

How Harrisburg honored the African-American troops from the Civil War when no one else would

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This historical marker is the only indication of the amazing history that happened in Harrisburg on November 14, 1865. *(Jim Cheney | Special to PennLive.com)*

Despite nearby sites like Gettysburg and the presence of [The National Civil War Museum](#), Harrisburg's significant involvement in the Civil War is little-known today. Sites like Camp Curtin and Sporting Hill, which played pivotal roles during the war are relegated to place names, with their historical significance known to few today. However, there is one Civil War event that's obscurity surprises me more than any other.

At the end of the Civil War, a grand review was held for the Union troops in Washington, DC. On May 23 and 24, 1865, 150,000 of the more than 2 million soldiers who fought in the war marched through the streets of Washington, past thousands of cheering people and President Andrew Johnson. It was a joyous occasion to mark the end of the war and honor those that had fought bravely in it. However, absent from this celebration were the 180,000 African-American soldiers that had also fought bravely during the war.

Several prominent citizens in Harrisburg, both white and black, decided that something should be done to honor the African-American troops that had fought in the war. Several months later, on November 14, 1865, thousands of troops from Pennsylvania and Massachusetts gathered in Harrisburg to be honored by the local citizens.



The Grand Review of the United States Colored Troops began at what is now Soldier's Grove in the Capitol Complex. Jim Cheney | Special to PennLive.com

The parade through Harrisburg began at the intersection of State and Filbert Streets, now the location of Soldier's Grove on the backside of the [Pennsylvania State Capitol Complex](#). From here, thousands of soldiers from the United States Colored Troops (USCT) walked through the streets of the city, past cheering residents. While the exact route seems to have been lost through history, it is known that they walked along Front Street and past the home of Simon Cameron.

Cameron had been Secretary of War during the first year of the war, as well as being a former US Senator and ambassador. He was also a staunch abolitionist and welcomed the chance to honor the USCT. As they walked past his home on Front Street in southern Harrisburg, Cameron stood on the porch watching them pass and thanked them for their service. The procession then continued to the Pennsylvania State Capitol, where speeches were given by Cameron, as well as several members of the clergy and USCT.

The fact that this important event in both Harrisburg and national history has been largely forgotten is quite surprising to me. Pennsylvania was the only state to honor the United States Colored Troops with a review, and this should be a source of pride that is known by all local residents. However, the only public note of the review is a small historical marker at 7th and State Streets, on the edge of Soldier's Grove and the capitol complex, and the review draws nary a mention on online encyclopedia Wikipedia.



The review passed by the home of Simon Cameron, where he thanked the troops for their service to the United States. Jim Cheney | Special to PennLive.com

A bit more information can be learned by visiting Simon Cameron's former home, which is now home to the [Dauphin County Historical Society](#). Known today as the [Harris-Cameron Mansion](#), which denotes its connection to both Cameron and Harrisburg founder John Harris, the museum covers several little-known facets of the city's history, including the Grand Review of the Colored Troops.

With the 150th anniversary of this important event coming up, several events are planned for downtown Harrisburg, including a reenactment of the Grand Review.

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