George Peake Biography

George Peake

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Biography

Despite prejudice and slavery, some black people managed to overcome the odds in early America and become financially successful. George Peake was one such individual. He was born in the colony of Maryland and spent his early life in Pennsylvania. He participated as a British soldier in the battle of Quebec in September 1754 during the French and Indian War, but he later deserted.

In 1809, Peake took up residence in Cleveland, Ohio, only a small frontier town at the time. He and his family, Cleveland's first black settlers, acquired a one-hundred-acre farm on the western outskirts of the town. Peake's wife was apparently a women of means and helped support the family. Peake is credited with inventing a labor-saving device--a stone hand mill. Settlers had learned from the Indians to grind corn with a pestle--a pounding device--and a mortar, or vessel. This method required a degree of strength to grind corn meal.

Peake's mill consisted of two wheel-like stones about 19 inches (483 mm) in diameter. Corn placed between the rotating millstones was quickly ground and produced a better quality meal than did the pestle and mortar. The mill became popular in Peake's community and contributed to the prosperity of his family. They became well-known among their neighbors and were apparently well liked. George Peake died in 1827 at the age of 105.