

**THE UNITED STATES
PRESIDENTIAL SERVICE CENTER**

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The Honorable Elaine F. Marshall

Secretary of State
State of North Carolina
2 South Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27601

October 1, 2026

RE: Request for Formal Historical Review and Correction of the 1833 North Carolina Secretary of State Certification Concerning Revolutionary War Patriot Ishmael Titus, Federal Pension File R10623

Dear Secretary Marshall:

It was amazing to see you in Shelby for Betsy's Woman of the Year Dinner at the Don Gibson and again last week at the Democratic Women of NC Convention with my wife, Stormy!

I write to you with an extraordinary request as the United States commemorates the 250th anniversary of American independence. I respectfully ask the North Carolina Secretary of State's Office to examine a certification issued by one of your predecessors nearly two centuries ago and determine whether North Carolina can now **correct, supplement, supersede, or formally withdraw that historical determination concerning Revolutionary War Patriot Ishmael Titus.**

The matter comes directly back to the office you now hold.

On October 10, 1832, Ishmael Titus appeared before the Probate Court of Berkshire County, Massachusetts. Approximately 89 years old, unable to read or write, and having been born into slavery, Titus made his mark with an “X” and swore under oath that he had served the American cause during the Revolutionary War. His surviving pension file is designated **R10623**. In his declarations, Titus described service in North Carolina, initially as a substitute for his enslaver, Lawrence Ross, and later as an enlisted soldier after obtaining his freedom. He described participation in or military movements associated with Kings Mountain, Guilford Courthouse, Deep River, Gates’s defeat at Camden, Salisbury, the Yadkin River, and the Holston River.

The surviving transcription of Pension File R10623 can be read here:

<https://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>

The historical problem that brings me to you originated in the **North Carolina Secretary of State’s Office**.

On October 2, 1833, North Carolina Secretary of State **William Hill**, your predecessor, issued a certification concerning Titus. Hill stated that Titus’s name did not appear on the muster rolls of North Carolina’s **Continental line** or in another document then known to him that established service in that line. Hill acknowledged Colonel Cleveland as a militia colonel associated with Kings Mountain and acknowledged an officer named Isaacs. Hill also stated that he had no recollection of a Captain Beverly. That certification remains preserved as part of the Titus pension record.

That document can be examined directly at:

<https://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>

There are compelling reasons to reexamine that 1833 certification today.

First, the standard employed in the certification deserves careful historical examination. Secretary Hill specifically reported that Titus could not be found on the muster rolls of the **Continental line**. However, the federal law under which Titus applied, the US Act of June 7, 1832, did not limit pension eligibility to the Continental line. Congress expressly extended eligibility to qualifying service in the **Continental line, State troops, volunteers, or militia**. Contemporary Pension Office rules likewise expressly recognized those classes of service.

The actual federal statute is available here:

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-4/pdf/STATUTE-4-Pg529.pdf>

The contemporary Pension Office rules interpreting the Act of June 7, 1832 are available here:

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https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/SERIALSET-00325_00_00-040-0118-0000/pdf/SERIALSET-00325_00_00-040-0118-0000.pdf

That distinction is critically important. **The absence of Ishmael Titus from a Continental-line muster roll does not, standing alone, establish that he did not perform qualifying Revolutionary War service.** The very federal statute under which he applied recognized militia, State troop, and volunteer service.

Second, Titus himself corrected an important point upon which Secretary Hill had expressed doubt. Titus initially associated Captain John Beverly with his company. In a subsequent sworn declaration, Titus corrected himself. He stated that when he enlisted, he enlisted under **Captain John Cleveland, son of Colonel Benjamin Cleveland** (after whom our county is named), and that John Beverly was instead the man to whom he had applied to enlist. Secretary Hill's October 2, 1833 certification had specifically questioned the existence of a Captain Beverly. Titus's later sworn correction therefore addressed precisely one of the concerns contained in Hill's certification.

Again, that correction appears within the surviving R10623 transcription:

<https://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>

Third, North Carolina's own historical resources now recognize Ishmael Titus as a Black Patriot soldier of the American Revolution. NCpedia, an authoritative online encyclopedia supported by the State Library of North Carolina, identifies Titus as a Black Patriot soldier and recounts his Revolutionary War service, his enslavement, his subsequent freedom, his pension application, and Secretary Hill's certification.

The State of North Carolina's biography of Titus is available here:

<https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/titus-ishmael>

Fourth, the North Carolina House of Representatives itself has specifically recognized Ishmael Titus by name. In 2013, House Joint Resolution 113, “Honor African-American Revolutionary Heroes,” named Ishmael Titus among North Carolina’s African American Revolutionary War patriots. The North Carolina House passed the resolution on second reading on February 27, 2013, by a recorded vote of **116 to 0**. The measure subsequently went to the Senate Rules and Operations Committee and did not complete the legislative process, so I do not suggest that it became a ratified joint resolution. Nevertheless, the unanimous House vote demonstrates a remarkable change in North Carolina’s historical understanding of Titus since 1833. [North Carolina General Assembly](#)

The complete legislative history can be examined here:

<https://www.ncleg.gov/BillLookup/2013/H113/True>

The text of House Joint Resolution 113 is here:

<https://www.ncleg.gov/Sessions/2013/Bills/House/HTML/H113v1.html>

Fifth, the federal government now recognizes him in writing. This is new. The National Park Service now identifies Ishmael Titus by name on its federal website as a Revolutionary War soldier who served under Captain John Cleveland and Colonel Cleveland at Deep River **and Kings Mountain** and later fought at Guilford Courthouse:

<https://www.nps.gov/common/uploads/teachers/lessonplans/African%20Americans%20in%20the%20Revolution.pdf>

Secretary Marshall, I am therefore respectfully asking your office to consider five specific actions:

1. **Open a formal historical review** of Secretary William Hill’s October 2, 1833, certification concerning Ishmael Titus and Pension File R10623.
2. **Determine whether the 1833 certification remains historically supportable** considering the full scope of the Act of June 7, 1832, Titus’s corrected sworn declarations, modern historical research, and evidence concerning North Carolina militia and Revolutionary War service that may not have been available to Secretary Hill. We believe it can no longer be supported legally, and with 2026 access to records on pensions, court

records, and sworn statements, this Black American hero case can easily be rectified.

3. **Issue a supplemental, corrected, or superseding certification** stating the conclusions reached by that modern review.
4. If the Secretary of State's Office does not possess unilateral legal authority to supersede the 1833 certification, **refer the matter to the appropriate North Carolina governmental authority and support an official state historical correction or recognition** based upon the overwhelming evidence in support of this black hero.
5. Upon completion of that review, **transmit the resulting determination to the National Archives and Records Administration for association, to the extent permitted, with the historical record of Pension File R10623**, and to the appropriate North Carolina archival and historical repositories.

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The National Archives confirms that it preserves Revolutionary War pension and bounty-land application files within Record Group 15, including the Revolutionary War pension series.

National Archives information concerning those records can be found at:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/army/pensions>

and:

<https://www.archives.gov/research/military/american-revolution>

I recognize an important legal distinction. The pension Ishmael Titus sought was a **federal pension**, and I am not asking the North Carolina Secretary of State to exercise federal pension authority that the office does not possess. Nor is this primarily a request for a monetary award nearly two centuries after Titus's death.

This request seeks to correct the historical record regarding Black Revolutionary War North Carolina heroes.

The document that materially affected that record was issued under the seal and authority of the North Carolina Secretary of State. If the historical evidence now demonstrates that the certification was incomplete, based on too narrow a class of

military records, or rested in part on an identification Titus himself later corrected, then I believe North Carolina should examine whether the office that issued that certification can now place a corrected governmental statement beside it.

I also want to make something clear concerning Secretary William Hill. I am not seeking to condemn a public official who was working in 1833 with the records and information available to him. Nearly two centuries have given historians access to records, databases, legislative sources, pension files, military histories, and cross-referencing methods that William Hill could never have imagined. The issue is not whether William Hill should have known in 1833 what we know in 2026. **The issue is what North Carolina should do now that we know more.**

The circumstances of Ishmael Titus's life make this review especially important. He was born enslaved. He could not read or write. He began military service while he was held as the property of another human being. His opportunity to create and preserve the documentary evidence later demanded by government was profoundly different from that of a literate commissioned officer carrying his own discharge papers and family records.

Yet Titus remembered.

He remembered commanders. He remembered battles. He remembered saving Colonel Cleveland's life. Newspapers from coast to coast covered his death and obituary. He remembered Kings Mountain. He remembered Guilford Courthouse. He remembered Salisbury. He remembered the Yadkin. He remembered the Holston River. He remembered being captured with other men by Tories in the Allegheny Mountains. He remembered Colonel Cleveland being brought in as a prisoner. He remembered Cleveland's sons' arriving and the resulting rescue. When he realized part of his earlier testimony was missing information, **he returned to the government and corrected it under oath.** The state of Massachusetts issued legislative help to him in its state records, by his name, as needing help.

The surviving pension record is here:

<https://revwarapps.org/r10623.pdf>

Something deeply American is in that story.

In 1832, an elderly man who had been born enslaved stood before a court and attempted to make the United States acknowledge that he had helped create it. He could not sign his own name. He was broke and nearly blind, and he had a wife, Lucy. **Ishmael Titus made his mark with an X.**

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Nearly two centuries later, the North Carolina Secretary of State's Office has an opportunity to determine whether the State should now place its own mark beside his and say that the record deserves correction. As we commemorate the 250th anniversary of American independence, I can think of few actions more meaningful than reopening the documentary history of one of the Black Patriots who helped secure that independence but died without receiving the pension recognition he sought. I respectfully ask you to assign this matter for review and to advise me whether your office can issue a corrected or supplemental certification concerning Ishmael Titus. I am pleased to provide the complete documentary research file we have assembled, including the federal pension material and supporting historical evidence, for your staff and the appropriate North Carolina historians and archivists to examine. Ishmael has a brass plaque set in stone on the Charlotte Liberty Walk in front of Duke Plaza and the Harvey Gantt African American Museum.

Thank you for considering this unusual but profoundly important request. I hope that, after 193 years, North Carolina can finally determine whether the record concerning Ishmael Titus should be set right.



Professor Martin C. Mongiello, MBA, MA, MCFE
CSCS (SS/SW), USN, Ret.



Emeritus Chair, The Monroe Chair
The American Revolutionary War Living History Center

cc: Christopher Klink, Esquire
The Honorable Jeff Jackson, Attorney General
The Titus Family Foundation and The Honorable Patricia J. Titus,
Retired Judge of the Los Angeles County Superior Court
The US Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC
Williamstown College, MA "Ishmael Titus Project"
The Honorable Nicole Beverly, Town Clerk, Williamstown, MA
Mary Anne Royle, Esquire — Veterans Law Office, Greenfield, MA
The African American Veterans Monument Inc.

