



Virginia C.A.R. Patriots of the Round Table ***Cato Varnum***

Unsung Hero at Yorktown – Fighting for Freedom, His and Ours

This month (February 2023), America celebrates Black History Month. African Americans, both free and enslaved, played an important role in the American Revolution. The Round Table already has two Black Patriots: James Lafayette and Billy Flora. James Lafayette spied on behalf the Patriots at Yorktown, and Billy Flora stood bravely at the Battle of Great Bridge to defend it against a British advance.

This month, we recognize one of the members of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, perhaps the most famous regiment that included African Americans during the American Revolution. The 1st Rhode Island Regiment was an integrated unit composed of African American, Native American, and white soldiers, who served together from 1778 through the end of the war in 1783.

Cato Varnum was a 16-year-old boy who, in March 1778, enlisted in the 1st Rhode Island Regiment and served to the end of the war. He participated in the siege of Yorktown in a light infantry unit. Despite his youth, he served bravely and with dedication to the Patriot cause. Very little is known about his life before or after his military service, but we honor him as one of many African Americans who fought on behalf of freedom and liberty.

Discussion Questions and Activities for Local Societies

1. What led to the recruitment of the 1st Rhode Island Regiment in 1778?

<https://www.amrevmuseum.org/read-the-revolution/from-slaves-to-soldiers>

2. What benefit was promised to enslaved people who enlisted in the regiment?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1st_Rhode_Island_Regiment

Additional Resources

<https://www.americanrevolutioninstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Rhode-Island-in-the-American-Revolution-2000.pdf>

<https://www.battlefields.org/learn/articles/10-facts-black-patriots-american-revolution>

African Americans in the American Revolution (short video):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrdwOoXX8e8>