

# Dover, ex-slave from Norwalk, fought in Revolutionary War

By JUDY COBIN  
Hour Correspondent

*Editor's note: The following is an historic account of a former slave living in Norwalk during the Revolutionary War era.*

**NORWALK** — In a census taken by the Colony of Connecticut on Jan. 1, 1774, there were 136 blacks listed as living in Norwalk.

One of them was a slave named Dover.

Dover was the slave of Thomas Fitch of Norwalk, who was governor of Connecticut from 1754 to 1766. Fitch died on July 18, 1774 and Dover is listed in the inventory of his estate as "Negro Man Dover." The inventory, taken between 1774 and 1781, listed Dover's value at 58 pounds.

Other items listed in the inventory were a "pair of fat Oxen" valued at 18 pounds, a "Bay Stone Horse" valued at 30 pounds, and a "Old Gray Horse" valued at 4 pounds, 10 shillings.

Also included in the 1774 census were nine Native Americans and 4,243 whites. There is no indication how many of the blacks and Native Americans were slaves and how many were free. In 1774, Norwalk included parts of New Canaan and Westport, and all of Wilton.

The census is reported in Volume 14 of The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut.

During the Revolutionary War, Dover served in the Continental Army from 1777 to 1783. He fought to win his freedom from slavery while the Continental Army fought for the freedom of the United States from English rule.

In the beginning of the Revolutionary War in 1775, Blacks, whether they were free men or slaves, were not to be allowed into the colonies' military service, according to African-American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War by the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR).

It wasn't until officials in the states realized they could not fill quotas for soldiers imposed on them by the Continental Congress that blacks were later allowed to participate in the fight for independence.

The DAR says that when Connecticut faced the problem of not meeting its quota, a special legislative committee recommended allowing blacks to enlist.

The idea was rejected.

But a law was passed in May of 1777 allowing slaves in Connecticut to be hired as someone's substitute for fulfilling a military service obligation. In October of the same year, another law was passed freeing owners from the responsibility of supporting slaves once the owner emancipated them.

After this, owners were more willing to allow slaves to enlist for military service with the understanding that when the enlistment was completed the slave would be given his emancipation.

Philip Foner in "Blacks in the American Revolution" said the number of blacks in the

## DAR has only recently begun admitting black members

By JUDY COBIN  
Hour Correspondent

**NORWALK** — The Daughters of the American Revolution, or DAR, is a volunteer women's service organization founded in 1890. Women over 18 years of age, regardless of race, religion, or ethnic background, who can prove lineal bloodline descent from someone who participated in the Revolutionary War effort are eligible for membership.

The organization is also known as the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, or NSDAR.

The DAR began research on minority participants in the Revolutionary War in the 1980s after reaching a settlement with Lena Ferguson, a black woman who maintained she was kept from joining a Washington, D.C. chapter of the DAR because of her race.

In 2001, the DAR published the book "African American and American Indian Patriots of the Revolutionary War," based on a series of booklets it began producing in 1988 on minority participation in the war.

Lena Ferguson's nephew, Maurice A. Barboza, worked with her to obtain her membership in the DAR and reach the settlement with the organization. In an op-ed article published in *The New York Times* on July 31, 2004, he maintained the DAR did not go far enough in its research and did not recognize many minority participants because they only included men described as "black," "Negro" or "mulatto."

Barboza said they should have included men described as "brown," "yellow," "copper," and other terms used in advertisements to describe runaway slaves.

Continental Army was between 5,000 and 8,000.

The DAR said they were able to identify about 3,000 blacks and Indians who participated in the Revolutionary War at all levels. In their book, they list 499 black and Indian participants who were from Connecticut.

The DAR does not list Dover in the book. There was nothing in his war service record indicating he was black. His war service was discovered when a text search on "Negro" and "Norwalk" in the Genealogy Library at the Genealogy.com Web site turned up a note about it written in 1777 by William St. John of Norwalk.

In his book, "The St. John Genealogy," author Orline St. John Alexander writes:

"Norwalk, Conn., June 3, 1777. Received of my brother Stephen St. John, the one half of his Negro boy named Dover, now inlisted into the Continental Service, for the onehalf of which boy I am obliged to pay sixty dollars on demand, to exempt me from all actual service. Received, William St. John (i. 83) The above money my brother has as yet never accounted with me for."

Stephen St. John was married to Ann Fitch, the daughter of Governor Fitch's brother Samuel.

A service record for Dover is contained in Volume 12 of the Collections of the Connecticut Historical Society. Titled "Return from 4th Brigade of Militia," and dated May 1, 1778, it says, "A Return of the Soldiers that have inlisted and been draughted or detached from the 4th Brigade of Militia of the State of Connecticut commanded by Brigadier General Siliman to serve in the Continental Army commanded by his Excellency General Washington."

Dover St. John is listed as

being from Norwalk and is in Captain Eliphalet Lockwood's Company, Colonel Matthew Mead's Brigade. Lockwood and Mead were also from Norwalk.

By the summer of 1783, in anticipation of the British leaving New York City and the war ending, men were being discharged from the Continental Army and Dover returned to Norwalk. Since he had left, Governor Fitch's widow, Hannah, died and her heirs now owned him.

According to documents recorded on page 317 of Volume 15 of the land records of Norwalk, Thomas Fitch, son of the deceased governor, represented the owners of Dover and asked the Town of Norwalk's selectmen for permission to give Dover his freedom. One document, dated Aug. 1, 1783, said the "major part of the selectmen" of the Town of Norwalk agreed that Dover was covered by the law of October 1777 and gave Thomas Fitch permission to free him.

In a second document, dated Aug. 2, 1783, Thomas Fitch wrote: "The Subscriber Thomas Fitch of Norwalk in the County of Fairfield and State of Connecticut above named and mentioned do by Virtue of the above permission and license and the Desire Direction Consent and authority given to me by the owners and proprietors of the above Negro man in behalf of them and for myself and by Virtue and force of said additional Statute law Emancipate set at liberty and make free the said negro man Dover."

Research has found no further record of Dover.

*Judy Cobin is a member of the Norwalk-Village Green Chapter of the DAR.*

*Ralph Bloom assisted with the research for this article.*

# Officials: Storm response was good

From A1

dead at the scene, said Assistant Fire Chief Lawrence Reilly.

Norwalk Public Schools were closed Monday due to the storm. Few students complained, however, taking advantage of the snow day after an unseasonably mild January.

Mayor Richard A. Moccia said the city received relatively few complaints about its job snow-plowing over the weekend.

"The main problems were the amount of snow, trying to get the primary road plowed and where to put the snow," said Moccia after moving his vehicle from his parking place at City Hall Monday afternoon to accommodate the plow driver.

At the peak of the storm early Sunday, snow piled up at the rate of three inches per hour. That posed problems for Department of Public Works' plow crews, who were called

into work beginning at 8 p.m. Saturday.

"It took us a while to get the main roads cleared," said Harold F. Alvord, department director. "The snow was of such volume that we had to make a couple passes."

Alvord said private contractors plowing snow from parking lots into streets and residents shoveling snow into already plowed roadways added to the work.

Thirty plow trucks were put out during the storm. After accounting for several breakdowns, anywhere from 26 to 30 trucks were on the streets at any given time during the storm, Alvord said.

The storm forced the city to call up 40 to 50 employees, Alvord estimated. It will not be known the total costs of materials and overtime manpower until next week, he said.

The city's combined dispatch center performed smoothly in its first major storm since fire and police dis-

patch were merged, said Michael Dolhancryk, the city's emergency planner.

"Fire was listening to what was going on with police, both were listening to what was going on with EMS," he said.

The Department of Public Works was able to route snow plows and salt trucks ahead of emergency responders, Dolhancryk said, keeping city employees safer in near-blizzard conditions.

"Norwalk is fortunate," said Dolhancryk. "We have some excellent resources, firefighters, police officers, EMS types, who have done this many times and were able to stay ahead of the curve."

*Staff writers Patrick R. Lindsey and Robert Koch can be reached via e-mail at plinsey@thehour.com and rkoch@thehour.com.*



**verizon**wireless  
We never stop working for you.®

# OUR SWEETEST DEALS!

## LOWEST PRICES EVER!



RED HOT CAMERA PHONE

\$29.99

Samsung SCH-a850: With new 2-year Agreement.



RED HOT COLOR FLIP

BUY 1 GET 1 FREE!

\$19.99

Samsung SCH-a630: With new 2-year Agreement per phone.

## ADD LINES ONLY \$9.99!

monthly access per line after 2 lines for \$69.99 on our America's Choice<sup>SM</sup> Family SharePlan.® With new 1- or 2-year Agreement per line. Activation fees, taxes and other charges apply.\*

## UNLIMITED TXT & PIX \$10

monthly access per line to any other Verizon Wireless customer from within the National Enhanced Services Area, plus 500 additional messages to and from non-Verizon Wireless customers.

GET AMERICA'S MOST RELIABLE WIRELESS<sup>SM</sup>

1-800-811-7600

VISIT US ON THE WEB

www.verizonwireless.com/offers

**VERIZON WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS STORES**  
See store for Return/Exchange Policy.

<p><b>DANBURY</b> 15 Federal Rd. 203-740-3700</p> <p><b>MERIDEN</b> Westfield Shoppingtown 203-639-9097</p>	<p><b>MILFORD</b> CT Post Mall 203-878-0133</p> <p><b>NORTH HAVEN</b> 91 Washington Ave. 203-239-0000</p>	<p><b>NORWALK</b> 55 Westport Ave. Rt. 1 Across from Stew Leonard's 203-840-0021</p> <p><b>ORANGE</b> 116 Post Rd. Rt. 1 Across from Barnes &amp; Noble 203-795-6259</p>	<p><b>STAMFORD</b> 972 High Ridge Rd. 203-968-6116</p> <p>Stamford Town Ctr. Next to Stride Rite 203-325-3282</p> <p><b>TRUMBULL</b> Trumbull Mall 203-374-6012</p> <p><b>WATERBURY</b> Brass Mills Ctr. 203-575-1113</p>
---	---	--	---

Visit the new Verizon Wireless Store at **BJS** WHOLESALE CLUB. **NOW OPEN**

Or visit the Verizon Wireless Store at **Target CITY**. **NOW OPEN**

Verizon Wireless in select locations.

**AUTHORIZED RETAILERS**  
Equipment prices, rebates and return policy vary by location. Authorized Retailers may impose additional equipment-related charges, including cancellation fees.

<p><b>WIRELESS IKON</b> WILTON 15 Danbury Rd.</p>	<p><b>WIRELESS ONE</b> NORWALK 330 Connecticut Ave.</p>
---	---

**BEST BUY** **wireless.ZONE**  
800-411-CELL

\* Our Surcharges (incl. 2.29% Federal Universal Service (varies quarterly), 5¢ Regulatory and 40¢ Administrative/line/mo., and others by area) are not taxes (details: 1-888-684-1888); gov't taxes and our surcharges could add 8% to 35% to your bill. Activation fee: \$35.

**IMPORTANT CONSUMER INFORMATION:** Subject to Customer Agreement, Calling Plan and credit approval. \$175 termination fee/line, up to 45¢/min. after allowance, other charges and restrictions. Usage rounded to next full minute. Offers not available everywhere. Camera phone required for Unlimited PIX offer. Excess TXT Messages sent/received 10¢ each. Excess PIX Messages sent/received 25¢ each plus airtime. Network details, coverage limitations and maps at verizonwireless.com. See verizonwireless.com/bestnetwork for network claim. Phone offers expire 2/20/06. Shipping charges may apply. While supplies last. Max. 5 lines on same account on Family SharePlan. © 2006 Verizon Wireless.