

“FAITHFULLY TO SERVE”: JESSE & JOB LEASON, AFRICAN AMERICAN SOLDIERS IN THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR

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The United States manuscript censuses for 1790-1820 contain the names of Jesse Leason and Job Leason, free Black men who headed households in Windham, CT. As it turns out, Jesse and Job were brothers, and from 1777 to 1783 they served as soldiers — privates — in the Continental Army under George Washington, as part of the 8th Infantry Regiment of the Connecticut Line. Their story is an important one, and although records are scarce, it is one worth telling. The Leason brothers joined the Continental Army in April of 1777 on three-year enlistments. They were not the only Black New Englanders who fought for American independence, and the fact that some of the Continentals were African American — indeed, that some of them were enslaved — is important. They were also poor men, and the fact that men who owned little or no property made up the majority of Washington’s army is also important. Why would men like them, men who did not have equal rights, risk their lives to create a country that would refuse to recognize them as equals?

We know that Jesse and Job were Continentals because their names appear on a series of muster rolls — simple lists of the soldiers in each regiment, made on average about once a month — from 1777 through 1783. Indeed, these muster rolls constitute the majority of the documents on which the brothers’ names were recorded throughout their entire lives. It is important to recognize that, unlike the majority of the Revolutionary soldiers, they had not joined their state militia, but rather the Connecticut Line, the name given to the Connecticut infantry regiments that were part of what was called the Continental Line, the regular infantry, the trained ground troops that bore the brunt of combat during the Revolutionary War. The Leason brothers survived the rigors of Valley Forge (1777-78) and fought at Germantown (1777), Fort Mifflin (1777), and Monmouth (1778), and guarded the Hudson Valley corridor in 1777 to prevent British forces in New York City under General Henry Clinton from linking up with a second British army under General Gentleman Johnny Burgoyne driving south from Canada, a blocking action that resulted in decisive American victory at Saratoga that was the turning point of the War. The hardships the brothers endured for their country were severe. The contributions made by them, the 8th Regiment, and the rest of the Connecticut Line to the cause of American freedom were immense.

According to the historian Judith L. Van Buskirk in *Standing in Their Own Light: African Americans Patriots in the American Revolution* (2017), the Leason brothers were not the only Black men to take up arms during the Revolution. She writes that about 5,000 African Americans fought on the Patriot side in the American Revolution, and other historians put the number of people of

color (Blacks, indigenous peoples, and men of mixed race) in the Patriot forces even higher, at 6,000-7,500. According to the historian David O. White in *Connecticut's Black Soldiers, 1775-1783* (1973), more than 400 Connecticut soldiers of color served on the Patriot side during the Revolution.

As the historian Joyce Lee Malcolm points out in *Peter's War: A New England Slave Boy and the American Revolution* (2010), some of these soldiers were free people of color, but others were enslaved. To meet the steep quotas for soldiers imposed by Congress, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island permitted enslaved men and boys to join the Continental Line, and if they stayed for the duration, they would be freed at the end of the war — provided, of course, that the Patriot side won. The same states also allowed affluent white men to avoid military duty if they could get someone else — sometimes a man they had enslaved — to take their place, sometimes with the promise of freedom. (Washington, one of the largest slave owners in Virginia, vehemently opposed allowing enslaved men — and free Black men, as well — to join the Continental Army, but as troops grew increasingly scarce, he relented under Congressional pressure and accepted the reality of Black soldiers from the North.) Malcolm also points out that, during the War, the British offered freedom to men and women enslaved by Patriots (although not by Loyalists) who escaped to the British lines and agreed to work for a British victory. Malcolm juxtaposes the experience of Peter, an enslaved teen from Massachusetts who joined the Patriot forces, with Titus, an enslaved man from New Jersey who fought with a Loyalist Ranger unit on the British side.

According to Van Buskirk, White, and Malcolm, soldiers of color fought on the Patriot side for a variety of reasons. Enslaved men like Peter hoped to gain their freedom. Free men of color sought to prove their mettle — to demonstrate to their white neighbors that they were worthy of equal treatment in the new nation. Sadly, Van Buskirk writes, equality was not forthcoming, even after the War. But while the burdens shouldered by Black soldiers failed to convince most white Americans that Blacks and whites should be treated equally, she nevertheless believes that the contributions made by soldiers of color had a major impact on the African American community itself. In the aftermath of the Revolution, she writes, free Black Americans experienced increased segregation, increased violence, and the degradation of their civil rights. “But,” she writes, “not one of these developments went unchallenged by the African American community. They claimed that this was their land and that their forefathers had spilled their blood in its defense. The abolition movement used not only the rhetoric of the American Revolution but also the example of their fathers and grandfathers who had fought to create the Republic. Black veterans had explained to their children and grandchildren how they had brought down British generals. They exhibited badges of merit and showed their war wounds to their kin. On the distaff side, Black women related how difficult it had been to marry their soldier sweethearts and then keep the home front going during the eight years of war.”

Why did Windham's Leason brothers join the Connecticut Line and fight for independence? Job Leason, at least, was illiterate, and so did not leave any detailed written record explaining his decisions or recounting his life story. Still, some scraps and and clues do exist in the historical

record. The most detailed account of the Leason brothers' military service comes from the muster rolls, for even in the 18th century, the military kept good records, so let's start there. According to the rolls, the brothers joined the Continental Army on April 5, 1777, a little less than two years into the war. They enlisted for three years, considerably more than a militiaman's commitment of only a few months. Jesse seems to have left the Army on schedule in 1780. But Job signed up for a second three-year hitch, serving until the War ended in 1783. Each held the rank of private in what was called the 8th Regiment of Foot (an old-fashioned way of saying infantry) of the Connecticut Line.

The 8th was a typical regiment. Theoretically, it was supposed to have 1,046 officers and men, but in reality there were always fewer, for Connecticut, like other states, had a tough time coming up with enough volunteers to meet the quotas set by the Continental Congress. On April 27 of 1775, the Connecticut Assembly voted to raise 6,000 troops, to be divided into six regiments, with each regiment divided into ten companies. These first Connecticut troops – which did not include the Leason brothers, who joined later, in 1777 – were dispatched to eastern Massachusetts to join the volunteers that were already besieging Boston following the Lexington Alarm of April 1775. A few months later, on June 14, 1775, Congress took responsibility for the ragtag forces, renamed it the Continental Army, and put George Washington, a veteran of the French and Indian War, in command. Washington's chief generals included Israel Putnam of Connecticut, another French and Indian War vet. The Continental Army was subsequently reorganized in 1776, and then again in 1777. In 1777, when the Leason brothers joined, the Connecticut Line of the Continental Army consisted of eight regiments. The Leasons' regiment, the 8th – which had been under the command of Col. Jedediah Huntington of Norwich in 1775 – was now placed under the command of Col. John Chandler, with Huntington transferred to command the 1st. During the course of the War, Chandler (who resigned March 5, 1778) would be replaced by Col. Giles Russell (who died on October 28, 1779), who would in turn be replaced by Lt. Col. Isaac Sherman. Sherman was the son of one of Connecticut's preeminent politicians, Roger Sherman, an influential member of Congress. Sherman remained in command of the 8th until January 1781. From 1777 to 1781, the Leasons served in what was called Brigham's Company, named for company commander Capt. Paul Brigham (1746-1824). Brigham, from Coventry, CT, remained company captain until he was discharged on April 22, 1781. Shortly after his discharge, Brigham moved his young family to the Vermont frontier, where he became a founder of the Vermont town of Norwich (named for Norwich, CT) and eventually Vermont's second governor.

Muster rolls, taken every month or so, provide snapshots of Brigham's Company at various times throughout the War. The Company's muster roll for November 1778, for example lists three commissioned officers (Capt. Brigham, Lt. Richard Sill, and Lt. Levi Hotchkiss), four sergeants, three corporals, one drummer, one fifer, and 30 privates – well short of the ideal complement of 100 men. The privates were listed alphabetically. Marginal notations recorded whether or not the men were present for muster, sick, or on detached duty. The August 1779 muster roll noted that Jesse Leason was "on Duty," the February 1780 roll recorded him as being "at the Huts," and the April 1778 roll noted that Job Leason was "on Command at fishkill." The brothers were discharged at Springfield, NJ, at the end of three years in April

1780, but Job reenlisted the next year. He was again discharged – this time for good – at West Point in July 1783, when the War ended.

Like many soldiers in the Continental Army, the brothers were not always paid on time or at all. In 1782, during his second hitch, Job Leason complained to Col. Isaac Sherman that his pay was six pounds, ten shillings, and six pence in arrears. Sherman wrote out an order in his own hand to the paymaster instructing that Job receive his pay. “This certifies that Job Leason served in the state 8th Connecticut Regt. Previous to the 1st day of January 1781. 25th October 1782. Isaac Sherman, Lieut C[—].” The note continues, “Gentlemen, Please to Deliver your order on the Treasurer to the bearer for my service as above. 23rd October 1782. Committed Payable. Witness Isaac Sherman, Lt Collon—.” The note was also signed by Job, who signed with an “X” surrounded by the words, “Job Leason, his mark,” indicating that he was illiterate. (I found a digital copy of this note as part of an internet sale, in which the original was being sold by a vendor to a private collector.) It is possible that Jesse, too, could not read or write.

As part of Brigham’s Company, the Leason brothers would have been involved in several important Revolutionary War battles and campaigns, sharing the suffering and privations endured by the rest of the Connecticut Line. According to “A Revolutionary Diary of Captain Paul Brigham, November 19, 1777 – September 4, 1778,” edited by Edward A. Hoyt and published in the January 1966 issue of *Vermont History*, the Company spent most of the summer of 1777 stationed near Peekskill, NY, defending the highlands north of New York City, which was occupied by British forces. This was a blocking action, aimed at preventing British troops in New York commanded by Gen. Henry Clinton from linking up with a second British army commanded by Gen. John “Gentleman Johnny” Burgoyne, which was marching south from Canada. Had the two British armies met, New England would have been severed from the rest of the States, a major blow for the Patriots. But because the two British armies never did join forces, Burgoyne was defeated that year in the Battle of Saratoga, perhaps the most pivotal battle of the War, a Patriot victory that persuaded France to enter the conflict on the American side. The 8th did not fight at Saratoga, but its role in preventing Clinton from relieving Burgoyne was nevertheless vital.

Following Washington’s defeat at the Battle of Brandywine in September, 1777, Brigham’s Company was ordered south to join the main Continental Army in Pennsylvania, arriving in time to participate in the Battle of Germantown in October. The Company lost twenty-two men killed, wounded, or missing in the battle. In November, the Company was part of the unsuccessful defense of Fort Mifflin on Mud Island in the Delaware River, after which it joined the main army for winter quarters at Valley Forge. At Valley Forge, the brothers would have shared in the privation, starvation, and suffering — but also would have received the crucial training in “Prussian drill” from General Baron von Steuben that transformed the Continental Army into an efficient fighting machine. In June of 1778, the Company took part in the Battle of Monmouth. After that, Brigham’s Company – and the rest of the 8th – spent most of the rest of the war patrolling the northern outskirts of New York City, wintering in 1778-79 in Redding, CT and 1779-80 at Morristown, NJ, where conditions were even worse than they had been at Valley Forge.

Capt. Brigham kept a diary of his experiences during the War, but only four small fragments still exist, none of which mentions the Leason brothers, unfortunately. But Brigham's diary does make it clear that the entire Company — including Jesse and Job — suffered from cold weather, storms, and insufficient supplies and provisions. On Oct. 28, 1777, Brigham wrote in his diary, "On ye 28th marched to Burlinton [Burlington, NJ] and Crossed ye River [Delaware River] to Bristol [Pennsylvania] about Dusk had orders and marched to [—] where I Tarried with my Guard our Troops were in ye woods without any Tents and it was a Stormy night with hail and Rain Exceeding Bad for ye Poor men." The next day, he added, "on ye 29th a Stormy Day I Lay Still all Day with my Guard our Brigade marched before Break of Day in ye midst of ye Storm I heard this Evening that the Enemy had Got within 3 miles of Burlington and our Bagage had not Got over." On Nov. 11, Brigham noted, "on ye 10th Clear and Cold made me a new hut and Did not Enjoy it all night for we had orders to be Ready to march at 4 o'clock in ye morning this Day I had Iteligence that Jephura Titus was Dead and had ben Some Days." On Nov. 20, he added, "on ye 20th went into Camp it was Cold and Clear Provisions Very Poor and Scarce not Enough [—] to Seport the men [—]."

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Researching the lives of ordinary men and women is a difficult task, even more so for African Americans, especially before 1850. Prosperous, powerful, and literate people often left plentiful records of their activities and achievements. Even middling folks frequently appeared in documents relating to lawsuits, voter rolls, jury rolls, election results, newspaper stories, letters to the editor, tax documents, property deeds, and probate inventories. The United States Census was, of course, supposed to record the existence of every person living in the United States, enslaved or free, Black or white, female or male, citizen or not. But until 1850 most people's names are missing from the Census tallies, as the enumerators recorded only the names of the heads of each household – and in practice missed some of those, too. Until 1850, everyone else – the majority of Americans – were recorded simply as hatch marks on the enumerators' tally sheets. The first Census in 1790, for example, recorded the names of the head of each household (who was almost always male), and then the numbers (but not the names) of the adult white males, adult white females, white children, free people of color (with no record of their age or gender), and slaves (again, with no record of their age or gender). Searching pre-1850 census records for people of color – and also for white women and children – thus turns up plenty of hatch marks, but very few names.

However, sometimes it is possible to find unexpected information in early Censuses. I had first learned about the Leason brothers from the Census, because — unlike most people — each of them was a head of household living in Windham, CT, from the 1800 Census through the 1820 Census, and so their names were recorded. Because the Census differentiated between whites and non-whites, I knew from the Census that they were men of color. And because the Census recorded that everyone living in the two households the brothers headed was a free person of color and not enslaved, I knew they were free.

I then searched for the brothers on Ancestry.com, where I learned that they had military records, and those records – primarily the laconic muster rolls discussed above – told me that they had served as Privates in the Continental Army from 1777 to 1783 as part of Bringham’s Company of the Eighth Regiment of the Connecticut Line. Because other records exist that describe the experiences of their Company and Regiment, I was able to know what campaigns the brothers had been in, what battles they had fought, and what hardships they had endured. The muster rolls did not record a soldier’s race; I would not have known they were Black without the Census. Neither Jesse nor Job appears on the list of 289 African American men from Connecticut who fought in the Revolutionary War in either the Continental Army or the state militia that was compiled in 1973 by David O. White, a University of Connecticut History M.A. who worked at the Prudence Crandall House museum in Canterbury. However, White acknowledged that his list was not comprehensive – he included no one that he did not know for sure was Black – and he estimated that the number of African American men who served was at least 400.

Then, by luck, I stumbled upon another record. Looking for more information about the brothers’ regimental commander, Lt. Col. Isaac Sherman, I ran an internet search, and something unexpected popped up. A company that specializes in auctioning and selling historic documents to private buyers had posted for sale a document that not only had Sherman’s name attached to it, it also had Job Leason’s. The document – discussed above – was a brief order, signed by Sherman, that the Continental Army paymaster pay Job more than six pounds in back wages. The advertisement contained digital images of the document, a transcription, and a brief explanation of the document’s background – its “provenance,” in museum parlance. The document itself was signed by Job as well as by Sherman and revealed that Job had been illiterate, as he had signed with an X. The background explanation about the document – perhaps written by the auction company’s owner, Seth Keller – said that “as many as 1,400 Connecticut soldiers of color” had served in the Continental Army and state militia during the Revolution, considerably more than White’s more credible estimate of 400. It summarized the information available from the muster rolls, which I already knew. It also contained the following paragraph:

“[Job] Leason’s first wife is believed to have been Zilpha Perkins, daughter of London Perkins (1721-99), a former slave who operated a tannery, and his wife Cate Perkins (c. 1717/18-1813). Zilpha’s parents had both been enslaved by Capt. John Perkins and his wife Lydia of Norwich [CT, but] were free by 1786 [a few years after the Revolutionary War ended in 1783]. Their eight children were all born into slavery and baptized in Lisbon [CT].” The paragraph went on to note that Job Leason’s second wife was named Rosanna, and that Job and Rosanna had not had any children. “After 1808,” the paragraph continued, “Leason was feeble and unable to work except at basket making.” By 1808, Leason was “very poor and destitute of property” and in need of “assistance for his support,” and so applied for a government pension as a war veteran, which he began receiving in 1818. No sources were cited.

Who were the Perkinses of Norwich, and could researching them tell me more about Job or Jesse Leason and why they joined the Continental Army? As it turns out, there were two

Norwich men named Capt. John Perkins, father and son, and because they were white, male, and well-to-do, there are a lot of historical documents in which they appear. The father had been born in Norwich in 1709 and died in 1761. According to a published Perkins family genealogy, *The Family of John Perkins of Ipswich, Massachusetts*, the first Capt. Perkins was married twice, first to Elizabeth Bushnell in 1731, and then to Lydia Tracy — the Lydia Perkins in the auctioneer’s paragraph above — in 1743, the year after Elizabeth died. He was nicknamed “the great Perkins” for his large physical size. I tracked down copies of this elder Capt. Perkins’s will and 1761 probate inventory, a detailed list of all the property he had owned just before he died. The inventory ran to 14 handwritten pages and included properties in Canterbury as well as Norwich. Perkins’s principal home, a 650-acre farm, was located in “Hanover Society,” a section of Norwich that later separated and became the town of Lisbon. Listed in the inventory as part of Perkins’s estate were fifteen “negroes,” along with the monetary value assigned to each of them as property to be devised to his heirs. These enslaved men and women appeared in the part of the inventory that listed Perkins’s livestock. It was chilling, to find human beings listed as property, on a par with horses and cows. Here is the what the inventory said:

- One Negro Man Named London, 36-0-0 [36 pounds, 0 shillings, and 0 pence]
- One Negro Woman Named Cate[,] London[‘s] wife, 15-0-0
- One Negro Man Named Simon, 50-0-0
- One Negro Woman Named Lucy Hagar[,] Simon wife, 35-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Solah, 35-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Dinah, 50-0-0
- One Negro Boy Name[d] Jim, 50-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Zilpha, 40-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Milcha, 32-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Purah, 32-0-0
- One Negro Boy Named Onisimus, 28-0-0
- One Negro Girl Named Tamer, 17-0-0
- One Negro Boy Named Ziba a Suckling Child, 8-0-0
- One Negro Boy Named John, 48-0-0
- One Negro Boy Named Cugg, 42-0-0

I had found London Perkins, his wife Cate, and his daughter Zilpha. It is not surprising that Jesse and Job were not listed in the inventory. According to the historian Eugene Genovese in *Roll, Jordan, Roll, the World the Slaves Made*, enslaved people rarely married other slaves who lived in the same household, which they considered a kind of incest. But it also would have been difficult for Zilpha Perkins, as an enslaved woman, to travel freely or far, meaning that as long as she was enslaved her relationships most likely would have been with people who lived in and around Norwich. If Job Leason did later marry Zilpha, then there is a chance — a good one — that he, too, had lived in Norwich – and a possibility that he, too, had been enslaved.

I also checked the will and probate inventory of the second Capt. John Perkins, the son of the first. The second Capt. Perkins was his father’s principal heir and had inherited the 650-acre

farm in Norwich in 1761. But by the time the second Capt. Perkins died in 1800, he owned no slaves, as none were listed in his 1801 probate inventory. I also read the will and probate inventory of the first Capt. Perkins's younger brother, Matthew Perkins, who had died in 1773. Matthew's probate inventory listed only three enslaved people: "one Negro Man Named Cuff, 10-0-0[;] one Negro Man Named Cudge, 50-0-0[; and] one Negro Woman Named Sagor, 25-0-0." The decline in the Perkins family's slave holding from 1761 to 1801 was typical, and spoke to another revolution that was happening at the time, a rapid decline in slavery in Connecticut and other northern states. Indeed, slavery in Connecticut began to decline almost immediately after the Revolution, although it would not disappear entirely until after 1840.

If London Perkins had indeed died in 1799 in Norwich, as the auctioneer thought, and had operated a tannery there, I wondered if he would show up in the 1790 U. S. Census as a head of household. Unfortunately, the Census enumerator for New London County that year had decided not to record the last names of any of the free Black heads of household he listed, instead recording them only by their first names with the prefix "Negro." There was, however, one "Negro London" listed in the Census as a free head of household – on the same page as several Leffingwells – the head of a household of two free Black people. Presumably, the other one was Cate, who is supposed to have lived until 1813, when she would have been in her nineties. I still need to do more research – in the Otis Free Library in Norwich, and by consulting Norwich's town historian Dale Plummer. But for now, there are only "maybes." Job Leason may have lived in Norwich before the Revolution, may have been enslaved, and may have married London and Cate Perkins's daughter Zilpha. And, in all likelihood, Job's older brother Jesse had grown up in the same town, under the same conditions.

What do we know about the Leason brothers after the Revolution? In 1800 both Jesse and Job lived in Windham, CT, as free Black men. If they had been enslaved before the Revolution, they were free after it, most likely because of their service during the War. Moreover, it was not just Jesse and Job who were free in 1800 – so, too were the other five members and Jesse's household (presumably his wife and children) and the one other person of Job's household (presumably his wife Rosanna), all of them Black. Freedom was becoming more common, a second American Revolution. While there were still 14 enslaved people living in Windham in 1800, there were 78 free Blacks. Some of Windham's free Blacks lived in households headed by white men or women, working as servants, but there were also thirteen Windham households composed entirely of free Black people, headed by Jube Negro (probably Jube Dyer, formerly enslaved by Eliphalet Dyer, who had taken the place of Eliphalet's son in the Revolutionary forces in return for his freedom), Pomp Negro, Cuff Perkins (was he the same Cuff who had been enslaved by Matthew Perkins in Norwich in 1773?), Philomon Little, Rock O. Ceasare, Ezra Rathbun, Pero Negro, Jesse Leason, Job Leason, Prince Negro, Edward Gauson, Peter Welsh, and John Tyler. Altogether, these thirteen households comprised 53 individuals, or 68% of Windham's free Black population. Most were likely farmers. Windham's 1810 Census recorded only the names of white heads of household, but Black-headed households were again recorded in 1820, when Windham's Black population numbered 87 – 83 free people and four slaves. Jesse was still there in 1820.

For more information, I returned to military records. As seen, by one account, by 1808 Job Leason was unable to do any work other than making baskets. In fact, in old age both brothers applied for pensions as Revolutionary War veterans, something to which they were entitled for their service in the Connecticut Line. United States military records show that in 1818 Jesse and Job were each receiving a pension allowance of \$8.00 a month. In their applications for the pensions, each had stated his age: Jesse had been born in c. 1753 and Job in c. 1758. But the brothers sought more than pensions — they also asked for “bounty lands,” frontier lands that Congress had reserved for needy Revolutionary War pensioners, which the recipients were allowed to sell. As invalids, it is unlikely that either brother intended to move to the frontier to take on the arduous task of clearing the forest and breaking the soil. More likely, they hoped to sell their bounty lands for small sums of money — perhaps to whoever it was who helped them write and file their applications. In his application for bounty lands, which was filed with the Court of Common Pleas on June 28, 1820, Jesse Leason testified that he had “made declaration for a Pension under the Act of Congress of the 18th day of March 1818 & thereon attained a Pension certificate Number 9,653.” He then further testified that he warranted bounty lands because he had become infirm and impoverished. “I am by occupation a day labourer or Farmer, & maker of Baskets,” he told the Court, “and have been unable to do any work for more than a year by means of sickness & unable to take care of or wait on myself under which I still labour & can neither walk nor stand without help.” He also told the Court about his household. “I have a wife Susannah,” he declared, “aged 57 years who is a weakly sickly woman. I have one daughter Sally aged 14 years Who enjoys a comfortable share of health & a grandchild named Jesse Leason Bates, four years old who is in good health & an illegitimate & depending on me for Support.”

Jesse then provided the Court with a list of his meager property: “1 Iron Pot worth 50c ... 1 Kettle, 50 – 1 axe \$1.00 ... 1 hoe 50c — 6 chains \$4.00 — meat tub 50c ... Knives & forks, 12 Teacups, 12[c] Water pail, 12[c]...” He listed no real property, so he was a tenant. His entire estate was valued at \$7.36. Job was even more destitute than Jesse. In his 1820 application for bounty lands, he testified, “My discharge is lost — I am now a Pensioner the date of my original application was April 2nd 1818. The aforesaid pension [...] is [number] 9,654[.] I have no trade & depend upon day labor for support, & have been feeble for 12 years & unable to do anything except a little Basket making.... I have a wife Rosanna, age fortyfour who enjoys pretty good health — I have no children....” Job’s entire estate consisted of “1 axe hoe & drawing knife.... Table chairs & iron pot.... 1 Tea Kettle Tea cups & saucers....” The disposition of the brothers’ request for bounty lands is unclear. After they died, a “Mr. Whiting” in Windham wrote to the Bounty Land Office: “*Job & Jesse Leason* late of this town deceased, were enlisted men served during the *Revolution War*, consequently would be entitled to bounty lands from the government to their legal representatives. Will you be so kind as to inform me by letter, whether they [...] with their rights to their lands to any person in their life time. If so, it will doubtless appear upon your records. If not it is the wish of their representatives to obtain the lands due for the services of said Leasons.” In the margin of the letter, someone — likely an employee of the Bounty Land Office — had jotted the following: “1272 for [...] of the 12th March 1828 to Job Leason, Private Connct Line, and the same delivered to the Hona. John Baldwin. Jesse Leason — not determined.”

Jesse Leason died in 1826 at the age of 73. Job died two years later, in 1828, at the age of 70, their deaths recorded by the town of Windham. In addition, *The Christian Secretary*, a weekly newspaper put out by the Connecticut Baptist Convention and the Connecticut Baptist Missionary Society, published Job's death notice. Presumably, then, Job was a Baptist, and perhaps Jesse was, too. We are left to guess at the significance of a free Black man – and maybe both men and their families – deciding not to join the Windham Congregational Church that was attended by the majority of his white neighbors. After 1828 the Leason families disappear from Windham's official records.

Tracking down the history of Jesse and Job Leason has been frustrating, and there are still many questions to answer. Like most ordinary people – and especially people of color – they left only a few traces in the public records. Most of what I could find revolved around their experience in the Continental Army. The importance of that experience, though, should not be understated. It is worth repeating the words of the historian Judith L. Van Buskirk in *Standing In Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution*. For generations after the Revolution, Black parents passed on to Black children the oral stories of their grandparents' vital contributions to American independence and freedom, and used those stories to advocate both for the abolition of slavery and for equal rights. "They claimed that this was their land and that their forefathers had spilled their blood in its defense," writes Van Buskirk. "The abolition movement used not only the rhetoric of the American Revolution but also the examples of their fathers and grandfathers who had fought to create the Republic. Black veterans had explained to their children and grandchildren how they had brought down British generals. They exhibited badges of merit and showed their war wounds to their kin." Jesse and Job Leason had fought for freedom on several levels – for their country, for themselves (if indeed they had been enslaved before the War), and for their wives, children, and grandchildren. Job's wife, Zilpha, had been born a slave. We may not know many details about Jesse and Job's lives. But we know that, combined with the service of hundreds of other Black Revolutionary soldiers, their contribution to American freedom was immense.