Denton Lock - A Moundsville Black Man in the Civil War

by Linda Cunningham Fluharty

©May 27, 2012

In 1890, a quarter century after the Civil War, the government compiled a census of veterans and widows. In the Marshall County census: "LOCK, Maria, widow of DENTON LOCK. Address: Moundsville, WV. Disability Incurred: Got killed in war. Remarks: His widow has not got any....." By 1890, she was unable to provide information about the regiment her husband enlisted in, but he died while serving as a corporal in Company "D" of the Third United States Colored Troops.

Denton Lock is first found in the 1850 Federal Census of Wheeling, Ohio County, (West) Virginia. He was a barber, described as a black male, age 21, born in Ohio. He resided with Arnold and Charity Clark and their two children; the Clarks were also black.

In Marshall County, (West) Virginia, Denton Lock was united in marriage to Maria Demsey/Demsy on September 2, 1852 by Reverend Lynch. Her surname looks like "Dunsy" on the marriage record but is stated as Demsy in her pension file.

They are found in the 1860 census of Moundsville, and Denton, age 35, born in Ohio, was working as a laborer. He is listed as mulatto, and his wife, Mariah, 30, as black. Three mulatto children, Jane (13), Henry (10) and Eliza (18 [error]), are listed. Also in the home was Mary Kent, known to be the mother of Mariah Lock, despite Mariah's former surname, Demsey.

The Company "D" Descriptive Book describes Denton Lox as 33 years old, 6 feet tall, with brown skin, black eyes and black hair. He was a farmer born in Cadiz, Harrison County, Ohio, and he enlisted on July 4, 1863 at Philadelphia to serve three years.

On the Company Muster Roll for July 26 to August 1863, is this remark: "Appointed Corporal July 25/63. Killed in Action August 26/63. Due U. S. 1 Canteen .44c." Corporal Lox was Killed in Action during the Siege of Fort Wagner, Morris Island, South Carolina.

Fort Wagner was a beachhead fortification, one of the toughest constructed by the Confederate Army. The first battle occurred on July 11, 1863, with many Union losses. A week later, during the second Battle of Fort Wagner, Col. Robert Gould Shaw, the subject of the movie, "Glory," was shot in the head as he led his men unsuccessfully against the Confederates. But the Union regiments continued shelling until they met with success on August 26. This was only the fourth time during the war that black

troops played a crucial combat role. - And it was on that day that Denton Lox lost his life.

On December 14, 1863, Lt. Col. Benjamin Chew Tighlman, 3rd Regiment U. S. Colored Troops, wrote:

> "I have the honor to transmit the report desired by General Hitchcock, as required by your letter of Dec. 13.
>
> "The 3d Reg't U. S. Colored Troops first reported for active service Morris island, S.C August 18th 1863. Since that time there have been - Killed officers, none. Enlisted men, (11) eleven. Wounded officers, none; enlisted men, (11) eleven. Missing, none.
>
> "These casualties have all occurred in the trenches and batteries in Morris Island S.C., in fair fight according to the usages of War. The only instance of unusual or barbarous treatment was this, - On the night of 26th Aug, the rifle pits in front of Fort Wagner were taken and a party from this reg't was sent out in advance to dig cover. Three were killed, two wounded and one missing. (Corporal Denton Lock, Co "D") - Two days afterwards his body was found by our advance sappers, stripped and tied to the trigger of a torpedo, so that moving it would have caused an explosion. Probably he had in the dark, advanced beyond the proposed line and was there killed by the fire from the Fort, and his body found by the enemy and converted into a trap."

Mariah (also Maria) Locke applied for a government pension and received Certificate #134.039. The daughter of the soldier, Eliza A. Locke, born 23 July 1853, was compensated until her 16th birthday in 1869. Mariah's application indicates that she and the soldier had a daughter Mary Jane, born 27 November 1850 (before their marriage), and she died 29 June 1867 (She may be the Mary J. West, age 1, found in the 1850 census of Marshall County, living with Mary Kent.) Henry, present in the 1860 census, is not mentioned.

The widow didn't marry again. She lived with her mother, Mary Dent, until Mrs. Dent died in 1890, at the age of 114. Maria Lock died in Wheeling, Ohio County, in November 1897.

Annie A. Lock married Henry B. Clemens, a Wheeling barber, in 1872. Eliza A. Lock and Annie are the same person. At the time of the 1870 census of Marshall County, Henry Clemens, age 24, was residing in the home of Maria Lock (40), Mary Kent (75), Eliza Dimsey (age 60), Eliza A. Lock (17). Alfred Low (22), Mary Low (16), and John W. Low (9) were also in the home.

The obituary of Mary Kent follows:

Wheeling Daily Intelligencer, 10 Nov 1890

A VERY OLD WOMAN DIES.

Mrs. Mary Kent, born a Slave in Virginia, passes away, aged 114 Years.

Mrs. Mary Kent died at her home in Marshall county, about ten miles from this city, on Saturday, of a complication of disorders incident to old age. Mrs. Kent was colored, and was born a slave. At the time of her death she was certainly the oldest person in West Virginia, and possibly the oldest in America. She had in her possession papers granting her her freedom, dated in 1708, and reciting that she was then twenty-two years old. Twelve or fourteen years ago an exhaustive account of her life was printed in the INTELLIGENCER. It was supposed then that her race was about run, but she retained her mental faculties until the last, and up till this summer kept her physical health. Rheumatic pains kept her in the house much this summer, but this was the only indication of approaching dissolution.

She was born in the same county in Virginia in which George Washington first saw the light. When yet a child she was brought by her owner, Joseph Shepherd, to a point about seven miles from what was then Fort Henry, now Wheeling. Born in the year of the declaration of American independence, she was possibly an eye witness in her infancy to the last battle of the revolution, the siege of Fort Henry, when the British, enforced by a large Indian band, attacked the fort.

She grew to girlhood as the property of Joseph Shepherd, and when he died she passed by inheritance to Moses Shepherd, his son. She was a strong, buxom woman, and her master, after his marriage, owned more slaves than he had use for. So it happened that her mistress permitted her to "work out" for the neighbors. Many a day, she said, she walked from her home seven miles in the country to the village which is now Wheeling, washed all day, and walked back in the evening with a silver shilling, given rather as a grantuity than as wages, clasped in her hand. In this way she earned and saved most of the money with which in 1798, when she was twenty-two years old, she bought her freedom. To make up the sum finally she circulated a paper prepared for her by a white woman, and she still had that faded subscription sheet, bearing the names of the Zanes and Finks and other early settlers, with others not now decipherable, and the amount each contributed toward her "freedom money."

She married, and her children have grown old and died. To-day her grandchildren are of middle age, and live in this city, but she refused always to leave the country, and with the wife of a grandson, resided in Marshall county. She had never been on a railroad train, and always refused to go on one. She was fond of reminiscences, and told many things of thrilling interest about the "good old times."

It is doubtful if any of the very few old persons who have been reputed in recent years to have attained as great an age as Mrs. Kent could prove as satisfactorily that they were as old.

Mrs. Kent always smoked a pipe. She was a regular practitioner of the old rule, "early to bed and early to rise." She never used spectacles. Her husband died fully half a century ago, and but one child, her youngest, Mrs. Maria Locke, now sixty years of age, survives her. She also lives near Moundsville.

The facts above given were mainly obtained from her grandson, H. B. Clemens, the well known barber, whose recollection, however, was not entirely fresh as to the details when the reporter talked to him some time ago. Judge Cranmer once examined her papers, and he remembers particularly the one with the names of subscribers to her fund to buy her freedom.

Wheeling Register, 9 Nov 1890

OVER A HUNDRED.

DEATH OF THE OLDEST WOMAN IN WEST VIRGINIA.

Mrs. Mary Kent, Grandmother of Mrs H. B. Clemens, of Wheeling, Dies at Moundsville, at the Age of One Hundred and Fourteen Years.

Mrs Mary Kent, who was the oldest woman in West Virginia, and probably a good many other States, died yesterday at Moundsville at the phenomenal age of one hundred and fourteen years While it is apparent that the cause of her death was the gradual fading away of the vital tissues, she retained her faculties wonderfully up to the last, and the transition from life to death was as quiet and apparently painless as the passing into a sound sleep. The genuiness of her age is substantiated by those who have known her for many years, and have kept track of her career from the first. She was a grandmother of Mrs. H. B. Clemens of this city.

While it was not possible at this writing to learn the details of her life, enough has been gleaned to show that it was a most remarkable case of longevity. She was born in Virginia, and came of a numerous family. She passed through the days when slavery was ripe, and was herself sold like thousands of others and separated from the family, and among her effects are some of the original papers drawn up at that time, which are curious to observe Among the trinkets and mementoes which this venerable woman has treasured for years are many worth going a long distance to see They date back to periods but briefly touched upon in history, which Mrs Kent could tell about in detail. Her husband died fully half a century ago, and but one child, her youngest, Mrs Maria Locke, now 60 years of age, survives her. She also lives in Moundsville

Mrs Kent at one time lived in Triadelphia, and even then while fairly well advanced in age, used to walk to Wheeling, a distance of seven miles, almost every day and do washing. She has always been an active woman, but had very regular habits, which is doubtless the secret of her long life She retired early, and rose correspondingly, and at a certain fixed hour. She always indulged in a little pleasure with the pipe early in the morning. but whether or not this habit of smoking acted in a measure as a preserver is hard to tell. Certain it is she had the secret of longevity well outlined. It is said that Mrs. Kent never used specs in her life, and a singular feature of her career is the fact that she never rode on a railroad car.