

PLYMOUTH IN THE REVOLUTION: **The American enlisted man**

Cato Howe (1750-1824)

[Negroes should not have to pay taxes, since they have] no voice or influence in the election of those who tax us

Petition to the Massachusetts legislature in 1780
from Paul Cuffe, a free Black shipbuilder of Dartmouth, Massachusetts

Many Black Americans fought in the Revolution, on both sides of the conflict. Several wealthy merchants and gentlemen in the Plymouth area kept one or two slaves as house servants. Some states, like Rhode Island, automatically freed slaves when they passed muster. Massachusetts did not. Massachusetts, however, in a series of lawsuits carried out in the early 1780s, became first state to outlaw slavery altogether.

Three young Black Plymoutheans - Prince Goodwin, Cato Howe and Quamany Quash - enlisted in the Patriot forces. **Cato Howe** was probably a free man. **Quamany Quash** was slave to Theophilus Cotton of Plymouth, leaders of Plymouth's Sons of Liberty. Cotton did not free Quamany Quash until 1781, after Quash's service in the Continental Army. **Prince Goodwin** was probably a freed slave.



Battle of Bunker Hill, an engraving by John Trumbull

Quash seems to have been present at the Siege of Boston; Howe was at Valley Forge and may have been at Bunker Hill. Both Quash and Howe probably served in the New York campaign as well as the battles of Trenton, Princeton, Saratoga and Monmouth.

Research is ongoing in an effort to document these men's history and service records.

Following the war, the Town of Plymouth granted Howe 94 acres of land near the Kingston/Carver border, known as Parting Ways. Howe invited Quamany Quash, Prince Goodwin and another freed slave (Plato Turner) who had served in the American Revolution to join him there, with their families.

Deborah Sampson (1760-1827)

When I heard her spoken of as a Soldier, I formed the idea of a tall, masculine female, who had a share share of understanding without education, & one of the meanest of her sex - When I saw and discoursed with her I was agreeably surprised to find a small, effeminate, and conversable woman, whose education entitled her to a better situation in life

Paul Revere to William Eustis

In May of 1782, Deborah disguised herself as a young man, left Plymouth County for a town in the north where she was not known, and enlisted for three years in the army, using the name Robert Shurtliff. Although General Cornwallis had surrendered at Yorktown in 1781, the war was not over until April of 1783. Deborah served with the 4th Massachusetts Regiment (Captain Webb's Light Infantry) in New York. A good soldier, she was teasingly called "Molly" because she had no beard. Deborah was wounded at Tarrytown in October of 1782. It may have been her wounds that led to her female identity being discovered. She was discharged in October of 1783.

After the war, Deborah married Benjamin Gannett and had three children. The family was poor and Deborah was forced to petition the Massachusetts General Court for her military back pay. Paul Revere visited her to investigate her claim. Her story piqued public interest and, in 1802, she traveled on a lecture tour throughout New England.

Ill health resulting from her war wound led her to apply successfully for an invalid pension in 1805 and a veteran's pension in 1819. After her death in 1827 at the age of 67, her husband Benjamin Gannett had the unusual distinction of being granted a "widow's" pension as the husband of a veteran.

Richard Bagnall (1752-before 1846)

While some soldiers served the entire duration of the war, most served short terms of enlistment. They had crops to plant and families to support. As the first wave of revolutionary fervor began to recede. Congress increased terms of enlistment. Bounties of cash, clothing, food and land were used as incentives to encourage soldiers to sign up. Richard Bagnall of Plymouth first enlisted during the excitement after the Battle of Lexington. He left for Marshfield with Colonel Theophilus Cotton's regiment, serving 11 days. He then spent 8 months in and around Boston with Washington's army, receiving a coat as a bounty for enlistment. As a corporal, Bagnall was the lowest rank of non-commissioned officer.

In 1777, Bagnall enlisted in the Continental Army as an ensign (lowest commissioned officer), under Colonel Ichabod Alden of Duxbury. The regiment served in western New York State, which was inhabited by the Iroquois and other tribes of the Six Nations. Many Native nations sided with the British. While moving

troops from Ticonderoga to Albany, the regiment was attached at Cherry Valley, where Colonel Alden was killed. After the attack, General Washington thought it necessary to destroy the Six Nations' settlements to protect the frontier. In the fall of 1779, an expedition into Native territory destroyed 40 Indian towns and thousands of bushels of corn. When Bagnall returned to Plymouth, he brought red-colored corn seed with him.

For the next two years, Bagnall served around West Point, New York, until he joined Colonel Scammell's troops and traveled to Yorktown, Virginia, in the fall of 1781. Scammell, who had taught school in Plymouth, was fatally wounded at Yorktown. Bagnall stayed with the army until 1782. After the war, he returned to Plymouth where he and his wife Bethiah had eight children.