

Here All Along: African Americans in the Windham, CT Area, 1688-Present

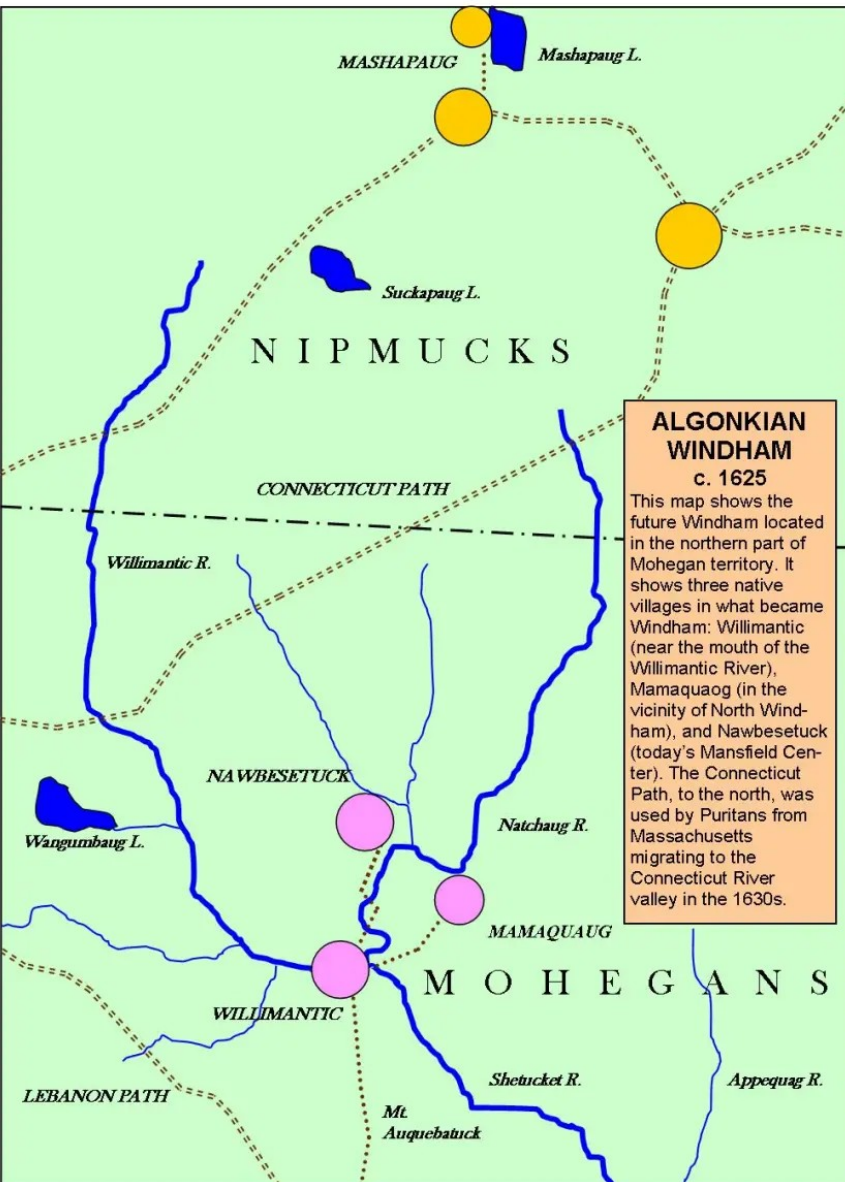
JAMIE EVES, WINDHAM TOWN HISTORIAN

Introduction

- Why should public historians do African American history at the local level?
 - Real people, real places, real stories
 - In 1982 the anthropologist Eric Wolf wrote a global history titled *Europe and the People Without History*, in which he focused on the experiences of “the people without history” – people not given a voice in standard “western” histories. One of his points was that denying people access to their own history is one way of exploiting them. Local communities have their own histories, which local people should know.
- Research in progress
 - This is what I have found out so far. I want to learn more. A lot more.
- A dialog, not a lecture
 - Community history = the community researches and writes the history together.

Research Questions

- Africans arrived in Connecticut in the 17th century, along with Europeans. Although often rendered invisible by their white neighbors, they were “here all along.” My research asks, “In what ways were African Americans in the Windham area made invisible?”
- The concept of race – although relatively new in the 17th century – was woven indelibly into the social fabric of northeastern Connecticut. Race would become so intrinsic to the ways that people viewed their communities that until recently few white people questioned its importance. Race appears in a wide range of historical records. My research asks, “In what ways did views about race shape the way in which residents of Windham, both black and white, lived their lives?”
- As a colleague says, “Black history is American history.” The presence of African Americans, their experiences and contributions, were integral to the histories of our local communities. My research asks, “In what ways did the presence and experiences of African Americans shape the history of northeastern Connecticut? In what ways were the experiences of African Americans similar to but also different from those of their white neighbors?”



Indigenous Peoples

White and Black people arrived in what became Windham in 1688. Of course, other peoples lived here before that. At the beginning of the 17th century, “the Place Among the Rivers” (an approximate translation of both Shetucket and Natchaug) was a borderland, where the territories of the Pequots and Mohegans to the south verged upon those of the Nipmucks to the north. By the early 18th century, however, the Algonkian peoples had been dispossessed of the Place Among the Rivers, and a new place, called first Joshua’s Tract and then Windham, Mansfield, and Hampden (and eventually also Chaplin and Scotland) came into existence.



WINDHAM GREEN, JUNE 8, 1892.

Joseph, Town Founder

In 1892 the people of Windham and Scotland gathered on Windham Green to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the incorporation of Windham as a town. AS part of the festivities, Jane Gay Fuller, a novelist and poet who lived in Scotland recited a poem in which she recalled the founding of Windham and the legends of Jonathan Cates and Joe Ginne.

Nor was he [Jonathan Cates] Abolitionist,
For in the South he bought a slave,
A trusty servant, faithful friend,
Who loved his mater to the end.
You all have heard of "Guinea Joe,"
Who would have been a settler, too,
If he had been a man, you know!

-- Jane Gay Fuller, 1892

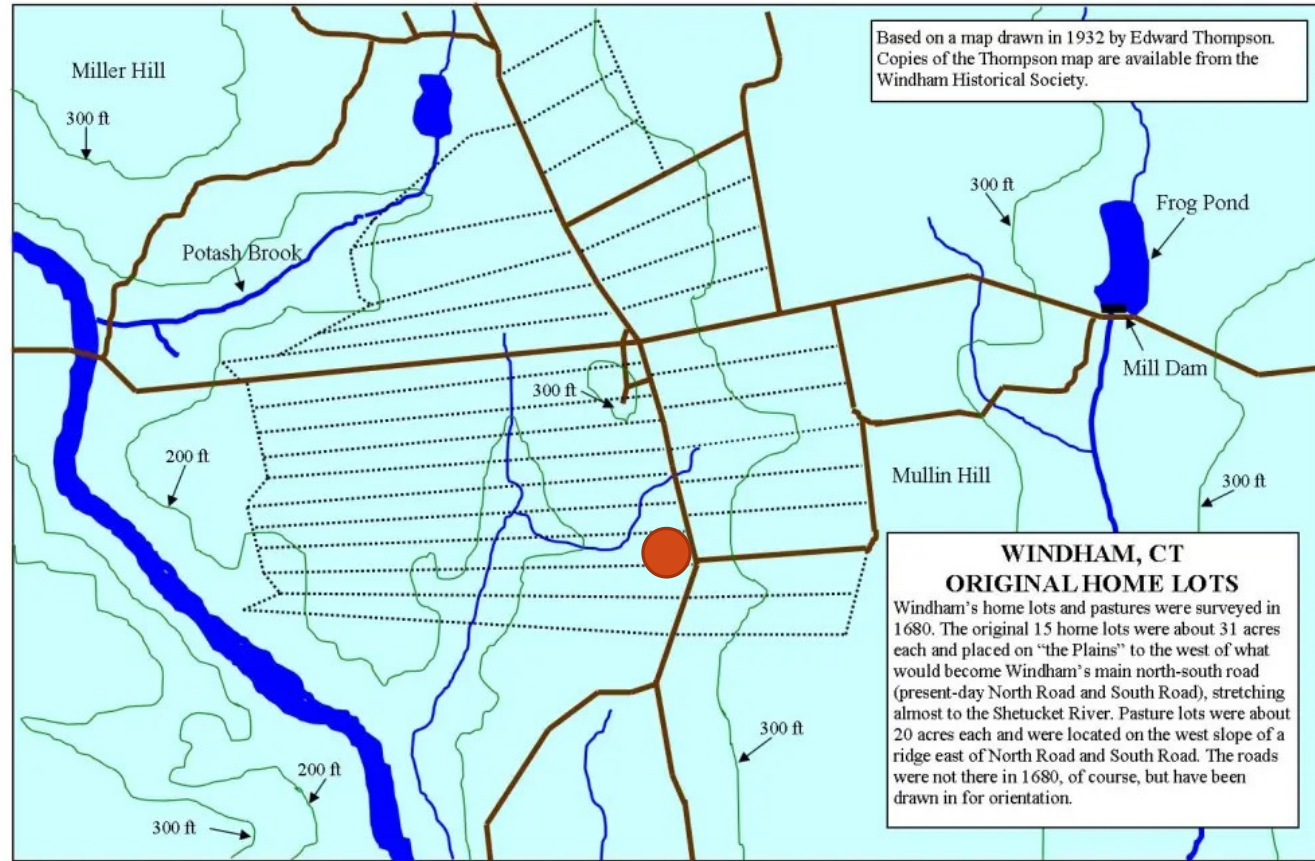
Joseph, Town Founder

- Connecticut town histories typically begin with “the first settler.”
- Most histories of Windham begin with Jonathan (or John) Cates (or Kates or Keats), the first European-born person to live there.
- Cates arrived in 1688, when Windham was part of Joshua’s Tract. It would be another two years before the land speculators who owned Joshua’s Tract, called the Legatees, would survey farm lots and open it to settlement. Cates would eventually purchase a lot, but until then he was a squatter. In local lore, Cates was often presented as a Puritan refugee.
- With Cates came a Black man who, in the later oral histories of Windham, would become known as Joe Ginne, a man whom Cates had enslaved.



CATES MEMORIAL TABLET AT WINDHAM CEMETERY.

Joseph, Town Founder



"In the autumn of 1688, Joshua's tract received its first settler. John Cates, an English refugee, fearful of the spies of Andross [sic], found his way into this desolate, uninhabited wilderness, and passed the winter, Crusoe-like, in a cave or cellar, fashioned by the hands of his faithful negro, Joe Ginne. Little is known of the previous history of this gentleman [i.e., Cates]. Tradition represents him as a high political offender, a Commonwealth soldier and even a Regicide, but the shy Englishman kept his own secret. It is said that he landed first at Virginia, where he purchased his servant, and thence came on to New York and Norwich, but found no security till he took up his abode in this remote wilderness."

Ellen Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, vol. 1 (1600-1760): 1874

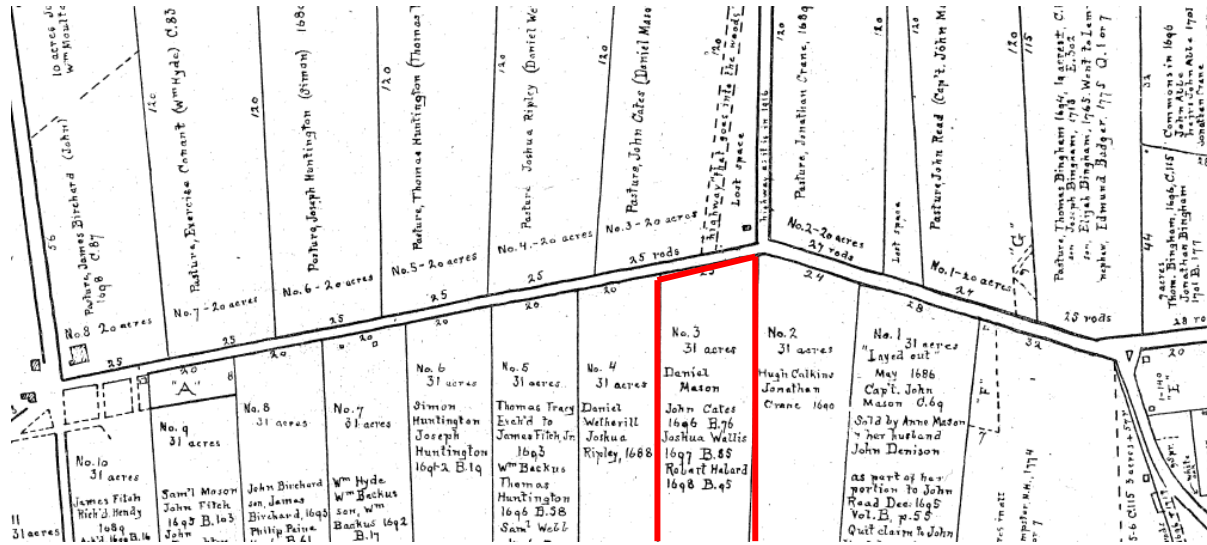
Joseph, Town Founder

There is a lot to unpack in Larned's paragraph.

1. Joe Ginne's life in Connecticut was inextricably connected to John Cates's, as the lives of Black people and white people were generally connected in 17th-century America. The two men arrived together. They lived together for nine years, until Cates died in 1697. For two of those years, until Jonathan Ginnings and his wife arrived at the settlement in 1690, they had only each other for company.

2. A second is that Cates had enslaved Ginne, purchasing him in Virginia before coming on to Connecticut.

3. A third is that without Joe Ginne, Cates likely would not have survived that first winter in Windham. Ginne built their shelter and provided them with food. Later, he built (or helped build) the first frame house in Windham.



Joseph, Town Founder

Larned cited one document that referred to Joe Ginne: Cates's will. (Cates died in 1697, apparently from old age.)

I John Kates of Windham, in the Colony of Connecticut, doe make this my last Will & Testament: I give 200 acres of my Land not yet laid out to the Poor of the Town of Windham, to be Instayled to sd. Poor for their Use forever. I doe also give and Instayle 200 acres more of my lands not yet laid out to a scoole House for the Use of the above said Town forever. And further I doe give unto the Reverend Mr. Samuel Whiting (minister of the Gospel) of said Towne, I say I give unto him my Negro Jo., one bed and bed Clothes, one Chest, and my Wearing Clothes. And further, I do give unto the Church of Windham ten pounds in Money. I doe make Mary Howard my Executrix, and doe give unto herr all my Estate not above mentioned, both personal and real. And I appoint Ensign Jonathan Crane and sergt. Thomas Bingham to be Overseers of this my Will. Always provided that if any of my Children should Come over out of England, then my Will is that they, he or she, should enjoy my Estate notwithstanding what is above exprest. Otherwise, to stand Exactly in all Points. The Negro Jo. an Exception.

Jno. X Kates

Joseph, Town Founder

What can we learn from Cates's will?

- Cates was illiterate.
- Cates was prosperous. Larned and other sources agree that he brought a quantity of gold and silver with him to Connecticut, which he used to purchase several hundred acres of land in Windham.
- Cates wanted to be a benefactor, to be remembered for his good works.
- Joseph's name. In the will, "Joe Ginne" is referred to as Jo., an abbreviation for Joseph, which was probably what he was called.
- Joseph was property, bequeathed in the will to Rev. Whiting.
- What was Cates's purpose in giving Joseph to Whiting? Was Joseph a valuable servant, incentive for Whiting to remain in Windham? Or was he elderly, and Cates wanted Whiting to care for him? Were the clothes and other personal items left to Whiting for Whiting's own use, or were they for Joseph?
- Why was Joseph the sole exception to the provision that, if any of Cates's children came to Windham from England, they would get everything?

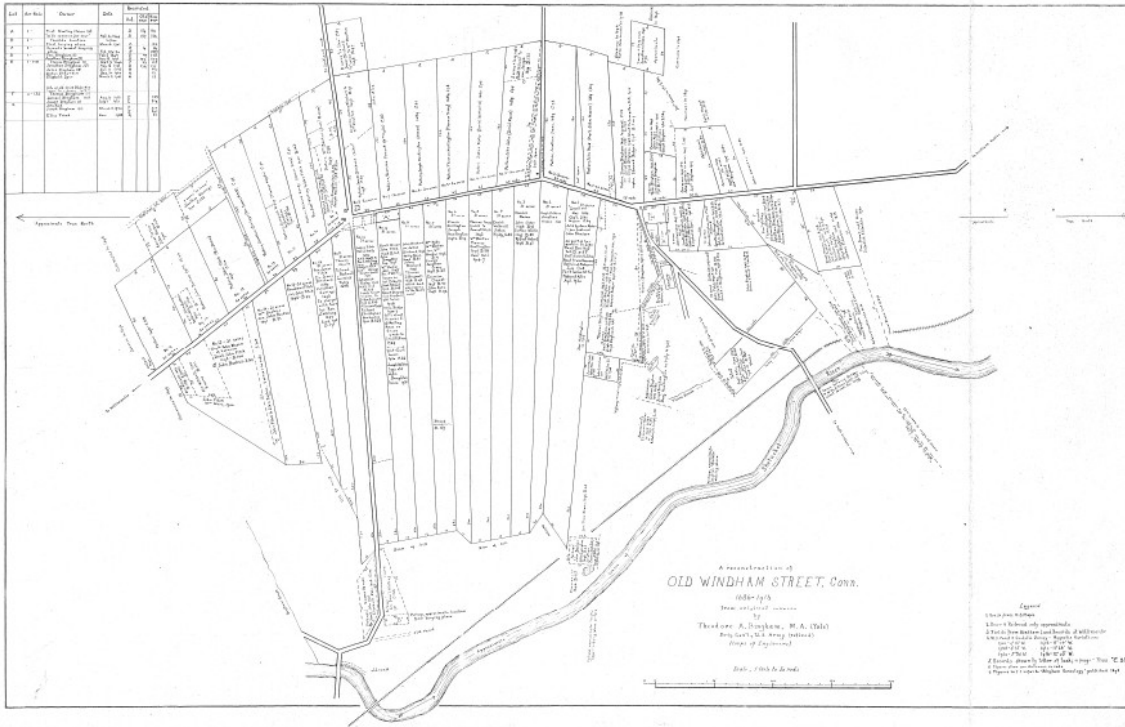
Joseph, Town Founder

Joseph did not, of course, play any political role in the new settlement of Windham. Several 19th-century local historians reproduced documents relating to Windham's early history, such as its petition to the Connecticut General Assembly for incorporation as an independent town. Cates was a frequent signer, as were most of Windham's other adult male heads of household. Neither a freeman nor a householder, Joseph signed none of these documents. Like women, children, and indentured servants, he could neither vote nor hold office. His name was absent from church records.

Joseph, Town Founder

Joseph and the Myth of Joe Ginne

- § Most of what Larned – and other 19th-century writers – wrote about Joseph was based on local oral traditions that had been passed down over generations.
- § The story of Jonathan Cates and Joe Ginne is a **foundation myth**. (Foundation myths are the stories people tell that explain how they think they became what they think they are.)
- § Joe Ginne was portrayed as a “faithful servant” who was overcome with grief at Cates’s death. Words like “slave” and “enslaved” were rarely used.
- § The surname “Ginne” does not appear in any contemporary documents. Was he actually called that? If so, what did it mean?



Joseph, Town Founder

Where was Joseph buried?

A. W. Parkhurst (1892) wrote that both Cates and Joseph “were buried near the place of their concealment [the cellar in which they had lived together during their first winter in Windham], and a rough stone, rudely initialed, marked for a time the spot. When the first cemetery was laid out, the body of Cates was removed thither.”

Indeed, where *were* enslaved people – and indigent people who could not afford headstones – buried in Windham?



Joseph, Town Founder

JANE GAY FULLER, 1892

Nor was he [Cates] Abolitionist,
For in the South he bought a slave,
A trusty servant, faithful friend,
Who loved his master to the end.
You all have heard of "Guinea Joe,"
Who would have been a settler, too,
If he had been a man, you know!

The forest welcomed him! The breeze
Brought back the tuneful melodies
His childhood loved beyond the seas!
And blue-birds sang, and blossoms sprang
To cheer the lonely-hearted man,
Till others came; then life began
Anew for the poor refugee
Unsought in his obscurity.

THERON BROWN, 1892

Pious he [Cates] was, and Puritan, possessed
Of worldly goods, a gentleman, a guest
Of Pilgrim Land, a friend of high and low,
A freeman – and he owned a slave, black Joe!

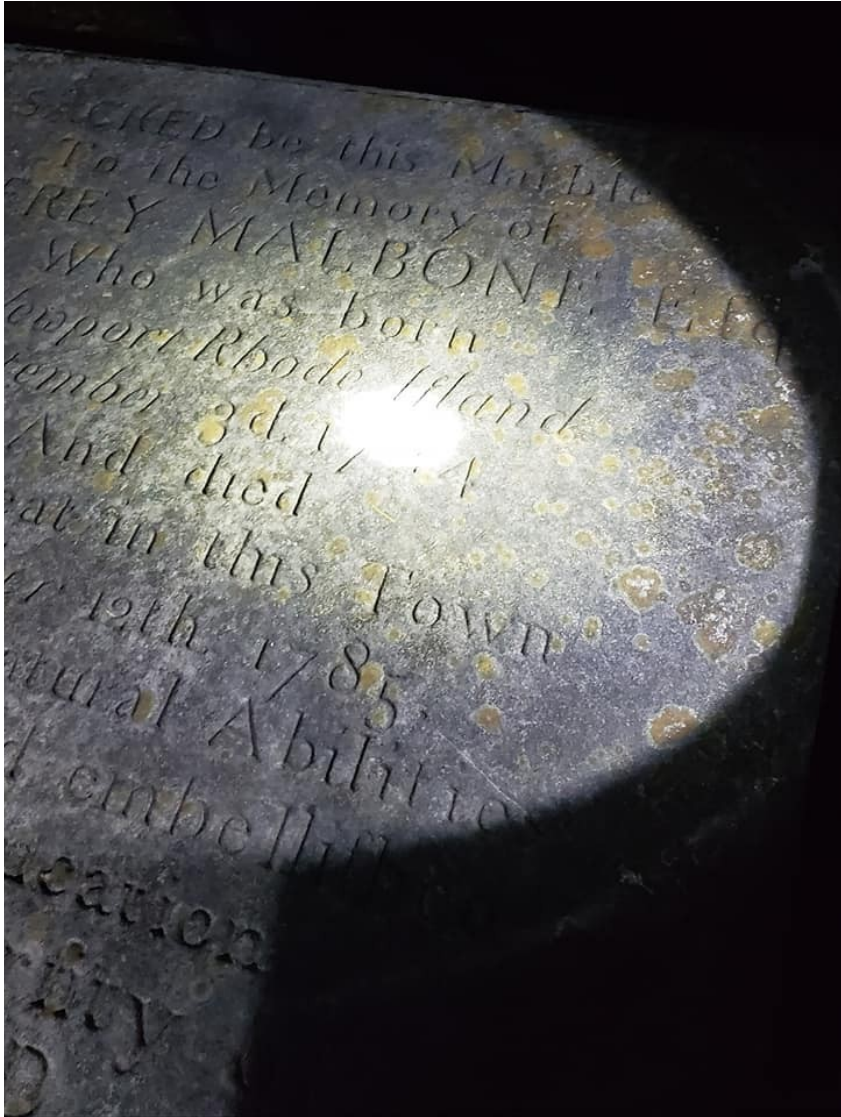
Enough that by the moral light he saw,
When liberty was only white man's law,
His human chattel was no swift reproof
To one whose soul had felt oppression's hoof,
Since Right, to even a Myflower refugee,
Implied no negro's title to be free.

We trust the legend that John cates was kind.
As kind of heart as liberal of mind.
And, after twice four years of upright deeds,
And generous thoughts for Windham's future needs,
When, praised for scattered blessings, he who gave
The town's first dwelling filled its earliest grave.
That the green threshold of his churchyard inn
Was watered by the tears of black Joe Ginne.

African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Sadly, slavery in Windham began with Joseph, but did not end with him. The first census of Connecticut, conducted in 1756 when it was still a colony, found 2,406 whites and 40 Blacks living in Windham town, all or most of them enslaved. Windham County had 19,670 whites and 345 Blacks. “These blacks were mostly negroes,” Ellen Larned wrote in her history of Windham County, “owned by the opulent families. A few Indians held as slaves were probably included among them. Apparently, the list was not complete.”





African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Mortlake

From Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, vol. 2 (Worcester, MA: Charles Hamilton, 1880).

"...the advent of another distinguished personage of very different character and proclivities [than Israel Putnam] – Godfrey Malbone, of Newport. An aristocrat by birth and sympathies; a loyalist, devoted to the Crown and Church of England – untoward fate brought him to finish his days amid the rude, rebel yeomanry of Pomfret [and Brooklyn, CT].... Colonel Malbone was a man of varied experience and accomplishments. He was educated at King's College, Oxford, had traveled much and moved in the first circles of Europe and America. Inheriting a large estate from his father, he had lived in a style of princely luxury and magnificence. His country-house, a mile from Newport state-house, was called 'the most splendid edifice in all the Colonies.' Completed at great cost after long delay, it was destroyed by fire in the midst of house-warming festivities."



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Mortlake

“Colonel Malbone’s financial affairs had become seriously embarrassed. His commercial enterprises had been thwarted by the insubordination of the Colonies. His ships had been taken by privateers, and his property destroyed by Newport mobs, and now that his elegant edifice was consumed, he refused to battle longer with fate and opposing elements, and, early in 1766, buried himself in the wilds of Pomfret [and Brooklyn]. Some three thousand acres of land ... had been made over to him at the decease of his father, well stocked with cows, horses, sheep, swine, goats and negroes. These slaves according to common report were a part of a cargo brought from Holland who helped repel a piratical assault, and were retained for life and comfortably supported. Amid such rude, uncongenial surroundings, Malbone made his home, ... renouncing all business interests but the cultivation of his land and the utilization of his negro forces.”



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Mortlake

- § Essentially, Mortlake was a plantation, here in northeastern Connecticut, owned by Godfrey Malbone and worked by enslaved people.
- § Malbone came to Connecticut from Newport, RI, where his family had made a fortune in the shipping industry, including the slave trade. Newport was a center for the slave trade.
- § In Brooklyn, CT, Malbone built Trinity Church in 1771 – in part because he was nominally an Anglican (Episcopalian), and in part because he did want to be taxed to support the construction of a new Congregationalist church in Brooklyn.
- § Enslaved people attended services at Trinity Church. They were seated in the balcony, while whites had pews on the ground floor.
- § Enslaved people were buried in the Trinity churchyard, towards the back, behind the graves of white people.
- § A loyalist, Malbone was on the losing side during the Revolution.

African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

A WOOD PARTITION RENDERED THE BLACK PEOPLE SEATED IN THE BALCONY INVISIBLE TO THE WHITES BELOW



GROUND FLOOR PEWS, FOR THE WHITE FOLKS



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

SEATS IN THE BALCONY

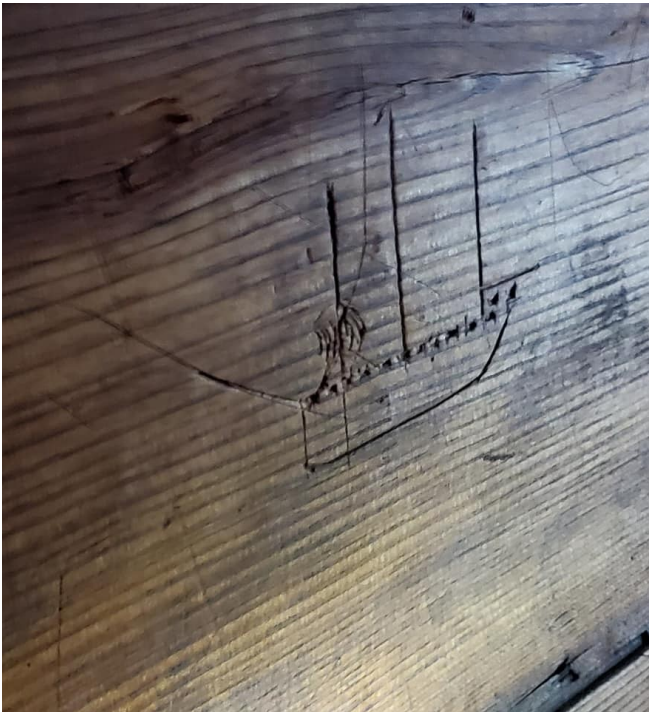


THE VIEW FROM THE BALCONY



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

BECAUSE THE BLACK PEOPLE IN THE BALCONY WERE INVISIBLE TO THE WHITE PEOPLE BELOW, THEY COULD (AND DID) CARVE IMAGES ON THE PARTITION.



WAS THE ENSLAVED PERSON WHO CARVED THIS SHIP TRANSPORTED ON IT TO NEWPORT, BEFORE BEING TAKEN TO BROOKLYN/POMFRET?



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

THIS IMAGE HAS BEEN INTERPRETED AS THE HAND OF GOD REACHING DOWN TO GRASP THE LONG-WINDED MINISTER, PERHAPS AS SOME SORT OF DIVINE PUNISHMENT. MALBONE HIMSELF SOMETIMES CONDUCTED SERVICES. COULD THIS ILLUSTRATION BE ABOUT HIM?



BUILDINGS



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

ELIZA WAS AN ENSLAVED PERSON BURIED IN THE TRINITY CHURCH YARD. NO LAST NAME WAS RECORDED. GRAVESTONES FOR ENSLAVED PEOPLE WERE RARE IN NORTHEASTERN CONNECTICUT.



SARAH



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Windham During the Revolution

Larned: "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...."



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

Windham During the Revolution

Larned: "Social life in Windham was still characterized by exuberant hilarity. 'Jaunting 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 houseful of negroes, great and small, and entertained much company in fine style. Pictures and rarities brought from abroad adorned his handsome residence."

Do you think Larned's characterization of enslaved people is accurate?



African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

There were also eleven households in Windham in 1790 where ONLY free people of color lived, meaning that the listed head of household was a free man of color (and the heads listed were all male).

These free men of color who headed their own households in Windham in 1790 were Zephaniah Jennings, Primus Mingo, Andrew Jackson, Prince White, Edward Davison, Samuel Phillips, John Lynes, Ezra Rathbone, John Phillips, Cuff Perkins, and Peter Hitch. (The census enumerator's handwriting was not always clear.) In 1800, the free Black heads of household in Windham were Jube Negro, Pomp Negro, Cuff Perkins, Philomon Little, Rock Ceasare, Ezra Rathbun, Pero Negro, Jesse Leason, Job Leason, Prince Negro, Edward Gauson, Peter Welsh, and John Tyler.

Pero. Negro	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	4	"
Elph. Crowell	1	"	"	"	1	"	"	1	"	1	"	"
Nathan Simons	1	"	"	"	1	"	1	2	"	1	"	"
Nath. Hibbard	"	"	"	"	1	"	"	"	"	1	"	"
Jesse Leason	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	"	6	"
Jabez Rouse	"	"	"	"	1	"	"	"	"	1	"	"

African Americans and Enslavement in Northeastern Connecticut

After 1790, the number of enslaved people in Windham declined, while the number of free Black people increased, as men, women, and children gradually became free. In 1784 the Connecticut General Assembly passed an Act of Gradual Abolition, stating that those children born into slavery after March 1, 1784 would be freed by the time they turned 25. There were 28 enslaved people in Windham in 1790, 14 in 1800, 11 in 1810, four in 1820, and none in 1850. At the same time, the number of free Blacks in Windham remained fairly stable 1790-1850: 63 in 1790, 78 in 1800, 73 in 1810, 83 in 1820, and 77 in 1850.

Until 1850, the Census recorded only the names of the heads of household (the vast majority of whom were men) and indicated other people by series of hatch marks under several gender, age, and racial categories. Because the Census recorded only the names of the heads of household, until 1850 the names of most of Windham's African Americans went unrecorded. But the 1850 Census does reveal the names of two of Eliphalet Dyer's former slaves -- Prince and his wife Lucinda, who were still alive in 1850, a 90-year-old free man and an 80-year-old free woman, living in the home of Dyer's descendant, Clarence Dyer. The Census records them as Prince and Lucinda Dyer. In 1790, Prince would have been 30 and Lucinda 20. They had managed to outlive slavery.

Jesse and Job Leason of the Connecticut Line

Before the Revolution

Two of the free Black householders living in Windham in the early 1800s (they appear in the 1800 and 1820 Censuses) were brothers Jesse and Job Leason, both of whom served in the Continental Army during the Revolution. Little is known about them before 1777, however, other than that Jesse was born c. 1753 and Job c. 1758.

Job Leason's first wife is believed to have been Zilpha Perkins, daughter of London Perkins (1721-99), a former enslaved man who operated a tannery, and his wife Cate Perkins (c. 1717/18-1813). Zilpha's parents had both been enslaved by Capt. John Perkins and his wife Lydia of Norwich, CT, but were free by 1786. Their eight children were all born into slavery and baptized in Lisbon, CT. There is a good chance that both brothers had originally come from Norwich/Lisbon, and that they, too, had been enslaved, although not by Perkins. Job was illiterate. (At left, pages from John Perkins's probate inventory, 1761.)

five Sacks of 126 pounds of Sheep wool 43-13-4
260 pounds of Flax at 8-10-10: one Negro man Named London 13-0-0
one Negro Woman Named Cate London wife 50-0-0
one Negro Man Named Simon 35-0-0
one Negro Woman Named Lucy Hager Simon wife 35-0-0
one Negro Girl Named Bala 50-0-0
one Negro Girl Named Dinah 50-0-0
one Negro Boy Named Jim 50-0-0
one Negro Girl Named Milcha 32-0-0
£ 298:5:6

page 10th

one Negro Girl Named Sarah	£ 32-0-0
one Negro Boy Named Osefimus	28-0-0
one Negro Girl Named Tamer	17-0-0
one Negro Boy Named Ziba a Sucking Child	8-0-0
one Negro Boy Named John	48-0-0
one Negro Boy Named Cagg	42-0-0
one large Roan Mare & Colt	17-0-0
one Brown Mare & 9: one Bay mare & 9	15-0-0
one Black Horse & 11: the old Bay mare & Colt & 3: 0-0	14-0-0
one yearling horse & 11: 3: 10: one Brown yearling mare & 11: 10: 7-0-0	
one pair of 2 yearling Halls & 9: one pair of young working oxen & 10: 10: 19-10-0	
one pair of 6 yearling Halls & 8: 10: one pair of young oxen & 8: 10: 17-0-0	
twelve two yearling Steers & Heifers	28-10-0
Nineteen yearling Steers & Heifers	25-13-0
one Dark Brown three yearling Fry Cow	2-14-0
one pair of six yearling working oxen	15-10-0
four Cows without Calves	18-0-0
one pair of 11 yearling Steers & Heifers	94-10-0

Jesse and Job Leason of the Connecticut Line

During the Revolution

In April 1777, when they were 24 and 19, Jesse and Job joined the Continental Army for three years as privates. They rejoined when their terms expired and served until the end of the Revolutionary War in 1783, when they were discharged. They had not joined the Connecticut militia, where the term of service was only three months. They were part of the 8th Regiment of the Connecticut Line. They guarded the Hudson Valley in 1777, fought at Germantown, and wintered at Valley Forge. Although neither brother recorded his experiences, their company commander, Capt. Paul Brigham of Coventry, CT, left a partial memoir. Pvt. Joseph Plumb Martin, a white soldier who served in a different regiment of the Connecticut Line, wrote a full memoir. Thus, we can know a lot of what the brothers experienced.

At left, a detail from a 1778 muster roll for Brigham's Company of the 8th Regiment of the Connecticut Line.

Inducted	Private	
Apr 5	Job Leason	0 years
5	Jesse Leason	0 years
4	John Munro	
	Linos Mops	
	Mr Nathl Powers	0 years

Link at Stratford

Jesse and Job Leason of the Connecticut Line

Why Did They Join the Army?

We don't know for sure why the brothers joined the Continental Army, but we can guess. For African Americans, the Patriot cause offered hopes for freedom and equality on several levels. As the historian Joyce Lee Malcolm points out in *Peter's War: A New England Slave Boy and the American Revolution* (2010), enslaved men from Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island could become free if they served in the Continental Army for the full duration of the War. In addition, well-to-do white men sometimes sent their slaves to fight for them, with the promise of freedom if they survived - Eliphalet Dyer's son sent one of Eliphalet's slaves, Jube Dyer, in his place; Jube survived the War and was freed. For both enslaved and free Black men, service in the Continental Army carried the hope that, after the War, they would be treated by their white neighbors with greater respect. That respect - and the equality that should have gone with it - were not usually forthcoming, but the hope was there. There was also the prospect of soldiers' pay, and perhaps a pension when the War was over. The Leason brothers fought for freedom for America, and probably also for the promise of equality embedded in the Declaration of Independence. If they had been enslaved before the War, they were free when it ended. And, as events would show, they also needed financial help.

At left, a page from Jesse Leason's 1818 application for a veteran's pension.

April 1818 - he enlisted into the [then] Army of the United States, and soon after joined the company of Capt. Paul Beigham, of Col. John Chandler's Regiment being then called the 8th Connecticut Regiment, of the Connecticut Line, that he continued faithfully to do duty in S. Connecticut Line, for the term of three years, and until, on or about the 15th day of March, 1818, when he was regularly discharged - ^{and by reason of the reduced circumstances of the said Leason, and that he was poor and indigent and stands in need of assistance from his country for his support, and Prays the benefit of a later Act of Congress, being, any Act.} Entitled "An Act to provide for certain persons engaged in the land and naval service of the United States in the Revolutionary War!" -
"Dated at Windham the 2d day of April 1818"
Jesse Leason
State of Connecticut
County of Windham ss. Windham April 2d 1818
Then came personally before me Judge Charles W. Leason, of the County of Windham and District of Connecticut, - Jesse Leason the signer of the above petition - and in my presence subscribed, and made Oath to the following Affidavit -
"I Jesse Leason, of the Town of Windham, County of Windham and State of Connecticut do swear, that I am a resident in the S. Town of Windham, that on or about the 15th day of April 1818 - I enlisted as a private soldier, in Capt. Paul Beigham's company in Col. John Chandler's [then called] the 8th Regiment of the Connecticut Line of the Continental Army, and soon after joined said Army at Peekskill in the State of New York, that I continued faithfully to serve in said Regiment, for the term of three years and was discharged therefrom on or about the 15th day of March, 1818, which discharge is not in question."

Jesse and Job Leason of the Connecticut Line

After the War, free Blacks especially experienced increasing segregation, increasing violence, and the degradation of their civil rights.... But 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 distaff 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.

Judith L. Van Buskirk, *Standing in Their Own Light: African American Patriots in the American Revolution* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017)



District of Connecticut, ss.

At a *Special* Court of Common Pleas, holden at *Windham* within and for the County of Windham, in said district—

ON this *28th* day of *June* — A. D. 1820, personally appeared in open Court, being a Court of Record for the County aforesaid, [Having the power of fine and imprisonment,]

Job Leason of Windham in the County of Windham aforesaid

aged *sixtyfour* years, who, being first duly sworn according to law, doth, on his oath, declare, that he served in the Revolutionary war as follows, viz: That he enlisted for the term of *three years* on *or about* *15th* day of *March* in the year *1777* — in the State of *Connecticut* in the company commanded by Captain *Israel Brigham* in the regiment commanded by Colonel *John Channing* in the line of the State of *Connecticut* on the Continental establishment: that he continued to serve in the said corps until *on or about* *the 15th day of March 1780* having served *three years*, when he was discharged from the said service in *Springfield* in the State of *Vermont*

*My discharge is lost — I am now a Pensioner — the date of my original application was April 3^d 1812 — the Act of Congress in reference is 9.654 I have no trade & depend upon day labor for support — I have been feeble for 12 years & unable to do anything except a little basket making — I have a wife (Rosanna) aged fortyfour who enjoys pretty good health — I have no children — I further swear that I again enlisted in Capt. *Peter Brigham* Col. *Eben Huntington's* Regt. for three years on or about the *1st day of July 1781* — I served therein until *on or about* *the 10th day of July 1783* when I was discharged at *West point* in the State of *New York**

And I do solemnly swear that I was a resident citizen of the United States, on the *18th* day of *March*, *one thousand eight hundred and eighteen*; and that I have not, since that time, by gift, sale, or in any manner, disposed of my property, or any part thereof, with intent thereby so to diminish it, as to bring myself within the provisions of an act of Congress, entitled, "an act to provide for certain persons engaged in the land and naval service of the United States, in the Revolutionary war," passed on the *18th* day of *March*, *one thousand eight hundred and eighteen*; and that I have not, nor has any person in trust for me, any property or securities, contracts, or debts due to me; nor have I any income other than what is contained in the Schedule hereto annexed, and by me subscribed.

Job Leason

A Schedule of the whole real & personal estate & income of Job Leason of Windham in the County of Windham & State of Connecticut — Vt.

<i>1 axe hoe & drawing knife</i>	<i>\$1.63</i>
<i>1 axe chain & iron post</i>	<i>3.34</i>
<i>1 Tea Kettle 10 cups & 10 saucers</i>	<i>0.84</i>
	<i>0.42</i>

Jesse and Job Leason of the Connecticut Line

After the Revolution

By 1808 both Jesse and Job Leason were living in Windham, but in poverty. Although not old by today's standards – 55 and 50 – they were no longer able to labor as farm hands, the work they had done, and were reliant on basket making for a living. They did not own their homes. They had families to support, although Job was childless and married to his second wife, Rosanna, who was in good health. Jesse's wife, Susannah, was "a weakly sickly woman," and he was responsible for his 14-year-old daughter Sally and grandson Jesse Leason Bates. Jesse valued his entire estate at \$7.36. Job had even less. They applied for veterans' pensions in 1818 and received them, and then for their share of "bounty lands" in 1820. Jesse died in 1826 at the age of 73. Job died in 1828 at the age of 70. (A page from Job's bounty lands application is at left.)

The Jackson Family: Becoming Visible?

When the Jacksons moved from rural Columbia to urban Willimantic in the 1830s, they moved into a growing young mill city on the rise. Willimantic was located in the northwestern part of the town of Windham, in the gorge of the Willimantic River. Steep, granite hills rose on both sides. The river itself tumbled over several rapids and waterfalls, descending more than 90 feet in less than a mile, providing enough power to drive four cotton mills. The mills were new, having been built in the 1820s, when the Jacksons had been living in Columbia. As mill workers and others with urban crafts and skills flocked to the expanding city, the population burgeoned. In 1833 Willimantic was “citified” enough to incorporate under a new state law as an urban “borough” within the town of Windham. A former turnpike had metamorphosed into a wide Main Street, paralleling the Willimantic River on the north, with a panoply of new side streets: Winter Street, High Street, Bridge Street, Union Street, North Street, Church Street, State Street, Washington Street, Milk Street, and Jackson Street, among others. Most of the street names were typical post-revolutionary New England street names. But Jackson Street stood out as different. It was named not for the President of the time, but for the Jackson family that lived on it. Jackson Street was laid out sometime after 1833 and before 1855, and quickly became the main street leading north out of the mill city to neighboring rural Mansfield. Shown on an 1855 county map, the Jackson home was not located downtown, but on the outskirts, on the slopes of Prospect Hill, on 30 acres rented from Samuel Hill. It is unlikely that residents named the street in honor of the family. The Jacksons were not community leaders, movers, or shakers, nor holders of local office. Moreover, with the exception of Washington Street, none of the other streets during this time were named for individuals. Most likely Jackson Street was called Jackson Street because it was the road that led out to the Jackson home on the outskirts of the city, a visible landmark at a bend in the road. Naming roads for where they went was an old Connecticut custom. But it gave the Jacksons something most people of color did not have in 19th-century Connecticut: visibility. There were no shops and stores on Jackson Street when the Jackson family lived there. Downtown was confined mostly to Main and Union Streets. It would only be later, in the second half of the century, that Jackson Street became a commercial area. When the Jacksons lived there, it was a residential area north of downtown.

The Jackson Family: Becoming Visible?

GENEALOGY

Lyman Jackson (c. 1796-1858) – b. Stonington
Clarissa Buck Jackson (1799-c. 1875) – b. Preston
Lyman and Clarissa m. 1823, age 27 and 24, both recorded as

being Black

Gurdon Buck (c. 1777-1842) – b. Griswold, bap.
Wethersfield, m.

Plainfield, Preston, Lisbon, Canterbury, Willimantic

Martha Moody Buck (1774-1851) – b. Preston
Pico Moody (1745-1828)

Abigail Walley Moody (1745-1790)

John Jackson (c. 1668-1737)

Joan Jackson

Adam Jackson (enslaved by Joshua Hempsted)

Abby Buck (d. 1850)

INTERPRETATION

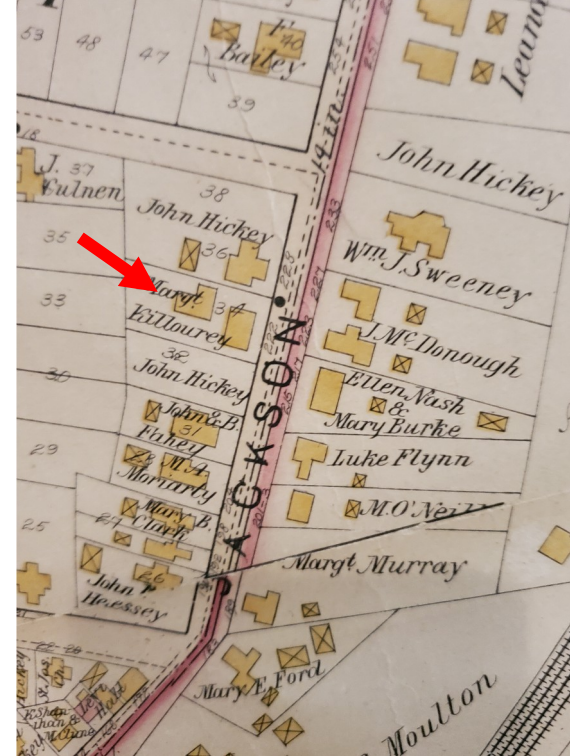
African Americans in early Connecticut sometimes had difficulty finding marriage partners. They comprised only 2.9% of the population in 1820. Interracial marriages with whites, while they occurred, were not the norm. African Americans did marry Native Americans, but they were even less numerous.

Altogether, Clarissa gave birth to seven children over 19 years — from 1826-45 — starting when she was 27 and continuing until she was 46 and survived each birthing.

The Jacksons named at least some of their children after relatives from previous generations. Family – on Clarissa's side anyway – seems to have been important to them.

Not permitted to vote, not even in Connecticut, but paid taxes indirectly.

Was it safer to live on the outskirts, to be “quiet,” as one of their white neighbors described them?



The Jackson Family: Becoming Visible?



The Jackson Family: Becoming Visible?

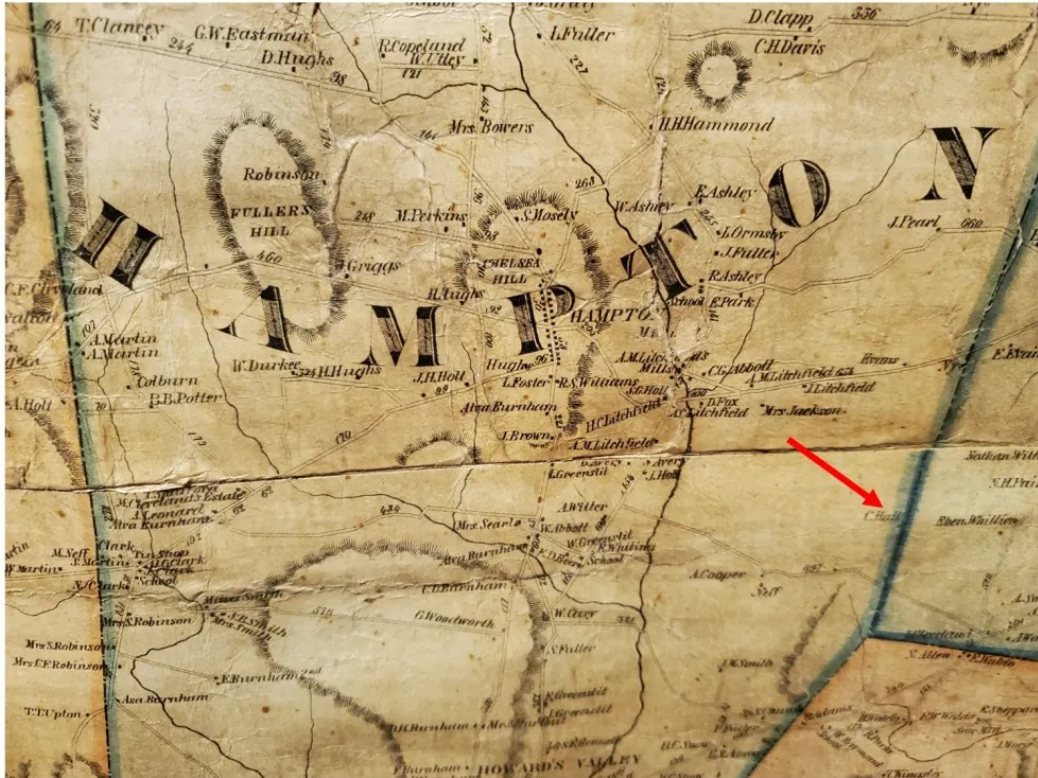
Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

“Once let the black man get upon his person the brass letter, U. S., 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.”

–Frederick Douglass



Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)



Caesar Hall, Jr. was born c. 1828 in the small farming community of Chaplin, CT. He was named for his father, an African American farm laborer whose name appears in official records as “Ceazer,” “Caesar,” “Cezar,” “Ceaser,” and “Cesar.” Caesar, Jr. grew up in a large household. Besides himself and his father, there was his mother Susan, who was also African American, his older brother Henry, and younger brothers James, Charles, George, John Q. A. (we may assume that the Q. A. stood for Quincy Adams), Gilbert, and Edwin. Sometime during the two years after Caesar, Jr. was born, the Hall family moved from Chaplin to the neighboring town of Hampton, also predominantly rural, where they would remain. The 1850 United States Census recorded Caesar, Sr. as a “laborer,” which probably meant that he was a farm hand, employed on one or more of Hampton’s many farms. Lacking enough wealth to acquire a farm of his own, either to own or to rent, he labored for others. An 1855 wall map shows a house labeled “C. Hall,” right along Hampton’s eastern border with Brooklyn, CT. The house did not sit directly along a road, as did all of the other houses in Hampton, nor was it near any other houses. We don’t know if it was the home of Caesar Hall, Sr. or Caesar Hall, Jr, but whoever lived there was keeping their distance from the rest of the community. Perhaps it was safer that way.

Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

Caesar Hall, Jr. appeared in official Connecticut records for the first time in 1850, in the federal Census, when he was 23 years old. The 1850 United States Census was a milestone for historians, because for the first time it recorded the names of everyone, not just the heads of household, as had previously been the case. According to the Census, Caesar, Jr. was a farm laborer, like his father. He resided in Hampton, but not as a member of his father's household. Instead, he lived with Willard Talbot, a white farmer, along with Talbot's wife Maria, the three small Talbot children, and a young white woman named Elizabeth Bunn. Caesar, Jr. and Elizabeth would have been servants, and Caesar probably did much of the household's farm labor, probably working alongside Talbot. Shortly after the Census, Caesar, Jr. married an African American woman named Julia and moved out of the Talbot household. Caesar and Julia's marriage records could not be located, but the 1860 United States Census showed them living in their own household in Hampton. Now 31 (ages listed in the Census should always be taken as approximations, as the data was not always collected from the person in question, but rather could have been supplied by a family member or even a neighbor), Caesar, Jr. was still a farm laborer. He could read and write. At 32, Julia was a year older than her husband. And there were three children: Nancy N., 9; William P., 3; and Susan E., 1. Nancy attended school.

Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

In 1861 the Civil War began. Across Connecticut — across the entire North — African American men rushed to enlist in the Union Army, only to be turned away. Both the federal Army and the state militias were for whites only. Men of color were not permitted to join, barred by a law enacted by Congress in 1792. But the Civil War went badly for the Union during 1861 and 1862, especially in the East. In 1862 President Lincoln and Congress, needing more troops, decided to lift the ban. The Emancipation Proclamation — issued in 1862 but put into effect on the first day of 1863 — called for recruiting black soldiers. African American soldiers would serve in segregated, all-black regiments with white officers, but they would be given the opportunity to fight. The first of these “Colored” regiments to be formed and put into service was the famed 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the subject of the movie *Glory*. (A member of the 54th, John Harris, later lived in Willimantic and is buried in the Old Willimantic Cemetery.) Connecticut moved more slowly than Massachusetts to recruit black soldiers, in part because Governor William Buckingham feared that white soldiers might react with hostility. But a registration of potential African American soldiers occurred in the summer of 1863, enlistments began in late 1863, and volunteers were mustered into actual regiments — the 29th and 30th Connecticut Volunteer Infantries (Colored) — early in 1864. Among those who signed up were Caesar Hall, Jr., and his younger brother, John Q. A. Hall, both of whom joined the 29th C.V.I.

Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

Just as with white soldiers, Connecticut men of color probably joined the Union Army for a variety of individual reasons: duty, patriotism, peer pressure, adventure, signing bonuses, soldier's pay, a desire to save the Union, proving their worth, and — for some — to end slavery. Indeed, for soldiers of color like Caesar Hall, ending slavery was doubtless at or near the top of the list, although they themselves were free. 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 together suffered 2,751 combat deaths and around 36,000 deaths from disease. Sixteen men 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 share of the population than white men. Doubtless, one of the reasons for this was that they were especially motivated to end slavery in the United States. But they were also moved by a desire to prove themselves as full American citizens, to make a difference in a crucial moment, to save democracy, to earn the respect of their white neighbors, and to further the cause of racial equality in the North as well as the South.



Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

Caesar Hall, Jr., enlisted in the 29th Connecticut Volunteer Infantry on December 3, 1863, at Norwich, CT, the nearest large city to his home in Hampton. His brother John enlisted seven days later. Caesar was 36, a bit old for a soldier, but this was the Civil War, fought mostly by citizen soldiers whose ages ranged from their mid-teens into their 50s, a large proportion of whom were married with children. John was 25 and single. Caesar's recruitment papers indicate that he was relatively tall for the time, although short by today's reckoning, at 5' 5 1/2". He was recorded as having black hair and black eyes. (Every one of the Connecticut enlistment records I have seen for African American Civil War soldiers said they had black eyes, not brown, so I would not take the notation too literally.) Caesar was assigned to Company H and given the rank of corporal. He mustered in on March 8, 1864, and on April 30 he was "promoted" to full private. He served through to the end of the War, mustering out on October 24, 1865.

Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

SAMUEL BOWERS, of New-York, a volunteer at the camp on Grapevine Point, attempted to desert on Friday night, by running the guard. CAESAR HALL, of Co. A [sic], Twenty-ninth Connecticut Volunteers, (colored) on guard at the time, ordered him to halt, when BOWERS threw snuff in his eyes. HALL pursued and closed with the runaway; he bayoneted him badly through the arm, broke his gunstock over his head, and brought him back to camp. BOWERS was sent to the hospital, and will probably recover. HALL was, this morning, promoted to be corporal.

New York Times, Jan. 1864



Caesar Hall and the 29th CVI (Colored)

1870 Census: Caesar and Julia Hall living in Hampton. He was a farmer, although he did not own any real estate. She was “keeping house.” Nancy was 19 and a household servant. William was 13, Susie 11, and Mary 9 – they were “in school.”

1875 Willimantic City Directory: Julia was living in Willimantic in a household that did not include Caesar. She was a laundress, living in a commercial block that fronted Main Street, but she entered from the back, near the railroad tracks. Caesar lived in Willimantic, too, but as a boarder at a different address. Nancy had moved away. William (24) was living with Julia and working as a cook. Mary (19) was a domestic servant.

Between 1875 and 1896, Caesar joined the Grand Army of the Republic. He died on March 15, 1896.



Still Researching

- John C. Harris
- John Q. Hall
- Lianzo Sekater
- John Buck
- Julia Hall
- Rachel Jackson
- Cora Moore
- The 20th Century, the Great Migration, etc.
- Employment in the Mills
- Etc.

Some Sources

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- Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut*, vol. 1 (1874)
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- William A. Dobak, *Freedom By The Sword: The Official Army History of the U. S. Colored Troops in the Civil War, 1862-1867* (Washington: Center of Military History, 2011).
- Jamie H. Eves, "'If He Had Been a Man, You Know?': Joe Ginne, Town Founder," <https://millmuseum.org/joe-ginne/>
- Jamie H. Eves, "'Faithfully to Serve': Jesse & Job Leason, African American Soldiers in the Revolutionary War," <https://millmuseum.org/job-jesse-leason/>
- Jamie H. Eves, "'A Respectable, Quiet Colored Citizen': Lyman Jackson (1796-1858), African American Cabinet Maker, and Clarissa Buck Jackson (1799-c. 1875), African American Wife and Barber," <https://millmuseum.org/lyman-jackson/>
- Jamie H. Eves, "'Let Him Get an Eagle on His Button': Caesar Hall (1828-1896), African American Civil War Soldier from Hampton and Willimantic," <https://millmuseum.org/caesar-hall-2/>