**Sterling and Nancy Campbell Biography**

Sterling Campbell was born into enslavement in 1838 in Christian County, Kentucky. His enslaver was John P. Campbell, and his parents were Adelaide Campbell and Louis Gibson. He had one brother named Henry Gibson. In 1858, Sterling received the permission of his enslaver and the permission of Randel Boyd, the enslaver of his intended wife, to marry Nancy Boyd. Nancy was the daughter of Roe McCulluct and Eliza Boyd. The couple’s enslavers, John P. Campbell and Randel Boyd were partners in the tobacco industry and lived close to each other.

On January 21, 1864, Sterling enlisted in Company H, 16th USCT in Clarksville, Tennessee. He was 26 years old, five feet four inches tall, with black eyes and hair, and a black complexion. It is probable that at the time of his enlistment, Nancy had also escaped to freedom in Clarksville. The 16th USCT left Clarksville for Chattanooga, Tennessee in April 1864. On September 18, 1864, Sterling was treated for diarrhea. He was sick in the Regimental Hospital on October 30, 1864 but was present with his unit during the Battle of Nashville where the 16th USCT was part of the Federal Army’s reserve and participated in the march back to Chattanooga after the battle. In January/February 1865, Sterling was charged forty cents for lost Camp and Garrison Equipage. He was admitted to the Regimental Hospital on August 6, 1865 for diarrhea and was so sick that they transferred him to General Hospital Number 1 where they diagnosed him with hepatic dropsy (body swelling caused by liver disfunction). He returned to duty on September 16, 1865. Sterling was allowed to go home on furlough on November 24, 1865 and returned December 8, 1865. From January 21st to the 23rd, 1866, Sterling was treated for a headache which may mean that it was a migraine headache. He was in the hospital again with diarrhea from January 28 to February 1, 1866, and was hospitalized with dysentery from February 19 through February 22, 1866. Sterling’s military history highlights the dangers of camp life, and shows how disease killed more soldiers than bullets did in the Civil War. He was mustered out of the Army in Nashville, Tennessee on April 30, 1866. The Army owed him seventeen dollars and twenty cents at the time of his discharge.

The 1870 Montgomery County, Tennessee census is the only census that listed Sterling Campbell. The family was living in District 12 which included downtown Clarksville. He is listed as a 35-year-old laborer. Nancy, aged 30, was listed as keeping house. Sterling’s 65-year-old mother, Adelaide was living with them. Three children were listed with them. Daughter Jud was fourteen, sons Sterling, Junior and Lewis were aged 4 and 2 respectively. Two other children were added to the family later: daughter Eliza Jane was born in 1874 and the final child, George was born in 1875.

Sterling Campbell died on April 14, 1876 of heart disease. Two of his children, Jud and Eliza Jane, had predeceased him. It is not currently known where the two children are buried but Sterling was buried in Mt Olive Cemetery by Henry Roberts. In one of life’s ironies, Henry Roberts was deposed for Nancy’s Widow’s Pension application and stated his records were burned in Clarksville’s big fire of 1878. He stated he remembered burying Sterling in Sterling’s own garden. But for the discovery of his headstone, Sterling’s resting place would be unknown.

Nancy Campbell applied for a widow’s pension on April 5, 1889. At the time she applied, Nancy had three living children: Sterling Junior, Lewis, and George. All three children were eligible for a minor’s pension since they were less than sixteen years old when their father died. The minor’s pension would pay each of them $2 per month until they reached the age of sixteen. Stephen O. W. Brandon was Nancy’s pension agent. He wrote down the statements of her witnesses and guided her through the pension process, but he was not a lawyer. Nancy was granted a pension on January 22, 1895. By the time of her pension the laws were changed so that when a pension was granted, it was backdated to the original application date. Nancy received money on her pension and the children’s pension starting from 1889 which amounted to a first check of $450. Stephen O. W. Brandon lobbied Nancy to get her to agree to give him 1/3 of her first check for the work he did to help her get her pension. This was in violation of the pension laws which only allowed pension lawyers and agents to receive a maximum of $10. Nancy would not agree to this and shrewdly took her son Lewis with her when she picked up and cashed her first check. She offered Brandon the $10 he was authorized and he refused it. She added five dollars and met with another refusal. Brandon finally accepted $30. Unfortunately for him, Nancy reported the transaction. A special examiner was sent to take her statement as well as one from her son. The special examiner found more cases where Brandon required more than ten dollars in payment and recommended that Brandon be criminally prosecuted. Brandon was found guilty on four counts of violation of the Pension Act of June 27, 1890. He was sentenced on April 28, 1896 to 13 months in the Brooklyn Penitentiary for each count. Sentences were to be served concurrently.

The 1910 Montgomery County, Tennessee census listed Nancy Campbell living at 314 Kellog Street with her sister, Margaret Boyd. Nancy owned the house and no occupation was listed for her. Margaret was working as a cook for a private family. Nancy’s son Lewis was married with nine children and living next door at 312 Kellog Street. Sterling Junior was married and living at 437 Lee Street. Both Sterling Junior and Lewis were working as laborers in a tobacco factory. Sterling Campbell died on March 22, 1911 of tuberculosis. His burial place is currently unknown. Nancy Campbell died five years later on June 4, 1916 of chronic bronchitis. She was buried in Mt Olive Cemetery on June 5, 1916 by Nace Dixon’s Undertaking firm. No headstone has currently been found for her.

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