

Black Revolutionary War hero Agrippa Hull is born, March 7, 1759

On this day in history, March 7, 1759, black Revolutionary War hero Agrippa Hull is born to a free black family in Northampton, Massachusetts. Agrippa's family attended the church of Great Awakening preacher Jonathan Edwards. As a young boy, he was sent to Stockbridge to live with another free black family when his birth family experienced economic hardship. Agrippa lived in Stockbridge, a unique town made up of English and Dutch settlers, free slaves and a large number of Indians, all living peacefully together, for the rest of his life.

In 1777, at the age of 18, Agrippa joined the Continental Army and became an orderly for General John Paterson. In this role, Hull was present at the surrender of British General John Burgoyne at Saratoga. He spent the winter of 1777-78 at Valley Forge and participated in the Battle of Monmouth Courthouse.

In May, 1779, Hull was reassigned to Colonel Thaddeus Kosciuszko, a Polish engineer who was constructing the defenses at West Point at the time. Hull would remain with Kosciuszko for the last four years of the war and they would become fast friends. Hull was particularly known for his wit, quick humor and practical jokes. One time Kosciuszko even found Hull wearing Kosciuszko's uniform and throwing a party for his black friends.

During their time in the south, both Hull and Kosciuszko got a firsthand look at the effects of slavery that would mark them for the rest of their lives. Kosciuszko would denounce slavery and become an ardent abolitionist. For the last two years of the war, Hull often worked with the medical staff and learned how to do amputations and simple surgeries. He served in nearly every major battle of the southern campaign, including Cowpens, Guilford Courthouse, the Siege of Charleston and Eutaw Springs.

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In July, 1783, after six years of service, Agrippa Hull was discharged personally by George Washington at West Point. He returned to Stockbridge and became a servant in the home of lawyer and politician Theodore Sedgwick who had been a member of the Continental Congress and would later be a US Senator. Sedgwick was known for representing Elizabeth Freeman, the first slave to win her freedom under Massachusetts' new Constitution, in her freedom suit. Freeman, known as "Mum Bet," worked alongside Hull for many years in the Sedgwick household.

Hull married and had several children. He used extra money from his employment to buy land and eventually became the largest black landholder in Stockbridge. He was well regarded by the entire town and viewed of as a father figure to all. In 1797, he had a warm reunion with Thaddeus Kosciuszko on his return visit to America. In 1831, he made a memorable journey to West Point to visit the US Military Academy, where he had served with Kosciuszko 50 years before. Hull entertained the cadets, who had recently erected a monument to Kosciuszko, with stories of the Polish hero's exploits.

Agrippa Hull died on May 21, 1848, the last surviving veteran of the American Revolution in Stockbridge. He treasured his discharge paper signed by George Washington for his entire life. He was viewed in Stockbridge and beyond as a philosopher, father and patriot and is another example of a heroic African-American who fought for the freedom of his country.