

up to Mr. Saml. May junr? his son Hezekiah being very
dangerously ill. — No. Old Mr Mayr? and his Wif
in much sorrow intermix'd wth joy. Mr. Nathan's Wife
is brought to bed & has a son — But Mercy likewise. And
the latter has a black one. — Thot to Velly m^r Mason's Essex.
A most grievous & sore Evil! God grant her Repentance &

October 1756.

her Wicked Companion also: & Support of wound-
ed Relatives, and give to each of y^e. Grace we
may be sufficient for y^e. — I believe I must walk to Mr. Dan. Adams's to

Peter Maynard

A Black Revolutionary War Soldier from Westborough, Massachusetts

On September 21, 1756, the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman of Westborough, Massachusetts, visited the home of “Old Mr. Maynard”—86-year-old David Maynard. Parkman took the “Opportunity of discharging [his] Duty to [Maynard’s] Daughter Mercy, who, though unmarried, is big with Child.” Two weeks later, Parkman noted that David Maynard and his children were “in much sorrow intermixed with their Joy.” David’s daughter-in-law Lucy, his son Nathan’s wife, had given birth to a son, “but Mercy likewise and the Latter has a black one.” The father, it was believed, was “Mr. Masons Essex.”

Parkman wrote, “A most grievous and Sore Evil! God grant her Repentance and her Wicked Companion also: and Support the wounded Relatives, and give to each of that Grace which may be sufficient for them!” On October 18, the minister visited “poor, Miserable Mercy Maynard,” whom he found “in Some Penitent Way, which may God please to forward and ripen!”¹

While premarital pregnancies were not uncommon in eighteenth-century New England, the case of Essex and Mercy was quite unusual.² Mercy Maynard, the youngest of the eleven children of David and Hannah Maynard, was born on March 4, 1725.³ Her mother died twelve days later, and her father, then 55 years old, did not remarry. Mercy was nearly 31 when she became pregnant early in 1756. By that time, eight of her surviving siblings had married, leaving Mercy and her 38-year-old sister, Hannah, at home caring for their aging father. For women in their thirties, spinsterhood was often a permanent condition.

The responsibilities of caring for an aging parent, loneliness, and the frustrations of dependence may have played a role in Mercy’s involvement with Essex. “Mr. Mason,” Essex’s enslaver, was probably Daniel Mason, Mercy’s brother-in-law, and visits to the Mason home may have been a regular part of Mercy’s life. Mercy’s sister Martha, a widow, had married Mason, a 54-year-old widower, in 1752, three years after her husband’s death, bringing into her new marriage two small children, aged three and four.⁴ Mercy would have been welcome in her sister’s household for companionship and help with the children and household chores. And that would have put Mercy into contact with Essex. Were it not for the survival of Ebenezer Parkman’s diary, we would have no idea what happened to Mercy Maynard, and Parkman’s only reference to “Mr. Masons Essex” is the sole record of that enslaved man’s existence.

A year after Mercy’s son was born, David Maynard died, and on November 12, 1757, his heirs, including Mercy, consented to his will.⁵ Maynard’s will, signed on August 14, 1755, provided for his two unmarried daughters, Hannah and Mercy. In addition to £10 each, Hannah and Mercy were to have the use of the east end of their father’s house, “from Garrett to Cellar,” with use of the “Yard room and the Well,” as well as wood for



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their fires and a cow apiece, the latter to be kept, “both Summer and Winter,” by David’s sons Ebenezer and Nathan. “But,” wrote David, “if my said Dauters Shall marry, or when they shall decease,” the east end of the house would belong to Ebenezer. David Maynard did not change his will after the birth of Mercy’s son.

While Mercy may have been “in Some Penitent Way” following the birth of her child, that did not “ripen” to the point of making a confession before the Westborough church, and her son was not baptized.⁶ Her son’s birth was not registered with the town clerk. Only two additional references to Mercy Maynard exist. On January 15, 1772, Parkman noted that a Captain Howard from Canada Parish of Windham, Connecticut, gave him “some Account of Mercy Maynard, who lives, and has done for some years, at his House.” Howard visited Parkman again in 1774, with Parkman noting that Howard “has been a kind Friend to the unhappy Mercy Maynard.” By that time, Mercy was 49 years old. When and where she died are not recorded.⁷

Mercy’s son, however, apparently remained in Westborough. On December 9, 1776, the Massachusetts House of Representatives instructed the selectmen of each town to compile a list of their male inhabitants who were 16 years old and older, “distinguishing those Persons who had before the nineteenth Day of April,

Anno Domini, 1776, been by Law deemed to be of the Denomination of Christians called Quakers, Indians, Negroes and Melattoes, from other People.” The towns were required to submit their lists by January 31, 1777.⁸ In response, the town of Westborough compiled a list of 223 men, including “Peter Maynard a Mulatto.”⁹

Peter Maynard had been documented there six months earlier, on July 17, 1776, when he was one of twenty-six men who signed a receipt, acknowledging the payment of £9 by the town of Westborough “for our Inlisting into the Contanential Service and passing Muster.” The back side of the receipt noted that the men “went with Lt. James Godfry.”¹⁰

A town meeting on March 27, 1777, voted “to give each man 30 pounds who Shall Inlist and past Muster for the Tarm of 3 years or during the war in Behalf of Said Westborough.” Maynard was one of the men “who enlisted on the Towns encorougment,” and received £30.¹¹ He was on pay accounts from April 28, 1777, to December 31, 1779 (“credited to town of Westborough”), and on a muster roll for Col. Timothy Bigelow’s regiment dated September 1, 1777, at Van Schaick Island on the Hudson River, with the “Roll sworn to in Camp near Stillwater.”¹² (Bigelow’s regiment participated in the Battle of Saratoga, but there is no record of Maynard’s presence there.)

In early 1778, Peter Maynard was at Valley Forge. He was one of twenty-five soldiers who received a “free Will offering” of clothing from the town of Westborough. A town committee enlisted 23-year-old Stephen Fay to carry the clothing to Valley Forge, a distance of about 300 miles, instructing him, on January 29, 1778, “to take a Receipt that Each man hes Received his proportion.” If any of the soldiers could not be found, Fay was to deliver the clothing “to the Commander of the Company to which Such persons belonge” and get a receipt. On February 13, Henry Marble signed a receipt acknowledging that he had received clothing for four men, including Peter Maynard, who were “att Present Absent from the Camp.” These four men were likely in one of the hospitals. Maynard received a pair of shoes, a pair of stockings, a shirt, and “Mitts.”¹³



Camp at the Valley Febr 13-1778
 then recd of M^{rs} Stephens Fay sundry articles
 of Clothing for 4 men Being att Present
 Absent from the Camp & this receipt I Give
 in this Behalf Recd for
 Joseph M^{rs} Cutler 1 shirt 1 pair of shoes 1 pair of stockings 1 pair of Mitts
 M^{rs} Fitchell 1 shirt 1 pair of shoes 1 pair of stockings 1 pair of Mitts
 Benj^{rs} Godfry 2 pair of shoes 1 pair of stockings 1 pair of Mitts
 Peter Maynard 1 shirt 1 pair of shoes 1 pair of stockings 1 pair of Mitts
 I Jay Recd by Mr Henry Marble

Opposite: Rev. Ebenezer Parkman’s October 6, 1756, journal entry on the birth of Mercy Maynard’s son. Courtesy, American Antiquarian Society. Left, top: Detail of Soldiers standing in snow-covered military camp, possibly in Valley Forge, Pa., during American Revolution by George Peter, 1920. Library of Congress. Left, bottom: The February 13, 1778, receipt showing Peter Maynard (last line) received clothing from Westborough at Valley Forge. See note 13.



Detail of *The State of Massachusetts* by George Franklin Cram, 1811. David Rumsey Map Collection.

On February 2, 1778, Maynard appeared on a return for Captain Daniel's Barns's Company in Bigelow's regiment. The next year Maynard was back in New England, still under the command of Barns, whose company was at Providence. In November 1779, Maynard enlisted to serve in Captain Bowman's Company in the 5th Massachusetts Regiment, "During War."¹⁴

Continental Army pay accounts place Maynard in Captain Dow's Company as part of Colonel Bigelow's Regiment from January 1 through December 31, 1780, and in January 1781, he was on a muster roll as a private at West Point, New York, in Captain Phineas Bowman's Company in Col. Rufus Putnam's 5th Regiment. Peter Maynard appeared in a "Descriptive List" at West Point, dated January 10, 1781. Aged 24, he was noted to be five feet, ten inches, with a "brown" complexion and black hair and eyes. He was still at West Point in April 1781.¹⁵

After the war, Maynard moved to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where his five-member family appeared in the 1790 census under the heading, "All other free persons," a category for non-white people.¹⁶ On March 5, 1801, the Massachusetts General Court passed a resolution giving 200 acres of land or twenty dollars to non-commissioned officers and soldiers who served for three years and received an honorable discharge. Maynard appeared on the "list of men entitled to \$20 or 200 acres of land, agreeable to resolve of General Court of March 5, 1801." The offer of 200 acres was likely impossible for a man of limited means to accept: the cost of acquiring animals and tools to clear land, plant crops, and build a home would have been insurmountable. Not surprisingly, Maynard chose the twenty dollars.¹⁷

By 1801, Maynard and his family were living in Lenox, Massachusetts, just north of Stockbridge.¹⁸ Lenox vital

records include the name of his wife, Asenath, and the births of their four children: Mary (March 16, 1785), Daniel (August 6, 1789), James (February 23, 1794), and Fanny (September 28, 1797).¹⁹ Asenath, whose maiden name is unknown, was born in 1764 and died on August 6, 1809.²⁰

Peter Maynard later moved to Oneida County, New York, where his pension application, dated March 28, 1818, stated that he "was Sixty Six years old and upwards—that by reason of his reduced circumstances in life, he is in need of assistance from his Country for support—that he served as a Soldier, in the War of the Revolution for Six years and upwards" and "never had any pension allowed him by the Laws of the United States."²¹

Maynard returned to Lenox and on June 29, 1820, appeared before the Circuit Court of Common Pleas to establish his eligibility for a veteran's pension. In the form that was filled out for him, he was described as "a Farmer" who was "able genarally to perform light work." He had no family living with him and "no property except a small chest" in which he kept his clothing. The Clerk of the Court, who gave a value of one dollar for Maynard's belongings, signed the form on Maynard's behalf.²² Three months later, he stated under oath that he had moved back to Massachusetts and asked that his pension be paid to him there.²³

Peter Maynard died in Lenox on July 15 or 16, 1822. He left no will, and his estate, appraised at \$4.63, was insufficient to pay his debts. Among his effects were three books, including a life of Washington appraised at 18 cents. According to a probate record, he had "three children who all reside in the state of New York" and who "have neglected to administer upon his said Estat, or in any ways to make a settlement of the same."²⁴

Peter Maynard's service as a soldier reminds us of the complex nature of the Revolution. Recruitment of soldiers tended to reach down the social scale to men who had few prospects and certainly lacked the means to avoid service by paying a fine. While Maynard's initial recruitment may be seen as a way to earn £30, his later ownership of a biography of Washington suggests pride in the role he played in his six years of service.

As a Black man, Maynard's life was hardly ordinary, and, beyond the shared experience of service during the Revolution, he likely had little in common with the dominant white population either in Westborough or in western Massachusetts. His life began under extraordinary circumstances. The evidence from the dates in his service records and his pension applications roughly coincide with the birth of Mercy Maynard's son in early October 1756, and, given his association with Westborough and his designation as a "Mulatto," one may reasonably, but not conclusively, state that Peter Maynard was indeed Mercy Maynard's son.

An additional intriguing bit of information helps make the case. Like the Lenox town vital records, the Parsons collection of vital statistics for Lenox lists Peter and Asenath Maynard and their four children, but instead of an eldest daughter named Mary, this record set shows a daughter named Mercy.²⁵ ♦

Notes

- ¹ Diary of Ebenezer Parkman, Sept. 21, Oct. 6, 18, 1756. Transcriptions of the diary are at ebenezerparkman.org and colonialsociety.org/documents/ebenezer-parkman-world/diary-links.
- ² Daniel Scott Smith and Michael S. Hindus, "Premarital Pregnancy in America, 1640–1971: An Overview and Interpretation," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 5, no. 4 (1975), 537–70.
- ³ *Vital Records of Westborough, Massachusetts, to the End of the Year 1849* (1903), 71; archive.org/details/vitalrecordswes00ricegoog.
- ⁴ *Ibid.* Martha Maynard married Hezekiah Tomlin, June 18, 1749 (p. 182). Their children, Hezekiah and Resigne, were born, respectively, on May 10, 1748, and July 17, 1749 (p. 98). Hezekiah Tomlin died Sept. 29, 1749 (p. 254). Martha's intention to marry Daniel Mason (1698–1768) of Concord was recorded Nov. 9, 1752 (p. 212).
- ⁵ David Maynard died Oct. 2, 1757. *Ibid.*, 246.
- ⁶ David Maynard was one of the twelve members who founded the Westborough church on Oct. 28, 1724, but no record exists of his daughter Mercy's baptism. Mercy was

one of a group of young women who met with Parkman to be catechized on June 15, 1741.

- ⁷ Diary of Ebenezer Parkman [note 1], Oct. 21, 1774.
- ⁸ *Independent Chronicle* (Boston), Dec. 19, 1776, [2].
- ⁹ "Peter Maynard a Molatto" appears on "A List of Male persons Belong [sic] to Westboro January the 1 A.D.: 1777 who are 16 years old." Digital Commonwealth, ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/z316sd686. (image 1). Peter Maynard was the only man identified as "a Mulatto."
- ¹⁰ "Certifications of Service in the Continental Army, 1776–1780." Digital Commonwealth, ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/z316sd88p (images 5–6).
- ¹¹ "Names of Person [sic] who enlisted on the Towns encouragement." Digital Commonwealth, digitalcommonwealth.org/search/commonwealth:z316sd79q (image 2, right column).
- ¹² Mass., Muster rolls (index file cards) of the Revolutionary War, 1767–1833, FamilySearch film 2030579, at FamilySearch.org, images 613 and 614 of 2706.
- ¹³ "Receipts for Donated Clothing Sent to Soldiers at Valley Forge, 1777–1778," Digital Commonwealth, ark.digitalcommonwealth.org/ark:/50959/z316sf275 (image 4).
- ¹⁴ Mass., Muster rolls [note 12], images 617 and 621 of 2706.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, images 619, 622, 623, and 624.
- ¹⁶ *1790 United States Federal Census*, Stockbridge, Berkshire, Massachusetts, Peter Maynard household, Ancestry.com.
- ¹⁷ Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775–1783, "Massachusetts, United States records," FamilySearch, familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSQ8-99LM-T, image 626 of 2706.
- ¹⁸ *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolutionary War: A Compilation from the Archives*, vol. 10 (1902), 401; catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008555379.
- ¹⁹ *U.S., Town and Vital Records, 1620–1988*, Lenox vital records, image 196 of 523; Ancestry.com.
- ²⁰ Asenath Maynard, FindaGrave memorial #214032275, New Lenox Cemetery, Lenox, Berkshire County, Massachusetts.
- ²¹ *U.S., Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, 1800–1900*; Ancestry.com, image 471 of 521.
- ²² *Ibid.*, image 478 of 521.
- ²³ *U.S., Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, 1800–1900*; Ancestry.com.
- ²⁴ *Berkshire County, MA: Probate File Papers, 1761–1917*, AmericanAncestors.org (from records supplied by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives and digitized images provided by FamilySearch.org); case 4259: image 5 for inventory; image 22 for date of death and children.
- ²⁵ Parsons collection of vital statistics, Lenox, Massachusetts, 1750–1849, FamilySearch film 238335, at FamilySearch.org, image 126.