



The Half Moon

- The Newsletter of the Newtown Historic Association -

Welcome

The Newtown Historic Association presents this newsletter to the Newtown community with the goal of providing news and information on related historic and preservation events in our area. We welcome any suggestions for future articles.

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Research Center Hours:
Tuesday, 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.
Thursday, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
And also, by appointment

Black History Month

Black History Month is “an annual celebration of achievements by African Americans and a time for recognizing their central role in U.S. history.” It is also known as African American History Month. This month-long celebration grew out of a national “Negro History Week” started in 1926—an idea born by prominent African Americans at the time, including Carter Godwin Woodson, who chose the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass. This week-long designation “inspired schools and communities nationwide to organize local celebrations, establish history clubs and host performances and lectures.”



Carter Godwin Woodson
(1875 - 1950)

By the late 1960s, “Negro History Week” had evolved into Black History Month on many college campuses due in part to the civil rights movement and growing Black self-awareness.



Civil rights march on Washington, D.C.

Since Gerald Ford officially established it in 1976, every U.S. president has designated February as Black History Month. Other countries, including Canada and the United Kingdom, also celebrate Black history one month during the year.

The Library of Congress website offers a calendar of events in national celebration of Black History Month. We offer this special edition of The Half-Moon in celebration of Newtown’s own Black history

Sources:

- A&E Television Networks, LLC, <https://www.history.com/topics/black-history/black-history-month>.
- The Library of Congress, <https://blackhistorymonth.gov/>.

Lighthouse Hill Cemetery: A Story of Strength and Service

by Brian Rounsavill *(In Celebration of Black History Month)*

The African American community has been an integral part of the local fabric from the time Newtown was founded. During the first half of the 19th century, the Leedom Farm, the Pine Grove Farm and the Archambault House were all said to have been sites on the Underground Railroad. In addition, it is widely known that Frederick Douglass visited Bucks County in 1864 and spoke before large crowds at Newtown, Pineville, and Penn's Manor on three successive days. He came to Bucks County at the invitation of Mahlon B. Linton of Newtown, one of the county's leading abolitionists, who often hosted anti-slavery activists when they visited the area. Douglass spoke at Newtown Hall (now Newtown Theatre) on Thursday, February 4, 1864.



*Portrait of Frederick Douglass, circa 1865.
Source unknown.*

African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church

Early records indicate that the St. Mark African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church has been a source of fellowship for Newtown's African American community since the early 1800s. St. Mark A.M.E. Zion Church was founded in Newtown around 1820 as the John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church. Soon afterwards, members built a small frame meetinghouse high on the hill overlooking Newtown at the corner of Frost Lane and Congress Street. Unfortunately, the congregation faced resistance, the church burned in 1821, and the congregation scattered. The church was rebuilt on that same location high on the hill, but it too burned again in 1840 and the fire could be seen for many miles, which gave way to the nickname "Lighthouse Hill." The original church cemetery from 1854 is still in use today.



Lighthouse Hill Cemetery Sign, 2021.

The third structure that housed the AME Church was built at the intersection of Frost Lane and State Street, where the trolley turned after crossing the Newtown Creek. Shortly thereafter in 1857, that building also succumbed to a fire of incendiary origins, reportedly caused by boys using it for "unreligious" gatherings.



John Wesley African Methodist Episcopal Church, circa 1895, which was located behind the current church at 136 North Congress Street.

Undeterred, the fourth structure was erected behind 136 North Congress Street (shown on the previous page) in 1858 on a lot owned by Leah Evans. In the late 1800s, this site was the worshipping place of both the Methodist and the Baptist faiths. The Baptists eventually built their own church in about 1914, the Macedonia Baptist Church, located at 218 North State Street.



Macedonia Baptist Church, 218 N. State Street, 1953.

In 1897, the wooden frame structure pictured on the previous page was replaced by the present Gothic Revival brick church that is located at 136 North Congress Street and is a registered historic building.

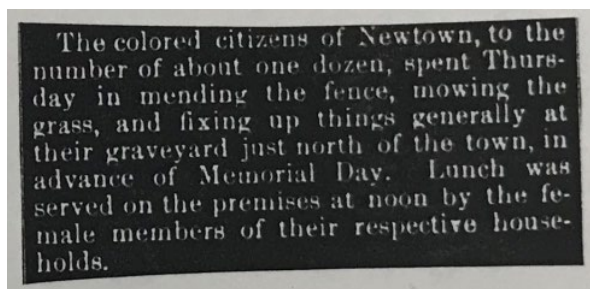


St. Mark AME Zion Church, 136 North Congress Street, circa 1915.

Potter's Field

Little is known about the locations chosen by the early residents of Newtown for burials. Until the founding of Newtown's first religious organization, the Presbyterian Congregation, in 1734, it is reasonable to believe that burials were made on the Common, in conformity with the prevailing customs of the times. For example, it is recorded in Hershey's Business Directory and Gazetteer of Bucks County, 1871, that the unknown continental soldier, who was killed at the south attic window of the

Bird-in-Hand Tavern during the Tory Raid of 1778 (after he shot several of the enemy), was buried "*on the [Common] lot now [i.e., 1871] owned by J.V. Randall, at the north end of the town. But no tombstone marks his grave, and the exact spot is not known.*" It is inconceivable that a county seat community, like Newtown was during the Eighteenth Century, had no place for general internment. Although the four white religious congregations in Newtown eventually established their own private church-yard burial grounds, persons of color were not originally permitted to be buried in the otherwise public Newtown Cemetery (Presbyterians, 1769; Quakers, 1818; Episcopalians, 1832; and Methodists, 1846). Recognizing that there was no free place for general burials, "Potters Field" was established as a burial ground along the creek behind the Newtown Hall (the free meeting house, now Newtown Theatre). However, Borough ownership of the Newtown Hall lot created dissention, since some of the members wished to use the building as a schoolhouse and for other purposes. There was also conflict over management of the Potter's Field, which prompted the old Free Burying Ground behind the Free Meeting House to be relocated just outside the confines of the Borough, likely to prevent the Borough from having authority over it.



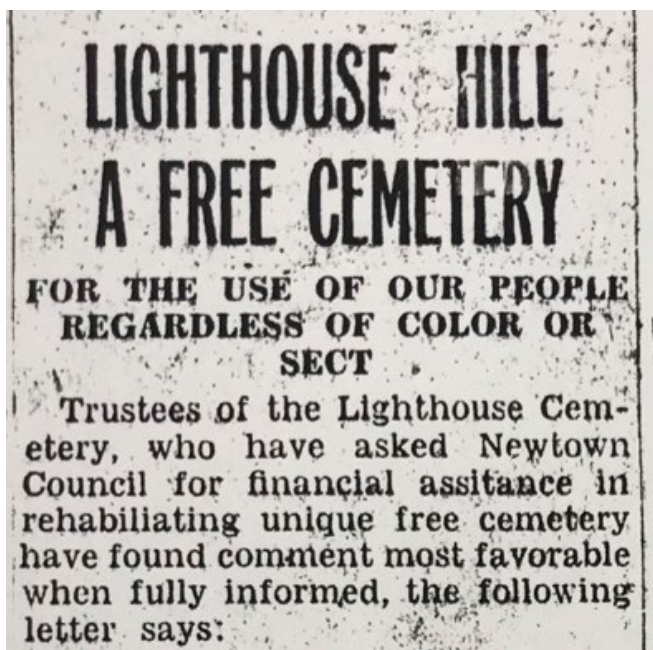
Published in the Newtown Enterprise, May 29, 1897.

Free Burial Ground for White and Colored Persons

In 1852, the people of the Borough of Newtown and the surrounding area believed that it was their duty to provide a place for burials. They were of the opinion that the time had come to provide a free burying ground and cemetery, wherein all persons, without charge, may be buried. They felt strongly that the free burying ground should be in, or near, the Borough. The original site they selected was a lot in Newtown Township on the east side of Congress Street, immediately north of the Borough line, called Madryn. For some reason, this lot was not found to be satisfactory, so a new lot was selected at the southeast corner of Congress Street and Frost Lane. The oldest documented burial in this cemetery, now called Lighthouse Hill Cemetery, dates to 1854.

In 1856, Samuel and Amelia Phillips conveyed the new lot “for a free Burial Ground or Grave Yard for the purpose of Entering or Burying the remains of All Persons White or Colored therein. The Graves to be made in Rows North and South with heads thereof to the West and feet to the East. Three perches in width on the Eastern side of said Grave Yard were to be appropriated exclusively for Colored persons and the remainder for White persons.” However, since the passage of the thirteenth amendment in 1865, this provision was not enforced and, for many years, any person so desiring, regardless of race, creed, or financial standing, was given interment privileges in this free, public cemetery without discrimination or distinction.

In 1949, the “Trustees of the Free Burial Ground or Graveyard for White or Colored Persons,” commonly known as Lighthouse Hill Cemetery, reorganized and updated the rules and regulations governing the Cemetery. These rules included: “Any person dying or residing in the Borough or the Township of Newtown, regardless of his race, creed or financial standing, may have interment privileges in the Cemetery upon payment of the nominal sum of \$5 for each burial permit, which amount may, however, in the case of indigent and destitute persons, be reduced or rescinded entirely. The graves of all persons buried in the Cemetery shall be located without discrimination, one next to the other, in successive parallel rows North and South, with the heads thereof to the West and the feet to the East, thus continuing the established burial plan that has been in effect for many years.”



Published in the Newtown Enterprise, January 12, 1950.



Lighthouse Hill Cemetery (in blue) and Lincoln Heights Cemetery (in orange).

Lincoln Heights Cemetery

Another cemetery, called Lincoln Heights Cemetery, was a private, colored burial ground established by Elwood Hagerman during the World War I period and later owned by Robert LaRue, which adjoined the southern boundary of the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery. It is not known exactly when Hagerman laid out Lincoln Heights Cemetery and sold off the first burial lots, but it must have been in the mid-1800s based on available records. When Elmer Price sold the lot located East of the cemetery in 1901, the southeast corner of the cemetery property was designated as, the “corner of the lands about to be divided into burial lots.” However, this description was probably of a much earlier date, as there are many nineteenth century tombstones in Lincoln Heights Cemetery, with the oldest marked grave being that of Martie Richardson, who died in 1889.

Unfortunately, the plan for the original layout of the Lincoln Heights Cemetery does not exist, but it was reconstructed by Ned Barnsley based on descriptions appearing in several deeds given by Mr. Hagerman to various purchasers of burial lots. These deeds, prepared by Horace Reeder, reveal that the Lincoln Heights Cemetery was divided East and West into numbered sections, and North and South into numbered plots. Around 1950, after both cemeteries had deteriorated to the point where they were difficult to enter, attempts were made to get the Borough to rightfully maintain the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery, as it was a common misunderstanding that it was to be maintained solely by the St. Marks and Macedonia Baptist Churches. Since

the cemetery was Newtown's free cemetery, a non-sectarian and non-denominational cemetery, the Newtown Community Welfare Council took over the maintenance of the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery in 1965. In 1969, after more than a decade of attempts by the Trustees of Lighthouse Hill Cemetery, the heirs of Robert LaRue sold Lincoln Heights to the Community Welfare Council of Newtown for \$1. Accordingly, the two adjoining cemeteries were joined now under one name, Lighthouse Hill Cemetery.



View of the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery, circa 2020, showing several flags marking veteran graves.

Civil War Veterans

For over 150 years, Lighthouse Hill Cemetery has served as the burial location for numerous African American residents. Although time tells us that hundreds of burials took place here, very few individuals had the means to afford grave markers. Consequently, the official archived list of recorded burials in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery contained less than 100 names. Recently, with the aid of several online resources, 186 individuals have been documented as being buried in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery.

Although the majority of the graves are unmarked, lacking proper grave markers, a number of plots are decorated with veterans' flags. Specifically, there are twelve African American Civil War veterans buried in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery. In addition to these twelve Civil War veterans, there are many other African American servicemen buried here. Research indicates that Lighthouse Hill veteran burials also include individuals who served our country in World War I (7), World War II (11) and Korea (4).

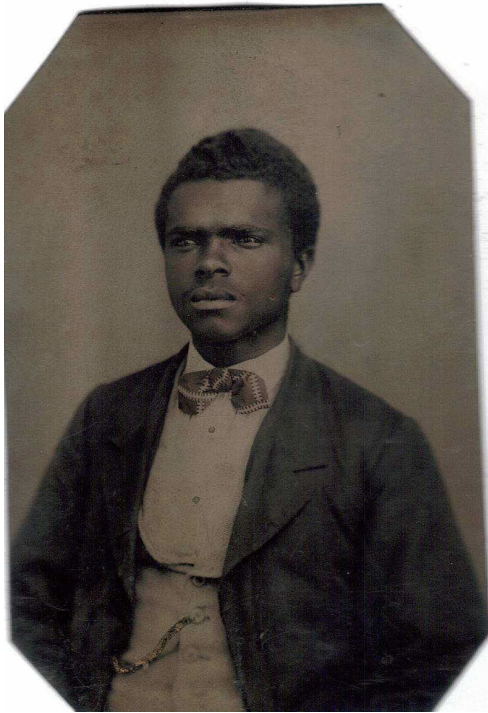
African American Civil War Veteran Burials in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery

Name	Birth	Death	Military Service
Simon Adams	1835	1894	Private, Co. F, 2nd Reg, US Colored Vol Cavalry
Thomas Bentford	1832	1899	Maryland GAR; born as a slave in Virginia, served as a landsman in the Navy from 1864-5
James D. Brown	1837	1917	Co. A, 25th Regiment U. S. Colored Troops Vol (GAR)
Charles Davis	1833	1907	Private, Co. A., 32nd US Colored Infantry
John Forrest	1834	1915	GAR, Colored Troops
Jason H. Johnson	1842	1885	Corporal, Co. E., 30th Reg, US Colored Troops
William H. Kellum	1828	1884	Staff Sergeant, Co. A., 25th Reg., US Colored Troops; 1864-1865; Barber in Newtown
Isaac Lee	1844	1902	Private, Co. K, 14th Rhode Island Reg US Colored Heavy Artillery, Coachman
George Scudder	1841	1924	Company F., 22nd US Colored Troops (GAR); Corporal
Jonathan Smith	1845	1920	Co. H. 32 U.S.C. Infantry (GAR)
John A. Thompson	1851	1910	GAR, Listed race as Mulatto and Occupation as Barber on 1910 census
Henry B. Washington	1828	Before 1880	Co. A., 25th Reg. United States Colored Infantry, PA. Vol, GAR

GAR = Grand Army of the Republic.

The Family of Lycurgus and Adelaide Powell

Like the majority of those buried in unmarked graves on Lighthouse Hill, although there may be no visible evidence marking their final resting spots, they have many interesting stories to be told. For example, the story of the Lycurgus and Adelaide Powell family was discovered when researching information for this article, as they too are buried in unmarked graves on the hill.



Tintype portrait of Lycurgus Powell, circa 1875.

According to the 1920 census, Lycurgus Powell (1851-1923) was born in Maryland and was employed as a farmer in Newtown Township, where he lived with his wife Adelaide Dorsey Powell (1855-1940). There, he owned his own farm, was schooled, and was able to read and write. They moved from Maryland to Newtown shortly before the turn of the century. The 1900 census of Newtown indicates that they were married in 1873 and had sixteen children, ten of which were living. In 1900, they were renting in the Friends Home, located at 50 South Congress Street, where they lived with twins Frederic (14) & Adella (14), Robert (13) and Clinton (11), and Lycurgus was a general laborer who was out of work for 8 months (census taken by Cyrus Hillborn on June 5, 1900). Although, Lycurgus' father, William Powell, died in 1857, he is said to have served in the Civil War, as his mother, Matilda Powell, filed for a Civil War pension in 1886 for William's service in the 98th Ohio Infantry, Company E. Yet another Civil War connection to Lighthouse Hill Cemetery.



Tintype portrait of Adelaide Dorsey Powell, circa 1875.

In addition to Lycurgus and Adelaide Powell, at least seven of their children, plus a granddaughter, Dorothy L. Dorsan (1907-1908), can be documented as being buried on Lighthouse Hill. Records indicate that children Irving E. Powell (1881-1955), Charles F. Powell (1882-1977), Estella Powell (1886-1979), Edith Powell (1890-1890), Hubert Powell (1890-1890), Helen Powell (1891-1892) and Nettie Powell (1892-1893) were buried here. Included below is the actual death certificate for Lycurgus Powell, documenting his final resting place.

Form T. S. N. 100-5-5-22		400	
1. PLACE OF DEATH County of <u>Rich</u> Township of <u>Newtown</u> Borough of <u></u> City of <u></u>		COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH BUREAU OF VITAL STATISTICS File No. <u>97632</u> Registered No. <u>88</u>	
2. FULL NAME <u>Lycurgus Powell</u>		3. SEX <u>Male</u> 4. COLOR OR RACE <u>Black</u> 5. MARRIED, WIDOWED OR DIVORCED <u>Married</u>	
6. DATE OF BIRTH <u>November 15th 1851</u>		7. AGE <u>71</u> years <u>9</u> months <u>16</u> days	
8. OCCUPATION <u>Laborer</u>		9. BIRTHPLACE <u>Maryland</u>	
10. NAME OF FATHER <u>William Powell</u>		11. BIRTHPLACE OF FATHER <u>Maryland</u>	
12. MOTHER'S NAME <u>Matilda Johnson</u>		13. BIRTHPLACE OF MOTHER <u>Maryland</u>	
14. THE ABOVE IS TRUE TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE. (Informant) <u>Lycurgus E. Powell</u> (Address) <u>134 West 133rd St.</u>		15. PLACE OF BURIAL OR REMOVAL <u>Lighthouse Hill</u>	
16. DATE OF DEATH <u>September 29th 1923</u>		17. I HEREBY CERTIFY, That I attended deceased from <u>Central Hemorrhage</u> and that death occurred, on the date stated above, at <u>14</u> M. The CAUSE OF DEATH was as follows: <u>Sudden Death</u>	
18. LENGTH OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients or Recent Residents) <u>At place of death</u>		19. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (For Hospitals, Institutions, Transients or Recent Residents) <u>At place of death</u>	
20. UNDERTAKER <u>John B. Brown</u>		21. DATE OF BURIAL <u>Oct 3 - 1923</u>	
22. LOCAL REGISTRAR <u>John B. Brown</u>		23. ADDRESS <u>Newtown</u>	

Death certificate of Lycurgus Powell, indicating that his burial was in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery.

An Ex-Slave Named Grief

Unlike the unmarked grave of Lycurgus Powell, there is one grave marker on Lighthouse Hill that is incredibly unique because it is clearly marked, and boldly proclaims, “*Elam, Family of Grief, Ex Slave.*”



Elam Family Grave Marker, 2021.

To learn more about this bold proclamation, the Elam family’s connection to Newtown was researched. In 1870, Grief Elam (1846-1916) was listed as a Mulatto born in 1846 in Virginia, living in Wyliesburg, Virginia and working as a farm laborer. There, he is listed with his first wife, Lucy (23), daughter, Mary (2) and son Charles (two months), and he was unable to read or write. His wife, Lucy, died on June 25, 1876, at the age of 30 in Charlotte County, Virginia. Grief was married two more times before dying at the age of 68 on October 15, 1916, in Bacon, Charlotte County, Virginia.

In 1900, Grief’s son, Charles Elam (1869-1955), age 30, was living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, along with his wife, Matilda Mickey (23) and his son, Henry (five months). Charles and Matilda were married in 1899 in Philadelphia, where he worked as a day laborer. By 1910, he had moved to Middletown, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where he worked odd jobs and lived with his wife, Matilda (34) and children Edward (10), Jane (8), Andrew (6) and Frank (1). By 1920, he had removed to Yardley, where he worked as a laborer in a powerhouse and lived with his wife, Matilda (43) and children Edward (19), Jane (17), Andrew (16), Frank (10) and Sarah (7). This family is also listed in the 1930 Yardley census. Charles Elam died in 1955 and was

buried in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery. At some point, descendants of Grief placed the large gravestone on the family plot, commemorating his family’s journey from slavery to the final resting place on the hill in Newtown.

Death certificate of Matilda Elam (1876-1926), wife of Charles Elam (1869-1955), daughter-in-law of Grief Elam (1848-1916), indicating that her burial was in the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery.

A Proud Story

As documented herein, the Lighthouse Hill Cemetery has a deep history that lies quietly beneath the green grass that covers hundreds of unmarked graves high on the hill overlooking Newtown. It is a story of resilience, rebuilding and service to our Country. It is a story of slavery and men serving to fight for their freedom. It is a beacon of light emanating from the ashes. It is ultimately a story that should make any Newtonian proud.

Sources:

- Miscellaneous Correspondence and Notes, Newtown Historic Association Archives.
- *Historic Newtown*, C. Callahan, P. Gouza, and B. Rounsavill, 2001, p. 67.
- *Lighthouse Hill Cemetery* by Ned Barnsley, The Newtown Enterprise, July 26, 1951, p. 7, Article No. 182.
- *Newtown Heritage Walk*, St. Mark AME Zion Church, Site #25.
- *Potter’s Field* by Ned Barnsley, The Newtown Enterprise, January 11, 1940, p. 8.
- *Potter’s Field on Lighthouse Hill* by Ned Barnsley, The Newtown Enterprise, January 18, 1940, p. 8.
- *When Frederick Douglass Visited Bucks County* by T.A. McNealy, Old Bucks County, Vol. II, Issue IV, 1994, p. 8.