

From: Shade, Mark
Sent: Friday, January 15, 2010 1:35 PM
To: Community and Economic Development
Subject: PA Tourism Office Invites Public to Help Tell the Stories of U.S. Colored Troops Members

News for Immediate Release

Jan. 15, 2010

PA Tourism Office Invites Public to Help Tell the Stories of U.S. Colored Troops Members

In Gettysburg, Agency Launches Search for Descendants

Gettysburg – The Pennsylvania Tourism Office is searching for the families of James Shirk of Shippensburg, Enoch Watson of Lancaster, and Robert Bridges Forten of Philadelphia, as well as the relatives of tens of thousands of other men who fought in the Civil War as members of the United States Colored Troops.

The Colored Troops were regiments of the U.S. Army that were comprised of free blacks and freed slaves; the soldiers reinforced the Union army in the final two years of the Civil War.

During a visit to St. Paul AME Zion Church—a site regarded as the center of black life and culture in Gettysburg during the 19th century—Department of Community and Economic Development Deputy Secretary for Tourism Mickey Rowley said the commonwealth wants to tell the stories of those men and announced the state is launching an effort to locate their descendants.

"Shirk, Watson, and Forten are just three of the 180,000 members of the Colored Troops who fought in the Civil War," said Rowley. "Now is the time to create a conversation among the families of these troops, among the communities they called home, and among those who are unaware of this vital piece of American history."

The St. Paul AME Zion Church was home to the "Slave Refugee Society," a group established in 1840 to "help those who sought freedom from the 'tyrannical yoke of oppression.'"

The descendants will be included in a year-long commemoration – called the Pennsylvania Grand Review – that will include exhibitions, presentations and conservation projects that will reveal the hidden histories of the troops.

The Grand Review will serve as a commemoration of the November 1865 event of the same name. It was organized by the women of Harrisburg to honor the United States Colored Troops who were not permitted to participate in the Grand Review of the Armies, a military procession and celebration held May 23-24, 1865, in Washington, D.C., following the end of the Civil War.

"We have designed the Grand Review to reconnect the families of the USCT with their history, conserve the gravesites of these troops, and share this piece of history

with a new generation of Americans,” Rowley said. “Our commemoration will culminate Nov. 5-7 with a reenactment, parade, and living history presentations, followed by a wreath-laying on Nov. 19 at the grave of Charles Parker, one of only two United States Colored Troops buried at National Cemetery in Gettysburg.”

Descendants of the United States Colored Troops should call 1-800-VISIT-PA and provide their contact information, which will include them in this special year-long commemoration of these African-American patriots.

Rowley noted that the Grand Review is being made possible by the generous support of Amtrak, which provided \$25,000 for promotional support and development along with the Pennsylvania Humanities Council that supplied \$16,000 for a symposium of scholars, educators, and enthusiasts.

Additional sponsorship opportunities are available. For information, contact Lenwood Sloan, director of cultural and heritage tourism at the Department of Community and Economic Development, at 717-720-1313 or at lsloan@state.pa.us.

The Grand Review has been created in partnership with the Appalachian Regional Commission, PA Dutch Country Roads, the Senator John Heinz History Center, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Concerned Black Men of PA, Partnership for Sacred Spaces, Institute for Cultural Partnerships, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Pennsylvania Civil War 150 Consortium, Historical Society of Dauphin County, Dauphin County Parks and Recreation, Jump Street Inc., Harrisburg 150, and the Indiana University of Pennsylvania’s Center for Northern Appalachian Studies.

The Pennsylvania Tourism Office, under DCED, is dedicated to inspiring travel to the State of Independence. For more information, go to visitPA.com or call (800) VISIT PA; become a fan at facebook.com/visitPA, follow us at twitter.com/visitPA, share photos at flickr.com/visitPA, or watch us on youtube.com/visitPA. For a free subscription to Pursuits Magazine, go to visitPA.com/pursuits.

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