



**Once Known:
A History of Slavery in Westford, Massachusetts**

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Preface

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. When I first stepped into the Westford Museum in about 2013, I saw the Westford Women Doll collection and was startled to see one dressed in colonial clothing with dark fabric for skin. I knew there had been enslaved people on the Royall Estate in Medford, so why was it so hard to believe that there were enslaved people in Westford. I learned this doll represented Peggy, an enslaved woman in the Joseph Hildreth, Jr. household. Throughout my time learning about Westford's history, I heard there were others enslaved in town and some free men and women after the Revolution.

The lack of information on Peggy bothered me. There were so many questions and the answers had to be there somewhere. Thanks to a grant from the Freedom's Way Foundation, I was able to embark on this journey to find these answers.

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General History of Slavery in Massachusetts

In the earliest days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, there was no difference between slavery and indentured servitude. It was a custom. Positive law was needed to make it legal.¹ While there were enslaved people in the Colony, slavery became legal in the colony in 1641.² Massachusetts was the first colony to do so.

Also from the earliest days, men from Massachusetts were involved in the slave trade. From 1725-1729, The *Boston Gazette*, the leading newspaper at the time, announced thirty-two parcels of slaves for sale. A parcel was a shipment of slaves from a merchant ship. From 1730-1734, there were twenty-seven parcels and from 1735-1739 there were ten, a marked decrease. After 1739, there were only twelve parcels marketed in the *Gazette*.³ After 1739 then, the majority of slaves sold within the Commonwealth were probably the second sale.

The African trade from Newport and Boston was conducted in sloops, brigantines, and schooners generally carrying forty or fifty tons. One brigantine is described as sixty feet in length and "sixty feet length by the keel, straight rabbet, and length of the rake forward to be fourteen feet, three foot and one half of which to be put into the keel, so that she will then be sixty-three feet keel and eleven feet rake forward. Twenty-three feet by the beam, ten feet in the hold, and three feet ten inches between decks and twenty inches waste." The three feet ten inches between the decks was the space allotted to the captives.⁴

According to "The Early African Slave Trade in New England" many of the ships from New England made voyages to Guinea.⁵ The Guinea voyagers were known as "rum-vessels." There was no article of merchandise comparable to rum on the African coast. Weeden argues that their intent was not immoral, but economic in that they had tried to trade other dry goods and they were all rejected in Africa, except for the rum.⁶

Boston Merchant Peter Faneuil owned the ship *The Jolly Bachelor* which made an ill-fated voyage to Sierra Leone in 1742. When the *Jolly Bachelor*'s accounts were balanced on June 14, 1743, it revealed that a pound sterling was equal to twelve bars of iron in Sierra Leone. A captive was worth sixty bars, or £5. In other places at about the same time, a captive was worth £12 in "goods," or, rum. Weeden wrote, "We see the frightful scale by which merchandise ascends through rate after rate—paper priced rum, coast valued iron [and] sterling gold—while human flesh, sense, mind and spirit goes down in corresponding degradation."⁷ About 1718, some would pay £30-50 for a captive to enslave and up to £80.⁸

Many ships arriving in New England had first stopped in the West Indies to either trade there or "season" the captives for future enslavement. This meant acclimating the captives to the new environment, gaining some immunity to new diseases, and perhaps learning some English.⁹

¹ Lorenzo Johnston Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, Atheneum: New York, 1969, 125

² "Massachusetts Bodies of Liberty (1641)," accessed August 1, 2023, <https://history.hanover.edu/texts/masslib.html>

³ Desrochers, Robert E. "Slave-for-Sale Advertisements and Slavery in Massachusetts, 1704-1781." *The William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2002): 623–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3491467>

⁴ Weeden, "The Early African Slave Trade in New England," *American Antiquarian Society*, 1887, issue 5, 115.

⁵ Weeden, 111.

⁶ Weeden, 117

⁷ Weeden, 128

⁸ Weeden, 113-114

⁹ Desrochers, 623–64.

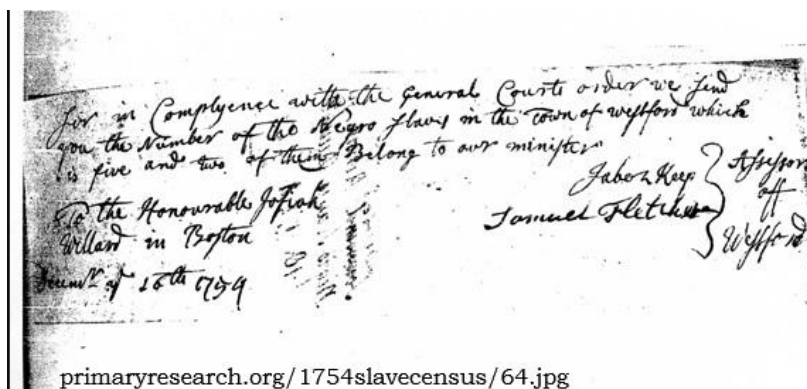
Given connections between Boston merchants like Hugh Hall and David Jeffries with Barbados, New Englanders also enslaved natives of that island. Robert E. Desrochers, in his study of Slave for Sale advertisements, suggests that, “Slaves of Barbadian provenance may have constituted a third or more of Massachusetts imports in the 1720s and 1730s.”¹⁰

When the captives came to Boston, they were typically sold on Long Wharf and the King Street/Dock Square area, though evidence can be found for sales happening all over the city, including private sales in the enslavers' homes.¹¹

Enslaved people had an interesting legal status. They were considered *property* of another person, but they also had certain legal rights as a *person*. Sometimes slaves were treated as persons. In New England, enslaved people had a right to life. If an enslaver killed his enslaved, it was a capital crime versus the south where death was considered punishment for the enslaved.¹² For a time, the enslaved were also taxed as polls and *not* personal property. Lorenzo Johnston Greene wrote, “It was as personal property that Negroes were bought and sold, and transferred informal bills of sale were generally executed to affect transfer of title to the slave.”¹³ The record conflicts on this because it’s been said in Massachusetts, that no bill of sale was needed to acquire a slave, but records show that bills of sale were produced and accepted.¹⁴ In Massachusetts, it was required of enslavers to post a bond of £ 50 when freeing an enslaved person so that person could support themselves.¹⁵ So far, no bills of sale have been located for the people enslaved in town.

The Slave Census

Prior to the Federal Censuses starting in 1790, there were few in colonial Massachusetts, and it is questionable if the information is reliable. In 1754, Massachusetts Bay Governor William Shirley ordered that an enumeration of all slaves, both male and female, over the age of sixteen be completed by each town. According to this 1754 census, Westford reported that there were 5 enslaved people over the age of 16. Westford’s Reverend Willard Hall is mentioned as enslaving two of them.¹⁶



¹⁰ Desrochers, 623–64.

¹¹ Desrochers, 623–64.

¹² Greene, 177.

¹³ Greene, 172.

¹⁴ Greene, 172.

¹⁵ “Massachusetts Bodies of Liberty (1641)”

¹⁶ PrimarySource.org, “1754 Slave Census,” Accessed 24 April 2023, <https://primaryresearch.org/1754slavecensus/64.jpg>.

There are ten potential enslaved people who could have been included as the five in the 1754 census. These are Jack, Peggy, Dinah, Jenny, Prince, George, Ishmael, Prince, Dinah, and Caesar. Ishmael and one of the Dinahs were enslaved by Reverend Willard Hall. Typically the results were not always reliable as people sometimes were not truthful about enslaved individuals. It's all conjecture as to who was included on that list. In an attempt to determine who was included in the census, this author created a spreadsheet. Without certain data from taxes and other sources, the information could not be discerned to a great degree of confidence. One bit of information is that Nathaniel Boynton had removed to Pepperell in 1754 and is not included as a potential candidate for the census.

There was another colony wide census in 1764.¹⁷ It was not a “slave census,” but a general census. The *Boston Evening Gazette* posted a notice for a 1764 census of residents or to pay a fine. The census wanted to enumerate white males and females above 16, under 16, “negroes” and “mulattoes,” and “Indians.”¹⁸ Looking at the year 1764, one can assume that King George III wanted a better sense of his colonies and how to assess taxes. It took a long time for results to be sent in, so the 1764 census was finished in 1765. The census record was difficult to track down, but it identifies 5 negro males and 7 negro females living in Westford.

Westford’s Results of the 1764 Census¹⁹

Table 1

Houses	Families	White Males under 16	White Males over 16	White Females under 16	White Females over 16	Negro Males	Negro Females	Indians and French Nationals
143	169	231	233	217	269	5	7	0

The modern age of adulthood is eighteen, but these census records use sixteen. There are a few reasons for this. One reason is that sixteen was the age that the Puritans used as the *minimum* age for making a rational decision to enter into the church’s covenant. Another reason is that at sixteen, white men had militia duties. Therefore, it was important information to know how many men were of this age and inform the government how many potential soldiers they would have.²⁰

¹⁷ For more information on this census, see Samuel A. Green, “The First Census of Massachusetts,” *Publications of the American Statistical Association*, Vol. 2, No. 13 (Mar., 1891), pp. 182-185 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2276526>.

¹⁸ The Annotated Newspapers of Harbottle Dorr: The Boston Evening-Post, 6 May 1765. Massachusetts Historical Society Collection. <https://www.masshist.org/dorr/volume/1/sequence/83>

¹⁹ Josiah H. Benton, *Early Census Making in Massachusetts 1655-1765*, accessed 24 April 2023, <https://archive.org/details/earlycensusmakin00bent/page/80/mode/2up>, 80.

²⁰ J.L. Bell, “Boston’s Population in 1765,” Accessed 24 April 2023, <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2006/05/bostons-population-in-1765.html>

Religion and Slavery

Slavery is mentioned in the Bible and some have used it as justification. However, Judge Samuel Sewall (1652-1730), argued against it, calling it the most atrocious of crimes. He famously wrote, “And seeing GOD hath said, *He that Stealeth a Man and Selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death.* Exod. 12.16. This Law being of E-verlasting [sic] Equity, wherein Man Stealing is ranked amongst the most atrocious of Capital Crimes.”²¹ This 1700 commentary criticizes Sewall’s contemporaries for enslaving individuals and does not hold back his true feelings on the subject. He further wrote, “It is likewise most lamentable to think, how in taking Negroes out of *Africa*, and Selling of them here, That which GOD ha’s [sic] joynd [sic] together men do boldly rend asunder; Men from their Country, Husbands from their Wives, Parents from their Children.”²² He argued that the merchants were ripping families apart and tried to appeal to their faith to change their deeds.

Therefore, it’s always a little jarring to learn that Ministers were also enslavers, as if they should be held to a higher moral standard. In fact, many ministers were also enslavers; like Reverend William Emerson in nearby Concord and Westford’s Reverend Willard Hall.

How did Reverend Hall feel about enslaving individuals? We are not sure. Reverend Hall was an enslaver and performed nineteen documented baptisms on enslaved people and admitted one “to the table.” One can then assume he was comfortable having them as Church members and probably preached in a similar manner as Cotton Mather. The Reverend Cotton Mather, the Boston theologian, clergyman, and enslaver, wrote in his diary, “I would always remember, that my servants are in some sence [sic] my children... I would make them as my children; and so far as the methods of instituting piety in the mind which I used with my children may be properly imprudently used with my servants they shall be partakers in them – nor will I leave them ignorant of anything wearing. I may instruct them to be useful to their generation.”²³

The Reverend Mather encouraged slave baptism on the grounds that slave owners were “the Elect of God,” who must thus treat their slaves as “rational creatures whom God has made your servants.” But the Reverend Mather had also thought that teaching the enslaved about Christianity was an avenue to elicit compliance by reminding them that their enslavement and commitment to Christianity would bring them spiritual rewards like “a mansion in Heaven” and “rest from their labors.”²⁴

We often see enslaved individuals referred to as servants, specifically in Reverend Hall’s Church book. This stems from the Hebraic tradition and the status of a New England enslaved person being in the gray area between a plantation slave and an indentured servant. They were considered property, but also likely slept under the same roof and ate at the same table as the enslaver and his family.²⁵

Much of what we know about names of the enslaved in Westford comes from Reverend Willard Hall’s Church book (See “The Enslaved of Westford” below). It’s also possible that there were other enslaved living in town, but they were not baptized. Those not baptized would have appeared in tax records, but records are missing from many years in the 1700s.

²¹ Samuel Sewall, “The Selling of Joseph” <https://www.masshist.org/database/53?mode=transcript>

²² Sewall, “The Selling of Joseph.”

²³ Cotton Mather’s Diary, Massachusetts Historical Society Collection, Seven Series, Volume Eight, Part Two, in Greene, 219.

²⁴ Elise Lemire, *Black Walden: Slavery and Its Aftermath in Concord, Massachusetts*, University of Pennsylvania: Philadelphia, 2009, 20.

²⁵ Greene, 324.

Some of the enslaved who were baptized are listed as children. Typically, captives brought to the colonies prior to 1740 were often about 15 years old.²⁶ This begs the question if they were captured and brought to this country as children or if they were born here.

That some of the enslaved in town were baptized shows that their enslavers allowed them to learn to read, and specifically the Bible. It also provided an opportunity to build a community with the other enslaved individuals in town and communicate. Church membership meant reading the Bible and learning to read, which in turn offered community, and certain rights, privileges, and language that allowed communication and ability to appeal to authority and the community if necessary.²⁷

But what did reading the Bible mean to those who were enslaved? They may have read in the New Testament, “Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour [sic], that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them...but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit...”²⁸ For the free people reading this, they saw justification for their enslaving. In that sense, the message of liberation contained in Exodus was meant only for God’s chosen people, not for the enslaved unable to partake in the communion.²⁹ The enslaved read that their enslavers were honorable; that liberation was not meant for the enslaved. Outside of the home, they received the message that they were subservient and their compliance would lead them to Heaven.

Perhaps the portions of the *Bible* the enslaved were allowed to read were carefully curated so they could not read about how being baptized could mean being freed. Colonists disagreed about baptizing enslaved people, arguing that it gave the enslaved grounds to seek manumission or enfranchisement. Some feared that allowing enslaved people or Black people into the Church membership would give them political equality and the right to vote in Massachusetts, which at some points in time was limited to church members.³⁰ In 1729, the Royal Attorney General assured English colonists that baptism did not enfranchise slaves.³¹

Baptizing the enslaved seemed to be more of another act of domination than benevolence.

Prominence in town

In *Black Walden*, Elise Lemire describes the circumstance through which Joseph Cuming acquired a slave upon gaining some prominence in town. The story there is reminiscent of Joseph Hildreth’s. In 1731, Joseph Hildreth, Jr. inherited about 500 acres of land from his father’s estate. About the same time, he was also named tax collector for the town on November 10, 1731. In Reverend Hall’s Church Book, Jack, enslaved by Hildreth, was baptized on August 15, 1731. Peggy was baptized on June 24, 1732.

Hildreth lived with his wife Deliverance and their children. In Reverend Hall’s book, Jack and Peggy are not listed as children, so we can assume they were over the age of 16. Joseph Hildreth was assessed for slaves in 1752, and then again from 1757 to 1762, just one year before his death.

²⁶ Desrochers, 623–64.

²⁷ Jared Hardesty, *Black Lives, Native Lands, White World*, Bright Leaf/University of Massachusetts: Amherst, 2019, 106.

²⁸ *The Holy Bible*, 1 Timothy 6:1-2

²⁹ Hardesty, 4.

³⁰ Greene, 260-61.

³¹ Lemire, 20.

The tax records could mean that Peggy and/or Jack were in the house from at least 1732 to about 1763. If they were at least 16 in 1732, then they were at least 47 in 1763 when Joseph died. There is no mention of Peggy or Jack in Joseph's probate. His wife, Deliverance, lived another 10 or so years. There is no probate for her.

Joseph Hildreth had died by the next census in 1764. So the twelve total enslaved reported in town (5 males and 7 females) probably do not include Peggy and Jack, unless they were not reported upon his death. The Hildreth children were also of adult age by 1764, so there wasn't so much of a need for a household slave at that point.

There is no indication that an enslaved person in Westford was ever emancipated. In Massachusetts, it was required of enslavers to post a bond of £ 50 when emancipating an enslaved person so that person could support themselves.³² There is no court record of any suing for their freedom. Except when noted below, there is no record of a death or marriage.

Tax Records

By 1675, enslaved people were rated as property as first seen in tax records of Newbury, MA. In Boston, they were in the same category as horses, sheep, and pigs.³³ In 1698, two acts specifically classified an enslaved person as personal property and their value was determined "according to the sound judgment and discretion of the assessors."³⁴

Judge Samuel Sewall and others were moved to protest against this type of tax, where humans were valued the same as animals and did so in 1706. Their efforts were in vain and enslaved people continued to be included in this tax category until slavery was abolished in Massachusetts.³⁵

In 1707, the tax law changed to distinguish between "slave" and "servant" but does not explain the distinction. The law stated that all "Indian, molatto and negro slaves" were to be taxed as other personal estate at one shilling in the pound. Each enslaved male over the age of 14 years would be valued at £ 20 and each enslaved female over 14 years at £ 15 but all "Indian, molatto, and negro male servants" were to be appraised as polls, not as personal estate.³⁶ The law does not mention female servants.

Starting in 1718, all enslaved for life over the age of 14 were assessed as "personal estate" and adjustments could be made for infirmity or disability. Males typically £ 15 and females £ 10. But a servant for a certain length of time was assessed as a poll tax, NOT personal estate.³⁷

Bill Prescott, a former Westford resident, extensively analyzed Westford's tax records years ago. He found that tax records for the town were missing or incomplete for some years. He was curious when he found taxpayers assessed for an extra poll tax and determined it must be on account of an enslaved person in the house.

In Westford, a slave was assessed the same rate as a horse. On the actual forms, the word "negro" appears next to the Taxpayer's line.

³² "Massachusetts Bodies of Liberty (1641)"

³³ Greene, 169

³⁴ See *Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay: Volume 1 1692-1714*, Wright and Potter: Boston, 1869, pgs 337, 359, 387.

³⁵ Greene, 171

³⁶ *Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay: Volume 1 1692-1714*, 615.

³⁷ George H. Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts*, D. Appleton and Co.: New York, 1866, 64-65

According to Prescott's work on the tax valuations in Westford, 1757-58 shows a high point of enslaved in town, followed by a decline reaching a low point in 1768, then another high in 1773.³⁸ Around 1760 in Massachusetts, it became increasingly harder to know whether people of color were free or not so there was a decline in the slave trade. However, that advertisements continued in newspapers meant that slave traders were not deterred from continuing their activities.³⁹ Instead of hiring out the enslaved with no work, New England enslavers often offered them for sale instead. This practice increased during the unsettled economic depression that followed the French and Indian War (1754-1763).⁴⁰ In Westford, this shift is reflected in the decline of baptisms for the enslaved and tax records. Does this data align with what was broadly happening in New England or is it due to the lack of surviving tax records?

The 1771 Tax List is special because it was when the provincial governments required a special valuation be made for personal and real property. Of the columns for the list, "Servant for life" meant: "All Indian, Negro, or Molatto servants for life from fourteen to 45 years of age"⁴¹

On the 1771 tax list, William Read and John Robins are marked as having a "servant for life." William Read is not on the 1774 tax list. Though we don't know the names of the enslaved, we know that they were in town because the enslaver was taxed accordingly.

Prescott also analyzed Westford's 1774 tax records and created a listing of the top 200 wealthiest men in town. If the enslavers were alive in 1774, all except William Read were ranked among the top 200 wealthiest men in town.

In 1776, black polls were the same as white polls, not personal property⁴²

Life of the Enslaved in Town

Names for the enslaved in New England were place names, classical names, Biblical slave names, or common English names. Names from these categories were "intended to advertise a slave owner's values, and characteristics whether his classical education, his religiosity, or his cosmopolitanism."⁴³ Popular place names were usually major ports in England or its colonies, showing off an enslaver's knowledge of the world.⁴⁴ In Westford, we see the names: Dinah, Hannah, Jethro, Prince, Ishmael, Cesar, Moses, York, and Noble (See "The Enslaved of Westford" below).

Enslaved people in New England were allowed some semblance of a life outside of their required duties. There's no indication that Westford made laws separate from the Colonial laws. The Massachusetts Bay Colony passed laws for Indian and African slaves and free blacks to prevent "disorders, insolencies, and burglaries" that were allegedly perpetrated by these people at night.⁴⁵ Therefore, many towns had a curfew of nine o'clock PM. Sometimes enslaved people were also hired out to others when there wasn't sufficient work for the enslaver. This allowed them to earn a wage or have some property of their own.

³⁸ William B. Prescott, "Taxation of Slave Owners in Colonial Westford." Private Printing. December 1987. Collection of the Westford Historical Society W.2003.23)

³⁹ Desrochers, 623-64.

⁴⁰ Greene, 122

⁴¹ Prescott, "Taxation of Slave Owners in Colonial Westford."

⁴² Moore, 65.

⁴³ Lemire, 17.

⁴⁴ Lemire, 17.

⁴⁵ Hardesty, 67.

Once the enslaved married, they were expected to maintain proper relationships with their wife and were liable for arrest and punishment as were white people.⁴⁶ In December 1705-06 th legislature enacted a law to outlaw mixed race marriages.⁴⁷ Massachusetts Bay Colony was the only New England colony to do so. There were punishments for breaking the law, even for the person performing the ceremony. However, the law didn't prevent as much as it intended. The marriage wouldn't be annulled and economic considerations by the enslaver took priority- he didn't want to lose his "property!" As such, some enslavers helped enslaved with their secret relationship.⁴⁸

The enslaved seem to be well fed and they were probably given the same food as the family, and in many cases they eat at the same table with their enslavers. They also generally slept under the same roof as their enslavers may be on the same floor, but more frequently in the extra story above the main floor.⁴⁹ There isn't evidence of slave quarters in Westford, so we can assume they slept in the same house, and likely ate at the same table. The enslaved seemed to be a part of the family. There are stories of enslavers in other towns shedding tears over the graves of their enslaved. This family structure, like baptizing the enslaved people, was a constant reminder of their position and held them in a state of constant surveillance.⁵⁰

Because the enslaved in Westford would have performed a variety of jobs, from farming to mending fences, to sewing and childcare, it would behoove an enslaver to provide some rudimentary education. That would also make the enslaved person more valuable. Greene argues this, "was not the result of a general movement, but was fostered by kindly disposed masters members of the clergy, and by religious organizations."⁵¹ The enslaved were taught the trades because that's what the industry of the region demanded. Greene noted, "there was no color line in colonial industry."⁵² Barring the enslaved from learning the trades was subsequently ignored as it was necessary for the enslavers' livelihood and the economy. Per Hardesty, there was some backlash in the colony about using enslaved people for trade work as some thought it undermined the trade.

Even though the enslaved were baptized, they were likely segregated in the Church. If they were buried in a cemetery, then it was likely in back corners and along rock walls.⁵³ We don't have confirmed burials of enslaved people in Westford (see Peggy's story below).

Warning Out

People were warned out of towns when they couldn't support themselves and the town didn't want to support them. Whites "warned out" free blacks because they did not want them living in their towns.

Lemire notes that self-emancipated people sometimes were warned out of the towns in which they tried to settle. There was concern that not only might they appear on the town's poor list, but also because white residents did not want free blacks in the vicinity of their enslaved.⁵⁴

⁴⁶ Greene, 202-203.

⁴⁷ *Acts and Resolves of the Province of Massachusetts Bay*, 579.

⁴⁸ Greene, 208-210.

⁴⁹ Greene, 222-223.

⁵⁰ Hardesty, 57.

⁵¹ Greene, 237.

⁵² Greene, 111-112.

⁵³ Greene, 284.

⁵⁴ Lemire, 45.

The process of warning out was common in New England. Formerly enslaved people in Concord were warned out and sometimes they settled in the area around Walden Pond.

The Revolution

In May 1656, the 1652 Act of the General Court, allowing “negroes and Indians” to serve in the Militia was repealed. It stated, “...henceforth no negroes or Indians although servants to the English, shall be armed or permitted to train...” for the Militia.⁵⁵

In 1660, Massachusetts Bay Colony Governor Simon Bradstreet reiterated, “We account all generally from sixteen to sixty that are healthfull [sic] and strong bodys [sic], both Householders and Servants fit to bear Armes [sic], *except Negroes and slaves, whom wee [sic] arme [sic] not*” (emphasis in source).⁵⁶ These laws accentuated the subordinate status of emancipated men who were not allowed to bear arms. Yet, in 1707, on the call of an alarm, *all* able-bodied men, regardless of race, were expected to report to the training ground for assignment. If they failed to do this, it was punishable by a fine of 20 shillings or by 80 days labor.⁵⁷ Even up to the eve of the American Revolution, enslaved and free blacks were prohibited from bearing arms. Slowly the restrictions eased, especially as the army needed more bodies and some enslaved men were self emancipating to join the British.

In June 1775, the Continental Congress formed the Continental Army. At the Battle of Bunker Hill on June 17, 1775, there were many Patriots of Color on the battlefield, including one from Westford. Despite their patriotism, in November 1775, General George Washington prohibited enlistment of free and enslaved Black men. There was some fear about arming the enslaved men for fear they would rise up against their enslavers, which was the case in Concord. In January 1776, Black men were allowed to enlist *if* they previously served. By 1777 any free man was eligible to enlist. By 1778, states began to enlist free and enslaved Black men (See the stories of Cesar Bason and York Hambleton in “The Enslaved of Westford” below).

Life after Enslavement

Massachusetts abolished slavery with their Constitution in 1780. Presumably, all servants by that time and after were paid for their services. What was to come of the formerly enslaved?

The records in Westford are not clear who may have remained in town and what their living situation may have been. The Massachusetts Constitution did not discriminate against Blacks, but custom and tradition apparently prohibited them from exercising the right to vote.⁵⁸

Barred from purchasing property in order to start a farm, competing with white people for jobs, and because of their inferior status, many emancipated people remained with their former enslaver as a hired servant. Greene notes, “frequently denied the opportunity of earning a living and forced into idleness. As a consequence free Negroes were to be later stigmatized as an idol lazy, and dissolute class.”⁵⁹ The white workmen “manifested a sullen antagonism” to the competition, which, as John Adams remarked, in 1795, might have resulted in the white tradesmen destroying slavery had it not already been abolished.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Moore, 243.

⁵⁶ Moore, 243-4.

⁵⁷ Greene, 303.

⁵⁸ Greene, 302.

⁵⁹ Greene, 304.

⁶⁰ Greene, 322.

Emancipated women in particular accepted food and shelter from their former enslaver in return for their continued labor.⁶¹ They continued life as it was, only now they were choosing it. What choice did some have? Many stayed close to the town because people knew them and knew their emancipated status. They were also familiar with the terrain. Should they settle in another town and be warned out from there, they'd be forced to return on the basis that the town should accept responsibility for them.⁶²

The 1790 Federal Census

The 1790 Census was the first official one for the new country. There are no enslaved people listed in the Westford 1790 Census. Knowing that some emancipated people remained with their former enslaver, or were living somewhere in town but not in a traditional house, the results from the 1790 census are curious. Perhaps they were not enslaved, but were they still living there? Like the 1754 census that indicated zero Native Americans lived in town, it is hard to believe that these numbers are accurate. Or perhaps they were not counted in the census at all, the census taker turning a blind eye towards the situation.

Cato Grey lived in Westford in 1790 and is listed in a household of 3 "non white" individuals. He served in the Revolution but his residence is not listed on his papers.

Perhaps the enslaved individuals in town were emancipated in 1780 and all decided to live together in one house. This is not unheard of.

There is also a woman, Cate Porter, who married Thomas Dugan of Concord. Thomas Dugan's story is detailed in the book *Black Walden* by Elise Lemire. This marriage is recorded in Westford Vital Records, but they were married in Concord on December 29, 1791.

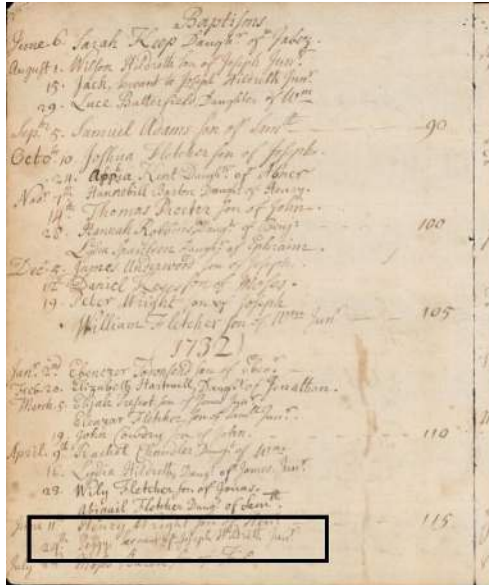


⁶¹ Greene, 305.

⁶² Lemire, 109, 116-117.

The only other marriage listed under “NEGROES” was in 1849. Now, was Cate Porter formerly enslaved in Westford? How did she come to live here? How did she come to know Dugan? More research is needed there as well.

The 1800 Federal Census for Westford lists “4 Blacks” and 3 of them lived with Phillis Jackson. The other lived with Caleb Blake.



Reverend Hall's Church Book
 digitalcommonswealth.org/book/viewer/commonwealth:76539x69n/image/14

Joseph Hildreth, Jr. was assessed for slaves in 1752, and then again from 1757 to 1762, just one year before his death.

The tax records could mean that Peggy was in the house from at least 1732 to about 1763. If Peggy was at least 16 in 1732, then she was at least 47 in 1763 when Joseph died. There is no mention of her in Joseph's probate. His wife, Deliverance, lived another 10 or so years. There is no probate for her.

Joseph Hildreth had died by the census in 1764. So the twelve total enslaved reported in town (5 males and 7 females) do *not* include Peggy and Jack, unless they were not reported upon his death. The Hildreth children were of adult age by 1764, so there wasn't so much of a need for a household slave at that point.

There is no indication that Peggy was ever freed. There is no court record of her suing for her freedom. There is no record of marriage or even of her death.

On the land between what we know as Hildreth Street and Boston Road, the land that once belonged to Joseph Hildreth, Jr, there lies a marker along a rock wall, nestled into a tree.



Photo courtesy of
Marilyn Day

It is likely a footstone. It is marked: "P. Hildreth." According to Historian Judy Cataldo, footstones were placed at the foot of a burial place, opposite a headstone. Joseph Hildreth's house was most likely about a mile north of where Flagg Road meets Hildreth Street (near present day 58 Hildreth Street). That land abuts the property on which this stone is, so in theory, this could have been a grave for Peggy. Footstones were often moved. But was it moved? Charlie Hildreth, who lived at 25 Boston Road in the early 1900s built extensive rock walls on his property.



Rock walls being built on Charlie Hildreth's land. Photo from Westford Museum S-25.

As a result, this footstone may have been moved from closer to Hildreth Street to its current location closer to Boston Road to accommodate these rock walls.

The author created a spreadsheet of every P Hildreth in Westford (born a Hildreth or married a Hildreth). There are two P. Hildreths that remain for which no death or burial information can be located. Then there is Peggy, if she ever used the surname of Hildreth. There is a picture taken by Charlie Hildreth near this place. The caption says that it is where the dog Major is buried. This photo is from May 1941 of Alice Hildreth and Major. Charlie could have buried his dog here and used the existing stone marker.



“92 Alice Hildreth, Major, and scarlet thorn, May 1941” Westford Museum Collection

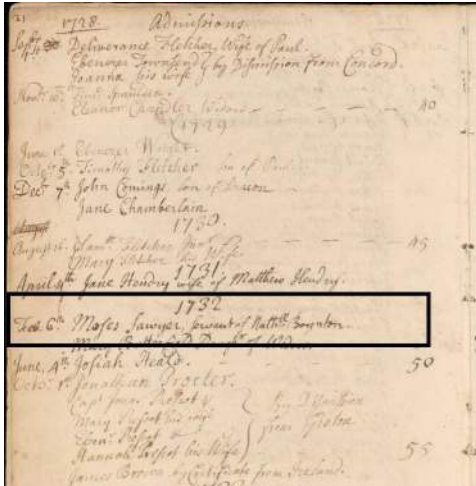
This author maintains that this stone once marked where Peggy was laid to rest.



Photo courtesy of Marilyn Day.

Moses Sawyer

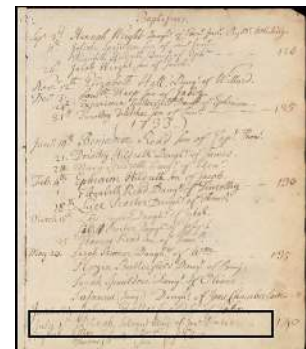
Moses Sawyer was admitted to the table on February 6, 1732. He was enslaved by Nathaniel Boynton, the father of the Westford Town Clerk of the same name, and grandfather to Abel Boynton.



We don't have a record of a baptism, just that he was allowed Communion. We know from the Boynton genealogy, that Nathaniel Boynton lived on his father's homestead (near where Patten Road meets Forge Village Road) and "like him" was a house carpenter. As Moses was male, we can assume that Moses helped Nathaniel with his carpentry work, as opposed to working inside the house. Boynton was dismissed from First Parish Church, Westford to the Church in Pepperell on March 17, 1754. Groton West Parish had just formed into Pepperell on April 12, 1753. Nathaniel Boynton died on 5 August 1757 in Pepperell and is buried in Walton Cemetery there. He was 62 years old. Pepperell Vital Records states the cause of death was a fever. There is no mention of Moses in his probate.

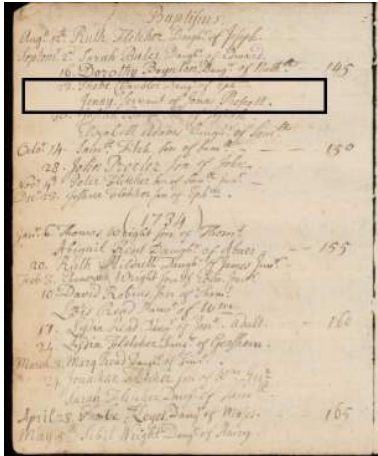
Dinah

She was baptized on July 1, 1733. She was enslaved by Jonathan Proctor. In 1745, the Proctors were dismissed from the Church to go to Harvard. Hodgman places his property near Pond Brook. William Prescott does not list where his property might have been.



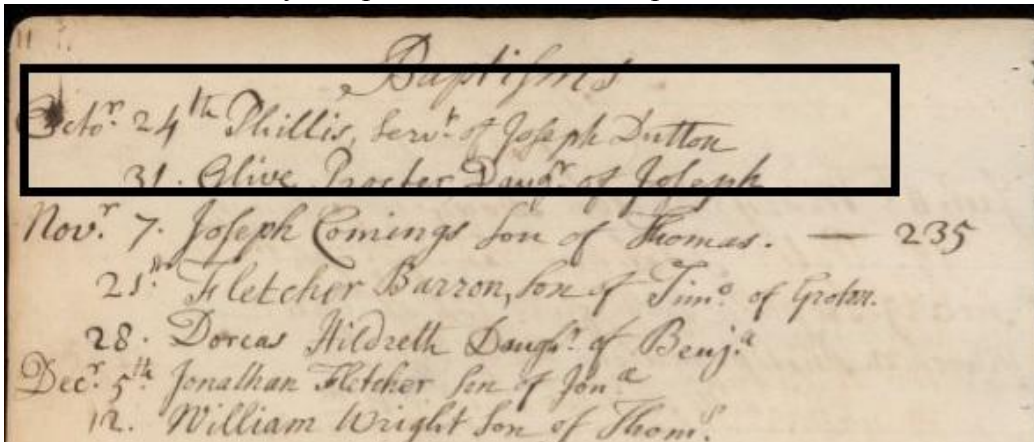
Jenny

Jenny was enslaved by Captain Jonas Prescott, Jr. She likely worked in the household. She was baptized by Reverend Willard Hall on September 23, 1733. She was not listed as a child, so she was likely over 16. Jonas Prescott was a farmer in Westford. William Prescott places his property on the North side of the railroad tracks in Forge Village near the intersection of East and West Prescott streets. Hodgman calls it "near the promontory formed by the brook and margin of the pond." There is no mention of Jenny in Prescott's probate.



Phillis

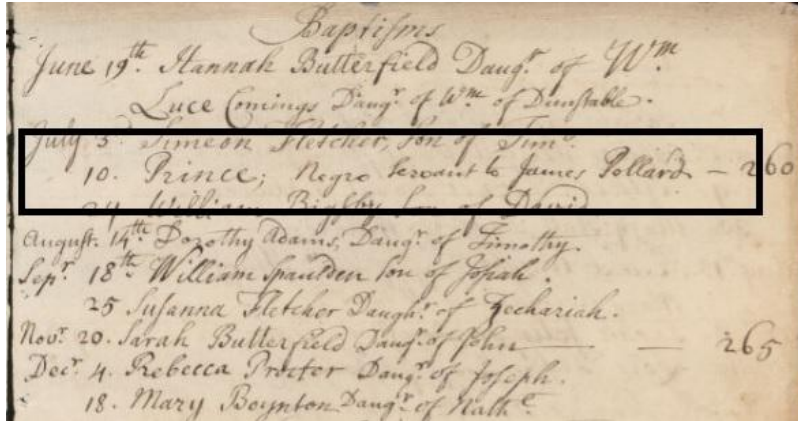
Phillis was enslaved by Joseph Dutton. She was baptized on October 24, 1736.



Joseph Dutton died 1775 at 63 years old. He's buried in Fairview Cemetery. On his gravestone is written, "Memento Mori" which in Latin means remember that you have to die. In the 1771 tax list, Joseph Dutton is listed as owning an ironworks. He is not listed as owning any servants, nor servants for life. His real estate was valued at 12 pounds. He had 8 acres of pastures, enough for 7 cows. He produced about 25 barrels of cider per year and 8 tons of hay per year. He owned one horse, two oxen, 4 cows, and 1 swine. He seems to have died intestate, a probate record could not be located in the index.

Prince

Prince was baptized on July 10, 1737 and listed as a negro. He was enslaved by James Pollard.



According to Hodgman, on the 1730 map, Pollard was "without a homestead," but settled near the center where he kept a tavern, near where Mrs. John W. P. Abbot lived. Prescott does not place him on the 1730 map. Capt. James Pollard owned the Sherman D. Fletcher place.⁶³ He was a Captain in the French and Indian War.

Westford records of 1750 indicate he was a tavern keeper. He was also on the committee to establish Fairview Cemetery.⁶⁴

Probate indicates he was of sound mind but a failing body in 1781. He hoped that Jesus would forgive his sins. He left half of his land, dwelling, and entire barn to his wife Elizabeth that she could live there and not pay rent. She also received some livestock to do with what she wanted. The other parts of the estate went to Isaac Patten, under the direction of his Executors, until he reached 21 years old. Zaccheus Wright and Timothy Spaulding were the executors.

An Isaac Patten lived 1761-1836. Isaac must have worked on James's farm. Isaac married Lydia Keyes and their first son born in 1783 was named James Pollard Patten. His son Isaac, born 1785, is listed as dying in Westford in 1811 and is buried in Westlawn Cemetery.

Phillis

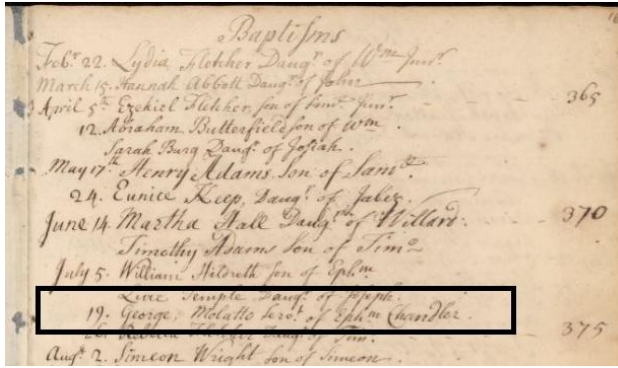
Phillis was baptized on August 5, 1739. In the Church book, she is listed as the servant of Job Spaulden "of Chelmsford." On March 15, 1736, a *Josiah Spaulding* was admitted to the table in Westford after being dismissed from Chelmsford. It's unclear if they are the same. There is no record of a Spaulden in Westford.

George

George was baptized on July 19, 1741 and was enslaved by Ephraim Chandler. He is listed as a "mulatto."

⁶³ Hodgman, 249.

⁶⁴ William B. Prescott, *Patriots and Taxpayers of Colonial Westford, Massachusetts in 1774*, Private Printing, Westford Historical Society files.



According to Bill Prescott, Chandler lived on the east side of Tyngsboro Road just north of the intersection of Flushing Pond Road. He enslaved a man named George. He was listed as mulatto in the church book. He was baptized on July 9, 1741. An Ephraim Chandler and Abigail Blood of Groton filed intentions to marry on November 12, 1747. He died intestate in May 1767. His wife, Abigail, made her mark on the document, naming Mr. Thomas Lund as administrator as she was of old age. Lund is listed as, “heir at law.”

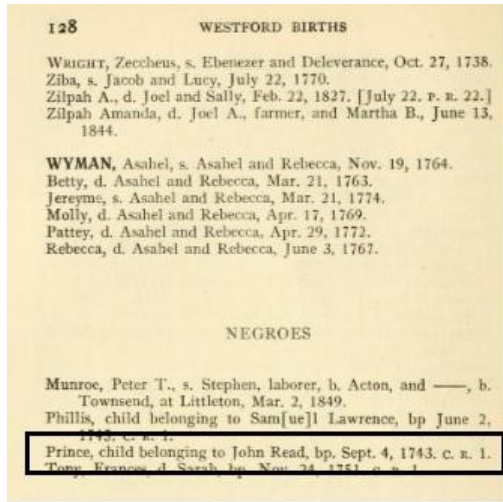
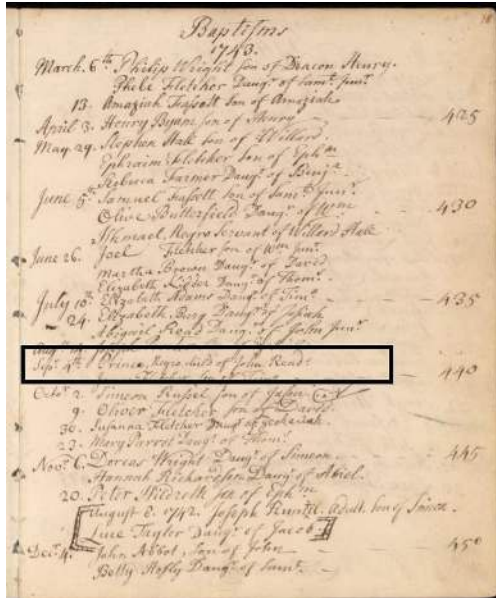
Ishmael

Ishmael was baptized June 5, 1743. He was enslaved by Reverend Willard Hall. He is listed as a negro and is included in the 1754 Slave Census. There are no tax records for Willard Hall.



Prince

Prince was baptized on September 4, 1743. In the Church book, he is listed as, “negro child of John Read,” as well as in Westford Vital Records which refers back to the Church Book (C.R. 1). It is unclear, but there is a possibility that he is John Read’s child.

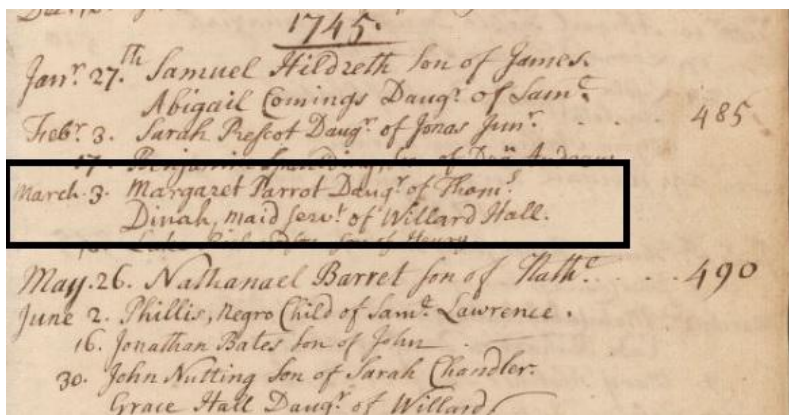


Vital Records of Westford, Massachusetts to 1849, 128

Prince is not listed as a mulatto, either, so he is likely under 16 and enslaved by John Read. Read was assessed for a slave in 1757 and 1758. Read is not listed as an enslaver on the 1771 tax list. Hodgman places his property near E.J. Whitney but Prescott places him on the Southwest side of Concord Road and Littleton Road about 500 feet east of where Concord Road splits southerly from Littleton Road.

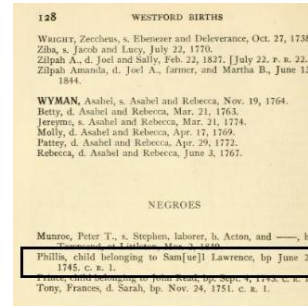
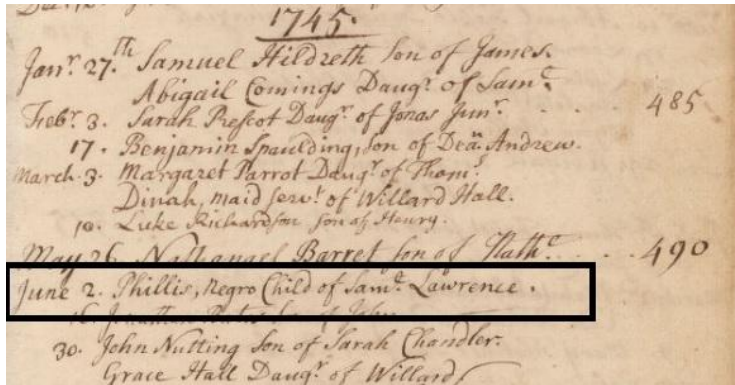
Dinah

Dinah was baptized on March 3, 1745. She was the other enslaved person in Reverend Willard Hall’s house. She is listed as a “maid servant.” She is included on the 1754 Slave Census. There are no tax records for Willard Hall.



Phillis

Phillis was baptized on June 2, 1745. She is listed as the “negro child” of Samuel Lawrence in Hall’s Church Book as well as in Westford Vital Records which refers back to the Church Book (C.R. 1). It’s unclear, but there is a possibility that she is Samuel’s daughter.

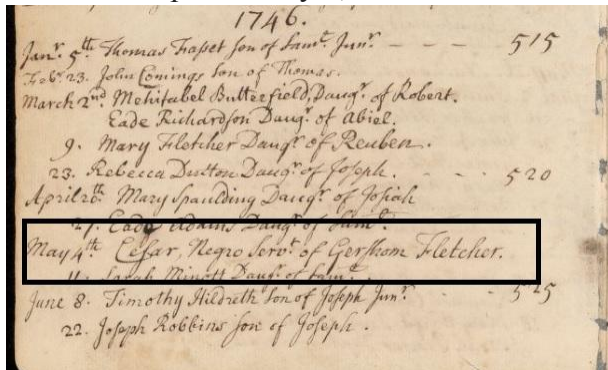


Vital Records of Westford, Massachusetts to 1849, 128

Lawrence married Mary Hildreth on May 6, 1737 in Westford. Mary’s parents were Joseph and Deliverance Hildreth, the enslavers of Peggy. Mary, born in 1718, was a teenager when Peggy was in their household. After the death of Mary in 1788, Samuel removed to Ashby where his sons Samuel Jr., and Charles were living.”⁶⁵ Samuel died the following April. His Probate is dated April 25, 1789 in Ashby with Samuel and Charles listed as administrators. According to the probate papers, it appears Samuel was a farmer, with land in Boxborough as well as Ashby. He died intestate. It also appears that at the time of his death, he was unable to pay the debts that he owed. There is no mention of Phillis in his probate. Slavery had been outlawed in the Commonwealth in 1780. There are some stories of formerly enslaved people suing their enslaver for past wages. If Phillis was still alive in 1789, she did not claim to have any debts needing to be paid from Lawrence’s estate.

Cesar

Cesar was baptized May 4, 1746. He was enslaved by Gershom Fletcher.



Fletcher was assessed for a slave 1757-1763. It’s unclear, but can be assumed that Cesar was one of the slaves counted on the 1754 census. Hodgman notes that in 1759, Cesar served in the French and Indian War in Captain Daniel Fletcher’s company for the “reduction of” Canada.⁶⁶ In 1770, Fletcher moved to Plymouth, NH. Based on the language used in his probate, compared to the other contemporary probates read during this research, it appears Gershom was a very religious man. Gershom Fletcher died on June 28, 1779, while visiting Westford. He states in his

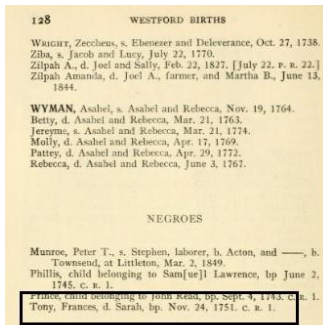
⁶⁵ “Samuel Lawrence Sr 1714- bef. 1789,” accessed August 10, 2023. <https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Lawrence-4624>

⁶⁶ Hodgman, *History of Westford*, 64.

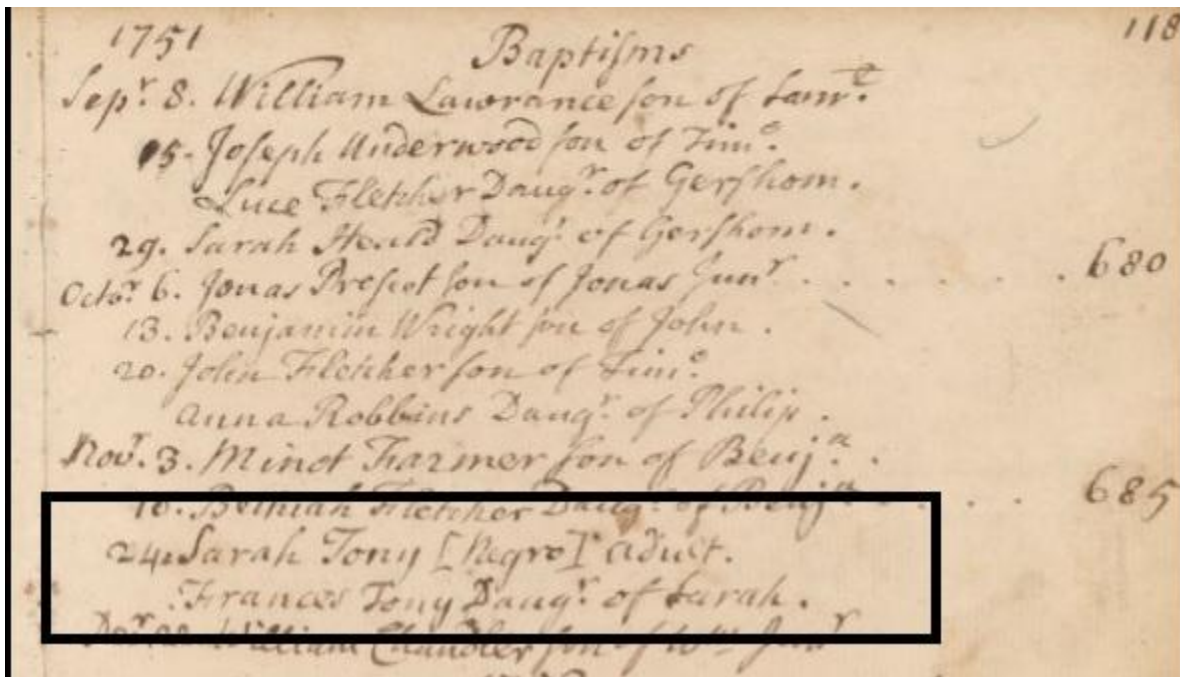
probate that his body is failing him but his mind is sound. It also mentions a farm in New Plymouth, NH, where a Joseph Reed was living. Gershom left additional land in Plymouth on the land of the original right of Francis Powers to be divided between Plymouth and Westford to benefit the poor. There is no mention of Cesar in his probate.

Sarah and Frances Tony

Sarah was baptized November 24, 1751. She is listed as “[Negro] adult.” Her daughter is Frances, also baptized on November 24, 1751.



Vital Records of Westford, Massachusetts to 1849, 128



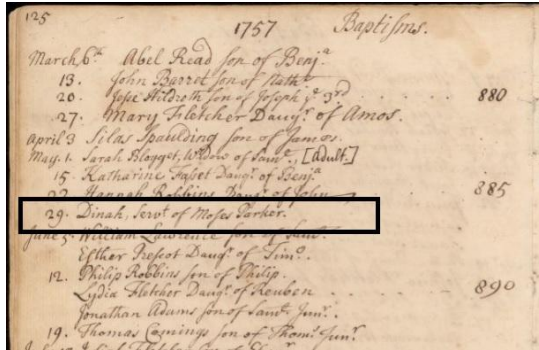
Hodgman surmises that Sarah and Frances were enslaved in Enoch Cleveland’s household. Cleveland’s family, along with Sarah and Frances, were warned out of town in 1751. Cleveland lived near an old mill site in Providence Meadow (west of the current Providence Road and south of Leland Road). There is an “island” rising 14 feet in the middle of the marsh that is known as

“Tony’s Island.”⁶⁷ If Sarah and her daughter were warned out, perhaps they were emancipated and were squatting on that land.

If Cleveland was also warned out, then he returned. His marriage intentions to Martha Butterfield were filed in Westford on Jan 20, 1753, but he was listed as a Chelmsford resident. Their son, Enoch Cleaveland Jr., was born at Westford on July 26, 1754. He is not on the 1774 tax return.

Dinah

Dinah was baptized on May 29, 1757. She was enslaved by Moses Parker.



Moses was born to Aaron and Abigail Parker on May 16, 1718. Abigail Hildreth was Moses’s grandmother. He married Bridget Cummings (b. 1722) in 1744. Her brother was Ephraim Cummings, another enslaver. Moses Parker of Westford served in the American Revolution. Moses Parker is not listed as an enslaver on the 1771 tax list. According to *The Hildreths of Westford*, Parker was at the Old North Bridge and also at the Battle of Bunker Hill. He was wounded and taken prisoner at Bunker Hill. He died in a military prison on July 4, 1775. That Moses Parker was born in Chelmsford and is *not the same* as this Moses Parker.⁶⁸

Jethro

Jethro was baptized on November 26, 1758. He was enslaved by Abner Wilkins. Wilkins was assessed for a slave in 1773 and 1775. He is not listed as an enslaver on the 1771 tax list.

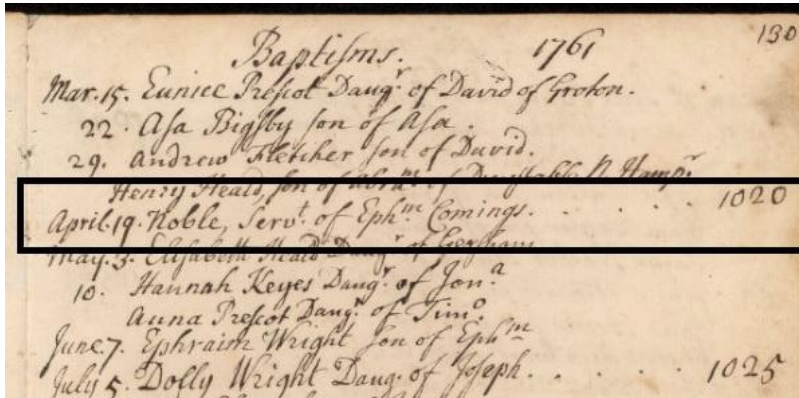


⁶⁷ Hodgman, 72-73. See also Robert W. Oliphant, *The Westford Gazetteer: A History of Westford, Massachusetts in its Place Names*, Private Printing: Westford, Massachusetts, 2010.

⁶⁸ See J.L. Bell’s blog posts: <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2017/06/remembering-moses-parker.html>, <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2017/06/moses-parker-and-his-comrades-in-redoubt.html>, <https://boston1775.blogspot.com/2017/06/moses-parker-most-prominent-military.html>

Noble

Noble was baptized on April 19, 1761. He was enslaved by Ephraim Comings.



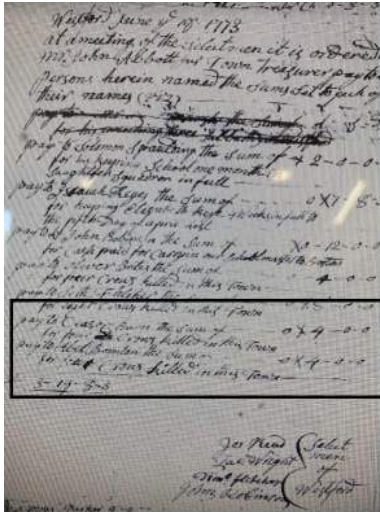
Comings was assessed for a slave 1771 and 1773. He married Mary Hildreth on October 12, 1742. Ephraim Comings is listed as having a servant for life. Assuming this was still Noble, then in 1771, Noble was between the ages of 14 and 45, but most likely at least 26 in 1771. Noble was probably involved in producing the barrels of grain and cider and helping with the livestock.

legacy.sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstat/masstat.cgi?state=person&person=03490134

CUMINGS, EPH'M			
Town of Westford, Middlesex County			
Buildings and Boats			
Dwelling Houses and Shops Adjoining 1	Shops Adjoining 0	Tanhouses -- etc. 0	Stillhouses 0
Warehouses 0	Superficial Feet of Wharf 00000	Gristmills -- etc. 0	Ironworks -- etc. 1
Tons of Vessels			
General Population Characteristics and Assessed Worth			
Servants for Life 1	Servant Owner Y	Annual worth of the Whole Real Estate (£) 010	Value of Trading Stock (£) 00000
Value of Factorage or Commissions (£) 0000	Value of Money Lent at Interest (£) 00000		
Land and Agriculture			
Acres of Pasture 12	Number of Cows the Pasture will Keep 7	Acres of Tillage 14	Bushels of Grain Produced per Year 150
Barrels of Cider Produced per Year 020	Acres of Salt Marsh 0	Tons of Salt Marsh Hay per Year 0	Acres of English and Upland Mowing Land 4
Tons of English and Upland Hay Per Year 2	Acres of Fresh Meadow 15	Tons of Fresh Meadow Hay Per Year 15	
Farm Animals/Livestock			
Horses 01	Oxen 02	Cows 4	Goats and Sheep 10
Owns Goats or Sheep Y	Swine 03		

Cesar Bason

Cesar's beginnings are unclear. The first mention of him is in 1773 when he was paid 4 shillings for four crows that he killed in town. The town receipt lists "Ceasor Burn" as the recipient.



Mass 1031 Roll #R-27 Town Records Misc. Roll 2357-62 1750-1850
J.V. Fletcher Library

The trouble locating records for Cesar is that there is discrepancy in the spelling of his name and it's unclear if he was enslaved by James Burn. His name has been in the record as Caesar, Cesar, Caesor, Sezor, and Cesor. There was only one Burn who lived in town. That was James Burn.

James Burn was born 18 June 1690 and served in Lovewell's War in the snowshoe company in Chelmsford in 1724. He was the son of James and Mary (Proctor) Burn. Burn lived on land once owned by Samuel N. Burbeck. On the 1730 map of Westford, there is a "Jas Burns" who lived near Rattlesnake Hill. James Burn was a potter. According to Hodgman, there is a pasture near where he lived that in 1883 was still called "Burn's Pasture." According to Hodgman's history, shards of pottery were found on the land he formerly owned. William Prescott's research on taxation of enslavers in Westford, found that James Burn was assessed for a slave in 1752 and 1768.

James Burn died January 19, 1771 at the age of 80 and is buried in Fairview Cemetery. A probate could not be located. When an enslaver died intestate and without heirs, the enslaved individual became the charge of the town. By his first mention in 1773, Cesar's enslaver was no longer alive, however, we do not know if he was freed after 1768 (the last year James Burn was assessed for a slave). He is not included in the 1771 Tax list.

Cesar was a Private in the Second Foot Company of the Westford Militia. The Captain was Jonathan Minot. Enslaved and Free Blacks were prohibited from bearing arms and serving in the Militia. However, controls like this were partially removed or removed entirely in time of emergency, like during the impending Revolution. Along with the other members of the Westford Militia, Cesar answered the Lexington Alarm on the morning of April 19, 1775 and fought the British Regulars on the Battle Road in Lexington.

He officially enlisted in the Continental Army on April 26, 1775 for an eight month period. This was in Captain Abijah Wyman's company in Colonel William Prescott's Regiment. Colonel Prescott's regiment constructed the redoubt the night prior to the battle of Bunker Hill.

There is an account in Hodgman's *History of Westford*, where he recounts the story "on good authority" that in the battle, Cesar found that he was almost out of his powder and putting in his last charge said to himself, "Now, Cesar, give 'em one more." He fired his musket and was then shot and fell back into the trench and died. According to tradition, it was Leonard Proctor who was near Cesar and could have heard this. The surname Bason appears because a Mr. Francis Tinker, of Ashby, said that Jacob Bascom of Westford was killed at Bunker Hill. However, no such person existed. Bason seems to be some combination of Bascom and Burn.

Cesar is most likely the only Patriot of Color from Westford to be present at Battle Road and Bunker Hill.⁶⁹ According to *Patriots of Color*, there were 13 men named Cesar who fought on Battle Road or Bunker Hill. The return of Prescott's Regiment dated October 3, 1775 from Cambridge lists Cesor Bason of Westford having died on June 17, 1775.⁷⁰

Cesar was owed £ 3 11 shillings for the 26 miles he traveled in Prescott's regiment. In the August 1775 return, he isn't listed as owning a gun or a bayonet. His name is also written as Sezor.⁷¹

Muster/payrolls, and various papers (1763-1808) of the Revolutionary War [Massachusetts and Rhode Island] Vol. 16, Siege of Boston 1775

The report was made after Cesar's death. So, does he not own a weapon because he is dead or because he was prohibited from doing so? In the Westford Town Archives, there is a record of the town paying Joseph Prescott £ 2 and 9 shillings. The note states that Prescott lent a gun to someone and it was lost at the Battle of Bunker Hill so the town reimbursed him for his lost property.

⁶⁹ George Quintal Jr., *Patriots of Color: "A Peculiar Beauty and Merit": African Americans and Native Americans at Battle Road & Bunker Hill*, Division of Cultural Resources- Boston National Historic Park: Boston, 2004. 247.

⁷⁰ Muster/payrolls, and various papers (1763-1808) of the Revolutionary War [Massachusetts and Rhode Island] Volume 16, Page 76

⁷¹ Muster/payrolls, and various papers (1763-1808) of the Revolutionary War [Massachusetts and Rhode Island] Volume 16, Page 76

Hence pay to Joseph Prescott the sum of ... in full for a gun borrowed of him by the select men and was lost at Bunker Hill. The same is to make up his due with what was before ordered

May 20, 1782, Westford Town Archives, Box 1, 1776-1738 some undated documents

It's curious that Cesar was not allowed to own a gun, but needed one in order to fight. Could he have borrowed it from Prescott and it was lost at Bunker Hill because it did not return to Westford as that was where Cesar died? Or was the gun lost by someone else in the chaos of battle?

On February 16, 1776 Abijah Wyman certified that "Cesor Bason" was a soldier in Colonel Prescott's regiment and was slain at Bunker Hill and that he hadn't yet received his coat and blanket as a bounty granted him by Congress.⁷²⁷³ On March 15, 1776, there was an order for a bounty coat or its equivalent in money. A bounty coat is a heavy coat offered as an enlistment bounty when men enlisted for a 8 month period as Cesar did. It is awarded (or its equivalent in money) at the end of the enlistment period.⁷⁴ As Selectmen for the Westford, Joseph Read, Zaccheus Wright, Zechariah Hildreth, Francis Leighton, and Jonathan Keep requested a Bounty Coat and Blanket on behalf of Cesar to be paid to Zaccheus Wright for Cesar's family, as there was no estate to administer.⁷⁵

To the Committee of Clothing for the Province of Massachusetts Bay please to pay the Bounty due to Cesar Bason for Coat and Blanket to Zaccheus Wright for the use of said Cesar's family there being no estate to Administer upon and the

Wyman
62

Joseph Read } select
Zaccheus Wright } men of
Zechariah Hildreth }
Francis Leighton }
Jonathan Keep }

Muster/payrolls, and various papers (1763-1808) of the Revolutionary War [Massachusetts and Rhode Island] Vol. 57, Coat Rolls, 8 months' service, 1775, book 2, 1775-76, image 157

That the document cites a family, indicates that there was someone to receive this money. A Francis Bason married Philip Smith of Westford. Their intentions were filed in Westford on December 17, 1775.⁷⁶

⁷² <https://archive.org/details/memorialofameric00bost/page/110/mode/2up?q=bason>

⁷³ muster and pay rolls vol 57 page 62-63 file 7

⁷⁴ Quintal, 14.

⁷⁵ muster and pay rolls vol 57 page 62-63 file 7

⁷⁶ Vital Records of Westford, Massachusetts, 237.



Vital Records of Westford, Massachusetts, to the end of the year 1849, The Essex Institute: Salem, 1915
<https://archive.org/details/vitalrecordsofwe00westf/page/236/mode/2up>

This is after Cesar's death. Could Francis have been his widow? Daughter? It's unclear if Francis and Philip are White or Black. Their marriage intention is not listed under "NEGROES" in Westford's vital records. Their deaths aren't recorded in Westford Vital Records. We know Cesar was Black and his surname became Bason and that the only other Bason is Francis. As interracial marriages were illegal (though still sometimes occurred), we have to wonder about Francis.

Philip Smith was not born in Westford, but he is indicated as from Westford on the Muster Rolls. He was not a taxpayer in Westford in 1771. On the coat roll dated June 26, 1775 in Charlestown, Philip Smith made his mark that he received his payment that was previously agreed upon. That he left his mark, means that he didn't know how to write and probably didn't know how to read either. Philip and Francis are not listed separately in the 1790 census but could possibly be the two "all free other persons" living with Cato Gray. They are not listed in the 1800 census.

Reflecting back on being paid for the killing of crows, this author wonders why Cesar did this and why Abel Boynton did this. At first, one can think, this was a way a formerly enslaved man could earn some money. But Abel? Abel was the son of Nathaniel Boynton who, according to 1774 tax records, was the 18th wealthiest man in Westford. Abel was not struggling in life, needing to kill crows in order to make ends meet. Crows were a nuisance to many towns as they destroyed agriculture. The alternative is that this was just something that was done and everyone helped.

York Hambleton

York Hambleton was enslaved by Abel Boynton, son of Nathaniel Boynton, Westford's Town Clerk. Hambleton is a government district in the United Kingdom and it is located near York, England. York Hambleton's name follows the convention of naming enslaved people after cities or regions from the enslaver's ancestry. Indeed, the Boynton family arrived in 1638 from Yorkshire, England.

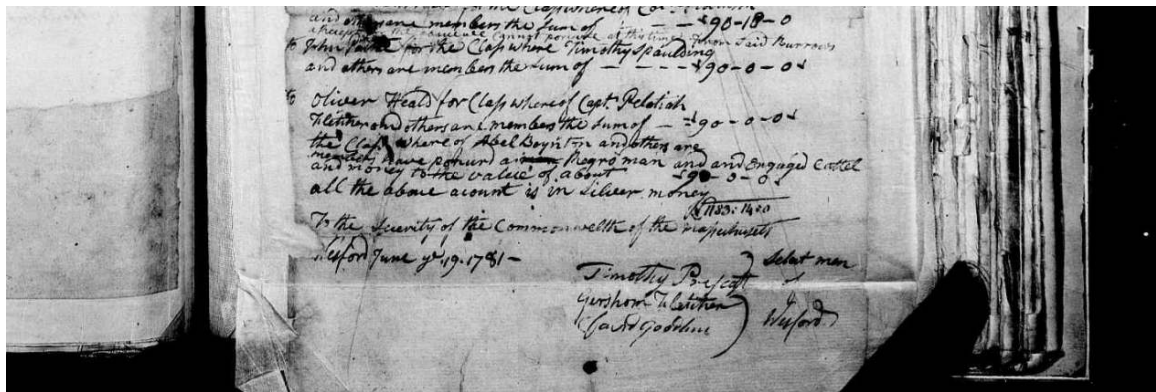
Abel Boynton was probably a member of this Middle Class and enslaved a man prior to him being married and having a family. His father hadn't even passed away yet, so he would not

have gotten an inheritance allowing him to purchase a large tract of land or gain prominence in the community.

Abel was a Private in the First Foot Company of the Westford Militia and answered the Lexington Alarm on April 19, 1775. Abel was just a few months shy of his 20th birthday. He officially enlisted in the Continental Army on May 5, 1775 and fought in the Battle of Bunker Hill. After 1774 and prior to 1781, most likely by 1778, Abel enslaved the man he called York Hambleton. It is assumed after 1774, because Abel does not appear on the town's tax list as he was not a landowner yet at 18.

If Hodgman is right, and Abel Boynton owned a tannery on Heywood Street, then York likely worked there. He also may have lived in the center of town, near present day 39 Main Street.

In December 1780, the town agreed to raise a certain number of men to supplement the Army. There is a record of Abel Boynton being listed as a member of Class No. 12, in which he "engaged a negro."⁷⁷ York's enlistment is less than six months after this call. Does "engaged a negro" mean that Abel engaged York to fight as his substitute?



Our first record of York Hambleton is his enlistment in the Continental Army on May 7, 1781. He was listed as 31 years old and 5' 7" in height. His trade was listed as "Laborer." His time for enlistment was 3 years.

Number	Date of Enlistment	Name	Age	Height	Complexion	Hair	Eyes	Trade	for What	for What	
									mon Engag	Time Engag	
13	July 8	Benj. Capron	46	5	8	Light Brown	Dark	Stutter	Stephinton	3 years	
14	Nov 17	John Choate	24	5	9	Dark	Light	Laborer	D.	D.	
1	May 7 ¹⁷⁸¹	York Hambleton	31	5	7	Black	Black	Black	Laborer	Westford	3 years
2	Apr 14	Wm. Burrows	50	5	8	Light	Light	Light	Painter	D.	D.
3	D ^o 26	John Nutting	42	5	10	D.	D.	D.	Laborer	D.	D.
4	D ^o 5	John Patch	20	5	10	D.	D.	D.	Farmer	D.	D.
5	Mar 16	David Johnson	17	5	5	D.	D.	D.	D.	D.	D.
6	Apr 9	Simon Phelps	17	5	7	D.	D.	D.	D.	D.	D.
7	D ^o 5	John Patch	17	5	5	D.	Dark	Dark	D.	D.	D.

York Hambleton's enlistment, Descriptive List, Vol. 29, Page 12

⁷⁷ Massachusetts Muster and PayRolls, Volume 32, Page 447.

He was mustered as a Private into Captain Holbrook's regiment and was sent to West Point.

appoin'ted Sergeants	Term Remarks	appoin'ted Corporals
Thos. Young	was in service	Philip Henshaw
David Smith	d. of disease	Edward Holbrook
Isaac Tye	d. of	File
Joshua Abington	d. of	James General
James Scudder	d. of	Isaac Private
Noyes Lovell	d. of	Isaac Private
Thos. Hull	d. of	Isaac Private
Job Hathaway	d. of	Isaac Private
Thos. Rowlett	d. of	Isaac Private

"Massachusetts, Revolutionary War, Index Cards to Muster Rolls, 1775-1783," database with images, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSQZ-ZLH8?cc=2548057&mc=QZZQ-M7P%3A1589088615> : 27 January 2017), Haley, William Hancock, David - image 500 of 2457; Massachusetts State Archives, Boston.

York was likely still enslaved at the time of his enlistment because Abel Boynton puts in a request to the state for money owed to him, as *lost property*. On October 20, 1792, three men in town noted that they were informed that a “certain negro man by the name of York Hambleton who was the property of Colonel Abel Boynton” died at West Point towards the end of the Revolution. Oliver Prescott, Judge of Probate, appointed Abel Boynton as administrator of the probate. York died intestate, that is, without a will. They found no debts that he owed, except a sum of about £ 9 to Abel Boynton for clothes to go into the army.

Westford Oct. 20. 1792

These Certify that we the undersigned have been credible in finding that a certain negro man by the name of York Hambleton who was the property of Col. Abel Boynton, died at West Point near the close of the late American war

Samuel Adams
Nath. Boynton
John Pidd

Middlesex County, MA: Probate File Papers, 1648-1871. Online database. AmericanAncestors.org. New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014. (From records supplied by the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Archives. Digitized images provided by FamilySearch.org)

<https://www.americanancestors.org/DB536/rd/14462/10214-co1/263877806>

No further information has been found regarding his death. The probate record is dated 1792, eleven years AFTER York enlisted in the Army.

Hannah Kibbery

She and her sons were “warned out” of Westford.⁷⁸ It’s unclear if they were enslaved here.

Other Enslaved People in Westford

For these people, we do not know their name. The only record is the tax record or other record of the enslaver. For this reason, we are listing the enslaver’s name.

Samuel Fitch

According to the tax records, Samuel Fitch was assessed for a slave in 1757 and an extra poll tax in 1774. This is NOT the same Samuel Fitch of Boston, also an enslaver, who was a loyalist. The Samuel Fitch House in Westford is supposed to have been used on the Underground Railroad. So it’s an interesting cycle of the history of the house. More research is needed in this area. There is some evidence that safe houses on the Underground Railroad existed in Groton, so it is not altogether unlikely that houses in Westford were also used.

Peletiah Fletcher

In the 1771 tax list, Peletiah is listed as having a “servant for life.” In 1774, also according to tax records, he was the second wealthiest man in town.

legacy.sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstax/masstax.cgi?state=person&person=03490532

FLETCHER, PELATIAH			
Town of Westford, Middlesex County			
Buildings and Boats			
Dwelling Houses and Shops Adjoining 1	Shops Adjoining 0	Tanhouses -- etc. 0	Stillhouses 0
Warehouses 0	Superficial Feet of Wharf 00000	Gristmills -- etc. 0	Ironworks -- etc. 1
Tons of Vessels			
Farm Animals/Livestock			
Horses 01	Oxen 03	Cows 7	Goats and Sheep 11
Owns Goats or Sheep Y	Swine 04		
General Population Characteristics and Assessed Worth			
Servants for Life 1	Servant Owner Y	Annual worth of the Whole Real Estate (£) 015	Value of Trading Stock (£) 00000
Value of Factorage or Commissions (£) 0000	Value of Money Lent at Interest (£) 00000		
Land and Agriculture			
Acres of Pasture 15	Number of Cows the Pasture will Keep 12	Acres of Tillage 15	Bushels of Grain Produced per Year 160
Barrels of Cider Produced per Year 024	Acres of Salt Marsh 0	Tons of Salt Marsh Hay per Year 0	Acres of English and Upland Mowing Land 8
Tons of English and Upland Hay Per Year 8	Acres of Fresh Meadow 6	Tons of Fresh Meadow Hay Per Year 6	

William Read

In the 1771 tax list, Read is listed as having a “servant for life.” William Read had a place similar to Nathaniel Boynton as Prescott places him 1200 feet west of the beginning of Flag Road and Main Street.

⁷⁸ “Slavery,” Accessed 10 June 2023, http://www.54lowellroad.com/index_files/Page583.htm

READ, WILLIAM			
Town of Westford, Middlesex County			
Farm Animals/Livestock			
Horses 00	Oxen 00	Cows 2	Goats and Sheep 0
Owens Goats or Sheep N	Swine 00		
Buildings and Boats			
Dwelling Houses and Shops Adjoining 1	Shops Adjoining 0	Tanhouses -- etc. 0	Stillhouses 0
Warehouses 0	Superficial Feet of Wharf 00000	Gristmills -- etc. 0	Ironworks -- etc. 0
Tons of Vessels			
Land and Agriculture			
Acres of Pasture 6	Number of Cows the Pasture will Keep 2	Acres of Tillage 2	Bushels of Grain Produced per Year 018
Barrels of Cider Produced per Year 007	Acres of Salt Marsh 0	Tons of Salt Marsh Hay per Year 0	Acres of English and Upland Mowing Land 1
Tons of English and Upland Hay Per Year 1	Acres of Fresh Meadow 0	Tons of Fresh Meadow Hay Per Year 0	
General Population Characteristics and Assessed Worth			
Servants for Life 1	Servant Owner Y	Annual worth of the Whole Real Estate (£) 002	Value of Trading Stock (£) 00000
Value of Factorage or Commissions (£) 0000	Value of Money Lent at Interest (£) 00000		

Moses Burge

Born in Westford October 19, 1728, Moses was the son of Josiah and Susanna (Jacquith) Burge. Moses was the second son, but no records have yet been found of his older brother Samuel (b. 1726). Assuming Samuel died and it is not recorded, Moses may have inherited his father's property. In 1769, Moses Burge was assessed for a slave 7 shilling, 4 pence equal to 3.67 horses; 1790 census, 1 free white male over 16 and 1 under. There are no records for marriage or for births or baptisms of children, however there is an adopted child, Samuel Howard (son of Josiah Howard), on 11 February 1787.

When Moses signed the 1774 Solemn League and Covenant, he was just shy of his 49th birthday.⁷⁹ He is ranked 21 on the 1774 tax list.⁸⁰ Moses died on 22 December 1796 at 68 years old.

Burge's Pond in Westford is named for Josiah Burge.

Jonathan Keyes

He is not listed as an enslaver in the 1771 tax record. He was assessed for a slave in 1773. In the 1774 tax listing, he is ranked the third wealthiest man in Westford.

John Robins

In the 1771 tax list, Robins is listed as having a "servant for life."

⁷⁹ Patriots and Taxpayers of Colonial Westford, Massachusetts in 1774, William Prescott, private printing,

⁸⁰ Patriots and Taxpayers of Colonial Westford, Massachusetts in 1774, William Prescott, private printing,

ROBINS, JOHN			
Town of Westford, Middlesex County			
Buildings and Boats			
Dwelling Houses and Shops Adjoining 1	Shops Adjoining 0	Tanhouses -- etc. 0	Stillhouses 0
Warehouses 0	Superficial Feet of Wharf 00000	Gristmills -- etc. 0	Ironworks -- etc. 1
Tons of Vessels			
Land and Agriculture			
Acres of Pasture 3	Number of Cows the Pasture will Keep 3	Acres of Tillage 8	Bushels of Grain Produced per Year 080
Barrels of Cider Produced per Year 008	Acres of Salt Marsh 0	Tons of Salt Marsh Hay per Year 0	Acres of English and Upland Mowing Land 0
Tons of English and Upland Hay Per Year 0	Acres of Fresh Meadow 12	Tons of Fresh Meadow Hay Per Year 14	
Farm Animals/Livestock			
Horses 02	Oxen 02	Cows 4	Goats and Sheep 9
Owns Goats or Sheep Y	Swine 03		
General Population Characteristics and Assessed Worth			
Servants for Life 1	Servant Owner Y	Annual worth of the Whole Real Estate (£) 009	Value of Trading Stock (£) 00000
Value of Factorage or Commissions (£) 0000	Value of Money Lent at Interest (£) 00000		

Francis Leighton

Francis Leighton is on the list of enslavers in Westford because on the 1790 Federal Census, he is listed as having an “all free other persons” in his household. This is an assumption that it is a Black person. Often formerly enslaved people would sometimes remain with their former enslaver.

Francis was born in Ipswich on July 22, 1734. He married Lydia Fitch (b. 1737) in 1760. After the marriage, they moved to Westford. He died April 9, 1806 at the age of 72. He is buried in Westlawn Cemetery. He served in the American Revolution and marched on the alarm of April 19, 1775. Lydia Fitch is the daughter of Samuel Fitch and Joanna Keyes Kidder. She was born in what is today the Samuel Fitch Bed and Breakfast. Samuel Fitch was also an enslaver. After Lydia’s death in 1801, Francis married Hannah Brown of Acton who is the widow of Captain Issac Davis, who was the first to fall in the Battle of Old North Bridge.

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