

## **Said, Omar Ibn** <sup>[1]</sup>

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by Thomas C. Parramore, 1994; Revised SLNC Government & Heritage Library, June 2023

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**1770?–1864**



"Ambrotype of Omar ibn Said." Photo courtesy of UNC, DocSouth.

<sup>[4]</sup>Omar Ibn Said, an Islamic scholar, was born in Futa Toro (now a part of [Senegal](#) <sup>[5]</sup>) to a wealthy Muslim family before being enslaved in the United States and eventually North Carolina. Said was well educated in Quranic schools, studying arithmetic, business and theology alongside religious leaders including his brother for twenty five years. In addition to his studies, he worked as a teacher and tradesman. He purportedly made a pilgrimage to [Mecca](#) <sup>[6]</sup> between 1790 and 1805.

In 1807, at nearly 40 years old, Said was captured, enslaved, and forced to migrate to Charleston, S.C. He was among the last African people to be trafficked through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade before the outlawing of the overseas slave trade at the end of 1807.

Said was enslaved for two years in Charleston and on a South Carolina rice plantation by a man called Johnson, who Said described as "small, weak, and wicked" with "no fear of God at all." In 1810, he escaped and made his way to [Fayetteville](#) <sup>[7]</sup>. Near Fayetteville, Said visited a Christian church to pray. After being seen in the church, he was captured and imprisoned for sixteen days. When efforts to locate his enslaver proved unsuccessful, Said was claimed as property by General [James Owen](#) <sup>[8]</sup> of [Bladen County](#) <sup>[9]</sup>.

It was at James Owen's [Cape Fear River](#) <sup>[10]</sup> estate called Milton that Said learned English and was said to have converted to the Christian religion. Owen, intrigued by Said's fluency with Arabic and his high level of education, gave Said an Arabic translation of the Bible in 1819. Said joined the First Presbyterian Church in [Fayetteville](#) <sup>[7]</sup> in 1820. Modern scholars hold that Omar Ibn Said remained a devout Muslim for the entirety of his life.

In 1831, he completed his autobiography titled "The Life of Omar Ibn Said." This narrative is thought to be the only autobiography written in Arabic by an enslaved person in the United States.

In 1836, the Owen family moved to [Wilmington](#) <sup>[11]</sup> and took Said with them. There are reports that he accompanied his enslavers to resort springs in the South and there entertained children with folk stories. An added source of public interest

in the 1850s was Omar's advanced age.

During the Civil War <sup>[12]</sup> the Owen family moved to Owen Hill, a Cape Fear farm formerly the home of General Owen's brother, Governor John Owen <sup>[13]</sup>. Said died at Owen Hill at the age of ninety-four.

Omar Ibn Said was referred to by many names, including Uncle Moreau, Uncle Moro, Prince Moro, Omeroh, Umeroh, Moro, Morro, Meroh, Moreau, and Monroe.



"The Lord's Prayer written in Arabic by Uncle Moreau (Omar) a native African, now owned by General Owen of Wilmington N. C. . He is 88 years of age & a devoted Christian. Given to Mary Jones, at the Rockbridge Alum Springs, Rockbridge County Va. by Genl Owen July 27, 1857." Photo courtesy of UNC, DocSouth. <sup>[14]</sup>**References:**

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J. F. Jameson, "Autobiography of Omar ibn Said, Slave in North Carolina," *American Historical Review* 30 (July 1925)

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#### **Additional Resources:**

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Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/omarsaid/menu.html> <sup>[17]</sup>

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/omarsaid/summary.html> [18]

<https://docsouth.unc.edu/highlights/omarsaid.html> [19]

"'Oh ye Americans': The Autobiography of Omar ibn Said an enslaved Muslim in the United States 1831." National Humanities Center. <http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai/community/text3/religionomaribnsaid.pdf> [20]

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"Ambrotype of Omar ibn Said." Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/omarsaid/support6.html> [4] (accessed March 14, 2012).

"The Lord's Prayer written in Arabic by Uncle Moreau (Omar) a native African, now owned by General Owen of Wilmington N.C. . He is 88 years of age & a devoted Christian. Given to Mary Jones, at the Rockbridge Alum Springs, Rockbridge Country Va. by Genl Owen July 27, 1857." Documenting the American South, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/omarsaid/support3.html> [14] (accessed March 14, 2012).

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## Origin - location:

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## From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) [35]

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