Thomas Freeman and Henrietta Freeman, who were not related, were married in August 1846 or 1847, in a “slave marriage” conducted by Jacob Freeman "a colored minister of the Methodist Episcopal Church at 12 miles west of Milledgeville in Jones County State of Georgia." Both were slaves of John F. Freeman and lived on his plantation. John R. Freeman stated that “he was raised with Thos Freeman and got him from [his] uncle.”¹ At the time of the marriage, Thomas was approximately 23 years old and Henrietta about 15.

John R. Freeman and his wife Mary Hamilton Freeman arrived in Floyd County in the early 1850s; bringing Thomas and Henrietta and other slaves with them. John and Mary Freeman were fairly prosperous farmers, who by 1860 owned over 160 acres of farmable land, at least 450 acres of wooded territory, and 50 slaves, including Thomas, Henrietta, and their six oldest children.

In 1864, General William Tecumseh Sherman’s army was advancing into northwestern Georgia. John R. Freeman moved south before the occupation, leaving Thomas Freeman near Rome, in Floyd County, Georgia, where John R. Freeman operated ferries.²

In 1862 the Union had begun to enlist Black men in military service. After the 1 Jan 1863 Emancipation Proclamation freed all those enslaved in Confederate territory, recruitment was extended. During the Atlanta campaign of May-September 1864, the enrollment of Black soldiers began in occupied areas of northwestern Georgia under authority granted to Colonel Ruben D. Mussey, the Nashville, Tennessee-based commissioner for the Organization of U.S. Colored Troops in the Department of the Cumberland. From July to September 1864, the 44th U.S. Colored Infantry was stationed in Rome, for recruiting purposes. By late summer the 44th USCI contained some 800 black enlisted men³, including Thomas Freeman, who enlisted in Company I on 30 June 1864. The unit was commanded by Colonel Lewis Johnson, who was white.

By order of Gen. Vandever, Thomas Freeman remained on duty as a blacksmith in Rome during July and August 1864, then joined his company. On the morning of October 13, most of the 44th were doing garrison duty in Dalton, Georgia, when advance units of the Army of Tennessee, commanded by Confederate General John Bell Hood, unexpectedly converged on the town. Hood vowed to take no prisoners. Although Col. Johnson claimed that his Black troops displayed the "greatest anxiety to fight," he surrendered to Hood and quickly secured paroles for himself and the 150 or so other white troops.

¹ Henrietta Freeman, certificate number 443639, Case Files of Approved Pension Applications..., 1861-1934; Civil War and Later Pension Files; Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15; National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as “Henrietta Freeman Pension Application”)
² Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
attached to the garrison. The regiment's 600 African American enlisted men suffered a harsher fate. Some were re-enslaved, while others were sent to work on fortification projects in Alabama and Mississippi. Many ended the war as prisoners in Columbus and Griffin, Georgia, where they were released during May 1865 in what one of them described as a "sick, broken down, naked, and starved" condition.⁴

Thomas Freeman was among those taken prisoner. John R. Freeman, then living in southwest Georgia, "in some way found out Thomas Freeman had been a prisoner of war and had been left very sick near Griffin Ga."⁵ John R. Freeman arranged to have Thomas Freeman transported to his own home in Meriwether County, and arranged for medical care for "many months." Thomas Freeman, who had been "a very stout able bodied slave" before imprisonment was now "a perfect physical reck."⁶ In late 1865 John R. Freeman and Thomas Freeman returned to Floyd County, where both of them lived out their lives.⁷ In April 1866 Thomas Freeman received $101.20 back pay from his military service.

After the war Thomas Freeman continued to work as a blacksmith and farmed. Census records and documents related to the settlement of his estate indicate that he and Henrietta reared at least 12 children born between about 1859 and 1874. In 1870 the family lived in the racially mixed Texas Valley area, district 1120, near Mead and Elizabeth Freeman and their family. Other black families in the area include Albert and Adaline Horn, Squire and Cylla Smith, and Frank and Martha Benton.⁸

On 9 October 1871, Thomas and Mead Freeman, who is believed to be Thomas’s father⁹, purchased one half of lot no. 4 (80 acres in Floyd County’s district 15, section 4) from G.B. Gentry for $130. The 1880 Census shows Thomas and Henrietta Freeman still in District 1120, then called Flatwoods, with three sons (Mingo, Lindsey, and Thomas) and two daughters (Louisa and Fredonia). Thomas, 54, is a blacksmith; Henrietta, 48, keeps house. Living nearby are Mead and Elizabeth (Lizzie) Freeman, with their grandchildren Angeline, Hillyer, and Lydia, and nieces Jessie, Lila, and Hattie. Thomas’ and Henrietta’s daughter Josephine, now married, lives close by with her husband Charles Rodgers and their young children. The area is still racially mixed, with as many white families as Black living nearby. Black families include Tom and Leah Selman, and Cato and Mary Clemmons.¹⁰

The Dependent and Disability Pension Act, which provided pensions for Union Army veterans who had served at least 90 days and who were unable to perform manual labor, whether or not the cause of their disability was related to their service in the Civil War, was passed by the United States Congress in 1890. Soon after, Thomas Freeman began the process of applying for a pension. He was required to travel to Dalton, where he was examined on 14 May 1890. He stated that “while in U.S. service [he] was taken

⁴ New Georgia Encyclopedia
⁵ Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
⁶ Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
⁷ Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
⁸ 1870 United States Federal Census. Texas Valley, Floyd, Georgia; Roll M593_149; Page 165B; Image 339; Family History Library Film: 545648.
⁹ In the 1893 distribution of Thomas Freeman’s estate one of the heirs is his brother, Sanford Freeman. The 1870 U.S. Federal Census lists 30 year-old Sandford Freeman living in the household of Mead Freeman.
¹⁰ 1880 United States Federal Census. Flat Woods, Floyd, Georgia; Roll 146; Family History Film 1254146; Page 228D; Enumeration District 067.
sick with measles & was sick seven or eight months ... I am still disabled ... from doing manual labor”. Examiners found that at the age of 67 he was 6'1”, weighed 158 pounds, and had a normal temperature. Their description of his ailments, including rheumatism, lung and kidney disease, and vision disorders from the bout with measles, is graphic, with the summary “There is considerable emaciation and debility.” They rated his disability at 12/18ths, entitling him to a pension of $12 per month, beginning around March 1892.11

Thomas Freeman died on 18 April 1893. His family physician, Dr. A.J. Higginbotham, lived about six miles from the Freeman residence and had visited Thomas Freeman “almost daily” during the year before his death. John R. Freeman, his former owner “attended the funeral of the said Thomas Freeman and saw him buried,”12 presumably in the Freemantown Cemetery, where his Federal headstone is placed.

When Thomas Freeman died, he owned 380 acres of land in Floyd County, appraised at a value of $1,000. His estate also included livestock (2 mules, 3 cows, 1 ox, 3 yearlings, and 14 hogs); farrier, blacksmith, and carpenter tools; a wagon, buggy, and various household furnishings. He left no will, and the land was divided by lot among his widow, his children (including the heirs of a daughter and son who had predeceased him), and, at the request of the heirs, Thomas’s brother, Sanford Freeman. The widow’s lot was valued at $175; the others at $75. Henrietta Freeman was also granted money and property necessary for 12 months support by the Floyd County Court of Ordinary in its 1893 August Term.

In May 1893 Henrietta Freeman applied for a Federal Widow’s Pension. Over the next six years Sanford Freeman, Frank Bentin, John R. Freeman, and Mary Freeman supported her petitions, confirming her identity, the facts of her marriage to Thomas Freeman, and that she had not remarried since Thomas Freeman’s death. Mary Freeman was the wife of John R. Freeman, who died in 1896. Henrietta was granted a pension of $24 per quarter, but later petitions for greater sums were denied. These petitions provide some detail about Henrietta Freeman’s lifestyle.

In 1894 her affidavit states that “she owns twenty five acres of land in Floyd County Georgia ... That said land is worth not exceeding five dollars per acre as lands are now selling in the neighborhood. That she also owns one horse about fifteen years old worth twenty five dollars. That she also owns three cows worth ten dollars each. That she owns two beds and covering, one table, four chairs and cooking utensils all worth twenty dollars. That she also owns one hog, ten hens, one plow and a small lot of farming tools all of the value of ten dollars and that further than as above set forth she owns no property, real, personal or mixed. That she has no one upon whom she can legally call for support and no one is bound for her support. That she is dependent upon her labor for her support. That she has planted upon her said land three acres in cotton, two acres in corn, one half acre in potatoes and about one fourth of an acre in garden produce. That the produce from the lands planted as herein set forth are her only sources

11 Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
12 Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
of income and that said produce when marketed will not exceed fifty dollars annually." She is also said
to have three or four grandchildren to take care of.  

The next year, in 1895, she repeats that “she has no means of income other than her labor, that she has
cultivated about five acres of land. The income from this and her gardening and her milk cow is her
means of support, and is her only income from all sources.” The 1895 tax on her land and personal
property was $217.  

By 1899 she reports that her income is “not over fifteen dollars per year from all the property now
presented by her; that [she] ... is without other means of support than her own labor, except the
pension of $24 per quarter which she is drawing from the United States Government”. In 1900 she
petitions that she has no income whatever aside from her pension of $24 per quarter.  

The U.S. Census picks up the story, although in less detail. In 1900 Henrietta is 72 years old; unmarried
daughter Fredonia and son Lindsey share the home, as do grandchildren Carlton Wily and Mary Price.  

Sons Tom Freeman and his wife Ida, Mingo and wife Frances, Nick, and daughter Henrietta and her
husband Sie Montgomery all live nearby on land inherited from their father. Two children are known to
have died before Thomas in 1893. Four others – Essex, Josephine, Fanny, and Louisa – have not been
located in the 1900 census.  

By 1910 more of the Freeman children have scattered or died. Henrietta is still living on her land, with
granddaughter Beatrice Freeman (daughter of Thomas and Ida Montgomery Freeman). Only Josephine
Rogers, Mingo and Frances Freeman, Essex Freeman’s widow Hannah, and Henrietta and Gib
Montgomery are nearby. Thomas and Ida Freeman are a little farther away, perhaps not on the family
land, but still in the district. Sanford Freeman’s widow Susan is nearby, as well. But Fredonia has married
Oliver Perry and moved to Tennessee, Essex has died and Nick will pass away in July, and the
whereabouts of the other three children, Lindsey, Fanny, and Louisa, is unknown. White families such as
Mart and Sallie Duke and Henry and Mary Redmond still live nearby, as do related Black families,
including Cicero and Dora Sanford and Pleas and Bertha Jones.  

Several sources, however, make it clear that by this time the name Freemantown is well established. In
November 1910 Henrietta Freeman and her children Mingo Freeman, Josephine Rodgers, Henrietta
Montgomery, and Fredonia Perry confirm a lost deed from Thomas Freeman to the Trustees of
Freemans Chapel Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. In a 1949 document
describing his 1909 marriage to Luna Presley, Henry Grady Terrell recollects “Driving to Mountain
Springs Methodist Church at the foot of Lavender Mountain and just off old Bryant Gap Road ... At the
home of George Rolland and Sally Vaughn Presley. From there took Luna Presley ... And at midafternoon

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13 Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
14 Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
15 Henrietta Freeman Pension Application
16 1900 United States Federal Census. Flatwood, Floyd, Georgia; Roll 196; Page 3A; Enumeration District 0130; FHL microfilm 1240196.
17 1910 United States Federal Census. Flatwoods, Floyd, Georgia; Roll T624_187; Page 11B; Enumeration District: 0075; FHL microfilm 1374200.
we drove to Freeman Town, then to Redmond Gap Road and drove along the fence toward Rome. To the Rev. William Cooper’s home which was about one mile west of Berry Schools and about one half of a mile north of the present Battey State Hospital, and united in Holy matrimony.” In the 1910 census, Roland Presley and his second wife Ella, who are white, are enumerated on the same page as Henrietta Freeman’s daughter Josephine Rodgers and her sister-in-law Susan Freeman.

The first sale of Freeman land to the Berry Schools occurred in 1916, when Essex Freeman’s widow, Hannah Montgomery Freeman, sold her portion of Lot 20 for $1,450. By 1920 the impact of the school is becoming significant. School Superintendent Henry Hamrick, his wife Ethel, son, and three Berry students are practically next door to Henrietta Freeman and her granddaughter Beatrice Freeman. Of the children, only Mingo and Francis Freeman are close. Henrietta and Gib Montgomery are in an adjacent district and Hannah Freeman lives in Rome. Fredonia Perry still lives in Tennessee and Henrietta and Gib Montgomery have moved to Michigan. Burials in the Freeman Chapel cemetery will continue for a few years, but the end of Freemantown is near.

On 21 March 1923, five months before her death, Henrietta Freeman sold the 25 acres she inherited from Thomas Freeman for $800 to the Berry Schools. Fredonia Perry sold the same year. The other children and the heirs of those who had died would hold on to their land for a few more years, finally selling the last of the land in 1926. The places of residence of the sellers include Rome, Georgia; Arlington, Tennessee; Detroit; and Seattle.

Henrietta Freeman died on 17 August 1923, of heart disease, at the age of 95. Her son Mingo Freeman gave information for her death certificate, including the names of her parents, William and Dista Freeman. She was buried at Freemantown Cemetery, on 19 August 1923.

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19 Deed, Hannah Freeman et al to the Berry Schools, 19 Oct 1916.
20 1920 United States Federal Census. Mount Alto, Floyd, Georgia; Roll T625_257; Page 14A; Enumeration District 91.
21 The death certificates of Pearl Freeman Powell, daughter of Sanford Freeman and Susan Cathey who died in 1927, list the place of burial as Freeman Town Cemetery. Annie Mae Daniel and William H. Daniel, whose relationship to the Freeman family is unknown, have headstones in the cemetery. Annie Mae Daniel died in 1926 and William Daniel in 1943.
22 Death certificate, Henrietta Freeman.