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“On the Verge of Liberty”:

The Impact of Advocacy and Federal Policy at the Point Lookout Contraband Camp

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History 485 Senior Thesis

Dr. Jeffrey McClurken

November 30, 2020

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I hereby declare upon my word of honor that I have neither given nor received unauthorized help on this work.

Madelyn Shiflett

ABSTRACT

In 1862, the United States government established Hammond General Hospital at Point Lookout in St. Mary's County, Maryland for the treatment of Union soldiers. In response, enslaved people in Maryland and Virginia began escaping to Point Lookout, and a contraband camp was soon formed. Even though official policies that governed the treatment of "contrabands" drastically changed between 1861 and 1865, many of these policies did not apply to the state of Maryland. As a result, these individuals faced repeated threats to their safety and well-being. Yet, the level of protection that these refugees received improved over time due to the actions of a small group of people who advocated for them. This clear change in how refugees were treated at Point Lookout's contraband camp between 1862 and 1865 can be attributed to the actions of those on the ground who provided refugees with a way to speak out against unfair treatment. Once the U.S. Army left Point Lookout in 1865, conditions declined for newly-freed people in St. Mary's County, who had to contend with government policies that failed to fully support them for a second time.

INTRODUCTION

On May 28th, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons, a nurse stationed at Point Lookout in Maryland, was startled by a knock at her door. An enslaved man named Sandy Dorsey, a familiar face to Gibbons, begged to be let in and began weeping as he showed her the shackles around his ankles. Dorsey explained how he had escaped from his owner, who had chained him to a tree.¹ Yet, this was not the first time that Dorsey had escaped to Point Lookout. Earlier in May, Dorsey had been returned to his owner after spending four months there.² When African-American refugees began arriving at Point Lookout in 1862, most U.S. officials were hesitant to let them stay. Over time, a contraband camp formed as more and more people made their way to the site's hospital, but they were by no means secure. Between 1862 and 1865, some soldiers and nurses began ignoring policies that protected the rights of slave owners in Maryland and took measures to protect the camp's refugees instead. The situation did not change at Point Lookout because of official policies that governed the treatment of African-American refugees. Changes were made as advocates began vocalizing the needs of refugees despite racial prejudices that were held in majority at Point Lookout. Consequently, when the U.S. Army left Point Lookout in 1865, conditions worsened for formerly enslaved people in southern Maryland, as government policies were once again the only measures in place to protect them.

¹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/97204>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, May 28, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/80006>.

² Colonel Robert S. Rodgers to Brigadier General Henry H. Lockwood, May 27, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/93556>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863.

Point Lookout is located in St. Mary's County, Maryland on the tip of a peninsula where the Potomac River and Chesapeake Bay meet. From here, only a few miles of water separate the Maryland and Virginia coasts. The peninsula is surrounded by water on three sides.³ Randolph Shotwell, a Confederate soldier who was imprisoned at Point Lookout during the Civil War, provided a description of its topography:

The peninsula is less than half a mile in width, low, level, and covered with light white sand which the slightest breeze stirs into dense clouds, than which nothing could be more distressing to man or beast. Northward from the Point is a vast stretch of wooded wilderness; abounding in swamps, and traversed by a narrow road without a traveler, or a habitation for miles on miles.⁴

With little shade and a low elevation, the area is immensely hot in the summer and bitterly cold in the winter. The peninsula is also subject to regular flooding. Before the war, the area was owned by William Cost Johnson, who operated the site as a seaside resort. Once war broke out in 1861, Johnson fell into financial turmoil and was forced to sell his property.⁵ Due to its proximity to Virginia and its accessibility by boat, the United States government purchased the site in mid-1862 for use as a military hospital.⁶ The same year, Hammond General Hospital was constructed for the treatment of U.S. soldiers.⁷

³ Edwin W. Beitzell, *Point Lookout Camp for Confederates* (Abell, MD: self-published, 1972), 1.

⁴ J.G. Hamilton, "The Prison Experiences of Randolph Shotwell: Point Lookout," *North Carolina Historical Review* 2, no. 2 (1925): 151, accessed August 2020, JSTOR.

⁵ Summer cottages at Point Lookout were owned by individuals such as Cyrus McCormick and Roger Taney. The cottages were used by hospital personnel during the Civil War; Richard H. Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital: The North's Largest Civil War Prison* (N.p.: Coastal Books, 2014), 11; Beitzell, 19.

⁶ Triebe, 11-12.

⁷ Sixteen hospital wards were constructed at Point Lookout in the shape of a wheel, with a circular corridor connecting them at the center. The complex had more than fifty buildings to support the hospital. The first patients arrived on August 17, 1862; Triebe, 11-12. See *Figure 1* for a visual representation of Hammond Hospital at the time of the Civil War.

By 1863, the United States was overwhelmed by the number of prisoners-of-war who had been captured and continued to be captured as the war went on. After the breakdown of prisoner exchange in May of 1863 and the Battle of Gettysburg in July of 1863, it became clear that the U.S. was running out of places to send prisoners.⁸ To alleviate crowding, the U.S. government constructed an additional prison camp, Camp Hoffman, at Point Lookout just north of Hammond Hospital to house ten thousand Confederate prisoners.⁹ Additional facilities were added around the hospital to accommodate prisoners and guard units. The camp was enclosed with a fifteen-foot fence, guards towers, and a “deadline” to dissuade prisoners from escaping.¹⁰ Over 52,000 Confederate prisoners passed through Point Lookout between August of 1863 and April of 1865, with over 3,500 deaths.¹¹

The defining memories of Point Lookout which prevail today need to be questioned, and new stories need to be told. Though few historians have studied Point Lookout during the Civil War, the experiences of Confederate prisoners-of-war have become central to modern understandings of the site’s role during the conflict. Only four major works have been written about Point Lookout during the Civil War, all of which focus on the prison camp.¹² Yet, there is

⁸ Elizabeth C. Bangert, “The Press and the Prisons: Union and Confederate Newspaper Coverage of Civil War Prisons” (master’s thesis, College of William and Mary, 2001), 35, accessed August 2020, <https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd/1539626316/>. Over 18,000 Confederate prisoners were captured at Gettysburg. Earlier, in May of 1863, the United States decided to stop prisoner exchange with the Confederacy due to the mistreatment of African American soldiers and persistent violations of formal rules for prisoner exchange. Triebe, 12-13.

⁹ Beitzell, 20. Due to the cessation of prisoner exchange in May of 1863, Camp Hoffman’s population rose to over twenty-thousand soldiers by the end of the war. Triebe, 24.

¹⁰ The “deadline” was a shallow trench running inside of the camp, fifteen feet away from the fence. If prisoners cross the line, they were shot by guards on the watchtowers above. Triebe, 28.

¹¹ Bradley and Linda Gottfried, *Hell Comes to Southern Maryland: The Story of Point Lookout Prison and Hammond General Hospital* (Fairfield, PA: Turning Point Publishing, 2018), 113-14.

¹² For works written about Point Lookout during the Civil War, see Edwin W. Beitzell, *Point Lookout Camp for Confederates* (Abell, MD: self-published, 1972); Richard H. Triebe, *Point Lookout Prison Camp and Hospital: The North’s Largest Civil War Prison* (N.p.: Coastal Books, 2014); Bradley and Linda Gottfried, *Hell Comes to Southern Maryland: The Story of Point Lookout Prison and Hammond General Hospital* (Fairfield, PA:

more to the story. Point Lookout can be viewed as a microcosm for the Civil War itself: notions of freedom and human rights were redefined, and prevailing social orders were reversed.

African-American refugees who lived at the site's contraband camp between 1862 and 1865 escaped to freedom and, in doing so, forced the United States government to define the course that lay ahead for enslaved people. Yet, this freedom was altogether impermanent and had to be secured by other means.

When the U.S. government first acquired property at Point Lookout in August of 1862, a contraband camp formed shortly after.¹³ The camp was created not by the U.S. government, but by the African-American men, women, and children who arrived and forced the hospital personnel to decide what would be done in response. People held in slavery risked their lives by escaping to Point Lookout due to the protection that soldiers and humanitarian workers could potentially provide.¹⁴ Some enslaved people in Maryland came from nearby farms and plantations. Others in Virginia put themselves in danger by crossing the Potomac River to safety. Military installations all through the South, and in slave-holding border states like Maryland, were a draw for people held in bondage.¹⁵ Hammond Hospital provided a perfect place for enslaved people to escape due its accessibility by water and its overall lack of frequent travelers.¹⁶ The camp grew gradually as more and more people made their way to Point Lookout.

Turning Point Publishing, 2018); Jack E. Schairer, *Lee's Bold Plan for Point Lookout: The Rescue of Confederate Prisoners That Never Happened* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2008).

¹³Asa W. Bartlett, *History of the Twelfth Regiment: New Hampshire Volunteers in the War of the Rebellion* (Concord, NH: I.C. Evans, 1897), 164, accessed August 2020, University of New Hampshire Library.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Amy Murrell Taylor, *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War's Slave Refugee Camps* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018), 5.

¹⁶ Triebe, 11.

A nurse who worked at Point Lookout's Hospital, Abby Hopper Gibbons, arrived in 1862 and quickly became a friend and advocate for African-American refugees there. Prior to the war, Gibbons was an abolitionist, teacher, and women's rights activist.¹⁷ She provided humanitarian aid in various cities throughout the war and worked at a number of hospitals as a nurse.¹⁸ Throughout her service during the war, Gibbons spoke out against slavery and provided aid to runaway slaves.¹⁹ She was also strongly disliked by many due to her outspoken nature and her support for racial equality.²⁰ Gibbons served as a nurse at Point Lookout between July of 1862 and September of 1863, leaving for a short time in July of 1863 when her home was targeted during the New York City Draft Riots.²¹ Gibbons eventually rose to the position of head matron at Point Lookout.²² Most of what is known about the site's contraband camp can be attributed to her personal correspondence. Abby interacted with the contraband camp's refugees on a daily

¹⁷ Margaret Hope Bacon, *Abby Hopper Gibbons: Prison Reformer and Social Activist* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), xi-xvii, 1-2. 100-101.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 87-95.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 95, 100-101.

²⁰ In one instance, Dr. Clinton Wagner (head surgeon) threatened to dismiss Abby after she stopped him from unjustly punishing an unnamed refugee who was working in the hospital. Abby dared him to write her dismissal on paper and informed him that she knew many officials in Washington, warning him, "You shall feel this." No dismissal came. In response to such instances of outspokenness, Abby was not popular amongst many members of the command. Sarah Hopper Emerson, ed., *Life of Abby Hopper Gibbons Told Chiefly Through Her Correspondence* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1897), 350-53; Bacon, 101, accessed October 2020, Google Books.

²¹ Emerson, 346; Transcription of William H. Gardner Order, September 23, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/15507>; Bacon, 99-100, 115-18. The New York City Draft Riots happened in response to the passage of the Draft Act. Wealthy men were able to avoid the draft, which incensed many working-class men in New York City. The city was ransacked. Eventually, federal troops were sent into the city to stop the rioters. Bacon, 113.

²² Bacon, 107-8.

basis, wrote to relatives and friends to request monetary aid and supplies, and spoke up for refugees when they were treated unjustly.

Within Abby Hopper Gibbons' correspondence and the writings of other people who interacted with refugees at Point Lookout or at other contraband camps during the Civil War, the language used to describe enslaved people reflects common perceptions about race during the mid-nineteenth century. Historians have struggled to decide the best way to represent such language within their own work. The real words of people from the nineteenth century will be used in this paper, not to reinforce the harmful and racist attitudes they often express but to reveal the realities of life for African-Americans during this time. The term "refugee" will also be used in place of "contraband," except when quoting historical texts, because of the problematic nature of the word as it was used during the Civil War.²³ Even amongst those who offered help to enslaved people and advocated for emancipation and racial equality, their perceptions of African-Americans were not always without fault.²⁴

The actions of Abby Hopper Gibbons and other likeminded individuals at Point Lookout contributed to the growth of the contraband camp there. While federal policies were created throughout the war to offer aid to African-American refugees, many of these policies did not apply to the state of Maryland since it was still a part of the United States.²⁵ Up until late 1864,

²³ This is not to diminish the ingenuity of General Butler's semantics, but to recognize the inherent problem with his application of the term "contraband" and to provide a more accurate description of individuals' experiences. Chandra Manning, *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 24-25.

²⁴ Joseph H. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1990), 81-83.

²⁵ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 48, 168; John H. Bayne et al. to E.M. Stanton, Annapolis, MD, March 10, 1862, enclosing affidavit of A.J. Smoot, March 1, 1862, Letters Received, Secretary of War, Record Group 107, National Archives, accessed September 2020, *Freedmen and Southern Society Project*, University of Maryland, <https://freedmen.umd.edu/Smoot.html>.

the Fugitive Slave Act applied to Maryland while the Emancipation Proclamation, in part, did not.²⁶ As a result, official policy only went so far to protect those living at Point Lookout's contraband camp. Most U.S. officials posted there were either ambivalent or hateful toward the camp's inhabitants. Only a select group of nurses and soldiers at Point Lookout spoke up for refugees. Nonetheless, more and more protections were offered as the war went on. What prompted these changes, and how did individuals like Abby Hopper Gibbons combat unfair policies to bring about reform? While official policies had many limitations in offering protection to refugees, those working on the ground saw firsthand the challenges that people were facing. At first, the United States had no plan in place for enslaved people who escaped to Union lines during the war.²⁷ It was the refugees themselves, such as Sandy Dorsey, who continued to flee, and the people who worked alongside them who instituted major change.

SECTION I: "CONTRABAND OF WAR"

The term "contraband" was applied to enslaved people who made their way to Union lines during the Civil War.²⁸ In the summer of 1861, Union General Benjamin Butler decided to take advantage of the Confederacy's policies that considered enslaved people as legal property; using the term "contraband" allowed Butler to bring former slaves into Union lines on the basis that capturing enemy "property" was a method of waging war.²⁹ His decision was prompted by

²⁶ Robert Fabrikant, "Emancipation and the Proclamation: Of Contrabands, Congress, and Lincoln," *Howard Law Journal* 49, no. 2 (2006): 385, accessed September 2020, NexisUni; Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 48; "The Fugitive Slave Law," *American and Commercial Advertiser* (Baltimore), June 28, 1864, 3, Google News Archive, accessed October 2020.

²⁷ Michelle Wartman, "Contrabands, Runaways, Freemen: New Definitions of Reconstruction Created by the Civil War," *International Social Science Review* 76, no. 3 (2001): 122-24, accessed August 3030, JSTOR.

²⁸ Kate Masur, "A Rare Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation': The Word 'Contraband' and the Meanings of Emancipation in the United States," *Journal of American History* 93, no. 4 (2007): 1050-51, accessed September 2020, JSTOR.

²⁹ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 32.

the arrival of three enslaved men—Frank Baker, James Townsend, and Shepard Mallory—to Fortress Monroe in Virginia on May 23, 1861.³⁰ Shortly after their arrival, their owner, Colonel Charles Mallory, arrived to claim them.³¹ Butler refused to let them go on the basis that they were “contraband of war.”³² As a result of his decision, more and more “contrabands” were accepted into Union lines throughout the South.³³ This created a major legal dilemma for the United States going forward.

Butler’s application of the term “contraband,” a term previously used in trade to refer to illegal goods, allowed the U.S. military to utilize runaway slaves for labor.³⁴ By referring to runaway slaves as captured goods, he was forcing the Confederate government to consider the reality of their own laws. How could the Confederacy take issue with the United States utilizing its “property” in a time of war without reinforcing that they considered enslaved people as such?³⁵ Yet, in a way, Butler still reinforced enslaved people’s status as property and only agreed with their rescue for the purpose of helping the Union war effort.³⁶ Shortly after his decision to

³⁰ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 32; Benjamin F. Butler and Jessie Ames Marshall, ed., *Private and Official Correspondence of Gen. Benjamin Butler during the Period of the Civil War* (Norwood, MA: Plimpton Press, 1917), 1: 102-3, 105-7.

³¹ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 32.

³² Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 102-3.

³³ Louis Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy Toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), 14.

³⁴ Masur, 1054.

³⁵ According to historian Lynda Morgan, some Unionists and Confederates reversed their views on “the issue of slaves’ humanity versus their status as property for the purpose of prosecuting the war.” By positing that enslaved people were property, Butler and other Union officials were able to justify “contraband policy,” and later emancipatory policies. On the other hand, some Confederates “began to stress the humanity of slaves” in order to protect the institution of slavery during war. Lynda J. Morgan, *Emancipation in Virginia’s Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1992), 91.

³⁶ Benjamin Butler was known to be a political general. His viewpoints changed throughout the war, and he was by no means an abolitionist. Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 13. After the war, Butler reflected back on his decision. He wrote, “. . . as a lawyer I was never very proud of it, but as an executive officer I was very much

turn away Colonel Mallory, Butler said in defense of his decision that he “determined for the present and until better advised as these men were very serviceable and I had great need of labor in my Quartermaster’s Department, to avail myself of their services.”³⁷ He fully intended to use these individuals as a labor force, and likely never considered the impact that his decision would have on slavery’s demise. Following the creation of Butler’s contraband policy, the term was used throughout the war to refer to those who fell between clear boundaries of free and enslaved.³⁸ The initial meaning that Butler gave the term “contraband” slowly transformed as the idea of emancipation became more of a reality.

Contraband camps were established within territories occupied by U.S. troops throughout the South.³⁹ These camps provided refugees with a place to live and a limited degree of protection. According to historian Amy Murrell Taylor, author of *Embattled Freedom: Journeys through the Civil War’s Slave Refugee Camps*, the level of protection that refugees received depended entirely on “strategy, resources, leadership, and the environment.”⁴⁰ Inhabitants on the east coast, for example, were more secure in comparison to those in the west because eastern camps tended to be more permanent.⁴¹ Contraband camps were not always formed through

comforted with it as a means of doing my duty.” Benjamin F. Butler, *Butler’s Book: Autobiography and Personal Reminiscences of Major-General Benj. F. Butler, A Review of His Legal, Political, and Military Career* (Boston: A.M. Thayer, 1892), 259.

³⁷ Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 105. In response to Butler’s “contraband decision” in 1861, the War Department informed him that “[t]he Government cannot recognize the rejection by any State of its Federal obligations” and advised him to keep a record of all refugees behind his lines because “[t]he question of their final disposition will be reserved for further determination”; Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 119.

³⁸ Michael Cohen, “Contraband Singing: Poems and Songs in Circulation During the Civil War,” *American Literature* 82, no. 2 (2010): 274, accessed September 2020, Duke University Press.

³⁹ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 32-34.

⁴⁰ Taylor, 17.

⁴¹ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 32-34.

organized efforts by the U.S. military, but by refugees who fled to Union lines.⁴² U.S. officials were confronted by enslaved people who, by arriving within Union lines, demanded to be made free. Yet, there were many limitations to this newly gained freedom.

There was a strong difference between military emancipation and civil emancipation. According to historian Chandra Manning, who has written about the war's contraband camps at length, "military emancipation happened because of war" but it "did not decide where or even if former slaves belonged in the reconsolidating United States."⁴³ Only civil emancipation could secure permanent freedom for enslaved people. Surely, war created the necessary conditions for enslaved people to seek freedom. The chaos of war "introduced an alternative source of power into a South" because anywhere that the Union Army went, enslaved people went also.⁴⁴ However, according to Amy Murrell Taylor, none of them became free by running to Union lines and none of them knew "if freedom would indeed come—or whether the war might end without their permanent freedom secured."⁴⁵ Military emancipation was, by nature, impermanent since Union soldiers were by no means obligated or empowered to offer permanent freedom to refugees. Also, the war would eventually end, along with the effects of military emancipation.

During the war, the U.S. government struggled to reach a consensus on the status that enslaved people would have once the war was over. The instructions provided by Congress or President Abraham Lincoln on how to deal with runaway slaves were often contradictory and

⁴² Ibid., 36-40.

⁴³ Ibid., 162, 166-67.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁵ Taylor, 8.

“created confusion when soldiers tried to apply them to real situations”⁴⁶ Regarding the question of “contrabands,” one Union soldier wrote that “[t]he policy of the Government on this question is as much a riddle and a mystery as the ancient oracles of Egypt.”⁴⁷ The term “contraband” itself “sidestepped any decision on the slaves’ ultimate status.”⁴⁸ Refugees living in wartime contraband camps were neither enslaved nor free. The “freedom” they had gained by running to Union lines was altogether impermanent, and there was no definitive on what would happen to them once the Union Army was gone.⁴⁹ As a result, the word “contraband” came to describe these individuals who existed within a liminal state.⁵⁰

Evident through the development of the term “contraband,” itself, the language used to describe runaway slaves changed throughout the course of the Civil War. Prior to the war, the term “fugitive” was often used in place of “runaway” due to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which defined runaway slaves as criminals who could legally be retrieved, even in free states.⁵¹ At Point Lookout, Abby Hopper Gibbons used the term “fugitive” in her earliest letters from Point Lookout in 1862.⁵² However, Gibbons used “contraband” more often than not

⁴⁶ Chandra Manning, “Working for Citizenship in Civil War Contraband Camps,” *Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 2 (2014): 178-79, accessed August 2020, JSTOR.

⁴⁷ W.D.W., “Letter From the 7th Regiment, No. 9,” December 16, 1861, in *Quiner Scrapbooks: Correspondence of the Wisconsin Volunteers, 1861-1865* by E.B. Quiner, vol. 2, 5-6, accessed October 2020, Wisconsin Historical Society, <https://content.wisconsinhistory.org/digital/collection/quiner/id/13024/rec/16>.

⁴⁸ Cohen, 274.

⁴⁹ Taylor, 8.

⁵⁰ Masur, 1051-53.

⁵¹ United States Fugitive Slave Law (1850), *The Fugitive slave law. Hartford, Ct?: s.n., 185-?*, Hartford, PDF, retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/98101767/>.

⁵² Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, September 16, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/78950>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, September 8, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79009>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, August 6, 1862,

in her correspondence. Starting in 1861, citizens in both the North and South used the term “contraband” more and more after Butler’s initial use of the word.⁵³ Confederate prisoners at Point Lookout were also well aware of the term’s usage. One prisoner, Robert E. Park, referred to an African-American soldier on guard as “an escaped ‘contraband,’ as Beast Butler styles the stolen and refugee slaves from the South.”⁵⁴ By and large, the term “contraband” came to replace the word “fugitive”; the former was used when referring to enslaved people who were rescued and protected by Union armies.

The term “refugee” was used occasionally during the war in reference to formerly enslaved people living in contraband camps. At the time of the war, however, “refugee” was mostly used in reference to white people who had been displaced by the war.⁵⁵ Yet, unlike other refugee groups during the Civil War, enslaved people often left by choice because they saw an opportunity amidst the chaos of war.⁵⁶ Enslaved people who fled from their homes found themselves in unfamiliar places without a sense of security; sometimes they traveled with family members. Other times they traveled alone.⁵⁷ Contraband camps were by no means safe places,

Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/68559>.

⁵³ Masur, 1051.

⁵⁴ Oddly enough, Park is one of few people to use the term “refugee” at Point Lookout in reference to the inhabitants of the contraband camp. He makes a clear distinction between “contraband” and “refugee,” the former being those enslaved people who were “stolen” by the U.S. Army from slave holders. Robert E. Park, “Diary of Robert E. Park, Macon, Georgia, Late Captain Twelfth Alabama Regiment, Confederate States Army,” quoted in *Point Lookout Camp for Confederates*, by Edwin W. Beitzell (Abell, MD: self-published, 1972), 99.

⁵⁵ This segmented language continued into the post-war era with the creation of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands in March of 1865. Even then, a clear distinction was made between white “refugees” and “freedmen.” David Silkenat, *Driven from Home: North Carolina’s Civil War Refugee Crisis* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016), 5, accessed October 2020, Google Books.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

⁵⁷ According to historian Chandra Manning, emancipation came fast for those who ran away with their families but slow for those who did not because “basic markers of human identity like kin” equated to true freedom; Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 11. For ten-year-old Austin Smith, who had lived in Maryland but was sold into

and these individuals faced repeated threats to their well-being and their newly gained, yet impermanent, freedom.⁵⁸ Due to its location in Union territory, the Point Lookout Contraband Camp provides a unique perspective of life in wartime contraband camps.

SECTION II: “MUCH AFRAID OF MARYLAND”

During the Civil War, Maryland remained in the United States, yet, as a slaveholding state, it occupied a marginal space. Maryland was one of four slave-holding border states, along with Missouri, Kentucky, and Delaware.⁵⁹ Not only did these states border the Confederacy geographically, but they were a “middle ground,” as noted by historian Barbara Fields in her book *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century*.⁶⁰ Fields further explains that “the center is seldom moderate and the slaveholding center was never so.”⁶¹ Maryland did not secede, yet its status as a slave state produced a complicated political situation for U.S. soldiers operating within Maryland. President Abraham Lincoln also struggled to decide what to do with Maryland, since keeping peace there equated to protecting the nation’s capital.⁶² Maryland’s governor until January of 1862, Thomas Hicks, explained the state’s position as he saw it: “I care nothing for the Devilish Nigger difficulty, I desire to save the union, and will cooperate with the Administration in everything tending to that important result that is

Virginia, the contraband camp at Point Lookout led to eventual reunion with his family. Smith crossed the Potomac River to Point Lookout and was retrieved by a family member in 1863. Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 49.

⁵⁸ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 35, 37-39.

⁵⁹ The term “border state” refers to slave states that did not secede. Christopher Phillips, *The Civil War in the Border South* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2013), 1.

⁶⁰ Barbara Fields, *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 91.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Phillips, 13-14; Andrew Ward, *The Slave’s War: The Civil War in the Words of Farmer Slaves* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 107-8.

proper.”⁶³ In other words, Hicks would “cooperate” as long as slavery was not threatened in Maryland.

While present in Maryland, the U.S. Army felt compelled to respect the rights of property owners there since it was still part of the Union—that is, respect their right to own human beings. Slaveholders took advantage of the “middle ground” that Maryland positioned itself in, “demanding respect for their property rights in recognition of their loyalty”⁶⁴ In August of 1861, General John Dix wrote that “[u]nless we abstain from the reception or the capture of fugitive slaves we shall expose ourselves to the imputation of intermeddling with a matter entirely foreign to the great questions of political right and duty”⁶⁵ Additionally, General Butler, after landing troops in Annapolis in April of 1861, wrote to Governor Hicks and assured him that “the forces under my command are not here in any way to interfere with or countenance any interference with the laws of the State.”⁶⁶ Slavery was legally protected within Maryland, which allowed its slaveholders privileges in the face of military occupation.

The experiences of enslaved people living in Maryland differed from those living in Virginia, and other Confederate states. Due to the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, enslaved people from Maryland who ran away were not offered protection when their owners came to retrieve

⁶³ Thomas H. Hicks to Hon. S. Cameron, November 18, 1861, quoted in *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* by Barbara Fields (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 92.

⁶⁴ Fields, 100.

⁶⁵ Major General John A. Dix to S.R. Richardson Esq., October 12, 1861, quoted in *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland during the Nineteenth Century* by Barbara Fields (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 101.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 26.

them.⁶⁷ Enslaved people who had escaped from Virginia, on the other hand, were not returned to their owners because the Fugitive Slave Act did not apply to places in rebellion against the United States.⁶⁸ This legal conundrum presented itself from the very start of the war. While slavery was undeniably at the heart of the conflict, the United States' initial reason for fighting was not emancipation; at first, hopes for reunion did not equate to radical change.⁶⁹ By 1863, the U.S. government had made a clear, public declaration that the country would not be the same as it was before the war through the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1861 and 1862, however, U.S. soldiers felt obligated to protect loyal citizens' rights, to treat citizens in the Confederacy with civility, and to uphold the status quo.⁷⁰ As a result, citizens of the state of Maryland expected U.S. armies to leave slavery intact.

In defense of his "contraband decision" in May of 1862, General Benjamin Butler noted that slave owners in Virginia, as members of a foreign nation, were not deserving of the same protections as citizens of the United States.⁷¹ He claimed that he had no reason to return escaped slaves to their owners there on the basis that "the Fugitive Slave Act did not affect a foreign country," but "in Maryland, a loyal State, a fugitive from service had been returned."⁷² Maryland gained such a reputation for returning runaway slaves to their owners that enslaved people often ran to Washington, D.C. instead of remaining in the state. This trend increased greatly after the

⁶⁷ The Fugitive Slave Act was not officially repealed until June of 1864. United States Congress, Act of June 28, 1864, chp. 168, *United States Statutes at Large: Thirty-Eighth Congress, Session 1*, Library of Congress, accessed October 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/38th-congress/session-1/c38s1ch166.pdf>.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 106-7; Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 172-73.

⁶⁹ Stephen V. Ash, *The Black Experience in the Civil War South* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2010), 4-5.

⁷⁰ Ash, 5-6; Phillips, 15-16.

⁷¹ Butler, *Private and Official Correspondence*, 106-7.

⁷² *Ibid.*

District of Columbia Emancipation Act was passed in April of 1862.⁷³ The District's Superintendent of Contrabands, D.B. Nichols, noted that escaped slaves in Washington, D.C. were "much afraid of Maryland," as slave owners in Maryland often arrived there to force people back into slavery.⁷⁴

At Point Lookout, nurse Abby Hopper Gibbons was well aware of the laws that protected Maryland citizens' rights to own slaves. As long as slave owners proved their allegiance to the United States by taking an oath, their enslaved workers were turned back over to them. On August 5th, 1862, an unnamed, enslaved man living at Point Lookout's contraband camp was returned to his two owners, both citizens of St. Mary's County, after they took an oath of allegiance.⁷⁵ Gibbons wrote that this "of course was swearing to a lie" as there was "scarcely a man on the ground whom [she] should call a loyal citizen."⁷⁶ In a similar instance, Gibbons reprimanded Captain Wood of the New York Militia for allowing a refugee to be taken by his owner, to which he retorted "that if his master took the oath, he was bound to believe him, and that his duty was to deliver the slave to his owner."⁷⁷ In response to a third instance, Gibbons wrote that she had the "liberty to send any Virginia slaves to Washington or elsewhere" but

⁷³ Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 50.

⁷⁴ D.B. Nichols Testimony, American Freedmen's Inquiry Commission Records, quoted in *Troubled Refuge: Struggling for Freedom in the Civil War* by Chandra Manning (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016), 50.

⁷⁵ Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, August 6, 1862.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Emerson, 367.

could not offer the same protection to Maryland slaves.⁷⁸ According to Abby, “of all the states in the Union [Maryland] least deserves to be called loyal.”⁷⁹

Refugees from Maryland who were living at Point Lookout’s contraband camp evidently learned that they had a better chance at freedom if they claimed they were Virginians. In May of 1863, two refugees, Sandy Dorsey and Charlotte Bennet, were returned to their owner, William Taylor, who lived three miles from Point Lookout in St. Mary’s County.⁸⁰ Dorsey had previously been given a pass to visit his wife and children, but now his pass was revoked and he was sent away with Taylor.⁸¹ Charlotte, only fourteen years old, was also turned over to Taylor following rumors of her “immoral” behavior.⁸² In response to these two refugees being placed outside of the lines, Gibbons wrote: “There is not a more disloyal State in the Union than this same Maryland. [The commanding officer] said he would give me a *pass* for any I would name in a note as *Virginians*. The contrabands all declare now they are from that State.”⁸³ At Point Lookout, enslaved people from Maryland were keenly aware of federal policies that protected the state’s slave holders.

⁷⁸ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Mr. Adam S. Hill, May 6, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/93647>.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Colonel Robert S. Rodgers to Brigadier General Henry H. Lockwood, May 27, 1863; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863. On May 28, 1863, Abby told Taylor to leave, but he came back a second time to take Sandy and Charlotte. Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, May 28, 1863.

⁸¹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863.

⁸² Colonel Robert S. Rodgers to Brigadier General Henry H. Lockwood, May 27, 1863. Regarding the accusations raised against Charlotte, Abby noted that “there was not the slightest ground for the charges....” Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, June 19, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/78961>.

⁸³ Emerson, 368.

A group of refugees from St. Mary's made their way to Point Lookout by boat, claiming that they had crossed the Potomac River from Virginia. A New Hampshire soldier posted at the Confederate prison described the incident:

A planter of the neighborhood, named Coan, came into camp and complained that about forty of his slaves had come within Marston's lines The shrewd negroes had left the plantation in the night, crossed to the Virginia side, and come into camp in the morning, claiming that they were from the neighborhood of Richmond. One of his old hands was accosted by the planter while at work on the wharf discharging a transport: 'Why, Sam, how you came here?' 'Scuse me, sar, but I nebber seed you afo. I's from Ole V'ginny!' The planter could get none of his former slaves to recognize him, and he retired discomfitted.⁸⁴

Even though Maryland was not part of the Confederacy, enslaved people from Maryland who escaped to Union lines had less protection from being retrieved. The refugees who traveled to Point Lookout by boat, including Sam, took note of this and claimed to be Virginians to avoid capture. In response to laws that called for their enslavement, refugees from Maryland took matters into their own hands to better their chances at freedom.

Yet, Maryland's policies for the return of escaped slaves held less and less power over time, not because the Fugitive Slave Act lost its influence but because some of the hospital personnel at Point Lookout eventually chose to turn slave owners away. Even when the Fugitive Slave Act was repealed in late 1864, its precedence still lingered in people's minds. According to historian Robert Fabrikant in his article, "Emancipation and the Proclamation: Of Contrabands, Congress, and Lincoln," since the Fugitive Slave Act had penalties for "anyone who hindered the arrest of fugitive slaves," the Union army felt obligated to "cooperate with slave-owners, even

⁸⁴ Martin Alonzo Haynes, *A History of the Second Regiment, New Hampshire Volunteer Infantry, in the War of the Rebellion* (Lakeport, NH: n.p., 1896), 207-8, accessed August 2020, Internet Archive. The language used by Haynes to represent Sam's words reflects commonly-held, racist perceptions of African Americans during the mid-nineteenth century.

Confederate slave-owners.”⁸⁵ Not only was the return of slaves upheld by federal legislation, it was protected by the Fugitive Slave Clause in the U.S. Constitution, which still applied to Maryland.⁸⁶ Regardless of the legal obligation that federal officials faced, the *St. Mary’s Beacon* noted in October of 1862 that at Point Lookout, “all efforts to recover [escaped slaves] have proven futile. The test oath, which formerly served as a warrant of recovery, has now become impotent”⁸⁷ Eventually, federal policy did offer additional protections for enslaved people behind Union lines, but it was the people at Point Lookout who dealt with slave owners directly who decided to leave them empty-handed.⁸⁸

Another piece of federal policy that failed to offer adequate protection to enslaved people from Maryland was the Emancipation Proclamation. On January 1, 1863, the Emancipation Proclamation was issued and freed all slaves in areas of rebellion.⁸⁹ It was highly criticized by some in the North for having no real, enforceable power and for only applying to Confederate-held territory.⁹⁰ Nonetheless, it still encouraged more people to escape from slavery, allowed

⁸⁵ Fabrikant, 329-30.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 353. The Fugitive Slave Clause is found in Article IV, Section 2, Clause 3 of the U.S. Constitution; it called for the return of enslaved people in the instance that they left the state in which they were held.

⁸⁷ “War and Other News,” *St. Mary’s Beacon*, October 2, 1862, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

⁸⁸ Congress passed various pieces of legislation throughout the war that tried to solve the issue of runaway slaves, including the First and Second Confiscation Acts in 1862. However, these two acts did not offer freedom to enslaved people unless they belonged to someone directly involved in the rebellion. The Additional Article of War (the Act Prohibiting the Return of Slaves) passed in March of 1862 had more of an effect on Maryland’s enslaved population, but it has received little attention by historians. This article barred Union military personnel from returning enslaved people directly to their owners; instead, they had to go through civil authorities authorized in the Fugitive Slave Act. Yet, as evidenced by Point Lookout’s contraband camp, enslaved people were never fully protected from retrieval by their owners. Fabrikant, 320-21, 331-32.

⁸⁹ Abraham Lincoln, *Emancipation Proclamation*, January 1, 1863, Presidential Proclamations, 1791-1991, Record Group 11: General Records of the United States Government, National Archives, accessed October 2020, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/299998>.

⁹⁰ Many abolitionists complained about Abraham Lincoln’s lack of commitment to complete emancipation through his Proclamation. For example, Sergeant George E. Stephens, a soldier in the 54th Massachusetts

African-American soldiers to be raised, and served as a public declaration for why the United States was fighting the war.⁹¹ This proclamation did hold some power in Maryland, but it could not be enforced in the same way that it could within Confederate territory. Based on a letter written by Abby Hopper Gibbons in May of 1863, four months after the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, enslaved people from Maryland who escaped to Union lines still faced the same issues that they had faced before. Gibbons wrote that she was outraged when the commanding officer of the 2nd Maryland, Colonel Robert Rodgers, ordered “that all the Maryland slaves were to be put outside [the lines] the next night.”⁹² The real impact of the Proclamation came from the people that it mobilized on the ground and the “moral symbolism” it carried, not necessarily its legal weight.⁹³

As a mobilizing force, one of the most significant aspects of the Emancipation Proclamation was its call for African-American soldiers to formally be raised and employed by the U.S. Army. While enslaved people in the state of Maryland were still enslaved after January 1, 1863, they were impacted in other ways, particularly by the presence of African-American soldiers that had been raised through the Proclamation. In that sense, the Emancipation Proclamation did have a tangible effect in Maryland. Starting in January of 1864, a number of

Volunteers, noted that the United States’ emancipation policy was “the fulmination of one man, by virtue of his military authority, who proposes to free the slaves of that portion of territory over which he has no control” while “United States officers and soldiers are yet employed hunting fugitive slaves.” George E. Stephens to the editor, *Weekly Anglo-African* (New York), September 3, 1864, in *A Voice of Thunder: the Civil War Letters of George E. Stephens*, ed. Donald Yacovene (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 306, 324; Louis Gerteis, “Slaves, Servants, and Soldiers: Uneven Paths to Freedom in the Border States, 1861-1865,” in *Lincoln’s Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered*, ed. William Alan Blair and Karen Fisher Younger (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 179, accessed October 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central; John David Smith, *Black Soldiers in Blue: African American Troops in the Civil War Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 3.

⁹¹ Gerteis, “Slaves, Servants, and Soldiers,” 176-77; Ward, 108-9, 111.

⁹² Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863.

⁹³ Fabrikant, 314.

United States Colored Troop regiments served as prison guards at Point Lookout; these soldiers interacted with the enslaved population in the surrounding area and rescued many people by bringing them back to the contraband camp.⁹⁴ African-American refugees and soldiers gave the Emancipation Proclamation the power that it lacked by running away and by enlisting. While President Lincoln did not free enslaved people in Union territories through his Proclamation, by 1863 there were clear signs that emancipation would result from war.⁹⁵ Federal officials' commitment to change rather than legal force ensured a positive end result for enslaved people.

Federal policies that dealt directly with contraband camps during the Civil War had less of an impact in the state of Maryland. As a border state and a slaveholding state, laws that protected the institution of slavery in Maryland remained intact. The Fugitive Slave Act was an ever-present threat to refugees living at Point Lookout. If a slave owner came to retrieve their enslaved workers, U.S. officials were bound to respect their rights as citizens. Additionally, when the Emancipation Proclamation freed enslaved people in areas of rebellion, Maryland's enslaved population remained in bondage. Federal policies such as these only went so far to help enslaved people within the United States. Yet, by late 1863 fewer enslaved people at Point Lookout were being returned to their owners because officials began advocating for their protection. The refugees themselves also took matters into their own hands and found ways to

⁹⁴ James K. Bryant, "A Model Regiment: The 36th United States Colored Infantry in the Civil War," PhD. diss., University of Vermont, 1996, 65, accessed October 2020, ProQuest; James K. Bryant, "The Model 36th Regiment: The Contribution of Black Soldiers and Their Families to the Union War Effort, 1861-1866," PhD. diss., University of Rochester, 2001, 233.

⁹⁵ At least for President Lincoln, the timeline of his fight for emancipation is somewhat unclear. In August of 1862, Lincoln wrote to editor Horace Greeley, stating that "[i]f I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that." Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, August 22, 1862, in *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, ed. Roy P. Basler (Cleveland, OH: The World Publishing Company, 1946), 651-52. For an in-depth discussion about the differences between President Lincoln's private and public attitudes toward emancipation, see George M. Fredrickson, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008).

work around laws that called for their enslavement. In 1864, African-American soldiers at Point Lookout provided additional aid to enslaved people there. While policy had its limitations, a select group of people were determined to create insurmountable change. President Lincoln, for one, informed a group of border state politicians in July of 1862 that “[i]f the war continue[s] . . . the institution [of slavery] in your states will be extinguished by mere friction and abrasion—by the mere incidents of war.”⁹⁶

SECTION III: “PLEADING FOR THE POOR CONTRABANDS”

In October of 1862, the *St. Mary’s Beacon* noted that “there has been quite a stampede of ‘contrabands’ from our county during the past two weeks Quite a number are reported to be harbored at Point Lookout, by Federal authority”⁹⁷ By October of the following year, the paper noted, in regard to the number of enslaved people who had run away:

Our losses, here, can no longer be counted by ones and twos, but by hundreds. It is no longer the isolated and occasional case . . . but has become the wholesale, premeditated and organized business of this branch of our population. On Saturday last night, about fifty negro men left their homes in this vicinity and have not since been heard from these negroes find shelter and protection somewhere Since the above was in type, we learn that from 50 to 100 slaves, belonging to citizens on the Patuxent side . . . have left their masters during the past two days.⁹⁸

This massive influx of enslaved people fleeing in St. Mary’s County is reflected in an 1864 slave register accounting for slaveholders’ losses during the war.⁹⁹ Out of 1,153 enslaved people who

⁹⁶ Abraham Lincoln, “Appeal to Border State Representatives to Favor Compensated Emancipation,” July 13, 1862, in *The Collected Works of Lincoln*, by Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler (Springfield, IL: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1959), 5: 318.

⁹⁷ “War and Other News,” *St. Mary’s Beacon* (Leonard Town, MD), October 2, 1862, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

⁹⁸ “Negro Stampede,” *St. Mary’s Beacon*, October 22, 1863, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

⁹⁹ This register was created as a measure to provide slaveholders with financial compensation at the end of the war for the enslaved workers that they had lost. George B. Dent, “Slave Statistics of St. Mary’s County Maryland, 1864” in *Archives of Maryland*, ed. Agnes Callum, vol. 369 (Baltimore, MD: Mullac Publishers, 1993), accessed September 2020, <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/html/index.html>.

ran away or enlisted in St. Mary's County during the war, 1 left in 1861, 53 in 1862, 326 in 1863, and 770 in 1864.¹⁰⁰ Entire groups of enslaved people regularly fled together in St. Mary's. This increase can be attributed to a number of factors, but the conduct of officials at Point Lookout had a major impact on people's decision to run away.

While there is no accurate count of how many people lived at Point Lookout's contraband camp during the war, many people listed on the 1864 slave register for St. Mary's County can be traced to the camp using letters, correspondence, and reports. As the war went on, more and more people lived at the camp. In August of 1863, one soldier at Point Lookout wrote that "we have about 700 of their stripe here now not counting 407 that arrived while I am writing in all we have about 1100."¹⁰¹ A New Hampshire soldier wrote that "at times there were not less than two thousand" when he visited the contraband camp.¹⁰² Refugees arrived on a regular basis, yet the level of protection they received depended on who was in command at the time. Some were not permitted within Union lines, while others were welcomed. In one instance, a group of men arrived at Point Lookout but left the next day:

The other day three Contrabands came a shore bringing quite a valuable Boat . . . they found they were decently treated and said if they had known how well we treated them, they would have brought their wives – The next morning, the Quarter Master called & said, well Mrs. Gibbons, those boys have gone off The third day what should appear but the Boat, men, wives & babies¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Dent, "Slave Statistics of St. Mary's County."

¹⁰¹ Frank Nichols to Abby Hopper Gibbons, August 18, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/70355>.

¹⁰² Bartlett, 166.

¹⁰³ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, September 8, 1862.

Once these men had discovered that Point Lookout was a secure place to live, they returned home to retrieve their families. According to Abby Hopper Gibbons, large groups of people arrived at the hospital on a daily basis.¹⁰⁴

What prompted this flight of enslaved people to Point Lookout, and why did so many leave during the latter half of the war? The overall uncertainty about what African-American refugees would endure at Point Lookout likely complicated each person's decision to leave. For those living at Point Lookout, the conditions and treatment they faced early on presented an additional barrier between security and freedom. The topography of Point Lookout was unforgiving, to say the least. African-American refugees living outside the bounds of the hospital wards faced harsh environmental conditions.¹⁰⁵ According to historian Chandra Manning, it is important to recognize the "uncomfortable juxtaposition" between suffering and triumph within contraband camps because "it underscores how high the black men and women who risked the camps in full knowledge of their dangers saw the stakes of citizenship to be."¹⁰⁶ Contraband camps were not places where freedom and new beginnings were easily obtained once people crossed into Union lines. Rather, they were temporary spaces created by people who did not know what remained in store for them.

¹⁰⁴ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, April 16, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79310>.

¹⁰⁵ Confederate prisoner Anthony Keiley expressed about the severity of summer and winter weather at Point Lookout. During the winter, the area would often flood, and the water would then freeze, which cost some prisoners and guards their lives or their feet. Anthony M. Keiley, *In Vinculis, or the Prisoner of War* (Petersburg, VA: Daily Index Office, 1866), 67-68, accessed September 2020, HathiTrust.

¹⁰⁶ Manning, "Working for Citizenship," 192.

Disease was also rampant in the contraband camp at times. The camp inhabitants were noted to have suffered from measles in May and June of 1863.¹⁰⁷ As more and more people arrived at the camp from different areas, the spread of disease increased. Abby Hopper Gibbons noted that “many are sick and a great many die; to the grief of the survivors, who feel that it [is] very hard that, after a long life of misery, and when on the verge of liberty, they must be separated by death.”¹⁰⁸ According to historian Jim Downs, enslaved people who escaped to Union lines were affected by disease and sickness more so than soldiers because the former “often lacked the basic necessities to survive” and because many officials acted with ambivalence toward them.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, accounts of refugees who suffered from illness were often times overlooked because “these episodes [did] not fit into the patriotic narratives of the Civil War.”¹¹⁰ The absence of institutional structure within the contraband camp further contributed to the suffering that refugees endured.

The refugees also repeatedly faced violence and theft on the part of U.S. soldiers and hospital personnel. In a letter to her daughter written on June 16, 1863, Gibbons described a frightful scene involving a group of U.S. soldiers:

Some of the 2nd Maryland went to the Contraband Camp at 12 o clock, turned over their tents and beat several in the most shameful manner – cutting two severely with a knife – The next morning [the refugees] flocked to our Quarters saying they were ordered off and wished to go – that they could not sleep at night because of constant fear. I went to the

¹⁰⁷ Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, May 14, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/16738>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, June 16, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/78673>.

¹⁰⁸ Emerson, 388.

¹⁰⁹ Jim Downs, *Sick from Freedom: African American Illness and Suffering during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 4.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

General and told him at least 50 were unable to go. Some had infants a week or two old, and a good many had measles.¹¹¹

In December of 1862, the same regiment of soldiers also “broke into the contraband quarters cook house on Christmas Eve & stole their choice articles.”¹¹² A few months earlier, Gibbons reported the postmaster for “beat[ing] unmercifully a contraband he does not own, but claims to have under his control, and [is] keeping for her master.”¹¹³ In another instance, the same postmaster “kicked and beat” a thirteen-year-old boy before throwing him over a tent.¹¹⁴ Gibbons concluded her story by saying that the boy, who was already covered in scars upon his arrival, “did not seem so especially oppressed by it, as he had never been used to anything else and [thought] Point look out [was] the best place in the world.”¹¹⁵ Early on, the unwelcoming, harsh environment may have been enough to dissuade people from escaping to Point Lookout. Nonetheless, enslaved people were willing to risk mistreatment, poor living conditions, illness, and even retrieval by their owners in order to gain a chance at freedom.

Upon arrival at the contraband camp, many refugees were poorly clothed and underfed, yet the hospital did not have enough supplies to give them. Hospital personnel often complained

¹¹¹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, June 16, 1863.

¹¹² Dr. John Stearns Jr. to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 20, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/15908>.

¹¹³ Gibbons wrote home to her husband, John, about the postmaster, who then sent a letter to President Lincoln. Lincoln then sent the letter to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, who passed it to Surgeon General William Hammond. The postmaster was soon discharged. Bacon, 103. Abby Hopper Gibbons to her family, August 10, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/70287>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Clinton Wagner, August 27, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/93629>.

¹¹⁴ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, October 16, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/78803>.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

about the slowness with which supplies arrived. Yet, refugees were already in poor condition when they escaped to the hospital. Abby Hopper Gibbons noted, “The poor souls are half naked” and “scantily clad and fed, and looked as if they were a half starved race.”¹¹⁶ In May of 1863, Gibbons visited Charlotte Bennet after she was turned over to her owner and noted that she lived in a “mud cabin” which was “more like an oven than a place to live”¹¹⁷ Many enslaved people had left behind a life of poverty and abuse, and continued to endure hardships at Point Lookout in instances when the hospital did not always properly care for them. Gibbons eventually confronted Colonel Robert Rodgers of the 2nd Maryland for refusing to give full rations to the refugees at the contraband camp.¹¹⁸ The complaint fell on deaf ears. In response, Gibbons turned to friends and family members in the North to provide clothing and food for the refugees. She persistently wrote letters asking for donations.¹¹⁹ To Abby, there were not enough supplies to go around, and the contraband camp was not regarded as a priority.

To others, too much care was being given to the refugees. Another nurse, Sophronia Bucklin, disagreed with the amount of aid that Gibbons provided to the contraband camp:

¹¹⁶ Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/16405>.

¹¹⁷ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863.

¹¹⁸ Colonel Robert S. Rodgers to Brigadier General Henry H. Lockwood, May 27, 1863; Captain J.M. Lucas to Colonel Robert S. Rodgers, May 26, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/93570>; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Mr. Adam S. Hill, May 6, 1863.

¹¹⁹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, May 14; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, September 16, 1862; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, September 8, 1862; Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863; Henry Dickinson to Robert Haydock, April 6, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/16368>; Maria M. Morgan to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 30, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79928>; Henry Dickinson to Robert Haydock, May 18, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/16933>; Bacon, 105.

Mrs. Gibbons had near here a circle of negroes, who, the soldiers in bitterness said, had cream in their tea and coffee, and were given hot beefsteaks, and ‘That is where our rations go [to]’ A devotion of such character to the interest of the contraband, when wounded and dying heroes needed care and sympathy, evinced an evil judgement. The contrabands were fed and protected, while hundreds of brave white men were deprived of what would have been common fare at home There is no one in this broad land, who, regardless of prejudice, can justify an unwholesome pandering after associations of this kind¹²⁰

Bucklin considered the refugees less deserving of fair treatment and drew on racial stereotypes to make her case. She explained that the refugees did not need the same food as white soldiers because they were already accustomed to a poorer diet; for enslaved people, “corn-bread and bacon had been luxurious living.”¹²¹ Taking a similar tone, the *Southern Aegis & Hartford County Intelligencer* complained that the government was paying \$50,000 a day to care for “contrabands.”¹²² The paper named “Abolition policy” as the cause, which would eventually result “not [in] the freedom of the black man, but the enslavement of the white laboring man!”¹²³ The idea that African-Americans should be treated equally was too much for some to bear.

Similar criticisms were made against Abby Gibbons for bringing refugees into the hospital wards to be treated. One man was treated for the wounds he received while cleaning a cannon.¹²⁴ Nurse Sarah Blunt wrote that he belonged to “the race who Mrs G[ibbons] worships” and that “he has the best of care”¹²⁵ She complained that “the negro is the one thing that

¹²⁰ Sophronia E. Bucklin, *In Hospital and Camp: A Woman’s Record of Thrilling Incidents Among the Wounded in the Late War* (Philadelphia: J.E. Potter & Co., 1869), 114-15, accessed September 2020, HathiTrust.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹²² “Cost of Keeping Contrabands,” *Southern Aegis & Hartford County Intelligencer* (Bel Air, MD), January 23, 1863, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Sarah Blunt to her mother, May 11, 1863, Sarah R. Blunt Correspondence, 1862 March 4-1865 July 24, accessed October 2020, New York Heritage Digital Collections.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

prevents Mrs Gibbons from doing the soldiers as much good as she came out to do [A]ny rank abolitionists would call her an Angel. I am out of that opinion.”¹²⁶ Based on Sarah’s account, Gibbons’ desire to provide aid to the refugees was not shared by most of her fellow nurses. She saw to their basic needs more so than to others, including those in command at Point Lookout. While some important changes were being made, racial prejudices against African-Americans kept many soldiers and nurses from offering their support.

Over time, conditions did change at Point Lookout. In just a month after Abby Hopper Gibbons arrival, she wrote that in terms of the way African-American refugees were treated, “it seems strange that in a few weeks such a change should be wrought.”¹²⁷ Gibbons’ arrival likely had something to do with this. Change did not come because of rules that governed the operation of contraband camps as a whole. It came from changing attitudes amongst U.S. officials at Point Lookout. In his 1973 book, *From Contraband to Freedman: Federal Policy toward Southern Blacks, 1861-1865*, historian Louis Gerteis explains that the failure of wartime programs to help formerly enslaved people had more to do with “the nature of federal policy toward Southern blacks” than with a lack of support by federal officials.¹²⁸ When inconsistencies arose in how to officials were expected to respond to escaped slaves, some individuals chose to take matters into their own hands to see to their care and rescue.

The housing provided for inhabitants of the contraband camp at Point Lookout best exemplifies the changes that were made in terms of their protection over time. In mid-1862,

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, September 8, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79009>.

¹²⁸ Gerteis, *From Contraband to Freedman*, 153.

nurse Sophronia Bucklin visited the contraband camp which, at the time, was located in a patch of pine trees just north of the hospital. Bucklin wrote:

Within these woods . . . the contrabands were sole denizens. Amidst the dense, dark pines they burrowed like beasts of the field in half-subterranean dens. A hole from three to four feet deep was dug by them in the black soil, and roofed over with boards, on which turf was closely packed. An opening, which admitted them on their hands and feet, and one for the escape of the smoke, which went up from an exceedingly primitive fireplace, were the only vents for the impure air, and the only openings for light. In these dens men, women and children burrowed all winter . . . Bare as the barest poverty could make them.¹²⁹

By 1863, frame barracks were constructed for the refugees and the contraband camp was moved outside of the woods. It is likely that the quarters were constructed sometime in late 1863 or early 1864 after the prison camp was created, according to a letter from Abby Hopper Gibbons on September 17th, 1863.¹³⁰ She wrote that the prison commandant at Point Lookout, General Gilman Marston, “is a good friend of the Contrabands” and “has ordered Barracks in an excellent location and will improve their condition in every way.”¹³¹ The buildings are also visible in a lithograph of Point Lookout from 1864 (*Figure 1*).¹³²

¹²⁹ Bucklin, 84.

¹³⁰ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, September 17, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/78848>.

¹³¹ General Marston was replaced as commandant by Brigadier General Edward Hinks in December of 1863. Hinks was then replaced by Colonel Alonzo Draper in April of 1864, and Brigadier General James Barnes in July of 1864. “Point Lookout Prisoner of War Camp,” *The American Civil War*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.mycivilwar.com/pow/md-point-lookout.html>. Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, September 17, 1863.

¹³² When the U.S. government sold buildings at Point Lookout after the war in 1865, “contraband quarters” were included in the advertisement and were described as being sixty feet by fourteen feet in size. “Large Sale of Government Buildings and Other Property at Point Lookout, MD,” *Baltimore Daily Commercial* (Baltimore), January 13, 1866, 3, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020. A plan drawn for the sale of government buildings, showing the contraband quarters, can be found in *Appendix B*.

This drastic change in living conditions at the contraband camp correlates with changing attitudes toward the refugees themselves amongst the soldiers in command. At first, refugees were mostly dismissed or treated with ambivalence, but by late 1863 organized measures were carried out for their care. While some aspects of life in Point Lookout's contraband camp changed, however, one constant seemed to be the widespread acceptance that whites were superior. Refugees always faced unfair treatment of some kind and depended greatly on the will of the commanding officer to determine what level of security they would have. As a result, any improvements made by individuals like Abby Gibbons and Gilman Marston were always untenable. Nonetheless, refugees found ways to improve their position themselves.

While under the protection of the U.S. Army, refugees at Point Lookout did take opportunities to access rights that had previously been denied to them. A number of refugees living in the contraband camp changed their names, possibly as a means to avoid detection or to break ties with their former lives and former owners.¹³³ Others were legally married.¹³⁴ Abby Hopper Gibbons aided refugees in these efforts. She also secured many refugees jobs in and around the hospital and sent formerly enslaved people into the North to find employment there. David Biscoe and his wife worked as servants in New York for Gibbons' family.¹³⁵ David was given a job as a writer and made four dollars a week.¹³⁶ Despite her clear disdain for Abby and

¹³³ Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863.

¹³⁴ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, October 16, 1862; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, April 16, 1863.

¹³⁵ David Biscoe is likely the same person as John Perry Bisco, who took a new name, David Lewis, in order to avoid detection by his owner. Abby sent him to New York with his wife to provide work for her brother. Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863.

¹³⁶ Julia Hopper Gibbons to Abby Hopper Gibbons, June 10, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/96567>.

for the refugees living in the contraband camp, Sarah Blunt eventually took an unnamed girl with her when she left Point Lookout in mid-1863.¹³⁷

Refugees also aimed to make themselves indispensable to the Union Army as a means of securing protection on a more permanent basis. Historian Chandra Manning states, “Everywhere that refugees from slavery came into contact with the Union Army, they offered labor, resources, local intelligence, and goodwill” to “make an incontrovertible case for the obligation of the U.S. government” to protect them.¹³⁸ Gibbons noted that a number of the refugees worked in the hospital.¹³⁹ A.W. Bartlett, a soldier in the 12th New Hampshire Regiment, described other kinds of work that refugees carried out at Point Lookout:

Some were sent North to earn a living as servants and laborers; some at once found places as cooks and waiters for the officers in the army; while a large number were constantly employed by the Government in driving teams, loading and unloading boats and cars, chopping, shoveling, etc.¹⁴⁰

The dedication of refugees to aiding the Union Army contrasted greatly with the complaints of local white who believed that they were lazy. The *Southern Aegis & Hartford County Intelligencer* complained that “instead of being employed in useful and profitable labor” the refugees at Point Lookout were “spending their time in idleness.”¹⁴¹ In reality, however, the

¹³⁷ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, June 19, 1863.

¹³⁸ Manning, “Working for Citizenship,” 182.

¹³⁹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Dr. Anthony Heger, May 30, 1863; Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, September 8, 1862; Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863. In a letter to her husband, Abby noted that a slave owner arrived to retrieve an unnamed man whom he owned. She fetched the post’s commander and asked him to keep the man there to provide work at the hospital. The commander did so and sent the slave owner away. Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, August 19, 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/70317>.

¹⁴⁰ Bartlett, 166.

¹⁴¹ *Southern Aegis & Hartford County Intelligencer*, January 23, 1863. The opposite was also true. During the Civil War, many whites claimed that enslaved people were accustomed to discipline, which is what made them good workers and soldiers; their positive attributes were tied to their enslaved status. Glatthaar, 84-85.

unrelenting work ethic of these individuals was clear. In March of 1863, Gibbons wrote about an unnamed woman who “work[ed] ever on from morn till night” in the hospital “with kindly voice & happy face.”¹⁴² Refugees at Point Lookout understood the impact that making themselves useful could have on their futures.

Another important opportunity that refugees at Point Lookout sought while under the protection of the federal government was education. According to historian Ronald Butchart, “Literacy opened the possibility of encountering ideas opposed to human bondage.”¹⁴³ Additionally, enslaved people understood that whites’ goals of “keeping the masses of African-Americans illiterate contributed to the myth of racial inferiority.”¹⁴⁴ In contraband camps throughout the South and in border states, formerly enslaved people prioritized learning. A.W. Bartlett wrote that “[o]ne of the leading manifestations of these people was their eagerness to learn to read.”¹⁴⁵ In September of 1862, Abby Hopper Gibbons wrote to the Rooms of the Board of Education and asked for supplies because “everyday [the refugees] apply to me for spelling books.”¹⁴⁶ In helping enslaved people learn to read, individuals like Gibbons were breaking a number of state laws that prohibited enslaved people from learning to read.¹⁴⁷ Life at Point

¹⁴² Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863.

¹⁴³ Ronald E. Butchart, *Schooling the Freed People: Teaching, Learning, and the Struggle for Black Freedom, 1861-1876* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2, accessed October 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Bartlett, 166. He further explained that “not more than one third of the [Confederate] prisoners could write their own names. It was only by this wide-spread ignorance through the slave states . . . that the Rebellion was made possible. And hence it is plainly seen how necessary to the welfare and safety of free people is the general diffusion of knowledge.” Bartlett, 150.

¹⁴⁶ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Julia Gibbons, September 16, 1862.

¹⁴⁷ Butchart, 2-3.

Lookout's contraband camp was altogether dangerous, but refugees took every opportunity that they could to better themselves and to prove themselves deserving of equal treatment.

For the inhabitants of Point Lookout's contraband camp, the lack of security presented a daunting challenge. Abby Hopper Gibbons remained one of the biggest allies of African-American refugees at Point Lookout in 1862 and 1863. Yet, in many instances, Gibbons was fighting a losing battle. A large number of white officers and soldiers at Point Lookout disagreed with her devotion to the camp's inhabitants. Based on her correspondence, few stood alongside Abby; she spent most of her time "pleading for the poor contrabands."¹⁴⁸ At one point, Gibbons received an anonymous letter from a group of soldiers at Point Lookout; they warned that she "had better leave double quick or else the soldiers [would] give [her] an introduction to the bay."¹⁴⁹ They accused her of being a "nigger lover" and "H--l hound."¹⁵⁰ Colonel Robert Rodgers, the commanding officer of the 2nd Maryland at Point Lookout, complained that "this worthy old lady . . . adds nothing to the harmony & good discipline of my post."¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, Gibbons used her many connections in Washington, D.C. and New York to find someone who would listen to her and continuously spoke out against injustices despite the backlash she received. As a result, most of the early changes seen at Point Lookout can be attributed to her work.

¹⁴⁸ Abby Hopper Gibbons to James Sloan Gibbons, August 19, 1862.

¹⁴⁹ Anonymous letter to Abby Hopper Gibbons, n.d., Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/17395>.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Colonel Robert S. Rodgers to Brigadier General Henry H. Lockwood, May 27, 1863.

Once Abby Hopper Gibbons departed from Point Lookout in September of 1863, the contraband camp's inhabitants faced a period of uncertainty.¹⁵² William H. Gardner dismissed Abby and, possibly due to her outspokenness, immediately changed the responsibilities of head matron to lessen the power of nurses.¹⁵³ The refugees at Point Lookout lost a major advocate as well as a spokesperson who had recorded their experiences. As a result, historical records that document the refugees' experiences in 1864 and 1865 are scarce. While at Point Lookout, Gibbons befriended George O'Meally, a soldier in the Veteran Reserve Corps.¹⁵⁴ O'Meally continued to inform Abby of the state of the refugee camp once she was gone. By February of 1864, a regiment of African-American soldiers arrived at Point Lookout and stepped in to care for the people living at the contraband camp.¹⁵⁵ In March of 1864, O'Meally informed Abby that the refugees "appear[ed] happy and contented, with good clothes and plenty to eat."¹⁵⁶

The presence of United States Colored Troop regiments at Point Lookout had a direct impact on the number of people who escaped to the site's contraband camp in 1864. The 36th United States Colored Infantry Regiment arrived in February of 1864 and served as guards at the prison until July of 1864.¹⁵⁷ Soldiers in the 36th U.S.C.I., a regiment made up of formerly

¹⁵² Transcription of William H. Gardner Order, September 23, 1863. Abby and all other nurses at Point Lookout, besides a small group of Catholic sisters, were removed at this time. This was part of an army-wide measure that aimed to give medical officers full control over nurses and to remove Protestant nurses who had been causing trouble. Bacon, 118-119.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ "George O'Meally," *Soldiers and Sailors Database*, National Park Service, accessed October 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/civilwar/soldiers-and-sailors-database.htm>. O'Meally prided himself for removing the shackles from Sandy Dorsey's ankles. George O'Meally to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 28, 1864, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/73106>.

¹⁵⁵ Bryant, "The Model 36th Regiment," 193; Bryant, "A Model Regiment," 109.

¹⁵⁶ George O'Meally to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 28, 1864.

¹⁵⁷ Bryant, "The Model 26th Regiment," 193, 237. When the 36th left for Virginia in July of 1864, they were replaced by the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry, the 3rd and 4th Maryland Colored Regiments, and the 24th and

enslaved men from Virginia and North Carolina, dedicated themselves to helping enslaved people in St. Mary's County and in Virginia.¹⁵⁸ While these soldiers were posted as prison guards, they took opportunities to help others held in bondage around the prison. Two regiments of African-American soldiers, the 7th and 38th U.S.C.T. Regiments, were also raised at the contraband camp, which is reflected on an 1864 register for enslaved people in St. Mary's.¹⁵⁹

An article printed in the *St. Mary's Gazette* in March of 1864, one month after the arrival of the 36th U.S.C.I. to the Confederate prison, noted that African-American soldiers arriving in the area "were accompanied by a considerable number of runaways, chiefly women and children."¹⁶⁰ The soldiers also "entered the County Jail and released twenty-one prisoners—leaving only one white man . . ."¹⁶¹ Based on newspaper listings for runaway slaves in St. Mary's, "prisoners" likely refers to enslaved people who had run away and were caught.¹⁶² The *St. Mary's Beacon* commented on the arrival of African-American soldiers:

28th Colored Infantry Regiments; "Point Lookout Prisoner of War Camp," *The American Civil War*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.mycivilwar.com/pow/md-point-lookout.html>.

¹⁵⁸ Bryant, "The Model 36th Regiment," iv, 215-217, 233.

¹⁵⁹ Bartlett, 166. Ninety men listed on the 1864 register for St. Mary's were noted to have enlisted, but this was not a complete count. About 600 enslaved and free African-American men from St. Mary's enlisted throughout the war; Dent, "Slave Statistics." Three men in the 38th U.S.C.T. received the Medal of Honor for their actions at Chaffin's Farm in Virginia, including James Harris and William Barnes who were formerly enslaved in St. Mary's County. "United States Colored Troops Memorial Monument," *Visit St. Mary's*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.visitstmarysmd.com/directory/united-states-colored-troops-memorial-monument/>; Nicholas A. Redding, "Maryland's African American Soldiers at Appomattox," April 9, 2020, *Preservation Maryland*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.preservationmaryland.org/marylands-african-american-soldiers-at-appomattox/>; Steward T. Henderson, "Battlefield Markers & Monuments: African American Civil War Memorial & USCT Memorial," October 31, 2017, *Emerging Civil War* (blog), accessed November 2020, <https://emergingcivilwar.com/2017/10/31/battlefield-markers-monuments-african-american-civil-war-memorial-usct-memorial/>.

¹⁶⁰ "Negro Troops," *The St. Mary's Gazette* (Leonard Town, MD), March 24, 1864, 1, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² For examples of enslaved people who ran away in St. Mary's County during the Civil War, see: "Notice of Committal to Jail," *St. Mary's Beacon*, May 15, 1862, 2, accessed October 2020, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020; "\$10 Reward," *St. Mary's Beacon*, April 3, 1862, 4, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress; "Notice of Commitment," *St.*

We learn that there are now several squads of negro soldiers scattered throughout the county, and that the influence exerted by their presence among the slaves is becoming extremely prejudicial to the interest of our people. Since the arrival of a detachment [at] Chaptico, most of the negro men in that vicinity have left their masters, whilst those that remain at home are becoming insolent and worthless.¹⁶³

The African-American soldiers at Point Lookout, belonging to a number of U.S.C.T. regiments, interacted directly with the refugee population living outside of the hospital and contributed to the camp's growth.¹⁶⁴ Based on this article, the presence of African-American soldiers provided hope to enslaved people in St. Mary's and encouraged more people to run away. The soldiers also regularly freed enslaved people both around the prison in St. Mary's and in Virginia across the Potomac River.

The 36th U.S.C.I. crossed into Virginia on three different occasions in 1864 to raid for supplies.¹⁶⁵ On June 11th, 1864, General Edward Hinks led an expedition with 300 men from the 36th and 50 cavalry soldiers. Hinks reported that he returned to Point Lookout with "about 50 contraband's (slaves), and without any loss of men or material."¹⁶⁶ Another expedition led by Colonel Alonzo Draper, the commanding officer of the 36th, returned with "375 head of cattle, 160 horses and mules, about 600 contraband's, including between 60 and 70 recruits for the

Mary's Beacon, June 5, 1862, 3, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020; "Notice of Committal to Jail," *St. Mary's Gazette*, December 10, 1863, 3, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁶³ "Negro Soldiers," *The St. Mary's Gazette*, January 14, 1864, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁶⁴ The first guard unit at Point Lookout consisted of the 2nd and 12th New Hampshire Regiments, followed by the 4th Rhode Island Volunteer Regiment, the 10th U.S. Veteran Reserve Corps, the 166th Company of the 1st U.S. Volunteers, and the 139th Ohio Infantry Regiment. In February of 1864, the first African-American soldiers, belonging to the 36th U.S.C.I. Regiment, arrived for guard duty. The 36th was followed by the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry, the 3rd and 4th Maryland Colored Regiments, and the 24th and 28th Colored Infantry Regiments. "Point Lookout Prisoner of War Camp," *The American Civil War*, accessed October 2020, <https://www.mycivilwar.com/pow/md-point-lookout.html>.

¹⁶⁵ Bryant, "The Model 36th Regiment," 212-236.

¹⁶⁶ *OR*, ser. I, vol. 33, pt. 1, 268-69.

army and navy”¹⁶⁷ During this expedition, one soldier lost his life trying to rescue a group of enslaved people. Thirty-seven-year-old Private Peter Wilson broke off from Draper’s column during a skirmish with Confederate cavalry on June 16th.¹⁶⁸ Wilson approached a house and attempted to rescue the enslaved people living there. According to a correspondent writing for the *American & Commercial Advertiser*, “the Rebels ran down a negro soldier and a contraband, both of whom were murdered in cold blood”¹⁶⁹ Wilson, a former slave himself, gave his life in an attempt to help others to freedom.¹⁷⁰ Time and time again, members of U.S.C.T. regiments at Point Lookout went to great lengths to rescue enslaved people nearby.

The June expedition also returned with “a large number of plows, harrows, cultivators, wheat drills, corn-shellors, harness, carts, and carriages, etc. for the use of the contraband settlement on the Patuxent.”¹⁷¹ A month earlier, the property of Joseph Forrest had been confiscated “by the military authorities at Point Lookout” and was “worked by contrabands and refugees of which there are quite a large number at Point Lookout.”¹⁷² The adjacent farm belonging to John Sothoron was also confiscated.¹⁷³ The U.S. Army continued to send refugees

¹⁶⁷ *OR*, ser. I, vol. 37, pt. 1, 166-67; Bryant, “The Model 36th Regiment,” 232-33.

¹⁶⁸ Bryant, “The Model 36th Regiment,” 226-229.

¹⁶⁹ “From Point Lookout,” *American & Commercial Advertiser* (Baltimore, MD), June 23, 1864, Google News Archive, accessed October 2020. *OR*, ser. I, vol. 37, pt. 1, 164.

¹⁷⁰ After the war, Peter Wilson was reinterred and buried in the Fredericksburg National Cemetery. “Roster of Known Union Soldiers Buried in Fredericksburg National Cemetery,” Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park, PDF, accessed September 2020.

¹⁷¹ *OR*, ser. I, vol. 37, pt. 1, 163-67.

¹⁷² Forrest was a Confederate sympathizer who had fled the state of Maryland earlier in the war. “Military Occupation,” *The St. Mary’s Gazette*, May 12, 1864, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁷³ Richard Paul Fuke, *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 31, accessed October 2020, EBSCOhost.

from Point Lookout to live there. This was part of a larger trend in which the U.S. Army placed African-American refugees on confiscated farms as a means of securing land for displaced people.¹⁷⁴ After the war, these two farms remained under the control of the federal government and played a major role in the postwar lives of freed people in southern Maryland.

Based on the number of enslaved people who ran away or enlisted during 1864 in St. Mary's County alone, the presence of African-American soldiers at Point Lookout had a direct impact on the contraband camp. These soldiers, most of them being former slaves themselves, took it as a direct responsibility to help others who were enslaved. Hundreds of people were rescued by these soldiers. They also brought their wives and children to Point Lookout, many of whom were employed in St. Mary's County after the war according to an article in the *Aegis & Intelligencer* on September 1, 1865.¹⁷⁵ One soldier in the 36th U.S.C.I. Regiment, David Cherry, married a woman named Harriet who had been rescued from Virginia.¹⁷⁶ The relationship formed between soldiers and refugees at Point Lookout had a lasting impact on their lives going forward. Further, many African-American soldiers and refugees remained in the area immediately after the war and relied on aid from U.S. officials stationed in St. Mary's County.

In 1864, the *St. Mary's Gazette* wrote that "slavery can now be said to have but little more than a nominal existence in this State, and the rights of the slaveholders are so poorly respected And yet, we are a 'loyal' people and live under the Constitution and laws framed

¹⁷⁴ The Confiscation Act of 1863 allowed the Secretary of the Treasury to take control of abandoned lands in the Confederacy; Roy W. Copeland, "In the Beginning: Origins of African American Real Property Ownership in the United States," *Journal of Black Studies* 44, no. 6 (2013): 651, accessed October 2020, JSTOR.

¹⁷⁵ "Employment of Colored Persons in St. Mary's County," *Aegis & Intelligencer* (Bel Air, MD), September 1, 1865, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁷⁶ Bryant, "The Model 36th Regiment," 233.

by our forefathers!”¹⁷⁷ Advocacy on the part of federal officials and African-American soldiers at Point Lookout had a drastic effect on the way that refugees were treated. While conditions in the contraband camp remained poor throughout the war, obvious improvements were made in connection with its growing permanence and size. The refugees themselves had a direct role in improving their own position at Point Lookout. While policies did not always align with officials’ desires to provide aid, a select group of people worked relentlessly to better the condition of enslaved people and refugees in southern Maryland.

SECTION IV: “HIS ULTIMATE STATUS”

While many U.S. soldiers felt obligated to uphold certain policies that failed to protect African-American refugees, their daily interactions with people who had been enslaved had a major impact on how they felt about race issues and slavery. Even if policy did not change, people’s attitudes often times did.¹⁷⁸ At Point Lookout, many white soldiers and hospital workers from the North interacted with enslaved people for the very first time, and struggled to make sense of what status these people would have after the war. White soldiers and hospital workers had conflicting views about the presence of African-American refugees at Point Lookout. Many considered them a curiosity or a burden, while others embraced the prospect of emancipation and considered it a personal responsibility to offer them protection. Nonetheless, those who stood up for the refugees often used problematic language when writing about them due to their own preconceived notions about African-Americans.

¹⁷⁷ “Negro Soldiers,” *The St. Mary’s Gazette*, January 14, 1864, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

¹⁷⁸ The relationship between white soldiers and African-American soldiers provides an example of how perceptions of slavery and African-Americans changed during the war. For an in-depth discussion of how white soldiers from the North interacted with African-American soldiers from the South, see Joseph H. Glatthaar, *Forged in Battle: The Alliance of Black Soldiers and White Officers* (New York: Collier Macmillan, 1990).

The perspective of A.W. Bartlett, a soldier in the 12th New Hampshire who interacted with the camp's inhabitants, offers a glimpse into how white soldiers and hospital workers were personally affected by their interactions with refugees at the contraband camp. Within his writing, he grappled with the cultural identity of the camp's refugees, which greatly differed from his own. In 1862, he visited the camp and witnessed the refugees singing and dancing.¹⁷⁹ Drawing a connection between racial stereotypes and his own experiences, he wrote that "the plantation 'Sambo' of antebellum days" often made "the evenings merry with frolicsome sports."¹⁸⁰ To see this in person was "a treat to those who never before came nearer to anything of the kind than a minstrel show."¹⁸¹ He was likewise entertained by their religious practices, noting that their church services consisted of "praying, singing, shouting, moaning, groaning, and weeping, all timed . . . by shaking hands, stamping the feet . . . and other strange and erratic motions . . . until they would work themselves up to the highest pitch of frenzy."¹⁸² While Bartlett was taken aback by their cultural practices, he simultaneously acknowledged their "fervent spirit of reverence and devotion" and expressed an overall respect for them.¹⁸³

Within Bartlett's account, he reinforced racial stereotypes that defined African-Americans during the 19th century, but also expressed his support for emancipation and recognized slavery's direct connection to the war. He wrote that, "Beyond the rebel picket line the colored man felt himself no longer a slave, and when under the protection of the stars and

¹⁷⁹ Bartlett, 166-69.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 166-67.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 167.

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 168.

stripes he became at once the Nation's war—his ultimate status to be determined by the result of the war.”¹⁸⁴ He argued that the “innate propensity of the colored race to be always found on the smiling side of life” had led slave owners to claim, “that the slave was altogether happy and contented,” which he wholeheartedly disagreed with.¹⁸⁵ What can be inferred from Bartlett's account is that, for a large number of northerners at Point Lookout, interacting with African-American refugees and soldiers there may have been their first time seeing people who had been enslaved in the South. Bartlett was clearly trying to make sense of a group of people that he was previously unfamiliar with outside of racial stereotypes, while still expressing his disdain for the institution of slavery.

Even Abby Hopper Gibbons, one of the biggest advocates for African-American refugees during the war, expressed paternalistic and derogatory attitudes toward these individuals at times. According to historian Joseph Glatthaar, who discusses the relationship between African-American soldiers and white officers, “[i]n a society with such widespread and deep-seated racial prejudices as the North, rare indeed was the individual untainted by racism.”¹⁸⁶ For those living in the North who had limited contact with enslaved African-Americans, they still carried “powerful preconceptions” about them.¹⁸⁷ Gibbons often noted on the physical appearance of refugees at the camp within her letters. She wrote home to her family in March of 1863, asking: “Does anybody want Contraband help? A very fine looking set of house hands came a few days since . . . They were the best looking & most capable I have seen in this region.”¹⁸⁸ She

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁸⁶ Glatthaar, 81.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863.

described refugees as “good looking” in many instances; in trying to convince others to support their plight, she often drew more attention to their physical characteristics and their skills rather than their humanity and their needs.¹⁸⁹

Within the same letter, Gibbons stated that a man named John Perry Bisco was being sent north by boat and would be employed by her brother, John. She described her thought process in sending him away from Point Lookout:

. . . John Perry Bisco, Perry he is called, a good faithful honest fellow as ever lived – he is black as the ace of spades He will be a faithful fellow and at Milton will be a prize . . . His wife will be with him, they have no children, are both valuable. George & Grace must go somewhere – the former is a Carpenter & a valuable man but Perry will suit Uncle John best.¹⁹⁰

The problematic nature of her description reflects the status that African-Americans held within American society at the time. Even Gibbons, who championed the cause of emancipation and of rights for formerly enslaved people, reflected common perceptions about African-Americans that were based entirely on stereotypes and “scientific” studies of race that had emerged in the mid-19th century.¹⁹¹ Not only does Gibbons note the complexion of his skin, but she also evaluates his value as a laborer and equates his status to that of physical property.

While Gibbons failed to look beyond racial stereotypes, her intentions behind sending refugees north were still altogether admirable. In previous letters, Gibbons stated that Perry, George, and Grace all faced the immediate threat of being retrieved by their owners, and she took immediate steps to remove them from Point Lookout as a way to prevent their owners from

¹⁸⁹ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Lucy Gibbons Morse, April 16, 1863.

¹⁹⁰ Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863.

¹⁹¹ Glatthaar, 82-84. For an example of a study of race from the mid-19th century, see John Campbell, *Negro-mania: Being An Examination of the Falsely Assumed Equality of the Various Races of Men* (Philadelphia: Campbell & Powell, 1851), accessed October 2020, HeinOnline.

having any success.¹⁹² She also chose to send them to family members and found them employment.¹⁹³ However, Gibbons' contradictory attitudes demonstrate commonly-held beliefs that supposed African-Americans were naturally inferior and were entirely dependent on whites.¹⁹⁴ According to Glatthaar, whites from the North had learned about enslaved African-Americans from stories or newspapers, but "seldom through personal experiences."¹⁹⁵ Exemplified within Gibbons' letters, the language used by Northerners "reflected their assumptions that blacks were more akin to animals than to whites . . ."¹⁹⁶ Racial slurs were repeated matter-of-factly even amongst "more enlightened" individuals who supported emancipation, as they had no reason to discredit ideas that had been accepted as facts for over a century.¹⁹⁷

As for Confederate prisoners at Point Lookout, their perceptions toward African-American refugees and soldiers do not reflect major, positive changes, but still demonstrate that the presence of African-Americans who had been elevated beyond the status of "slave" directly affected them.¹⁹⁸ A discussion took place amongst prisoners about the radical societal changes

¹⁹² Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863; Sarah Hopper Emerson to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 16, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/96524>.

¹⁹³ Julia Gibbons to Abby Hopper Gibbons, June 10, 1863; Abby Hopper Gibbons to unknown, March 1863; Emily Gardner to Abby Hopper Gibbons, March 28, 1863, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/16863>; Dr. William Henry Prince to John Hopper, January 11, 1864, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79622>.

¹⁹⁴ Stephen Ash, *The Black Experience in the Civil War South* (Santa Barbara, CA: Prager, 2010), 1.

¹⁹⁵ Glatthaar, 82.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 81.

¹⁹⁸ Within their diaries and letters, many Confederate prisoners lamented over the fact that formerly enslaved men had become soldiers and were tasked with guarding them. Prisoner B.T. Holliday wrote that "it was a

taking place around them. One prisoner, Randolph Shotwell, mentioned the contraband camp in his diary and stated that the refugees were “held here at government expense” and were “virtually prisoners as they could not escape from the limits of the Point.”¹⁹⁹ To Shotwell, the refugees at Point Lookout were being held against their will. This sentiment was repeated amongst Confederate prisoners, who believed that African-American soldiers at the prison had been tricked into enlistment by the U.S. Army. Prisoner John Stevens of the 5th Texas Infantry wrote that “we knew the poor negro was not blamable, because all through the south he was faithful to the charge we had left in his hands.”²⁰⁰ Based on these accounts, the prisoners believed that enslaved people had been tricked into leaving. This sentiment was not only repeated by Confederate prisoners, but also by the press in southern Maryland. In January of 1865, the *Aegis & Intelligencer* wrote that these “unfortunate negroes” had been “enticed from their peaceful homes by the abolitionists who have been sent among us since the commencement of the war. Further, no one “can blame the negro for accepting freedom when offered to him; their ignorance is to be pitied”²⁰¹ To those who did not consider African-Americans to be equal, they could not fathom the possibility that enslaved people chose to leave on their own.

bitter pill for Southern men to swallow and we felt the insult very keenly.” B.T. Holliday, “Account of My Capture,” quoted in *Captives in Gray: The Civil War Prisons of the Union*, by Roger Pickenpaugh (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), 131.

¹⁹⁹ Hamilton, 151.

²⁰⁰ John Stevens, *Reminiscences of the Civil War: Life in Hood's Texas Brigade, Army of the Northern Virginia*, quoted in “The Model 36th Regiment: The Contribution of Black Soldiers and Their Families to the Union War Effort, 1861-1866” by James K. Bryant, PhD. diss., University of Rochester, 2001, 194.

²⁰¹ “An Appeal for Aid,” *The Aegis & Intelligencer*, January 27, 1865, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

One Wisconsin soldier proposed that “the rebellion is abolitionizing the whole army.”²⁰² While not all white soldiers came to accept abolitionism, the experiences of white soldiers at Point Lookout demonstrates that African-American soldiers and refugees at Point Lookout had a drastic impact on them. Some continued to defend the idea that African-American people were racially inferior and inept, while others found themselves questioning what they knew about the life of an enslaved person. Yet, even those who supported refugees and the possibility of emancipation still “bore the marks of their era and background.”²⁰³ Taking into consideration how the level of protection afforded to African-American refugees at Point Lookout increased throughout the war, people were thinking about slavery’s future and its role in the war. If emancipation was inevitable, what place would formerly enslaved people hold in American society going forward and how would white Americans respond to this level of change?

SECTION V: “THE FREEDMEN ARE GENERALLY POWERLESS”

The state of Maryland emancipated over 87,000 enslaved people on November 1, 1864, yet the whereabouts of Point Lookout’s refugee population after that date remains largely unknown.²⁰⁴ Some traveled to other areas where they would have a better chance at finding work, while some remained under the care of the government.²⁰⁵ Charlotte Bennet, who had been

²⁰² Paul D. Escott, *“What Shall We Do with the Negro?”: Lincoln, White Racism, and Civil War America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 31.

²⁰³ Glatthaar, 81.

²⁰⁴ Fuke, xv. The population of St. Mary’s County in 1870 suggests that a large number of formerly enslaved people and refugees remained in the area once the war was over. Bayly E. Marks, “Skilled Blacks in Antebellum St. Mary’s County, Maryland,” *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 4 (November 1987): 537-564, accessed October 2020, JSTOR. For a breakdown of St. Mary’s population before and after the war, see *Appendix C*.

²⁰⁵ A number of formerly enslaved people in Maryland moved to Baltimore. In a way, post-war Baltimore operated similarly to wartime contraband camps, in that a large number of people lived there and were left without proper safety nets. The *Baltimore Gazette* wrote in 1866 that freed people “c[a]me to the city without the means of support and . . . depend[ed] on what they [could] pick up to satisfy the demands of hunger, and [sought] shelter at night in the police stations.” Fuke, xv, xvii, 115.

turned back to William Taylor with Sandy Dorsey in mid-1863, eventually made her way to Baltimore and lived there after the war.²⁰⁶ By January of 1866, the U.S. Army had left Point Lookout.²⁰⁷ The remaining refugees and the newly freed African-American population in St. Mary's County were once again left to depend on federal legislative power to offer protection, but policies created for their protection came with many limitations and unintended consequences. Much like advocates at Point Lookout during the war, federal agents and relief workers on the ground provided most of the care for freedmen and women rather than federal policy itself.

Life for formerly enslaved people in southern Maryland presented additional challenges than in places like Baltimore, which had a large free African-American population before the Civil War.²⁰⁸ According to historian Barbara Fields, slavery had a much slower decline in southern Maryland, which was “a backward agricultural region devoted primarily to tobacco.”²⁰⁹ Here, the existence of slavery faded away gradually due to the area's overall isolation; slavery ended “not in the emergence of a vigorous antislavery society, but in relative stagnation.”²¹⁰ This region's free population saw little economic promise after the war because there was no economic base besides agriculture for people to build their lives on.²¹¹ By 1870, most freed

²⁰⁶ 1870 United States Federal Census, Population Schedule, Slave Inhabitants, Maryland, St. Mary's County, accessed October 2020, *Family Search*.

²⁰⁷ “Large Sale of Government Buildings and Other Property at Point Lookout, MD,” *Baltimore Daily Commercial*, January 13, 1866, 3, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

²⁰⁸ Fuke, 17, 112.

²⁰⁹ Fields, 6.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

people worked as field laborers or domestic servants.²¹² In addition, according to historian Richard Fuke, even the government officials sent to help freed people still considered them “a subservient labor force” that had to “come to terms” with white employers’ demands and beliefs.²¹³

As a whole, Maryland itself differed from many Southern states after the war. Due to its large, prewar population of free African-Americans, formerly enslaved people faced “whites’ long-accustomed familiarity with and professed contempt for a large and subservient free black population.”²¹⁴ When faced with the reality of an even larger free African-American population after 1865, historian Ira Berlin noted that “with almost a century of experience to draw on, whites had little need to grope.”²¹⁵ On March 3, 1865, Congress created a new agency, the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands (better known as the Freedmen’s Bureau), to provide aid to displaced refugees of all races in “rebel states, or from any district of country within the territory embraced in the operations of the army.”²¹⁶ In Maryland, only six counties in the southern portion of the state were incorporated due to their proximity to Washington, D.C.²¹⁷ Agents were sent out to various locations to provide on-the-ground support

²¹² Ibid., 13-14.

²¹³ Ibid., 17.

²¹⁴ Ibid., xix.

²¹⁵ Ira Berlin, *Slaves Without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 381-82.

²¹⁶ United States Congress, Act of March 3, 1865, chp. 90, *United States Statutes at Large: Thirty-Eighth Congress, Session 1*, Library of Congress, accessed October 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/statutes-at-large/38th-congress/session-2/c38s2ch90.pdf>.

²¹⁷ St. Mary’s County was one of the six counties included under the Bureau when it was first created in March of 1865; Paul A. Cimbala and Randall M. Miller, eds. *The Freedmen’s Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 290.

for freed people and to address their complaints. By September, the rest of Maryland was added due to repeated issues and complaints in other areas.²¹⁸

Since Maryland had remained loyal to the United States, the Freedmen's Bureau had no legal power to enforce agreements made between African-American laborers and white employers.²¹⁹ However, the Bureau agent for St. Mary's County, Edward O'Brien, was deeply committed to making sure that such contracts were fair. O'Brien stated that white farmers asked him to approve dishonest contracts but he "steadily refused" as he could not "consent to any injustice being committed upon the colored people."²²⁰ While the Bureau itself could not enforce rules in Maryland, many agents tried their best to ensure that formerly enslaved people were treated fairly. After the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, freed people could utilize the courts to bring their complaints about employers forward.²²¹ Yet, as noted by commissioner C.H. Howard, without the help of a Bureau agent "the freedmen are generally powerless to obtain redress for wrongs."²²² Much like the relationship that formed between Northern aid workers and Point Lookout's refugees during the war, a relationship formed between Bureau agents and freed people.

²¹⁸ Fuke, 24.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 25.

²²⁰ E.F. O'Brien to S.N. Clark, January 4, 1866, quoted in *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland* by Richard Paul Fuke (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 26.

²²¹ Fuke, 28. The Civil Rights Act of 1866 mandated that "all persons born in the United States," except Native Americans, were "declared to be citizens of the United States" and gave citizens the "full and equal benefit of all laws and proceedings for the security of person and property." It was passed after the House of Representatives overrode President Andrew Johnson's veto of the bill. "The Civil Rights Bill of 1866," *History, Art & Archives*, United States House of Representatives, accessed November 2020, <https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1851-1900/The-Civil-Rights-Bill-of-1866/>.

²²² C.H. Howard, quoted in *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland* by Richard Paul Fuke (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 28.

Despite the fact that permanent emancipation had become a reality and an entire government agency had been dedicated to the care of formerly enslaved people, most African-Americans in St. Mary's County continued to face serious hardships. Abby Hopper Gibbons returned to Point Lookout in September of 1866. Upon return, she noted that a number of people who had lived in the contraband camp recognized her.²²³ During her 1866 trip, Gibbons paid close attention to the state of living that freedmen and women found themselves in:

The Laws give no protection whatever to the colored man, and the suffering by hard treatment & starvation is horrible – they may earn say \$1.00, and go to the store where for 2 lbs of meet [sic] they will take every [cent] . . . [a] woman said that she worked hard, and could not earn enough to pay for the ground she lived upon and to get enough food to live. And she did not know what would become of them next winter – They say it is better to live with strangers, than their old mothers, and wherever they are allowed to put in a few stakes and make a shelter, they do it – but all property owners ask them a shameful rent for the few feet of earth – [some] work in the field, and are paid 37 cents per day – which sure will not pay for meat & meal too.²²⁴

Most refugees who remained in St. Mary's County after the war faced immense poverty. Under the Freedmen's Bureau, a system of contract labor between white farmers and African-American laborers developed in rural areas. Planters decided on wages and limited the self-reliance and social mobility of their laborers. Federal agents intervened to ensure that labor contracts were fair. Without Bureau agents present on the grounds, African-American workers faced intimidation and mistreatment on the part of white citizens. Even though agents wanted to help freed people, the impetus behind their work was to reinforce African-Americans' role as agricultural laborers rather than encourage economic mobility.²²⁵

²²³ Abby Hopper Gibbons to Sarah Hopper Gibbons Emerson, September 18, 1866, Abby Hopper Gibbons Papers, Friends Historical Library of Swarthmore College, accessed September 2020, <http://tricontentdm.brynmawr.edu/cdm/ref/collection/InHOR/id/79298>.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Fuke, 38.

A large number of freed people in St. Mary's remained under the direct care of the government until 1866. Starting in 1864, the government held over 3,000 acres of farmland on the Patuxent River in St. Mary's.²²⁶ The property had belonged to two Confederate sympathizers who had fled from Maryland, Joseph Forrest and John Sothoron.²²⁷ A large number of refugees were placed on these farms during the war to provide labor. After the war, over five hundred freed people lived on the "Government Farms" and were cared for by the Freedmen's Bureau.²²⁸ White farmers in the area often complained about the farms' operation. One farmer wrote to the Bureau in 1865, saying that he was "very much annoyed by [freed people] passing and repassing through [his] fields" and that there were "4 or 5 hundred of these creatures . . . so you may guess there is unpleasant living thus."²²⁹ The farms provided limited care to freed people; further, the project "had the earmarks of a temporary expedient."²³⁰ Much like the contraband camp at Point Lookout, federal policy regarded the Government Farms as a temporary solution in a time of emergency.²³¹ By 1866, the government closed the farms and returned the property back to Forrest and Sothoron. The Bureau was, itself, intended to be a temporary effort.²³²

²²⁶ Fuke, 31. According to historian Lynda Morgan, the Freedmen's Bureau "encouraged blacks to return to plantations and discouraged their migration to cities in both rhetoric and policy." Lynda J. Morgan, *Emancipation in Virginia's Tobacco Belt, 1850-1870* (Athens, University of Georgia, 1992), 132.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Fuke, 31. According to the *Aegis & Intelligencer* in 1865, field hands were paid \$10 a month and the "'gangsman,' a colored man at the head of 25 or 30 others" was paid \$15 a month at the Government Farms. A teacher was also provided for the children. "Employment of Colored Persons in St. Mary's County" *Aegis & Intelligencer*, September 1, 1865, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

²²⁹ H. Jones to A.W. Bradford, September 23, 1865, State Papers, quoted in *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland* by Richard Paul Fuke (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 35.

²³⁰ Fuke, 32.

²³¹ Ibid.

²³² Ibid., xiv.

The Freedmen's Bureau lacked proper legal authority, especially in Maryland, and as a result failed to properly protect formerly enslaved people from whites. According to historian Richard Fuke, author of *Imperfect Equality: African Americans and the Confines of White Racial Attitudes in Post-emancipation Maryland*, the real impact of the Bureau did not come from policy. With all of the many legal limitations that the Bureau faced,

... the willingness of a Bureau agent to listen to the complaint of a freedperson and that agent's ability to bring suit against a planter in a civil court . . . gave Bureau agents leverage in negotiating settlements. That informal process of advocacy and intervention, more than legal proceedings, became the main line of Bureau's 'adjudication' and the heart of individual agents' strategy across the South.²³³

O'Brien, and other agents, had committed himself to the care of freed people in St. Mary's. A number of complaints were presented to Bureau agents and investigated in St. Mary's. An unnamed agent also appealed to property owners to donate land for the creation of a school.²³⁴ Dr. John Mackall Brome, owner of a large plantation, donated one acre in 1867 for the "use, benefit, and education of the colored people of St. Mary's County."²³⁵ In total, the Bureau set up eleven schools in St. Mary's for freed people.²³⁶ While agents had limited authority and were impacted by their own prejudices toward African-Americans, the only substantive help that freed people in southern Maryland received resulted from federal officials who worked with them directly.

²³³ Ibid., xxvvi.

²³⁴ "All of Us Would Walk Together," Historic St. Mary's City, accessed September 2020, <http://hsmcwalktogether.org/project/st-marys-manor-and-the-civil-war/>.

²³⁵ Many of Dr. Brome's formerly enslaved laborers continued to live at Saint Mary's Manor, his plantation, and worked the fields or in the main house. These families lived in slave quarters into the 20th century. "All of Us Would Walk Together," Historic St. Mary's City.

²³⁶ Ibid.

By May of 1865, the *St. Mary's Gazette* noted that federal soldiers left for Washington to be mustered out of service, except for those stationed at Point Lookout.²³⁷ Yet they did not remain there for long; in January of 1866, buildings constructed at Point Lookout for Hammond Hospital were sold at auction by the government.²³⁸ Officials working for the Freedmen's Bureau remained in St. Mary's County until 1868 when the Bureau was dissolved.²³⁹ Once the federal agents and soldiers who had provided aid and support to freed people in southern Maryland were gone, African-Americans were largely left to their own devices. In a matter of three years, the institutional forces created for freed people had been removed. The same issues that limited the influence of wartime policies for enslaved people behind Union lines transcended into the postwar era. At the heart of these issues was the belief that rights for African-Americans were not to be regarded as permanent or equal to those of whites.

CONCLUSION

For enslaved people who ran to Point Lookout between 1862 and 1864, the biggest source of positive change was the federal officials and aid workers who advocated for refugees' rescue and care. Maryland's enslaved population faced different barriers than enslaved people living in Confederate states. As a loyal state, the U.S. Army was obligated to uphold policies such as the Fugitive Slave Act that protected the rights of slaveowners. Nonetheless, the threat of retrieval and poor conditions at Point Lookout's contraband camp were not enough to dissuade refugees from flocking to the area. Refugees worked to make themselves indispensable to the U.S. Army and accessed opportunities that they were previously denied. Advocates like Abby

²³⁷ "Departure of Troops," *St. Mary's Gazette*, May 25, 1865, 2, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress, accessed September 2020.

²³⁸ *Baltimore Daily Commercial*, January 13, 1866.

²³⁹ Paul A. Cimballa and Randall M. Miller, eds. *The Freedmen's Bureau and Reconstruction: Reconsiderations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), xxviii-xxxi, 332-34.

Hopper Gibbons and African-American soldiers provided a voice for these individuals who fell between clear boundaries that defined African-American people within American society at the time.

While policies directed toward “contrabands” were altogether inconsistent, conditions at Point Lookout’s contraband camp changed for the better as attitudes amongst federal officials changed. Refugees at Point Lookout fought to secure a future in which the U.S. government recognized them as people deserving of equal rights and protections. Nonetheless, the chaos of war eventually settled, and wartime gains were largely lost.²⁴⁰ After the war, the Freedmen’s Bureau appointed agents who took the place of Northern aid workers and federal soldiers. These agents provided a support system for African-American workers, yet federal policies that were created to help formerly enslaved people after emancipation failed in southern Maryland. One Ohio aid worker wrote prophetically, “Benevolence may do much to ameliorate [freedpeople’s] condition, but cannot systematize and secure their rights.”²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Chandra Manning notes that “[e]mancipation undid the core of enslavement but could not by itself cure the effects or heal the damage caused by them; Manning, *Troubled Refuge*, 11, 26.

²⁴¹ S.A. Duke to Maj. Gen. Samuel Curtis, March 9, 1863, Headquarters Department of Missouri, St. Louis, quoted in “Working for Citizenship in Civil War Contraband Camps,” by Chandra Manning, *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 4, no. 2 (2014): 192.

APPENDIX A



Figure 1: 1864 Lithograph of Point Lookout, with the contraband camp located behind the patch of trees.

Image Source: George Everett, *Point Lookout, Md. View of Hammond Genl. Hospital & U.S. genl. depot for prisoners of war*, Point Lookout, 1864, map, Library of Congress, accessed August 2020, <https://www.loc.gov/item/99447401>.

APPENDIX B

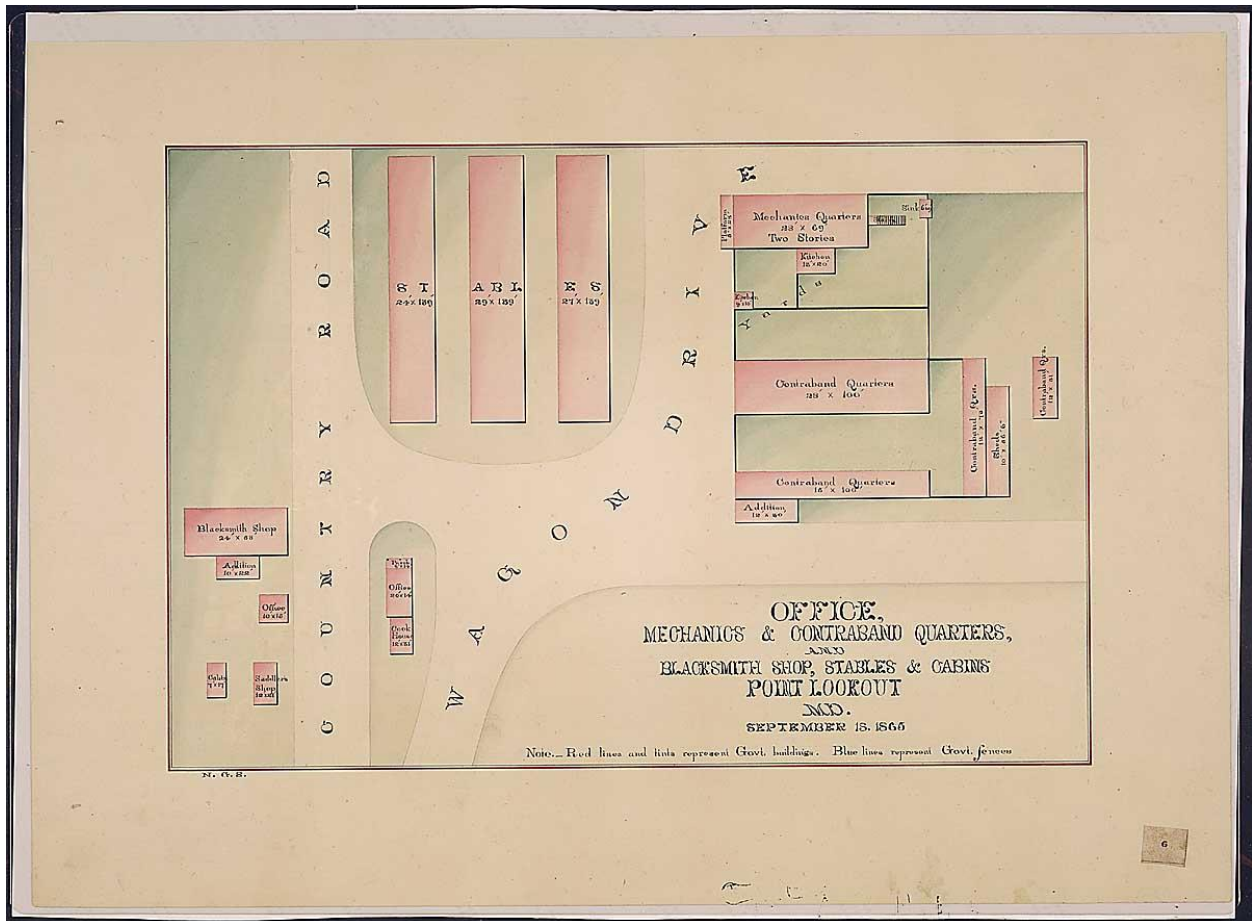


Figure 2: Plan for the Sale of Buildings at Point Lookout in 1865, including “Contraband Quarters.”

Image Source: *Office, Mechanics & Contraband Quarters, and Blacksmith Shop, Stables & Cabins Point Lookout, MD*, September 18, 1865, RG 92: Records of the Office of the Quartermaster General, 1774-1985, National Archives, Washington, D.C., in *Medicine In Maryland, 1752-1920*, accessed October 2020, <https://mdhistoryonline.net/2018/06/02/h416/>.

APPENDIX C

Date	Slaves	Free African-Americans	Whites	Total
1790	6,985	343	8,216	15,544
1800	6,399	622	6,678	13,699
1810	6,000	636	6,158	12,794
1820	6,047	894	6,033	12,974
1830	6,183	1,179	6,097	13,459
1840	5,761	1,393	6,070	13,224
1850	5,842	1,633	6,223	13,698
1860	6,549	1,866	6,798	15,213
1870	--	7,726	7,218	14,944

Figure 3: Population of St. Mary's County from 1790 to 1870.

Source: Bayly E. Marks, "Skilled Blacks in Antebellum St. Mary's County, Maryland," *The Journal of Southern History* 53, no. 4 (November 1987): 537-564, accessed October 2020, JSTOR.

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