

Biography

Frederick Reams

by James D. Schaffer
Great 5 Grandson

Frederick Reams was born circa 1739 in Amelia County, in Colonial Virginia. He was born a British subject, son of native Virginians Thomas (1706–1773) and Elizabeth (1700–1773) Reames. The family's surname was later standardized as Reams.

At the time of Frederick's birth, Amelia County encompassed a larger geographic area than it does today, including lands that would later form Nottoway and Prince Edward Counties. Established by a late 1734 legislative act from the western portions of Prince George and Brunswick Counties, the region's economy was completely centered on tobacco, which functioned as both the primary commodity and the actual currency of the colony. This dominant tobacco culture fostered a regional population consisting of wealthy planters, farmers, and a rapidly expanding population of enslaved laborers that surged significantly between 1737 and 1739.

Frederick's early civic involvement is documented during the French and Indian War. According to an act of assembly passed in March 1758, Frederick provided vital provisions to the Amelia County Militia while they were in active service. Later that same year, in September 1758, colonial records note that he received payment for his own active military service within the county militia.

Circa 1766, Frederick married Sarah Womack (1738–1780) in Henrico County, Virginia when he was about 27 years old. Between 1735 and 1749, Frederick's native Amelia County shared a border with Henrico County, where Sarah was born. Their union produced at least seven sons and two daughters.

As the colonies transitioned into rebellion against the British Crown, Frederick again stepped forward. On June 4, 1776, he joined 269 fellow members of the Amelia County Militia in signing the "Petition of Officers and Soldiers of Amelia County" addressed to the Virginia Convention. The petitioners requested that affluent "overseers"—who owned significant land and enslaved property and were traditionally exempt from standard militia drafts—be ordered into active defense or alternative service rather than mere local patrolling. The Convention received the petition favorably and enacted the requested changes. While this action establishes Frederick's recognized service within the patriot militia, surviving historical documentation yields no official pension records indicating he ever served as a regular, full-time soldier in the Continental Line.

Following the death of his first wife in 1780, Frederick remarried, wedding Martha Ann Berry on June 12, 1780. In the 1782 Amelia County personal property tax list, Frederick remained in the area as the head of a household comprising six individuals.

Frederick Reams, as of September 1783 a sovereign United States citizen, executed his last will and testament in Raleigh Parish, Amelia County, Virginia, and passed away circa April 21, 1785. On July 29, 1785, an official inventory and appraisal of his estate was returned to the county court and ordered to be recorded.

The exact final resting place of Frederick Reams remains unknown.

Sources

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