

Aaron, Edward and Esaw Carter: Brothers in Arms, Fighting for Freedom

by Anna Fossi

In July 1775, as General George Washington took control of the Continental Army and began to organize the patriot forces, his Adjutant General Horatio Gates gave the advice to recruiters that they should not allow “any deserter from the Ministerial army, nor any stroller, negro or vagabond.”¹ Though exclusion from war may sound like a blessing, the war provided a rare opportunity for enslaved black men to pursue freedom. Given this direct exclusion at the beginning of the war, one path enslaved men could pursue was to take the British up on their offer to fight for the Crown in exchange for freedom. However, Washington soon had to accept that for any chance at success in the war the army must concede and accept almost any recruit they could get, including already free black men or some who could become free by joining as a substitute for the white men enslaving them.

By the Revolutionary War, Connecticut had more slaves than any state in New England.

[Connecticut's slave population by year:](#)

1690: ~ 200 enslaved people

1774: ~ 5100 enslaved people²

Although both Connecticut and Rhode Island passed acts in 1774 prohibiting the importation of enslaved people into their borders, [slavery itself was not banned](#). In 1784 the Connecticut state legislature passed an act of [Gradual Abolition](#), which stated that children born into slavery after March 1, 1784, would only be free at age 25. Slavery officially endured in Connecticut until 1848, though the effects of its legacy were felt long after.

Edward, Aaron, and Esaw were the children of Edward (Ned) and Jenny Carter, along with Jacob, Asher Sally, and an unidentified child. Aaron, Edward, and Esaw Carter all served in the Connecticut Line and were present at the Redding Winter Encampment. Jenny, Ned, and Edward are documented as slaves of Jonathan Kellogg of Colchester, while the other children were likely divided among Kellogg's sons. Ned Carter served as a soldier at Crown Point in 1755 during the French and Indian War, where he was able to gain freedom. Records also indicate that Edward Carter Sr. also served from 1777-1783 in the Revolutionary War, indicating that the pursuit of freedom was only one of multiple reasons for black men to enlist in the Continental forces during this period.

Edward Carter Jr. was born in Colchester, Connecticut likely in 1750, making him 27 years old when he enlisted into the Connecticut Line on May 7, 1777. Following the war, Edward and his wife Eunice Williams moved to Willington, Connecticut. According to Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut, 1650-1900, Edward and his family, which grew to include 11 children, were ordered to leave Willington by the town selectmen who did not want black residents in the town. Following this, he returned to Colchester with his family and finally purchased land in Ellington, Connecticut. Though the state-approved Carter's pension application, Eunice is recorded as saying her and Edward were "poor and illiterate." Edward died at 76 in February of 1826, and his wife continued to receive his pension.³

Aaron Carter served in the Third Connecticut Regiment, enlisting on May 29, 1777.⁴ Aaron Carter's pension record, submitted by his wife Rachel Carter on behalf of her late husband, as well as a testimony from his daughter Abigail Caples, gives a rare account given by a black women from the 1800s, though the content is largely focused on her husband's life. Carter's enlistment records state he was "exchanged for Salmon Root," and while there is no record indicating for certain that Salmon Root enslaved Aaron Carter prior to the Revolution, this is a likely scenario explaining

Carter's substitution for Root. In Rachel Carter's recollection in the application, Aaron entered the army in 1777 and was honorably discharged in 1783. Notably, Rachel mentions that Aaron entered the army at the same time as his brother, Edward Carter. Following Aaron's death, Rachel and her daughter Abigail both attest that she had lived in Middletown for twenty years, and had never remarried.⁵

State of Connecticut } ss. Middletown,
County of Middlesex }

On this 28th day of April
A.D. 1837 before the Court of Probate for
the District of Middletown in said County,
(the same being a Court of Record by
the Laws of the said State of Connect-
icut by which it was created) per-
sonally appeared Rachel Carter, a resi-
dent of the Town of Middletown in
the said County of Middlesex and State
of Connecticut, aged eighty two years
and upwards, who being first duly
sworn according to law, doth on her
oath make the following declaration
in order to obtain the benefit of the
provision made by the Act of Congress,
passed July fourth 1836:

That she is the widow of Aaron
Carter late of Windsor in the County
of Hartford in said State of Connect-
icut deceased, who was a private
in the Army of the Revolution:
that said Aaron Carter served in
the said Army several years, and so
far as the recollection which she now
has of facts will enable her to state

[Alt text: Pension application for Aaron Carter's family, with a statement from his wife Rachel Carter, 1837]

State of Connecticut } N. Middletown,
County of Middlesex }

I Abigail Caples of said Middletown being duly sworn depose and say that I am fifty eight years old; that I am the daughter of Aaron Carter who was a soldier in the army of the Revolution; that the said Aaron died when I was about eighteen years old at Windsor in the County of Hartford in said State; and that my mother Rachel Carter the widow of the said Aaron Carter has remained his widow and unmarried ever since the decease of the said Aaron, and has resided for more than twenty years last past in said Middletown; and farther I say not. Dated at Middletown the 28th day of April, - A. D. 1837.

Witness
J. Barnes.

Abigail Caples
her
mark

Subscribed and sworn to this 28th day of April A. D. 1837 in due form of law by the said Abigail Caples before me the undersigned Judge of the Court of Probate for the District of Middletown in said State. I farther certify that the deponent is a re-

[Alt text: Pension application for Aaron Carter's family with a statement from his daughter Abigail Caples, 1837]

Esaw Carter enlisted May 7, 1777 and served in the Connecticut Fourth Regiment alongside his brother Edward, both in Captain Andrew Fitch's company. There are not currently any known probate or pension records for Esaw, though we do know that both he and his brother Edward served in the Fourth Connecticut Regiment together. As previously mentioned, records indicate that the Carter children were split up and enslaved by Jonathan Kellogg's sons. Though, it is unclear whether one of Kellogg's sons enslaved both Esaw and Edward, or if they were split up.⁶

Aaron, Edward, and Esaw Carter all served in the Connecticut Line and were present at the Redding Winter Encampment. Their pension applications, probate records and entries in the United States census all provide vital information about their service in the American Revolution, and the opportunities they were able to gain through their freedom.

Muster Roll of Cap^t Edw^d Sells' Comp^y in the Battalion of Connecticut Troops in the Service of the United States Commanded by Col^l Samuel Hyllys for the Month of Jan^y

Commissioned Officers } Edward Sells Cap^t Jan^y 1st 1777 On Duty by Gen^l Carson
 } Samuel Richard Lieut Jan^y 1st 1777
 } Elijah Ransom Lieut Jan^y 1st 1777

Rank	Subjects	Present	Remarks	Appointed	Expire	Present	Remarks
11th	Edw ^d Sells	Present	On Command Chatham	28th May	28th May	Present	On Duty by Gen ^l Carson
12th	Samuel Richard	Do		9th May	9th May	Present	On Duty
13th	Elijah Ransom	Do	Sick at Westchester 21st	22nd May	22nd May	Present	Do
14th	David Condit	Present	On Duty				
15th	Iron						
16th	Daniel Cotton		Sick in Quarters	22nd May	22nd May	Present	Do
17th	Privates			Admitted			
18th	Edw ^d Billings	Present				Present	On Duty by Gen ^l Carson
19th	Edw ^d Brown						
20th	Jack Pringle		Sick at Colchester				Sick at Danbury Mass
21st	Richard Coary			23rd May	23rd May	Present	Sick at Glensburgh
22nd	Richard Cook						
23rd	Aaron Carter		On Duty by Gen ^l Carson 21st	21st May	21st May	Present	Do
24th	Robert Douglas	Present	On Command Colchester	19th May	19th May	Present	Do
25th	Dolphin East		On Duty	22nd May	22nd May	Present	On Command Middle
26th	Sam ^l Ferguson		Sick at Farmington				Sick at Middlebury
27th	David Elger		On Command Norwich	28th May	28th May	Present	Do

[Alt text: Muster Roll from February 2, 1779 listing Aaron Carter]

Pay Roll of Capt. Fitches Camp of 4th Connecticut Battalion
 Commanded by Capt. John Durkee for the Month of Feb 79

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Names	Rank	Comm.	of Pay	% of Pay	Time of Service	Substance	Amount	Remarks
Andrew Fitch	Capt.	1 Feb	1 March	40	20	18	18	✓
Edw. S. Coleman	Lieut.			26 $\frac{2}{3}$		10	11	✓
James Hyde	Ensign			20			19	
Ephraim Dorthick	Serj.			10				Sick absent
Samuel Flory	✓						3	
Wm Waterman	✓						3	
Fred. Wm Mack	Cirpl			7 $\frac{1}{2}$			2 4	
Joseph Markham	✓						2 4	
Isaac Brown	✓						2 4	
John Saunders	Drum						2 4	
Fred. Brownman	Serj.						2 4	
Jack Anthony	Private			6 $\frac{2}{3}$			2	
Isaac Brown								Sick absent
<u>Edward Carter</u>	✓						2	
<u>Esau Carter</u>	✓						2	
Wm Carter	✓						10	

[Alt text: Muster Roll January 5, 1779 listing Edward and Esau Carter]

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Pay Roll of Capt. Fitches Camp of 1st Connecticut Regiment
 Commanded by Col. John Duerkee for the Month of Feb. 1779

Names	Rank	Comm.	Pay	What	Time of	Service	Subst.	Amount	Remarks
Andrew Fitch	Capt.	1 Feb	1 March	40	10	20	18	18	✓
Edw. S. Coleman	Serj.			26 $\frac{1}{2}$		10	11	11	✓
James Hyde	Ensign			20			19	19	
Ephraim Dorthick	Serj.			10					Sick absent
Lemuel Fling	✓						3	3	
Wm Waterman	✓						3	3	
Fred. Wm Mack	Corpl			1 $\frac{1}{2}$			2	4	
Joseph Markham	✓						2	4	
Lyfe Brown	✓						2	4	
John Saunders	Drum						2	4	
Fred. Prossman	Serj.						2	4	
Jack Anthony	Private			6 $\frac{1}{2}$			2		
Isaac Brown									Sick absent
<u>Edward Carter</u>	✓						2		
<u>Esaw Carter</u>	✓						2		
Wm Carter	✓						10		

[Alt text: Muster Roll February 1779 listing Edward and Esaw Carter]

Family separation was an all too common aspect of chattel slavery. Often, enslavers separated families at auctions, or in the case of the Carters, the breaking up of Kellogg's estate, where the Carters were viewed simply as property, forced their separation. The Redding

Encampment may have been one of the few places these brothers would be able to see each other again, and even then it is entirely possible some of them may not have been old enough at the time of separation to remember the others. Or simply the nature of war may have kept them apart, though like much of this forgotten history it is nearly impossible to know.

Edward and Esaw, both in the Fourth Regiment, and Aaron in the Third Regiment, would have all been stationed in the same section of the Redding Encampment. The encampment was split into three camps in the north half of Redding, and the three Carter brothers were all in the west camp along with the Sixth and Eighth Connecticut Regiments.⁷ Further research would need to be done to determine if there are records of the individual placements of soldiers in the makeshift huts across the camp. However, there is at least evidence showing that the 3 brothers served in close proximity to each other in the Revolutionary War, though after the war they went in different directions.

¹ Captain Schuyler C. Webb and Master Sergeant William J. Herrmann, “Historical Overview of Racism in the Military”, Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute, 1.

² Compiled by Peter Hinks, "Slave Population of Colonial Connecticut, 1690-1774", Yale.

³ Timothy Nicholson, "Chappell, Edward Carter, Jr. (1750- 26 Feb. 1826)," Oxford African American Studies Center, 15 March 2013. <https://doi-org.ccsu.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/acref/9780195301731.013.38926>

⁴ Henry P. Johnston, ed.. *The Record of Connecticut Men in the Military and Naval Service During the War of the Revolution 1775-1783*, Vol. I-III. (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood & Brainard Co., 1889), 172.

⁵ U.S., Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files, 1800-1900. Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs, Record Group 15. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶ Johnston, 186.

⁷ Daniel Cruson, *Putnam's Revolutionary War Winter Encampment: The History and Archaeology of Putnam Memorial State Park*, (Charleston, SC: The History Press 2011) 20.

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