Uncle Ned's Mountain

Two centuries of African-American farmers, slaves, soldiers, and saviors in a small New England town

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Cover: Detail from a picture of the 29th Connecticut Regiment in Beaufort, S.C. in 1864. See page 131 for the full view.

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This book is dedicated to the many African American men, women and children who have lived and toiled in Ridgefield, Connecticut, over the past three centuries in not always the best of circumstances.

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With special thanks to my wife Sally for her great help with this project, and to Jackie Kingston, for her ever eagle eye.

Preface

In 2019, the Hearst newspapers in Connecticut did a feature story about my research into a long forgotten station on the Underground Railroad, operated by an African-American couple in Ridgefield. A few days later I received a telephone call from a man who worked for a college in New Haven, inviting me to be on a panel discussing Black history. It seems he had seen the newspaper story and was so surprised by what he read — not that there was a station in Ridgefield, but that the Underground Railroad *existed in Connecticut*!

I was amazed that a representative of a Connecticut college, many of whose students were Black, was unaware that major Underground Railroad routes, using both land and sea, passed through Connecticut. The chairman of the Social Studies Department at another New Haven college had written a whole book on the subject, called *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*. However, Horatio T. Strother seemed to predict his 21st Century collegiate colleague's surprise. "Even at the height of its operations, the work of this 'railroad' in Connecticut was shrouded in obscurity, and so it has remained," Strother wrote in 1962.

It was my own ignorance of Ridgefield's African-American history that helped spark this book. Despite 17 years of formal education, I found myself completely lacking in any sense of the lives and accomplishments of Black Americans in the 18th and 19th Century. Worse, I knew almost nothing about their early history in Ridgefield, a town about which I had been writing for nearly 50 years. Worst, perhaps, was the fact that not a single one of the many published histories of the town offered more than a passing mention to Black Ridgefielders.

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The starting point in this journey probably came when I noticed two surnames that stood out as unusual in the list of Revolutionary War veterans embossed on the War Memorial on Main Street. Among all the Bennetts, Keelers, Hawleys, Olmsteads, and other well-known pioneering families of the town were Lewis and Ebenezer Jacklin. *Jacklin?* Who were they? It turned out that, in an era when most Connecticut Blacks were enslaved, these two men, and nearly a dozen other Jacklins who'd lived and worked in Ridgefield for decades, were all born free. In the 18th Century, two Jacklin families contributed to the community in many

different, but substantial ways.

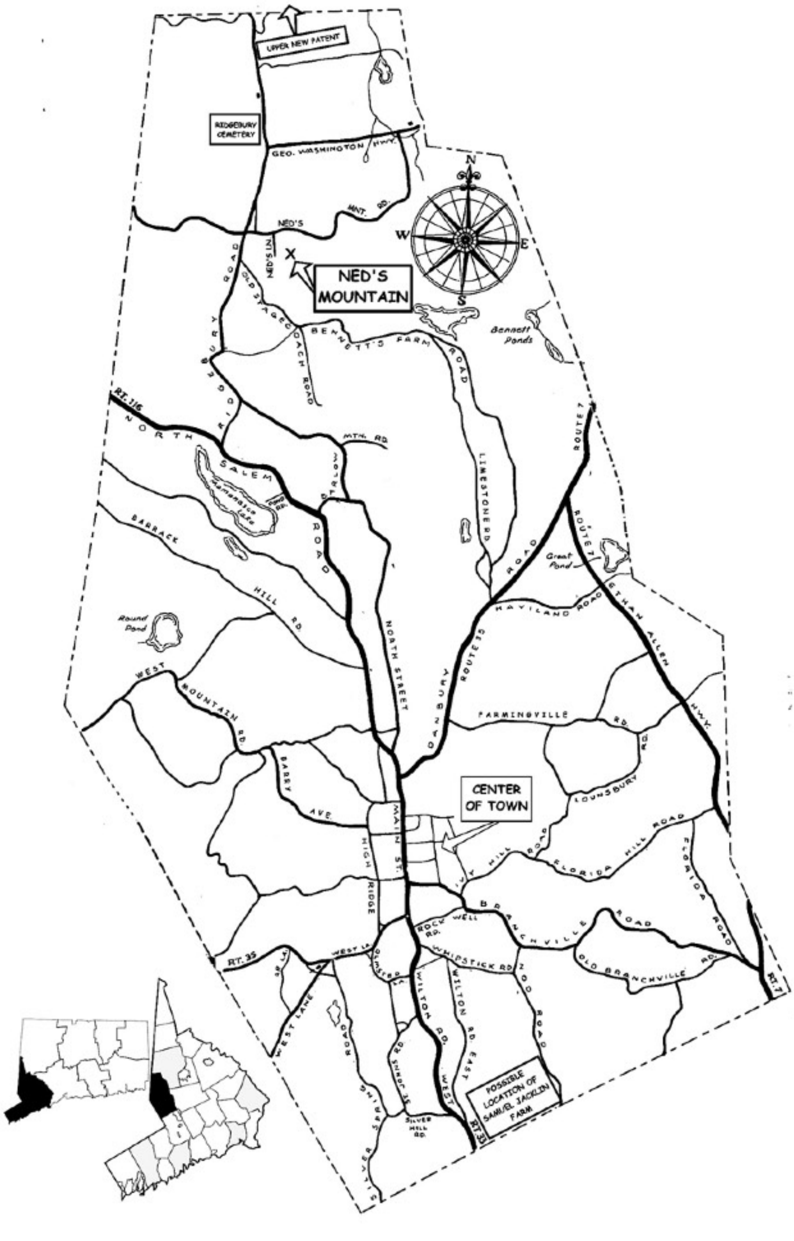
In delving into the fascinating history of the Jacklin family, I began finding other African Americans from Ridgefield. About 60 of them were enslaved — at least two became widely advertised runaways. I identified a half dozen Black men who had lived here and had served in the Revolution — all on the side of the patriots. I also realized that another soldier, named Jack Congo, was not a Ridgefielder as one historian had suggested.

Then came the discovery that an elderly Black couple named Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey Armstrong had operated an Underground Railroad station using caves on Ned's Mountain in Ridgebury — the very "mountain" itself had long been named for Uncle Ned. Further research found that four people who had lived at the Armstrong's homestead — including two Armstrong grandchildren — had volunteered to fight in the Civil War, and that two of them had died while in the service. A fifth resident of Ned's Mountain may have been a young man of color, a native of the Kingdom of Hawai'i, who had fought on land and sea for the Union cause, then became a famed "Buffalo Soldier."

Other African-American men and women — and the trials they faced in their lives here — kept surfacing as I delved into town records and old newspapers. All this forgotten information about the Black past seemed to cry out to be recorded on modern paper in the form of a book.

However, undertaking this project has presented several problems, including the lack of records relating to African Americans and the difficulty in accessing some distant records because of the pandemic. However, a special problem is myself: I am a white man writing about Black people. Try as I might, I will never be able to fully appreciate the enormous challenges that African-American men, women and children faced — and the pains they suffered — in the first two centuries of Ridgefield's existence, be it as slaves, farmers, soldiers, laborers, or operators of an Underground Railroad station.

Nonetheless, I hope this little book will give readers today and tomorrow at least some appreciation of the remarkable people of African descent who made their home in Ridgefield during the town's first two centuries.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NED'S
MNT. RD.
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BENNETT'S FARM ROAD
Bennett Ponds
RT. 116
NORTH SALEM ROAD
MTN. RD.
BARLOW
POND RD.
LIMESTONE RD.
ROUTE 7
Great Pond
BARRACK HILL RD.
Round Pond
HAVILAND ROAD
ETHAN ALLEN HWY.
WEST MOUNTAIN RD.
NORTH STREET
DANBURY ROAD
ROUTE 35
FARMINGVILLE RD.
BARRY AVE.
CENTER OF TOWN
LOUNSBURY RD.
MAIN ST.
HIGH RIDGE
IVY HILL ROAD
FLORIDA HILL ROAD
FLORIDA ROAD
BRANCHVILLE ROAD
ROCK WELL RD.
WHIPSTICK RD.
OLD BRANCHVILLE RD.
RT. 35
WEST LA.
RT. 7
WEST LANE
WILTON RD. WEST
WILTON RD. EAST
ZOO ROAD
SILVER SPRING ROAD
SILVER HILL RD.
RT. 33
POSSIBLE LOCATION OF SAMUEL JACKLIN FARM

Introduction

People in Ridgefield, Connecticut, have called it Ned's Mountain for a century and a half. The "mountain" is really just a steep, rocky hill reaching 962 feet above sea level. It's located in the Ridgebury section of the northern part of the town, overlooking pastures dotted with multi-million-dollar homes and elegant horse barns, and capped with a modern house offering fine views for miles around.

Those views were much different nearly two centuries ago when Black men and women fleeing enslavement in the South sought refuge on Ned's Mountain and when four African-American boys grew up there and went off to fight in the Civil War.

In a way, Ned's Mountain, the only name on a map of Ridgefield that recalls an African American, symbolizes a past that the town has largely forgotten — or ignored.

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Ridgefield was founded in 1708 by a group of nearly two dozen men from Connecticut coastline communities who purchased thousands of acres from native tribal leaders. The town straddles ridges in the then heavily forested foothills of the Berkshires and its "mountains" can reach more than 1,000 feet above sea level, high for this part of New England.

The land was tough, not only steep but also riddled with rocks and swamps, and bore such hardscrabble place names as Toilsome, Rattlesnake Swamp, Brimstone, Nod, and the Wolfpits. Unlike the flat and fertile Connecticut River Valley, little of Ridgefield's soil was suitable for any sort of large-scale agricultural use. Dairy farming and growing the crops to support the cows — and the families who owned them — became the most common occupation for what were mostly subsistence farmers.

It was not a place that attracted settlers expecting to get rich. They were hard-working men and women moving up from the well-developed coast 15 miles to the south, probably looking for more acreage to farm than could be found in long-established shoreline towns like Norwalk, Fairfield and Milford, and willing to work hard to turn wilderness into homesteads.

The vast majority of the early settlers were white, the descendants of English, Scots-Irish, Dutch, and French Huguenots who had

come to Connecticut in the 1600s. Of them, much has been written in town histories. A few settlers, however, were African Americans, some free but most enslaved.

Blacks have been an important part of Ridgefield since at least the 1730s, probably earlier, yet little has been documented and even less written about their lives and their contributions to the community — and the nation — during the town's first two centuries. Ridgefield records in the 1700s rarely mention non-European residents, be they free Blacks, slaves or native American Indians. That's partly because relatively few African or indigenous people lived in the town. And those few who did were not always identified by race. However, the lives of African Americans are difficult to uncover and document mostly because they were not been handled the same as whites in the keeping of many local records. Even Blacks who were free, taxpaying landowners weren't considered full citizens, and were prevented by Connecticut tradition and laws from voting or holding office. It was what Newtown historian Daniel Cruson called "subconscious racism" and it affected record-keeping of the lives of Blacks both enslaved and free.[1]

The African Americans who lived on Ned's Mountain a century after the town's founding were all free men and women, but without doubt had their roots among the enslaved. Some may have once been slaves themselves.

Edward and Betsey Armstrong's modest compound on Ned's Mountain seems both a symbol and a real representation of the African-American experience in Ridgefield. At least "Uncle Ned," as Edward was known, probably came into this world enslaved, one of about 60 enslaved men, women and children found to have lived in Ridgefield in the 18th Century. By the time he made his home on Ned's Mountain, Ned Armstrong was free, as was his wife. They lived in a northern section of the town, part of which had been cleared from the wilderness a century earlier by a free Black family named Jacklin that contributed at least three young men to the fight for American independence. Ned and Betsey's compound itself produced at least four soldiers in the Civil War that led to the emancipation of millions of African Americans.

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[1] Cruson, Daniel, *Newtown's Slaves: A Case Study in Early Connecticut Rural Black History*, Newtown Historical Society, 1994, p. 8.

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In describing Ridgefield's first two centuries, local and regional historians have limited their mention of African Americans almost solely to a few who were enslaved, and then more as a curiosity and never as contributing members of the community, or even as part of a social or moral problem that hung over the town, colony, state, and nation. In particular, historians have virtually ignored African Americans' part in settling the town and their noteworthy contributions in the fight for America's independence. In his 251-page history of the town, one 19th Century historian made no mention at all of Blacks in 18th Century Ridgefield, and actually deleted references to them in reprinting a report describing what the town was like in the year 1800.

Admittedly, finding and understanding information on the lives of Ridgefield's early Blacks is not easy. As historian William Piersen says in his book on African-American culture in 18th Century New England, "There never seem enough sources for any historian to feel certain about the past, and in early Afro-American history there is rarely enough evidence to even offer security."[2] Especially in New England, records kept on Blacks, both free and enslaved, were not nearly as complete as those for whites. The records that do exist, particularly military records, may not point out that a person was Black; this is as it should be — when they were identified by race, it was often unnecessary and derogatory. However, it makes the work of a historian more difficult.

Since few Blacks could write — and those who could probably had no time for the likes of diaries, memoirs or histories — there are hardly any contemporary accounts of African-American life written by African Americans.

Yet, the information that *can* be found in old records has been largely ignored by local historians throughout Connecticut. A remarkable example of the overlooked African-American past in Ridgefield is the little-known but sizable Jacklin family, early settlers of the town who contributed as many as five soldiers to the American Revolution. These and other free Black men from Ridgefield fought for freedom and equality, yet were never truly free or equal themselves — before or after their

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[2] Pierson, William D., *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England*, Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988, p. xi.

war service.

This book tries to reveal and describe the African Americans' participation in Ridgefield's first two centuries. Unfortunately, it can't truly reflect what it must have been like to be a Black man, woman or child in Ridgefield in the 18th or 19th Century. However, we can be certain of this: If life was hard for the white settlers and their descendants, it was considerably harder for African Americans, who spent their lives enslaved or, if free, were often treated as if they were only a small step above enslavement.

Philanthropy imploring America to release the Slave and revive Liberty.

Cover illustration for the book, "A Picture of Slavery, For Youth," published by Jonathan Walker in Boston in 1840. —*Library of Congress*

Chapter 1

In the Days of Slaves

Enslaved African Americans were living in Connecticut as early as 1639 when a Dutch master was recorded as having killed his Negro slave.[3] Virtually every community of any size in New England had slaves from early in their existence. Ridgefield was no exception.

The first African Americans in Ridgefield were probably enslaved. From very early on, the town had slaves and slave owners, although by the late 18th Century, it had fewer slaves in proportion to the total population than any town in Fairfield County. The existence of at least 60

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[3] Greene, Lorenzo J., *The Negro in Colonial New England 1620-1776*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1942, p. 18.

slaves and 25 free African Americans living in Ridgefield in the 1700s have been discovered so far.[4] More undoubtedly lived here.

"By the opening of the eighteenth century, slavery was embedded in the New England colonies, an accepted and familiar part of the society," writes Princeton historian Wendy Warren. "The institution of chattel slavery grew steadily over the next decades, peaking at roughly midcentury, and dying only very slowly as the nineteenth century approached."[5] And by the beginning of the Revolution, Connecticut had more African Americans than any other New England colony, though not all were enslaved.[6]

In 1720, a decade after Ridgefield was established, Connecticut's 38,000 people included about 1,100 slaves.[7] The enslaved population gradually increased until around 1750 when it began growing more quickly until the eve of the Revolution. "According to a census taken in 1774, there were 191,392 whites, 5,085 Negros, and 1,363 Indians in Connecticut," reports historian Ralph Foster Weld. "Apparently therefore, the slaves constituted between one fortieth and one thirtieth of the population."[8] By 1782 at the end of the Revolution, nearly 6,300 slaves lived in Connecticut. One in every four estates probated during this time included slaves.[9]

Another account says that by 1770, Connecticut had more than

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[4] *See* Appendix A.

[5] Warren, Wendy, *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America*, New York: Liveright Publishing Corp., 2016, p. 249.

[6] Greene, Lorenzo J., p. 88.

[7] Hinks, Peter, compiler, "Slave Population of Colonial Connecticut, 1690-1774," for *Citizens ALL: African Americans in Connecticut 1700-1850*, Gilder Lehrman Center, Yale University, http://www.glc.yale.edu

[8] Weld, Ralph Foster, *Slavery in Connecticut*, Tercentenary Commission, Yale Univesity Press, 1935, p.4.

[9] Warshauer, Matthew, *Connecticut in the American Civil War*, Middletown, Wesleyan University Press, 2011, p. 226. Danbury District probate records from 1742 to 1784 also suggest at least 25% of the estates included slaves. That does not mean one of every four "households" had slaves. The estates of the majority of people who died never went through the probate process because they were of too little value or the heirs were too few in number to warrant it. Those people would typically not have been able to own a slave.

6,400 slaves, the largest enslaved population of any New England colony.[10] Half of all the ministers, lawyers, and major public officials, and a third of all the doctors, owned slaves.[11] The Rev. Jonathan Ingersoll, the highly respected pastor of Ridgefield's Congregational Church from 1739 to 1778, was among the town's early slave owners as were a handful of other wealthier residents — all church-going Christians — such as Matthew Keeler, David Scott, and Matthew Seymour. (Congregational ministers in nearby Redding and Newtown also owned slaves.)

The Christian Slave-Holder

The typical Ridgefield resident today is usually shocked to learn that not only good Christians, but even the town's leading religious leader in the mid-18th Century — Rev. Ingersoll — were slave-holders. How could that be? Perhaps as an old song proclaimed, "The Bible told me so." Both the New and Old Testaments contain not only acknowledgement of slave-owning, but rules for treating one's slaves properly. For example, historian Andrew Delbanco notes that, in a letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul "exhorts slaves to obey their masters, and in the letter to Philemon he says explicitly that fugitive slaves must be returned — a requirement sometimes known as the Pauline Mandate."[12] In a lecture to a New Haven historical society in 1874, Professor William C. Fowler maintained that most white people in the 17th and 18th Century Connecticut were strict believers in the Bible. "While the Puritans of Connecticut thus looked into the Bible for the rules of duty and the doctrines of religion, they could not help seeing that the chosen people of God, distinguished, among contemporary nations for their high civilization, held slaves," Fowler said. "So that every time they repeated the Decalogue [10 Commandments], whether as children in the family, or at

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[10] Harris, Katherine J., "Freedom and Slavery," in *African-American Connecticut Explored*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013, p. 9.

[11] Main, Jackson Turner, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, Princeton University Press, 1983, p.177.

[12] Delbanco, Andrew, *The War Before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War,* New York: Penguin Books, 2019, p.52-3.

school, they saw what, to them, was full proof that their neighbor's 'man servant and maid-servant'[13] were his property, which they had no right to covet."[14]

Thus, owning a slave was not looked upon as aberrant, but as normal, even divinely endorsed — or at least divinely allowed. What's more, many "good Christians" in the Northeast believed that kidnapping Africans from their native lands and turning them into slaves in the colonies benefited the enslaved because here, they could be exposed and converted to Christianity. Thus, they argued, their souls could be saved from everlasting damnation, presumably the final destination for all native Africans who weren't enslaved and converted.

Thus, it's no surprise Rev. Ingersoll owned a slave. In fact, the minister grew up among wealthy slave-holders of New Haven. Historian Lorenzo J. Greene lists Jonathan Ingersoll's brother, Jared, among the "162 leading slave-holding families of colonial New England."[15] What's more, most New England clergymen kept at least one slave, historian William Piersen found, adding that "Congregations often took up collections to purchase Black servants for their ministers."[16]

Both Ingersoll's Congregational church and the Church of England made efforts to convert Connecticut's slaves to Christianity.[17] While no evidence has been found of a slave's becoming a member of a church in Ridgefield, several free African Americans joined the Congregational church, including three members of the Jacklin family, as will be seen later. But overall, between the free and enslaved Black populations in Ridgefield, probably very few were practicing Christians. The reason is

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[13] "Servant" was understood to mean "slave."

[14] Fowler, William C., "The Historical Status of the Negro in Connecticut," *Historical Magazine and Notes and Queries Concerning the Antiquities, History and Biography of America*, Vols. XXIII-XXIV, New York, 1874-75, p. 7. Fowler, incidentally, was no friend of the African American, and displayed evidence that he felt Blacks to be inferior.

[15] Greene, Lorenzo J., p. 351.

[16] Piersen, p. 52.

[17] The Congregational society seemed open to accepting Blacks then, but that open attitude apparently changed; as late as 1963, only 18% of the congregations in the United Church of Christ in the entire United States allowed Black members. *The New York Times*, January 18, 1964, p.12.

not hard to understand. The teachings of especially the Congregational church used the religion to attempt to convince the would-be converts that being good and obedient slaves was what God expected of them. Catechisms for the enslaved were even worded to include demands from God to be obedient to masters. That did not sit well with most Blacks, whether enslaved and free, and historian Greene concluded that "after more than a century of efforts to convert them, it is likely that when the colonial era ended in 1776, most of the Negroes in New England, as in the other American colonies, were still infidels."[18] William Piersen added that the Christianity offered to the enslaved "was self-serving and neither emotionally nor intellectually satisfying to most Africans and Afro-Americans."[19]

Most Puritan/Congregational and Anglican/Episcopalian leaders made no effort to understand, much less accommodate the Africans' traditional native faiths, which were more emotional, outgoing and song-filled. When the Great Awakening occurred in the 1730s and '40s, practices of many denominations became more personal and emotional, and drew more Black interest. Especially when preachers realized that hymn-singing would attractive many more Africans than staid sermons, music became a bigger part of services in congregations that were reaching out to Blacks.[20]

The Earliest Slaves

Perhaps the earliest evidence of slavery in Ridgefield is found 26 years after the town's founding in 1708. In an advertisement published in the *Boston Gazette* several times in 1734, Timothy Keeler of Ridgefield sought the return of his runaway slave named Mingo.[21] This is one of at least two cases in the 18th Century of a runaway from Ridge-

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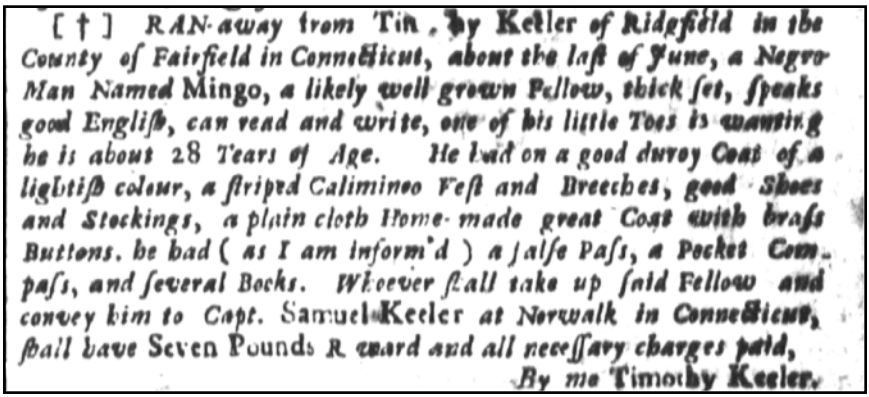
[18] Greene, p. 289.

[19] Piersen, p. 61.

[20] Greene, p.257-289, devotes a chapter to the subject of "Slavery and Conversion."

[21] *Boston (Mass.) Gazette*, Issue 761, Aug. 5, 1734, p. 4. The advertisement appeared in several other issues. See Appendix J for the full text of the ad.



[†] RAN away from Tim. by Keeler of Ridgfield in the County of Fairfield in Connecticut, about the laſt of June, a Negro Man Named Mingo, a likely well grown Fellow, thick ſet, ſpeaks good Engliſh, can read and write, one of his little Toes is wanting he is about 28 Years of Age. He had on a good duroy Coat of a lightiſh colour, a ſtriped Calimineo Veſt and Breeches, good Shoes and Stockings, a plain cloth Home-made great Coat with braſs Buttons. he had (as I am inform'd) a falſe Paſs, a Pocket Compaſs, and ſeveral Books. Whoever ſhall take up ſaid Fellow and convey him to Capt. Samuel Keeler at Norwalk in Connecticut, ſhall have Seven Pounds Reward and all neceſſary charges paid,

By me Timothy Keeler.

This advertisement, which appeared in the Boston Gazette in July 1734, is the first mention of slavery in connection with Ridgefield.

field, although there were probably others.

The advertisement does not call Mingo a slave, but a "Negro." Since at that time most Blacks were enslaved, Keeler assumed there was no need to state Mingo's status. After all, Keeler was offering £7 as a reward for Mingo's return.

What is especially fascinating about the ad is Keeler's reporting that Mingo "can read and write," something many white people in the 1730s could not do.[22] That fact suggests that Mingo may have been trained as a secretary or "manservant." Keeler was a prominent figure in early Ridgefield, serving as town clerk, a selectman and a representative to the General Assembly, and he probably had a need for a "secretary" — and the wealth to buy one.

Keeler calls Mingo "a likely well grown Fellow, thick set" and goes on to describe his clothing and possessions, including a compass and "several books." He also reports that Mingo used a "false pass." 17th and 18th Century laws required slaves — and even free Blacks — to carry documentation when they left the immediate vicinity of their homes. The literate Mingo no doubt used his skills to concoct a fake document.

Keeler probably also placed the ad in closer newspapers, and may have chosen the *Boston Gazette* because of its wide area of coverage

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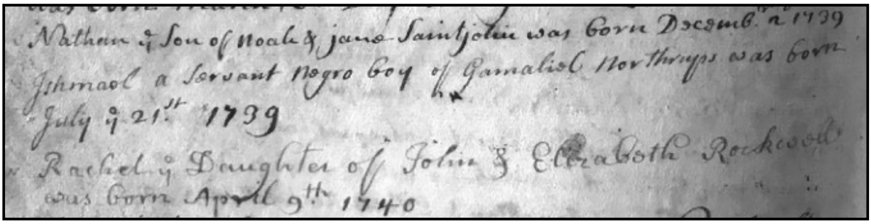
[22] See Chapter 5 for a discussion of literacy.



The earliest official mention of slavery in Ridgefield was the birth of Ishmael, noted in 1739 in the town's first record book.

and because Boston was thought to be a safer harbor for runaways than many New England locales and thus a preferred destination.

It is unknown whether Timothy Keeler was ever "reunited" with Mingo. Keeler died in 1748, and left his widow — his second wife, Sarah Allen Couch Keeler — three slaves, none named Mingo. She lived until 1787 and among her probated possessions were "Negro servants" as well as "my Negro girl named Lydia" and "the Negro boy named Ned," both of whom she bequeathed to a daughter, Hannah Wilson (who as we will see, wound up a pauper and had to free Lydia).[23] That enslaved boy may have grown up to become Uncle Ned Armstrong of Ned's Mountain.

'A Servant Negro Boy'

It was the same slave-owning Timothy Keeler who, as town clerk, recorded the first "official" mention of slavery in Ridgefield. In the town's very earliest record book, he wrote: "Ishmael, a servant negro boy of Gamaliel Northrup's, was born July ye 21st, 1739."[24] Because any child of an enslaved woman was by colony law a slave, the boy was labeled — even at birth — a "servant," which in New England was a

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[23] Keeler, Wesley B., *Ralph Keeler of Norwalk, Conn. and His Descendants,* Vol. 1, Albany, N.Y., 1980, p. 33. *See also* p. 43 and Chapter 7.

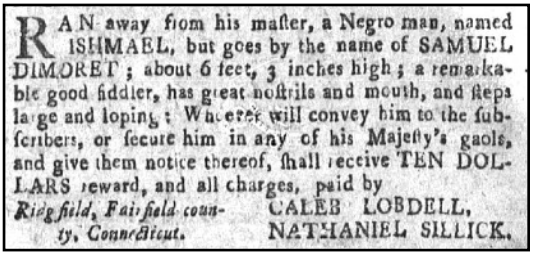
[24] *Ridgefield Land Records,* Vol. 1, p. 225. The fact that this and other records of births and deaths of slaves are found in a book of "land records" has nothing to do with status as "property." In the very early years of settlement, all vital records were written down in the same book as land records.

common way of saying a "slave."[25]

The use of "servant" instead of "slave" in many documents may have reflected colonists' discomfort with the term "slave"; they might have felt more at ease calling them servants instead of the term for human beings treated as property. However, historian Alonzo Greene felt the Puritan-Congregational New Englanders had "developed a slave system under which the status of bondman was something between a Jewish 'servant' and the Gentile 'slave.' As such the Negro was considered a part of the Puritan family and in keeping with the custom of the Hebraic family, was usually referred to as servant, rarely as a 'slave.' "[26]

No name of a parent is given for Ishmael, but since Northrup automatically became the owner of the child, he probably wanted only a notice of the existence of his new piece of property in the town's official records.

Old advertisements in newspapers indicate Ishmael may have grown up to lead a rather remarkable life. Ads in 1770s for a runaway slave gave his name as "Ishmael from Ridgefield." He was described at six-foot, three-inches tall — a giant in the 18th Century — and an expert fiddler. While most of his life remains a mystery, he was sold to at least two different owners when he was in his 20s and escaped from each of them. By the early 1800s, he may have been a free man living in Norwalk under the name of Samuel Dimoret.[27]


RAN away from his maſter, a Negro man, named ISHMAEL, but goes by the name of SAMUEL DIMORET; about 6 feet, 3 inches high; a remarkable good fiddler, has great noſtrils and mouth, and ſteps large and loping: Whoever will convey him to the ſubſcribers, or ſecure him in any of his Majeſty's gaols, and give them notice thereof, ſhall receive TEN DOLLARS reward, and all charges, paid by
Ridgfield, Fairfield county, Connecticut. CALEB LOBDELL, NATHANIEL SILLICK.

In 1775 Ishmael had run away, apparently to Newport, R.I., where this ad appeared, and was using the name Samuel Dimoret.

Perhaps not coincidentally, the very first free African American

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[25] Quarles, Benjamin, *The Negro in the Making of America,* New York: Touchstone, 1996, p. 46.

[26] Greene, p. 168.

[27] History teacher Selden West, formerly of Darien, Conn., has uncovered much information on Ishmael and his owners.

on record as living in Ridgefield was Michael *Dimorat,* who bought land in 1736 and reported the births of three of his four children to Town Clerk Timothy Keeler.[28] (Dimorat and one of his soldiering sons will be discussed in Chapter 2.)

The Peak Population

Ridgefield's African-American population probably peaked around the middle of the 18th Century, and included both free and enslaved people. By the mid-1700s, the first attempt at a town-by-town enumeration of Connecticut's population was undertaken, with mixed results. Though enumerations during this period were often flawed by inconsistent counting, uncooperative residents fearing higher taxes, and untrained enumerators, the 1756 Connecticut "census" gives us at least an approximate sense of the number of African Americans in Ridgefield.[29]

The town's population that year was said to have totaled 1,069, which included 46 African Americans. In most Connecticut towns, 46 Blacks would have meant just about 46 slaves since the vast majority of Connecticut Blacks were enslaved at that time. However, Ridgefield may have been an exception, having a substantial population of free African Americans. The families of the two Jacklin brothers, sizable landowners in town, accounted for 14 men, women and children. There may have been other free Blacks living here then, but it seems likely that 30 or more enslaved Blacks were among those enumerated.

Ridgefield's Black population in 1756 was 4.3% of the total, the largest percentage of African Americans ever counted in the town. Over most of its history, only about one percent of the inhabitants were Black. By contrast that year, 3.2% of Stamford's population of 2,648 was Black; Norwalk, 3.2%; Newtown, 1.9%; and Danbury, 1.2%. Fairfield, however, the largest town in the county, had 260 Blacks among its 4,195 people, a percentage of 6.2% — one of the largest concentrations of African Amer-

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[28] *ibid*., Vol. 1, p. 221. Michael Dimorat will be discussed later.

[29] Lorenzo Greene, in *The Negro in Colonial New England*, p.72-2, explains the many shortcomings of early counts, but says: "Despite these difficulties, it is possible to glean from the available data some impression of the number and distribution of the Negroes in New England."

icans in the colony.[30] Statewide, 126,975 people were counted, of whom 3,019 or 2.4% were Black. This figure is not very accurate, however, because the major city of New Haven did not report African Americans in its enumeration, despite having a sizable number of them living there. Nor did the substantial towns of Greenwich and Wallingford, among many others, submit tallies.[31] (*See Appendix L*.)

Perhaps a more accurate count was undertaken in 1774 (*Appendix M*). While it also did not include names of the people counted, it did provide totals by age-range and sex. It also did not tell whether the Blacks who were counted were free or enslaved, something the federal censuses did when they began in 1790.

The 1774 enumeration found 1,708 people in Ridgefield, including 1,673 whites and 35 Blacks. African Americans were now only 2% of the town's population, a rather sizable drop in less than 20 years. The 35 consisted of 9 males and 9 females under 20 years old, 9 males and 8 females over 20.[32] Again some would have been members of the Jacklin families, although by 1774, a few Jacklins may have grown up and moved away. (Several would soon join the Continental Army.)

Oddly enough, 1774 was the year in which Connecticut's African-American population reached its colonial peak in relation to the white population. "In 1774 … one in every 33 persons was a Negro and by 1790 the Negro proportion had fallen to about one in every 50 persons," Lorenzo Greene reported.[33]

The decline in Ridgefield's Black population may have been related to several factors. Fewer people may have been using enslaved assistance because they could not afford it or did not need it. There may have been more people in town who believed slavery was wrong. More people were freeing slaves and most of the freed may have chosen to move elsewhere where more opportunities existed for employment.

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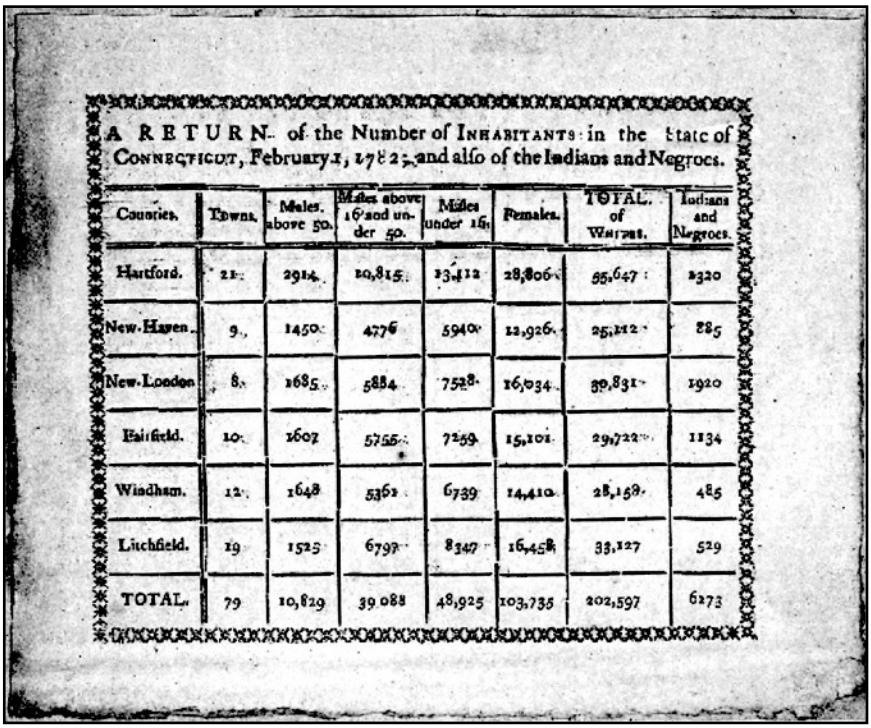
[30] Fairfield at that time was much larger in territory than today, encompassing parts of Bridgeport, Westport, Weston, Redding, and Easton.

[31] Hoadly, Charles, *Public Records of the Colony of the Connecticut*, Hartford: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1897, Vol. 14, p. 492.

[32] *ibid*., p. 488.

[33] Greene, p. 90.



A RETURN of the Number of INHABITANTS in the State of CONNECTICUT, February 1, 1782, and also of the Indians and Negroes.

Counties.	Towns.	Males above 50.	Males above 16 and under 50.	Males under 16.	Females.	TOTAL. of Whites.	Indians and Negroes.
Hartford.	21	2914	10,815	13,412	28,806	55,647	2320
New-Haven.	9	1450	4776	5940	12,926	25,212	885
New-London	8	1685	5884	7528	16,034	30,831	1920
Fairfield.	10	1607	5755	7269	15,101	29,722	1134
Windham.	12	1648	5362	6739	14,410	28,159	485
Litchfield.	19	1525	6797	8347	16,458	33,127	529
TOTAL.	79	10,829	39,088	48,925	103,735	202,597	6273

A Connecticut census in 1782 found 29,722 whites and 1,134 "Indians and Negroes" in the 10 towns of Fairfield County. Non-whites were thus 3.6% of the county's population, second highest county in the state behind New London, 5.8% (where, however, a large number of Pequots and Mohegans lived). Statewide, 3% of the population was non-white.

An 1782 Connecticut enumeration counted 1,697 people in Ridgefield, of which 25 — or 1.4% — were Black, continuing the downward trend. Among the 10 towns in Fairfield County, about 6.4% of the population was non-white — 29,722 whites and 1,920 "Indians and Negroes."[34] This count did not separate free and enslaved non-whites.

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[34] Connecticut Census. A return of the number of inhabitants in the State of Connecticut, February 1, 1782; and also of the Indians and negroes. s. l. 1782. Pdf. https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.00306300/.

The more detailed count of non-white Ridgefielders offered by the first federal census in 1790 found only five enslaved and four free non-whites among the town's 1,947 residents (352 families). In other words, only 0.4% of the inhabitants were of either African or native American Indian origin, and 0.25% were enslaved. Compared to the 13 other towns then existing in Fairfield County, Ridgefield's one quarter of one percent was the smallest percentage of enslaved residents. In Redding, 2.1% of the population of 1,503 was enslaved;[35] Newtown, 2%; Weston, 1.5%; Danbury, 0.8%; and Brookfield, 0.3%. In Huntington (now Shelton), nearly 5% of the population of 2,742 was enslaved.[36]

Although Ridgefield had had at least three free Black families, their members had left town or died by the time of the 1790 census, which found not one free, non-white head of a household. The four free non-whites who lived in Ridgefield that year all resided with white families, probably as domestics. (*For Ridgefield's African-American population from 1756 to 1900, see Appendix K.*)

Statewide about 1.2% of the population was enslaved in 1790. Another 1.2% were non-whites — African Americans or American Indians — who were free.[37]

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Not all of Ridgefield's enslaved population were always "working slaves." Records between 1739 and 1800 — a period during which the town had at least 60 enslaved people[38] — reveal the births of 13 children of enslaved women who, under Connecticut law, automatically became slaves at their very first breath.[39] However, as young children they would not be workers. Some of these children may have died or

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[35] According to the 1790 census, one Redding man — Isaac Gorham Jr. — owned seven slaves while two others owned three each. In Ridgefield, all owners had only one slave each.

[36] First Census of the United States, 1790 (NARA microfilm publication M637, 12 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[37] 1790 Census.

[38] See Appendix A.

[39] Not all of the births of enslaved children were necessarily reported in town records, so there were undoubtedly many more than 13 during the century.

been sold away before they reached an age when they could perform light work for their master — perhaps as young as 5 or 6 years old. At any given time during much of the 18th Century, probably six to 12 child, teenage or adult slaves were laboring in town.

Some enslaved people had grown too old to be laborers or household help, other than the lightest tasks, and were in effect "retirees."[40] They were too elderly to be set free and unable to support themselves. In fact, a 1702 Connecticut law required owners to take care of their elderly slaves. The law's impetus was not necessarily humanitarian; towns didn't want the welfare costs of caring for abandoned slaves.

The relatively small number of slaves in Ridgefield toward the last half of the century may have reflected the town's economy and location more than an ethical or moral aversion to slavery. Buying and providing for a slave was expensive and 18th-Century Ridgefield was made up mostly of farmers of modest means, who could not afford such a "luxury." The town itself was nearly bankrupt in the late 1700s.

In the South many plantations were big businesses that sold large quantities of such crops as tobacco, flax, indigo, and especially cotton, and owners maintained large numbers of slaves to keep production outputs sizable and affordable. In Ridgefield, most people were subsistence farmers with small spreads that grew wheat, oats, and rye, and raised livestock, all primarily for their own use. They relied for labor on their own families and occasional hired hands to help out. Only a few families of means felt the need to "own" extra help.

The enslaved tended to be more numerous in the towns with ports or navigable rivers where they were employed in loading and unloading vessels and related industries.

What the Enslaved Did

The majority of slaves in the South worked on raising a single farm crop on a large plantation and needed to be taught few skills. In the North, many slaves also worked on farms. In New England, however, most farms were small-scale operations. Consequently, less help — hired

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[40] See page 21. Also, in Appendix A, see "Step" and the "unknown" Negro woman of Matthew Keeler. Both had been valued in an estate inventory at amounts much less than the typical enslaved person and thus were probably elderly.

or enslaved — was needed, and those who did provide assistance were used for a wide variety of tasks and often were, like most farmers, multi-talented. "To meet the demands of New England's diversified economy, the slave had to be more skilled and more versatile than the average plantation Negro accustomed to the routine cultivation of a single crop," wrote historian Lorenzo Greene.[41] In Fairfield, the county's largest town and the county seat, "most African Americans lived in households headed by farmers," Vincent J. Rosivach found.[42] As farm hands they could plant and harvest crops, care for livestock, repair barns and fences, maintain horses and oxen and their equipment, make and repair tools, and do the many other often-skilled chores that were involved in farming.

Some may have worked at local industries which, in Ridgefield in the 18th Century, were pretty much limited to water-powered mills, limekilns and perhaps a tannery and small hat-making operations. The mills of different types ground flours from a variety of grains, turned apples into cider (a widespread alcoholic beverage in the 18th Century), sawed logs into lumber, and processed lime, which was found and often mined throughout the northern part of town. Enslaved workers may have felled trees to fuel operations at the limekilns, as well as to supply households with heat and saw mills with lumber, and they may have worked at mining the limestone and other minerals found in town.

Many Ridgefield slaves appear to have worked in households as cooks, nannies, maids, and manservants, like the talented Mingo. Families back then were often large and, if it was affordable and did not trouble them ethically, extra help could be bought. Some historians speculate that owning a slave relieved male owners of domestic responsibilities to enable them to spend more time at their vocations — such as being a minister or lawyer — or to engage in public service.[43] But most of the household enslaved probably aided homemaking women in raising

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[41] Greene, pp. 100-123, describes the many and variety skills of colonial slaves in New England — and their importance to the economy.

[42] Rosivach, Vincent J., "The Hubbards, An African-American Family in Connecticut, 1769-1810," in *Connecticut Historic Review*, Vol. 35, No. 2, (Fall 1994), p. 264.

[43] Forbes, Robert P., "Grating the Nutmeg: Slavery and Racism in Connecticut from the Colonial Era to the Civil War," *Connecticut History*, Association for the Study of Connecticut History, 2013, Vol. 52, No. 2, p. 173.

their large families and handling the myriad tasks involved running a home, such as cooking, preserving foods, cleaning, spinning, knitting, weaving, sewing, and making candles and soap.[44]

For a few whites, possessing a slave may have been more a status symbol than a practical convenience or even a luxury. "For New England's wealthiest colonists, many of whom were merchants rather than farmers, the ownership of enslaved people who were not needed for physical labor could be a sign of prosperity and prominence," says historian Wendy Warren.[45] However, Ridgefield in the 18th Century had few wealthy people who seemed likely to pay for the cost of maintaining an enslaved servant just for show.

Recording Their Lives

During the 18th Century, Ridgefield's records list the births and deaths of two dozen slaves, but report not a single marriage. In fact, only one 18th Century African-American wedding is recorded, and that was between two free persons, Elisabeth Jacklin and Jack Freeman, whose lives will be described in Chapter Five.

In the South marriage between slaves was severely restricted — as was teaching slaves to read or allowing them to assemble.[46] In New England marriage among slaves in the 17th Century was generally forbidden — enslaved persons, whether male or female, were supposed to devote full time to the needs of the people who owned them, and not be distracted by spouses or their own children.[47] By the 18th Century such restrictions became less common. Nonetheless, recorded marriages of the enslaved were rare. Some masters still discouraged marriage, even though it could result in children who could be sold.[48]

The ability of Blacks, especially slaves, to meet suitable mates was difficult in places like Ridgefield because so few African Americans, free or enslaved, were living in the small, rural Connecticut communi-

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[44] For more on what enslaved women did, see Greene, p. 110ff.

[45] Warren, p. 148.

[46] Egerton, Douglas, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.21

[47] Warren, p.159.

[48] Pierson, p. 19.

ties. Opportunities for socializing were thus very limited. And even if there were opportunities, the enslaved at little free time to pursue them.

Then, too, many people — white or Black — did not use ministers to perform marriage ceremonies in the 18th Century. Instead, town officials such as justices of the peace often officiated.[49] In fact, the Puritans, the progenitors of the Congregational Church that dominated Ridgefield and southern New England, believed that marriage was a civil contract, not a religious one, and discouraged their clergy from being involved in marriage ceremonies. "The Founding Fathers recognized no scriptural warrant for the performance of marriage by clergymen: marriage was concerned with business and property and was therefore the proper function of the magistrate and not the minister," says Greene.[50]

While there was apparently no requirement for record-keeping of marriages, most officiants seemed diligent about recording their weddings with the town clerk and the absence of any record of an enslaved marriage may indicate their rarity. However, it may also have simply reflected a lack of interest in recording marriages of enslaved couples. Clearly, because enslaved babies were being born through most of the 18th Century, there were couples, married or not, whose female partners were enslaved.

The 1790 census reported that two households, headed by William Wallace and Matthew Seymour, each had one slave and one free non-white household member. This might suggest married couples, in which either the husband or wife — but more likely the husband — was free and the other spouse was enslaved. This was not unusual in New England, although it was often the case that the husband and wife lived and worked in separate households.[51]

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The first reported death of an African American in Ridgefield was an enslaved child, recorded only a month after Ishmael's birth. She was "Jenny, ye daughter of Tamar, ye servant woman of Sarah Keeler,"

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[49] di Bonaventura, Allegra, *For Adam's Sake: A Family Saga in Colonial New England*, Liveright, 1994, p. 101.

[50] Greene, p. 192.

[51] Several such cases are described in *For Adam's Sake* and in *Peter's War* by Joyce Lee Malcolm.

who died August 26, 1739.[52] No age was given. Other deaths found in early Ridgefield records include "Cesar, ye negro servant man of Gideon Smith," who died Aug. 2, 1749,[53] and "Dorcas, ye negro woman servant of Timothy Benedict," who died Jan. 10, 1760.[54]

There is no known African-American cemetery in Ridgefield. These segregated burial grounds were found in some other Connecticut towns, including Easton. Enslaved or free African Americans who died in Ridgefield may have been buried in special sections of such cemeteries as Titicus and Ridgebury, though no record of segregated portions of these graveyards has been found. In fact, no graves of 18th Century African Americans have been identified, perhaps largely due to the fact that they could not afford long-lasting slate, limestone, or granite markers. A dozen or so 19th Century gravestones of Blacks survive in Ridgebury Cemetery and they are mixed with white families.[55]

The early death records of Jenny, Cesar, and Dorcas provide only one name for each. In most 18th Century Connecticut communities, slaves generally had only a given name. It usually wasn't until — and if — they were freed that they were able to take a surname. Thus, in the Ridgefield record book, Jenny, Tamar, Cesar, and Dorcas were their only names, while their owners records had both given names and surnames.

Tamar, incidentally, was a fairly common name among enslaved women in Ridgefield.[56] For instance, Tamar, the "servant woman" of Matthew Seymour, was the mother of six children born between 1742 and 1754.[57] Tamar was the name of a fascinating — and strong — Biblical woman who was an ancestor of both King David and Jesus Christ,

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[52] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 1, p. 225.

[53] RLR p.214.

[54] *ibid*. p.214

[55] See Chapter Eight's discussion of the Armstrong and Halsted families.

[56] Another Tamar was the "woman servant" of Theophilus Stebbins; she had twin girls named Tamar and Dinah in 1759.

[57] *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 1, p. 257. Peggy was born in 1742, followed by Elisabeth, 1746, Dover, 1747, Betty, 1749, Allen, 1751, and Naomi, 1754. Three subsequent children died within days of their birth in 1761 and 1762 (twins).

and who, by employing seduction and trickery, successfully sought revenge on a man who had "done her wrong."

Unlike the birth records of the white Ridgefielders, those for both Tamars do not offer a name for the father. Again, it is possible that Seymour and Keeler filed the birth records solely to put their ownership on the public record, not out of any interest in noting the arrival of human beings into the community.[58]

Ridgefield records used only one name for slaves throughout the 18th and well into the 19th Century. While a newborn or a child who died in infancy was typically described as the son or daughter of a mother, that single-named mother was always the "servant of" and never "wife of" someone. However, when an older slave died, he or she was rarely described as anyone's son, daughter, husband, wife, father or mother, but only as the "servant" of his or her owner.

Even after there were no more enslaved people in Ridgefield, many Blacks — probably mostly freed slaves — were given only one name in town records and were often identified by race. For instance, the 1812 death records list "Charity, (a black girl), dec'd March 11, 1812, ae. 13."[59] While the suggestion is that she was a free person, because she was Black, she did not get the same kind of attention in the records that most white residents received. Occasionally, a dead person got no name at all. Town Clerk Benjamin Smith records the death of "the negro girl belonging to Elijah Smith dec'd April 2, 1795."[60] (It should be noted, however, that the same town clerk occasionally recorded the deaths of white women without bothering with their given names; instead he de-

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[58] Interestingly, the Seymour family continued to have Black servants until at least 1818 when RVR Vo1. 2 p. 221 says Matthew Seymour "had negro Nab" die at the age of 40. The use of "negro" in 1818 suggests that Nab was a freedman employed by Seymour, possibly the son of the same Matthew who owned Tamar.

[59] Town of Ridgefield, *Births Marriages Deaths, Vol. 2, 1745-1852,* p. 216. "Dec'd" meant deceased. Charity was one of 22 people who died "of a prevailing fever" between Feb. 14, 1812 and Feb. 14 the following year. Most died in the late winter and early spring of 1812, among them a physician named Dr. Elisha Alvord, and several prominent citizens including Capt. Henry Whitney and Delight Benedict, famously portrayed in S.G. Goodrich's autobiography as Aunt Delight Benedict, one of his first teachers.

[60] *ibid*., p 204.

scribed them only as a wife and gave the husband's name.)

While at least one slave was a formal member of a local church, "Phillis, a Negro woman servant," baptized and admitted as a member of the Ridgebury Congregational church in 1790,[61] was identified by only one name — and her race. It is unclear whether she was free or enslaved.

In the 1700s, an African-American's race was often noted in town vital records, usually by describing the person as a Negro or "of colour." While that practice, which continued until the 1830s, was racist, today it helps both historians and genealogists identify African Americans among the population and how they contributed to local society. One of the last mentions of race occurred in 1831 for Emily, "a girl of colour," who died at the home of Philip Bradley at the age of 17.[62] Emily was probably a free Black girl who worked as a maid.

The Value of A Slave

The use of slaves in town was certainly well established by 1739 when Ishmael was born and Jenny died. A year later, on Feb. 13, 1740, the town clerk placed in the land records the first recorded sale of a slave in Ridgefield. David Scott — whose house is now the headquarters of the Ridgefield Historical Society — sold to Vivus Dauchy "a certain Negro woman named Dinah and a Negro boy named Peter to be servants or slaves during the period of their natural lives." The price was £200, "current money of said colony."[63]

In the first half of the 18th Century, slaves in Connecticut sold for anywhere from 20 shillings to more than £300. The recorded price varied with the quality and age of the slave as well as the quality of the money at the time. For instance, the Rev. William Hart of Saybrook

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[61] Wilson, Jennifer, *Ridgebury Congregational Church, United Church Of Christ 1760-2000, 240th Anniversary Timeline*, published 2000. Several members of the Jacklin family, who were free African Americans, were also members of the Congregational church in Ridgefield, Ridgebury and New Canaan.

[62] *Births Marriages Deaths*, *Vol. 2, 1745-1852*, p.229.

[63] *Town Book of Records,* 1746-1797. Unlike most old Ridgefield records, this book has no page numbers. The term "current money" probably meant paper money; see the following note.

bought a Negro boy in 1749 for "£290, Old Tenor," paper money that was about equal to £60 in hard coin.[64]

An examination of hundreds of Ridgefield probate records between 1744 and 1782 found enslaved men being valued at anywhere from £8 to £366. At the same time many houses in the town were valued at £70 to £100. That may show both that slaves were considered quite valuable and that houses in Ridgefield were generally pretty modest. It probably also reflects the changing value of the pound during his period.

The 1765 inventory of Capt. Thomas Hawley includes a "Negro man" valued at £50. Hawley's dwelling house was worth £75 and his barn and "cow house" at £25.[65] In 1749 the estate of Timothy Keeler, one of the town's wealthiest residents, included three slaves: One "boy" worth £120, another boy — no doubt much older — worth £270, and a "negro man" worth £260, a total of £650. His house, barn and 15-acre homestead were valued at only twice that, £1,250.[66] Timothy's wealth was an exception; his brother Joseph Keeler's house, barn and five-acre homestead was worth only £78 in 1758. Joseph had no slaves.

Enslaved females, used chiefly for household work, were usually less valuable than males, but still of substantial worth. One of the highest prices found among old probate records was in the 1760 inventory of David Scott's estate, where "a Negro girl named Ann" is listed as being worth £37 10 shillings, by far the most valuable thing Scott owned at that point.[67]

The estate of Matthew Seymour shows the variations in values placed on enslaved women. When he died in 1768, Seymour had four slaves appraised in the inventory of his estate. The most valuable was "a Negro girl named Ellin," worth £45 (whom his will initially described as a "wench," but the transcriber changed to "girl"; "wench" was used to denote an enslaved woman of child-bearing age — roughly 15 to late

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[64] Steiner, Bernard Christian, *History of Slavery in Connecticut,* The Johns Hopkins Press, 1893, p. 390. Old Tenor was paper money, issued to help pay debts in a colony, and was not worth nearly as much as gold, silver or copper coin.

[65] Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol. 3, p 64.

[66] *ibid*., Vol. 1, p. 43

[67] *ibid*. Vol. 1, p. 181.

30s). Another Negro girl named Naomi was worth £35. But more interesting are the "Negro man named Step," worth only £8, and a Negro woman, £4. Both were probably elderly, perhaps husband and wife, but they were too old to set free since they would have been unable to support themselves. Four pounds is the lowest valuation of a slave that has been found in Ridgefield-related records.[68]

"Ellin" dropped in value between Seymour's death in 1768 and "Ellen's" appearance in a 1781 inventory of Seymour's son-in-law, Jeremiah Keeler, when she was worth £30, £15 less but still a substantial amount. The difference was probably due to her growing older, but may also have reflected the ever-changing value of money during those turbulent times.[69]

Dr. Vincent Rosivach of Fairfield University studied the sales of 111 slaves in Fairfield and found that the median value of a male was £38 and a female £15. Since it's difficult to equate fluctuating 18th Century pounds with modern dollars, Professor Rosivach compared the slave values to the values of other common items. For instance, he calculated that a team of oxen averaged £13 15 shillings in value. Thus, the average adult male slave was worth 2½ teams of oxen. He was also worth four times the value of an average horse and the value of nearly nine cows.[70]

Not all of the upper echelons of Ridgefield society owned slaves; no evidence has been found that slaves were used by either Gen. Joshua King or Col. Philip Burr Bradley, two wealthy, well-educated men who dominated political, religious and economic life of the post-war community and whose large homes were on Main Street. Both had served alongside Black soldiers in the Revolution. As a result, they may have gained a special respect for African Americans and had an aversion to enslaving them.

It is interesting to note that in his 251-page *History of Ridgefield*, published in 1878 as the first formal history of the town, the Rev. Daniel Teller did not acknowledge the existence of slavery — *or even of African Americans* — in Ridgefield. Just as surprising, Teller, a Congre-

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[68] *ibid*., Vol. 1, pp. 49, 71, vol. 3, pp. 501, 528

[69] *ibid*., Vol. 3, pp. 501, 528.

[70] Cruson, Daniel, *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County,* Charleston, S.C: The History Press, 2007, p. 26-27

gational minister in the town, republished most of the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich's description of what Ridgefield was like in the year 1800,[71] but omitted a 125-word paragraph that described Black residents of the community (*see Appendix C*). Goodrich was the third minister of the Congregational Church in the village; Teller was the 10th. Was Teller ashamed of Ridgefield's slave-owning past, which included Jonathan Ingersoll, the second minister? Was he even among those who would erase the slave-owning past — what historian Joanne Pope Melish called "a virtual amnesia about local slavery"?[72]

The Treatment of Slaves

Some people, often those surprised to learn that Ridgefielders owned slaves, have speculated that the local enslaved people must have been well-treated. After all, New England was the home of many early abolitionists and "enlightened" people. Indeed, the people who owned slaves no doubt thought they were kind and considerate. "Ordinary people...considered themselves to be caring and responsible, who told themselves and believed that even if enslaved people longed for freedom, their own personal enactment of slaveholding was permitted, protective and unproblematic," says Princeton historian Wendy Warren.[73]

Compared to how most slaves were treated in the Deep South, Connecticut's enslaved people were probably better off. Several historians have suggested that in many cases, slaves in New England were considered almost a part of the family, allowed to eat at the same table as their owners and sleep in the same houses. Some have cited a 1704 diary kept by a racist Boston woman named Sarah Kemble Knight, who complained that Connecticut slave owners were too socially intimate with their slaves. At one point she observes that slaves were allowed "to sit at

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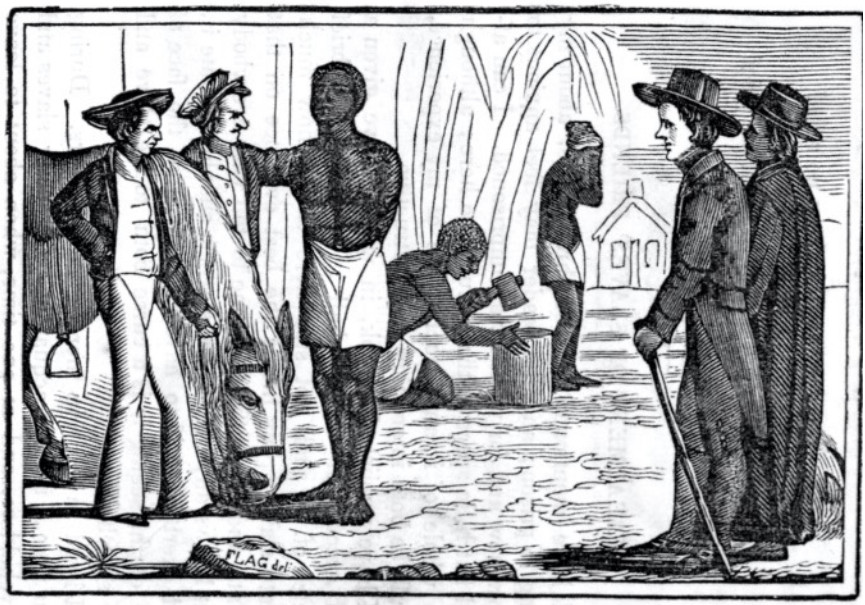
[71] Goodrich, Rev. Samuel G., *Ridgefield in 1800,* The Acorn Club, 1954. This small book reproduces the November 1800 report by Rev. Goodrich, which he described as "a statistical account of Ridgefield." On the occasion of the new century, Congregational ministers across Connecticut were asked to compile detailed descriptions of their communities.

[72] Melish, Joanne Pope, *Disowning Slavery*, Ithaca, N.Y: Cornel University Press, 1998, p. 220.

[73] Warren, p. 129.



"Exchanging citizens for horses," from Jonathan Walker's 1840 abolitionist book aimed at children. —*Library of Congress*

table with them… and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand."[74]

In some cases the enslaved were permitted to worship with the family at church on Sundays, although they were usually relegated to separate seating in the meeting house, far from the pulpit and behind the white congregation. The enslaved were often also given a basic education, including reading and mathematics, skills that could prove useful to their owner. As we have seen in the case of Mingo, the man who fled Timothy Keeler's enslavement, some could also handle writing, a skill many whites in the 18th Century never learned. A New England farm required multi-tasking and an educated slave could handle more of the tasks. In the end, "an intelligent slave…was a more valuable asset to his

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[74] di Bonaventura, p. 131.

master," observes Lorenzo Greene.[75]

While Connecticut slaves may have been better treated than many of their Southern counterparts, the fact remains that they were people who had been either kidnapped from their homes in Africa or directly descended from those who were taken from their homelands. They were owned property, with few rights and little hope for a better future. They could be sold at any time to anyone. If they were married, they could see their spouses sold away from them or, at the least, live in another slaveholding household miles away. Their children were not *their* children, but *their owner's property* and could legally be sold off, and often were. "Historians continue to insist that northern slavery was of a milder variety than that found in South Carolina or Jamaica, and in many ways it was," said historian Douglas R. Egerton, "yet a young bondman who could visit his family only on Sundays might not have agreed."[76]

An indication of how some local slave holders may have truly felt about their slaves is offered by a dying Samuel Starr of Ridgefield, who hurriedly dictated a will after he came down with smallpox in 1771. Early on, he says: "It is my will and pleasure that my wife Ann shall have and share a third part of my moveable estate, except my Negro man Dick, which, with the remainder of my moveable estate, I order to be sold to pay my just debts and funeral charges." Dick was treated like livestock or a parcel of land, "moveable" property to be sold to pay Starr's debts.[77] The estate of Joseph Hauley in 1749 includes "one negro boy" valued at £366; the same inventory line includes an ox at £38 and a large steer, £66, as if to say that the boy was not only chattel, but also on a level with livestock, even though he was ten times more valuable.[78]

Some people, possibly those who had some affection for their slaves, listed them by name in their wills and specified to which heir they would go. Others like Joseph Hauley ignored them in their wills, treating them as "moveable property" — along with cows, clothing, or acreage — and left it to administrators who distributed the property to the heirs to decide the futures of these human beings.

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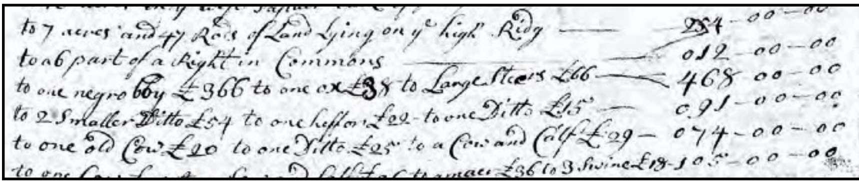
[75] Greene, p. 237.

[76] Egerton, p. 24

[77] Danbury District probate records, Vols 1-3, 1744-1782, 362/413.

[78] ibid., Vol. 1, p. 87.


to 7 acres and 47 Rods of Land Lying on ye high Ridg — 254-00-00
to a 6 part of a Right in Commons — 012-00-00
to one negro boy £366 to one ox £38 to Large Steers £66 — 468-00-00
to 2 Smaller Ditto £54 to one heffer £22 to one Ditto £15 — 091-00-00
to one old Cow £20 to one Ditto £25 to a Cow and Calf £29 — 074-00-00

The inventory of Joseph Hauley's estate in 1749 lists an unnamed "negro boy" on the same line as an ox and a large steer.

Other Restrictions

During much of the 18th Century, many white people assumed that any Black person they saw was a slave. Especially early in the century, most African Americans in most communities *were* in fact enslaved.

Because they recognized that Blacks were not happy with having been kidnapped from their homelands and then treated as chattel, whites were concerned about keeping Africans under control. In 1690, Connecticut passed what were called "Black codes" to regulate African Americans. For instance, any "negro, mullato, or Indian servant [slave]" found outside the bounds of the town in which he or she lived had to possess a ticket or pass from a town official or the slave's owner. Otherwise the person would be considered a runaway, which meant he or she could be arrested and held until the master paid for charges.[79] "Even a free negro without identification could be taken before a magistrate, and was obliged to pay for the costs of the action," said Ralph Foster Weld.[80]

In the case of free Blacks, governments were sometimes requested or forced to acknowledge their free status. On Nov. 14, 1789, for instance, Ridgefield received an official notice from the town of Bedford, N.Y., that Peg Wilson, a former slave, had been freed "from a state of slavery by the last will and testament of Isaac Miller" and "is desired to pass and repass unmolested."[81] Wilson apparently had friends or family in or near Ridgefield, and was concerned about being arrested as a runaway when visiting or passing through the town.

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79 Steiner, p. 382.

80 Weld, p. 9.

81 *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 7, 1789, p. 85

As late as the 1830s, the problems that could beset a free Black person without proof of status were demonstrated in the case of Daniel Jacklin, who was probably related to Ridgefield's Jacklin families. Daniel was a free man from Stamford but somehow got arrested and jailed as a "runaway...colored man" in Baltimore in 1832.[82] Clearly officials in Baltimore — south of the Mason-Dixon line — considered him a slave. (*See Appendix I.*)

While many Connecticut statutes treated Black slaves as human beings, offering the same legal protections as whites, they also contained many restrictions focused on keeping them in check. The fear of Blacks, especially slaves, becoming involved in attacks on whites, or at least, stealing from whites, led to laws enacting curfews, banning consumption of alcohol, and even requiring the heads of households to prevent any forms of entertainment among their slaves after 9 p.m. Laws also provided severe punishment if any Black, enslaved or free, struck a white man, or even defamed a white.[83] In many communities Blacks in general lived in a sort of police state. However, compared to modern times, 18th Century life — even for whites — in a Congregational town like Ridgefield was hardly free-spirited. The pioneer Ridgefielders generally adhered to strict Puritan standards; even children caught giggling in church were publicly punished in the early years of the community.[84]

Slavery's Decline

Central Fairfield County had out-and-out opponents of slavery in the 18th and early 19th Centuries. In 1775 when Danbury voters were asked to endorse a doomed measure proposed by the Continental Congress to end the slave trade in the colonies, they not only approved of the

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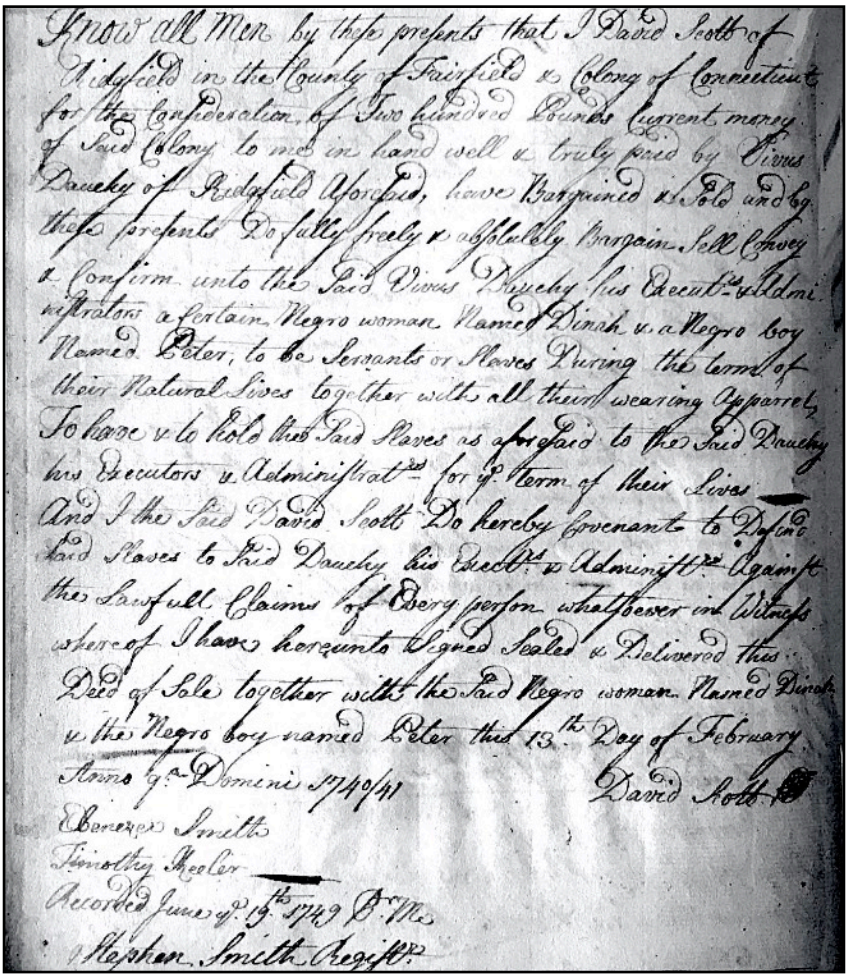
[82] *Easton (Md.) Star*, Tuesday, June 26, 1832, p. 4.

[83] Greene, p. 137.

[84] In a 1959 talk, future Smithsonian historian Silvio Bedini, author of *Ridgefield in Review*, said the town's first settlers "found the influence of the Church of England too strong in Norwalk, and sought to escape it. The Congregationalists believed that church authority was inherent in each local body of believers, in the autonomy of the local church, and they wished to be free of external human control. They were extremely strict and puritanical in their manner of living." They were so strict, he said, that even a child caught misbehaving in church would be brought before the whole congregation and chastised by the minister.



Know all Men by these presents that I David Scott of Ridgfield in the County of Fairfield & Colony of Connecticut for the Consideration of Two hundred Pounds Current money of said Colony to me in hand well & truly paid by Vivus Dauchy of Ridgfield aforesd, have Barganied & Sold and by these presents Do fully freely & absolutly Bargain Sell Convey & Confirm unto the said Vivus Dauchy his Execut.rs & Administrators a certain Negro woman Named Dinah & a Negro boy Named Peter, to be Servants or Slaves During the term of their Natural Lives together with all their wearing Apparrel, To have & to Hold the said Slaves as aforesaid to the said Dauchy his Executors & Administrat.rs for y.e term of their Lives And I the said David Scott Do hereby Covenant to Defend said Slaves to said Dauchy his Execut.rs & Administ.rs Against the Lawfull Claims of Every person whatsoever in Witness whereof I have hereunto Signed Sealed & Delivered this Deed of Sale together with the said Negro woman Named Dinah & the Negro boy named Peter this 13.th Day of February Anno D.ni Domini 1740/41

David Scott

Ebenezer Smith
Timothy Keeler

Recorded June y.e 15.th 1749 D.r Me
Stephen Smith Regist.r

Ridgefield Town Hall record from 1741 in which David Scott sells two slaves — Dinah and Peter — for £200.

ban, but added the hope "that something further might be done for the relief of such as are now in a state of slavery in the Colonies, and such as

may hereafter be born of parents to that unhappy condition."[85] By the early 19th Century, nearby Georgetown had become a hotbed of the abolitionist movement, generating not only opponents of slavery, but also violent reactions to their efforts. Early one November morning in 1838, the Georgetown Baptist Church, a center for abolitionists, was blown up by opponents who placed a keg of gunpowder under the pulpit.[86]

David Scott was the first Ridgefield owner to officially record the concept of freeing a slave. In 1748, he filed notice with the town that "my Negro man Quash" would be freed upon Scott's death.[87] Unfortunately for Quash, that death didn't happen until 12 years later — and we don't know Quash's age. What's more, freeing an elderly slave might not have been done to be kind and, in fact, could have had the opposite effect. Slaves over 45 were considered old, and the older they became, the less able they may have been to earn a living and take care of themselves as free people. For many old slaves, remaining with the family that owned them at least assured a roof over their heads and food on the table, while freedom may have meant living in extreme poverty and on an 18th Century version of welfare. As noted earlier, Connecticut law prevented slave owners from abandoning elderly slaves and allowed the selectmen to sue former masters for the costs of caring for elderly, freed slaves. In what may be a tragic ending to this story, a Black man named Quash was found dead alongside a Ridgefield road in 1780, a victim of exposure. A court ruled he had been drunk and succumbed to cold weather while walking home.[88] There is no way of knowing whether the two records of a man named Quash reflected the same man.

Quash, incidentally, is an example of a name that conveys a piece of the early African-American experience. While most enslaved people were given biblical names by their owners, some bore family-given names with African roots. Quash, a not-uncommon name among the

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[85] Foner, Philip S., *Blacks in the American Revolution,* Greenwood Press, 1976, p. 32-3.

[86] See page 123. Robert H. Russell, in his *Wilton, Connecticut: Three Centuries of People, Places, and Progress*, Wilton: Wilton Historical Society, 2004, has an excellent account of the abolitionist movement in Georgetown, pp. 192-196.

[87] *Town Book of Records*, 1746-1797.

[88] See Appendix A.

enslaved particularly in New England, was probably a shortened form of Quashy or Quashee, said to be a word for "Sunday" in one of the African languages, probably reflecting the day of the week of his birth.[89] Employing African-derived day-names was a way in which Blacks in early America paid tribute to their heritage.[90] Cuffe, found both as a given name and a surname for many early African Americans, was said to derive from Kofi, an Akan word for "born on Friday."[91]

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Connecticut had begun to gradually eliminate slavery by the 1770s. More people were questioning the morality of the practice while others were concerned about slavery's effects on local economies, feeling that unpaid slaves were doing jobs that whites would like to have. In 1774, the General Assembly passed a law that stopped the importation of slaves. In 1784, a "gradual emancipation" law decreed Black and mulatto children born of an enslaved woman after March 1 that year would become free at age 25. In 1797, the age was reduced to 21.

The gradual emancipation laws were, however, part of a bigger statute that slapped many restrictions on the state's Blacks, whether free or enslaved. Historian Joanne Melish notes that the statute "outlined a complicated system of seizures, fines, whippings, and other punishments for a legion of illegal activities: Travel by slaves or free Negroes without a pass; vagrancy; unauthorized purchase or sale of any item; violating the nine o'clock curfew; and unauthorized entertaining of slaves."[92]

To avoid losses that emancipation laws might bring them, a few unscrupulous Connecticut people had their slaves shipped to or sold in states where slavery was allowed. To curtail that kind of effort to bypass

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[89] Dillard, Joey L., ed., *Black Names*, Contributions to the Sociology of Language, 2013, pp. 20-21, says it means Wednesday, but William Pierson, p. 7, says Sunday.

[90] Harris, "In Remembrance of Their Kings of Guinea," in *African American Connecticut Explored*, p. 38.

[91] Kaplan, Sidney and Emma Nogrady, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution,* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989, p. 152.

[92] Melish, Joanne Pope, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and "Race" in New England, 1780–1860,* Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2000, p. 69-70.

the law, Connecticut passed the Nonexportation Acts in 1788 and 1792, which banned moving Connecticut slaves outside the state for the purpose of avoiding the emancipation laws. Several area residents, including at least one Ridgefielder, Benjamin Dean, were hauled into court in 1796 for nonexportation violations. New York had no gradual emancipation laws and Ridgefield is situated right on the state line. "The allure of selling one's chattel increased and the fear of getting caught diminished the closer one lived to the state line," said Yale researcher David Menschel.[93]

By the time of the Revolution, owners were already freeing slaves, but the process wasn't necessarily simple. In 1777, the state legislature passed a law regulating the manumitting of slaves, requiring a town's selectmen to review each candidate to make sure he or she would be "of good and peaceable life and conversation."[94] In other words the selectmen had to make certain the candidate wouldn't be a burden on the community — either a welfare recipient or a troublemaker. (If the person did go wrong or became indigent, the former owner could be ordered to take him back or the town could sue the ex-owner to recover the costs of maintaining the person.[95]) On Nov. 21, 1777, Ridgefield selectmen met to "examine" Cyphax, a 20-year-old slave of the Rev. Ingersoll. As noted previously, half the ministers in Connecticut — most of whom were Congregational — had slaves in the 18th Century. The aging Ingersoll, who was two years away from his death, wanted to free Cyphax. Town records reported the selectmen "do judge him an able-bodied man and as likely to get a living as men in common in his condition are, and do therefore approve of his being liberated or set free, according to an act of the Assembly." Three days later, Ingersoll freed Cyphax.[96]

In January 1782, Matthew Keeler freed his slave, Dick, citing his long and faithful service. No record has been found of the selectmen meeting to review Dick's freedom. However, Keeler himself had added a

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[93] Menschel, David, "Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery 1784-1848," Y*ale Law Journal*, New Haven, 2001, Vol. 111, Issue 1, p. 211-12.

[94] Rosivach, p. 275.

[95] See Appendix G describing the obligations of selectmen with respect to slaves or former slaves.

[96] See Appendix B.

proviso, reflecting Connecticut law, that "if at any time the above said Negro slave Dick should become dissolute and idle in spending his time and earnings, and thereby likely in case of any misfortune to become a charge to me or my heirs, then it shall be lawfull for me or my heirs to again take said Negro slave into my or their service during his natural life."[97] Like Cyphax, Dick should not become a burden on the community. Dick may have opted to work for Seymour after he was freed: The 1790 census showed the Seymour household had one free non-white person living in it, along with one slave — perhaps Dick's wife.

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Ridgefield had more than two dozen free African Americans during the middle of the 18th Century, possibly starting with Michael Dimorat, who came to Ridgefield in 1736. However, he stayed only three years. The first free Black to own land, settle in Ridgefield and raise a family in the town was probably Robert Jacklin Jr., who bought more than 70 acres in very northern Ridgefield starting in 1745. A few years later his brother Samuel had a substantial farm at the south end of town. The story of the Jacklins will be told in the next chapters.

The number of African Americans continued to decline after the Revolution. In his sketch of the town as it entered the new century in 1800, the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich reported, "We have no more than eight Blacks in the town, most of whom are young and will be free by the law of the state at the age of 25 years and are most of them females." Goodrich adds that "none of them has been remarkably vicious, they are well educated and are no ways deficient in genius."[98] Goodrich was using "vicious" in the now archaic sense of "immoral" or "imperfect." The fact that he felt he needed to say this suggests he thought others believed Blacks would typically be immoral, poorly educated, and less intelligent than whites. That he says none have been "remarkably" immoral may reflect either a degree of racism or a minister's-eye view of strict obedience to the Ten Commandments — or both.

Goodrich's tally was far from what the census that year found:

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[97] *Town Book of Records,* 1746-1797, unpaged.

[98] Rev. Goodrich, p. 21.

25 Blacks, of whom 19 were free and six enslaved.[99] Many, perhaps, lived in rural parts of town, especially Ridgebury, with which Goodrich had little contact. The sizable Jacklin family was gone by then and the suggestion in Goodrich's phrasing is that most of the Blacks living in town were enslaved house maids.

The minister's son, author S.G. Goodrich — better known as "Peter Parley" — grew up in the village in the 1790s and early 1800s. Describing his childhood in his 1856 autobiography, Goodrich said, "The society of Ridgefield was exclusively English … I remember but one Irishman, one negro and one Indian in the town. The first had begged and blarneyed his way from Long Island, where he had been wrecked; the second was a liberated slave; and the last was the vestige of a tribe, which dwelt of yore in a swampy tract, the name of which I have forgotten."[100]

Perhaps the very last enslaved person in Ridgefield was a woman named Lydia. On April 13, 1818, the Town Meeting decided that "Lydia, a woman of colour, and late servant of the Widow Hannah Wilson of this Town who is now a pauper, be, and she hereby is freed from slavery." The literal interpretation of this entry in the town records suggests that Hannah had run out of money and was unable to support Lydia. The fact that she was being freed from slavery also suggests that Lydia might now become a ward of the town. Hannah Keeler Wilson had inherited Lydia in 1787 in a bequest from her mother, Sarah Keeler, widow of the Timothy Keeler of Keeler Tavern fame. Born in 1741, Hannah would have been in her upper 60s at this point; Lydia would have been at least in her 40s. The Keelers from whom she received Lydia were a wealthy family, hinting that perhaps Hannah was estranged from her family who typically would have been seeing to her care.[101] (Hannah was also the

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[99] 1800 *Federal Census Ridgefield, Fairfield, Connecticut*; Series: M32; Roll: 1; Page: 74; Image: 47; Family History Library Film: 205618.

[100] Goodrich, S.G., *Recollections of A Lifetime*, New York, 1856, Vol. 1, p. 60. Teller, who had left out Rev. Goodrich's references to Blacks, also omitted this information in reprinting most of author Goodrich's boyhood portrait on Ridgefield.

[101] Hannah Wilson is reported to have died in 1827, although hard evidence of this date has not been found. It is not surprising that there is no record of Lydia's death.

same daughter of Timothy and Sarah Keeler who was given an enslaved boy named Ned, who may have been Edward "Ned" Armstrong featured in Chapter Seven.[102])

By 1820, there were no slaves and 28 free Blacks in Ridgefield, according to the U.S. census.[103] Statewide, the 1800 census had counted 951 Connecticut slaves; by 1830, the number had fallen to 25. However, it was not until 1848 that Connecticut finally officially abolished slavery. Massachusetts had done so in 1783 — more than a half century earlier.[104]

Not all slaves in Connecticut were of African origin. The colony itself had enslaved American Indians, especially in the eastern half of the state. During the brutal King Philip's War, in which the settlers fought and conquered an uprising of the Wampanoags and their Narragansett allies between 1675 and 1678, more than 3,000 natives and 1,000 colonists were killed. Many of the surviving Indians, including women, were captured and enslaved.[105]

A few other native slaves came to Connecticut from South Carolina where the local colonists fought the Tuscarora nation between 1711 and 1715, enslaving hundreds of the defeated warriors, and selling them to New England buyers. The arrival of these often angry, warlike captives alarmed Connecticut officials, who in 1715 banned the import of any Indian slaves — not on moral grounds but because they considered them a threat to public safety.[106]

It is unknown how many natives lived in Ridgefield — and if any were slaves — after local Indian leaders sold what's now Ridgefield to the settlers in eight transfers between 1708 and 1740. Most, if not all, probably left the area. Rev. Goodrich said in 1800: "There are no Indians at present living in the town, except one who has learned the Masons trade and has married a white woman. One died in the town about 2

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[102] Keeler, p. 33-34

[103] Bedini, Silvio, *Ridgefield in Review*, Ridgefield, 1958, p. 148.

[104] Slavery in Massachusetts and other New England states was abandoned not just on moral grounds. Many working class people opposed slavery because it took jobs away from them. They could not compete with "free" labor.

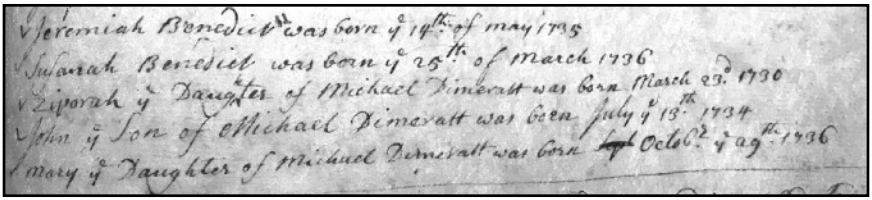
[105] di Bonaventura, p. 21.

[106] Steiner, p. 384.

years since at a great age not certainly known, but supposed 96."[107] That person of "great age" may have been Ruth Syacus, whose death Sept. 7, 1799, is recorded in the town records, which rather tersely describe her only as "a squaw."[108] Whether she was a local native or descended from an enslaved Indian, or was herself enslaved, we will probably never know.

[107] Rev. Goodrich, p. 4

[108] Ridgefield Vital Records, Vol. 2, p.210.


Jeremiah Benedict was born y 14th of may 1735
Susanah Benedict was born y 25th of March 1736
Ziporah y Daughter of Michael Dimerett was born March 23d 1730
John y Son of Michael Dimerett was born July y 13th 1734
mary y Daughter of Michael Dimerett was born Sept Octob2 y 29th 1736

The births of Michael Dimerat's children are recorded in Ridgefield's records in the 1730s without any reference to a mother. John went on to serve in two wars.

Chapter 2
The First Free Blacks

Probably the first free African-American family to live in Ridgefield was named Dimerat and spent only a few years in the town. However, Michael Dimerat may have recommended the community to the Jacklin family, who would arrive a few years later and remain for decades. One Dimerat, who spent part of his boyhood here, went on to serve in both the French and Indian War, and the American Revolution.

Town records indicate that, in 1736, Michael Dimerat bought a little over an acre somewhere on the north side of the Bedford Road (today's Route 35 west of the Fountain) from Matthew Seymour (who, as we've seen, was a slave owner).[109] Nearly three years later, he sold the same property back to Matthew Seymour, with a big difference.[110] When he bought it, he paid £10. When he sold it, he received £22 10 shillings, more than double the buying price. The suggestion is that Dimerat bought the acre as an undeveloped lot, built a small house on it and then sold it back to the man from whom he'd bought it. Perhaps he had decided to move on to new territory — or perhaps this was a pre-arranged "contract" in which Seymour hired Dimerat to build a house on the Bedford Road.

However, Dimerat clearly lived in the town for two to three

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[109] RLR, Vol. 2, p. 193.

[110] RLR, Vol. 3, p.11.

years. In late 1736 or early 1737, the town clerk listed the births of three of the four children of "Michael Dimeratt." The manner in which the births were given was unusual for Ridgefield records. Children Ziporah (1730), John (born 1734), Mary (1736), and Elizabeth (1739) were each described as a son or a daughter of Michael. There is no mention of a mother. Usually, both parents were cited; if only one parent's name was given, it was invariably the mother, but not here. Perhaps when he was filing his deed for the purchase on Bedford Road, Michael Dimerat also gave the town clerk information on his children — failing, as some men seem wont to do, to include his wife's name. However, he did the same thing three years later when he reported Elizabeth's birth.

The surname is uncommon in 18th Century Connecticut. Official records, mostly military, spell it at least seven different ways, which is not surprising since the name was unusual and the bearers of it were probably illiterate, unable to tell officials how they should spell it.[111] We use a Ridgefield version, Dimorat.

There is never any indication in Ridgefield's records that the Dimorats were African American. Besides two deeds and the birth recordings, the only other mention in Ridgefield of the surname was in 1771 when the selectmen compensated Samuel Jacklin for taking care of Mary Dimorat, "an indigent person."[112] This was probably Michael's daughter, born in 1736, although it could have been Michael's unnamed wife. Samuel Jacklin's being African American suggests Mary was, too, but there is no mention in Ridgefield records of her race.

A second, more telling clue came from New York State muster records for the French and Indian War, which list a John "Demorat" as a member of Capt. John Peterse Smith's company of Orange County, N.Y., militia in 1759. John is described as a native of "Norwake" in Connecticut. And he is listed as "a negro," an uncommon instance of a military record's citing race.

This might have been a different John Dimorat except that the very next man listed in the company muster was James Jacklin, a brother of Samuel Jacklin, the Ridgefield farmer who took care of John's sister

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[111] Military and other records include these versions of the name: Damerat, Demorat, Demeratt, Dimerack, Dimerat, Dimeratt, Dimorat.

[112] Ridgefield Town Records, 1748-1797, Town Meeting, April 15, 1771.

(or mother) Mary.

James Jacklin was reported as being 39 years old while John Dimorat was listed as 22 — two to three years younger than his birth record would indicate. John was also described as a laborer, which usually meant he worked on a farm. However, the fact that he and James Jacklin were together in the company — and were the only two Connecticut natives there — is too much to be just a coincidence. The Jacklins and the Dimorats not only knew each other, they were probably friends.

The Orange County record hints that the Michael Dimorat family had lived in Norwalk before, and perhaps after, coming to Ridgefield. Norwalk is the town from which the Jacklins and most of Ridgefield's first settlers had moved, and it seems likely that the Dimorats and Jacklins knew each other there. Since Michael Dimorat moved to Ridgefield sooner than the Jacklins, he may have recommended that Samuel and Robert Jacklin settle there.

John Dimorat must have possessed a great sense of adventure. He was in his early 20s when he signed up to fight in the French and Indian War; not a lot of people volunteered for that conflict. John began his service in Connecticut three years before Orange County, serving as a private in the Campaign of 1756, first under Col. David Wooster and then under Col. Israel Putnam,[113] both of whom would figure prominently in the fight against the British in the Revolution 20 years later. In the Campaign of 1757, Dimorat was in the Sixth Company of Capt. David Waterbury of Stamford.

Why he opted to serve a final enlistment in Orange County, on the west side of the Hudson River 30 miles from Fairfield County, is unknown. Perhaps James Jacklin, whom he probably knew from his youth, may have enticed him to join up. James may have moved to Orange County, seeking new horizons.

Twenty years later, John Dimorat again volunteered to serve, this time in the fight for independence from the British under whom he had served during the French and Indian War. On March 1, 1778, John enlisted in the Third Connecticut Regiment for a three-year hitch. At around 44 years old, he was probably one of the oldest members of his

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[113] Bates, Albert Carlos, *Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755-1762*, Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1903, p. 109-110.

regiment. He was assigned to Capt. John Barnard's Company, in which he continued to serve until just before his discharge Feb. 5, 1781. He saw service largely in the Hudson River Highlands area, attacking New York-based British forces.[114]

Among the military documents in the National Archives related to John Dimorat is a record of the clothing issued to him in 1780: "2 shirts, 1 woolen overhalls, 1 hatts, 2 hose, 1 socks, 4 shoes, 1 frocks, 2 linnen overhalls, 1 blanket, 1 state shirts, 2 state shoes."

After the war John Dimorat wound up in Massachusetts. However, like countless other African-American veterans of the Revolution, he lived his last years in poverty, hardly befitting a man who had spent six years in the service of his country during two wars. He died Aug. 3, 1807, in the Boston Alms House.[115]

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As mentioned in Chapter 1, a runaway Ridgefield slave named Ishmael was reported to have taken the name of Samuel Dimoret and was living in Norwalk in the early 1800s. Since the surname Dimorat was so unusual, it seems likely that somehow, the enslaved Ishmael must have known one or more of the Dimorats who had lived in Ridgefield in the 1730s. Had they sheltered him when he was a "fugitive" from his owner and had he adopted their name late in life? An even more intriguing question is: Had a member or members of the Dimorat family purchased Ishmael's freedom and he chose their surname as his own?

And had he selected "Samuel" because Samuel Jacklin had cared for Michael Dimorat's daughter (or wife) as an indigent person?[116]

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[114] National Archives; Washington, D.C.; Compiled Service Records of Soldiers who Served in the American Army During the Revolutionary War; Record Group Title: War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records; Record Group Number: 93; Series Number: M881; NARA Roll Number: 219

[115] *Deaths in Boston from 1800 to 1810*, Vol. 32, p. 46. No age was given, but it was noted that he was a native of Connecticut.

[116] *See* Chapter Five.

When Robert Jacklin Sr. tried to buy a farm in New London in 1717, townspeople tried to ban all Blacks from ever owning land there.

Chapter 3
A Slave Frees Himself

Two Jacklin brothers, the sons of a slave who had bought his own freedom three centuries ago, moved to Ridgefield in its early years. Robert Jacklin Jr. and his family helped settle the town's newly acquired northern territory of New Patent, part of which is now called Ridgebury, in the 1740s. Soon after Robert's arrival, his brother Samuel bought what was to become a sizable farm at the south end of the town.

Free, independent Black households were unusual in rural Connecticut in the 18th Century. Professor Rosivach knew with certainty of only one "independent African-American household in eighteenth century Fairfield," a town much larger than Ridgefield.[117]

What's more remarkable about the Ridgefield Jacklins is that they contributed three to five sons to the American Revolution.

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[117] Rosivach, p. 273.

The Jacklin family's recorded story began in late 1600s in the eastern Massachusetts town of Newbury, where Dr. Peter Tappan[118] was a prominent physician.[119] Around 1685, Tappan acquired a slave named Robert. Robert's origins are unknown but he was likely among the Africans brought to New England in ships, either directly from Africa, where they had been kidnapped, or indirectly via the West Indies, whose plantation owners shared many slaves with the northern colonies.[120]

After the doctor died in 1707, Robert was inherited by his sons. However, Robert managed to amass enough money working jobs on the side so that on Oct. 15, 1711, he was able to buy his own freedom.[121] Soon after he took the name of Robert Jacklin. He may have chosen the surname to recall a well-known Boston family of the 17th Century with which he may have been associated, or Jacklin may be an Anglicized version of his African birth name.

For a Black man in colonial America, being free of slavery was hardly the same as being free. In order to travel outside the boundaries of Newbury, Robert Jacklin needed a pass from local authorities, similar to what Peg Wilson would obtain from officials in Bedford, N.Y.[122] The written pass was evidence that he was a freedman and not a runaway slave. It was also a proof of his home town, which could become responsible for him in case he became indigent.

Robert Jacklin chose to move to New London, Conn., a growing coastal town founded by Congregationalists who hoped the harbor, said to be the deepest in the Northeast, would rival old London in England as a commercial port. There in 1712 he married. However, what happened afterward in his marital life is unclear, even confusing.

Robert married Mary Wright, daughter of William and Hagar

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[118] Also spelled Toppan.

[119] di Bonaventura, p. 120

[120] Chapter Two of Wendy Warren's *New England Bound: Slavery and Colonization in Early America* (New York: Liveright, 2016) offers a fascinating look at the extensive slavery connections between New England and the West Indies, particularly Barbados and Antigua, in the 1600s.

[121] di Bonaventura, p. 120

[122] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 7, 1789, p. 85

Wright, report historians James Rose and Barbara Brown.[123] Robert and Mary soon had a daughter, Mary, but the authors say wife Mary Jacklin died seven days later of "childbed fever," a postpartum bacterial infection.[124] Less than six months after Mary's death, the two historians say, Robert married "a young woman" named Hagar.[125] This is where it gets confusing.

In her acclaimed book on the lives of early New London families,[126] Yale historian Allegra di Bonaventura does not report that Mary died after her firstborn, and instead says she goes on to have two more children with Robert. What's more, she reveals that Mary's father, William Wright, was an Algonquin native and belonged to a conservative Christian religious sect called the Rogerenes, who were centered around New London. Rogerenes would sometimes disrupt services at local churches to protest the practices of the Congregational Church, the dominant religion of southern New England. William Wright, she says, was arrested and convicted, on very little evidence, of burning down the Congregational meeting house in New London, and was banished from the region, leaving behind his wife Hagar with three children.[127]

So, did Mary die in 1713 and if so, was Robert's new wife another daughter of William and Hagar Wright, named Hagar? In other words, his late wife's sister?

At any rate, whether his wife became Hagar or was still Mary, Mr. and Mrs. Jacklin had a son, the future Ridgefielder Robert Jacklin Jr., born March 31, 1715. Robert Sr. fathered four more sons: Freeman, James, Samuel, and John. Samuel, too, would settle in Ridgefield.

Working as a laborer on local farms, Robert Jacklin earned enough money by 1716 to buy his own farm in New London. Then troubles began. Some New Londoners didn't like the fact that a Black family was buying property in town. Rose and Brown said Jacklin "soon found

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[123] Rose, Dr. James M. and Barbara W. Brown, *Tapestry: A Listing History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*, Baltimore: Clearfield Co., 1979, p.71.

[124] *Ibid.* p.72.

[125] *Ibid*.

[126] di Bonaventura, p. 120-21.

[127] *Ibid*. p.104

that he faced considerable opposition … As feeling mounted to a fever pitch, an attempt was made to have Jacklin claimed as a slave of Samuel Gerish of Newbury, Robert's former home. Fortunately, Jacklin was able to produce proof of his emancipation, and the matter was dropped."[128]

After that effort failed, New London residents petitioned in April 1717 for a town meeting at which they approved what Rose and Brown called "one of the first truly racist measures in the annals of the state." The resolution said:

> *Voted that this town do utterly oppose and protest against Robert Jacklin a Negro man's buying any land in this town, or being an inhabitant within said town and do further desire the deputies that shall attend the Court in May next that they represent the same to the General Assembly that they would take some prudent care that no person of that color may ever have any possessions or freehold estate within this government.*[129]

In other words the voters told New London's representatives to the Connecticut General Assembly to seek a colony law, banning Blacks from owning land in New London for all time. A month later, the Assembly passed a measure "prohibiting negroes purchasing land without liberty from the town."[130] The less-harsh law was not a flat ban on Blacks and allowed them to apply for permission to possess land. Jacklin soon managed to convince New London's town fathers to grant him the "liberty" to own land and, in 1718, he filed his deed for his farm on the New London land records.

Perhaps facing continued racist behavior from his neighbors, Jacklin sold the farm three years later — at a profit of £12.[131] He remained in the area, however, renting a farm in upper New London from a family known to be friendly to African-Americans.

Robert Jacklin must have been rather savvy in the realms of real

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[128] *Ibid.*

[129] *Ibid*

[130] Norton, Frederick Calvin, "Negro Slavery in Connecticut," in *Connecticut Magazine* (Vol. 5, No. 6), June 1899

[131] Rose and Brown, p. 72.

estate, credit and the law. In the following years, he became a familiar figure in the courts of New London County. In fact, he was "the most prolific Black litigant in early eighteenth century New London ..., appearing in thirty cases as either creditor or debtor."[132] In about a quarter of the cases, he was the plaintiff, seeking payments from customers of his products or services, while in the rest, he was a defendant. "He...had difficulty paying his bills, as all the cases in which he was a defendant demonstrate," says historian Bruce Stark."[133] However, many of these cases were dismissed, possibly because they were settled out of court. His problems with paying debts, particularly £150 he owed to his landlord, may have been due to his own mistakes, but may also have been the result of drought, illness or even problems brought on by racism.

Nonetheless, Blacks like Jacklin "found justice and equitable treatment in the New London County courtroom," says Dominic DeBrincat, who suggests that this was because New Londoners were trying to emulate the fairness of the English common law system or more likely because of "simple socio-economic pragmatism: Magistrates treated people of color fairly because all New London Country residents had a stake in upholding Blacks' interests and obligations. As Blacks like Robert Jacklin intertwined themselves in the local economy, debtors, creditors, landlords, merchants, families, and neighbors all wanted reassurance that the court would weigh each economic exchange equally."[134]

Jacklin finally left New London in 1728, moving a little northwest to 128 acres he had purchased in Colchester. At some point his wife, probably Hagar, died, perhaps also in connection with childbirth. By 1729 he had sold this farm and, with a new wife, Zipporah, moved nearly 70 miles west to Norwalk. His name last appeared in public records in 1735 when he bought land on Clapboard Hill in what is now a posh section of northwestern New Canaan, but was then rather remote, hardscrabble land of the Canaan parish of Norwalk.

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[132] DeBrincat, Dominic, "Discolored Justice: Blacks in New London County Courts, 1710-1750," in *Connecticut History Review,* Association for the Study of Connecticut History, 2005, Vol. 44, No. 2, p 189,

[133] Stark, Bruce P., *New London County Court African Americans and People of Color Collection, Inventory of Records Finding,* Connecticut State Library, 2008.

[134] DeBrincat, pp.199-200.

"Free Negroes as well as slaves ... lived in the Parish, and though it took a town authorization, free Blacks did own Parish land," says New Canaan historian Mary Louise King. "Robert Jacklin, a free Negro of Norwalk, ... built his house in 1735."[135]

Robert's sons — Robert, Freeman, James, Samuel, and John — all joined their father in moving westward to this area. John apparently lived in Stamford or perhaps Pound Ridge, a nearby Westchester County town that had been founded largely by Stamford families.

The Jacklin family seemed to have settled in pretty smoothly. In 1743 James was admitted as a member of the 10-year-old Congregational Church of New Canaan, and a year later Samuel joined the same church.[136]

A New Patent Settler

In a 1731 boundary settlement, a huge chunk of the colony of Connecticut was chopped off its western edge and given to New York in exchange for Connecticut's acquiring some valuable coastline in Greenwich. The severed slice, running from New Canaan north to Massachusetts, was called The Oblong. For Ridgefield's proprietors, who were the main landowners, losing some 8,500 acres of the town was a blow. These founders had bought large tracts including Oblong land from the American Indians to create Ridgefield, and had spent 20 years laboring to turn much of the Oblong's wilderness into productive farmland.

As soon as they saw the inevitability of the Oblong exchange, the Ridgefield proprietors began asking the colony's leaders for compensation. And in 1731, the colony granted them a huge piece of land that extended from around the George Washington Highway area all the way north to the town of New Fairfield. Because it was granted to Ridgefielders by a second patent from the colony's governor — the first patent having established the original Ridgefield settlement — the added territory was called "New Patent."

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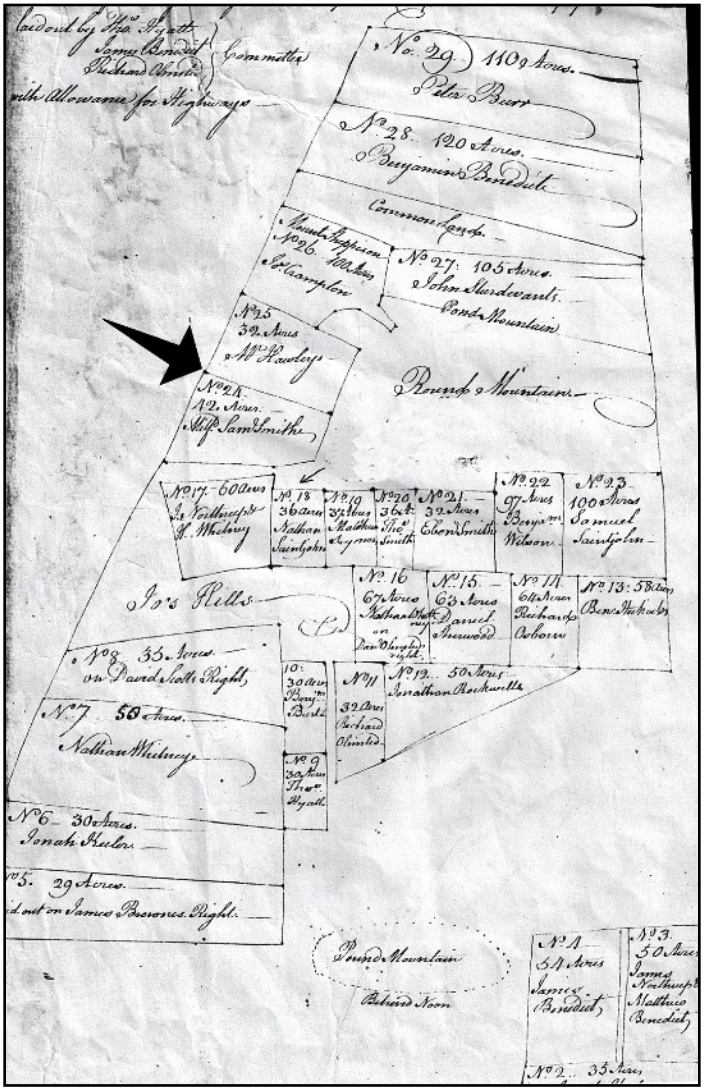
[135] King, Mary Louise, *Portrait of New Canaan: A History of A Connecticut Town*, New Canaan Historical Society, 1981, p. 32.

[136] *Connecticut Church Records Index*, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut.



A map of New Patent lots, drawn in 1787, based on a 1740-41 land division, shows Smith and Hawley lots (arrow) that Robert Jacklin bought in 1745. The land on the New York line is in western Danbury today.

Ridgefield's proprietors then set about acquiring title to this territory that still belonged to the native American Indians. In December of 1739, they paid three native leaders — Betty, Capt. Jacob Turkey and Mokquaroose — the exceedingly modest sum of £6 and 5 shillings for all the land in the New Patent. A year later, the proprietors mapped and distributed among their members New Patent lots of between 30 and 120 acres (the larger the lot, the poorer the land for farming).

Robert Jacklin Jr., who was probably living with his wife Anne in Canaan parish of Norwalk — now New Canaan — learned of the availability of this new territory and probably decided New Patent would be a land of opportunity not available in more settled areas nearer Long Island Sound. Whether racism problems in his current hometown had anything to do with his decision to move is unknown, but New Patent — most of which is now western Danbury — was remote, and he'd have very few neighbors.

In November 1745, Robert Jr. purchased 42 acres on the west side of Round Mountain from "Milford Samuel Smith," one of the town's original proprietors.[137] Soon thereafter he bought an adjoining 32 acres from the Hauley family, offspring of the town's first minister. Jacklin probably did not have to get a town authorization for either purchase as both New London and Norwalk apparently required of African-Americans. No record has been found of town officials' ever discussing Robert Jacklin or, later, his brother Samuel, in the context of admission to the town.

In the years that followed Robert and Anne Jacklin carved out a farmstead from the ancient forests, clearing fields of both huge trees and countless rocks, cutting wood to build a home and barn, and planting crops — a huge undertaking.

By 1748, Robert's name was appearing on the list of owners of assessable property in Ridgefield, with a valuation of £28. In 1750, the valuation was £40 18 shillings.[138] These values were apparently a percentage of the true market value (in 2020 Ridgefield assessments are

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[137] *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 3, pg. 161. He was labeled "Milford" because he'd come from Milford, Conn., distinguishing him from another proprietor named Samuel Smith who was from Norwalk and, of course, was called Norwalk Samuel Smith.

[138] *Town Records, 1746-1797*, unpaged.

70% of market value), and were about average for farms in Ridgebury.

Interestingly enough, his brother Samuel Jacklin shows up on the tax list in 1750, with property valued at £28 5 shillings. It is possible that Robert sold Samuel a share of his New Patent land, though no deed has been found to prove this. In 1753, deeds were filed when Samuel bought farmland at the more developed south end of Ridgefield, far from Robert's land, and he may have returned the New Patent land to his brother.

Robert's 74 acres was about as far away from the center of Ridgefield as a Ridgefielder could get and still be within the town. It was located in what's now called the King Street District of Danbury, bordering New York northwesterly of the Richter golf course. The trip between there and Ridgefield's village was more than 10 miles over rough, hilly, and often muddy paths, many only recently blazed through the woods.

Nonetheless Jacklin seems to have made the effort to travel to the center of town to record the births of at least five of his and Anne's children: Daniel (born 1749), Benjamin (1752), Ebenezer (1757), Anne (1759), and Thaddeus (1761).[139] Both Ebenezer and Thaddeus — and probably Daniel — later served in the American Revolution.

How long Jacklins remained as farmers in New Patent is not known for certain. Robert was still active in 1777 when, on Dec. 4, he filed notice with Town Clerk Stephen Smith that he had a "red pied heifer, her face is white, coming two years old, without any artificial mark."[140]

By 1778, Robert was still a landowner, with property assessed at nearly £26, typical of a small farm operation in Ridgefield at that

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[139] *Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767,* Vol. 1, p.13.

[140] *Town Records, 1746-1797*, unpaged, but near the end. From the earliest settlement of the town, farmers often recorded with the town clerk the brand marks for their cattle, usually specially shaped holes cut in the ears. These would identify the owners in case the cows got loose and wandered off, or if they were grazing common land mixed with cows of other owners. By the late 18th Century, however, many farmers seemed to be opting not to brand their animals, perhaps because they were not grazing with the cows of other owners, and instead they filed a simple description of the cow, in case it wandered off.

time.[141] While there is no record of Robert's selling his farm, we can estimate that he departed the town — or this life — in the early 1780s. He last appeared on the tax list in 1781, when his property was valued at only £3, suggesting he had already disposed of most of his holdings.[142]

Perhaps he had moved west. Toward the end of and after the Revolutionary War, many Connecticut farmers, both white and Black, were drawn to places like central and western New York where the soil offered more fertility and fewer rocks. "On the farms and in the cities, Black Revolutionary veterans and their families began to look for new horizons," Rose and Brown found. "The wooded, sandy flatlands of Rhode Island and the rocky farm lands of Connecticut were filled with Black and white families who had visions of adventure and opportunities to the west."[143]

Robert may also have "retired" to New Milford where at least one of his sons, Thaddeus, had a home.

Robert's old farm is now part of Danbury, but its exact location has not been determined. Ridgefield gave up this territory in 1846 after decades of complaints from New Patent residents about how far the trip was and how poor the roads were between them and their community's center in Ridgefield. The center of Danbury — including its churches and town hall — was much closer.

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[141] *Town Record Book,* 1708-1746. (These original, hand-written records, stored in the town clerk's vault, have no page numbers.) No deeds of sale could be found for Robert's New Patent lands.

[142] *Town Book of Records,* 1746-1797, unpaged.

[143] Rose and Brown, p. 39.

Two members of the Jacklin family from Ridgefield were with Washington at Valley Forge. — *A. Gilbert, Library of Congress*

Chapter 4

Fighting for the Independence

About 9,000 African-American free and enslaved men served in the American Revolution — many of them heroically.[144] They represented between 10% and 15% of the entire army. By the end of the war, Black sailors made up a quarter of the Navy.[145] If they were slaves when they signed up, most of them were promised emancipation if they

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[144] Nash, Gary B., "The African Americans' Revolution," in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 254-255. The number is an estimate. According to *Black Soldiers in the War for Independence*, p. 67, "the difficulty of stating accurately the number of Blacks in the Continental army arises from the fact that many muster rolls have been lost and many of those available do not identify the soldier by race." Lorenzo Greene, in *The Negro in Colonial New England*, p. 190, cites a figure of only 3,000 Blacks in the Revolution.

[145] Weir, William, *The Encyclopedia of African American Military History,* Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 2004.

served at least two years, and many served much longer.

"Despite being denied liberty by their country's formal Declaration of Independence, African Americans still volunteered to endure the hardships and dangers of combat to guarantee the freedom of the United States," says military historian Michael Lee Lanning. "Some did so in response to promises of release from slavery in exchange for their service. Others either willingly or unwillingly accompanied their owners into the military as servants. Still others volunteered to leave the monotony of their current life for the prospect of adventure afforded by military campaigns. All believed that their race as a whole could only benefit from their demonstrated loyal service."[146]

A large number of the Black volunteers were freedmen or free-born. In fact, "proportionate to their number [free Blacks] were more likely to join the fray than whites," reports historian Gary B. Nash. "Especially in New England, Blacks responded to the call to arms by repeatedly re-enlisting, whereas most whites served a single one- or two-year term of service, or even less." What's more, Blacks had proportionately fewer deserters than whites.[147] "They were not likely to have a farm that needed protection nor the kind of home that inspired homesickness," said historian Benjamin Quarles. "They had less to desert to."[148]

Nash attributes their enlistment record in part to the fact that, while many whites had farms back home that required constant attention, many Blacks could not afford a farm and found the military a good place to earn a living. But Nash also felt that most African Americans saw the war for independence as a way of gaining freedom for the enslaved and equality for the race in general.

Quarles put it this way: "The free Negro who enlisted of his own volition … was probably inspired by a complex of motives — a desire for adventure, a conviction of the justice of America's cause, a belief in the high-sounding goals of the Revolution, but also the prospect of receiving a bounty. Money gifts were generously given (or promised) to

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[146] Lanning, Lt. Col. Michael Lee,, *African Americans in the Revolutionary War,* Citadel Press, 2000, p. 12.

[147] Nash (Oxford), pp. 254-55.

[148] Quarles, Benjamin, *The Negro in the American Revolution,* Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961, p. 73.

those who joined the army."[149]

Perhaps these factors figured into the fact that, although Connecticut and Massachusetts had the smallest percentage of African-American residents, the two states also had the highest rate of Black enlistments in the Revolution. "In Connecticut practically no town of any size failed to supply one or more Negroes for the Continental Army," reports Quarles.[150]

At least seven African-American men who were born or lived in Ridgefield served in the war. There may have been even more.[151] Historian David O. White compiled a list of 289 Black soldiers from Connecticut who served in the Revolution. However, he said, it was often difficult to tell whether a soldier was Black or white because race was rarely defined in military records. Thus, White believed, as many as 400 Blacks may have served in the war from Connecticut.[152]

In civilian life African Americans were invariably treated as a lower class, and denied basic freedoms that whites enjoyed. Military life was a little different. While some Black soldiers were assigned to "all-colored" units, the majority served shoulder-to-shoulder with white soldiers in fully integrated companies.[153] While Blacks were often given menial tasks such as cleaning latrines and horse sheds, "military service during the Revolution provided one of the few environments in which Blacks and whites shared a degree of equality," Col. Lanning found.[154] For instance, both were paid identical wages, which was generally two pounds per month for a private in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment.

"The daily life of Black soldiers, sailors and marines in the Revolution differed little from that of their white comrades," Lanning said. "Though prejudice and discrimination did not evaporate with the first shots at Lexington, Black servicemen in the Revolution certainly

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[149] *ibid*., p. 80.

[150] *ibid*, p.79, Quarles in *Revolution* notes that 10 of Stratford's 114 soldiers were Black, as were 13 of Wallingford's 132.

[151] *See* Appendix H.

[152] White, David O., *Connecticut's Black Soldiers 1775-1783,* The Pequot Press, p. 56.

[153] Lanning, p. 73.

[154] *ibid*. p. 97.

experienced a marked increase in equality through the war. Ultimately, as in every armed conflict, soldiers in the trenches and sailors and marines in the forecastle judged men by their performance rather than the color of their skin as they fought for their country's liberty, their unit's pride and their mutual survival."[155]

Historian Judith Van Buskirk expressed it this way: "The serious business of defeating the enemy while defending one's own life calls for soldiers to put aside their prejudices and dislikes in order to coalesce as a unit. This is the ideal. During the Revolutionary War, there was a form of fellowship in Washington's forces. The white man and Black man were allies in the ranks — even in the presence of dislike and distrust … Unit cohesion does not eliminate prejudice but it does force a wide variety of individuals to share their lives in close quarters over an extended period of time. There was no other institution in eighteenth-century life, other than the military, that did this."[156]

Black soldiers in the Revolution experienced a degree of equality they would not see again for more than a century and a half. "I've heard one analysis say that the Army during the Revolutionary War was the most integrated that the Army would be until the Korean War," said Maj. Glenn Williams, a historian at the U.S. Army Center for Military History.[157]

Long after the war, when many African Americans were seeking pensions from the federal government, white officers frequently testified that Blacks in their companies had not only served under them in the war, but did so with distinction.[158]

Nevertheless, there was discrimination in which kind of military service that African Americans could join. Blacks were allowed into the Continental Army and Navy; all seven Ridgefielders enlisted in the Continental Army. However, they were literally prevented from joining the

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[155] *ibid.*, p. 119.

[156] Van Buskirk, Judith L., *Standing in Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution*, Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017, p. 235

[157] Collins, Elizabeth M., *Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War*, Soldiers Live, www.army.mil

[158] Many examples are described in Van Buskirk.

Connecticut militias, thanks to a law passed in 1715 that reflected a fear that local armed Blacks might become involved in uprisings against the white population.[159] That is probably why very few, if any, African Americans fought at the Battle of Ridgefield, a locally famous engagement between mostly local militias and the British in 1777.

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A large number of Black soldiers were slaves who were enlisted as substitutes for white men who, for one reason or another, did not want to serve when local authorities drafted them. In 1777, Connecticut passed a law allowing Blacks to substitute for whites.[160] A study of the records could find no cases of Black men from Ridgefield — enslaved or free — substituting for whites. However, one Black man, erroneously said to have been a Ridgefielder, probably was a substitute; the story of Jack Congo will be related later in this narrative.

It should be noted that not all Blacks fought on the side of independence. Early in the war, the British declared that slaves who fled from their patriot masters and joined the side of England would instantly be considered free. Thousands of slaves, mostly in the South but some in the North, responded to that opportunity for freedom. Some wound up fighting with or supporting British troops, but most did support work. After the war, many did not fare as well as they had hoped or as the British had promised, although most were at least spared from being returned to their masters. Some were relocated to Nova Scotia, an arrangement that proved unpleasant and led many to move to Sierra Leone in western Africa. Others went to England.

No evidence could be found that any enslaved Ridgefield Black fled to the British during the Revolution. However, it is well documented that a number of loyalist white Ridgefielders did so.

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[159] Greene, p. 127. Greene tells how Blacks were accepted for service when New England's and New York's white populations were desperate for help fighting the French and the Indians in the late 1600s and early 1700s, but as soon as the threat ended, governments banned them from town militia units.

[160] Van Buskirk, p. 225.

A Valley Forge Veteran Who Sought Help

Many Blacks who served in the Revolutionary War spent some or all of their veteran years in poverty, often extreme poverty. Such was the case of Ebenezer Jacklin, who was Robert Jr. and Anne's third son.

Ebenezer was born in Ridgefield in 1757[161] and probably grew up on the New Patent farm. In January 1777, when he was about 20 years old, he joined the Fifth Connecticut Regiment, led by Ridgefield's Col. Philip Burr Bradley.

Local historian George Rockwell[162] says he served in Capt. Isaac Hine's Company, but all his military records say he was in Capt. Ezekiel Sanford's Company.[163] (As we will see later, Sanford was a Redding man whose family had an enslaved man who was also in his company and who later married Ebenezer's niece.)

Rockwell said Ebenezer served until 1781, but the National Archives show he was discharged Oct. 15, 1778[164]; Ebenezer himself later maintained he left the service in 1779.

Private Jacklin's story is a sad one, but one that had a relatively good ending. Although he had signed up for three years of service, he was discharged early, probably because of an injury or illness. He was among the 11,000 or so troops who encamped at Valley Forge, Pa., with General George Washington in the winter of 1777-78. It was an awful place to be, almost as bad as — perhaps in some ways worse than — fighting in a battle. "During the hard winter months, the regiment ... suffered heavy losses due to the cold and lack of provisions," F. Lee Betz wrote of Valley Forge in a history of the Connecticut Fifth.[165]

General Washington himself said his men were "often times half starved, always in rags, without pay, and experiencing every species

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[161] *Ridgefield Vital Records,* Vol. 1, p 13

[162] Rockwell, George L., *History of Ridgefield*, Ridgefield, 1928, p. 173.

[163] U.S., Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783 (Folders 94-96); 5th Regiment, 1781-1782 (Folders 97-98)

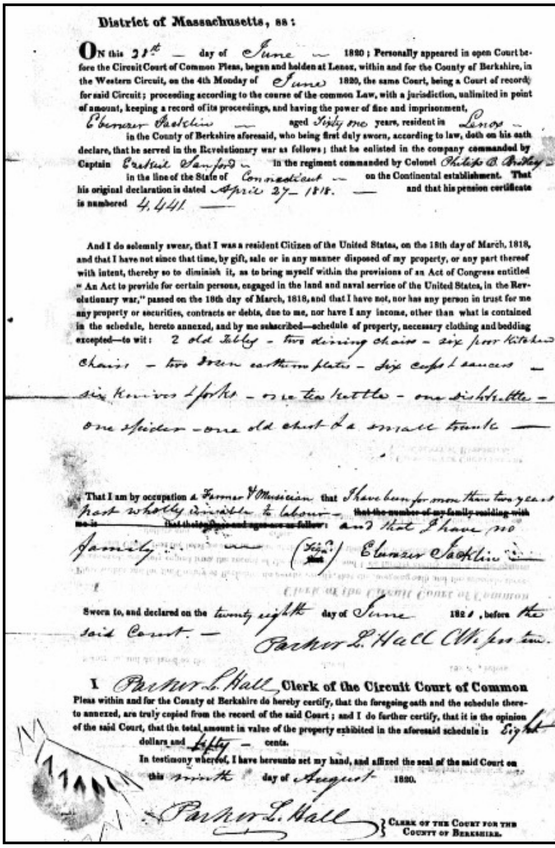
[164] *ibid*.

[165] Betz, F. Lee, *Fifth Connecticut Regiment, Continental Line: A Brief History of the Regiment*, Ridgefield, 1978, p.4-5

of distress, which human nature is capable of undergoing."[166]

The worst "distress" was illness. "Disease has destroyed ten men for us where the sword of the enemy has killed one," wrote John Adams.[167] Of those 11,000 troops at Valley Forge, nearly 2,000 died, two thirds of them from such diseases as influenza, dysentery, typhoid, and typhus.[168] Many others froze to death, including at least one Ridgefield soldier.[169] Many who didn't die became seriously sick — including, probably, Ebenezer Jacklin.

Jacklin was there at least from December through March. He was "on furlough" from March to June 1778, suggest-


District of Massachusetts, ss:

On this 21st — day of June — 1820; Personally appeared in open Court before the Circuit Court of Common Pleas, begun and holden at Lenox, within and for the County of Berkshire, in the Western Circuit, on the 4th Monday of June 1820, the same Court, being a Court of record, for said Circuit; proceeding according to the course of the common Law, with a jurisdiction, unlimited in point of amount, keeping a record of its proceedings, and having the power of fine and imprisonment, Ebenezer Jacklin — aged Sixty one years, resident in Lenox — in the County of Berkshire aforesaid, who being first duly sworn, according to law, doth on his oath declare, that he served in the Revolutionary war as follows; that he enlisted in the company commanded by Captain Ezekiel Sanford — in the regiment commanded by Colonel Philip B. Bradley — in the line of the State of Connecticut — on the Continental establishment. That his original declaration is dated April 27 – 1818. — and that his pension certificate is numbered 4,441. —

And I do solemnly swear, that I was a resident Citizen of the United States, on the 18th day of March, 1818, and that I have not since that time, by gift, sale or in any manner disposed of my property, or any part thereof with intent, thereby so to diminish it, as to bring myself within the provisions of an Act of Congress entitled "An Act to provide for certain persons, engaged in the land and naval service of the United States, in the Revolutionary war," passed on the 18th day of March, 1818, and that I have not, nor has any person in trust for me any property or securities, contracts or debts, due to me, nor have I any income, other than what is contained in the schedule, hereto annexed, and by me subscribed—schedule of property, necessary clothing and bedding excepted—to wit: 2 old tables – two dining chairs – six poor kitchen chairs – two dozen earthen plates – six cups & saucers – six knives & forks – one tea kettle – one dish kettle – one spider – one old chest & a small trunk —

That I am by occupation a Farmer & Musician that I have been for more than two years past wholly unable to labour — ~~that the number of my family residing with me is — that their names and ages are as follow:~~ and that I have no family. — (Signed) Ebenezer Jacklin

Sworn to, and declared on the twenty eighth day of June 1820, before the said Court. — Parker L. Hall Clk pro tem.

I Parker L. Hall, Clerk of the Circuit Court of Common Pleas within and for the County of Berkshire do hereby certify, that the foregoing oath and the schedule thereto annexed, are truly copied from the record of the said Court; and I do further certify, that it is the opinion of the said Court, that the total amount in value of the property exhibited in the aforesaid schedule is Eight dollars and fifty — cents.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand, and affixed the seal of the said Court on this ninth day of August 1820.

Parker L. Hall } Clerk of the Court for the County of Berkshire.

The court document in which Ebenezer Jacklin, applying for a veterans pension in 1820, lists his modest possessions.

[166] Lanning, p. 15.

[167] *ibid.*, pg 115.

[168] Pruitt, Sarah, *235 Years Ago, Washington's Troops Made Camp at Valley Forge*, www.history.com March 7, 2019

[169] Elisha Gilbert froze to death at Valley Forge, says Rockwell, p. 168.

ing he was recovering from an illness, maybe severe frostbite, with which many soldiers were afflicted.[170] Jacklin returned to duty over the summer, but was discharged Oct. 15, 1778, perhaps debilitated by the earlier illness.[171]

Ebenezer Jacklin appears only once in Ridgefield's land records. The Grand List of 1782 says he had property assessed at £3.[172] That was exactly the amount that his father's property was assessed at the year before, suggesting that Robert's by-then small holding was turned over to Ebenezer, perhaps through inheritance. By 1784, neither Robert nor Ebenezer were shown as owning any property. Both had probably left Ridgefield.

Ebenezer moved north. Records suggest he lived for periods over the next three decades in Vermont, northern New York and western Massachusetts. By 1818, when he was living in Lenox, Mass., he was disabled and in poverty. He applied through a local court for a federal pension, which the government had just begun to offer to needy, low-income veterans of the Revolution.

His testimony in the Circuit Court of Berkshire County states that he had enlisted in May 1777 in Ridgefield in a Fifth Regiment company commanded by Captain Ezekiel Sanford and that he served until November 1779 when he was discharged at Valley Forge.[173] These dates don't match with his actual record, which says he enlisted Jan. 1, 1777, and left Oct. 15, 1778.

The application said he participated in the battles of Fort Washington, Pa., and Princeton, N.J., but according to his Connecticut Fifth records, he could not have done so since Fort Washington took place in

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[170] Boyle, Joseph Lee, *Fire Cake and Water: The Connecticut Infantry at the Valley Forge Encampment*, by Clearfield Co., 1999, p. 108.

[171] The William Clements Library of the University of Michigan estimates that during the war, many more soldiers died of disease than were killed in action. Of a total of 25,3246 Revolutionary War deaths, 6,284 killed in combat, 10,000 in camp (disease, etc.), and 8,500 as prisoners.

[172] *Town Book of Records*, 1746-1797, unpaged..

[173] Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files (NARA microfilm publication M804, 2,670 rolls). Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

Two Jacklins are honored on the War Memorial, but other Jacklins from Ridgefield also served in the Revolution.

November 1776, six weeks before he signed up, and Princeton, two days after he enlisted. However, he probably took part in the Battle of Germantown and then encamped at Fort Washington with the Connecticut Fifth in October 1777 before moving on to Valley Forge for the winter. Records also indicate he could have been at the Battle of Monmouth on June 28, 1778.

Forgetting details of their time in the military was not at all unusual for the aged veterans who were seeking pensions for service that had occurred more than 40 years earlier. While Ebenezer's participation

in various battles has not been confirmed and his recollections of his service — or Massachusetts officials' interpretation of those recollections — may have been confused, it is known for certain that he was at Valley Forge with the Fifth Connecticut because he shows up in several military records as being there.[174]

In order to apply for a pension, a veteran had to provide not only his war record, but also his worth in property (except clothing and bedding) and his income. This was evidence that he was in need of financial help — the pension was not aimed at the well-off.

In his application testimony, Ebenezer listed all his worldly possessions: Two old tables, five dining chairs, six "poor kitchen chairs," two dozen earthen plates, six cups and saucers, six knives and forks, one tea kettle, one dish kettle, one spider (a wrought-iron trivet on legs), one old chest, and a small trunk. These were probably contained in spartan rented quarters.

He told the court that "I am by occupation a farmer & musician." That description of himself is intriguing on two counts. If they worked on farms, which many in that era did, African Americans were usually described as "laborers." To be called a "farmer" suggested that Ebenezer Jacklin might have once had his own small farm, perhaps in or near Lenox.[175] But even more interesting, even baffling, is his styling himself as a musician. It seems unlikely that, in the early 19th Century, he could have performed music professionally (although Lenox today is the home of Tanglewood, the Boston Symphony Orchestra's summer venue!). It also seems unlikely that he would be describing what he did 40 years earlier in the military — there is no mention of his having been a fifer or a drummer, which was usually noted in military records. In fact, the regiment records show that Truman French was the company fifer when Jacklin was serving. Perhaps he was what we today might call a "folk musician," who had gained a reputation playing at local gatherings.

Jacklin also told court officials that "I have been for more than two years past wholly unable to labour and that I have no family." That

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[174] Boyle, p. 108.

[175] Cruson, *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County,* p. 34, observes that, to earn a living, most newly freed slaves did what they had been doing: work as laborers on a farm.

he was an invalid in his early 60s is not surprising for a man of that era who had worked hard, enjoyed few if any creature comforts, and, of course, had no form of "health care." In fact, the average Black man lived only to about 40 in the 18th Century.[176]

That he felt he had "no family" was sad, and may have referred to immediate family, such as a wife, children or grandchildren. No record of his being married has been found. Back in Connecticut or somewhere in New York State (as we shall see), there were possibly brothers, and certainly cousins, nieces and nephews. He may have long ago lost contact with them — post office announcements in area newspapers indicated Ebenezer had had unclaimed mail in various towns in western Massachusetts and southern Vermont for a number of years. The letters may have been from family trying to connect with him.

After interviewing Jacklin, John Hooker, the chief justice of the Circuit Court of Berkshire County, certified on April 27, 1818, 40 years after his discharge, "that it appears to my satisfaction that the said Ebenezer Jacklin did serve in the revolutionary war ... against the common enemy" and "that he is in reduced circumstances, and stands in need of the assistance of his country for support." He wound up in 1821 receiving the standard pension for a private: $8 a month, roughly worth $300 today.[177] It certainly must have helped him in his last years.

The 1818 pension act was designed to assist veterans in need. It is interesting to note that of the many applicants, 8% of the white men were rejected and only 3% of Blacks were turned down. Scholars suggest this difference was largely due to many white men who tried to cheat the system by claiming they were poor. Blacks did not need to lie about being poor.[178]

Ebenezer Jacklin died in Stockbridge, Mass., in 1825. A brief newspaper announcement reported his age at 70,[179] but based on his

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[176] Gilbert, Alan, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 107

[177] National Archives; Washington, D.C.; Ledgers of Payments, 1818-1872, to U.S. Pensioners Under Acts of 1818 Through 1858; Record Group Number: 217; Series Number: T718; Roll Number: 2

[178] Van Buskirk, p.196

[179] *Massachusetts Spectator*, April 8, 1825.

Ridgefield birth record, he would have been 67. His name appears today in Ridgefield on a bronze plaque honoring Revolutionary War veterans, mounted on the War Memorial along Main Street at the head of Branchville Road.

Like so many other Black soldiers who served in and survived the Revolution, Ebenezer Jacklin lived the rest of his life in poverty. "Black Americans, despite brave service and extreme sacrifice, mostly remained mired in the status quo," Col. Lanning lamented.[180]

Thaddeus and Daniel Jacklin

Thaddeus Jacklin, who was Robert and Anne's fourth son, was their second to serve in the war. He was born in 1761 in Ridgefield, and joined the fight for independence in 1781, serving in the Fourth Regiment of the Connecticut Line from July until December.[181] Six-month stints in the service were common, especially among subsistence farmers who needed to be home to help work their farms and support their families.

According to historian David O. White,[182] Thaddeus enlisted from New Milford, where he lived at the time,[183] had two wives during his life, and two daughters. He had probably died by 1830. This hints that perhaps his parents, Robert and Anne, may have moved to the New Milford area by 1781, living with their son in their old age.

Robert and Anne Jacklin may have contributed a third son to the fight for independence. Daniel Jacklin was born in 1749 in Ridgefield. There are indications he, too, may have also wound up in New Milford and "may have been the Daniel Jacklin who served during the Revolution in the Fourth Regiment of Ulster County (N.Y.) militia under Colonel Johannes Hardenburgh," say Rose and Brown.[184] Ulster County

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[180] Lanning, p.21

[181] Rose and Brown, p.74.

[182] White, p. 59

[183] The 1790 Census shows him living in New Milford with one other household member, presumably his wife. By 1820, he is listed as the head of a household of three, including one under 14, all "free colored persons."

[184] Rose and Brown, p. 73.

is about 24 miles west of New Milford, on the west side of the Hudson River. By the time of the Revolution, Daniel may have moved there in the westward migrations. If so, he may have returned to New Milford, for he married a New Milford woman, Mary Phillips. By 1799, however, they were living in Ancram, Columbia County, in upstate New York.[185]

Adding to the confusion is a brief news item in a Bridgeport newspaper in 1827 reporting, "Mr. Daniel Jacklin, of New Milford, raised a blood beet, the past season, weighing 8 lb 12 oz."[186] Perhaps this was a son of the Daniel Jacklin who had been born in Ridgefield or a son of Thaddeus, who named him for his brother.

Jacklins remained a part of the New Milford community for many years. In the Civil War, Philip Jacklin of New Milford fought in the Union Army. He was probably descended from Robert Jacklin of Ridgefield. However, New Milford historian Kathleen Zuris, who has tried to trace the Jacklin family in her town, could not find in the records how Thaddeus, Daniel and Philip Jacklin might have been connected (*see Appendix D*).

The Mysterious Lewis Jacklin

Another Revolutionary veteran from Ridgefield was Lewis Jacklin.[187] Unfortunately, research has been unable to determine who his parents were, but military records indicate he came from Ridgefield.

Lewis spent a long time in the service.[188] He signed up for three years, beginning November 1777 and served most of his enlistment in Capt. Abner Prior's Company in Col. Philip Burr Bradley's Fifth Connecticut Regiment. By June 1780, he was being labeled "brigade waggoner," a job that entailed driving and caring for horses and equipment.

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[185] *ibid*.

[186] *Republican Farmer,* Bridgeport, Conn., Nov. 21, 1827, Vol XVIII, Issue 918, Page 3.

[187] Military records occasionally spell his name Louis or Luis.

[188] National Archives; Washington, D.C.; Compiled Service Records of Soldiers who Served in the American Army During the Revolutionary War; Record Group Title: War Department Collection of Revolutionary War Records; Record Group Number: 93; Series Number: M881; NARA Roll Number: 266

While wagoners may have been at the scenes of battles, they as a matter of policy were not considered fighters and were not generally provided with arms.[189] "The typical colored volunteer served with the infantry, where he was either assigned to functions in support of combat operations or detailed for duty as an orderly," writes professor Benjamin Quarles. "Since white soldiers generally disliked assignment to the wagon, commissary or forage services, it was not unusual for Negroes to find themselves enrolled in these departments."[190] By September 1780 he was in Capt. James Morris's Company and was discharged that fall. During November of 1777, he had been listed as "sick at Ridgefield, Conn," suggesting he was home recuperating.[191]

Like Ebenezer, Lewis Jacklin also spent the winter of 1777-78 with Washington at Valley Forge.[192] Military payroll records, which give few details on the nature of a soldier's service, say he was serving in Norwalk in January 1779 and in Middlesex that March. In February 1780, he was "sick at Morristown," N.J.

While Lewis Jacklin's name appears in some two dozen musters and payroll records from the war, what happened to him after his service is as much a mystery as his origins. He is not shown as a casualty, nor has any record of his death been found. He does not show up in any local censuses[193] and was not a landowner in Ridgefield. As so many other Blacks who served in the Revolution, he disappeared from the historical record after he left the military.

Lewis is not forgotten, however. His name, alongside Ebenezer's, appears in bronze on Ridgefield's War Memorial. (Since Ridgefield native Thaddeus Jacklin enlisted from New Milford, he is not included on the monument.)

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[189] Rees, John U., *'They Were Good Soldiers,'* Warwick, England: Helion & Company, 2019, p.174-5.

[190] Quarles, *America*, p. 62.

[191] NARA M246. Muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns, and other miscellaneous personnel, pay, and supply records of American Army units, 1775-83.Roll 0014

[192] Boyle, p. 108.

[193] The United States began taking censuses in 1790.

Henry Williams

At least one other Black soldier in the Revolution came from Ridgefield, but little is known about Henry — or Harry — Williams,[194] other than that he served from 1781 until the war's end in 1783. We do not even know whether he joined free or enslaved.

Rockwell says Henry Williams served in Capt. Isaac Hine's company in the Connecticut Line and that Williams enlisted in February 1781 "for the war."[195] The Connecticut Historical Society collections list a Harry Williams who enlisted from Ridgefield in February of 1781 for the duration of the war.[196] That suggests that he may have been enslaved and, by signing up for long-term service, was expecting emancipation. We could find no Henry Williams in Hine's company, but there was a Harry Williams who served in Capt. David Humphreys' company of the Fourth Connecticut Regiment from 1781 until war's end. Humphreys' company was almost all African-Americans.

However, the National Archives also lists a Henry Williams in Capt. Ezekiel Sanford's company on Aug. 1, 1777 — the same company in which Ebenezer Jacklin served. (That company also had *two* people named John Williams!)

The name of "Henry Williams" appears on the War Memorial on Main Street.

No records have been found of his life before and after his war service. Neither a Henry nor a Harry Williams shows up in the birth, marriage, death, or land records of Ridgefield, nor could a grave be found for him anywhere in Connecticut.

However, as we will learn from the case of Jack Freeman, also known as "Jack" and "Jack Rowland,"[197] his name could have changed. If he entered the service enslaved, working toward emancipation, he may

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[194] While Rockwell calls him Henry, *Connecticut's Black Soldiers 1775-1783* uses Harry as do all the Revolutionary War records in the National Archives mentioning him.

[195] Rockwell, p. 195.

[196] Bates, Albert C., ed., *Rolls and Lists of Connecticut Men in the Revolution, 1775-1783*, Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1901, p.110.

[197] See page 87ff

have been given the name Williams. After his discharge and with a newly won freedom, he might have selected a different name, one that pleased him and not others in control of him.

The Sad Story of Jack Congo

Another Black soldier has been incorrectly identified as a Ridgefielder. He is included in this history, both to correct the record and to offer a revealing account about how Blacks were viewed and treated by at least some whites in 18th Century Connecticut.

Jack Congo was born enslaved around 1750. On April 15, 1777, either he volunteered with the permission of his owner, Nathaniel Baldwin, to be a substitute so that Baldwin could avoid service, or he was forced by Baldwin to enlist for him. Congo joined the Fifth Connecticut Regiment, probably with the understanding he would be granted his freedom if he served, which was a promise given to most enslaved Connecticut men who enlisted (but a promise that was not always kept).

In December, Private Congo was at Valley Forge and in January 1778, he was doing guard duty there. In June he was described as "absent by order," apparently because of illness.[198]

By Sept. 14 Congo was at the Fishkill (N.Y.) Supply Depot, a huge military center that included a large hospital where he was probably a patient. The Fishkill depot has been described as a small city, with housing for thousands of soldiers, the major military hospital, a prison, storage buildings, an armory, blacksmith shops, stables, and a cemetery. (Only the Van Wyck Homestead, the headquarters building, remains today.) Jack Congo died at the depot Oct. 30, 1778, and is buried in an unmarked grave along with hundreds of other soldiers, white and Black, in what historians call "the largest single burial ground of the Revolutionary War."[199]

Ridgefield historian Silvio Bedini described Congo as a Ridgefielder who was "killed" in the Revolution.[200] He believed Congo lived in Ridgefield, probably because of a letter that, in the 1950s, was in the

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[198] Boyle, p. 48

[199] Associated Press, March 18, 2013

[200] Bedini, pp. 89-90.

collection of the Ridgefield Library and Historical Association.[201] That letter, dated Oct. 10, 1793, in Ridgefield, was written by Nathaniel Baldwin to Col. Philip Burr Bradley, who had commanded the Fifth Connecticut Regiment. Baldwin describes Congo as "a Negro … who at the time of enlisting & during the time he continued in the service was my Servant." The phrasing indicates that Congo was Baldwin's slave. Baldwin wrote the letter because "I consider myself entitled to his wages, as he left no other Legal Representative." He calculated those wages at £24, 4 shillings and 3 pence — perhaps equal to about $3,800 today.[202]

To put it bluntly, Baldwin was trying to cash in on his dead slave, ten years after the war ended and 15 years after Jack Congo had died in the service of his country.

Col. Bradley had no idea what had happened to Private Congo and told Baldwin to seek out the captain who was in charge of Congo's company, a man who lived in Tolland.

Because the letter was dated in Ridgefield, Bedini and others thought Baldwin — and Congo — were from Ridgefield. But Baldwin in fact lived in Goshen, a town in Litchfield County, and so had Jack Congo.[203] The letter was dated in Ridgefield probably because Baldwin had come to town to seek Bradley's help. Unable to meet with him personally, he penned the letter instead while he was here.

Jack Congo did know Ridgefield — he fought to defend the town with the Connecticut Fifth at the Battle of Ridgefield on April 27, 1777, reports Keith Jones.[204] But he never lived here.

In 1795, two years after his initial request, Baldwin was still trying to collect Jack Congo's pay, applying that year to the Connecticut General Assembly.

"The state refused to pay Baldwin Congo's wages, 'for want of

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[201] Its whereabouts today has not been determined

[202] *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency.* However, it is difficult to estimate the comparative values of money because the value of the pound was always changing, and depended upon whether it was paper money or coinage.

[203] White, p. 39.

[204] Jones, Keith Marshall III, *Farmers Against the Crown*, Connecticut Colonel Press, 2003, p. 162

positive evidence that Congo had died,'" says David O. White.[205] "Baldwin then provided eyewitnesses who had attended Congo's funeral, but the Selectmen who were in office in the town of Goshen in 1777 testified that they had no record that Congo was freed to serve in the war, and the Assembly again denied Baldwin's petition."

No doubt, Jack Congo would have been pleased.

[205] White. pp. 39-40

Chapter 5
A Man of Industry

Despite having the limited rights and facing the many prejudices that free Blacks lived under in Connecticut, Samuel Jacklin amassed and operated a sizable farm, as big as or bigger than many farms in Ridgefield in the mid-18th Century. Thanks to his fine reputation, his success as a property owner, and the fact that he left a will, we know more about Samuel Jacklin than any other African American who lived in Ridgefield during the 1700s.

A son of Robert Sr. and Hagar Jacklin, Samuel Jacklin was born around 1720 in New London, and moved west with his parents to the Canaan Parish of Norwalk, now New Canaan. At some point he married Sarah, whose surname has not been found.

In the early 1740s, Samuel and brother, James, bought a 132-acre farm in the Ponus Ridge area of Canaan Parish in Norwalk.[206] After a few years, James left for other pursuits and brother John acquired a share of the farm. Perhaps he did not like Norwalk, or maybe he felt the urge to be on his own, but Samuel decided to find a farm in Ridgefield, possibly at the recommendation of brother, Robert Jr., who had bought the New Patent land in 1745.

Samuel was in Ridgefield by the late 1740s, possibly initially purchasing a share of his brother's farm; the 1750 taxing list says he had property assessed at nearly £24.[207] However, it wasn't until 1753 that his name appeared on the land records as a property owner. That year, he bought a farm at the very south end of town, a dozen miles from the New Patent home of his brother and only six or seven miles from his previous farm at Canaan Parish.

He may actually have been in Ridgefield by 1744; the local vital records report, "Mary, daughter of Samuell & Sarah Jacklin, b[orn].

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[206] King, p. 34

[207] *Town Book of Records, 1746-1796*

31 Dec 1744,"[208] However, Mary was probably born in Canaan Parish and Samuel had the birth details put in the Ridgefield records after he moved here.

Samuel and Sarah had at least three other children: Joseph (baptised 1749, but possibly an adopted son-in-law[209]), Benjamin (baptised 1750), and Elisabeth (baptised 1759).[210] Elisabeth, undoubtedly born in Ridgefield, married Jack Freeman in 1784 — much more about Freeman and that marriage appears later in this chapter. Perhaps Lewis Jacklin was another son who missed being recorded in the town's vital records.

Jacklin was probably in his 30s when he bought the Ridgefield farm. Unlike brother Robert's spread, the core of Samuel's farm was in an already settled part of Ridgefield — in the lower Flat Rock District south of the village and just north of the Norwalk line (back then, Wilton was a parish of Norwalk). He bought the first 10 acres in 1754 from Abraham Resseguie, a member of a Huguenot family who were among the earliest settlers and one of whose descendants owned the Keeler Tavern in the 19th Century.[211]

One history notes that "a Samuel Jacklin served in the Fourth Company, Fourth Regiment of the New York Line," in 1778-79.[212] It's unlikely this was farmer Samuel from Ridgefield — who'd probably have been too old to be a soldier — but it might have been a son whose birth record has been lost, or a child of one of his brothers. Interestingly, a Joseph Jacklin served in this regiment, and that was the name of Samuel's son-in-law and heir. Samuel's farm in New Canaan was only a mile or so from Westchester County, source of many of the members of the Fourth Regiment.

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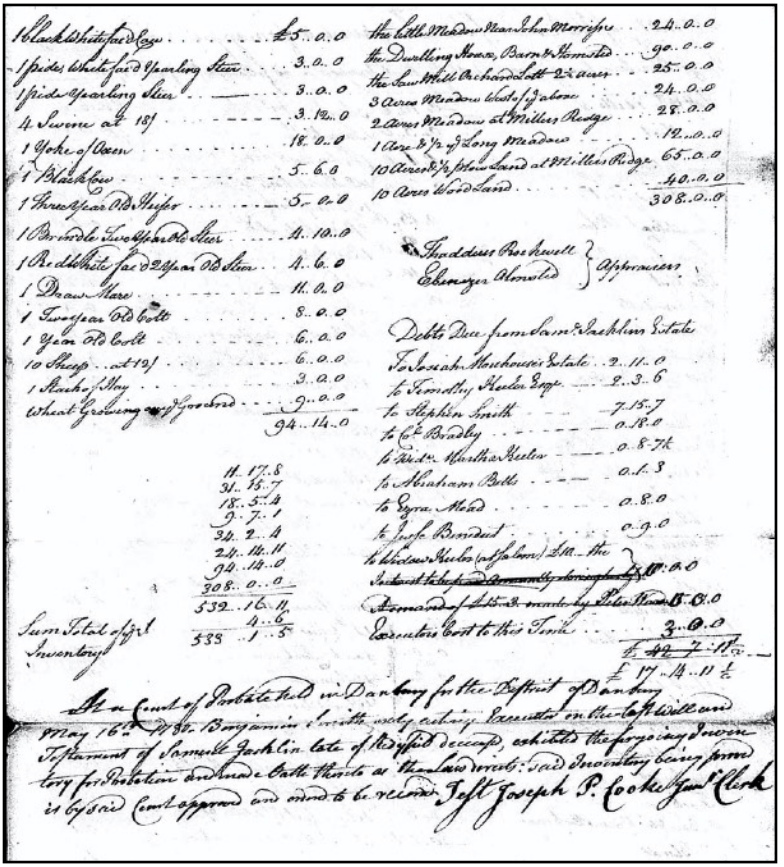
[208] *Land Records,* Vol. 1, p. 251. The announcement of a birth on the Ridgefield records doesn't mean it happened in Ridgefield. For example, the same volume on page 199 reports the birth of Seaborn Burt, son of the town's first blacksmith, Benjamin Burt, on July 4, 1706. That's two years before Ridgefield was even established. And, as his name suggests, Seaborn came into this world aboard a ship — in his case, in the Atlantic Ocean, probably off Nova Scotia or Maine.

[209] Rev. Goodrich, p.18

[210] Rose and Brown, p. 73.

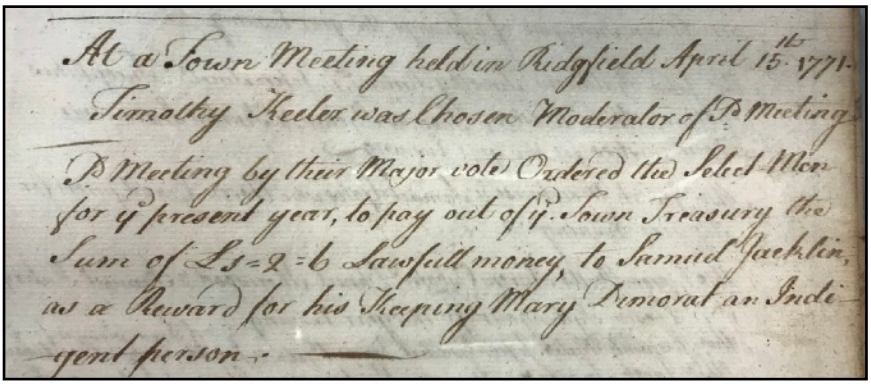
[211] *Ridgefield Land Records,* Vol. 3, p. 161.

[212] Rose and Brown, p. 73



The sixth and final page of the inventory of Samuel Jacklin's estate showed a total value of £533, one shilling and five pence — a sizable amount in 1780.

Samuel Jacklin earned a reputation as a respectable, hard-working farmer, so much so that he was mentioned, long after his death, in a church account of what the town was like at the end of the 18th Century. In his 1800 "statistical report" on Ridgefield, the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich of the First Congregational Church wrote: "About the time of the Revolution, there was a freeborn negro man who died in this town aged about 54. He was married and a member of the church in this place


At a Town Meeting held in Ridgfield April 15th 1771.
Timothy Keeler was Chosen Moderator of D Meeting
D Meeting by their Major vote Ordered the Select Men
for y present year, to pay out of y Town Treasury the
Sum of £1-2-6 Lawfull money, to Samuel Jacklin,
as a Reward for his Keeping Mary Dimorat an Indi-
gent person.

A 1771 Town Meeting votes to pay Samuel Jacklin for taking care of Mary Dimorat.

for many years, whose property was acquired by his own industry and at his decease was inventoried at more than £500. He gave the whole to an adopted son, a free molatto, who spent the whole in less than 10 years."[213] Samuel had died 20 years before Goodrich wrote this report, and six years before the minister even arrived in town, so Samuel's reputation was well known long after his death.

Jacklin apparently assisted the town government in helping others in need, and reached out to care for an indigent Black woman just before the Revolution; town fathers provided some financial assistance with her costs as was common practice in the 18th Century. On April 15, 1771, a Town Meeting authorized the Select Men "to pay out of ye Town Treasury the sum of one pound, two shillings six pence lawfull money to Samuel Jacklin as a reward for his keeping Mary Dimorat, an indigent person."[214] As we have seen in Chapter Two, Mary was more than a homeless woman; she had undoubtedly known the Jacklins for many years.

Yet, while Samuel Jacklin may have been a respected landowner in the community, he was not a "freeman" — a man who could vote. He consequently could not hold any public offices. For many years,

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[213] Rev. Goodrich, p. 18. See also Appendix C.

[214] Town Records, 1746-1797.

Connecticut had an unwritten "understanding" that Blacks, even free Blacks who owned land, could not be voters. In 1814, that restriction was made official when the Connecticut General Assembly passed a law, saying no one could be a freeman and able to hold office unless he was a white male.[215] Four years later Connecticut adopted a new Constitution that specified that only a white male could vote. Connecticut thus became the only New England state to specifically disenfranchise African Americans.[216] Blacks remained so until the nation passed the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1870 (*see Chapter 9*).

Samuel Jacklin's status is a great irony of the American Revolution, whose roots were often expressed with the simple slogan, "No taxation without representation." Hard-working, land-owning Jacklin had to pay his taxes but was unable to have a direct voice in the operation of the government that was spending those taxes. In the Massachusetts town of Dartmouth, the brothers Paul and John Cuffe, both free Blacks, refused to pay their taxes, charging that it was "taxation without representation." Their battle with the town ended in 1783 when a Massachusetts court ruled that African Americans who paid taxes were entitled to suffrage.[217] No Connecticut court was that enlightened. However, in 1851, just a few years after the General Assembly rejected a measure to let Black men vote, it passed a law exempting Blacks from paying taxes. "The message was clear," said Connecticut historian Matthew Warshauer. "The state's leaders would rather decline revenue than lift Connecticut's Black residents to a position of equality by granting them the vote."[218]

On Feb. 24, 1780, a few days before his death, Samuel Jacklin dictated his will. That and the inventory of his estate that was compiled after his death tell us a lot about the man.

That he was religious is clear from the very beginning of his will: "In the name of God, Amen, I Samuel Jacklin of Ridgefield…, be-

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[215] Rose and Brown, p. 38.

[216] Moss, Hilary, "Cast Down on Every Side," in *African American Connecticut Explored,* p. 151.

[217] *Blacks in the American Revolution*, pp. 84-85. Paul Cuffe, a shipbuilder and captain, went on to become a successful businessman, assembling a sizable fleet of commercial vessels.

[218] Warshauer, p. 27.

ing weak of body but through ye goodness of God, of sound mind, being desirous of setting my house in order before my decease…" He continues, "First of all, I give and bequeath my Soul into the Hands of Almighty God who gave it, hoping for acceptance with him thro the Merits of Jesus Christ and my Body to the Earth, believing in the Resurrection from the Dead." This was fairly standard boilerplate wording for the beginning of many wills of dedicated Christians in the 18th Century. (*For the complete text of the will, see Appendix F*.)

After ordering that his debts and funeral expenses be paid, he leaves his entire estate to his "son," Joseph Jacklin of Ridgefield. He also appoints "my trusty friends" — Benjamin Stebbins and Benjamin Smith — to be his executors. Stebbins and Smith were two of the leading citizens of Ridgefield at the time, and the fact that Jacklin considered them "trusty friends" was both touching and noteworthy. Clearly, he had become a respected part of the Ridgefield community, even though he could neither vote nor serve as a town official (both Stebbins and Smith held many of the most responsible town offices over the years).

The will and accompanying estate documents raise a question as to whether Samuel was able to read and write. In the 18th Century, many people — white and Black — were illiterate, even though as early as 1690 the Connecticut General Court ordered that "all parents and masters shall cause their respective children and servants, as they are capable, to be taught to read distinctly the English tongue, and that the grandjurymen in each town do, once in the year at least, visit each family they suspect to neglect this order, and satisfy themselves whether all children under age, and servants, in such suspected families, can read well the English tongue…" The reason for the law was so that Connecticut citizens would be able to read "the holy word of God or the good laws of this colony."[219]

In New England by the early 1760s, the literacy rate — among white men — has been estimated at 85%, but only around half that among women.[220] Samuel Jacklin signed the will with an **X**, and witnesses Matthew Keeler, Justus Olmsted and Benjamin Smith confirmed

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[219] Kendall, Edward Augustus, *Travels Through the Northern Parts of the United States*, Vol.1, New York: 1809, p. 271.

[220] Glade, Carla Olson, *Literacy in Colonial America*, Colonial Quills.Blogspot.com, 2011

that the **X** was "his mark." An **X** was often used by people who could not write. It is possible that Jacklin, who died shortly after the will was dictated, was simply too weak to sign his name.

However, it is also quite possible Jacklin knew how to read, but could not write. Only reading, not writing, was a skill required by law. Among whites who could read in the 18th Century, teaching the ability to write was often reserved for those of higher class or greater affluence.[221] Jacklin's probate records offer hints that he — or someone in his household — was able to at least read: The inventory of his possessions included "one large Bible" and a half dozen other books — among them, a "spelling book."[222]

The estate papers included an extremely detailed inventory of his property that gives a fascinating picture of a farmer's possessions — and life — in the 18th Century (*for the complete inventory, see Appendix E*). Aside from an extensive array of farming equipment, used to tend both his crops and livestock, Samuel had a well-equipped kitchen and he — or family members — appear to have been makers of not only cider, but beer and cheese. Besides tea, the standard hot beverage of colonial America, he brewed coffee, a less-common drink until after the Revolution.

Samuel Jacklin also kept bees, which required skills and knowledge that were not commonplace among the subsistence farmers of the area in the mid-18th Century. Bees provided honey in an era when sugar was expensive and highly taxed. They also made wax that was used for making candles. (Their function in pollinating crops had not yet been discovered.)

Among more than 400 items listed in Jacklin's estate were: three beehives, three pecks of salt, 20 pounds of cheese, one cowbell, three sickles and three scythes, two wooden bottles, three cider barrels and a beer cask, a saddle and harness, one pocket book, a yoke, a horse plow, a harrow, and many other farm implements and tools. He owned

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[221] A study by Kenneth Lockridge of more than 3,000 New England wills found that the percentage of men who could sign their wills was 60% in the 1660s, 85% by 1760, and almost 90% in 1790. Monaghan, E. Jennifer. "Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England," *American Quarterly,* vol. 40, no. 1, 1988, pp. 18–41.

[222] See Appendix E.

many kitchen pots, pans, bowls, jars, plates, and utensils including a coffee pot and a teapot, three tea cups and six tea spoons. He had the usual tables, chairs, chests, and other household furnishings, plus a "looking glass" — somewhat of a luxury in the 18th Century.

His clothing included a half dozen pairs of "trowsers," most of them white; four vests — brown, blue, green, and striped; various other apparel including gloves, boots and hats; and two pair of spectacles. He also left 250 Continental dollars (valued for the estate at £1, 17 shillings and 6 pence), plus £1, 18 shillings and 7 pence in cash.

Besides the "large Bible," he had a psalm book, a book of meditations, the spelling book, two "pamphlets" (probably religious), and three other books whose nature was not described. It is possible these had belonged to someone else in the family, maybe his wife.

Among his most valuable possessions were his livestock, including a "black and white faced cow" (worth £5), three steers, a yoke of oxen (£18), four swine, a black cow, a three-year-old heifer, a draw mare, a two-year-old colt and a year-old colt, 10 sheep, and six geese.

His house, barn and homestead were valued at £90. He also owned 10 acres of "good plowland" at Millers Ridge worth £65, 10 acres of woodland, plus various meadows, for a total of £308 worth of real estate.

In all, his estate was valued at £533. That, according to one authority, is roughly equal to about $100,000 today, a substantial sum for 1780 Ridgefield.[223] He left only £17 in debts.

Comparing the value of money then and now is difficult. Money values in the last half of the 18th Century fluctuated widely and wildly, especially in the brand new United States of America. However, the probate evidence indicates Samuel Jacklin was worth as much or more than the average white farmer of his day in Ridgefield and far more than most free Blacks living in Fairfield County.

No record of where Samuel Jacklin was buried has been found. Since his wife, Sarah, is not mentioned in the will, she had probably died before 1780. There is no record of her death in Ridgefield or New Canaan. Samuel — and perhaps Sarah — may be buried among the

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[223] Nye, Eric W., *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency*, accessed Thursday, June 20, 2019, www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm.

town's early residents in Titicus Cemetery, many of whose old gravestones have deteriorated beyond identification or have totally disappeared.

Joseph Jacklin, to whom he left his entire estate, was himself an interesting man, though perhaps not exactly industrious.

The 'Adopted' Son

The Rev. Samuel Goodrich had described Joseph Jacklin as Samuel's "adopted son," but he was probably more than that: He seems to have been Samuel's son-in-law.

In 1749, "Joseph, son-in-law of Samuel Jacklin," was baptized by a Congregational minister in Pound Ridge, N.Y.[224] Pound Ridge was just north of Canaan, the Norwalk parish where Samuel and his father, Robert Sr., had farms. Unfortunately, the record offers no clue as to Joseph's original surname or his age — except that he was probably an adult — or why his father-in-law was named, and not his parents. It could be because Joseph's parents had died or that they had abandoned him. Or it may be because Samuel — but not Joseph's parents — were members of the Congregational church, and that Samuel had sponsored his baptism as a congregant.

In 1777, a Joseph Jacklin was a member of a local militia unit called Horton's Company of Guards, part of a regiment of state militia under Col. Levi Pawling. Records show he was from Salem — now Lewisboro — in Westchester County, which borders Pound Ridge, New Canaan and Ridgefield.[225] This was probably Samuel's son-in-law.

Ridgefield records report Joseph took the "oath of fidelity to the State of Connecticut" in 1782, swearing that he was not a loyalist and that he was in full support of the revolution.[226] Taking that oath entitled him to obtain a portion of Ridgefield's allotment of salt, a valuable

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[224] *Connecticut. Church Records Index*, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut, p. 378. New York churches or chapels near the Connecticut line were often served by Connecticut-based ministers.

[225] National Archives. Horton's Company of Guards, 1777-1778 (Folder 117) - Pawling´s Reg of Militia, 1776-1777 (Folder 135)

[226] Town Book of Records, 1746-1797.

commodity that was being parceled out by the town fathers, but only to those loyal to the cause. If any other male Jacklins were still in town, they are not recorded as having taken the oath. (Presumably, any Jacklin who fought in the Continental Army didn't need to take an oath of loyalty.)

Samuel's inventory, compiled May 16, 1780, included £9 worth of wheat "growing in the ground." That suggests someone — probably Joseph — was keeping the farm going since the wheat would have had to have been planted after Samuel's death in February, but well before the May 16 inventory. Considering that £9 was worth as much as a cow and a young steer combined, the inventory suggests a lot of wheat was growing and that much work had been put into planting it.

Joseph held onto the farm for several years, apparently disposing of the various tracts of land gradually, though no records of the sales were filed with the town. He is shown on tax lists until 1785, when his property was assessed at £22. Four years earlier, the assessment had been £55, and it dropped each year, suggesting that Joseph was selling off his holdings or they were being taken from him to settle tax or other debts.[227] Goodrich's wording in describing Joseph hints that he may have frittered away the farm. After 1785 Joseph disappeared from the Ridgefield records.

He may have continued to live and work in the town for a while as a laborer on farms. He might have been the quick-witted worker mentioned by prolific author Samuel G. Goodrich ("Peter Parley"), the minister's son, in his 1856 autobiography.[228] In a profile of General Joshua King, a perhaps somewhat haughty man who was at the top of the social ladder in Ridgefield, Goodrich wrote:

> *It is related that one day [King] came into the field where his men were haying. A thunder-storm was approaching, and he commanded the laborers in a tone of authority to do this and that, thus requiring in fact what was impossible. Jaklin, an old negro, noted for his dry wit, being present, said in an under-tone:*
>
> *"I'm thankful the Lord reigns."*

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[227] *ibid*.

[228] Goodrich, S. G., *Recollections of A Lifetime*, Hartford, 1856, vol. 1, p. 245

"Why so?" said a bystander.
"Because," was the reply, "if the Lord didn't reign,
the Gineral would!"

His much younger "sister" Elisabeth was married in Ridgefield in 1784 to yet another veteran of the Revolutionary War — that may have been the point at which Joseph decided to move on to new horizons.

His eventual destination may have been central New York. In 1800, a Joseph Jacklin was living in Kortright, Delaware County, N.Y.,[229] a recently established township, many of whose first settlers were from Connecticut.[230] The U.S. Census that year indicates there were seven people in his household.[231] By 1803 he had taxable property there worth $144, which was about average for landowners in Kortright.[232] Thus, Joseph Jacklin may have joined the post-war, westward migration.

A Jacklin Weds A Veteran

A freed slave who served in the Revolution and became a prominent Redding farmer married into the Jacklin family on June 24, 1784, in Ridgefield. Four years after her father had died, Elisabeth Jacklin, daughter of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin, married Jack Freeman of Redding.[233] She was about 25 years old, he about 31.

Freeman started life enslaved, living in Fairfield, Newtown and finally Redding. In his book, *The Revolutionary Soldiers of Redding*, William Edgar Grumman reported in 1904, "A colored soldier, known as

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[229] Reel 22, 1800 Federal Census of New York, Microfilm Series M32; National Archives, Washington, DC.; Pg. 286

[230] French, J.H., *Gazetteer of the State of New York,* R. Pearsal Smith, 1861, p. 262. Among the original settling families were Keelers from Ridgefield.

[231] 1800 Census Place: Kortright, Delaware, New York; Series: M32; Roll: 22; Page: 1316; Image: 380; Family History Library Film: 193710

[232] New York Comptroller's Office. Tax Assessment Rolls of Real and Personal Estates, 1799–1804. Series B0950 (26 reels). Microfilm. New York State Archives, Albany, N.Y..

[233] Ridgefield Vital Records, Book 1., p.154.

'Major' Jack Freeman, once lived in town."[234] Grumman did not know in what company Freeman had served in the war, but offered a guess that was incorrect. He was unaware of Freeman's full story.

A recent book, *"They Were Good Soldiers,"* focuses on pension records of many Blacks in the Revolution, and reveals that Jack Freeman was a soldier who, in the war, was known as Jack Rowland.[235] How this name change happened has been officially recorded, an uncommon case of such documentation and one that demonstrates a frequent problem with tracing the histories of African Americans in the 18th Century.

In 1833, Jack Freeman, an aged Black farmer, decided to apply for a federal pension then being offered to any veteran of the Revolutionary War, not just those who were destitute as was the case with the 1818 pension. To do this, he applied through the Probate Court for the District of Danbury, which included Redding and Ridgefield.

To apply, he sought help from his neighbor William Sanford, son of his former owner Hezekiah Sanford, who had died in 1798. (Hezekiah was a brother of Ezekiel Sanford, Freeman's captain in the army.) William provided testimony in Freeman's favor.

In his application Freeman said he served in Capt. Ezekiel Sanford's Company of the Fifth Continental Regiment. However, the federal officials rejected his initial request because no record of a Jack Freeman could be found in Capt. Sanford's Company.

When William Sanford questioned Freeman about this, he discovered what was wrong and submitted more detailed information with Freeman's second application.

For most of his life, Jack Freeman had been known simply as Jack.[236] In January 1777, he joined the Fifth Connecticut Regiment, possibly as a substitute for his master, with the understanding that he would be emancipated as a result of his service. Soon after he enlisted, he met

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[234] Grumman, William Edgar, *The Revolutionary Soldiers of Redding, Connecticut, and the Record of Their Services*, Hartford: The Hartford Press, 1904, p.135

[235] Rees, John U., *'They Were Good Soldiers': African-Americans Serving in the Continental Army, 1775-1783*, Warwick, England: Helion & Co., 2019

[236] Jack may have been an Anglicization of an African word, Quok or *Quaku*, a name often given to boys born on Wednesday. Egerton, p. 93 and 175.

with his leader, Capt. Ezekiel Sanford, who felt that Jack needed a full name for his military records. While the last name of a slave's master was often used in such cases, Capt. Sanford — to avoid confusion or maybe even to avoid being associated with slavery — recommended that Jack not be known as Jack Sanford.

The captain then asked Jack who had owned him before Hezekiah Sanford.

"One Rowland of Fairfield," Jack replied.

"Then you shall be called Jack Rowland!" Capt. Sanford said.

Freeman's reporting of his previous owner as Rowland is odd since, in another testimony, he does not mention being owned by a Rowland, only a Burritt, in Fairfield.

William asked Jack whether he knew he had been called Jack Rowland in the regiment.

"Yes, I know I was," he replied.

"Why did you not tell of … this before?" William asked.

"I did not think any thing about it," Jack Freeman replied. "I have been called Jack Freeman so long."[237]

The incident reveals both how ex-slaves were often named, and as a consequence, a difficulty in researching their histories. As we have seen many times, enslaved Blacks in Connecticut often were given only one name by their owners. When they became free — as Jack did via his service in the Revolution — they almost always chose a full name. Jack did not want to be named for a former master and instead chose Jack Freeman, a surname selected by many former slaves who wanted to express their newly earned status. (Other surnames chosen by freed Connecticut slaves included Freedom and Liberty. One man even named himself simply Free.[238])

Nonetheless, many ex-slaves chose the family name of their former master. Capt. Ezekiel Sanford knew this, which is probably why he suggested Jack Rowland. However, as soon as he was officially free and out of the Army, Jack abandoned "Rowland" in favor of a name he liked.

The National Archives contain a description of William San-

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[237] National Archives, pension reel 2093, as cited in Rees, p. 155.

[238] Quarles, *Revolution*, pp. 51-2.

ford's 1834 deposition given with the help of Freeman to obtain his pension.

> *He was born in Fairfield March 1753. His age is received from his Master Hezekiah Sanford, who kept a record. He was born the slave of one Burritt...At the age of seven years he was purchased by Jonathan Booth of Newtown. He lived [there] in servitude until he became of the age of thirteen years when he was purchased by Hezekiah Sanford and serv'd him until he entered the service of the United States of America in the month of January 1777. He enlisted for the term of during the War in the Company commanded by Captain Ezekiel Sanford in the [5th Connecticut] Regiment commanded by Colonel Philip Bradley. On the 1st day of June 1777 he joined the said Regiment at Crump Pond, New York, and from thence marched south with said Regiment to Peekskill on the Hudson River where he continued [to] serve with the Continental Troops there, then under the command of General McDougal, until the month of September when he marched south [to Pennsylvania]. He was engaged in the battle of Germantown in the month of October, afterwards marched to Philadelphia from thence into Winter quarters at Valley Forge. He participated with the rest of the Army in all the hardships and distress endured by the soldiers during that memorable winter. On the opening of the spring the said Regiment was marched to Princeton. There he was discharged under the following circumstances — Having enlisted as aforesaid, he was by the laws of Connecticut, emancipated, and being sick, enfeebled and desirous of returning home he agreed with his former master through Captain Ezekiel Sanford, who was a Brother of Hezekiah, that notwithstanding he was emancipated, he would labor in his service for the term of three years, if his said master would employ or procure a substitute. His*

> *master did procure such substitute to enlist in his stead."*[239]

William Sanford added to Freeman's account with his own sworn statement:

> *I, William Sanford of Redding, say that Jack, a coloured Man (a slave to my Father), enlisted in the United States service under Capt. Ezekiel Sanford & that he went of[f] in the spring 1777 & that he was gone one year. Sd. Capt. came home in the course of the year & told how home sick Jack was & wanted his old Master to hire a Man in his room & he would come back and be a good slave. My Father did hire a Man I understood took his place. Jack came home & served I think three years for his freedom."*[240]

Freeman's testimony to Sanford summarizes his war service to include the Battle of Germantown and the winter at Valley Forge. It is interesting that while Freeman's testimony says he was "sick enfeebled and desirous of returning home," William Sanford just says he was "home sick." This may have been William's interpretation of Jack's condition, but in view of the many casualties that the winter at Valley Forge caused — previously described in the account of Ebenezer Jacklin's service — his sickness may have been much more than psychological.

Additional testimony was given by Abraham Adams, who served in the same company with Freeman and who stated, "I am well acquainted with Jack Freeman of the Town of Redding, a colored man, and know that said Freeman served in the Revolution in the year 1777 & 78, this deponent seeing him dayly all the time I was there, which was six months."[241]

Stephen Jackson, Joel Foster and Walker Bates of Redding all stated that Freeman "is a man of good character for veracity, and that we fully believe that he served in the Revolutionary War."

The archives contain yet another testimony, worded very much

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[239] National Archives pension reel 2093, Jack Freeman, (S17058)

[240] *ibid*.

[241] *ibid*.

like the others, from Jeremiah Mead of Ridgefield, who served alongside Freeman in Capt. Sanford's company. In a strange twist of fate, his 1833 affidavit was witnessed and signed by a Ridgefield justice of the peace named Philip Burr Bradley, the very same man who, as a colonel, had commanded the Fifth Connecticut Regiment in which Mead and Freeman had served. It is likely Col. Bradley had little recollection of Rowland/Freeman — as noted earlier, he did not know what had happened to another Black soldier in his regiment named Jack Congo.[242]

The pension records also contain a sworn statement from the Rev. Jonathan Bartlett, pastor of the Congregational Church in Redding, as well as Benjamin Meeker, a resident of the town, certifying "that we are well acquainted with Jack Freeman who has subscribed and sworn in the above declaration; that we believe him to be eighty years of age; that he is reputed and believed, in the neighbourhood where he resides, to have been a soldier of the revolution, and that we concur in that opinion."

Jack Freeman signed the new court documents in 1834 with an **X**, typical of most Blacks and many white men of the era who could not write. (Abraham Adams, a prominent white Redding farmer who supported Freeman's pension, also signed his name with an **X**.)

Freeman had begun applying for his pension in 1832; approval took two years. The fact that he did not apply for the 1818 pension, aimed at those in poverty, suggests that he may have been a successful farmer in Redding at that time. The infirmities of old age may have prompted him to seek the well-deserved pension at the remarkable age of 80.

So how did Jack Freeman and Elisabeth Jacklin meet and become a couple? An inspection of National Archives' records of Capt. Ezekiel Sanford's company reveals that both Freeman and Ebenezer Jacklin served together in that outfit, including spending the awful winter of 1778 at Valley Forge. Ebenezer was a son of Robert Jacklin, the New Patent/Ridgebury settler who was a brother of Samuel Jacklin, the Flat Rock farmer and the father of Elisabeth. Ebenezer probably introduced Jack to cousin Elisabeth.

After the wedding Elisabeth Jacklin moved to Freeman's home in Redding. There she had at least five children: Anne, 1785; Ebenezer,

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[242] See p. 74-76.

1786; Charles, 1790; Thaddeus, 1793; Nancy, 1797. Anne, Ebenezer and Thaddeus are probably named after Jacklin family members from Ridgefield — Anne being an aunt, Thaddeus a cousin, and Ebenezer, the cousin who probably introduced her to Jack.

In the Redding records of their children's births, the parents are identified as John and Elizabeth Freeman,[243] and all documents filed in connection with their property call them John and Elizabeth. He was also called John when he and Elisabeth were "christened and taken into the Episcopal Church in Redding" on June 18, 1785.[244] "Jack" was apparently considered too informal for official Redding records!

The Sanford family that once owned Jack Freeman did more than provide support for his pension. The Freemans appear to have started out their marriage living on and working farmland owned by the Sanfords. By 1802, they were buying portions of this land — interestingly enough, Elisabeth was the first purchaser, acquiring eight acres from Stephen Jackson, who later would attest to Jack's integrity; Jackson had just recently bought the acreage from Capt. Ezekiel Sanford, who had been Jack's commanding officer in the Fifth.[245] And in 1806, when Jack bought the house in which he and Elisabeth had been living, along with four acres, the seller was William Sanford, son of his former master and the man who, a quarter century later, would help Jack get his federal pension.[246]

In his history of Newtown's slaves, Daniel Cruson observes that it was quite common for a recently freed slave "to settle close by their former master, often buying land from him."[247] Many probably worked for the people who once "owned" them.

Bruce Nelson, a town historian of Redding, places the Freeman farm in the vicinity of the four-road intersection of Route 107 (Redding

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[243] *Redding Vital Records*, p. 94.

[244] Connecticut. Church Records Index, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut, Vol. 4, p. 2. Nonetheless, it was a Congregational minister who in 1834 testified to Jack's character when he was applying for the pension.

[245] *Redding Land Records,* Vol. 6, p. 414.

[246] *ibid*., Vol. 7, p. 214.

[247] Cruson, *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County,* p. 34.

Road), Peaceable Street, Umpawaug Road, and Goodsell Hill Road.[248]

By all accounts, Jack Freeman was well respected among both whites and Blacks in and around Redding. Although Charles Burr Todd's 1907 edition of *History of Redding* ignores Freeman, regional historian D. Hamilton Hurd described him in 1881 as "an aged colored man, better known as 'Governor' — a title which he received from the fact of his being the acknowledged governor of the colored inhabitants of the state. He every summer, on the recurrence of Saint Cuffee's Day, called out his subjects for inspection and review."[249] Hurd is known to have exaggerated various reports and that's no doubt the case here. Many African Americans in Massachusetts and Connecticut from the mid-1700s into the mid-1800s engaged in an annual tradition of electing Black "governors," leaders in their communities — not necessarily the state as a whole (although especially in the 18th Century the election of the Black 'governor' of Connecticut was a major event that included a sizable campaigning, a parade, fancy dress, and elaborate ceremonies[250]). These unofficial Black governors were selected in many towns throughout the state, though there is no record of the tradition in Ridgefield.[251]

When he and Elisabeth were buying land, Jack Freeman took out mortgages with their son, Ebenezer. For instance, in 1806, he took a $59.48 mortgage with Ebenezer on the home-lot he bought the same day for $42.[252] Ebenezer, who was only 20 years old when he loaned this money to his father, would provide him with another mortgage loan in 1823.[253]

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[248] Email correspondence, Jan. 16, 2020.

[249] Hurd, D. Hamilton, *History of Fairfield County*, Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1881, p. 599.

[250] Greene, p. 249ff. Piersen devotes two whole chapters, 10 and 11, to Black Kings and Governors, observing that while many historians and contemporaries have assumed that African Americans were imitating the masters' ways by electing governors, the annual celebration and the rituals used for it were actually based on ancient African traditions. To some degree, Blacks were satirizing whites with their elaborate ceremonies, not mimicking them, he says.

[251] "Connecticut's Black Governors," History and Genealogy Unit, Connecticut State Library, Feb. 2005, published on MuseumofCTHistory.com.

[252] Redding Land Records, Vol. 7, p. 215.

[253] *ibid*., Vol. 10, p. 234.

Son Thaddeus of Redding was also known to lend money. In 1830, he gave a mortgage for $83 to Nehemiah Mead 2nd on four acres in the Bennett's Farm district of Ridgefield.[254] How or why he connected with Mead has not been determined; perhaps he was related to Jeremiah Mead, the comrade in the Connecticut Fifth who later testified in his behalf for the pension. However, what is more interesting about Thaddeus is his marriage in 1821 to Sophia Phillips of New Milford[255] — the same town where his namesake cousin, Revolutionary War veteran Thaddeus Jacklin, lived, and where Thaddeus Jacklin married a woman named Hulda Phillips, no doubt related to Sophia. Thaddeus Jacklin was Thaddeus Freeman's first cousin, once removed. Had he met Sophia at a family gathering in New Milford — or in Redding?

According to the federal pension records, Jack Freeman died Feb. 1, 1839, a month short of his 86th birthday. There is no local record of his death, nor that of Elisabeth, and there is also no record of their burial places. The surviving Freemans apparently left Redding around that time, perhaps moving west.

Even though he was a Revolutionary War veteran who had earned his freedom, bought a farm, joined a church, and became a well-liked member of the Redding community, Jack Freeman did not win the respect of all. Perhaps presaging of his surname problems with gaining a pension, the 1810 U.S. Census taker in Redding recorded his name as "Jack a Negro."[256]

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[254] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 14, p.79.

[255] Barbour, *Town Marriage Records Pre-1870*, p. 88

[256] This is cited by Rosivach, p. 276, in noting that Jack was one of only three Black "heads of households" in Redding in 1810.

Chapter 6
19th Century Slavery, War, & Suffrage

In the year 1800, Ridgefield's 2,025 inhabitants included 2,000 whites and 25 Blacks, of whom 19 were free and six enslaved.[257] Twenty years later, in 1820, there were no slaves and 28 free Blacks in a town of 2,301 people, according to that year's census.[258] (*See Appendix K for the town's African-American population from 1757 to 1900.*)

By the middle of the century, Ridgefield's minority population had hardly changed. In 1850, the town's population of 2,237 consisted of 2,208 whites and 29 people of color.[259] Ten years later, however, while the total population had continued a gradual decline to 2,213, the number of people of color had risen to 51. Thus in the 10 years before the Civil War, the percentage of the minority population nearly doubled, from 1.3% to 2.3%. That was the highest percentage of Blacks that a federal census in Ridgefield has ever found — in 2020, Ridgefield's African-American population was 1% (the non-white population was 7.3%, which included 4.8% Asian).

It is uncertain why the non-white population rose so much in a short period between 1850 and 1860, but it may have been related to the fact that many of Connecticut's young, white families were moving west as new lands with better soils opened up to farming. The white population was declining and with it, the white labor pool. African Americans were available to fill the need for farm workers. Some may have been from families of recently freed slaves from other states; others may have grown up in nearby cities and looked to the countryside for work. A few may even have been former slaves who'd fled the South.

In 1860, roughly half of the 51 non-whites were from Black families named Riley, Brown, and Gall, and most of them were farmers,

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[257] 1800 *Federal Census Ridgefield, Fairfield, Connecticut*; Series: M32; Roll: 1; Page: 74; Image: 47; Family History Library Film: 205618.

[258] Bedini, Silvio, *Ridgefield in Review*, Ridgefield, 1958, p. 148.

[259] *1850 Census, Ridgefield, Fairfield, Connecticut;* Roll: 37; Page: 182. The town's non-white population included at least Sandwich Island native whose race was listed as "copper."

farm hands or domestics. Almost all of the male African Americans living in Ridgefield in the first half of the 19th Century were farm hands; most of the women were domestics in white households, and they lived on the farms or in the houses of white families.

There were a couple of notable exceptions. One, the Armstrongs, will be discussed in Chapter 7. Another was the family of Lewis Riley, who appears to be the only Black man recorded as having owned a farm in Ridgefield in the first half of the 19th Century.

In 1833, Riley purchased the house of John Bates, along with an acre of land, and soon after bought additional acreage from Harry Gilbert and others.[260] The acquisitions of just the house and two acres cost him $275 — about $77,000 in 2021 dollars, a substantial sum in those days. However, Riley had help; he signed mortgages with John Bates and with Abner Gilbert for a total of $220. While the purchase of a home was a significant and unusual event for a 19th Century Black family in Ridgefield, even in Fairfield County, perhaps almost as noteworthy is the fact that Riley had earned the respect of his fellow townsmen to the degree that two of them would loan him substantial sums. African Americans in 19th Century Connecticut were not often able to get credit because whites distrusted their ability to repay loans. However, the same whites were offering Blacks few lucrative jobs; employment that was available was at very low pay, making it difficult for Blacks to shoulder the burden of debt.)

Riley's ancestry is unknown. He was born around 1785 in Rye, N.Y.,[261] and was living in Ridgefield by 1820 when he appears under the name of Lewis Ryley as the head of a household that included three children under 14, two adults — he and his wife, Rosannah (sometimes written Roseannah), and one person over the age of 45 who may have been a parent of his or of Rosannah. Interestingly, this census entry appears on the line above that of Ned Armstrong, the Underground Railroad station master discussed in the next chapter, who spent much of his life in Ridgebury. Riley may have lived in the same compound on Ned's Mountain where the Armstrongs resided and assisted fleeing slaves. And

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[260] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 15, pp. 11 and 36.

[261] Ridgefield Vital Records, Vol. 3A, p. 26. His birthplace appears in the record of his second marriage, to Jane Shewit, in 1856.

there he may have met his second wife.

By the 1830 census, when his record is labeled simply "Riley — Negro," Lewis appears to have moved east in town to the vicinity of today's intersection of U.S. Route 7 with Connecticut Route 35 where the Bates and Gilbert families lived. Three years later he bought his homestead in this neighborhood. His family consisted of himself, Roseannah, a baby daughter Malvina, and son George Helon Riley, a young teenager. Here the Rileys probably operated a small subsistence farm while working for white farmers nearby.

Rosannah Riley died in 1851, about 65 years old. Five years later Lewis married a Danbury woman named Jane Shewit, who was 46. He was 71 at the time and his occupation was listed as "laborer" on the marriage record.[262] However, at 71, Lewis was probably not doing much laboring, and perhaps married a woman 25 years younger than he was as a way of assuring that he would be cared for in his declining years. In return she may have gotten an interest in his property, although no documentation of this has been found. Lewis died three years later, in 1859. A year after that, the 1860 census indicates his son George and George's wife, Martha Ann, and their children John W., 7, Joshua, 4, and David H.[263], 1, along with Martha's mother, Sally Ann Knapp, may have been living in the homestead.

Lewis's widow, Jane, went to work for Peter B. Cornen, an oil tycoon who lived at Danbury and Farmingville Roads in Ridgefield and was probably the richest man in town in the mid-19th Century. The 1870 Ridgefield census lists her occupation there as a domestic.

Intriguingly, that census reports that 60-year-old "Jane Ryley" was a native of Virginia, raising the possibility that Jane may have been born enslaved and might have fled her home state. Perhaps she had spent time with the Armstrongs, who were known for aiding runaway slaves, and there got to know her future husband, who had lived in the immediate Ridgebury neighborhood. Some support for this theory may be found in a family tradition handed down for generations of Riley descendants, including Bonnie Johnson of Maryland. "My grandmother Lillian Riley, great-granddaughter of Lewis Riley, told me a story about a runaway

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[262] *ibid*.

[263] For what happened to David, see Chapter 9.

Martha Ann Knapp Riley, Lewis and Roseannah's daughter in law, gave them nine grandchildren. The earliest known picture of an African American Ridgefielder, this may date from the 1850s. —Collection of Bonnie Johnson

slave in the family," she reported in 2021. "Her name was Jane. Perhaps the same person?"[264]

Lewis and Rosannah founded a sizable family in western Connecticut. They themselves seem to have had only two children. However, while Malvina died unmarried in 1849 of typhoid fever, their son George Helon Riley and his wife, nee Martha Ann Knapp, had nine offspring, a number of whom settled in Danbury and New Milford.

One of those nine had a short, sad life, which included a marriage that generated headlines across the country in 1889, illustrating late-19th Century white hostility to interracial marriage. Amos Riley was born just across the Ridgefield border in Lewisboro, N.Y., in 1869, and a year later, was living in Ridgefield. By the age of 11, he was already out earning a living, working as a servant and

[264] Email correspondence. Ms. Johnson has been compiling a genealogical history of her family. She also recalls being told that Jane "had children with several different men." Thus, Shewit may have been a name from a past husband and not related to her enslaved name.

farm hand for the Benjamin Stebbins family in Pawling, N.Y., along with his 17-year-old sister, Harriet, a domestic for the Stebbinses. In 1889, when he was 20 years old, Amos married Sarah Anna Knapp, 15, in Brewster, N.Y. Sarah was white. Research done by Terrie Roese into the Riley family reveals that the marriage drew widespread attention, not only because it involved miscegenation, but also because a few weeks earlier, Sarah's older sister had also married a Black man.

An account in the *Meriden Journal* described the events under the headline, "Two Cases of Miscegenation":

> *A few weeks ago Deborah Knapp, a pretty white girl of Danbury, eloped with Frank Treadwell, a colored youth. Last week, Deborah's sister, younger than she and much prettier, left her home and met Amos Riley, negro, who is a waiter in a restaurant here. The pair went to Brewster, N.Y., where they were married by a clergyman whose name they refused to give. They are now keeping house together in Griffin's Lane in this city, and their married life is not at all pleasant, as the dusky belles in that neighborhood make it warm for the "white trash."*[265]

This story was carried in newspapers as far west as South Dakota, under such headings as "Like the Negro," "What Ails the Women. Wholesale Miscegenation at Danbury, Connecticut," "Both Sisters Eloped with Negroes," and "In the Land of Steady Habits."[266]

Amos and Sarah moved to Ridgefield, and there had a daughter, Nellie, on Feb. 19, 1890. Nine months later, Amos died of typhoid fever in Danbury where he had been working for a hotel. He was only 21 years old, and his widow, 17. After Amos's death, Sarah became a laundress in Danbury. Her daughter, Nellie, died in 1905 at the age of 15. By 1930, Sarah was still living in Danbury, working as a maid in a hotel. She died in 1948 and is buried at Wooster Cemetery in Danbury.

Rosannah had died in 1851 at the age of 65. Lewis died eight years later. They are buried together along with their children, Malvina and George (d. 1873), and their daughter-in-law, Martha Ann Riley (d.

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[265] The Journal, Meriden, Connecticut, 10 May 1889 entitled,

[266] Roese, Terrie, "The Rileys," research paper, 2021, p. 4

1888), at the Lower Starrs Plain Cemetery, only about a quarter mile from their Ridgefield home. Also buried there are at least two of their grandchildren, including James H. Riley (1849-1921) and David H. Riley, whose tragic life will be discussed in Chapter Nine.

Racial Issues

How did the majority of antebellum white Ridgefielders feel about Blacks, slavery and abolition? It's difficult to say with certainty. The town had no newspaper and coverage of the community by area and regional newspapers was very sketchy, focused chiefly on sensational deaths, crimes or lurid scandals. Official town records don't address the subject — slaves and slavery had virtually disappeared from Ridgefield by 1810. Nonetheless, clues suggest the majority of Ridgefielders at least opposed slavery. Certainly, some of the most outspoken residents did so. However, townspeople were probably not at all ready to accept the concept of Black equality with whites, and the majority undoubtedly opposed Black suffrage.

The state as a whole was deeply split as to how the white population felt about African Americans. Many people today believe that Connecticut was an anti-slavery stronghold that had always supported Blacks in their quest for freedom and equality. After all, the state is in New England, home of many leading abolitionists. And in 1839, Connecticut people gave assistance and support to the slaves who revolted and took over the *La Amistad*, a schooner whose crew had kidnapped them from Africa.

But Connecticut was also the state that violently quashed Prudence Crandall's attempt to open a private school for Black women, with even the General Assembly declaring: "Whether bond or free, the negro and 'his kind' have ever been blots on the fair face of civilized society, and corroding cancers to a free State."[267] At least 46 pro-slavery organizations existed in the state in the 1830s.[268]

In 1839, the same year as the *La Amistad* incident, a proposal to allow free Black men to vote was rejected by a committee of the General

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[267] Warshauer, p. 22.

[268] *ibid*., p. 25.

Assembly, which defended its action by saying that since "the colored population is regarded as a distinct and inferior race, the proposition to admit them to a full participation of political power can be regarded in no other light than a proposition to promote by legislation an equality in social condition between the races."[269]

Racist expressions in Connecticut were hardly limited to politicians. No less than Thomas Day, the editor of the *Hartford Courant*, considered the leading newspaper in the state for much of the 20th Century, wrote an 1856 editorial, "Sam and Sambo," trying to explain why many Nutmeggers like himself opposed allowing slavery to expand into the new territories in the West:

> *"It is not because we feel any burning zeal in the black man's cause that we resist the progress of slavery in this country. We like the white man better than we do the black. We believe the Caucasian variety of the human species superior to the Negro variety….Color is not the trouble; thick lips and wooly hair are not the objections. It is that the Caucasian variety is intrinsically a better breed, of better brain, better moral traits, better capacity in every way, than the Negro, or the Mongolian, or the Malay, or the Red American."*[270]

Many no doubt agreed. And outside observers could see the prejudice. In *Democracy in America*, a two-volume account of his travels in the United States in the early 1830s, French historian and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville wrote: "In that part of the Union where the Negroes are no longer slaves, have they come closer to the whites? Everyone who has lived in the United States will have noticed just the opposite. Race prejudice seems stronger in those states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists…"[271]

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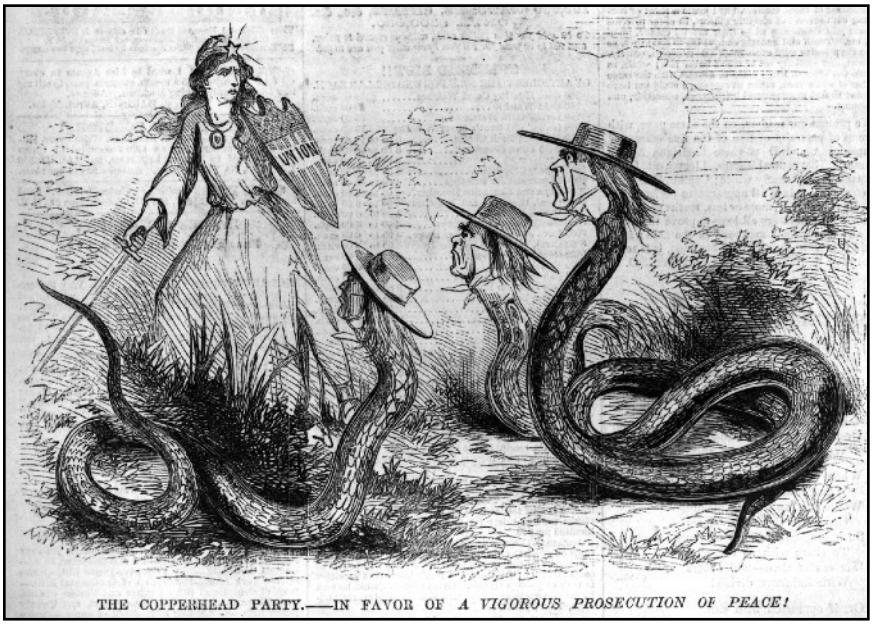
[269] *ibid*, p. 25.

[270] Day, Thomas, "Sam and Sambo," *The Hartford Courant*, March 6, 1856.

[271] Cited in Delbanco, p. 129.



Connecticut Democrats, or "Copperheads," supported slavery in the South and opposed the war. Ridgefield voted Republican before and during the war; many towns backed Democrats.
—Harper's, 1863

Local Protests and Gunshots

By 1850, attitudes were starting to change. A new party was forming in Connecticut to oppose the Democrats, who in the antebellum years strongly supported the South and its right to use slave labor. Many statements by Democratic leaders on behalf of their party were flat-out racist, and the state's Democrats by the end of the decade were supporting the South's right to secede from the Union and were opposing the Civil War, as well as any efforts to free the slaves in the South. After the war started, they continued to voice vehement opposition to the conflict, much to the distress of many Connecticut soldiers who were on the front lines, fighting the Confederates.

Supporters of the South and of ending the war were often called secessionists, copperheads, or even "dirty heads." Backers of the war, mostly Republicans, were labeled abolitionists, loyalists, federals, or just Yankees. Both sides were not averse to displaying their feelings. For Independence Day in 1851, 14 men, mostly members of the newly formed American Flag Company in Ridgefield, contributed $33 to buy a 14-by-10-foot flag, which was flown from a pole erected on Main Street to protest slavery.

Skirmishes occasionally broke out. After the Confederate victory at the first Battle of Bull Run July 21, 1861, a Ridgefield man who publicly cheered the Southern success was drenched at the village pump and forced to swear a patriotic oath under an American flag.[272]

A more dramatic confrontation — involving a "secessionist flag" and gunshots — had occurred two months earlier in Ridgefield, on May 2, 1861, just a few weeks after the war began. Accounts of the incident in newspapers from Boston to New York and beyond varied quite a bit on the details, reflecting their Republican or Democratic editorial leanings. The basic facts seem to be that someone raised a "peace flag" to express opposition to the war and support for negotiating with the South. Two men tore it down and both were shot.

The pro-South accounts, such as that of the *Columbian Register* in New Haven, offered one version: "A party of young men visited the premises of Buttery, and tore down his 'secession' flag. The owner stood in the door and offered no resistance. After the feat had been accomplished, two or three approached the house, and Buttery retreated inside, and closed the door. The party then beat the door, when Buttery discharged a shot gun, the charge taking effect upon Abram Nash and one Fowler."

The *Columbian Register* added, "It is probable that Abram, and his friend Fowler, will be likely to remember that it is not good manners to kick in the doors of another man's house."[273]

A week later the newspaper updated the report to describe the "secession flag" as "an American flag, with the Stars and Stripes, an eagle, and the picture of Washington on it, with the year it was made

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[272] Warshauer, p. 59.

[273] *Columbian Register*, New Haven, Conn., May 18, 1861, p. 1

(1857), and also Independence wrote in large letters. It was made to hoist on the Fourth of July, four years ago." It goes on to comment, "there is nothing so very objectionable about that. It will be remembered that the rowdies who tore it down, battered down the door of the owner's house, and got shot for their pains. All things considered they were served about right. This mob spirit should be discountenanced by all good citizens. There are, in almost every community, unscrupulous persons ready to take advantage of momentary excitement to display their lawless propensities; and if they occasionally meet with a severe punishment, the cause of law and order will be the gainer."[274]

Pro-Lincoln, anti-slavery Republican newspapers carried accounts that were quite a bit different. For instance, the *Hartford Courant* reported, "A member of Capt. Hawley's Rifle Co., named Fowler, a daguerreian of this city, was in Ridgefield Saturday night and, with Abraham Nash, attempted to haul down a secession flag, which a dirty head had raised there. While in the act, shots were fired from a groggery near by. Fowler was wounded, but Nash received 50 shots in the knee and is dangerously hurt."[275]

A groggery, of course, was a tavern; those Democratic reports of the "house" of Buttery probably did not refer in fact to a home, but a "public house" — a bar — owned by Buttery. As the *Springfield* (Mass.) *Republican* put it, "the shots were fired from the house of Stephen Buttery, the keeper of a low groggery."[276] The *Worcester* (Mass.) *Spy* was more direct, saying the shots came from "the grog shop of Stephen Buttery of Ridgefield."[277] The terms groggery or grog shop were used to describe taverns with poor reputations and the Republican accounts were attempting to characterize Buttery's "house" as a bar with not the best class of patrons. No record of any arrests connected with the incident have been found.

Stephen Buttery, probably a native of Wilton or Norwalk, apparently maintained the tavern on Florida Road in the southeast part of the town, where the incident may have taken place. Abram Nash may

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[274] *ibid*., May 25, 1861, p. 4.

[275] *Hartford Courant*, June 7, 1861, p.1.

[276] *Springfield Republican*, Springfield, Mass., May 7, 1861, p. 2.

[277] *Massachusetts Spy*, Worcester, Mass., May 15, 1861, p. 1

have been Abraham St. John Nash, a carpenter and a shoemaker, who was a well-known Ridgefielder; he survived his wound, living until 1906. However, he may have suffered other consequences from the injury. He lost his St. Johns Road home and farm to a bankruptcy sale in 1870, possibly related to his inability to work full-time or at full strength because of his injury.

Private Edward P. Fowler, the daguerreotype photographer who had enlisted in Capt. Hawley's company April 22, 1861, was discharged May 9 — five days after he was shot in Ridgefield and two weeks after he enlisted. The reason for his discharge was a "disability," no doubt related to the shotgun wound. Fowler went on to become a longtime commercial photographer in Haverhill, Mass.

"Capt. Hawley," incidentally, was probably Connecticut's most famous Civil War soldier. An antebellum lawyer and newspaper editor from Hartford, and a staunch Republican, Joseph Roswell Hawley enlisted right at the war's beginning and by its end, was a brigadier general. He went on to become governor of Connecticut, a Congressman, and finally, a United States senator.

Republican Ridgefield

During the 1850s the Republican Party emerged from former Whigs and other political groups who were opposed to slavery — but not necessarily for what today would be considered noble reasons. Many Connecticut residents had long been against slavery because it was "free labor" that took away jobs that "white" men could be performing for pay. What's more, once the war broke out, many — including, some historians say, President Lincoln himself — backed emancipation primarily because it would cripple the South to lose such a huge source of "free"

labor. Thus it would help the North win the war.[278]

Democrats and their supporters often called Republicans the "Black Republicans"[279] or the "Abolition Party" and some Democratic newspapers would list the two parties in election results as "Democratic" and "Abolition."[280] Ridgefield seemed firmly in the hands of the latter, for the town voted Republican in the 1852, 1856 and 1860 elections, backing Lincoln in the last.

One of the feistiest and perhaps most racially charged campaigns took place in 1856 when Republican John C. Fremont faced Democrat James Buchanan. (A third-party candidate, Millard Fillmore, ran as a Know Nothing; he had become president in 1850 when Zachary Taylor died in office, but did not win his party's endorsement in 1852.) Fremont opposed slavery in the South while Buchanan did not. On Aug. 23, a North Carolina legislator named Wynne spoke to a large gathering at the Ridgefield town hall, supposedly a Buchanan rally. An *Albany (N.Y.) Evening Journal* correspondent who attended the event said the audience included "20 to 30 Buchanan men and as many more Republicans." The correspondent's account continued:

> *"[Wynne] presented these propositions:…Every Fremont man is guilty of treason, and ought to be punished as such…Slavery is a divine institution, a natural state of society and a lovely thing at the South….The Buchanan men present endorsed these sentiments, and after the meeting broke up I conversed with several who distinctly repeated them, but many also repudiated them. I have recently met several Buchanan men*

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[278] Lincoln wrote newspaper editor Horace Greeley Aug. 22, 1862: "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union." Quoted in Warshauer, p. 95-6, from Basler, Roy P., ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln,* New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953, Vol. 5, p. 433-34

[279] "From enemies of the party, the moniker 'Black Republican' became a routine term of abuse." Delbanco, p. 338.

[280] *Columbian Register,* New Haven, Oct. 18, 1856, p. 2.

from distant parts of Connecticut, and they took the same position. One gentleman…took the ground that a negro was not a human being!"[281]

The correspondent, whose leanings were clearly Republican, added that "In 1840s the Democrats defended low wages and were beaten. In 1856 they defend slavery and will be beaten."

Three weeks later a "great mass meeting" for Buchanan took place in town, according to diarist Anna Resseguie, adding that "a procession of Fremont men, numbering 52 wagons, it is said, passed our house."[282] On the night before the Nov. 4 election, "we were favored with the sight of a torch-light procession tonight, a Buchanan one," Resseguie reported. In the end, Fremont took Ridgefield by 100 votes Nov. 4, 1856, but Buchanan won the presidency. Fremont carried all of New England while Buchanan won all of the South plus border northern states.[283]

After the war began, Ridgefield remained Republican, even in the face of strong Democratic opposition to the conflict, especially when things were going badly for the North early on and the anti-war sentiment, expressed by Buttery's flag, was gaining some strength. In an April 29, 1861, letter to the *Bridgeport Daily Advertiser and Farmer* newspaper, headlined "The Feeling in Ridgefield," someone with the initials G.B. attacked Republicans for "their endeavors to put down free discussion and free speech" of Democrats who considered the Civil War "the wickedest and most awful of all wars." "The Democrats of Ridgefield," G.B. said, "believe it more honorable to desire peace than cry war….If we fight it out, we may have only the relics of a Republic to give our children; but if we negotiate before we fight, we shall have a Republic to bequeath as noble as the one left us by our fathers!"[284]

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Certainly, there were Ridgefield abolitionists who favored free-

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[281] *Albany Evening Journal,* Sept. 3, 1856, p. 2.

[282] Ables, Kay *et al*., eds., *A View from the Inn: The Journal of Anna Marie Resseguie*, 1851-1867, Ridgefield: The Keeler Tavern Preservation Society, 1993, p. 149. "Our house" was today's Keeler Tavern Museum.

[283] Resseguie, p.151

[284] *Daily Advertiser and Farmer*, Bridgeport, May 2, 1861, p. 2

ing the slaves simply because slavery was evil. Among the town leaders to oppose enslaving human beings was the Rev. Clinton Clark of the First Congregational Church, the church whose second pastor had been a slave holder. In a sermon delivered April 14, 1854, as reported by Anna Resseguie in her diary, Clark declared that "the evils of our nation are slavery, intemperance, gambling and kindred vices, political and commercial dishonesty."[285]

Another Congregational minister was quite wrapped up in the abolition issue. However, the Rev. Chauncey Wilcox apparently wasn't considered aggressive enough and as a result, was "fired" by the Greenwich congregation he helped to found years earlier. The 1824 Yale graduate was the first pastor of the North Greenwich Congregational Church, serving from 1826 until 1846. There, Wilcox "vehemently opposed the evil of slavery in America," according to Greenwich historian Jeffrey Bingham Mead. But he was at odds with his North Greenwich church's deacon, Silas Hervey Mead, also an abolitionist. "Deacon Mead was an extremist in abolitionist circles in Greenwich," historian Mead says. "Such men fought to end slavery, denouncing Southerners and those in the North who did not embrace their aggressive measures."[286] Wilcox, on the other hand, felt that organizing anti-slavery groups in the North and bad-mouthing Southerners were the wrong approach, and that one catches more flies with honey than vinegar.

Wilcox put it this way: "We must persuade them [Southerners]; we cannot drive them. In order to persuade them, we must so conduct as to have access to them. We must gain a hearing … We must be able to go among them and address them personally… If we can form associations against slavery in the slaveholding states, it might possibly do good."[287]

The battle between Wilcox and Mead lasted several years and culminated with Wilcox's dismissal in 1846. "It is painful when a deacon of a church does so much to destroy the usefulness of his ministries, as I believe Deacon S.H. Mead has done," Wilcox wrote to a family member.

After his firing, Wilcox moved to Ridgefield where, by 1849, he

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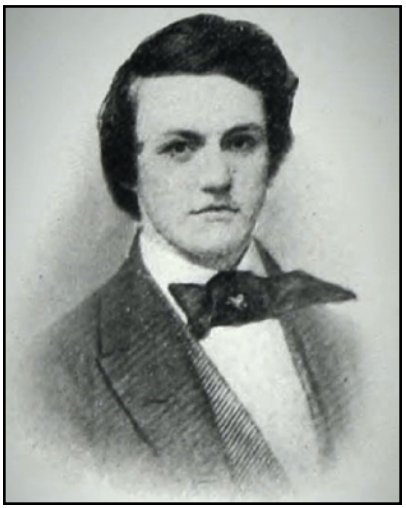
[285] Ables, p.101.

[286] Mead, Jeffrey Bingham, "Rev. Chauncey Wilcox of North Greenwich: His Dismissal and Abolitionism," writingsofjeffreybinghammead-.blogspot.com, Dec. 12, 2014.

[287] *ibid*.

was principal of the High Ridge English and Classical Boarding School for Boys — he had earlier taught at a small private school in Greenwich while he was serving as the pastor. (Wilcox's school was in the former home of the Rev. Samuel Goodrich, the First Congregational Church minister described in Chapter 1.) He died in 1852 at the age of 55, a few days after attending the funeral of his father in Middletown.



Cyrus Northrop spoke in favor of giving Black men the vote, not a popular position in Ridgefield in 1850.

One of Wilcox's most successful students at High Ridge was Cyrus Northrop, a farm boy from the West Lane district of the town who went on to become president of the University of Minnesota for 26 years — Northrop was so much admired in Minnesota that the huge auditorium and the stadium at the university, as well as a town and a mountain in the state, are named for him. "Mr. Wilcox was a very thorough teacher," Northrop once recalled.[288]

Wilcox's influence on Northrop may have been considerable. At age 15, Northrop was hired as the teacher at the town's Center School on Catoonah Street and, in dealing with pupils, "I learned that sweetness and light are more effective than noise and violence," he said, seemingly echoing Wilcox's methods of dealing with the evils of slavery.

The teenaged Northrop also joined the local debating society, part of the Lyceum chapter here, where Wilcox's influence may have been displayed in Northrop's feelings about African Americans. "Once in a while there would be a public exhibition at which different members would make addresses," Northrop said. "On one of these occasions, I made an address in favor of giving Negroes the right to vote. That was

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[288] Firkins, Oscar W., *Cyrus Northrop: A Memoir*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1925, p. 36.

really a brave thing to do in 1850, in Connecticut, and a leading citizen of Ridgefield, who did not sympathize with my views, expressed himself in rather strong terms respecting my amount of cheek in making such an address. I do not suppose that there were 20 people in the audience who were in favor of Negro suffrage. But times change and fortunately we change with them. The time came when Connecticut changed its constitution in such a way as to permit the Negro to vote, and no sensible person in the state would now maintain that there is any reason why the Negro should not vote."[289]

A longtime president of that Ridgefield Debating Society was Edward Hurlbutt Smith, who had a reputation as a skilled orator. The prominent businessman used those skills on May 30, 1893, Decoration Day — what we today call Memorial Day — to recall the horrors of slavery. In his oration, delivered in the Town Hall, he criticized not only his country's founding fathers but also its religious leaders for supporting slavery. And he praised the attack of the South on Fort Sumter as a "messenger from God" that led to the Civil War and emancipation.

Smith had spent time in the South as a young man and was aghast at what he saw. "There were over three million men, women and children, slaves in this Christian land of ours," he said, "men who had no rights to the fruits of their labor and toil; men without a hope, sold at the auction block like so many articles of merchandise; wives separated from their husbands, children from their parents, your lovely girls, as fair in face and form as any within this hall today bought and sold as young cattle in the streets."

He called the first shot fired at Fort Sumter "the fore-runner of a doomed system, announcing a day of deliverance; the breaking of the bonds; the opening of the prison doors that the captives might go free; that no more should be witnessed the scarred and bleeding backs of its victims, no more the sobs of the mother, the wail of anguish from the bruised heart of the father, as they saw their little ones torn from their embrace and home." (*The entire speech appears in Appendix P.*)

Although she does not often mention the issue in her diaries, Anna Resseguie makes it clear she found slavery abhorrent and when she did write about the subject, it usually involved information she found

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[289] Firkins, Oscar W., *Cyrus Northrop: A Memoir*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1925, p. 38-9

Phillis Dubois, born a slave, was a longtime part of the Resseguie family.

disturbing. For instance, on March 31, 1856, she reported reading in the *Boston Cultivator* "that 30 ships leave the port of N.York every year that are engaged in the African slave Trade."[290] One of the most interesting of her recordings was written Jan. 28, 1862, as the Civil War was raging, about a guest at her parents' Resseguie's Hotel, now the Keeler Tavern Museum:

> *"A Mr. Blackman stays here tonight, who has lived in Virginia. He says he can never forget the feeling he experienced when he saw for the first time, a drove of slaves. There were thirty, tied by their arms to each other. A driver with a long whip attends them as if they were sheep. They were driven to the jail and marched in for the night. He saw an old colored woman the next morning crying bitterly on the side-walk. On inquiring the cause, she replied that they had taken her son in the drove. There would be an understanding on the part of the buyer that the slave he would purchase should be sent on an errand. On passing the jail, the slave would be captured and confined."*[291]

Anna Resseguie was more than casually acquainted with African Americans. Phillis Dubois, a Black woman whose mother bought her out of slavery, was a beloved part of the Resseguie household for more than a half century. Phillis helped bring up Anna and the two shared countless experiences together, including Anna's taking care of Phillis in her old age.

Resseguie was well-educated, having attended the Ridgefield Female Academy, and well-read, subscribing to a number of newspapers

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[290] Ables, p. 141.

[291] Ables, p. 217.

and consuming many of the latest books, both fiction and non-fiction. She was interested not only in current events, but science, and often recorded in her diary interesting scientific discoveries being reported in the news.

Chapter 7
Devoted to Freedom for Slaves

Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey Armstrong were a popular African-American couple who risked arrest and imprisonment to shelter slaves who were fleeing from bondage in the South and seeking freedom in the North in the first half of the 19th Century. Two of their Ridgefield-born grandchildren went on to fight slavery via the Civil War, and one became among the last victims of the conflict.

The Armstrongs' "station" on the Underground Railroad was reported to be in Ridgebury near the top of a hill still today called Ned's Mountain. The stop included a small, well-hidden cave or caves where runaways could elude pursuing slave-catchers.

Uncle Ned was "a man who devoted a life to an idea, the freedom of his colored brothers of the South," said an 1879 article in *The New-York Tribune*. "So well did he plan and execute that, to this day, … near neighbors only knew 'Uncle Ned' and 'Aunt Betsey' as good, kind colored people, handy to have around to assist with the house or farm work."[292]

None of Ridgefield's many histories even hints that the town may have had an Underground Railroad stop, much less one operated by an African-American couple living in Ridgebury. Nor have statewide studies of the Underground Railroad mentioned any Ridgefield activity. That's not strange since so many of the stations were kept secret from slave-chasers, state and town authorities and unsympathetic neighbors. White men and women who operated stations were at risk of arrest or at least public censure, but a Black couple providing shelter faced serious threats from not only law enforcers but also local racists.

Little is known about the origins of Edward and Betsey Armstrong. Edward, or "Ned," was born about 1782 in Ridgefield, according to the 1850 Census. He may have been free at birth, but it's possible he was a child of an enslaved mother and thus born enslaved. The estate of Sarah Keeler, widow of Timothy Keeler, listed in 1787 "the Negro boy named Ned" as among the property she left at her death. Ned was be-

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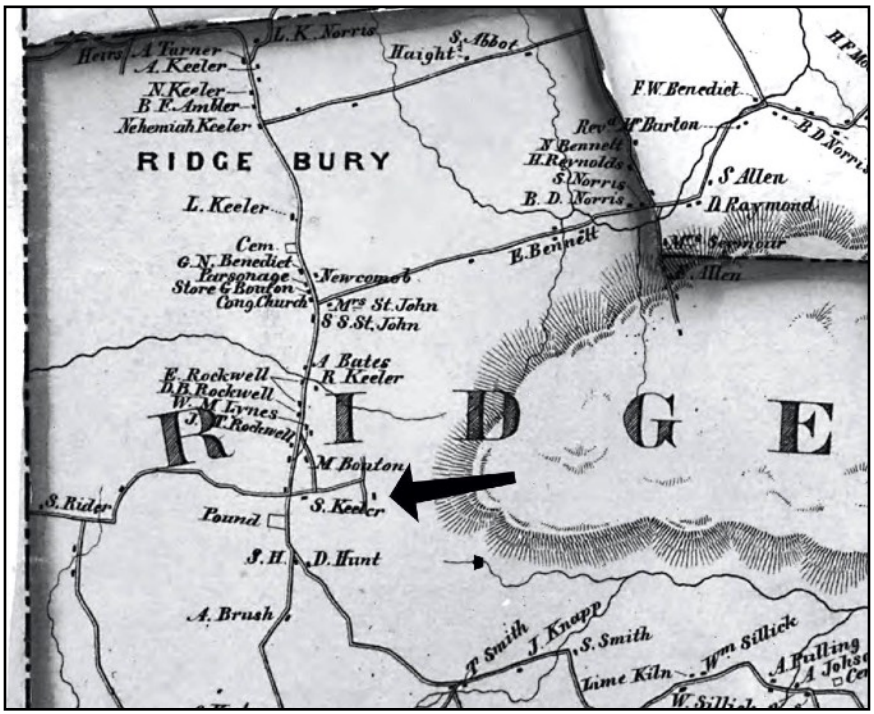
[292] *New-York Tribune,* July 7, 1879, p. 8.



The arrow on this 1856 map shows the probable location of Ned and Betsey Armstrong's home.

queathed to her daughter, Hannah Keeler Wilson.[293] It is possible Ned later gained his freedom from her and took the formal name Edward Armstrong.

The 1840 Census shows Edward living with his wife in Ridgebury, probably on what is today called Ned's Mountain, with a family that included three boys, one under 10 and two between 10 and 20, and three girls, two under 10 and one between 10 and 20. (Only the name of the head of the household was provided in the 1840 Census.)

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[293] Keeler, Wesley B., *Ralph Keeler of Norwalk, Conn. and His Descendants,* Vol. 1, Albany, N.Y., 1980, p. 33.

Betsey was also said to have been born here; she, too, may have been enslaved. The year of her birth is a bit of a mystery. Her gravestone in Ridgebury Cemetery and her death record in the Ridgefield Town Hall say she was 90 years old when she died in 1857 — that would have made her birth year around 1767. However, the 1850 census-taker said she was 68, a more likely age for a woman with a 70-year-old husband. Since the postmortem information on her age was probably second hand, the gravestone and death record could easily have been mistaken. She or her husband were probably interviewed in person for the census; they weren't for their deaths.

The Armstrongs were likely living on Ned's Mountain by the 1830s. The exact location of their home is not certain but tradition and one land record suggest it was on the east side of Ned's Lane, a short, dead-end road running off the southern end of Ned's Mountain Road. Ridgefield Land Records contain an 1843 court order against the Armstrongs' son-in-law, John Smalley (*see page 129*), describing where he lives as "in the Society of Ridgebury," bounded on the north and east by property of the heirs of Timothy Keeler, south on "Ned Armstrong's land" and west by highway.[294]

Nearby was a cave or caves where, according to at least two accounts, the people escaping from slavery could be temporarily hidden and housed on their journey north.

Historian Silvio Bedini knew of Ned, but not of his activities. In his 1958 history, *Ridgefield in Review,* Bedini wrote: "Ned's Mountain derives its name from a Negro man named Ned who lived in the area. Four Negro families made their homes on Ned's Mountain Road during the 19th Century."[295]

George L. Rockwell, an earlier historian of Ridgefield, also knew of a Black community at Ned's Mountain, but did not mention it in his 1927 *History of Ridgefield*. In an undated typescript collection of notes about Ridgebury that he learned after his book's publication, he includes a fascinating report that "a number of colored men who lived on or near

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[294] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 17, p. 332. Note that this Ridgebury Timothy Keeler is not the same as the Timothys who ran the Keeler Tavern.

[295] Bedini, Silvio, *Ridgefield in Review,* Ridgefield: 250th Anniversary Committee, 1958, p. 350. Three of those families were the Armstrongs, Watsons and Smalleys.

Ned's Mountain had an orchestra and played for dances around the countryside. One of them was Grandison Riley, who played the guitar."[296] He does not tell when this orchestra existed.

By 1850 census, there appear to have been at least three houses in the Ned's Lane compound, occupied by 13 African Americans, most of them Armstrong children and grandchildren. Besides Edward and Betsey Armstrong themselves, the compound that year included Betsey Watson, the Armstrongs' 34-year-old daughter, and her four children: Velander, 18, Mary, 15, George, 13, and John, 9. John Watson grew up to serve in the Civil War. Another Armstrong daughter, Caroline Smalley, 32, and her husband, John Smalley, 45, lived there with children Samuel, 7, Catherine, 6, John S., 4, and Mary E., 3. John S. Smalley became one of the last victims of the Civil War.

The 1879 *New-York Tribune* article described the Armstrongs' homesite: "A more interesting 'mountain' is not found in the State. Standing upon its top, you can trace the water coursing west across fine dairy farms and through valleys to the Titicus — a branch of the Croton — thus finding its way to our homes in New-York; to the south, kissing the sea at Norwalk, after starting many a [mill] wheel to spinning; to the east through Miry Brook, Danbury, Brookfield — joining the Housatonic furnishing power for Birmingham, Danbury and Brookfield. There is no finer view within sixty miles of New-York than from the top of 'Ned's Mountain'." While this would seem a very visible location, the Armstrongs managed to keep their activities so secret that contemporary neighbors were unaware of the station's existence.

It's is unclear whether the Armstrongs owned their homestead. Their names appear on no deeds of ownership in the land records, but it is possible deeds existed that were never filed with the Ridgefield town clerk. The Armstrongs may have lived in or built homes on land loaned or leased to them by the nearby Keelers or Boutons in exchange for their work on nearby farms. Since they had little money, their accommodations were probably of basic construction, not much more than crude cottages. Nonetheless, the Armstrongs were happy to share what little they had with the fleeing enslaved, who had much less.

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[296] Rockwell, George L., *The Cellars of Ridgebury District,* undated, in the collections of the Ridgefield Historical Society. No record of a Grandison Riley could be found in contemporaneous census records — or elsewhere.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was an elaborate but loosely organized network of "stations" — safe havens usually in people's private homes but sometimes in businesses and churches. Men, women and even children fleeing slavery could find assistance and shelter at these locations as they traveled northward. The network extended across all the northern states, from the Atlantic shore to Iowa.

"The picture that emerges from recent studies is not of the highly organized system with tunnels, codes, and clearly defined routes and stations of popular lore, but of an interlocking series of local networks, each of whose fortunes rose and fell over time, but which together helped a substantial number of fugitives reach safety," writes historian Eric Foner.[297]

Many runaways were fleeing to Canada, where slavery was completely illegal and where slave-hunters could not apprehend them. Others headed to northern and western New York or northern New England, where slavery was so unpopular, pursuers had less chance of successfully catching or holding them.

While the Nutmeg State didn't ban slavery outright until 1848, the practice was extremely rare by then. (When that emancipation was declared, only six slaves were left in the entire state, all of them elderly.) The state had a sizable abolition movement. However, Connecticut had many close trading ties with the South, the source of most of the cotton that the many mills in the state needed. Consequently, Connecticut also had a large pro-slavery population, some of whom on more than a few occasions attacked abolitionists and tried to foil their efforts to help fleeing slaves.

Several Underground Railroad "tracks" took runaways into and through Connecticut. While some of these fleeing men and women found permanent homes in Connecticut, most in the 1830s and 1840s probably continued on to at least Massachusetts and Vermont, where anti-slavery sentiment was stronger. Massachusetts had banned slavery in 1783, more than a half century before Connecticut.

The Underground Railroad did not involve a map with clearly

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[297] Foner, Eric, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*, New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2015, p. 15.

defined routes and instead was an informal network of stations, whose interconnections could change on short notice. No one knows how many stations there were. Because the system was "underground," it was clandestine, and station masters usually needed to know only the nearby stations to the north so that they could provide the directions or transportation to the next safe destination, usually between 10 and 20 miles away.

Sometimes, the runaways had to travel to the next stop on their own, but often they were led or carried by a "conductor," who frequently provided a ride in a wagon. In Wilton, the next community to the south of Ridgefield, William Wakeman, considered that town's "foremost abolitionist," was both a station master and a conductor. Wilton historian Robert H. Russell reports that, "As a conductor, Wakeman was bold and tireless, taking his 'packages of hardware and dry goods' to places as distant as Plymouth and Middletown, Connecticut, trips of forty or fifty miles as the crow flies, and much farther by road."[298]

The Underground Railroad began forming in the early 1800s. From the beginning, New York City was a major hub for the network. "Although reliable statistics do not exist, it is clear that New York in the 1820s remained a destination for fugitive slaves, or a way station as they traveled to upstate New York, New England and Canada," Foner says.[299]

From New York City, many fleeing slaves traveled to Connecticut along the coast. Most who took this southern line into Connecticut continued on toward New Haven, then headed northward to Farmington and Hartford, or northeasterly toward northern Rhode Island. A few may have veered northward sooner than New Haven, traveling along the Norwalk and Housatonic River Valleys. However, it seems unlikely that any of these travelers would have visited the Armstrongs, which would have meant heading a bit to the west once they reached Ridgefield.

However, another track from New York City followed what is today called U.S. Route 22 up through White Plains in Westchester County and on north, paralleling the Connecticut border about nine miles

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[298] Russell, Robert H., *Wilton, Connecticut: Three Centuries of People, Places and Progress*, Wilton Historical Society, 2005, p. 194.

[299] Foner, p. 48

west of Ridgefield.[300] Runaways could have been brought up to the area of Purdys, at the western edge of North Salem, then over to Ridgebury only about 10 miles away.

Still another "track" from New York City employed the Hudson River and its valley. Some of the fleeing slaves would follow that route all the way to Lake Champlain and on to Montreal while others would veer off to western New York and head for Buffalo. Still others would go "eastward via a number of laterals into Connecticut, Massachusetts or Vermont," said Horatio T. Strother, the foremost historian of Connecticut's Underground Railway.[301] A New York City abolitionist minister named Dennis Harris even bought a steamboat with which he established a passenger ferry service between Manhattan and Poughkeepsie and on which he smuggled people fleeing slavery part-way up the Hudson.[302]

One of the major stops on the Underground Railroad along the Hudson was Peekskill, N.Y., a town of many abolitionists including Henry Ward Beecher who had a cottage there — supposedly with an escape tunnel in case his house were raided.[303] Peekskill is 21 miles west of Ned's Mountain. Fleeing Blacks could have disembarked from a boat at Peekskill and traveled to Ridgebury to enter New England, or they could have gone more northeasterly to the abolition-backing Quaker outposts in eastern Duchess County before crossing the border.

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Many Connecticut stations remain unknown today because their existence was kept so quiet during and even after their use. Two threats prompted the secrecy. The first, of course, were the many Southern — and some Northern — slave hunters. Although harboring escaped slaves was illegal, local officials in Connecticut often "looked the other way"

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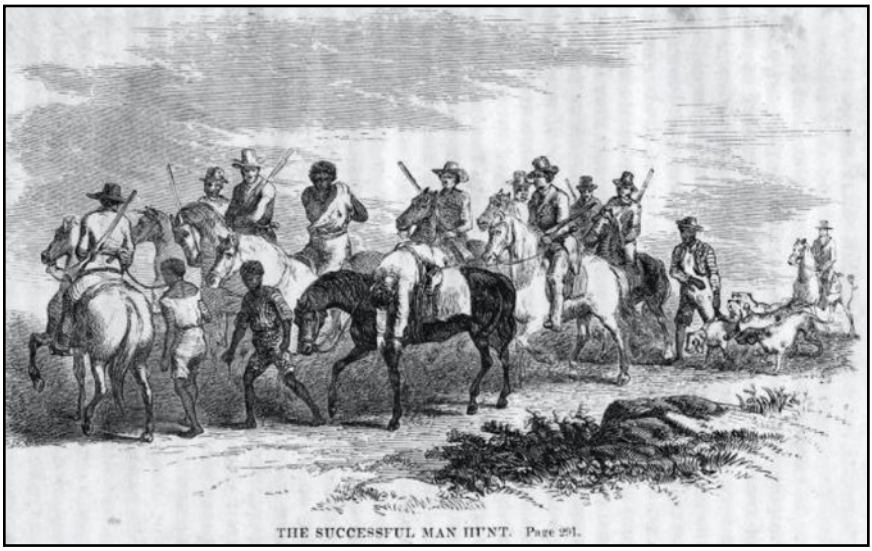
[300] Blockson, Charles L., *The Underground Railroad: First-Person Narratives of Escapes to Freedom in the North,* New York: Prentice Hall, 1987, p. 246.

[301] Strother, Horatio T., *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1964, p. 120.

[302] Gill, John Freeman, "An Underground Movement," *The New York Times,* Jan. 10, 2021, p. 1RE

[303] Switala, William J., *Underground Railroad in New York and New Jersey,* Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 2006, p. 98.



State and federal laws allowed slave catchers to operate in Connecticut. This 1850s illustration appeared after the Fugitive Slave Act went into effect. —*Cornell University Digital Collections*

and sometimes even helped runaways. Nevertheless, legal and illegal slave-catchers were active in Connecticut, often aggressively chasing Blacks all the way from the South into and beyond the state.

The second threat came from the State of Connecticut itself, which in 1835 enacted a "fugitive slave law," declaring that any slave escaping from another state would not be considered free in Connecticut and could be apprehended if the owner demanded it. "The fugitives who succeeded in reaching the Nutmeg State could look for no official help in their quest for freedom," Strother noted.[304]

Then, in 1850, Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Act, far worse than the state law. Not only slave catchers, but also ordinary citizens were empowered to apprehend suspected slaves, who were brought before a local official to determine whether they should be freed or sent South. These officials were compensated $10 per person who was de-

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[304] Strother, p. 39.

clared a slave and $5 per person who was set free — not a merciful incentive. What's more, anyone who helped or sheltered a runaway could be fined $1,000 and sent to jail for up to six months (but anyone who falsely reported a free Black as a slave was not subject to any penalty). It was clear that the law, powered through the Congress by Southern interests, favored Southern slave owners at the expense of the right to a fair trial and even fair treatment.

The harshness of the Fugitive Slave Act helped to increase anti-slavery sentiment in Connecticut in the 1850s. Nonetheless, the state remained split between pro-slavery and anti-slavery factions. African-Americans' rights went only so far, and Fairfield County was perhaps the least supportive. In 1857, a statewide referendum proposition on allowing free Black men to vote was defeated 5,553 to 19,148 — 22% for and 78% against. While Windham County had 36% support and Hartford County, 34%, only 10% of the voters were in favor in Fairfield County, the lowest percentage of any county in the state.[305]

A March 1900 article in the *Springfield (Mass.) Republican* offered recollections of poet, novelist and historian who lived through the late Underground Railroad years. In it, Aella Greene wrote: "Faring through Connecticut [along two major routes] the fugitives found that which, had they dared to sing at all, would have caused them to sing, 'Jordan am a hard road to trabel…' In every one of the towns on each route, there were people of pronounced pro-slavery ideas, people glad to see the slaves sent back to the servitude from which they were fleeing, and some of whom were not averse to aid in their rendition, at least not averse to putting the hunters on their track. Risky business, indeed, was it for the fugitives to traverse Connecticut, and hazardous for the agents of the road to do their work."[306]

No one knows how many runaways employed the services of the Underground Railroad. For obvious reasons, few if any stations kept records. However, Strother said, "it has been estimated that in the decade of the 1840s over a thousand fugitives annually escaped from what aboli-

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[305] Strother, p. 184

[306] Greene, Aella, "The 'Underground Railroad' and Those Who Operated It," *Springfield Republican,* March 14, 1900.

tionists liked to call 'the land of whips and chains'."[307] Historian Wilbur Siebert said in 1894 that anywhere from 25,000 to 100,000 slaves had escaped by the time of the Civil War.[308] Sydney Howard Gay, a New York City newspaper editor who had been a leader in the railroad and in anti-slavery efforts in general, estimated in 1880 that some 30,000 runaway slaves reached "a safe refuge in Canada" in the three decades before the Civil War, thanks to the Underground Railroad.[309] Many others had chosen to settle in northern states.

The vast majority of runaways — around 80% — were young men in their teens and 20s. Women were less likely to run away because they had children or felt a strong obligation to family responsibilities.[310]

Most stations appear to have been operated by whites, including a number of religious leaders, chiefly Congregational or Baptist. The Armstrongs may have been among the relatively few stops run by free African Americans.

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Georgetown, a village that includes land in Wilton, Ridgefield, Redding, and Weston, was active in the abolition movement and efforts to help escaping slaves. "It is a historical fact that the first anti-slavery society in Connecticut was started in Georgetown in Oct. 1838," said Georgetown historian Wilbur F. Thompson. "Dr. Erasmus Hulson and Rev. Nathaniel Colver were appointed by the Anti-Slavery Society of Connecticut to lecture on slavery. On Nov. 26, 1838 Messrs. Colver and Hulson addressed the meeting. But the opposition was so strong the meeting was adjourned until Nov. 27th. That evening the enemies of the movement broke up the meeting, and on the 28th of November the Baptist Church was blown up with gunpowder. A keg of gunpowder was placed under the pulpit."[311]

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[307] Strother, p. 9.

[308] Siebert, William H. *The Underground Railroad from Slavery to Freedom,* New York, 1898, p. 47.

[309] Foner, p. 229.

[310] Rudiselm, Christine and Bob Blaisdell, *Slave Narratives of the Underground Railroad*, Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, 2014, p. xiv

[311] Thompson, Wilbur F., "The Old Churches of Georgetown," in *History of Georgetown*, typescript, unpaged, 1923

Wilton historian Russell reports that "Underground stations were in Georgetown at the homes of John O. St. John and Rev. [Samuel Merwin] Main, neither of which are remaining, and also at the old Gilbert & Bennett shop where later the Connery Store was built at the corner of Route 57 and Old Mill Road,"[312] Wilton historian Russell reported. Some "passengers" who stopped in Wilton may have moved north to the Armstrongs' station, but it seems more probable that they headed northeasterly toward Farmington and Hartford.

Stops on the Underground Railroad were rare in upper Fairfield County, maintained Newtown historian Daniel Cruson, noting that the main routes in Connecticut took travelers along the coast and up the central part of the state.[313] Cruson pooh-poohs many modern-day claims of houses that served as stations, claims that are based largely on supposedly mysterious underground rooms or passages that seem to be ideal for hiding fleeing slaves and allowing them to surreptitiously escape. (Similar tales are told of Revolutionary-era "Tory holes" in many 18th Century houses with what seem to be hidden rooms.)

While it is likely most fleeing slaves passing through Connecticut used the routes that are, today at least, better-known and coastal, there is good reason to support Ned's Mountain — 15 miles north of Long Island Sound shore's "main line" — as being a possible stop.

New York was a hub for northward-bound runaways, and as we have seen, several reliable histories report the use of the Hudson River, its valley, and today's Route 22 as a means of passage north from the city. Those aiming for destinations to the northeast in Massachusetts and beyond could easily turn off these northerly routes to head into Connecticut at Ridgebury. That's what both General George Washington and Comte de Rochambeau did in traveling with their troops between southern Westchester County and Hartford a half century earlier, a route that took them through Ridgebury within sight of Ned's Mountain.

The only two accounts that have been found so far reporting the Armstrongs' involvement in the Underground Railroad were both published in newspapers in 1879, when people were still alive who lived through the era of the Underground Railroad and who could have access

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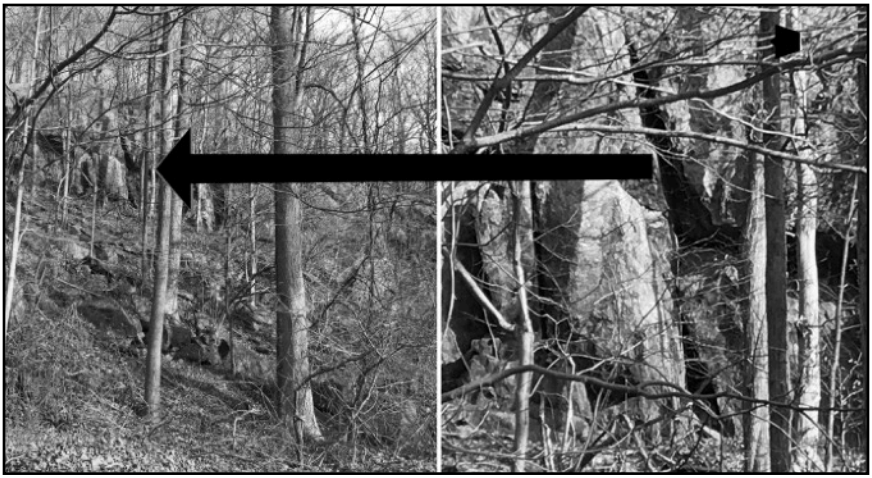
[312] Russell, p. 194-5.

[313] Cruson, Newtown's Slaves, p. 79ff.



Ned's Mountain has many steep, rocky cliffs. A simple crevice, such as this one on the western hillside (close-up on the right), may have been the inconspicuous opening to a hideaway cave.

to first-hand knowledge of station operations.

The 1879 article in the *New-York Tribune*[314] was contributed by a writer, identified only as "S.", who lived in Brooklyn, but clearly knew Ridgebury and its people. "Uncle Ned," the writer said, was "a man who devoted a life to an idea, the freedom of his colored brothers of the South, and so well did he plan and execute, that to this day, Captain John Rockwell, Smith Keeler, George Bouton, and other near neighbors only knew 'Uncle Ned' and 'Aunt Betsey' as good, kind colored people, handy to have around to assist with the house or farm work."

Some of these neighbors, the *Tribune* article said, helped the Armstrongs build their "mansion"[315] near the top of the mountain.

"It was noticed that many colored men came and went, that offi-

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[314] In the years before the Civil War, the *Tribune* had been what Foner called "the nation's most important antislavery newspaper." Its longtime editor was Horace Greeley.

[315] The term mansion may have been used ironically, but the word's origin is the French for "house," not a large house.

cers often searched for certain colored men at the mansion, but never found them. No keeper of a railroad station was ever more faithful than were Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey, the keepers of the 'Ned's Mountain' station of the 'underground' route from the South to Canada."

Behind the house, the writer said, "is a cave that furnished a hiding place and shelter for the weary liberty-seekers, and there Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey supplied food and clothing until, rested and refreshed, under darkness of night, they would flee from this land of 'freedom'[316] to Canada. Even the existence of the cave — so well did Uncle Ned guard the secret — never became known except to one person, B.D. Norris, until after Mr. Lincoln had made all slaves free." (*See Appendix M for a copy of the complete story*)

Today, a few people know about the cave or caves. Interviews with several who grew up in the neighborhood and have explored Ned's Mountain report that the rocky cliffs are riddled with caves of all sizes, but some fairly large.[317]

The Rockwells, Keelers and Boutons, described as "near neighbors," were in fact close to the Armstrong homestead on Ned's Lane. B.D. Norris was a farmer who lived at the eastern end of George Washington Highway, which was a mile away. Why he knew about the station is unknown; perhaps he was a secret supporter of its operation.

S.'s report to the *Tribune* was dated June 7, 1879, but appeared in print in July, and may have been sparked by reports that spring of an unusual find in Ridgefield. The *New Haven Register* carried this story on June 17, 1879:

A RIDGEFIELD MYSTERY

The discovery of a skeleton in a cave at Ridgefield is causing some speculation. Many years ago, Uncle

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[316] As with the word "mansion," B. was probably being ironic, knowing that in Connecticut, slaves who escaped the South were never truly free.

[317] In a posting on Old Ridgefield/Facebook Feb. 8, 2020, Ridgefielder Karen Casagrande reported that "I lived on Ned's Mountain many years and as a kid walked in the woods, looking for Old Ned's cave. I thought I found it in the woods on the left about a quarter mile past Ned's Lane … opposite old Mr. Hannom's place." Mike Rodgers said in a June 2021 conversation he found at least two sizable caves on or near the mountain and many smaller ones.

> **Ned and Aunt Betsey, a colored couple, and most diligent agents of the underground railway, lived nearby, and many a fugitive slave, traveling from the South to Canada, found a refuge with them. These guests were always hidden in the cave, an inclosure about twenty square feet, with a very small opening, and some people think the skeleton may have belonged to one of them."**[318]

The exact same story appeared in several other newspapers, including *The Ridgefield Press*, which simply reprinted the item it had seen in the *Farmer* — probably the *Bridgeport Farmer*.[319] On July 16, the *Press* reprinted the *New-York Tribune*'s July 7 article about Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey, without comment.[320] These were the only mentions of the Armstrongs and their Underground Railroad interests to appear in the local newspaper.

The skeleton's belonging to a runaway slave seems quite unlikely since the Armstrongs were, by this and the *Tribune* accounts, devoted to helping slaves and would hardly have left a dead or dying person in a cave. In fact, as will be seen in Chapter Eight, recent discoveries about the subsequent residents at the Ned's Mountain compound may explain the bones and actually provide a name for the person to whom they belonged.

The speculation about the skeleton may have prompted "S." to write his account, but whatever the reason, the two reports, in separate publications, both provide evidence that the Armstrongs were part of the Underground Railroad.

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It is impossible to know where the Armstrongs sent or led their visitors on the next stage of their journey. New Milford to the north was

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[318] New Haven (Conn.) Register, June 17, 1879, Vol. 39, No. 140, p. 4

[319] *Ridgefield Press*, June 25, 1879, p. 3

[320] *ibid.*, July 16, 1879, p. 3

The Armstrongs' gravestones in Ridgebury Cemetery.

known as a center for Underground Railroad activity[321] and Farmington to the northeast was a major Connecticut hub — what historian Strother called "the Grand Central Station of [Connecticut's] Underground Railroad towns."[322]

How long their operation lasted can only be guessed. Old age or perhaps illness had probably ended their efforts by 1850. The family began disappearing from Ridgefield in the 1850s. Ned Armstrong died in 1851 at the age of 67 of "dropsy of the heart," a term for heart failure. Betsey Armstrong died in 1857 of the "infirmities of age." They are

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[321] Strother, p. 123.

[322] *ibid.,* p. 168.

buried together in Ridgebury Cemetery.

The Smalley Family

The Armstrongs' son-in-law John Smalley was born in New Jersey around 1800. After apparently spending some time in New York City, he met Caroline Armstrong and the two were married April 5, 1840 by the Rev. Nathan Burton, minister of the Ridgebury Congregational Church.[323]

In 1837, when living in New York, Smalley apparently ran afoul of the law. That August the Court of Special Sessions convicted "John Smalley, a black," of stealing "a buffalo skin worth $12." (Buffalo skins were used to make robes widely employed as winter blankets and coats for riding in carriages and sleighs.) Smalley was sentenced to six months in a "penitentiary."[324]

While this might not have been Ridgefield's John Smalley, a curious document in the Ridgefield Land Records suggests he may have indeed been John Smalley of Ned's Mountain. In 1843, six years after the conviction and five years after Smalley would have been out of the "pen," John Hart of New York City obtained a judgment against John Smalley of Ridgefield for $8.16, plus 80 cents for the cost of the suit. On Nov. 11, 1843, a justice of the peace named Pierre A. Sutton "levied this execution on the dwelling house of the said debtor." The house was described as in Ridgefield "in the Society of Ridgebury," bounded on the north and east by property of the heirs of Timothy Keeler, south on "Ned Armstrong's land" and west by highway.[325]

This suit may have involved the "buffalo skin" John Smalley was convicted of taking in 1837. For Hart, seeing Smalley sent to prison may not have been enough; he wanted compensation for the skin. While $8.16 seems a small amount of money for this much effort, it was the equivalent of about $225 in today's dollars. If the two John Smalleys are the same and Hart was indeed trying to recoup a loss, there may have been more to the case than is evident. For instance, Hart and Smalley may

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[323] RVR, Vol. 1, p. 188

[324] *New York Morning Express,* Aug. 30, 1837, p. 2.

[325] Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 17, p. 332.

have been somehow associated and had a falling out, and Hart was seeking his revenge.

Whatever happened, the Hart attachment document appears to be the only mention of the Armstrongs in the Ridgefield land records. No deeds were ever filed with the town clerk when the Armstrongs acquired the land, and none when their family left it, yet the attachment says "Ned Armstrong's land."

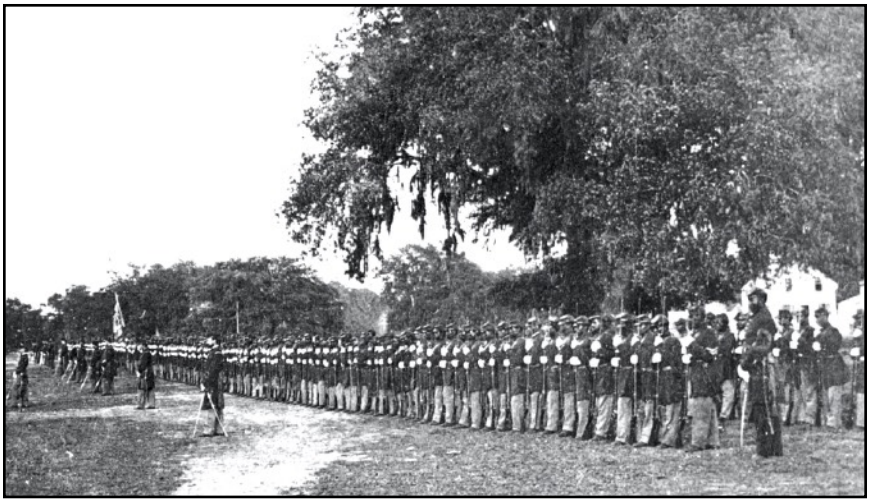
It also provides hints as to the location of the Armstrong compound, which appears to have been on the east side of Ned's Lane, off Ned's Mountain Road. The 1850 Census indicates there were three buildings close together, occupied by the Armstrongs, Smalleys and Watsons.

John Smalley died in 1852 at the age of 52 and his wife, Caroline, two years later — she was only 35. The cause of death for both was listed simply as "dropsy," an excess accumulation of water in a person's tissues, brought on by other causes not explained.

By the 1860 census, most remaining members of the Watson and Smalley families had moved to Danbury.

One Smalley became a longtime resident of Redding. Around 1870, Mary E. Smalley, born to John and Caroline in 1847, married Peter Peterson of Redding; he was about 18 and she 23 at their wedding. They had children Jane and Peter. Mary's husband Peter died in 1889 and is buried in Umpawaug Cemetery in Redding. Her son Peter Henry Peterson, born Oct. 18, 1879, lived all his life in Redding and had at least four children. He was still living in Redding in 1942, working for a contractor.

Mary E. Smalley Peterson lived until 1935, dying around the age of 88. She had worked as a laundress and a household staff member. She may have been the last member of the family to have been a part of the Ned's Mountain station on the Underground Railroad, albeit as a small child.



29th Regiment in full-dress uniform near Beaufort, SC, in 1864.

Chapter 8

Five Volunteers from Ned's Mountain

At least 10 Black men who had lived in Ridgefield enlisted in the Civil War, and four of them died in the service of their country.[326] That's an astounding — and tragic — 40% death rate. Of the 2.1-million Union soldiers who enlisted, 360,000 — 17% — died while in the service.

While the cause of death has not been found for one of the four war victims, three are known to have died of disease. An African-American man entering the service stood a greater chance of dying than whites because medical services for Blacks were worse for them, according to the testimony of Isaac Hill. As we will see, Hill reported that wounded or ill Black soldiers in the 29th Regiment did not receive nearly the same medical care that whites did.

Of the 10 Black Civil War soldiers who lived in Ridgefield, only four are honored on any Ridgefield monument.

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[326] See Appendix N for a list.

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Five young men who had grown up on Ned's Mountain were among the first to respond to the news in 1863 that African Americans could finally fight in the Civil War. Two of them wound up dying in the Union Army and a third was wounded in combat. Another — probably a native of the Sandwich Islands — joined the Union Navy, then the Army in Massachusetts.

After the war began in April of 1861, Connecticut and its towns and cities called for volunteers to join the Union Army. But those calls were not directed at Black men. While Congress in 1862 finally passed an act allowing the enlistment of African-American soldiers, many officials in Connecticut — particularly members of the Democratic Party — opposed using Blacks in the military.

Gov. Buckingham wanted Black soldiers in the state's military.

When Connecticut Gov. William Alfred Buckingham, a friend of Lincoln and an outspoken supporter of emancipation, proposed legislation in 1863 allowing African Americans to serve, "Connecticut Democrats denounced the bill in unmeasured terms, arguing it would let loose upon the helpless South 'a horde of African barbarians,'" wrote Connecticut historian Charles Hawley. "They predicted Black cowardice, disgrace, and ruin as a result of the experiment."[327] One Democratic legislator called it "the greatest monstrosity ever introduced into Connecticut…You will let loose upon every household south of Mason and Dixon's line a band of ferocious men who will spread lust and rapine all over the land."[328]

Nonetheless, with an ever-increasing need for more soldiers, Gov. Buckingham managed in November 1863 to persuade the General As-

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[327] Hawley, Charles (Ben), "The Twenty-ninth Regiment Colored Volunteers," in *African American Connecticut Explored*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013, p. 177.

[328] Warshauer, p. 145.

sembly to allow the creation of a state regiment of Black soldiers, called the "29th Regiment (Colored) of Connecticut Volunteers."

Unlike the Revolutionary War, where most units were integrated, the Civil War officially had only segregated regiments; "integration" in the 29th was limited to the officers — all white. Segregation in the Army was strong and remained so through World War II. The Navy, on the other hand, tended to be integrated and attracted a sizable number of Black sailors. By the end of the Civil War, a quarter of the U.S. Navy personnel were men of color.[329]

An Army regiment consisted of about 600 men. So many Connecticut African Americans volunteered for the Army that a second regiment — the 30th — had to be formed almost immediately to accommodate them. Hawley points out that in 1860, 8,726 Blacks were living in Connecticut, of whom only 2,206 were men between the ages of 15 and 50 and eligible to serve. War records indicate 1,764 men of color eventually served from Connecticut — an astounding 78% of those eligible.[330] Of those volunteers 15% died in the service.

Only 48% of the eligible white men served in the war.[331]

Throughout the North, Blacks responded to the call for soldiers, in substantial numbers — around 180,000 men in all. By the war's end, some 10% of the Union Army was African-American. "These Negroes in blue took part in 499 military engagements, 39 of which were major battles," reports Professor Quarles. "Their death toll was high, amounting to nearly 37,000, comprising more than one fifth of their total."[332]

The 29th was full of men eager to fight. "All the soldiers of the Twenty-ninth Regiment, although dark-skinned, felt the full responsibility of their mission," the Rev. Alexander Herritage Newton, commissary sergeant for the 29th, said in his autobiography. "They were in the South to do, to dare, and to die. And while they had not been trained in military tactics at West Point and were backward in their movements, they had been to the armory of God and had received weapons of the heart that made them daring and dangerous foes — men to be really reckoned with.

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[329] Weir, p. 107.

[330] Hawley, p. 178.

[331] Warshauer, p. 5.

[332] Quarles, *America*, p.142.

And I am proud to say that the history of the colored man in warfare has been an enviable one. He has always showed his patriotism by action, by deeds of sacrifice, by death itself. We had the same muscle, the same strength, the same heart, the same conscience, the same cause, the same right, the same liberty as the white man." [333]

Cousins John S. Smalley and John Watson, and brothers George Washington Halsted and Prince Albert Halsted had grown up in an environment that had aided slaves fleeing from the South. They no doubt heard accounts of the horrors of slavery directly from its victims or in stories told by their parents. The work of Ned and Betsey Armstrong may well have influenced their decisions to show up in Bridgeport in late 1863 to volunteer for the fight. They were all assigned to the 29th.

An 18-Year-Old Orphan Answers the Call

John S. Smalley was born around 1846 and was only six years old when his father died. His mother passed away two years later, leaving him an orphan. He was probably cared for by his aunt, Betsy Watson, until he got into his teens and was able to be hired out as a worker or indentured servant.[334] At some point Frederick Starr, a white man, became John's "guardian." Starr, who in 1860 was a 28-year-old butcher with a wife and two small children, lived on Elm Street in Danbury. He later operated a grocery store in that city.

Smalley may have been in training with Starr to become a butcher, but he may also have been just a hired hand. When Smalley was only 18 years old and volunteered to join the Union Army, he gave his occupation as "laborer," a wide-ranging term that could include anything from farming to ditch digging. And he said his residence by that time was Bridgeport.

Since he was not yet an adult, Smalley needed the permission of a parent or guardian to sign up. In an affidavit dated Nov. 27, 1863, Frederick Starr stated: "I hereby give consent to have John S. Smally, my ward, enlist in the service of the United States for the term of three

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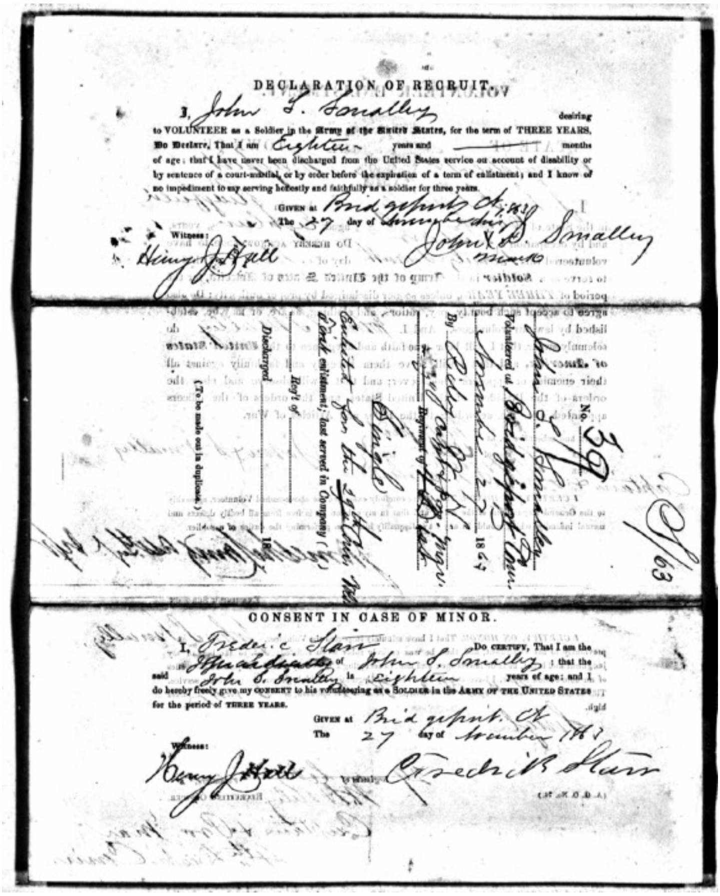
[333] Newton, A.H., *Out of the Briars: An Autobiography and Sketch of the 29th Regiment, Connecticut Volunteers*, Philadelphia, 1910, p. 30.

[334] See Chapter Nine's section on child labor.



DECLARATION OF RECRUIT.

I, John S. Smalley desiring to VOLUNTEER as a Soldier in the Army of the United States, for the term of THREE YEARS, Do Declare, That I am Eighteen years and — months of age; that I have never been discharged from the United States service on account of disability or by sentence of a court-martial, or by order before the expiration of a term of enlistment; and I know of no impediment to my serving honestly and faithfully as a soldier for three years.

Given at Bridgeport Ct. 1863
The 27 day of November

Witness: Henry J. Hall   John X S. Smalley (mark)

No. 39
John S. Smalley
Volunteered at Bridgeport Conn.
November 27 1863
Regiment of
Enlisted for the
Last enlistment; last served in Company
Discharged
(To be made out in duplicate.)

CONSENT IN CASE OF MINOR.

I, Frederic Starr Do CERTIFY, That I am the [illegible] of John S. Smalley; that the said John S. Smalley is eighteen years of age; and I do hereby freely give my CONSENT to his volunteering as a Soldier in the Army of the United States for the period of THREE YEARS.

Given at Bridgeport Ct
The 27 day of November 1863

Witness: Henry J. Hall   Frederick Starr

John Smalley's enlistment at age 18, signed with an X, includes consent of Frederic Starr, his legal guardian.

years." Smalley was assigned to Company B of the 29th Regiment.

Mothers and Wives Weeping

The men of the 29th were paid less than their white counterparts and suffered other forms of discrimination. When John Smalley enlisted, Black soldiers were paid $3 a month less than whites, and had to con-

tribute to the cost of their uniforms — which whites did not have to do.[335] They may even have been cheated out of money due to them for their service. In a history of the 29th Regiment, Sgt. Isaac J. Hill described "the inducements held out to men to join this Regiment" including: "They were to receive a bounty of $310 from the State, $75 from the County from which they enlisted, and $300 from the United States. The $310 from the State we received, the other bounties we did not receive."[336] Hill was an African American who served as a regiment orderly, probably because he could read and write. He was also an African Methodist Episcopal minister.

The 29th spent a couple of months training in New Haven — today, a monument to the regiment stands in New Haven's Criscuolo Park where the training took place; it lists on its stones the names of all the members of the regiment.

The 29th left for Beaufort, S.C., in March 1864. "Never did my ears hear, or my eyes perceive, or my heart feel the strong yearnings of nature as they did at that moment," Hill wrote. "Mothers weeping for their sons, and wives for their husbands, and sisters for their brothers, and friends for their friends, that were then on their way to the scene of conflict. White and colored ladies and gentlemen grasped me by the hand, with tears streaming down their cheeks, and bid me bye, expressing the hope that we might have a safe return."

After a brief stint at Beaufort and Hilton Head, which had been taken earlier by Union troops, the regiment was sent to Virginia where it participated in the fighting to take Petersburg and Richmond. Like so many engagements in the Civil War, the battles were fierce and the aftermaths ugly. "When I looked upon the dead and wounded, it was awful to see the piles of legs and arms that the surgeons cut off and threw in heaps on the ground," Hill wrote.

During this fighting on Oct. 27, John Smalley was wounded

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[335] According to William Weir's *The Encyclopedia of African American Military History*, Congress set the pay for black troops at $10 a month — $3 of which was deducted for clothing — while white soldiers were getting $13 with no clothing deduction. On June 15, 1864, Congress equalized the pay for black and white soldiers, retroactive to Jan. 1, 1864.

[336] Hill, I.J., *A Sketch of the 29th Regiment of Connecticut Colored Troops*, Baltimore, 1867, p. 7.

The 29th Colored Regiment Monument in Criscuolo Park in New Haven, where the troops trained in 1863-64, lists all the members of the 29th and 30th regiments.

"while on the skirmish line" at a place called Kell House. His casualty report said he suffered a "severe" spine injury.[337]

Hill did not think much of the medical attention that injured Black soldiers were receiving. "Many ... cases could be saved by a little care and attention after the battle, but the complexion and rank of a man has a great bearing," he said. "There was a great distinction made among the wounded, so much so that it would make the heart of any Christian ache to see men treated so like brutes."[338]

Despite this injury, Smalley recuperated enough to return to service within a few weeks, though he seems to have been reassigned to less stressful work as a company cook instead of a soldier.

Members of the 29th were among the first Union troops to enter Richmond after it was abandoned by the Confederacy in 1865. And on

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[337] U.S., Colored Troops Military Service Records, 1863-1865, National Archives, p. 1495; also Historical Data Systems, Inc.; Duxbury, MA 02331; American Civil War Research Database.

[338] Hill. p. 20

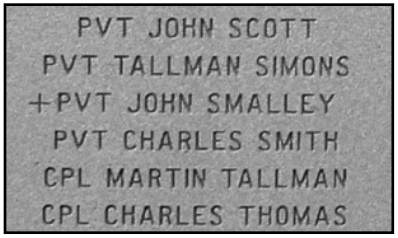
April 4 they witnessed a visit by the President. As Abraham Lincoln walked more than a mile from the James River to Jefferson Davis's former headquarters, many people lined the street cheering. Hill described the scene:

> *All could see the President, he was so tall. One woman standing in a doorway as he passed along shouted, "Thank you, dear Jesus, for this sight of the great conqueror." Another one standing by her side clasped her hands and shouted, "Bless the Lamb — Bless the Lamb." Another one threw her bonnet in the air, screaming with all her might, "Thank you, Master Lincoln." A white woman came to a window but turned away, as if it were a disgusting sight. A few white women, looking out of an elegant mansion, waved their handkerchiefs. President Lincoln walked in silence, acknowledging the salute of officers and soldiers, and of the citizens, colored and white. It was a man of the people among the people. It was a great deliverer among the delivered. No wonder tears came to his eyes when he looked on the poor colored people who were once slaves, and heard the blessings uttered from thankful hearts and thanksgiving to God and Jesus. The gratitude and admiration amounting almost to worship, with which the colored people of Richmond received the President must have deeply touched his heart."*

Five days later Lee surrendered at Appomattox and 11 days later, Abraham Lincoln was dead.

Toward the end of April, the 29th Regiment sailed from Richmond for Norfolk via the James River. "We left many kind and weeping friends standing on the wharf bidding us God speed, and wishing us a safe return," Hill reported.

From Norfolk, the regiment sailed for south Texas, with a stop at New Orleans. The troops arrived at Brazos July 7, part of a 50,000-man force along the Gulf Coast and the Rio Grande dealing both with relations with Mexico and with the beginnings of reconstruction in Texas.



The Black Civil War soldiers monument at Wooster Cemetery in Danbury includes John Smalley's name on the back. + indicates he died in the service. No Ridgefield monuments mention the Ridgefield native.

Only two months earlier, what some have called the last battle of the Civil War took place outside Brownsville — after the Confederate States had ceased to exist. In the skirmish at Palmito Ranch May 12 and 13, the Confederates overcame a Union Army attack.

To reach the military base at Brownsville, the 29th's troops had to march 20 miles inland through mosquito-infested marshes and waters sometimes waist deep. "It had not rained in this part of Texas for six weeks, and yet the mud in the roads was in places up to a man's knees and for miles hub deep," Hill recalled. "I was astonished to see the many

stragglers strewed all along the road. Many of them died and were buried in the forest, with nothing to look at their graves but the wild beasts of prey."

Many members of the regiment became sick and wound up hospitalized, including both John Smalley and Isaac Hill.

It was a nightmare, Hill said. "There were seven hundred sick in this hospital, four hundred of that number in the ward with me," he wrote. "The hospital stewards and nurses were men with no human feeling. The poor sick were dying ten per day and before they were cold, the hospital stewards would search them, and take anything valuable that they found about them before they reported them dead. It would be impossible for me to tell the many instances of cruelty perpetrated on the poor sick soldiers by the hands of these colored stewards. They acted more like demons than human beings. The fare was also very bad; we had two pieces of bread and a pint of coffee per day."

John Smalley's grave in a Louisiana national cemetery. USCT stands for United States Colored Troops.

Hill survived. Smalley didn't — he died of dysentery on Sept. 27 in that hospital.

During its war service, the 29th Regiment lost a total of 198 men, including 45 killed or mortally wounded in battle. More than three times that number — 153 men — succumbed to disease.

Two days after Smalley died, word came that the regiment was ordered home to Connecticut, where it was disbanded.

John S. Smalley was buried in a national cemetery on the post at Brownsville. However, in 1909, more than 1,500 soldiers who were interred at Fort Brownsville were moved to Alexandria National Cemetery in Pineville, La. Thus, John Smalley's remains lie today in the South, a land whose soldiers he had fought and from which fled slaves his grandparents had assisted.

Although he was born in Ridgefield, the name of John Smalley is not found on any monument or in any history book in his native town. However, it is engraved in stone in Wooster Cemetery in Danbury. There, a monument dedicated in 2007 honors African Americans from greater Danbury who served in the Civil War. A year later, the larger multi-stone monument bearing the names of all the men of the 29th Regiment Conn. Volunteer Infantry, was completed in New Haven's Criscuolo Park.

A Cousin Survives and Vanishes

Smalley and his cousin, John J. Watson, grew up together on Ned's Mountain. In 1850, when the census-taker stopped by, Watson was 9 years old and Smalley, 4. Their mothers were sisters.

The two may have traveled together from Danbury to Bridgeport to sign up for the Army. They both enlisted Nov. 27, 1863. Watson was at least 21 years old and didn't need the permission that Smalley, a minor, had to have from an adult.

Watson was in the same company, B, as his cousin and they no doubt saw much action together, including the Richmond-Petersburg campaigns. But John Watson escaped injury and was never reported hospitalized with an illness.

He was mustered out of the service in Brownsville in October 1865, returned to Connecticut, and seems to have vanished. No record of his life after the war, or of his death, has been found.

His mother, Betsey Ophelia Watson, a daughter of Ned and Betsey Armstrong, had moved to Danbury by 1860. She owned a small home, was working as a laundress, and lived with sons Velander, George and Tyler, and niece, Elizabeth Smalley — John's sister. She died in Danbury March 29, 1874.

The Two Princes

By 1860, new families had moved into the compound on Ned's Mountain. The census shows Prince Halsted, 63, and his wife, Sarah, 50, along with children, George Washington, 20, Prince Albert, 13, and Mary E., 16, living there. Records spell their name both Halstead and Halsted, but their gravestones in Ridgebury Cemetery use Halsted. (The census

actually reported "Halstem.")

Living in the same compound were Prince Ramorson, 23, "Cherry" or Charity Ramorson, 28, Charles Ramorson, 6, and Lorenzo Ramorson, 5.[339] All of them were listed as Black and all the men were working as farm hands.

It is hard to tell just when the Smalleys and Watsons left and the Halsteds and Ramorsons arrived. Since there are no deeds on the land records for these families, the censuses provide snapshots of who was living there once every 10 years, leaving to the imagination and a few birth or death records what was happening in between. There may have been points at which some or all of Smalleys, Watsons, Halsteds, and Ramorsons were there at the same time.

And in fact, in the 1860 Census, young Mary Smalley was living with three people named "Ramerson" on another farm in Ridgebury, suggesting that at least the Smalleys knew the Ramorsons from Ned's Mountain.

Prince Halsted was no newcomer to Ridgefield. He shows up in the 1840 Census, living in Ridgebury. Though it's very difficult to pinpoint the location of their home then, he and his family do not appear to be living with the Armstrongs at that time. His family then consisted of his wife, and two sons, one under 10 and the other between 10 and 20.

By 1850, Prince Halsted was in North Salem, N.Y., working on Col. Joseph Field's farm on the east side of the lower end of Peach Lake, not far from the Ridgefield line. Everyone got a name in the 1850 Census, so Prince and his wife Sarah are shown living there with three children, Joshua, 8, Prince (Albert), 4, and (Mary) Jane, 6.

The 1860 census shows Prince Halsted and his wife, Sarah E. Halsted, at Ned's Mountain with three children: George Washington Halsted, 20, Mary E. Halsted, 16, and Prince Albert Halsted, 13 (he was often called just Albert Halsted). "Joshua" has vanished and George Washington appears. Their ages are close; the North Salem census may have been in error in reporting Joshua. Jane seems to be the same as Mary E. Halsted, the name on her gravestone.

Described in the 1860 Census as a "farm hand," Prince Halsted had been born around 1797 in Connecticut (says the 1860 Census) or

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[339] This surname can be read variously as Ramerson, Ramorson, Romorson or Romerson; the handwriting is often unclear.

New York (says the 1850 Census). The two censuses agree that his wife, Sarah, was a native of New York, born around 1810. Sarah died in 1867 and Prince in 1879. They are buried together in Ridgebury Cemetery.

Two Sons Serve

Prince and Sarah's sons — George Washington and Prince Albert Halsted — may have envisioned enlisting in the Union Army as a way of fighting slavery, of supporting their country, and even of finding adventure. It wound up a tragedy for Albert.

Both George and Albert enlisted in December 1863, as soon as African-Americans were allowed to join Connecticut's regiments. They were assigned to Company E of the 29th Regiment, and taken to the Draft Rendezvous, a camp in New Haven that provided basic training. Both were almost immediately hospitalized with illnesses.

Albert spent nearly three months in Knight General Hospital, a military facility in New Haven, suffering with typhoid fever. For some reason, he was returned to duty on April 5, 1864. Ten days later, he was dead. His medical record said he had died of "typhoid pneumonia."

His death was tragic, but not unusual. Two thirds of the 620,000 recorded military deaths in the Civil War were caused by disease, not wounds.[340]

Although there are indications Albert was buried in Wooster Cemetery in Danbury, no gravestone for him exists today. It is possible that a government-sponsored marker was created — an order for a federal gravestone was reportedly filled, but records show that that stone would have erroneously stated he served in a Massachusetts regiment. Perhaps the stone was rejected because of the error and, somehow, a corrected replacement was never acquired.

"Private Albert Halstead" is, however, listed on the Wooster Cemetery monument to African Americans who died in the Civil War.

At training camp, brother George Washington Halsted came down immediately with measles and mumps and was also sent to Knight

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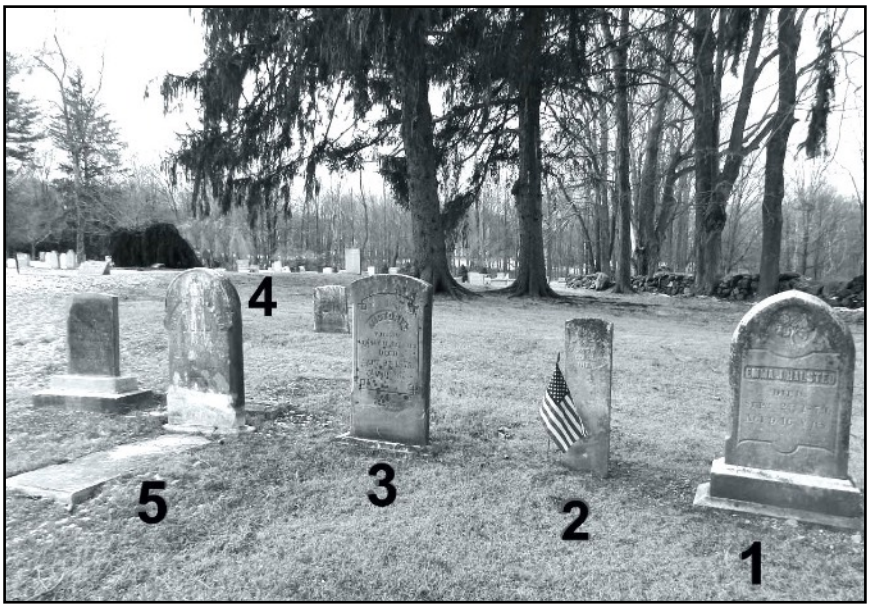
[340] Some of the latest scholarship suggests that 750,000 to 850,000 military personnel died in the war. If the deaths of emancipated slaves who starved or succumbed to illness are included, the war may have killed about one million people. *See* Delbanco, p. 350.



Three generations of Halsteds are buried together in Ridgebury Cemetery. 2 is Civil War veteran George Washington Halsted, and 3 Victoria Halsted, his wife. 4 is Prince Halsted, his father, and 5, Sarah E. Halsted, his mother, while 1 is his daughter, Emma J. Halsted, who died at age 16.

General Hospital. George recovered; amazingly, of the 25,340 men treated at Knight between 1862 and 1865, only 185 died.[341]

George Washington Halsted went on to serve with the 29th Regiment at Beaufort, S.C., and in the gruesome Richmond-Petersburg campaigns in Virginia. He must have been an outstanding soldier because he was promoted to corporal and then to sergeant.

One of his comrades was the Rev. Alexander Herritage Newton, commissary sergeant for the 29th who noted in his autobiography that Sgt. Halsted was wounded in a "fierce encounter" Sept. 29, 1864, three miles outside Richmond. "This battle was indeed a slaughter pen. The

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[341] Rockey, J.L., *History of New Haven County*, New York: W.W. Preston, 1892, Vol. 1, p. 79.

enemy fought like tigers," Newton said. "These scenes would have made your heart sore. ...The wounded and dying scattered over the battlefield thick, the hurrying to and fro of the physicians and the nurses; the prayers and groans and cries of the wounded, the explosion of bombs, the whizzing of bullets, the cracking of rifles; you would have thought that the very forces of hell had been let loose. And, indeed, it was a hell, the horrors of which no one could ever forget."[342]

Sgt. Alexander H. Newton of the 29th described the battle in which comrade Sgt. Halsted was wounded at "a slaughter pen."

Sgt. Halsted recovered from his wound and was with the 29th at Brownsville, Texas, after the war ended and the regiment was finally mustered out of service.

After the war, George Halsted returned to farm work. In 1870, he and his family were living in North Salem, probably on the Newman Briggs farm at the very south end of Peach Lake and not far from Colonel Field's farm where his father had worked in 1850. George and his wife Victoria had two daughters, Alagatha,[343] 8, and Emma J., 7, living with them then, along with George's father, Prince. A son, George, born in 1858, was apparently living elsewhere.

George Washington Halsted died April 12, 1874, only 31 years old. Victoria died a year later, aged 36. Both are buried in Ridgebury Cemetery, along with their daughter, Emma Halsted, who died in 1879 at

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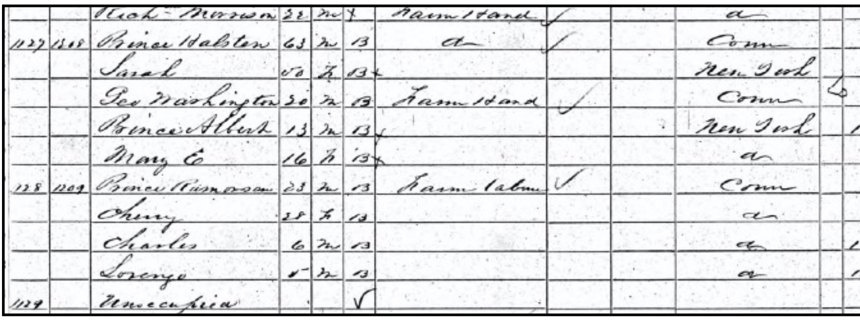
[342] Newton, p. 55-6.

[343] The census-taker said "Allegesh," but Ridgefield vital records show Alagatha.

the age of 16.

Their son, George, was a 22-year-old laborer living in Danbury in 1880, but what happened to him after that has not been discovered. Nor has Alagatha's whereabouts after 1870 been found.



		Rich Morrison	22	m	B	Farm Hand	do	
1127	1308	Prince Halsten	63	m	B	do	Conn	
		Sarah	50	F	B		New York	
		Geo Washington	20	m	B	Farm Hand	Conn	
		Prince Albert	13	m	B		New York	1
		Mary E	16	F	B		do	
1128	1309	Prince Ramorson	23	m	B	Farm labor	Conn	
		Cherry	28	F	B		do	
		Charles	6	m	B		do	1
		Lorenzo	1	m	B		do	1
1129		Unoccupied						

The 1860 Ridgefield census shows "Prince Ramorson," or is it "Prince Romerson"? He is 23, classified as "Black," and living with sister-in-law "Cherry" (Charity), and her children, Charles and Lorenzo. Was he a son of John Samerson/Romerson?

A Third Prince — from Hawai'i?

Many mysteries surround the Ned's Mountain compound but perhaps none is as unusual as the identity of "Prince Ramorson," described in the 1860 Census as a 23-year-old Black "farm hand" living in one of the homes with three members of his family. The spelling of his name adds to the mystery — and confusion; it is unclear from the census-taker's script whether the young man's name was Ramorson, Ramerson, Romorson, or some other vowel variation.

Prince was a name fairly common among African Americans in the 18th and early 19th Centuries — Prince Halsted and Prince Albert Halsted were living in the same compound. (Often the name was aimed at reflecting a royal descent from ancestors in Africa.) Ramorson, however, was a surname that was unusual in this region for persons of any race at that time. There was one notable exception: A Prince *Romerson*, born in the Kingdom of Hawai'i around 1840, came to New York and New England, served in the Union Navy blockading Confederate ports

during the Civil War, then joined the Union Army to fight the Confederacy on land, and finally wound up being one of the U.S. Army's "Buffalo Soldiers" in the postwar West.

Was the census taker's Prince Ramorson/Romorson the same as Hawaii's Prince Romerson?

A death report in the Ridgefield town hall records adds weight to the possibility that the two were the same. On April 17, 1854, a "laborer" reported as John *Samerson* died of "bilious fever" in Ridgefield at the age of 60.[344] Like Prince Romerson of military fame, John Samerson — very close to *Ramorson, Romorson* or *Romerson* — was born in "Owyee," the Sandwich Islands, according to his Ridgefield town hall death record. His race was described as "copper."[345]

Was John "Samerson" the father of "Prince Ramorson" of Ridgefield who was actually "Prince Romerson" of Hawai'i? What are the chances of a native of Hawai'i named John Samerson being in the same small New England town at the same time as someone named Prince Ramorson/Romorson, who may have been from Hawai'i — unless they were connected?

If Ramorson/Romorson, Romerson, and Samerson are all the same family, how could such variation in the name occur? Several causes may be involved.

The spelling of unfamiliar people's names in official records was often based largely on how they sounded to others, especially when the owners of the names were illiterate. The result was spellings based on interpretation of sounds. For example, the census taker in 1860 recorded the name of Cherry Ramorson/Romorson. Ridgefield vital records indicate she was the same person as Charity Samerson. Someone in the household said "Charity" and the census man heard "Cherry."

The variation of the initial letter — R in Ramorson/Romorson and S in Samerson — may be due to another potential source of confusion: handwriting. The Ridgefield vital records, which consistently use Samerson, were probably based on second-hand information submitted to the town clerk in writing. All of the Samerson/Ramorson people were

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[344] Bilious fever has been defined as fever associated with excessive bile or bilirubin in the bloodstream and tissues, causing jaundice. The fever was probably caused by malaria or viral hepatitis.

[345] Ridgefield Vital Records, Vol. 3A, p. 35

living in the Ridgebury parish of the town and someone from there, possibly the pastor of the Ridgebury Congregational Church, probably supplied the Ridgefield town clerk with annual reports of births, marriages and deaths.[346] When the Ridgebury records were turned in, the submitter may have written Samerson due to some misunderstanding, or the town clerk may have misinterpreted the submitter's handwriting of Ramerson and used Samerson instead during several years of recording the family's name.[347]

Then, too, Ramorson/Romerson/Samerson may all be anglicizations of a more complex Hawaiian name and the owners of the name may have varied — or allowed variations in — how the surname was pronounced or spelled. Henry Opukahaia, a young scholar from Hawai'i at the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Conn., in the late 1810s, often appeared as Henry Obookiah, including on the cover of his posthumously published memoirs.[348]

After citing several Hawaiians who served in the Civil War, historians Justin Vance and Anita Manning pointed out the difficulty in tracing the past and future of these soldiers. "Likely there were dozens more Native Hawaiians who served, but it may be impossible to identify them because often names simplified or invented, such as 'John Boy' or 'Joseph Kanaka' [Hawaiian for 'man'], were used on official enlistment papers."[349]

"Prince Romerson was definitely an anglicized name," Dr. Vance said in an email correspondence.[350] "I'd guess completely made up (or given by the enlisting sea captain authority) vs. a version of a Hawaii

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[346] The fact that Ridgebury vitals often appear in the records immediately after the year's worth of Ridgefield parish vitals strongly suggests this.

[347] George L. Rockwell, in his *History of Ridgefield*, gives the name of a local American Indian chief as Japorneck. However, he had misread the town clerk's 1727 handwriting. The name was Taporneck.

[348] "A Great Hope for Hawaii Dies in Cornwall," *Today in Connecticut History,* Office of the State Historian and CTHumanities, Feb. 17, 2020.

[349] Vance, Justin W. and Anita Manning, The Effects of the American Civil War on Hawai'i and the Pacific World. *World History Connected* 9.3, (2012): 57 pars. 28 Feb. 2020 <https://worldhistoryconnected.press.uillinois.edu/9.3/vance.html>.

[350] Feb. 28, 2020.

name."

Prince Romerson is well enough known to be the subject of a four-page biography in the 2015 book, *Asians and Pacific Islanders and the Civil War*.[351] A 1,500-word profile of him appears on Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia. He was born around 1840 in Hawai'i, then a kingdom, which became a U.S. territory in 1900. Very little is known of his early life but according to a Wikipedia biographer, he was "living in the American Northeast before the war."

If the Ramorsons, Romersons and Samersons were the same family, at least some of them were in Ridgefield by 1854 when John Samerson died.

The 1860 census and town's vital records seem to be reporting the same people with names spelled differently:

- The census says that a residence in the Ned's Mountain compound housed Prince Ramorson, 23, Cherry Ramorson, 28, Charles Ramorson, 6, and Lorenzo Ramorson, 5.
- The Ridgefield vital records report that Lorenzo D. Samerson was born April 15, 1856, a child of William and Charity A. Samerson. William was 30 years old, and Charity, 26, at the time.
- In 1859, William Samerson died of consumption in Ridgefield at the age of 33.
- The town's vital records also note two other deaths: John F. Samerson, 6, who died of consumption Aug. 20, 1860, and Ann M. Samerson, 10 months, who died Feb. 1, 1859, of a "brain disease."[352] No parents are given, but they were probably children of William and Charity.
- Ann M. *Rommerson*, age 8, died of whooping cough on Oct. 31, 1852, according to the only Ridgefield vital record using the R spelling.[353] Ann M. *Samerson*, the infant who died seven years later, may have been named for this girl.

Since John Samerson was 60 years old at his death in 1854, he

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[351] McCunn, Ruthann Lum, in Shively, Carol A., ed.. *Asians and Pacific Islanders and the Civil War*, Washington, DC: National Park Service, 2015, p. 142-45

[352] Ridgefield vital records, Vol. 3A, p. 38.

[353] Ridgefield vital records, Vol. 3A, p. 34.

may have been the father of Prince Ramorson as well as of William Samerson. (John may also have been the namesake for the child, John F. Samerson, who died in 1860.) Thus, Charity was probably Prince's sister-in-law.

The Mystery Skeleton

William's death in 1859 explains why he does not appear in the 1860 census. His death — or John Samerson's five years earlier — may also explain something else: The origin of the mysterious skeleton found in 1879 in a secret cave that Ned and Betsey Armstrong may have earlier used for the Underground Railroad.[354]

Hawaiians are known to have used caves for burials. According to Hawaiian writer Betty Fullard-Leo, "Burial caves have been found on every Hawaiian Island. Unfortunately, by the time many of the caves were catalogued by authorities, they had already been discovered earlier and looted. Most chiefly families are believed to have had their own secret burial caves, the location of which was closely guarded by the kahu, or family retainer. Sometimes stone walls that looked like the surrounding cliffs were cleverly constructed to hide a cave entrance."[355] Other sources say commoners also used caves to inter their dead "well into the Christian period."[356]

What happened to the 1879 skeleton that may have belonged to William or John Samerson has not been learned, but it probably was interred in an unmarked grave, perhaps in Ridgebury Cemetery.

The births of sons Charles Ramorson and John Samerson, who may have been twins, were not recorded in Ridgefield's vital records, suggesting they occurred when William and Charity lived elsewhere, and adds to evidence that the family may have arrived around 1854 or 1855,

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[354] *See* Chapter Seven.

[355] Fullard-Leo, Betty, "Sacred Burial Practices," *Coffee Times,* Kauai, Hawaii, February, 1998.

[356] Allen, M. S., and T. L. Hunt, "Descriptive Summary of A North Kona Burial Cave, Island Of Hawaii," paper prepared for the Mauna Loa Field Station, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park, 1976. Christian missionaries began arriving in 1820.

possibly just after John Samerson's death.

Perhaps saddened by the death of her husband and two of her children, Charity Ramorson/Samerson, along with Lorenzo and Charles, seems to have left town sometime after 1860 and to have vanished from the national records. None of them could be found in any subsequent censuses, military records or cemetery databases. Perhaps Charity remarried and adopted a new name.

Adding to the mystery of this family is the 1860 census report that three more people named "Ramerson" were living in Ridgebury, not at the old Armstrong compound but about a mile north amid the farms of Nehemiah and Lyman Keeler. Emeline Ramerson, 50, was described as having been born in the West Indies. Was she John Ramorson/Samerson's wife? With her were Matilda Ramerson, 26, who had been born in New York, and "Jas" or James Ramerson, 28, a native of Connecticut. Were they her children?

And compounding the mystery, living right next door in the household of the Lyman Keeler farm was Mary E. Smalley, described as age 10 but probably closer to 13, granddaughter of the Armstrongs.

Navy and Army

Unlike others in his probable family, Prince Romerson of Hawai'i left many records. In January 1863, he was in New York City where he enlisted in the Union Navy. Records indicate he had worked as a barber before joining. For a year he served aboard the USS Wamsutta and USS Mercedita as part of the naval squadrons maintaining the blockade of Confederate ports.[357]

Why would a citizen of the Kingdom of Hawai'i living in Ridgefield wind up fighting in the Civil War? "During any war, people join the military from many motives," say Vance and Manning. "In most cases, their service was probably the result of Hawaiians being away from home, in need of work, and the best choice before them was to enlist. Although gainful employment and adventure played a part, ideological reasons also were a motive. Hawaii missionary descendants mention their interests in preserving the Union and in abolition, but Native

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[357] McCunn, in Shively, p. 143.

Hawaiians who were educated largely in a New England model, may have had similar interests."[358]

By May of 1864, Prince Romerson had left the Navy and was in Boston where he joined the Union Army. He was assigned to the 5th Regiment Massachusetts Colored Volunteer Cavalry. Possibly because of his past military experience or an ability to read and write, he was almost immediately promoted to sergeant.

Romerson fought at the Second Battle of Petersburg and, as did members of Connecticut's 29th Regiment, took part in the whole, bitter Richmond-Petersburg Campaign. He also served as a guard for the Union prison camp for Confederates in Maryland.

After the war ended, his regiment, with Connecticut's 29th, was sent to Texas, but Romerson was taken ill like so many other soldiers. He recuperated in New Orleans, then at a hospital on an island off New Rochelle, N.Y., before being mustered out of the service with his regiment Oct. 9, 1865.

However, Romerson was apparently fond of the military and the adventure it offered. He enlisted in 1867 as a private in what became the 25th United States Infantry Regiment. A racially segregated unit of the United States Army, it was dubbed the "Buffalo Soldiers" and included many Civil War veterans from "colored" regiments. Serving at least three years, Romerson fought in the American Indian Wars with the 25th — despite Hollywood portrayals that invariably ignore their participation, men of color made up a fifth of the regular Army in the post-war West.[359]

When he died on March 30, 1872, of unstated causes, possibly at Fort Griffin, Texas, Romerson may have been a discharged veteran, working as a citizen, possibly as a barber, a profession he is believed to have practiced before joining the military.[360]

Romerson is buried in the San Antonio National Cemetery. Perhaps it is no surprise that his gravestone bears yet another version of the name: Prince *Rowerson*.

How a family from Hawai‘i may have wound up as farm workers

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[358] Vance, Justin W. and Anita Manning, op.cit.

[359] Weir, William, *The Encyclopedia of African American Military History*, Amherst, N.Y., Prometheus Books, 2004, p. 73

[360] McCunn, p. 145.

in a small, rural community in southwestern Connecticut is one of the many mysteries surrounding the Ramorsons/Romersons/Samersons. New England in the 19th Century had been a destination for a number of Hawaiians who left their native land, working aboard whaling vessels that frequently visited the islands' harbors. New York and New Haven were the nearest significant ports to Ridgefield. These newcomers may have run into someone from Ridgefield who reported a house was available to a family who would do farm work. Did John Samerson come first? Was he the father of Prince and William, and did they come with him or later? John's death report says he was married — was Emeline his wife and widow? Perhaps one day researchers in Hawaii will be able to help in finding the roots of this fascinating family that spent nearly a decade in distant Ridgefield and may have left the bones of one of its members in a Ned's Mountain cave.

If Prince Romerson's name weren't confused enough, his gravestone in the San Antonio National Cemetery spells it ROWERSON.

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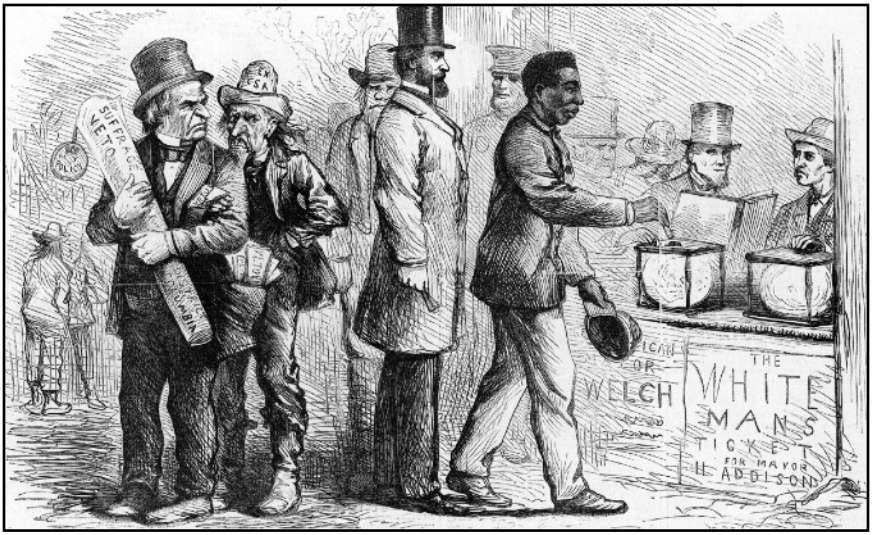
By 1870, no people of color appeared to be left at Ned's Mountain and only one of the old cottages on the compound appears to have been in use. It was occupied by Irish immigrants, Pat and Mary Hartell, and their three children, Mary, Maggie and Patrick. Four decades of being a refuge for people fleeing enslavement and a home to people who fought slavery had ended.

Today, nothing visible remains of the Armstrong compound. The east side of the lane is steep and wooded, with a modern house at the summit. The lane itself leads to a back entrance of a large estate, the former McKeon farm, more recently called Double H Farm for its owner,

the late E. Hunter Harrison.

Ironically, Hunter Harrison was a leading North American railroad executive.

The gate at the end of Ned's Lane leading to Double H Farm.



An 1867 cartoon depicting white displeasure with Black suffrage.

Chapter 9

After the War

After the Civil War and the enactment of 13th Amendment abolishing slavery nationally, the next big issue issue facing Blacks in Ridgefield and Connecticut was suffrage.

Even after the war, the majority of white Connecticut residents — the men, at least, for they were the only ones who could vote — believed Blacks were unequal. While the white, male voters of the state approved the 1865 U.S. Constitutional amendment banning slavery, those same voters that same year also defeated by a wide margin a Connecticut Constitutional change that would have allowed Black men to vote. In commenting on that rejection of Black suffrage, *The New York*

Times said*:* "The decision is purely due to prejudice — to unreasonable, unjust and cruel prejudice — against the negro."[361]

These attitudes and laws, of course, kept Black men in the same category as all women, Black or white. However, Black men did soon win the right to vote, through the adoption in 1870 of the 15th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. And despite its 1865 vote against Negro suffrage, Connecticut was the 15th approving state of the 28 needed for ratification. Nonetheless, it took six more years before Connecticut removed "white" from its own Constitution when describing what kind of males could vote.[362] Several scholars have maintained that Connecticut excluded Blacks from voting longer than "all the New England communities."[363]

Being able to vote also gave Connecticut's Black men the right to run for office. In Ridgefield, however, very few African Americans have held elective office since 1870 — to this day. Ridgefield's first Black town officials were elected at the Annual Town Meeting on Oct. 9, 1871. Thomas F. Brown and Hart Steele, whom the *Columbian Register* in New Haven described as "two colored gentlemen," were chosen as haywards "by almost unanimous vote." Haywards caught and impounded loose livestock, such as cattle or swine, that could damage farm crops.[364] It was not one of the major town offices, but it was an ancient one.

It would, in fact, take a whole century after Black suffrage before an African American held a major public office in town. On Aug. 7, 1969, Dr. Clifford V. Smith, a former university professor who worked at the time for the federal Environmental Protection Agency, was named to the Board of Education. (Dr. Smith later became the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee, was a trustee of Johns Hopkins University, and president of the General Electric Fund.)

In the 19th and even much of the 20th Century in Ridgefield, it is possible that whites discouraged African Americans from running for public office. "Emancipation, like slavery, brought a cruel reversal of the

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[361] "The Connecticut Election," *The New York Times*, Oct. 4, 1865

[362] Warshauer, p. 188

[363] Greene, p. 300.

[364] *Columbian Record,* New Haven Oct. 14, 1871, p. 4

American dream," said historian William Piersen. "Unlike other immigrant groups, who were remunerated economically and socially for their initiative and perseverance in assimilation, Blacks were, more often than not, punished for such behavior by a white community that feared Black advancement might threaten the stability of the caste relationships."[365]

However, Blacks may also have been reluctant to run because, as has been observed elsewhere in Connecticut, they did not feel comfortable with seeking political office.[366] The reasons for that discomfort are complex, and may have involved a long history of distrust of white political leaders, lack of encouragement from white population, and perhaps even the simple fact that the amount of work needed to earn a living and support a family left no time or energy for politics.

In addition, the pool for potential Black town officials in Ridgefield was always small. Between 1870 and 1900, the African-American population of the town ranged between 13 (1880) and 27 (1870 and 1900), and was always around 1% or less of the population. Through most of the 20th Century and into the 21st, the African-American population has remained around 1%.

Laborers and Domestics, Adult and Child

In 1870, the year in which Black men won suffrage and five years after the end of slavery nationally, Ridgefield did not appear to be the "land of opportunity" for people of color that it seems to have been in the 18th Century. While several Black families owned land in Ridgefield the 1700s, only one did in 1870. Twenty seven African Americans, about 1.4% of the population of 1,919 people, lived in town that year. All the adults (21 and older) who were identified by the census as employed were unskilled workers — six men were described as "laborers" and four of the five employed women were domestics; a fifth was a "washwoman."

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[365] Piersen, p. 47.

[366] In his book, *Negro and White in Connecticut Town* (New Haven: College and University Press, 1961), Frank F. Lee discusses in some detail the relation of Blacks and politics in an unidentified but real Connecticut town in the first half of the 20th Century.

This situation, in which Blacks worked almost only at unskilled jobs, continued to dominate the minority population well into the 20th Century in Ridgefield — and elsewhere in the state. [367]

Even children worked. An examination of the 1870 census reveals some disturbing examples of child labor among Blacks. Although only 14 years old, Willie Sills lived with and worked as a "farm hand" on the lower Main Street farm of William N. Benedict and his wife, Elisabeth, both in their 60s.

Probably even more disturbing is Ellen Felmetty,[368] who the census says was a 10-year-old African-American girl. She was living with Lewis and Olive Reynolds, both in their early 70s, and William M. Parsons, described as a 58-year-old "Baptist clergyman." It is possible she was a sort of foster child, being cared for by the trio. However, it seems unlikely that a couple of white septuagenarians and a white, 58-year-old minister would be parenting a 10-year-old Black girl. She was probably a domestic servant, possibly in an informal indentured-servant relationship — true indentured servitude, in which a person works without salary for a period of years in return for training or eventual compensation, was outlawed five years earlier by the 13th Amendment. Her parents or parent may have provided Ellen to the Reynoldses as a servant in return for payment to them.

The Tragic Life of David Riley

Yet another working Black child would lead a short, strange and ultimately tragic life that may have involved mistreatment because of his color. A grandson of Lewis Riley, described in Chapter Six, David H. Riley was born in 1860, a son of George H. and Martha Ann Riley.[369] By

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[367] *See* Lee, p. 50ff.

[368] She is probably from a sizable family from Greenwich, whose named is variously spelled Felmette, Felmote, Felmetee, and Felmetta, called one of the first free Black families to live in that town by Jeffrey Bingham Mead in an article in *Greenwich Time*, Greenwich, Connecticut, August 20, 1995, Page B3.

[369] Roese, Terrie, *The Rileys*, unpublished manuscript, 2021, p.2. *See also* p. 100-103.

1870, he shows up in the U.S. census as an 11 year old, living with Charles B. Staples, 49, and his wife Sarah, on Catoonah Street. The census-taker did not note any occupation for David but it's likely he had been hired out by his parents to be a helper for Mr. and Mrs. Staples.

When he was 16 years old, David ran into trouble with the law: He was caught stealing a horse and carriage that belonged to — of all people — a Fairfield County deputy sheriff. According to an unusually detailed account in the *Bridgeport Standard* [370] on Aug. 16, 1876, David and "a young white fellow named Clifton Gilbert"[371] stole the horse and carriage owned by Louis Hunt, which was tied up in the Main Street yard of Dr. Daniel Adams.[372] Young Gilbert — whose name also appears as Clifford and was probably actually Clinton — happened to be the son of town constable John Gilbert.

The pair drove the horse to Sing Sing, N.Y., then through New Jersey to near Scranton, Pa., where they sold it to a man "who locked it up and did not pay for it." They then went to Fishkill, N.Y., where Riley had a brother, but where police had been warned to keep eye out for them. They were quickly arrested and locked up until Constable Samuel J. Barlow could arrive from Ridgefield.

Barlow, a Civil War veteran whose main occupation was selling stoves and tinware, brought the two to his home in Ridgefield. "He kept them locked in his house until last evening, efforts being made in the meantime to settle the matter by paying the expenses."

Then a strange thing happened. "Last evening young Gilbert was allowed to go out doors and he escaped," the *Standard* said. Clifford Gilbert wound up vanishing, and was never tried for the crime.

Why would Constable Barlow have allowed prisoner Gilbert to go outdoors? Several newspapers speculated that he was influenced by John Gilbert, Clinton's dad and a fellow constable. In fact, *The Hartford Courant* directly blamed Gilbert in an account that deviates a bit from

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[370] *Bridgeport (Conn.) Standard*, Aug. 29, 1876, p. 3.

[371] The name is sometimes reported as Clifton or Clifford Gilbert. However, census records report only a Clinton Gilbert as a son of John Gilbert.

[372] Dr. Adams, a retired physician from New York City and prominent Ridgefield citizen, has gained much modern fame as the man who first compiled the "laws of baseball." Some call him the "Father of Baseball" and were trying in the early 21st Century to get him into the Baseball Hall of Fame.

that of the *Standard*. "Ridgefield is again in a turmoil of excitement," said the *Courant*. "Deputy Sheriff Hunt's horse and carriage were stolen on the 16th and with them disappeared Clifton Gilbert, son of Constable Gilbert, and a colored boy, David Riley. The thieves were arrested in New York state and taken home. Constable Gilbert was allowed access to them, and enabled his son to escape."[373]

The Waterbury American was even more direct. "Ridgefield folks are pretty mad at Constable Gilbert because he allowed his son, who was arrested for stealing Deputy Sheriff Hunt's horse and carriage, to escape, while a colored boy, who helped him, goes to the state prison for three years and a half."[374]

Indeed, the *Standard* reported, Riley appeared in Superior Court Aug. 29, 1878, "a young and very quiet and respectable appearing colored man," and testified that Gilbert had "put him up to the job of stealing the team and was most active in the matter." Riley added that Gilbert would probably join the Navy to escape capture and prosecution.

Riley pleaded guilty to a charge of horse stealing. However, the *Standard* alleged that he was duped. He "was told to plead guilty and he would get clear," the newspaper said. Instead, the judge sentenced Riley to three and a half years in the state prison at Wethersfield.

Then in early 1878, another remarkable thing happened: Less than two years into his 3½-year imprisonment, both the House and Senate of the Connecticut General Assembly voted to pardon David Riley. It was one of only four pardons issued by the legislature that year.[375]

The reason for his release has not been found, but may have involved evidence of his being misled by court prosecutors. It may also have entailed the likelihood that Gilbert, apparently the main player in the theft of the horse, escaped punishment while the 16-year-old Riley was left to suffer the consequences. Clearly Riley had someone advocating for him — probably from the time of his incarceration; perhaps it was his older siblings, at least five of whom were living in the area.

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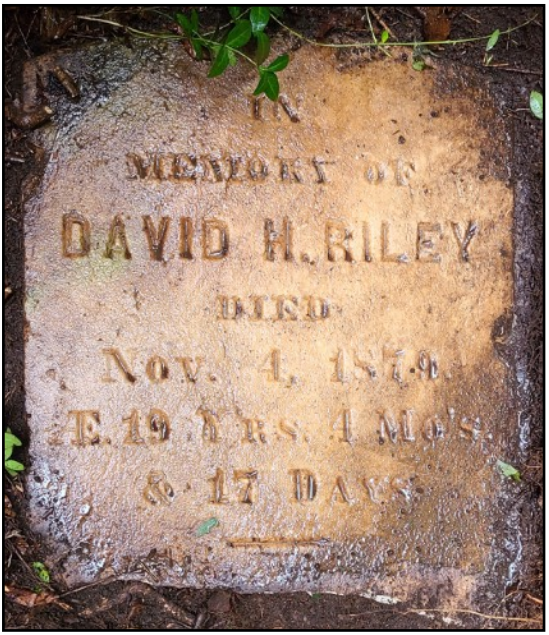
[373] *Hartford Daily Courant,* Sept. 1, 1876, p. 4.

[374] *Waterbury Daily American*, Sept. 5, 1876, p.1

[375] *Report of the Directors of the Connecticut State Prison to the General Assembly*, January session, Hartford: Wiley, Waterman & Eaton, 1879, p. 19.

David's freedom did not last long. On Nov. 4, 1879, he was found dead in a pond near a Hartford park. He was only 19 years old. Newspaper accounts suggest murder was a possible cause, though no one was ever charged in the death.[376]



David Riley's gravestone was unearthed in July 2021 at Lower Starrs Plain Cemetery. *—Photo by Anna Asmodeo*

Along with his parents and other members of the Riley family, David is buried in Lower Starrs Plain Cemetery at the very south end of Danbury, a short distance from his grandfather's farm in Ridgefield. In the summer of 2021, his well-preserved gravestone that had fallen years ago was unearthed by several historians of the mostly hidden cemetery. The handsome stone, like the efforts to free Riley himself, reflect a caring family.

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In census reports there were also white families with young white teenagers or pre-teenagers of different surnames in their censused households who may have been domestics or laborers — or maybe just relatives, such as grandchildren. One example was Phebe Knapp, who back in 1850 at the age of 10, was "poisoned," according to federal cen-

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[376] The *Boston Journal* Nov. 10 reported from Hartford: "A negro named David Riley was found dead in a small pond at Charter Oak Park to-day. He belonged in Ridgefield. It was supposed to be a case of murder, but there were no marks of violence on the body."

sus mortality records.[377] However, the town's death records intriguingly reveal that she was a "servant girl" who had consumed opium.

In the 19th Century, child labor was not illegal, and many poor children, Black or white, worked long hours to help support their families. In the cities, they labored in factories. In the country, farms and middle-class households provided job opportunities for children. Child labor historian Betsy Wood says that "After the Civil War officially ended child slavery, most Americans still did not think there was anything wrong with children earning their keep, as long as working kids could get at least a rudimentary education. While some states such as Massachusetts had child labor laws on the books, those measures only regulated employment. Children could be allowed to work as many as 10 hours daily."[378]

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The 1870 census found only one Black property owner, Isaac Hart Steele, in Ridgefield, who had that year been elected a town hayward. Steele's personal property was valued in the census at $500. According to research done by Keith Jones for his book, *The Farms of Farmingville*, Steele, a native of of North Salem, N.Y., paid $300 to William Lee in 1865 for a small, already antique house on two acres along what is now Limekiln Road.[379] Located just south of Poplar Road, the house still stands today — much expanded and "improved." Steele would have been about 29 years old at the time of the purchase.

Jones says the Steele family may have been living in Ridgefield as early as 1859, when his daughter, Mary E. Steele, was born to his first wife, Sarah A. Steele. Sarah died in 1862 at the age of 32, and by 1865 when the house purchase took place, Isaac was married to Catherine

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[377] Nonpopulation Federal Census Schedules, Mortality, 1850-1885; Census Year: 1850; Ridgefield, Fairfield, Connecticut, Connecticut State Library, Hartford.

[378] Wood, Betsy, "Abolishing child labor took the specter of 'white slavery' and the job market's near collapse during the Great Depression," *The Conversation.com*, Aug. 27, 2020. She is the author of *Upon the Altar of Work: Child Labor and the Rise of a New American Sectionalism*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2020.

[379] Jones, Keith Marshall III, *The Farms of Farmingville,* Ridgefield: Connecticut Colonel Publishing Company, 2001.

A 21st Century view of Isaac Steele's once-modest cottage that has been expanded over the years. The barn is at the right.

"Katie" Pines Steele, who was 24 years old in 1870.

Isaac Hart Steele's home sat on two acres of limestone ledge, making it unsuitable for farming, Jones said. To earn an income, Steele worked on neighboring farms, including that of Azariah Smith. Apparently his abilities at farming gained a reputation for excellence because Steele was hired to oversee the fields on Gov. George E. Lounsbury's large farm, The Hickories.

His wife, Katie, may have worked as a member of the household staff at The Hickories, Jones said. Her step-daughter, Mary, may also have worked for the governor; when she died in 1933, her occupation was listed as "servant" in the town's death records.

Mary E. Steele was born in 1859, possibly in the Limekiln Road house, and attended school in the old Farmingville Schoolhouse near the site of today's Farmingville School. She told an interviewer in the 1920s that her ancestors had lived in the North Salem area since the 1700s, and recalled hearing her great-grandmother tell of attending a gathering in North Salem during the Revolution when General Washington and General Lafayette and their staffs stopped for refreshments on their way to Hartford. Aunt Sibby Sickle had also been present when the French Army under General Rochambeau passed through North Salem and Ridgebury.

Katie Steele died in 1889. Three years later, Isaac Hart Steele sold the Farmingville property for $712, more than twice what he paid, and bought a place on Danbury Road near where Adam Broderick salon is in 2022. He lived there for a while, eventually returning to North Salem, where he died in 1921 at the age of 87.

Mary remained in Ridgefield, living in an apartment over a store on Main Street, a little north of where Books on the Common is in 2021. She died in December 1933, at the age of 75. Mary, along with father Isaac, mother Sarah and step-mother Katie, are buried with other members of the Steele family in the historic June Cemetery on June Road in North Salem.

The old Steele homestead on Limekiln Road included a barn, now converted into a house, that stands only a couple of feet from the edge of the road's pavement. Keith Jones reported that he was told by a former owner that a mid-1980s town road crew worker was "reluctant to enter the building, reciting local tradition that the attic was haunted by the ghost of an old, white-haired man who could be seen hovering behind [the] gable window."

"Perhaps, the attic ghost — if there really is one — is the heart-broken spirit of Hart Steele in search of his wife, Catherine, both of whom barely scratched a living from this small, limestone infested property," Jones wrote.

Beers atlas of 1867 showed at least one African American as a possible the owner of a house.[380] Frank Stedwell, 60, and his son, Leander, 14, lived at the corner of North Salem and Ridgebury Roads where today is the entrance to Ridgefield High School. For many years this intersection was known as "Black Man's Corner" and "Black Frank's Corner." According to an account from Beverly Crofut, an old-time Ridgefield resident, "Black Frank" was a Micmac Indian who had a shack at the triangle of the intersection of those two roads in the 19th Century. The shack stood there for "years and years," Crofut said.[381] Rockwell, in his notes on Ridgebury cellars, says "Stedwell, a colored man," lived "in

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[380] Beers, Frederick W., et al., *Atlas of New York and Vicinity*, New York: Beers, Ellis & Soule, 1867, p. 40.

[381] Sanders, Jack, *Ridgefield Names: A History of the Town of Ridgefield, Connecticut, Through Its More than 1,200 Place Names*, Ridgefield, 2021.

an old house" a mile away on Chestnut Hill Road near the New York state line. He does not offer a given name nor a time.

In addition, the members of the Lewis family, discussed in Chapter Six, may have still owned a modest farm near today's intersection of Routes 7 and 35.

Post-War Prejudice

Prejudices still had many ways of surfacing. While official town records had tended to drop racial identifiers in the early 19th Century, newspapers did not. Throughout the 1800s and well into the early 1900s, articles in the press routinely noted the race when the person was Black. For example, a New Haven newspaper reported in 1863 that "The *Danbury Times* says that about midnight of the 15th, two colored men passing through Sugar Hollow, a lonely region between Danbury and Ridgefield, were furiously assaulted by an animal believed to be a cross between a Jaguar and a wild cat."[382] Needless to say, if the men had been of European ancestry, the account would not have said "two white men passing through Sugar Hollow…."

The Ridgefield Press often identified African Americans in news accounts. In an article in 1886, the newspaper reported that the house of Andrew Benedict had been broken into and clothing, including four overcoats and a "valuable shawl," had been stolen. "John Taylor, colored, was suspected of the crime and was arraigned before Justice John F. Gilbert, Wednesday, but on investigation, it appeared that the Negro was not the guilty party," *The Press* reported. "He was accordingly discharged, with the strict injunction to return to his home in New Canaan, as he had every appearance of a vagrant."[383] Not only was the article racist, the actions it reported appeared to be an early and rural example of racial profiling, not to mention rather cold treatment of a man of little means and perhaps needing a helping hand.

John Taylor was hardly the only Black man brought up on charges that didn't prove true. In 1878, "a colored man" named Isaac Gaul, who allegedly had once lived on "Ridgebury Mountain," was ar-

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[382] *New Haven Palladium*, Jan. 15, 1863.

[383] *The Ridgefield Press,* Aug. 5, 1886, p. 1.

rested in New York State for "an outrage perpetrated on a young girl in Pleasantville," reported the *Brewster Standard*. But when a member of the girl's family was summoned to identify Gaul, it turned out he was not the perpetrator. Nonetheless, Gaul was held for the Fairfield County, Connecticut, sheriff, who wanted him on an outstanding warrant — for allegedly *cutting out the tongue of a horse* in Wilton! *The Standard* was not satisfied with just identifying Gaul as a "colored man," but went on to feed on the prejudices many people possessed about Blacks. "Gaul," it said, "is a stalwart, ruffianly appearing character, and when arrested was fresh from from the scene of a terrific hand-to-hand encounter, his face and body bearing marks severe of a pounding."[384]

It should be noted that other minorities were treated similarly in the media and society. As late as the 1920s, *The Ridgefield Press* would report that a person was "an Italian" when there was no need to mention that fact. It was not unusual to see a news story that said simply "an Italian" was involved in an incident, such as an auto accident, never even bothering with a name. When an old building housing workers on a state road construction project in Ridgefield burned down in 1920, the *Press* headline said: **Fatal Fire at Branchville; Former Seth Beers Store, Used to House State Road Gang, Totally Consumed — All Italian Occupants Escape — Only American in Gang Dies in Flames.**[385]

As they did with Isaac Gaul in 1878, late 19th Century media would also feed on fears some people had toward Italian immigrants. In describing a shooting suspect in 1893, *The Press* said Jerry Crystonan was "nearly six feet tall, with heavy dark mustache, and flat fierce-looking face, peculiarly scarred on the chin, his countenance presenting sharply the Italian underhand cunning that will stab in the dark."[386]

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Another strange case may reflect the unequal treatment African Americans routinely received in the second half of the 19th Century. A Black Ridgefield woman named Mary Riley was sentenced in the 1860s

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[384] The *Brewster (N.Y.) Standard*, as copied in *The Ridgefield Press*, Jan. 23, 1878, p. 3

[385] Sanders, Jack, *Wicked Ridgefield,* Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2016, p. 77.

[386] ibid., p. 78-79.

to four years in prison for arson — despite the fact that she was known to be insane. Even the *Hartford Courant* later said she "fired a building when insane."[387] Incarcerated in the new state prison in Somers, she was seriously ill by 1871 with cancer and, prison officials reported, had but a few months to live.

General James T. Pratt, a state representative who served on the prisons committee, told a session of the State House of Representatives in July 1871 that the warden "thinks the prison is not the place for her." An account in a Norwich newspaper is more direct. "It is believed that she ought never to have been sent there, being insane." The legislature voted to release her from prison.

It turned out Mary exceeded the warden's prediction that she had but a few months to live. She died of cancer May 20, 1875, in Ridgefield, at the age of 55. Her death record says she was a native of the town, who was married; however, no husband is listed.[388] She appears in the 1860 Census as a domestic living with the family of Lewis Stewart on North Street, just north of Wooster Street.

Mary Riley appears to have been known to be insane when she was sentenced to prison. She was not responsible for her attempt to set fire to an undisclosed building, yet she was shipped off to a penitentiary. Had she been white, she probably would have been sent to the Connecticut General Hospital for the Insane, a brand-new facility in Middletown opened in 1868 and still operating to this day. No doubt, Mary Riley had no one to plead her case. She was a poor Black and no one cared.

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[387] Hartford Courant, Saturday, July 22, 1871, p1.

[388] Ridgefield Vital Records, Vols. 3A, p.54 and 4A, p.22.

Afterword

In 1972, nearly two centuries after the Revolutionary War began and just over a century after the Civil War ended, an organization called Suburban Action Institute contracted to buy 11 acres on Barry Avenue in Ridgefield with the aim of building about 110 apartments that could house lower-income families.[389] SAI focused on trying to change restrictive housing and zoning rules in suburbia and flat-out accused Ridgefield of being among many suburban towns that, deliberately or otherwise, had zoned out poor minorities. It added that Ridgefield was virtually an all-white town, with a Black population of around one percent. Ridgefield, SAI charged, was "lily-white."

In population, Ridgefield has almost always been almost "lily-white." In the 18th Century, that was, in a way, a good thing because most Blacks in Connecticut were enslaved. Towns with large percentages of African Americans were towns with large numbers of slaves. Because of its geography, economics and demographics, Ridgefield had few slaves and consequently few Blacks.

However, 18th Century Ridgefield could be a land of opportunity for those with modest expectations. If they were willing to work its rocky, hilly soils, Ridgefield was open — to Black families as well as white. Unlike places such as Norwalk and New London that required a vote of the "town fathers" to admit African-American landowners, Ridgefield seems to have had no such restrictions.[390] Brothers Robert and Samuel Jacklin perhaps sensed that openness when they decided to buy land and settle in Ridgefield.

As a consequence, a good portion of Ridgefield's small African-American population in the 18th Century was not enslaved, but first, second and even third generation free Blacks who, like the early white settlers, sought a place to farm and to raise a family.

However, though free of bonds, Black families were not free of prejudice, and did not receive the same treatment that white settlers did. They were subject to restrictive laws and unequal treatment. The landowning Jacklins could not serve as town officials or even vote to select

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[389] *The Ridgefield Press*, March 23, 1972, p.1

[390] King, p. 32.

those officials. They had to pay taxes, yet had no voice in how the money was spent.

Despite these societal- and government-imposed limitations on their rights and freedoms, the Jacklins contributed as many as five of their sons to the Revolutionary War. They helped the nation win the battle over "taxation without representation" while they themselves remained taxed and unrepresented.

For reasons already explained, it's challenging to find information about African Americans in the 18th and 19th Centuries. Nonetheless, enough facts can be found to reveal the extent, and to a limited degree, the nature of slavery in 18th Century Ridgefield. However, because they were landowners, more can be uncovered about the lives of 18th Century free Blacks in the town. And thanks to federal pension records in the National Archives, even more can be learned about the African-American men who fought for independence in the Revolution and who battled the slave-holding South in the Civil War.

Still more can be uncovered about 19th Century Blacks, enough to know that the awareness and recognition of the their contributions to the two wars for freedom is as lacking as it is for 18th Century Blacks, and that they were treated better than the 18th Century enslaved, but not much better.

The fact that Ridgefield has been so "lily-white" for so long has no doubt played a part in the lack of local awareness of these pioneering, accomplished and sacrificing people, and of the hard times and harsh treatment they endured. Both public officials and Ridgefield historians of the past have all but ignored them — one historian even deleted them.

Today, African-Americans are still only 1% of Ridgefield's population, at least partly because restrictive zoning prevents building affordable housing that would permit more minorities to live here. There are, however, efforts to modify zoning codes to allow more flexibility in such housing.

The names of six of the 17 Black men of Ridgefield who fought in the Revolution and in the Civil War appear, embossed in brass, on Ridgefield's War Memorial along the Main Street. And while that expresses a degree of appreciation for a small portion of Ridgefield's 18th and 19th Century Black population, no recognition — be it through school courses, in town histories or on community monuments — has been given to the many African Americans who helped build a fledgling

community out of the rocky, wooded wilderness three centuries ago — including those who did so while they were enslaved by white men and women. Nor have the contributions, accomplishments, and mistreatment of 19th Century African Americans — 11 of whom fought to defend the Union and to oppose slavery — been acknowledged.

I hope this little book be a step toward recognizing, acknowledging — and appreciating — these noteworthy but forgotten people.

Appendix A

18th Century African-Americans in Ridgefield

This list of enslaved and free Blacks, known to have lived in Ridgefield between its founding in 1708 and 1800, was compiled by examining thousands of hand-written pages of birth, marriage, death, land, and probate records, as well as local histories, and other sources. In all, 85 African-Americans have been identified, including 60 enslaved or probably enslaved people, and 25 who were free or probably free. At least 13 children were recorded as born enslaved in Ridgefield, and at least 10 were born free. No doubt, there are both free and enslaved Ridgefielders who are not in this list, either because they never appeared in any official records or because, while they may have been mentioned in a record, their race was not. (In his cataloguing of the enslaved for his book, *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County*, Daniel Cruson estimated existing birth records for the 18th Century Blacks reflected less than half the actual number of births.)

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Abigail: Enslaved; belonging to Matthew Seymour; born March 8, 1761, daughter of Tamor; died two days later. [RLR 1/257]

Allen: Enslaved; born 1751, son of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour [RLR 1/257]

Andrew: Enslaved; born July 22, 1761, son of Tamar, servant of Sarah Keeler. [RLR 1/257]

Andrew: Enslaved; "ye servant of Stephen Smith," died Feb. 29 (19?), 1785. [RVR 1/203] He may be the same Andrew who was born in 1761.

Ann: Enslaved; in a 1760 inventory of David Scott's estate, "a Negro girl named Ann" is listed as being worth £37 10 shillings. She was by far the most valuable thing he owned at that point. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 1-3, p. 181]

Armstrong, Betsey: Free, possibly born enslaved. Maiden name unknown. Called "Aunt Betsey," she and her husband Ed-

ward "Uncle Ned" Armstrong were reported to operate a station on the Underground Railroad off Ned's Lane in Ridgebury. Her gravestone says she was 90 when she died in 1857, but the 1850 census says she was 68 that year, which seems more likely. Census says she was born in Ridgefield; her birth was either around 1767 or 1782. [*See text*]

Armstrong, Edward: Free, possibly born enslaved; known as "Uncle Ned," he with wife "Aunt Betsey" were reported to operate a station on the Underground Railroad in Ridgebury. The 1850 Census says he was born in Ridgefield. Since he died in 1851 at the age of 65 years 6 months, he would have been born about January 1786. No birth record has been found and he may have been born enslaved. He might have been the "Negro boy named Ned" (*q.v.*) listed in the estate of Sarah Keeler. He and Betsey lived on Ned's Mountain. Their grandson, John S. Smalley, who was born here, died in the Civil War. [*See text*]

Betty: Enslaved; on April 10, 1769, William Johnson sold Esther Kellogg of Norwalk, for £12 "New York Money" a 14-month-old "negro child" named Betty. On Dec. 6, 1770, Esther married Timothy Keeler Jr. of Ridgefield, and moved with Betty to a house on Main Street that Keeler had purchased and soon turned into the Keeler Tavern. Betty lived there "for many years" until her death. [Bedini, p.41-42, from papers in Keeler Tavern Museum].

Betty: Enslaved; born 1749, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour. [RLR 1/257]

Cesar: Enslaved: "Ye negro servant mann of Gideon Smith" died Aug. 2, 1749. [RLR 1/214] Also spelled Ceazer in [RLR 1/217]

Charity: Possibly free; described simply as "negro" when she died March 11, 1812. Her age was 13, indicating she could have been born in Ridgefield in 1799. [RVR 1/216]

Cyphax: Enslaved, free; he was a 20-year-old male slave freed by the Rev. Jonathan Ingersoll Nov. 24, 1772, three days after the selectman had interviewed him and decided he

was fit to be freed [Rockwell, p. 55]. His subsequent history is unknown.

Dick: Enslaved; when Samuel Starr was suffering from small pox in 1771, he suspected he would die — and he did — of the disease, and quickly dictated a will. In it, he says, "It is my will and pleasure that my wife Ann shall have and share a third part of my moveable estate, except my Negro man Dick, which, with the remainder of my moveable estate, I order to be sold to pay my just debts and funeral charges." [Fairfield County Probate Records, Vol 1-3, 1744-1782, p. 362E/413P]

Dimorat, Elizabeth: Free; daughter of Michael; born Feb. 23, 1738/39 in Ridgefield. [RLR 1/221]

Dimorat, John: Free; born July 13, 1734, probably in Norwalk but listed on Ridgefield birth records; son of Michael, no mother listed; served in French and Indian War and the American Revolution; died 1807 in Boston's Alms House. Surname spelled many ways. [RLR 1/221]

Dimorat, Mary: Free; born Oct 29, 1736, probably in Ridgefield; father Michael, no mother listed. She may be the Mary Dimorat who was cared for as an indigent person by Samuel Jacklin in 1771 — or that may have been her mother (*see text*). [RLR 1/221]

Dimorat, Michael: Free, possibly a freed slave; He was the first known African American to own land in Ridgefield. He was the father of Elizabeth, John, Mary, and Ziporah Dimorat. Place of birth and death unknown. No wife given in records. [RLR 1/221; 1/224]

Dimorat, Ziporah: Free; daughter of Michael; born possibly in Norwalk March 23, 1730. [RLR 1/221]

Dimoret, Samuel: *See* Ishmael.

Dinah: Enslaved; David Scott sells her to Vivus Dauchy along with the boy Peter, for 200 pounds Feb. 13, 1740. [Rockwell, p.54]

Dinah: Probably enslaved; described as "had" by Theophilus Stebbins; gave birth to twins Tamor and Dinah, June 7, 1759. [RLR 1/257]

Dinah: Probably enslaved; born 1759, daughter of Dinah, prob-

ably slaves of Theophilus Stebbins; she was twin sister of Tamor [RLR 1/257].

Dinah: Enslaved; In her will dated 1761 Mrs. Abigail Cooke leaves her daughter, Dorcas Ingersoll, "my negro woman Dinah"; the inventory lists Dinah as worth £12 while in the same line it values a "silver tankard" at £11. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782,Vol 1, p. 278]

Dorcas: Enslaved; "ye negro woman servant of Timothy Benedict," died Jan. 10, 1760. [RLR 1/214]

Dover: Enslaved; born 1747, son of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour [RLR 1/257].

Ellen, Ellin: Enslaved; The will of Matthew Seymour, dated 1766, gives to his wife, Hannah, "the use and improvement of my Negro ~~wench~~ [crossed out] girl named Ellin during the natural life of my sd. wife." Ellin, the most valuable of four slaves Seymour owned at his death (*see also* Naomi and Step), is then supposed to pass to his daughter, Hannah Keeler, upon the death of his wife. However, in the 1780 will of Jeremiah Keeler, husband of Hannah, he says, "I will and bequeath to my well beloved wife, Hannah Keeler, my Negro wench named Ellen, as her own forever." Jeremiah either claimed the official ownership of Ellen or was relinquishing any share in Ellen that he may have had as husband of Hannah. Perhaps it was his way of making sure that Ellen stayed with Hannah, and that his children would have no claim on the slave. Note also that while Seymour or his will transcriber changed "wench" to girl, Jeremiah used wench, a term used to describe a woman of child-bearing age — roughly 15 to late 30s. The 1781 inventory of Jeremiah Keeler's estate placed Ellen's value at £30; the Keeler house was worth £100, while the barn was £25. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782,Vol. 1, pp. 49, 71, vol. 3, pp. 501, 528]

Elizabeth: Enslaved; born 1746, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour [RLR 1/257]

Ishmael: Enslaved; "A servant negro boy of Gamaliel Northrop's was born July ye 2st, 1739" [RLR 1/225]. This is the first

record of an African-American birth in Ridgefield. No mother's name was given. An advertisement in 1771 says "Ishmael" of Ridgefield ran away from his owner, Eliphelet Kellog, in Balltown (Ballston Spa), N.Y., and was 6 foot 3 inches tall. He was captured and sold to Nathaniel Sillick (Selleck) of Ridgefield, but ran away from him in 1775. By then he was said to be using the name Samuel Dimoret. In the early 1800s, a Samuel Dimoret was living in Norwalk [Research by Selden West]

Jack: Status unknown, but probably enslaved; listed as a "negro" from Ridgefield who served in the Revolution; may have been Jack Congo — *see* page 76ff in the text. [Walling]

Jacklin, Ann(e): Free; she was the wife of Robert Jacklin Jr. and mother of Daniel, Benjamin, Ebenezer, Anne, and Thaddeus. [*Tapestry*] There is no record of her death here, and we do not know her maiden name or where she was born.

Jacklin, Anne: Free; she was the daughter of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, born in 1759. She grew up in Ridgefield but what happened to her is unknown. [Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767, Vol. 1, p. 13.]

Jacklin, Benjamin: Free; he was born in Ridgefield in 1752, son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, and probably grew up here, but what eventually happened to him has not been discovered. [Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767, Vol. 1, p.13.]

Jacklin, Benjamin: Free; son of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin, who lived in the Flat Rock district. [*Tapestry*] No records of what happened to him have been found.

Jacklin, Daniel: Free; born in 1749, probably in Ridgefield, he was a son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, and grew up in New Patent/Ridgebury. [Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767, Vol. 1, p. 13.]

Jacklin, Ebenezer: Free; born in Ridgefield in 1757, son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, he served in the Revolutionary War in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment. He was at Valley Forge. After the war he moved to upper New England, mostly western Massachusetts, and died in Lenox, Mass., in

1821. In his successful 1818 application for a federal military pension, he said he was a former farmer and musician who was by then an invalid and in poverty. [Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767, Vol. 1, p.13.] His name is on the Veterans Memorial on Main Street.

Jacklin, Elisabeth: Free; baptized 1759; daughter of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin [*Tapestry*]; married Jack Freeman. [RVR 2/154].

Jacklin, Joseph: Free; Samuel Jacklin describes him as his son and leaves his entire estate to him in 1780, but the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich suggests he may have been adopted and a mulatto. Other records indicate he was a son-in-law of Samuel. He took the oath of fidelity in 1782. [*See text*]

Jacklin, Lewis: Free; he enlisted in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment from Ridgefield and served at Valley Forge, but his relation to Robert or Samuel Jacklin, both landowners, is not known — Lewis does not show up on the land records as a property owner. His name is occasionally spelled Louis. He is listed on the Veterans Memorial. [*See text*]

Jacklin, Mary: Free; daughter of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin, baptized in 1744, lived on her parents' Flat Rock farm but what happened to her has not been uncovered. [*Tapestry*]

Jacklin, Robert: Free; he was a brother of Samuel and son of Robert Sr., a slave who had bought his own freedom. Robert Jr. purchased land in 1745 in the newly acquired New Patent section of Ridgefield, now western Danbury, and apparently established a farm there. He was still listed on the tax rolls in 1780, but his whereabouts after that are unknown. He was the husband of Ann and father of Daniel, Benjamin, Ebenezer, Anne, and Thaddeus.[*See text*]

Jacklin, Samuel: Free; born around 1720 in New London, died 1780 in Ridgefield; he came to Ridgefield around 1750 and possibly farmed first with his brother, Robert Jacklin Jr., in New Patent, but in the 1750s bought a farm in the Flat Rock district of southern Ridgefield. By his death he had property probably worth more than the average Ridgefield farmer's. He was the husband of Sarah and father of Elisabeth and Benjamin, and of adopted Joseph [*See text and Appendices E and F*]

Jacklin, Sarah: Free; she was the wife of Samuel Jacklin, although there is no record of her existence, including her death, in Ridgefield. However, an inventory of Samuel Jacklin's estate in 1780 lists many items that may have belonged to her. [*Tapestry*]

Jacklin, Thaddeus: Free; he was born in Ridgefield in 1761, son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin. He served in the Revolution and appears to have lived for a while in New Milford, then in upper New York. [Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767, Vol. 1, p. 13.]

Jacob: Probably enslaved; an unnamed town official in 1773 mentions seeking compensation for "getting out a writ and time after Jacob Negro," a charge of six shillings. The nature of this writ is unclear. [Clark papers, Conn. Historical Society.]

Jenny: Enslaved; on Dec. 20, 1795, her daughter, Nancy, was born while Jenny was owned by Stephen Smith. [RVR 1/71] Jenny had been inherited by Stephen's wife, Sarah Couch Smith, when her father, Timothy Keeler, died in 1748. [Danbury District Probate Records, Vol. 1, p. 42] Smith declared daughter, Nancy, born Dec. 14, 1795, would be free at age 25, as law required. [RVR 1/84]

Jenny: Enslaved; daughter of Tamar, "ye servant woman of Sarah Keeler," died Aug. 26, 1739; belonged to Sarah Keeler. [RLR 1/225]

Jenny: Enslaved; daughter of Tamar, woman servant of Sarah Keeler, born Sept. 10, 1758, and "died about a year after." [RLR 1/257]

Luc: Enslaved; possibly as in "Luke," listed in the inventory of the estate of Nathan St. John in 1749, valued at £330, an unusually large amount; by comparison, horses in the same estate were valued at £40 to £60, a cow at £24, and an ox at £21. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 1, p. 46]

Lydia: Enslaved; Sarah Keeler, widow of Timothy Keeler, bequeaths "my Negro girl named Lydia" to Hannah Keeler Wilson in 1787. [Keeler genealogy]. On April 13, 1818, the Town Meeting decides that "Lydia, a woman of

colour, and late servant of the Widow Hannah Wilson of this Town who is now a pauper, be, and she hereby is freed from slavery."

Michael: Enslaved; son of Tamar, servant of Theophilus Stebbins, born Sept. 13, 1756. [RLR 1/257]

Mingo Enslaved; advertised as a runaway from Timothy Keeler in the summer of 1734; able to read and write. [See text and Appendix J]

Nab: Presumably a freed slave, described at her death Sept. 24, 1818, as "a woman of colour and late servant of Matthew Seymour, deceased." She was 40 years old. (RVR 2/221). It is not known for certain when she came to Ridgefield and whether she was in the town in the 18th Century.

Nancy: Enslaved; daughter of Jenny, servant of Stephen Smith, born Dec. 20, 1795 [RVR 1/71]. In [RVR 1/84], "I Stephen Smith of Ridgefield in Fairfield County certify that I had born on this 14th day of December, 1795, a negro female child which I have named Nancy, which child by the law of this state will be free at the age of twenty five years; said child was born of my negro slave Jenny at the time above-mentioned;" dated May 21, 1798, witnessed by Philip Burr Bradley and Azor Belden.

Ned: Enslaved; Sarah Keeler, widow of Timothy Keeler, bequeaths "the Negro boy named Ned" to her daughter, Hannah Keeler Wilson, wife of Jeremiah Wilson, in 1787. This boy may have grown up to become Edward Armstrong (*q.v.*). [Keeler genealogy]

Naomi: Enslaved; born 1754, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour. [RLR 1/257]; she is listed in the inventory of Seymour's property after his death in 1768 as being worth £35. Her father may have been Step (*q.v.*). [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782,Vol. 3, p. 71]

Pegg[y]: Enslaved; born 1742, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour. [RLR 1/257]

Peter: Enslaved; David Scott sells his "negro boy" along with "the woman Dinah" to Vivus Dauchy, Feb. 13, 1740, for £200. [Rockwell, p. 54]

Phillis: Enslaved; She was admitted to the Ridgebury Congregational Church: "October 3, 1790 Lord's Day. Phillis, a Negro woman servant of Captain Timothy Benedict, having on the 12th September last made Public Confession for the sin of ----- of which she had been guilty in her youth, this day proceeded to make public confession of the Christian Religion and enter into Covenant, she was baptized and admitted a member." [Timeline of Ridgebury Congregational Church by Jennifer Wilson, 2000]

Quash: Enslaved, then probably freed; David Scott in 1748 filed notice with the town that "my Negro man Quash" would be freed upon Scott's death. He may be the same man as the following, although there is no evidence to confirm it. Quash, meaning he was born on Sunday, was a fairly common name among New England African Americans. [Town Book of Vital Records, 1746-1797]

Quash: Free; a town record reports that on March 26, 1780, a "Negro man named Quash" was found dead on the highway at a place called Blacksmith Ridge. A Superior Court inquest ruled he was intoxicated and on the evening of March 25, attempted to travel home, but succumbed to exposure and the effects of alcohol. [Fairfield County Superior Court, Papers stored at Connecticut State Library, Box 6, acc# 1919-026]

Step: Enslaved; the 1768 inventory of the estate of Matthew Seymour lists four slaves, including the "Negro man named Step" who was valued at only £8 (while a "girl" named Ellin was £35). He is probably elderly. Step is listed with "a Negro woman" worth £4, possibly his wife who perhaps is Tamar, the mother of Naomi, another of Seymour's slaves, whose birth is recorded in the Ridgefield records. Thus, Step may be Naomi's father. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol. 3, p. 71]

Tamar: Enslaved; called "ye servant woman of Sarah Keeler" when her daughter dies Aug. 26, 1736 [RLR 1/225]; Timothy Keeler, Sarah's husband, gives his wife title to "Tamer" in his will dated 1748 [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol. 1, p. 36.]

Tamar: Enslaved; the servant woman of Matthew Seymour had six children: Peggy, 1742; Elizabeth, 1746; Dover, 1747; Betty, 1749; Allen, 1751; Naomi, 1754; three subsequent children, including twins, died as infants in 1761 and 1762. also spelled Tamor. [RLR 1/257] She may have been the wife of Step (*q.v.*). *See also under* Unknown.

Tamor: Enslaved; called a Negro of Theophilus Stebbins; twin daughter of Dinah, born Jan. 7, 1759. [RLR 1/257]

Tamor: Enslaved; called a Negro of Theophilus Stebbins; had son Michael Sept. 13, 1756. [RLR 1/257]

Unknown: Enslaved; "a Negro wench and child" valued at £350 were owned by Alexander Resseguie at his death in 1752. [John E. Morris, *The Resseguie Family,* Hartford, 1888]

Unknown: Enslaved; the child mentioned as belonging to Alexander Resseguie above.

Unknown(2): Enslaved; Tamor, belonging to Matthew Seymour, had "negro twins" Jan. 7, 1762, who died three days later. [LR 1/257]

Unknown: Enslaved; Stephen Smith had a "negro" who died Feb. 19, 1785." [RVR 1/203] May be the same as Andrew, who was recorded as dying that day.

Unknown: Enslaved; death record says only, "the negro girl belonging to Elijah Smith dec'd April 2, 1795." [RVR, Vol. 2]

Unknown: Enslaved; The inventory of the estate of Joseph Hauley in 1749 includes "one negro boy" valued at £366, one of the largest amounts found in official records for a slave valuation in Ridgefield; by comparison the same line includes an ox at £38 and a large steer, £66 [Danbury Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 1, p. 87.]

Unknown: Enslaved; In the inventory of his estate in 1767, Jonah Keeler had "a negro man" worth £40 (his house and 8-acre homelot were worth £140). His will does not even mention the man as anyone special. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 3, p. 24]

Unknown: Enslaved: the 1768 inventory of Lemuel Morhouse lists "a negro woman" worth £25; [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 3, p. 35]

Unknown: Enslaved; 1765 inventory of Capt. Thomas Hawley in-

cludes a "Negro man" valued at £50. Hawley's dwelling house was valued at £75 and his barn *and* "cow house," £25. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol. 3 p 64]

Unknown: Enslaved; the 1768 inventory of the estate of Matthew Keeler lists three slaves by name, and a fourth only as "a Negro woman" valued at a very low £4, probably because she was elderly. She may be Tamar (*q.v.*), the mother of Naomi (*q.v.*), and may also be the wife of Step (*q.v.*). [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol. 3, p. 71]

Unknown: Enslaved; In his 1782 will, Samuel Smith mentions his "Negro boy," wishing that he be excepted from the "moveable estate" that could be sold to pay off any of his debts or to provide money to distribute to his heirs. Moveable estate consisted of all possessions except land and buildings — things like money, jewelry, tools, and farm animals. He specifies that the boy go to his son Samuel. The subsequent inventory of Samuel Smith's sizable estate worth £2,581 lists "1 Negro Boy £30" among basic property such as a drawing knife, wooden bottle, an old iron, and a cheese press. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 3, p. 549-553.]

Williams, Henry or Harry: Possibly enslaved; he was a soldier in the Revolution, said to have come from Ridgefield. His name is on the Veterans Memorial. [Rockwell, *et al.*]

Zebulon: Perhaps free; "Zebulon, (negro man) died May 11th 1791 in ye 80th year of his age." [RVR 2/205]

Zebulon: Enslaved; cited in 1749 inventory of Timothy Keeler's estates as "one negro man named Zebulon" worth £260; may be the same Zebulon who dies in 1791. [Danbury District Probate Records, 1744-1782, Vol 1, p. 43.]

RLR=Ridgefield Land Records

RVR=Ridgefield Vital Records

Keeler Genealogy=Keeler, Wesley B., *Ralph Keeler of Norwalk, Conn. and His Descendants,* Vol. 1, Albany, N.Y., 1980.

Rockwell=Rockwell, George L., *History of Ridgefield,* Ridgefield, 1927.

Tapestry=Rose, James M. and Barbara W. Brown, *Tapestry: A Living History of the Black Family in Southern Connecticut,* New London, Conn.: New London Historical Society, 1979.

Walling=Walling, Richard S., *Men of Color at the Battle of Monmouth, June 28, 1778: The Role of African Americans and Native Americans at Monmouth, containing a brief history of these Men of Color and a Presentation of nearly Two Hundred names and identifications*. Hightstown, N. J.: Longstreet House, 1994.

Appendix B

These early slave-related actions are recorded in the town hall records.

Ridgefield, November 21st, A. D., 1777

Pursuant to an act passed by the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Concerning liberality of letting free their servants or Slaves, Mr. Jonathan Ingersoll having a man, Cyphax by name, being twenty years old (with the consent and approbation of sd. Cyphax) did present sd. Cyphax before us the Subscribers, Selectmen of sd Ridgefield, and we do Judge him an Able bodied Man, and as likely to get a Living as men in common in his Condition, are,—and do therefore approve of his being Liberated or Set free according to sd Act of Assembly, as witness our hands the day & year above witness in presence of: Jonathan Ingersoll, Sam'l. Olmsted, Nathan Olmsted, Nathan Olmsted 2nd, Stephen Smith, Timothy Keeler, Select Men

Received to Record November 21st, 1777 Cyphax
& recorded, per me Stephen Smith, Register.

###

Know all men by these presents that I, Jonathan Ingersoll
of Ridgfield in ye County of Fairfield & State of Connecticut, having Obtained ye Approbation of ye Selectmen of Ridgfield, according to ye direction of assembly in this State in their last session, I do, for ye Love & Goodwill, I have for my Negro Man Servant Cyphax, emancipate, Liberate and make free him ye sd Cyphax, from me, my heirs, executors, administrators, and by these presents he, ye sd Cyphax is made free, emancipated & Liberated from me, my heirs, Executors & Administrators for Ever; And in Testimony & Confirma'tion of ye same, I do hereunto Set my hand & Seal this 21st day of November 1777.

In presence of Jonathan Ingersoll Thaddeus Sturgis
John Waterous
Recorded November 24th, 1777 per me
Stephen Smith, Register.

###

Know all men by these presents, that I David Scott, of Ridgefield, in the county of Fairfield and Colony of Connecticut for the consideration of two hundred pounds, current money of said colony, to me

in hand well and truly paid by Vivus Dauchy of Ridgefield, aforesaid have bargained and sold and by these presents do fully and absolutely bargain, sell, convey and confirm unto the said Vivus Dauchy, his executors and administrators, a certain negro woman named Dinah, and a negro boy, named Peter, to be servants or Slaves during the term of their natural lives, together with all their wearing apparel. To have and to hold the said slaves as aforesaid to the said Dauchy, his executors and administrators for the term of their lives.

13th day of February, A. D. 1740.

Ebenezer Smith . (Signed) David Scott. Witness.

Timothy Keeler l Recorded June 19th, 1749.

Appendix C

The Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich included a 128-word paragraph about Blacks in his 1800 account of the status of Ridgefield, officially called "A Statistical Account of Ridgefield, in the County of Fairfield, drawn up by Rev. S.G. Goodrich from minutes furnished by a number of his parishioners, November 1800." In 1878, the Rev. Daniel Teller omitted this paragraph in a lengthy transcription of Goodrich's text that he included in his book, *History of Ridgefield*. In his own history, George Rockwell did not report the information, possibly because he never saw Goodrich's original essay, only Teller's abridgment of it. Silvio Bedini did see the complete original text, and rephrased the paragraph that winds up being three words shorter than the original.

Here's what Goodrich wrote:

We have not more than 8 blacks in the town, most of whom are young and will be free by the law of the state at the age of 25 years and are most of them females—none of them have been remarkably Vicious, they are well educated and are no ways deficient in genius. About the time of the Revolution there was a freeborn negro man who died in this town aged about 54; he was married and was a member of the church in this place for many years, whose property was acquired by his own industry and at his decease was inventoried at more than £500. He gave the whole to an adopted son, a free molatto who spent the whole in less than 10 years.

Here's how Bedini reworded it:

The Negro population of Ridgefield in 1800 totalled only eight persons, most of whom were young females and would be free by law of the State at the age of twenty-five years. They were well educated "and in no ways deficient in genius." Rev. Goodrich reported that during the Revolutionary War there was in Ridgefield a freeborn Negro who had married and was a respectable member of the church. By his own industry he had acquired property which was inventoried at the time of his death at more than five hundred pounds. This he left to his adopted son, a free mulatto. The heir was apparently not as thrifty as his foster father, for he disposed of the entire inheritance within a ten year period.

Appendix D

Kathleen Zuris, a New Milford historian, was consulted about the Ridgefield Jacklins who moved to that town in the late 1700s. She writes in a Sept. 22, 2019 email:

I'm afraid I can't shed much light as far as the Jacklins in New Milford. I haven't been able to connect Philip with Thaddeus, or determine the parentage of Daniel Jacklin. I don't know if the Philip Jacklin who married Eunice Hubbard on 9 December 1832 is the same Phillip Jacklin who wed Charlotte S. Phillips on 9 June 1850.

There is no birth record for a Philip Jacklin in New Milford. The 1850 census record for a Philip Jacklin in New Milford, shows his age as 30, which would be too young for the 1832 marriage, and even younger for the 35-year-old Philip Jacklin who was living in Bridgewater, CT, in the 1860 census. (Of course, these ages could be in error.)

Several years ago, I did attempt to compose the story of African Americans in early New Milford, but set it aside several times. (I began it with the first families of color who were in New Milford in the 18th century: the Phillips, Jacklins and Carpenters). But, when the New Milford Historical Society was doing a series of programs, and we were approaching the Civil War sesquicentennial, I was asked to put something together. My PowerPoint program led me to compile *New Milford, Connecticut's African Americans in the American Civil War (1861 - 1865).*

It is interesting to note that Philip Jacklin didn't wait for the authorization for men of color to enlist, which CT Governor William Buckingham ordered in November of 1863. Twelve African American men from New Milford joined the 29th (Colored) Regiment Connecticut Volunteer Infantry.

Appendix E

Inventory of Samuel Jacklin's estate

This is an inventory, taken in May 1780 after he had died, of all the possessions of Samuel Jacklin, compiled to calculate the value of his estate, which totaled more than £533. The inventory makes it clear that Samuel Jacklin was a man of considerable property for a farmer, Black or white, in 18th Century Ridgefield.

There is no real organization to the listing, which takes up four pages, with two columns per page. Original spellings have been maintained. Values at right are in pounds, shillings and pence. Within the listings 2/ or 5/ means 2 shillings or 5 shillings; 2d or 5d means 2 pence or 5 pence. Where words are within [brackets], the 1780 compiler has used the term "ditto" or "do." to express the fact that the item is the same as above; we have, for the sake of clarity, explained what was being dittoed.

1 hatt 13/6 1 [hatt] 3/	0 16 0
1 great coat	0 5 0
1 red [coat]	0 1 0
1 strait body coat	2 0 0
1 small coat blue	0 15 0
1 large born vest	0 3 0
1 blue vest	0 10 0
1 green [vest]	0 6 0
1 striped vest	0 7 6
1 pr leather breeches smooth buttons	0 5 0
1 pr [breeches] covered buttons	0 6 0
1 pr [breeches covered buttons]	0 1 0
1 pr blue [breeches]	0 3 0
1 pr leather [breeches]	1 0 0
1 pr knee buckles	0 1 0
1 pr checked trowzers	0 2 6
1 pr white [trowzers]	0 0 6
I pr. white [trowzers	0 0 6
1 pr. white [trowzers]	0 3 0
I pr. [white trowzers]	0 0 3
1 pr checked [trowzers]	0 6 0
1 striped lin'n shirt	0 14 0

1 checked [linen shirt]	0 9 0
1 checked [linen shirt]	0 2 0
1 checked [linen shirt]	0 3 0
2 white [linen shirts] at 6d	0 1 0
1 checked wool [shirt]	0 12 0
1 checked wool [shirt]	0 10 0
1 frock	0 4 0
1 pr blue & wt yarn stockings	0 3 0
1 pr blue [stockings]	0 1 6
1 pr blue seamed [stockings]	0 2 0
1 pr grey [stockings]	0 1 6
1 pr white [stockings]	0 0 9
1 pr woolen gloves	0 3 0
1 pr mittens	0 2 0
1 white cap 4d 1 checked [cap] 4	0 0 8
1 pr boots 8/	0 8 0
1 pr shoes 5/ 1 pr [shoes] 2/	0 7 0
3 books at 2/	0 6 0
1 large Bible	0 18 0
1 Psalm book 1/ 1 [Psalm book] 1/	0 2 0
1 [book] meditations	0 1 0
1 spelling book	0 1 0
2 pamphlets at 6d	0 1 0
1 bed & bolster, plain tyck 37 at 8d	1 4 8
1 [bed & bolster] striped tyck, 34 ea at 8d	1 2 8
1 straw bed	0 4 0
1 pillow 3/6 1 bedsted & cord 12/	0 15 0
1 bed & pillowWt 35 at 2/9	4.6 9
1 bedsted & cord	0 15 0
1 diamond blanket	0 9 0
1 birdseye [blanket]	0 6 0
1 old [blanket]	0 3 0
1 striped [blanket]	0 15 0
1 green [blanket]	0 6 0
1 striped blanket	0 10 0
1 white blanket	0 8 0
6 yrds blue sheard flannel at 9/	2 14 0
1 blue flannel gown	0 6 0

1 lt. callico gown	0 18 0
1 dark callico gown	1 0 0
1 callinance gown	0 9 0
1 striped linnen gown	0 10 0
1 dk short gown	0 1 0
1 scarlet cloak	1 16 0
6 yds new worsted cloth at 5/	1 10 0
1 black cloak	0 3 0
1 striped coat 6/ 1 [striped coat] 6/	0 12 0
1 silk hat 4/ 1 linnen gown 12/	0 16 6
1 sheet 10/ 1 [sheet] 12/	1 2 0
1 [sheet] 12/ 1 [sheet] 12	1 4 0
1 [sheet] 9/ 1 [sheet] 9/	0 18 0
1 [sheet] 15 1 [sheet] 15	1 10 0
2 [sheets] at 4/ 1 [sheet] 6/	0 14 0
1 pillow case 6d 1 [pillow case] 9d	0 1 3
3 [pillow cases] at 9d	0 2 3
1 check'd lin'n handkf	0 4 0
1 [checkered linen handkerchief] 4/ 1 3/6	0 7 6
1 silk [handkerchief]	0 6 0
1 lawn [handkerchief]	0 9 0
1 pr worsted gloves	0 1 0
3 women's caps at 3/	0 3 0
1 shift 6/ 1 [shift] 6/	0 12 0
1 [shift 4/6 1 [shift] 2/	0 6 6
1 [shift]1/6 1 [shift] 1/	0 2 6
1 apron 6/ 1 [apron] 3/	0 9 0
1 [apron] 7/6	0 7 6
1 bolster 3/9	0 3 9
1 tablecloth 4/ 1 [tablecloth] 3/	0 7 0
1 towel 1/ 1 [towel] 6d	0 1 6
1 pr stockings 1/	0 1 0
1 pr silver buckles	0 6 0
1 pr pockets	0 2 0
1 warming pan	1 4 0
1 brass kettle	1 16 0
1 iron pott	0 12 0
1 [iron pot] 6/ iron kettle 4/	0 10 0

1 frying pan 6/	0 6 0
1 pr flatt irons	0 4 0
1 box iron 3/	0 3 0
1 trammel 8/ 1 [trammel] 7/	0 15 0
1 peel & tongs	0 9 0
1 grid iron	0 2 0
1 candlestick 6d 1 [candlestick] 6d	0 1 0
1 pr hand irons	1 0 0
1 pr steelyards	0 6 0
1 tin water pot	0 6 0
1 hetchel 15/ 1 [hetchel] 3/	0 18 0
1 lantern	0 4 0
1 coffe pot 6d 2 tart pans 1/	0 1 6
1 pr bellows	0 9 0
3 pewter platters wt 7	0 14 0
3 basons	0 14 4
7 plates	0 8 6
1 quart pot	0 3 6
14 spoons	0 7 0
2 knives & 1 fork	0 2 6
1 lamp	0 2 0
1 earthen platter	0 1 6
1 [earthen platter] 6d 1 [earthen platter] 1/	0 1 6
9 earthen plates	0 9 0
1 teapot 2/ 1 [teapot] 1/6	0 3 6
4 drinking glasses	0 4 0
3 teacups & five plates	0 1 0
6 tea spoons	0 1 0
1 punch bowl	0 1 6
3 bowls at 9d	0 2 3
1 sugar bowl	0 2 0
2 earthen cups at 6d	0 1 0
1 salt seller	0 0 9
1 vinegar cruet	0 1 6
1 cream cup	0 1 0
1 tin cannister	0 1 6
2 half pin bottles	0 1 0
4 phials at 4d	0 1 4

1 square bottle	0 1 6
3 snuff bottles at 6d	0 1 6
2 quart bottles at 9d	0 1 6
1 large jugg 3/	0 3 0
1 small [jugg]	0 1 3
2 stone pots at 4/	0 8 0
1 looking glass	0 9 0
1 bread tray	0 2 0
1 tray ⅙ 1 churn 8/1 1 canteen 6d	0 10 0
1 table 3/ 1 [table] 15/	0 18 0
1 [table] 9/ 1 [table] 10/	0 19 0
1 large chest	1 0 0
1 chest 7/ 1 [chest] 4/	0 11 0
2 pr spectacles	0 2 6
1 stow & cup	0 2 0
6 chairs at 2/	0 12 0
3 pails at 2/6	0 7 6
3 wash tubs at ⅙	0 4 6
1 pail 1/ 6 bowls at 9d	0 5 6
1 chopping knife 3/	0 3 0
1 hour glass 1/6	0 1 6
1 mortar & pestle	0 1 6
2 puding pans	0 1 6
1 driping pan	0 0 9
1 cream pot	0 0 9
3 cyder barrels	0 9 0
1 beer cask	0 3 0
1 piggin 2/ 1 dye tube 2/6	0 4 6
2 Hogsheads at 10/	1 0 0
2 meat casks at 3/	0 6 0
1 soap barrel	0 2 6
3 small tubs	0 4 6
2 wooden bottles at 3/	0 6 0
1 corn basket	0 4 0
1 barrel of pork	6 0 0
12 lb. hogs fatt	0 12 0
60 lb smoaked meat at 1/	3 0 0
3 barrels cyder at 18/	2 14 0

1 sugar box	0 1 3
3 empty barrels	0 7 6
2 keggs at 2/6	0 5 0
10 dry barrels at 1/9	0 17 6
2 dry hogsheads at 3/	0 6 0
2 half hogshed tubs at 3/	0 6 0
2 brooms	0 2 0
20 lb cheese at 3d	0 5 0
6 bushel of bran at ⅙	0 9 0
5 bushel of flaxseed at 3/	0 15 0
1 bushel of buckwheat	0 5 0
12 bushel of korn at 5/	3 0 0
10 lb tobacco at 7d	0 5 10
1 cart rope	0 6 0
3 beehives	0 3 0
1 wooden keeler	0 2 0
18 baskets	0 18 0
5 bushel of wheat at 9/	2 5 0
1 wheat riddle 4/1 1 oat [riddle] 2/	0 6 0
3 pecks salt	1 4 0
3 bushels Indian bran & meal	0 6 6
a half bushel	0 3 0
3 sickles	0 4 0
1 pillion 3/ 1 keel 6/ 1 dutch wheel 18/	1 7 0
1 wheel 12/1 tow wheel 6/	0 18 0
1 sythe & tackling	0 10 0
2 new sythes 18/2 2 old [sythes] 3/	1 1 0
3 pecks of beans 3/ 5 bags at ⅔	0 14 0
1 cow bell 3/	0 3 0
60 lb old iron at 3d	0 15 0
1 ½ steel at 1/	0 1 6
1 ½ wool	0 30 0
2 lb hens feathers 1/	0 1 0
1 pr harnes[s]	0 5 0
1 pr ditto 6/ 1 pr geers 13/6	0 19 6
1 saddle 24/ leather 10/	1 14 0
1 pr cards 1/6 shreds of cloth 2/	0 3 6
1 chain 13/ 1 [chain] 15/6	1 8 6

1 clevis & pin	0 3 0
1 iron shovel	0 9 0
8 run lin'n yarn	0 9 0
1 yoke ring 1/ 6	0 1 6
2 gimblits	0 2 0
35 lb tallow at 8d	1 3 4
1 mortar 2/ 1 chamber pott 1/	0 3 0
1 large cupboard	0 15 0
1 hammer 1/	0 1 0
6 lb beef gammon	0 3 0
10 yards & ½ white flannel at 4/	2 2 0
250 Continental Dollars	1 17 6
1 pocket book	0 12 0
in cash	1 18 7
a cart	3 0 0
1 yoke & irons	0 6 0
An ox plow & irons	1 1 0
1 yoke 1/ 1 long yoke 1/	0 2 0
1 horseplow 10/	0 10 0
1 ax 12/ 1 [ax] 9/ 1 [ax] 6/	1 7 0
1 shaving horse 2/	0 2 0
1 hoe 4/6 1 cheesepress 3/	0 7 6
1 ox sled 2/ 1 pitchfork 2/	0 4 0
16 lb flax at 6d	0 8 0
1 coarse hetchel	0 2 0
1 crackle 6/ 1 cow hide 13/ 1 horse hide 3/	1 2 0
1 harrow 3/	0 3 0
6 geese at 3/ 12 fowls at 1/	1 10 0
2 sieves at 1/6	0 3 0
1 black white fac'd cow	5 0 0
1 pide white fac'd yearling steer	3 0 0
1 pide yearling steer	3 0 0
4 swine at 18/	3 12 0
1 yoke of oxen	18 0 0
1 black cow	5 6 0
1 three year old heifer	5 0 0
1 bringle two year old steer	4 10 0
1 red white fac'd 2 year old steer	4 6 0

1 draw mare	11 0 0
1 two year old colt	8 0 0
1 year old colt	6 0 0
10 sheep at 12/	6 0 0
1 stack of hay	3 0 0
wheat growing in ye ground	9 0 0
===	
the little meadow near John Morrison	24 0 0
the dwelling house, barn & homested	90 0 0
the saw mill orchard lot 2½ acres	25 0 0
3 acres meadow west of above	24 0 0
2 acres meadow at Millers Ridge	28 0 0
1 acre & ½ ye Long Meadow	12 0 0
10 acres & ½ plow land at Millers Ridge	65 0 0
10 acres wood land	40 0 0
===	
Total of land and buildings above	308 0 0
===	
Overall total	533 1 5
Debts	17 4 11

Appendix F

The Will of Samuel Jacklin

In the name of God Amen, I, Samuel Jacklin, of Ridgefield in the County of Fairfield, State of Connecticut, being weak of body but thro' ye Goodness of God of Sound mind, being desirous of setting my House in Order before my Decease, do make & ordain this my last Will & Testament, that is to say

First of all I give & bequeath my Soul into the Hands of Almighty God who gave it, hoping for acceptance with him thro the merits of Jesus Christ & my Body to the Earth, believing in the Resurrection from the Dead & as to what worldly goods God hath blessed me with, I give & bequeath them in the manner following:

First, I order all my Just & Righteous Debts & Funeral Charges to be paid in a reasonable time after my decease by my Executors hereafter named.

2ly, I give & bequeath unto Joseph Jacklin of sd. Ridgefield & to his heirs forever all the whole of my Estate, both Real & Personal, after my Just Debts & Funeral Charges aforesd. are paid.

3d I hereby constitute, ordain & appoint my Trusty Friends, Benjamin Stebbins & Benjamin Smith, to be Executors to this my Last Will & Testament, & I hereby order them to fulfill the same, & I hereby revoke & disanul all former Wills & Testaments by me made, & declare this to be my Last Will & Testament, in testimony whereof I here unto set my hand & seal in Ridgefield aforesd this 24th day of February AD 1780, Signed, Sealed pronounced & declared in the presence of Matthew Keeler, Justus Olmsted, Benjamin Smith.

Mark

Samuel **X** Jacklin

His

Appendix G

The Connecticut Town-Officer*, a guidebook written by Samuel Whiting Esq. and published in Danbury in 1814, describes the following duties of selectmen with regard to slaves under state statute at that time:*

All slaves set free by their owners, who afterwards come to want, are to be maintained by their former owners; and on their refusal to do so, such slaves are to be relieved by the selectmen of the town to which they belong; and the selectmen shall recover of the said owners, or masters, all the charge and cost they are at for such relief, in the usual manner, as in case of other debts. *Provided however, that*,

When any master or owner of any slave shall be disposed to emancipate and make free such slave, and shall apply to any two of the civil authority, or one of the civil authority and two of the selectmen of the town, to which he belongs, it shall be the duty of said authority, or authority and selectmen (as the case may be) to enquire into the health and age of such slave, and if they find upon examination, that such slave is in good health, and is not of greater age than forty-five years, or less than twenty-five years, the said authority, or authority and selectmen, shall give to the owner or master of such slave a certificate thereof, under their hands. *Provided*, That previous to giving such certificate, the person giving the same shall be convinced by actual examination of the slave to be made free by such certificate, that he or she is desirous thereof. *Statutes B. 1 p.624, 625 and 626*

Appendix H

Seven African Americans Who Served in the Revolution

John Dimorat: Free; born in 1734, spent at least part of his childhood in Ridgefield; served in French and Indian War from both Connecticut and New York, and in the Revolutionary War for three years with the Connecticut Third Regiment.

Daniel Jacklin: Free; born in 1749 in Ridgefield, son of Robert and Ann Jacklin; may have been the Daniel Jacklin who served during the Revolution in the Fourth Regiment of Ulster County (N.Y.) militia under Colonel Johannes Hardenburgh. By 1799, he and his wife, the former Mary Phillips of New Milford, were living in Ancram, Columbia County, N.Y.

Ebenezer Jacklin: Free; born in Ridgefield, 1757, son of Robert and Anne Jacklin; enlisted in Fifth Connecticut Regiment, Capt. Ebenezer Sanford's Company in January 1777, serving until Oct. 15, 1778; discharged, possibly because of illness. He was at Valley Forge and probably participated in the Battle of Germantown and possibly also the Battle of Monmouth. Died 1825 in Lenox, Mass. His name is on the War Memorial.

Joseph Jacklin: Free; son-in-law and adopted son of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin of Ridgefield whose farm he inherited in 1780. Enlisted from Salem (Lewisboro) N.Y. in 1777 in Horton's Company of Guards, part of a regiment of militia under Col. Levi Pawling.

Lewis Jacklin: Free; parents unidentified; he enlisted from Ridgefield in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment in 1777, serving until 1781. He was a brigade waggoner under Capt. Nehemiah Beardsley, and spent the winter of 1777-78 with Washington at Valley Forge. Nothing has been found of his pre-war or postwar life. His name is on the War Memorial.

Thaddeus Jacklin: Free; he was born in 1761 in Ridgefield, Robert and Anne's fourth son; enlisted in 1781 from New Milford in the Fourth Regiment of the Connecticut Line from July until December.

Harry Williams: Possibly enslaved; also known as Henry Williams, enlisted in February 1781 for the duration of the war, serving until 1783. Rockwell says he served in Capt. Isaac Hine's company in the Connecticut Line A Harry Williams served in Capt. David Humphreys' company of the Fourth Connecticut Regiment from 1781 until war's end. A Henry Williams was in Capt. Ezekiel Sanford's company on Aug. 1, 1777. Nothing is known of his origins or his post-war life. His name is on the War Memorial.

Two other men have been attributed to Ridgefield but were probably not from here. **Jack**, described as "Negro" and sometimes listed as Jack Negro, was said to be from Ridgefield in Richard S. Walling's book, *Men of Color at the Battle of Monmouth*, published in 1994. However, I can find no record of a Jack from Ridgefield, although there were Blacks named Jack from both Redding and Danbury who served in the Revolution. **Jack Congo** is often said to have come from Ridgefield, but as explained in the text, he was likely from Goshen.

Appendix I

This advertisement appeared in June 1832 issues of *The Baltimore Patriot* in Baltimore, Md., and *The Easton Star* in Easton, Md. Since there is no such place as Stadford, I assume it's an error for Stamford, Stafford or Stratford. We have not found how Daniel may have been related to Ridgefield's Jacklin families, nor do we know how he fared in his ordeal at the Baltimore County Jail. He could have been the Daniel Jacklin, born in 1749, probably in Ridgefield, who was a son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, and grew up in New Patent/Ridgebury.

WAS COMMITTED to the Jail of Baltimore County on the 21st day of May 1832, by James B. Bosley, Esq., a Justice of the Peace in and for the City of Baltimore as a runaway, a colored man who calls him self DANIEL JACKLIN, says he is free born and was raised in Stadford, State of Connecticut. Said colored man is about 22 years of age, five feet eight inches high, of chesnut colour, had a black mole on the right cheek. Had on when committed a grey money jacket, blue trowsers, check shirt, red and yellow vest, black fur hat, pumps and stockings. The owner of the above described colored man is requested to come forward, prove property, pay charges, and take him away, otherwise he will be discharged according to law.

D.W. HUDSON, Warden
Baltimore County Jail june 12 3w

Appendix J

This advertisement appeared in the *Boston Gazette* on Aug. 5, 1734, and on other dates. Capt. Samuel Keeler was Timothy's father and, living in the port town of Norwalk, was probably easier to contact than Timothy, who lived in the hills of Ridgefield. A century later, a columnist in a Hartford newspaper reprinted Keeler's ad as a curiosity, and it wound up being published in newspapers throughout the country, especially in the South where runaways were common.

> *RAN away from Timothy Keeler of Ridgefield in the County of Fairfield in Connecticut, about the last of June, a Negro Man Named Mingo, a likely well grown Fellow, thick set, speaks good English, can read and write, one of his little Toes is wanting, he is about 28 Tears [sic] of Age. He had on a good duroy Coat of a lightish colour, a striped Caliminco Vest and Breeches, good Shoes and stockings, a plain cloth Home-made great Coat with brass buttons, He had (as I am inform'd) a false Pass, a Pocket Compass, and several Books. Whoever shall take up said Fellow and convey him to Capt. Samuel Keeler at Norwalk in Connecticut, shall have Seven Pounds reward and all necessary charges paid.*
>
> *By me, Timothy Keeler*

Appendix K

Ridgefield's African-American population, 1756-1900*

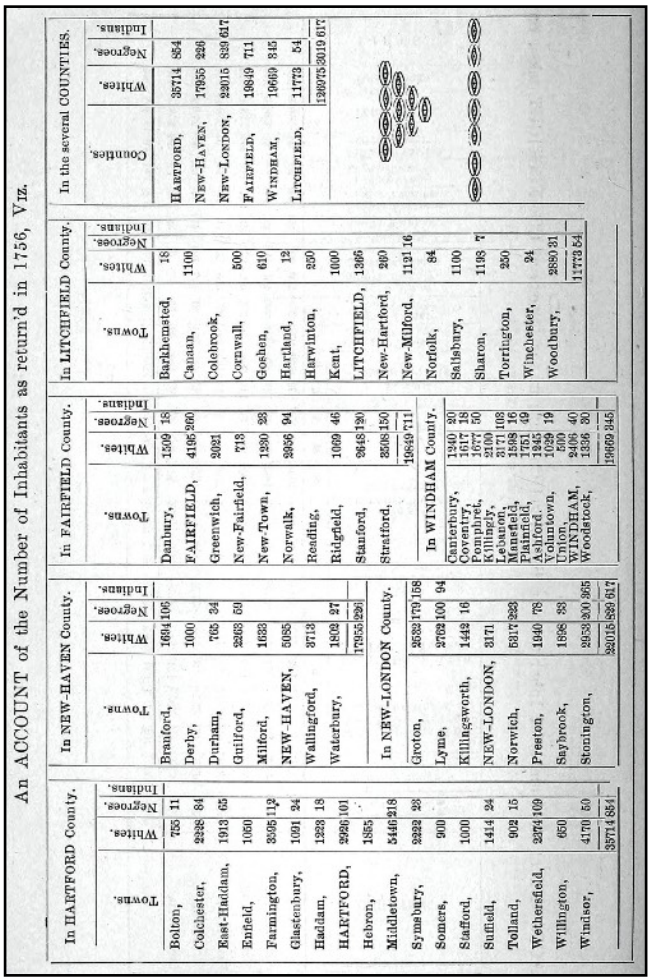
Year	Total People	Black (slaves)**	% Black
1756	1069	46 (?)	4.3
1774	1673	35 (?)	2.0
1790	1947	9 (5)	0.7
1800	2025	25 (6)	1.5
1810	2103	13 (?)	0.6
1820	2301	28 (0)	1.2
1830	2324	23 (0)	1.3
1840	2474	47 (0)	1.9
1850	2237	28	1.3
1860	2213	51	2.3
1870	1919	27	1.4
1880	2028	13	0.6
1890	2235	***	***
1900	2626	27	1

* The 1756 and 1774 totals are from a colony enumerations (see Appendices M and N); the rest are federal census totals.

** The number of enslaved persons counted in the total Blacks as counted by the U.S. census.

*** A fire destroyed the 1890 US census data.

Appendix L



An ACCOUNT of the Number of Inhabitants as return'd in 1756, Viz.

In HARTFORD County.				
Towns.	Whites.	Negroes.	Indians.	
Bolton,	755	11		
Colchester,	2238	84		
East-Haddam,	1913	65		
Enfield,	1060			
Farmington,	3395	112		
Glastenbury,	1091	94		
Haddam,	1923	18		
HARTFORD,	2926	101		
Hebron,	1365			
Middletown,	3446	218		
Symsbury,	2232	28		
Somers,	900			
Stafford,	1000			
Suffield,	1414	94		
Tolland,	902	15		
Wethersfield,	2374	109		
Willington,	650			
Windsor,	4170	50		
	35714	854		

In NEW-HAVEN County.			
Towns.	Whites.	Negroes.	Indians.
Branford,	1694	106	
Derby,	1000		
Durham,	765	34	
Guilford,	2263	60	
Milford,	1633		
NEW-HAVEN,	5095		
Wallingford,	3713		
Waterbury,	1892	27	
	17955	226	
In NEW-LONDON County.			
Groton,	2532	179	168
Lyme,	2762	100	94
Killingsworth,	1442	16	
NEW-LONDON,	3171		
Norwich,	5317	333	
Preston,	1940	78	
Saybrook,	1696	93	
Stonington,	2959	300	365
	22015	599	617

In FAIRFIELD County.			
Towns.	Whites.	Negroes.	Indians.
Danbury,	1509	18	
FAIRFIELD,	4196	200	
Greenwich,	3021		
New-Fairfield,	718		
New-Town,	1930	23	
Norwalk,	3956	94	
Reading,			
Ridgfield,	1069	46	
Stamford,	2648	130	
Stratford,	3208	150	
	19649	711	
In WINDHAM County.			
Canterbury,	1340	20	
Coventry,	1617	18	
Hampstead,	1577	50	
Killingly,	2100		
Lebanon,	3171	108	
Mansfield,	1598	16	
Plainfield,	1751	49	
Ashford.	1345		
Voluntown,	1029	19	
TOLLAND,	1400	40	
WINDHAM,	2408		
Woodstock,	1336	30	
	19669	945	

In LITCHFIELD County.			
Towns.	Whites.	Negroes.	Indians.
Barkhamsted,		18	
Canaan,	1100		
Colebrook,			
Cornwall,	500		
Goshen,	610		
Hartland,		12	
Harwinton,	250		
Kent,	1000		
LITCHFIELD,	1366		
New-Hartford,	290		
New-Milford,	1121	16	
Norfolk,	84		
Salisbury,	1100		
Sharon,	1193	7	
Torrington,	250		
Winchester,	94		
Woodbury,	2880	31	
	11773	84	

In the several COUNTIES.			
Counties.	Whites.	Negroes.	Indians.
HARTFORD,	35714	854	
NEW-HAVEN,	17955	226	
NEW-LONDON,	22015	599	617
FAIRFIELD,	19849	711	
WINDHAM,	19669	945	
LITCHFIELD,	11773	84	
	126975	3419	617

The 1756 enumeration, from *Public Records of the Colony of the Connecticut,* by Charles Hoadly, state library, Vol. 14, published in 1897.

Appendix M

ACCOUNT of the Number of Inhabitants in the County of FAIRFIELD, on the First of JANUARY, 1774.

TOWNS.	*Males* under Ten Years.	*Females* under Ten Years.	*Males* between Ten and Twenty Years, Married or Single.		*Females* between Ten and Twenty Years.		*Males* between Twenty and Seventy.		*Females* between Twenty and Seventy.		*Males* above Seventy.		*Females* above Seventy.		Negro Males under Twenty.	Negro Females under Twenty.	Negro Males above Twenty.	Negro Females above Twenty.	Indian Males under Twenty.	Indian Females under Twenty.	Indian Males above Twenty.	Indian Females above Twenty.	Total Whites.	Total Blacks.
			M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S	M	S										
Danbury,	425	387	2	302	12	282	416	103	424	81	14	6	7	12	15	13	15	7			2	1	2473	53
FAIRFIELD,	774	689	2	557	12	519	741	228	739	183	30	11	20	39	83	75	91	66			2	2	4544	319
Greenwich,	496	420	12	333	24	287	403	114	404	112	19	9	10	11	35	25	34	20		3	2	3	2654	122
New-Fairfield,	199	204		170	8	182	207	51	199	44	9	3	6	6	5	4	6	5					1288	20
Newtown,	357	357	1	277	8	291	324	103	324	67	20	6	20	23	12	20	18	9	1	1			2168	61
Norwalk,	754	700		544		486	638	173	638	217	43	8	25	17	37	25	43	31		2	4		4243	145
Redding,	208	189		152	2	121	196	46	206	46	10	4	6	3	9	14	17	5					1189	45
Ridgfield,	269	269	1	214	4	189	276	59	281	57	7	4	6	7	9	9	9	8					1673	35
Stamford,			13	1008	7	909	561	244	562	199					12	18	17	13					3503	60
Stratford,	806	795	2	655	33	618	830	292	812	240	38	14	19	47	69	72	108	70	7	12	9	7	5401	354
	4318	4010	33	4212	110	3874	4592	1413	4589	1246	190	65	119	165	286	275	358	234	8	18	19	16	28986	1214

The 1774 enumeration, from *Public Records of the Colony of the Connecticut,* by Charles Hoadly, state librarian, Vol. 14, published in 1897.

Appendix N

Ten African Americans Who Served in the Civil War

William Avery: Private; Enlisted in the 29th Regiment, Company K, Jan. 6, 1864, and was wounded in July or August of 1864 at Petersburg, Va., and recovered. He was discharged Oct. 24, 1865. He is listed on the War Memorial on Main Street. [Rockwell, Morse]

Lewis O. Drake: A native of Somers, N.Y., he was born around 1838 and by 1860 was working as a farm hand for William W. Beers, a lumber merchant, in Branchville. By the time he volunteered for service, he was living in Norwalk. He served in the 29th Regiment, Company E, and was mustered out at Brownsville, Texas, Oct. 24, 1865. He lived in Norwalk, working in 1870 for a stable, and died Dec. 7, 1881, only 43 years old, leaving a wife, Jane, and daughter, Mary. [Norwalk Hour, Feb. 25, 2002; 1860 census]

Albert Halsted: Prince Albert Halsted was born about 1846, grew up in Ridgebury and North Salem, and lived on former homestead of Edward and Betsey Armstrong in the 1850s. He enlisted while a resident of Danbury. With his brother, George, he volunteered for the 29th Regiment in December 1863 and was assigned to Company E. Almost immediately he hospitalized with typhoid fever at Knight General Hospital, New Haven. He died of typhoid pneumonia April 15, 1864. He is listed on the African-American Civil War monument in Danbury's Wooster Cemetery, but not in Ridgefield. [See Chapter [See Chapter 8]

George W. Halsted: George Washington Halsted, brother of (Prince) Albert Halsted, was probably born in Ridgefield around 1840, grew up in Ridgebury and North Salem, and lived on former homestead of Edward and Betsey Armstrong. He enlisted while a resident of Danbury in the 29th in December 1863, assigned to Company E of

the 29th Regiment, and after surviving measles and mumps during basic training fought with the 29th, and was promoted to sergeant, and was wounded Sept. 29, 1864 outside Richmond. He recovered and was mustered out of the service at Brownsville, Texas. He later lived in North Salem and is buried in Ridgebury Cemetery. [See Chapter 8]

William H. Jemmison: Enlisted in the 30th Regiment (Colored) Jan. 5, 1864, and assigned to Company A. It was absorbed into the 31st Regiment, and he was assigned to Company D. He died July 20, 1864, while still in the war, but cause of death has not been found. He is buried in the National Cemetery in Philadelphia, where his name is sometimes spelled Jamison or Jemison. He was listed as a resident of Ridgefield when he enlisted, but does not appear in the 1860 Ridgefield census. [Morse]

Samuel J. Johnson: Enlisted in the 30th Regiment (Colored) Nov. 3, 1863, and assigned to Company A. It became the 31st. Discharged May 16, 1865. He was listed as a resident of Ridgefield, but his name did not appear in the 1860 Census of Ridgefield. Morse says he was either a drafted or a substitute. [Morse]

William L. Johnson: Enlisted while a resident of Ridgefield in the 30th Regiment, Company A. Dec. 22, 1863. Discharged Nov. 7, 1865, probably in the 31st. His name does not appear in 1860 Census of Ridgefield. [Morse]

John A. Scott: Enlisted from Ridgefield in the 29th Regiment, Company K, Jan. 5, 1864; died as a private Aug. 19, 1865, at the post hospital Brownsville, Texas. Cause of death was given as scurvy and is buried at Alexandria National Cemetery in Louisiana. Rockwell spells the name Scot. He is on the War Memorial as Scott. [Rockwell, Morse]

John S. Smalley: Born probably in Ridgefield around 1846, a grandson of Edward and Betsey Armstrong, he was orphaned at 8, and, as a resident of Danbury, volunteered Nov. 27, 1863, at the age of 18, requiring approval of a

guardian. He was in Company B of the 29th Connecticut Regiment; served as a soldier in Beaufort, Hilton Head, in the Petersburg-Richmond campaign where he received a severe spine injury; then became a cook; with the 29th at Brownsville, Texas after the war ended, and died there of dysentery Sept. 27, 1865, one of last Union soldiers to died in service. [See Chapter 8]

John T. Watson: Born about 1841, probably in Ridgefield, a grandson of Edward and Betsey Armstrong, on whose compound he was living in 1850. As a resident of Danbury, he volunteered with his cousin, John Smalley, on Nov. 27, 1863, and was also assigned to Company B of the 29th Regiment. He fought in the same campaigns as Smalley and survived the war. His life thereafter has not been discovered. [See Chapter 8]

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Appendix O

Article in July 7, 1879, New York Tribune, page 8.

"UNCLE NED" AND "AUNT BETSEY."

To the Editor of The Tribune.

SIR: "Ned's Mountain," in the Northern part of Ridgefield Township, Fairfield County, Conn., was their home, and a more interesting "mountain" is not found in the State. Standing upon its top you can trace the water coursing west across fine dairy farms and through valleys to the Titicus—a branch of the Croton—thus finding its way to our homes in New-York; to the south, kissing the sea at Norwalk, after starting many a wheel to spinning; to the east through Miry Brook, Danbury, Brookfield—joining the Housatonic, furnishing power for Birmingham, Danbury and Brookfield. There is no finer view within sixty miles of New-York than from the top of "Ned's Mountain."

The mountain takes its name from Edward Armstrong, commonly called "Uncle Ned," one of the subjects of this sketch, a man who devoted a life to an idea, the freedom of his colored brothers of the South, and so well did he plan and execute, that to this day Captain John Richwell, Smith Keeler, George Bouton, and other near neighbors, only knew "Uncle Ned" and "Aunt Betsey" as good, kind colored people, handy to have around to assist with the house or farm work. 'Tis true these same neighbors helped to build his mansion on the top, or near the top of the mountain. It was noticed that many colored men came and went, that officers often searched for certain colored men at the mansion, but never found them. No keeper of a railroad station was ever more faithful than were Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey, the keepers of the "Ned's Mountain" Station of the "underground" route from the South to Canada. Back of Uncle Ned's mansion is a cave that furnished a hiding-place and shelter for the weary liberty-seekers, and there Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey supplied food and clothing until, rested and refreshed, under darkness of night they would flee from this land of "freedom" to Canada. Even the existence of the cave—so well did Uncle Ned guard the secret—never became known except to one person, B. D. Norris, until after Mr. Lincoln had made all slaves free. Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey are sleeping among the evergreens in the little Ridgeberry Cemetery. Strange hands—no co-laborers like Horace Greeley and William Lloyd Garrison—raised the beautiful marble slab to their memory.

Brooklyn, June 7, 1879. S.

Appendix P

The Decoration Day address of Edward Hurlbutt Smith, given May 30, 1893, in Ridgefield Town Hall:

When we recall the fact that a little over a quarter of a century ago, there were over three million men, women and children, slaves in this Christian land of ours; men who had no rights to the fruits of their labor and toil; men without a right, without a hope, sold at the auction block like so many articles of merchandise; wives separated from their husbands, children from their parents; your lovely girls, as fair in face and form as any within this hall today, bought and sold as young cattle in the streets, I speak of scenes and events which I have repeatedly witnessed in the streets of Mobile and New Orleans, and therefore speak feelingly.

When we remember that our forefathers were partakers in this great wrong in the earlier days of the Republic, and only abandoned it when they found it unprofitable; when we recall these facts, and that also from the press, yes, even the pulpit, from the lips of the eloquent and profound exponents of State Craft, argument and appeal implied, if not directly expressed, in defense of the doctrine of the right of the stronger to enslave the weaker, were listened to with pleasure and applauded as the words of wisdom falling from the lips of experience and of judgment; and that, by some, it was accounted the loftiest act of patriotism to intercept and return, under that flag, the poor fugitive in his midnight flight to liberty or death; and a great nation, boasting of its religion and independence, had become so debauched by its professional politicians that it seemed almost ready to adopt the sentiment which might be inferred from the decisions of the highest tribunals in the land. Witness the decision of the Supreme Court of the United States in the Dred Scott case — the black man had no rights which the white man was bound to respect.

Recalling these facts to mind, I wonder at God's goodness to us as a nation, and feel that we ought reverently to thank our God for that first shot fired at Sumter's battlements; for it was the fore-runner of a doomed system, announcing a day of deliverance; the breaking of the bonds; the opening of the prison doors that the captives might go free;

that no more should be witnessed the scarred and bleeding backs of its victims, no more the sobs of the mother, the wail of anguish from the bruised heart of the father, as they saw their little ones torn from their embrace and home.

Reverently I can but feel that that shot was a messenger from God, proclaiming that no more should the soil of his chosen land be pressed by the foot of a slave, but by men, free men, no more to be called chattels, articles of merchandise, but by a man, a soul responsible to his God, an American Citizen. What a triumph for humanity! What a victory for Justice!

And as we come together to testify our respect and gratitude to the fallen by decorating their graves with flowers, the first fruits of the new birth of Spring, we should rejoice that the lives, the labors, the heroic devotion of the men who composed the most sublime army of the world, fought not for enslavement, but for freedom; not for destruction, but for preservation; not for personal aggrandizement, but for national honor; and that unmanned by no danger, neither discouraged nor disheartened by any defeat, but with the courage and enthusiasm of the Crusaders of old in their fight for the Holy Land, their steady tramp, tramp, tramp, as they went marching on, ceased not until that stainless old flag floated untrammeled over a free land, and they had established the sublime truth, enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, and which for nearly a century had been a living lie in our national life: That all men are born free and equal and endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, among which are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness.

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Correspondents

Contemporary research of Terrie Roese, Bonnie Johnson, Selden West, Bruce Nelson, and Julie Hughes.

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