

FORT TICONDEROGA

National Historic Landmark

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Essay for your consideration

BLACKS AT FORT TICONDEROGA

Fort Ticonderoga Research Notes

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French and Indian War

Numerous blacks served in the British provincial forces against Carillon (Ticonderoga), particularly in the New York Regiment. The Fort Ticonderoga museum collections hold powder horns carved by John Bush, a black soldier from Massachusetts. (See Scott A. Padeni, "Forgotten Soldiers: The Role of Blacks in New York's Northern Campaigns of the Seven Years' War," *The Bulletin of the Fort Ticonderoga Museum*, vol. XVI no. 2 [1999], pp. 152-169.) Bush was a featured character in the international traveling exhibition, *Clash of Empires: The French, English and Indian War, 1754-1760*, organized by the John Heinz History Center, Pittsburgh, PA; Dr. R. Scott Stephenson, guest curator.

Lemuel Haynes and the Green Mountain Boys

In May 1775, just three weeks after Lexington and Concord, the first American victory of the Revolution was won here by Benedict Arnold, Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys.

At least three blacks are said to have been among the 270 men who joined Allen and Arnold in this first victory: **Primas Black**, **Epheram Blackman**, and **Lemuel Haynes**. (Lerone Bennett, Jr., *Before the Mayflower: A History of the Negro in America, 1619-1964*, 1962.) We cannot say with certainty exactly who was among the 83 men Allen counted with him during the very first moments of the attack.

Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833) born in West Hartford, Connecticut to white mother and black father. Indentured servant working in Granville, Massachusetts; witnessed aurora borealis which he thought presaged Judgment Day. Freed in 1774 and enlisted as a Minuteman. Marched to Roxbury following Boston Massacre. In April 1775, his company from Granville, Massachusetts, participated in the siege of Boston in the immediate aftermath of the action at Lexington and Concord. Shortly thereafter, Haynes was among the Massachusetts troops who accompanied Allen and Arnold in the May attack on Fort Ticonderoga. Haynes went on to a distinguished literary and religious career. He became well-known as the first black ordained Congregational minister. He served congregations in Vermont, Connecticut, and New York. Among his literary works was an epic ballad, "The Battle of Lexington." (Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution*, 1989.) A portrait of Haynes in the pulpit is in the collection of the Rhode Island School of Design.

Rev. Job Swift and Rev. Lemuel Haynes, *Discourses on Religious Subjects ... To Which are Prefixed Sketches of His Life and Character, and a Sermon Preached at West-Rutland, on the Occasion of his Death, by the Rev. Lemuel Haynes*, Middlebury, Vermont, Huntington & Fitch, 1805. 300 p.

Philip Skene's industrial plantation at Skenesborough (Whitehall)

Several other blacks played an additional, equally critical role in Allen's capture of the Fort—helping Allen's force get across Lake Champlain!

After the French and Indian War, former British officer Major Philip Skene resigned his commission and received a grant of 26,000 acres of land at the southern end of Lake Champlain. There he began to develop an industrial plantation to exploit the rich timber and mineral resources of the region, intending to benefit from the easy transportation afforded by the water highway. Much of the labor for Skene's industrial endeavors was provided by enslaved blacks and white indentured labor. By the early 1770s, Skene was Lt. Governor and Deputy Postmaster in these parts.

Local historians tell us that, in early May 1775, Allen sent one of his officers to secure boats from the small English garrison at Crown Point 15 miles north of here. A black man had charge of the garrison boats and willingly assisted. In addition, Major Philip Skene, the preeminent Loyalist in these parts, owned a "large oar-boat" under the command of a slave named Jack and crewed by two other blacks. Skene's boat was commandeered and put to Allen's purposes as well. (Rev. Josiah F. Goodhue, *History of the Town of Shoreham, Vermont, 1761-1861*, 1861.)

The presence of Skene's boat on the lake—and its crew of blacks stopping at farms along the shore for milk—made a vivid impression on the local white settlers, still recalled by old-timers as late as the 1840s. (Dr. Asa Fitch, collector, *Their Own Voices: Oral Accounts of Early Settlers in Washington County, New York*, 1983.)

Ethan Allen organized a three-pronged attack in May 1775, including Skenesborough, as well as Fort Ticonderoga and Crown Point. Once safely in rebel hands, the American forces used Skene's iron forges, sawmills, and his black labor to build the first American navy, a series of row-galleys and gunboats (including the **Philadelphia**, now on exhibit at the Smithsonian). The growing American fleet kept the British trapped in Canada for most of the 1776 campaign season. The American fleet, commanded by Benedict Arnold, was defeated and substantially destroyed in battle at Valcour Island in October 1776. But the American navy had preserved the great democratic experiment during the first fragile year of independence. Fort Ticonderoga holds the Philip Skene Papers and a sizable research archive on the first American navy.

American Revolution at Ticonderoga

Numerous blacks served with the rebel American forces in the campaigns defending Ticonderoga. An example is **Pompey Blackman**, Lexington, Massachusetts, who served here in 1777 with the 26th Massachusetts regiment. (See, for example, *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution*, vol. II, p. 110.)

Capt. Ebenezer Allen and Dinah Mattis

In the summer of 1777, British forces under the command of General Burgoyne overwhelmed American defenses at Ticonderoga. That September, as the American forces gradually compelled Burgoyne to surrender at Saratoga, "the turning point of the Revolution," the Americans launched a rear-guard attack on the crucial communication point at Fort Ticonderoga. Captain Ebenezer Allen liberated a slave, **Dinah Mattis**, "a Negro wench," and her infant **Nancy** during this September 1777 raid on the British and Germans at Ticonderoga. The "freedom documents" for Dinah and Nancy are among the great Revolutionary treasures in the Vermont archives. See Sharon Carbonti Davis, "Vermont's Adopted Sons and Daughters," *Vermont History*, vol. 31 (1963).

Prince Taylor at Black Point

After the Revolution, one of the early civilian settlers in these parts was **Prince Taylor**, a free black who managed a large farm and tavern at the north end of Lake George (a location quickly called Black Point). During the first years of the new republic, in May 1791, two future presidents, Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson and Congressman James Madison escaped the heat of Philadelphia and traveled north to Lake Champlain and Fort Ticonderoga and then continued on to visit Vermont, the first state to be added to the union of 13. The two Virginia plantation owners were flabbergasted to meet Prince Taylor, a successful black farmer who employed white indentured laborers. See *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the American Revolution*, vol. XV, p. 449; Jane M. Lape, *Ticonderoga: Patches and Patterns*, 1969, pp. 39, 234, 237; J. Robert Maguire, ed., *The Tour to the Northern Lakes of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, 1791*, 1995. 1798 Cockburn survey of the Stoughton Patent, "A Map of Alexandria," shows a house on a 12-acre parcel, Lot 30, on Black Point. US-NARA microfilm M804, Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty Land Applications: Massachusetts service, dossier #S.42.463; Essex County, NY, application for tavern license; filed 25 June 1812.

Archaeology at Mount Independence

ca. 1845-46 Benson J. Lossing, *Pictorial Field-Book of the Revolution*, Harper Brothers, 1851, vol. I, pp. 148-149. "Three or four years ago the white wife of a negro dreamed three times—the cabalistic number—that at a certain place on Mount Independence immense treasures were buried when the Americans evacuated that post. . . . [with the aid of a pure white dog and a carved pumpkin, they scared away the money-diggers]." [FTA #3668].

Don Loprieno, Site Manager, Stony Point Battlefield SHS, "Pompey Lamb Revisited: Black Soldiers in the American Revolution." 1/19/2004.

<http://www2.lhric.org/spbattle/Pomp.html>