

**Uncommon Sufferings
and
Surprising Deliverances:**

**The Black Community of Scituate-Norwell
1633 to 1800**

Draft Report

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PREFACE

Time

This report is limited to the colonial period from the landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth in 1620 to the early days of establishment of the newly formed United States in 1800. In some instances, the material mentions people who lived after 1800 but only if they had some connection with those who lived during the 1620 to 1800 time period.

Geography

Although the focus of this report was Scituate-Norwell, residents of the two towns did not limit their activities or relationships within the town borders. For that reason, in many instances, the data extends to surrounding towns. In one instance, the story of a black man from Marshfield is included although there are no apparent ties with Scituate-Norwell. The material on this man, Briton Hammon, is included because of its historic importance and Marshfield's proximity to Scituate-Norwell.

Language

As much as was possible exact data entries were copied in compiling the research records for this project. The words used to describe black people and Native Americans are not those in use today and may be offensive to contemporary readers. No insult is intended by the inclusion of those terms, rather they are used to reliably document the sources used in compiling the stories.

The words also convey a history of its own kind, that of the evolution and changing attitudes toward race that have occurred in the more than 300 years that have elapsed since the date that the first black person moved to Scituate-Norwell.

In the narrative portion of the report, I have tried to consistently use terms that are familiar and more acceptable today. Where ancient terms have been retained in the text, they are included in quotations along with the exact spelling and punctuation found in the original documents. In the colonial era, spelling was inconsistent, with different scribes and clerks writing the same name according to their own phonetic interpretation. All spellings have been used as they were found in the record where possible and relevant. It wasn't until sometime after 1870 when the Elementary Education Act was passed and uniform spelling began to be used. (SSS 484)

INTRODUCTION

In 1620 when the Pilgrims landed in Plymouth, Scituate-Norwell was a wild and undeveloped land of woods, marsh and beaches crisscrossed by Indian pathways. To keep wolves from digging up the bodies of the dead, the settlers piled rocks on the graves. The only cleared land, at The Glades, near the marsh at Route 3A, and at Third Cliff, was used by Native Americans as planting grounds. The first English colonists arrived in 1628 from Plymouth and settled in and around the harbor. Halfway between Plymouth and Boston, the town eventually drew residents from both ports of immigration.

The town was formally incorporated in 1633, one of the earliest in the Plymouth Colony. The boundaries were altered a number of times during the early years and in 1848, the south section of town became the independent community of South Scituate. In 1888, the name of South Scituate was changed to Norwell.

SECOND PARISH-SCITUATE; FIRST PARISH-NORWELL.

Religious conflict marked Scituate from its earliest days. In 1642, a second church was founded by a break-away group of members of the First Parish in Scituate. The rebel group disliked the baptism by immersion that the minister of the First Parish practiced in the chilling waters of the North River. This move established the Second Parish's reputation as the more liberal congregation, a perception that persisted into the 19th century.¹

During the mid and late 1800's the church harbored many abolitionists and in 1842 hired a minister, Samuel Joseph May, an uncle of Louisa May Alcott, who was a prominent figure in abolitionist circles. May was also an ardent temperance advocate who formed a cold water army in the town.

“The small village with the six years ministry of Rev. May continued to be the intellectual center of Plymouth Colony.”²

May had helped William Lloyd Garrison and John Greenleaf Whittier draft a “Statement of Sentiments” for the American Anti-slavery Society which was formed in Philadelphia in 1833, five years before he was hired as the church's minister.³ He continued to preach his abolitionist views in South Scituate.

“In those days there were seats way up in the back of the gallery where the colored people sat. They were not allowed to sit down in the body of the meeting house. This custom May criticized in no uncertain terms and it was finally abandoned.”⁴

Despite the reputed liberality of the congregation, it is reported that May was asked to leave his post after six years because of his views on slavery. Nine

years after he left the church, on Nov. 1, 1751, church members voted to remove the “Negroes Seat in the Men’s Gallery” to provide access to new pews being installed for Nathaniel Church, Jr. and Mr. Elisha Tolman.⁵

But there is another, less well known minister of the church, the Rev. Nathaniel Eells, who served 150 years earlier than Rev. May who was also involved in the cause of emancipation. But unlike Rev. May, Rev. Eells theological stance appears to have agreed with the members of the congregation; he served the church for 46 years right up to his death in 1750 at age 72. Members observed a day of fasting and prayer when he died.

The Rev. Eells came from a family that first settled in Hingham and then Scituate. He became minister in 1703 at the age of 25 right out of Harvard College and appears to have been the first minister of the church to preach Unitarian beliefs. Mary Power, reviewing the history of the church for its 275th anniversary, said that Rev. Eells’ pastorage marked the beginning of a “more liberal Christianity” for the church. Rev. Eells is described by Samuel Deane, a later minister of the church, as being “of broad chest and muscular proportions, remarkably erect, somewhat corpulent in his late years, of dark complexion, with large black eyes and brows, and of general manners rather dignified and commanding...”

Rev. Eells kept careful records of his duties, faithfully recording all of the baptisms, marriages and funerals at which he officiated. What is extraordinary about the records is that they note the admittance of numerous black slaves and servants to church attendance and membership. Over a period of 31 years, the records mention more than 40 African-Americans involved in the church. Rev. Eells entries provide us with the best written record we have of the black population in Scituate at that time.

Slaves in Scituate? Indeed. Slavery in the town dates back to 1673, 100 years before the American Revolution and almost 200 years before the Civil War. Scituate had an unusually high number of slaves for New England communities at that time because of its thriving shipbuilding industry although the records contain few references to slaves actually working in the industry.

During that early period in American history, there were two fights for independence: that of the early patriots who struggled to gain political and economic liberty from English rule, and that of slaves who struggled to gain their personal freedom from the patriots. Between 1701 and 1780, 47 black slaves in Scituate were freed either in the wills of their owners or in the Plymouth court.

Rev. Eells was an important figure in one of these court battles. In 1719, he appeared as the “prochain amy” or “next friend” of a young woman named Molly, the daughter of an African slave named Maria and a black man named Anthony Sisco, the first black person Rev. Eells mentions in his church records. Maria is the first slave known to have been brought into Scituate, having been purchased by Walter Briggs in 1673 as a young child. A copy of the bill of sale reads:

“KNOW ALL MEN BY THESE PRESENTS that I, Margret Cock ...
in consideration of the sum of fourteen pounds ten shillings payed by
Walter Briggs of Scituate ... given granted, bargained and sould
unto the said Briggs all our right tytle intrest claime or demand ...
have in or to a negro girle called by the name of Maria...”

After joining the Briggs' household, Maria became the property of three different members of the family as her owners died and handed her on to their heirs. After approximately 36 years in slavery, Maria was freed but since she had Molly while she was a slave, Molly automatically became a slave. When Maria was freed, Molly was not. So Maria and Anthony Sisco went to court to sue for Molly's freedom. Maria and Anthony won the court case but the man who owned Molly, Cornelius Briggs, appealed the decision. Before the appeal was heard, Maria died. Eells stepped in at that point and pursued the matter on Molly's behalf. Again the court ruled in Molly's favor and she became one of Scituate's free people of color.

Judge William Cushing, a prominent jurist of the colonial period and the judge who is reported to have handed down a landmark state court decision outlawing slavery, was a member of the church. Although he lived away from the town during much of his professional life, Cushing considered Scituate his home and his name appears in the Second Parish-Scituate church records.

In 1888, when the town of South Scituate changed its name to Norwell, the Second Parish of Scituate became the First Parish of Norwell.

Data for this report was gleaned from the vital records of Scituate, court documents, local histories and the records of the First Parish Church of Norwell. The church records proved to be a rich source of new and additional data that augmented names, places and circumstances previously identified in the other sources.

BLACK HISTORY - SCITUATE, NORWELL

Unlike Plymouth and Boston, events in Scituate during the colonial period have not found their way into the history books. The town had its prominent citizens, many of whom had connections to the famous leaders of the period but none achieved the prominence of a Daniel Webster or John Quincy Adams. Today the town is a popular summer resort because of its coastline, not a destination that tourists seek out for its historical significance.

In many ways, however, Scituate is distinguished by its interesting black history. From the earliest days, people of color were members of this community, the wealthiest in the Plymouth colony. ⁶Most were slaves who later gained their freedom in the courts or in the wills their owners. Many continued to work and live with their former owners or other wealthy families as servants.

“Slavery was practiced to a considerable extent; but they had no occasion to import servants of this description, for they won them “with their sword and their bow.” The wills of the first generation often make provision for Indian servants, but rarely mention an African slave. We have seen but one instance of this kind previous to 1690. Subsequently to 1700, African slaves had pretty generally been purchased by the wealthy families: and the posterity of that race is now more numerous in this Town, than in any other town of the ancient Colony.”⁷

CENSUS

While never in the same numbers in New England as in the South during the time of plantation slavery, captive African and West Indian slaves were imported into Massachusetts as early as 1638 when the ship "Desire" arrived at Marblehead with slaves that had been exchanged for Indian captives taken during the Pequod War.⁸ West Indian slaves were generally preferred by the Colonists, having spent a period of three or more years becoming accustomed to life as a slave. African slaves were less accepting of their status and therefore considered more difficult to control.⁹ The demand for slaves increased between 1689 and 1763, the years that the Colonists were fighting wars with the Indians; indentured servants were pressed into military service, leaving a shortage of labor back home.¹⁰

In Massachusetts, black people were concentrated in the commercial centers of Essex, Middlesex, Suffolk, Plymouth and Bristol counties.¹¹ Although population numbers prior to the first federal census in 1790 are inexact, some guesses can be made from local vital records as to how many people of color lived in the town. In 1754, the state legislature instructed assessors in each community to compile a list of all black people sixteen years and older. What numbers do exist are thought to be low because it was financially advantageous for owners to smuggle slaves into communities and not to list them on official records to avoid import duties and taxes.¹²

In comparing birth, marriage and death records for Scituate and the surrounding communities, the numbers do appear to be substantially higher for Scituate. The numbers used here are estimates only and cannot be considered firm because of the lack of any uniform counting policy during this time period. As indicated, they have been compiled from multiple sources and in some instances have been computed based on data and formulas outlined by particular scholars.

Sorting out the details of slave life in colonial America is a daunting task. Documents are scanty and, with very few exceptions, slaves left no personal records of their own experiences. Names are not consistent. Official records are not complete. But Scituate-Norwell offers a unique opportunity to examine the

lives of these colonial citizens because of the extensive public records that the town of Scituate has preserved going back to 1638.

Slaves were not unusual in colonial Scituate-Norwell. By mid-18th century, the Plymouth colony had one of the largest slave populations in the Massachusetts Bay area and Scituate-Norwell, as the largest town in the Plymouth colony, had more slaves than any other town. ⁱ (ⁱ McManus, Edgar J., *Black Bondage in the North*, 1973, Syracuse University Press. p 16.)

BLACK POPULATION

	MASS	PLYMOUTH	SCITUATE-NORWELL
1676	200 (No %) ^a NA		2 (< 1%) ^{b, c}
1708	400 (No %) ^a NA		20 (No %) ^b
1720	2,000 (2.1%) ^a	Not Available	25 (No %) ^b
1755	4,500 (2.2%) ^a	544 (2.5%) ^d	114 (No %) ^b
1764	5,235 (2.2%) ^a	462 (2%) ^d	122 (No %) ^b
1776	5,249 (1.8%) ^a	487 (1.8%) ^d	141 (5.2 %) ^b
1790	5,369 (1.4%) ^a	503 (1.7%) ^d	150 (3%) ^b

^a Green, Lorenzo J., *The Negro in Colonial New England*, Columbia University PhD dissertation, 1942.

^b Scituate Vital Records

^c Green, Evarts B. and Harrington, Virginia, *American Populations Before the Federal Census of 1790*, Gloucester, Massachusetts, 1966.

^d McManus, Edgar, *Black Bondage in the North*, Syracuse University Press, 1973.

ⁱ McManus, Edgar J., *Black Bondage in the North*, 1973, Syracuse University Press. p 16.

SLAVE STATUS

In the early records the distinction between slave and servant is not always clear nor do the records always show when and how a slave became a free person. In some instances, the terms servant and slave are used interchangeably.

Indentured servants were debtors voluntarily bound to the person to whom they owed money for a set period of time. Once the agreed upon time for the service was up, the indentured servant was free to pursue independent work and living conditions. It was the practice at the time to grant colonists who paid their own way to the New World, a piece of land to live on and farm, a powerful incentive for borrowing the money for the trans-Atlantic passage. The demand for land became so great so soon, that Plymouth Colony restricted this practice as early as 1630. Nonetheless, apparently few of these "redemptionists" came to the South Shore-Plymouth area. Those who did were for the most part given land in Scituate, a remote area from Plymouth that the Colony's rulers wanted to settle.¹³ No examples of indentured servitude by a black person was uncovered in this research.

Servant is the term that came to be used for those people who were hired for wages as domestic helpers, personal maids and valets, and other work on a farm or homestead. In some instances sources used for this report apply the term servant to people who are designated as slaves in other sources. Slaves were captured and bound for life to the owner who purchased or captured them and were considered property. Perpetrators of crimes of robbery and non-payment of debts were punished by servitude and were technically referred to as slaves. The terms of punishment varied depending on the severity of the crime. It could be for a specific number of years; for life; or until restitution was made. The first case imposing perpetual slavery on a criminal occurred in 1677 on a Native American.¹⁴ But generally those who are referred to in the records as slaves were black. No instance was found in this research of any white person who held the status of slave or was designated as a slave in the records.

Whether they were labelled as slaves or servants, from the earliest times people of color were marked by a separate and segregated status dictated by their color. Black slaves were forced to walk behind their owners on the way to church or to social gatherings. They lived in their owners' homes but were made to sit apart at the end of the dinner table and to sleep in the least desirable space. In some instances, slaves owned by wealthy farmers living in rural areas, lived apart in separate quarters.¹⁵

At church on Sunday, slaves or free people of color were relegated to worship in the most remote and uncomfortable spots at the meeting house.

In 1770, the Second Parish built a new church with

“a little box clinging to the wall like a sort of crow's nest, a place apart for the colored people of the community.”¹⁶

Blacks were served communion following ministration to the white members of the church¹⁷ As an act of penitence or symbolic contrition, white church goers washed the feet of black church members in ritualized ceremonies.¹⁸ Black people often were buried in separate sections in cemeteries.

“It may be of interest to know that there is a row of Marble stones to Negroes on the eastern slope of the First Parish Cemetery. This is probably due to happenstance rather than design as there is no rule as to what part of the the cemetery shall receive Negroes. The stones were provided for the unmarked graves of veterans by the government.”¹⁹

Starting in 1642 when Massachusetts passed the first law establishing the institution of slavery in the Colonies, a separate body of laws developed that applied only to black people. Blacks were prohibited from voting on public and church matters and from holding public office.²⁰

NAMES

Many of the first slaves brought into the Colonies were identified with numbers, not names.²¹ Others retained or adopted native names that can be traced to particular places and tribes in Africa. With time, the spelling of the names changed but the phonetic pronunciation often remained the same. Quaco was later translated to Jacco, Jacky, Jack.

One of the most common slave names in the Colonies and one which appears repeatedly in local records is that of Cuff, Cuffe, Cuffee and Coffee. Although considered by many to reflect skin color, linguistic scholars have traced the origin to Kofi, the name given to a boy of the Ewe tribe in West Africa who was born on a Friday.²² In Africa it was a common practice to name children after the day of the week on which they were born.

Another African name found in local references is Quark or Quarque, an 18th century version of KWEKU, a Fanti name given to a boy born on Wednesday.²³

Quash or Quamino, another African day name, was used by Gold Coast tribes, the area from which some slaves in New England communities came.

Sambo was originally an African name given to a second born son.²⁴

It was also common practice for owners to give slaves names such as Ceasar, Pompey, Venus, Juno and Cato from the classics.²⁵

Having a Christian name usually indicated that a slave had been in the Colonies for some period of time and was most likely a first generation

resident ²⁶ In some instances, these classical names seem to have been derived or influenced by the African names of the slaves, i.e. Heke, a large wild animal in Mende, becoming Hercules. (BN 20)

Other slaves adopted places for their names, presumably those that had some import in their lives. The name Boston and London occurs in the record of Scituate slaves. Some slave parents named children after the place where they were born or, in other instances, owners named slaves for the place of their purchase. (Puckett in Murdock, 486.)

Other African or African-derived names found in the Scituate-Norwell records are:

Cuba, a feminine version of Kwaco or Quaco, a name for a girl child born on Wednesday. Phoebe is a classical name for the moon but Pheba, Phiba or Phibbi is also thought to be an African day name for a girl born on a Friday.

Cato is thought to have originated with Keta, an African word.

Hagar is a word from the Mendi tribe meaning lazy.

Joe is thought originally to have been Cudjo, an African name for a boy born on Monday; Venus an anglicized version of Benah; Abby, of Ahba or Abba, an African day name for a girl born on Thursday. ²⁷

In a study of ²⁸ sixty-five names of slaves used prior to 1700, John was the most frequently noted, being used 10 times, while Maria and Antonio, used four times, was the next most common. ²⁹

In Africa, it was a tradition for men to change names when they travelled for work or business, adopting different surnames. (BN 25) Slaves in America often changed names. "Cornhouse" became Primus; Quash became Bryan. (BN 93)

Nicknames often mimicked personal traits, likes, dislikes or significant events in the life of the bearer. (BN 28) Interpreting the meaning behind a given name in the old records can be tricky. Not only is spelling not consistent, words often have a foreign pronunciation, not the one used in current day English although the word may appear to be English. i.e. Bone for Bonny which may be either a phonetic interpretation or French. (BN 26)

Younger slaves showed respect by calling elders "Uncle." (Puckett in Murdock 484)

In 11th century England, all had but one name but by the 13th century, they had two names. These names became hereditary. Slave names followed the same pattern. Surnames were given when the population increased to the point where it was necessary for identification. (Puckett in Murdock. P?)

In Scituate, the most often used names for a man appear to be Cesar or Ceasar, Jack, Richard or Dick, Boston, Brister and Winsor. For a woman, the names are Zilpah, Peg or Margaret, and Mariah.

In choosing or acquiring last names, it has been said in numerous sources that slaves often took the name of their first or favorite owner when they were freed. Owners were required to give their permission for the adoption of such a family name. Some Scituate slaves -Litchfield, Tilden, Joselyn, and Sylvester- do

appear to have adopted the names of their owners. In some instances, slaves followed the principle of patronymics meaning that they adopted the first name of a slave as a surname for a freed family. (Source? Exs?)

Slaves also adopted what is referred to as gift names, the name of a person from whom they had received or hoped to receive a gift.³⁰

In Scituate-Norwell, one instance of two slaves was discovered who were given land with the provision that they assume the name of their owner.

I give "to my two boys, George and Thomas, whom I obtained, 'with my sword and my bow,' on condition that they take my name of Williams, lands at Showamett." (Near Taunton.)³¹

Samuel Deane, who cites this story in his History of Scituate, states that "these were Indians without doubt", but information in a later source identifies a Hezekial Williams, "or 'Black Bill", as he was familiarly called.

"No man was so well known in Scituate as he, and no one was so welcome at all of the (ship) yards. Black Bill was supposed to be a runaway slave. Where he came from, how he came, or when, no one seems to remember. He lived in the woods, in little huts built by himself, at one time, over fifty years ago, in front of the Dana place. His hobby was the building of ships in the woods, some half dozen at a time; building a fleet, he called it, with which he hoped to sail South and free the slaves. He never finished a single vessel, but would bail them in a strange manner, as, for instance, putting a mast in the ground, and building around it, putting up frames that resembled anything from a ship to a hen-coop. He built at one time in the woods near George Moore's Swamp, and also at Hobart's Landing. He would work on his vessels until without money or food, then he would leave them to work for the farmers, he would eat as much as two or three men, but would live sparingly when in the woods at work building. Black Bill built some of his vessels on the Collomore place. His last residence was on Scrabble Lane, east of Cummings Litchfield's in South Scituate. From here he went to the Bridgewater Almshouse, where he died."³²

No attempt was made to connect George and Thomas with Hezekial Williams but the provisions of the will and Hezekial Williams' name and apparent appearance in Scituate-Norwell at a later date warrants more investigation.

Some slaves took versions of their African day names as their surnames.³³

After the Revolutionary War some slaves adopted Liberty or Freedom as their name. Others such as Paul Cuffee, a shipbuilder and captain in New Bedford, took the first name of his father as his surname.³⁴ It is commonly believed that many freed slaves took the last name of Freeman to indicate their new found independent status. Only two such slave families were found to do so in Scituate and Norwell. These free black people lived in the area for such a long period of time and had so many descendents that a casual glance at the data

makes it appear that many more slaves took the name of Freeman than actually did.

SLAVE LIFE

Like all immigrants from a foreign country, captive slaves came with their own culture and language, sets of beliefs, myths, religions, social practices and traditions.

RELIGION

African religions emphasized fetishism, superstitions and psychic powers. To protect themselves against evil spirits or ghosts, Africans in the Colonies wore their clothes inside out, especially travelling at night.³⁵ African superstitions are thought to be the origin of New England beliefs in haunted houses. Fortune telling, referred to as "Negro-Mancy" was a popular pastime with blacks and whites.

Funerals were a social occasion for slaves and featured singing, music and dancing. Processions wound around town as the body was carried from door to door to insure that God punished any hidden enemies of the dead. This may have been more common in urban areas such as Boston where more Africans and African-Americans were concentrated and better able to maintain native rituals. In rural communities like Scituate where blacks lived further apart and were fewer in numbers it was more difficult to maintain native culture. Local records provide little insight into black life although one reference says that burial, like marriage, was a civil ceremony in which black slaves carried the body in an oak or pine coffin to a family plot on the homestead where they lived or to the burial ground near the Meeting House.

“... Mary Greene, was a Quakeress of charming personality, greatly beloved by family, acquaintances, and those who served her. At her death, an old colored servant begged to be buried at her feet when she died. The family burial lot is on the home farm, and at the foot of her grave can be found that of the faithful servant.”³⁶

Africans believed that when they died, they returned to Africa.³⁷ Black residents clung to traditional religious practices until the Great Awakening of the mid-1700's and the dawn of a less rigid and puritanical Christian worship.³⁸

NOTE: Funerals climax of life. (FSTF 33)

WORK

In reading material from the colonial period, it is a shock to the contemporary reader to realize the place that children had in that society. They

were put to work at a very young age and were customarily sent to live with other families. For white children this usually occurred from the age of four to seven. Based on the records here regarding slavery, black children were sold at any age, even soon after birth.

“ A record of another Negro child being given away is in L. Vernon Briggs, ed., Hanover Church Records, ... Briton, a negro child born in the house of Mr. Edward Jenkins of Scituate was given to Mr. John Studley of Hanover soon after its birth. O.M. Dickinson attributes this giving away of children to a housing shortage, but I doubt it.” ³⁹

New England colonists preferred purchasing slaves as children because they could be more easily socialized to colonial family and community life. Some owners purchased black infants as slaves after their own wives lost a child in birth. Such children were used also to care for other children in the family and to do household chores. ⁴⁰

Where there are specific references in local sources, we know that female slaves of all ages helped with child rearing and household duties. Boys and men appear to have worked at farming, personal service as valets and butlers and coachmen, driving carriages. Although many sources say that black slaves were brought into commercial centers, particularly, those where shipbuilding occurred few direct references are found to confirm employment in this industry in these two towns.

Elsewhere it is known that male slaves worked doing hard labor, lifting and hauling on construction sites and in iron-making occupations. ⁴¹ Other slaves were put to work using skills they had learned in their native lands such as spinning, basket making, fishing and hunting. ⁴²

Slaves in the Northeast were often able to work for employers other than their owners. At the discretion of their owner, they could keep their wages for themselves or be made to turn them over to their owners. ⁴³

PLAY

For all its stiff-laced, stern religiosity, the colonial period had its wild and raucous times. Slaves and black people socialized much as their owners did. In the earliest days when Pilgrim attitudes were at their strictest, slaves and owners got together at corn huskings, barn raisings, funerals and Sunday church services. Everyday activities such as fishing and boating, swimming and skating also provided opportunities to socialize. To meet spouses, mates or friends, slaves crept away at night to visit other homes, a practice called “night-walking.” ⁴⁴

Slaves and black residents ran markets on Sundays as was the tradition in Africa, creating more occasions to socialize as well as conduct business. In

keeping with a native tradition, Africans entertained blacks and whites with storytelling.⁴⁵

After 1680, as the Pilgrim culture loosened up, singing and dancing, became a part of social gatherings.⁴⁶ Africans were popular musicians and many played the fiddle at dances, performed as callers and sang. Horse races and pig runs were also popular social events. Gambling was a regular feature of colonial life although laws prohibited slaves and indentured servants from participating.⁴⁷ PawPaw, one of the gambling games, used cowrie shells shaken like dice.

Black residents also socialized with whites at local taverns. Drinking during the colonial era was widespread and, after 1683 when a law was passed banning the sale of liquor to blacks and Indians, it became illegal for minorities.⁴⁸ But the Pilgrim Fathers' attempts to control drinking and gambling and keep behavior within bounds was met with mixed success. Colony records show numerous examples of owners who encouraged and joined in with their black slaves and neighbors in illicit conduct.⁴⁹

In the early 1700's while whites conducted city and town elections, black people in New England developed a parallel institution called "Negro Election Day." The holidays featured parades with colorful and elaborate costumes, singing, dancing and the playing of musical instruments. The earliest known celebrations of this type occurred in Massachusetts in Salem, Lynn and Boston. This research did not disclose any such celebration in Scituate-Norwell although early records indicate that the holiday occurred in areas along the coast and river valleys where blacks lived in greater numbers. In some instances, white owners or employers paid the cost of the holidays.

These gatherings elected governors, deputy governors, kings, sheriffs, deputies and other such figures who acted as leaders within the black community and sometimes judges who imposed sentences for crimes and misdemeanors. In some instances, the election days were strictly social holidays, and a time for partying, carousing and merriment. In some places the celebrations were held in taverns.⁵⁰

PROTEST

Sufficient numbers of slaves ran away from their owners to warrant special ads in the newspapers of the time. Between 1704 and 1784 more than 100 such ads ran in the eleven newspapers that were being published in New England; at least one ad for almost every issue of each newspaper. Runaways tended to be young and male, the vast majority under the age of thirty-five. Understandably, the most likely time for a slave to run away was from late August to November. It is supposed that hiding places afforded by newly formed hay and fodder stacks made this an optimal time as well as having favorable weather.⁵¹ Many slaves exploited the chaos that followed the Revolutionary War and ran away during that period.⁵²

In their efforts to escape slavery, black people were helped by Indians and whites. Indians harbored runaway slaves while white servants pretended to be owners to disguise the runaway attempt. Other slaves headed for cities where they could more easily be lost in the larger numbers of black residents. Some slaves signed on to work on ships headed for other ports. Those slaves who could not speak English well had a more difficult time remaining undetected.⁵³

Only one instance of a runaway slave was found in the local records. Edward Wanton, a Quaker who owned a shipyard on the North River, placed an ad in the Sept. 22, 1712 edition of *The Boston Newsletter* trying to discover the whereabouts of his “mulatto man servant named Daniel about 19 years of age” who had run away. Four years later in 1716, Daniel had still not been found since Wanton’s will bequeaths Daniel to Wanton’s daughter, Elizabeth Scott, if Daniel could be found.⁵⁴

FREEDOM

From a very early date, slaves sued for their freedom in the courts and tended to be successful.

Many slaves were freed by owners in their wills but this was not always a guarantee of freedom. Only deeds of manumission given by owners to slaves guaranteed irrevocable freedom. Notices of the intent to free a slave were posted in communities. When owners freed a slave, they were required to post a 50 pound bond with the city or town to insure that freed slaves did not become indigent wards of the town. If the bond was not posted, slaves were not considered free and owners continued to be liable for their support. Some owners set up private Social Security-like accounts with their slaves’ earnings and then used the savings for support of the slaves when they were no longer able to work.

In order to attract enlistees and command loyalty to the cause of Independence, the Revolutionists offered freedom to any slave who joined the war against the British as long as their owners gave permission but those who served on the British side were offered freedom as well. Records indicate that both sides honored the promises they made. After the war, 3,000 “negroes” left the country on British navy ships and hundreds more on private vessels. They were relocated to the British colonies of Nova Scotia, Jamaica and London.

After this widespread emancipation in the North, however, some northern slave owners in an attempt to avoid granting freedom, sold their slaves in the South. Others exported them to the West Indies.⁵⁵

Some slaves took matters into their own hands and petitioned the court for freedom particularly around the time of the revolution when independence became a political issue. At least 12 such petitions were submitted to the general court in Boston. One petition asked for transportation back to Africa. (Miller and Smith 524)

EARLIEST BLACK SCITUATE RESIDENTS⁵⁶

NEGRO SERVANT OF GOODMAN LEWICE, JR.

The earliest reference to a black resident in Scituate occurs in 1635 with the listing in the death records that a "negro" servant of Goodman Lewice, Jr. was "buryd" March 6, 1635.⁵⁷

ELIZABETH WARD

The next earliest reference is to an Elizabeth Ward, a resident of Plymouth, who married Goeing White on Oct. 15, 1638.⁵⁸ As with the "negro" servant of Goodman Lewice, Jr., the listing is under "Negroes, Etc" in the section for marriages in the vital records of the town but the actual entry says only, "Elizabeth, 'Servant to Mr. Hatherlye,' and Goeing White" married, with no distinct reference to color. Samuel Deane mentions the marriage in his History of Scituate but makes no mention of Ward being black. A pamphlet, "History of Ethnic Minorities in Scituate, Massachusetts," published by the Scituate Human Concerns Committee in 1969, suggests that Ward may have been a white indentured servant and not black but it is certain that Goeing White was a white European.

Elizabeth and Goeing White did have a granddaughter named Mary which two local histories say married a James Newell, "her African slave" in 1690.

"James Newell, an African slave of Mary White, 1690. Mary White had a farm in Conihasset, one mile west of Merritt's brook, and she had a singular fancy to marry her slave. Tradition speaks of him as a respectable man. Their children, Joshua, James, Hezekiah, and four daughters, born from 1691 to 1706."⁵⁹

Although Rev. Samuel Deane, the author of the above quote states that some of the children married and continued to live in the town, no record of that fact was found.

MARIAH

The most mentioned slave in local histories is Mariah, a young girl estimated to be between four and seven years old when she was purchased by Walter Briggs of Scituate at a tavern in Boston in 1673 near what is today Commercial Street. Briggs is said to have purchased Mariah as a domestic servant for his second wife, Frances Rogers Briggs.

Eleven years after buying her, Walter Briggs died and bequeathed Mariah to Frances, along with part of his house and personal belongings. Three years later Frances died and left Mariah to her widowed daughter-in-law, Deborah.

About the same time that Mariah became the property of Deborah Briggs, Mariah gave birth to a son named Will Tomas. Most black women of this period gave birth to their first child between the age of 18 and 21, a slightly younger age than white women.⁶⁰ The father of Will Tomas is unknown.

Within a year, Deborah Briggs sold Mariah and Will Thomas to her brother-in-law, Cornelius Briggs of Barnstable. The price listed in the bill of sale is 19 pounds for the woman and the child. It could not be determined from the record whether Mariah and Will Tomas moved to Barnstable or remained at the family homestead in Scituate but shortly after the sale, Cornelius Briggs is known to have moved back to Scituate. But it seems most likely that Mariah and Will Tomas continued to live in the same house during this period despite the change in her ownership. Their change of ownership may well have coincided with a change in ownership of the house as family members formed new living units. Later events also show that sometime during the period in which she was owned by Cornelius Briggs, Mariah gave birth to another child, Molly, who is also referred to in the record as Mary. The father of this child was Anthony Sisco, a black man who may have been the slave or servant of the Rev. Eells, the minister at the Second Church of Scituate.

Six years after Mariah became his property, Cornelius Briggs died. The inventory of his estate filed with the court in Plymouth values Mariah at eleven pounds and Will Tomas, then about five years old, at sixteen pounds. His will deemed that Mariah should be set free in 1706, eight years later. No mention was made of freedom for Will Tomas.

In settling the estate, James Briggs, the brother of Cornelius acting as executor, sold Mariah to Stephen Otis, a resident of Scituate and a friend of the Briggs family. Otis was one of the two appraisers who evaluated the estate. It is assumed that with this sale, Mariah did move from the Briggs' household to the Otis household since this is the first time she was sold outside the immediate family.

Will Tomas, 5 years old, was not sold with his mother so presumably he remained with the Briggs family. Eight years later however, in 1703 when he was thirteen, Will Tomas was sold for thirty-five pounds to Jabez Wilder of Hingham. Wilder was a relative of Stephen Otis's wife.

Three years later, Stephen Otis honored the terms of Cornelius Briggs' will and set Mariah free.

While Mariah had been set free, the same was not true for Molly. About ten years after having been granted her own freedom, Mariah with Tony Sisco sued Cornelius Briggs to gain Molly's freedom. What circumstances prompted the action is not known but they won the case and the jury granted Molly her freedom. Briggs was ordered to pay Mariah and Tony five pounds for court costs.

But Cornelius Briggs appealed the decision. One year later, before the appeal could be heard, Mariah died. She was about 50 years old.

Molly herself, continued the court suit in an attempt to gain her freedom, aided by the Rev. Nathaniel Eells, the minister of the Second Parish Church in Scituate. Again the jury ruled in her favor and again Cornelius Briggs appealed the decision. The disposition of the case after that is not known.

Tony Sisco remarried, a woman named Phebe. Both worked as servants for Thomas Rogers of Marshfield. The couple had one daughter named Ruth. Thomas Rogers was the grandson of Frances Rogers Briggs, Walter Briggs second wife and the woman for whom he purportedly purchased Mariah as a maid.

ADAM

The earliest anti-slavery tract to be written in the Colonies was a piece called "The Selling of Joseph", penned in 1703 by Judge Samuel Sewell. Sewell was also the judge in the Salem Witch Trials who later repented his decision to put to death those accused of witchcraft.⁶¹ A descendent of Sewell's, Edmund Quincy Sewell, was the minister of the First Parish Church - Scituate in 1834.

Sewells' writing of "The Selling of Joseph" was prompted by the trial of a slave named Adam who sued his owner, John Saffin, in 1701 to gain his freedom.

Saffin is an oft mentioned figure in the sparse literature on New England slavery during the early days of the colonies and one with a connection to Scituate. A lawyer, Saffin lived for a time near Little Musquashcutt Pond close to Mann Hill not far from Walter Briggs' house.

Saffin also owned property in Bristol and Boston where he was a businessman and a prominent figure in public life, serving for a time as the speaker of the House of Representatives. His third marriage was to the sister of Cotton Mather, the Boston preacher.

Saffin was known to have been a slave trader with other Boston merchants, importing slaves from West Africa. Whether or not any of the ships they used in their slave trading came from Scituate where a shipbuilding industry thrived on the North River for almost 200 years, is not known. No references were uncovered in the local records of any mention of slaves associated with Saffin during the time he lived or owned property in Scituate.

As Saffin's slave, Adam lived primarily at the farm in Bristol to which Saffin moved later in his life. Saffin inherited Adam through his wife, Martha, who acquired him when her father, Hezekial Willet of Plymouth died.

Adam also went to court to win his freedom. As with Mariah and Tony and Jethro, the judge and jury agreed with Adam and he was granted his freedom in 1701. But Saffin appealed the decision and won, retaining his right to keep Adam enslaved.

Sewell believed that Saffin won the appeal by tampering with the jury and unduly influencing the outcome of the case. It was Sewell's outrage over the trial that prompted his publication of the anti-slavery tract.

'Mr. Saffin tampered with Mr. Kent, the Foreman, at Capt. Reynold's, which he denied at Osburn's. Conived at his Tenant Smith's being on the Jury, in the case between himself and Adam (a negro) about his freedom.'⁶²

Adam then appealed to Sewell and after protracted legal, court and political proceedings, and eventually won his freedom.

The proceedings also prompted the writing of the first of 6,000 slave narratives known to have been written between 1703 and 1944. The narrative is a collection of pamphlets, court documents and diaries known as "Adam Negro's Tryall" published sometime between 1703 and 1710. Although considered a slave narrative, the publication does not contain any material written by Adam.⁶³

Saffin also had a slave named Jethro who lived at the farm in Bristol whom he had also inherited from Capt. Hezekial Willet when Willet was slain by the Narragansett Indians in King Phillips War. Jethro was captured by the Indians in the attack but escaped and went on to warn the area's residents of an impending strike.

After Willet's death, Jethro, too, claimed his freedom and when Saffin would not release him, he sued in Plymouth Court but lost the case. The Jury however, awarded Jethro his freedom two years later in 1678, a decision that was thought to be a reward for his saving many lives with his warning of the coming raid.⁶⁴

CUFFEE and FLORA

One of the more intriguing stories in the Scituate-Norwell records is that of Cuffee and Flora. Cuffee was a slave owned by Joseph Clapp who lived in the Black Pond Hill section of Scituate, what is today Mt. Blue Street in Norwell. In 1740, Cuffee married Flora, a slave belonging to Mr. Thomas Clapp, a relative of Joseph Clapp's. The Rev. Nathaniel Eells of the Second Parish Church in Scituate performed the ceremony and according to Eells' notes in the church records, it was the 280th wedding at which he officiated during his time as minister at the church. The couple had three, possibly four or five children, one of whom was named Charles. There is also mention of a Simeon who may be a son but that could not be confirmed.

Although the record for this family is not complete, based on dates, places, and the names of descendents, it is likely that Cuffee and Flora were the first slave relatives of a family later known as Grandison which is mentioned frequently in local histories.

“One day soon after the Revolution, a typical Southern Negro, accompanied by a white woman, appeared in town and settled in this place. Nobody knew from whence they came, but it was generally believed that it was from the far South, and all sorts of stories were told regarding them and who they were. It was at one time thought that the man was a runaway slave and the woman the wife or daughter of his master. Later it was rumored that they came from the western part of the State and that the man had served in the Continental Army from the town of Adams. Paying no heed to their neighbors they proceeded to set up an establishment. The land was cleared and gradually people ceased to wonder about them and they lived their lives and ended their days in their little place in the woods.”⁶⁵

A Charles and Simeon Grandison are listed as soldiers in the Revolutionary War but there is no mention of their color. First Parish, Norwell, church records identify the wife of Simeon Grandison as a “white woman, her maiden name Woolsey -of parentage and connections- They were of New Yk state. She died of cancer -aged 64.”

Charles and Simeon Grandison are most likely the sons of Cuffee and Flora who returned after the war to settle on land that may have been granted to Cuffee and Flora when they were freed by Joseph Clapp. A later generation of Grandisons, one of whom was also named Charles, owned a farm in the same area according to at least one local history.

“ This Charles Grandison was one of the characters of his time. He owned what is now the Bates farm at the head of the lane and his father’s and grandfather’s old place.

“He was a great worker and the huge piles of stones along the walls attest to that fact. It was his ambition to equal and if possible excel his white neighbors and he was very much respected by them. There were three daughters in the family but unfortunately one was born blind, another deaf and dumb and the other became blind. Realizing their helpless position, just before his death, Mr. Grandison deeded his farm to the town and the family were cared for at the almshouse. One of them, Abby, lived for many years.”⁶⁶

The Rev. William Fish of the Second Parish Church, South Scituate, presided at the funeral and wrote later, “Attended the funeral of Mr. Charles Grandison (colored) aged 73 years -and a remarkable man for one of his position- industrious, honest, upright in his relations- a man universally respected. He was a reverent and religious man also and continued a member of the parish, a paying member to the end, though not able to attend church, - a reproof to many white members who leave the parish to avoid paying the small tax assessed upon them.”

The lane that is mentioned as being near the Grandison property is Cuffe Lane, off Mt. Blue Street, a narrow dirt path overgrown now with weeds and brush.

“This lane goes back into the dense woods and cedar swamps which surround Black Pond, a queer little pond that probably very few of the inhabitants of the town have ever seen.

“About a quarter of a mile from the highway (Mt. Blue Street) just after it crosses the Black Pond brook this lane skirts a little clearing consisting of two old fields that have only partially grown up to underbrush and there is where the Cuff Grandison farm, or plantation, was located.”⁶⁷

The pond, surrounded by a quaking bog, is now the central feature in the 55 acre Black Pond Nature Preserve owned by The Nature Conservancy and protected for its rare ecology and flora. Adjacent to the preserve is 47 acres of town-owned conservation land, the Cuffee Hill Reservation.

THE CUSHING FAMILY

The Cushing family of judges was the most celebrated and prominent in Scituate-Norwell; the most famous of the judges was William, a member of the first Supreme Court of the newly formed United States who served for 21 years on the court. For one year, Cushing acted as chief justice and administered the oath of office to George Washington when Washington was inaugurated for his second term. It was the first time the ceremony had been performed.⁶⁸

It was also William Cushing who, as a member of the Superior Court in Massachusetts, supposedly issued the first court ruling in the Quark versus Jennison case that was thought to be the legal basis for the abolishment of slavery in Massachusetts.

The case, which was heard in Worcester, involved a Dr. Nathaniel Jennison who was charged with assaulting a black man named Quark Walker whom Jennison claimed was his runaway slave. Walker, at the age of nine months, along with his parents, had been sold to a man named Caldwell who had promised to set Walker free at the age of 25. But before Walker reached that age Caldwell died. Walker was appraised as part of Caldwell's estate and bequeathed along with other property to Caldwell's widow. Caldwell's widow then married Jennison of Barre, Massachusetts and Jennison assumed the ownership of Walker.

When Walker reached 25, the age at which Caldwell had promised him his freedom, Walker demanded it from Jennison but Jennison refused to honor the promise. Walker ran away. Jennison found him, beat him up and held him captive

for two hours in an attempt to reclaim Walker as his property. Walker then went to court, charging Jennison with assault and battery.

It has been claimed that in William Cushing's charge to the jury, as one of three judges who delivered such instructions, he directed them to consider the Massachusetts Bill of Rights of 1780 stating that all men were created free and equal and that that language could be applied to the institution of slavery and to the situation of Quark Walker. Cushing had been a member of the committee that drafted the state Constitution.

The jury found Jennison guilty and ordered him to pay a fine of forty shillings. He appealed the decision but failed to follow through in filing the necessary papers. Walker recovered 50 pounds in damages and Cushing's interpretation of the state's Bill of Rights since then has been widely cited as the legal precedent for the abolishment of slavery in Massachusetts.

Available sources do not disclose whether Walker actually gained his freedom in the bargain nor what happened to him after the court ruling.

The degree of Cushing's influence and his role in the decision has been disputed by John D. Cushing, a descendent of William Cushing's, who studied the court documents and concluded that Cushing not only was not instrumental in influencing the decision but played no part in it at all^{69, 70}.

CUSHING SLAVES

As one of Scituate's most prominent and wealthy families, the Cushings were one of the town's largest slave owning families and that fact is noted in the local histories and other sources that discuss the family.

DICK

Some of the more descriptive passages providing insight into attitudes toward slaves and servants and the lives of those slaves and servants during this period occur in relation to the Cushing family. John Adams who later became the second president of the United States, wrote in 1771 about Dick, a slave or servant of Judge of Judge John Cushing, the father of Judge William Cushing:

“Overtook Judge (John) Cushing, in his old curricle, and two lean horses, and Dick, his negro, at his right hand, driving the curricle. This is the way of travelling in 1771: -a Judge of the Circuits, a Judge of the Superior Court, a Judge of the King's Bench, Common Pleas and Exchequer for the Province, travels with a pair of wretched old jades of horses, in a wretched old dung cart of a curricle, and a negro, on the same seat with him, driving. ...”⁷¹

Another author writes:

“Our minds picture the colored servant of ... Judge John Cushing, who on days when the post-rider was expected, would leave the home at Walnut Tree Hill, pass through “Mr. Neal’s gate” along the private road leading to the old farmhouse, and there find the letters for which the old judge was anxiously waiting, some of them from his son, Judge William, who, as the newly appointed Chief Justice of the Supreme Judicial Court, was trying to re-establish that court...”⁷²

Dick does show up in the local records of slaves and free black people in Scituate but none of the references provide enough information to determine if he is the servant referred to in these two references.

PRINCE

Judge William Cushing and his wife, Hannah, were similarly served in the judge’s judicial duties by a black servant named Prince from about 1772 to 1810.

“While on the State bench, Cushing’s rides extended into Maine, then a part of Massachusetts; and on the United States bench, as the circuits were then annually changed, he travelled over the whole Union, holding courts in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia. His traveling equipage was a four-wheeled phaeton, drawn by a pair of horses; which he drove. It was remarkable for its many ingenious arrangements (all of his contrivance) for carrying books, choice groceries, and other comforts. Mrs. Cushing always accompanied him, and generally read aloud while riding. His faithful servant, Prince, a jet black Negro, whose parents had been slaves in the family and who loved his master with unbounded affection, followed behind, in a one-horse vehicle, with the baggage.”⁷³

One source says that a slave named Prince was given to the judge's wife, Hannah Phillips, by her father, George Phillips of Middletown, Ct., when Hannah was a young girl with the provision that she educate him as a Christian. Whether or not this is the same Prince has not been determined but in 1779, a Prince Warden, listed as a slave to Judge William Cushing, complained to the Attorney General in Boston that Cushing failed to emancipate him as promised. The Attorney General wrote to Cushing as follows:

Prince 'complains that you deny to give him a manumission and that you still claim him as a slave and threaten to make those pay who employ him; he either is your slave or he is a freeman... Therefore, unless you give him a proper manumission in the course of a week, an action will be carried to next court that so if he is your slave you may have an opportunity to prove it.' ⁷⁴

Papers from the Cushing estate indicate that Prince Warden became a hired hand soon after. ⁷⁵

SCIPIO

On some of the Cushings' trips, the couple were accompanied by another black servant, Scipio.

"On long circuits, and during the winter and spring months, another colored servant, Scipio accompanied them (Judge Wm. Cushing and his wife) on horseback, riding ahead over the muddy roads, to see if the bridges were safe, before attempting to cross them." ⁷⁶

As with the references to Dick, the name Scipio shows up in local records in a marriage to a woman named Peggey in Pembroke but this Scipio is listed as being from Bridgewater. Whether or not it is the same person has not been determined.

BRAY

Cushing had another servant named Bray who was the focus of his attention.

"In 1793, Cushing devoted much time, upon returning from a Federal Circuit, to watching the activities of Bray who managed to spend considerable time working for other people and not reporting whether the wages were to be paid to his own account or to that of the Judge. Cushing was particularly displeased that Madame Cushing had given Bray a corner of the garden to work for himself." ⁷⁷

Many of the former slaves and servants of the Cushings' continued to serve the Judge and his wife until their deaths.

"In the Scituate home, with its quaint, beautiful furnishings, Judge and Madam Cushing spent the life of kind, courtly, neighboring folk, she ever helpful for others' needs; and after her husband's death, for the twenty-

four years of widowhood, she lived alone, faithfully attended by their colored servants...”⁷⁸

MARGARET and BOSTON

Another early record of Cushing slaves is that of Margaret and Boston, two slaves belonging to Elijah Cushing of Pembroke who were married in 1740. Elijah was brother of Judge John Cushing and an uncle of Judge William Cushing.

RICHARD TILLAH and PEG

Josiah Cushing, also of Pembroke, a cousin of John and Elijah's, owned a slave couple, Richard Tillah and Peg. The Tillah's had six children, one of whom, Prince, was sold to Benjamin Jacobs, a Scituate farmer. Prince later sued for his freedom from Jacobs, claiming that he was not a slave when Josiah Cushing sold him. He won and was awarded 75 pounds damages but Jacobs appealed. The final disposition of the case has not been determined.

ASHER FREEMAN

The first record of a black person named Freeman appears in 1777, that of Asher Freeman who is listed as a servant of Nathan Cushing, a lawyer. There were two Nathan or Nathaniel Cushings living in Scituate at the time. Which Nathan was the owner of Asher Freeman is undetermined.

Freeman served as a private in the Revolution in 1779 under a Capt. William Turner at the age of 23 but whether he took the name Freeman because he won his freedom serving in the war as many slaves did is not known.

Asher and Dina Cato posted their intentions to marry in 1777 but it appears that Asher went off to war before the ceremony was performed. Intentions were posted again in 1780 although no record of the actual marriage appears. Nonetheless, the couple had six children, five of whom continued to live, marry and raise families in the area. Asher died in 1820 and Dinah, eight years later. She is listed as a pauper in the records of the Rev. Samuel Deane, minister of the Second Parish, Scituate, who performed the burial.

Lemuel Freeman, one of Asher and Dinah's children, married Esther Sampson of Hanover in 1798. The couple had one child who died fairly young. Esther died at thirty-five and Lemuel then married Betsy Gundaway of Pembroke. They had six children, two of whom also died young. Lemuel died at 48 and six years later, Betsy froze to death at 38.

Members of later generations of this family remained in town and worked as shoemakers and laborers. A great granddaughter of Asher and Dinah, Hannah Freeman, married a man named Jack Enolds.

“In later times Jack Ennols, known even among the colored people as Black Jack, was a character. He was a southern slave and military servant to General Paine, who after the war drifted down here and joined the colony. His old horse and phaeton were familiar figures in the streets of Norwell and Hanover for many years and everybody knew the pleasant greeting and happy laugh of Old Black Jack.”⁷⁹

“Perhaps the last southern slave in this community was ‘Black Jack’ Enos. The Writer recalls him and his phaeton very clearly. As a boy the writer remembers ‘Black Jack’ sitting in Tom Studley’s blacksmith shop. Those assembled tried to get me to say that he was a ‘colored man’ but I refused.”⁸⁰

Whether or not Enolds came from a local slave family has not been determined.

A Prince Freeman is listed as having purchased four acres of land in Scituate in 1788 with a partially built house from Thomas Studley of Scituate. Twelve years later he purchased an adjoining parcel.

Prince Freeman married Abigail Grandison, a descendent of the Charles Grandison who lived on Mt. Blue St. in Norwell in 1789. The couple had five children. A son, Prince, Jr., was one of eight sailors who died in the shipwreck of the "Cyrus" on Cape Cod in 1830. The body was never recovered. Abigail (Grandison) Freeman died at the age of 53 and Prince died 22 years later, never having remarried. He was 84 years old.

The name Prince appears as a child of Richard Tillah, Josiah Cushing’s slave, and the name Freeman in the Asher Freeman family, servants of Nathan Cushing, but according to the local records for both of these families no connection could be established between them. It is hoped that further research will provide a more complete picture of the connections between these people.

BRITON HAMMON

Eventually, the story of the lives of slaves were told by themselves in thousands of published monographs, books and pamphlets. Most of these narratives however were written by Southern slaves during the anti-bellum period of plantation slavery, during the height of the Abolition Movement and after the Civil War. Those written during the colonial period in the North are rare. But one of the first involves a black man from Marshfield by the name of Briton Hammon, a "negro man, servant to General Winslow". The only Winslow at that time with the title, General, was General John Winslow.

The narrative, published in 1790 was called , "A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Deliverance of Briton Hammon, a Negro Man", and at

least one source identifies it as the first slave narrative to have been written by a slave.⁸¹

The fantastic escapades, adventures and disasters attributed to Hammon defies belief in some respects and it is possible that the story was a fabrication. Fictionalized accounts of slave experiences became a popular form of literature in the mid-1700's in Western Europe. This genre of literature was spawned by a development in western European thought that adopted a romantic view of the "noble savage". Intrigued by the exotic, European courts hosted celebrated African royalty as guests. Later versions of slave narratives were fictionalized accounts based on real circumstances although they were still often embellished.⁸² Most of the slave narratives that readers are familiar with today, such as that written by Frederick Douglas, are entirely factual and have been written by slaves themselves or transcribed from oral reports dictated by slaves.

In the Briton Hammon story, Hammon left Winslow's house in Marshfield on Christmas Day 1747 and signed on as crew on a ship in Plymouth Harbor headed for Jamaica and the Caribbean. There is nothing in the story however to indicate that Hammon was running away. Rather, he appears to have had his owner's blessing in undertaking the trip.

At some point, Hammon's ship ran aground and some of the crew were taken captive by Indians. Reuben Young of Cape Cod, Joseph Little, Lemuel Doty, John Nowland and Nathaniel Rich of Plymouth, all crewhands, are said to have been killed in the attack. No attempt was made for this report to identify any of these men in local records.

Hammon tried to escape by jumping overboard but was captured and beaten although he later says he was well treated during five weeks in captivity. Hammon was then rescued by the master of a Spanish ship who paid \$10 for his freedom. He was captured again and jailed as he was walking in the streets of Havana and confined in a dungeon for almost five years. Again Hammon was rescued by another ship's captain who knew of his plight. He then attempted to stow away on a ship bound for England but was discovered and put ashore. He remained in Havana for another year where he worked as a bearer for the bishop of the city, carrying the Bishop about in "a large two-arm chair ... lined with crimson velvet and supported by eight persons".

Hammon then signed on as crew on a ship bound for England. Once in England he continued working on a series of ships until he was wounded in the arm in a battle with a French ship. After more adventures, Hammon, while in a pub in England, overheard someone talking about a ship headed for New England. One of the passenger's on the ship happened to be General Winslow, the owner that Hammon had not seen for thirteen years.⁸³

FREED SLAVE COMMUNITIES

Slaves often found themselves living in dire circumstances when they gained their freedom, sometimes worse off than they were under slavery. They

lived in abject poverty with no sure source of food and housing, worked in menial jobs and often became public wards, farmed out to families who bid the highest amount for their labor at town meeting. They lived in root cellars, shacks and dugout caves. "Massa eat the meat; he now pick the bone," was the expression slaves adopted to describe the conditions they faced as free people, often too old or infirm to work and support themselves adequately.⁸⁴

"Boston, Aug't 1823

Mr. Job Otis, -Sir:

There is an old Black Woman by name of Jenny that was born in your house & was one of Uncle Barney Little's serventes she is now old & cannot get any work in this place & she wants to go into your family to live otherwise she must come to Scituate & the town to support her, she is anxious to know if you will take her in your family you will write to George Pillsbury & let them know your determination. I write by the request of Aunt Pillsbury.

Your Obt. St.

Charles Otis." (OS 128)

Others formed squatter settlements.⁸⁵ Three such settlements of freed slaves are known to have existed in the South Shore area: the Wildcat neighborhood in Norwell between Pleasant, Circuit, and Pine Streets and Wildcat Lane; the Ward Street neighborhood in Hingham; and the Parting Ways community in Plymouth.

About the Scituate-Norwell settlement , local histories say:

"Tradition tells us that the slaves belonging to the various Clapp families became too numerous for the family requirements and purse-strings, consequently they were given portions of land from the large Clap (cq.) grant of early days, and allowed to shift for themselves. This was the beginning of the scattered negro settlement in the section south of White Oak Plain known to this day as 'Wildcat.'"⁸⁶

"In the history of Scituate, written by Samuel Deane nearly one hundred years ago, he speaks of a certain hill which is located on a very little travelled wood road leading from Pleasant to Pine street, in what is now Norwell, as 'Wild Cat Hill.' To the south a large tract of swampy land extending almost to the Hanover line, once the mill pond of the Old Cornet Stetson sawmill, that was burned in the Indian raid of 1676, was referred to as 'Old Pond Swamp.'

Since that time this section, broadly speaking, including Pleasant, Forest, Pine and Circuit streets, has come to be known as 'Wildcat' or 'Old Pond.' While it is now largely grown up to woods and has some of the prettiest

roadways in town, it was in early times the home of many of the families prominent in the town and some of the largest farms were in this locality. Here were the homesteads of the Clapp family, Tilden, Stowers, Elijah, John and others. The John Clapp farm was a regular plantation. It stood back from the roadway and included a saw mill and blacksmith shop on the property. Just across the stream in Hanover the farm and mill later owned by Samuel Church were located. The Otises were always prominent residents here, Daniel and his sons, John and Ephraim, being among the later ones. John's son Joseph C., still holds the old place and is the only representative of the old families left in this locality. Here lived his great, great grandfather Dr. Ephraim Otis, who quaint old army commission signed by the members of the Colonial Council, in the absence of the Governor, is still in existence.”⁸⁷

“When the keeping of slaves was abandoned numbers of them settled in this section and others came from Hingham, Plymouth and the surrounding towns, so that for many years there was quite a colored settlement in this vicinity.”⁸⁸

“The people who once owned the old places are all gone and their children and children's children, too, are for the most part either dead or have moved away. A generation of strangers now occupy the ancestral homes. The colored settlement has dwindled down to three or four families and few people know the meaning of Wildcat ...”⁸⁹

CONCLUSION

The facts that allowed putting these stories together are contained in multiple records of the town but it was the additional information in the records of the First Parish Church of Norwell that made it possible to confirm identities and make family links that had not been made previously.

Comparing the data with that written by the local authors who have compiled written histories of the two towns show that in many respects those histories are accurate. In some cases, the information has been taken directly from the same church records that were examined for this report.

But there is one assumption that bears further research and that is the one which concludes that some of the later black residents of the town were slaves or the descendents of slaves from other parts of the country. Enough evidence exists to think that a search for local roots of those families might establish earlier connections to Scituate-Norwell.

Examination of the records of the First Parish Church of Scituate might provide as much additional information as those of the Second Parish did.

These are but a fraction of the stories that can be told about the people of color who lived, worked, loved and died in Scituate-Norwell during the formative

years of the United States. This researcher was continually amazed at the detail that the compilation provided and the stories that unfolded over the course of the research. Once assembled, mere fragments of information became powerful testimony to the triumphs and tragedies that marked these families.

The research process followed here was outlined by James Deetz in his book, "In Small Things Forgotten: The Archeology of Early American Life". The term "In Small Things Forgotten" is used in colonial court records to designate a collection of items in a deceased person's estate that were overlooked in compiling an inventory of personal property. A random value is placed on the overlooked items to complete the total worth of the deceased's wealth. In closing his book, Deetz writes,

"It is terribly important that the "small things forgotten" be remembered. For in the seemingly little and insignificant things that accumulate to create a lifetime, the essence of our existence is captured. We must remember these bits and pieces, and we must use them in new and imaginative ways so that a different appreciation for what life is today, and was in the past, can be achieved. The written document has its proper and important place, but there is a time when we should set aside our perusal of diaries, court records, and inventories, and listen to another voice.

"Don't read what we have written; look at what we have done." ⁹⁰

Footnotes:

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- 37 Pierson, Black Yankees, p. 73.
- 38 Pierson, Black Yankees, pgs. 103-107.
- 39 Towner, p. 440.
- 40 Scituate Vital Records, pgs. 26-28.
- 41 Pierson, Black Yankees, p. 97.
- 42 ????

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- 44 Towner, p.199-208
- 45 ibid, p. 45.
- 46 ibid, p. 233.
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