

Titus, Ishmael ^[1]

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by Jared Dease & Andrea Smythe, October 2023

ca. 1743 - January 27, 1855



Ishmael Titus Plaque in Charlotte, NC. The plaque is located near the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts & Culture. May 20, 2015. Image courtesy of Commemorative Landscapes, UNC Chapel Hill.

^[2]Ishmael Titus was a Black Patriot soldier during the American Revolution. Titus was born around 1743 in Amelia County (now Lunenburg County), Virginia. Titus was born under the ownership of his first enslaver, Harry Bluford. He was enslaved by Bluford for many of the early years of his life. The few details of Titus's early life that are documented are affiliated with Bluford and the French and Indian War.

During the French and Indian War, Bluford served as a commissary transporter under General [Edward Braddock](#) ^[3] for the British army. Heavy supplies often required extra horsepower to transport, and Bluford used Ishmael (then about thirteen years old) to supervise and ride extra supply horses. Bluford and Titus's service coincided with Braddock's Campaign and subsequent ambush at the [Monongahela River](#) ^[4] on July 9, 1755. Later in life, Titus recalled the events of Braddock's defeat, citing that red British uniforms were likely "colored with blood." At the time of his death, Titus was documented as "the last survivor of Braddock's Defeat."

Sometime after Braddock's Defeat, Bluford sold Titus to a pair of brothers in North Carolina, John and Dick "Miur" (Mair, Marr, Myer). The pair lived on the Dan River near the Virginia border, likely in present-day [Stokes County](#) ^[5], and "owned or were interested in the Iron works called 'Troublesome Iron works' ^[6]." The Miur brothers enslaved Titus for "a long while" until they sold him to Lawrence Ross, who owned a homestead on the Yadkin River in Rowan County.

Titus served with Patriot forces in the American Revolution during his enslavement to Ross. In Spring 1779, Ross was called to

volunteer in the local militia. Instead of serving himself, Ross offered to emancipate Titus if he served in his place. According to Titus's pension application, he served one year in Ross's place with the militia and was subsequently granted his freedom. "During this time some skirmishes took place among the Tories & Indians [and I] was stationed during the winter at a place called then Fort Independence [7]." As a free person, Titus voluntarily reenlisted for at least two more years, and was present at some of North Carolina's high-profile battles during the American Revolution. According to Titus's pension application, he was present at the following battles with the following commanders: Kings Mountain [8] under Benjamin Cleveland [9] on October 7, 1780; Guilford Courthouse under Samuel Isaacs [10] and John Beverly [11] on March 15, 1781; and Deep River under Benjamin Cleveland on July 29, 1781. Titus also dictated that he was sent to the "Gate's Defeat" at the Battle of Camden [12] in August 1780, but that his unit "did not arrive

there till the American Army began to retreat... I was one of the number who retreated to Salisbury." Titus did not reenlist at the end of his second term in 1781, and was "discharged on the Holston River at a Log Court House," likely in Tennessee or Virginia.

After serving in the American Revolution, Titus left North Carolina and moved to a town, "Ottiwich/Minich[?]," near New Rochelle, New York. Titus continued to move around New England at this time, living also in Ballston, NY, and Troy, NY. Titus was next documented in Savoy, Massachusetts, in September 1812. There, he married Lucy Rogers, a free person of color (recorded on the 1850 census as "mulatto") from the Savoy area. Lucy and Titus remained married until his death in 1855. Together, Titus and Lucy moved to the town of Pownal in Bennington County, Vermont, according to both his pension application and the 1820 census.

After living in Vermont, Titus and Lucy moved to the town of Williamstown in Berkshire County, Massachusetts, where they would live until Titus died. It was in Williamstown where Titus applied for his Revolutionary War pension. On June 7, 1832, Congress passed "An Act supplementary to the 'Act for the relief of certain surviving officers and soldiers of the revolution" [13]. The 1832 pension expansion provided every living soldier or officer with at least two years' service in the Continental Army, militia, or state troops with a pension of full pay for life. Now qualifying for a pension for his service, Titus completed his pension application [14] on October 10, 1832, with the help of Berkshire County probate clerk W. P. Walker. Titus was born enslaved, and many states' laws forbade teaching enslaved people to read and/or write; thus, he was illiterate and signed his dictated pension application with an "X." Due to his aged memory, some details of his initial application were not accurate. Titus issued two revisions to his initial application before submitting his final version on December 5, 1832. Titus's application for pension was denied on October 2, 1833 by North Carolina Secretary of State William Hill [15]. Hill cited that:

"the name of Ishmael Titus does not appear on the musterrolls of the Continental line of this State in the Revolutionary War, or any other document affording evidence of service in said line. There was a Colonel Cleveland (a Militia Colonel) who I believe was at the Battle of Kings Mountain and I believe there was an Officer of the name of Isaacs, but I have no recollection of a Captain Beverly, or to have heard of such an Officer."

According to the Southern Campaigns Revolutionary War Pension Statements & Rosters, "About 15% of the rejected soldiers' claims were because the soldier claimed Continental service, but his name could not be found on a roster. In such cases the applicant had to obtain testimony from an officer or two eye-witnesses." As he was enslaved, Titus's surname may not have matched muster roll records. Enslavers frequently gave their surname [16] to the people they enslaved. Titus may have been documented as any of the names of his former enslavers: Bluford, Marr, or Ross. Another problem of Titus's application was that he initially served as a substitute [17] for Lawrence Ross. He may have been documented in subsequent records under a name that he had not chosen for himself. In any case, Titus did not seek reconciliation or reapplication for his service pension.

Titus died on January 27, 1855. Though Titus's true age is unknown, he was likely 110 years old at the time of his death.

Titus is considered by many a symbol of Black North Carolinians in the American Revolution. His story inspires creations of popular media and art. In August 2012, artist Thomas Kelly Pauley recreated a depiction of Ishmael Titus using forensic and studied research. The portrait was unveiled [18] at the American Revolutionary War Living History Center in Grover, North Carolina. Its dedication served to memorialize the contributions of Black North Carolinians to the American Revolution. On May 20, 2015, the Mecklenburg Historical Association [19] and The May 20th Society [20] dedicated a plaque [2] to Ishmael Titus as part of the Charlotte Liberty Walk [21]. It bears an image of his likeness and honors "African American Contributions during the American Revolution." The plaque is located near the Harvey B. Gantt Center for African-American Arts & Culture [22] in Charlotte.

In 2021, the Charlotte Museum of History commissioned [23] four local artists to create four portraits of historic Charlotteans. The portraits were painted live as part of the June 2021 African American Heritage Festival in Charlotte, hosted by the Arts and Science Council. Artist Makayla Binter [24] completed the portrait [25] of Ishmael Titus at the festival. It was subsequently added to the Charlotte Museum of History's collection with a biographical write-up attached. The portrait is displayed [26] in the museum and is viewable to the public.

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Additional Resources:

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"African Americans in American Revolution (Ishmael Titus), Charlotte." *Commemorative Landscapes*. UNC Chapel Hill. <https://docsouth.unc.edu/comm/land/monument/943> [36] (accessed October 4, 2023).

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Authors:

[Dease, Jared](#) [45]

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Origin - location:

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Charlotte ^[48]

Rowan County ^[49]

Stokes County ^[50]

From:

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