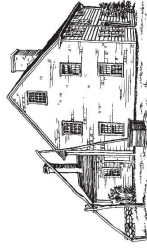


Special Exhibition 2016



LITTLE COMPTON
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

IF JANE SHOULD WANT TO BE SOLD



Stories of Enslavement, Indenture and Freedom in Little Compton, Rhode Island

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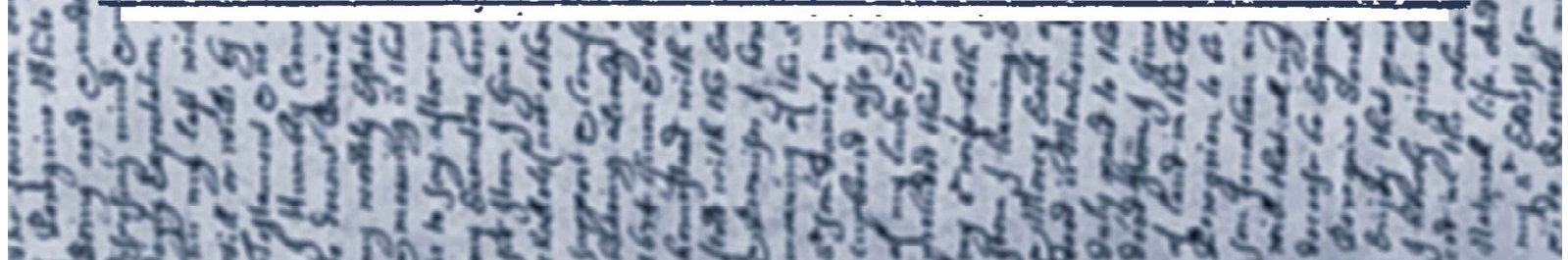
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Slavery

Over 200 men, women and children were enslaved in Little Compton between 1674 and 1816. They were of African, Native American and mixed-race descent. Some had European fathers.

Slavery changed over time in New England. In the 1600s, it was usually the short-term enslavement of Native people captured in wars or punished for crimes or debts. By the mid-1700s it was primarily the life-long, inheritable, enslavement of African people.

The first African slaves came to New England in 1638 in exchange for captive Pequot Indians shipped to the Caribbean for sale as slaves. During King Philip's War in 1675-1676, Little Compton men profited from the sale of captured Indians. People of African descent were enslaved in Little Compton before 1700.

Colonial officials passed laws in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island trying to limit slavery, but the laws failed. The benefits of slave ownership were just too great. Over 45 Little Compton families owned slaves.

Older histories state that slavery in Little Compton was gentler and somehow better than slavery in the South, or even in South County, Rhode Island. Historical evidence does not support those ideas. For individuals enslaved in Little Compton, bondage could be just as brutal as in other parts of the world. Each enslaved person's story is different, illustrating both suffering and survival within an inherently cruel system.

Indenture

Indenture was a temporary form of bondage governed by a contract.

At its best, indenture was a voluntary apprenticeship that taught a young person valuable skills, like woodworking or silversmithing. Family members negotiated the apprentices' contracts and ensured their masters treated them fairly.

Voluntary indentures could be a stepping-stone to success.

Nineteen of Little Compton's 29 First Proprietors (English landowners) received their right to buy land from the Sakonnet Indians as a reward for completing their indentures in Plymouth.

At its worst, indenture was involuntary and very much like slavery, with unscrupulous masters, no protection for the servant, terms that were repeatedly extended and never-ending menial labor.

In between the two extremes, indenture in Little Compton took many forms, ranging from criminal sentences for white men who were "idle and indigent" to a method of Christianizing Native children by placing them in English households.

On at least 28 occasions the Little Compton Town Council ordered children, of all races, into indenture so that the town would not have to pay for their care. The children, who were usually orphaned or illegitimate, had to work for their keep. At times they were awarded to the highest bidder. Indentures often started around age 8. Girls were indentured until age 18, boys age 21. When their indentures ended their masters gave them a new suit of clothes and a Bible.

Freedom

There have always been free people of color in Little Compton.

Most of the town's Native people were free even after English settlement. Many held deeds to land near Adamsville after King Philip's War, but were forced to sell because of debts or English encroachment. Some that stayed worked as wage-earning servants in English homes.

A small number of free people of African descent lived in Little Compton from the very early 1700s. They were household servants, day-laborers, skilled craftspeople and even mill owners.

Early Little Compton was much more diverse than it is today. In 1755, 10% of the town's residents were people of color. Today less than 1% of the population identifies as Native American or African American.

In 1784 Rhode Island passed the Gradual Emancipation Act making the newborn children of enslaved women free, though indentured until adulthood, and making it easier to free adult slaves. Anyone born before March 1, 1784 was still a slave for life.

Slavery continued in Little Compton for another 32 years. Kate Hilliard, Little Compton's last enslaved woman, received her freedom on August 5, 1816 after her master's death. Slavery in Rhode Island was legal until 1843.

Most newly-free people did not stay in Little Compton. Lack of opportunity, isolation and racism prompted them to move elsewhere. According to the 1940 census there was only one black person in town.

Anti-Slavery Activists

Only one local person is known to have publicly protested northern slavery, though others may have shared his feelings.

Reverend Peleg Burroughs

In the 1780s the Reverend Peleg Burroughs of the Old Stone Baptist Church in Tiverton wrote in his journal that he preached against slavery in the home of Tiverton slave owner Philip Gray. This was a brave thing for Peleg to do because he relied on gifts from the slave-owning members of his congregation to support his family. Peleg's anti-slavery sentiments did not stop him from running a store that sold West Indies goods produced by slave labor. In 1789 the Providence Society for the Freeing of Slaves invited Peleg to be a founding member.

After slavery ended in the North, a number of local people turned their attention to ending slavery in the South.

Deacon Thomas Burgess

Deacon Thomas Burgess was among the first of Little Compton's abolitionists. He and his wife Ruth were the first to join the Little Compton Anti-Slavery Society in 1837. An obituary refers to his home as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

Ruth Burgess Burleigh

Deacon Thomas' young daughter Ruth was a leader in the effort to have the Little Compton Congregational Church take a formal stand against slavery. Their minister Alfred Goldsmith and many in the congregation refused to discuss it. Ruth and 16 others withdrew from the church. The minister resigned. The congregation quickly reconciled with its abolitionist members and adopted an anti-slavery position in 1842.

George Burleigh

George Burleigh was Little Compton's most widely-known abolitionist because of his regionally popular anti-slavery poems and hymns. George traveled to Little Compton from his family home in Connecticut to deliver abolitionist speeches in the home of Deacon Burgess. While there he fell in love with Ruth. The couple married and continued their activism together.

Abby Maria Wilbour

Abby Maria Wilbour organized Frederick Douglass' visit to Little Compton in 1842 to speak against slavery at the Methodist Church. In his autobiography, Frederick thanked a number of Little Compton families for assisting the abolitionist cause.

Nathaniel Gifford

Nathaniel Gifford and his brother Clothier attended Rhode Island's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1836. Women were not allowed. The Gifford brothers used their business connections in New Bedford to help people escaping slavery as they arrived in that port city. A biography calls Nathaniel a conductor on the Underground Railroad. He helped at least one of the "railroad's" passengers settle in Little Compton, a young boy named Henry Manton.

Slave Traders

Little Compton's proximity to Newport, America's 18th-century slave-trading center, made slave trading a lucrative venture for a number of local men.

Captain Richard Grinnell

As the captain of the *Maria* Richard Grinnell purchased 40 slaves in Sierra Leone in 1774 and delivered 36 of them to South Carolina.

Captain Oliver P. Earle

An unnamed slave-ship registered in Little Compton and captained by Oliver P. Earle left Africa with 114 enslaved African people in 1802. The following year, Oliver died at Bents Island off the coast of Africa of a fever. His wife Deborah had his story inscribed on his headstone in Little Compton's Old Burying Ground.

Captain Daniel Beebe

Daniel Beebe's wife Mary recorded that he drowned off the coast of Africa in 1800 on his gravestone.

Captain Willard Briggs

Willard Briggs was a slave ship captain and owner. In 1789 he worked with Tiverton's Benjamin Bordon and Godfrey Manchester to purchase slaves near Cormantine Castle in Africa. In 1793 Willard hired Captain John Almy Briggs to sail his brig *Hannah* to the Gold Coast of Africa and then to Cuba. It carried a cargo of 124 enslaved people.

Abial Cook

Abial Cook, Captain Willard Brigg's father, was a sailor on the sloop *Medford* for a voyage from Rhode Island to Surinam and then to Boston in 1741.

Joseph Grinnell

Joseph Grinnell reported in his diary that he signed up as a sailor for a slaving voyage on the *Sally*.

George Briggs

George Briggs, the nephew of Captain Willard Briggs died at Cape Mount, Liberia. A family story states that George's father Arnold Briggs was the captain of the vessel, and that George died during a slave uprising. George was 16.

Andrew Taylor

Andrew Taylor was part owner of the *Hiram*, a slave ship registered in Tiverton. The *Hiram* made slave voyages in 1805 and 1806. Andrew was a merchant and father of 11 children. He ran a store from his home on Meeting House Lane. Captain Paul Brownell of Westport and his seven-man crew sailed the *Hiram*. On their first voyage they forced 122 enslaved people on board and sold the 92 survivors in South Carolina. On the second voyage they took 94 people from African, and 34 died during the journey to Cuba.

Captain Job Almy

As captain and co-owner of the *Eliza*, Job Almy made two slaving trips to Africa in 1807 just prior to the banning of the slave trade by the Federal Government in 1808. He brought 149 enslaved people to South Carolina. In 1808 Job died off the coast of Africa along with Captain David Slocum and Mr. Tristram Durfee of Tiverton. The men were on what was probably their first attempt at illegal slave trading.

Captain Nathaniel Briggs

Tiverton's Nathaniel Briggs captained 8 slave voyages. He oversaw another 10 voyages as a slave ship owner. Nathaniel was responsible for the forced transport of 2,166 enslaved people and the deaths of 267 people during their passages from Africa to their points of sale.

Though a relatively small number of men personally took part in the slave-trade, hundreds of local men, women and children of all races worked to produce the trade goods and supplies – candles, corn, salted meat, lumber, butter, barrels – that made slaving voyages possible and profitable. Hundreds more purchased goods like sugar and molasses brought to Newport on the last leg of the voyages. In 18th century Little Compton it was nearly impossible to avoid entanglement with the slave trade.

Misremembering Slavery

Once slavery ended in Little Compton in 1816, the community tried to forget it. For much of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries Little Compton joined with hundreds of other New England communities in efforts to minimize the history of slavery and forced indenture in the region. If mentioned at all, northern slavery was described as a gentler, somehow better institution than that practiced in the South. Little Compton even congratulated itself because its slavery was better than that of South County.

Since the 1940s scholars have worked to shed light on the realities of northern slavery and New England's amnesia surrounding it. Despite half a century of important academic efforts, the existence of slavery, and more specifically the widespread nature of slavery, in New England remains a surprise to many.

Little Compton's early historians did not deny the existence of slavery in the community, but they wrote about it in a way that made every master seem kind and every enslaved person loyal. Their histories present local slavery as a small-scale, short-lived, benign curiosity rather than a harsh, significant economic and social institution that endured for 150 years and impacted hundreds of people, enslaved and free. Twenty-first century local historians have begun to add new voices to Little Compton's stories of enslavement, and twenty-first century audiences are ready to accept them.

Slavery and forced indenture in Little Compton were brutal, enduring and widely-accepted institutions that provided great economic and social benefits for multiple generations of at least forty-five slave-owning families. Local families who did not own slaves also benefited from the labor and military service of unfree people, from the many job opportunities and new markets tied to the Triangular Trade, from the lower taxes that resulted from the forced indenture of the poor and from the privileges associated with being white.

Slavery and forced indenture stole the freedom of at least 250 men, women and children of color in Little Compton and established a system that fostered inequality even once they and their descendants were free. There is still more to be discovered about Little Compton's historic people of color, and still more to be learned from their stories.

Stories of Enslavement, Indenture & Freedom in Little Compton, Rhode Island

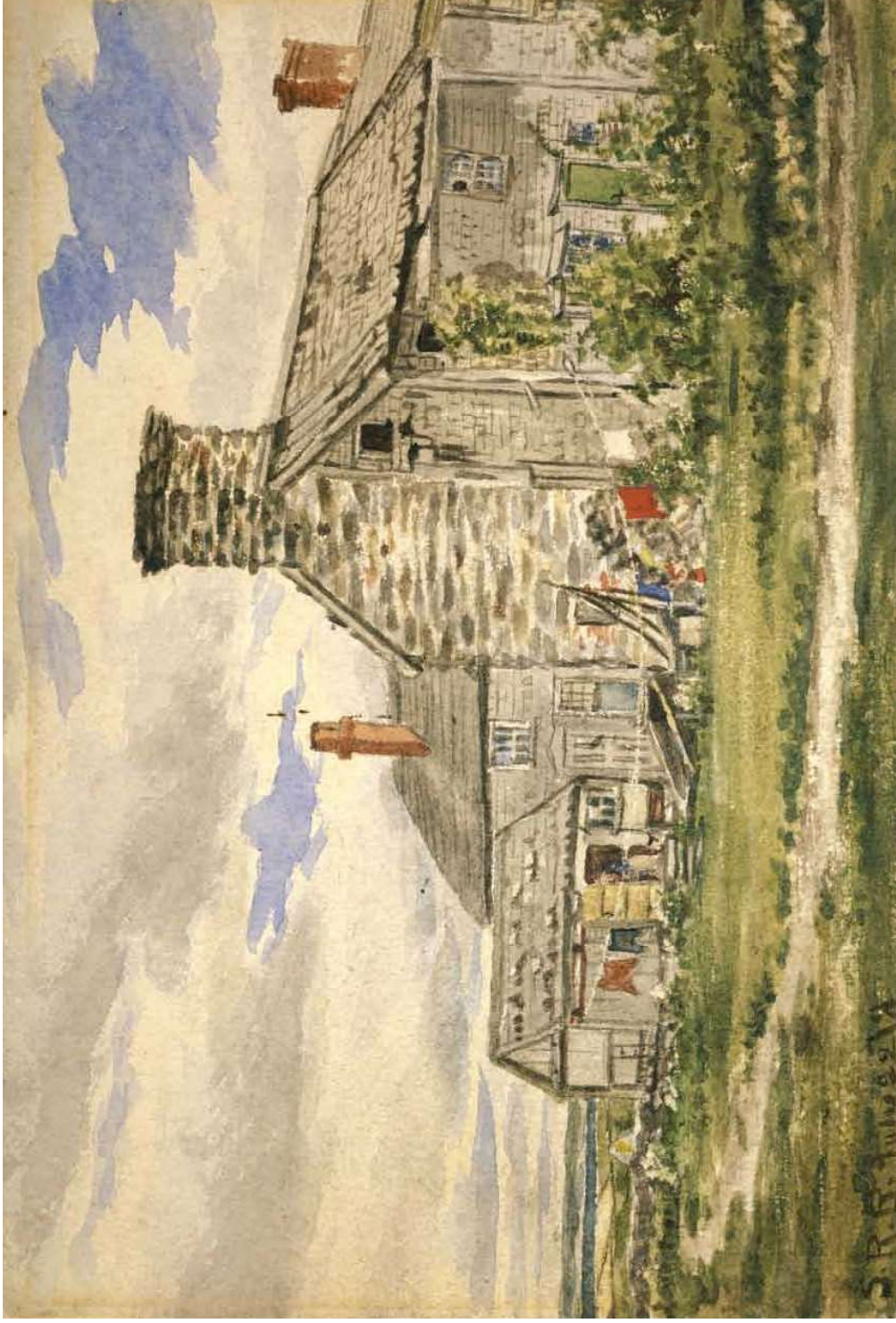
Dates

It is unusual to know the birth and death dates of historic people of color. These dates were usually not recorded by town clerks. The dates listed here are the dates that Little Compton's enslaved, indentured and newly-free people appeared in the historic records.

INDENTURED & FREE

John Irish 1641–1717

John Irish, an English boy, served a voluntary indenture with one of the most powerful men in colonial Plymouth, Miles Standish. When John completed his indenture, he was a free man and able to take advantage of the many opportunities available to free, hardworking, white men in colonial New England. Plymouth officials rewarded John and 18 other former indentured servants of Plymouth with the right to purchase land from the Indians at Sakonnet. Because of this reward, John became one of Little Compton's First Proprietors. His 100-acre farm overlooking the Sakonnet River provided a comfortable livelihood for generations of his descendants. John's voluntary indenture was a stepping stone to success.



John Irish's Little
Compton home.
Built c. 1680.
Painting by Sydney
Burleigh c. 1900.
Courtesy of
Jack Nelson.

ENSLAVED

Hanah

1676

Hanah was a spoil of war and so became a slave. English colonists enslaved Hanah and hundreds of other Native people during King Philip's War when they were captured or surrendered. Their enslavements were for life or for a term of approximately ten years. Little Compton's first English settler, Benjamin Church signed the document that made Hanah a slave for life. He required Hanah to make her mark to show that she agreed to her fate. Hanah's first owner, Adam Right of Duxbury sold Hanah to William Wodell of Portsmouth, RI for 4 pounds and 10 shillings in 1676. Alderman, a Native man who received 100 acres of land in Adamsville for killing King Philip, witnessed Hanah's sale.

INDENTURED or ENSLAVED

Peter Awashonks

1696

It can be hard to know a person's exact freedom status. Peter Awashonks was unfree in 1696 when his master Edward Richmond passed away. Inventory takers listed Peter as property in Edward's estate inventory with two other Native men or boys. They were each valued at £3. Peter was the son or grandson of Awashonks, the female sachem of the Sakonnetts. We cannot tell if the men were voluntarily indentured, ordered into indenture for debt or crime, enslaved for a term of years or enslaved for life. Their relatively low value indicates either that they had only a few years left to serve, or that they were advanced in age. If Peter was Awashonks' son, he would have been in his 40s or 50s in 1696. Peter was in line to be the next sachem of the Sakonnet people.

INDENTURED & FREE

Ann Dier 1702

Ann Dier was part Native American, part English. She was one of only two people of color in colonial Little Compton recognized as kin by their white family members. Her English grandfather, Lawrence Springer, acknowledged her in his 1701 will by leaving her a yearling calf that she was to share with her cousin Jeremy Springer when they came of age. Both children appear to be illegitimate. Ann was the indentured servant of Thomas Butt of Acoaxet. In 1702 Thomas passed away and left Ann to his wife Elizabeth. The men who took Thomas' probate inventory assigned Ann a value of £4. It is likely that her indenture ended when she turned 18.

ENSLAVED & FREE

Hope & Mercy

1716

*That my two mullatto girls, Hope and Mercy be with my wife or daughters,
Woodman and Head till they arrive at the year of twenty five and
then to be immediately free and at their disposition & to be allowed forthwith
by their masters or mistresses each of them a good new suit of cloaths
from top to Toe and twenty shillings of money a piece.*

The Will of William Briggs, Little Compton, 1716

Hope and Mercy lived at a time when temporary enslavement was still common. Their master William Briggs gave Hope and Mercy to his wife and daughters in his will, but ensured that they would be freed when they turned 25. He also made arrangements to give the women a modest amount of money and new clothing when they left his family.

William described Hope and Mercy as “mulatto girls,” meaning they were of at least two races. They could have been of African, Native or English descent.

The Briggs family did not treat Hope and Mercy like slaves for life, nor did they treat them like indentured servants with a pre-existing contract. The women were in limbo somewhere in between, temporarily enslaved and dependent on their master to set them free.

Little Compton was part of Massachusetts until 1747 and would have followed that colony’s laws regarding slavery. In 1641 Massachusetts limited slavery to captives of just wars and strangers who willingly sold themselves or were sold to them. In 1652 in nearby Rhode Island, the General Assembly ruled that all enslaved people should be held for no longer than 10 years.

The public largely ignored these laws. The benefits of enslaving people for life were just too great. Over time slavery in New England became a permanent status inherited by the children of enslaved women. Throughout the 1700s New Englanders enslaved growing numbers of African people and smaller numbers of Native people. They were neither captives of just wars nor willing.

ENSLAVED

Will

c. 1700–1746

Will was a married man, a father of two boys and a member of Little Compton's Congregational Church. He was also enslaved. In 1721 Edward Gray inherited Will, a "Negro" man, from his father Thomas Gray. Thomas made an unusual stipulation in his last will and testament giving Will one day every month to work for himself. That day enabled Will to provide some extra comforts for himself and his future family. In 1731 he married Jane, the "Negro" servant of Samuel Gray. In 1744 he was baptized, and in 1745 Will entered into full communion in the church. He had his son Ebenezer baptized in 1745 and his son Nero in 1746. Will's life mirrored that of many of his white neighbors, except for a glaring lack of freedom.

ENSLAVED ➦ FREE

James Fobes 1729

James' 1729 probate documents begin with "James Fobes (So Called) Free Negro Man." A small number of free African or African American people were part of the Little Compton community in the early 1700s. James was probably once enslaved by William Fobes, one of Little Compton's First Proprietors. James secured his freedom. The townspeople began to call him "James Fobes," though the town clerk wrote "So Called" to remind us that he did not have a real last name. James was a carpenter and a miller. At his death, he owned half a windmill on Windmill Hill and a small house, though he did not own the land on which it sat. James also had his own "mulatto" apprentice boy.



This 19th-century Windmill Hill mill replaced the mill once operated by James Fobes. Image from glass plate negative. Little Compton Historical Society.

ENSLAVED

Hector 1714--1740

In 1740 an enslaved man named Hector ran away from his master. George Brownell advertised a £3½ reward for his capture and warned all ships' captains not to carry off his servant. In an age before photography, a highly detailed advertisement was George's best hope for Hector's return. From the advertisement we learn that Hector was a "Negro," born in Little Compton about 1714, who spoke English well, had a broad flat nose, a long face, thick lips, and very white teeth that showed when he smiled. He was of middle stature, well-shouldered, had small long legs and great feet. George also wrote that Hector walked "lubberly," was very confident and did "not scruple a lye."

Whereas the Town Council of Little Compton in the County of Newport and Colony of Rhode Island did on the 12th Day of Decemr A: D 1749 pas an order in the words following: Whereas Jehu Fishman a poor Indian Boy who has lived with Tobes Little for some time and having no Parents Living to take care of him: may if furn^d of by said Tobes Little become Charge-able to this Town: Therefore it is ordered by this Council that John Pabodie Council Clerk be and he is hereby Directed and fully Im-
-powered to bind out the said Indian Boy to the said Tobes Little untill he shall come to the age of twenty one years upon such terms as they shall agree; and that the same be done in the presence of two of his Majesty's Justices of the Peace of this Town as by said order:

The Little Compton Town Council ordered Jehu Fishman, an orphaned Indian boy, into indenture in 1749. Little Compton Town Council & Probate Records.

INDENTURED & FREE

Jehu Fishman

1749

The Little Compton Town Council described Jehu Fishman as a “poor Indian boy” in his 1749 indenture order. Jehu was orphaned and had been living for some time with a white family headed by Fobes Little. If Fobes stopped providing for Jehu, the boy would have become chargeable to the town. To avoid paying for Jehu’s care, the council ordered that he be “bound-out” or indentured to Fobes until Jehu was 21 years old. Jehu was now required to work for his keep. Each of the 14 children of color ordered into indenture by the town was at least partly Native American.

ENSLAVED

Cate

1756

Cate was the only Little Compton woman we know to have emancipated herself. In 1754 Cate's master Silvester Richmond seemed to give Cate her freedom, but in reality he freed her only if she was able to raise her freedom bond herself. Typically masters gave the town a bond of approximately £100 to provide for the freed person in sickness or old age. Cate could not raise the money, and so she remained enslaved to Silvester's son Perez. After two years Cate could not tolerate her enslavement any longer and ran away, even though her runaway notice described her as "advanced in years."

ENSLAVED ↔ FREE

Sarah Pabodie

1721–1797

When Sarah Pabodie's fourth owner, John Pabodie, passed away in 1767, Sarah's value was listed as zero. The Pabodie heirs should have taken care of Sarah in her old age but did not. Sarah became chargeable to the town, meaning town funds were spent for her support. In 1772 the Town Council voted to no longer support "Sarah Pabodie an aged Negro woman." Their use of a last name for Sarah indicates that she may have been free at this time. Owners sometimes freed enslaved people as a way to avoid caring for them in old age. Thomas Church, a prominent white resident, took Sarah into his household. Sarah may have been the mother of his enslaved woman Jane. In his 1797 will Thomas ordered his son to care for Sarah "who has long lived in my family." Sarah would have been in her 90s.

INDENTURED ⇌ FREE

Fal Solomon

1758

The Little Compton Town Council ordered that Fal Solomon be indentured to Doctor William Wilbor in 1758. The year before Fal had become seriously ill during a terrible epidemic that swept through Little Compton's Native community. Her parents most likely died.

William brought Fal to his home, which is now the Wilbor House Museum. He and his family nursed Fal back to health. William charged the town for all of the expenses involved in the first year of Fal's care. To avoid future expenses, the Town Council ordered that Fal be indentured to William so that, from then on, Fal would have to work in exchange for her food, shelter and clothing until she was 18 years old. Fal had no choice in this involuntary indenture.

Fal may have been assigned sleeping quarters in the Wilbor House's open chamber. Open chambers are unfinished rooms located over a home's kitchen that functioned like a wide hallway providing access to the second floor rooms and the attic. Open chambers were often used for storage and to house servants. Open chambers are warmer than attics but not very private.

During her indenture Fal would have worked with the Wilbor women and children to cook, clean, care for younger children, do farm chores and help make wool and linen fabric. She may also have attended Quaker meetings with the Wilbors.

When she was 18, the Wilbors would have given her new clothing and a Bible, and Fal would have been free to stay with the Wilbors as a wage-earning servant, return to her surviving relatives or work for another family.

Tour a re-creation of Fal Solomon's sleeping quarters in the Wilbor House Museum.



Fal Solomon's
sleeping quarters as
interpreted by the
Little Compton
Historical Society.

INDENTURED ⇄ FREE

Pardon

1758

Pardon's father was of African descent and his mother, Sarah Ned, was Native American. Because Sarah was a free woman, Pardon was born free. As was the custom with most children of color, Pardon was indentured as a boy. He served Job Almy of Windmill Hill.

Job and his neighbor Abial Cook were bitter enemies. One July evening in 1758 Pardon came back from the fields and reported to Job that there was a small fire burning near Abial's windmill. Job ordered Pardon to move the fire closer to the mill so that it would burn. Job threatened to beat Pardon's brains out if he did not obey.

Pardon did obey, and the mill burned. A long court battle followed. Eventually, it became clear that Job had forced Pardon to burn the mill and had bribed his mother Sarah to lie to the court. Job had promised her £50 and a new pair of shoes if she "spoke well" in front of the officials.

After the trial, Pardon petitioned the court to be released from his indenture to Job. Court officials agreed because of Job's abusive treatment of the boy.

Indentured servants were subject to the wills of their masters. Many instances of mistreatment took place on Little Compton's isolated farms. It was very rare for cases of abuse to go to court.

Most historic records describe Pardon as "mulatto" (mixed race). One record written by a clerk in Newport refers to him as "mustee" (Indian and African). In Little Compton, "mulatto" was used to describe any mixed-race person. The word "mustee" does not appear in any known Little Compton record, though it was commonly used in nearby Newport and Dartmouth. Geographic differences in language existed even in neighboring towns.

ENSLAVED ↔ FREE

Quash Almy

1741–1782

Quash Almy was enslaved in Tiverton by Colonel Job Almy, but settled in Little Compton with his family when he became a free man. Job allowed Quash to marry Elizabeth Tripp, a free woman of unknown race, and freed Quash sometime after his marriage. Tiverton's Town Clerk recorded Quash and Elizabeth's story as part of the birth record for their eight children born between 1741 and 1762: Lucy, Benjamin, Abner, Sampson, Gideon, Maribah, Patience and Abner 2nd. The 1782 census shows the family living as free people in Little Compton. Marrying a free woman was an excellent strategy for an enslaved man, because she could earn wages to help buy his freedom, and all of their children would be born free.

ENSLAVED

Sampson

Born 1720–1763

Sampson's bill of sale shows that William Shaw purchased him from Nathaniel Church for £38. The "Negro boy Sampson," was 19 months old. As an adult Sampson married Experience Tobe, a free Native woman, and the couple had two children, Anne and Dorothy, who because of their mother's freedom were born free. Sampson and his family lived in what town records describe as a "wigwam" near his owner's house on Shaw Road.

Sampson negotiated with William for his freedom, and they drew up a contract. Sampson was to pay William £150 to buy his freedom and agreed to dig his garden and make his baskets and brooms forever. Even if Sampson could save his freedom price, he would never really be free of William.

As an enslaved man Sampson fought in the French and Indian War in 1760 and was paid for his service. When he returned he brought small pox back to Little Compton. The Town Council quarantined Sampson and his family in the "Pest House" to prevent the spread of disease. The council appointed white men to stand guard over them and hired people of color to nurse them.

Because of her illness, Experience could not pay her expenses and became "chargeable" to the town. As a result, the council ordered Dorothy and Anne into indentures with two different families to minimize town expenses. The girls were separated from their parents and from each other, perhaps for the first time, and would remain so until they were 18.

During the small pox outbreak, the council ordered the family's belongings, including their money, to be "cleansed." Once the family had recovered, Town Councilman Thomas Church refused to return their money, and William Shaw took him to court. The court ordered Thomas to return the £6. We do not know if Sampson ever succeeded in purchasing his freedom.

INDENTURED & FREE

Dolly Sampson

1760–1790

One of the challenges of researching the lives of New England's historic people of color is that names and racial descriptions change from record to record. Dolly Sampson, a free “Negro” woman listed as the head of a small household in the 1790 census, may also be Dorothy Tobe the daughter of Sampson, an enslaved “Negro” man, and Experience Tobe, a free Indian woman. Dorothy and her sister Anne were ordered into indenture by the Town Council in 1761 when her parents became ill with smallpox and indebted to the town. Many free women of color took their fathers' first names as their last names.

Know all men by these presents that I Nathaniel Church of Little Compton in the County of Bristol in the Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England yeoman for and in Consideration of the Sum of Eighteen pounds in Current Money of S. New England to me in hand well and Truly paid before the Enjoaling and delivery of these presents by William Shaw of the Town & County aforesaid yeoman the Receipt whereof to full Content and Satisfaction I do hereby acknowledge and thereof and of Every part thereof do acquit Exonerate and Discharge the aforesaid William Shaw his heirs Executors Administrators and assigns for Ever by these presents: Have and hereby do fully freely & Clearly and absolutely give Grant Bargain and Sell unto the said William Shaw one negro boy named Sampson being two years of Age the Twenty seventh day of May next after the date of these presents a To Have and to hold the said negro boy named Sampson unto him the said William Shaw his heirs Executors Administrators and assigns so his and theirs own sole and proper use Benefit and Comfort for & during the termes of his natural life. And I the said Nathaniel Church at the time of this Enjoaling of these presents do acknowledge my self to be the true sole and lawfull owner of the said negro boy having my self full power good right and lawfull Authority to sell & disposing thereof in manner as aforesaid: And I do hereby warrant defend and defend the said negro boy for and during the termes of his natural life unto the said William Shaw his heirs Executors Administrators and assigns against the Lawfull Claims and Demand of all persons what so ever In witness whereof I the aforesaid Nathaniel Church have hereunto set my hand & sold the sixth Day of January in the seventh year of the reign of our Sovereign King of Great Britton and in the year of our Lord one Thousand seven hundred

Signed sealed & delivered
In the presence of
George Brewster
John Richmond

Nathaniel Church

Sampson's Bill of Sale. William Shaw purchased Sampson when the enslaved boy was 19 months old. He cost £38. It was not unusual for New England families to bring very young enslaved children into their households. It was easier to train them to be obedient servants. Rhode Island Judicial Archives.

ENSLAVED ↔ FREE

Isaac

Born c. 1737—Free 1771

When his enslaved Indian man Isaac escaped in 1765, Job Almy made sure to mention that Isaac's mother was a "Spanish Squaw" in the runaway advertisement. There were laws in place to prevent the life-long enslavement of local Indians, but it was legal to permanently enslave "Spanish" or "Carolina" Indians brought to New England from the South. Isaac ran away in November wearing only thin shoes. His escape attempt seems to have failed. It appears that he returned to his master because Job's 1767 will promised Isaac his freedom on January 1, 1771, if he behaved well.

ENSLAVED & FREE

Jane

1746–1778

Jane's story was lost from Little Compton's history, but a handful of historic documents scattered throughout southeastern New England help restore it.

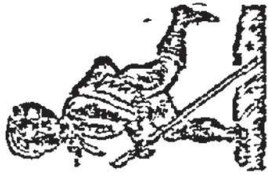
Thomas Church, the son of Benjamin Church, Little Compton's first English settler, owned Jane. She lived and worked in the Church family home on West Main Road. When Thomas wrote his will in 1746, he gave Jane the very unusual choice to be sold after his death or to stay with his family. Jane chose to stay.

Thomas Church, the younger, inherited Jane from his father. She worked in Thomas' large Sakonnet Point household for over 30 years with other enslaved and indentured people. Around 1760 Jane had a son with Prince Bailey, a man enslaved on a neighboring Warren's Point farm.

During the Revolution a British raiding party from Newport burned the Churches' home. The entire household, including Jane and Caesar, escaped to Dighton, MA. In 1778 Prince, who was now a free man, followed Jane and Caesar to Dighton and married Jane in the English fashion by posting their intentions with Dighton town officials. Jane was still enslaved.

In 1781 Caesar Church volunteered to serve in the Revolution. In return, the town of Dighton gave him his freedom. He died while in military service a year later. He was approximately 21.

As a resident of Dighton, Jane may have become free around 1783 when a Massachusetts court case signaled the complicated end of slavery in that state. We know that Prince moved to Newport after the war. Jane, if she was still alive, probably went with him. Prince Bailey spent the last few years of his life fighting in probate court with Thomas Church for Caesar's back military wages. We do not know the outcome.



RUN-AWAY from their Masters, (Col. Job Almy, and Cornelius Sole, both of Tiverton) on the 2d Day of November Instant, two Negro Men, and one Indian Man, Slaves, all born in Tiverton, described as follows, viz.—
Pero, one of the Negroes, about 25 Years of Age, is a Blacksmith by Trade, and plays on a Fiddle; had on when he went away, a Sheeps gray Coat, with blue Cuffs, a striped Flannel Jacket, Leather Breeches, thick Shoes, a Hat, and a full Cap.—*Jack*, (the other Negro) about 35 Years of Age, 5 Feet 6 Inches high, has a Scar on his Forehead, and has a glaring Eye; had on a mill'd Worsted Coat, white Holland Jacket, a striped Flannel ditto, Fustian Breeches, and a Pair of thin Shoes ———*Jazz*, (the Indian) about 28 Years old, 5 Feet 10 Inches high, was born of a Spanish Squaw, has a Scar in his Forehead; had on a mill'd colour'd Coat, a short Jacket near the same Colour, a Pair of Tow Trowsers, and a pair of thin Shoes.

Whoever shall secure one or more of said Slaves, so that his or their Master or Masters may him or them again, shall be well rewarded, and all necessary Charges paid, by

JOB ALMY,
CORNELIUS SOLE.

Tiverton. Nov. 5, 1765.

INDENTURED & FREE

Josias Wilcox 1772

Josias Wilcox's father abandoned his family in 1772. Josias' mother Sarah, a free white woman, struggled to care for her five children, but in the 1700s there were few ways for single women to earn a living. Sarah asked the Town Council to indenture 13-year-old Josias to Jonathan Elles, a blacksmith in Providence, until he was 24 years old. The council agreed and so avoided having to provide for Josias with town funds. Most boys' indentures ended at 21. Josias' apprenticeship is the longest on record in Little Compton, but it provided him with valuable skills he could use to support himself as an adult. A total of 14 white children were indentured by the Town Council. None had fathers to provide for them.

INDENTURED

Aaron Biggs 1772

In 1772 Aaron Biggs decided to run away from his abusive master, Samuel Tompkins of Prudence Island. When Aaron tried to join the British Navy, the teenager was chained, imprisoned below decks and sentenced with 30 lashes. Just before Aaron's flogging, a sailor stated that Aaron was one of the attackers of the *Gaspee*. Aaron was not really part of the attack, but he confessed to avoid being hung. Aaron's coerced testimony became England's best chance of capturing the men who burned the *Gaspee*. King George III personally requested a copy of his testimony. Eventually it was disproved. The Reverend Ezra Stiles of Newport wrote that Aaron's mother was an Indian woman from Little Compton. No one advocated for Aaron during his imprisonment.

ENSLAVED

Kuffe

1777

Kuffe was a skilled farmer, particularly acquainted with the workings of his owner John Bailey's Warren's Point farm. In 1777 John wrote his will and divided his extensive holdings between his two sons. He was worried about his younger son, John, Jr., who was only 19 years old, unmarried and serving in the Revolution. In addition to giving John, Jr. a house and a farm, John, Sr. also gave him Kuffe. Kuffe could manage the farm while John was away at war, and when John returned the enslaved man could mentor his teenage master in the care of the sheep, pigs and flax the farm produced.

ENSLAVED

Aaron & Moses 1771–1773

Sometimes when Little Compton slave owners did not have enough work to occupy their enslaved people, they rented them out. In the winter of 1771, Abial Cook rented two of his enslaved men, Aaron and Moses, to Nicholas Power a rope maker in Providence. Nicholas was horrified by the poor condition of Aaron's and Moses' clothing. Moses could not work because his clothing was so tattered. Nicholas had the men's clothing mended and bought them new shoes. He deducted the cost from the rent he paid for the men. Abial objected and took Nicholas to court. Abial won. During the court case Abial rented out Moses and Aaron again, this time to Captain Thomas Lathrop of Martha's Vineyard for a whaling voyage.

ENSLAVED

49 Un-Named People

1704–1792

The most common story of enslavement in Little Compton is that of an un-named person being inherited as property.

This story occurs 49 times in Little Compton probate documents.

It is striking because of its lack of details.

It is unforgettable because of its frequency.

ENSLAVED ➦ FREE

Ebenezer Richmond 1778

Ebenezer Richmond secured his freedom during the Revolution by volunteering for Rhode Island's First Regiment. He enlisted in 1778 for the duration of the war and was awarded his freedom by the newly-formed state of Rhode Island. His owner's permission was not required. Rhode Island paid Perez Richmond £100 to compensate him for the loss of Ebenezer. Even before joining the First Regiment, Ebenezer was a veteran of the Revolution. As part of Cook's Militia in 1777, Ebenezer stood guard either in one of Little Compton's ten "Block Houses" that overlooked the Sakonnet River or in the fortification constructed of earth and pointed logs for the town's defense. We do not know if Ebenezer survived the war.

Little Compton November y^e 25th Novm: 1748 Wee the sub-
 scribers Being chosen to Apprise the Personal Estate of the
 Reverend Mr Richard Billings Late of Little Compton afores^d,
 Deceas^d have so done according to the best of our Judgment
 To his wearing apparel ----- £ 144 00 00
 To his Library 100 To 2 Beds & Bedding 100 ----- 200 00 00
 To Linnen ----- 060 00 00
 To sundry goods in y^e west Great room ----- 110 00 00
 To goods in y^e East Room ----- 020 00 00
 To sundry goods in y^e west Chamber ----- 040 00 00
 To sundry goods in y^e East Chamber ----- 030 00 00
 To sundry goods in y^e Study ----- 025 00 00
 To goods in the Parlor ----- 015 00 00
 To goods in the kitchen ----- 100 00 00
 To meat & Sauce in y^e Cellar ----- 072 00 00
 To Sundrys in y^e Shop ----- 010 00 00
 To casks in y^e Stable ----- 005 00 00
 To a grind Stone ----- 015 00 00
 To Plate Buckels & Buttons ----- 010 00 00
 To 2 Piggs ----- 015 08 00
 To Corn ----- 080 00 00
 To a mare ----- 050 00 00
 To a Watch ----- 150 00 00
 To Stock & Hay ----- 300 00 00
 To 2 Negroes ----- 018 00 00
 To Cash -----
 The sum Total ----- £: 1472 08 00

{ Benjaⁿ Teabury }
 { Fobes Little }

{ Recorded Decem^r y^e 9th 1748 p^r }
 { John Dubodre Court^{ll} Clerk - }

Reverend Richard Billings' 1748 probate inventory lists two un-named "Negro" people as property. They were his most valuable possessions. Little Compton Town Council & Probate Records.

ENSLAVED, INDENTURED & FREE

Primus Collins

Born 1777–Died 1858

Primus Collins was enslaved in Newport until age 4, indentured in Little Compton until age 18, and a free man until his death at 81. He was one of very few free men of color to settle and raise a family in Little Compton.

In 1799 Primus married Elizabeth Thomas, a free woman, whose ancestors had been enslaved by the Samuel Gray family of Little Compton. Primus and Elizabeth had two girls, Lucy and Amy. Lucy lived her whole life in Little Compton as a single woman. Amy married Charles Simmons, a black man from Bermuda, and moved to New Bedford.

Primus was a property owner. His first half-acre was a gift in 1801 from his former master, Colonel William Richmond of Treaty Rock Farm. Primus then bought over 40 additional acres and a house in five separate purchases between 1803 and 1836. His last purchase, when he was almost sixty-years-old, included a house and farm on Meeting House Lane.

Primus farmed and worked as a day laborer. He was also the Negro Governor of Rhode Island. The Negro Governor was an honorary official elected by men of color during a festive celebration. Masters frequently lent their servants and enslaved people fine clothing and even carriages to help celebrate Election Day.

Primus was a voter. As a free person, a man and a property owner, Primus met all of Rhode Island's very restrictive voting requirements. He voted in 1811 and was nominated, though not elected, as a Justice. It was an event rare enough and controversial enough to be reported in the *Columbian Phoenix*, a Providence newspaper.

Rhode Island rescinded the right of black men to vote in 1822 and restored it in 1842 after the Dorr Rebellion.

ENSLAVED ↔ FREE

Kate Hilliard

1784–1816

During Kate's lifetime she had three different owners in the Hilliard family. She married Prince Grinnell on March 7, 1784, and they had two children. The Hilliard home was sometimes a tavern, sometimes a poor house. Kate's labor helped both businesses succeed. David Hilliard freed Kate in his will and directed his grandson William to provide Kate "all things comfortable in sickness & in health" and instructed Kate to be "obedient unto" William, "laboring for him as far as she may be able." *Kate Hilliard was the last person to be enslaved in Little Compton. Kate became free on August 5, 1816, the day David's will was probated. Two hundred years later this exhibition honors Kate and Little Compton's other unfree people.*

ENSLAVED & FREE

Sippo & Cate Cook

1778–1796

Sippo and Cate were the parents of eleven children. David Cook, a gentleman farmer on Little Compton's Windmill Hill owned Sippo. Tiverton farmer Abner Chase owned Cate and the children.

Sippo worked on the Cook farm six days a week and visited his family in Tiverton whenever possible. In the summer of 1778 he joined 56 other Little Compton men serving in Captain William Richmond's Company in the Rhode Island Expedition. Sippo appears to be the only black man in the group. Nine months later, Sippo received a payment or "bounty" for his military service.

Sippo served as an enslaved man, perhaps accompanying his owner David or in place of him. He did not have a promise of freedom from Rhode Island for his service in the Little Compton militia, but he may have had a private arrangement with his master.

On July 5, 1784, one year after the end of the war, several months after Rhode Island passed the Gradual Emancipation Act freeing the newborn children of slaves, and one day after the United States celebrated its first Fourth of July as an independent nation, David Cook handed Sippo Cook his freedom papers.

Sippo moved to Tiverton to be near his family, taking whatever work he could find. At times he would farm for Tiverton slave trader Nathaniel Briggs. Slave traders were often wealthy men who provided jobs for many people, of all races, in their communities.

Twelve years after Sippo became free, Abner freed Cate and 9 of the couple's children. Sippo may have been saving money for all those years to buy his family's freedom, or Abner may have tired of providing for so many people.

Sippo and Cate lived in what is now Weetamoo Woods, preserved land in Tiverton that is open to the public. The cellar hole of their house can be seen along the path.

ENSLAVED & FREE

Fortune Gray

1780–1802

Fortune Gray was a devout Christian and turned to the white members of local churches for help at two very important points in his life.

As a young, enslaved, African American man in Tiverton, Fortune chose to be baptized in the Old Stone Baptist Church in Adamsville in 1780. When he wanted to marry Kathrine Almy, a woman of color who may have been free, his owner Philip Gray agreed to the union but forbid Fortune from being married by a minister or a judge. Fortune wanted more for himself and his bride. He turned for help to his white brothers and sisters in Christ at the Old Stone Church. Together they devised a plan for Fortune and Kathrine to marry themselves “as the Quakers do” with no officiant present but surrounded by loving, supportive witnesses. Church members helped Fortune technically obey his master but found a clever way to give Fortune and Kathrine the legal, Christian marriage they desired.

Fortune’s membership in the Baptist Church ended abruptly in 1792 with no explanation when the Reverend Peleg Burroughs wrote in his journal that Fortune had been excluded.

Fortune, a free man since at least 1790 and apparently a recent widower, moved himself and his two daughters Mahala and Sabina to Little Compton. There they received the help of the Reverend Mase Shepard of the Congregational Church. Mase held the deed for Fortune’s house and lot near the corner of Peckham Road and Burchard Avenue. Neighbors refer to the property in their deeds as “Fortune Gray’s house,” but Fortune was never the legal owner.

Mase helped the next generation of the Gray family in 1807 when he sold Mahala and Sabina a small lot and house on Long Highway for \$50. Because of the minister’s help, the sisters became the first female African American land owners in Little Compton.

Fortune lived at a time when slavery in the North was on the decline, and newly free people had to invent new ways to feed and shelter their families and live and work with their neighbors, of all races. The relationships Fortune built with his fellow church members helped ease the path for his family as he moved from bondage within a white family to freedom and property ownership within a multi-racial community.

FREE

Sabina Gray Lawton

Born 1786—Died 1876

In 1807 Sabina Gray Lawton and her sister Mahala became the first African American women to own land in Little Compton. They represent the first generation of local people of African descent who lived when freedom was more common than enslavement. Born in Tiverton and probably free from birth, Sabina was the daughter of Fortune Gray, an enslaved African American man, and Kathrine Almy Gray, a woman of color. Sabina and Mahala chose to be baptized at the Old Stone Baptist Church in 1805. They moved to Newport in 1808, where Mahala enrolled in the African Free School, and Sabina married William Lawton, a free, African American mariner. Sabina raised two sons in Newport, but as an elderly widow returned to Little Compton to live with her step-niece Lucy Collins.

ENSLAVED

Saul c. 1777

Saul's owner, Colonel William Richmond (1727-1807) had no children and frequently left Treaty Rock Farm to attend to business, politics and military service. William trusted Saul with "the entire supervision and control of his farm." Little Compton's most successful men owed their success in part to the labor of their enslaved people who ran their affairs at home and produced reliable incomes, allowing masters to attend to other matters. A Richmond genealogy states that "Saul was complete master of ceremonies and affairs about the farm. An ox could not be bought without his presence and counsel." Saul and William's relationship must have included a level of trust and respect. William's respect for Saul did not prevent him from giving Saul's children away to his friends as gifts.

INDENTURED & FREE

Moses Suckanush

1797–1811

After his father Simon died the Town Council ordered Moses Suckanush to be indentured to Cannan Gifford of Adamsville in 1797. The indenture described Moses as a “black boy.” He was of mixed race. His father descended from the Sakonnet sachems. His mother Deborah Richmond was part African American. The indenture contract instructed Cannan to give Moses a Bible and to teach him to “read and write good English if teachable & to cypher as far as the Rule of Three.” It seems that Cannan fulfilled these obligations. Moses died in 1811 after a whaling voyage. Among his modest belongings were a Bible, a dictionary, a small book, and a “Cypering Book.” After settling Moses’ estate, the Town Council ordered Abigail Suckanush, who was probably his young wife, to leave Little Compton and return to her hometown.

ENSLAVED ➦ FREE

Barbary Bailey

1810–1812

Kindness towards enslaved people is hard to find in Little Compton's records. In 1810 Deborah Bailey treated her "Negro girl Barbary" with great kindness in her will. Deborah gave Barbary an entire room of furniture much like one would give a daughter. Barbary appears to be free, but was probably once enslaved. Barbary passed away two years later and returned Deborah's kindness. Barbary's heirs included Deborah's grandchildren. She gave them money and the linen sheets Deborah had given her. Barbary gave the remainder of her belongings – earrings, silver spoons, dresses, furniture – to Rebeckah, Sary and Mariah Bailey and Ginny Burgess, all women of color. Ginny named her daughter Barbary Bailey. Not every woman of color in Little Compton lived in comfort surrounded by white and black loved ones, but Barbary did.

FREE

Lucy Collins

Born 1801–Died 1893

Lucy Collins was a bit of a local celebrity. In her old age, she was one of only a handful of people of color who chose to make Little Compton their home. People took notice of Lucy when she walked by and wrote about her in their diaries. Local historian Sarah Soule Wilbour wrote that Lucy was “the only native colored person in town.” As the child of locally enslaved people, Lucy was the last living reminder of Little Compton’s own slavery. Lucy lived her whole life as a free woman. She farmed the 30-acres her father purchased on Meeting House Lane, cared for her elderly aunt, and sometimes struggled to make ends meet. At the end of her life she promised her farm to the Nicholsons, a family of color, in exchange for their care in her old age. She died at 92.



Lucy Collins.
Free Woman.
Born 1801.
Died 1893.
Little Compton
Historical Society.

FREE

Ezra Cook

c. 1870

Like most free people of color, Ezra Cook did not stay in Little Compton for very long. Racism, compounded by isolation and lack of opportunity made Little Compton an undesirable place for people of color to raise their families. Ezra was an African American boy who attended school in Adamsville around 1870. Lizzie Manchester of Manchester's Store was one of his school mates. Their teacher used Ezra as a form of punishment. Anyone who misbehaved had to sit wrapped in a blanket with him. Lizzie recalled this memory in 1936. She thought the punishment was funny. She also thought that Ezra did not care that he was humiliated in this way. Ezra's family moved away.

ENSLAVED ➦ FREE

Moselle Gray

Born c. 1857–Died 1912

On the eve of the Civil War, Moselle Gray was an enslaved infant in North Carolina. Her owner, Arnold Gray was one of a number of Little Compton men who moved south and continued their family history of slave ownership there. When Arnold died in 1857 his 7 siblings inherited his 14 enslaved people, including Moselle. Six of the Gray siblings sold their enslaved people at auction and pocketed the profit. Only Willard Gray object to the sale. He freed Moselle and a man named Benjamin and brought them to Little Compton around 1860. Moselle lived with the Gray family for twenty years. The Grays saved Moselle from southern slavery but not from the hardships of life in New England for a woman of color. Moselle struggled and overcame many challenges to raise her own family in Newport. She has dozens of local descendants today.



Moselle Gray. Born c. 1857 – Died 1912. Enslaved in North Carolina by Little Compton native Arnold Gray. Inherited and freed by his brother Willard Gray in Little Compton around 1860. Photographed in Fall River, c. 1866. Little Compton Historical Society.

ENSLAVED ☞ FREE

Henry Manton

1860–1935

Henry Manton came to Little Compton as a young boy on the Underground Railroad. Born and enslaved in North Carolina, Henry appears in the 1870 Census in the home of Nathaniel Gifford of John Dyer Road, a “conductor on the railroad.” Henry never left the area. In 1892 he purchased a farm in the Pottersville neighborhood of Little Compton and raised a large family there. In addition to farming, Henry was a skilled mason. His family was the first to have a telephone in Pottersville. Henry’s wife, Dora Johnson Manton, descended from Native people in Dartmouth and created herbal medicines for her neighbors. At times the Mantons were the only people of color in Little Compton. Many living residents remember Henry’s grandsons who lived on the family farm until recent years.



Wilson Lewis descends
from Sippo and Cate Cook.
Courtesy of his
great-granddaughter
Cheryl Martin Lewis.

FREE

Wilson Lewis

Born 1861--Died 1947

While researching her genealogy, Tiverton resident Cheryl Lewis Martin discovered that her great-grandfather Wilson Lewis was of African, Native and European descent. His ancestors included Sippo Cook an African American man once enslaved in Little Compton, Grace Lewis a free Native woman from Tiverton and Frances Stratton a white woman from Maine believed to be French Canadian. Prior to her research Cheryl had no knowledge of her African and Native ancestors. As we delve more deeply into Little Compton's historic records more people will be able to connect to their ancestors who were once enslaved and indentured here.