

To the Manor Born:
The Extraordinary Journey of Dutchess County's
African American Revolutionary War Veteran
Andrew Frazier

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Andrew Frazier was a person of color born at the Manor of Morrisania (now the Bronx) c. 1743, most likely enslaved. The Graham family he would have served there, and especially the Graham family member he served as "waiter" in the Revolutionary War, would fall into some obscurity. By contrast, Frazier's profile would rise: As a patriarch of a large family who lived the Jeffersonian dream, owning and cultivating farmland in Milan, NY. As the progenitor of a woman who would reference her great-grandfather's patriotism, attracting national attention as a late 19th century trailblazer of women's and women of color's "capacity" and rights. And as a veteran whose grave is marked annually to this day. Inaccurately and posthumously portrayed as a body servant to George Washington just in time for the 1932 Washington bicentennial, we explore Frazier's story: a reversal of fortune, and how the bifurcation of a factual and fictional legacy came to be.

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We don't know if Andrew Frazier was born c. 1743 free or enslaved at the Manor of Morrisania, most likely the later. In his just-over-a-century life he would see the rapid expansion of slavery in New York, then its "gradual" abolition. He would see the land patents of the wealthy turned into the freehold farmland of Jefferson's ideal agrarian economy, becoming a landowning farmer himself, while raising seven children.

He would become patriarch to an ever-growing family that included soldiers in the Civil War. And his name would be invoked three generations later when a lineal descendant, Susan Elizabeth Frazier, led the call for equal opportunity into the early 20th century and through WWI.

Gravesite

As was the tradition at the time, he was buried at his family homestead in 1846, in Milan, NY. He and other family members were removed to a particular section of the Rhinebeck Cemetery some time after 1900 (perhaps when the farmland was sold outside the family). The family plot has grown to 19 headstones.



Andrew Frazier was African American, in part, or in whole, with the debate of that particular issue becoming part of the extraordinary story. The family plot lies adjacent to section E, sometimes called Potters Field. It was created in 1853 through a gift of Mary Garrettson for African Americans and the poor.

Frazier's headstone reads "In the Revolutionary war 1776, In memory of

Andrew Frazier who died June 2, 1846 aged 102 years 11 months and 18 days." (More on his actual birthdate later).

Having lived a long life, we have dozens of pages of sworn testimony from Frazier and people who knew him as he applied in 1834 for a Federal veterans pension. Allowed by Congress at the time, it required extraordinarily detailed sworn testimony of the veteran's service. There was a bureaucratic to-and-fro and paper trail that lasted ten years, so a good amount of detail of his service is available.

In Frazier's personal and direct sworn testimony in the 1830's he said he was born in 1742, but he did not know the exact date. How the precise date that reads on the headstone came to be, we do not know.

Says he was born in the year 1742

We know that Frazier is a person of color. Among the most prominent references to Frazier's race among pension testimony is that of John Armstrong Jr. who, writing to the federal pensions commissioner from Rhinebeck's Rokeby in 1839, said that Frazier as a testifier could be relied on for "truth and integrity."

After Frazier's name in parentheses Armstrong wrote the words, "the colored man," for some reason.

Andrew Frazier (the colored man)

We don't know if Frazier was born free or enslaved, but the numbers suggest the later. The Manor of Morrisania was so named for Lewis Morris (1671-1746) first Lord of the Manor.

The Morris family was not only one of the largest slave owning families across both New York and New Jersey (more than 100 enslaved individuals), but was involved in the slave trade itself as a business.

The 1755 slave census shows that Morrisania had 29 enslaved adults. Although named, the census did not include anyone under the age of 15 and Andrew Frazier would have been 11 or 12 years old. In terms of the balance between the enslaved and free persons of color, the 1790 Morrisania Census is revealing: with a total of 26 persons of color, 24 were enslaved and 2 were free.

Morris, Graham, Frazier Relationship

In his pension application, Frazier says that he was born in Morrisania, and that a record of his birth was noted in the Graham family bible. This is important, despite the bible having been lost by the time Frazier testified. (The British burned both the Graham home and Morris home at Morrisania when they took over New York City, perhaps it perished in that way).

Morrisania was erected into a Manor in 1697 on behalf of Lewis Morris (1671-1746), First Lord of the Manor, Chief Justice of New York and Governor of New Jersey. He married into the Graham family, marrying Isabella Graham (1673-1752). And their daughter Arabella Morris (1708-1797) did likewise, marrying James Graham (1690-1767). So the two families were very well connected through two consecutive generations of intermarrying



Upper Manhattan to the left. What is now the Bronx to the right where the Morris and Graham families had their homes at the Manor of Morrisania.

The achievements of the Morris family are well known across New York and New Jersey, with many illustrious members

including a signatory to the Declaration of Independence. The Graham family owned land in Ulster County, Staten Island and New Jersey. And had interests in both the Great Nine and Little Nine Partners Patents in Dutchess County. Graham family members ranged from New York Attorney General to Surveyor General of New York with Revolutionary War service ranging from Colonels, to Captains and Lieutenants to a personal scout to General Washington.

The move to Northern Dutchess

When James Graham died at Morrisania in 1767 (Frazier would have been age 25) several of his children immediately moved to or engaged with the Little Nine Partners Patent interest and claimed the subdivided lots that had been just left to them. These lots form what is now the central part of Pine Plains.

Two sons in particular would be involved in building houses there: Lewis Graham and



The Morris Graham house, built 1771, shown 1940's.

Morris Graham. Both are still standing with the former being restored, and the later abandoned and dilapidated. The Graham children start showing up on records by the late 1760's, and it seems that Andrew Frazier arrived with them at the same time.

In 1771 Charles Graham became clerk of the town of Northeast (now Pine Plains) and Morris Graham became Supervisor. But then war broke out, calling the Graham children into service as follows: Charles Graham, Captain; Augustine Graham, Lieutenant; Morris Graham, Colonel; Lewis

Graham, Colonel; John Graham, scout for General Washington.

Frazier's military service

Frazier initially served in 1775 under brothers Captain Charles Graham and Lieutenant Augustine Graham. But he served for the most part and most personally to Colonel Morris Graham as Waiter or Body Servant until 1778.

Frazier testifies in great detail about marching from Pine Plains to Tarrytown, then to West Point, to Sing Sing, and to Harlem and to New York City at the time the British took possession. He retreated with American troops to New Rochelle and Rye, and was in battle of White Plains. He marched from Pine Plains to Rhinebeck as the British burned Kingston.

He served as a wagon team leader, or driver, that involved taking captured enemy arms to Armenia to be melted down for re-use at the furnace there. He said he spent a great deal of time "hunting Tories" and restoring stolen property – all prior to becoming waiter to Colonel Morris Graham.

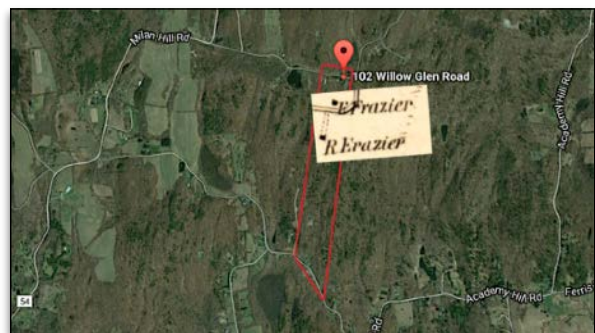
Among the things that Andrew Frazier mentions in his testimony of service during the war, was the fact that he saw General Washington.

In what must have been a difficult moment for Andrew Frazier as well, right after the Battle of White Plains, Morris Graham was court-martialed when he was accused by a Colonel Reed of cowardice, of retreating without firing. Washington called for the court martial to happen quickly. It happened within a few days. Graham was quickly and fully acquitted. And he served

in visible and active roles through to the very end of the Revolutionary War. But the incident must have haunted him.

Morris Graham post-war years

The end of the war was not kind to Morris Graham. In 1791 the New York assembly passed a law to relive the debt of Morris and Charles Graham, declaring them insolvent through a series of "misfortunes." And by 1798, Morris Graham's stone house and 377-acre farm in what is now Pine Plains were being sold off. He moved north to Deerfield New York where he lived with his sister Arabella. He died there in 1804 at the age of 58. He never married. He was buried on the family homestead in a small lot that by 1903, newspaper accounts say, his gravestone was missing. The small plot is today overgrown in a suburban stretch of Deerfield.



Just after 1800 Andrew Frazier purchased a strip of farmland at what is now known as Willow Glen Road and Woody Row Road. Home sites of Robert and Egbert shown (1867).

Andrew Frazier post-war years

By contrast, Andrew Frazier had an extraordinary life after the war. He had 11 children: four sons, although for the most part, only one, Robert, stayed in the area. He had three daughters who married, and four daughters who remained single. He was able to buy farmland in Milan, a strip of land that runs between what is now

Willow Glen Road and Woody Row Road, building a house there in 1809. His son Robert was able to greatly expand the farm in size and acreage in subsequent years. Although by the next generation, the land seems to have been sold off due to legal or financial pressures.

The large family was very well known in the area. But one of his more famous descendants, who also happens to be interred at Rhinebeck, was his great-granddaughter Susan Elizabeth Frazier.

Susan Elizabeth Frazier



Her father Lewis (son of Robert of Milan) had moved to New York City and was a Coachman for a wealthy 5th Avenue family, living just off 5th Avenue himself. He was a founder of and secretary to the Coachman's Union

League Society. Susan grew up in the city and attended Normal College.

Susan Elizabeth Frazier first established herself as an advocate for greater roles for women and persons of color by making a speech in 1892 at the Brooklyn Literary Union called "Some Afro American Women of Mark" which has been referenced from its time of first presentation, through to contemporary books and dissertations today. The speech was also published in the AME Church Review (excerpt below).

SOME AFRO-AMERICAN WOMEN OF MARK.*

BY S. ELIZABETH FRAZIER.

WE have heard and read much of men of mark of our race, but comparatively little is known of able Afro-American women. It is my delight to present brief sketches of the lives of "Some Afro-American Women of Mark," having gained my information concerning them from libraries, public and private, from correspondence and from personal knowledge.

In 1894 Frazier applied for the position of New York City public school teacher at a school with white students. Later that year she received a request to meet in person with School 58 principal F. W. James. Upon meeting her, James declined to appoint her due to her African American heritage, saying such an appointment could "cause trouble." At the time, African Americans were restricted to teaching only other African Americans.

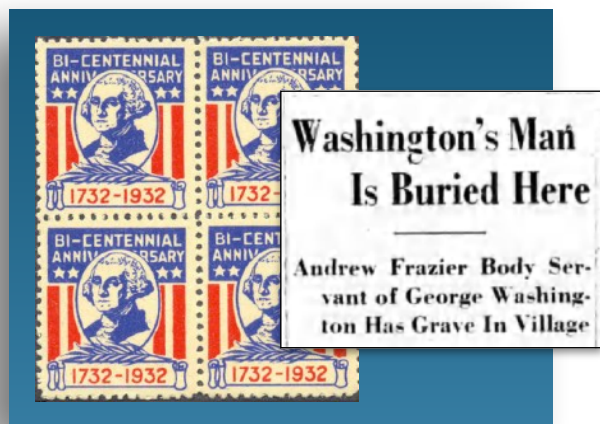
So she took her case to the courts which rejected her plea in 1895. But she was eventually appointed May 26, 1896, after nationwide press attention, and the lobbying in the City and in Albany.

Press coverage at the time frequently mentioned her great-grandfather's role in the Revolutionary War. And yet in 1911 her application to the DAR which was first accepted, was rejected once it was discovered she was a person of color. By 1918 she had won a local New York city newspaper contest for being the most popular teacher which took her to the battlegrounds of Europe, especially important given her volunteer work for black veterans. She died in 1924. She is interred in Rhinebeck Cemetery in an unmarked grave within the Frazier family plot.

Miscast

One misperception is that Frazier was body servant to Washington. It may have been a combination of an evolving oral history over a century (Frazier was body servant to Morris Graham) and/or more specific articulation from the then-chair of the local Washington Bicentennial (birth) Committee, Helen DeLaporte.

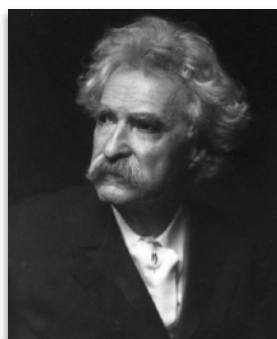
Mrs. DeLaporte was very generous and a prolific researcher, collector, and historian. She was founder and leader of the local DAR. She is quoted as saying that she established Frazier's Washington connection "without doubt." I have searched some of Mrs. DeLaporte's original files and have yet to find the connection.



Her letters February 1932 letter to the federal pensions office refers to Frazier as "a colored soldier." But by April she referred to him as a white "Scotchman" who had "married an Indian" whose descendants had "inter-married with the colored race."

GENERAL WASHINGTON'S NEGRO BODY-SERVANT.

Perhaps the larger question is of more interest: why did American society wish to portray so many African Americans into Body Servants of Washington that by 1868, Mark Twain had written a parody? Making light of the seeming never-ending line of body servants to Washington who were passing away?



Perhaps its intention was a kind of gloss over slavery, that it elevated the position from the reality of being "owned" to one of dutifully offering the highest national service.

The terrible irony is that Washington's life-long body servant, "Billy" is buried with other Mount Vernon slaves in an unmarked grave. Billy was purchased by Washington as a teenager and was the only slave of Washington freed on his death. So Washingtons "real" body servant has as little recognition as any of George and Martha Washington's many other slaves.



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