



Profile 22 of 39: Thomas Mason (R6993), a free man of color, enlisted as a private in the Army in 1777 in Caswell County, NC. However, this is about his wife's later struggles over his pension, centered around documentary proof of their marriage.

Mason served under Captain William Wilson and Lt. Col. Stephen Moore. He participated in the Battle of White Marsh in Pennsylvania, where he served six months in a horse company. In August 1780, he fought in the Battle of Camden, SC, and served three months. In March 1781, he sustained a hand wound during another three-month tour that included the Battle of Guilford Courthouse, NC.

After his service, Mason returned to Virginia and married Elizabeth Ailstock in April 1791 in Louisa County. The ceremony was officiated by Reverend Douglass of the Protestant Episcopal Church. They had six children and remained together until Thomas's death in October 1832.

Elizabeth Mason, a resident of Campbell County, Virginia, applied for a pension in 1854 at the age of ninety as the widow of Thomas Mason. Before his death, Mason applied for a pension, but his paperwork was lost. Elizabeth Mason filed her claim under the Act of Congress, July 4, 1836. Due to her declining health, she testified before a Justice of the Peace, Jno. P. Knight, rather than in court.

Several sworn statements were made at different times, one by her only surviving child, Thomas Mason Jr., who was familiar with his father's service. Neighbor Samuel George, a friend of fifty years, was described by Justice of the Peace Melville Talbot as "well known to be a person of veracity." Another neighbor, Gravitt Edwards, a white acquaintance and neighbor, swore to Justice of the Peace Melville Talbot that the Masons "always passed as man & wife and never heard it denied by anyone." North Carolina's Comptroller's Office confirmed a payment for Revolutionary War service to a Thomas Mason.

However, officials concluded that the record did not specify race, making verification difficult. Her lawyers wrote a vociferous letter to L. P. Waldo, Commissioner of Pensions, addressing each objection. On Private Mason's identity, J. S. Pollard wrote, "we deem it but just and fair to presume & claim, that he is the Thomas Mason." On their marriage, and those of African Americans in general, he argued, "their marriage relations are very little regarded among white men, and if married by even a Clergyman, as not obligatory upon to make a matter of record...."

Despite their efforts, the pension claim was denied due to a lack of official military records and the absence of a documented marriage. Virginia law at the time did not require the registration of marriages among free Black people. Elizabeth Mason's claim was never approved. She died without receiving a pension. Her case was studied in Damani Davis's article, "The Rejection of Elizabeth Mason."

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