

## **Denied! The Story of the Duplex Family Through Pension Records**

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Prince Duplex was a man of African descent who was at the Winter Encampment in Redding, Connecticut. Pension records of Revolutionary War veterans can tell us a lot about the individuals who fought and their families. An overwhelming majority in the U.S. House and Senate passed the 1818 Revolutionary War Pension Act, which originally provided those who applied with a monthly pension of half their service pay. The pension pay was \$8.00-\$20.00 a month depending on the person.<sup>1</sup> The Act was revised in 1820 to provide privates with \$96 a year (\$2,327.93 in 2022 dollars) and officers with \$240 a year (\$5,819.82 in 2022), but only if they were proven to be needy. The pensioner needed to provide evidence of income, inventory, and service.<sup>2</sup> The Duplex family was one of the many families who received a pension through this act. The Duplex family's pursuit of pension benefits to which they were entitled demonstrates what many people of color had to go through to get their pensions.

Before we can look deeper into pensions we have to know more about the family. Prince Duplex was a man of African descent who was at the Winter Encampment in Redding, Connecticut. Originally enslaved, he gained his

independence through fighting in the Revolutionary War. He enlisted multiple times throughout the war. In 1783 he married **Lement** Parker in Connecticut in a ceremony performed by Alexander Gilbert, a former parson. They moved a few years later to **Danby** in Tioga County, New York. The Duplexes had four children: Sylvia, Prince Jr., George, and Vashti.<sup>3</sup>

Prince Duplex was receiving a pension of \$8.00 each month until March of 1818, when the Pension Act was revised.<sup>4</sup> After the revision he started to receive his \$96.00 annually. With a family of six and having the job of a basket maker, money was most likely very tight for the family. There is no record of what he earned as a basketmaker, but there is a record of the meager number of items the family owned. If money had been tight the pension may have helped relieve some financial stress on the Duplex family. What can be substantiated is the amount of debt that Prince Duplex owed, a total of \$29.00 (\$703.23 in 2022), to four different people in 1820 (National Archives). While this was not a large debt, it was a significant part of his income.

State of New York  
 TUGA County, So. On the 8<sup>th</sup> day of September 1820 personally  
 appeared in open Court being absent of former places holden in &  
 for the said County in said State with power to hear, try and  
 determine all actions, real, personal & mixed arising in the said  
 County, and also all transactions, although the same may  
 not have arisen within the said County, and with other powers  
 Prince Duplex aged about five years, resident in the town of  
 Danby in the said County, who being first duly sworn according to  
 law, doth on his oath declare that he served in the Revolutionary  
 War as follows: That he enlisted in Hartford County in the State  
 of Connecticut on the eighteenth day of May 1777 in Colonel  
 Sherman's Regiment and Captain Paine's Company: that he was  
 in the Battle of Germantown, Mifflin, (or Fort Mifflin), Monmouth  
 and that he was discharged in Morristown in the State of New Jersey  
 on the nineteenth day of July one thousand seven hundred eighty  
 and that from the same Prince Duplex hath a private in the army  
 of the Revolution and who is inscribed on the Pension List of the  
 War Office at the State of eight Dollars per month  
 to commence on the twenty seventh day of April one thousand  
 eight hundred and eighty, as per Certificate from the De-  
 partment of War that he Certificate is not numbered  
 (Signed) Prince Duplex  
 And I do solemnly swear that I was a resident citizen of the  
 United States on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of March 1815, and that I have  
 not since that time by gift, sale or in any manner disposed  
 of my property, or any part thereof with intent thereby to  
 diminish it as to bring myself within the provisions of an act  
 of Congress entitled "an act to provide for certain persons engaged  
 in the land and naval services of the United States in the  
 Revolutionary War" passed on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of March 1815, and  
 that I have, nor has any person in trust for me, any property  
 or securities, contracts or debts due me, nor have any other  
 income than what is contained in the Schedule hereunto annexed

and by me subscribed -  
 Property in my Possession  
 2 Drawing Knives - 2 1/2 \$ 50 2 Wooden Plates  
 1 Case 12 1/2 \$ 44 2 00 2 Iron Tea Spoons  
 4 Jack Knives - 2 - 1 00 1 Dish Kettle  
 \$24 50  
 Debts that I owe  
 2 Notes of \$10 each - 20 00  
 1 do - 5 - 5 -  
 1 do - 4 - 4 -  
 \$29 00  
 That by occupation he is a Basket maker, and so far as  
 he has a wife aged 5 years and has been afflicted with  
 sine for 17 years and has been at much expense in  
 Sworn & declared in open Court  
 the 8<sup>th</sup> day of Sept<sup>r</sup> 1820 before me } (Signed) Prince Duplex  
 (Signed) James Lee of Hartford for Judge  
 TUGA County, So. I Thomas M. Applewell Clerk of the Court of  
 the said County do hereby certify the  
 foregoing Certificate to be truly copied  
 before me of the said Court: And that it is the  
 order of the said Court that the total amount  
 of the property exhibit in the foregoing  
 is Five Dollars forty four cents, interest  
 and the deal of said Court this 9<sup>th</sup> Sept<sup>r</sup>.  
 Thomas M. Applewell

Prince Duplex's federal pension application records.

After his death on October 29th, 1825, Prince Duplex's Pension was transferred to his Widow, Lement Duplex. When Prince Duplex died, he left his daughter, Vashti E. Duplex Creed, in charge of his affairs. She would take care of her mother Lement Duplex, until her mother's death in 1847.

Throughout this time Lement Duplex received a pension of \$80.00 a year instead of the \$96.00 a year that Prince Duplex received. Vashti petitioned the government on behalf of her mother for the missing \$16.00 a year. After Lement Duplex's death, in 1847, Vashti continued to fight for the money that had not been received by her mother. She would be denied this money by the government based on the argument that the money Lement Duplex was owed had been paid in full to her (Duplex, Prince/Lement (Claim 16.963), 24).

The issue of money stems from the constant infighting in the government over the Pension Act of 1818.<sup>6</sup> The pension benefits awarded to Revolutionary War veterans and their families were different from English or Colonial pensions, which typically were limited to the officer-class. The pensions were service-based, regardless of rank, and thus provided for widows of men who had not died during the war. Citizens were worried about the money being spent on pensioners. One ad that was published in the *Connecticut Courant* stated:

We do not mean to quarrel with this, because we sincerely approved.

When it passed, the principle and motive of the act for granting pensions to the survivors of the Revolutionary War. – But the number of these objects

of national generosity, or if the reader prefers it, of national justice, has far exceeded the calculations made by the venerable father of the measure, (Gen. Bloomfield) or by any of its supporters in Congress.<sup>5</sup>

There were many other ads like this printed in the *Connecticut Courant* in the early to mid-1800s. The citizens of Connecticut were concerned about the country's debt. It seems not long after her mother's death Vashti E. Duplex Creed stopped attempting to get this money as there is no other document in the pension file.

The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818 was meant to bring relief to Revolutionary veterans and their families. Veterans who were Native Americans, African Americans, foreigners, or female, and their widowers or widows, if qualified, received pensions, apparently on the same basis as white applicants, though further study is needed to determine whether initial denials were greater for Black or Native widow (Dent, 6). While looking at numbers of denied and accepted widow pensions from the Revolutionary War and the effect their ethnicity had on the rates of acceptance be interesting, it would also have taken a lot more time than the scope of this project has.

The administration of the original and revised Act would affect Prince Duplex and his family for many years. After his death, his wife Lement Duplex continued to receive the pension until her death, but not the full amount Prince Duplex had received. There is no indication in the pension file as to why this occurred, but it seems to have been affected by the strife among the government officials over the number of times veterans and their families were on the pension rolls. After the deaths of both Prince and Lement Duplex, their children and their grandchildren continued to thrive. Their children Sylvia Duplex, Vashti E. Duplex Creed, and Prince Duplex Jr. became part of the founders of Temple Street Church in New Haven, Connecticut. Their grandson Edward Parker Duplex was elected Mayor of Wheatland, California in 1888 (Rosenberg). Another grandson [Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Creed](#) graduated from Yale in 1857 and served as a doctor in the Civil war. Though their family never received the money they petitioned for, they [persevered and prospered](#).



**Cortlandt Van Rensselaer Creed,**

## **M.D. advertisement**

<sup>1</sup>John P. Resch, “Politics and Public Culture: The Revolutionary War Pension Act of 1818,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 8, no. 2 (1988): 141-143. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3123809>

<sup>2</sup>John P. Resch, “Federal Welfare for Revolutionary War Veterans.” *Social Service Review* 56, no. 2 (1982): 171. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/60000115>.

<sup>3</sup>Duplex, Prince/Lement (Claim 16.963). *Revolutionary War Pension and Bounty-Land Warrant Application Files*, 7.

Ancestry. <https://www.ancestrylibrary.com/discoveryui-content/view/18350:1995?tid=&pid=&queryId=8e55b3500f51>; Goodman, Florence. “Wolcott Historical Society News – April 2009.” News, 2009. <https://web.tapr.org/~wa1lou/whs/oldnews200904.html>.

<sup>4</sup>Original claim. Declaration, in order to be placed on the Pension list, under the Act of the 18th March, . Application for pension. 1830. Pdf.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/rbpe.19602800/>.

<sup>5</sup>Editorial Article 2 — no Title.” *Connecticut Courant* (1791-1837), Sep 21, 1819.

<sup>6</sup>Resch, “Politics,” 148.

### **Further Reading:**

Long, Thomas. “Creed, Cortlandt Van Rensselaer.” Oxford African American Studies Center. 31 May. 2013.

Rosenberg, Charles. “Duplex, Prince, Jr..” Oxford African American Studies Center. 31 May. 2013.

Rosenberg, Charles. “Duplex, Prince, Sr..” Oxford African American Studies Center. 29 Feb. 2012