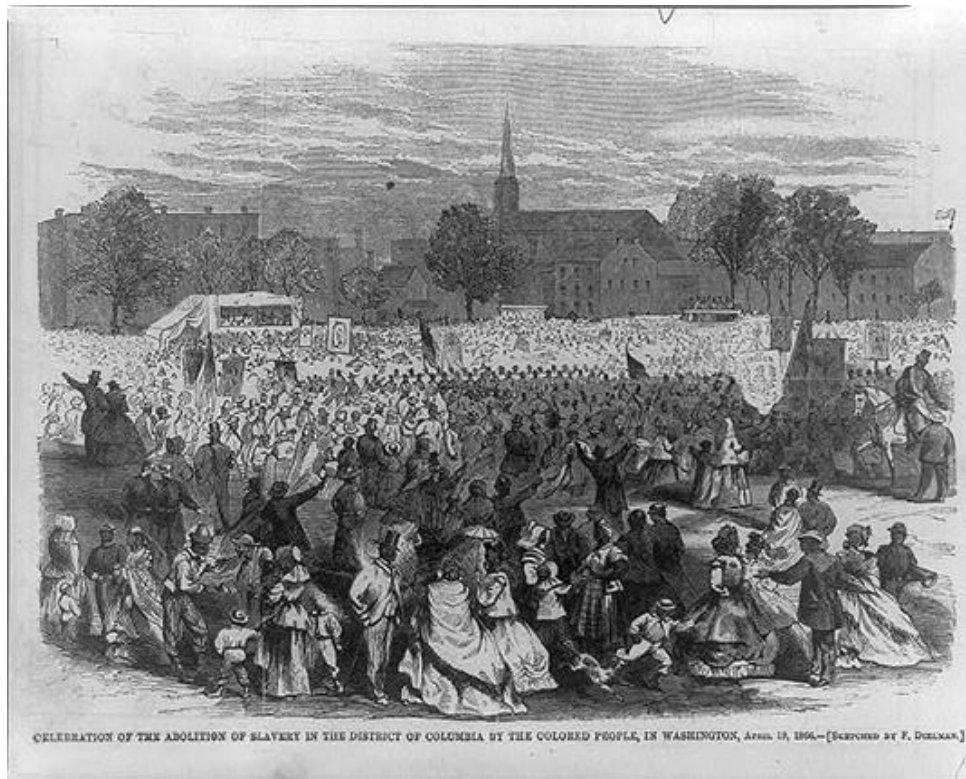


**Before Juneteenth:
Emancipation Day in the District of Columbia April 16**

Terence Walz

Introduction

Before Juneteenth became a national holiday, the emancipation of enslaved populations in various states in the United States was celebrated on different days. In the District, that date was April 16, and it remains a local holiday. In states that remained in the Union in 1861, emancipation was often granted on a gradual basis, such as in Connecticut, New York, and Pennsylvania. In the former Confederate states, emancipation depended on the arrival of Union troops to spread the word of freedom. Thus “Emancipation Day” is celebrated in Virginia on April 3, in Florida in early May, in Texas on June 19. In Maryland, a slave state that remained in the Union, emancipation was enacted on November 1, 1864. In this posting, we look at how that day in 1862 affected the inhabitants of 1801 F Street.



Emancipation Day Celebrated in April 1866 in Washington: Image *Harper's Magazine*.

One hundred and sixty-three years ago on April 16, 1862, five people in the Carroll household on the corner of 18th and F Streets were freed from lifelong bondage. They were John Brooks, aged 46, and two children of a former bondswoman, Mariah Warren: Nellie, aged 27, and Henry, aged 23. These three were owned by William Thomas Carroll and his wife Sally Sprigg Carroll. In addition, two other people in the household were freed: Henrietta, aged 25, another daughter of Mariah Warren, and Lucy Blackstone, aged 16, both of whom were the property of John Swann Mercer and his wife, Violetta Carroll Mercer, and given to them after their marriage in 1856. Violetta, the Carrolls' eldest daughter, and her husband had moved back from living in Maryland with his family to the District to live with her parents in early 1862. Mariah, the enslaved matriarch, had been sold by the Carrolls seven years earlier to her husband, John. More about her, later.

On May 27, 1862, Carroll and Mercer went to Court to submit their petitions for compensation for the loss of their property under the terms of the emancipation act which was enacted a month earlier. These precious documents provide rich details about formerly enslaved individuals.¹ In asking for compensation, enslavers were asked to provide information on the age and length of service of the enslaved person, a physical description, his or her particular skills, and an estimation of the person's value. John, who had been gifted by Sally's parents to the Carrolls when they were first married, came into the household in 1829. He was a tall and

That your petitioner acquired *his* claim to the aforesaid service or labor of said *John, Ellen and Henry* in manner following: *John Brooks was given to my wife Mrs. Carroll by her father in the Spring of 1829. The Mother of Ellen & Henry Warren was purchased by me in the Summer of 1827 and was owned by me when the former John, Ellen & Henry have been owned and possessed by me from the aforesaid date in the full belief of me that in the last two to the date of the aforesaid act of Congress.*

That your petitioner's claim to the service or labor of said *John, Ellen & Henry* was, at the time of said discharge therefrom, of the value of *three thousand dollars* in money. *Your petition has stated the preceding facts and that he is now under a bond of \$1000 to the Government to his personal service of that bond to his personal service that he has no knowledge of any infirmity or defect that renders a claim of \$3000 value to him.*

Your petitioner hereby declares that *he* bears true and faithful allegiance to the Government of the United States, and that *he* has not borne arms against the United States in the present rebellion, nor in any way given aid or comfort thereto.

And your petitioner further states and alleges, that *he* has not brought said *John, Ellen & Henry* into the District of Columbia since the passage of said act of Congress; and that, at the time of the passage thereof, said *John, Ellen & Henry* were held to service or labor therein under and by virtue of your petitioner's claim to such service or labor.

Your petitioner further states and alleges, that *his* said claim to the service or labor of said *John, Ellen & Henry* does not originate in or by virtue of any transfer heretofore made by any person who has in any manner aided or sustained the present rebellion against the Government of the United States.

And your petitioner prays the said Commissioners to investigate and determine the validity of *his* said claim to the service or labor of said *John, Ellen & Henry* herein above set forth; and if the same be found to be valid, that they appraise and apportion the value of said claim in money, and report the same to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States, in conformity to the provisions of said act of Congress.

(Signed by) *Wm. T. Carroll*

Carroll's petition for compensation for emancipating
John Brooks, Nellie Warren and Henry Warren, dated May 27, 1862.
Source: see footnote 1.

slender man, his brown hair slightly tinged with grey and considered the very fine waiter and dining room servant. Carroll put his value at \$2,000. Ellen Warren, called Nellie and the oldest of the surviving Warren children, was described in the document as a “comely person,” of average height, with dark brown skin and long glossy black hair. Her skills were as a “chamber and dressing maid,” whose value was estimated at \$750. Her brother, Henry, 5’8” – slightly taller than average height in those days – was a “full, stout person, copper color, with curly hair,” whom Carroll described as a “good waiter, house servant, and market man.” He was probably assigned the heavy lifting in the household, hauling coal and wood to the house stoves and fireplaces, and shopping at the local market. He was valued at \$750.

The five Blacks were not the only workers in the Carroll household. The 1860 census reveals they also had four Irish women working for them, some of them probably living in the newly constructed downstairs servant bedrooms.

Carroll, who was Clerk of the Supreme Court and a lawyer, had no need for legal representation, but in addition to his son-in-law, he brought a second witness to testify to his ownership of the individuals being emancipated: his neighbor from across the street, Henry K. Randall, who for many years was chief clerk of the Revolutionary War Pensions Bureau in the Treasury Department. Randall’s three-story house was located on the south side of F Street on the corner of 18th Street.

For his three slaves, Carroll asked for a total compensation of \$3,500. Instead, he received \$1,182.60: \$262.80 for John, \$438 for Nellie, and \$481.80 for Henry. The basis for these evaluations cannot be determined. Age seems to have been a factor, since John was the oldest of the enslaved people in the Carroll house and Henry the youngest.

Dr. Mercer then submitted his petition for compensation for Henrietta and Lucy. Henrietta, the younger daughter of Mariah Warren, was then aged 25, and was described as “about five feet seven inches high, of fine figure & person, dark brown color with long & waving hair. She has lost several of her front teeth—pleasant voice when spoken to.” Henrietta “was a child’s nurse, and a most elegant lady’s maid and in all respects a valuable servant,” Mercer attested. There were sick children in the Carroll family when she was enslaved there, and during her time with the Mercers she would have looked after their young two sons.

Lucy was then sixteen, “about five feet two inches high, of good figure and appearance – very dark in color, with a very bushy and curly head, pleasant voice when spoken to.” Her skills were as a seamstress and “lady’s maid” Apparently, Mercer attached importance to the tone of voices adopted by enslaved women, since it is mentioned in both their petitions.

For compensation, Mercer asked for \$1,500 for Henrietta and \$1,000 for Lucy. He received \$416.10 for Henrietta and \$459.90 for Lucy.

Three months after Carroll and Mercer applied for compensation for their lost property, Mariah, the mother of Nellie, Henrietta and Henry, was freed by her husband, John Warren. She had left service in the Carroll household in 1855, when her husband bought her on Christmas Day 1855 for \$352. Apparently, he never took the trouble or felt the need to emancipate her.

This he did on August 16, 1862, filing a petition for emancipation with the government but not seeking any compensation.² The Warrens rented a place near the Carroll home while their three children were enslaved there. It was at 421 20th Street between E and F, two blocks and a half away.³ Henry went to live with them after he was freed, but the two daughters took jobs, either with their former enslavers or with new employers, and lived elsewhere. But after John died in 1868, Mariah's home, now on 16th Street, became their home when they lived in the city.⁴ Henry may have taken a job found by the Freedman's Bureau in Arkansas for \$12/month and thereafter made a life outside of Washington – he disappears from the record in the District.⁵

The Freedman's Bureau drew up a list in 1867 of all the formerly enslaved people of the city who were still living in the city and on their rolls. None of the Warrens are mentioned; John Brooks is. A note beside his name indicates he was living "at Mrs. Carroll's." No doubt he was needed to provide direction for the ever-changing staff of young Irish and free Black servants she hired to maintain the house and look after her family. But the time the 1870 census was taken, he was no longer there.

¹ Source: <https://civilwardc.org/files/figures/petitions/1200px/cww.00466.002.jpg>;
<https://civilwardc.org/texts/petitions/cww.00467.html>.

² <https://civilwardc.org/texts/petitions/cww.01007.html>.

³ Washington Directory, 1862.

⁴ On the Warren family after enslavement, see my posting,
https://www.dacorbakon.org/docs/Carrolls_Enslaved_Warren_Family.pdf.

⁵ According to records of the Freedman's Bureau on Ancestry.com. He was also paid a bounty of \$100 for signing the year-long contract. It was for employed as a farmhand on one of the farms owned by G. W. Gifford. There is no further documentation on him in Arkansas.