

# Shop, James, papers

James Shop papers

1780

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## Title Statement

Shop, James, papers Guide to the James Shop papers MSS.16473

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**Unit ID**

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**Unit Date**

1780

**Manuscripts**

BW 19 (box)

**Container**

1 (folder)

**Language**

English

**Extent**

0.04 Cubic Feet 1 legal sized folder

**Condition Description**

Good

**Repository**

Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library

## Administrative Information

**Conditions Governing Access**

This collection is open for research.

**Preferred Citation**

MSS 16473, James Shop papers, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia Library.

## Biographical / Historical

James Shop was a freedman in the Connecticut line of the Continental Army.

"By 1777, as much as 10 to 15 percent of the Continental Army was made up of black soldiers. The vast majority of black soldiers served in fighting units comprised primarily of white men. Not only were they in the regiments of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, but they also fought beside white fellow soldiers in Southern states. Hardly any military action between 1775 and 1781 did not involve black soldiers. Their

presence is recorded at Lexington, Concord, Ticonderoga, Bunker Hill, Long Island, White Plains, Trenton, Princeton, Bennington, Brandywine, Stillwater, Saratoga, Red Banks, Monmouth, Rhode Island, Savannah, Stony Point, Fort Griswold, and Yorktown."1 "Only 50 years after the defeat of the British at Yorktown, most Americans had already forgotten the extensive role black people had played on both sides during the War for Independence. At the 1876 Centennial Celebration of the Revolution in Philadelphia, not a single speaker acknowledged the contributions of African Americans in establishing the nation. Yet by 1783, thousands of black Americans had become involved in the war. Many were active participants, some won their freedom and others were victims, but throughout the struggle blacks refused to be mere bystanders and gave their loyalty to the side that seemed to offer the best prospect for freedom."2

"By 1775 more than a half-million African Americans, most of them enslaved, were living in the 13 colonies. Early in the 18th century a few New England ministers and conscientious Quakers, such as George Keith and John Woolman, had questioned the morality of slavery but they were largely ignored. By the 1760s, however, as the colonists began to speak out against British tyranny, more Americans pointed out the obvious contradiction between advocating liberty and owning slaves. In 1774 Abigail Adams wrote, "it always appeared a most iniquitous scheme to me to fight ourselves for what we are daily robbing and plundering from those who have as good a right to freedom as we have."2

Widespread talk of liberty gave thousands of slaves high expectations, and many were ready to fight for a democratic revolution that might offer them freedom. In 1775 at least 10 to 15 black soldiers, including some slaves, fought against the British at the battles of Lexington and Bunker Hill. Two of these men, Salem Poor and Peter Salem, earned special distinction for their bravery. By 1776, however, it had become clear that the revolutionary rhetoric of the founding fathers did not include enslaved blacks. The Declaration of Independence promised liberty for all men but failed to put an end to slavery; and although they had proved themselves in battle, the Continental Congress adopted a policy of excluding black soldiers from the army."2

1 "Black Courage: African-American Soldiers in the War for Independence". American Philatelic Society. February 18, 2020. <https://stamps.org/news/c/collecting-insights/cat/stamps-in-history/post/black-courage-african-american-soldiers-in-the-war-for-independence>

2. Ayers, Edward. "African Americans and the American Revolution", American Revolution Museum at Yorktown. Cineva Web Agency. Accessed 1/28/22 <https://jyfmuseums.org/learn/learning-center/colonial-america-american-revolution-learning-resources/american-revolution-essays-timelines-images/african-americans-and-the-american-revolution/>

## Content Description

This collection consists of two documents related to John Shop, a freedman from Connecticut who served in the Continental Army. One item is a Connecticut pay-table committee document authorizing payment to Shop for his army service. This was signed by James Hart on December 15, 1770 in Hartford, Connecticut. The other is a one page letter certifying Shop's service in the 2nd Regiment of the Connecticut line of the Continental Army. In the letter he is identified as a freedman from the town of Woodbury. Marked with Mr. Shop's "X" dated September 25, 1780.

## Keywords

Freedmen

United States -- History -- Revolution, 1775-1783