PAID		REMARKS
					Days	Months		Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	Dolls.	Cts.	
Fleet																								
1000	Anderson, Charles	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1001	Charles Latta	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 3 10	131	00	3 15										206 15							
1002	Center, Braxton	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1003	Nap ^r Hudlin	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1004	Bear, Robinson	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 1 3 10	11	00											11 00							
1005	Fielding, Lutz	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1006	Wednesday, James	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1007	Spencer, Natt	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										141 13							
1008	Howell, Taylor	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1009	Pandle, Nell	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1010	John, Coleman	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										149 13							
1011	Solomon, Blackwell	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1012	Hyam, Blackwell	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1013	Moses, Marshall	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1014	Henry, Boyle	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 05										138 38							
1015	Emanuel, Blackwell	1 Ctry	16 Oct 31	13 16 10	135	33	3 15										138 38							
1016	Ira, Gravid, Small		16 Nov 15	2 - 10	20												20 00							
1017	Kate, Graves		16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1018	Miles, Hunter	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1019	Peter, Hunter	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1020	Cha ^r , Brooks	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1021	Lewis, Washington	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1022	Albert, Hutchins	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1023	Isaac, Washington	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1024	John, Smith	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1025	Elas, Smith	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1026	Will ^m , Gadsden	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1027	Paris, Scott	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1028	Alex ^r , Franklin	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1029	David, Harris	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1030	John, Hunter	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1031	Sam, Hunter	1 Ctry	16 "	15 2 - 10	20												20 00							
1032	Geo. Harlin	1 Ctry	18 Oct 31	13 14 10	134	67	3 15										137 72							
1033	Milson, Bell	1 Ctry	18 Oct 31	13 14 10	134	67	3 05										137 72							
1034	George, Glass	1 Ctry	20 Nov 22	7 5 10	71	67											71 67							
1035	Robt, Blackman	1 Ctry	20 Nov 15	27 10	9												9 00							
1036	Reuben, Smith	1 Ctry	20 "	15 27 10	9												9 00							
1037	Peter, Williams	1 Ctry	20 "	15 27 10	9												9 00							
1038	Jack, Bellis	1 Ctry	20 "	15 27 10	9												9 00							
1039	Andy, Higgins	1 Ctry	20 Nov 15	5 15 10	55	00	52 40										55 40							
1040	Will ^m , James	1 Ctry	20 Oct 31	7 7 10	72	32	3 15										75 37							

The Stingray Point Lighthouse



The Stingray Point Lighthouse was built in 1858 in the Chesapeake Bay near the mouths of the Rappahannock and Piankatank Rivers. A hexagonal screwpile lighthouse, it was deactivated in 1965 and dismantled shortly thereafter. A replica of the lighthouse was built at the Stingray Harbor Marina in 2003 in Deltaville, Virginia, 1.6 miles west of the original site.

USS Hunchback



Ship's officers and crew on deck, in the James River, Virginia, 1864-65. Photographed by Matthew Brady. One man is playing the banjo in the foreground, another is holding a small white dog, while others are reading newspapers. Men seated in center appear to be peeling potatoes. Many crewmen are wearing their flathats in the style of berets. About a fifth of this ship's crew appear to be African Americans.

Middlesex County Board of Supervisors



Stingray Point Contraband Sailor Proclamation

WHEREAS, very early in the Civil War, Alexander Franklin, David Harris, John Hunter, Miles Hunter, Peter Hunter, and Samuel Hunter, then enslaved in lower Middlesex County, Virginia, fearing impressment into Confederate service, sought refuge in the Stingray Point Lighthouse near Deltaville on July 15, 1861; and

WHEREAS, knowing that Union ships were on blockade duty in the Chesapeake Bay, these men hailed the USS Mount Vernon in the Bay near the entrance to the Rappahannock River and were taken aboard; and

WHEREAS, the Secretary of the United States Navy, when consulted, used the contraband of war theory established at Fort Monroe just two months earlier, and authorized the employment and enlistment of self-emancipated men for the preservation of the Union; and

WHEREAS, in September of 1861, Alexander Franklin, David Harris, John Hunter, Miles Hunter, Peter Hunter, and Samuel Hunter, along with others, enlisted in the U.S. Navy as contrabands of war nearly a year before black men were permitted to serve in the U.S. Army; and

WHEREAS, these six men, who came to be known as the Stingray Point Contraband, played an integral role in the fight for the end to the institution of slavery and the Union's ultimate victory in the Civil War; and

WHEREAS, after serving in the Navy, David Harris is the only one of the six men known to have returned to the Deltaville area of Middlesex County, where he had been enslaved and where some of his descendants still reside; and

WHEREAS, the Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society, using official Navy records and other public records as documentation, applied for and received approval from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources for a highway marker commemorating the actions of the Stingray Point Contraband Sailors; and

WHEREAS, a historical highway marker for the Stingray Point Contraband Sailors will be dedicated on July 17, 2021, 160 years after this historic event; and

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors desires to honor and memorialize the courageous actions of the Stingray Point Contraband Sailors; and

NOW, therefore, we, the Board of Supervisors of Middlesex County, do hereby proclaim in perpetuity July 15 to be

Stingray Point Contraband Sailor Day

in Middlesex County and ask our citizens to acknowledge the contributions made by the Stingray Point Contraband Sailors and others to ensure liberty, freedom, and equal justice for all the citizenry of this great nation.

At the regular meeting of the Middlesex County Board of Supervisors held on June 1, 2021, on a motion duly made by Supervisor Kimbrough, and seconded by Supervisor Mansfield, this Proclamation was adopted by the following vote of its members:

Wayne H. Jessie, Sr.	Aye
Peter W. Mansfield	Aye
John B. Koontz, Jr.	Aye
Reginald A. Williams, Sr.	Aye
Lud H. Kimbrough, III	Aye

A Copy Teste:
Matthew L. Walker, Clerk

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Contributors to Stingray Point Marker Fund

Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society is grateful to the following persons who have contributed to the cost of the highway marker and the cost of today's dedication. Their generous support has made the Stingray Point Contraband highway marker a reality.

\$200 and above

Pionne Corbin
Patricia Polson Satterfield
Knox W. Tull, Jr.

\$100 to \$199

Johnanna Grimes
Sarah Lavicka
Roberta Ray
Davaline Taliaferro
Allison Thomas
Bessida Cauthorne White

\$50 to \$99

Karen Daly
Jewel W. Davis
Anil Hurkadli
Lloyd Huckstep
Carolyn Jackson-King
Yvonne Thompson Jones
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Zachary J. Robinson
Delores Summons

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V. Cilento Johnson
Carlyle Robin Jones
Priscilla A. Ord
Mrs. W. David South
Selma E. Stewart
Margaret T. Taliaferro
Inez Tuck
Gloria Waller
Barbara J. Williams

Marker Dedication

Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society thanks the following individuals and entities for their contributions to today's dedication program. The support has been invaluable.

Deltaville Community Association
Kevin Gentry
Michael Gresham
Middlesex County
Gene R. Quarles
George Robinson
Cherlanda Sidney-Ross

Program Endorsers

Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society expresses appreciation to the following organizations for serving as endorsers of today's program.

The African-American Civil War Museum
The American Civil War Museum
The Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)
Contraband Historical Society
The Middlesex County Museum and Historical Society, Inc.

The Stingray Point Contraband Research Team

Andrea McDonald
Patricia Polson Satterfield
Davaline Taliaferro
Bessida Cauthorne White

The Stingray Point Marker Dedication Committee

Michael Gresham
Dallas Henderson
Hallie Holmes
Andrea McDonald
Willie Montague
Patricia Polson Satterfield
Davaline Taliaferro
Gloria Waller
Bessida Cauthorne White
Gloria Boyd Yarbrough



USS *Vermont* Group of Contrabands, between 1862-1863

Middle Peninsula African-American Genealogical and Historical Society
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