

[< Back to the Blog](#)

The Archive of Torbert's Journey



Saturday, 6/17: Welcome Center closed all day. Restrooms open 9:30am to 4:30pm. Thanks for your understanding!

Gates Open for Vehicle Access: 05: [Calendar](#) [Shop](#) [Give](#)



AM - 08:34 PM

Explore

the Land & River

Visit

Bartram's Garden

Learn 

with Us

Understand

Who We Are

Torbert Ganges was born around 1839 in Bucks County. [\[1\]](#) His first appearance in the

historical record was at age 11. In the 1850 Federal Census, he was listed in the household of Sampson Ganges, working as a boatman.[2] Sampson was among the first generation of children born in America to the Ganges Africans. In 1800, the *U.S.S. Ganges* confiscated a pair of illegal slave ships carrying 135 people. A court battle ensued over their legal status before they were placed in the care of the Pennsylvania Abolition Society. The Ganges Africans were signed into indentured servant contracts, and many of them assimilated into Pennsylvania's free Black community.[3]

Following Torbert's journey through archival documents shows that the trajectory of his life took several turns despite being relatively brief. After he left school at age 16, archival documents placed him in the reception records of Eastern State Penitentiary in 1862. At 23, Ganges was arrested for rioting before serving in the Union Army during the Civil War. On February 26, 1864, 25-year-old Torbert Ganges enlisted with the 32nd Regiment Infantry, U.S. Colored Troops, Company H.[4] The 32nd was organized at Camp William Penn in Philadelphia before they were ordered to South Carolina where they fought in the Battle of Honey Hill.[5] The 32nd Regiment Infantry lost a total of 150 men throughout the war. A pair of officers and 35 enlisted men were mortally wounded or killed, while 113 died of disease. Torbert Ganges and the remaining soldiers of the 32nd Infantry were mustered out in August of 1865.[6] Ganges returned to Bucks County and was arrested for robbery and receiving stolen goods. He served two terms in Eastern State Penitentiary in 1876 and 1879.

In 1893, Torbert made the local paper after he helped apprehend an accused murderer. According to Ganges, a man came to his home and offered to pay him for food. He gave the man a loaf of bread but refused to take any money. A short time later, the man returned, asking to purchase tobacco from Ganges. After giving the man tobacco and refusing money, Ganges went into town and alerted authorities that he had seen a man fitting the description of Wallace Burt. Burt was wanted for the murder of a local elderly couple.[7] Torbert Ganges was awarded \$448 of the \$1,000 reward offered by the county following Burt's conviction.[8]

In December of 1895, Ganges appeared in newspapers again when he was arrested for robbery. Torbert and Samuel Crusen from New Jersey were accused of stealing poultry and produce.^[9] As a result, James Bunting's poultry house was missing chickens, and William Vandegrift was robbed of food he kept at a boardinghouse for farm laborers he employed. In addition, Charles Pope was robbed of 30 bushels of wheat, 20 bushels of apples, 25 bushels of potatoes, and buckwheat flour. The irony of the crime is that Torbert and Crusen borrowed a cart from Charles Pope to carry the load of stolen produce.^[10] The pair were caught after a resident of the boardinghouse tipped off the local farmers. According to the *Allentown Leader*, "Old Torbert Ganges has an old black horse with a crooked hind leg, that twists when he walks, making a peculiar hood-print on the ground. Detective Wharton traced this hoof-print seven miles between a house that had been robbed and Ganges' hut."^[11] Ganges pleaded guilty to burglary and was sentenced to six years and six months at the local prison. Before handing down the hefty sentence, the judge reminded the 56-year-old Ganges that he had already sentenced him to prison twice.^[12]

Ganges served a few months of his sentence before he was transferred to the almshouse for treatment, where he died on July 16, 1897. The article that announced Torbert's death did not include details on his illness, but it did note that he was sent to the almshouse on the recommendation of an appointed court commission.^[13] Torbert Ganges' final appearance in the historical record is on a "Burial of Indigent Soldiers" list in 1899.^[14]

Image: Torbert Ganges' Gravestone, located at Slate Hill Burial Ground, Yardley, Pennsylvania. "Torbut Ganges," taken by Stan Doremus, Findagrave.com, Memorial ID:8148456

Notes

^[1] 1850 United States Federal Census [database online], Census Place: Lower Makefield, Bucks County, Pennsylvania; Roll M432_758, Page 19A, Image 44.

[2] Ibid. While it is possible that Sampson Ganges was Torbert's father, it is speculative since the 1850 federal census does not list a relationship to head of household.

[3] Materials on the U.S.S. Ganges, the indentured contracts, and documents from the court case can be found in Collection 0490, Pennsylvania Abolition Society Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Also see, Sharece Blakney, *Stories We Know: Recording the Black History of Bartram's Garden and Southwest Philadelphia*, edited by Aislinn Pentecost-Farren (published by the John Bartram Association and Mural Arts Philadelphia, 2017).

[4] *Compiled Military Service Records of Volunteer Union Soldiers Who Served with the United States Colored Troops; Infantry Organizations, 31st through 35th*; Microfilm Serial: M1992; Microfilm Roll:22

[5] Samuel Bates, *History of Pennsylvania Volunteers, 1861-5; Prepared in Compliance with Acts of the Legislature*, 1871. Page 1061 – On the same page listing Torbert, there is a Peter Ganges, also 32nd USCT and page 1060 shows a William Ganges, 32nd USCT as a Corporal. The 1850 Federal Census shows an 18-year-old William Ganges living in the same household as Sampson and Torbert.

[6] Frederick Henry Dyer, *A Compendium of the War of the Rebellion* (The Dyer Publishing Company, 1908), 1729.

[7] The Central News (Perkasie, Pennsylvania), Thursday, October 5, 1893; Page 3. The article describes Wallace Burt as an "Indian half-breed", other papers running the story described him as a half-breed Cherokee and a negro looking half-breed Indian. Torbert Ganges is referred to as a colored man in some newspapers or an old negro.

[8] The Allentown Leader (Allentown, Pennsylvania), Friday, December 13, 1895; Page 1.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Ibid

[11] Ibid.

[12] The Allentown Leader (Allentown, Pennsylvania), Thursday, December 19, 1895; Page 1.

[13] The Columbian (Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania), Thursday, July 22, 1897. Page 6

[14] The Central News (Perkasie, Pennsylvania), Thursday, February 17, 1898; Page 4. -- The Bucks County Gazette (Bristol, Pennsylvania), Thursday, February 16, 1899. He appears on this list twice. Once for his burial in 1898 and then when his headstone is placed in 1899.

(215) 729-5281

5400

Lindbergh

Boulevard

Philadelphia, PA

19143

info@bartramsgarden.org

Bartram's Garden is located in Lenapehoking, the homeland of the Lenape people.

©2023 Bartram's Garden

Site by Masters Group Design

BARTRAM'S GARDEN

WHAT'S NEW

CALENDAR

DONATE

SHOP

VOLUNTEER

DIRECTIONS

SOUTHWEST NEIGHBORHOOD

CAREERS

PLAN YOUR EVENT

MEDIA KIT

FORM LIBRARY

Join our Mailing List

Email Address *

SUBSCRIBE

