

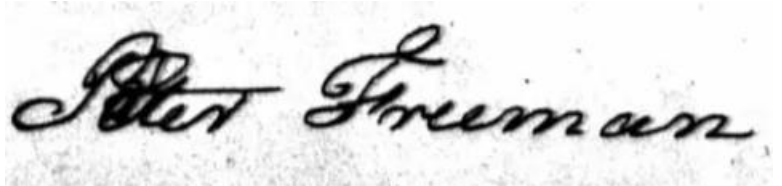
40 of 40: Peter Freeman (1752–1826) and his father, Cuff Freeman (circa 1731–1804), both served in the Revolutionary War in the Connecticut Line until 1783. They enlisted in May 1778 and December 1777, respectively. Before doing so, they purchased their own independence. They, along with Cuff's wife, Phebe, were at different times the legal property of Isaac Miller and Joseph Coe of the state. Peter freed himself on March 30, 1778, and Cuff on April 23, 1776. Peter paid Miller 17 pounds and 12 shillings for himself. A clause in Cuff's deed given by Coe affixed "Freeman" to his name.

Father and son were among at least 66 African Americans, free and enslaved, to have served in Col. David Humphreys' Company of Colored Troops beginning in 1778. Among the dozen or so white officers, there was one African American, Gamaliel Terry, a sergeant, according to the 2008 publication, "Forgotten Patriots," which documents nearly 6,000. The Freemans may have participated in some or all of the following actions: the Battle of Rhode Island (1778), Hudson Highlands Defense (1779–1781), Siege of Yorktown (1781), and Winter Encampments at Morristown and Valley Forge. At least 818 Blacks from 80 Connecticut towns took to the battlefield with one thought: full citizenship in the United States.

Afterward, Cuff and Peter were denied the vote and the rights to which they were entitled. Despite paying taxes and amassing considerable acreage between 1780 and 1790 on Farmington's western border with Bristol (possibly part of Plainville), voting in Connecticut was restricted to white men. Even after the Freemans had died, the state instituted a literacy test in 1855, followed by a poll tax and grandfather clauses intended to disenfranchise immigrants and keep African Americans in their place.

Peter and his mother, Phebe, could read and write. He did not need to place an "X" between his first and last names, as most of his compatriots did. Peter and his father's names appear on the Farmington Grand list, from 1795 to 1805. In 1795, they were taxed on "10 acres plowland, 4 of bush pasture, 80 unenclosed lands." Between 1796 and 1805, Peter was taxed on land that fluctuated in size over the years, with valuations between \$16.85 and \$39.00. Plainville historian Henry Allen Castle's history of Plainville notes that the Freemans sold a 115-acre parcel in 1803. The 1800 census lists Peter as head of a household of six members. He married Jane Freeman in Burlington in 1822.

Peter Freeman applied for a pension under the Act of 1818, citing old age, feebleness, and destitution. He declared his possessions, including an old hut valued at \$20 and household items. Although he could not meaningfully participate in the political life of Farmington, Peter exercised his personal gifts as an elected “Black Governor” likely after his service in the war. Earning the title means that he had the ear of the larger community. “Black Yankees” (1988), shows Peter in the appendix as one of 22 “Black Governors” between the 1740s and 1855. It cites Isaac Stuart’s “Hartford in Olden Time” as describing the officeholder as one of note, honest, and “wise above his fellows.”

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Peter Freeman". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid, with a large initial 'P' and a long, sweeping 'F'.