

Prince Whipple

Symbol of African Americans at the Battle of Trenton

Introduction

One of the most enduring symbols of the American Revolution is that of *Washington Crossing the Delaware*. Painted in 1851 by German-American artist Emmanuel Leutze, the painting evokes strong feelings of drama and heroism. It is the Creation Story of the American Nation. The story of Prince Whipple, long identified as the young African American soldier seated in front of Washington, is a neglected and little understood part of that Creation Story.

The Painting & the Legend

Nearly seventy-five years had elapsed from the time of this epochal event to Leutze's work. During those intervening years, the promise of the Declaration of Independence had become a sham in the United States, but still remained an inspiration to revolutionaries and liberals in foreign lands. One such liberal was Leutze. Born in 1816 in Germany, Leutze arrived in the United States at the age of nine. Returning to Germany to continue his artistic training, he quickly became involved in the democratic revolutions fermenting in Europe. Through his work at the Royal Art Academy in Dusseldorf, Leutze sought to both pay homage to the first modern democratic revolution, and to inspire his fellow Europeans by the idealism of the American Revolution.

When the painting arrived in the United States in 1851, it was a time of social upheaval caused by the conflict of a slave system within a society founded on freedom and basic human rights. America was split along this divide, and the Abolitionist movement looked for examples of American history that would remind their fellow citizens of the promise of the Declaration of Independence. It was at this critical time that the epic painting, *Washington Crossing the Delaware*, entered the realm of American consciousness.

William C. Nell was a leading African American abolitionist in the mid-19th century, and published a landmark volume, *Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* in 1855. By this work, Nell is credited with saving from obscurity the names and deeds of hundreds of African American patriots. It was Nell who first relates the story of Prince Whipple as the man in the boat with Washington. It is Nell's account which has remained to this day as the only source for the presence of Whipple at Trenton. Such prestigious and popular reference sources as PBS's *Africans in America*, various encyclopedias and dozens of printed and electronic sites present this information as historical truth.

For a full account of William C. Nell (1816-1874) and his work, please see SeacoastNH.com.

Prince Whipple did serve in the American Revolution, both at Saratoga in 1777, and at the Battle of Rhode Island in 1778. In December of 1776 however, Whipple was with his master, William Whipple in Baltimore, Maryland. William Whipple of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, had been a ship's captain and early



Historians and popular culture have identified the African American soldier in the front of the boat as Prince Whipple. Whipple was at Saratoga and Rhode Island, but not Trenton. Men of color did serve in John Glover's regiment of Marblehead sailors, and in the many New England regiments which made the Crossing on Christmas Day in 1776.

revolutionary. In 1776, he was a member of the Continental Congress and was with that body in December when it moved to Baltimore to escape the British forces making their way through New Jersey. When Nell was collecting his material for *Colored Patriots of the Revolution*, he included Trenton along with Saratoga and Rhode Island when telling the story of Prince Whipple. Like Leuzte, Nell used symbolism to inspire and remind Americans of the vision of a nation of free men and women.

African Americans at Trenton

At the outbreak of the American Revolution in Massachusetts in 1775, hundreds of African American and Native American men served in local militias and state forces (Records of these men may be found in *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution* with the descriptive key words such as black or Negro). This pattern was the same in Connecticut, Rhode Island and New Hampshire.

Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors in the War of the Revolution, - Vol. I-XVII (17). Boston: Wright and Potter Printing Co., 1896 is available on-line at ancestry.com. This form allows for searching by keyword.

Many original records of the period no longer exist, so we are limited in our ability to form a complete list of men of color who served at the Battle of Trenton. However, from existing sources, both primary and secondary, and from critical analysis, we are able to develop a list of some of the African American men who either served, or likely served, at Trenton. Some men are identified by naming patterns typical of the time period (African names such as Juba, Mingo, Cuffee; status names such as Freeman or Liberty; place names such as Bristol or London; and classical names like Caesar, Cato, Primus and Pompey), these names represent only about five percent of the names of African Americans of the Revolutionary era (National Archives). Other men are identified by military service records that correspond with the Trenton campaign time frame.

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Eyewitness Account
While New Englanders were accustomed to the sailing tradition of crews of mixed ancestry and race, the "gentlemen" officers of other states were not. Alexander Graydon of Philadelphia wrote of Glover's regiment in 1776, "in this regiment, there were a number of negroes, which, to persons unaccustomed to such associations, had a disagreeable...effect."
Campaign of 1776; The Road to Trenton
Gregory T. Edgar, Heritage Books, 1995

Potential Soldiers at Trenton

Pomp Devereux	Glover's 14 th Cntl.
Scipio Dodge	Baldwin's 26 th Cntl.
Hanobel	Baldwin's 26 th Cntl.
Sipeo	Baldwin's 26 th Cntl.
Nathaniel Small	Baldwin's 26 th Cntl.
Luther Jotham	Bailey's 23 rd Cntl.
Thomas Semor	Bailey's 23 rd Cntl.
Primus Hall	Massachusetts
Peter Jennings	
Philip Rodman	
Primus Coffin	New Hampshire
Dick Fortune	Durkee's 20 th Cntl.
Cesar Cipeo	Durkee's 20 th Cntl.
Samuel Pompey	Connecticut
John Pompey	Connecticut
Abraham Pharoah	Connecticut
Cudgo Shephard	Connecticut

Typical abstract of military service record:
Nathaniel Small, Gloucester: enlistment agreement dated Chelsea, Nov. 13, 1775, signed by said Small and others, engaging themselves to serve in the Continental Army in Col. Baldwin's regt. for the term of 1 year from Dec. 31, 1775; list of men belonging to the 26th regt. who agreed to tarry 6 weeks from the last of Dec., 1776, as returned by Col. Baldwin, dated Trenton, Jan. 1, 1777; reported a negro.

(Mass. Soldiers and Sailors: Vol. 14, p. 316.)

Epilogue

Although Prince was not at Trenton, he was at William Whipple's side at the time of the Declaration of Independence. He was a prominent member of Portsmouth's African American community after the Revolution and left a legacy that continues to this day.

Sources:

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