African American History at Washington’s Headquarters

*What we know & What we don’t know*

**Hasbrouck Family**

- Hasbrouck Family Slaves
  - *What We Would Like to Know*
    - We would like to confirm what we have heard about the Hasbrouck Family slaves, including the following:
      - Jonathan Hasbrouck owned 5 slaves
      - One slave escaped when the army came through the area.
      - The slaves were trained millwrights.
      - The Hasbroucks may have kept their slaves by the Dutch system, which different slightly from the English system.

**African Americans Present at Washington’s Headquarters**

- William “Billy” Lee
  - *What We Know*
    - Born in 1752 or earlier William Lee was a slave purchased by George Washington in 1768. Lee was described as “mulatto” and functioned as General Washington’s personal valet, accompanying him hunting and surveying, as well as remaining with him as his body servant throughout the Revolutionary War.¹
    - Lee supposedly had a wife and child at Mount Vernon, but little else is known about them.²
    - He supposedly took a second wife during the war, a free black woman referred to alternatively as Peggy Lee and Margaret Thomas (see next). He would request her presence at Mt. Vernon after the war, a request that Washington was hesitant to grant.³

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² Ibid.
- Lee would be the only slave that was freed outright in George Washington’s will on his death.\textsuperscript{4}

- \textbf{What We Would Like to Know}
  - Any direct reference to his presence at the Hasbrouck House
  - Any additional information on his duties, particularly related to Headquarters.
  - Any other important information related to his biography.

- \textbf{Peggy Lee OR Margaret Thomas}
  - \textbf{What We Know}
    - Peggy Lee, alternatively referred to as Martha Thomas, was a free black woman\textsuperscript{5} that was employed as a “maid servant” and for “Washing Table Linnen” for Washington’s Headquarters at Newburgh between August of 1782 and June of 1783.\textsuperscript{6}
    - After the War ended, Billy Lee apparently referred to Margaret Thomas (als Lee) as his wife and requested that Washington bring her to Mount Vernon, a request that Washington felt compelled to grant despite reservations.\textsuperscript{7} At that point Washington believed that she was in working for Isaac and Hanna Sills, free blacks who worked as cooks in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{8} There is no known evidence that Margaret Thomas (als Lee) ever arrived at Mount Vernon.
  - \textbf{What We Would Like to Know}
    - Did Peggy Lee live in the Hasbrouck House, or nearby?
    - Any other important biographical information about her.
    - Any record of interaction between herself and Billy Lee at Headquarters

- \textbf{African American Servants/Slaves at Headquarters}
  - \textbf{What We Know}
    - Research has been done suggesting the possibility of 3 different slaves that may have accompanied Martha Washington to Headquarters in November of 1782. Their names are Joe, Giles, and Austin.\textsuperscript{9} This is not definitively proven.
    - David Humphries was said to have an African American body servant named Jethro Martin.
    - Jethro Martin – Jethro Martin is described as a servant/slave that served David Humphreys throughout the Revolutionary War and received a pension.\textsuperscript{10} It was said that he also stirred a desire for freedom amongst other enslaved in Connecticut as well.\textsuperscript{11}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{4} Mary V. Thompson “William Lee & Oney Judge…”
\item \textsuperscript{5} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{6} Thatcher, and Brien. \textit{George Washington Slept Here},... 68, 128-129
\item \textsuperscript{7} George Washington letter to Clement Biddle, July 28. 1784
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{9} Washington Headquarters State Historic Site, Research Files – “Servants and Slaves”
\item \textsuperscript{10} \textit{Revolutionary Characters of New Haven; the Subject of Addresses and Papers Delivered before the General David Humphreys Branch, No. 1, Connecticut Society, Sons of the American Revolution; Also List of Men so Far as They Are
\end{itemize}
A “Mrs. Thompson” functioned as the cook at many of Washington’s Headquarters. She was thought to have retired by the time Washington came to Newburgh.

**What We Would Like to Know**

- Can we confirm the identity of the servants/slaves brought to headquarters to attend Martha Washington. Were they Joe, Giles and Austin?
- Could Oney Judge have been at Washington’s Newburgh Headquarters?
  - **Oney Judge** – Oney Judge was born in 1773 and from the age of 10, served as a personal attendant or body servant to Martha Washington. This could have included travel during revolutionary war to Headquarters. It is suspected that Martha brought several servants/slaves with her to Newburgh.
- What was the identity of Washington’s household or cooking staff while at Headquarters? Were there any enslaved or free blacks among them?
- The identity of any of the body servants/servants of the Aides-de-Camp. Was Jethro Martin David Humphrey’s body servant and is there any record of his presence at Headquarters.
- Where did these various servants, staff, etc. stay at Headquarters?
- Was “Mrs. Thompson truly retired at the time Washington was in Newburgh? Interpreters have heard claims that Mrs. Thompson was related to Samuel Fraunces, who has been suspected of having African American ancestry. Is this a connection worth pursuing?

**Events Involving African Americans Related to Washington’s Headquarters**

- **Washington/Carleton Conference**
  - **What We Know**
  - On May 6, 1783, General George Washington conferenced with Sir Guy Carleton in Orange Town on the subject of the implementation of the Treaty of Paris. This was during Washington’s period of residence at the Hasbrouck House in Newburgh.
  - During the interview, Washington expressed disappointment and surprise at the British allowing slaves that had fled their patriot masters to serve the British in exchange for their freedom, to board ships and leave the colonies as free people. He argued that this

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*Known from the Territory Embra. New Haven, Conn.: General David Humphreys Branch, No. 1, Connecticut Society, Sons of the American Revolution, 1911. 64*


12 Thatcher, and Brien. *George Washington Slept Here,…*. 67-68

13 Ibid. 67-68

14 Mary V. Thompson “William Lee & Oney Judge…”

15 Washington’s Headquarters State Historic Site, Research Files – “Servants and Slaves”

flew in the face of one of the major articles of the Treaty of Paris, providing that all property seized by the British, including slaves, was to be returned. Carleton countered that he felt this would be a breach of faith given the agreement the British had entered into with the former slaves, and that their masters would be compensated monetarily for their losses. Washington insisted that he still viewed this as a violation of the agreement.\textsuperscript{17}

- It should be noted that one we can document one specific slave that fled Washington’s ownership at Mount Vernon that left on those ships, named “Harry Washington”.\textsuperscript{18}

  - Harry Washington – Harry Washington was purchased by Washington in 1763 and worked alternatively as a “ostler” for Washington’s horses and assisting in clearing swamp land for Washington’s “Dismal Swamp Company”. Harry ran away from Mount Vernon once in 1771 and was returned in 1773. He would flee again around 1775, likely in conjunction with Lord Dunmore’s proclamation offering freedom to slaves with rebel masters in exchange for military service. Harry likely served in the British army, and was listed in records as leaving from New York on a ship to Sierra Leone in 1783.\textsuperscript{19} These were the same ships leaving New York that Washington was conferencing with Carleton about.

- What We Would Like to Know

  - More research on the context of the conference including:
  - More context for both Washington and Carleton’s positions.
  - What this says about the positions both the British and Americans take and how it related to the larger issue of slavery.
  - The letters Washington received asking about the status of these freed slaves.
  - Individual stories associated with these events. (i.e. more specific research on Harry Washington or other individuals)

- Lafayette’s Letter on Slavery/Emancipation

  - What We Know

    - The Marquis de Lafayette, a close personal friend of the General, wrote Washington on the subject of slavery while he was headquartered at Newburgh.
    - In his letter, he expressed an idea to jointly purchase an estate with Washington for the purpose of freeing slaves and to treat them instead as tenants. He felt that Washington lending his support to the project could serve as an example for the rest of America to follow suit.\textsuperscript{20} Washington responded positively to the

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} To George Washington from Marie-Joseph-Paul-Yves-Roch-Gilbert du Motier, marquis de Lafayette, 5 February 1783, AND Wiencek, An Imperfect God..., 260
sentiment of the letter, but declined to go into further detail until he had met with Lafayette in person.\(^{21}\)

- There were accounts of their discussion at Mount Vernon afterward on the subject, with Washington expressing his desire to be rid of slaves. Soon after that, Lafayette actually purchased an estate and put his plan into action, which Washington later commented on, praising the work, but blaming political impracticality on pushing emancipation any further.\(^ {22}\)

- **What We Would Like to Know**
  - How the letter reflects Washington’s changing attitudes toward the institution of slavery
  - What the scheme itself says about both men’s attitude toward African Americans and their feelings on the issue of slavery.
  - The details of what ultimately became of Lafayette’s scheme and Washington’s involvement/non-involvement in it.
  - Any stories of African Americans involved in this “experiment”

- **David Humphreys & African Americans**
  - **What We Know**
    - David Humphreys, Aide-de-Camp to General Washington while he was at his Newburgh Headquarters, served as a nominal commander to a group of African American troops from Connecticut during the war.\(^ {23}\)
  - **What We Would Like to Know**
    - More research should be done on this particular regiment and whether Humphreys ever actually served as its commander.
    - More research could be done into the context of African American soldiers in the Continental Army more generally
    - More specifically, research on Humphreys role in the context of African American recruitment, if any. This thread has possible connections to his body servant, Jethro Martin as well.
    - One of Humphreys poems was considered an antislavery poem. A copy of this poem should be located and researched.

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**African Americans After Washington /Site History**

- **Frederick Douglass Speech**
  - **What We Know**

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\(^{22}\) Wiencek, *An Imperfect God*, 262-263.

- Sources list a speech by Frederick Douglass in 1870 in Newburgh celebrating the passage of the 15th Amendment, giving African Americans the right to vote.  
  o What We Would Like to Know
  - There is discrepancy over whether the speech was delivered on the grounds of Headquarters, that the parade of celebration passed by the Headquarters, or if Headquarters was entirely uninvolved in the event.
  - It should be established if the speech took place on the grounds of Headquarters, or had any substantive relationship with Headquarters (ie. Douglass referencing Washington in his speech coupled with a march past Headquarters, or a direct visit.)

- African American Visitors to Headquarters
  o What We Would Like to Know
    - Were there any prominent African American visitors to Washington’s Headquarters (Note: These may be found in the headquarters historic guest register)
    - Was there regular visitation by African Americans to Headquarters in its early years as an historic site? How did that pattern evolve? What are the reasons behind it?
    - Have there been past events that have focus on African American issues at the site, or prominently featured African Americans (ie. Civil War Commemorations, etc.)

- African American Presence in Newburgh
  o What We Know
    - There are references to an active African American community in Newburgh from the early 19th century onward, located near the vicinity of Washington’s Headquarters.
  o What We Would Like to Know
    - How did the African American community in Newburgh evolve? What was that community’s relationship with Washington’s Headquarters throughout its history?

Other Minority Groups and Headquarters

- Native Peoples and Headquarters
  o What We Know
    - Washington corresponded with Sir Guy Carleton regarding native issues regarding frontier violence while he was at Washington’s Headquarters.
    - In Newburgh there is a park named after a “Chief Cronomer”.
  o What We Would Like to Know

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25 Sir Guy Carleton to Washington, March 31, 1783. AND George Washington to Sir Guy Carleton, April 7, 1783
What is the context of the Carleton/Washington dialogue on native issues discussion? What are the particular events that the men are referring to and can this be connected to Washington’s broader policy/experience with Native Peoples?

Research on Chief Cronomer’s presence may yield more information on Native Peoples located in the Newburgh area.
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