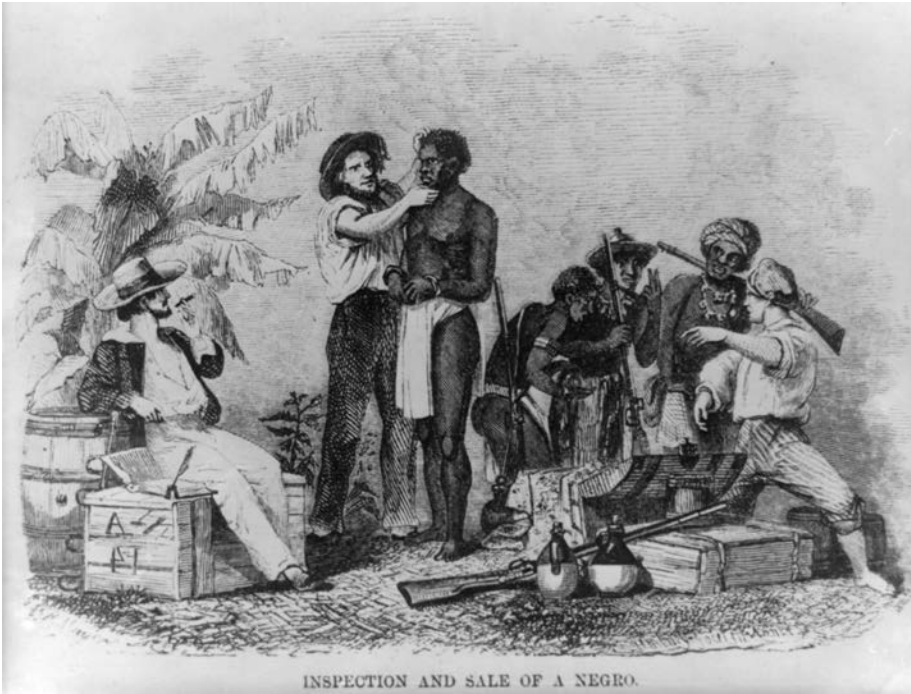


The Enduring Journey of Samuel Ball

**From Slavery
to Freedom
Part One:
1761-1783**

by Chipp Reid



Contents

| | |
|------------------------------------------|----|
| Preface by Laird Niven | ii |
| Introduction: His Past, Our Future..... | 1 |
| One: Foundations | 3 |
| Two: Carolina Gold..... | 7 |
| Three: Family Lines | 9 |
| Four: Kidnapped | 11 |
| Five: “Sambo” | 15 |
| Six: First years | 17 |
| Seven: Out here in the fields | 20 |
| Eight: The Revolution begins | 24 |
| Nine: War comes to South Carolina..... | 27 |
| Ten: Bold freedom’s hand..... | 34 |
| Eleven: Black Pioneers | 39 |
| Twelve: The smell of powder | 44 |
| Thirteen: Loyal Refugee Volunteers | 51 |
| Fourteen: Evacuation | 56 |
| Bibliography | 61 |
| Notes | 66 |

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About the Author

Chipp Reid is a maritime and military historian. He is the author of three books and numerous academic articles that have earned awards and accolades in Colombia, England, Spain and the United States. He appeared in Season 7 of “The Curse of Oak Island” and is a consultant on military and naval matters. When not pursuing his next book project, Chipp spends his time sailing, surfing, and rescuing Alaskan Malamutes.



Oak island archaeologist Laird Niven at work on the Samuel Ball homestead.

Samuel Ball's story is one of patience, determination, unimaginable courage and heartbreak. His journey to Nova Scotia took him several years and countless miles and not only are we fortunate to know so much about him, but we know exactly where he lived, which is a rare thing. The Samuel Ball site's archaeology allows us a unique opportunity to get an insight into who he was and how his family lived. Archaeology is critical when studying marginalized people like the Black Loyalists, who grew up being property with no opportunity to record their history in any conventional way. Their story lies in what a famous archaeologist called "the small things forgotten"-- those small pieces of pottery, glass, and other objects that accumulate in the ground to create a timeline that captures the essence of our existence.

While archaeology is the study of past peoples based on the material things they left behind, artifacts alone cannot tell us the whole story, like details of

their journey to the excavated site. Historical archaeology relies on documents and other texts to add to life to past voices. Chipp Reid has done extensive research on Samuel's life in America and his journey to Oak Island, and, through Chipp's meticulous work, we can hear Sam Ball's voice loud and clear. Born into slavery, Sam managed to escape his owner during the Revolutionary War, leaving his family behind and made his way to the British lines, where he served until the end of the war. By the end of the eighteenth-century, Ball had sufficient means to construct a substantial house in Oak Island's admirable location. He also had the means to buy many of the lots surrounding, establishing a significant farmstead by the middle of the nineteenth century. At the time of death in 1842, at the age of 81, Samuel Ball would have been able to look back on his life with extreme pride, knowing that his hard work took him from being owned as property to being a property owner.

Laird Niven

Oak Island, February, 2021

Introduction: His Past, Our Future



The fabled “Money Pit” of Oak Island.

History.com

“There’s an island in the North Atlantic, where people have been looking for an incredible treasure for more than two hundred years.” The now familiar opening words of the hit show “The Curse of Oak Island” teases viewers with a variety of theories of what, if anything, might be buried on an obscure island in a quiet corner of Nova Scotia, Canada. The theories run the gamut from the “lost” works of William Shakespeare to looted gold from the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem (and deposited on Oak Island by the Knights Templar) to precious metals and jewels carried to Nova Scotia during the Golden Age of Piracy in the 17th and early 18th centuries to possible connections to the Founding Fathers of the United States.¹

Central to the mystery surrounding the alleged treasure is the story of one man who arrived in Nova Scotia with barely more than his clothing and a promise, but it was a promise that thrust Samuel Ball into the heart of the Oak Island story. Ball was an escaped slave who gained his freedom fighting with the British during the American War for Independence. He served three years, then emigrated to Nova Scotia as part the re-settlement of thousands of people who remained loyal to King George III. Among them were more than 3,000 Black Loyalists, many of them escaped slaves.²

Samuel arrived in Nova Scotia in 1783. He could barely read,³ had endured 18 years of bondage, then three years of war, but it was the promise that allowed him to rise above adversity to become a landowner, a friend, a settler, a builder, and a role model. The promise Samuel received and fulfilled was freedom – his freedom.⁴ Samuel Ball was the embodiment of the joys and pains, the successes and failures, that come with being free. He used the skills plantation owners forced him to learn as a slave to earn his freedom helping the British. He brought those skills to Nova Scotia where he used them to rise above his at-first slender financial means but, more important, to over-

come the racism he faced when he reached Canada. He accomplished all this because he was free and his freedom was a gift he would not squander.

At the time of his death, Ball was certainly comfortable. He owned nearly 40 acres of land in and around Chester, Nova Scotia, including nine acres on Oak Island. He owned cattle, sheep and built on his properties. More important, he earned the respect of those who met and knew him. John Thomson, a Chester resident, described Samuel as “an honest, sober and industrious settler, and worthy of every justice.”⁵ However, as precious as his freedom was to Samuel, it created an aura of mystery around the former slave, one that continues to this day.

One of the biggest questions about Samuel that continues to challenge all connected to Oak Island is just where did he get the money to buy the land he would come to own? Did he find the mythical millions and tap into them to finance his success? Or, did he leverage his own skills and hard work and slowly acquire property over time as he reveled in the freedom to make his own way in a new land?⁶ It is somehow fitting with the stories that swirl around Oak Island that the life of one of the primary characters in the tale is a man of mystery. Even the dates of his birth and death have fallen prey to the never-ending litany of speculation that attends the search for whatever is or was beneath the ground on the island.

Most stories about Samuel list his birth as simply the year 1765 and his death in 1846, at a generally accepted age of 81.⁷ The basis for these dates is Samuel’s will, which went to probate in January, 1846.⁸ However, as is often the case on Oak Island, scratch the surface and a different story emerges. One of the depositions Judge of Probate John Creighton took before he adjudicated Samuel’s will was from John Barkhouse Sr., a neighbor and friend of Samuel. In his deposition, Barkhouse attested Samuel “asked me [to] sign [his will] as a witness and I made my mark.” It is one of the more commonly known facts. What many people, including Nova Scotia historians who have written about Samuel, have seemingly missed is what Barkhouse said before he testified to witnessing the will. Barkhouse gave his deposition in court on January 9, 1846. When Creighton asked him to describe his relationship with Samuel, Barkhouse stated “I knew old Mr Ball of Oak Island very well, here now dead four years ago.”⁹ Somehow, Oak Island chroniclers have overlooked this statement – “here now dead four years ago.” That Samuel died four years before the court proceeding would mean he actually died in 1842, not in 1846. If chroniclers are correct that Samuel was 81 years old when he died, it would mean he was born in 1761. Moreover, in a letter to British Governor General George Prevost, Samuel said he was born in

South Carolina, where he escaped slavery. His last name, which he took later in life, was the final clue.

Armed with these facts, it became possible to trace Samuel's life, from his birth in 1761 in Berkeley County, South Carolina,¹⁰ to the day he signed on to serve in a combat support unit in the British Army to the day he took ship from New York to Shelburne, Nova Scotia, where he began his new life. Many of the accepted stories about him proved wrong. F. Stanley Boyd, a Nova Scotia chronicler, for example, claimed Samuel joined the British forces under Lord Charles Cornwallis in November, 1775. There is no validity to this claim as Cornwallis did not arrive in North America until May, 1776.¹¹ Several stories claim Samuel was a combat soldier – British records disprove this theory as well.

Despite these researchers' historical errors, the story of Samuel's life remains one of hope. Although born into slavery, he clung to his dream of freedom, which he expressed one night with a dash to liberty, ironically a gift granted to him by the forces his owners claimed wanted to repress the American colonists. He overcame illiteracy, racism, and poverty to prove a person could forge his or her own path, with his or her own hands, as long as he or she had the moral fortitude, mental toughness and the heart to never accept failure. He would come to carry the name of his owners from South Carolina, yet he made the name "Ball" his own.

One of the aspects of Samuel's life that made the search for documentary records about him somewhat easier was he was a bit player on a grand stage. In his letter to George Prevost in 1809, he gave the Governor-General some of his background. This document provides Samuel's own testimony on his birth in South Carolina, that he escaped from a Ball plantation.¹² This statement made it possible to track down his birth records. The Ball family was one of the largest plantation- and slave-owning families in South Carolina. The family kept fairly meticulous records of slave purchases, births, deaths, even the clothing and other supplies they received. Those records somewhat miraculously survived the destruction of Charleston during the American Civil War. Sir Henry Clinton, commander in chief of the British forces in North America for much of the Revolutionary War, took a particular interest in black refugees and black soldiers in the Royal service. His diaries and letters, which the William L. Clements Library of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor graciously made available, detail the service of these Africans. Although Samuel's name appears in very few documents, Clinton's papers provide an insight into the life of an escaped slave in the British army, a life Samuel knew well. These same papers, as well as those of Sir Guy Carlton, made it possible to track Samuel from the time of his escape to the date he left

New York and arrived in Shelburne.

Samuel's life touched on a great many of the major issues of the day. He escaped from a plantation a South Carolina patriot owned. His mother was directly from Africa, brought to South Carolina because of a perceived knowledge of rice cultivation. As a slave, rice was the reason for Samuel's existence, and it was the rice industry that created and impelled the slave economy of colonial South Carolina. After his escape in June, 1780, he had a front-row seat on the final three years of the war. When he switched units on his arrival in New York, he was in the thick of one of the grittiest stories of the Revolution, the near civil war in New Jersey in which Loyalists and Rebels tore at one another, sometimes in large chunks but more often in small-unit operations that nevertheless stained the ground with the blood of hundreds. After arriving in Nova Scotia, he was present for the Shelburne Race Riots, although whether he was actually in Shelburne or had already moved to Chester is unknown. Still, he could not help but see the violence of the mobs in the riots and the virulence of their racism. That he would overcome both is again a testimony to his character and courage.

Because he was a witness or participant, even peripherally, to some of the seminal events of his day, it is possible to construct an accurate account of what he did, where, and when. In many cases, the narratives belong to others who shared the same experiences as Samuel, such as slaves who worked in the South Carolina rice fields or Black Loyalists who served in the same units as Samuel. Observations, from newspapers, diaries, letters, and other primary sources help to fill in some of the blanks as Samuel left precious few accounts of his own life.

In 2015, a remarkable trial took place in the tiny German town of Luneburg. The defendant was a 93-year-old SS officer, Oskar Groning, who spent two years as a bookkeeper at the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp during the Second World War. Four survivors of Auschwitz came forward as witnesses for the prosecution. The trial, of course, had no nothing to do with Oak Island or Samuel Ball. However, one of the survivors, Max Eisen, in an interview with CBS News during the trial, summed up not only the reason why he testified but, in an indirect fashion, the reason to learn about Samuel Ball. "Without history there is no memory," Eisen said. "Without memory there is no future. If we don't learn from the past, we repeat the same mistakes."¹³

It is exactly why the story of Samuel Ball, what he did, what he overcame, how he lived, is far more important than any speculation about his role in the mystery of Oak Island. It is why his story deserves telling and re-telling. His story is the real treasure of Oak Island.

One: Foundations

At the time of Samuel's birth, South Carolina had all the appearances of a prosperous, successful, and growing part of the British Empire. It was. By 1761, South Carolina had emerged as one of the wealthiest colonies in North America, rivaling Virginia and even the sugar-rich Caribbean for exports.¹⁴ Rice was the reason for this success, and while it created wealth for a privileged few, such as the Ball family of Berkeley County, rice was also the source of misery for thousands of Africans and their descendants who were held in bondage. The Balls built a vast fortune on the backs of their slaves who toiled on thousands of acres of rice fields. In 1768, when Samuel was just seven years old, South Carolina rice exports accounted for nearly 20 percent of total exports from the British colonies of the Eastern Seaboard. The value of the colonies' exports was 2.8 million pounds sterling, roughly \$480 million in 2018 dollars.¹⁵ South Carolina accounted for 552,000 pounds sterling, or almost \$97 million, of which 332,000 pounds (\$58 million) came from rice.¹⁶ By comparison, combined exports from the four New England colonies – Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut – totaled 439,101 pounds, or about \$77 million.¹⁷

The prosperity slavery and rice would bring, however, seemed like a mere dream when the first Europeans arrived on the shores of what would become South Carolina. Those settlers were not English but Spanish. In August, 1526, a group of between 500 and 600 men, women, children, and African slaves landed at an area their leader, Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon, called the "River Jordan." Although historians dispute the exact place at which the Spanish landed, 16th century sources appear to place it somewhere near the Santee River, about 15 miles north of present-day Hilton Head Island.¹⁸ Although it would be another two hundred years before Samuel's mother would arrive in South Carolina from the Senegal-Gambia region as a slave, the Ayllon expedition had a direct impact on his life. The goal of the Spanish expedition was not simply to establish a colony but to also create a new source of slaves. Ayllon had commissioned a slave-catching operation a year before he led settlers to North America, in 1525, in what is today North Carolina, that managed to bring off 60 Native Americans. The Spaniard believed only slave-powered labor could tame the new lands and as yet, the supply of Africans was insufficient to meet the growing needs of other Spanish colonies.¹⁹

Ayllon named the new settlement San Miguel de Gualdape and bad luck plagued the expedition from the start. The Spanish loaded their flagship, the caravel *Capitana*, with enough supplies to at least allow the colonists to survive their first months until their own farms could sustain them. As they attempted to bring



Lucas Vazquez de Ayllon, the Spanish Conquistador who led the abortive first European effort to colonize what is today South Carolina.

Courtesy of the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid

the ship over a sandbar, she struck a shoal and sank. Although Ayllon saved all on board, he lost all of his supplies, dooming the effort. Disease then struck in the form of one of the two great epidemiological scourges of colonial South Carolina— malaria. Ayllon himself succumbed sometime in the fall of 1526, leaving the settlers leaderless. Sometime in October, the settlers' slaves revolted and either died in their bid for freedom or ran off, where they eventually died although there is a legend that some few married into local Indian tribes.²⁰

The area would remain the domain of the Native Americans (and perhaps the descendants of Ayllon's slaves) for the next 150 years. Although British settlers splashed ashore in Virginia, establishing their colony of Jamestown, in 1607 and by 1640 had moved into North Carolina, and the Spanish had colonized parts of Florida, South Carolina remained devoid of Europeans. It was the slave-driven economies of Britain's Caribbean holdings that spurred renewed interest in South Carolina, which led to the first English arriving in 1670, and, some 90 years later, that would bring

Samuel Ball into the world.

The genesis of the Carolina Colony was two-fold. First, King Charles II, the British monarch, wanted to find new lands for exploitation and reward those who had supported the return of the Stuart dynasty to the English throne. Establishing a new colony would satisfy both of those ends.²¹ Second, and just as important, a new colony would help alleviate over-population and unrest among the white population of Britain's Caribbean colonies, especially Barbados. By the 1660s, Barbados already had a population density of 250 people per square mile, although two-thirds of those were Black or South American Indian slaves. By 1680, the population density reached 400 people per square mile on the tiny island, with slaves accounting for three out of every four people.²² Immigration to the island had almost dried up as poorer white would-be colonists found no land available and few opportunities. By 1670, second-generation Barbadians had begun emigrating to Jamaica, Tobago and Bermuda. Officials in London believed establishing a new colony on the North American continent, especially one with a semi-tropical climate, would be a relatively simple and cost-effective solution. It would also provide new farmland that could feed the burgeoning Caribbean population, where landowners preferred to use every available acre for sugar production rather than staple crops.²³

Although the crown had granted lands in what would be South Carolina as early as 1639, no settlers actually attempted to colonize the area until 1669, when three ships, the *Carolina*, *Port Royal* and *Albemarle*, left England bound first for Ireland to pick passengers, then Barbados before pushing on for the new lands in North America. The first mate of the *Carolina* was a Devonshire-born mariner named John Coming, who sailed with his young wife, Affra Harleston, to take advantage of a generous offer of 150 acres to every "free man" that helped establish the new colony.²⁴ His young wife was the daughter of an Irish nobleman who had supported the return of the Stuarts and she, it seems, left Ireland more for adventure than any other reason. The two married on the voyage from Ireland to Barbados.²⁵ Coming had no children of his own to leave behind, but his half-brother, William Ball, had a young son, Elias, in whom Coming took great interest.²⁶

After spending the winter in Barbados, where Coming and his wife hired six white servants, the settlers sailed for Carolina, landing in March, 1670, near what would become the city of Charleston. Coming staked out a piece of land about 30 miles from the landing spot, at a junction of two rivers the British would name after a nobleman, dubbing the waterway the Cooper River. Coming and others called the site Coming's T, due the junction of the Cooper River and one of its tributaries. In future years, it would simply be Comingtee. Thanks to the generous terms of the

settlement pact, Coming enlarged his holding to nine hundred acres as the British offered extra acreage "150 acres more for every able man-servant they brought with them or caused to be transported into the colony, and 100 acres more for every woman-servant, and man-servant under sixteen years of age."²⁷ The pact also encouraged settlers to bring slaves to tame the new land, although Coming and his wife only had white servants when they arrived.²⁸

Coming and his wife set to the task of clearing their land and establishing a working plantation. To do so, however, they needed laborers and they were among the first to begin using slaves. Coming, as captain of several trade ships, never engaged in the raids that kidnapped Native Americans for the slave trade, but he did transport dozens of enslaved Africans from Barbados to Carolina. At first, the Comings grew basic crops on which to live, raised cattle and apparently experimented with a number of possible cash crops, from olives to rice. By 1680, the couple owned a number of male African slaves and a handful of female Native Americans.²⁹ In this, the Comings were no different than many other white land owners. Census records show that by 1698, nearly every other person then living in the colony was black as plantation owners imported more and more human chattel.³⁰

There was a good incentive for these first landowners to invest in slaves. Under the compact creating the colony, the crown rewarded those who planned to work the land, even if it was slaves that did the work. "To every free person that should arrive to plant and inhabit before the twenty-fifth day of March, 1671, 100 acres, and 100 more for each servant he brought with him or caused to be transported into the colony, 70 acres for every woman-servant, or man-servant under sixteen years of age. And to every servant that should arrive before the time last mentioned, 70 acres."³¹ Although records do not exist of how many slaves the Comings purchased, by the time of his death in 1696, there were enough for Coming to have them working a large portion of his expanding estate.³²

Prior to his death, Coming wrote his will. Since he and Affra had no children of their own, he decided to split his growing estate between two nephews. The first was a member of Affra's family, John Harleston. The other nephew was the eldest son of John Harleston's half-brother, William Ball. William, however, had already established himself as a tailor in Devon, so it was to the younger son, Elias, that Affra turned for an heir. Elias Ball was 22 when he received his aunt's letter, bidding him to come to Carolina to claim his inheritance. He arrived in Charleston late in 1698, with his cousins John and Elizabeth arriving in 1699.³³ Elizabeth apparently traveled with her brother for many of the same reasons her aunt went to the Carolina Colony, including marriage. She and Elias wed in 1699 and by 1700, her brother had either left the colony or was disinterested enough in the operations



Coming T plantation as it appeared in 1933.

Courtesy Library of Congress.

that he no longer had an active role in running the plantation, instead taking his portion of the inherited property to build his own plantation.³⁴

The new couple, along with John Harleston, at least for a time, settled in at Comingtee. The three new owners worked alongside their slave laborers in planting crops, clearing land, prepping lumber for sale, and boiling down pitch and turpentine.³⁵ The hard work paid off. Elias Ball, whom the Ball family still refers to as “Red Cap,” expanded his estate and slave work force, tripling the size of Comingtee by 1718. The space was necessary as he and Elizabeth had five children – Ann, Eleanor, Elias, Elizabeth and John Coming. By 1720, plantation records show the Balls also owned 100 slaves. Elias Ball also began to buy up more and more land. When he died in 1751, in his will, “Red Cap” parceled out more than 3,000 acres to his children, while Comingtee encompassed more than 1,000 acres. He also owned a home in Charleston, at the corner of East Bay and Pickney Streets.³⁶

Although he would add to his holdings almost

until his death, Elias “Red Cap” Ball was still just a plantation owner in early 18th century South Carolina. His family, following his aggressive path of expansion, would come to control an empire that, by the end of the Civil War, encompassed 20 plantations and held nearly 4,000 Africans in bondage.³⁷ Those years, however, were far in the future. In 1730, Elias the Second and John Coming remained ensconced in clearing land, planting crops and slowly bringing in new shipments of slaves to expand their plantations. Both Elias the Second and John Coming Ball had direct impact on the life of Samuel Ball.

Before he retired to Charleston, “Red Cap” Ball arranged marriages for his two daughters. Ann, his first born, married a landowner and merchant, George Austin, and Eleanor, the third-born child of “Red Cap” and Elizabeth, who married Henry Laurens, a slave trader. Austin and Laurens would become partners in a slave trading enterprise that would make Laurens the largest slave importer and seller in the colonies. The marriage also brought together two families that

would play a major role in the expansion of slavery in South Carolina, with Laurens supplying many of the Africans that worked on the Ball plantations, including Samuel's parents.³⁸

When Elias the Second took over the day-to-day operations of Comingtee, his father had already acquired but had yet to begin clearing, several large estates. The younger Elias was born in 1709 and was just 21 when he inherited Comingtee. His brother, John Coming, born in 1714, spent ten years with Elias at Comingtee before he purchased a thousand-acre tract to the north of his brother which he dubbed Hyde Park.³⁹ By then, Elias the Second had married a widow, Lydia Child Chicken, whose deceased husband, George Chicken, had founded Strawberry Hill plantation, which bordered the Ball lands. With the marriage, Strawberry Hill became part of the burgeoning Ball empire, and Elias the Second began to purchase

slaves to work those fields.⁴⁰ In 1747, Elias the Second purchased a 670-acre estate next to Hyde Park which he named Kensington. He also bought 75 slaves from Henry Laurens to begin working the new plantation, and once the slaves had built a house on it, Elias and Lydia moved to Kensington permanently.⁴¹

John Coming was just as active, purchasing slaves and clearing lands his father had left but which he had never worked. By 1751, John Coming operated not only Hyde Park but Dockum, Cypress Grove and Three Mile Head plantations.⁴² In 1764, Elias the Second purchased Limerick plantation, which also bordered Hyde Park. All told, the Ball family holdings at the time of Samuel Ball's birth amounted to more than 4,000 acres.⁴³ The reason for the expansion, and the family's wealth, was a simple crop that made South Carolina one of the richest colonies in North America – rice.

Two: Carolina Gold

Elias “Red Cap” Ball had plenty of reasons to experiment with and cultivate rice. One of the biggest was quite literally across the river from Comingtee. Sir Nathaniel Johnson, the deposed governor of Barbados,⁴⁴ owned a large plantation he called “Silk Hope” that ran down the river that separated his lands from the Ball properties. Johnson had attempted to create a silk industry, planting 24,000 mulberry trees, but the trees (and the worms) never really flourished. Like “Red Cap,” Johnson also invested in various crops, traded for deerskins, raised cattle, hogs, and harvested lumber mostly for the West Indies markets. In 1689, he began experimenting with growing rice.⁴⁵ By the time the Ball patriarch arrived and settled at Comingtee, Johnson had already begun exporting rice to British and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean.⁴⁶

Johnson, however, did more than demonstrate to “Red Cap” the potential for profit from rice. He instilled in the elder Ball and other plantation owners the need for slaves to properly raise the crop. The former Barbados governor brought 100 slaves with him when he landed in South Carolina, and that number only grew as he tilled more and more rice fields. “Red Cap” could not help but watch as his neighbor used slaves to slowly transform the fields of Silk Hope that abutted the Cooper River into rice paddies. Johnson settled in South Carolina armed with experience in controlling and running slaves on a plantation as the sugar industry on Barbados depended on their labor. It was an example every plantation owner would soon follow.⁴⁷

Unlike other colonies that discovered cash crops after English (or Dutch or Swedish) settlers arrived, such as tobacco in Virginia and Maryland, or fishing grounds in Massachusetts, the settlers who came to Carolina arrived with an agricultural mission. The burgeoning populations of the British and Dutch West Indies needed food and rice was one of the first staple crops plantation owners tried to cultivate. The origins of these experiments were the West African slaves that sweated on the sugar plantations, people that grew up planting, harvesting and living on rice.⁴⁸

Rice production in the West Indies was a hit-or-miss enterprise. Both the Dutch and English imported slaves from specific regions of West Africa, principally from what is today Senegal, Ghana and Sierra Leone, believing their enslaved laborers could make rice flourish on the islands. The plantation owners, however, made no allowance for the subsistence nature of West African rice production, nor did they make the necessary improvements to their lands to facilitate the irrigation necessary for rice paddies.⁴⁹ Although rice production was mostly unsuccessful, or, at least not profitable, it made enough of an impression on English landowners, especially those on Barbados, as being possible in areas more conducive to its cultivation, and it was a primary reason Barbadians such as Nathan



Elias “Red Cap” Ball, the patriarch of the slave-owning Ball family.

Johnson looked to the new colony of Carolina⁵⁰ as being a rice-producing province.⁵¹

One of the problems early rice farmers encountered was the varietal they attempted to cultivate. The common type of West African rice – and the type with which the slaves on Barbados were most familiar – did not grow particularly well in the West Indies. Although it did take root in Carolina, the West African type did not yield the results many planters sought.⁵² This changed sometime around 1700 when planters began using rice seeds from Madagascar. The Madagascar varietal proved particularly well-suited to the climate and methods plantation owners employed in South Carolina, methods that greatly resembled those the slaves from Madagascar and West Africa knew well and carried with them into bondage.⁵³

The documentary evidence for just when and which plantation owner introduced the Madagascar seed to South Carolina is fuzzy at best. Records do not exist for the type of rice South Carolina planters used prior to 1720. What is certain is that by 1720, rice was the cash crop of the colony. English naturalist Abbe Raynal, writing on the various plants in South Carolina, noted the Madagascar variety flourished in the Low Country, and appeared somewhat indifferent as to



Rice fields on a South Carolina plantation.

Courtesy SC Sea Coast Consortium.

how it came to grow in the colony, as long as it did in fact grow. “Whether the province may have acquired it [rice] by a shipwreck, or whether it may have been carried there with slaves, or whether it be sent from England, it is certain that the soil is favorable for it.”⁵⁴

By 1750, when Elias the Second took over the operations of the Ball plantations from his father, rice was the economic engine of South Carolina. It was also the reason for the rapid expansion of the wealth and land holdings of the Ball family. The Ball plantations, starting with Comingtee and heading both north and east to Hyde Park, Kensington, Strawberry Hill, Limerick and others, sat astride the Cooper River and one of its main tributaries. Although nearly 30 miles inland, the fresh-water Cooper River rises and falls with the tides at the Ball plantations, allowing the family to use the daily ebb and flood to irrigate increasingly larger tracts of rice. By 1700, South Carolina was already producing 500,000 pounds of rice for export. Within twenty years, exports had risen to nearly 5 million pounds.⁵⁵ The Ball family business expanded along with the province’s overall rice industry. By the time of Samuel’s birth, the future of the Ball family as well as the bulk of the economy in South Carolina relied on rice, with an English merchant remarking in 1768 that rice was the “only Commodity of Consequence produced in South Carolina ... as much their staple Commodity, as Sugar is Barbados and Jamaica, or Tobacco to Virginia and Maryland.”⁵⁶

Rice did not simply drive the colonial South Carolina economy. It set the stage for a massive expansion of slavery in the colony. The plantation system settlers from Barbados brought with them took root in the province just as quickly as did the rice. Slaves were the foundation of the plantation economies of the both places, although it was in South Carolina that slavery found perhaps its institutional height in British America.⁵⁷ As Elias the Second and John Coming Ball planted more and more rice, they required more and more slaves, which led directly to Samuel Ball and his involvement in the ongoing mystery on Oak Island, Nova Scotia.

Three: Family Lines



Elias Ball II, owner of Hyde Park Plantation.

Courtesy Low Country Land Trust

The ascendancy of rice as the primary staple and cash crop in South Carolina did more than stoke the desire and need for slaves. It created a demand for slaves from particular regions of West Africa where the indigenous people already had a well-established system of cultivating the plant. For plantation owners such as Elias “Red Cap” Ball and his sons, Elias the Second and John Coming, that meant paying a bit extra for slaves from areas that today encompass Senegal, Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. Slaves from the modern-day Ivory Coast, Benin, Ghana, and the coastal regions of Nigeria ranked second. By 1720, when Elias “Red Cap” had cemented by marriage a partnership with Henry Laurens, there were 43 slaves working roughly 700 acres of rice at Comingtee. That number had doubled by 1730 and doubled again by 1740. At the time of his death in 1751, “Red Cap” left 218 slaves to his sons, and through his daughter Elanor’s marriage to Henry Laurens, there was a steady supply of new slaves to tend the rice fields from Comingtee to Kensington.⁵⁸

Slave owners and traders had long attempted to

classify the various African peoples they kidnapped and sold into bondage, based not so much on ethnicity as on the whites’ perceptions of the Africans’ enterprise, strength, vitality and, to a lesser extent, intelligence.⁵⁹ Geography also played a large role in the Europeans’ categorizations, although the English especially were notoriously inaccurate in their classifications. Slave traders used terms such as “Gambian,” “Angolan” or “Congo” to describe the origin of their human chattel. However, in many cases, English dealers made their geographic classifications based on where they bought the slaves and not on their actual homelands.⁶⁰ This meant when plantation owners purchased “Gold Coast” slaves, whom whites believed were best suited for the rice fields, they actually bought Africans from non-rice producing areas.⁶¹ It took a savvy slave dealer to understand the vagaries of the African market and the Ball family in particular had one of the best almost under its roof. Henry Laurens, the son-in-law of Elias “Red Cap” Ball, understood the complexities of the African slave markets and built his business reputation on his ability to provide the right slaves for particular plantation tasks. “Our Planters almost to a Man are desirous of large, strong People like Gambias & will not touch small limbed People when such can be had,” he explained to Liverpool merchant Gidney Clarke.⁶² The preference for “Gambias,” however was not exclusive, as Lauren told London trading firm Clifton and Smith. The need for slaves ready to work in the fields was so great, Laurens said he could often ask more for Africans from the “Rice Coast” than he could for slaves from other areas. “Our People would give a preference to slaves from that Quarter, for had they been Gambias we are almost sure they would not have brought so much by £20 a head.”⁶³

For Elias the Second and John Coming Ball, the need for slaves from rice-growing areas had them turn to Laurens to secure the labor they required. Laurens was only too happy to oblige and beginning in 1721, the Balls’ brother-in-law imported more and more slaves for the family plantations, most, but not all from rice-growing regions of West Africa. The importance the Balls placed on a slave’s origin was paramount and infiltrated just about every facet of the slave’s life. Although they were not large-scale sellers, the Balls did sell some slaves to other plantation owners, and those prices depended precisely on where the slave, or the slave’s parents, came from in Africa. In 1750, the Elias “Red Cap” Ball sold a pair of slaves to his son-in-law George Austin, noting in his ledger both were “Angolans.”⁶⁴ The use of “Angola” as part of a name was also common on Ball plantations, the most famous slave with that erstwhile title being Angola Amy, whose descendants continue to live in Berkeley

County, South Carolina.⁶⁵

The ethnicity of a slave was especially important to owners whenever their chattel either wandered off the plantation or intentionally ran away. Each issue of the *South Carolina Gazette*, a Charleston newspaper, carried ads either for captured slaves or runaways and nearly every ad included the slave's ethnicity. The January 25, 1755 edition carried several ads for slaves then at the "Working House," a jail for strays and runaways: "A negro man of the Guinea country, speaks very little English...", "A negro man of the Guinea country, says his name is James...", "A negro man of the Ebo country ..."⁶⁶ For slave dealers such as Laurens and plantation owners such as the Balls, the ethnic origins of a slave determined not only the price of the slave, but his or her worth to the master. "The Slaves from the River Gambia are preferred by Us to all others, save those from the Gold Coast [Senegal]," Laurens once wrote. "There must not be a Callabar [areas south of the River Niger] among them."⁶⁷ The Balls took this type of advice to heart. The family ledgers show the Balls bought mostly "Gold Coast" or "Gambians" for work in the rice fields, and "Angolans" as basic laborers. "Gambians" also became household servants.⁶⁸ The emphasis on where a particular slave was caught and his or her ethnic origins had a direct impact on Oak Island as the careful purchasing of the Ball family would lead directly to the arrival of Samuel Ball.



TO BE SOLD, on board the
Ship *Bance-Island*, on tuesday the 6th
of *May* next, at *Abley-Ferry*; a choice
cargo of about 250 fine healthy
NEGROES,
just arrived from the
Windward & Rice Coast.
—The utmost care has
already been taken, and
shall be continued, to keep them free from
the least danger of being infected with the
SMALL-POX, no boat having been on
board, and all other communication with
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.
Austin, Laurens, & Appleby.
N. B. Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the
SMALL-POX in their own Country.

Advertisement from the *South Carolina Gazette* for
"Rice Coast" slaves.

Courtesy Library of Congress

Four: Kidnapped

On July 22, 1755, the ship *Pearl* docked at Charleston, South Carolina, in bound from the West African coast. On board were 203 “Angolans” – slaves destined for the rice plantations of the South Carolina Low Country.⁶⁹ An ad in the *South Carolina Gazette* that appeared soon after their arrival announced the upcoming sale of the human cargo, promising “The utmost care has been taken, and shall be continued, to keep them free from the least danger of SMALL POX...”⁷⁰ The sellers were George Austin and Henry Laurens, owners of the largest slave-trading firm in Charleston and both brothers-in-law to Elias the Second and John Coming Ball.

The 203 Africans did not actually set foot on South Carolina for four days. The account book of Austin and Laurens indicates the sale took place July 26, 1755. Among the people Austin and Laurens sold that day was a young woman, 15 or 16 years old.⁷¹ She had no way of understanding any of the instructions the white people around her screamed out. The sights and smells and the experience of her voyage were terrors from which she could hardly have recovered before she had to endure the infamy of being sold.⁷² Her name would become Coomba Laurens, and her arrival and subsequent bondage are where the story of Samuel Ball begins.

The slave trade between South Carolina and West Africa would become the largest in North America, with 40 percent of all slaves imported to the American colonies going through Charleston.⁷³ The southern port was one of the hubs of the infamous “Triangle Trade,” that sent ships laden with rum from New England ports, especially Newport, Rhode Island, to West African slave “factories.” These were fortified trading posts to which local strongmen brought their captives for sale at the African slave markets. The usual price was rum, cloth, or manufactured goods, with rum being the best currency.⁷⁴ The slaves came from all over the African continent and arrived at the factories where European traders would barter, buy and sort their human cargo before loading them onto ships bound for the West Indies, North, Central and South America.⁷⁵ It was a dehumanizing, terrifying process for the captives.

Coomba Laurens may have come from the area between the Niger and Congo rivers, although she could just as easily have come from anywhere from modern-day Mali to modern-day Angola. The Austin and Laurens ledger simply lists the 203 slaves on the *Pearl* as “Angolans,” which was a catch-all term for slaves not from the prime rice-growing regions of West Africa.⁷⁶ She was most likely snatched from her family or village compound, not in a large scale raid but by a small group of marauders looking for targets of opportunity.⁷⁷ This was the most common way most



An 1863 lithograph showing the sale of an African slave.

Courtesy Library of Congress.

Africans became part of the slave trade, and it was how Olaudah Equiano, who grew up in what is today Benin, ended up on a slave ship bound for Barbados. Equiano would eventually learn English and publish an account of his life in 1789. The story of his capture is probably very similar to what Coomba experienced in 1755 when rival tribesmen grabbed her.

Equiano’s journey into the horrors of slavery began, “One day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our walls, and in a moment seized us both, and, without giving us time to cry out, or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the nearest wood.”⁷⁸ He was 12 years old when the marauders captured him – about the same age as Coomba – and said the first emotion he experienced was

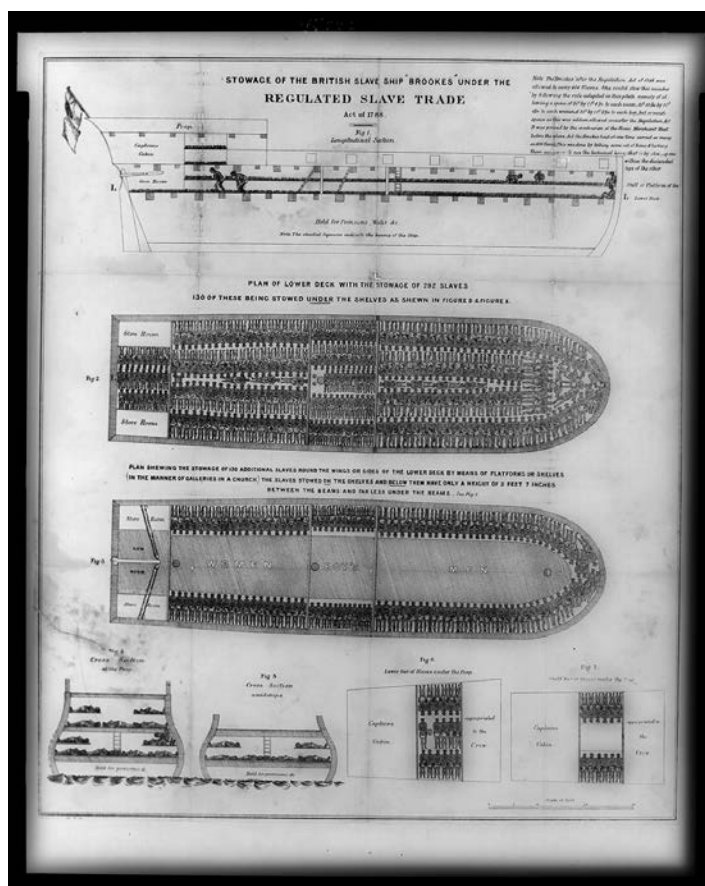
abject terror. “I was left in a state of distraction not to be described. I cried and grieved continually; and for several days did not eat anything but what they forced into my mouth.”

Equiano passed through several different villages where he had different masters, although the Africans, he said, treated him with as much kindness as they could muster. Slavery, he said, was common in Africa, although slaves, “do no more work than other members of the community, even their master; their food, clothing and lodging were nearly the same as theirs, (except that they were not permitted to eat with those who were free-born;) and there was scarce any other difference between them, than a superior degree of importance which the head of a family possesses in our state, and that authority which, as such, he exercises over every part of his household.”⁷⁹ Despite this seemingly benign form of the practice, it was still slavery and Equiano attempted to escape several times. Whether it was the escape attempts or the intention of his captors from the start, Equiano was soon on his way to the coast and one of the slave factories. He either did not know or chose not to say which one.⁸⁰

Whether Coomba experienced the same type of capture as Equiano is a mystery. She likely had the same range of emotions on being torn from her family and transported to the coast. For Equiano, his first encounter with those who would transport him into bondage was yet another cause for terror.

The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast, was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo. These filled me with astonishment, which was soon converted into terror, when I was carried on board. I was immediately handled, and tossed up to see if I were sound, by some of the crew; and I was now persuaded that I had gotten into a world of bad spirits, and that they were going to kill me. Their complexions, too, differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, (which was very different from any I had ever heard) united to confirm me in this belief. Indeed, such were the horrors of my views and fears at the moment, that, if ten thousand worlds had been my own, I would have freely parted with them all to have exchanged my condition with that of the meanest slave in my own country.⁸¹

These were not unique observations. Narratives of slaves kidnapped and carried to either the West Indies or North America offer similar episodes.⁸²



Stowage of the British slave ship *Brookes* under the regulated slave trade act of 1788.

Courtesy Library of Congress.

For Equiano, and undoubtedly Coomba, the sense of loss and terror increased as English and American slavers herded their captives onto ships for the long voyage across the Atlantic. The exercise was yet another brutal assault on the captives' senses, one that left an indelible mark on them even before they reached their destinations.

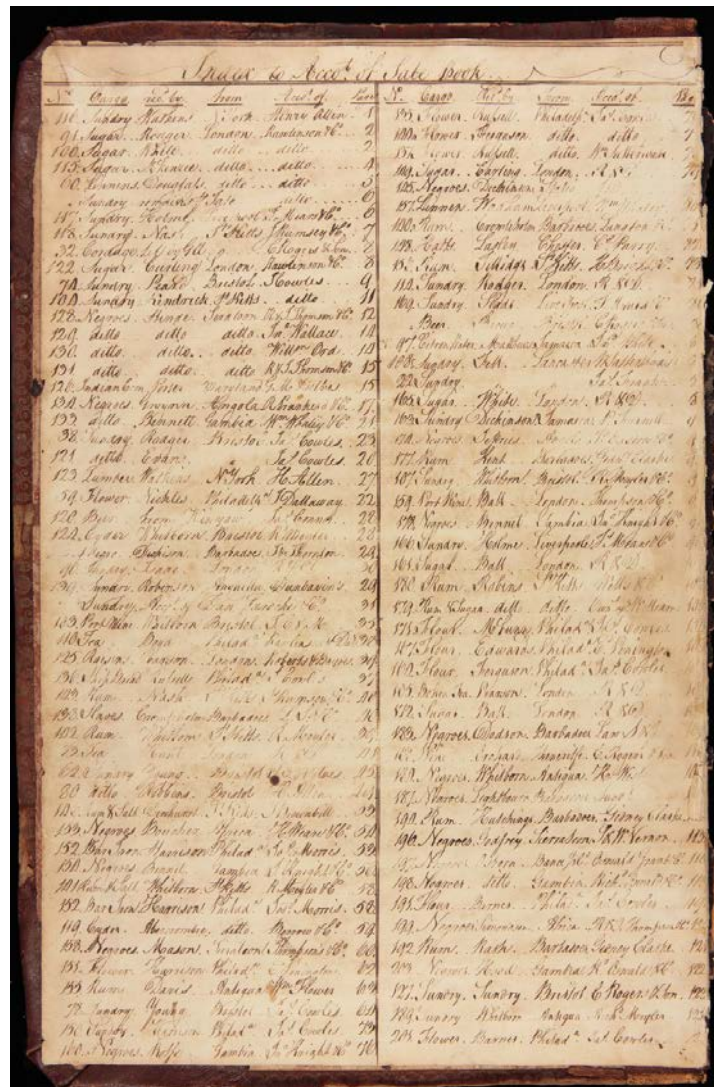
[W]e were all put under deck, so that we could not see how they managed the vessel. But this disappointment was the least of my sorrow. The stench of the hold while we were on the coast was so intolerably loathsome, that it was dangerous to remain there for any time, and some of us had been permitted to stay on the deck for the fresh air; but now that the whole ship's cargo were confined together, it became absolutely pestilential. The closeness of the place, and the heat of the climate, added to the number in the ship, which was so crowded that each had scarcely room to turn himself, almost suffocated us. This produced copious perspirations, so that the air soon became unfit for respiration, from a variety of

loathsome smells, and brought on a sickness among the slaves, of which many died—thus falling victims to the improvident avarice, as I may call it, of their purchasers. This wretched situation was again aggravated by the galling of the chains, now became insupportable; and the filth of the necessary tubs, into which the children often fell, and were almost suffocated. The shrieks of the women, and the groans of the dying, rendered the whole a scene of horror almost inconceivable.⁸³

Throughout the six- to eight-week voyage to the West Indies, the lack of sanitation, poor food, insufficient drinking water, and epidemic diseases combined to make slave ships legendary for their foul smell and high death rates. At the time of Coomba Laurens' capture, the death rate on a slave ship ran at roughly fifteen percent. Although they had little regard for the fate of their human cargo, slave ship captains had to show some considerations toward the slaves as their pay and commissions on the sales depended on delivering a relatively intact cargo.⁸⁴ This could be a difficult task as captives, “preferring death to such a life of misery, somehow made through the nettings and jumped into the sea.”⁸⁵ Captives died throughout the voyage, no matter how many precautions slave captains took. Whether suicide, disease or starvation, the trip from Africa to the New World was, in every way imaginable, a trip through Hell. “Many a time we were near suffocation from the want of fresh air, which we were often without for whole days together. This, and the stench of the necessary tubs, carried off many.”⁸⁶

Records do not indicate how many slaves the captain of the *Pearl* loaded on his ship in Africa. On average, a ship-rigged vessel such as the *Pearl* could carry 250 to 325 slaves,⁸⁷ depending on how many adults and children were in the cargo. William Jeffries, the captain of the *Pearl*, brought in 203 Africans who, after a week-long quarantine to guarantee none of the captives carried disease, went on sale. Equiano described his own sale in Barbados as almost a feeding frenzy among sharks:

On a signal given, (as the beat of a drum,) the buyers rush at once into the yard where the slaves are confined, and make choice of that parcel they like best. The noise and clamor with which this is attended, and the eagerness visible in the countenances of the buyers, serve not a little to increase the apprehension of terrified Africans, who may well be supposed to consider them as the ministers of that destruction to which they think themselves devoted. In this manner, without scruple, are relations and friends separated, most of them



The index page of the sales ledger from the slave trading firm of Austin and Laurens, 1755.

Yale University, Beneike Rare Book and Manuscript Library

never to see each other again ... Why are parents to lose their children, brothers their sisters, or husbands their wives? Surely, this is a new refinement in cruelty, which, while it has no advantage to atone for it, thus aggravates distress, and adds fresh horrors even to the wretchedness of slavery.⁸⁸

The auction that included Coomba took place on the wharves in Charleston. The average price of the adults was £260 for healthy male adults, the equivalent of about \$32,000 in 2018. Austin and Laurens could fetch up to £250 for healthy females, while children sold from £80 to £110.⁸⁹ Austin and Laurens sold 116 adults males, 45 adult females, 49 boys and 38 girls, among them the girl Laurens would name Coomba.⁹⁰ The firm netted £52,550 from the sale, with Laurens buying five men, two women, two boys and one girl, noting that he paid £2250 in cash, John Coming Ball bought one adult male in the auction, as did a gentle-

man named Jacob Marley.⁹¹

Slave owners often sought out pre-adolescents as they would return the most on their investment. They could begin doing chores on a plantation around the age of seven before they went to work in the fields or houses at age twelve. As Equiano related, planters wanted slaves that would require minimal training to cultivate the rice crop and the West Africans met that criteria. “All our industry is exerted to improve these blessings of nature,” Equiano wrote. “Agriculture is our chief employment; and everyone, even the children and women, are engaged in it. Thus, we are all habituated to labor from our earliest years.”⁹²

The Laurens records do not indicate whether Coomba was a field or house slave when she first arrived in South Carolina. At the time, Henry and Eliza resided either in Charleston, where Henry worked, or at Hyde Park with Eleanor Ball’s brother, John Coming Ball.⁹³ It is likely this connection that led to the transfer of an unnamed female slave from Laurens to John Coming Ball in 1757. Soon after the transfer, the name “Coomba” appears in the Ball ledger as receiving a blanket in October, 1757. She was 16 years old.⁹⁴ Two years later, Coomba gave birth to her first child, a son, whom John Coming named Stephy. Sometime in 1761, Coomba gave birth to a second son. In neither case does the ledger name the father.

Whether Samuel, later in his life, knew the exact date of his birth is somewhat uncertain. He knew his age in 1783 – 22 – but like many slaves, probably had few if any records of his birth.⁹⁵ It was not uncommon for many slaves to attach their age to someone or something on the plantation where they were born and toiled. Amos Gadsden, a slave who lived in Charleston and worked on the Bissell plantation outside of the city, participated in the Slave Narrative Project for the U.S. Library of Congress in 1936. Gadsden did not “rightly know what year I was born, but I was nineteen years old before the [American Civil] War, when the family Bible was lost; old Mistress had my birth writ-

ten in the Bible.” At the time of his interview Gadsden however, was quite sure of his age. “I keep my age by Master Henry. He died three years ago; he was 83 and I was five years older than him, so I am 88.”⁹⁶

Another question is whether Samuel knew his father. It is more than likely that he did and that his parents were married, even though the ledger does not provide that information. Slaves who lived on Ball plantations in years after Samuel recalled marriages between one another, which were occasions for celebration that masters usually allowed.⁹⁷ However, the choice of mate was often left up the plantation owners, not the slaves. Benjamin Russell was a rice plantation slave prior to

the American Civil War. He remembered, “The master and mistress were very particular about the slave girls. For instance, they would be driving along and pass a girl walking with a boy. When she came to the house she would be sent for and questioned something like this: ‘Who was that young man? How come you with him? Don’t ever let me see you with that ape again. If you cannot pick a mate better than that I’ll do the picking for you.’ The explanation: The girl must breed good, strong, serviceable children.”⁹⁸

Although Coomba carried the last name of her first owner, Henry Laurens, most slaves had no last name and Samuel, by his own account, did not take the name “Ball” until after he made his escape and arrived in Canada. Margaret Bryant, a slave on a rice plantation in Murrell’s Inlet, S.C., did not use a last name until she married. She grew up, she said, as “Margaret One. Me and Ma here. Mary One. Husband title, husband nishel (initial) had been One. Number One carpenter give him that name Michael One—and he give that name.”⁹⁹

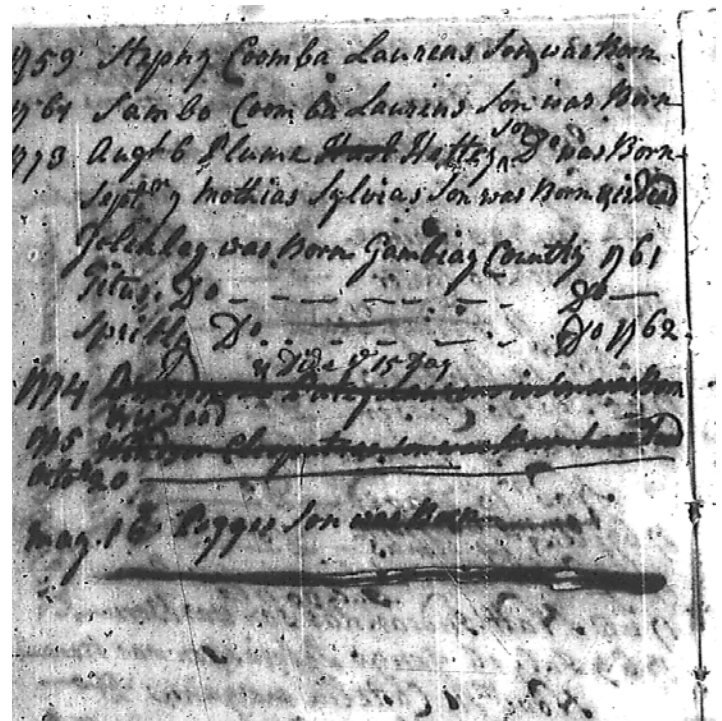
John Coming Ball also did not give the new child on his plantation a new name. He did choose a name to convey a message. He named Coomba’s new son Sambo.¹⁰⁰

Five: “Sambo”

The evidence for Samuel’s birth year is entirely contained in the Ball family records. The only male slave child born between 1760 and 1766 with a name that was even close to “Samuel” was in 1761. Even more telling is the fact the ledger records no births of male slave children in 1765. It does record the birth of 14 girls, but no boys. This points to one inescapable fact: Samuel quite simply could not have been born in 1765.¹⁰¹ With the only child with a name similar to Samuel being born in 1761, the logical conclusion is this is the year in which Samuel Ball was born. He would have to endure not only 18 (or 19) years of bondage, but the ignominy of the name his slave-owner gave him – Sambo.

Names, first or last, carried special significance on the Ball family plantations. Very few slaves actually had last names. In the case of Margaret Bryant and many other slaves, names were often no more than job identifiers. Last names such as Cooper, Carpenter, Forest, Miller were occupations slaves had on plantations. Numbers – one, two, three – were simply identifiers for the birth order of slaves with the same name: Margaret One, John Four. Slave owners used this naming convention for one primary reason – to reinforce the notion of people as property.¹⁰² Take away a person’s name or give a person a name that constantly reinforces the notion his or her worth is nothing more than an exploitable commodity and it serves to dehumanize the individual. Doing so was central to the entire system slave owners built up around their plantations, and they used names as one means to exert control and extend dominance over what they feared could be a restive, if not rebellious, labor force.¹⁰³

The Ball family used a number of conventions in naming their slaves. Some of the names identified on which plantation a particular slave lived and worked. Many slaves on Comingtee had geographic names – Carolina (a male), Indiana (a female), Salisbury, Exeter. Elias the Second and John Coming Ball, like so many other slave owners, also used names from Greek and Roman mythology – Cupid, Cato, Jupiter, Diana, Philippa. They took still others from the Bible and also, in some cases, used Anglicized versions of African names such as Quaco and in at least one instance, Afraca (Africa).¹⁰⁴ It was also a common practice to name children after the day on which they were born, and the seven African day names, in their masculine and feminine forms, can all be found in Ball records. They were actually only approximations as Africans used a lunar rather than numerical calendar. Whites also made African names easier to pronounce and Anglicized them – Cudjo (Monday) often became Joe, Quashie (Sunday) and Cuffie would become Coffee and Squash; while Quaco, Ashanti for Monday, became Jocco, Jocky, and most commonly, Jack.¹⁰⁵

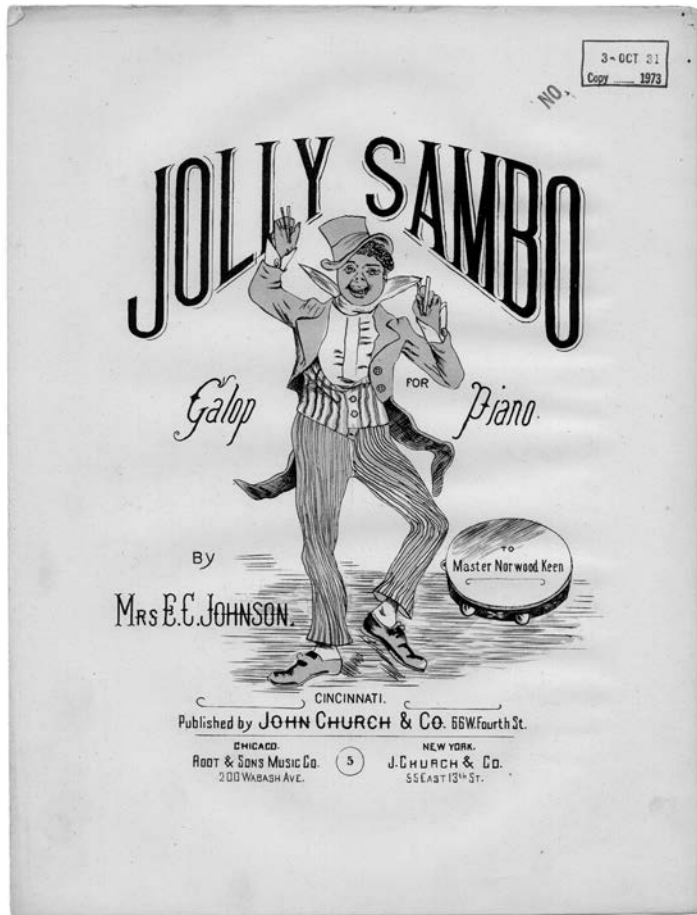


The page from the Ball Family ledger showing the birth of “Sambo.”

South Carolina Historical Society

There are also a number of “special day” names – Easter, Christmas – in the ledger.¹⁰⁶ No slaves, other than a select few, had surnames. Those that did actually either belonged to someone else and were brought to a Ball plantation, such as Coomba Laurens, or they were originally Ball slaves who were given to one of Elias the Second’s or John Coming Ball’s children or in-laws, such as Hannah Shubrick, whom Elias the Second gave to his daughter Eleanor after she married Richard Shubrick. Hannah returned to the Ball slave fold in 1759 for reasons Elias did not note.¹⁰⁷

While many names were simply methods for the Ball family to sort out which slaves belonged to which plantation, a few names had a much darker purpose. Sambo was one such name. It was a name that morphed into a noun that had a very definite and very derogatory connotation. The name has its origins in several West African dialects. Among the Hausa people of what is today Nigeria, Cameroon, Benin, Ghana, Niger and Sudan, the name Sambo means simply “second born.”¹⁰⁸ If the notation that Coomba was an “Angolan,” the name slave traders and owners used for Africans from those regions, is correct, Sambo is a normal African name. However, among the slaves South Carolina plantation owners coveted the most, those from the Gold or Rice Coast, Sambo had a much different meaning. For the Mende and Vai, who come from modern-day Sierra Leone, Liberia and Senegal,



Cover of a popular and virulently racist song “The Jolly Sambo” from 1913 that perpetuated the idea of the obedient African.

Courtesy Library of Congress

Sambo means “disgrace.”¹⁰⁹

By the time of Samuel’s birth, plantation owners certainly knew the dual meaning of the name. What is a mystery is John Coming Ball’s reason for choosing it. Coomba came from his sister’s plantation. The reason why Henry Laurens deeded her to his brother-in-law is another mystery. If Coomba was what plantation owners called a “problem slave,” then the name Sambo was absolutely a sign John Coming was attempting to exert control over the mother and remind her newly born son throughout his life of his station. There are, however, no notes in the Ball family papers concerning why Coomba arrived at Hyde Park. If she was a “problem slave,” first Laurens, then John

Coming, would have classified her in one of four ways: Truculent, cunning, demoralized opportunist or proud. Each type had his or her own unique characteristics, with the “cunning slave” looking for ways to escape, while the “proud slave” would use his or her position as a means of leverage over other slaves. The “demoralized opportunist” was at the bottom, a slave who would steal from owners and other slaves alike to simply pad his own life.¹¹⁰

It was the “truculent slave” that worried owners the most. Whites viewed these slaves as bad-tempered and insubordinate. Owners often sold off slaves they considered “truculent” to sterner, more cruel owners to break their spirit. These whites used the whip and other physical punishments to get “truculent slaves” to work and produce their quotas of rice. There is no way to know whether Coomba Laurens was a “truculent slave” as the Ball family records make no mention of her character. Since she does not appear as a house slave, she almost certainly worked in the rice fields.¹¹¹ What is known is John Coming Ball, and his brother Elias the Second, had reputations for using the whip and other physical inducements to keep their slaves in line. If Coomba was indeed a “truculent slave,” Henry Laurens would have had no qualms about selling her to either of the Ball brothers who would use whatever force they wanted to make her more subservient and pliable,¹¹² and the name of her second son would have served as a reminder she was property.

Whether Sambo was a punishment or a nod to Coomba’s African origins, by the time of Samuel’s birth, the word had gained a notorious meaning among both whites and slaves as it described a particular type of slave. A “Sambo” was an extremely obedient, docile slave who appeared to have little to no self-esteem or sense of self-worth. Stories abound of slaves that allowed their owners to use them as footstools or human pack animals. Henry Manigault, a rice plantation owner in Georgia, reveled in the fact “his Sambo” would carry Manigault on his back across flooded rice fields so the owner would not get his feet wet.¹¹³ The word quickly became one of shame among the slave population, with a connotation that remains anathema to this day. Those slaves that could shunned the name, instead adopting the English biblical alternatives of Samuel or Sam.¹¹⁴ It is exactly what Samuel Ball did the moment he escaped as he shed the name Sambo for Samuel.

Six: First years



The main plantation house at Hyde Park as it appeared circa 1970, when some members of the Ball family still lived on the property.

Low Country Land Trust

There are few surviving narratives of the childhood of a slave on a rice, or any other type of plantation. One of the few from a contemporary of Samuel King comes from a fellow Ball plantation slave, Boston King. A slave on White Hall Plantation, King would give himself his last name after he escaped to the British in 1780. In 1798, he wrote his memoirs, which were published in London and gained him an amount of fame. He eventually repatriated to what is today Sierra Leone, where he believed his father had been grabbed by slave catchers sometime in the 1750s. According to King, he began working for Ann Ball and her husband “when I was six years old.” He “waited in the house upon my master. In my ninth year I was put to mind the cattle.”¹¹⁵

King’s recollections are similar to those of slaves who lived seventy to eighty years later than himself or Samuel. Pick Gladdany, a slave on a cotton plantation in the decade before the American Civil War, recalled, “Squire William Hardy was de man that I worked for when I had done turned five. They teach me to bring in chips, kindling wood, fire wood and water. I learnt to make Marse’s fire ever morning. Dat won’t no trouble, cause all I had to do was rake back de ashes from the coals and throw on some chips and lightwood and de fire come right up. Wasn’t

long before I was big enough to draw water and bring in big wood.”¹¹⁶ Joe Rutherford, a rice plantation slave before the Civil War, recalled, “My work was to drive cows, until I was old enough to work in the fields when I was 13.”¹¹⁷ Another pre-Civil War slave, Sam Mitchell, was 87 in 1936 when he told his story. Mitchell remembered, “I start for mind cow when I was nine years old. When I been twelve, I start work in field or cutting march or splitting rail.” Prior to his master putting him to work, Mitchell recalled, “Slave children play mud-pie, make house out of sand and such thing.”¹¹⁸

In addition to their small jobs for their masters, slave children helped their mothers and the older women appointed to watch over them with small jobs in gardens, gathering firewood or other tasks their elders assigned them. Elias the Second and John Coming both allowed their slaves to keep their own gardens and poultry, fish and even hunt. Family papers show both men often purchased produce from their slaves, and also allowed them to sell their produce to other plantations.¹¹⁹ “Slaves had own garden,” remembered former Gracie Gibson. “Some of [the] old women, and women bearin’ [children] not yet born, did oardin’ [with] hand-cards¹²⁰; then some would get at [the] spinning wheel and spin thread ... Other women

weave cloth and every woman had to learn to make clothes for the family, and they had to knit coarse socks and stockings. Mighty nigh all [the children] had a little teency bag of asafetida, on a string 'round they necks, to keep off diseases."¹²¹

There is evidence slave children and the children of slave owners often played together, although even then, the stories of former slaves point to a large divide between the two. The most obvious was the wealthy white children would return home to a large house, well-provisioned and amply provided. The slave children returned, not quite to squalor, at least on Ball plantations, but certainly not the splendor they glimpsed while playing with white children. Margaret Bryant, a former slave on a rice plantation on the Pee Dee River recalled playing with white children, in which one of the more popular games was "finding worms" older slaves would use as bait for fishing.¹²²

After a day of play, slave children such as Samuel returned to quarters on Ball plantations that were almost small towns.¹²³ A slave family usually "lived in a two-room log house daubed [with] mud ... [I]t had a wood and mud chimney to [the] gable end of one room. [The] floor was hewed logs laid side by side close together." The houses clustered around a central fire pit, which was a communal cooking area. Pens for chicken, geese, ducks and goats stood nearby as did the slaves' gardens. To one observer from New England who toured several South Carolina rice plantations just prior to the outbreak of the Revolutionary War, the slaves' ability to provide for themselves was a surprise. "The Negroes are the only people that seem to pay any attention to the various uses that the wild vegetable may be put to ... vegetable pins made from prickly pear, also molds for buttons made from calabash, which also holds their victuals.," the observer wrote. "The allowance for a Negro is a quart of Indian corn per day and a little piece of land they cultivate better than their masters. There they rear hogs and poultry, sow calabashes etc. and are better provided than the poorer white people with us."¹²⁴

No Colonial era slave quarters still exist on former Ball properties. The few slave houses that still stand date from the period immediately prior to or during the Civil War. Archaeological digs at Ball plantation sites and at other rice plantations from the mid-18th century, however, reveal a number of different types of dwellings, ranging from West African round houses to the small log cabins Bryant described.¹²⁵ There are no records of the type of house in which Samuel and his mother (and probably his father) lived at Hyde Park Plantation. Charles Ball (no relation to Samuel), a slave in South Carolina during the 1790s, gave a similar description to that of Bryant of the slave quarters on the cotton plantation on which he lived. The cabins, he wrote, were "about a quarter mile" from the owner's house. The slave houses were "fifteen or sixteen feet square, built of hewn logs,



Isaac and Rosa, a pair of slave children from New Orleans, photographed in 1864.

Courtesy Library of Congress

covered with shingles, and provided with floors of pine boards." He called the dwellings "dry and comfortable," and proof the plantation owners wanted to maintain their slaves' health since their health determined their ultimate value to the plantation.¹²⁶

Although owners had a vested interest in maintaining the health of their slaves, they were not overly concerned with their well-being. Most owners let the slaves themselves see to their own food, clothing, and shelter. The most important thing to an owner was how much a slave would return on the investment the plantation made in the laborer. The slaves' health was a secondary thought. Rice farming in South Carolina was a Russian-roulette industry for slaves. Malarial swamps and marshes riddled the South Carolina Low Country where rice cultivation took place. Mortality rates among slaves in general ran as high as 40 percent annually on rice plantations, with child mortality rates

reaching 60 percent.¹²⁷ Disease was rampant in the Low Country, where malaria, Yellow Fever, cholera, and typhus burned through plantations. The Balls rarely spent the summers at their plantations, instead fleeing for Charleston where they could avoid the swarms of disease-carrying mosquitos that infested the rice swamps.¹²⁸ For young Samuel, simply surviving his first seven years was an accomplishment.¹²⁹

By the time he was seven years old, Samuel was likely already contributing to Hyde Park as he worked the small jobs allotted to children. These jobs would increase as he grew older and stronger. By the time he was 10, Samuel probably was in the pastures tending sheep, cattle and horses. By age 12, he would have been in the rice fields, learning a trade (and laboring) or a combination of both. It is likely he did both, as rice plantation owners ran multiple businesses in addition to agriculture and also strove to be self-sufficient. North Carolina Governor James Glenn, in a letter to the London Board of Trade in 1751, said owners often trained slaves to become “useful Mechanicks, as Coopers, Carpenters, Masons, Smiths, Wheelwrights and other Trades.”¹³⁰ All of those skills went directly to the maintenance, growth and profitability of the plantation and both Elias the Second and John Coming Ball made ample use of slaves as skilled craftsmen. Ads both men placed in the *South Carolina*

Gazette seeking the return of lost or runaway slaves often described their targets as carpenters, lumber jacks, and painters.¹³¹

Ball family records also show weavers, barrel-makers (coopers) and blacksmiths as the trades their slaves practiced.¹³² As Samuel escaped bondage when he was 18, if he had begun training in a skilled trade, he was probably still just learning in 1780 and the family records would not list him as a “mechanick.”

Skilled slaves had more value to their owners than just on their plantation. Former slave Willis Williams, who at age 87 recalled, “I belonged to Mass [Master] John Williams. He was a man had all the colored people. He didn’t work all on his own plantation. He’s hire out his people to work turpentine. Put ‘em out for so much a year. He’d give them blanket, suit, coat, pants. First of the year, Boss would collect wages for all he hired out.”¹³³ Ball family records show at least one slave, a painter/carpenter named Peter, who helped build the main house at Comingtee, also worked for several other plantation owners building houses.¹³⁴

Although some slaves became skilled tradesmen, the most likely destination for Samuel was the rice fields of Hyde Park, a destination that destroyed many of those unfortunate enough to live in bondage.

Seven: Out here in the fields

Rice farming in South Carolina was a labor-intensive, man- and woman-killing enterprise. The transition from being a child to working in the riced field was probably extremely difficult for an 11- or 12-year-old child slave such as Samuel.¹³⁵ After three years of almost play working, the young boy was now working alongside the adults, with his own quota to fill, trying to somehow avoid the diseases that ran rampant on rice plantations, serious injuries in the boggy ground or outright drowning in the flooded fields. All were hazards rice plantation slaves faced on a daily basis, and this, combined with the long hours, rough living conditions and often violent and brutal treatment, broke many slaves, few of whom lived to old age.¹³⁶

For Samuel, at age 12, even if he was one of the young slaves John Coming Ball selected to learn a trade, still would have been in the rice fields. The seeds he literally planted in the rice swamps would take root years later when he successfully farmed his lands in Nova Scotia. Planting crops, however, was the not only skill his master forced him to learn as rice farming required slaves to have advanced knowledge of properly clearing land, irrigation, road building, botany and forestry.¹³⁷ The controlled felling and harvesting of trees was especially important on Ball plantations as lumber and wood products, including turpentine, were second only to rice as profit-making industries.¹³⁸

The planting season at Hyde Park was a year-round endeavor, although actual rice cultivation took place from the onset of warm weather in mid- to late-March. The first crops Samuel, with the other slaves at Hyde Park would have planted were provision crops such as corn and sweet potatoes that would feed both the Ball family and the slaves. Ball plantation masters set aside specific fields solely for food crops and made sure their slaves sowed those first, ensuring the Ball families could eat throughout the year. Once the corn and sweet potatoes were in the ground, the slaves turned to rice.¹³⁹ It was dirty, back-breaking work.

First, the slaves had to either prepare or create irrigation trenches that would keep the fields in a semi-flooded state throughout the growing season. As a precursor, slaves dug a large holding pond. At Comingtee, the pond was six feet deep and covered nearly an acre. Once they created the pond, slaves dug the trenches to feed the water to the rice fields. These could extend hundreds to thousands of feet across the plantation. A system of wooden gates controlled the water flow from the holding pond into the fields, gates the slaves built and understood how to use.¹⁴⁰

While some slaves worked on either creating or repairing the irrigation system, others began the laborious task of clearing the fields. The nature of the rice fields forced the slaves to do all the work by



An 1866 woodcut showing slaves working in the rice fields.

Courtesy Library of Congress

hand as the boggy terrain prevented the use of horses and plows. Instead, slaves armed with hoes turned the ground.¹⁴¹ A hoe was a wooden stick the length of an arm, with an iron blade at one end. Slaves quickly became adept at using both the bladed end and the blunt end to aid in their work.¹⁴² The work gangs fanned out across the fields weeding every inch with either their hands or their hoes. Once they cleared the weeds, the slaves then had to prep the dirt for seeds. Working in groups of 20 per acre, the slaves dug long furrows across the fields, about eighteen inches apart, creating several hundred empty, striped acres, in which they sowed the rice seeds.¹⁴³

As April turned to May and the fields started to dry in the hot South Carolina sun, the slaves began the complicated task of watering the growing rice plants. To do so, they partially flooded the fields with water from the retention ponds. The slaves opened a number of sluices to allow water to turn the damp ground into a soggy mud the slaves slogged through to accomplish their constant task of weeding around the growing rice plants. The slaves inundated the fields periodically as the ground baked in the summer heat. The flooded paddies forced the slaves to spend much of the year up to their knees in muck.¹⁴⁴ By early September, the mature rice plants stood at shoulder height and the harvest began. Slaves, again working in gangs of 20 per acre, used sickles to hack down the reedy plants, laying the stalks out to dry. Field hands carried great stacks on their heads to oxcarts or piled them on

barges that wandered the inland creeks to transport the plants to barns built in several locations on the plantation. Once the green plants turned brown, the tedious process of separating the grains took over life on the plantation.¹⁴⁵

Although slaves had to do all the work in the rice fields by hand, by and large, it did not take place under the lash. Ball plantation slaves such as Samuel worked under the task system as opposed to the gang system that was prevalent on tobacco and sugar plantations and that would come to rule cotton plantations in later years.¹⁴⁶ The task system was a largely South Carolina phenomena, the origins of which many scholars have yet to adequately explain. A general consensus is it was likely an outgrowth of absentee plantation owners, such as Elias “Red Cap” Ball and his sons, Elias the Second and John Coming, who generally fled from their swampy properties in the summer months to escape malaria and Yellow Fever, leaving their slaves, under the watchful eyes of managers, to run their operations.¹⁴⁷ If the reason for its adoption is murky, its use proved to be one of primary reasons for the rapid growth and success of rice farming in Colonial South Carolina.¹⁴⁸

Under the task system, each slave had an assigned job and a daily and weekly quota to reach. For slaves such as Samuel, who in 1773 was likely just beginning to work in the fields as well as (possibly) in a trade, the task system actually afforded the individual a good deal of latitude in his or her work week. A slave normally had the daily task of maintaining more than a quarter-acre of rice – weeding, irrigating, and otherwise caring for the plants.¹⁴⁹ Hyde Park, spanned 696 acres at the time of Samuel’s birth in 1761 and slaves were constantly expanding it. The plantation farmed roughly 150 acres of rice and John Coming Ball had 86 slaves of whom 70 were field slaves.¹⁵⁰ One slave, then, had to weed and maintain more than two acres of rice each week, and this was just one of his or her tasks. Female slaves, in addition to their field tasks, had to cook, weave, repair or sew clothing, care for children and for older slaves. The women also took on the task of maintaining the slaves’ gardens, which ranged from growing melons, sweet potatoes, squash, corn and greens to tending small flocks of chicken, ducks, and geese. The women also attended the slave-run markets where they either sold or bartered their foodstuffs for household items and an occasional luxury item.¹⁵¹ Male slaves had more menial tasks to accomplish in addition to their work in the fields. One of their primary secondary tasks, and one which Samuel learned as he demonstrated during his time with the British army, was felling trees and splitting rails for fences. Their daily quota was 100 rails of 12-foot length each day, this on top of their work in the rice.¹⁵²

The slaves could not easily accomplish all of their tasks, and owners such as John Coming Ball of-

ten increased their demands whenever it appeared the slaves had too much spare time. Still, Johann Bolzius, a European observer who toured a number of South Carolina rice plantations, noted, once the slaves had completed their tasks, they had time to tend to their own gardens, a practice that was lucrative to some extent for the slaves and also led to the growth of cottage industries. In 1728 Abraham, a Ball family slave, was paid £1 10s for providing his master with eighteen fowls, while a female slave received £8 for supplying hogs. In 1736 twenty-two Ball family slaves were paid more than £50 for supplying varying amounts of rice to their master.¹⁵³ The extent of this trade in provisions was occasionally impressive; over the course of two years, the slaves belonging to James Hartley’s estate were paid £124 for supplying 290 bushels of their corn. Plantation owner Henry Ravenel not only purchased his slaves’ provision goods, consisting of corn, fowls, hogs, and catfish, but also their canoes, baskets, and myrtle wax.¹⁵⁴ It almost certain that Samuel learned numerous skills in addition to agriculture and arboriculture, skills he was able to use later in life when he settled in Nova Scotia.¹⁵⁵

No matter how much time they had for their own industries, the slaves were slaves, tied to the plantation and their masters. Although the task system was far more benevolent toward the slaves than the gang system, it was slavery. Charley Watson, who was a slave on a rice plantation during the Civil War, called the task system the “can and can’t system ... in the morning, when it git[gets] so you can see, you got to go to work and at night when it git[gets] so dark you can’t see you ceased work.”¹⁵⁶ Unlike the gang system, which relied on overseers to force the slaves into the fields, the task system had “drivers,” other slaves who earned their masters’ trust and ran the work gangs in the fields. Sam Mitchell, who was a rice plantation slave, recalled, “On Woodlawn there was no overseer. We had a nigger driver. Massa didn’t allow much whipping, but slave had to do task. If didn’t, then he get whipping. Driver do whipping, but if he whip too severely, Massa would sometime take field hand and make him driver and put driver in the field.”¹⁵⁷

Although they didn’t use overseers, the Ball employed numerous managers, whose job was to see to the running of the plantation and that the slaves met their quotas of rice, lumber, turpentine and other products. These managers ranged in ability from utterly incompetent and cruel to clever, savvy businessmen. All were white and in addition to managing the slave labor force, they had to maintain the accounts for the plantation.¹⁵⁸ These accounts became part of the Ball Family Papers at the South Carolina Historical Society, which in turn held the key to the early days in the life of Samuel Ball.

The slaves worked six long days on the Ball plantations, with Sundays usually off, except when they had to complete their most labor-intensive task



Slaves threshing rice as depicted in an 1866 woodcut.

Courtesy Library of Congress

– the harvest. After laying out the plants to dry, the slaves then had to begin the process of separating the individual grains. The first step was to flail the plants to release the grains from the stalks. Slaves used a tool made of wood and leather to whip the stalks until they freed the grains. Next, the slaves had to remove the husks. A rice grain has an outer husk and an inner shell, and the slaves had to shear off both. In the mid-1700s, workers used hand-operated mills which the slaves built from wood slabs two feet across. The slabs pressed and revolved against each other, and there were cuts or corrugations that ran from the middle to the edge, through which the rice grain moved as the pressure of the rotation pulled off the outer husk. The inner shell was the more difficult of the two to remove and to do so, the slaves had to pound the rice by hand. The slaves used a large mortar and pestle, each about waist high, to grind and pound the rice to remove the inner husk. It was a jolting, sweaty, repetitive job. A field hand might pound seven mortars, or fifty pounds of rice, in one day.¹⁵⁹ The pounding sometimes broke the rice, which made it unsalable. Slaves collected these half-grains, called “Negro rice,” from the ground around the barn to add to their own provisions. Plantation owners and the overseers kept a punishing eye on the barnyard to make sure the slaves broke as little rice as possible.¹⁶⁰ Depending on the amount of rice they had to clean, the slaves would often work seven days a week until they accomplished their task.¹⁶¹

Maggie Black, who was a slave on a rice plantation in Marion, S.C., during the Civil War, described the harvesting process as part dance, part frenzy, all mixed with the fear of arbitrary whippings for the smallest mistake. [Note: The following excerpt was written as it was told in a patois that is somewhat difficult to understand. The author corrected this spelling

and grammar to make it more readable.]

Peoples had to work their hand for everything they had back then. They grow their own rice right there on de plantation in them days. Had to plant it on some of the land that was wetter than the other land was. They had to let the rice get good and ripe and then they would eat it and have one of them big rice whipping days. Heap of people come from plantation or boat and help whip that rice. They just take the rice and beat it ‘cross some hoss that they had to fix up somewhere there on the plantation. [T]hey have hoes just like these hoes you see carpenter use ‘bout here dese days. They would have hundreds of bushels of that rice there ... Then they have rice mortars right there on de plantation what they fix the rice in just as nice. How they have to take it to de mill. You see they have a big block outter in the yard with a uh big hole in it that they put de rice in and take these things call pestles and beat down on it and that what knock the shaft off it.¹⁶²

During Samuel’s time at Hyde Park, an acre of rice produced between twenty and forty bushels, each bushel weighing sixty-five pounds. One slave had to clean roughly four acres worth of rice, with an average yield of four and a half barrels of rice per worker, and with a barrel at five hundred pounds, a single slave could produce more than a ton of rice. It was how owners such as John Coming Ball assigned value to their slaves. They looked upon slaves as an investment from which the owner could “reasonable expect above 16, 20, and 25 per Count” when rice gave a “tolerable price.”¹⁶³ Charleston merchant Alexander Garden, in a letter to the Royal Society of Arts in England, offered a different view of the profitability of slavery.

Our Staple Commodity for some years has been Rice and Tilling, planting, Hoeing, Reaping, Threshing, Pounding have all done merely by the poor Slaves here. Labour and the Loss of many of their Lives testified the Fatigue they Underwent in Satiating the Inexpressible Avarice of their Masters. You may easily guess what a Tedious, Laborious, and slow Method it is of Cultivating Lands to Till it all by Hand, and then to plant 100, 120 Acres of Land by the Hand, but the worst comes last for after the rice is Threshed, they beat it all in the hand in large Wooden Mortars to clean it from the Husk, which is very hard and severe operations as each Slave is tasked at Seven Mortars for One Day, and each Mortar Contains three pecks of rice. Some task their slaves at more, but often pay more ... dear for their

Barbarity, by the loss of many ... Valuable Negroes and how can it be well otherwise, the poor Wretches are Obligated to Labour hard to Compleat their Task.¹⁶⁴

There are no words that can convey the degradation the infamous practice of slavery inflicted on its victims. Apologists, such as historian Edwin McCrady, have attempted to justify to some extent the barbarous notion of human bondage by applying a type of benign racism. McCrady claimed, "There were no doubt many and great evils inseparable from the institution of slavery, but these were reduced to a minimum on a Carolina plantation; generally the slaves were contented and happy, and shared in the prosperity which their labors on the new rice fields were bringing to their masters."¹⁶⁵ Any who had to endure the horrors of enslavement had a much different view. Those who gained their freedom at the end of the American Civil War attempted to put into words the horrors they experienced. Louisa Gouse, a slave on the Washington Woodberry rice plantation along the Pee Dee River, tried her best to describe her time in bondage.

The colored people, never had no liberty, not one speck, in slavery time. Old man Wash Woodberry, he was rough with his niggers ... white folks would whip [their]

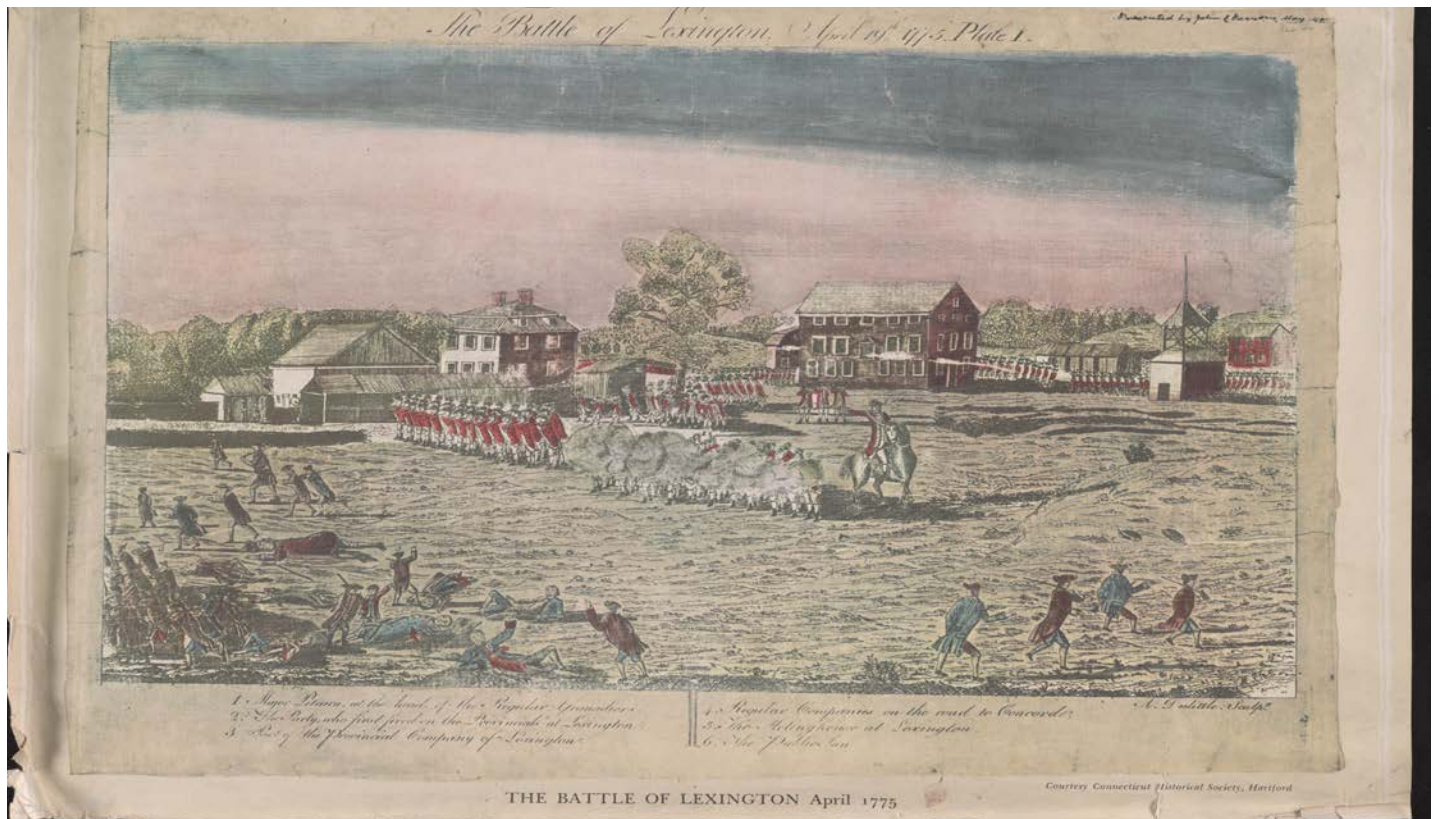
colored people right there, if they didn't do what they tell them to do. Oh, they was awful in that day and time. Colored people had to live under a whip master and couldn't do nothin', but what he say do ... They had these head men, what they call overseers, on all the plantations that been set out to whip de niggers ... I tell you; it was rough and tough in them days. They would beat you 'bout to death. My grandfather and my grandmother, they die with scars on them that the white folks put there.¹⁶⁶

Sam Mitchell, the Woodlawn rice plantation slave, was more succinct: "What do I think of slavery? I think slavery is just a murdering of the people. I think freedom is a great gift. I like my Massa and I guess he was as good to his slaves as he could be, but I rather be free."¹⁶⁷

Samuel Ball spent up to 19 years as a slave at Hyde Park, at least six and possibly seven of them as both a forced laborer in the rice fields and likely, given his later employment in the British army, as a tree cutter on the plantation.

He left no record of those days nor of his thoughts of his time as a slave for John Coming Ball or of the period in which Elias the Third ran the plantation. He would shed the first name his owner gave him, but adopt the surname of Ball.¹⁶⁸

Eight: The Revolution begins



Print of an Amos Doolittle illustration shows Minute Men being fired upon by British troops in Lexington, Massachusetts. Includes a numbered key indicating: “1. Major Pitcarne, at the head of the Regular Granadiers” [sic], at center ; “2. The Party who first fired on the Provincials at Lexington” at center ; “3. Part of the Provincial Company of Lexington” at bottom left ; “4. Regular Companies of the road to Concord” at top right ; “5. The Meeting-house [sic] at Lexington” at top left center ; “6. The Public Inn” at top right center.

Courtesy Library of Congress

News of the famed “shot heard ‘round the world” reached Charleston on May 8, 1775 when the *South Carolina Gazette* ran an account of the battles at Lexington and Concord in Massachusetts. The problems between England and its American colonies had been a major topic in South Carolina since 1774 when the British closed Boston and initiated a military occupation of the city. For plantation owners such as Elias the Second and John Coming Ball and their sons, the main concern was maintaining access with markets in the West Indies that were major consumers of South Carolina rice.¹⁶⁹ The period immediately prior to the onset of hostilities was one of unprecedented prosperity in South Carolina and most of the wealthiest planters were hesitant, at first, to effect a break from the Crown.¹⁷⁰ They viewed themselves as good Englishmen and attempted to transplant English society to the Low Country. John Coming Ball went so far, according to Ball family tradition, to ship bricks from England to South Carolina so he could use British materials to build his home.¹⁷¹

The shots the Minutemen and Redcoats traded outside of Boston did little, at first, to change the sentiments among the higher echelons of South Carolinian society, especially the slave-owning class. The wealthiest planters depended on the trans-Atlantic slave trade and British control of the sea lanes ensured a steady supply of new forced labor. Even the richest plantation owners, however, had their doubts about the wisdom of English rule of the colonies. The passing of the Stamp Act in 1764 was the first of several “annoyances” that pushed many in South Carolina toward the idea of at least standing up to, though not breaking away from, the King and Parliament. South Carolina joined with its sister colonies in sending messages to London expressing their displeasure over what the Americans saw as “illegal” and “onerous” taxation by a distant government.¹⁷² By 1774, when England moved to suppress Boston, many in South Carolina were openly critical of the Crown and sided publicly with their compatriots in Massachusetts.¹⁷³

The increasing rift between the colonists and

the Crown led to divisions among the colonists themselves, often seemingly overnight. In South Carolina, the line separating patriots and loyalists was an extremely narrow one and split families such as the Balls equally. John Coming Ball died in 1764, three years after Samuel's birth, and his oldest son, John, took up running Hyde Park. His second son, Elias, moved to a new plantation on the Wambaw River, about four miles from Hyde Park and took his nickname from the new estate. Elias the Third, a cousin to John Coming Ball, his brother, William, and his in-laws, the Laurens, were all staunch patriots. Elias "Wambaw" Ball, however, was an equally as staunch Loyalist. Henry Laurens and his son, John, would become major backers of the patriot cause, while Elias the Third and William Ball commanded patriot militias.¹⁷⁴ And yet, as late as January, 1775, Henry Laurens believed his compatriots could and would easily avoid a complete rupture with their mother country. "Independence," he wrote, "is not the view of America not a Sober Sensible Man wishes for it." Laurens gauged the prevailing opinion among Charleston whites when he noted that "some are Red-hot & foolishly talk of Arms & there is another extreme who say that implicit obedience is the Surest Road to a redress of Grievances - the great majority of numbers lie between."¹⁷⁵ As one observer noted, "Prior to 1775 South Carolinians were in many ways the most unlikely of rebels. The men who led the resistance to the British Parliament and who would eventually lead the colony into independence had little to gain and much to lose from such a hazardous undertaking."¹⁷⁶

For white plantation owners, the main reasons to either remain loyal or to espouse the patriot cause was slavery. Their overarching concern was maintaining control over their slaves and their businesses. It was already a somewhat tenuous hold. By 1775 slaves outnumbered whites in South Carolina by nearly three-to-one. Tax records for the year showed 76,917 slaves in the colony, nearly all of them concentrated in the Low Country and Charleston.¹⁷⁷ The considerable degree of autonomy slaves of colonial South Carolina had in their daily lives was another source of concern for their masters. Planters worried whether the wealth they enjoyed was worth the risk they ran in surrounding themselves with such "very dangerous Domestic, their number so much exceeding the whites."¹⁷⁸ The outbreak of hostilities exacerbated their fears as rumors spread among owners and slaves the British wanted to turn the slaves against their masters, rumors that, at least at first, were unfounded.

Rumors of a slave revolt were seemingly ingrained among slave holders, not without some justification. Rebellions in 1715, 1739 and allegations slaves were planning a revolt in 1766 all elicited overly harsh reprisals from white society. Slave owners used extreme punishments against any slaves they believed were plotting insurrection, nearly all of which

Express Mails.
For carrying a daily Express back, or in railroad cars, for mailing slips from newspapers, newspapers, and letters (other money) not exceeding half an ounce, marked "Express Mail," and in the times hereinafter stated, 1843, inclusive, on the following day at the Post Office Department of September next, to be delivered of said month:
N. C. to Raleigh, 80 miles and intermediate points, if required. Leave on the 1st of July, 1839. Arrive at 9 1-4 p m arrive at Raleigh at 6 1-2 a m. Arrive at Fayetteville, 60 miles and intermediate points, if required. Leave on the 1st day of July, 1839. Arrive at Fayetteville at 4 3-4 a m, arrive at Fayetteville at 10 1-4 a m. Arrive at Fayetteville at 1-2 p m, arrive at Fayetteville at 6 p m. Arrive at Fayetteville, by Cheraw, S. C. and intermediate points, if required.

Committed to the Jail
IN Winston County, Mi. by James Pagan, a Justice of the Peace for said county, two negroes; one negro man by the name of POLLY, who belongs to the French of Canton; the other a negro woman by the name of POLLY, who she belongs to one Henry Hayman of Canton, Madison county, Mi. Edmon is about 30 years old, 5 feet 10 inches high, rather tall-boned, stout built, dark complected, and stammers very much when talking. Polly, his wife, as they are called, is about 40 years old, quick spoken, dark complected. The owners of said negroes are requested to come forward, prove property, pay expenses and take them out of jail.
CALBY M'DANIEL, Jailor.
August 6, 1838. 517

Committed to Jail.
IN Winston County, Mi. by James Pagan, Justice of the Peace for said county, a mulatto man, who says he is free, with the exception of one hundred dollars, which he owes Robert B Herron, balance of payment for himself, and says his name is CLABORNE; his agent, James Grant, lives in Vicksburg, Miss.

Ads in the Columbus Democrat of Columbia, Mississippi announcing the capture and jailing of fugitive slaves.

Courtesy Library of Congress

culminated in public executions. In 1769, for example, authorities burned at the stake on the Charleston green a slave woman accused of poisoning her master. Other slaves convicted of rebellion or violent resistance were commonly gibbeted and left to die of thirst and exposure. Even after death their corpses continued to be instructive, as was that of Caesar, a slave executed in 1739 for trying to lead a band of runaways out of the colony and who, after being hanged, was "hung in Chains at Hang-Man's Point opposite to this Town, in sight of all Negroes passing and repassing by water."¹⁷⁹

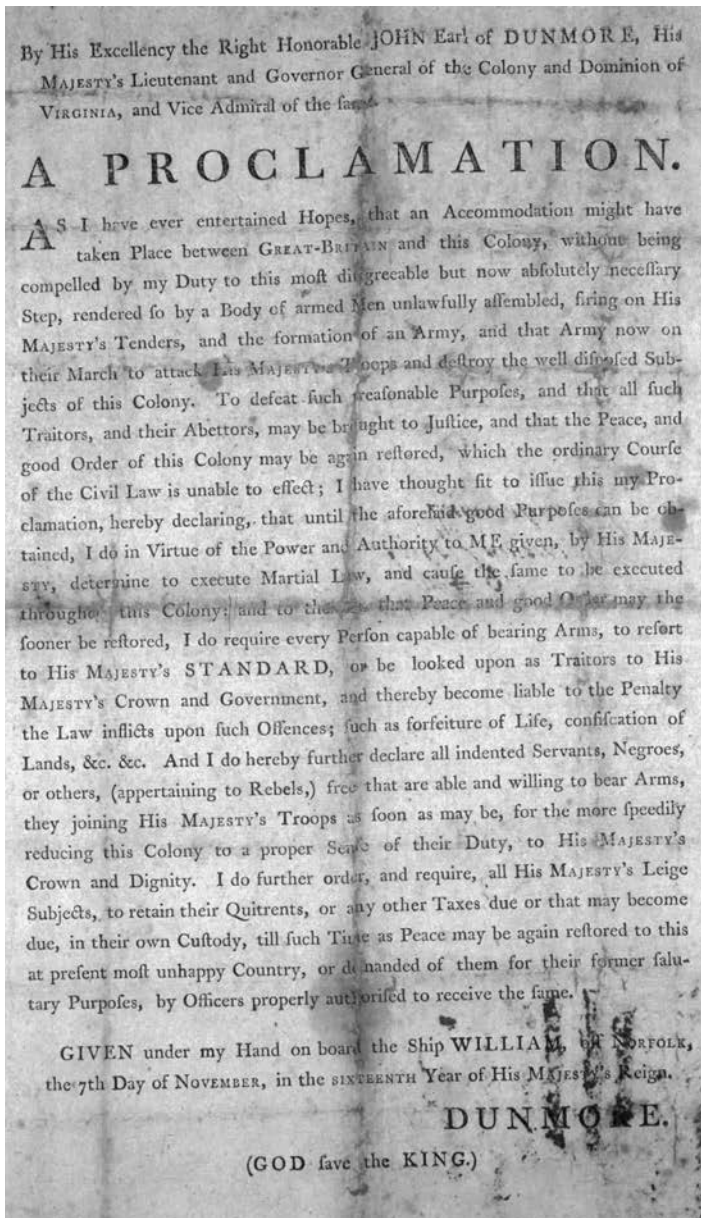
Slave owners justified their barbarity by claiming, "the laws of self-preservation rendered such executions necessary" and believed the "Example of Justice . . . [would] deter other Negroes from committing such Insolencies and Crimes for the future."¹⁸⁰ Among some of the most savage owners were Elias the Second and John Coming Ball, who routinely maimed slaves that attempted to escape. The injuries were never so severe as to hamper the slave's value or ability to work. The Balls often had toes amputated or otherwise scarred attempted escapees. When a slave was able to run off, Elias the Second, John Coming Ball and their heirs were quick to resort to maiming as a means of discouraging others from escaping.¹⁸¹ Ads in the *South Carolina Gazette* often described Ball slaves, such as "Booba," who ran off from Hyde Park in 1762, in somewhat graphic terms. After describing his clothes and that he said he belonged to John Com-

ing Ball, the ad concluded, “Two toes upon on each foot seem as if they were cut off.”¹⁸²

This was the life that Samuel Ball had to endure during his time in bondage. The advent of hostilities with Great Britain only exacerbated what was already a tense atmosphere at Hyde Park and all of the Ball plantations. Escape attempts became commonplace. Ball family records indicate as many as six out of every ten slaves attempted to run off, with

new slaves from Africa making the most attempts.¹⁸³ Although there is no documentary evidence¹⁸⁴, it is possible Coomba Laurens, Samuel’s mother, attempted to escape and for that reason, Laurens deeded her to John Coming Ball. Samuel was almost certainly well aware of the escape attempts and their outcomes and as events moved forward in South Carolina, the opportunity for freedom would arrive from an unlikely source.

Nine: War comes to South Carolina



The proclamation of Virginia Royal Governor John Murray, Lord Dunmore, offering freedom to slaves in return for military service.

Courtesy Library of Congress

For more than a year, the war with England was a distant rumble for the slaves and slave owners of South Carolina.¹⁸⁵ The relative calm, however, was merely a veneer of normalcy. Lieutenant General Sir William Howe, the commander in chief of His Majesty's forces in North America, had already cast his eyes south. Howe was in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where he decided to camp his army while waiting for reinforcements from England. Lord George Germain, the British Secretary for Colonial Affairs, expected Howe to occupy New York, which Germain viewed as a key

to North America.¹⁸⁶ Howe also wanted to occupy New York, but would not move until he received more men, more naval support, and tried one last time to open negotiations with the Colonials. However, he also realized any prolonged period of inactivity would send the wrong signals to both the rebellious Americans and to London. Howe had strong misgivings about detaching any part of his relatively small force of 7,000 Redcoats and also believed the intelligence coming from the south was dubious at best. Despite his doubts, he authorized Lieutenant General Sir Henry Clinton to take five battalions and sail to Virginia to discover the extent of royal support in that colony and the remainder of the southern provinces.¹⁸⁷

Much of the news coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina was the product of the royal governors of those provinces, John Murray, Lord Dunmore in Virginia, Josiah Martin in North Carolina and Sir William Campbell in South Carolina. The governors had sent numerous reports to Germain as well as Howe, claiming Loyalist sentiment ran so high they believed they could organize upwards of 10,000 armed men to help stamp out the rebellion. Slavery figured prominently for the three governors not only in their approach to dealing with the insurrection but in how they attempted to execute their plans.¹⁸⁸ South Carolina Gov. Campbell, received a rather brutal introduction to the importance of the institution to both sides when he arrived to take office on June 29, 1775.¹⁸⁹ Campbell's arrival coincided with the expansion of authority of the patriot-led Committee of Public Safety, which had all but supplanted royal authority in the colony. The Patriots had already embraced the idea that loyalty to England would not only mean an end to slavery, but a Crown-led slave insurrection. The rumors swirled all around Charleston and the rest of the south that England planned to arm the slaves and lead them against their owners. On May 3, 1775, the *South Carolina Gazette* ran a letter from Arthur Lee, a Virginian then in London, in which Lee claimed "it had been proposed to [the] Ministry to grant freedom to such Slaves as should desert their Masters and join the King's troops."¹⁹⁰ Three weeks later, the *Gazette* printed an extract from a letter from an anonymous American then in London, who claimed, "there is gone down to Sheerness, seventy-eight thousand guns and bayonets, to be sent to America, to put into the hands of n*****s [negroes], the roman Catholics, the Indians and Canadians; and all the . . . Means on earth used to subdue the colonies."¹⁹¹ The *Gazette* did not print the word "negroes" in hopes of preventing the news of the rumor from reaching the slaves on the rice plantations and throughout the city.¹⁹²

Campbell was in a no-win situation. He had to



Sir William Campbell, the Royal Governor of South Carolina at the start of the Revolutionary War.

Courtesy Library of Congress

reassert royal authority over a province that believed those efforts would undermine the social fabric of the colony. The Royal governor also had to somehow gainsay the rumors he planned to use the black population against its white owners. “It was . . . reported and universally believed that to effect [a slave insurrection] . . . 14,000 stands of arms were actually on board the *Scorpion*, the sloop of war I came out in,” he wrote to Lord Germain. “Words . . . cannot express the flame that this occasioned amongst all ranks and degrees; the cruelty and savage barbarity of the scheme was the conversation of all companies.”¹⁹³ Campbell’s solution was to turn to what he believed was a large Loyalist population. There were numerous slave owners among the Loyalists who answered the governor’s call. However, Campbell concentrated his efforts on the mostly non-slave owning Scottish immigrant groups in the western part of the state. Those efforts only reinforced the notion among slave-owning Low Country patriots that England planned to abolish slavery and turn the slaves against their owners.¹⁹⁴

Campbell was not alone in trying to pit what he thought was a sizeable Loyalist community against a burgeoning Patriot population. North Carolina Gov. Martin and most of all, Lord Dunmore in Virginia, were convinced the loyal subjects of their colonies could easily quell any patriot groups that sought to

emulate the Minute Men of Boston. Dunmore was so sure he could squash any breakaway sentiments that he reported to the Colonial Office that with the aid of a few regular army troops, he could easily raise 200 to 300 fighting men who would all but wipe out the patriots. Martin reported he could raise up to 20,000 Loyalist among the Scottish immigrant populations of North and South Carolina and Georgia and would ensure the security of the southern provinces for the king. Their reports throughout the summer of 1775 led George III to push Howe to mount an expedition south.¹⁹⁵

For Samuel and other slaves on the Ball plantations, the outbreak of hostilities had one almost immediate impact on their lives. South Carolina continued to export huge amounts of rice, not just to England but the West Indies and other colonies in North America, including Quebec.¹⁹⁶ The closure of English ports to American shipments did little to curtail rice farming as Spain, quietly at first, opened its ports to South Carolina and the rest of the rebellious colonies. The upshot was, as the price of and demand for rice grew, so too did the demands on slaves to cultivate more acres and harvest larger crops.¹⁹⁷ The increased work load coincided with a massive crackdown on the small degree of autonomy slaves enjoyed. New laws and restrictions curtailed their movement, even between plantations of the same owner, including the Ball family. Patriot militia prowled the roads, looking for any slaves who might be away from their fields. Plantation owners, such as Elias the Third, and other Ball children, listened intently for any talk of escape or insurrection and instituted Draconian punishment on any slave who disobeyed.¹⁹⁸ Boston King, the Tranquil Hill slave who would escape in 1780, in his *Memoirs*, said the Ball family meted out harsh punishments for even the smallest offense, real or imagined. When a bag of nails went missing, the Kensington plantation manager “being of very violent temper, accused me to the master with stealing of them. For this offense I was beat and tortured most cruelly, and was laid up three weeks before I was able to do any work.”¹⁹⁹

The harsher treatment made what was already a horrific life even worse. Now denied even the ability to visit family members on different plantations, the slaves actually began to act in the manner their owners tried to prevent. In the course of a trial of a free black man named Thomas Jeremiah, a slave who testified against Jeremiah claimed he heard the accused, “Say that the old King had rec[eive]d a Book from our Lord by which he was to Alter the World (meaning to set the Negroes free) but for his not doing so, was now gone to Hell, & in Punishm[en]t-That the Young King, meaning our Present One, came up with the Book, & was about to alter the World, & set the Negroes Free.”²⁰⁰ It was not the only instance, real or imagined, of the slaves looking to England and the troubles between the Crown and the colonies as means of winning their freedom. Night meetings and whisper



A pair of contemporary depictions of the “Royal Ethiopian Regiment” Lord Dunmore raised in 1775. Above, a soldier in a hunting short with “Liberty to Slaves” emblazoned on it and right, a soldier in a discarded uniform on the 14th Regiment of Foot, which records show Dunmore gave to his Black troops.

campaigns were rife on plantations throughout the Low Country, including the Ball family holdings.²⁰¹

White plantation owners took great pains to prevent any news from reaching their slaves, but in almost every instance, those efforts ended in failure. As early as 1702, South Carolina slaves were well aware of the opinion of the English Solicitor General, who in a ruling concerning the slave trade, said, “that as soon as a Negro comes into England he becomes free.”²⁰² Throughout the early and mid-18th century, slaves



found any number of methods of getting and passing along information, which helped not only in escape attempts but in the few uprisings that did actually take place. By the time the war between the colonies and Great Britain began, whites were doing everything they could to limit any knowledge of the hostilities among the slaves. The *South Carolina Gazette*, in its story on the alleged plot to arm slaves, censored the word “Negroes” to prevent news of the believed shipment from reaching the plantations. Still, the slaves

often received news faster than the white-run newspapers or political committees, a fact that often bewildered their owners. The slaves, however, had their own version of a 24-hour news network. Benjamin Russell, a slave in Berkeley County, S.C., described the information chain. "How did we get news? Many plantations were strict about this, but the greater the precaution the alerter became the slaves, the wider they opened their ears and the more eager they became for outside information. The sources were girls that waited on the tables, the ladies' maids and the drivers; they would pick up everything they heard and pass it on to other slaves."²⁰³

The rosy picture the royal governors of Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina painted in the spring of 1775 had all but evaporated by the end of the summer. It was an illusion that Campbell, Martin and most of Lord Dunmore clung to despite all evidence to the contrary. After claiming they could raise enough Loyalists to cow the Patriots in their colonies, Martin and Lord Dunmore in Virginia made good on their promises and called for volunteers to serve the King.²⁰⁴ In South Carolina, Lord William Campbell also asked for volunteers, but he soon found his authority barely extended past the walls of his royal residence. Days after he arrived in Charleston, Campbell found Patriot militia patrolling the streets and in control of the arms and powder in the city arsenal. Campbell reported to London that although he "took possession of the government in the usual manner," he soon found "the powers of government . . . [had been] wrested out of . . . [his] hands."²⁰⁵

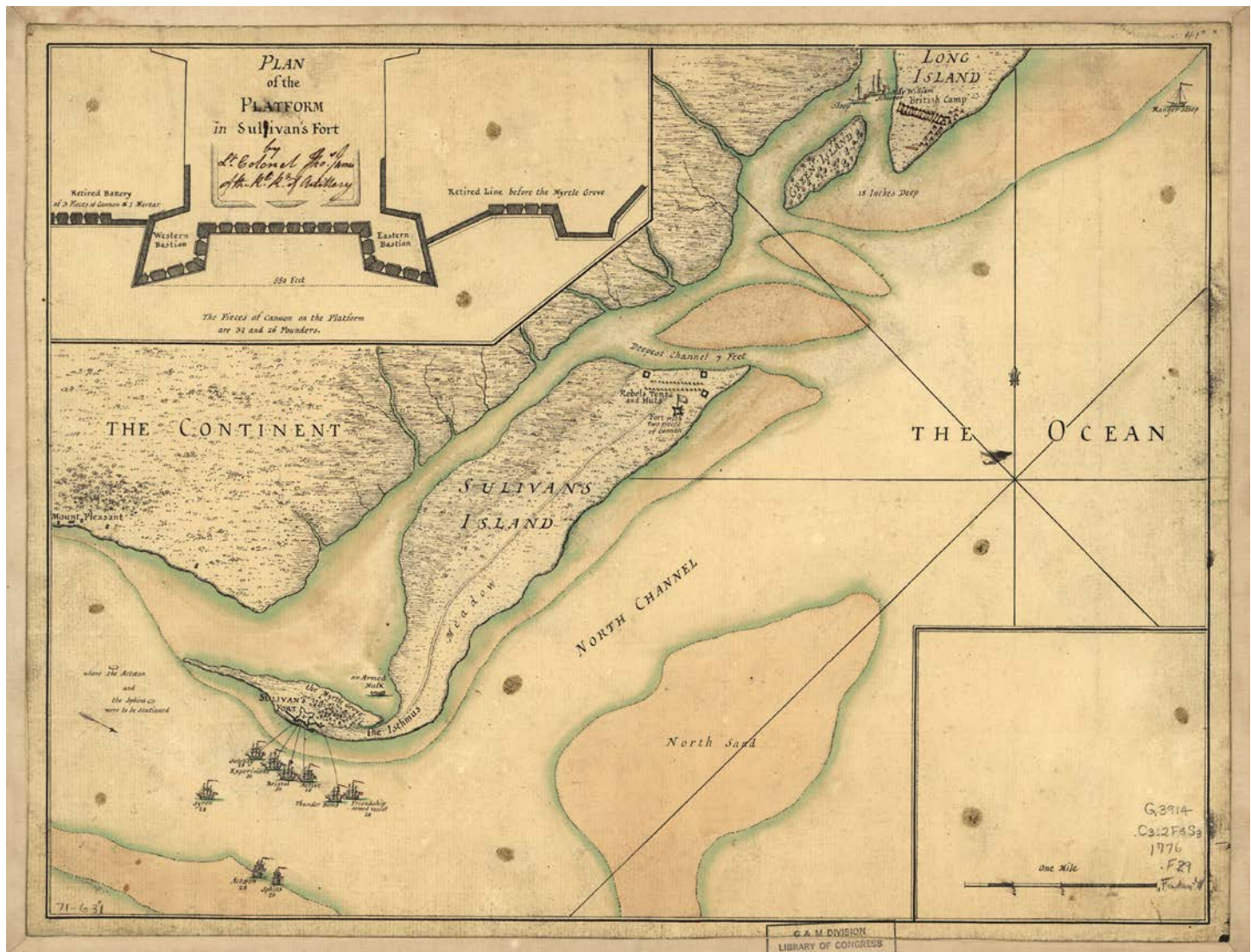
By the end of the summer, all three royal governors would be in exile, seeking safety on board Royal Navy warships. Of the three, only Lord Dunmore continued to actively campaign in his colony. Dunmore fled from Williamsburg on June 5, 1775 for the safety of HMS *Fowey*, then in the Chesapeake Bay. He launched a series of raids in the Tidewater region of Virginia and stoked the fires of slave rebellion as he openly called on Virginia's slave population to join his force of Loyalists. Dunmore's raids caused economic pain but little more as the Patriots soundly defeated the Loyalists in several large skirmishes.²⁰⁶ Of far more consternation was the effect Dunmore had among slaves. On November 7, 1775, Dunmore issued a proclamation that confirmed all of the rumors of the spring and summer. The royal governor offered freedom to any slaves who would take up arms in support of the King. The words in the proclamation hit slave owners throughout the South like a thunderclap: "I do hereby further declare all indent[ur]ed Servants, Negroes, or others, (appertaining to Rebels), free, that are able and willing to bear Arms, they joining the King's troops."²⁰⁷

The immediate effect of Dunmore's proclamation was to incite a race war in Virginia. By the start of 1776, nearly five hundred slaves had flocked to the

British standard, although how many were actually of fighting age and willing to bear arms remains questionable.²⁰⁸ Dunmore organized a small battalion of former slaves, whom he officially freed, armed and equipped, and issued them with uniforms that had buttons emblazoned with "Liberty to Slaves." The new soldiers, members of what Dunmore called the Royal Ethiopian Regiment, were ecstatic.²⁰⁹ Their white opponents were livid. On December 14, 1775, the Virginia Assembly adopted a resolution declaring, "It is enacted, that all negro or other slaves, conspiring to rebel or make insurrection, shall suffer death, and be excluded all benefit of clergy: We think it proper to declare, that all slaves who have been, or shall be seduced, by his lordship's proclamation, or other arts, to desert their masters' service, and take up arms against the inhabitants of this colony, shall be liable to such punishment."²¹⁰ Patriot militias summarily executed any blacks they found away from their plantations, while the white population decried what it saw as an attack on the very fabric of their society. In the skirmishes that followed the creation of the Royal Ethiopians, white Loyalists received proper treatment or burial while the Patriots often left dead or wounded black soldiers on the field, bereft of any aid.²¹¹

Dunmore's experiment with black troops came to an ignominious end on December 9, 1775 when the royal governor threw his half-trained Ethiopians at an entrenched force of about 300 Continentals of the 3rd Virginia Regiment. The Ethiopians lost a handful of men killed and wounded, and most of their unit cohesion as they fled from the battlefield. The defeat forced Dunmore to once more take refuge on board Royal Navy warships off Norfolk, and he took with him about 300 escaped slaves.²¹² Despite the setback, the proclamation and use of black troops had an electric effect on slaves throughout the South, especially in South Carolina, where whites were "struck with horror" when they heard of Dunmore's proclamation.²¹³ Charleston newspaper editors refused to publish stories about Dunmore's proclamation or his black soldiers, hoping to prevent the news from reaching the slaves. Once more, it was a fruitless venture as "Negroes have a wonderfully art of communicating Intelligence among themselves," Archibald Bullcock and John Houston told John Adams. Using their network of informants, the two Low Country planters said slaves were able to get and disseminate news that could "run severall hundreds of Miles in a week or a Fortnight."²¹⁴

By mid-November 1775, South Carolina Governor William Campbell was on board HMS *Cherokee*, his only place of refuge in the colony he was supposed to control. Word of Dunmore's proclamation ran through the Low Country plantations, where despite little Loyalist activity, the slave population became restive and looked to the British to end their bondage.²¹⁵ Although Campbell had little to no authority



“A plan of the attack of Fort Sullivan, near Charles Town in South Carolina by a squadron of His Majesty’s ships on the 28th day of June 1776, with the disposition of the King’s land forces and the encampments and entrenchments of the rebels, from the drawings made on the spot,” from a 1776 engraving by William Faden.

Courtesy Library of Congress

outside of his ship, the presence of the British flotilla was a clarion call to the slaves. Campbell and the *Cherokee* anchored off Sullivan’s Island, a sandy spit of land that controlled access the Charleston harbor. The sight of the British man o’ war riding at anchor began attracting runaway slaves to the island, at first in ones or twos, then by the dozens. By December, nearly 500 slaves had fled to Sullivan’s Island, believing the guns of the little British flotilla would protect and ultimately set them free.²¹⁶ At least 30 of the slaves had run off from Ball family estates.²¹⁷ The escapees began building huts on the island as they awaited their deliverance, but it was a forlorn hope. On December 9, 1775, Colonel William Moultrie, commander of the 2nd South Carolina infantry regiment, ordered two companies of soldiers “to surprise, seize, and apprehend a number of negroes who are said to have gone over to the enemy.” The South Carolinians overran the make-

shift camp, and forcibly returned the runaways to their masters.²¹⁸

Meanwhile, British general Clinton was making his way down the coast with five battalions with orders to aid Dunmore or the other royal governors in their efforts to pacify their colonies. At the same time, a force of seven regiments under Major General Sir Charles Cornwallis was outfitting in Ireland for service in the south. Cornwallis was to sail as part of a large squadron under Admiral Sir Peter Parker. News of Cornwallis reached North America almost as soon as the British general began recruiting. Arthur Lee, the American merchant in London, wrote February 13, 1776 to Cadwallader Colton, who lived in New York, “Lord Cornwallis, with six regiments (sic), to sail immediately from *Cork* for *Virginia*, where General Clinton is to take the command. They have certain assurances of being joined by the *Scotch* in *Vir-*

ginia, and those on the borders of *North-Carolina*. (Emphasis in letter)²¹⁹ Once more, plantation and slave owners tried to suppress the news, and once more they failed. Although Cornwallis did not arrive off the American coast until mid-April, those in bondage in South Carolina were already anticipating the British arrival. Slaves in Charleston soon spread rumors to those on the plantations the British would set free all the blacks in the province.²²⁰ To combat those rumors and crush any thoughts of insurrection, the South Carolina General Assembly, on April 11, 1776, passed a law prescribing the death penalty for anyone who helped slaves escape from their masters (or mistresses) and forbade large assemblies of slaves for any reason, including church services. Although the politicians claimed the new law was a measure, “to Prevent Sedition, and Punish Insurgents and disturbers of the Public Peace,” the real aim was to further increase white control over an increasingly restive black population.²²¹

For both sides, their hopes and fears hinged on when and where the British decided to strike. Clinton had orders to link up with Lord Dunmore in Virginia, and, based on the best possible circumstances, to operate in support of either Dunmore, Martin in North Carolina or Campbell in South Carolina. After a brief stop in New York, Clinton sailed for Norfolk, where he met Dunmore on February 13, 1776,²²² and seeing the Virginia royal governor did not need his help²²³, he sailed for Cape Fear, N.C. The plan was for Clinton’s five battalions to meet Admiral Sir Peter Parker and a flotilla of frigates as well as the transports carrying Cornwallis and his seven regiments from Ireland. Clinton arrived off the North Carolina coast on March 12, 1776, where he found Martin and Campbell waiting for him and where the British plan began to unravel.²²⁴

The first problem was Cornwallis and his force had nothing but problems in assembling and setting out from Cork. Cornwallis was supposed to leave on December 1, 1775. He did not set sail with Admiral Sir Peter Parker until February 10, 1776. On March 7, 1776, Cornwallis wrote to Lord Germain, complaining “our voyage hitherto has been largely unsuccessful ... I fear there is no chance of our arrival on the American coast before the end of next month at soonest, and the assembly of the fleet off Cape Fear, where there is no port, may be a work of some time.”²²⁵ On April 18, Cornwallis again wrote Germain, telling the Secretary for War the transports were still at sea and continued to endure “a very tedious” passage. Cornwallis did not actually arrive off Cape Fear until May 3, and it wasn’t until May 16 that the entire British force managed to assemble.²²⁶

Nothing in Cornwallis’ three letters to Germain mention South Carolina, slaves, rice, the Ball family or anything even remotely connected to the life of Samuel Ball. However, all three letters play an import-

ant role in unraveling some of the mystery surrounding one of the principal characters in the saga of Oak Island. Cornwallis’ letters make it very clear that it was utterly impossible for Samuel to run off and join the British army before sometime in June of 1776. The most widely accepted biographies of Samuel claim he escaped from Hyde Park (the biographies never name his home plantation) in November, 1775 as one biographer states, “as the troops in South Carolina were under the command of Lord Cornwallis.”²²⁷ Clearly, as Cornwallis did not reach the American coast until May 3, 1776, this is wrong for two primary reasons. Ball family records do record his escape – in 1780. It is the same year in which he first appears in British army records, meaning he was still at Hyde Park during the first attack on Charleston. The belief of a later connection between the Cornwallis and Samuel is also erroneous, based on a misreading of Samuel’s letter to Prevost.

Samuel, in his petition to Governor Prevost, makes clear the time frame in which he served was four years after Clinton’s 1776 southern campaign. He wrote Prevost he “joined the King’s troops, in that part of the country [South Carolina], then under command of Lord Cornwallis, and soon after came to New York with General Clinton...”²²⁸ Although Clinton and Cornwallis led the 1776 attack on Charleston, they were operating under orders of Sir William Howe, a fact the slaves, with their vast information network, almost certainly knew. Moreover, New York was not in British hands in July, 1776, when Clinton brought his small army north. New York did not fall until September, 1776, and Cornwallis was a principal land commander in the campaign. Ball’s inclusion of Cornwallis in his petition has led to the mistaken belief he was a personal servant to that general. However, muster rolls and the fact Samuel went to New York and was nowhere near Yorktown, Virginia in 1781 gainsays that theory. In short, Samuel escaped from Hyde Park and enlisted in the only Black Provincial unit in the British army in June, 1780, not 1776.²²⁹ Samuel would remain a slave for four more long years before he would finally have the opportunity to make good his escape, along with dozens of other Ball family slaves.²³⁰

The British attempt to capture Charleston and create a Loyalist-controlled South ended in abject failure. The attack on the city was a dismal reverse for the British. Coordination between Clinton and Parker was negligible, with each blaming the other for the failure to subdue Fort Johnson, later renamed Fort Moultrie, which guarded the approach to Charleston. Clinton claimed he could not launch an amphibious attack on the rebel fort as he lacked boats and could not cross a creek that separated the British lines from the Continentals because the water was too deep.²³¹ The attack of June 28, 1776, was a purely naval affair, with the Royal Navy backing off after receiving a very bloody nose. Parker was unable to bring his frigates to

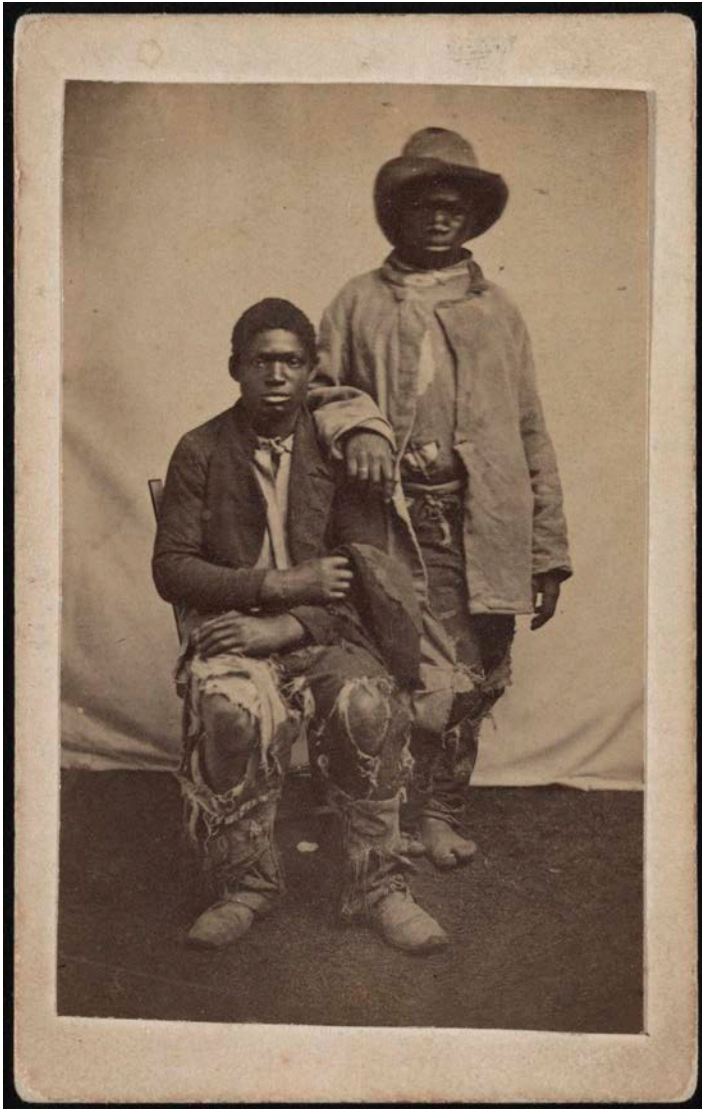
bear on the fort as they drew too much water to approach Sullivan's Island, on which the fort rested. The British ships also were unable to make much of impact on the palmetto-and-sand fortification, which simply absorbed cannon shot.²³² Parker blamed Clinton's lack of initiative for the failure to take the fort, and the two commanders began a feud that would last for both of their lives.²³³

The idea of thousands of Loyalists suddenly taking up arms and kicking out the rebels was an even bigger failure. North Carolina Governor Josiah Martin's force suffered a major defeat at Moore's Creek Bridge, while South Carolina Governor William Campbell's Loyalist allies met disaster in the backwoods of South Carolina. The two setbacks meant there would be no Loyalist army waiting to join forces with the British regulars and it also meant both North Carolina and South Carolina were firmly in the hands of the rebels.²³⁴ It was a bitter reverse for Clinton, especially since Campbell, as late as February 13, had assured the British general he had "taken every measure in my power to exhort and prepare the King's

Loyal Subjects within this Province to join the troops now in expectation immediately on their arrival."²³⁵

Although the campaign failed militarily, it had a dramatic effect on both the white and black populations of South Carolina. White residents, fearing both the British and their slaves, began a mass exodus from Charleston to the countryside, braving the threat of disease rather than facing the prospect of battling Redcoats or their bonded laborers. Slaves, on the other hand, rejoiced at the idea their deliverance could be just one British patrol away. On plantations throughout the Low Country, overseers and owners alike reported an increase in insubordination and outright defiance among the slave population. Ralph Izard, owner of a plantation that abutted some of the Ball family estates, claimed his slaves were in "utmost distraction" on the arrival of the British. Another slave owner wrote to a friend in Philadelphia, "The flame [of emancipation] runs like wild fire through the slaves... The subject of their nocturnal revels, instead of music and dancing, is now turned upon their liberty. I know not whence these troubles may lead us."²³⁶

Ten: Bold freedom's hand



An 1862 photo of a pair of runaway slaves that reached Union lines near Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

Courtesy Library of Congress

No matter how hot the “flame of emancipation” burned among the slaves of South Carolina, without British soldiers to fan those flames, freedom remained a pipe dream. The failure of the 1776 campaign against Charleston brought four years of relative peace to the region. Patriot and Loyalist militias still clashed, but for the most part, South Carolina settled into a period of military inactivity.²³⁷ The demand for rice, indigo (which both sides used as dye), and especially wood products, from rails to fuel, kept the plantation owners flush and their slaves hard at work. The frantic reactions to the British invasion among plantation owners gave way to a wary watchfulness, although fears of a slave revolt continued to reverberate throughout South Carolina. The Lord Dunmore proclamation and the clashes between the Virginia

governor's black soldiers and Patriot militia remained fresh in the minds of many whites, as did the rampant fear of the previous year. The fears, old and new, pushed many who had believed the colonies could reconcile with their mother country to embrace the radical idea of independence, which firebrand orators such as William Drayton and Henry Laurens claimed was the only way to preserve the institution of slavery.²³⁸ This, in turn, led to still more efforts to restrict the movement and lives of the slaves.²³⁹

For more than three years, the war remained a northern problem. Following his defeat at Charleston, Clinton sailed north where he joined forces with William Howe in August, 1776, for the attack on New York. The city fell on September 16, 1776, and the British soon controlled most of New Jersey. The new year brought with it an attempt to sever New England from the rest of the colonies. Major General Sir John Burgoyne set out from Canada with an army of British and Hessian regulars, as well as Loyalist units and Native Americans. He pushed down the Hudson River Valley, forcing the scattered Continental Army units and militia to retreat toward Albany, New York. Howe, meanwhile, campaigned mostly in New Jersey throughout 1777 and also consolidated his hold on Rhode Island. However, rather than pushing out of New York City and up the Hudson to join forces with Burgoyne, Howe spent the summer trying to lure George Washington into an open battle, something the wily American commander avoided time and again. In September, Howe, again to force a climatic battle with Washington, moved south and struck at Philadelphia. The campaign culminated in the battles of Brandywine and Germantown and the British capture of Philadelphia, but failed to destroy the Continental Army.²⁴⁰ Howe remained in Philadelphia, inactive, throughout the winter, turning his army into mere spectators. His inactivity would cost him his command.

The British army marched out of Philadelphia on June 18, 1778, heading for New York and an almost entirely different prosecution of a war that was now in its third year. The situation in North America had undergone a radical change from the time Howe had captured Philadelphia. Howe himself was gone – recalled to England. Sir Henry Clinton replaced him, and initiated a new strategy, one circumstances had forced on him. The British plan to cut New York and New England off from the rest of the rebellious colonies had ended in complete failure in October, 1777, with the surrender of Major General John Burgoyne at Saratoga, New York. Howe's decision to move on Philadelphia instead of driving north to meet Burgoyne was one of the reasons many in England clamored for Howe's removal. Clinton, commanding the remaining British troops in New York, attempted to



Sir William Howe, British commander in chief in North America from 1776 to 1778.

Courtesy Library of Congress

drive up the Hudson from the city, but did not have enough troops to both maintain a garrison and reach Burgoyne.²⁴¹

The stunning Colonial victory at Saratoga fundamentally changed the war as France officially recognized the fledgling United States and joined the fight against England. At the same time, Spain, which had clandestinely supplied the rebels with money, weapons, uniforms, and equipment, began to take a much more open role in supporting the Continentals. With the entry of England's chief rivals, what had been a localized rebellion morphed into global conflict that would rage from the Pacific to India to the Caribbean as well as North America.²⁴² Clinton somewhat reluctantly arrived in Philadelphia in April, 1778, to take command. "The great change which public affairs had undergone in Europe as well as America, within the last six months had so clouded every prospect of a successful issue to the unfortunate contest we were engaged in that no officer who had the least anxious regard for his professional fame would court a charge so hopeless as this now appeared likely to be."²⁴³ The British commander now had the responsibility of defending territories stretching from Florida to Nova Scotia and saw a steady drain on his resources as he attempted to execute his orders.²⁴⁴

Clinton decided to march his army back to New York rather than use transports, and he led his Redcoats, Hessians and a large train of Loyalists through New Jersey. On June 28, 1778, Washington struck Clinton at a small crossroads called Monmouth Court House. The two armies blasted away at one another, as the Continentals displayed a new-found discipline and ability with the bayonet that surprised Clinton and Cornwallis, who commanded the British in the battle. The American aim was to take the British baggage train, which numbered nearly 1,500

wagons and was under the command of Lieutenant General Wilhelm von Knyphausen, a Hessian general. Clinton quickly shifted his forces, moving Cornwallis into a position where he could strike back at Washington while allowing the wagons and rear elements to continue the march north. The battle raged on a stifling hot day, and was tactically inconclusive. Both sides claimed victory, with the British saying they had successfully repulsed the American attack without loss of their baggage train, while the Americans viewed the battle as a victory as they held the field and repelled every British counterattack.²⁴⁵

The Battle of Monmouth convinced Clinton he could not defeat the numerically superior Continentals and forced him to begin to look elsewhere for a path to victory. He decided the path lay in the south.²⁴⁶ The British army also began to undergo a change, both in makeup and strategy as Clinton began to rely more on Provincial troops. It was a stormy relationship at times as the new Loyalists who came into British service were often far better at demanding resources from an already strained supply chain than they were in contributing to the King's war effort. Inspector General Innes reported, "Several persons to whom warrants had been granted to raise Corps had greatly abused the confidence that had been placed in them by offering warrants to every improper person as inferior officers, the consequence of which was that numberless abuses had taken place and among many others Negroes, Indians, Mulattos, Sailors and Rebel Prisoners were enlisted to the disgrace and ruin of the Provincial Service." Innes was not alone in his displeasure at the changing nature of the Provincial Corps. Clinton also wrote of the mixture of his feelings of responsibility and revulsions toward the larger and larger groups of Loyalists that arrived almost daily in New York.

[N]othing distressed me more that the number of refugees who came from all quarters to seek protection within the British lines. Many of these unfortunate people had been reduced from very affluent circumstances to the most abject penury by their attachment to Great Britain. Both humanity and sound policy, therefore required that at least some temporary provisions for their support ... [A]t the same time with a view of adding to our strength by employing such of them as were desirous and capable of bearing arms, I ... endeavored to increase the provincial line by every encouragement I could devise. But, although gentlemen of the first influence among them had been placed by Sir William Howe and myself at the head of regiments and brigades, they had met with so little success in raising their respective quotas that many of the battalions were nearly as strong in officers as in privates.²⁴⁷

Although officers such as Innes disapproved of using black soldiers, Clinton, if not an ardent supporter was at least an advocate for recruiting black non-combatants to aid the British war effort. The British commander in chief was well aware his opponents were not only considering the large-scale use of Black troops,²⁴⁸ but had at least one unit, the 1st Rhode Island, that had proved itself in combat during the 1778 British campaign at Newport.²⁴⁹ Whether it was the fighting prowess of the mostly black 1st Rhode Island, the plan John Laurens floated for raising a brigade of 5,000 slaves that could earn their freedom on the battlefield, or the chronic manpower shortage the British faced, in 1779, Clinton decided to authorize the wider employment of Black Loyalists, this time as combat soldiers. On June 30, from his headquarters in Phillipsburg, New York, Clinton decreed:

Whereas the Rebels have adopted a practice of [enslaving??] Negroes among their troops, I do hereby give notice that all Negroes taken in arms or upon any military duty, shall be purchased for the public Service, the money to be paid to the captors.

But I do most strictly forbid any person to sell or claim right over any Negro the property of a Rebel who may take refuge with any part of this army; And I do promise to bring every Negro who shall depart the Rebel standard, full security to follow within these lines any occupation which he may think proper.

The proclamation, however, was not the sweeping document some slaves believed it was. Clinton's orders applied only to slaves who were working for the rebel army or on rebel-owned estates and plantations, and then only to those slaves that ran off. He made clear any slaves caught fighting for the rebels would remain as slaves, this time to the British army. Clinton also sidestepped the issue of slaves that belonged to Loyalists. The commander in chief did not want to risk alienating Loyalists slave owners, especially those in the South, and although he was a tacit abolitionist, he had no intention of causing a rupture with the very community on which he was depending for new manpower.²⁵⁰ The Phillipsburg Proclamation coincided with Clinton's decision to again shift the war to the southern colonies. British forces under Lieutenant Colonel Archibald Campbell had captured Savannah, Georgia on December 28, 1778. Clinton planned to expand that hold over the south, for two militarily sound reasons. The first was to prevent Spain from sweeping out of its territories in Louisiana into the southern colonies. Georgia and British West Florida, headquartered in Pensacola, were the frontline in the border war with Spanish forces. Spanish Govern-



Sir Henry Clinton, who commanded the failed 1776 attempt to take Charleston, S.C., and after March, 1778, was commander in chief of British forces in North America.

Courtesy of Library of Congress

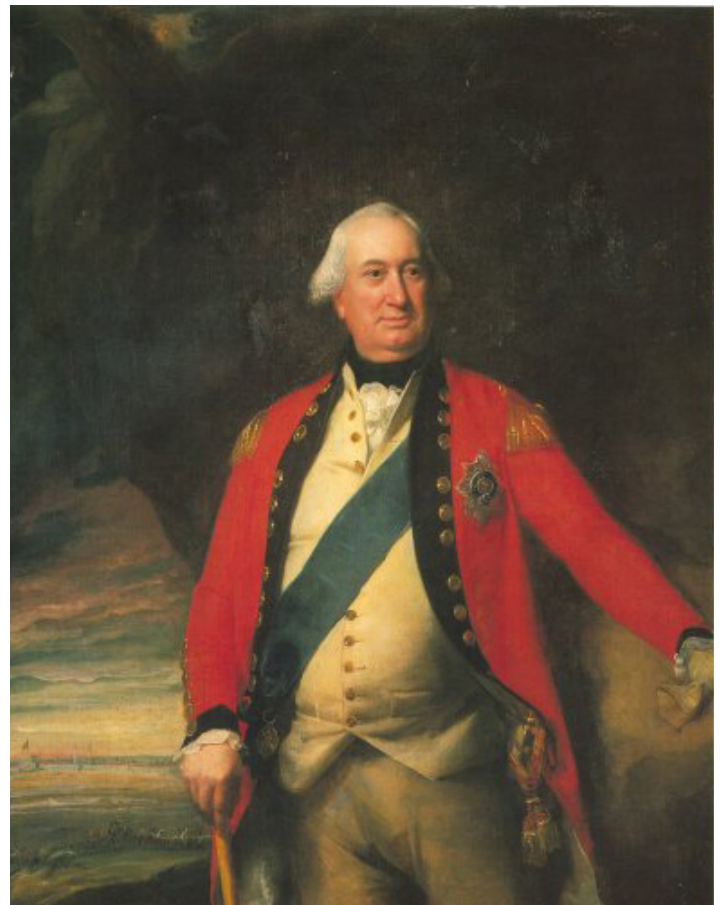
nor Don Bernardo de Galvez wanted to retake Pensacola, which Spain lost in 1762. British Florida represented a dagger the English could thrust at Spain's still-rich holdings in Mexico and Cuba. The second was Loyalists had again convinced Lord Germain and King George III that royal sentiment was again at a fever pitch in North and South Carolina and Georgia, and the Crown could meet its manpower goals in those provinces.²⁵¹

The Spanish posed by far the most imminent threat to British power in North America. Spain had supported the fledgling United States since hostilities first opened in April, 1775, sending money, supplies, weapons, and equipment from New Orleans up the Mississippi River, then the Ohio River to Pittsburgh, where the aid went overland to either Philadelphia or Washington's main headquarters outside of New York. Spanish artillery, muskets, and ammunition were instrumental in the Continental victory over John Burgoyne in the Saratoga campaign in 1777, while the bulk of the field artillery Washington had in use in his main army was also Spanish.²⁵² Soon after declaring war on England, Spanish forces (which included a bat-

talion of black troops raised in New Orleans), began pushing the British out of the Mississippi Valley and launched incursions into British West Florida. Spain also financed George Rogers Clark in his Ohio campaign in 1779 that seized large parts of present-day Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan. For Clinton and King George III, a strong expedition in the southern colonies would act as a deterrent to any further Spanish expansion and would continue to threaten Spanish possessions in the Caribbean.²⁵³

Clinton sailed from New York on December 26, 1779 and on February 11, 1780, landed thirty miles south of Charleston with 7,600 soldiers. The British commander, for some reason, frittered away nearly eight weeks before he finally moved on the city. On March 31, the British began digging siege trenches around Charleston, bottling up the 4,500 defenders. Slaves soon flooded the British lines, among them Boston King and 51 other slaves from Ball family plantations. Unlike 1776, however, not all slaves were welcome or would find their freedom among the Redcoats. Loyalists slave owners were quick to not only profess their allegiance to the king but to claim their property, no matter how dubious their loyalty. Elias Ball III, once a rebel militia officer, had switched side in the weeks since the British opened the siege and now was a company commander in a Loyalist unit his uncle, “Wambaw” Elias, commanded. Elias III petitioned the British for the return of his slaves and the British complied, sending 48 of them back into bondage.²⁵⁴ The number of slaves running off plantations, both Loyalist and Patriot, so alarmed Clinton the escapes could push borderline Loyalists into the rebel hands, he considered leaving many of them in South Carolina. He wrote to Lord Cornwallis, “As to Negroes, I will leave such orders as I hope will prevent the confusion that would arise from a further desertion of them to us, and I will consider of some scheme for placing those we have on abandoned plantations, on which they may subsist. In the mean time, your Lordship may make such arrangements as will discourage their joining us.”²⁵⁵

There is little chance Samuel knew there was a possibility the British would turn him away if he reached their lines in a bid for freedom. He and dozens of other slaves on Ball plantations simply waited and watched for their opportunity to escape their bondage. Others, such as Boston King, chose not to wait for the British to come to them and instead, went to the British, John Ball, the brother of Elias III, was now keeping the family books and, from early May, 1780, every day entered the names of slaves that escaped. It started off singly but soon, whole families and large groups were bolting to the British.²⁵⁶ The rise in runaways coincided with the arrival of Charles Cornwallis and an expeditionary force Clinton sent up the Cooper River to cut off food shipments to Charleston, which the British were besieging.²⁵⁷ Cornwallis established



Lord Charles Cornwallis, who commanded part of the British army that besieged and captured Charleston in 1780 and would command the British army in the southern campaign until his surrender in October, 1781, at Yorktown, Virginia.

Courtesy Library of Congress

his headquarters roughly a half-hour ride on horseback from Comingtee Plantation, and slaves on just about every Ball family estate could see the flotilla of British warships riding at anchor, tantalizingly close to their lands. On May 7, John Ball recorded, “Toby [from Kensington Plantation] gone to the enemy camp & Hype Park Abraham.” On May 9, it was “Phoebe & her daughter Cloe.” Charlotte, Bessy and three children, Roebuck, January, and Betty, ran off on May 10. Between April 27 and 28, fifteen slaves escaped. The numbers continued to rise as Cornwallis pushed into the interior and British troops marched through Ball lands.

Hollywood and popular fiction tend to portray slave escapes as elaborate affairs with long weeks or months of plotting capped off with hair-raising night-time runs through miles of white-patrolled areas before the slave finally finds succor. Slave narratives certainly contain escape stories such as those. However, most escapes appear to have been spur-of-the-moment, seize-the-opportunity dashes. Charles Ball, the Maryland-born slave, escaped three times from vari-

ous plantations in South Carolina, one a rice plantation and the other two cotton. In each case, Ball admits to dreaming of escaping, but never actually plotted to do so. Instead, he grabbed the opportunity when it appeared.²⁵⁸ Boston King ran off when he believed his overseer, “a very bad man, and knew not how to shew mercy” would punish him for a slight offense. “To escape his cruelty, I determined to go Charles Town, and throw myself into the hands of the English. They received me readily, and I began to feel the happiness, liberty, of which I knew nothing before, altho’ I was grieved at first, to be obliged to leave my friends, and among strangers.”²⁵⁹

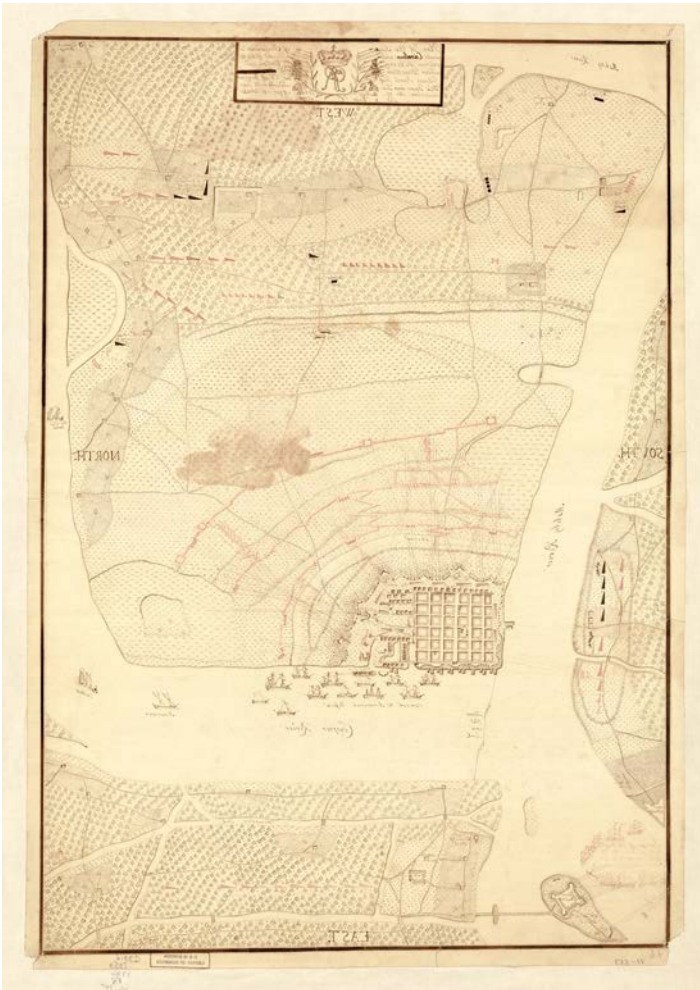
The notion of freedom was never far from the mind of any slave. Boston King said he had dreams of freedom as early as 12 years old, dreams he ascribed to Divine Providence.²⁶⁰ Olaudah Equiano, the West African who would adopt the European name “Gustavus Vassa,” in his autobiography, said plans of escape and freedom were nearly constant. “I therefore determined to seize the first opportunity of making my escape,” he wrote. When his circumstances frustrated his efforts, Equiano never lost sight of his ultimate goal and continued “hoping that by some means or other I should make my escape...”²⁶¹ Charles Ball, the Maryland-born slave who was sold to a rice plantation owner in South Carolina, vividly recalled in his autobiography, “Time did not reconcile me to my chains, hut it made me familiar with them. I reflected on my desperate situation with a degree of calmness, hoping that I might be able to devise some means of escape.”²⁶² Just how or when Samuel Ball first decided to attempt to escape from bondage remains unknown. Samuel left no written record of his life in South Carolina beyond a few descriptive sentences in two letters he wrote decades after he won his freedom. If

the narratives of other slaves who also escaped bondage are an indicator, Samuel likely entertained notions of escape in 1776 when the British launched their first attack on Charleston. The four-year interval between attacks probably magnified those ideas, so when Clinton returned in 1780, Samuel was ready to shed his slave name and, more important, break free from the yoke of slavery.

Samuel never wrote down his specific reasons for running off from Hyde Park. He went alone. Neither Ball family nor British records record either his mother, Coomba Laurens, or his brother, Stepny, accompanying him. One June 1, 1780, John Ball recorded simply, “Sambo Hyde Park made off.”²⁶³ Two days later, Samuel shed his slave name and, rather than just claiming his freedom, he decided to earn it. On June 3, 1780, Samuel appeared before Lieutenant Thomas Oldfield, the commander of a small support unit composed almost entirely of former slaves. He swore allegiance to King George III and enlisted for the duration of the war. He was now Private “Samuell” of the Company of Negro Pioneers, the only Black unit in the Provincial Corps of the British Army in North America.²⁶⁴ It was the start of three years of service for Samuel, and the beginning of long relationship between him and Sir Henry Clinton, the sponsor and benefactor of the Pioneers. Although the two would never meet, Clinton would act almost as a guardian to Samuel, long after the general had left North America, and it was Clinton’s lifelong dedication to the unit he created that would help Samuel to prosper when he settled in Nova Scotia.

Life in Nova Scotia, however, was several years away. On that June day outside of Charleston, 19-year-old former slave Samuel was aware of just one thing: he was free.

Eleven: Black Pioneers



“Plan of the siege of Charles Town in South Carolina [1780] under command of His Excellence Sir Henry Clinton,” from a map by Patrick Feningan.

Courtesy Library of Congress

The Company of Negro Pioneers, or Black Pioneers, had already served four years when Samuel enlisted on June 3, 1780. Sir Henry Clinton was the unit’s creator, sponsor, and most ardent backer. The pioneers were part experiment, part expedient. They were born during the first Charleston campaign in 1776, when slaves flocked to British lines. It was more than a pet project for the British commander in chief – it was a matter of personal conviction. Sir Henry Clinton had a not-so-well-kept secret; he was a closet abolitionist. Although he never openly advocated for ending the practice of slavery, Clinton was very frank about his feelings toward the institution. He agreed with those who abhorred the practice, but also realized the economic “necessity” of slavery both to the Colonies and Britain. Still, Clinton shared the views of Richard Hartlen, who believed a secondary goal of the war should be:

...to correct a vice, which has spread through the Continent of North America contrary to the Laws of God and man, and to the fundamental principles of this constitution from which yours are derived. That vice is Slavery. It would be infinitely absurd(?) to send over to you, an act to abolish slavery in one word because however repugnant the practice may be to the Laws of Morality or policy yet to expel an evil which has spread so far, and which has been suffered for such length of time, requires information of facts and circumstances and the greatest dissection to root it out.²⁶⁵

Clinton’s views on slavery, although not well known, certainly shaped his actions during his 1776 spring campaign in South Carolina. As more and more slaves entered British lines, Clinton saw it as his responsibility to not only care for them but to tacitly abide by Lord Dunmore’s proclamation. His main reservation in doing so openly was he had no explicit orders from either his commanding officer, Sir William Howe or from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, George Germain, allowing him to free anyone.²⁶⁶ Even though the British Parliament, debated the possibility of arming slaves and, more radically, abolishing the practice, it refused to do more than talk about the issue. There was support among the politicians and military leaders to do both. Some Parliamentarians pointed to a letter from Major General Thomas Gage, the British commander in 1775, declaring “things are now come to the Crisis that we must avail ourselves of every resource, even to raise the Negroes in our cause” as a reason to free slaves who were willing to fight.²⁶⁷ John Graves Simcoe, who would become the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada after war, during the siege of Boston in 1775 asked Gage for permission “to enlist such Negroes as were then in Boston, and put himself under the director of [Royal Governor] Sir James Wallace, who was then actively engaged at Rhode Island, and to whom that colony had opposed using negroes.” Simcoe recalled although the idea intrigued Gage, the commanding general “informed him that the Negroes were not sufficiently numerous to be serviceable, and that he had other employment for those who were in Boston.”²⁶⁸ Perhaps the strongest advocate for freeing and arming slaves was Captain William Dalrymple of the 20th Foot. A Scottish officer and Member of Parliament, Dalrymple wrote to Germain to endorse Lord Dunmore’s proclamation and creation of the Loyal Ethiopian Regiment, saying Britain should arm “the Bravest & most ingenious of Black Slaves whom [Dunmore] may find all over

the Bay of Chesapeake” because they were as “full of Intelligence, Fidelity & Courage as any will be found.”²⁶⁹

Clinton was aware of the military and political wrangling over the thorny issue of slavery and what to do with slaves in areas the Crown controlled. The general, however, never revealed exactly what he thought about slavery. Instead, he acted from what can only be a sense of humanity as he viewed first-hand the plight of the slaves as they entered British lines in May and June of 1776, seeking their freedom. Some came in singly, but many came in as families – husbands with their wives and children. They left everything behind in their bid for liberty, a fact that touched Clinton deeply and which he never forgot. For the rest of his life, Clinton remained committed to the welfare of the slaves that came to his troops seeking freedom.²⁷⁰ He also understood the value the now-free slaves could add to his forces and swiftly moved to utilize their skills as a force multiplier.

The slaves that flocked to the Union Jack the spring and early summer of 1776 were, by and large, from rice plantations. They brought with them sets of skills the British sorely needed: irrigation, drainage, animal husbandry, and most of all, tree cutting and road building. Wood was the oil for an 18th century army. It was heat, shelter, defenses, and there was never enough of it. While in Boston, Clinton certainly had the opportunity to see just how important wood was to the army and the difficulties the British had not only in procuring it but in detailing combat troops to act as wood cutters and to fill other manual labor duties. It was the dirty, unglamorous side of 18th century army life, duties that have changed little since. During the siege of Boston, Gage and then Howe often detailed free Blacks as well as some of the few slaves still in Boston to work on accomplishing those tasks.²⁷¹ These small groups of ad-hoc pioneers allowed the British commanders to keep more soldiers in the defensive works the pioneers built around Boston.²⁷²

Clinton recognized the abilities the slaves possessed and their value as potential force multipliers as they could replace front-line troops Clinton might otherwise have to detail to pioneer duties. “As I conceived they might be very useful to use for many purposes in these Climates, I have determined to form a Company with an intention of employing them as Pioneers and on working Parties,” he reported to Howe.²⁷³ The first recruits came from North Carolina as Clinton operated around Cape Fear while waiting for Cornwallis and Parker to arrive. The numbers of slaves and recruits for the pioneer unit rose markedly when the British began operations outside of Charleston. Slaves from as far away as Georgia made their way to the South Carolina coast, seeking their freedom.²⁷⁴ The first muster roll, in which Clinton refers to the pioneers as simply a “company,” lists 37 “Negroes.” Among the first recruits were John Britain

and James Bird, who ran off from the rice plantations of John Snelling, whose estates bordered those of the Ball family. The muster roll also lists four slaves who were apparently new arrivals from Africa – Friday, Quashie, Jack, and Morris – all of whom ran off from South Carolina plantations.²⁷⁵

The British forces remained in South Carolina for nearly a month as they repaired the damage to their ships and continued to seek an opening to renew the attack. Each day the British stayed, slaves poured into the lines, seeking their freedom. Clinton continued to employ his “company of negroes” as he now called them, eventually enlisting 71 men, many with families who remained with the recruits.²⁷⁶ He placed a Marine lieutenant, George Martin, in charge of the workers, and clearly thought highly of the young officer, promoting him to captain in the Provincial Establishment. Clinton exhorted the young Marine officer to ensure the pioneers received equal treatment from all in the army, telling him, “I shall rely on you and desire that it may be particularly recommended to the rest of the Officers to treat these people with tenderness & humanity.”²⁷⁷

Clinton took his own, somewhat unauthorized, steps to safeguard his new unit and enrolled the pioneers into the Provincial Corps. He told Martin:

As an encouragement to demean themselves with diligence & fidelity in the Service, it is my direction that they are acquainted and that they are to be regularly supplied with Provisions and to be decently cloathed, and that they are also to receive such as may hereafter be determined, from which the expense of Clothing & Provision shall be deducted—and further that at the expiration of the present Rebellion that [they] shall be intitled (as far as depends upon me) their freedom.²⁷⁸

As the commander of the newly created Southern Department, Clinton had the authority to raise units of Loyalists and enlist them into the King’s service. However, actual standing as a Provincial unit had to come from the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord George Germain. Clinton also had no authority to grant any slaves their freedom. Despite lacking the actual authority to make the black unit part of the Provincial Corps, Clinton used a very liberal interpretation of his orders and authority to ensure his quasi-overreach became part of the army’s policy.²⁷⁹

The British Army in North America had four components. The first was the regular army, the Redcoats, regiments raised, equipped, trained, and sent from England or elsewhere in the British empire. Next were the Provincials, locally raised units that were accepted into the British army establishment with the same pay and equipment as the regulars, and that received their uniforms and equipment from the army.

Members of Provincial units were eligible for land grants and pensions after their service,²⁸⁰ a facet that would aid Samuel Ball when he settled in Nova Scotia. However, just like thousands of his white Provincial counterparts, Samuel would face a long, somewhat tortuous road to finally receive the emoluments to which he was due.²⁸¹ Provincial regiments, such as the Queen's Rangers, were also eligible to become part of the regular British army establishment.²⁸²

Third were the Loyalist militias royal governors and local leaders could call up. These units received their pay from the regular establishment, but provided their own arms, equipment and uniforms. The Scottish Highlanders who met defeat in North Carolina and Lord Dunmore's Royal Ethiopians were both militia units. The members of these units returned to their homes after what were usually relatively short terms of service and had no promises of land or pensions. Finally, there were groups of Loyalists who had no actual status yet received the title of "Refugee Volunteers." Refugees were bands of Loyalists that attached themselves to the regular British army or even Provincial units and served without pay. Instead, these units were 18th century versions of private military companies. They fulfilled contracts for supplies and security that often yielded better financial results for those units. They were part partisans, part independent-contractors, part mercenaries, and caused nearly as many headaches for Clinton and other commanders late in the war as they did for the rebels whom they fought tooth-and-nail.²⁸³ The odd status of the refugees would also play in role in Samuel's future.

As a Provincial unit, Clinton had Martin organize the pioneers along regular military lines. The unit's commissioned and senior non-commissioned officers were white, while junior NCOs and privates who were black. Before a recruit could call himself a pioneer in the Provincial Establishment, each had to agree to take an oath of loyalty to King George III. Martin administered the oath, in which each recruit avowed he entered "freely & Voluntarily into His Majesty's Service," enlisting "without the least compulsion or persuasion into the Negro Company commanded by Captain Martin and that I will demean myself orderly & faithfully, and will cheerfully obey all such directions as I may receive from said Captain, or the Officers under his Command, and that I will continue to serve His Majesty in all such Services as I may be employed in during the present Rebellion in America."²⁸⁴

Martin never recorded how his new pioneers reacted to willingly entering the King's service. It most likely had a profound psychological effect. The men, all escaped slaves, now had a choice of for whom they would toil and rather than getting the lash, they would earn pay for their labor. They also had to know that instead of lining an oppressive owner's pockets, the pioneers would now work to ensure their

own and possibly many others' freedom. Decades later during the American Civil War, Jacob Stroyer, a South Carolina slave the Confederate Army forced into service, won his freedom by joining the Union Army. He likely gave voice to the emotions Samuel and other slaves experienced when they enlisted in the pioneers.

At last came freedom. And what joy it brought! I am now standing, in imagination, on a high place just outside the city of Columbia, in the spring of 1865. The stars and stripes float in the air. The sun is just making its appearance from behind the hills and throwing its beautiful light upon green bush and tree. The mockingbirds and jay birds sing this morning more sweetly than ever before. Beneath the flag of liberty there is congregated a perfect network of the emancipated slaves from the different plantations, their swarthy faces, from a distance, looking like the smooth water of a black sea. Their voices, like distant thunder, rend the air –

'Old master gone away, and the darkies all at home,

There must be now the kingdom come and the year of jubilee.'

The old men and women, bent over by reason of age and servitude, bound from their staves, praising God for deliverance.²⁸⁵

The unit of escaped slaves served Clinton well in South Carolina, so well that he extolled their virtues to Sir William Howe, then in Halifax preparing for the attack on New York. In his orders recalling Clinton from Charleston, Howe gave his blessing to the black Provincials: "You will be pleased to bring with You the company of Negroes and I shall with Pleasure continue their appointments or the appointments of any other troops you have raised for His Majesty's Service and may chuse to bring to the army."²⁸⁶ The British departed from South Carolina on July 21, 1776. For the slaves on the Ball plantations and throughout South Carolina, the sight of their liberators leaving must have been deflating. However, it was not debilitating and the thoughts of freedom the British campaign of 1776 sewed would remain for in place until the Redcoats returned in 1780, when Samuel and thousands of other slaves flocked to the Union Jack.

The Company of Negro Pioneers landed on Staten Island, where they helped establish the main British base ahead of the 1776 New York campaign. They set to work clearing ground for British encampments, erecting earthworks, building roads, and most of all, felling trees for huts and fuel for the Redcoats. The 71 Blacks toiled and sweat under the late summer sun, remaining well behind the lines as Howe's army routed the Colonials, first on Long Island, and then at Kip's Bay on Manhattan Island. By the end of Septem-



A somewhat inaccurate depiction of a member of the Company of Negro Pioneers and Guides. There is no evidence the Black Pioneers ever received green Loyalist uniforms.

ber, the British had chased George Washington's army into New Jersey and had large new areas over which to consolidate their control.²⁸⁷

The pioneers were part of all this, if only on the periphery. One of their main tasks was road construction, in which the skills they had acquired as rice plantation slaves made them indispensable. Hacking roads through rocky fields and thick woods and forests was back-breaking, man-killing work. Gangs of pioneers would concentrate on cutting down and clearing trees, while others cleared the ground of rocks, stumps, and other natural obstacles.²⁸⁸ A surveyor or otherwise trained engineer would supervise the work; whether Martin, the company commander, had such training, or had an engineer at his side, is unknown.²⁸⁹ The pioneers cleared and drained a large amount of marshy pastures on Staten Island where British troops would eventually build barracks. They worked closely with the Loyal American Regiment under the command of Colonel Cortlandt Skinner, one of the largest

Loyalist formations during the war. Although termed a regiment, at five battalions and an authorized strength of 3,000 men, the Loyal Americans were a brigade in all but name. The unit, which mostly recruited and operated in New Jersey, required vast amounts of wood for fuel and construction, as well as roads that could speed soldiers to and from boats that carried them from State Island to New Jersey.²⁹⁰

The Black Pioneers provided both, and also spent hours fashioning fascines from the branches, vines and small trees they cut. Essentially large bundles of sticks, fascines were the building blocks of 18th century road construction, and small work parties could fashion hundreds in a relatively short time. Bundling fascines was a task most slaves mastered at an early age as their owners built roads across their rice plantations both to connect fields and to ease the transport of harvests to the wharves of Charleston.²⁹¹ As small groups bundled the fascines, the remaining pioneers would begin the task of preparing the ground for a new road. Because much of the terrain in which they worked on Staten Island was marshy or lacked drainage, the pioneers used the fascines to slightly elevate the causeways that served as the foundations of the roads. The pioneers would then begin to corduroy the road, laying rails they had hewn from trees to create the road bed. The process, in good weather, was laborious but moved fairly rapidly.²⁹² Forest Avenue on Staten Island, one of the main thoroughfares in the borough, started off as a corduroy road the Company of Negro Pioneers built in 1776.²⁹³

Because rice plantation slaves also had experience in rail-splitting, many British regiments requested the pioneers' aid in preparing camps.²⁹⁴ If fascines were the asphalt of road building, rails were the plywood of construction. As the pioneers hacked down trees and split them into rails, British army engineers used the rails to build bridges, blockhouses, and check points. The work went so well that Clinton specifically asked to have the black pioneers on his next mission, the reduction of Newport, Rhode Island.²⁹⁵ Clinton brought four brigades on the expedition, two British and two Hessian. The Black Pioneers were the only Provincial unit Clinton included in his small army of slightly more than 6,000 combat troops.²⁹⁶ The expedition left New York on December 1, 1776, reached Newport six days later and faced no opposition when the troops splashed ashore. The small patriot militia force guarding Newport fled at the approach of the British, leaving the city to Clinton.²⁹⁷

After consolidating his hold on Newport, Clinton ordered his troops to build fortifications, a task in which the pioneers played a large role. Martin commanded a company that included Marine Lieutenant Robert Campbell as his second in command, Ensigns Thomas Oldfield and Charles Blundell, and Sergeant Thomas Jones, all of whom were white. The company had six corporals who were black and 65 privates.²⁹⁸

The expedition to Rhode Island was the first exposure the former slaves had to the harsh winter weather of the northern states and it was also the first time they had to labor in the cold. Soon after taking Newport, winter set in and Clinton reported he lost “no time in putting the troops under cover and laying in magazines of fuel, which the severity of the cold began already to make necessary.”²⁹⁹ The overwhelming need for fuel kept the pioneers busy throughout December and into 1777. The British army consumed up to 300 cords of wood per week and the Rhode Island winter proved much harsher than Clinton expected. Captain Frederick Mackenzie recorded in his journal that ice “an inch and a half thick” was common each morning as a hard frost descended each night.³⁰⁰ Although unarmed, the pioneers faced potential enemy action any time they left Newport on a wood-cutting mission. Rebel militias had regrouped and now hovered just outside of the city, ready to pounce on any suspecting group of British soldiers who ventured too far from friendly lines.³⁰¹ While modern depictions of the Black Pioneers show them carrying muskets, the unit was decidedly non-combat and did not have weapons. Regular British army units – either Redcoats, Hessians – provided defense for the pioneers.³⁰²

One of the major problems that beset not only the pioneers but all of Clinton’s army was a logistical system that often teetered on the brink of collapse. The British army throughout the duration of the Revolutionary War lacked an organized, uniformed quartermaster branch and instead relied on local contracts, foraging, and sometimes outright theft to provide its troops with day-to-day food, water and fuel.³⁰³ The supply problems were even worse for Provincial units. There was no cohesive policy as to how to uniform and equip the Provincial Line, which often left the Loyalist units either on their own in obtaining clothes or using cast-offs and hand-me-downs from the regular army.³⁰⁴ Although Clinton had ordered the Black Pioneers to receive regular supplies of clothing from Provincial stores, the endemic problems in supplying Loyalist units meant the pioneers rarely received their allotments. Alexander Innes, an inspector general under Clinton, reported with disgust, “I found the Provincial Corps in very great confusion and disorder.”³⁰⁵ These problems forced the pioneers to again rely on the trades they learned as slaves on their plantations to further their mission. The blacks made more of their own clothing than they received from stores and it likely looked eerily similar the clothes they wore while slaves.³⁰⁶

In 1775, Lord Dunmore tapped his slaves-turned-soldiers to fashion their uniforms, utilizing readily available “Negro cloth” which the Ethiopians easily attained from white plantations.³⁰⁷ A coarse blend of wool and cotton, “Negro cloth” was a cheap though durable weave that plantation owners bought

in quantity for their slaves. Also called “osnaburgs,” after Osnabruck, a northern German textile town that invented the weave, “Negro cloth” was a familiar product for Samuel and all of the pioneers. Most – and Samuel definitely – arrived in British lines outside of Charleston wearing clothing they made from “Negro cloth.” Ball family records are clear that all of the family’s slaves wore a blue-dyed uniform of sorts made of osnaburgs. The rough blue or sometimes white cloth was the standard uniform on the Ball plantations until well into the 1800s. As a boy, Samuel’s mother Coomba received three yards of the cloth to make his cloths and when he turned 12, he received his own allotment of five yards.³⁰⁸

Although the pioneers had the ability to make their own clothing and contemporary depictions of the unit shows them wearing blue “osnaburgs,” it is unlikely they had a steady supply of the cloth. Logistical problems plagued the British in Rhode Island, and by January, just about everything in Newport was running short. “The poor inhabitants of that town have been very much distressed by the want of fuel and provisions,” wrote one city merchant, who claimed the British and citizens alike “had not tasted any meat but once in two months.”³⁰⁹ Complicating the situation for the pioneers was the loss of their primary backer, Henry Clinton, who returned to England. The British general had received permission to sail for home in January, 1777, and he left his army under the command of Lieutenant General Hugh, Earl Percy.³¹⁰ His departure removed one of the strongest advocates for the use of Black Loyalists and escaped slaves as combat-support elements within the British army, although there is no evidence that Percy or any other British officer attempted to sideline or mistreat the pioneers. Of a more immediate concern to the Black Pioneers was their losses.

During their time in Newport, the combination of the brutal New England winter and the extremely hard labor the pioneers performed caused an attrition rate among the former slaves of nearly 27 percent. Seventeen of the 65 privates and two of the corporals that made the trip to Newport died before the bulk of the British force returned to New York in April, 1777.³¹¹ Sixteen men died of disease, while three died from exposure. Although the pioneers suffered an abnormally high loss rate, likely due to the former slaves’ inability to rapidly adjust to the new climate, the unit enjoyed an equally remarkable lack of desertion. Records show only one private, named Jamuson, deserted from the pioneers during their time in Rhode Island.³¹² British and Hessian army units reported desertion rates at anywhere from five to nine percent.³¹³ After returning to New York, the pioneers recruited among the growing number of escaped slaves that sought refuge in the city and built their strength back up to 64 privates by the beginning of July.³¹⁴

Twelve: The smell of powder



The British camp on Staten Island.

Courtesy Library of Congress

The Company of Negro Pioneers settled into a routine that lasted, except for a few brief intervals, for the next three years. The pioneers marched alongside Cortlandt Skinner's New Jersey Volunteers and John Graves Simcoe and the Queen's Rangers, whose Provincials ranged from bases on Staten Island into central New Jersey and the New York and Long Island countryside, where they battled with both Continentals, the regular American troops, and militia units.³¹⁵ The pioneers did what they could to turn Staten Island into something slightly more familiar. The former slaves built "some huts, in which and in the adjoining little gardens [grew] many things," a German officer recorded in his diary.³¹⁶ Strictly noncombatants, the former slaves moved into areas the Loyalists controlled to either gather and cut wood or to shepherd livestock back to the main British base. The knowledge the pioneers acquired on their plantations was an asset as they also tended flocks of sheep, cattle and poultry and also cared for the army's horses.³¹⁷ Detachments of Black Pioneers served in Westchester County and Long Island, Connecticut, as well as New

Jersey as the search for fuel especially demanded a seemingly never-ending supply of wood. Many of the pioneers also worked as blacksmiths, farriers, teamsters, tailors, coopers, and shoemakers in addition to their wood-cutting and engineering tasks.³¹⁸

The labor of the pioneers, however, did not guarantee the future of the unit. With Clinton back in England, the use of blacks, either free or runaways, met with renewed opposition among British officers. On March 14, 1777, Howe issued orders that all "Negroes, Mulattos, Indians and Sailors [that] have been enlisted shall be discharged and orders given none in future shall be admitted."³¹⁹ The ban on blacks would remain in effect, with varying degrees of enforcement, for two years.³²⁰ It was a decision about which the pioneers were likely aware, and might have had them watching their red-coated liberators with a healthy dose of suspicion as "their heads were full of notions of freedom and happiness in some West Indian island," wrote an observer. Any inkling the British might disband the pioneer company and return the former slaves to bondage was cause for the pioneers

to radically rethink their decision to join the Redcoats. There was a feeling of powerlessness Charles Ball, the Maryland slave, would recall some years later, “The idea that I was utterly unable to afford protection and safeguard to my own family, and was myself even more helpless than they, tormented my bosom ... with throbs of fear.”³²¹

The manner in which the British used the pioneers also began to change. Rather than sending the pioneers out as a cohesive unit, British commanders began to assign the unit piecemeal to various brigades, where squad-sized elements continued to execute the same tasks but with fewer men. Increasingly, the British also assigned the pioneers to far more menial tasks than they had in the past year, tasks that included digging latrines, acting as porters, or even as personal servants of individual officers. The unit muster roll for July shows nearly a third of the pioneers were on detail “under the personal orders” of individual regimental, brigade and division commanders. Samuel, however, remained on his normal duties, cutting trees, tending cattle, or any of the tasks the British assigned the pioneers.³²² The parceling out of the pioneers to duties that appeared more in line with those they had as slaves must have come as a shock, much as it did a generation later for Black soldiers who joined the British during the War of 1812. In 1814, Vice Admiral Alexander Cochrane organized a company of Colonial Marines from escaped slaves from Maryland and Virginia. The unit proved its worth in combat, fighting under white officers much as the Black Pioneers did during the Revolutionary War. The Colonial Marines also faced widespread prejudice and the belief among much of the British higher command they were only fit for manual labor or menial tasks. Despite the Colonial Marines’ exemplary combat record, they often found themselves used as little more than ditchdiggers. It was a harsh lesson that British offers of freedom not only had conditions, but could ring hollow in the face of the realities of war.³²³

Perhaps it was the uncertainty, real or perceived, of the Black Pioneers’ future that led its first commander, Provincial Captain George Martin, to apply for a transfer. British records are unclear exactly why Martin left and no orders from Howe or any other senior officer exist to provide a clear reason. Leadership of a non-combat Provincial unit that faced possible disbandment was not the ideal command for a young officer eager for adventure, and Martin was young. British records indicate he was 19 or 20 when Clinton selected him to command the Black Pioneers.³²⁴ As Howe relegated the unit to more and more backwater duties, Martin likely chafed under the inactivity. Army records show on June 6, 1777 he secured a lieutenantancy in the First, or King’s, Dragoons, then stationed in Ireland.³²⁵ Martin was one of a number of Marine officers who used that corps as a means of securing a more lucrative, and more permanent, com-

mission in the army. The British marines were not yet “royal” and many marine officers used the sea service as a way of learning some of the art of being a soldier while holding out hopes of an army commission. It was a practice that irritated marine officers who were dedicated to that service, but one that would remain until the early 1800s.³²⁶ Far from being a criticism of the pioneers’ first commander, if he did use the marines to open other doors, he was simply utilizing the tools at his disposal to keep his military career from stagnating.³²⁷ It was also a vindication of Clinton’s faith in the former slaves that command of a Provincial unit few in the army establishment wanted did not prove an impediment to Martin advancing his career.

Howe made an interesting selection for the pioneers’ new commanding officer, naming Captain Allan Stewart. A veteran of the French and Indian War with the 78th Foot, Stewart was on half-pay when the war broke out. He emigrated from Scotland in 1775 and settled in North Carolina.³²⁸ He was among the many Highlanders who offered their services to Royal Governor Martin to quell the rebellion, although Stewart was not present at the battle of Moore’s Bridge.³²⁹ Stewart would later admit he did not actually want to command the black unit, instead applying twice for permission to raise his own regiment of Provincials, with the War Office both times turning down his offer. Stewart seemingly accepted the appointment to the Black Pioneers as he saw it as a way to secure his own rank and future in the Provincial Corps.³³⁰ Stewart took command of the pioneers on July 13, 1777.³³¹ The pioneers, when Stewart took command, had three officers, Stewart, Lieutenant Thomas Oldfield and Ensign Charles Blundell. There were two sergeants, one of whom, Thomas Jones, was black, and three corporals, Abram Leslie, Tom Peters, and Frank Jones, who were also black. The privates numbered 72 men.³³²

Despite the changes in leadership and some of their duties, the Black Pioneers remained one of the British army’s primary combat support units, and were part of the reinforcements that sailed for Philadelphia on November 13, 1777 after Howe had captured the city. Leading the force was the pioneers’ patron, Sir Henry Clinton. They landed in a city in disarray. Nearly a third of the city population fled at the approach of the British, taking with them as many of their belongings as possible. The British claimed they found nearly a third of the homes in the city vacant, while hoarding, and shortages of food and fuel became commonplace. Howe set the pioneers to work under the watchful eye of Captain John Montresor, the chief engineer of the British army. Montresor directed the pioneers first in building a series of breastworks and redoubts outside of the city before, increasingly, putting them to work under a strong guard in gathering wood. It was a hazardous undertaking as rebel militia, recovering quickly from battlefield losses in the fall, clamped down a blockade on the city. By the end of

107

Muster Roll of a company of Blacks commanded by Capt. Peter Stewart at New York April 29th 1779

| No. | Rank | Name | Date of Enlistment | By whom Enlisted | For what Reason absent | Promoted | Discharged | Dead | Reduced | Priviled | Prisoners |
|-----|---------|------------------------|----------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|------------|------|---------|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Capt. | Peter Stewart | July 15 th 1777 | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Serj. | Wm. Wilford | Sept 7 th 1776 | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Serj. | John Stephenson | do 13 th 1778 | | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Serj. | John Hawley | March 5 th 1778 | Capt. Stewart | | | | | | | |
| 2 | do | George Wilcher | April 1 st 1778 | do | | | | | | | |
| 3 | do | John Wright | do 20 th 1778 | do | | | | | | | |
| 1 | Capt. | Thos. Bates | May 19 th 1776 | do | | | | | | | |
| 2 | do | Frank Jones | Sept 28 th 1777 | do | | | | | | | |
| 3 | do | Murphy Hill | April 2 nd 1778 | do | | | | | | | |
| 4 | Private | Adam | do do | do | With Doct. House | | | | | | |
| 2 | do | London | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 3 | do | Saml. Brooks | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 4 | do | Abel Gray | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 5 | do | Bob Hood | do do | do | Dismissed from Discharge March 29 th 1779 & Discharged again April 20 th 1779 } Feb 12 th 1779 | | | | | | |
| 6 | do | Therry, Ben | do do | do | In command with London & Hill | | | | | | |
| 7 | do | Salob | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 8 | do | Harvey | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 9 | do | Bob Linnard | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 10 | do | Saml. Moor | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 11 | do | Quach | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 12 | do | George Logan | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 13 | do | Saml. 1 st | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 14 | do | Dublin | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 15 | do | Miles | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 16 | do | Lacy | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 7 | do | Bainel | do do | do | With officers under the name | | | | | | |
| 18 | do | Jack Linnard | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 19 | do | Ben Linnard | do do | do | | | | | | | June 25 th 1779 Dismissed from Discharge 14 th 1779 |
| 20 | do | Tom 1 st | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 21 | do | Tom 2 nd | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 22 | do | Conner Dives | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 23 | do | Joe Bens | do do | do | | | | | | | Feb 23 1779 |
| 24 | do | Jack Adams | do do | do | With Lt. Adams by order of the command | | | | | | |
| 25 | do | John Convidanus | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 26 | do | Bennet 1 st | do do | do | With Lt. Adams by the command of Albany | | | | | | |
| 27 | do | John Abbott | do do | do | | | | | | | Jan 23 1779 |
| 28 | do | Nero | do do | do | | | | | | | |
| 29 | do | Liberty | do do | do | | | | | | | |

A muster roll of the Black Pioneers from April 23, 1779.

Courtesy Public Archives of Canada

December, foraging for wood and fodder for animals came to a halt in the face of increasingly active rebel patrols.³³³

Philadelphia was a city in transition after the British occupied the American capital. Nearly a third of its residents fled at the Redcoats' approach, leaving large areas of the city vacant. The population soon began to increase as Loyalists flooded into the Philadelphia. Lord Cornwallis estimated the city population grew from about 21,000 when the British entered Philadelphia to more than 60,000 by the start of 1778.³³⁴ The massive and rapid population increase creating difficult, even squalid living conditions throughout the city, raising fears of outbreaks of disease, especially cholera. On January 18, 1778, Howe issued orders for the residents "to rake and sweep into heaps on the cart-way, the dirt, soil, and filth to be found on the brick pavements, or footways, before their respective dwellings and lots, or to cause the same to be done on Saturday in every week."³³⁵ The Black Pioneers had

the unenviable task of collecting the rubbish, hauling it outside of the city and either burning it or burying it.³³⁶ It was probably a jarring change in roles for the former slaves, who started off in menial though militarily important tasks and were now reduced to sweeping waste from the streets, and the fact Howe made the white citizens perform the same task was likely of little comfort.³³⁷

The pioneers remained in Philadelphia with the British army until Clinton, who took command April 1778, moved the army back to New York, marching overland through New Jersey. The Black Pioneers were part of the second division under Lieutenant General Knyphausen, which was the target of Washington's attack at Monmouth Court House on June 28. The pioneers were about four miles from the center of the action, close enough to hear the cannon and smell powder, but well out of range of hostile fire. Once in New York, they again took up station on Staten Island and their normal routine of wood cutting, animal

husbandry, and personal service to senior officers. The unit was a shell of what it once was. The brutal winter of 1777-1778 and the long march north had claimed nearly half of its strength. The Black Pioneers left New York in November, 1777 with 72 privates. At its first muster after returning to New York in July, 1778, there just 46 men of all ranks.³³⁸ It was about as strong as the pioneers would be for the remainder of the conflict.

Throughout the war, the Black Pioneers had to endure the ignominy of their former lives as slaves. No matter how hard they worked, no matter if they wore a uniform and were full-fledged members of the Provincial Corps, the Company of Negro Pioneers would, for many, always be “that unit” of low-born ex-slaves, whose only use was as ditch-diggers. During the American Civil War, as a young officer (much like George Martin, the pioneers’ first commander) was leaving his regiment to take command of a black unit, a staff officer took him aside and candidly told him, “we do not want any nigger soldiers.” The young man’s commander was just as frank, telling the officer, “I am sorry to have you leave my command, and still more sorry that you are going to serve with Negroes. I think it is a disgrace to the army to make soldiers of them.” The general added he felt that way because he was sure black soldiers would not and could not fight.³³⁹ Overt discrimination at the hands of white British troops was only part of what the Black Pioneers faced. The threat of a return to bondage was never far away, despite their service and almost daily, they could reminders of how close they could be to chains thanks to the local newspapers. The *Pennsylvania Ledger*, a Loyalist run paper that published Wednesdays and Saturdays throughout the British occupation of Philadelphia, ran front-page advertisements in every issue offering rewards for runaway slaves. Those ads, such as “Three Guineas Reward: Runaway a few days ago from his master, a Negro fellow named Dick ...,” were usually nestled alongside others announcing lost property and stray cattle.³⁴⁰ The *New York Mercury* and *Providence Gazette* published similar ads throughout the years England controlled those cities.³⁴¹

The advertisements were not just the complaints of isolated slave owners. In August 1778, a refugee from South Carolina arrived in New York with demands for the return of his “property.” Daniel Manson was a shipwright and plantation owner from Charleston, who fled from Charleston and made his way north on the frigate *Rose*. During the voyage, Manson and the ship’s captain reportedly clashed over Manson’s stated goal of tracking down his escaped slaves and reclaiming his property. Manson landed in New York “with the wreck of a very good fortune from his attachment to the Government,” Alexander Innes, the inspector general for Provincial forces, reported in a letter to Clinton. Soon after he arrived, Innes told Clinton “This Poor Man has found one of

his Negroes in the Black Company. The fellow loves his master and would go with him.” Innes believed Manson had every right to claim his “property.” Clinton was less sanguine, and somewhat laconically told Innes “If the Negro wishes it, I have no objection.”³⁴² The muster roll for the unit shows no change in its strength.³⁴³

The success of the Black Pioneers spawned at least one other attempt to raise a unit of black engineering troops. Provincial Captain Richard Crowe organized a platoon-sized group of 20 escaped slaves into a pioneer unit he offered for service with the Provincial Corps. Clinton, however, either because he did not want a unit competing with the Black Pioneers or because of intransigence at the thought of a second black Provincial company, refused the offer and instead attached Crowe’s men to the commissary corps. Only one muster roll of the unit exists, and it appears working as cooks, waiters, and servants did not sit well with Crowe’s men. The unit disbanded sometime over the summer of 1778.³⁴⁴

For two years, the Black Pioneers continued in their duties of tree-cutting, road building and repair, animal husbandry, and any other job Clinton and the British commanders doled out to the unit. Although noncombatants, many of their mission took on a combat edge as they had to venture close to American lines to secure supplies of wood or fodder. Operating in tandem with Provincial line infantry units that provided local security, the pioneers accompanied the combat soldiers as they launched a series of increasingly strong raids into northern New Jersey. Each attack elicited an equally strong response from the militia and Continental Army units stationed across from Staten Island. During one raid to capture horses, cattle and cut wood, Simcoe received intelligence that a large force of Continentals planned to retaliate. “The rumors of them, however, added personal solicitude to Lieutenant-Colonel Simcoe’s public anxiety, and, for security, he got together the pioneers of his own and some other corps around his wagon. The uncertainty of what fate might attend his corps ... gave him more uneasiness than he ever experienced.”³⁴⁵

The pioneers continued to cross the narrow channel from Staten Island to New Jersey, where they cleared trees from large swaths of Bergen, Essex, and Union counties to feed the nearly insatiable demand for fuel.³⁴⁶ They also attracted just enough recruits to replace the men the unit lost due to disease and exertion. From the summer of 1778 to the summer of 1779, their strength fluctuated from 49 to 56 privates as the unit took in 17 new members, mostly slaves from New Jersey, New York and one from New Hampshire.³⁴⁷ Among the new arrivals was a former slave from North Carolina named Murphy Steele, who enlisted on April 21, 1778³⁴⁸, and who would serve alongside Samuel, and come to wield an unusual influence among other Black Loyalists for a time.³⁴⁹



Thomas Peters, an escaped slave from what is today North Carolina, who served as a corporal and sergeant in the Black Pioneers and likely knew Samuel Ball. Peters helped lead the effort to colonize what is today Sierra Leone with freed slaves then living in Nova Scotia, Canada.

Wikimedia

As new members such as Steele enlisted, they brought with them an almost invaluable tool – local knowledge. The escaped slaves from New Jersey knew all of the by-lanes, roads and paths. They knew the location of rebel troop concentrations, where local militia commanders lived, and how to avoid colonial patrols. Slavery was just widespread enough in New Jersey that the black soldiers could pass through enemy lines without too much difficulty, allowing them to gather valuable intelligence.³⁵⁰ Black Pioneers led Major General William Tryon on his raids through Connecticut and eastern Long Island, and Lieutenant General Knyphausen in 1779 and 1780 in his operations in New Jersey. The new pioneers' local knowledge was especially useful for the Provincials as the fight in New Jersey took on all of the nasty aspects of a civil war, and the Black Pioneers, whether serving as guides or laborers, increasingly became targets of Colonial militias. Judge Thomas Jones, writing of the conflict several decades after the end of the war, described increasingly bitter campaign as, “Not a stick of wood, a spear of grass, or a kernel of corn, could the troops in New Jersey procure without fighting for it unless sent from New York. Every foraging party was attacked in some way or the other. The losses on these occasions

were nearly equal; they could be called nothing more than mere skirmishes, but hundreds of them happened in the course of the winter. The British, however, lost men who were not easily replaced.”³⁵¹

With the New York front mired in a stalemate, Clinton decided to shift his focus south and once more put Charleston in the British crosshairs. Unlike the 1776 campaign, Clinton was ready with both troops, supplies, and a solid naval plan. After splashing ashore on February 11, 1780, 30 miles from Charleston, Clinton led his 8,500-man army inexorably closer to the city. On March 29, his soldiers encircled the Continental defenses, while the Royal Navy took control of the waters just off the city. The siege lasted until May 12, when American commander Benjamin Lincoln surrendered. It was the single-largest loss for the Continentals in the war.³⁵² The surrender, however, did not bring a halt to the British operations. The countryside around Charleston was alive with patriot militia and partisans, groups that cut supply lines, conducted small hit-and-run attacks on British patrols, and that disappeared into the swamps outside the city. On May 18, Clinton ordered Cornwallis to take a force of nearly 3,000 men and clear out the interior along the Cooper River. Cornwallis chose Strawberry Hill, one of the Ball family plantations, as his headquarters when he pushed up the river.³⁵³ From Strawberry Hill, Cornwallis marched his troops across all of the Ball holdings as he searched for South Carolina militia Colonel Francis Marion, the famed “Swamp Fox,” who operated in the vicinity of the Cooper and Santee rivers.³⁵⁴ The British troops failed to bring on any major engagements with the rebel militias but did attract large numbers of Loyalists that swelled their numbers. It was during the sweeps through the Low Country that Samuel and more than a hundred other Ball family slaves escaped, seeking their freedom with the British.

The influx of recruits for an expanded Provincial Corps did not have a huge effect on the Black Pioneers, despite the thousands of slaves that entered the British lines. Muster rolls show the contingent in Charleston took in just a dozen new men during its months in the city.³⁵⁵ Part of the problem was the pioneers were spread out from New York to Savannah. The small squad in Savannah would remain there until the end of the war, when the British returned the city to American control. Another squad-sized group remained on Staten Island with the garrison in New York. Lieutenant Thomas Oldfield led two sergeants, three corporals and 27 privates to Charleston.³⁵⁶ Allan Stewart, who remained on the rolls as the company commander, was absent after finally receiving permission to raise his own regiment of Provincials.³⁵⁷ The pioneers at first built many of the siege lines, batteries and trenches the British used to invest Charleston. After the city fell, the British parceled the men out individually or in pairs to officers as servants, teamsters, cooks, tailors, while keeping a core of the

pioneers on their normal duties. That Samuel was one of the twelve men the British accepted into the pioneer company says a great deal about him, even though no records exist as to reason for his acceptance. Slaves were entering British-held Charleston at a dizzying rate; how many of them tried to enlist or wanted to enlist is one of the many unanswerable questions about that period.

Despite the lack of records, Samuel's enlistment was a watershed moment for him, much as it was for hundreds of South Carolina slaves that enlisted in the Union army during the Civil War. The first black regiment of that war was the 1st South Carolina, which the Federal government accepted into service November 5, 1862.³⁵⁸ Thomas Higginson, a company commander in the regiment, had previously commanded a company in a white regiment. He found the escaped slaves not only took quickly to military life, but their joy in striving for their own and others' freedom gave them an *esprit de corps* many white units lacked.

I see that the pride which military life creates may cause the plantation trickeries to diminish. For instance, these men make the most admirable sentinels. It is far harder to pass the camp lines at night than in the camp from which I came; and I have seen none of that disposition to connive at the offences of members of one's own company which is so troublesome among white soldiers. Nor are they lazy, either about work or drill; in all respects they seem better suited for soldiers than I had dared to hope.³⁵⁹

It was the same reaction British Admiral George Cockburn had in 1814 when he saw the Colonial Marines. Like the Black Pioneers and the 1st South Carolina, the Colonial Marines were all escaped slaves and Cockburn expressed his doubts – sometime forcefully – as to whether the unit would fight or even serve well. He completely reversed his opinion after seeing the Marines in action, boasting, “they have induced me to alter the bad opinion I had of their whole Race and I now really believe these, we are training, will neither show want of zeal or courage when employed by us in attacking their old masters.”³⁶⁰

Although the Black Pioneers were a noncombat unit, their military bearing and organization must have captured Samuel's attention. It could have been the reason he decided to enlist. Or, it could have been a sense of gratitude to his liberators. Boston King recalled the kindness he found among the British when he ran off from Tranquil Hill. “They received me readily, and I began to feel the happiness, liberty, of which I knew nothing before, altho' I was grieved at first, to be obliged to leave my friends, and among strangers.”³⁶¹ King did not enlist but did find employment as a personal servant to several British officers.³⁶² Samuel

enlisted. If he told his wife and children in later years why he chose to join the British army, no one wrote down his reasons and it is left to speculation as to what prompted him to enter the King's service. Whatever the reason, even as part of a noncombat labor unit such as the Black Pioneers, Samuel was able to aid the war effort that was setting free him and thousands of other slaves. He could have chosen to simply take his freedom and leave the colonies. Instead, he chose to remain and, in his own way, fight back against those who had enslaved him.

There could be another reason he enlisted – simple economics. Joining the British army meant, in theory, a steady paycheck and anyone, slave or free, who wanted to either move north or just get away from South Carolina would need money and transport. The Company of Negro Pioneers offered Samuel both the financial means and the mode of transportation for him to build a new life away from the plantations of the Cooper River. Again, because neither he nor his family left any written records regarding his service in the Black Pioneers, there is simply no way to know Samuel's exact reasons for joining the British army. If he was anything like the escaped slaves that enlisted in the Colonial Marines in 1814 or the 1st South Carolina in 1862, his motivation was likely a mixture of the three – gratitude, personal economics and, if not revenge, a chance to somehow strike back in his own way at his oppressors. Cockburn and Higginson discovered this was case for the men they commanded,³⁶³ and it was probably no different for Samuel and the other Black Pioneers.

The company Samuel joined was an eclectic mix. Lieutenant Oldfield, the acting commander, rose through the commissioned ranks with the unit. He was originally assigned to the pioneers as an ensign (the equivalent of a modern-day second lieutenant). All of the noncommissioned officers were now black and included Sergeant Tom Peters, an original member who enlisted on May 19, 1776, Corporal Frank Jones, who enlisted July 25 1777, and Corporal Murphy Steele, the North Carolina runaway who somehow reached the British in Philadelphia where he enlisted on April 2, 1778. For Samuel, the names of the privates must have reminded him of the plantation: Quashie, London, Dublin, Liberty, Scipio, Jupiter, and Nero. There were so many privates named Tom (five of them) Oldfield assigned each a number and referred to them as Tom No. 1, Tom No. 2. There were also two Princes, two privates named Henry and one named Sam (Moore). Samuel was the only private with that name.³⁶⁴

Of all the pioneers, Murphy Steele might have been the most famous, or notorious. After escaping from his owner in North Carolina and enlisting, Steele rose from private to corporal in a short time. By the beginning of 1779, he was a sergeant, then, he was private again. The muster roll of August 24, 1779,

notes Captain Stewart reduced Steele to the ranks before restoring him to corporal. Stewart did not note reason for the demotion. By Christmas, 1782, Steele was a sergeant. He was wounded at least once and had a reputation for bravery in the small company of pioneers.³⁶⁵ He was also a bit of a mystic. In one of his most famous episodes, he claimed to receive a divine message, which he wrote down and sent to Clinton. The “vision” was part religion, part revolution. According to Steele, a “Voice” spoke to him, telling him to convey a message to Sir Henry. When Steele demanded to know the origin of the voice, he claimed it told him “he was the Lord.”

The message Steele conveyed to the British commander in chief was an order for Clinton to “send word to [General] Washington That he must surrender himself to the Troops of the King’s Army and that if he did not the wrath of God would fall upon him.” In

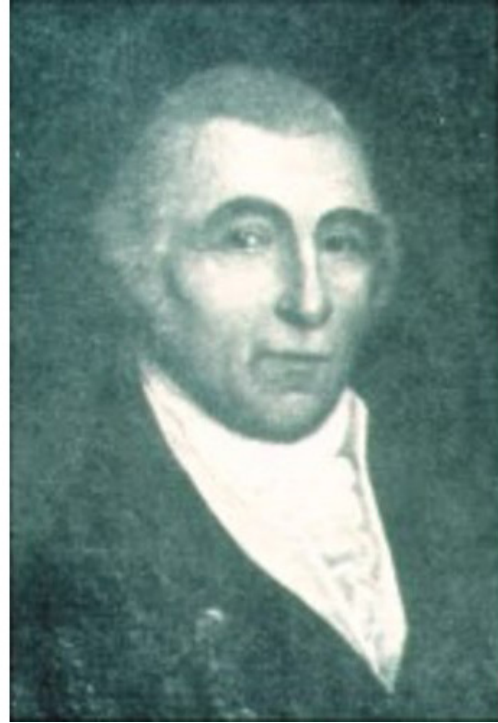
addition, “if General Washington did not surrender, the [Commander] in Chief was then to tell him, that he would raise all the Blacks in America to fight against him. The Voice also said that King George must be acquainted with the above.”³⁶⁶ Clinton never replied to the letter.

Samuel and the Black Pioneers remained in Charleston until the middle of June, when Clinton took 4,500 men, including 31 pioneers, back to New York. On their return, the pioneers essentially ceased to function as a cohesive unit. Clinton parceled the men out as needed, often as personal servants. The British assigned one group that included Steele and Samuel to a new unit that was forming in New Jersey and New York and that would gain notoriety due to its commanders. It would also be a source of learning for Samuel. The new unit was the Loyal Refugee Volunteers.

Thirteen: Loyal Refugee Volunteers

The shift in the focus of the war to the south at first caused few changes in the north. The stalemate between Clinton and Washington continued, with neither side able to dislodge the other from the strong positions each army held. The arrival of a division of French troops under Jean Baptists de Vimeur, the Comte de Rochambeau, forced Clinton to finally abandon Rhode Island, but even that loss did not greatly affect the balances of forces. The two armies eyed one another uneasily outside of New York but did little to dislodge one another from their lines.³⁶⁷ The real change for Clinton was in the type of soldiers he had available. After leaving the cream of his army with Cornwallis to prosecute the southern campaign, Clinton had no choice but to rely increasingly on Provincials and Loyalist militia. The Provincials were not the problem. Trained, armed, and equipped like the regular British army, the Provincials had everything for which to fight as they battled to maintain their property in the colonies, which independence threaten to take from them. The Loyalist militia was more of a mixed bag, as apt to pack up and go home as they were to stay and fight and contribute to Clinton's army.³⁶⁸ To augment his force, Clinton turned to what modern-day armies have also increasingly used – private military contractors.

The thousands of Loyalists that fled to New York should have offered fertile recruiting ground for the British. However, many of the refugees had little interest in fighting as part of either militia or with one of the established Provincial units. After five years of war, most were only interested in getting out of the rebellious provinces, not fighting to retain them.³⁶⁹ Clinton, in a move many modern generals would recognize, decided to privatize a number of the mundane daily tasks his soldiers had to perform, making more troops available should Washington decide to strike or Clinton decide to attack the Americans.³⁷⁰ Among of the primary tasks Clinton contracted out was the collection of wood for fuel, as well as patrolling and intelligence gathering. One the units that came forward to provide both was the Loyalist Refugee Volunteers. The brainchild of Abraham Cuyler, the former royal mayor of Albany and a large landholder in the Hudson Valley, the Refugees were part business, part war-fighters. Cuyler negotiated an exclusive contract with the army's Barracks Department to provide firewood to the British garrison of New York. He picked four field commanders to oversee the military side of the business – Thomas Ward, David Babcock, Philip Luke and John Everett. The four field officers led patrols, raids, snatched prisoners and, in general, harassed the Rebel militia and Continental Army at every chance.³⁷¹ What set Cuyler's unit apart from others refugee organizations was the Loyalist Refugee Volunteers were



Abraham Cuyler, royal governor of Albany, New York and founder of the Loyalist Refugee Volunteers.

Courtesy New York State Department of Education

integrated. Many of the laborers were black as were some of the 150 or so armed soldiers that executed the combat side of the Refugees' missions. Those armed Blacks, however, operated under very tight controls, which Ward testified to after a small group of Black Refugees murdered a white prisoner.³⁷²

Samuel, in his petition to Prevost, related he returned to New York with Clinton and received orders to join the Refugees, then under the command of "Major Ward." The timeframe would be in the summer of 1780, when the reputation of the Refugees was at its highest. It is also interesting as the integrated unit attracted large numbers of runaway slaves from New Jersey and New York as well as free Blacks.³⁷³ The question becomes why would Clinton order Samuel, and probably other recruits for the Black Pioneers, to join Cuyler's Refugees. There are no muster rolls for the Black Pioneers for the summer of 1780, so there is no way to verify how many of the Provincials were sent on temporary assignment to the semi-private Refugees. What is certain is Clinton was back in New York by July 15, 1780 and by August, the Refugees were fraying.³⁷⁴ Much of the problem was Ward, who became a local celebrity in May when he and a group of the Refugees defeated a large force of Pennsylvania Continentals under Major General "Mad" Anthony Wayne at the Battle of Bull's Ferry. Wayne was one of Washington's top commanders and after Cuyler built a

block house at Bull's Ferry, present-day Fort Lee, N.J., the American general decided to root out the Refugees. Ward commanded the post, which had a garrison of 92 officers and men, as well as "20 Negroes." Wayne attacked with nearly 1,000 veteran soldiers and after a day-long battle, retreated with a loss of 60 dead and wounded. Wayne's reputation suffered – Major John Andre, Clinton's aide-de-camp, even wrote a poem lambasting the American general.³⁷⁵ Ward's reputation skyrocketed, putting him in direct competition with Cuyler for control of the lucrative woodcutting aspect of the Refugees.³⁷⁶

The main point of contention between the two officers, however, was money. Cuyler believed, rightly it would turn out, that Ward was selling on the black market much of the wood the pioneers cut, and he was not cutting Cuyler into any of the profits. Moreover, the contract terms stipulated the Volunteers were to pay for any wood they took from Loyalist-owned properties. Ward did pay the Loyalists but usually far less than what he promised and often directed his woodcutters to take more wood than the contract allowed. Cuyler accused Ward of pocketing the leftover funds, a charge Ward vehemently denied. Cuyler and Ward also disagreed on how to use the many blacks – slave and free – that daily arrived at the block house at Bull's Ferry. Major General James Pattison sent Cuyler a curt note, telling the Volunteers' commander, "It having been represented . . . that not only the Male but Female Negroes with Children take advantage of your Post in New Jersey, to run away from Masters and come into this City, (which if they are suffered to do) they must become a burden to the Town – The General therefore requests you will be so good as to prevent their passing the North [Husdon] River, as far as it is in your power to do it."³⁷⁷

Ward, however, not only welcomed the new refugees, he armed them, an act that caused consternation in the British high command. No matter how sympathetic Sir Henry Clinton was toward the plight of the slaves, even the commander in chief of the King's troops was not prepared to sanction the large-scale arming of black soldiers. "[I]f this is permitted the confusion that it will create is beyond description, and such a handle will be made of it by [the Continental] Congress and the whole Continent that I tremble for the consequence, and notwithstanding this I cannot do business on this head."³⁷⁸ Adding still more the growing rancor between Cuyler and Ward was Ward's either inability or unwillingness to maintain proper accounts. The lack of records of what he paid out and to whom not made it nearly impossible for Cuyler to have any true idea of what was happening in the woodcutting business or just how much Ward was spending on the wood contracts or on feeding and paying his fighters. By August, the relationship was at the breaking point. Cuyler sent a pointed note to Ward on August 6, 1780 telling his now-famous field com-

mander to "Stop all unfair practices." Two weeks later, on August 21, 1780, Cuyler terminated his contract with Ward and led a band of the Refugees to Long Island, where they established a new woodcutting operation.³⁷⁹

The rift came just as Clinton and the British wanted to begin stockpiling wood for the coming winter, which could explain how Samuel ended up with the Refugees. The group under Cuyler, who continued using the name Loyalist Refugee Volunteers, set up a new camp at Smithtown. Ward's followers, with him now in charge, abandoned the block house at Bulls' Ferry because of its exposed location, and relocated to a new camp at Bergen Point, close to modern-day Bayonne, N.J., where they began to refer themselves as the Loyal Refugee Volunteers.³⁸⁰ Cuyler's group would become little more than another group of Loyalists while Ward's Refugees would continue to not only fulfill army contracts but raid and battle with local Patriot militia and Continental Army bands. Ward's men also won the backing of William Franklin, the former royal governor of New Jersey (and son of Benjamin Franklin), who was now the president of the Board of Associated Loyalists. Franklin lobbied Clinton to grant Ward a Provincial commission, which would make it easier for the Refugees to operate and recruit as Ward would now have the authority to actually command military units. It also created the possibility of others in the Refugees receiving similar treatment, which carried with it land grants and pensions.³⁸¹

Samuel reported to the Refugees sometime in November. His petition to Prevost confirms that time frame as he stated he joined "Major Ward at Bergen Point."³⁸² Ward was still a captain in November and would not take (literally) the title of major until the summer of 1781 after he gained still more fame leading raids on enemy installations in northern New Jersey.³⁸³ As Samuel wrote his petition nearly 30 years after he served with the Refugees, he likely referred to his former commander by his highest rank, which was common for that period. There is no indication Samuel was one of the armed men Ward used in his raids and patrols. The muster rolls of the Refugees do not list the woodcutters by name, and Samuel remained on the rolls of the Black Pioneers throughout his time with Ward.³⁸⁴ Ward paid his cutters based on the cordage they produced, which led to numerous complaints against the Refugees for taking wood for which they had either not paid nor received permission to cut. In January, 1781, Mrs. June Cadmus, whose husband, George, and son, David were ironically serving in the New Jersey Volunteers, wrote a letter to Lieutenant General James Robertson, the military governor of New York, complaining about Ward's activities. "I beg leave to mention to your Excellency that the persons who are mentioned in the affidavit herewith have lately cut down a quantity of wood and sent the same

as your memorialist hath been informed to the city for sale without any permission from her said husband or making him any compensation.”³⁸⁵ Cadmus claimed the “Treecutters” all but clear-cut her property, leaving her family without heating fuel for the winter. It was one of dozens of complaints New Jersey residents lodged against Ward.³⁸⁶

His time with the Refugees was likely eye-opening for the 19-year-old runaway slave from South Carolina. Everything would have been new, from the climate to the conditions in which he lived. Samuel spent at least three months with the Black Pioneers before he joined the Refugees, a period in which he would have received a uniform, such personal equipment that he needed, tools for woodcutting, and learned the rudiments of military discipline. He also began a personal odyssey that would endure for the remainder of his life – as a free man. Like slaves of later generations, Samuel probably learned the harsh lesson that liberty did not necessarily equate to an easy life. “De slaves, where I lived, knowed after de war dat they had abundance of dat somethin’ called freedom, what they could not eat, wear, and sleep in.,” recalled Ezra Adams, a former slave who lived near Winnsboro, S.C., after the American Civil War. “Yes, sir, they soon found out dat freedom ain’t nothin’, less you is got somethin’ to live on and a place to call home. Dis livin’ on liberty is lak [like] young folks livin’ on love after they gits married. It just don’t work. No, sir, it las’ so long and not a bit longer.”³⁸⁷

Even if he did at times think about what he lost he in running away, Samuel, like nearly every other Pioneer, had no intention of giving up his freedom. The Black Pioneers continued to show the lowest desertion rate of any unit in the Provincial Corps.³⁸⁸ His three months with the Provincials also would have accustomed Samuel to a change in diet and routine. Samuel grew up eating a variety of fresh vegetables and fruit – cabbage, pumpkins, potatoes, oranges and peaches. Older slaves often went hunting to provide sources of protein other than the pork their masters doled out as rations. Fish was also an important staple. As Ann Bell, a former slave from Winnsboro, S.C., recalled, “How did. they feed us? Had better things to eat then, than now and more different kind of somethin’s. Us had pears, molasses, shorts, middlings of de biscuit, corn bread, and all kinds of milk and vegetables.”³⁸⁹ Once he enlisted, Samuel lived off the standard British army ration of salted beef or pork, bread, and only sometimes fresh vegetables or fruit.³⁹⁰ The change in diet often had an adverse effect on the former slaves, leaving them susceptible to disease and fatigue. The different types of food and the poorer quality of it simply did not provide the necessary nutrition the pioneers needed to adjust to the climate or work load.³⁹¹

As a slave, Samuel worked under the task system, and he likely saw little physical change be-



A 1790 view of Bull's Ferry, New Jersey, where the Loyalist Refugee Volunteers scored a major victory over Continental Army troops under famed Major General “Mad” Anthony Wayne.

Courtesy Library of Congress

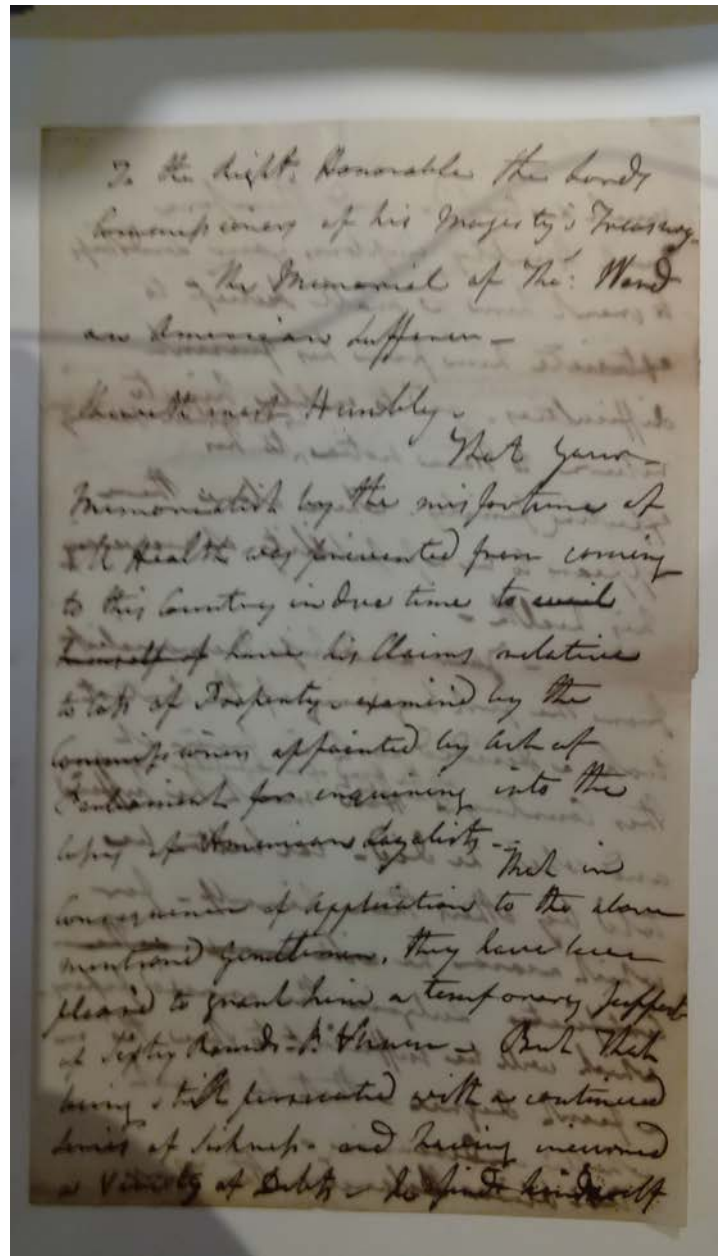
tween his duties with the Black Pioneers or those he had at Hyde Park Plantation. The main difference was in the reason for his labors. On the plantation, he had to work or faced brutal punishment. Once he ran off, Samuel chose to work and received pay for his effort. The temporary assignment to the Refugees carried an even larger financial incentive as Ward paid his woodcutters based on how much cordage they chopped. The more fuel they supplied, the more the cutters received.³⁹² Ward's men retained their exclusive contract for firewood with the British Army Barrack Department and remained in New Jersey until the middle of 1782. The Refugees left Bergen Point in March 1781 and moved to a new base near the site of Fort Lee, which the British had razed in 1776. From their new post they were able to expand their woodcutting and foraging, although it put the Refugees much closer to Continental Army units that soon looked to curtail the Loyalists' activities. Ward led several military raids in the summer of 1781, including a celebrated march on Closter, N.J., and also beat off an attack by New Jersey Continentals at his new post, which he dubbed Fort DeLancey in honor of Colonel Oliver DeLancey, Clinton's aide.³⁹³

Samuel remained with the Refugees for two years, all of which served as an education for his years in Nova Scotia. How much he earned as part of the Refugees is a mystery as Ward kept few records of what he paid or to whom, a practice that again landed

him in trouble in the summer of 1782. Those records that do exist show working for the Refugees was lucrative for the woodcutters. In one two-week period in July, 1781, the Refugees provided the British army Barracks Department with 220 $\frac{3}{4}$ cords of firewood, for which Colonel Alured Clarke, Barrack Master of the British army in New York, paid £884, 5 shillings. The woodcutters each received 10 dollars – about £2 – for each cord of wood they delivered.³⁹⁴ Again, as no individual records exist, it is impossible to know exactly how much Samuel earned or even how much fuel he cut. If his later endeavors in Nova Scotia are any indication, he earned enough to at least support himself when he arrived in Shelburne in 1783.

Arguably the best lesson Samuel learned took from his assignment with the Loyal Refugee Volunteers was how and how not to handle contracts. Ward maintained his exclusive contracts with the Barrack Department throughout 1781 and into 1782. However, his continued mismanagement and outright fraud dogged the Refugees. The complaints began to pile up, as did Ward's debts. The Refugees grew to a strength of 344 officers and men, organized into eight companies, including the woodcutters. While the army contracts provided the bulk of the unit's income, the Refugees also had contracts to provide local security, intelligence, and conduct raids such as that Ward led on Closter in 1781 and on Newark in the spring of 1782. Each member of the Refugees in turn had contracts with Ward stipulating what he would do and how much he was to receive. Samuel's status, however, might have been somewhat different as he was technically enlisted into a Provincial unit and was only on temporary duty with the Refugees to help them meet their contractual obligations for firewood. Samuel, then, was in a position to see not only the benefits of government contracts, but the easy pitfalls into which the contractors could land if they either failed to fulfill their obligations or attempted to defraud the government or others. This latter lesson became clear in the summer of 1782 when the Refugees fell apart due to Ward.

The woodcutters felled trees at a remarkable rate throughout 1781 and into 1782. At one point in August, 1781, the Refugees had stockpiled 668 cords of wood. According to the University of California School of Agriculture and Natural Resource, it took from 700 to 1100 trees – depending on the diameter – to provide that much firewood.³⁹⁵ The woodcutters ranged throughout northern New Jersey to meet their firewood contracts, trampling across private property while offering, though usually not making, payment for the wood. By October, 1781, the inhabitants of Bergen County had had enough. More than a dozen estate and private landowners initiated a lawsuit against Ward and the Refugees. Clinton appointed Ward's former commander, Abraham Cuyler, to investigate the Refugees' business dealings. Cuyler found am-



Excerpt of a letter from Sir Henry Clinton on behalf of Thomas Ward.

Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan

ple evidence of wrongdoing and called for a court of inquiry. The court found Ward owed more than £9,000 to landowners for wood – money he had received from Barrack Department. Ward, however, had spent much of that income on arming and equipping his soldiers and in funding his raids.³⁹⁶ The inquest, however, faded temporarily when the news of Yorktown reached New York. The surrender of Charles Cornwallis to a Franco-American army in Virginia all but ended major operations in the war. Ward continued to launch raids across New Jersey – perhaps to raise money to pay his debts – but even those operations came to an end on April 30, 1782, when Clinton placed a moratorium on all combat.³⁹⁷

The cessation of combat was the death knell for Ward and the refugees. The tribunal that found he owed more than £9,000 to the people from whose property his men took wood adjusted that figure and ordered Ward to pay £3,557. It was still far more than Ward could pay. He delayed making restitution throughout the summer of 1782 as he prepared many of his followers to leave New York – and his debts – behind. On October 2, 1782, Ward and about 200 Refugees took ship for Digby, Nova Scotia, where he expected to find land and opportunity.³⁹⁸ He spent two years trying to dodge his debts before he relocated again, this time to England, where he sought Henry Clinton's help in obtaining a pension and a land grant. Clinton obliged the former Refugee commander, telling a commission settling compensation claims for Loyalists, "The particulars of this gentleman's service and suffering I will lay before hereafter, if you should think it necessary; in the mean time it may perhaps be sufficient to say that he commanded a very considerable body of Loyalists near New York, where he made a very gallant defense of his post ... The poor gentleman is, I believe, in want of some temporary assistance."³⁹⁹

The demise of the Loyal Refugee Volunteers

did not end the term of Samuel's enlistment in the British army. He and the other Black Pioneers that were on temporary duty with the Refugees returned to the pioneers, where they still had a year of hard work ahead of them. The end of combat operations in the north opened areas previously under rebel control to wood foraging operations, and the growing population in New York required more and more fuel.⁴⁰⁰ The American victory at Yorktown sent thousands of Loyalists north to the only large British force still operating – Clinton's army in New York. The population in New York swelled past 45,000 with the influx of Loyalists from Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware.⁴⁰¹ For Clinton, and, after July 1782, his successor Sir Guy Carleton, the primary mission became providing for the new arrivals and planning for their evacuation. Samuel and the Black Pioneers continued to provide firewood for the burgeoning populace while also planning for their own departure. Samuel remained with the pioneers until June, 1783, by which time Carleton and Washington had worked out a timetable for the British evacuation of New York. That timetable would be different, however, for Samuel than for nearly every other Black Loyalist in New York.

Fourteen: Evacuation



A highly stylized depiction of the entry of George Washington into New York City following the British evacuation on November 25, 1783.

Courtesy Library of Congress

As the war between England and the new United States sputtered to a tenuous truce in 1782, attention turned to both the peace talks in Paris and how the British planned to compensate their former colonists for lost property.⁴⁰² At the top of the list were the slaves that had run off to either join the British army, slaves such as Samuel, and those simply answered the proclamations of Lord Dunmore, William Howe, and later, Henry Clinton. As negotiators tried to hammer out an agreement to finally end the war, the article of the proposed treaty that concerned former slaves the most was one that, for the British at least, would be the most difficult to accept. In Article VII, the Americans demanded, “[H]is Britanic Majesty shall with all convenient speed, and without causing any Destruction, or carrying away any Negroes or other Property of the American inhabitants, withdraw all his Armies, Garrisons & Fleets from the said United States, and from every Post, Place and Harbour within the same.”⁴⁰³

Sir Guy Carleton, who replaced Clinton as

British commander in chief, did his best to interpret the codicil in a way that would protect the thousands of slaves who came to the British seeking their freedom. He time and again stonewalled George Washington, who pressed Carleton to implement the agreement. For Carleton and other British officers, protecting the former slaves and honoring their commitment to them was a matter of personal integrity. Lieutenant General Alexander Leslie, who commanded the British troops in Charleston in 1782, sent a pointed letter to Carleton insisting, “the impossibility of delivering up, under any stipulation a certain description of Negroes, who having claimed our protection have borne arms in our Service or otherwise rendered themselves more peculiarly obnoxious to the resentment of their former masters, and the severity of Rebel Laws.”⁴⁰⁴ On May 6, 1783, Washington and Carleton met to finalize the ceasefire that would last until the final British evacuation. Once again, Washington pressed the British commander about the

slaves. According to a transcript Jonathan Trumbull and George Clinton, aides to Washington, kept of the meeting, the subject of the return of any slaves to their masters offered a clear divide between the two generals. After Washington asked Carleton how long it would take to arrange the final evacuation of British troops from the United States. Carleton replied “that upwards of 6,000 Persons of this Character had embarked and sailed and that in this Embarkation a Number of Negroes were comprised.” The statement flabbergasted Washington, who “expressed his Surprise that after what appeared to him an express Stipulation to the Contrary in the Treaty that by Property in the Treaty might only be intended Property *at the time* the Negroes were sent off.”⁴⁰⁵

Both men used their own interpretations of the treaty to press their point. Washington argued the codicil on the return of slaves applied to all slaves no matter when they entered British lines. Carleton, however, remained adamant the British had to only return those slaves who entered the British lines *after* the two sides had already accepted the treaty. Carleton held fast that

[I]t was never the Intention of the British Government by the Treaty of Peace to reduce themselves to the Necessity of violating their Faith to the Negroes who came into the British Lines under the Proclamation of his Predecessors in Command, that he forbore to express his Sentiments on the Propriety of these Proclamations but that delivering up the Negroes to their former Masters would be delivering them up some possibly to Execution and others to severe Punishment which in his Opinion would be a dishonorable Violation of the public Faith pledged to the Negroes in the Proclamations.⁴⁰⁶

Washington berated Carleton for what the American saw as a clear violation of Article VII of the treaty. Carleton, however, refused to budge. He conceded the Crown would have to compensate slave owners, but Washington did not believe compensation would actually work “as it was impossible to ascertain the Value of the Slaves from any Fact or Circumstance which may appear in the Register, the value of a Slave consisting chiefly in his Industry and Sobriety and General Washington further mentioned a Difficulty which would attend identifying the Slave supposing him to have changed his own Name or to have given in a wrong Name of his former Master.” Carleton, however, replied, somewhat adroitly, “[A]s the Negro was free and secured against his Master he could have no Inducement to conceal either his own true Name or that of his Master.”⁴⁰⁷ It was almost a prophetic statement as Samuel, after three years of freedom, adopted the last name of Ball soon after he arrived in Nova Scotia. Carleton was also painfully aware of the

impact the talks over their collective fate were having on the slaves, telling Washington, “if the Negroes were left to themselves without Care or Control from him Numbers of them would very probably go off and not return to the parts of the Country they came from, or clandestinely get on board the Transports in Manner which it would not be in his Power to prevent in either of which Cases and inevitable Loss would ensure to the Proprietors.”⁴⁰⁸

Worse, many southern slave-owning Loyalists were in New York and were actively searching for and in some cases, grabbing their former slaves. Boston King, who arrived in New York in January, 1783, vividly described the high and lows among the slaves as the fighting came to an end but the quest for permanent freedom remained elusive.

The horrors and devastation of war happily terminated and peace was restored between America and Great Britain, which diffused universal joy among all parties; except us, who had escaped from slavery and taken refuge in the English army; for a report prevailed at New-York, that all the slaves, in number 2000, were to be delivered up to their masters altho’ some of them had been three or four years among the English. This dreadful rumour filled us all with inexpressible anguish and terror, especially when we saw our old masters coming from Virginia, North Carolina, and other parts, and seizing upon their slaves in the streets of New York, or even dragging them out of their beds. Many of the slaves had very cruel masters, so that the thoughts of returning home with them embittered life to us. For some days we lost our appetite for food, and sleep departed from our eyes.⁴⁰⁹

The American War for Independence officially ended on September 3, 1783 when commissioners for the United States and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Paris. Although a foregone conclusion, plans for the final evacuation of New York accelerated during that summer and the plight of the thousands of blacks consumed much of the planning. Slave owners, patriot and Loyalist, submitted hundreds of claims, with each side accusing the other of ignoring the treaty terms. Brigadier General Samuel Birch began issuing certificate to any former slave who could prove, usually by simply making a statement, he or she had been with the British for at least 12 months or had arrived due to the Phillipsburg Proclamation.⁴¹⁰ For Boston King and most of the former slaves, the “General Birch Certificates” finally put an end to the lingering doubts among them as to whether they would lose the freedom for which they had risked everything.⁴¹¹ “The English had compassion upon us in the day of distress, and issued out a Proclamation, importing, That all slaves should



General Sir Guy Carleton, who oversaw the British evacuation from the new United States and who used his position as general-in-chief to safeguard the liberty of thousands of former slaves.

Courtesy Library of Congress

be free, who had taken refuge in the British lines, and claimed the sanction and privileges of the Proclamations respecting the security and protection of Negroes,” King recalled. “In consequence of this, each of us received a certificate from the commanding officer at New-York, which dispelled all our fears, and filled us with joy and gratitude.”⁴¹²

As the British left New York, first in a trickle and finally in torrents, Carleton kept an accurate count of the blacks that took ship for Nova Scotia. He created a ledger he named “The Book of Negroes” in which he recorded the name, place of birth, former owner, military service and, somewhat obliquely, when the individual arrived in British lines.⁴¹³ The ledger was part social record, part business accounting. While the British had a treaty obligation to compensate slave owners a fair value for their losses, Carleton viewed his obligation to the former slaves on a far more personal level. He had no intention of renegeing on the promise of freedom the Crown had made and that had induced so many slaves to run away from their plantations. The Book of Negroes was one way for him to satisfy both demands. British inspectors noted how a slave reached their lines – “ran off” was the most common entry –

and whether the individual had served in the army or navy. There were physical descriptions – inspectors described Boston King as a “stout fellow” – and most important, entries for when an individual arrived in British lines whether he served in a military unit. The date a runaway slave reached the British was paramount in the discussions over compensation. Carleton interpreted Article VII as applying to any slave who escaped to the British after Yorktown. The Americans believed it applied to slaves that escaped throughout the war. Although he berated Carleton several times over the British commander’s interpretation, there was little Washington could do about it.⁴¹⁴ As long as the Book of Negroes could show a former slave had reached the British before October, 1781, Carleton had every intention of ensuring that individual received his or her freedom.

The military service entry was important to the individual runaways for their future as service with the British army or navy carried rights to land grants, pay, and pensions. It could also, however, carry years of service. Enlistment in either the British army or navy put the individual at the mercy of the British command. As would happen in the War of 1812, many black enlistees believed, with some validity, the British could and would assign them to duty stations after the way that would almost guarantee if not a return to slavery, then a life little better than bondage. The most effective Black unit the British employed in the War of 1812, the Corps of Colonial Marines, all but mutinied in 1816 after the Admiralty sent them to Bermuda to work on constructing the royal dockyard on the island and where they were little better than slave labor.⁴¹⁵ For the former slaves gathered in New York in 1783, those same fears were present and often led to confusion or outright lies when they appeared before the inspectors before they took ship to Nova Scotia.⁴¹⁶

The Book of Negroes has become an important tool for Afro-Canadians in tracing their heritage. The slightly more than 3,000 people in the ledger actually detail the history of two countries – Nova Scotia, Canada, and Sierra Leone. More than 1,200 of those in the Book of Negroes moved to Sierra Leone in 1792, where they helped establish the first free black colony in the British Empire. Samuel, however, was never in the Book of Negroes. He was not part of any compensation agreement, which immediately set him apart from other former slaves that finally found permanent freedom in Canada, although whether he knew he was not part of the agreement is a yet another part of his life that remains shrouded in mystery. The final muster roll of the Black Pioneers lists Samuel as one of 18 members of the unit that arrived in Port Roseway – present-day Shelburne – Nova Scotia in July 1783 as part of an advance party of British soldiers. Carleton sent north to help prepare the province for the influx of refugees.⁴¹⁷ Brook Watson requested the help in a letter to Carleton on July 8, 1783. Watson was the British

126

Muster Roll of Capt. Alan Mowatt's Comp^y of Black Pioneers July 1783

| N ^o | Name | Rank or M ^o d ^o | Signature | Quarterm ^o | Private | Side | N ^o | Name | Remarks |
|----------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|-----------------------|---------|------|----------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Alan Mowatt | Captain | A. Mowatt | | | | 1 | John Deussen | On command at Port Roseway no pay drawn for this time |
| 2 | John Mowatt | Lieutenant | J. Mowatt | | | | 2 | John Deussen | |
| 3 | Edward Mowatt | Ensign | E. Mowatt | | | | 3 | John Deussen | |
| 4 | Thomas Peltz | | | | | | 4 | John Deussen | |
| 5 | Abraham Lusk | Sergeant | | | | | 5 | John Deussen | |
| 6 | Stephen Hall | | | | | | 6 | John Deussen | |
| 7 | George Amundell | Corporal | | | | | 7 | John Deussen | |
| 8 | James Wadles | Private | | | | | 8 | John Deussen | |
| 9 | Big Tom | | | | | | 9 | John Deussen | |
| 10 | Libby | | | | | | 10 | John Deussen | |
| 11 | Henry | | | | | | 11 | John Deussen | |
| 12 | John | | | | | | 12 | John Deussen | |
| 13 | Thomas | | | | | | 13 | John Deussen | |
| 14 | John | | | | | | 14 | John Deussen | |
| 15 | John | | | | | | 15 | John Deussen | |
| 16 | John | | | | | | 16 | John Deussen | |
| 17 | John | | | | | | 17 | John Deussen | |
| 18 | John | | | | | | 18 | John Deussen | |
| 19 | John | | | | | | 19 | John Deussen | |
| 20 | John | | | | | | 20 | John Deussen | |
| 21 | John | | | | | | 21 | John Deussen | |
| 22 | John | | | | | | 22 | John Deussen | |
| 23 | John | | | | | | 23 | John Deussen | |
| 24 | John | | | | | | 24 | John Deussen | |

Muster roll of the Black Pioneers showing Samuel Ball, listed at private "Samuell," as a member of the advance party that went to Port Roseway, Nova Scotia, in July, 1783, to prepare the province for the influx of refugees soon to arrive.

Courtesy Library of Congress

government official in charge of facilitating the settlement of the thousands of Loyalists on their way from New York. He wrote to Carleton requesting, "£10,000 to enable him to pay for wood for fuel," as well as men to help gather the estimated "3,774 pounds of forage necessary for the King's troops and others" then on their way to Nova Scotia.⁴¹⁸

Money and supplies, however, were in short supply in New York as the British prepared to evacuate. Carleton was hiring as many ships as he could to carry passengers to Nova Scotia. As commander in chief in North America, he also had the responsibility of organizing the evacuation from Savannah, Georgia, and Charleston, both of which the British occupied into the summer of 1783.⁴¹⁹ Many of the refugees from those cities, including several thousand more escaped

slaves, chose to go south to East Florida.⁴²⁰ The cost of the dual evacuation was staggering as Carleton attempted to purchase or prepare six months of rations for every Loyalist headed for Nova Scotia.⁴²¹ Watson, as Britain's commercial agent in Nova Scotia, had the responsibility of stockpiling the supplies and ensuring roads, wharves, and other infrastructure were ready to receive the new settlers. Watson needed help, and Carleton decided to send some of the Black Pioneers. For Samuel, it meant several more months of service, a term he was able to use as the basis for his petition to Prevost seeking his land grant.

The pioneers joined several groups of private contractors in cutting firewood, building roads, hauling food and forage, caring for animals and preparing arrival points throughout the province for the influx of

refugees from America. The two primary tasks, however, was the collection of firewood and the stockpiling of food. The promise of rations was one that lured many Loyalists as provisions had run short in New York. The new settlers also would have no time to cultivate new farms before the hard Nova Scotia winter descended, making food of the utmost importance simply for the survival of the thousands of newcomers. In tasking the military to aid in the collection and distribution of food, Watson and Nova Scotia Governor John Parr sought to decrease the likelihood of theft or fraud.⁴²² The massive effort to settle, feed, and simply move the more than 15,000 people that arrived in Nova Scotia between 1783 to 1785 was one that tasked the limited logistical system in the province to the limit. It also ensured a need for the Company of Negro Pioneers, who were among the only groups willing and able to work. The British offered military wages to already established Nova Scotians to aid in the relief effort and the low pay and tough conditions failed to attract many volunteers.⁴²³ The need for men to cut wood and move supplies was so acute Parr kept the Black Pioneers in service for a year longer than any other Provincial unit that arrived in Nova Scotia

during this period. Samuel and the pioneers remained in the Provincial Establishment until August, 1784, when Major General John Robinson finally mustered the unit out of service. Although it was back-breaking, usually thankless work, Samuel received his army pay throughout this time, allowing him to feed, clothe and house himself. Samuel appeared for a final muster of those pioneers living in Shelburne in front of Robinson, who mustered the Provincial unit for its final inspection. The British general appended a note at the end of the muster roll, declaring, "They are entitled to His Majesty's bounty of provisions, agreeable to the instructions I have received."⁴²⁴

With that, the now 23-year-old former slave who once bore the shameful name "Sambo," embarked on a new journey, one of freedom and opportunity. He forged his own path and adopted a new name. He shed the stigma and stench of slavery and emerged as Samuel Ball, a free Black man who was capable, enterprising, and determined to use his hard-won freedom to make a new life for himself in a new land. His eventual success was the mark of the man, a man who built his own fortune.

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Endnotes

1 Finding Samuel

“Lost and Founding,” The Curse of Oak Island, The History Channel, April 30, 2019.

2 Henry Clinton to Parliamentary Commission on Loyalists, December 3, 1784, Henry Clinton Papers, Volume 200, Folder 33, William L. Clements Library Manuscript Division, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich. (HCP)

3 Deposition of John Barkhouse Sr., January 9, 1846, in Samuel Ball, *Last Will and Testament*, Court of Probate for Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia, Archives of Nova Scotia.

4 For more on the promises of freedom the British made to slaves, see Francis Edward Rawdon-Hastings, Lord Rawdon, June 30, 1779, HCP, Volume 62, Folder 28.

5 Samuel Ball Memorial to Sir George Prevost, September 9, 1809, Archives of Nova Scotia.

6 “The Mystery of Samuel Ball,” The Curse of Oak Island, The History Channel, January 3, 2017.

7 Two of the more widely accepted “biographies” of Samuel Ball that are available on the Web are: <http://oakislandsociety.ca/samuel-ball-man-substance-oak-island-1765-1846/> as well as the blog of a Nova Scotia historian, F. Stanley Boyd, at http://wsog.blogspot.com/2006/05/black-settlers-of-treasure-oak-island_07.html.

8 Samuel Ball, *Last Will and Testament*.

9 Charles Barkhouse Sr deposition.

10 See Chapter Five of this study.

11 F. Stanley Boyd, “The Black Settlers of ‘Treasure Oak Island’ The Primary Generation,” http://wsog.blogspot.com/2006/05/black-settlers-of-treasure-oak-island_07.html and Charles Cornwallis, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, Charles Ross ed. (London: John Murray, 1859) 1:21-22.

12 Samuel Ball to George Prevost, September 9, 1809.

13 “The Accountant of Auschwitz,” CBS Evening News, April 22, 2015.

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14 John J. McCusker and Russell R. Menard, *The Economy of British America, 1607-1789* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 81, 102, 172-174.

15 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 102.

16 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 174.

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19 Michie, *Reconnaissance Search*, 4.

20 Peter Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1974), 4-5, and Paul E. Hoffman, *A New Andalusia and the Way to the Orient: The American Southeast during the Sixteenth Century* (Baton Rouge, La.: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 63-67.

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22 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 151-154.

23 McGrady, *Proprietary Government*, 64-67.

24 McGrady, *Proprietary Government*, 117-119.

25 Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 26-29; Anne Simmons Deas, *Recollections of the Ball Family of South Carolina and Comingtee Plantation* (Charleston, S.C.: Alvin Ball, 1909), 24-26.

26 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 27.

27 “Instructions for Carolina Colony,” quoted in McGrady, *Proprietary Government*, 118.

28 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 28.

29 Deas, *Recollections*, 26-27.

30 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 172; Daniel C. Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves: Ethnicity and the Slave Trade in Colonial South Carolina* (Urbana, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 110-114.

31 McGrady, *Proprietary Government*, 118-119.

32 Deas, *Recollections*, 28.

33 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 90.

34 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 90-92.

35 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 94-95, and Deas, *Recollections*, 46.

36 Deas, *Recollections*, 29-35.

37 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 7.

38 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 177, 192; Ball Family Papers, List of Slaves, South Carolina Historical Society.

39 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 44-117

40 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 151-154.

41 Deas, *Recollections*, 39.

42 Deas, *Recollections*, 41.

43 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 177, 192

Carolina Gold

44 Johnson remained loyal to James II of England during the “Glorious Revolution” of 1688 that ushered in William III of Orange as king of England. Johnson’s loyalty to the Stuarts forced him out of his post as governor of Barbados and he, like many other Barbadians, sought new lands and opportunities in the new Carolina Colony that would eventually become South Carolina. See McGrady, *Proprietary Carolina*,

265.

45 Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1974), 42-45; James M. Clifton, "The Rice Industry in Colonial America," *Agricultural History*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (July, 1981), 268.

46 Clifton, "Rice Industry," 269.

47 Wood, *Black Majority*, 35-37.

48 Wood, *Black Majority*, 37-38.

49 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 170-171, and Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 44-52.

50 The modern-day states of North and South Carolina did not yet exist in the late 17th century. Although the two would eventually split into separate colonies, when colonists such as Johnson and "Red Cap" Ball arrived, the area was simply "Carolina."

51 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 166.

52 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 86-93.

53 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 106-108.

54 Quoted in Wood, *Black Majority*, 35.

55 McCusker and Menard, *Economy of British America*, 177.

56 Quoted in Wood, *Black Majority*, 35.

57 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 206.

Family Lines

58 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 135-144; Ball Family Papers, Slave Ledgers, 1720-1760. (BFP)

59 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 11-13.

60 William Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days: Slavery in the American Rice Swamps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 16-21.

61 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 36-39.

62 Henry Laurens to Gidney Clarke, June 26, 1756, *Laurens Family Papers*, Library of Congress Manuscript Division. (LFP)

63 Henry Laurens to Clifton and Smith, July 17, 1755, LFP.

64 Slave ledger, BFP.

65 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 134-137.

66 *South Carolina Gazette*, January 25, 1775.

67 Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, February 17, 1756, LFP.

68 Slave ledger, BFP; and Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 152-154.

Kidnapped

69 Account Book, Austin & Laurens, 1750 April – 1758 December, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, p. 91-93.

70 *South Carolina Gazette*, July 26, 1755.

71 Account Book, Austin & Laurens, 92.

72 Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains or The Life of an American Slave* (New York: N. Dayton, 1859), 77-79.

73 Wood, *Black Majority*, 87-88.

74 Hugh Thomas, *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870* (New York: Sion & Schuster, 1999), 241-247.

75 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 250-251.

76 Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days*, 16-21.

77 Gustavus Vassa, *The Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African, Written by Himself* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), 33-35. Note: Special emphasis was put on the Vassa narrative as his capture and descent into slavery occurred at the same time as Coomba Laurens.

78 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 33.

79 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 20.

80 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 42.

81 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 43.

82 There are numerous compendiums of slave narratives, dating from the 1670s to the end of slavery in the United States in 1865. For South Carolina specific narratives from the 18th century, see David Huw, *Trade, Politics and Revolution: South Carolina and Britain's Atlantic Commerce* (Columbia, S.C. University of South Carolina Press, 2018).

83 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 47-48.

84 Thomas, *The Slave Trade*, 288-292.

85 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 48.

86 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 48.

87 Elizabeth Donnan, "The Slave Trade into South Carolina Before the Revolution," *The American Historical Review* 33.4 (1928): 804-828.

88 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 52-53.

89 Account Book, Austin & Laurens, 93.

90 The Laurens ledger does not mention from where the other 45 Africans sold in this auction came. It is possible they were part of the firms "inventory" or they were slaves their first owners decided to sell off.

91 Account Book, Austin & Laurens, 93.

92 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 17.

93 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 178.

94 Slave Ledger, BFP.

95 Book of Negroes, Sir Guy Carlton Papers, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

96 Amos Gadsden, *Born in Slavery: Slave Narratives from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1938*, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

97 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 197-201.

98 Benjamin Russell, *Born in Slavery*.

99 Margaret Bryant, *Born in Slavery*.

100 Slave Ledger, BFP.

Sambo

101 Slave Ledger, BFP.

102 Wood, *Black Majority*, 251-255.

103 Robert A. Olwell, "'Domestick Enemies': Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776." *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 1 (1989): 24-26.

104 Slave Ledger, BFP.

105 Dusingberre, *Them Dark Days*, 181.

- 106 Slave Ledger, BFP.
 107 Slave Ledger, BFP.
 108 Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 185.
 109 Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 185.
 110 Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 171-179; 190-195.
 111 Slave Ledger, BFP.
 112 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 186-187.
 113 Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 186.
 114 Dusinger, *Them Dark Days*, 185.

First years

- 115 Boston King, "Memoirs of the Life of Boston King, A Black Preacher," *The Methodist Magazine* 21 (March 1798), 106-10, and 21 (April 1798), 15.
 116 Pick Gladdany, *Born in Slavery*.
 117 Joe Rutherford, *Born in Slavery*.
 118 Sam Mitchell, *Born in Slavery*.
 119 Account books, Comingtee, Kensington, Hyde Park and Limerick Plantations, BFP.
 120 There is no definition for this word in this narrative. The transcript is verbatim and provides no information about this task.
 121 Gracie Gibson, *Born in Slavery*.
 122 Margaret Bryant, *Born in Slavery*.
 123 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 155-160.
 124 Janet Schaw, *Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776*, Evangeline Walker Andrews and Charles McLean Andrews, eds (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1921), 176-177.
 125 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 85-93.
 126 Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains, or The Life of an American Slave* (New York: H. Dayton, 1859), 138-139.
 127 Richard H. Steckel, "Slave Mortality: Analysis of Evidence from Plantation Records." *Social Science History* 3, no. 3/4 (1979): 93-96.
 128 Ball *Slaves in the Family*, 144-145.
 129 Steckel, *Slave Mortality*, 98.
 130 James Glenn letter, quoted in Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 67.
 131 *South Carolina Gazette* March 25, 1764; August 9, 1766 are just two examples.
 132 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 137-138.
 133 Willis Williams, *Born in Slavery*.
 134 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 100-101.

Out here in the fields

- 135 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 186.
 136 Steckel, *Slave Mortality*, 104-106.
 137 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 46-52.
 138 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 144-146.
 139 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 103.
 140 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 53-54.
 141 Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, Pantheon Books,

- 1974), 285-288.
 142 Lewis Cecil Gray, *A History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860* (Gloucester, Mass: P. Smith, 1958), 548-549.
 143 Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 548-549.
 144 Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 291-295.
 145 Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 291-295.
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 147 Philip D. Morgan, "Work and Culture: The Task System and the World of Low Country Blacks, 1700-1880," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Oct., 1982), pp. 565-566.
 148 Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 545-547.
 149 Morgan, "Work and Culture," 566.
 150 Slave Ledger, BFP.
 151 Morgan, "Work and Culture," 566-567.
 152 Morgan, "Work and Culture," 567.
 153 Ball Family Account Book, BFP.
 154 Morgan, "Work and Culture," 572.
 155 Samuel Ball Memorial to Sir George Prevost, September 9, 1809, Archives of Nova Scotia
 156 Charley Watson, *Born in Slavery*.
 157 Sam Mitchell, *Born in Slavery*.
 158 Deas, *Recollections*, 42-43.
 159 Charles Ball, *Fifty Years in Chains*, 203-205.
 160 Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 303-309.
 161 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 105.
 162 Maggie Black, *Born in Slavery*.
 163 Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves*, 67.
 164 Alexander Garden Quoted in Wood, *Black Majority*, 79.
 165 Edward McCrady, *The History of South Carolina under the Royal Government* (New York: The MacMillan Co., 1901), 517.
 166 Louisa Gouse, *Born in Slavery*.
 167 Sam Mitchell, *Born in Slavery*.
 168 Samuel Ball to George Prevost, September 8, 1809.

The Revolution begins

- 169 McCrady, *Royal Government*, 555-556.
 170 McCrady, *Royal Government*, 513-515.
 171 Deas, *Recollection*, 92-94.
 172 There are numerous sources, primary and secondary, regarding the causes of the American Revolution ranging from the papers of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Edward Rutledge, George Washington, Thomas Hutchinson, Thomas Gage, William Pitt the Younger and others, as well as secondary histories such as *Rise to Rebellion* by Jeff Shaara and *1776* by David McCullough. All are essentially outside the scope of this study, which focuses solely on South Carolina and how outside events could have impacted the life of Samuel Ball.
 173 John Drayton, *Memoir of the American Revolution from its Commencement to the Year 1776*,

Inclusive; as Relating to the State of South Carolina, (Charleston, S.C.: A.E. Miller, 1821), 1:164-167.

174 Deas, *Recollections*, 94-103.

175 Henry Laurens to Richard Oswald, January 4, 1775, quoted in Olwell, Robert A. "Domestick Enemies": Slavery and Political Independence in South Carolina, May 1775-March 1776." *The Journal of Southern History* 55, no. 1 (1989), 28.

176 Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 23.

177 Tax records quoted in Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 24-25.

178 Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 24.

179 *South Carolina Gazette*, August 1, 1769 and Wood, *Black Majority*, 283.

180 *South Carolina Gazette*, October 16, 1736.

181 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 187.

182 *South Carolina Gazette*, April 11, 1762.

183 See Account Book for Kensington, BFP, Duke University.

184 It is actually possible records do exist of why Henry Laurens gave (or sold) Coomba to John Coming Ball. However, an initial search of the Ball Family Papers did not reveal any documents.

War comes to South Carolina

185 McCrady, *Royal Government*, 503-510.

186 William Howe to Lord George Sackville Germain, January 16, 1776.

187 William Howe to Lord Germain, January 16, 1776.

188 William Howe to Lord Germain, January 16, 1776, *Proceedings, Papers and Debates of the House of Lords and the House of Commons* (London: J. Allen, 1775-1783), 4:699-700.

189 Drayton, *Memoir*, 1:37

190 *South Carolina Gazette*, May 3, 1775.

191 *South Carolina Gazette*, May 26, 1775.

192 Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 29.

193 William Campbell to Colonial Office, August 31, 1775, *Documents of the American Revolution, 1770-1783: Colonial Office Series*, Kenneth Gordon Davies, and Great Britain Public Record Office, eds. (Shannon, Ireland: Irish University Press, 1972-1981), 9:94.

194 George F. Scheer and Hugh F. Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats: The American Revolution Through the Eyes of Those Who Fought and Lived It* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Co., 1957), 130-133.

195 Scheer and Rankin, *Rebels and Recoats*, 130-131.

196 McCrady, *Royal Government*, 391-393.

197 Wood, *Black Majority*, 211-214.

198 Ball, *Slaves in Family*, 191-192 and Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 28-30.

199 King, "Memoirs," 106-107.

200 Testimony quoted in Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 34.

201 Olwell, *Domestick Enemies*, 35-36, and Dray-

ton, *Memoir*, 1:318-319.

202 McCrady, *Royal Government*, 383-384.

203 Benjamin Russell, *Born in Slavery*.

204 Scheer and Rankin, *Rebels and Recoats*, 130-131

205 William Campbell to Lord Dartmouth, quoted in Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 38.

206 Scheer and Rankin, *Rebels and Recoats*, 131-132.

207 Proclamation of John Murray, Lord Dunmore, November 7, 1775, Library of Congress Rare Book and Manuscript Division.

208 Gene Allen Smith, *The Slave's Gamble: Choosing Sides in the War of 1812* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 12.

209 Alan Gilbert, *Black Patriots and Loyalists: Fighting for Emancipation in the War for Independence* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2012), 22.

210 *Virginia Gazette*, December 18, 1775.

211 Gilbert, *Black Patriots*, 26-29.

212 Isaac Samuel Harrell, *Loyalism in Virginia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1926), 48-49.

213 Olwell, "Domestick Enemies," 41-42.

214 John Adams diary, September 24, 1775 [electronic edition]. *Adams Family Papers: An Electronic Archive*. Massachusetts Historical Society. <http://www.masshist.org/digitaladams/>

215 Drayton, *Memoir*, 2:187.

216 William Moultrie, *Memoirs of the American Revolution* (New York: David Longworth, 1802), 1:113-114.

217 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 199-200.

218 Moultrie, *Memoirs*, 113.

219 Arthur Lee to Cadwallader Colton, February 13, 1776, *Proceedings, Papers and Debates*, 4:1127.

220 William R Ryan, *The Trial of Thomas Jeremiah: Charles Town on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 133-136.

221 Ryan, *The Trial of Thomas Jeremiah*, 145-146.

222 Sir Henry Clinton to John Murray, Lord Dunmore, February 13, 1776, HCP, 13:1.

223 At this time, Dunmore had recovered from his defeat at the end of 1775 and recruited more Loyalists to his standard. He assembled a flotilla of nearly 100 small ships and was then engaged in raiding Patriot-held territory up and down the Chesapeake Bay.

224 William Campbell to Henry Clinton, February 24, 1776, HCP, 15:15.

225 Charles Cornwallis to George Germain, *Correspondence of Charles, First Marquis Cornwallis*, John Ross, ed. (London: John Murray, 1859) 1:21.

226 Charles Cornwallis to George Germain, April 18, 1776 and May 16, 1776, *Correspondence*, 1:23-24.

227 Boyd, "The Black Settlers of 'Treasure Oak Island' The Primary Generation."

228 Samuel Ball to Sir George Prevost, September

9, 1809.

229 Muster Roll of a Company of Blacks Com-
manded by Captain Allan Stewart, July, 1780, Ward
Chipman Papers, Muster Rolls and Casualty Returns,
1775-1783, Archives of Canada, M.G. 23, D 1, Series
I, Volume 25. (Black Pioneers Muster Rolls)

230 Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 230-231.

231 Clinton, *Attack of Sullivan's Island*, 13; Scheer
and Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats*, 135-136.

232 Peter Parker to George Germain, July 9, 1776,
in Henry Clinton, *Attack of Sullivan's Island*, 2-6.

233 For more on the feud between the two British
commanders, see Henry Clinton, *Attack of Sullivan's
Island*, 18-21.

234 Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 30-31.

235 William Campbell to Henry Clinton, February
13, 1776, HCP, 13:1

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248.

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1783* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press,
1993), 140-146; 154-161.

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244 Henry Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 87-88.

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Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 92-97.

246 Henry Clinton, *Narrative of Lieutenant-Gen-
eral Sir Henry Clinton, K, B. Relative to His Conduct
During Part of His Command of the King's Troops in
North America; Particularly to that Which Respects
the Unfortunate Issue of the Campaign In 1781* (Lon-
don: J. Debrett, 1783), 47-51.

247 Henry Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 110.

248 See George Washington to Nicholas Coke,
January 2, 1778, *The Papers of George Washington,
Revolutionary War Series, 26 December 1777-28
February 1778*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Charlottes-
ville: University of Virginia Press, 2003), 13:284-285
and John Laurens to Henry Laurens, February 2, 1778,
Laurens Papers, 12:392.

249 There are numerous histories of the 1778
Franco-American campaign to attack Newport, Rhode
Island that ended in a resounding defeat for the allied
forces, as well as histories of the 1st Rhode Island. See
Daniel M. Popek, *They "...fought bravely but were
unfortunate:" The True Story of Rhode Island's Black
Regiment and the Failure of Segregation in the Rhode
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House, 2015).

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American Rebellion, 151-153.

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Guillermo Calleja Leal and Gregorio Calleja Leal,
*Galvez y Espana en la Guerra de Independencia de
los Estados Unidos* (Madrid: Albatross, 2016), 166-
169.

252 Guillermo and Gregorio Leal, *Galvez y
Espana*, 69.

253 Guillermo and Gregorio Leal, *Galvez y
Espana*, 164-167.

254 Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 233.

255 Henry Clinton to Charles Cornwallis, May 20,
1780, HCP, 99:13.

256 Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 229-230.

257 Henry Clinton to Charles Cornwallis, April
22, 1780, HCP, 81:2.

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260 King, "Memoirs" 106.

261 Vassa, *Life of Olaudah Equiano*, 36; second
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263 List of Negroes that is Gone from Kensington,
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Black Pioneers

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271 Howe, *Order Book*, 16-18.

272 Howe, *Order Book*, 22-30.

273 Henry Clinton to William Howe, April 20,
1776, HCP, 262:1.

274 Muster roll of Company of Black Pioneers,
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275 Muster roll of Company of Black Pioneers,
HCP, 236:13

276 Clinton to Howe, April 20, 1776.

277 Henry Clinton to George Martin, May 10,

- 1776, HCP, 263.
- 278 Henry Clinton to George Martin, May 10, 1776, HCP, 263.
- 279 Henry Clinton, Journal, June 30, 1779, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Report on American Manuscripts in the Royal Institution of Great Britain* (London: Mackie and Co Ltd., 1904), 1:468.
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- 281 Samuel Ball Memorial to Sir George Prevost, September 9, 1809, Archives of Nova Scotia.
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- 283 Philip R.N. Katcher, *Encyclopedia of British, Provincial and German Units, 1775-1783* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1975), 79-81.
- 284 Negro Company Oath, HCP, 263:1.
- 285 Jacob Stroyer, *My Life in the South* (Salem, Mass.: Newcomb & Gauss, 1898), 99-100.
- 286 William Howe to Henry Clinton, May 22, 1776, HCP, 16:1.
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- 288 Douglas R. Cubbison, *The British Defeat of the French in Pennsylvania, 1758: A Military History of the Forbes Campaign against Fort Duquesne* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland Publishing, 2010), 74-77
- 289 There is no correspondence in any of Clinton's papers, books, or journals explaining either his decision to appoint Martin as the commander of the black pioneers, nor if Clinton assigned trained engineers to supervise the more complex projects he assigned to them.
- 290 William S. Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers (Loyalists) in the Revolutionary War* (Trenton, N.J.: Naar, Day, and Naar, 1887),
- 291 Cubbison, *British Defeat*, 74-77.
- 292 Cubbison, *British Defeat*, 76-77.
- 293 Map of Staten Island (1776) and Overlay of Modern Roads, New York Historical Society Manuscript Division.
- 294 William Tryon to Henry Clinton, November 3, 1777, HCP, 26:14.
- 295 Henry Clinton to William Howe, November 26, 1776, HCP, 28:55.
- 296 Charles P. Neimeyer. "The British Occupation of Newport Rhode Island 1776-1779," *Army History*, No. 74 (2010), 31.
- 297 Henry Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 57.
- 298 Muster Roll of Company of Negro Pioneers under the Command of Captain Martin, July 20, 1776, HCP, 264:1.
- 299 Henry Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 58.
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- 301 Niemeyer, "British Occupation," 34.
- 302 Todd Braisted, "The Black Pioneers and Others: The Military Role of Black Loyalists in the American War of Independence," *Moving On; Black Loyalists in the Afro-Atlantic World*, John W. Pulis, ed (New York: Garland Publishing, 1999),
- 303 Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 62-63.
- 304 Directive on Equipping Provincial Corps, May 21, 1777, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *American Documents*, 1:427.
- 305 Alexander Innes to Henry Clinton, November 9, 1779, HCP, 75:4.
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- 307 John Murray, Lord Dunmore, to William Legge, Earl Dartmouth, December 5, 1775, Historical Manuscripts Commission, *American Documents*, 1:227.
- 308 Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 97.
- 309 Letter of Aaron Lopez to Joseph Anthony quoted in Niemeyer, "British Occupation," 35.
- 310 Henry Clinton, *American Rebellion*, 58-59.
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- 312 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 4 April 1777
- 313 Pearson, *Those Damned Rebels*, 265, 278.
- 314 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 11 July 1777.
- 315 **The smell of powder**
Stryker, *The New Jersey Volunteers*, 45-50; Simcoe, *Journal*, 22-23.
- 316 Johann Carl Philip de Krafft, *Journal of Lt. Johann de Krafft, 1776-1784* (New York, n.b., 1888), 56.
- 317 Henry Clinton memo, May 1, 1780, HCP, 102:5.
- 318 Todd W. Braisted, Black Pioneers
- 319 William to Robert Paterson, March 14, 1777, HCP, 75:5.
- 320 See decree of Francis Rawdon-Hastings, Lord Rawdon, June 30, 1779, HCP, 62:28.
- 321 Charles Ball, *Fifty Years*, 466, 471.
- 322 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 11 July 1777.
- 323 For more on the Colonial Marines, see Stanley Quick and Chipp Reid, *Lion in the Bay: The British Invasions of the Chesapeake, 1813-1814* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2016).
- 324 Paul Harris Nicolas, *Historical Record of the Royal Marine Forces* (London: Thomas and William Boone, 1845), xx.
- 325 War Office, *A List of the Officers of the General and Field Officers, as They Rank in the Army; of the Officers in the Several Regiments of Horse, Dragoons, and Foot, on the British and Irish Establishments. (To Which Is Now Added an Alphabetical Index) the Royal Regiment of Artillery and Corps Of Engineers, the Irish Artillery and Engineers and the Marines on Full and Half Pay. with the Dates of Their Commissions, as They Rank in Each Corps and Army* (London: J.

Millan, 1778), 7.

326 Paul Harris Nicolas, *Royal Marine Forces*, 31-33.

327 In a somewhat ironic twist, Martin's new unit, the First Dragoons, were on garrison duty in Ireland, which offered about as many chances for action as did the Black Pioneers.

328 War Office, *List of Officers*, 228.

329 Allan Stewart to Francis Lord Rawdon, August 1, 1779, HCP, 60:18.

330 Stewart to Lord Rawdon, August 1, 1779.

331 Stewart to Lord Rawdon, August 1, 1779.

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334 John Montresor, "Journal of Captain John Montresor, July 1, 1777 to July 1, 1778, Chief Engineer of the British Army," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol 6, No. 1, 287.

335 William Howe proclamation, *Pennsylvania Ledger or The Philadelphia Market-Day Advertiser*, January 21, 1778.

336 J. Thomas Scharf and Thomas Wescott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884* (Philadelphia: L.H. Everts, 1884), 1:372-373.

337 *Pennsylvania Ledger*

338 Black Pioneers Muster Roll, July, 1778.

339 H. Seymour Hall, *Personal Experience of a Staff Officer at Mine Run and the Albemarle County Raid and as Commander of the Forty-Third Regiment of United States Colored Troops through the Wilderness Campaign and at the Mine before Petersburg, Virginia from November 7th, 1863 to July 30th, 1864* (Kansas Commandery of the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, 1894), 11.

340 *Pennsylvania Ledger*, January 21, 1777.

341 Charles Ball, *Fifty Years*, 512-515.

342 Braisted, "Black Pioneers," 15.

343 Black Pioneers Muster Roll, December 7, 1779.

344 Abstract of the Number of Men, Women, Children and Waggoneers Victualled at the Commissary General's Provision Stores between 17 and 20 July 1778, HCP, 17:15.

345 Simcoe, *Queen's Rangers*, 73.

346 Stryker, *New Jersey Volunteers*,

347 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 1779. Note: Many of the muster rolls under Stewart do not have a specific date. They appear in the Chipman papers in a chronological order but because there are no month or days, these notes only use the year. Specific dates, when available, are provided.

348 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 1779.

349 Steele and Sergeant Thomas Peters would become fierce advocates for the lives of Black Loyalists in Canada and would spearhead the drive to resettle many of them in west Africa, where they founded the

nation of Sierra Leone. See Mary Louise Clifford, *From Slavery to Freetown: Black Loyalists after the American Revolution* (Jefferson, N.C.: MacFarland & Company, Inc., 1999), 26-32.

350 Krafft, *Journal*, 64.

351 Thomas Jones, *A History of New York during the Revolutionary War* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1879), 1:171.

352 Scheer and Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats*, 396-400.

353 Henry Clinton, *Journal of the Siege of Charleston, 1780*, Henry Clinton Papers, William L. Clements Library Manuscript and Rare Book Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Mich.

354 Edward Ball, *Slaves in the Family*, 191.

355 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 23 February 1782 through 24 April 1783.

356 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 23 February 1782 through 24 April 1783.

357 Braisted, "Black Pioneers," 19.

358 The regiment would become the 33rd United States Colored Troops during a general reorganization of the army in 1864.

359 Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Army Life in a Black Regiment* (Boston: Fields, Osgoode & Co., 1870), 18-19.

360 Chipp Reid and Stanley Quick, *Lion in the Bay: The British Invasions of the Chesapeake, 1813-1814* (Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2015), 123.

361 Boston King, "Memoirs."

362 Boston King, "Memoirs."

363 Reid and Quick, *Lion in the Bay*, 124-125; Higginson, *Army Life*, 19-21.

364 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, undated, 1780.

365 Black Pioneers Muster Rolls, 1778-1783.

366 Murphy Steele to Henry Clinton, August 16, 1781, HCP, 170:27.

Loyal Refugee Volunteers

367 Scheer and Rankin, *Rebels and Redcoats*, 472-473.

368 Paul H. Smith, *Loyalists and Redcoats*, 69-73.

369 Braisted, "Black Pioneers," 24.

370 James Pattison to Charles Lumm, January 25, 1780, "Official Letters of Major General James Pattison," *Collections of the New York Historical Society for the Year 1875* (New York: New York Historical Society, 1876), 354-355.

371 Todd W. Braisted, "Thomas Ward and the Woodcutters," *The Revolutionary War in Bergen County: The Times that Tried Men's Souls*, Carol Karrels, ed. (Charleston, S.C.: The History Press, 2007), 24-25.

372 Court Martial Proceedings against Samuel Doremus, Daniel Maffis, et al., quoted in Braisted, "Thomas Ward," 26-27.

373 James Pattison to Charles Lumm, April 30, 1780, "Pattison Letters," 391-392.

- 374 Abraha Cuyler to John Andre, August 1, 1780, HCP, 114:21.
- 375 John Andre, *The Cow Chase*, HCP, 196:35; For accounts of battle see Thomas Ward reports to Oliver deLancy, July 21, 1780, HCP, 112:47 and Henry Clinton to George Germain, August 1, 1780, HCP, 114:21.
- 376 Braisted, "Thomas Ward," 26.
- 377 James Pattison to Abraham Cuyler, May 25, 1780, "Pattison Letters," 387.
- 378 Richard Arbuthnot to George Germain, May 2, 1780, *Sackville Papers*, 2:162.
- 379 Abraham Cuyler to John Andre, August 11, 1780, HCP, 116:23.
- 380 Thomas Ward to William Franklin, November 18, 1780, *Board of Trade and Secretaries of State: America and West Indies, Original Correspondence* (London: Colonial Records Office, National Archives of the Great Britain), Class 5, 82:65.
- 381 William Franklin to Oliver DeLancy, November 19, 1780, Colonial Records Office, Class 5, 82:64-65.
- 382 Samuel Ball memorial.
- 383 Braisted, "Thomas Ward," 138-139.
- 384 Black Pioneers muster rolls, 1781-1782.
- 385 June Cadmus to James Robertson, January 16, 1781, HCP, 141:17.
- 386 Braisted, "Black Pioneers," 27.
- 387 Ezra Adams, *Born in Slavery*.
- 388 Black Pioneers muster rolls.
- 389 Ann Bell, *Born in Slavery*.
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- 391 Edwards and Thompson, "British Army Diet," 18-21.
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- 393 Braisted, "Thomas Ward," 138-140.
- 394 Alured Clarke to Oliver deLancey, October 7, 1781, HCP, 178:22.
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- Evacuation**
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