

# DAUGHTERS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION MAGAZINE

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## A SOLDIER OF THE REVOLUTION

By Elizabeth Henry Lyons

Author of "Old Richmond", "Some Portraits of Patrick Henry," etc.

In the hall of the home of the Historical Society in Richmond, surrounded by the faces of the illustrious sons whom Virginia loves to honor, hangs the picture of James, a negro soldier of the American Revolution.

The genial secretary who showed it to me called my attention to two other pictures of negroes in line with it.

"Do you think," he asked, "that any such place of honor has been given to three negroes north of Mason's and Dixon's line?"

Virginia recognizes a brave heart whether it beats in a black or white breast, and James has not been forgotten by the State he served so loyally. I tried in vain to find out if he had a surname, but he seemed to have been only known as James. In 1781 he was permitted by his master to enter the service of the gallant young Marquis de Lafayette to whom he proved so valuable an aid that two years later the grateful nobleman gave a testimonial of his worth which won him his freedom.

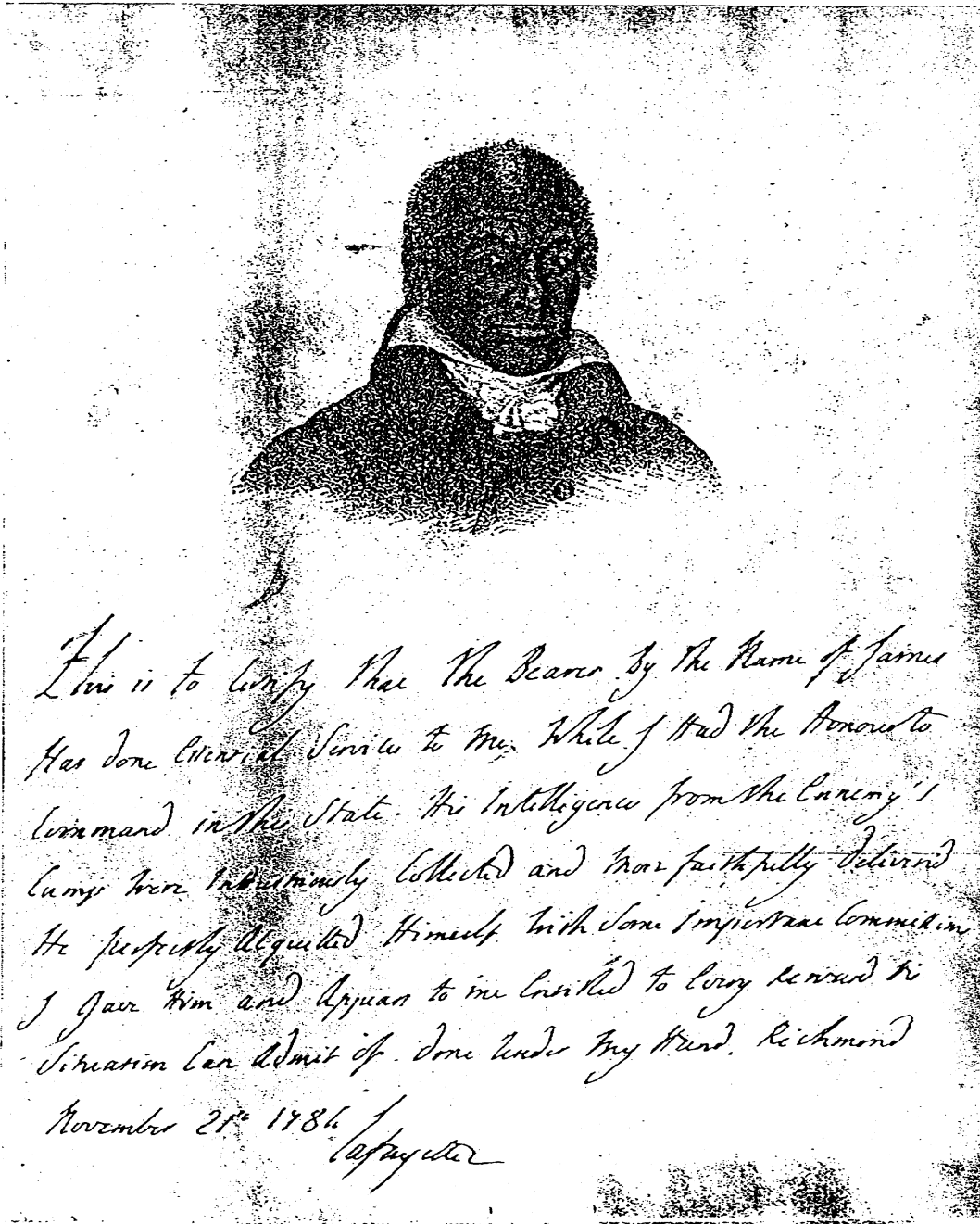
In the Journal of the House of Delegates "begun and holden in the city of Richmond, December 21, 1786," I find (page 115) that Mr. George Nicholas reported as approved by the committee of propositions and grievances the petition of James, a slave, the property of William Armstead of New Kent, "praying that he be emancipated and that the said William Armstead may receive from the public adequate compensation for his value."

From Hening's Statutes 1785-88 I find that "the said James shall from and after the passing of this act enjoy as full freedom as if he had been born free, any law to the contrary notwithstanding.

"And be it further enacted that the executive shall as soon as may be, appoint a proper person, and the said William Armstead another, who shall ascertain and fix the value of said James, and to certify such valuation to the Auditor of Accounts who shall issue his warrant to the treasurer for the same to be paid out of the general fund."

Deeply interested I pursued my investigations and, in the State Library of Virginia, I was so fortunate as to find the original petition. The time-yellowed manuscript reads as follows:

The petition of James (a slave, belonging to Wil Armstead of New Kent county) humbly sheweth that your petitioner persuaded of the just right which all men have to freedom notwithstanding his own state of bondage, with an honest desire to serve this country in its defence thereof, did, during the ravages of Lord Cornwallis thro this state, by the permission of his master enter into the service of the Marquiss Lafayette: That during the time of his serving the Marquiss he often, at the peril of his life, found means to frequent the British Camp by which means he kept open a channel of the most useful communication to the army of the state: That at different times your petitioner conveyed inclosures from the Marquiss into the enemies' line of the most secret and important kind, the possession of which, if discovered on him, would have most certainly endangered the life of your petitioner: That he undertook and performed all commands with cheerfulness and fidelity in oppositon to the persuasion and example of many thousands of his unfortunate con-



PORTRAIT OF JAMES, AND AUTOGRAPH LETTER OF LAFAYETTE  
 Hanging in the hall of the Virginia Historical Society Building, Richmond, Va.

dition. For proof of above your petitioner  
 begs leave to refer to the certificate of  
 the Marquiss Lafayette heretofore annexed,  
 and, after taking his case as here stated  
 into consideration, he humbly intreats that

he may be granted that Freedom which  
 he flatters himself he has in some degree  
 contributed to establish and which he hopes  
 always to prove himself worthy of; nor  
 does he desire even this inestimable favor