

KURC to be Featured in WHYY Series *Movers and Makers*.



It's time for the Chris Densmore TV fan club to dig out your Quaker suspenders and hats again.

The former curator of the Friends Historical Library at Swarthmore and KURC Board member played an important role in a *Finding Your Roots* episode about Kevn Bacon and wife Kyra Sedgwick. At FHL Chris explained to Henry Gates the very gradual acceptance by Quakers of the premise that slavery was profoundly wrong and that one of Bacon's Quaker ancestors had actually owned slaves--as did Sedgwick's. Chris thinks he has been featured on TV about ten times.

On Thursday, February 17, at 7:30, Chris will be shown in a WHYY documentary on the Kennett Underground Railroad Center, created by producer Karen Smyles and her crew during the last half of 2021. He was filmed at the Kennett Heritage Center and extensively at the Marlborough Meeting House, which was opened to the TV crew by gracious hosts Penny and Chip Thomas. Chip, Penny, and Chris explained the complex role of 19th C Quakers in opposition to slavery and support of the Underground Railroad.

Chris is not the only KURC board member to be featured. Michele Sullivan, whose study on black abolitionists of Chester County will be published soon, teamed up with Board member Crystal Crampton to be filmed at the Bucktoe Cemetery. Restoration and preservation of the Bucktoe site has been one of Crystal's most important missions for more than three decades, and the WHYY documentary should certainly bring the site more attention and resources.

Other filming sessions arranged by WHYY producer Karen Smyles involved Secretary Debbie Burston and her husband Vice President Adrian, KURC Treasurer Dick Kittle, and President Terry Maguire. We were filmed in the process of discussing some important agenda items in one of the few in-person Board meeting that we have had in the last few years.

KURC is grateful to WHYY and to Karen Smyles, who has been producing works for the series *Movers and Makers*, which "highlights important arts and culture stories from the Philadelphia, Southern New Jersey and Delaware regions." The show on KURC is part of the 2022 series. In 2017 Karen won a Mid-Atlantic Emmy for her production of "A Passion for Music," a show on the Philadelphia Youth Orchestra Music Institute. She is shown here with her Emmy and director Louis Scaglione. In June 2020 she produced "Philadanco Turns 50," a story of the Philadelphia Dance company--in which she was once a performer- a group "recognized for innovation, creativity, and the preservation of predominately African American traditions in dance."

We also express our gratitude to Karen's friend Lisa Quiveors, who heard about our organization and suggested us to Karen as a topic for a *Movers and Makers* segment. And we hope you, dear readers of *The Lantern*, will tune in on Feb. 17 at 7:30 on WHYY!



Re-dedication of Hockessin Colored School # 107 Begins with Prayers, Speeches, and Shovels

An obscure corner of the town of Hockessin and a small brick building, closed since 1959, have been getting a lot of attention lately.

On December 14, a distinguished group, including Governor John Carney, County Executive Matt Meyers, Dr. Ray Blackwell, and several ministers prayed and spoke before a ground-breaking ceremony. Also in attendance were former students of HCS 107---**Sonny Knott, Charles and Lois Johnson, Charlotte Emery, and Leroy Peterson.** Earlier, in late summer, Senator Chris Coons, Congresswoman Lisa Blunt Rochester, Chief Justice Collins Seitz, Junior. and again Meyer were present when Temple professor David Wilk brought students from Temple to conduct oral history interviews with some elderly citizens who had attended many years before, Hockessin Colored School # 107.

They were all in attendance on those days to cel-



ebrate the preservation of this building and its eventual conversion to a community center dedicated to diversity training; as Wilk, who is the board chair of the Friends of Hockessin Colored School # 107 described it as, “..teaching communities how to create inclusive economic development and the ability to recognize everyone’s contribution and value.”

New Castle County will pay off existing mortgages and assume a large portion of the costs of renovation and maintenance of the center. The Trust for Public Land, one of the nation’s largest conservation organizations, will also contribute considerably to this project

Built in 1920, as a considerable upgrade over pre-

vious school houses for black students, it was still meager compared to the schools that white children



attended. In addition, school buses did not transport black children to #107. They were only for white students.

To summarize the contents of the historical marker outside the school, one African American parent, Sarah Bulah, petitioned to have her daughter Shirley *New Castle County Executive Matt Meyer chats with former students of HCP # 107. Meyer pointed out that the school is the 250th park in the NCC Park System.*





As if the sun were blessing their endeavor, those involved in this repurposing effort, including the Honorable Joshua Martin, Esq. and wife Cynthia, Fred Sears of the Delaware Community Foundation, NCC Councilwoman Janet Kilpatrick, former student Sonny Knott, and many others, get ready to turn some earth and begin the construction, which is hoped to be completed by June, '22. Photos by Pete Seeley.



Governor John Carney at the December 14 event.

given access to the buses. Eventually with the help of Attorney Louis Redding-- the first Black lawyer admitted to the Delaware Bar Association--Bulah sued the State Board of Education. This case was joined with a similar effort in Claymont, and Delaware Chancellor Collins Seitz, *Senior*, father of the current Chief Justice, found against the State Board of Education “declaring that the disparity between white and African American schools was in violation of the United States Constitution.”

Eventually these cases were further joined in the case that became known as *Brown vs. Topeka Board of Education*, and in May, 1954, the Supreme Court ruled that the concept of “separate but equal” was

Join Hockessin Historical Society!

Proud Sponsors of KURC

Please visit our website and Facebook page for membership information and to learn about our organization.
www.hockessinhistoricalsociety.org
 Facebook: [HockessinHistoricalSociety](https://www.facebook.com/HockessinHistoricalSociety)

flawed, and American public schools must integrate.

From the small brick building to the marble halls of the Supreme Court is quite a distance. But the important political figures at those events this year, and the elderly folks in attendance, former 107 students, all see the significance of that location, and all have hopes that it will fulfill its new mission.

The “Colored Schools” of Delaware

When, in 1829, public education was instituted in Delaware, African American children were specifically barred from attendance. As far as we know, the only source of education for such children were a few schools in Wilmington supported by the Wilmington Monthly Meeting and also endowed by non-Quakers.

After the Civil War, more schools were created for black children. By 1866 there were 15 schools with about 700 enrolled. Gradually, the Delaware General Assembly took on the responsibility for these schools but in miserly and racist fashion: these schools would be supported *only* by Black tax dollars. Even then, tax collectors often refused to accept taxes offered by black Delawareans (thereby preventing such persons from voting). In a 1968 *Delaware History* article Prof. Harold C. Livesay wrote, “Negro education constituted one of the most disgraceful chapters in Delaware history.” The schools were shabbily built, lacking running water, decent lighting, and even in some cases flooring. They were judged by inspectors to be serious threats to children’s health. On the whole, though, the white population of Delaware seemed either indifferent or genuinely opposed to education of black Delaware children.

One white person thought this was wrong, and he was a good person to have on one’s side: Pierre Samuel du Pont. At one point the head of the du Pont Corporation and General Motors, he decided to upgrade Delaware education, including for African

Americans. Starting in 1920 he used six million dollars of his own money to create 86 schools for black children all around the state. In typical du Pont fashion, he insisted that he be made the Delaware state treasurer, and from that post directed more money for this purpose.

In 2001 Dr. Jeanne Nutter of The University of Delaware produced a documentary on the phenomenon of “du Pont schools,” called *A Separate Place*. She also curated an exhibition at Hagley Museum on the topic. Many of the original attenders of those schools spoke of how excited and awed they were to ushered into well-constructed, tiled, brightly lit schools with indoor bathrooms and modern equipment.

Did the philanthropic Pierre Samuel even consider the possibility of racial integration? Not at all, though neither did almost anyone else in Delaware at the time. And a modern viewer winces at the tradition that began and lasted for some years-- “Du Pont Days,” when PSD and wife would condescend to visit some of these schools to listen to teachers and students singing-- *literally singing*--his praise.

On the other hand, no less a person than Littleton Mitchell, long the head of the Delaware NAACP, recalled being amazed and delighted as a child when he walked into his new school.

Dr. Nutter’s documentary is available from the Hagley website: “If you need assistance with downloading this film or would like to request a complimentary DVD copy, please contact us at askhagley@hagley.org or call 302-658-2400 ext 276.”

Tentative Schedule of KURC Heritage Bus Tours for 2022

We hope to resume our usual tours this spring. That depends, though, on the status of the pandemic. Tours begin at the Brandywine Valley Tourism office on 300 Greenwood Rd, outside Longwood Gardens. Masks will be mandatory for all passengers, with at most 15 persons, including the guide.

April 24

May 16

June 19

July 17

August 21

September 18

October 16

For more tour information and to register using Eventbrite, please visit the Events Section of our Facebook page or website. Registration can also be made via email or voicemail.

Private tours may also be arranged.

Contact us by phone (484)-544-5070, or email info@kennettundergroundrr.org.

Frustrations and Hopes for KURC in 2022

The Board members of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center have been, like the rest of this country --and the world--frustrated about our inability to resume our usual activities and life. We looked forward for over a month to Juneteenth, and were not disappointed. Kennett Square was abuzz with activities, and were able to show off our year-old but still largely unvisited "Center." An informative walking tour utilized QR codes for dozens of those interested. We gave a bus tour the next day, and for the next month we gave tours weekly.

And then we had to shut down --again!

Even as the Delta variant surged, we planned for a re-opening in the winter. By late autumn Covid numbers were decreasing, and stores and restaurants were opening doors again. Several more groups of hardy, intrepid "Walkers with Harriet" came to Kennett Heritage Center, and KURC was getting busy planning room renovations and being filmed by WHYY.

And we became excited by another prospect: the MLK Community Breakfast set for January 17th. We planned to have KURC Board members attend the breakfast at Lincoln University, listen to the speakers, and then make a series of brief presentations, focusing on Black leaders/abolitionists/UGRR agents of the 19th C. We would also give another walking tour around Kennett Square.

KURC Board of Directors

Darleen Amobi

Adrian Burston - Vice President

Debbie Burston- Secretary,

Head of Education/Outreach

Crystal Crampton-Head of Marketing

Dick Kittle--Treasurer

Terence Maguire--President, *Lantern* Editor

Michele Sullivan

tonya thames-taylor

Volunteers: Susanna Davison, Chris Densmore, Anne-Louise Jeffery, John and Judy O'Neal, Pete Seeley, Linda Steelman

But then Omicron emerged. We found double-or triple-vaccinated friends and relatives having so-called "breakthrough" cases.

Members became uneasy about being in an enclosed place for three hours, so we thought we would just skip the breakfast and come at 11:00 for our presentation.

Next we thought--maybe we'll just do the presentations remotely. Finally, we learned that the breakfast had, *quite understandably*, been postponed until... whenever we could safely gather.

Hope persists, however. Lincoln University and Voices Underground have been planning for a long time to have a three-day conference, March 31-April 2, *Seeking Freedom: the UGRR in the Mid-Atlantic*. Our colleague Dr. tonya thames-taylor wrote an application for KURC to make a panel presentation, and it was accepted. We plan to share our stories and our activities with the audience, focusing--as we would have on MLK Day at Lincoln--on the ways in which African American abolitionists and UGRR agents shaped the struggle for freedom and equality in the 19thC. It would be great if many of our readers attended this conference, to hear us and the many worthy speakers on this subject.

Or at least we **hope** we will make our panel presentation. We also hope to resume the Heritage tours, the schedule of which is on p. 4. Will the Omicron surge have played itself out? Can we hope there is not a Sigma, a Tau, or an Upsilon surge?

We *can hope*, and when life is relatively normal, the members of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center will be ready to share what we care about and what we know.

The mission of the Kennett Underground Railroad Center is to preserve and celebrate the heritage and engage the public about the historic abolitionists, Underground Railroad agents, and freedom-seekers of this area and beyond.

In Kate Larson's *Walk with Me*, Fanny Lou Hamer's Voice and Courage Re-emerge at a Critical Time

Anyone who has read Kate Clifford Larson's biography of Harriet Tubman, *Bound for the Promised Land*, knows she is a thorough researcher and master of utilizing seemingly minor details to elucidate her subject. Larson's literary voice is clear, sometimes eloquent, and often powerful. We who were fortunate enough to have heard her two years ago at Kennett Friends Meeting know that well.

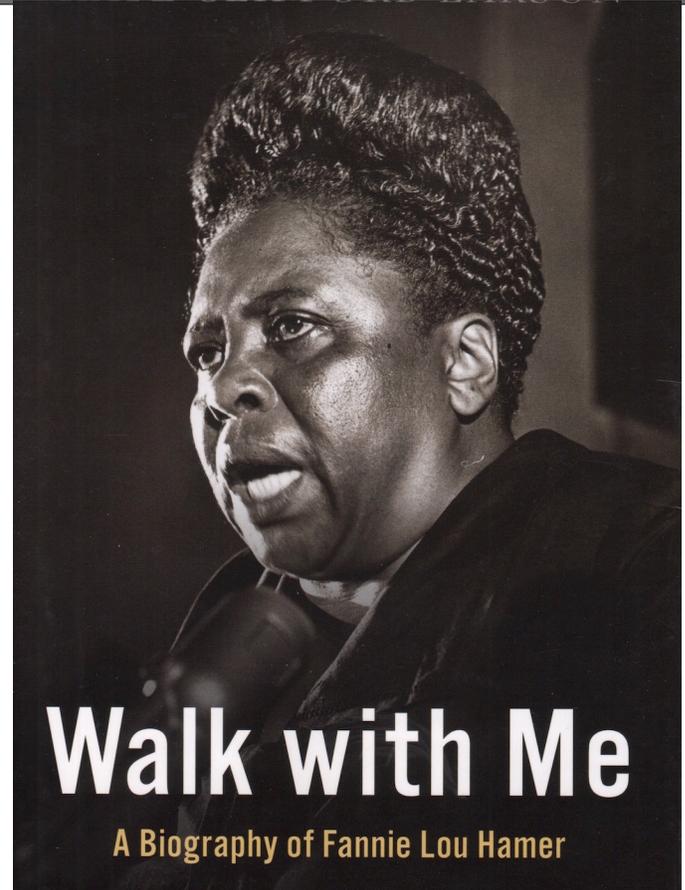
Those skills are brought to bear in her latest work, *Walk with Me* about Fanny Lou Hamer, a woman whose literal voice was one of her greatest assets. Hamer was a thunderous speaker, with a simple eloquence and a powerful range. Hamer used that voice from her earliest days, singing in the church where she grew up in and her father a part-time preacher.

The world outside of Mississippi first heard that voice in the riveting testimony she gave before the Credentials Committee of the Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City in August, 1964. Hamer was trying to convince the Committee not to seat the all-white Mississippi delegation, chosen by whites through violent denial of voting rights for Black people but rather the delegates of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. That effort failed, but national NBC TV coverage of Hamer's eight minutes gripped the nation and aroused great sympathy for her cause.

The wider world also heard her speak four years later at the 1968 DNC in Chicago, which hosted over 300 African American delegates, in large part because of her example. She spoke to the entire convention and received a standing ovation. She was also heard at the Newport Folk Festival with the Freedom Singers in 1965, where she joined singers such as Judy Collins, Odetta, Pete Seeger, and Bob Dylan.

What Larson shows in this biography is Hamer's growth-- from someone who knew from the start that the violent, white-dominated world in which she, her family, and friends grew up in and suffered was *simply wrong*. Even as her faith in a just God and Jesus was unshakeable, so was her conviction that the status quo in the Delta country of Mississippi was utterly, profoundly wrong.

What we follow in this book is Fanny Lou Hamer's gradual discovery of what could be done. What we



also witness is the determination to do all that she could to right those wrongs, and the astonishing resilience, courage, and endurance she demonstrated, even under brutal deprivation and repression.

In interviews about her book, Larson said that she looks for those moments in her subject's life when the ordinary person (which most of us start out as) becomes extraordinary. Two events in Hamer's life transformed her. In 1961, suffering from severe uterine pains, she went to a white doctor to have tumors removed. Without her knowledge or consent, he also removed her uterus; he sterilized her. She had long wished to have children of her own, and she and husband had adopted two girls. But now she could have none of her own. "Robbed of her fertility, Hamer could no longer contain her rage" (p. 49).

The other event is portrayed in Chapter 6, "Winona." Hamer and four other Blacks, returning from Atlanta, stopped and tried to get service at a bus terminal restaurant. They were arrested, brought to jail, and, for four days, were brutally tortured. Hamer was sexually

abused. Larson goes into very specific detail, painful to read and, according to Larson, painful to write. (If you read this book, do not read “Winona” late at night, as I did; getting and staying asleep was almost impossible). Difficult as it was to read and to write, Hamer emerged from this sadistic, hellish experience ever more determined to seek justice and equality.

They beat her body but strengthened her soul.

Hamer worked with the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) in the early 1960s to gain voting rights for Mississippi’s Black population. That gave her the opportunity to grow in other ways, including her gradual understanding that, not only was she marginalized as a Black person but also as a woman. The whites and African Americans leading the voter registration effort were mostly male, and her role in rallies and meetings was often to use her voice only to sing. She began to use it to speak. Her style, though unpolished, gripped her audiences in ways that the college-educated men rarely did. She also mentored the young college kids who came to Mississippi for the Freedom Summer on how to treat the Black people they were appealing to with respect, not to be condescending because those people were uneducated. Though she worked with Martin Luther King, Roy Wilkins, and other prominent Black leaders, she came to realize that they were sometimes embarrassed by her rough manner of speaking and appearance. She was a victim of class prejudice, even from fellow African Americans as well as liberal whites.

Over her last fifteen years, Fanny Lou Hamer emerged as a compelling voice not just for Black people, but for women and for poor people. She insisted on equality; when some SNCC members came to resent the white leadership in the voting rights drive, Hamer argued that they should not fight for equality and integration by segregating themselves. When she ran for office in 1971, she said, “I’m not just going to be representing Black people...but white people as well. [Poor] White people in Mississippi are oppressed” (p. 228).

Toward the end of her life, she was advocating for far more than the voting rights that began her quest. She was fighting for much

on the progressive agenda today: against poverty and income inequality, for broader health care, for better education of all people, for gender equality. Some of those problems simply persisted, and others, such as voter suppression, have re-emerged stronger in recent years.

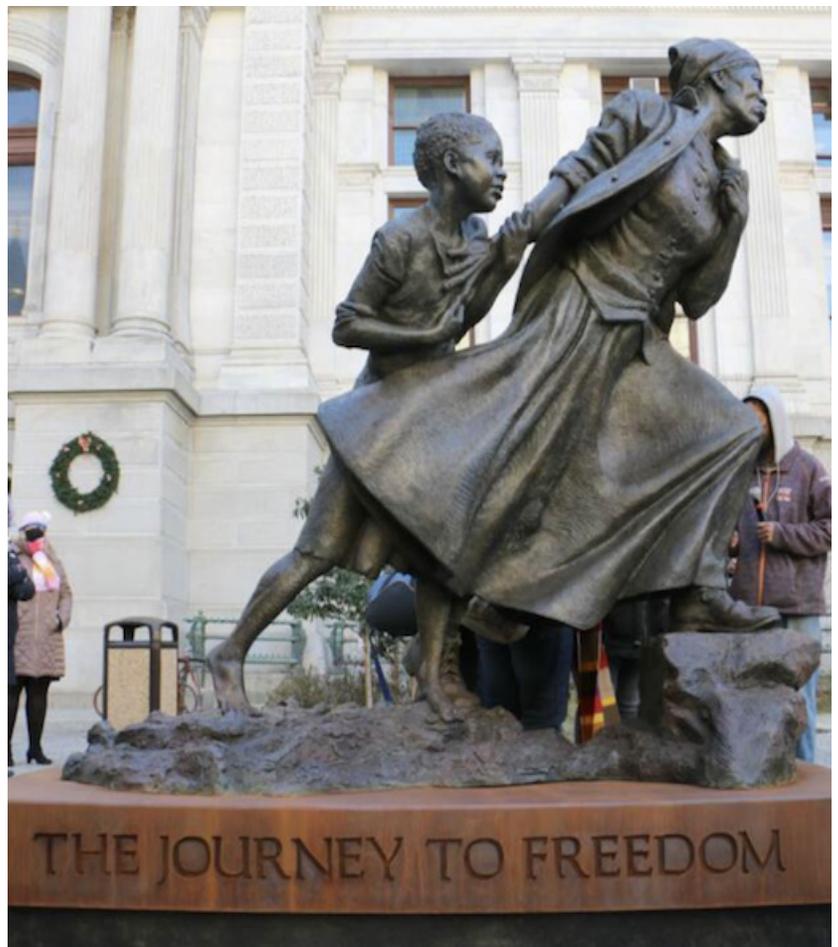
And through it all, Hamer rejected hate and embraced the Christian belief in love that sustained her.

There is much more to be said and learned about Fanny Lou Hamer. Watch Larson’s interviews in the videos cited below, and read this book--but remember that advice about Chapter 6.

I thank my KURC colleague tonya-thames taylor--like Hamer, a child of Mississippi--for the reference to these YouTube videos and also for the information about the traveling Harriet Tubman statue below.

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbysLZi0aCY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLZ-0Eup-CQ>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PijW9l02K0E>

- *Journey to Freedom*, by Wesley Wofford, will remain at Philadelphia City Hall until March 31, 2022. Photo



O'Neal's History Notes

KURC President Emeritus John O'Neal looks for material relevant to the time --19th C--and the issues central to the Kennett Underground Railroad Center--the struggle to abolish slavery, the heroism of those who sought freedom and those who helped them, and the ongoing struggle toward equality among the races in America. Below are snippets from the books and websites he has shared.

- tinyurl.com/2cwynkjh

From *Slavery's Capitalism* by Sven Beckert and Seth Rockman. "In the 1700s, China was the largest economy in the world. However, it was overtaken in the 1800s, first by England, then by the United States. Some economic historians suggest that slavery -- tragic and horrifying slavery -- was central to this transformation, first through England's lucrative slave-based colonies in the Caribbean and North America, then, after America's independence, through America's slave-based tobacco and cotton industries. In the U.S., the financial value of slaves alone exceeded the combined financial value of all the nation's railroads and factories."

- tinyurl.com/mry72tyx

From *Forget the Alamo*: by Bryan Burrough, Chris Tomlinson, and Jason Stanford. "In the early the late 1820s and 1830s, the lands of Texas, which were part of Mexico, became part of the mad rush to grow cotton and take advantage of booming global cotton prices. But growing cotton meant slaves, and slavery was illegal in Mexico, so the Americans that had gone to Texas to grow cotton made herculean efforts to ignore or circumvent the Mexican slavery ban. The lack of success of those efforts soon led to the Texas war for independence in 1836."

- tinyurl.com/ycktpypu

Freeman Basil Biggs in Gettysburg

While it was the 16th president who uttered the most famous speech in American history, it was a black Gettysburgian – Basil Biggs – who set the stage for that speech and dedicated his life's purpose to the nation's "unfinished work".

Born free in Maryland on August 10th, 1819, Basil Biggs was quickly introduced to difficult labor. His mother passed away when he was only four years

old, leaving him \$400 to secure an education. This money, however, disappeared before he could receive any schooling, leaving him to "work with his hands." Ultimately ending up in Baltimore, the industrious Basil found work as a teamster – the person who drove a team of horses to pull a wagon. This job paid well and he quickly developed his skills with wagons and cargo, both of which played central roles throughout his life.

- tinyurl.com/2p8rzub8

Abraham Galloway: From Cartridge Box to Ballot Box

Galloway was born a slave on the lower Cape Fear to a black woman and a white father — not his mother's owner but another slaveholding neighbor. Galloway escaped in 1857 on a turpentine schooner. In Philadelphia he quickly fell in with abolitionists and took up clandestine work for the Underground Railroad, venturing as far as Canada. He does not hide his half-white parentage. He points it out publicly, outraged at a social system that can declare one human being to be the property of another based on such fine distinctions of racial mixing.

- tinyurl.com/2p82vem4

Nathan "Nearest" Green (c.1820-?) • (blackpast.org)

It is not hard to argue that Jack Daniel's has become the most famous brand of whiskey in the world. However, this may have never happened without the work of a black slave named Nathan "Nearest" Green. While he was a key figure in forming the Jack Daniel's brand, Nearest Green's story has only recently become known outside of Lynchburg, Tennessee.

- <https://www.nps.gov/people/hubbard-pryor.htm>

The percentage of contrabands and runaway slaves who became soldiers was much higher than that of free men who joined the USCT. When the USCT formed in 1863, they flocked to Union lines and would often follow regiments back to their encampments, seeking protection and freedom. They willingly offered their services as soldiers. They often arrived degraded, frightened, and unfamiliar with the surroundings of a military setting. They also arrived half-starved, barefoot, unkempt and in tattered clothing, with the scars of one who'd been chained and beaten, treated worse than the dogs used to hunt them.