

Toby Gilmore's hat at His

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For years, Toby Gilmore's tall, scarlet and blue mitre was allowed to sit somewhere in Taunton's Historical Hall as it slowly flaked and crumbled into dust.

But now, after undergoing restoration for nearly a year at the Textile and Conservation Center, Merrimack Valley Textile Museum in North Andover, the revolutionary war hat once worn by the Raynham slave is enjoying as much care and attention as it received when its owner was alive.

A grant from the Massachusetts Council on the Arts and Humanities made the restoration possible.

"It's not the complete hat — it's the front panel," said Old Colony Historical Society Director Lisa Compton, waving at the pointed wool cap hanging framed behind glass in the Historical Hall's military room. The words "Federalism and Liberty" are embroidered proudly across the mitre's crown.

"We think that was added later," Ms. Compton said, "because federalism wasn't a prevalent idea (at the time of the revolution)."

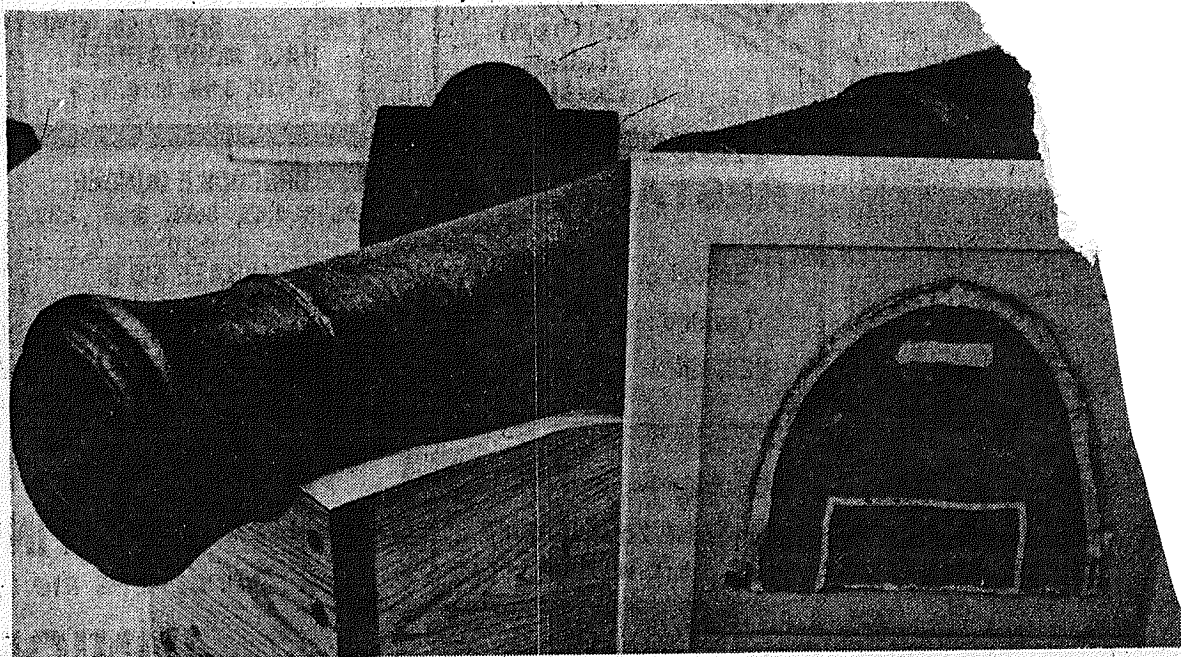
Gilmore, an "unswerving Washingtonian Federalist," would never have dreamed he would one day be a patriot for an unformed nation as distant as the United States while growing up in his native Africa.

Supposedly the son of an African chief, the former Shibodee Turry-Whurry was born in Guinea on the West Coast of Africa around 1742.

One day in 1758, as he and several companions were gathering coconuts from a tree, they were ambushed by American slave traders. Shibodee Turry-Whurry's companions escaped, but he was in the tree, and couldn't get away quickly enough. The slave traders kidnapped him and smuggled him aboard their ship which was headed to Virginia.

The 16-year-old boy was crammed below deck with other captured Africans. Slave quarters on ships were usually less than three and a half feet high, and the males were shackled together in pairs to yokes set into the floor. Women and children were held unchained in an equally crowded area behind a screen.

According to Richard W. Hill of Raynham in his article "Toby Gilmore and His Legends," the slaves were brought out of the hold several times during the long



TOBY'S HAT IS BACK: After undergoing a year of restoration, the Revolutionary War mitre worn by Raynham slave Toby Gilmore is back at Taunton's Historical Hall. The framed mitre is leaning

against the six pound ordnance some believe Gilmore received from General George Washington. (Cubie Photo)

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trip while the crew went below and washed out the quarters with vinegar.

"It is written the odor of a slaver was distinguishable five miles downwind," Hill wrote.

The slaver carrying Shibodee Turry-Whurry ran into bad weather, and strayed from its Virginia-bound course to dock in Newport, R.I.

In Newport, Toby was placed on the slave block, and was purchased by Captain John Gilmore of Raynham who renamed him Tobias Gilmore.

The boy's relationship with his owners grew to be a close one. Captain Gilmore and his wife had no children of their own, and Mrs. Gilmore taught Toby how to read and write. He was trusted and given a great deal of responsibility on the family farm.

On Sept. 16, 1776, Toby's 70-year-old master was drafted by the Continental Army. The 30-year-old, muscular, five-foot three-inch tall slave volunteered to serve in his master's place, and in return he was granted his freedom.

According to local legend, Toby eventually served under General David Cobb of Taunton, a member of General Washington's staff. Washington was allegedly so impressed with the former slave's loyalty and efficiency, he asked Cobb to make Gilmore a member of the command staff, and he became Washington's personal servant.

The story continues that Gilmore crossed the Delaware River with Washington in December of 1776, and was by Washington's side through the General's arduous winter at Valley Forge, Pa.

Military records lend little substance to the legend, however. There is no evidence Gilmore ever served with General Cobb who began his career under Col. Thomas Marshall of the 10th Massachusetts Regiment, and continued on to serve under Col. Henry Jackson in the 16th Massachusetts Regiment.

Gilmore began his service in Capt. Jonathan Shaw's Warren, R.I. Company, and his name cannot be found on any records con-

Ticonderoga, White Plains, Fort Clinton, West Point.

His location is not known, however, between June 15, 1781, and Sept. 21, 1781, and there is a small possibility he was with Washington during that period.

From Sept. 21, 1781, until his retirement from military life on Dec. 6, 1781, he served with Captain Daniel Drake's Company in Marshfield's North River.

Hill claims Gilmore himself was responsible for the legend.

"He must have been quite a story teller," Hill writes, "and we can picture him in his later years on the front porch of his big house surrounded by his children and grandchildren, spinning yarns of what was not a totally uneventful life."

Someone presented Gilmore with a six pound ordnance — a cannon — before he left the service. The legend claims the cannon was from General Washington in appreciation for his faithful service.

After the war, Gilmore returned to his former master's Raynham farm until he managed to save enough to purchase some land for a farm of his own.

A few years after his return, with the help of Captain Gilmore, he purchased 50 acres of land at a low price when the property of John Borland, a tory descendant of Elizabeth Poole who fled the country, was auctioned off.

He then married Rosannah Hack of Taunton, and after the couple set up housekeeping, they had eight children.

With his former master's help,

Gilmore eventually built a large, two story farmhouse. His children attended public schools "and had the respect of the community."

Eventually a community of eight to 10 homes housing Gilbert's descendants sprang up around the old farmhouse, but in 1912 the farmhouse burned down.

Gilmore never forgot his years in the Confederate Army, and his mitre and uniform were worn proudly on many holidays.

Every Fourth of July and Washington's Birthday, Gilmore would don his uniform and mitre, haul the cannon from his front yard to the Taunton Green, and fired a salute for each of the 13 states, plus one for General Washington.

Before his death in 1812, Gilmore presented the cannon to the town of Taunton on the condition it be used in firing salutes on all patriotic occasions, and especially on "Master Washington's" Birthday.

The cannon and uniform are now housed by Taunton's Historical Hall as well as the newly renovated mitre, but the uniform is in poor condition and isn't on display.

The mitre was donated to the museum by Gilmore's descendant A.S. Gilmore.

"I feel both the hat and uniform coat are significant," Ms. Compton said. "Intact pieces of clothing from that time are quite rare. We're lucky to have it at all.

"I wish we had enough money to restore the coat," she added.

"Maybe someday we will."

TOWN OF R SPECIAL VOTER DATES FOR STA

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NOV. 4,

Tues., Sept. 4,

Sat., Oct. 4,

Final Day, Tues., Oc

All Registration at T