

Farmers, Soldiers and Slaves:

*African-Americans in 18th Century
Ridgefield, Connecticut*

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Introduction

African-Americans have been part of Ridgefield's history since at least the 1730s, yet little has been written and even less documented about their lives and their contributions to the community — and the nation — during the town's first century.

Ridgefield records in the 1700s rarely mention non-European residents, be they free blacks, slaves or native American Indians. That may have been in part because relatively few African or indigenous people lived here and some of those who did may not have been identified by race in any records. However, since blacks and natives were usually not treated equally with whites, records of their lives are harder to find. Even African-Americans who were free landowners here weren't considered full citizens, prevented by Connecticut tradition and laws from voting or holding office.

In covering the 18th Century, Ridgefield 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 part of the community, or even part of a social or moral problem. What's more, local historians have virtually ignored free African-Americans' part in settling the town and especially their noteworthy contributions in the fight for America's independence.

One historian made no mention at all of African-Americans in 18th Century Ridgefield and actually deleted references to blacks in reproducing a report describing the town in the year 1800.

A remarkable example of how Ridgefield's African-American past has been overlooked is a little known but sizable family named Jacklin, early settlers of the town who contributed at least three — and perhaps as many as five — soldiers to the American Revolution. These and several other black men from Ridgefield fought for freedom and equality in the war for independence, yet were never truly free or equal themselves — before or after their service.

Slavery in Ridgefield

The first African-Americans in Ridgefield were probably enslaved. Like virtually every other New England community, the town had slaves and slave owners. Relatively speaking, however, Ridgefield had few of either — fewer in proportion to the total population than any town in Fairfield County by the late 18th Century.

Records of 33 slaves and 25 free African-Americans living in Ridgefield in the 1700s have been found so far.¹ More will undoubtedly come to light.

In 1720, Connecticut's 38,000 people included about 1,100 slaves.² The enslaved population gradually increased until around 1750 when a "more rapid growth" occurred until the eve of the Revolution, historian Ralph Foster Weld reported. "According to a census taken in 1774, there were 191,392 whites, 5,085 Negroes, and 1,363 Indians in Connecticut. Apparently therefore, the slaves constituted between one fortieth and one thirtieth of the population."³

Another account says that by 1770, Connecticut had more than 6,400 slaves, the largest enslaved population of any New England colony.⁴ Half of all the ministers, lawyers, and major public officials, and a third of all the doctors, owned slaves, said Connecticut historian Jackson Turner Main.⁵ The Rev. Jonathan Ingersoll, 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 like Matthew Keeler and David Scott. (Congregational ministers in both Redding and Newtown also owned slaves.)

The earliest evidence of slavery in Ridgefield is found 16 years after the town's founding in 1708 and far from the town's borders. In an advertisement that appeared in the *Boston Gazette* several times in 1734, Timothy Keeler sought the return of his runaway slave named Mingo.⁶ This is the only case we've found in the 18th Century of a runaway from Ridgefield, 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 probably assumed there was no need to state Mingo's status. After all, he was offering £7 as a reward for Mingo's return.⁷

What is especially fascinating about the ad is that Keeler reports Mingo "can read and write," something many white people in the 1730s could not do.⁸ That hints that Mingo may have been 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.

¹ See Appendix A.

² 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>

³ Weld, Ralph Foster, *Slavery in Connecticut*, Tercentenary Commission, Yale University Press, 1935, p.4.

⁴ Harris, Katherine J., "Freedom and Slavery," in *African-American Connecticut Explored*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2013, p. 9.

⁵ Main, Jackson Turner, *Society and Economy in Colonial Connecticut*, Princeton University Press, 1983, p.177.

⁶ Boston (Mass.) Gazette, Issue 761, Aug. 5, 1734, p.4. The ad appeared in several other issues.

⁷ For the complete text of the ad, see Appendix J.

⁸ See page 27 for a discussion of Samuel Jacklin's literacy.

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.” Laws required slaves — even free blacks — to have 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 placed the ad in closer newspapers, but may have chosen the *Boston Gazette* because of its wide area of coverage and because Boston was thought to be a safer harbor for runaways than many New England cities.

It is unknown where Keeler was “reunited” with Mingo. He died in 1748, but his widow — his second wife, Sarah Allen Couch Keeler — lived until 1787. Among her probated possessions were “my Negro girl named Lydia” and “the Negro boy named Ned,” both of whom she bequeathed to a daughter.⁹

Coincidentally, it was the 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.”¹⁰ Because any child of an enslaved woman was by colony law a slave, the boy was labeled — even at birth — a “servant,” which was a common way of saying a “slave.” (The use of “servant” perhaps reflected colonists’ discomfort with the term “slave”; they may have felt more at ease calling them servants instead of what they were: Human beings treated as property.)

No name of a parent is given for Ishmael, but since Northrup, an early settler of the town, automatically became the owner of the child, he probably wanted a notice of the existence of his new property in the town’s official records. There is no record, however, of what eventually happened to Ishmael.

The first record of a free black living in Ridgefield was 1736 when Michael Dimorat bought land and reported the births of three of his four children.¹¹ He and one of his sons will be discussed later.

An enumeration of the inhabitants of Connecticut in 1782 found that among the 10 towns in Fairfield County, about 6.4% of the population was non-white. There were 29,722 white people and 1,920 “Indians and Negroes.”¹² This census did not separate free and enslaved non-whites, nor did it provide town-by-town numbers.

No official count of non-white Ridgefielders was taken until 1790, the first federal census, which found only five slaves and four free non-whites among the town’s 1,947 residents (352 families). In other words, only 0.4% of the residents were of either African or native 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

⁹ Keeler, Wesley B., *Ralph Keeler of Norwalk, Conn. and His Descendants*, Vol. 1, Albany, N.Y., 1980, p 33.

¹⁰ *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.

¹¹ *ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 221. Michael Demorat will be discussed later.

¹² Connecticut. Census. A return of the number of inhabitants in the State of Connecticut, February 1, ; and also of the Indians and negroes. s. l. 1782. Pdf. <https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.00306300/>.

residents. In Redding, 2.1% of the population of 1,503 was enslaved¹³; Newtown, 2%; Weston, 1.5%; Danbury, 0.8%; and Brookfield, 0.3%. In Huntington (now called Shelton), nearly 5% of the population of 2,742 were slaves.¹⁴

Although Ridgefield had had at least three free black families, they 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 town that year all resided with white families, probably as domestics.

Statewide about 1.2% of the population was enslaved in 1790. Another 1.2% consisted of non-whites — African Americans or American Indians — who were free.¹⁵

Not all Ridgefield's enslaved population were "working slaves." Records between 1739 and 1800 reveal the births of at least 13 children of enslaved women who, under Connecticut law, automatically became slaves at their very first breath.¹⁶ However, as young children they would not be workers. Some of these children may have died or been sold away before they reached an age when they could labor for their master — perhaps 10 or 11 years old. At any given time during most of the 18th Century, probably a half dozen young or adult slaves were working in town. Throughout the whole century, a total of 33 enslaved people have been identified in Ridgefield, but subtracting small children, perhaps only 12 to 15 were working slaves.¹⁷

The small number of slaves here may have reflected the town's economy 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 poor farmers, 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 cotton, and owners felt they needed large numbers of slaves to keep 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.

Many of the 18th Century slaves in town appear to have worked in households rather than at farming; they were the equivalents of maids and perhaps even manservants. 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 owners of some domestic responsibilities and enabled them to spend more time at their vocation — such as being a minister or lawyer — or to engage in public service.¹⁸

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

¹³ 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.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ 1790 Census.

¹⁶ Keep in mind that not all of the births of enslaved children were necessarily reported in town records, so there were undoubtedly many more than 13 births during the century.

¹⁷ See Appendix A.

¹⁸ 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.

wedding is recorded as having taken place, and that was between two free persons, as we shall see later in the discussion of the Elisabeth Jacklin and Jack Freeman.

In the southernmost colonies marriage between slaves was restricted — as was teaching slaves to read or allowing them to assemble.¹⁹ Connecticut slaves could legally do all three. The ability of blacks, especially slaves, to meet suitable mates was problematic in towns like Ridgefield because so few African-Americans, free or enslaved, were living in the small, rural Connecticut communities. Opportunities for socializing were also very limited.

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.²⁰ 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 a slave marriage may indicate their rarity. However, it may also have simply reflected a lack of interest in recording marriages of enslaved couples. Clearly, there were couples whose female partners were enslaved because enslaved babies were being born throughout the 18th Century.

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 in separate households.²¹

The first reported death of an African-American in town 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," who died August 26, 1739.²² No age was given.

In most 18th Century Connecticut communities, slaves often had only a given name. It wasn't until — and if — they were freed that they took a surname. Thus, in the record book, Tamar was Tamar, and nothing else.

Tamar, incidentally, was a fairly common name among enslaved women in Ridgefield.²³ For instance, Tamar, the "servant woman" of Matthew Seymour, was the mother of six children born between 1742 and 1754.²⁴ Tamar was the name of a fascinating — and strong — Biblical woman who was an ancestor of both King David and Jesus Christ, and who, by employing seduction, sex, and trickery, successfully sought revenge on a man who had "done her wrong."

¹⁹ Egerton, Douglas, *Death or Liberty: African Americans and Revolutionary America*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p.21

²⁰ di Bonaventura, Allegra, *For Adam's Sake: A Family Saga in Colonial New England*, Liveright, 1994, p. 101.

²¹ Several such cases are described in *For Adam's Sake* and in *Peter's War* by Joyce Lee Malcolm.

²² Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 1, p. 225.

²³ Another Tamar was the "woman servant" of Theophilus Stebbins, who had twin girls named Tamar and Dinah in 1759.

²⁴ *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).

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.²⁵

Other deaths found in the Ridgefield records include “Cesar, ye negro servant man of Gideon Smith,” who died Aug. 2, 1749,²⁶ and “Dorcas, ye negro woman servant of Timothy Benedict,” who died Jan. 10, 1760.²⁷

At least one slave was a member of a local church. Jennifer Wilson, historian of the Ridgebury Congregational Church, reports that “Phillis, a Negro woman servant,” was baptized and admitted as a member of the church in 1790.²⁸ (Several members of the Jacklin family, who were free African-Americans, were also members of the Congregational church.)

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 death records for 1812 list “Charity, (a black girl), dec’d March 11, 1812, ae. 13.”²⁹ The suggestion is that she was a free person, but because she was black, she did not get the same kind of attention in the records that most white people got. 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.”³⁰ (It should be noted, however, that the same town clerk occasionally recorded the deaths of white women without providing their given names; instead he described them only as a wife and gave the husband’s name.)

In the 1700s, an African-American’s race was often noted in town records, usually by describing the person as a negro or “of colour.” While that practice, which continued until the 1830s, was probably racist, today it actually helps historians identify African-Americans among the population and how they contributed to local society — and the Revolution. 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 17.³¹ She was probably a free black who worked as a maid.

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 on the land records the

²⁵ Interestingly, the Seymour family continued to have black servants until at least 1818 when RVR Vol. 2 p. 221 says Matthew Seymour “had negro Nab” die at the age of 40. The use of “negro” suggests that Nab was a freedman employed by Seymour, possibly the son of the same Matthew who owned Tamar.

²⁶ *ibid.* p.214.

²⁷ *ibid.* p.214

²⁸ Wilson, Jennifer, *Ridgebury Congregational Church, United Church Of Christ 1760-2000, 240th Anniversary Timeline*, published 2000.

²⁹ *Births Marriages Deaths, Vol. 2, 1745-1852, Town of Ridgefield*, 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.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p 204.

³¹ *Births Marriages Deaths, Vol. 2, 1745-1852*, p.229.

first recorded sale of a slave in Ridgefield. David Scott — whose house is now the headquarters of the Ridgefield Historical Society — sold 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.”³²

In the first half of the 18th Century, slaves in Connecticut sold for anywhere from 20 shillings to close to £300. The recorded price varied with the quality and age of the slave as well as the quality of the money. For instance, the Rev. William Hart of Saybrook bought a negro boy in 1749 for “£290, Old Tenor,” paper money that was about equal to £60 in hard coin.³³

Dr. Vincent J. Rosivach of Fairfield University studied the sales of 111 slaves in the town of Fairfield and found that the median value of a male was £38 and a female £15. Since it’s difficult to equate 18th Century pounds with 21st Century dollars, Professor Rosivach calculated that a team of oxen averaged £13 15 shillings in value; in other words, the median 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.³⁴

David Scott was the first 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.³⁵ Unfortunately for Quash, that death didn’t happen until 12 years later — and we don’t know how old Quash was. What’s more, freeing an old 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 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. In fact, Connecticut had laws designed to prevent slave owners from dumping elderly slaves on the community and selectmen could sue former masters for the costs of caring for elderly, freed slaves.

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, usually by their masters, some bore names with African roots. Quash, a fairly common name among slaves from Nova Scotia to South Carolina, was probably a shortened form of Quashy or Quashee, a word for “Wednesday” in one of the African languages; it probably reflected the day of the week of his birth.³⁶ Employing African-derived names was a way in which Africans in America paid tribute to their heritage.³⁷

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 and educated men who dominated political, religious and economic life of the post-war

³² *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.

³³ 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.

³⁴ Cruson, Daniel, *The Slaves of Central Fairfield County*, Charleston, S.C: The History Press, 2007, p.26-27

³⁵ *Town Book of Records*, 1746-1797.

³⁶ Dillard, Joey L., ed., *Black Names*, Contributions to the Sociology of Language, 2013, pp. 20-21,

³⁷ Harris, “In Remembrance of Their Kings of Guinea,” in *African American Connecticut Explored*, p. 38.

community and whose large homes were on Main Street. Both King and Bradley fought 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. Even more surprising, Teller, the Congregational minister a century after the slave-owning Rev. Ingersoll, republished most of the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich's description of what Ridgefield was like in the year 1800³⁸, but left out a 125-word paragraph that described black residents of the community (*see Appendix C*). Goodrich was the third minister of the Congregational Church here; Teller was the 10th. Was Teller ashamed of Ridgefield's slave-owning past, which included Rev. Ingersoll, the second minister? Or did he feel Ridgefielders in the 1870s weren't interested in learning about the town's black history?

Some people, often those surprised to learn that Ridgefielders owned slaves, have speculated that the local slaves must have been well-treated. After all, New England was the home of many early abolitionists and “enlightened” people.

Compared to how most slaves were treated in the South, Connecticut's enslaved people were probably better off. Several historians have suggested that in many cases, slaves in New England were treated almost like 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 table with them... and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand.”³⁹

In some cases slaves were permitted to worship with the family at church on Sundays, although the slaves usually were relegated to separate seats in the meeting house, far from the pulpit and behind the white congregation.

While Connecticut slaves may have been better treated than 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 slave-holding household miles away. Their children were not their children, but their owner's property and could legally be sold off. “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, yet a young bondman who could visit his family only on Sundays might not have agreed,” said historian Douglas R. Egerton.⁴⁰

Central Fairfield County did, incidentally, have active abolitionists in the 18th Century. 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 ban,

³⁸ 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 a detailed description of their community.

³⁹ di Bonaventura, p. 131.

⁴⁰ Egerton, p. 24

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.”⁴¹ 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 area abolitionists, was blown up by opponents who placed a keg of gunpowder under the pulpit.⁴²

Ridgefield had even been a stop on the underground railroad, that cooperative effort to assist escaped slaves make their way from the South to Canada and northern New York and New England. Evidence has been uncovered that “Uncle Ned and Aunt Betsey” Armstrong, a black couple who lived on Ned’s Mountain, maintained a station on the “Underground Railroad” well before the Civil War.⁴³

Connecticut had begun to gradually eliminate slavery by the 1770s. More people were questioning the morality of the practice while others were more 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 a slave woman after March 1 that year would become free at age 25. In 1797, the age was reduced to 21.

To avoid losses that these 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 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 violation of the nonexportation laws. New York had no gradual emancipation laws and Ridgefield was 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.⁴⁴

By the time of the Revolution, owners were already freeing slaves, but the process wasn’t necessarily simple. On Nov. 21, 1777, Ridgefield selectmen met to “examine” Cyphax, the 20-year-old slave of the Rev. Ingersoll. As noted above, half the ministers in Connecticut — most of whom were Congregational — had slaves in the 18th Century. Ingersoll, who was two years away from his death, wanted to free Cyphax, and under colony law, the selectmen had to make certain Cyphax wouldn’t be a burden on the community — in other words, either a welfare recipient or a troublemaker. (If he did go wrong or became indigent, his former owner, Mr. Ingersoll, could be ordered to take him back.⁴⁵) 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

⁴¹ Foner, Philip S., *Blacks in the American Revolution*, Greenwood Press, 1975, p. 32-3.

⁴² Cruson, p. 98. Also, 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.

⁴³ *New York (N.Y.) Tribune*, July 7, 1879, p. 8. No history of Ridgefield or the Underground Railroad effort have reported this station, but there is evidence it existed. See the essay, *Uncle Ned’s Mountain*, by Sanders.

⁴⁴ Menschel, David, “Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery 1784-1848,” *Yale Law Journal*, New Haven, 2001, Vol. 111, Issue 1, p. 211-12.

⁴⁵ See Appendix G describing the obligations of selectmen with respect to slaves or former slaves.

do therefore approve of his being liberated or set free, according to an act of the Assembly.” Three days later, Ingersoll freed Cyphax.⁴⁶

In January 1782, Matthew Keeler freed his slave, Dick, citing his long and faithful service. However, he added a proviso, again reflecting Connecticut law: “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.”⁴⁷ Dick, like Cyphax, should not become a burden on the community as a whole. Dick may have opted to become an employee of 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?).

During much of the 18th Century, many white people assumed that any black person they saw was a slave. In most communities, the majority of African-Americans *were* slaves. In 1690, Connecticut passed what were called “black codes,” measures that required that a “negro, mullato, or Indian servant” [slave] found outside the bounds of the town in which he or she lived 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.⁴⁸ “Even a free negro without identification could be taken before a magistrate, and was obliged to pay for the costs of the action,” said Weld.⁴⁹

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.”⁵⁰ Wilson apparently had friends or family in Ridgefield, and was concerned about being arrested as a runaway when visiting the town.

As late as the 1830s, the problems that could beset a free black person without proof of free status were demonstrated in the case of Daniel Jacklin, who was probably related to Ridgefield’s Jacklin family. Daniel grew up in Stamford a free man but somehow got arrested and jailed as a “runaway...colored man” in Baltimore in 1832.⁵¹ Clearly officials in Baltimore — south of the Mason-Dixon line — considered him a slave. (*For the text of the advertisement about runaway Daniel Jacklin, see Appendix I.*)

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

The number of African-Americans declined after the war. As mentioned earlier, in 1800, the Rev. Samuel G. Goodrich wrote a sketch of the town as it entered the new century. In it he

⁴⁶ See Appendix B.

⁴⁷ *Town Book of Records*, 1746-1797, unpagged.

⁴⁸ Steiner, p. 382.

⁴⁹ Weld, p. 9.

⁵⁰ *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 7, 1789, p. 85

⁵¹ *Easton (Md.) Star*, Tuesday, June 26, 1832, p. 4.

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.”⁵² 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.

The large 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. In writing about 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.”⁵³

By 1820, there were no slaves and 28 free blacks in town in Ridgefield, according to the U.S. census.⁵⁴

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.⁵⁵

Not all slaves in Connecticut were of African origin. The colony itself had enslaved 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.⁵⁶

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.⁵⁷

It is unknown how many natives lived here — and if any were slaves — after local Indian leaders sold what’s now Ridgefield to the settlers in eight transfers between 1708 to 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

⁵² Rev. Goodrich, p. 21.

⁵³ 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.

⁵⁴ Bedini, Silvio, *Ridgefield in Review*, Ridgefield, 1958, p. 148.

⁵⁵ Slavery in Massachusetts 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.

⁵⁶ di Bonaventura, p. 21.

⁵⁷ Steiner, p. 384.

woman. One died in the town about 2 years since at a great age not certainly known, but supposed 96.”⁵⁸ 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 as “a squaw.”⁵⁹ Whether she was a local native or descended from an enslaved Indian, or was herself enslaved, we will probably never know.

⁵⁸ Rev. Goodrich, p. 4

⁵⁹ Ridgefield Vital Records, Vol. 2, p.210.

A Slave Frees Himself

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

Between them they contributed three to five sons to the American Revolution.

The Jacklin family's recorded story began in late 1600s in the eastern Massachusetts town of Newbury, where Dr. Peter Tappan⁶⁰ was a prominent local physician.⁶¹ Around 1685, Tappan acquired a slave named Robert. Robert's origins are unknown but he was probably among the Africans brought to New England coastal towns via ships from either Africa or the Caribbean.

After the doctor died in 1707, Robert was inherited by his sons. However, Robert managed to save enough money working jobs on the side so that on Oct. 15, 1711, he was able to buy his own freedom.⁶² 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 in colonial America, being free of slavery was not the same as being free. In order to travel outside the boundaries of Newbury, Robert Jacklin needed a pass from local officials, similar to what Peg Wilson had obtained from officials in Bedford, N.Y., as mentioned earlier.⁶³ 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 was given a pass that included a special provision so he could travel to New Jersey, presumably to join a new community of free blacks that was being established there.

However, Jacklin instead wound up in New London, Conn., a growing coastal community founded by conservative Congregationalists who hoped the harbor, said to be the deepest in the Northeast, would rival old London as a commercial port. There in 1712 he married. However, what happened afterward in his married life is unclear, and even confusing.

Robert married Mary Wright, daughter of William and Hagar Wright, report historians James Rose and Barbara Brown.⁶⁴ Robert and Mary soon had a daughter, Mary, but the authors say Mary Wright died seven days later of “childbed fever,” a postpartum bacterial infection.⁶⁵

Less than six months after Mary's death, the two historians say, Robert married “a young woman” named Hagar.⁶⁶ This is where it gets confusing.

⁶⁰ Also spelled Toppan.

⁶¹ di Bonaventura, p. 120

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 120

⁶³ Ridgefield Land Records, Vol. 7, 1789, p. 85

⁶⁴ Rose, Dr. James M. and Barbara W. Brown, *Tapestry: A Listing History of the Black Family in Southeastern Connecticut*, Clearfield Co., 1979, p.71.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* p.72.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

In her acclaimed book on the lives of early New London families,⁶⁷ Yale historian Allegra di Bonaventura does not report that Mary dies 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 religious sect called the Rogerenes, who were activist Seventh Day Baptists centered around New London. Rogerenes would often disrupt services at local churches, protesting the practices of the Congregationalists, 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.⁶⁸

So, did Mary die in 1713 and if so, was Robert's new wife another daughter of William and Hagar Wright, also 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. He was followed by four more sons: Freeman, James, Samuel, and John. Samuel, too, settled 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 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."⁶⁹

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.*⁷⁰

In other words New London's representatives to the Connecticut General Assembly were told 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."⁷¹ The less-harsh measure was not a flat ban on blacks and allowed them to apply for permission to possess land. Jacklin soon managed to convince the 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.

⁶⁷ di Bonaventura, p. 120-21.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.104

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ Norton, Frederick Calvin, "Negro Slavery in Connecticut," in *Connecticut Magazine* (Vol. 5, No. 6),

Perhaps facing continued racist behavior from his neighbors, he sold the property three years later — at a profit of £12.⁷² 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 worlds of real 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.”⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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.”⁷⁵

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, and was then a rather remote part of the Canaan parish of Norwalk.

“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.”⁷⁶

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 Westchester County town that had been settled largely by Stamford families.

The 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.⁷⁷ Congregational society seemed open to accepting blacks then but that

⁷² Rose and Brown, p. 72.

⁷³ 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,

⁷⁴ Stark, Bruce P., *New London County Court African Americans and People of Color Collection, Inventory of Records Finding*, Connecticut State Library, 2008.

⁷⁵ DeBrincat, pp.199-200.

⁷⁶ King, Mary Louise, *Portrait of New Canaan: A History of A Connecticut Town*, New Canaan Historical Society, 1981, p. 32.

⁷⁷ *Connecticut Church Records Index*, Connecticut State Library, Hartford, Connecticut.

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.⁷⁸

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 town founders had purchased large tracts including Oblong land from the American Indians to create Ridgefield, and had spent more than 20 years laboring to turn Oblong 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."

Ridgefield's proprietors then set about acquiring title to this territory that still officially belonged to the native Indians. In December of 1739, they paid 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).

Robert Jacklin Jr., who was probably living in Canaan parish of Norwalk — now New Canaan — with his wife Anne, learned of the availability of this new territory and decided New Patent might be a land of opportunity not available in more settled areas near 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.⁷⁹ 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 primeval forests, clearing fields of both trees and countless rocks, cutting wood to build a home, and planting crops — a huge undertaking.

⁷⁸ *The New York Times*, January 18, 1964, p.12

⁷⁹ *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 3, pg. 161. He was labeled "Milford" because he'd come from Milford, Conn., distinguishing him from the proprietor named Samuel Smith who was from Norwalk and, of course, was called Norwalk Samuel Smith.

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.⁸⁰ These values were apparently a percentage of the true market value (in 2020 Ridgefield assessments are 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, northwesterly of the Richter golf course, and bordering New York. 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 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).⁸¹ Both Ebenezer and Thaddeus — and probably Daniel — later served in the American Revolution.

How long Jacklins remained as a 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."⁸² 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, as often happened, got loose and wandered off, or if they were grazing common land mixed with cows of other owners. By late in the 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 filed just a simple description of the cow, in case it wandered off.

By 1778, Robert was still a landowner, with property assessed at nearly £26 pounds, typical of a small farm operation in Ridgefield at that time.⁸³

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.⁸⁴

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

⁸⁰ *Town Records, 1746-1797*, unpagged.

⁸¹ *Ridgefield Births Marriages 1709-1767*, Vol. 1, p.13.

⁸² *Town Records, 1746-1797*, unpagged, but near the end.

⁸³ *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.

⁸⁴ *Town Book of Records, 1746-1797*, unpagged.

were filled with black and white families who had visions of adventure and opportunities to the west.”⁸⁵

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.

Fighting for the Independence

Some 9,000 African-American free and enslaved men served in the American Revolution — many of them heroically.⁸⁶ They represented between 10% and 15% of the entire army. If they were slaves when they signed up, most of them were promised emancipation if they served at least two years, and many of those 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.”⁸⁷

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.⁸⁸ “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.”⁸⁹

Nash attributes their enlistment record in part to the fact that many whites had farms back at home that required constant attention while 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

⁸⁵ Rose and Brown, p. 39.

⁸⁶ Nash, Gary B., “The African Americans’ Revolution,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the American Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 2013, pp. 254-255. 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.”

⁸⁷ Lanning, Lt. Col. Michael Lee,, *African Americans in the Revolutionary War*, Citadel Press, 2000, p. 12.

⁸⁸ Nash (Oxford), pp. 254-55.

⁸⁹ Quarles, Benjamin, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, Chapel Hill, N.C.: The University of North Carolina Press, 1961, p. 73.

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 those who joined the army.”⁹⁰

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.⁹¹

Ridgefield had at least seven men who were born or lived here and who served in the war. It may have had even more.⁹² 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 that as many as 400 blacks served in the war from Connecticut.⁹³

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.⁹⁴ Although blacks were sometimes 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.⁹⁵ For instance, blacks and whites 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 wrote. “Though prejudice and discrimination did not evaporate with the first shots at Lexington, black servicemen in the Revolution certainly 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 forecandle 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.”⁹⁶

Historian Judith Van Buskirk put 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

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 80.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p.79, Quarles notes that 10 of Stratford’s 114 soldiers were black, as were 13 of Wallingford’s 132.

⁹² See Appendix H.

⁹³ White, David O., *Connecticut’s Black Soldiers 1775-1783*, The Pequot Press, p. 56.

⁹⁴ Lanning, p. 73.

⁹⁵ *ibid.* p. 97.

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p. 119.

period of time. There was no other institution in eighteenth-century life, other than the military, that did this.”⁹⁷

Black soldiers in the Revolution saw 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.⁹⁸

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 in the war, but did so with distinction.⁹⁹

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 white men.¹⁰⁰ A study of the records could find no cases of black men from Ridgefield — enslaved or free — substituting for whites. However, one black man who was 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 be instantly considered free. Tens of thousands of slaves, mostly in the deep South, responded to that opportunity for freedom. Some wound up fighting with or supporting British troops. But after the war, many did not fare as well as they had hoped and 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 most to move to Sierra Leone in western African. Others went to England.

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

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 1757¹⁰¹ 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 Rockwell¹⁰² says he served in Capt. Isaac Hine’s Company, but all his military records say he was in Capt. Ezekiel Sanford’s Company.¹⁰³ (As we will see later,

⁹⁷ 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

⁹⁸ Collins, Elizabeth M., *Black Soldiers in the Revolutionary War*, Soldiers Live, www.army.mil

⁹⁹ Many examples are described in Van Buskirk.

¹⁰⁰ Van Buskirk, p. 225.

¹⁰¹ *Ridgefield Vital Records*, Vol. 1, p 13

¹⁰² Rockwell, George L., *History of Ridgefield*, Ridgefield, 1928, p. 173.

¹⁰³ U.S., Revolutionary War Rolls, 1775-1783 (Folders 94-96); 5th Regiment, 1781-1782 (Folders 97-98)

Sanford was a Redding man whose family owned a slave who was also in his company and whom Ebenezer introduced to his niece. After they were married, they named a son after Ebenezer.)

Rockwell said Ebenezer served until 1781, but the National Archives' show he was discharged Oct. 15, 1778¹⁰⁴; 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.¹⁰⁵

General Washington himself said his men were “often times half starved, always in rags, without pay, and experiencing every species of distress, which human nature is capable of undergoing.”¹⁰⁶

The worst “distress” was illness. “Disease has destroyed ten men for us where the sword of the enemy has killed one,” wrote John Adams.¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸ Many others froze to death, including at least one Ridgefield soldier.¹⁰⁹ 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, suggesting he was recovering from an illness, maybe severe frostbite, with which many soldiers were afflicted.¹¹⁰ Jacklin returned to duty over the summer, but was discharged on Oct. 15, 1778, perhaps debilitated by the earlier illness.¹¹¹

Ebenezer Jacklin appears only once in Ridgefield's land records. The Grand List of 1782 says he had property assessed at £3.¹¹² 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.

Sometime after 1782, 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

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Betz, F. Lee, *Fifth Connecticut Regiment, Continental Line: A Brief History of the Regiment*, Ridgefield, 1978, p.4-5

¹⁰⁶ Lanning, p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pg 115.

¹⁰⁸ Pruitt, Sarah, *235 Years Ago, Washington's Troops Made Camp at Valley Forge*, by , www.history.com March 7, 2019

¹⁰⁹ Elisha Gilbert froze to death at Valley Forge, says Rockwell, p. 168

¹¹⁰ Boyle, Joseph Lee, *Fire Cake and Water: The Connecticut Infantry at the Valley Forge Encampment*, by Clearfield Co., 1999, p. 108.

¹¹¹ 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.

¹¹² *Town Book of Records, 1746-1797*, unpagged..

court for a federal pension, which the government had just begun to offer to 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.¹¹³ 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 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 applying for pensions for service that had occurred more than 40 years earlier. While Ebenezer's participation in various battles have 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.¹¹⁴

In order to apply for a pension, a veteran had to provide not only his 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 (probably 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 had his own small farm, perhaps in or near Lenox.¹¹⁵ 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 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 he was an invalid in his early 60s is probably

¹¹³ 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.

¹¹⁴ Boyle, p. 108.

¹¹⁵ Cruson, p. 34.

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.¹¹⁶

That he felt he had “no family” was sad, and probably referred to immediate family, such as a wife, children or grandchildren. No record of his being married has been found. Certainly 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 receiving the standard pension for a private: \$8 a month, roughly worth \$300 today.¹¹⁷ That amounted to \$96 a year. Before he died, he had received a total of \$658 — close to \$12,000 in today’s money. 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 that 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.¹¹⁸

Ebenezer Jacklin died in Stockbridge, Mass., in 1825. A brief newspaper announcement reported his age at 70,¹¹⁹ but based on his Ridgefield birth record, he would have been 67. His name appears today in Ridgefield on a bronze plaque on War Memorial along Main Street at the head of Branchville Road, honoring Revolutionary War veterans.

Like so many other black soldiers who served in and survived the Revolutionary War, Ebenezer Jacklin had lived in poverty. “Black Americans, despite brave service and extreme sacrifice, mostly remained mired in the status quo,” Col. Lanning lamented.¹²⁰

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.¹²¹ 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.

¹¹⁶ Gilbert, Alan, *Black Patriots and Loyalists*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013, p. 107

¹¹⁷ 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

¹¹⁸ *Standing in Their Own Light*, p.196

¹¹⁹ *Massachusetts Spectator*, April 8, 1825.

¹²⁰ *African Americans in the Revolutionary War*, p.21

¹²¹ Rose and Brown, p.74.

According to historian David O. White,¹²² Thaddeus enlisted from New Milford, where he lived,¹²³ had two wives and two daughters, and 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.

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.¹²⁴ Ulster County 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.¹²⁵

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.”¹²⁶ 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 track down 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.¹²⁷ 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.¹²⁸ 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. 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.¹²⁹

¹²² White, p. 59

¹²³ 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, of “free colored persons.”

¹²⁴ Rose and Brown, p.73.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *Republican Farmer*, Bridgeport, Conn., Nov. 21, 1827, Vol XVIII, Issue 918, Page 3.

¹²⁷ Military records occasionally spell his name Louis or Luis.

¹²⁸ 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

¹²⁹ Rees, John U., *They Were Good Soldiers*, Warwick, England: Helion & Company, 2019, p.174-5.

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.¹³⁰ Like Ebenezer, Lewis Jacklin also spent the winter of 1777-78 with Washington at Valley Forge.¹³¹ 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 has been found. He does not show up in any local censuses¹³² and was not a landowner in Ridgefield. Like so many other blacks who fought 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 monument on Main Street at the head of Branchville Road. (Since Thaddeus enlisted from New Milford, he is not included on the monument.)

Samuel Jacklin, 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 is unknown.

In the early 1740s, Samuel and brother, James, bought a 132-acre farm in the Ponus Ridge area of Canaan Parish.¹³³ 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 pounds.¹³⁴ 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.

¹³⁰ NARA M246. Muster rolls, payrolls, strength returns, and other miscellaneous personnel, pay, and supply records of American Army units, 1775-83. Roll 0014

¹³¹ Boyle, p. 108.

¹³² The United States began taking censuses in 1790.

¹³³ King, p. 34

¹³⁴ *Town Book of Records, 1746-1796*

He may have been here by 1744; the Ridgefield vital records report, “Mary, daughter of Samuëll & Sarah Jacklin, b[orn]. 31 Dec 1744,”¹³⁵ 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-law¹³⁶), Benjamin (baptised 1750), and Elisabeth (baptised 1759).¹³⁷ Elisabeth, undoubtedly born in Ridgefield, married Jack Freeman in 1784 — much more about Freeman and that marriage later. 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.¹³⁸

One history notes that “a Samuel Jacklin served in the Fourth Company, Fourth Regiment of the New York Line,” in 1778-79.¹³⁹ 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.

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 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.”¹⁴⁰ Samuel had died 20 years before Goodrich wrote this report, and six years before the minister even arrived in town.

Jacklin apparently helped others in need. 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.” As we shall see, Mary was more than just a homeless woman; she had known the Jacklins for many years.

¹³⁵ *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.

¹³⁶ Rev. Goodrich, p.18

¹³⁷ Rose and Brown, p. 73.

¹³⁸ *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 3, p. 161.

¹³⁹ Rose and Brown, p. 73

¹⁴⁰ Rev. Goodrich, p. 18. See also Appendix C.

While Samuel Jacklin may have been a respected landowner in the community, he was not a “freeman” — a man who could vote — and he consequently could not hold any public offices. For many years, Connecticut had an unwritten rule 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.¹⁴¹ Connecticut thus became the only New England state to specifically disenfranchise African Americans.¹⁴² (This, of course, placed black men in the same category as all women, black or white, who would not be able to vote until more than a century later. However, black men won the right to vote in 1870, 50 years before women.)

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.¹⁴³ No Connecticut court was that enlightened.

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..., being 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 kind of wording for the beginning of many wills of church-goers in the 18th Century, though Jacklin’s may have been more detailed. (*For the complete text of the will, see Appendix F.*)

After ordering that his debts and funeral expenses be paid, he then 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, as could Mingo, Timothy Keeler’s runaway slave. In the 18th Century, many people — white and black — were illiterate, even though as early as 1690 the Connecticut General Court ruled 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

¹⁴¹ Rose and Brown, p. 38.

¹⁴² Moss, Hilary, “Cast Down on Every Side,” in *African American Connecticut Explored*, p. 151.

¹⁴³ *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.

grand-jurymen 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 ruling was so that Connecticut citizens would be able to read "the holy word of God or the good laws of this colony."¹⁴⁴

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.¹⁴⁵ Samuel Jacklin signed the will with an **X**, and witnesses Matthew Keeler, Justus Olmsted and Benjamin Smith confirmed that the **X** was "his mark." An **X** was often used by people who could not write. However, it is possible that Jacklin, who died shortly after the will was written, was simply too weak to sign his name.

His probate records offer hints that he — or someone in his household — may have been able to at least read. An inventory of his possessions included "one large Bible" and a half dozen other books — including a "spelling book."¹⁴⁶ It is also quite possible that 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.¹⁴⁷

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 was not understood then.)

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 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."

His clothing included a half dozen pairs of "trowsers," most of them white; four vests — brown, blue, green, and striped; various other clothing 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

¹⁴⁴ Kendall, Edward Augustus, *Travels Through the Northern Parts of the United States*, Vol.1, New York: 1809, p. 271.

¹⁴⁵ Glade, Carla Olson, *Literacy in Colonial America*, Colonial Quills.Blogspot.com, 2011

¹⁴⁶ See Appendix E.

¹⁴⁷ *Literacy in Colonial America*.

described. It is possible these had belonged to someone else in the family, maybe his wife or his daughter, Elisabeth.

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.¹⁴⁸ 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 town’s early residents in Titicus Cemetery, many of whose oldest gravestones have deteriorated beyond identification or have totally disappeared.

His entire estate was left to Joseph Jacklin, himself an interesting man.

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.¹⁴⁹ 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

¹⁴⁸ Nye, Eric W., *Pounds Sterling to Dollars: Historical Conversion of Currency*, accessed Thursday, June 20, 2019, www.uwyo.edu/numimage/currency.htm.

¹⁴⁹ *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.

from Salem — now Lewisboro — in Westchester County, which borders Pound Ridge, New Canaan and Ridgefield.¹⁵⁰ 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.¹⁵¹ Taking that oath entitled him to obtain a portion of Ridgefield’s allotment of salt, a valuable 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. (One assumes that 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.¹⁵² Goodrich’s wording in describing Joseph hints that he may have frittered away the farm. After 1785 Joseph disappears from the Ridgefield records.

He may also have continued to live and work here for a while as a laborer on farms. He may have been the quick-witted worker mentioned by prolific author Samuel G. Goodrich (“Peter Parley”), the minister’s son, in his 1856 autobiography, *Recollections of A Lifetime*.¹⁵³ 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.”

“Why so?” said a bystander.

“Because,” was the reply, “if the Lord didn’t reign, the General 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.

¹⁵⁰ National Archives. Hortons Company of Guards, 1777-1778 (Folder 117) - Pawling’s Reg of Militia, 1776-1777 (Folder 135)

¹⁵¹ Town Book of Records, 1746-1797.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Goodrich, S. G., *Recollections of A Lifetime*, Hartford, 1856, vol. 1, p. 245

His eventual destination may have been central New York. In 1800, a Joseph Jacklin was living in Kortright, Delaware County, N.Y.,¹⁵⁴ a recently established township, many of whose first settlers were from Connecticut.¹⁵⁵ The U.S. Census that year indicates there were seven people in his household.¹⁵⁶ By 1803 he had taxable property there worth \$144, which was about average for landowners in Kortright.¹⁵⁷

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.¹⁵⁸ She was about 25 years old, he about 31.

As his name suggests, 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 ‘Major’ Jack Freeman, once lived in town.”¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰ 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, then an aged black farmer, decided to apply for a federal pension then being offered to any veteran of the 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 (1764-1837), son of his former owner Hezekiah Sanford, who had died in 1798. (Hezekiah was also a brother of Ezekiel Sanford, Freeman’s captain in the army.) William provided testimony in Freeman’s favor.

¹⁵⁴ Reel 22, 1800 Federal Census of New York, Microfilm Series M32; National Archives, Washington, DC.; Pg. 286

¹⁵⁵ 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.

¹⁵⁶ 1800 Census Place: Kortright, Delaware, New York; Series: M32; Roll: 22; Page: 1316; Image: 380; Family History Library Film: 193710

¹⁵⁷ 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..

¹⁵⁸ Ridgefield Vital Records, Book 1., p.154.

¹⁵⁹ Grumman, William Edgar, *The Revolutionary Soldiers of Redding, Connecticut, and the Record of Their Services*, Hartford: The Hartford Press, 1904, p.135

¹⁶⁰ Rees, John U., ‘*They Were Good Soldiers*’: *African-Americans Serving in the Continental Army, 1775-1783*, Warwick, England: Helion & Co., 2019

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 pension application.

For most of his life, Jack Freeman had been known simply as Jack.¹⁶¹ 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 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 previously owned him. "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."¹⁶²

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 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 won status. (Other surnames chosen by freed Connecticut slaves included Freedom and Liberty. One man even named himself simply Free.)¹⁶³

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 Sanford'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

¹⁶¹ 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.

¹⁶² National Archives, pension reel 2093, as cited in Rees, p. 155.

¹⁶³ Quarles, Benjamin, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961, pp. 51-2.

entered the service of the United States of American 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.”

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 off[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.”

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.”¹⁶⁴

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 like the others, by Jeremiah Mead of Ridgefield, who served alongside Freeman in Capt. Sanford’s company. In a

¹⁶⁴ National Archives, pension reel 2093.

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 — he did not know what had happened to another black soldier in his regiment named Jack Congo, who will be discussed shortly.¹⁶⁵

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 his 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 his cousin Elisabeth.

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

In the Redding records of their children’s births, the parents are identified as John and Elizabeth Freeman,¹⁶⁶ 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, 1785.¹⁶⁷ “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

¹⁶⁵ See p. 35.

¹⁶⁶ *Redding Vital Records*, p. 94.

¹⁶⁷ 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.

from Capt. Ezekiel Sanford, who had been Jack's commanding officer in the Fifth.¹⁶⁸ 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.¹⁶⁹

Bruce Nelson, a town historian of Redding, places the Freeman farm in the vicinity of the four-road intersection of Route 107 (Redding Road), Peaceable Street, Umpawaug Road, and Goodsell Hill Road.¹⁷⁰

By all accounts, Jack Freeman was well respected among both whites and blacks in and around Redding. While Charles Burr Todd's *History of Redding* ignores Freeman in his turn of the 20th Century book, 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."¹⁷¹ 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 the state as a whole (although the election of the black governor in Hartford was a major event, attended by a sizable parade, fancy dress and elaborate ceremonies). These unofficial black governors were selected in towns throughout the state.¹⁷²

When he and Elisabeth were buying land, Jack Freeman took out mortgages with his son, Ebenezer. For instance, in 1806, he took a \$59.48 mortgage with Ebenezer on the homelot he bought the same day for \$42.¹⁷³ Ebenezer, who was only 20 years old when he loaned this money to his father, would provide him with another mortgage loan in 1823.¹⁷⁴

Son Thaddeus of Redding was also known to loan money. In 1830, he gave a mortgage for \$83 to Nehemiah Mead 2nd on four acres in the Bennett's Farm district of Ridgefield.¹⁷⁵ How or why he connected with Mead has not been determined. However, what is more interesting about Thaddeus is his marriage in 1821 to Sophia Phillips of New Milford¹⁷⁶ — 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.

¹⁶⁸ *Redding Land Records*, Vol. 6, p. 414.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 214.

¹⁷⁰ Email correspondence, Jan. 16, 2020.

¹⁷¹ Hurd, D. Hamilton, *History of Fairfield County*, Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis & Co., 1881, p. 599.

¹⁷² "Connecticut's Black Governors," History and Genealogy Unit, Connecticut State Library, Feb. 2005, published on MuseumofCTHistory.com.

¹⁷³ *Redding Land Records*, Vol. 7, p. 215.

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, Vol. 10, p. 234.

¹⁷⁵ *Ridgefield Land Records*, Vol. 14, p.79.

¹⁷⁶ Barbour, Town Marriage Records Pre-1870, p. 88

First Free Blacks in Ridgefield

The first free African-American family to live in Ridgefield was probably closely connected with the Jacklins, but was in town a decade before them. One family member, who spent part of his boyhood here, went on to serve in both the French and Indian War, and the Revolutionary War.

Town records indicate that Michael Dimerat moved to Ridgefield in 1736, buying a little over an acre on the north side of the Bedford Road (today's Route 35 west of the Fountain) from Matthew Seymour (who, as we've seen, owned at least one slave).¹⁷⁷ Nearly three years later, he sold the same property back to Matthew Seymour, with a big difference.¹⁷⁸ 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 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 here for two or three 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 son or daughter of Michael. There is no mention of a mother. Usually, both parents were listed; if only one parent's name is given, it was invariably the mother, but not here. Perhaps when he was filing his deed for the purchase on Bedford Road, Michael Dimorat 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 very unusual for 18th Century Connecticut. Official records, mostly military, spell it at least seven different ways, which is not surprising since the name was uncommon and the bearers of it were probably illiterate, unable to tell officials how they should spell it.¹⁷⁹ 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.”¹⁸⁰ This was probably Michael's daughter, born in 1736, although it could have been his previously unnamed wife. Samuel Jacklin's being African American suggests Mary was, too, but there is no indication 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 lists 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

¹⁷⁷ RLR, Vol. 2, p. 193.

¹⁷⁸ RLR, Vol. 3, p.11.

¹⁷⁹ Military and other records include these versions of the name: Damerat, Demorat, Demeratt, Dimerack, Dimerat, Dimeratt, Dimorat.

¹⁸⁰ Ridgefield Town Records, 1748-1797, Town Meeting, April 15, 1771.

Connecticut. And he is listed as “a negro,” an uncommon instance of military records’ mentioning race.

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

James Jacklin was reported as 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 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 suggests that the Dimorats had lived in Norwalk before coming to Ridgefield. This 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. In fact, since Michael Dimorat moved to Ridgefield sooner than the Jacklins, he may have recommended that Samuel and Robert 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,¹⁸¹ 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, 30 miles from Fairfield County on the west side of the Hudson River, is unknown. However, one can guess that 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 same people — 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 regiment. He was assigned to Capt. John Barnard’s Company, in which he continued to serve in until just before his discharge Feb. 5, 1781. He saw service largely in the Hudson River Highlands area, attacking New York-based British forces.¹⁸²

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

After the war John Dimorat wound up living in Massachusetts. Like countless other African-American veterans of the Revolution, he lived his last years in poverty, hardly befitting a

¹⁸¹ Bates, Albert Carlos, *Rolls of Connecticut Men in the French and Indian War, 1755-1762*, Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1903, p. 109-110.

¹⁸² 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

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.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ *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.

Henry Williams

At least one other black soldier in the Revolution came from Ridgefield, but little is known about Henry — or Harry — Williams,¹⁸⁴ other than he served from 1781 until the war's end in 1783. We do not even know whether he joined free or as a slave.

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."¹⁸⁵ The Connecticut Historical Society collections list a Harry Williams who enlisted from Ridgefield in February of 1781 for the duration of the war.¹⁸⁶

That suggests that he may have been a slave who, by signing up for long-term service in the Revolution, 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 Jack Rowland and Ebenezer Jacklin were serving. (That company also had *two* people named John Williams!)

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

As with so many other blacks from the 18th Century, 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 was learned from the case of Jack Freeman, also known as Jack and Jack Rowland, his name could have changed. If he entered the service as a slave, working toward emancipation, he may 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 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

¹⁸⁴ 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.

¹⁸⁵ Rockwell, p. 195.

¹⁸⁶ Bates, Albert C., ed., *Rolls and Lists of Connecticut Men in the Revolution, 1775-1783*, Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1901, p.110.

was a promise given to most Connecticut slaves 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.¹⁸⁷

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. 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 there 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.”¹⁸⁸

Ridgefield historian Silvio Bedini described Congo as a Ridgefielder who was “killed” in the Revolution.¹⁸⁹ He believed Congo lived in Ridgefield, probably because of a letter that, in the 1950s, was in the collection of the Ridgefield Library and Historical Association.¹⁹⁰

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.¹⁹¹

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. 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.¹⁹² 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 positive evidence that Congo had died,’ ” says David O.

¹⁸⁷ Boyle, p. 48

¹⁸⁸ Associated Press, March 18, 2013

¹⁸⁹ Bedini, pp. 89-90.

¹⁹⁰ Its whereabouts today has not been determined

¹⁹¹ *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.

¹⁹² Jones, Keith Marshall III, *Farmers Against the Crown*, Connecticut Colonel Press, 2002, p. 163

White.¹⁹³ “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.

¹⁹³ White. pp. 39-40

Conclusion

In 1972, nearly two centuries after the Revolutionary War began, 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 would house lower-income families.¹⁹⁴ SAI accused Ridgefield of being among many suburban towns that, deliberately or otherwise, had zoned out poor minorities. It added that Ridgefield was a virtually all-white town, with a black population of around one percent. Ridgefield, SAI charged, was “lily-white.”

In population, Ridgefield has always been virtually “lily-white.” In the 18th Century, that was, for the most part, a good thing. In Connecticut as in most of the colonies, blacks were slaves. Towns with large percentages of blacks were towns with large numbers of slaves. Because of its geography, economics and demographics, Ridgefield had few slaves and few blacks.

Nonetheless, on a modest scale, Ridgefield could be a land of opportunity. For those who were willing to farm its rocky 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 had no such restrictions.¹⁹⁵ Brothers Robert and Samuel Jacklin perhaps sensed that openness when they decided to settle here.

As a consequence, nearly half of Ridgefield’s small African-American population in the 18th Century was not enslaved, but first, second and third generation free blacks who, like the early white settlers, sought a place to farm and raise a family.

Nonetheless, the land-owning Jacklins could not serve as town officials or even vote to select those officials. Yet, despite 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 were taxed and unrepresented.

It’s challenging to find information about blacks in the 18th Century, partly because public officials were not as diligent in recording data about them and partly because most blacks were illiterate — many kept so by the white majority. They were thus unable to record information about their own lives in letters, diaries or reminiscences. Nonetheless, enough facts can be found to reveal the extent, and to a degree, the nature of slavery in 18th Century Ridgefield. However, because they were landowners, more can be found 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 some of the African-American men who fought for independence.

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 people, and of the hard times and harsh treatment they lived through. Like public officials long ago, Ridgefield historians have all but ignored them — one even deleted them.

Three of their names appear, embossed in brass, on the Ridgefield’s War Memorial. While that expresses some degree of appreciation for a few of Ridgefield’s 18th Century black

¹⁹⁴ *The Ridgefield Press*, March 23, 1972, p.1

¹⁹⁵ King, p. 32.

veterans, no recognition has been given to those 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.

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 the town's vital and land records, histories, and other sources. In all, 58 18th Century African-Americans have been identified, including 33 enslaved or probably enslaved people, and 25 who were free or probably born free. At least 13 children were born enslaved in Ridgefield, and about 10 were born free. However, there may be 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.)

###

- Allen:** Enslaved; Born 1751, son of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour (Ridgefield Land Records [RLR], 1/257)
- Andrew:** Enslaved; Born July 22, 1761, son of Tamar, servant of Sarah Keeler. (RLR)
- Andrew:** Enslaved; “ye servant of Stephen Smith,” died Feb. 29 (19?), 1785. May be the same Andrew born in 1761.
- Armstrong, Betsey:** Possibly freed. Known as “Aunt Betsey” she and husband “Uncle Ned” Armstrong were reported to operate a station on the Underground Railroad. 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, so her birth was either around 1767 or 1782. Her maiden name is unknown.
- Armstrong, Edward:** Possible freed; Known as “Uncle Ned,” he with wife “Aunt Betsey” were reported to operate a station on the Underground Railroad in Ridgebury. 1850 Census says he was born in Ridgefield. Since he died in 1851 at the age of 65 6 months, he would have been born about January 1786. No birth record has been found and he may have been born enslaved. He and Betsey lived on Ned’s Mountain. Their grandson, John S. Smalley, who was born here, died in the Civil War.
- 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. Bedini says 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)

- Charity:** Possibly free; described simply as “negro” when she died March 11, 1812. Her age was 13, indicating she could have been born here in 1799. (Ridgefield Vital Records, Vol. 1, p.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.
- 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; served in French and Indian War and the 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. May be the Mary Dimorat who was cared for as an indigent person by Samuel Jacklin in 1771 — or may be her mother. [RLR 1/221]
- Dimorat, Michael:** Free, possibly a freed slave; father of Elizabeth, John, Mary, and Ziporah Dimorat. Place of birth and death unknown. No wife in records. [RLR 1/221; 1/224]
- Dimorat, Ziporah:** Free; daughter of Michael; born possibly in Norwalk March 23, 1730. [RLR 1/221]
- Dinah:** Enslaved; David Scott sells her to Vivus Dauchy along with the boy Peter, for 200 pounds Feb. 13, 1740.
- Dinah:** Enslaved; born 1759, daughter of Tamar, servant of Theophilus Stebbins; she was twin sister of Tamar (RLR 1/257).
- 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)
- Elizabeth:** Enslaved; Born 1746, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour (RLR 1/257)
- Jack:** Status unknown, but probably enslaved; listed as a “negro” from Ridgefield who served in the Revolution; may have been Jack Congo — see page 31ff. (WAL)
- Jacklin, Ann(e):** Free; She was the wife of Robert Jacklin Jr. and mother of Daniel, Benjamin, Ebenezer, Anne, and Thaddeus. There is no record of her death here, and we do not know her maiden name or where she was born. (Tapestry)
- 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. 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; He was born in Ridgefield in 1757, son of Robert Jr. and Anne Jacklin, and 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.)
- Jacklin, Elisabeth:** Free; baptised 1759; daughter of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin (*Tapestry*) ; married Jack Freeman, (Town Records 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. He took the oath of fidelity in 1782.
- 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.
- Jacklin, Mary:** Free; daughter of Samuel and Sarah Jacklin, baptised in 1744, lived on her parents Flat Rock Farm but what happened to her has not been uncovered.
- 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 be listed on the tax rolls in 1780, but his whereabouts after that are unknown.
- Jacklin, Samuel:** Free; Born around 1720 in New London, died 1780 in Ridgefield; he was a farmer who came here 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.
- Jacklin, Sarah:** Free; She was the wife of Samuel Jacklin, although there is no record of her existence, including her death, in Ridgefield records. However, an inventory of Samuel Jacklin's estate in 1780 lists many items that probably belonged to her.
- Jacklin, Thaddeus:** Free; He was born in Ridgefield in 1761, son of Robert Jr. and Ann 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.)
- Jenny:** Enslaved; On Dec. 20, 1795, her daughter, Nancy, was born while Jenny was owned by Stephen Smith.
- Jenny:** Enslaved; daughter of Tamar, "ye servant woman of Sarah Keeler," died Aug. 25, 1739. (RLR 1/225)
- Jenny:** Enslaved; daughter of Tamar, woman servant of Sarah Keeler, born Sept. 10, 1758 and "died about a year after."
- 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 in Ridgefield. No mother's name was given.
- Lydia:** Enslaved; Sarah Keeler, widow of Timothy Keeler, bequeaths "my Negro girl named Lydia" to Hannah Keeler Wilson in 1787. [Keeler genealogy]

- Michael:** Enslaved; son of Tamar, servant of Theophilus Stebbins, born Sept. 13, 1756.
- Mingo** Enslaved; Advertised as a runaway from Timothy Keeler in the summer of 1734; able to read and write [See 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 here in the 18th Century.
- Nancy:** Enslaved; daughter of Jenny, servant of Stephen Smith, born Dec. 20, 1795 (RVR 2/72). In RVR 2/84, “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 [Keeler genealogy]
- Naomi:** Enslaved; born 1754, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour. (RLR 1/257)
- Pegg[y]:** Enslaved; born 1742, daughter of Tamar, servant of Matthew Seymour. (RLR 1/257)
- Peter:** Enslaved; David Scott sells this “negro boy” along with “the woman Dinah” to Vivus Dauchy, Feb. 13, 1740, for 200 pounds.
- Phillis:** Enslaved; “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 the church by Jennifer Wilson, 2000]
- Tamar:** Enslaved; called “ye servant woman of Sarah Keeler” when her daughter dies Aug. 26, 1736 (RLR 1/225)
- 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.
- Tamar:** Enslaved; twin daughter of Tamar, servant of Theophilus Stebbins, born Jan. 7, 1759.
- Tamar:** Enslaved; the servant of Theophilus Stebbins had at least twins Tamar and Dinah Jan. 7, 1759.
- Zebulon:** Probably free; “Zebulon, (negro man) died May 11th 1791 in ye 80th year of his age.” (RVR 2/205)
- Unknown:** Enslaved; “a Negro wench and child” valued at 350 pounds were owned by Alexander Resseguie at his death in 1752. (John E. Morris, *The Resseguie Family*, Hartford, 1888)
- Unknown:** Enslaved; this death record says only, “the negro girl belonging to Elijah Smith dec’d April 2, 1795.” Not even her age is given. (RVR, Vol. 2)

Williams, Henry or Harry; probably enslaved; was a soldier in the Revolution, said to have come from Ridgefield. (Rockwell, *et al.*)

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 Connecti cut, having Obtained y^o Approbation of ye Selectmen of Ridgfield, according to y^o 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 y^e 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 bar gained and sold and by these presents do fully and abso lutely 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 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 abridgement 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, New Milford historian, 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

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 totalled 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 white cap 4d 1 checked [cap] 4	0 0 8
1 great coat	0 5 0	1 pr boots 8/	0 8 0
1 red [coat]	0 1 0	1 pr shoes 5/ 1 pr [shoes] 2/	0 7 0
1 strait body coat	2 0 0	3 books at 2/	0 6 0
1 small coat blue	0 15 0	1 large Bible	0 18 0
1 large born vest	0 3 0	1 Psalm book 1/ 1 [Psalm book] 1/	0 2 0
1 blue vest	0 10 0	1 [book] meditations	0 1 0
1 green [vest]	0 6 0	1 spelling book	0 1 0
1 striped vest	0 7 6	2 pamphlets at 6d	0 1 0
1 pr leather breeches smooth buttons	0 5 0	1 bed & bolster, plain tyck 37 at 8d	1 4 8
1 pr [breeches] covered buttons	0 6 0	1 [bed & bolster] striped tyck, 34 ea at 8d	1 2 8
1 pr [breeches covered buttons]	0 1 0	1 straw bed	0 4 0
1 pr blue [breeches]	0 3 0	1 pillow 3/6 1 bedsted & cord 12/	0 15 0
1 pr leather [breeches]	1 0 0	1 bed & pillow Wt 35 at 2/9	4 6 9
1 pr knee buckles	0 1 0	1 bedsted & cord	0 15 0
1 pr checked trowzers	0 2 6	1 diamond blanket	0 9 0
1 pr white [trowzers]	0 0 6	1 birdseye [blanket]	0 6 0
1 pr. white [trowzers]	0 0 6	1 old [blanket]	0 3 0
1 pr. white [trowzers]	0 3 0	1 striped [blanket]	0 15 0
1 pr. [white trowzers]	0 0 3	1 green [blanket]	0 6 0
1 pr checked [trowzers]	0 6 0	1 striped blanket	0 10 0
1 striped lin`n shirt	0 14 0	1 white blanket	0 8 0
1 checked [linen shirt]	0 9 0	6 yrds blue sheard flannel at 9/	2 14 0
1 checked [linen shirt]	0 2 0	1 blue flannel gown	0 6 0
1 checked [linen shirt]	0 3 0	1 lt. callico gown	0 18 0
2 white [linen shirts] at 6d	0 1 0	1 dark callico gown	1 0 0
1 checked wool [shirt]	0 12 0	1 callinace gown	0 9 0
1 checked wool [shirt]	0 10 0	1 striped linnen gown	0 10 0
1 frock	0 4 0	1 dk short gown	0 1 0
1 pr blue & wt yarn stockings	0 3 0	1 scarlet cloak	1 16 0
1 pr blue [stockings]	0 1 6	6 yds new worsted cloth at 5/	1 10 0
1 pr blue seamed [stockings]	0 2 0	1 black cloak	0 3 0
1 pr grey [stockings]	0 1 6	1 striped coat 6/ 1 [striped coat] 6/	0 12 0
1 pr white [stockings]	0 0 9	1 silk hat 4/ 1 linnen gown 12/	0 16 6
1 pr woollen gloves	0 3 0	1 sheet 10/ 1 [sheet] 12/	1 2 0
1 pr mittens	0 2 0	1 [sheet] 12/ 1 [sheet] 12	1 4 0

1 [sheet] 9/ 1 [sheet] 9/	0 18 0	6 tea spoons	0 1 0
1 [sheet] 15 1 [sheet] 15	1 10 0	1 punch bowl	0 1 6
2 [sheets] at 4/ 1 [sheet] 6/	0 14 0	3 bowls at 9d	0 2 3
1 pillow case 6d 1 [pillow case] 9d	0 1 3	1 sugar bowl	0 2 0
3 [pillow cases] at 9d	0 2 3	2 earthen cups at 6d	0 1 0
1 check'd lin'n handkf	0 4 0	1 salt seller	0 0 9
1 [checkered linen 'handkerchief'] 4/ 1 3/6	0 7 6	1 vinegar cruet	0 1 6
1 silk [handkerchief]	0 6 0	1 cream cup	0 1 0
1 lawn [handkerchief]	0 9 0	1 tin cannister	0 1 6
1 pr worsted gloves	0 1 0	2 half pin bottles	0 1 0
3 women's caps at 3/	0 3 0	4 phials at 4d	0 1 4
1 shift 6/ 1 [shift] 6/	0 12 0	1 square bottle	0 1 6
1 [shift] 4/6 1 [shift] 2/	0 6 6	3 snuff bottles at 6d	0 1 6
1 [shift] 1/6 1 [shift] 1/	0 2 6	2 quart bottles at 9d	0 1 6
1 apron 6/ 1 [apron] 3/	0 9 0	1 large jugg 3/	0 3 0
1 [apron] 7/6	0 7 6	1 small [jugg]	0 1 3
1 bolster 3/9	0 3 9	2 stone pots at 4/	0 8 0
1 tablecloth 4/ 1 [tablecloth] 3/	0 7 0	1 looking glass	0 9 0
1 towel 1/ 1 [towel] 6d	0 1 6	1 bread tray	0 2 0
1 pr stockings 1/	0 1 0	1 tray 1/2 1 churn 8/1 1 canteen 6d	0 10 0
1 pr silver buckles	0 6 0	1 table 3/ 1 [table] 15/	0 18 0
1 pr pockets	0 2 0	1 [table] 9/ 1 [table] 10/	0 19 0
1 warming pan	1 4 0	1 large chest	1 0 0
1 brass kettle	1 16 0	1 chest 7/ 1 [chest] 4/	0 11 0
1 iron pott	0 12 0	2 pr spectacles	0 2 6
1 [iron pot] 6/ iron kettle 4/	0 10 0	1 stow & cup	0 2 0
1 frying pan 6/	0 6 0	6 chairs at 2/	0 12 0
1 pr flatt irons	0 4 0	3 pails at 2/6	0 7 6
1 box iron 3/	0 3 0	3 wash tubs at 1/2	0 4 6
1 trammel 8/ 1 [trammel] 7/	0 15 0	1 pail 1/ 6 bowls at 9d	0 5 6
1 peel & tongs	0 9 0	1 chopping knife 3/	0 3 0
1 grid iron	0 2 0	1 hour glass 1/6	0 1 6
1 candlestick 6d 1 [candlestick] 6d	0 1 0	1 mortar & pestle	0 1 6
1 pr hand irons	1 0 0	2 puding pans	0 1 6
1 pr steelyards	0 6 0	1 dripping pan	0 0 9
1 tin water pot	0 6 0	1 cream pot	0 0 9
1 hetchel 15/ 1 [hetchel] 3/	0 18 0	3 cyder barrels	0 9 0
1 lantern	0 4 0	1 beer cask	0 3 0
1 coffe pot 6d 2 tart pans 1/	0 1 6	1 piggin 2/ 1 dye tube 2/6	0 4 6
1 pr bellows	0 9 0	2 Hogsheads at 10/	1 0 0
3 pewter platters wt 7	0 14 0	2 meat casks at 3/	0 6 0
3 basons	0 14 4	1 soap barrel	0 2 6
7 plates	0 8 6	3 small tubs	0 4 6
1 quart pot	0 3 6	2 wooden bottles at 3/	0 6 0
14 spoons	0 7 0	1 corn basket	0 4 0
2 knives & 1 fork	0 2 6	1 barrel of pork	6 0 0
1 lamp	0 2 0	12 lb. hogs fatt	0 12 0
1 earthen platter	0 1 6	60 lb smoaked meat at 1/	3 0 0
1 [earthen platter] 6d 1 [earthen platter] 1/	0 1 6	3 barrels cyder at 18/	2 14 0
9 earthen plates	0 9 0	1 sugar box	0 1 3
1 teapot 2/ 1 [teapot] 1/2	0 3 6	3 empty barrels	0 7 6
4 drinking glasses	0 4 0	2 keggs at 2/6	0 5 0
3 teacups & five plates	0 1 0	10 dry barrels at 1/9	0 17 6

2 dry hogsheads at 3/	0 6 0	1 ax 12/ 1 ditto 9/ 1 ditto 6/	1 7 0
2 half hogshed tubs at 3/	0 6 0	1 shaving horse 2/	0 2 0
2 brooms	0 2 0	1 hoe 4/6 1 cheese press 3/	0 7 6
20 lb cheese at 3d	0 5 0	1 ox sled 2/ 1 pitchfork 2/	0 4 0
6 bushel of bran at ¼	0 9 0	16 lb flax at 6d	0 8 0
5 bushel of flaxseed at 3/	0 15 0	1 coarse hetchel	0 2 0
1 bushel of buckwheat	0 5 0	1 crackle 6/ 1 cow hide 13/ 1 horse hide 3/	1 2 0
12 bushel of korn at 5/	3 0 0	1 harrow 3/	0 3 0
10 lb tobacco at 7d	0 5 10	6 geese at 3/ 12 fowls at 1/	1 10 0
1 cart rope	0 6 0	2 sieves at 1/6	0 3 0
3 beehives	0 3 0	1 black white fac'd cow	5 0 0
1 wooden keeler	0 2 0	1 pide white fac'd yearling steer	3 0 0
18 baskets	0 18 0	1 pide yearling steer	3 0 0
5 bushel of wheat at 9/	2 5 0	4 swine at 18/	3 12 0
1 wheat riddle 4/1 1 oat ditto 2/	0 6 0	1 yoke of oxen	18 0 0
3 pecks salt	1 4 0	1 black cow	5 6 0
3 bushels Indian bran & meal	0 6 6	1 three year old heifer	5 0 0
a half bushel	0 3 0	1 bringle two year old steer	4 10 0
3 sickles	0 4 0	1 red white fac'd 2 year old steer	4 6 0
1 pillion 3/ 1 keel 6/ 1 dutch wheel 18/	1 7 0	1 draw mare	11 0 0
1 wheel 12/1 tow wheel 6/	0 18 0	1 two year old colt	8 0 0
1 sythe & tackling	0 10 0	1 year old colt	6 0 0
2 new sythes 18/2 2 old ditto 3/	1 1 0	10 sheep at 12/	6 0 0
3 pecks of beans 3/ 5 bags at ⅔	0 14 0	1 stack of hay	3 0 0
1 cow bell 3/	0 3 0	wheat growing in ye ground	9 0 0
60 lb old iron at 3d	0 15 0	====	
1 ½ steel at 1/	0 1 6	the little meadow near John Morrison	24 0 0
1 ½ wool	0 30 0	the dwelling house, barn & homsted	90 0 0
2 lb hens feathers 1/	0 1 0	the saw mill orchard lot 2½ acres	25 0 0
1 pr harness[s]	0 5 0	3 acres meadow west of above	24 0 0
1 pr ditto 6/ 1 pr geers 13/6	0 19 6	2 acres meadow at Millers Ridge	28 0 0
1 saddle 24/ leather 10/	1 14 0	1 acre & ½ ye Long Modow	12 0 0
1 pr cards ¼ shreds of cloth 2/	0 3 6	10 acres & ½ plow land at Millers Ridge	65 0 0
1 chain 13/ 1 ditto 15/6	1 8 6	10 acres wood land	40 0 0
1 clevis & pin	0 3 0	====	
1 iron shovel	0 9 0	Total of land and buildings above	308 0 0
8 run lin'n yarn	0 9 0	====	
1 yoke ring 1/ 6	0 1 6	Overall total	533 1 5
2 gimblits	0 2 0	Debts	174 11
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		

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:

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

At least seven African-Americans from Ridgefield served in the American 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; 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; enlisted from Ridgefield in the Fifth Connecticut Regiment in 1777 and serving until 1781. He was a brigade waggoner under Capt. Nehemiah Beardsley, He 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; was born in 1761 in Ridgefield, Robert and Anne's fourth son, joined the fight for independence in 1781, enlisting from New Milford and serving 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 others 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 this essay, 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.

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 several 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, 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

The town of New Milford, later the home of some of the Ridgefield Jacklins, has officially supported the proposed National Liberty Memorial to African American Revolutionary War veterans in Washington D.C.

RESOLUTION CONCERNING AFRICAN AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR PATRIOTS OF NEW MILFORD, CONNECTICUT AND THE PROPOSED NATIONAL LIBERTY MEMORIAL

- WHEREAS, Senator Joseph Lieberman of Connecticut and Senator Charles Grassley of Iowa will introduce legislation in the U.S. Senate in May 2011 to complete the unfinished business of two decades: the construction of an entirely citizen-funded National Liberty Memorial to African Americans of the Revolutionary War at a location in the monumental core of Washington, D.C.;
- and WHEREAS, from 1775 to 1783, an estimated 5,000 to 10,000 slaves and free persons served as soldiers, sailors and patriots in the Revolutionary War, including Cato Mead of Norwich, Connecticut, and later of Montrose, Iowa, while tens of thousands of men, women and children provided civilian assistance, ran away from slavery and petitioned courts and the General Assembly for freedom;
- and WHEREAS, more than 800 African Americans who resided in over 80 towns and cities, and all eight counties, in Connecticut served in the Revolutionary War;
- and WHEREAS, 10 African American soldiers and patriots from New Milford, including Prince Crosbee, Jess Gratis, Prince Gratis, Sip Hubbell, Thaddeus Jacklin, Jeruel Phillips, Samuel Phillips, Shem, Mingo Treet, and Javan Wilson, participated in the struggle for independence;
- and WHEREAS, although the original memorial was not constructed, and the authority to do so has lapsed, genealogical research and the publication of hundreds of books over more than two decades reaffirm the significant contributions made by African Americans of the post-colonial period and validates their influence on the patriotism of future generations and the movement for civil rights;
- and WHEREAS, the momentum to construct a national memorial, and to finally compile a comprehensive list of African American patriots, arose in 1984 out of the quest of Lena Santos Ferguson, deceased, of our sister town of Plainville, Connecticut to honor her heritage and expand the nation's understanding of the role of African Americans in the Revolutionary War;
- and WHEREAS, beginning in 1984, Rep. Nancy Johnson, Senator Lowell Weicker, and Senator Chris Dodd were leaders in the enactment and advocacy of landmark legislation, including Public Law. 98-245 commemorating African American patriotism and Public Laws 99-558 and 100-265 that authorize a national memorial and declare the history of preeminent historical and lasting significance to the nation.
- WHEREAS, these combined efforts, reported by the Hartford Courant over 24 years, brought about the publication in 2008 of *Forgotten Patriots, African American and American*

Indian Patriots in the Revolutionary War, which contains the longest list. so far of African-Americans in the Revolutionary War,

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE MAYOR AND AND TOWN COUNCIL OF NEW MILFORD join the National., Mall Liberty Fund, D.C., .. (www.libgMdynddc.org) the congressional sponsors and original cosponsors of the National Liberty Memorial Act, including Rep. Donald Payne of New Jersey and Rep. Frank Wolf of Virginia, and those who applaud the decision of Congress and. President Reagan in - 1988 to authorize the predecessor memorial at a site between the Washington Monument. and Lincoln Memorial.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Mayor and Town Council encourages volunteers to discover the names of still-unknown African American Revolutionary War soldiers, sailors and patriots, enlarge the body of knowledge about their lives and forward the information to National Mall Liberty Fund D.C. for inclusion in a database that will celebrate the trail blazers of New Milford together with those of hundreds of proud American communities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the MAYOR and TOWN COUNCIL urges the Connecticut. Delegation to the United. States Congress to work for the enactment of the National Liberty Memorial Act and to spread knowledge of the history to institutions in Litchfield County while promoting its potential for understanding and unity-throughout the nation.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Clerk of the Town of New Milford forward certified copies of this Resolution to the entire Connecticut Delegation to the United States Congress, the Governor of the State of Connecticut, the Speaker and President Pro Tem of the General Assembly and the local superintendent of schools, librarian and historical society.

THE FOREGOING RESOLUTION WAS READ IN FULL, THE ROLL WAS CALLED ON THE ADOPTION THEREOF AND RESULTED AS FOLLOWS: YEAS: NAYS: ABSENT: AND THE RESOLUTION, AS AMENDED, WAS ADOPTED

In the town of New Milford, Connecticut Signed and Sealed at the Town Hall Of New Milford this 9th day of May 2011 Patricia Murphy, Mayor.

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