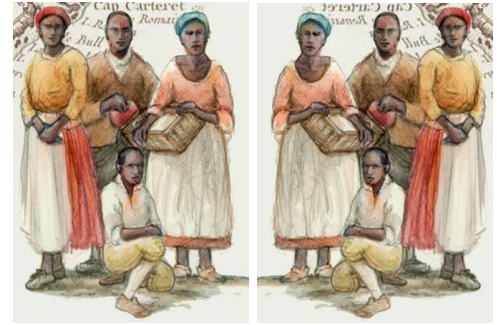




African Americans at Ninety Six

As the settlement of Ninety Six developed from a frontier trading post into a courthouse village and Revolutionary War outpost, black Americans, most of them held in bondage, made important contributions. Although historical documentation is limited, it is clear that African Americans played a vital role in every major event at Ninety Six.



Trade & Economy

Ninety Six was an important center for trade with the Cherokees. Many of the traders owned slaves who traveled with them through Ninety Six. One slave named Abraham carried dispatches from Fort Loudon to Charleston with appeals for help in February 1760. Abraham, being a superb woodsman, agreed to the hazardous mission “Upon a promise of his Freedom as a reward.” A decade later, an advertisement appeared in the *South Carolina Gazette*: “Abraham (Commonly called Indian Abraham) who obtained his Freedom by an Act of the Gen Assembly of this Province for his faithful Services during the late Indian War would be glad of Employ, either as a Cattle-Driver or Butcher (which Businesses he has followed for some years past) or in any other way wherein he can be Serviceable.”

The plantation economy of the backcountry was based upon slave labor. For example, Francis Salvadore, a young Jewish planter near Ninety Six, employed “about 30 slaves” to produce indigo. The wealthiest planter at Ninety Six, Robert Gouedy, advertised the sale of “34 valuable Negroes” in 1774. They provided a range of skilled labor on Gouedy’s plantation as there were “carpenters, coopers, wagon drivers, [and] plough men” among them.

Fort Ninety Six

Slaves and indentured servants also played a role during the French and Indian War as demonstrated by these two examples. In November 1759, Governor Lyttleton constructed a fort around Robert Gouedy’s barn to provide a magazine for supplies and to protect neighboring settlers against Indian attacks. Captain Dungeon “laid out the ground for the stockade; the Pionerr[sic], volunteers, Servants, etc., opened the ditch. . .” In February 1760, Fort Ninety Six was attacked by a party of 250 Indians. The garrison was composed of “33 resolute white men and 12 Stout Negroes, all armed” and successfully defended themselves for 36 hours.

Revolutionary War

The first revolutionary War battle south of New England occurred at Ninety Six in November 1775. A loyalist army attacked a makeshift fort held by the patriots. The loyalist force included several African Americans. Captains Hunt and Jones, taken prisoner in December 1775 for their part in the battle at Ninety Six, were black.

When the British reoccupied South Carolina in 1780, Ninety Six became the principle outpost in the interior. It was held by a loyalist garrison under the command of Lt. Col. John Harris Cruger. In 1780-81, the loyalists constructed an elaborate fortification system to protect the post. The garrison contained a labor battalion of about 200 African Americans who did much of the work on the defenses.

African Americans sometimes provided military intelligence crucial to the defense of Ninety Six. In August 1780 Cruger reported to Cornwallis that “two Negroes come in here, one yesterday, the other the day before, and reported that they had just run away from the rebels” who are now “encamped ten miles beyond the iron-works. . .”

During the siege of Ninety Six, the Americans deprived the loyalists access to a small stream, which provided the garrison’s water supply. The only water for the garrison was brought in at night by slaves who slipped through the ravine “within pistol shot of the American pickets” and returned “with pails of water.”

It is evident that African Americans helped shape the outcome of every major event occurring at Ninety Six.