

**HERE ALL ALONG: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN NORTHEASTERN
CONNECTICUT BEFORE THE GREAT MIGRATION, 1688-1910 — A
VIRTUAL EXHIBIT**

Curated by Jamie Eves, 2023

Sponsored by a grant from Connecticut Humanities

***Including Using “Here All Along” in the Classroom:
Integrating Local History into the Connecticut Social Studies Curriculum***

A Service of Teach It and Connecticut Humanities

**HERE IT IS: A VIRTUAL ART EXHIBIT FEATURING THE WORK OF
MICHELE “JUSTICE” THOMAS**

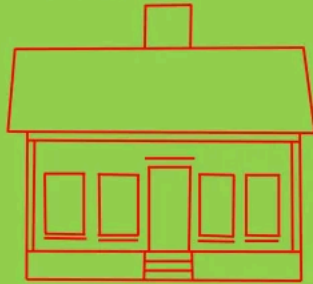
Curated by Joanne Sailor, 2023

**HERE ALL ALONG:
AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE WINDHAM, CT AREA, 1688-1910**

A Slide Show by Jamie Eves, Windham Town Historian

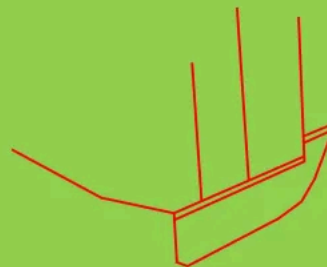
**RESOURCES FOR LOCAL AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY: THE CASE
OF WINDHAM, CT**

A Slide Show by Jamie Eves, Windham Town Historian



HERE ALL ALONG

AFRICAN AMERICANS IN NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT
BEFORE THE GREAT MIGRATION, 1688-1910





THE PURPOSE OF THIS EXHIBIT

This exhibit traces the presence of African Americans in Windham, Willimantic, and surrounding communities from the arrival of the first Black person in 1688 until 1910, just before the Great Migration of African Americans from the U.S. South and from the West Indies to the Northern United States. It is the latest in a series of exhibits at the Mill Museum that have traced the experiences of different groups of people in the Windham-Willimantic area. Previous exhibits explored the experiences of Polish Americans, Irish Americans, and Latino Americans. The Museum allows its guest curators to design exhibits in ways that make sense to them. The curator of this exhibit, Windham Town Historian Jamie H. Eves, Ph.D., wanted to focus on narratives and stories, and he chose stories that he believes are representative of the African American experience in this part of Connecticut. He invites visitors who know other stories not included in the exhibit to share them with him and us. We can add them to the exhibit on signs like the one you are reading right now! The exhibit will be up into July 2023. The Museum thanks Connecticut Humanities for helping to fund this exhibit.

—The Mill Museum



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

(Part I)

I conceived of the idea of the “Here All Along” exhibit in 2020, when the Mill Museum was closed because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and when my classes at Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut shifted to meeting online. I was then the Executive Director of the Mill Museum, but the Museum wasn’t open for in-person tours or programs. Wanting to “keep history alive” and continue to provide the public with access to their history, I and the rest of the Mill Museum staff pivoted to doing what I was doing with my university classes — teach history online. I turned to research projects that I had long kept on the back burner, projects that I now threw myself into with gusto, and for which I planned to create “virtual exhibits.” Among these projects was the history of African Americans in northeastern Connecticut, especially in Windham, Willimantic, and adjacent communities. This project picked up several threads that I had been thinking about off-and-on for more than a decade. Now was the time to take them up.

The first thread was the widespread public perception that African Americans had not been an important part of Connecticut history until recently. A few years earlier, I had been teaching a course in African American History at Saint Joseph College (now the University of Saint Joseph) in East Hartford, CT, and in one class we were discussing the fact that, until the 1960s, African American characters rarely appeared in movies, on television, on radio, or in comics except as domestic servants or comic relief — that otherwise, they were invisible in most of American popular culture. One student, an older African American woman, laughed and commented, “Don’t you know that there were no Black people in America until 1960?” The general (white) audience in Connecticut tends to think of Black History in the United States as follows: Black people came to America as slaves, where they had no power or culture of their own, and quickly assimilated to Anglo-American ways. Because it was too cold to grow cotton in New England, almost all of the slaves lived in the South. Then President Abraham Lincoln (and the Civil War) freed the slaves. Then, sometime in the early 20th century, a lot of Southern Blacks moved to Northern cities like Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport. Then Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King began the civil rights movement, which was supposed to achieve legal equality, but only sort of did that, which is why we now have Black Lives Matter. I wanted my local history museum to tell the full story of African Americans’ experiences here, in northeastern Connecticut, beginning not with the Great Migration of the early 20th century, but from the middle of the 1600s on.

The second thread was the recent decision by the Connecticut General Assembly to include African American History in the State’s High School curriculum as an elective. The State has done a good job collecting materials for teachers to use, but teachers in Windham were telling me that they also wanted local primary sources — meaning at the town level, not just the state level. The story of Venture Smith is a good story, they told me, but they wondered if there were stories in Windham that they could incorporate into their lesson plans.



CURATOR'S STATEMENT

(Part II)

A third thread was the story of the naming of Jackson Street in Willimantic, near where I live. Local lore had it that Jackson Street was named for Lyman Jackson, an early-19th-century African American resident. Who was Lyman Jackson, I wondered, and why did his neighbors name one of the Thread City's main streets after him?

A fourth thread was the Mill Museum's collection of historical photographs of the American Thread Company, including scores of images showing textile mill employees at work. Not one worker in the photos is Black — all are white. Did Connecticut industry — and the textile industry in particular — refuse to hire African American workers as late as the 1960s?

A fifth thread was a gravestone in one of the local cemeteries marking the resting place of Corporal Caesar Hall of the 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry, a Civil War regiment. I knew that the 29th was a "Colored" regiment composed of Black soldiers with white officers. Who was Caesar Hall, and what had his experiences been like? What motivated him — a married man in his thirties with children — to volunteer for duty in the Civil War? What happened to him when the War ended? Were other African American soldiers interred in Windham's cemeteries?

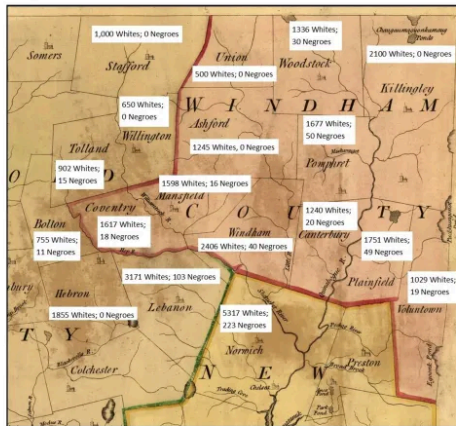
A sixth thread was a story about white allies. Following the events at Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017, I joined residents of Windham and Willimantic in a vigil on the corner of Jackson and Main Streets in Willimantic. Several speakers posed the question that was in all of our minds: what would we do if bands of violent, racist thugs marched through our city? Would we stand up to them? Would we fight back? A story I had been researching off and on for years provided a historical answer. In 1837 a violent anti-abolition mob marched on Willimantic's Methodist Church, determined to prevent an abolitionist speaker from addressing the congregation. In what I have come to call the Methodist Melee on Main Street, the Methodists fought back, battling the mob in a spirited fistfight that spilled out of the Church and onto Main Street. What had led those Willimantic Methodists — who were probably all white people — to stand up to the racist mob?

These and other stories I wove together into a larger narrative, a history of African Americans — and their white neighbors, who sometimes were allies and sometime were not — in the part of Connecticut where I live, from 1688 up to the beginning of the Great Migration in 1910. I stopped at the Great Migration because, as the historian Stacey Close has pointed out, the Great Migration transformed not just the history of African Americans in Connecticut, but the history of all of Connecticut, making it a logical breaking point. The core of the exhibit is made up of individual stories, the stories of local people and their experiences. My goal was to demonstrate that Black people were here in northeastern Connecticut — in its mill towns and farm towns — in Windham, Willimantic, and neighboring communities — all along, from the 1600s on, and that their experiences and impact on local communities were important and needed to be told. This is the kind of thing that I think municipal historians and local museums are supposed to do.

—Jamie Eves, Senior Curator, Mill Museum / Windham Co-Town Historian



ENSLAVEMENT



NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT IN 1756 (ABOVE)

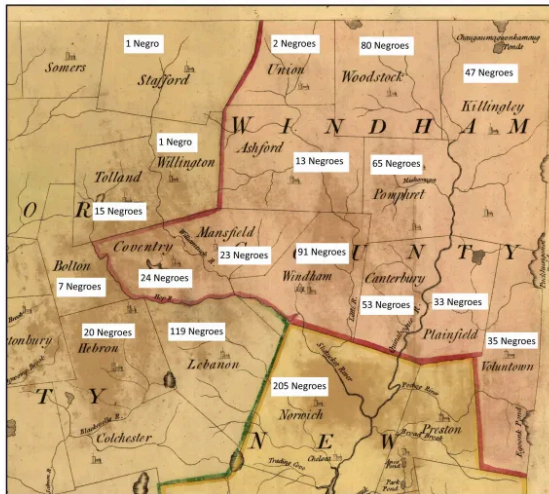
In 1756 the Board of Trade in London asked Connecticut to conduct a census of the colony's inhabitants, showing the number of "Whites," "Negroes," and "Indians." Although more accurate than earlier colonial censuses, it nevertheless "skewed" the colony by undercounting both the Black and the indigenous populations. Notice that the numbers superimposed above on a 1766 map of Connecticut show no indigenous people at all, and that several towns reported no Blacks, even though it is almost certain that some Black people lived there. Notice also that most of the towns that reported no Blacks also reported the number of Whites in round numbers, indicating that they may have been fabrications or rough estimates.

Source: Charles J. Hoadley, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut from May, 1721, to February, 1737*, *Baltimore, Transcribed and Edited in Accordance with a Resolution of the General Assembly* (Shelton: Cax, Lockwood, and Bennett, 1977).

NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT 1774 (BELOW)

In 1774, on the eve of the American Revolution, slavery reached its high point in northeastern Connecticut – and in the rest of the then-colony but soon-to-be state. The 1774 census was a more accurate count than 1756, with less "skewing." As in 1756, the census was supposed to count the number of "Whites," "Negroes," and "Indians" living in each town, but no indigenous peoples were recorded. The census did not differentiate between free and enslaved Blacks, but most of the "Negroes" were probably enslaved. The late 19th-century historian Ellen Larned, a resident of Windham County, thought that some indigenous people may have been included among the "Negroes." As with the 1756 census, it is best to consider these numbers to be estimates.

Source: *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (1806-1876), v. 13 (Hartford: Lockwood and Bennett, 1876).



The maps above are constructed from details taken from: *Misses Park, Plan of the Colony of Connecticut in North America*, Nov. 14, 1766. The original is in the Library of Congress.

Black people first came to Connecticut because they were enslaved and brought here against their will. Although many people today don't realize it, Connecticut has a long history of slavery. The first African or Afro-West Indian slaves in Connecticut probably arrived in 1638, when white colonists enslaved Pequots captured in the Pequot War and transported them to the West Indies to exchange for enslaved Africans or Afro-West Indians. Enslaved people are mentioned as living in Hartford as early as 1639 and in New Haven as early as 1644. The number of enslaved people living in Connecticut grew slowly during the 1600s, but rapidly in the 1700s, peaking around 1780, at the time of the American Revolution. "In 1790," write Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jennifer Frank in *Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Benefited from Slavery* (New York: Ballentine Books, 2006), "most prosperous merchants in Connecticut owned at least one slave, as did 50 percent of the ministers." There were more enslaved people in Connecticut in the 1700s than in any of the other New England colonies, in part because Connecticut had a larger middle class, and thus more people who could afford to purchase a slave. Slavery did not end legally in Connecticut until 1848, and did not end in fact until 1857, just before the Civil War. Connecticut's 1638-1848 era of legal slavery lasted for 210 years, and ended only 175 years ago.

SLAVERY IN CONNECTICUT

Year	Total Population	Black Population	Enslaved Population	Free Black Population
1756	128,212	3,587(a)(b)		
1774	197,836	6,464(a)		
1790	237,653	5,419	2,648	2,771
1810	261,942	6,763	310	6,453
1820	273,248	7,967	97	7,870
1830	297,675	8,072	25	8,047
1840	309,978	8,139	54	8,105

(a) The colonial census did not differentiate between free and enslaved African Americans. The figures, however, were estimated. The colonial census was less than accurate than the later United States census.

(b) There are few numbers reported in the Board of Trade to Connecticut Governor Park. The actual numbers from the census itself were 126,075 Whites and 3,070 Negroes. Park added to both categories, probably because he believed there had been undercounts.

Source: *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut* (1806-1876), v. 13 (Hartford: Lockwood and Bennett, 1876); Charles J. Hoadley, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut*, *Baltimore, Transcribed and Edited in Accordance with a Resolution of the General Assembly*, (Shelton: Cax, Lockwood, and Bennett, 1977); *United States Census*, 1790-1840.

THINKING ABOUT HISTORY: A LATE 19th-CENTURY HISTORY WRITER ABOUT SLAVERY IN WINDHAM IN THE 1700s

Historians sometimes get history wrong. One mistake is to interpret history through the lens of our own times. In 1874 – only nine years after the end of the Civil War – Ellen Larned published the first history of Connecticut's Windham County. In her chapter on the town of Windham during the American Revolution, she wrote:

"Social life in Windham was still characterized by exuberant hilarity. 'Janting and junketing,' feasting and merry-making were more and more in vogue. A very fine and generous style of living had been adopted by the upper circle, rivaling that of the leading families in the larger towns. Windham's relations with Norwich were especially close and cordial, were marked by continual interchange of hospitalities and festivities. Entertainment was made easy by the great number of negroes. Nearly every household owned its servants, generally a man and wife, with a great brood of children. They were a careless, happy set, fond of joking and fiddling, and added much to the general jollity. Colonel Dyer's body-servant Jack, the son of an African prince, was chief among these negroes, he accompanied his master upon many public missions, and was distinguished for gentlemanly demeanor. Colonel Dyer had a household of negroes, great and small, and entertained much company in fine style. Pictures and rarities brought from abroad adorned his handsome residence." (Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, vol. 1 [1874]).

What do you think about Larned's interpretation of slavery in Windham in the 1700s? Do you think it is overly positive, making slavery sound like it was not so bad? Why do you think Larned avoided using words like *slave*, *slavery*, and *enslaved*? Do you think that enslaved people in Windham were really "a careless, happy set"? Based on the statistics found in the colonial censuses, do you think it was true that "nearly every household owned its servants, generally a man and wife, with a great brood of children"? Remember, the Civil War had just ended. Were their reasons that white people in Connecticut like Larned might want to cast blame on the South and convince themselves that slavery here in the North had not been so bad?

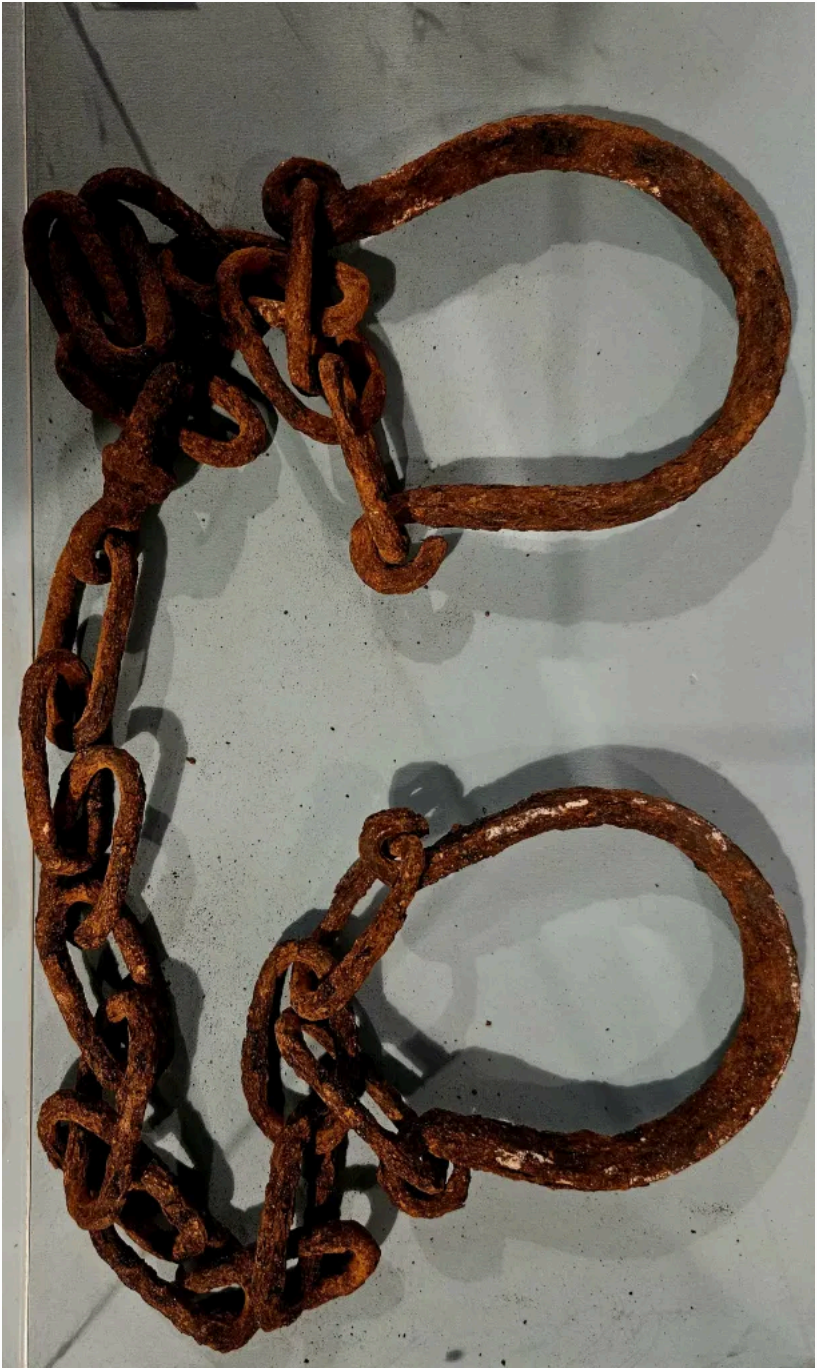
A DOCUMENT

This advertisement appeared as a broadside (printed poster), in Woodstock, CT, May 16, 1803 – 19 years after the Connecticut General Assembly passed the state's gradual abolition law in 1784. The original is in the collections of the Connecticut Historical Society.

Ten Dollars Reward!

Ran away from the Subscriber, on the night of the 15th instant, a Negro Boy, named Caesar, 18 years old, nearly 6 feet high, stout and well made, walks pretty erect, speaks fluently; He wore away a light colored sailor jacket, a mixed green and black swan down vest, a pair of blue overalls, a Holland shirt, a pair of gray socks, a pair of thick shoes, a brown home-made great coat, and a large old Hat; has a small scar on his left cheek. He has lately been guilty of theft, and made his escape through fear of punishment. Whoever will return said Negro, or secure him so that his master may get him again, shall receive the above reward, and all reasonable charges. — All persons are forbid harboring, trusting or employing said Negro, on penalty of the Law.

SAMUEL MC'CLELLAN
Woodstock, Connecticut, May 16, 1803.



ARE THESE SLAVE SHACKLES?

These iron shackles are on loan from the Pomfret, CT, Historical Society. They were given to the PHS in 1984 by Bob Kent, who found them in his barn and believed them to be 18th- or 19th-century slave leg shackles. The barn — once part of the Sumner farm and tavern — fell down in the 1970s. In the 1700s, the tavern and farm were owned by Samuel Sumner, Sr. In the early 1800s, the tavern entertained travelers on the Hartford-Providence Turnpike. In the mid-1800s, it belonged to Samuel Sumner, Jr., who is believed to have been a member of the Abington, CT, Anti-Slavery Society. It is possible that the Sumner property was a safe house on the Underground Railroad. Charles Webster, a free Black man who served in the 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War, lived on the Sumner farm, where he worked as a farm laborer.

- ♦ Were these iron shackles manufactured by a local blacksmith? The irregularity of the rings indicates that they were. A blacksmith shop was near the Sumner farm.
- ♦ Were they slave leg shackles, left over from when slavery existed in Connecticut? There were many different designs of slave shackles, but there were some (now displayed in museums) that looked very much like this pair.
- ♦ Could they instead have been a horse hobble? Normally, horse hobbles were constructed of rope or leather, but occasionally iron chains were used. We found an image of a chain hobble that looked very much like these shackles.
- ♦ Could they have been wrought in the blacksmith shop for prisoners at the Windham County jail in nearby Brooklyn, CT?
- ♦ Were they slave shackles brought North along the Underground Railroad?
- ♦ Were they slave shackles brought back from the South by one of Samuel Sumner, Jr.'s sons, who served in the Union Army during the Civil War?
- ♦ Were they used by the Abington Anti-Slavery Society as a prop? Abolitionists often used shackles as potent symbols of the cruelty of slavery?
- ♦ Did they arrive in Connecticut during the 1700s on board a slave ship docking at New London harbor?

Historians are often faced with artifacts that have limited “provenance,” meaning that there is no direct evidence about who made them or what they were used for. Such is the case with these shackles. All of the above explanations are plausible. What is known is that slave shackles existed, and that some of them looked like these. What do you think?

SHACKLES AS SYMBOLS OF SLAVERY

Anti-slavery activists in Britain and the United States used shackles as symbols of the cruelty of slavery. In 1787 the British Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade asked one of its supporters, Josiah Wedgwood (the maker of fine porcelain and stoneware) to design a symbol. Wedgwood created ceramic medallion depicting a shackled, kneeling slave asking for his freedom, asking "Am I not a man and a brother?" The medallions became popular, and were worn by British and American anti-slavery activists, including Thomas Clarkson and Benjamin Franklin. Although Eurocentric (they depicted the enslaved man in supplication to white reformers, not as an armed rebel or even as an equal), the medallions did contribute to the growth of the anti-slavery movement in both Britain and the United States, and were frequently reworked as drawings and woodcuts. *The Liberator* featured a version on its masthead. During the Memphis sanitation workers' strike in 1968, strikers modified Wedgwood's medallions into posters and buttons that read "I AM A MAN," turning the question into a definitive statement.

SHACKLES AS SYMBOLS OF SLAVERY





PLACES THE SLAVES MADE



The late historian Eugene D. Genovese, in his 1976 book *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*, put the history of slavery in the United States in a new light. Until then, mainstream historians assumed that, as enslaved people had little power or control over their lives, they lacked what historians call *agency*— the ability to shape themselves, their lives, and the world around them. But Genovese, using oral histories of slavery created by the Federal Writers Project during the New Deal, demonstrated that enslaved people *did* have agency, that — seemingly against all odds — they were able to affect the world around them in many important ways. A few years later, another historian, Mechal Sobel, expanded on Genovese's point. Colonial America, Sobel wrote in *The World They Made Together: Black and White Values in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (1989), was shaped by both enslaved people and by their enslavers. The same was true in colonial northeastern Connecticut, where the towns, villages, and rural neighborhoods were places that the enslaved people helped make. African American had less power and freedom than their Anglo-American neighbors, and they were much less numerous, so sometimes their contributions were subtle. But they left their mark, nevertheless.

MORTLAKE

While colonial Connecticut did not have a plantation economy in the normal sense of the term, where large numbers of either enslaved people or contract laborers worked to plant, tend, and harvest crops, it did have a few large agricultural holdings worked at least in part by African American slaves. One such "Connecticut plantation" existed in northeast Connecticut in a place called Mortlake. In 1687 the Connecticut General Court (as the legislature was then called) granted a tract of land in northeast Connecticut to Captain William Blackwell, to be used as a refuge for Puritans fleeing England to escape Stuart rule. Rather than simply deed Blackwell land in fee simple, the General Court made the grant in the form of a township, but constituted the township as an English manor rather than a town. Blackwell named the grant, which today is the northern portion of the Connecticut town of Brooklyn, *Mortlake*. Subsequently, Massachusetts Governor Jonathan Belcher bought Mortlake from Blackwell. Both Blackwell and Belcher sold smaller tracts to Anglo-American settlers, but in 1739-40 Belcher conveyed his interests in Mortlake in two separate sales to Israel Putnam (1739) and Godfrey Malbone, Sr. (1740). Malbone (1693-1768), a Newport, RI, merchant, slave trader, and privateer, paid a substantial sum for 3,000 acres of forest and farmland. He moved a large number of slaves to Mortlake, and turned over the management of the land to his sons, Godfrey, Jr. (1724-1783) and John. Because Mortlake was a manor, it lacked normal New England town government. In 1766, Godfrey, Jr. moved to Mortlake, by now "well stocked with cows, horses, sheep, swine, goats and negroes," although by then the General Court had stripped Mortlake of its manorial status and added it into the town of Pomfret (1757). Malbone, Jr., built Trinity Church, an Anglican (Episcopalian) church in Mortlake, modeled after Trinity Church in Newport. Besides agriculture, he also engaged in quarrying limestone. The Malbones lost part of their estate during the Revolution, a consequence of their tory activities. When Godfrey Malbone, Jr. died in 1783 and his brother John a few years later, their estate probate inventories listed a fine house in Pomfret, an abundance of personal property, several thousand acres of land split between Pomfret and Newport, a goodly amount of livestock, but no slaves.



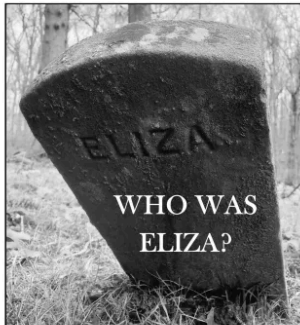
THE TRINITY CARVINGS

Godfrey Malbone, Jr., the Newport, RI slave owner who took up residence in northeast Connecticut in 1766, built Trinity Church (now called Old Trinity Church) in Pomfret (now Brooklyn), CT in 1770. Modeled on Trinity Church in Newport, it was an Anglican (Episcopalian) church. As many as 21 enslaved people are believed to be buried in its churchyard. Inside the church, white worshippers sat in pews on the ground floor, while enslaved people occupied benches in a balcony. A partition hid the Blacks from view. Graffiti carved into the rough board partitions are believed to have been made by slaves. One carving depicts a wooden three-masted sailing ship — quite likely a Newport slave ship. Another shows the hand of God reaching for a longwinded preacher. There are many more carvings in which the enslaved people of Mortlake found a voice.



OLD TRINITY CHURCHYARD

It is believed that at least twenty-one enslaved people are buried in marked graves in the churchyard of the Old Trinity Church in Brooklyn, CT. Six gravestones are legible, marked with the names Eliza, James, Orrin, Sarah, Godfrey, and Louisa. These gravestones are smaller and plainer than those of the many white people buried in the Old Trinity Churchyard, and they are located together in the back, in the southeast corner. In addition, there are relics of what appear to be at least fifteen other graves in the same area — the stones on these graves are broken and unrecognizable (if they ever had writing on them at all), but they are arranged in rows and so seem to be markers. Elsewhere, the graves of enslaved people are difficult to find. None of the cemeteries in Windham have slave graves — not marked ones, anyway, not that we could find. It may be that most enslaved people were buried on the land of their owners. But the gravestones in the Old Trinity Churchyard proclaim, "We were here."





A FEW WORDS ABOUT NAMES



In the years 1688-1910, African Americans were referred to in legal documents and official records in a variety of ways: Black, Negro, Mulatto, Molatto, and more. When the exhibit is using those documents, we use the terms they used, to give a sense of historicity, even if those terms now seem archaic. When writing more generally, we use the terms African American and Black. Following AP style, we have capitalized Black, but not white.

The names of enslaved individuals were names given to them by slaveowners. Enslaved people brought to Connecticut from Africa or the West Indies obviously had other names, and we regret not knowing what those names were. Slaves names were often used to demean enslaved people — names like Caesar or Prince were intended to be sarcastic reminders that enslaved people lacked power. When given English names like Eliza or Henry, it was intended to remind them that they were expected to assimilate to Anglo-American culture. Sometimes enslaved people were given their owners' last names, sometimes they were given the last name Negro, and other times they had no last names at all. In the 1790 U.S. Census, the enumerator for New London County recorded free Black people only by their first names, with the prefix Negro. Normally, though, free Black people chose their own names.



SAY THEIR NAMES

We are often asked to “say their name.” Names are powerful. When we use people’s names, we are remembering or recognizing them as individuals. It is easy to dehumanize people who have been victimized, but if we say their names we become connected to them as real people — people like us. We don’t know the names of most of the people who were enslaved in Connecticut in the 1600s, 1700s, and 1800s. But when we do know their names, we should say them — aloud, if possible. The six gravestones of enslaved people buried in the churchyard at Old Trinity Church that still have readable names carved into them give us a chance to say their names, at least. Please stop and say these names aloud, so that we will not forget: Eliza, Sarah, Henry, Orrin, Godfrey, Louisa.



PLACES THE SLAVES MADE



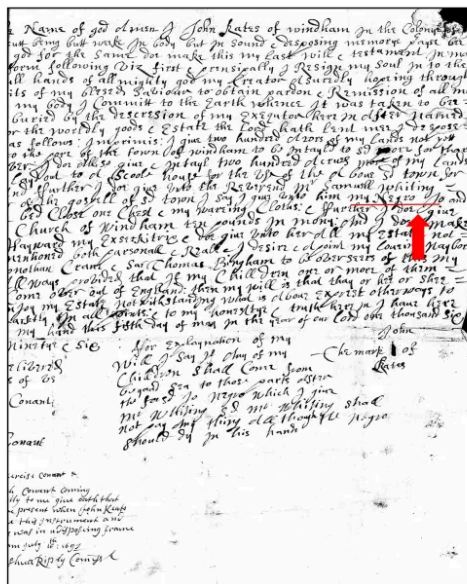
JO: TOWN FOUNDER

In 1688 the first two non-indigenous people arrived in what would become the town of Windham, CT. One was John Cates (or Kates, or maybe Keats), a mysterious figure who may have been a refugee from England's 17th-century political and religious Civil War. Or perhaps he was a buccancer, no one was quite sure. The other was Cates's slave, Jo, who is usually recorded in local history as Joe Gimne. Cates and Jo were squatters. Although Cates brought cash with him, he hadn't yet purchased any land in Connecticut. The Englishman was elderly, perhaps in his eighties, so it was up to Jo to keep them alive in the cold Connecticut forest. Jo dug a shelter in a hillside. He hunted and trapped game. He foraged for wild plants. For two years, the two men lived alone. Eventually, others came, several families of Anglo-Americans from Norwich and Stonington. Surveyors marked lines on the land, and Cates spent some of his treasure to buy a lot. Jo built them a house, probably assisted by Jonathan Ginnings, one of the new neighbors.

Cates went on to become a leading citizen of Windham, respected by his neighbors. He signed the petition to make Windham a town in 1692. He became a pillar of the local Congregational church. He dipped further into his treasure and purchased additional land in town. When he died in 1697 of old age, Cates left cash and land to be used to fund a school and support the church. Townspeople mourned his passing and found it easy to believe that their benefactor had been a staunch Puritan, a righteous Commonwealthman back in England, a defender of the True Faith, and an ally of Oliver Cromwell, driven by royalists to seek shelter in Puritan New England. For generations, Windham's residents eulogized him as the heroic founder of their town.

Cates had one more bequest in his will. It was Jo. "I doe give unto the Reverend Mr. Samuel Whiting (Minister of the Gospel), of said Towne," his will reads, "I say I give unto him my Negro Jo, one bed and bed Clothes, one Chest, and my Wearing Clothes." Presumably, the bed, chest, and old clothes were for Jo to use after he moved in with his new owner. Local lore has it that Jo wept when Cates died. In any case, he did not survive Cates by many years.

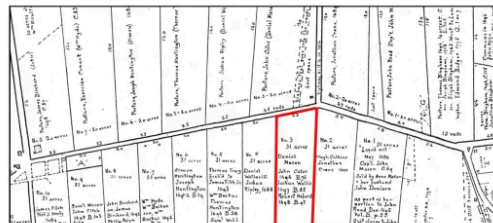
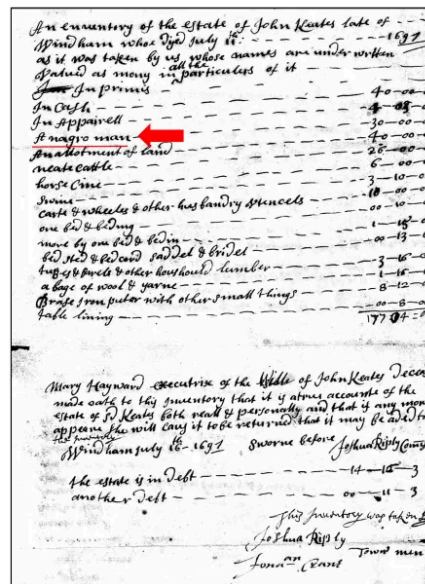
Townspeople did not consider Jo a town founder, not in the 17th century, nor in 1892 when Windham celebrated its bicentennial. He couldn't vote in local elections, nor sign petitions. He would not have participated in town meetings. He was not a member of the church. He never married or fathered children, not in Windham anyway. (Cates apparently had children in England.) Supposedly, at first both Cates and Jo were buried somewhere near the place where they had spent their first two, cold winters in Windham. Later, though, Cates's body was exhumed and moved to Windham's town cemetery, and a fine stone marker was carved and placed over his grave. There is no record that Jo's remains were ever moved. No stone marks his gravesite, and its location is unknown. Yet, Jo was a town founder every bit as much as Cates. He kept both of them alive for two years. He built or helped build the first house in Windham. Without Jo, there wouldn't have been a Cates. Windham was founded as a Puritan town, but it was also a place made by the enslaved man, Jo.



Above Left: The will of John Cates (Kates), in which he bequeathed "my Negro Jo" to Windham's Congregational Minister, Rev. Samuel Whiting. The will also provides that, if any of Cates's children in England should come to Connecticut, they would be entitled to any part of his estate, except for Jo. Was this because Cates trusted Whiting to care for Jo once he was no longer young enough to work? If so, it suggests that Cates viewed Jo differently from the rest of his property, but also makes it clear that he was property nonetheless.

Above Right: Inventory of Cates's (Kates's) estate. Although a person, Jo was also property. Valued at 30 pounds, he was Cates's third most valuable property, following 40 pounds of cash and an allotment of unimproved real estate also valued at 40 pounds. (Cates had already sold his home farm by the time he died.) By comparison, Cates's neat cattle were valued together at 26 pounds, his horse at 6 pounds and his wine at 27 pounds. That made Jo a generous bequest to Rev. Whiting.

At Right: Sketch map of early lots in Windham, CT. Cates' lot is outlined in red. Cates's house — the first house in Windham, which Jo helped build — no longer exists, but it was located on this site.

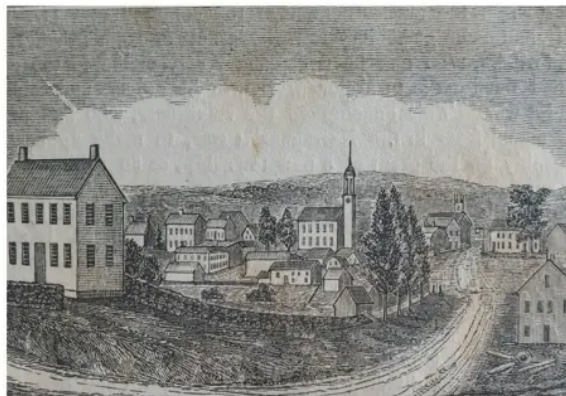


Click on the image above to navigate to an article about Jo elsewhere on our website.



WORK

The kind of work that enslaved people did in northeastern Connecticut in the 1600s, 1700s, and early 1800s would have primarily consisted of clearing land; planting, tending, and harvesting crops; mowing hay; caring for farm animals; chopping, splitting, and hauling firewood; quarrying; brickmaking; spinning thread and yarn and otherwise making textiles; hand sewing; washing clothes; carpentry, cooping, shoemaking, blacksmithing, and other artisanal crafts; foraging; and domestic chores. Until the early 1800s, northeastern Connecticut's economy was overwhelmingly agrarian and preindustrial, with no seaports north of Norwich. (In coastal areas, enslaved people also worked as sailors, fishers, shipwrights, and longshoremen.) The tools displayed here are only some of those that Black Connecticutans would have used.

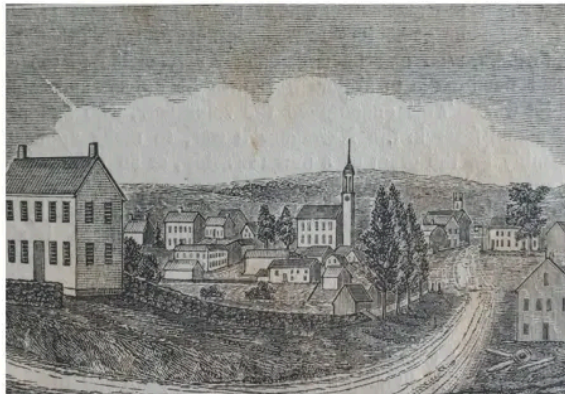


Windham in the early 1800s.



“Much attention was given to wool growing, the culture of hemp, flax and tobacco, and the making of cheese and butter. Great flocks of sheep and herds of cattle ranged over Windham pastures and commons. Wheat and other cereals were extensively grown and exported....”

Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*,
Vol. I (1874)



Windham in the
early 1800s.



Textile production tools. A winder and a great wheel.



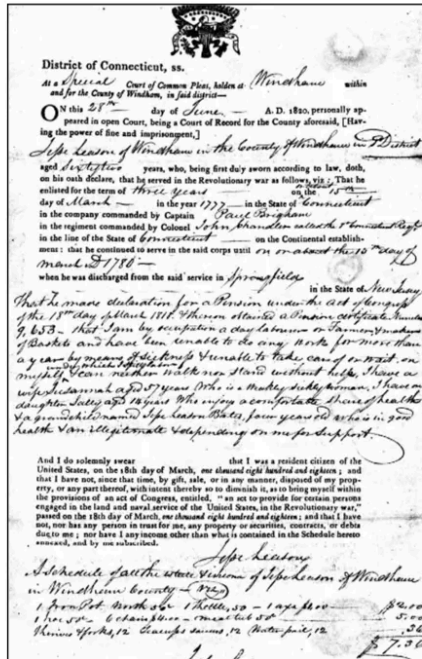
Agricultural tools. From left to right: rake, flail, two pickaxes, and a maul.



FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM

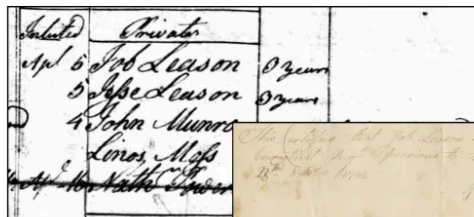


JESSE & JOB LEASON: REVOLUTIONARY WAR SOLDIERS



JESSE & JOB LEASON IN THE CONNECTICUT LINE

Jesse and Job Leason joined the Continental Army in 1777, two years into the Revolutionary War. Jesse served a full three-year hitch, then mustered out in 1780. Job resigned for a second hitch and mustered out in 1783, when the War ended. They were not merely militiamen, who served for shorter terms. They were part of what was called the Connecticut Line, the eight infantry regiments from Connecticut that were part of the Continental Army. Continentals were the backbone of the struggle for independence. They saw more combat and endured greater privations than militia units. The Leason brothers were privates. They were at Valley Forge. They fought at Germantown, Monmouth, and Fort Mifflin, and guarded the Hudson Valley as part of a blocking action to prevent British forces in New York City from linking up with a second British army led by General "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne driving south from Canada.



Above: Detail from a Revolutionary War muster roll. Once a month, Continental soldiers had to have their presence recorded at muster. Many of these muster rolls have survived. Jesse and Job Leason's names appear frequently on the muster rolls of Capt. Brigham's Company, Eighth Regiment, Connecticut Line.

On June 28, 1820, Jesse Leason of Windham, CT, an aged African American Revolutionary War veteran, filed a request in Connecticut's Court of Common Pleas for a share of the "Bounty Lands" Congress had set aside for veterans in Ohio. Leason gave his age as 62 and said that he had served three years from March 15, 1777 to March 15, 1780 "in the company commanded by Captain Paul Brigham, in the regiment commanded by Colonel John Chandler, called the 8th Continental Regiment, in the line of the State of Connecticut." In explaining his need for assistance, Leason asserted "That he made declaration for a Pension under the Act of Congress of the 18th day of March 1818 & thereon attained a Pension certificate [Numbered] 9653—that I am by occupation a day laborer or Farmer & maker of Baskets and have been unable to do any work for more than a year by means of sickness & unable to take care of or wait on myself, under which I labor, & can neither walk nor stand without help. I have a wife Susannah aged 57 years who is a weakly sickly woman. I have one daughter Sally aged 14 years Who enjoys a comfortable share of health & a grandchild named Jesse Leason Bates, four years old who is in good health & an illegitimate & depending on me for support." Leason then provided an inventory of his possessions: "1 Iron Pot Worth 50 cents—1 Kettle, 50—1 axe \$1.00—, 1 hoe 50 cents— 6 chairs \$4.00—metal tub 50 cents [—] Knives & forks, 12 [—] Teacups saucers, 12 [—] Water pail, 12," for a combined value of \$7.06. Even more impoverished than Jesse Leason was his younger brother Job, also a veteran of the Revolutionary War. The brothers had served together in the 8th Connecticut Regiment of Foot, part of the Continental Army under George Washington. Yet the early 1800s found both living in poverty in Windham, CT. Who were the Leason brothers? How did they come to fight for American freedom and independence? How had the Revolution changed their lives?

BLACK REVOLUTIONARIES: WHAT HISTORIANS SAY

According to the historian Judith L. Van Buskirk in *Standing in Their Own Light: African Americans Patriots in the American Revolution* (2017), the Leason brothers were not the only Black men to take up arms during the Revolution. She writes that about 5,000 African Americans fought on the Patriot side in the American Revolution, and other historians put the number of people of color (Blacks, indigenous peoples, and men of mixed race) in the Patriot forces even higher, at 6,000-7,200. According to the historian David O. White in *Connecticut's Black Soldiers, 1775-1783* (1973), more than 100 Connecticut soldiers of color served on the Patriot side during the Revolution.

As the historian Joyce Lee Malcolm points out in *Peter's War: A New England Slave Boy and the American Revolution* (2010), some of these soldiers were free people of color, but others were enslaved. To meet the steep quotas for soldiers imposed by Congress, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island permitted enslaved men and boys to join the Continental Line, and if they stayed for the duration, they would be freed at the end of the war—provided, of course, that the Patriot side won. Connecticut also allowed some men to avoid military duty if they could get someone else—sometimes a man they had enslaved—to take their place, sometimes with the promise of freedom. (Washington initially opposed allowing enslaved men to join the Continental Army, but as troops grew increasingly scarce, he and Congress relented and accepted the reality of Black soldiers from the North.) Malcolm also points out that, during the war, the British offered freedom to men and women enslaved by Patriots (although not by Loyalists) who escaped to the British lines and agreed to work for a British victory. Malcolm juxtaposes the experience of Peter, an enslaved teen from Massachusetts who joined the Patriot forces, with Titus, an enslaved man from New Jersey who fought with a Loyalist Ranger unit on the British side.

According to Van Buskirk, White, and Malcolm, soldiers of color fought on the Patriot side for a variety of reasons. Enslaved men like Peter hoped to gain their freedom. Free men of color sought to prove their merit—to demonstrate to their white neighbors that they were worthy of equal treatment in the new nation. Sally, Van Buskirk writes, equality was not forthcoming, even after the war. But while the burdens shouldered by Black soldiers failed to convince most white Americans that Blacks and whites should be treated equally, she nevertheless believes that the contributions made by soldiers of color had a major impact on the Black community itself. In the aftermath of the Revolution, she writes, free Black Americans experienced increased segregation, increased violence, and the degradation of their civil rights. "But," she writes, "not one of these developments went unchallenged by the African American community. They claimed that this was their land and that their forefathers had spilled their blood in its defense. The abolition movement used not only the rhetoric of the American Revolution but also the example of their fathers and grandfathers who had fought to create the Republic. Black veterans had explained to their children and grandchildren how they had brought down British generals. They exhibited badges of merit and showed their war wounds to their kin. On the staff side, Black women related how difficult it had been to marry their soldier sweethearts and then keep the home front going during the eight years of war."

FROM THE REVOLUTIONARY WAR DIARY OF CAPT. PAUL BRIGHAM

The white commanding officer of the Leason brothers' company kept a diary. Only a portion of the diary survives, which has been reprinted as "A Revolutionary Diary of Captain Paul Brigham, November 19, 1777–September 4, 1778," edited by Edward A. Hoyt and published in the January 1966 issue of *Vermont History*. Capt. Brigham was from Coventry, CT, but moved to Vermont after the Revolution. His diary does not mention the brothers, but it does make it clear that the entire Company—including Jesse and Job—suffered from cold weather, storms, and insufficient supplies and provisions. On Oct. 28, 1777, Brigham wrote in his diary, "On ye 28th marched to Burlington [Burlington, VT] and Crossed ye River [Dedham River] to Bristol [Pownessboro] about Dusk had orders and marched to [—] where I Turtied with my

Guard our Troops were in ye woods without any Tents and it was a Stormy night with hail and Rain Exceeding Bad for ye Poor men." The next day, he added, "on ye 29th a Stormy Day I Lay Still all Day with my Guard our Brigade marched before Break of Day in ye midst of ye Storm I heard this Evening that the Enemy had Got within 3 miles of Burlington and our Baggage had not Got over." On Nov. 11, Brigham noted, "on ye 10th Clear and Cold made me a new hat and Did not Enjoy it all night for we had orders to be Ready to march at 4 o'clock in ye morning this Day I had Reliance that Jeplura Titus was Dead and had ben Some Days." On Nov. 20, he added, "on ye 20th went into Camp it was Cold and Clear Provisions Very Poor and Scarce not Enough [—] to Support the men [—]."

At left: Job Leason demands his soldier's pay. Continental soldiers frequently went unpaid for long stretches. This was especially true for Black soldiers. Job went to his regimental commander, Lt. Col. Isaac Sherman (the son of Connecticut Congressman Roger Sherman) for help in getting his back pay. Sherman wrote an order to the paymaster instructing that Job receive his pay.



Left: A page from the 1800 manuscript United States Census, showing Job Leason as a free Black man living in Windham, CT. The first ten columns recorded white males and females of various ages; the eleventh column was for free Blacks, and the twelfth was for slaves. Had Job always been free, or did he earn his freedom as a soldier in the American Revolution? Did he live in Windham before the Revolution, or had he perhaps lived in Norwich, the home of his first wife, Zilpha? What happened to Zilpha, and when had Job married Rosanna? What happened to Rosanna after Job died? There are more questions than answers.



RECONSTRUCTING LIVES



ABOLISHING SLAVERY, RECONSTRUCTING LIVES

Historians use the term Reconstruction to refer to the years immediately following the Civil War (1861-1865), when the 13th Amendment permanently abolished slavery and the South was forced to reconstruct its economy, society, and culture. Connecticut had its own "Reconstruction," when it underwent its Industrial and Market Revolutions following the American Revolution. Like the South, Connecticut, too, abolished slavery. Connecticut's Reconstruction was earlier, more gradual, and only tangentially related to abolition, but its impact on the lives of Afro-Connecticans was profound. The benefits were mixed. As with the South, Reconstruction meant new freedoms, but sadly not for everyone, and it brought neither equality nor economic opportunity for the state's Black population.

ENSLAVED & FREE BLACK PEOPLE IN WINDHAM, CT		
Head of Household (white or Black)	# Enslaved	# Free Blacks
	U.S. Census, 1790	
Eliphalet Dyer (W)	8	1
Benjamin Brewster (W)	1	0
Samuel Gray (W)	2	0
Shubael Abbe (W)	2	0
Daniel Perkins (W)	1	0
Josiah Manning (W)	1	0
Timothy Larrabee (W)	5	0
Stephen White (W)	2	0
Eliphalet Murdoch (W)	1	0
John Peritt (W)	0	2
Zeph. Tracy (W)	0	1
James Cogshall (W)	1	0
David Durance (W)	1	0
John Keyes (W)	1	0
Gamaliel Ripley (W)	1	0
Ebenezer Lathrop (W)	0	1
James Grey (W)	0	1
Anber Robinson (W)	0	1
[A]—[J] Walker (W)	0	2
John Linkin (W)	0	1
[—]—[J] Spafford (W)	0	4
Roger Carey (W)	0	2
Zeph. Jennings (B)	0	5
Primus Mingo (B)	0	4
Sampson Abbe (B)	0	2
Andrew Jackson (B)	0	2
Prince White (B)	0	5
Edward Jenson (B)	0	8
Saml. Phillips (B)	0	2
John Laynes (B)	0	6
Ezra Rathbone (B)	0	6
John Phillips (B)	0	4
Cull Perkins (B)	0	6
Peter Hich (B)	0	2
TOTAL 1790	28	63
	U.S. Census, 1800	
TOTAL 1800	14	78
	U.S. Census, 1810	
TOTAL 1810	11	73
	U.S. Census, 1820	
TOTAL 1820	4	83
	U.S. Census, 1850	
TOTAL 1850	0	77

In 1830, there were 77 African Americans living in Windham, slightly fewer than at the beginning of the century. The 1850 Census was the first that recorded everyone by name. It also recorded information about employment, birthplace, and literacy. Of Windham's Black population in 1850, 34 were male, 48 were female, 18 were adult male, 20 were adult female, 39 were children, 16 were male children, 23 were female children, 22 were married (11 of each), 13 were heads of households (12 male and 1 female), 4 were elderly (2 of each), 16 were laborers (all male), 4 were probably domestic servants (all female), 1 was a waiter (male), 1 was a barber (female), and 1 was a cook (male). Although Windham was a cotton mill town, none worked in the cotton mills — not in any other manufactory. Industrialization was a key part of the Reconstruction of the Connecticut economy after the American Revolution, but — in Windham — it did not create jobs for African Americans.

CONNECTICUT'S GRADUAL ABOLITION

As the Revolutionary War ended, the Connecticut General Assembly amended the state's statutes governing slavery to provide for the gradual abolition of slavery. The amendment declared that all persons born to enslaved mothers in Connecticut after March 1, 1784, would become free on their 25th birthdays. The amendment emancipated no one currently a slave, but did provide the promise of freedom for future enslaved people born after that date. People currently enslaved would remain enslaved for the rest of their lives. Slave owners could continue to buy, sell, and otherwise transfer slaves. Indeed, nothing in the statute prevented slaveowners who owned slaves who would become free on their 25th birthdays from selling them out of state before they reached that age. The goal of the statute was abolition, not emancipation. In fact, when a few years later an actual emancipation bill was brought before the General Assembly, it was voted down. The amendment read as follows:

[N]o Negro or Molatto Child, that shall, after the first Day of March, One thousand seven hundred and eighty-four, be born within this State, shall be held in Servitude, longer than until they arrive to the Age of twenty-five Years, notwithstanding the Mother or Parent of such Child was held in Servitude at the Time of its Birth; but such Child, at the Age aforesaid, shall be free; any Law, Usage or Custom to the contrary notwithstanding. [An Act Concerning Indian, Molatto, and Negro Servants and Slaves (1784), in 1784 *Acts and Laws of Connecticut*, quoted in David Menschel, "Abolition Without Deliverance: The Law of Connecticut Slavery 1784-1848," *The Yale Law Journal* (2001), 111; 188.]

The 1784 law came on top of an earlier amendment, passed in 1774, the year before the Revolutionary War began, that banned the importation of persons into Connecticut for the purpose of enslaving them:

And whereas the increase of Slaves in this State is injurious to the Poor, and inconvenient:

*Be it further enacted by the Authority aforesaid, That any Person or Persons who shall hereafter, contrary to the true Intent of this Act, import or bring any Indian, Negro, or Molatto Slave or Slaves into this State, to be disposed of or sold within the same, or who knowing such Slave or Slaves to be imported and brought into this State, shall receive and purchase them, or any of them, shall forfeit and pay to the Treasurer of this State, the Sum of One hundred Pound lawful money, for every Slave so imported, brought into this State, received or purchased, to be recovered by Bill, Plaint, or Information, in any Court of Record proper to try the same. [An Act for Prohibiting the Importation of Indian, Negro or Molatto Slaves (1774), in *Acts and Laws of the State of Connecticut, in America*, 1784.]*

It is important to note that the 1774 law was not enacted out of humanitarian impulses. Rather, the General Assembly made it clear that the reason for abolishing the importation of slaves was to prevent slave labor from taking jobs away from poor whites.

In 1784, in the Greer case, Connecticut Courts held that once slaves had been manumitted (freed) by their owners, they could not be re-enslaved.

In 1787, the Connecticut courts closed a loophole in the 1774 statute by outlawing the old practice of capture, whereby persons (mostly indigenous people) born free in North America could be captured and enslaved. In the case of Timothy Caesar, who "lived as a slave and servant" to Joseph Hovey of Mansfield, CT, Caesar was declared free because he had been "born of a free woman."

In 1788, the General Assembly passed An Act to Prevent the Slave Trade, which prohibited kidnapping free people in Connecticut and selling them into slavery.

In 1797, the General Assembly repealed Connecticut's longstanding Slave Code, a law that severely restricted what enslaved persons could and could not do. Hereafter, it would be up to slave owners to regulate and control the behavior of their slaves, not the state. One of the provisions in the old Slave Code had been:

That if any Negro, Molatto or Indian Servant or Slave, shall be found abroad from Home in the Night-season, after nine of the Clock, without special Order from his or their Master, or Masters, it shall be lawful for any Person or Persons, to apprehend and secure such Negro, Molatto, or Indian Servant or Slave, so offending, and him, her, or them, bring before the next Assistant or Justice of the Peace; which Authority shall have full Power to pass Sentence upon such Servant or Slave, and order him, her, or them, to be publicly whipped on the naked Body, not exceeding ten Stripes, and to pay Cost of Court; except his or their Master or Masters shall redeem them, by paying a Fine not exceeding ten Shillings. [Acts and Laws of the State of Connecticut, in America, 1784.]

In 1828, in the case of the Town of Columbia vs. Williams, the Courts held that, if an enslaved person's owner died, and the heirs did not assert a claim to ownership, the enslaved person was considered free. (Unfortunately, in this case the heirs did assert ownership, although belatedly, and Adam was re-enslaved. The crux of this case, like several others involving manumission and slavery, was whether or not the Town of Columbia could re-enslave Adam in order to avoid its responsibility to provide assistance to the poor.)

In 1839, the Connecticut Courts held that slave owners had a common law right to manumit (free) their slaves and that neither the State nor other parties could prevent them from doing so. (This decision upheld what had long been the practice in Connecticut.)

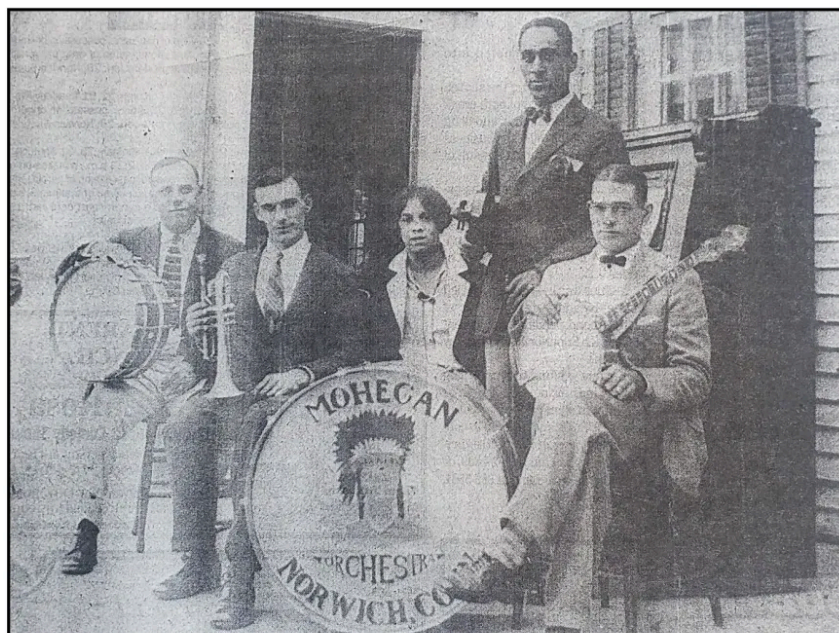
In 1848, the General Assembly declared slavery in Connecticut abolished.

To read an article about the Jackson family, click anywhere on the image above.



A DESCENDANT OF THE JACKSONS

While working on this exhibit, we met Carol Harris, a descendant of the Jackson family and a relative of Lyman Jackson. Carol's great-great-grandmother was Eliza Jane Jackson, an African American woman who in 1854 married George W. Peckham, a farmer in nearby Lebanon, CT, and a member of the Narragansett nation. Eliza Jane was the daughter of Timothy Jackson, a Lebanon farmer who has been described as either African American, Narragansett, or both. Timothy's gravestone in the Lebanon Center Cemetery says that he was born in 1804 in North Stonington, CT, but also may have been born in Charleston, RI. Timothy died in 1886. Growing up, Carol was told by family members that she was related to Lyman Jackson. She learned where the Jackson house in Willimantic was located, and was told that Lyman actually owned the house, but was swindled out of it by Deacon Samuel Hill. As a Black man in antebellum Connecticut, Lyman had few rights and little legal recourse to protect his title. Carol also recalled that, years ago, she had met Gloria Ann Reeves of Norwich, CT, an African American woman (who has since passed away) who was a direct descendant of Lyman Jackson through his son, Simeon, who as an adult had left Willimantic and moved to Norwich. Reeves had grown up hearing the same story as Carol about the Jackson house in Willimantic. As Lyman Jackson's marriage records say that he was from Stonington, and his gravestone indicates that he was born c. 1796, a reasonable conclusion is that Lyman and Timothy Jackson were brothers.



Mohegan Orchestra, 1930s. Anna Jackson (seated), pianist. Joe Jackson (standing), violinist. Reprinted Jan. 18, 2004, *Norwich Bulletin*. Anna Jackson is believed to be the granddaughter of Simeon Jackson and great-granddaughter of Lyman and Clarissa Jackson.

To read articles about the Methodist Melee on Main Street and Windham/Willimantic/Mansfield abolitionists,
click on the image above.

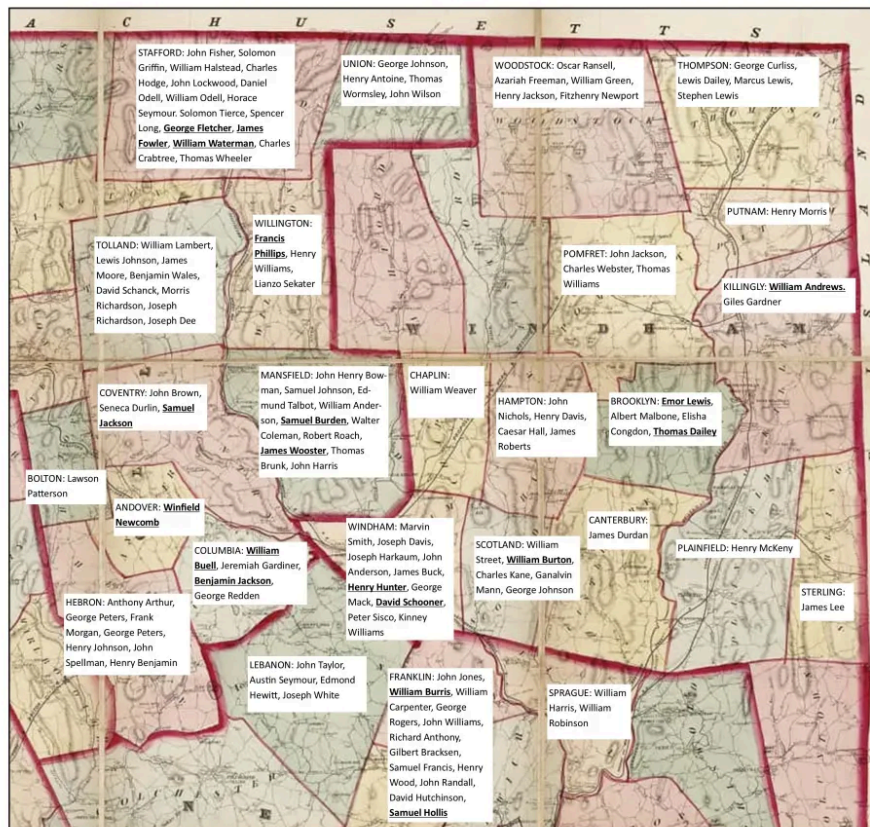


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FIGHTING FOR FREEDOM — AGAIN



Like the American Revolution, the Civil War was a struggle for freedom. During the Revolution, Black Connecticutans like Jesse and Job Leason fought for their own freedom. In the Civil War, African Americans from Connecticut and other Northern States — men like Caesar Hall, Marvin Smith, James Back, and John Harris — fought for the freedom of their Black brothers and sisters living in slave states, as well as for equality for Black Connecticutans. During the Revolution, the Patriot side had built a winning coalition around the phrase, “all men are created equal.” In 1863 at Gettysburg, President Lincoln told his audience that, “four score and seven years” later, that ideal still meant something, that the American promise of “a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” still needed to be fulfilled, so that “government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from this earth.” After the Revolution, Congress had prohibited African American men from serving in the United States armed forces. During the Civil War, however, Lincoln lifted that prohibition, and thousands of Black men volunteered to fight in segregated “Colored” regiments with white officers. “Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letters, U.S.,” Frederick Douglass said, “let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, there is no power on earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship.” At first, Connecticut Governor William Buckingham resisted enlisting Black volunteers, fearful that it would anger white soldiers, but later that year he relented. Black Connecticutans began to enlist in late 1863. As elsewhere, they were required to join segregated, all-Black regiments with white officers. Connecticut formed first the 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry (Colored) and then the 30th CVI (Colored). The 30th did not quite fill up, so it was combined with some “Colored” companies from other states to form the 31st United States Volunteer Infantry (Colored), but more than half of the men in the 31st were from Connecticut. Altogether, 178,975 Black men served as soldiers in the Union Army, and another 20,000 served in the Navy. All told, the various “Colored” regiments suffered 2,751 combat deaths and around 36,000 deaths from disease. Sixteen Black soldiers were awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor. According to the historian Herbert Aptheker, African American soldiers were more than 35% more likely to die from disease than white soldiers, because they routinely received poorer medical care. Although African Americans made up less than 5% of the population of the North and were only permitted to serve during the last year of the War, they comprised around 10% of all Union troops, meaning that Black men joined the Union Army in greater numbers relative to their population than white men. The map below shows the names of the Black men from each town in northeastern Connecticut that served in the 29th CVI (Colored) and 31st USVI (Colored). (Soldiers’ home towns were included on their enlistment papers.) Please say their names. The names in underlined bold died in service, either killed in action, died from wounds, died from disease, or missing in action and presumed killed. Total casualties for soldiers in the 29th and 31st were: KIA (42), died from accidents (7), fatal wounds (24), wounded in action (179), died in accidents (6), POWs (8), died as POWs (2), died of disease (229), discharged because disabled (154), MIA presumed killed (14), unaccounted for (1).



To read an article about Caesar Hall, click anywhere on the image above.



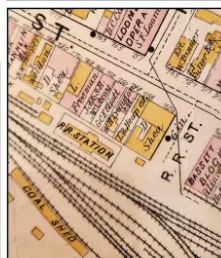
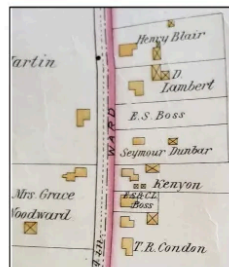
MOVING AWAY & HANGING ON



In the second half of the 19th century, the African American population in northeastern Connecticut began to decline. African Americans moved away from both the rural farm towns and the growing textile mill cities. Part of the explanation was economics – agriculture in Connecticut was in decline, and rural communities in general were losing population. But another part of the explanation was racism. The new factories declined to hire non-white workers, so none of the new jobs went to people of color. Even domestic service, which had formerly employed Blacks, was becoming increasingly the preserve of immigrants from Europe. In the town of Windham in particular, the African American population dwindled as the 19th century waned. Yet, while many of northeastern Connecticut's African Americans left for new homes in Norwich, Hartford, and especially New Haven, others remained, hanging on by filling the few jobs open to Black people: laundress, day laborer, housecleaner, cook, hostler. After 1910, when the Great Migration of Southern African Americans and West Indians to Northern cities began, the new arrivals found Black Connecticutans still here – as they had been here all along.

County	1880	1880 %	1890	1890 %	1900	1900 %	2020	2020 %
Fairfield	2,182	0.189	2,303	0.194	3,227	0.212	106,736	0.275
New Haven	3,513	0.304	4,085	0.317	5,085	0.334	118,903	0.306
Hartford	2,232	0.193	2,276	0.176	3,191	0.210	127,194	0.327
Litchfield	1,026	0.089	807	0.063	967	0.064	3,348	0.009
Middlesex	371	0.032	418	0.032	452	0.030	8,565	0.022
New London	1,480	0.115	1,473	0.114	1,609	0.110	16,026	0.041
Tolland	195	0.017	191	0.015	91	0.006	5,430	0.014
Windham	548	0.047	509	0.039	544	0.036	2,403	0.006
TOTAL	11,547	1.000	12,902	1.000	15,226	1.000	388,675	1.000

Year	African American Population	Percent
1756	3,587	.028
1774	6,464	.033
1790	5,419	.023
1810	6,763	.026
1820	7,967	.029
1830	8,072	.027
1840	8,139	.026
1850	8k	.025
1860	9k	.020
1870	10k	.019
1880	12k	.019
1890	13k	.016
1900	15k	.017
1910	15k	.013
1920	21k	.015
1930	29k	.018
1940	33k	.019
1950	35k	.026
1960	107k	.042
1970	181k	.060



THE HARRIS FAMILY

On an earlier display panel, we introduced you to John C. Harris, an African American Civil War soldier from Massachusetts, a member of the celebrated 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry (Colored), the subject of the movie *Glory*. Harris was born in New York City in c.1843, a son of George and Mary Harris. As a teenager, he moved to Sheffield, a farm town in western Massachusetts, where he worked as an agricultural laborer for Frederick Cooper, a white farmer. Also part of the Cooper household was Emma Freeman, a Black woman a year older than John who worked as a domestic servant. Emma had come from western Connecticut, born in 1844 in the Talcottville section of Torrington, not far from Sheffield. The Freemans were a large family. Besides Emma's parents Charles and Lucy, there were siblings Sarah, Lewis, Louisa, Charles, John, and Jane. Nearly was the home of Henry and Julia Freeman and their children. Another Black family, the Jenkinsons, also lived nearby. John and Emma became a couple, and in 1862 Emma gave birth to a daughter, Flora. In 1863, John went to war. He returned to Sheffield in 1865, and shortly after, he and Emma married. John's enlistment papers described him as 5' 6" with black eyes and black hair. John continued to work as a farm laborer, although by 1870 he had acquired a small farm of his own, valued at \$150. Also, by 1874 it seems that he no longer owned the farm and was once again a landless agricultural laborer. Besides Flora, the Harrises had children Eddie (who died in 1872), Gertrude, Frances, Anna (Anne Bella), William (Willie), Albert, Charles, Philip Stanley, Fred, and Olive, all born in Sheffield. For awhile, Sarah Freeman and her infant daughter Fanny Freeman lived with the Harrises, probably kind of Emma's.

In c. 1891 the Harrises (except for Flora, who by this time had married) left Sheffield and moved to Willimantic, CT. With agriculture declining throughout New England, and unable to own a farm of their own, there were good reasons for leaving rural Sheffield and moving to a city. The 1891 Willimantic street directory records the family living at 509 Jackson Street, on the northern edge of the city. John worked as a laborer, employed by T. R. Condon. More children were born: Harry in 1894, Bertha in 1895, Roland Stanley in 1897, and Grace in 1898 – a large family. The 1896 street directory shows John and Emma living at 521 Jackson Street, not far from 509, where they had lived in 1891. Son Charles lived with them and worked as a laborer. Willie also lived with his parents and worked as a driver, or teamster. The 1900 Census recorded John and Emma still residing at 521 Jackson Street, a small house that they rented. John still worked as a day laborer. Charles, still living with his parents, was listed as a farmer. Philip was a hostler. Fred was a farmer. They were not alone – their neighborhood had become a small African American enclave of four Black families living on the northern edge of the city. Along with the Harrises at 521 Jackson Street were the Robinsons at 509, the Hills at 501, and the Skoones at 513. Most of the men worked as day laborers. All rented their homes. By 1906, though, the Harrises had moved closer to downtown, renting homes on Rimes Court, Meadow Street, Turner Street, and Temple Street. John Harris died in 1906 and was buried in the Old Willimantic Cemetery, in what would become a family plot. There are still Harrises living in Willimantic today.

JULIA HALL

Cpt. Caesar Hall, the African American Civil War soldier whose service is described on another display board in this exhibit, was discharged in 1865 and came home to Hampton, CT. His wife Julia and children were waiting for him. Caesar had married Julia, who was also African American, shortly after 1850. The 1860 United States Census recorded them living in their own household in rural Hampton, where Caesar worked as a farm laborer. Julia was 32, a year older than her husband. Like Caesar, she could read and write. They had three children in 1860: Nancy N., 9, William P. 3, and Susan E., 1. Nancy attended school. The 1870 Census, taken after the Civil War, saw life for Caesar and Julia apparently returned to normal. Julia was "keeping house," which means that she undertook the myriad tough chores associated with being a farm wife. The Census listed Caesar as a "farmer," not a farm laborer, which may mean that he rented a farm, either for cash or shares. He did not own land. Nancy was 19, finished with school, and – although still living at home – worked somewhere as a household servant. William (13), Susie (11), and Mary (9) were in school, and would have helped with farm chores. The Halls made sure that all of their children got an education.

But something was wrong. Within five years of the Census – less than ten years after Caesar returned from the Second War for Freedom – he and Julia separated and left Hampton. They moved to Willimantic, a nearby cotton mill city. Julia was listed in the 1875 Willimantic City Directory as the head of a new household – although as "Mrs. Cesar Hall" – a household that did not include Caesar. Julia listed her occupation as "landless," a task that she would have performed as a farm wife. She lived with her children in the rear of a commercial block – the so-called Heap Block – that fronted on Main Street, entering and exiting through a back door that faced the railroad tracks. Her income could not have been much.

The 1880 Census revealed that Caesar had moved to Willimantic, too, but that he lived at a different address, in the household of Nancy Hendley, a white woman who took in boarders. His occupation was recorded as a laborer, but as he now lived in a city, it was unlikely that he was doing his former farm work. The children lived with their mother, who was still working as a landless, residing in the same back-door tenement by the railroad tracks. By now, Nancy had grown up and moved away. William, 24, worked as a cook. Susan, 22, and Mary, 19, were employed as domestic servants. By 1892, according to that year's street directory, Caesar and Julia (although not the children, who by now had all moved away) still resided in Willimantic, still at separate addresses. Caesar as a boarder at 74 Elm Street and Julia as a tenant at 68 Jackson Street. It was during these years that Caesar joined the local branch of the Grand Army of the Republic, a nationwide organization of Union Army veterans. Clearly, his years of service remained important to him. He died on March 15, 1896, at the age of 68, and was buried in the Old Willimantic Cemetery beneath an official United States military headstone, proudly proclaiming his one-time rank of corporal.

What had happened? Had Caesar and Julia's marriage always been rocky, and simply came to an end sometime after 1870? Or had his wartime experiences changed Caesar in ways that affected his marriage. Had he tried renting a farm when he got back from the War, only to fail financially, and lost his marriage in the bargain? What eventually became of Julia? She is not buried in Willimantic; Caesar is all alone on his plot. Did she eventually move in with one of her children? Where did the children go?

And one more mystery: Who arranged for Caesar's burial? Was it the Willimantic G.A.R.? The veteran's headstone was free, but someone would have had to arrange for it. Who had made sure that it said "corporal"? Had Caesar ordered it himself as he approached death? Or was it Julia that arranged for the stone and burial, carrying out one last wifely duty?

Illustrations, clockwise from upper right:

After she moved from Hampton to Willimantic in the 1870s, Julia Hall and her children lived in the rear of the Heap Block. This is the building as it looks today, photographed from the back. The brick structure with the tailor shop sign was not there in the 19th century, but a previous wooden structure was. Unlike most of Willimantic's Main Street commercial buildings, the Heap Block was made of wood. Today, it houses a vape shop.

Julia Hall would have reached the rear of the Heap Block via this alley, still there today.

Detail from a 1897 map of Willimantic, showing the Heap Block, Union Railroad Station, and the rail yards. The Heap Block fronted on Main Street.

Detail from a 1897 map of Willimantic showing the small African American neighborhood on the northern edge of the city, on Jackson Street – four of the houses in the image. The names on the map are property owners (landlords). Condon was John Harris's employer in 1891.

NO JOBS

The abolition of slavery in Connecticut coincided with the Industrial and Market Revolutions, all three of which occurred between the American Revolution and the Civil War. As a result, freedmen and freedwomen found themselves not only coping with new legal and social roles, but also with new economic realities. Most of the work done by enslaved people had been as agricultural laborers and domestic servants. African Americans in Connecticut were skilled at planting, tending, and harvesting crops; caring for farm animals; making textiles on preindustrial spinning wheels; and doing household chores. Some were skilled at carpentry, cabinet making, basketry, coopering, blacksmithing, and other crafts. Not surprisingly, then, as African Americans gained freedom, they most often took jobs as farm laborers, wood sawyers, quarrymen, laundresses, teamsters, and domestic servants. But by the middle of the 1800s, those jobs were becoming unavailable. Agricultural decline in the late 19th century reduced the number of farm jobs. Increasingly, domestic service jobs went to white immigrants as opposed to native-born Blacks. Industrialization transformed textile-making from a handicraft into factory work, and Connecticut's factories hired white labor only. The Mill Museum has scores of photographs in its collection of textile mill workers, every one of whom was white. Not one African American resident of Willimantic that we can identify was employed in the city's busy cotton and silk mills. Dale Plummer, the City Historian of Norwich, CT, confirms that the textile factories in that city, too, hired whites only. Charles Johnson, a pioneering African American sociologist who studied employment in the Hartford area, found similar prejudice in manufacturing there in the 1920s.



AMERICAN THREAD COMPANY WORKERS 1948-1957



In the 1940s and 1950s, the American Thread Company hired professional photographers to take hundreds of photos of its Willimantic, CT, thread mill complex. Dozens of the photos showed workers engaged in the various stages of making and packaging cotton thread. These are a representative sample.

Who is missing?



PLEASE SHARE YOUR STORIES!

The Mill Museum is a community museum that tells stories relating to the history of eastern Connecticut. Do you have stories that you believe would make this exhibit more inclusive? Please share them with us! We can write them up and include them in the exhibit.



USING "HERE ALL ALONG" IN THE CLASSROOM:

Integrating Local History into the Connecticut Social Studies Curriculum

Connecticut Humanities has established Teach It, a website with lesson plans for Connecticut Social Studies teachers. Below is a list of Teach It lesson plans that were inspired by/used content from the Mill Museum's *Here All Along* project, and which meant Connecticut social studies curriculum standards.

Telling Their Stories: African Americans in the American Revolution - <https://teachitct.org/lessons/telling-their-stories-african-americans-in-the-american-revolution/>

The Struggle for Equality: Black Burials in the Old Willimantic Cemetery - <https://teachitct.org/lessons/the-struggle-for-equality-black-burials-in-the-old-willimantic-cemetery/>

Anti-Racist Allies and Accomplices in Connecticut History - <https://teachitct.org/lessons/anti-racist-allies-and-accomplices-in-connecticut-history/>

The Role of Enslaved People in Founding Connecticut – <https://teachitct.org/lessons/the-role-of-enslaved-people-in-founding-connecticut/>

Connecticut's Complicity in Slavery – <https://teachitct.org/lessons/connecticuts-complicity-in-slavery/>

Understanding the Census: Tracking Connecticut's Black Population –
<https://teachitct.org/lessons/understanding-the-census-tracking-connecticuts-black-population/>

CThumanities



HERE IT IS: A VIRTUAL ART EXHIBIT FEATURING THE WORK OF MICHELE “JUSTICE” THOMAS

Curated by Joanne Sailor, 2023

Interwoven throughout the “Here All Along” exhibit was a second exhibit, called “Here It Is,” featuring the artwork of Justice — Michele Thomas, an African American artist from Hartford, CT, and a professor at the Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, NY. History and art thus came together in one exhibit room, side-by-side, telling similar stories. Justice’s multimedia artwork reflected on the African American experience in the United States. A sampling is below.

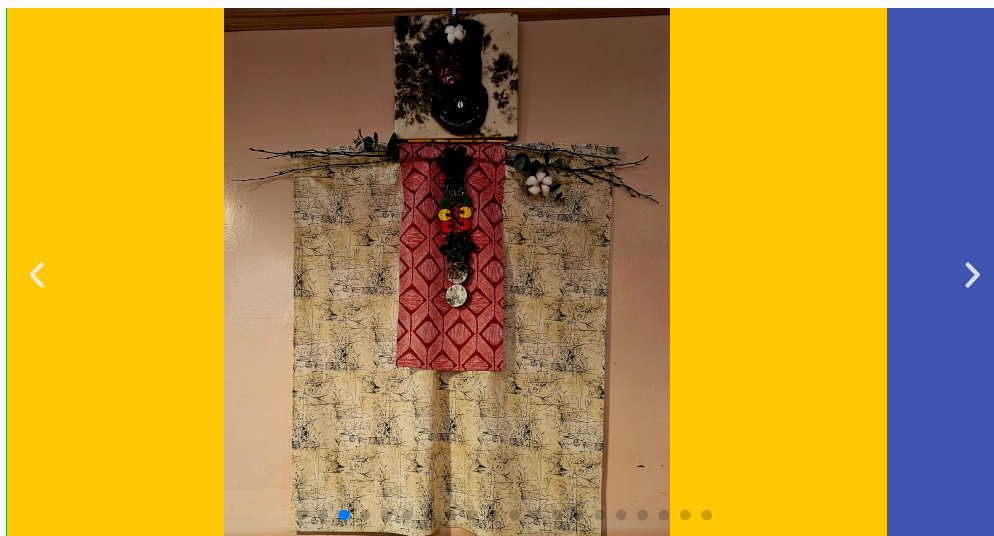
Artist’s biography: Justice – Michelle Thomas is a Hartford, Connecticut native, currently residing in Brooklyn, NY. She is married and a mother of boy-girl twins. She served in the Connecticut Air National Guard, retiring in 2010 with 21 years of faithful service. Justice attended Manchester Community College, where she received two associate degrees with High Honors for Fine Arts and General Studies. Justice then went on to graduate from Central Connecticut State University with a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science in Art Education. She pursued her second Master of Fine Arts degree at Pratt Institute in 2022. She worked as an art consultant and Resident Artist at the Montessori School of Greater Hartford (MSGH) facilitating art workshops for the teaching staff and demonstrated various art concepts to all age levels throughout the school. Justice also volunteered her services on Hartford Public Access Television where she co-produced, hosted and video edited a TV program called Artistic Expressions; a show dedicated to advancing and advocating for the Arts. Justice is currently a Professor at Pratt Institute. She also currently works as a Master Artist Assistant with the internationally world renown artist Kara Walker.

Artist’s Statement: While my concentration is painting, I am a multi-media artist. I osculate between tight rendering and loose brushwork while adding material elements such as metal, clay, burlap, tar and gauze. I tap into an exciting energy surge as creation manifests and emerges on the surface. No matter the subject, my goal is to illuminate the essence of layered conceptual complexities in one visual experience. For me, art production is a cycle of challenges and solutions making way for personal expression.

THE BLACK BODY

My work is about the identity of the Black body. How that body has been manipulated, codified, dehumanized, reconstructed, glorified, and adorned. Material and message are key. I use various collage elements to give meaning to the narrative. Whether working figuratively or in abstraction, the goal is to reclaim a positive identity while exposing negative truths. My evolution revolves around critically considering the relationship between the materials, their connotation, and the connection to the message. Movement from the canvas into the community is equally important in connecting, healing, and relaying positive messages through actions of love.

This current body of work represents my personal journey of looking back upon my life, retracing historical events and personal experiences to glean knowledge of self. No matter how painful looking at our collective past is, there exists an extreme benefit to learning from one’s mistakes and misfortunes in order to change the course of the future. The human story may at times be wrought with injustice, discontent and outright hatred yet our resilient spirit rises above and overcomes all obstacles. My mission is to encourage healing in this hurting world. As we journey back, we can reunite with spirit, taking us to the very source of existence where all knowledge and wisdom reside, manifesting the necessary energy to change the world and ourselves. Meditation is a key component to centering spirit.



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HERE ALL ALONG: AFRICAN AMERICANS IN THE WINDHAM, CT AREA, 1688-1910

A Slide Show by Jamie H. Eves, Windham Town Historian

A version of this slide show was presented in 2022 via Zoom by the Mill Museum as part of its Museum Lyceum lecture series. It was re-presented (also via Zoom) in its present form in 2023 at a meeting of the Windham-Willimantic chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. An abridged version was presented later in 2023, in person, at the Pomfret, CT, Historical Society.

For the 2023 PowerPoint version, click here: [Here All Along](#)

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RESOURCES FOR LOCAL AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY: THE CASE OF WINDHAM, CT

A Slide Show by Jamie H. Eves, Windham Town Historian

This slide show was presented in 2022 via Zoom at the Fall Conference of the Association for the Study of Connecticut History.

For the PowerPoint version, click here: [Resources for Local African American History](#)