

[Southern Campaigns American Revolution Pension Statements and Rosters](#)

Pension Application of Primus (Primes) Hall (Trask) W751      Ann Hall      MA  
Transcribed and annotated by C. Leon Harris. Revised 25 Dec 2014.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts/ Suffolk Ss

On this thirteenth day of October in the year of our Lord eighteen hundred and thirty five personally appeared in open Court before the Then Judge, Peter O. Thacher, Justice of the Municipal Court holden within and for the City of Boston Primas Hall sometimes called Primas Trask a man of colour and a resident in said City now aged seventy nine years and upwards who being first duly sworn accordi[ng: edge of page missing] to law doth on his oath make the following declaration for the purpose of obtaining the benefit of the act of Congress passed the 7<sup>th</sup> of Ju[ne] AD. 1832.

That he the said Primas was born in the City of Boston on the twenty ninth day of February Anno Domini 1756 in the family of David Walker in Beacon Street in said Boston, and at the a[ge] of one month old was given to Mr Ezra Trask of Beverly in the Cou[nty] of Essex who subsequently removed to the town of Danvers in said County in whose family he continued to live until the commencement of the revolutionary War, and that forepart of the month of January in [the] year one thousand seven hundred and seventy six he the said Pri[mas] enlisted in the town of Cambridge in the county of Middlesex as a soldier in the army of the Revolution for the term of one year in a company commanded by Capt Joseph Butler of Concord in said County, of the fifth Massachusetts Regiment commanded by Colo Thomas Nixon. The Majors name was Scammell. The name of the Lieutenant was Silas Walker, and Ensign Potter, Gad Smit[h?] and Wheeler were Sergeants.

He the said Primas further testifies that [he] served the full period of one year, and at Trenton in New Jersey, at [the] earnest solicitation of General Washington he volunteered for a period of six weeks which he faithfully served, and at Morristo[wn] in New Jersey was honourably discharged by General Washington, after the taking of Princeton in said State [3 Jan 1777]. The foregoing term of time completed thirteen months and a half service. During [his] service as before stated he was at the following stations and in [the] following battles to wit, First at Winter Hill near Boston [in present Somerville], the winter of 1776, where were also stationed on said Hill and the vicinity of the same several Regiments to wit, Colonel Hite[’s], Colonel [John] Glover’s, Colonel [John] Stark’s, Graton’s [sic: John Greaton’s] and others, and that [he con]tinued at said Station until after the British troops evacuated that City March [7<sup>th</sup>] 1776. Thence he marched to New York with the Army, and was stationed in the Bowery and was employed for some time in erecting Fortifications near Byards Hill [Bayard’s Mount, renamed Bunker Hill, at present Mott and Grand St until removed after 1802]. About [that?] time Colonel Nixon was at the place promoted to a Brigadier General and his brother, John Nixon who was Lieutenant Colonel assumed [the] command of the said fifth Regiment [see endnote]. After this period he was [st]ationed on Governor’s Island in the harbour of New York, but was [ob]liged to evacuate the same, when the British took possession of [the] Island [27 Aug 1776]. He distinctly remembers that Major Walcott was Bearer of a flagg of truce demanding the surrender of the place [w]hich demand was disregarded and a cannonade commenced – that two of the Vessels of the enemy came beating up the narrows and that by General Washington’s orders they were taken off the Island and in passing over to New York the Cockswain was killed by a chain shott fired from the Asia Man of War belonging to the enemy. Said Primas was after this stationed at the grand Battery in New York, but soon joined the Maine [sic: main] Army at Rattle-[sn]ake hills, and there had an action. After the engagement retreated [to] Harlem Heights and there had a skirmish [16 Sep 1776] – thence to Miles [Sq]uare and had another skirmish – thence to White Plains, and there had a Battle [28 Oct 1776] – thence crossed the Hudson River at Kings Ferry, and marched into New Jersey, and was under General [Charles] Lee at the time that General was surprised at Basking Ridge and taken prisoner [13 Dec 1776]. Then General [John] Sullivan took command, and marched the troops to Pennsylvania, to a place called Bristol and after remaining at Bristol a few days recrossed the Delaware, and attacked the Hessians at Trenton & Burlington and took

them prisoners [26 Dec 1776], the Regiment to which said Primas belonged being station at the former place when his term of service of one year expired, but [a]t the earnest request of General Washington he volunteered for the further term of six weeks, and during said service he was at the taking of Princetown [Battle of Princeton, 3 Jan 1777], and soon thereafter marched to Morristown in New Jersey and there received an honorable discharge from the Army signed by General Washington and returned home to Danvers in the Spring of 1777.

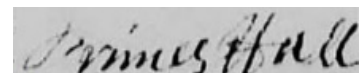
He further testifies that he again enlisted in the fall of the 1777 in the town of Danvers for three months, into a Militia Company commanded by Capt. Samuel Flint of said town and Lieutenant Herrick of Beverly and Colonel Johnson of Andover, and marched to Saratoga to join the Army under General [Horatio] Gates, who w[as t]hen acting against General Burgoyne; that he was in the second engagement between the two armies [Battle of Bemis Heights, 7 Oct 1777] when the Hessian Brigade was together with eight pieces of British Artillery – that he distinct[ly] recollects the death of Captain Flint who together with L[ieutenant] Herrick were both killed in said Battle. that he was standing near his Captain when he received his mortal wound, and caught him in his arms to prevent his falling, but on observing that [he] bled profusely set him down against a tree when he expired immediately. This battle was fought in October 1777. After the surrender of Burgoyne [17 Oct 1777] he with the Regiment marched to Albany crossed the river at that place to Greenbush, continued down the Hudson River on the east side till they arrived at a place called East Chester on the shore of Long Island Sound, when his term of thr[ee] months service expired, and he was a second time discharged, again returned to the town of Danvers.

He further testifies that in the year seventeen hundred and seventy eight [sic] he enlisted at Danvers for a further period of three months under Capt Woodbu[ry] of Cape Ann, and a Colonel whose name he has forgotten, but wh[o was] from Topsfield, and thence marched with the company to Rhode Island, and was stationed on the North part of said Island oppo[site] Tiverton, and was employed in building a Fort and keeping [missing] until his term had again expired and he was a third time disc[harged] from service. The French Fleet and Army under Count Rocham[beau] were at Rhode Island [landed 11 Jul 1780], the French troops being stationed on land above New Port on said Island at the time of his last tour above stated. that himself with another coloured man by the name of Manual were detached from Captain Woodbury's company and p[er]formed service with the French Corps of Sappers & Miners, and that the time he performed military duty in the three foregoing tours was nineteen months and a half.

He further testifies that in the years 1781 and 1782 he served twenty two months as Steward to and under Colonel Timothy Pickering [later Secretary of War] of the United States Quarter Master department, and was with that Officer at Verplan[ck] Point [Westchester County NY], Philadelphia, Baltimore & other places, and was at Yorktown at the time that place surrendered to the American Army, un[der] General Washington & the French forces [19 Oct 1781], and went into [the] British Garrison in said town with Colonel Pickering and there assis[ted] him in taking an account of the enemy's specie deposited in the milita[ry] chests in said Fort. that after the troops marched to the northw[ard] and were stationed at or near a place called Rattle snake hill [probably Snake Hill] near Newburg [Newburgh] in the State of New York he received a final discharge from the Army and in the month of December 1772 [sic] he returned home to Danvers Massachusetts. He further testifies that while serving as Steward in the army aforesaid during the Revolutionary War at a place called Dumfries in the state of Virginia his pocket book was stolen from him containing his several discharges from [the] Army and he has not to this day heard any thing of them, and [th]at he has also lost his last discharge.

Said Primas further testifies that the reason why he has not claimed the benefit of the act of Congress of the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1818 is in consequence of the amount of his property.

And he hereby relinquishes every claim whatever to a pension or annuity except the present and declares that his name is not on the pension roll of the agency of any State.



Commonwealth of Massachusetts./ Secretary's Office, Sept. 15<sup>th</sup> 1835.

I hereby Certify, That, from an examination of the Books and Documents, relating to Military Services in the War of the Revolution, which remain in this Department, it appears that the roll of Capt. Joseph Butler's Comp'y. in Col. Nixon's Regt. from Jan'y 1<sup>st</sup> 1776 is not found in this Office. The Muster roll of a Company under the above mention'd Officers from April 24<sup>th</sup> to August 1<sup>st</sup> 1775 is found in this Office, but the name of Primus Hall is not borne on it.

Primus Hall claims for services under Capt. Sam'l. Flint in Col. Johnson's Regt. in 1777, and under a Capt. Woodbury of Cape Ann, but the rolls are not found in this Office

[signed] Edward D Bannskey[?]

Com'th of Massachusetts.

I Elijah Flint of Danvers do testify and declare that I am seventy three years of age; that I am the reputed son of Capt. Samuel Flint formerly of this town, who with his first Lieut. Herrick of Beverly were killed while engaged with their company of Militia, Oct. 7<sup>th</sup> 1777 at Stillwater or Bhemis' Heights, at the Capture of Gen. Burgoyne and his Army and I do further declare that I know personally and have long known Primus Trask, since called Primus Hall, a colored man, who was brought up in the family of Ezra Trask, formerly of Beverly but subsequently of Danvers; that it has been and now is matter of notoriety that said Primus was engaged as a soldier in the service of his country in the Revolutionary war, that this has not been disputed within my knowledge; and I do farther declare that it has been currently reported that said Primus was present in the battle in which said Capt. Sam'l. Flint was killed; and farther, that I always considered said Primus a man of good character for truth and veracity.

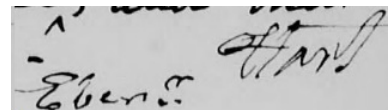
Danvers Oct. 7, 1835.

[signed] Elijah Flint

Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

I Ebenezer Hart [pension application W14852] of Lynnfield do testify, depose and declare that I am seventy three years of age, that I have always lived in Lynnfield except when in the service of my country; that I served as a soldier between seven and eight years during the Revolutionary war – that I personally knew Primus Trask, a colored man, who was brought up in the family of Ezra Trask who lived in Danvers, within three miles of where I now live; said Trask had previously lived in Beverly: that I was present in the battle of Oct 7, 1777 where Capt. Sam'l. Flint, who had been a neighbor of mine, was killed; that during my service I frequently saw Primus Trask and know him as a soldier in the war of the Revolution, but for what period he was engaged I cannot now recollect; that I distinctly recollect said Primus as steward to Col. Pickering in the Quartermaster Department at Yorktown: that I am now receiving pay under the Act of Congress of 15<sup>th</sup> of May 1828; and that I have heard that said Primus lives in Boston and is sometimes known by the name of Primus Hall; that it is, and has been matter of notoriety that said Primus was engaged in the public service as a soldier; and that his character for truth is good.

Lynnfield Oct. 8<sup>th</sup> 1835



[The file contains the following undated, unsigned notes:]

Primus Hall alias Trask born '56

Jany 76	Jos. Butler –	Nixon Colo.	12 mo.	vol'd 6 weeks	13.12
fall 77	Flint	Johnson	“ 3 mo.		3—
78	Woodbury	forgotten			3—

81 82 Steward under Pickering Qr. Mr. Dept. 22 mo

no doubt a waiter & slave

War Department/ Pension Office/ October 29<sup>th</sup> 1835

Sir [Reuben Baldwin Esq/ Boston Mass]

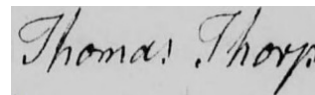
The claim of Primus Hall alias Trask has been examined & suspended

As the records of Massachusetts furnish no evidence of either of his alleged terms of service and as no satisfactory reason has been assigned for the delay in presenting a claim of this magnitude, the Department will require very conclusive proof of each term of service. The numerous survivors of the revolution still residing in Massachusetts must furnish abundant means of establishing any service rendered under her authority

The employment of a steward to the commissary Gen'l is not embraced in the provisions of the Act of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1832 [see endnote] His papers are placed on file

I am Respectfully/ Your Ob Servant/ J. L. Edwards [Commissioner of Pensions]

I Thomas Thorp [W8783] of Acton in the County of Middlesex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Do testify and say that I am Eighty years of age. That I have this day [14 May 1836] seen and conversed with and am fully satisfied that one Primas Hall of the City of Boston, Coloured man is the same man which was well known to me by the name of Primas Trask in the War of the Revolution, in the year 1776 we Enlisted in the Company under Capt Joseph Butler of Concord, Liut Walker of Concord & Ens Viram Wheeler of Concord, in Col. Thomas Nixon Regiment of the Mass line. That we march from Winterhill near Boston to the City of New York where we were stationed for a short time, and from thence to Governors Island in the Harbour of New York, from thence to New York City, and from thence to Rattlesnake Hill, where he had a skirmish, from thence to Harlem heights [sic: Harlem Heights], from thence to White Plains we their had a Battle, from thence we Retreated to New Jersey and Pennsylvania, from thence we returned to Trenton & Princeton and were in the Battles at those places, said Primas and myself having enlisted for the term of one year which term had Expired while we were stationed at Trenton, at which place we further Enlisted for a further time of six weeks, and had a bounty of ten dollars, during the said six week we were in the before mentioned Battle at Prinston I distinctly recollect said Primas was with me during the whole period of thirteen and a half months & in all the above named Battles and at Morristown in New Jersey we Received our discharges and returned to our Native state in the Winter of 1777. I further testify that I am a Pensioner of the United states – first under the Act of 1818 which Pension I have exchanged for the Benifit of the Act of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1832, having served as a Sergeant in the war since the above mentioned tour of thirteen and a half months



I William Flint [W14724] of Danvers in the County of Essex and Commonwealth of Massachusetts being sworn, do on Oath testify and declare that I am Seventy seven years of age, and am Pensioner of the United States under the Act of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1832.

I further testify and delare that I have this day [17 May 1836] conversed with a Coloured man from Boston and do recognise him to be the Identical person who was brought up in the family of Mr Ezra Trask, of this Town of Danvers Deceased and that he was then known by the name of Primas Trask and is since called Primas Hall; I do well remember that said Primas went with Captain Samuel Flint of this Town – who commanded a Militia Company for Three Months service, against General Burgoyne, where said Flint and his Liutenant Herrick were Slain. said Primas was a soldier in his Company and was waiter to Capt Flint, and I always understood and believed that said Primas served out the full period of Three months in said Company of Capt Flint.

I further testify and declare that I formerly had a Brother by the name of Joseph Flint who with the above named Primas were soldiers together in a Militia company and served Three Months in a Militia Company, and served Three Months in Rhode Island. Their Officers names I have forgotten, but I well remember of the above mentioned tour performed by said Primas and my Brother Joseph who is

dead, over forty years since. This tour of three months was performed after their return from the taking of  
Burgoyne William hisXmark Flint

War Department/ Pension Office/ May 28, 1836

Sir [Reuben Baldwin] The additional evidence in the case if Primus Hall alias Trask, enclosed in yours of 24 inst have been filed with the other papers. The declaration & evidence do not disclose whether he was freeborn or emancipated; and if the latter, at what time? This may now be supplied by deposition

I am very respectfully/ yr. mo obt. S't./ J. L. Edwards

Boston, Massachusetts/ June 3<sup>d</sup> 1836

Sir [James L. Edwards] Your letter of the 28<sup>th</sup> Ult'o. relating to the claim of Pension of Primas Hall is received, and handed to him for perusal, who expresses much disappointment at its Import – particularly of that clause, requireing “evidence whether he was freeborn or emancipated”? – especially as the laws of this Commonwealth have always recognized him since he arived at the age of 21 years, as one of her Citizens enjoying in common with other Inhabitants, all the rights and immunities granted by her laws, and paying his full share of Taxes, in support of her Government.

I am instructed by mr. Hall to say that he was never a Slave – and that Mr Ezra Trask of Beverly, who brought him up never applied that appellation to him, but always considered his Guardianship as ending when his Ward should arive at lawful age – the same as any white person under like circumstances [see endnote]

I am at a loss to conceive how that question can have any influence, or bearing on the case under consideration, provided the applicant was a free Citizen when the Act of 7<sup>th</sup> June 1832 passed, and became a Law. any other construction would be irreconcilable to the fact within my own knowledge of the many coloured persons who are now receiving the bounties of the United States, in the form of Pensions – but who at the time of their Enlistments, were slaves. [See endnote.]

I presume that on receiving the foregoing explanation, the Dept. will reconsider the case in question, and no longer with hold from the worthy old Soldier the munificence of the National Government, which he so justly deserved.

Please answer this communication and forw'd. the same to me at this place

Verry Respectfully sir I your Obedient Servant/ Reuben Baldwin

War Department/ Pension Office/ June 9, 1836

Sir [Reuben Baldwin], In reply to yours of 3<sup>d</sup> instant respecting the case of Primus Hall, alias Trask, I have to state that the enquiry in mine of 28<sup>th</sup> Ult'o. whether the claimant was a slave at the time of his alleged service, and which he was required to answer upon oath, is very material; and the bearing of the facts, when properly disclosed and established will be communicated. Until the objections indicated in mine of 28<sup>th</sup> Ult'o. shall be removed by satisfactory evidence and explanation, the further examination of the claim will be suspended. Very respectfully/ yr. mo. obt./ J. L. Edwards

War Department/ Pension Office/ July 9<sup>th</sup> 1836

Sir [Reuben Baldwin] The supplemental statement of Primus Hall, alias Trask, respecting his emancipation, would have been more satisfactory if accompanied by the instrument which he avers he received from his former master. Under all the circumstances of the case, the Department is constrained to decide that the testimony is not sufficient to shew he was an enlisted soldier in the ranks subject to, and actually performing military duty agreeably to the discipline of the Army. He no doubt was with the Army, for one of the terms alleged, yet may have been a waiter, or in some other civil capacity.

I am respectfully,/ yr. mo. obt./ J. L. Edwards

I Primus Hall of the City of Boston in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Being sworn do on Oath Testify and declare that according to the best of my knowledge and belief I was born in Beacon St. in this City on the 29<sup>th</sup> day of February of the year 1756; and in the family of a Mr Walker – My Fathers name was Prince Hall [see endnote], and he was a free man – my Mothers name was Delia Hall and she was a servant in the family of said Walker and at the age of one month old I was given to a Mr Ezra Trask of Danvers, with the express understanding that he the said Trask was to bring me up and learn me the Trade of Shomaker – as soon as I was old enough, and that at the age of Twenty one years I was to be free – the same as any white person.

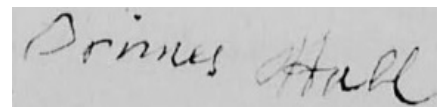
And accordingly at the age of ten years or thereabouts I began to work at said trade – and from then untill I was fifteen – when it was well known by Mr Trask, and a Physician, that the occupation of shomaker did not suit me – and my health was much impaired in conequence – said Physician Amos Putnam, advised my Master to change my employment, who thereupon proposed to me to give me my time, which proposal was accepted by me, and a Certificate to that effect was given me – The purport of which was that he the said Trask gave me my freedom with full liberty for me to transact any, or all business of every kind untill I should arive at the age of 21 years, and fully relinquished all claim upon me whatever – I was thence afterwards engaged in various ocupations some times as a Farmer at others as a Truckman in Salem – and untill I was Nineteen years of age – and had all the avails of my labour – and at the age of Nineteen I Enlisted as a Soldier in the War of the Revolution and served Nineteen Months and an half as a soldier by Three seiveral Enlistments. (Viz) first under Capt Joseph Butler Colonel Nixon, Thirteen and one half months – and Three months in the Campaign against Genl Burgoyne in Capt Flints Company of Colonel Johnsons Regiment of Militia – and Three months in a Campaign on Rhode Island under Capt Woodbury of Cape Ann. And also Twenty two months as Steward to General Timothy Pickering

I remember that when General Pickering was about to hire me as his Steward I exhibited to him my Certificate of freedom, which I had received from Mr Trask, as before stated – and as I was to go to the Southward with said Pickering, I thought It adviseable to have my said Certificate of freedom well established by the authorities of this state, and accordingly I presented it to Governor [John] Hancock, who attached his Certificate unde the official seal of this Commonwealth, to my said Certificate.

I had my Pocket book stolen at Dumfries in Virginia and with it I lost said Certificate and likewise Three Discharges from the Army, and have not seen either of them to this day.

I am by ocupation a Soap Boiler & have acquired a small property in this City and elsewhere by my industry

[13 June 1836]

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Primus Hall". The ink is dark and the handwriting is somewhat slanted to the right.

Boston, Massachusetts/ June 14<sup>th</sup> 1836.

Sir [J. L. Edwards] Your two communications of the 10<sup>th</sup> [sic] Instant is received, by which I perceive the requirement in yours of the 28<sup>th</sup> Ult. in relation to the case of Primus Hall, was misconstrued. The clause reffered to was as folows (Viz) “The declaration & evidence do not disclose whether he was freeborn or emancipated; and if the latter, at what time”. From the import of the foregoing it was inferred that the department required testimony as to way and manner of said Primus’ becoming free; which at this late day would almost be impracticable to adduce, since the occurrence took place more than sixty years since; more especially as the whole family of Mr Ezra Trask (his Master) are now extinct.

The contents of your letter of the 10<sup>th</sup> Instant is understood to require the deposition of said Primus, which is herewith enclosed, by which it will appear that his freedom was in consequence of the voluntary Act of Mr Ezra Trask, his then Master, who sanctioned the act by a written instrument; and this to at the age of Fifteen years old of said Primus; which Instrument in after times received the sanction of the authorities of this State.

I am instructed by said Primus to say that he never was literally considered a Slave; especially after he was given to said Trask, and that said Trask always repelled that appellation, when applied to said Primus, with indignation – but considered him merely as an apprentice to the shoemaking business, and in no respects different from a white person under like circumstances.

In relation to the loss of the above mentioned Certificate and discharges; I am further requested to say that while said Primus was acting as Steward to General Pickering, and at that time in Dumfries in Virginia, they took lodgings at a Tavern in that place and for want of better accomodation said Primus lodged on a Buffaloe skin on the floor where were many more under like circumstances, and that during the Night some one Purloined his Pocket Book and with it his Discharges from the Army, his Certificate of freedom, and a small sum of money, &c. and has not to this day seen either of them.

Please answer this communication and forward the same to me at this place.

Very Respectfully sir I am/ Your Obedient Servant/ Reuben Baldwin

Boston, Massachusetts/ July 14<sup>th</sup> 1836:

Sir [J. L. Edwards] [The first paragraph unrelated to Primes Hall is not transcribed here.]

Your Letter of the 9<sup>th</sup> Instant relating to the claim for Pension by Primus Hall alias Trask is received and by him perused; which when compared with the former communications from the Department on the same subject Mr Hall is fully impressed with the belief that any further testimony he may be able to adduce, as proof of his service as a soldier in the War of the Revolution, will also be considered unsatisfactory, especially when it appears by your last communication that the department are more ready to give credence to the belief that he might have been in the Army as a “Waiter” and not a “Soldier” Altho all the testimony hitherto adduced in this case, is decidedly in favour of the latter and not of the former. Said Hall is not well pleased at the reiterated and often repeated enquiries as to the maner how, and in what manner he became free; since he has been so over 64 years – and Inded the fact of his being given (not sold) to Mr Ezra Trask was the act by which said Primas was liberated from all Bonds of every kind name or nature appertaining to slavery. Those of Paternity and Minority, superceeding the same. This assertion will be better explained by understanding that said Primus was an adopted son of Ezra Trask; who to the day of his death never had any Issue, and further was at that early period what we should now call an Abolitionist, who altho a poor mechanic (shoemaker) undertook to bring up this coloured boy as his own Child – and perhaps never was Philanthropy more properly bestowed or better repaid, in after years when Mr. Trask became infirm and Indigent said Primas altho married and settled in business in this City, was nevertheless induced to hire a Farm in Danvers and from his own bounty paid the annual rent on the same for several years &c and otherwise contributed to the aid and assistance of his former much esteemed but Indigent Patron, or nominal Master.

Said Primas is a man of good repute and well known in this City and adjacent Country – whose Character for Truth and Veracity is second to none either here or elsewhere (see Judge Thatchers Certificate attached to the Declaration)

The probability is that said Primas will refrain from further Importuning the department in his behalf for a Pension – which he justly considers his lawful due, and refer his claim to the National Legislature at their next session – which he would have done before now – but relying on the justice of his cause and the magnanimity and liberality of his Country, hitherto bestowed on the relicts of the Revolution, without distinction of Colour, He was averse to apply for especial Legislation in his behalf when to himself and all others his case appeared so clear. He therefore considers his claim as put to rest for the present, as it is not intimated, that any further testimony is wanted.

[Last paragraph unrelated.]

Very Respectfully sir I am/ Your Ob’t. Servant/ Reuben Baldwin

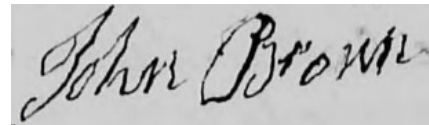
I John Brown of the Town & County of Nantucket, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, being Sworn do on oath testify, depose, and say, that I am Seventy five years of Age, and that I was born and brought up in the Town of Danvers, Essex County, in the aforesaid Commonwealth – that my fathers

name was James Brown, now dead, that I have a brother named Samuel Brown in or near Danvers – also a sister named Betsey & a sister named Sally living in Salem, and a sister named Polly living in Danvers. And that during the Revolutionary War with Great Britain, when the British Army under General Burgoyne was making fearful progress down into the States [from Canada via the Champlain Valley], the Militia of Essex County were called into service – and amongst the rest, Captain Flint’s Company from Danvers, for a tour of three months. – I belonged to said Company, and many of my neighbours. Amongst the number a free Coloured Man, by the name of Primus Trask. We marched to the State of New York, to reenforce the American Army under General Gates, then acting against Burgoyne, and arrived in camp after the first battle [Battle of Freeman’s Farm, 19 Sep 1777], and soon thereafter had another, in which Captain Flint’s Company were engaged. We had a hard fight, and took the British Artillery, but lost our Captain (Flint) and Lieut. Herrick – both were killed in the course of the engagement. I know that Primus was in said battle, for I was near him when Captain Flint was shot through the body, who immediately expired – Our Lieutenant Herrick, we found dead the morning after the battle, a short distance from where Captain Flint was killed. After the Surrender of Burgoyne’s Army, we marched down the Hudson River, and were discharged on the Shore of Long Island Sound, in the State of New York – the term of our enlistment, three months, having expired. Said Primus was discharged at the same time with myself, and I know he served faithfully as a soldier the above tour of three months, and was much esteemed by the Officers & men, as a brave & faithful Soldier in the service of his Country.

I further testify, that I am not in the receipt of a Pension under any Act – Being far removed from the place of my Nativity, I have not been able to adduce such testimony of my services, as would be considered satisfactory: but intend to make Application as soon as I can obtain the Assistance of some friend, in scouring out amongst the few surviving Soldiers of the Revolution in Essex County, or elsewhere, evidence of my service aforesaid. I am now very decrepid, & am confined to my house, and have not been able to do any work or labor for about three years, now last past.

Nantucket August 12<sup>th</sup> 1836

Witness. Elisha H Fisher/ Stephen B Gibbs

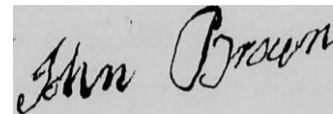


#### Memorandum.

I served three months on board Ship Rhone an American Privateer belonging to Salem Massachusetts, in the revolutionary war as Mariner – Nemiah Buffetin Master – Also 9 weeks on board Ship Julius Cezer and American Privateer belonging to Salem, Massachusetts, in the Revolutionary War – Thomas Benson Master.

Nantucket Aug’t 12 1836

Witness. Josiah Hussey



To The Honourable The Senate and House of Representatives of The United States in Congress Assembled

The Petition of Primus Hall alias Trask a colored Man and a Native Citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts respectfully represents That your Petitioner served as a Soldier in the Revolutionary War with Great Britain, and was in actual service Nineteen months and an half as a private Soldier and was in several skirmishes and Battles with the Enemy, particularly at White Plains in the State of New York and at Trenton and Princeton in New Jersey when the Hessians and British were taken at those places, At the latter place He made Prisoners of two of the Enemy with his own hands after pursuing them over half a mile.

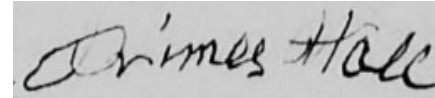
Your Petitioner further declares that He served as a Soldier in the Campaign against General Burgoyne three months, and was present when that Officer surrendered his Army to the American Forces. He also represents that He served a further term of three months on Rhode Island and also as Steward to



the Commissary General, Col Timothy Pickering, Twenty one months, and was with that Officer through all the Southern Campaigns until the surrender of Lord Cornwallis at York Town. All of which will more fully appear by reference to the Papers and Documents on file in the Pension Office, which Papers and Documents were forwarded to that Department as proof of his service in support of his claim to a Pension under the Act of Congress of June 7<sup>th</sup> 1832

Your Petitioner further respectfully represents That He is now over Eighty years of age and quite infirm and is thus unable to gain a support by manual labour. And that He considers himself aggrieved in consequence of the neglect with which his just claim has been treated by the Department and He humbly prays that Your Honourable Body will grant him that relief to which his faithful services entitle him, by causing him to be placed on the Pension list Roll of Revolutionary Pensioners agreeably to his above mentioned services.

And as in Duty bound will ever pray &c &c  
Peter Clark witness



25th CONGRESS/ 2D SESSION.        H. R. 318.  
JANUARY 4, 1838.

Read twice, and committed to a Committee of the Whole House to-morrow.

Mr. Ewing, from the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions, reported the following bill:

A BILL

For the relief of Primus Hall, alias Trask.

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That the Secretary of War cause the name of Primus Hall, alias Trask, of Massachusetts, a free colored man, to be placed on the roll of revolutionary pensioners, and that he be paid at the rate of sixty dollars per annum during his natural life; the first payment to commence on the fourth day of March, anno Domini eighteen hundred and thirty-one.

[A separate document with the same date "To accompany bill H. R. No. 318" summarized Hall's petition and includes the following paragraphs:]

The committee are satisfied that the petitioner has fully sustained, by clear and unimpeached testimony, the material statements in his memorial, and that he is justly entitled to a pension for a faithful service of eighteen months as a revolutionary soldier, not merely in camp duty, or the ordinary performance of military obligations, but in the field of battle, where his bravery and good conduct are proved to have been such as would have done honor to any man.

The Commissioner of Pensions has refused, from time to time, to allow a pension to this free colored man on different grounds; for a detail of which the committee refer to the papers marked 1, 2, 3, and 4, which they make a part of their report. The reasons given by the Commissioner, if sufficient in themselves at any time, have all been obviated, as the committee believe, by the testimony which has been produced.

Boston Massachusetts/ August 7<sup>th</sup> 1838

Sir [J. L. Edwards]        I am requested by the Hon Rich'd Fletcher to address you and solicit your Attention to the case of Primus Hall alias Trask, for whose benefit an Act passed at the late Session of Congress, and Mr Fletcher expected a Certificate would have issued before this time. I respectfully request that his certificate may be forwarded to me with as little delay as possible, or to Mr Fletcher.

I am Sir respectfully/ Your Ob Servt/ Reuben Baldwin

Boston Massachusetts/ August 16 1838

Sir [J. L. Edwards]        Your letter of 11<sup>th</sup> inst in answer of mine of the 7<sup>th</sup> is before me, and I regret to discover in it a disposition in the Department to revive all the difficulties formerly thrown in the way of the claim of Primus Hall, alias Trask; whose claim for remuneration for Revolutionary Service has been

so long pending before the department and the National Legislature. Mr Hall had flatter'd himself when he saw his name published in the Washington Globe amongst to whom relief had been granted, that his anxiety about his just claim would cease and that all objections were removed, in this it appears he is mistaken, for in order to obtain his rights he must go through with another formal declaration and probably supported by the same proof as formerly given, – Mr Hall has refer'd his case to the Hon Richard Fletcher who is the Member of Congress that presented his petition to the last Legislature of the Nation, that Gentleman can if he thinks proper make out a fifth declaration for Primus Hall, line for line, word for word, Comma for Comma, as I have already written four from his own mouth, I have neither time nor inclination to satisfy what appears to me an unreasonable demand of the Department and as Mr Fletcher has a personal knowledge of Mr Hall he will be able to substantiate his identity. Mr Hall will be unable to state the date of the Act under Oath as it has not been published her, and he has no access to the documents in the Department at Washington, it is hoped Mr Hall will in future meet with better success than he has heretofore through my Agency. I am very respectfully/ Sir Your Ob St  
Reuben Baldwin

Boston Sep'r. 3, 1838

Dear Sir [James L. Edwards] Inclosed is an Act passed at the last session of Congress in favor of Primus Hall of this City.

You will oblige me by forwarding to me a certificate in his favor agreeably to the act  
Very respectfully/ Reuben Baldwin

[A special pension certificate dated 27 Aug 1838 was finally issued to Primus Hall. On 21 June 1853 Ann Hall, 62, applied for a pension stating that she married Primus Hall in Boston on 29 October 1817, and he died 22 March 1842. Her attorney apparently had to file a suit to obtain her pension, which resulted in the undated decision that follows. She received a pension certificate dated 3 Oct 1853.]

Brief in the case of Ann Hall widow of Primus Hall alias Trask.

Suffolk County and State of Massachusetts/ Act 3<sup>d</sup> February 1853

It appears that Primus Hall, alias Trask, applied in the year 1835 to be placed on the pension rolls under the act of June 7, 1832, and that his claim was suspended from time to time, for various reasons, and finally rejected in July, 1836, on the ground that the testimony was not "sufficient to show he was an enlisted soldier in the ranks, subject to and actually performing military duty agreeably to the discipline of the army."

This ground was assumed, it would seem from the papers, chiefly from the fact that the claimant was a colored man, and hence, prima facia, a slave at the time of his alleged service, and, as such, incompetent to be a soldier within the meaning of the act under which he applied. That the claim was rejected upon this ground is shown by the fact that he was required to prove his manumission, and also by the fact that it was admitted by the office, in a letter to his agent of the 9<sup>th</sup> July 1836 that he "no doubt was with the army for one of the terms alleged, yet may have been a waiter or in some other civil capacity." The proof shows conclusively that he, in fact performed military services.

Under these circumstances the claimant applied to Congress, which afforded relief by the passage of a special act, (which was approved June 28, 1838) directing him to be placed on the pension roll at the rate of sixty Dollars per annum, and to be paid from the 4<sup>th</sup> March 1831 – thus setting aside the decision of the pension office – a purpose avowed in the report of the Committee on Revolutionary Pensions, to whom the papers had been referred.

A widow is not entitled under the second section of the act of 3<sup>d</sup> February 1853 to a pension (as such) granted to her husband by a special act of Congress; but in view of the action of Congress in the premises, the claimant in this case is deemed to be entitled, (without adducing additional testimony,) to the privilege of having a re-examination of the papers filed by her deceased husband, and of having her claim decided upon its merits, unprejudiced by the decision of the office in his case.

Taking up the case therefore, *de novo* I find that the Declaration of Hall, the husband of the present claimant sets forth with particularity a series of services in the revolutionary war, and among them, a service in Captain Butler's Company 5<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts State troops during the years 1776 and 1777, and a service of three months in Capt Flint's Company, in the Regiment commanded by Col. Johnson in 1777.

[Several paragraphs summarizing the testimony supporting Primes Hall's service not transcribed here.]

This proof, it is thought, sufficiently established a service, (in the absence of record evidence) of Sixteen months and two weeks, and it is presumed would have been so regarded by the office in ordinary cases. Waiving the point that it was also sufficient to rebut the presumption that the claimant was a slave at the time of his service, I find that the only evidence among the papers that he was born a slave is contained in his own affidavit, filed under a requirement of the office, in which he also swears that he was manumitted long anterior to his joining the army – and avers that the certificate of manumission was lost while he was in the service. It would seem that the whole of this affidavit, under the circumstances, should have been admitted; but assuming that Hall was a slave during the entire period of his several services, it is not conceived, (he being unquestionably a freeman at the passage of the Act of 1832, and, of course, at the time of his application,) that he was thereby excluded from the benefits of said act – certainly not by the letter of the law nor it is thought by its spirit – such relation not being inconsistent with the performance, in fact of such military duty as is contemplated by the pension laws.

I think therefore that the claim of Hall should have been allowed, and that, consequently, his widow is entitled, under the act of Feb'y 3, 1853 to a pension for the time proved as above.

The present applicant substantiates her marriage to Hall, and his death, by a duly verified Copy of Town Records – and her identity and present widowhood is established by witnesses (Jonas W Clark and Coffin Pitts) duly certified to be credible. She is allowed a pension at the rate of \$55 per annum, commencing 3<sup>d</sup> February 1853  
[signed] R Geddes/ Ex'g. Clerk  
Agent, Israel Perkins Esqr/ Danvers/ Essex Co Mass

#### NOTES:

Hall's first name is generally spelled "Primus," but he clearly signed "Primes," so that is the spelling used in my notes. The name was probably pronounced like Primus.

According to F. B. Heitman's *Historical Register of Officers of the Continental Army During the War of the Revolution* it was John Nixon who was promoted from Colonel to Brigadier General in New York in Aug 1776.

Hall is often said to have been born a slave, but his agent quoted him on 3 June 1836 as saying he was never a slave, The confusion may arise from the fact that similar terms were used for slaves and for servants and apprentices. Hall's status depended on that of his mother, who was referred to as a "Servant," which could mean either free or slave.

The pension act of 1832 and the regulations for administering it do not preclude a pension for a soldier detailed as a steward or waiter, nor do they make a distinction by race or condition of servitude. The regulations, which were approved by James L. Edwards, state that "This Law has been construed to extend, as well to the line, as to every branch of the Staff of the Army and to include under the terms 'Continental Line,' 'State troops,' 'militia,' and 'volunteers,' all persons enlisted, drafted, or who volunteered and who were bound to military service, but not those who were occasionally employed with the army upon civil contracts, such as Clerks to Commissaries and to Store Keepers, &c., Teamsters, Boatmen, &c." The soldier's name on a muster or pay roll, or the testimony of two witnesses, was considered to be sufficient proof of service in the Continental Army. For militia service, for which muster and pay rolls seldom survived, the testimony of two neighbors that the applicant was honest and had the reputation of having been a soldier was taken as sufficient proof.

Primes Hall's father, Prince Hall, may have been one of several of that name who were soldiers of the Revolutionary War. For more one Primes Hall and his father, see

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus\\_Hall](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primus_Hall) and

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince\\_Hall#Revolutionary\\_War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince_Hall#Revolutionary_War).

On 17 May 1836 Sarah Very stated that during Primes Hall's absence on the campaign against Burgoyne "his Mistress Mrs Trask frequently expressed much concern for the safty of her Coloured man, said Primus."

On 19 Sep 1853 Jonas W. Clark, 53, of Boston, certified the marriage of Primes and Ann Hall. On 31 March 1855 Ann Hall applied for bounty land, giving her age as 64. The file includes a copy of the record of marriage of Primus Hall and Anna Clark officiated by Rev. Joshua Huntington.

The file contains a copy of a record from the City of Boston showing that Primes Hall died at age 86 of "Old age" and was buried at St. Matthew's Cemetery No. 59."