



Revolutionary Times



Containing the Latest News from the Sons of the American Revolution

Crispus Attucks

“The first to defy, the first to die”

Crispus Attucks has been immortalized as the first casualty of the American Revolutionary War and the first African American hero.

“... a crowd of mostly white sailors followed a seafaring man of color into danger; and this time, into history.” (Jeffrey Bolster)

On March 5, 1770, toward evening that day, a crowd of colonists gathered and began taunting a small group of British soldiers.

Tension mounted rapidly, and, when one of the soldiers was struck, the others fired their muskets, killing three of the Americans instantly and mortally wounding two others. Samuel Adams called this incident the Boston Massacre

Attucks was the first to fall, thus becoming one of the first men to lose his life in the cause of American independence.

Early coverage and investigations into the details of the Massacre refer to Attucks as Michael Johnson, a name he may have used as an intentional alias.

After uncovering his actual name, newspapers published a few details about his life, notably his profession, a sailor; his birth in Framingham, MA; his residence of New Providence in the Bahamas; and his ship's destination of North Carolina.



His last name, ‘Attucks,’ is of Indigenous origin, deriving from the Natick word for ‘deer.’

His first name reflects the trend in the colonial era of enslavers forcing an Ancient Roman name onto their enslaved people. Attucks shares the name ‘Crispus’ with the son of Emperor Constantine.

Attucks was born around 1723 somewhere near Framingham, Mass., perhaps Natick, the Praying Indian town. His mother belonged to the Wampanoag tribe, and his father was an African-American slave.

Crispus Attucks was enslaved for 27 years, probably by a man named William Brown of Framingham. In 1750 he won his freedom by

running away to sea. Or he may have bought his freedom.

In any case, he often worked on whalers, and in between voyages he worked as a ropemaker. Seafaring was one of the few occupations free men of color could enter. Twenty-five years after the American Revolution, one-fifth of the 100,000 men employed as sailors were African-American.

This broadsheet is dedicated to the 250th Anniversary Celebration of the Declaration of Independence for more information visit the National Society Sons of the American Revolution website at: www.sar.org

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