




African American Historic Sites on “The Street” in Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1695 - 1783

Very few buildings associated with Deerfield slavery still exist; of those that remain, all have been renovated or restored. Surviving evidence reminds us, however, that slavery was woven into the everyday life of early western Massachusetts communities. This map identifies sites where Deerfield’s enslaved and free African American residents lived and worked through most of the eighteenth century.

An online walking map of “The Street” and accompanying interpretive information about Deerfield’s enslaved African American residents can be found on PVMA’s American Centuries website:
www.americancenturies.mass.edu

Key

-  African American site, private building
-  African American site, open to the public, seasonal
-  African American site, no existing building

Our Funders

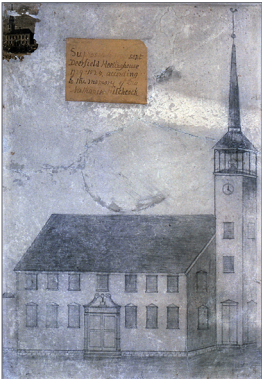
- The Ford Foundation
- Institute of Museum and Library Services
- Massachusetts Cultural Council
- MassHumanities
- The members and donors of PVMA
- National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Betty and Robert Romer
- The 1772 Foundation
- US National Park Service

In Memory of Miss Mary J. Hawks,
Curatorial Researcher, Memorial Hall Museum





1 Site of the Fourth Meeting House
“...Baptized upon his masters account”



Between 1735 and 1786, ministers at Deerfield's Fourth Meeting House baptized 17 enslaved Africans and the six free children of freed slaves Abijah and Lucy Prince, admitted six to Church membership, and married Caesar and Hagar "Servants to Samuel Dickinson."

4 Site of the Sheldon House
Pompey



We know that Pompey, owned by Ebenezer Sheldon (1691-1774), lived here. Pompey, like many Deerfield slaves, was baptized in the Fourth Meeting House.

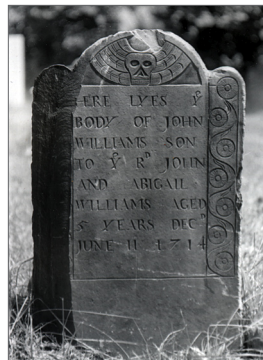
2 Site of Williams Houses and Store
“Caesar... Negro To a pr garters 9d, ...”



It was legal in colonial New England for slaves to own property. In the mid-eighteenth century at least 18 slaves and free blacks had accounts at Elijah Williams' (1712-1771)

store. Caesar (site 7), for instance, bought items such as shoe buckles and a knife, and settled his account with a fox pelt. The Williams household included enslaved people throughout much of the eighteenth century. Elijah owned at least three slaves: Town, Coffee, and Onesimus. The Reverend John Williams (1664-1729), Deerfield's first minister and Elijah's father, owned Robert Tigo, Kedar, Frank, Parthena (see site 13) and "Meseck". Meseck was bequeathed to Elijah's sister Abigail (see site 16), also owner of Patience, Lemuel, and Chloe. Chloe was freed in 1787 by Abigail's will. "A Molatto fellow," appears in the probate inventory of another sister, Sarah. Elijah's son, John (1751-1816), held two "Servants for life" in 1771.

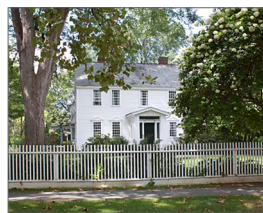
5 Burying Ground



As one of the few occasions when the public gathering of enslaved people was sanctioned in New England, funerals became events that brought Africans and African Americans together as a community. Were Deerfield slaves buried in the town's burying ground? In the absence of surviving evidence, we cannot be sure, although there exist later refer-

ences to at least one slave being buried there. They might have been buried in unmarked graves or in graves with wooden markers that deteriorated over time.

6 Timothy Childs House
Phillis; Humphry



Phillis, Humphry and Caesar lived in the Timothy Childs (1686-1776) household. Childs purchased nine-year-old Phillis from a Westfield, MA, minister in 1741. Dr. Thomas Williams treated Humphry several

times beginning in 1748, for ailments such as an injured hand and foot. Account book records indicate that Humphry dug potatoes for the doctor as credit towards his owner's debts. From 1749, Caesar purchased items such as shoe buckles and a wool cap at Elijah Williams' store.

3 Site of Dr. Thomas Wells House
Prince



Both slaveholders and non slaveholders regularly benefitted from the work of Deerfield's enslaved residents.

In 1741, Dr. Thomas Wells (1693-1744) hired out Prince to clear land for Joseph Barnard (site 14). Two years later, Dr. Wells sold "his Negro fellow" to Barnard for £160. Barnard later purchased "princes Bcos [bedclothes], Bedsted and Cord and a Blankit," and the "old blankit on princes Bed." from Widow Wells.



7 Site of Capt. Jonathan Wells House
Pompey; Caesar; a female slave



Pompey, Caesar and a female slave whose name cannot be recovered lived in the Captain Jonathan Wells (1659-1739) house. Pompey was baptized on June 15, 1735. In addition to baptism, Caesar was received as a member at the Fourth Meeting House. Like many Deerfield slaves, Caesar shopped at Elijah Williams' store, located in the center of town. In 1745, Caesar purchased a pair of shoe buckles and a knife. He brought in a fox, which he had hunted, to pay off his account.

8 Site of Jonathan & Mary Wells, Jr. House
"Negro woman"; "a Negro Boy"



In some cases an individual story must be reconstructed through deduction and cross referencing among surviving sources. The owner of the "Negro womans cloathing," for instance, listed in Jonathan Wells' (1684-1735) probate inventory was likely the same female slave whose treatment by Dr. Richard Crouch of Hadley was charged to Widow Wells' account. Another slave in Wells' inventory, "a Negro Boy" valued at £100, was likely Caesar, who, after his master's death, moved with Mary to the house of her father-in-law, Captain Wells (site 7).

9 Site of Daniel Arms, Jr. House
Titus



Titus, property of Daniel Arms (1719-1784), was baptized in 1762. He performed a variety of agricultural tasks for his master and other Deerfield farmers. In 1767, "Titus Negro Confes'd the Sin of Stealing, Lying & di[s]obedience to his Master" at the Fourth Meeting House. In 1771, Arms sold Titus to a new owner in Charlemont, MA. Many years later, the story of Titus and some six others stealing food and rum and meeting at a "place of resort" was recorded. Such gatherings offer a glimpse into a world the enslaved kept hidden from their oppressors. These kinds of meetings were not without great danger; in this case Titus and his friends were "without judge or jury sentenced to the whip." Although

whipping was a legal penalty for stealing, only a slave would have been denied a trial.

10 Site of Samuel Dickinson House
"Negro girl"; "a Negro Boy"; Peter



In 1742, Dr. Richard Crouch of Hadley charged Samuel Dickinson (1687-1761) for treating his "Negro girl." She may be the "Negro Wench & 2 children" listed among the contents of the barn in Dickinson's 1761 probate inventory: "pr Saddle Baggs 12/, Horse Collar 3/6, Negro Wench & 2 Children £30, 2 Bushel & 3 pecks Wheat 11/, Draught Chain 6/8. Samuel Dickinson also owned "a Negro Boy," and Peter (possibly the same boy).

11 Site of Samuel Childs House
Caesar



Caesar, the property of Samuel Childs (1679-1756), served in the French and Indian War (1754-1763). He was one of many enslaved Africans to serve in the provincial forces and militia during the numerous wars between France and England and on both sides of the American Revolution.

12 Ebenezer Wells House
Caesar; Lucy Terry



Lucy Terry, stolen out of Africa as a child, was sold in Boston to Samuel Terry in 1728 and was subsequently purchased by Ebenezer Wells (1691-1758) of Deerfield. In 1735, Lucy and Caesar, also owned by Ebenezer, were baptized. In 1744, she was "admitted to the fellowship of the church." Lucy was a gifted storyteller, remembered for "her wit and wisdom." Her thirty-line poem from 1746, commemorating an Indian raid, is considered the first such work by an African American. Lucy gained her freedom shortly after her marriage, in 1756, to Abijah Prince, a free black man living in Deerfield who was also a proprietor of Northfield, MA, and Sunderland, VT. Following the birth of their sixth child in 1769, the Princes moved to Guilford, VT.



13 Memorial Hall Museum
Remembering the enslaved Africans of Deerfield



Frank and Parthena, married slaves of the Reverend John Williams (site 2), were killed in the 1704 French and Indian attack on Deerfield. They are commemorated by an 1882 marble tablet in the Memorial Room. An updated memorial to the enslaved

Africans of Deerfield was installed in Memorial Hall, the museum of the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, in 2005. Designed by Shamek Weddle, "The African American Memorial plaque" includes no words, reflecting the hope that as our knowledge and understanding of slavery deepens so too will our ability to interpret this tragic era in American history.

14 Site of Joseph Barnard House
Prince



During the 1740s, Samuel Barnard (1684 -1762) sent his slaves Pompey, Adam, and Titus to work his property in and around Deerfield. They also worked at the house and store of Samuel's nephew, Joseph Barnard

(1717-1785). Joseph purchased Prince from Dr. Thomas Wells (site 3) in 1743 and continued the doctor's practice of hiring Prince out to neighbors. When Prince ran away in the fall of 1749, Barnard placed a runaway slave notice in the *Boston Weekly Post-Boy* offering a reward for his return. Prince was back in Deerfield by the following summer. He was liberated by death by 1752, the year that Joseph Barnard paid carpenter James Crouch for Prince's coffin.

15 Site of David Field House
"Negro"; "Neg. Fem"



One, possibly two, slaves were owned by David Field (1712-1792). In 1749, Dr. Thomas Williams charged Field to treat his "Negro" and the following year, to extract a

tooth from his "Neg. Fem," or female slave.

16 Site of Ebenezer & Abigail Hinsdale House
Caesar; Meseck



Caesar and Meseck lived at this site. Like a number of Deerfield slaves, Caesar served in the French and Indian War (see site 11, 18 & 19). Abigail inherited Meseck from her

father, the Reverend John Williams (see site 2), in 1736. In the early 1750s, Meseck and Caesar maintained accounts at the nearby store of Elijah Williams. Meseck helped Ebenezer Hinsdale (1707-1763) to operate the mercantile businesses he owned in Deerfield and Hinsdale, NH.

17 Site of Samuel Hinsdale House
"Servt Negroe"



The word 'servant' was frequently used to identify African Americans who were in fact "servants for life."

In 1749, Dr. Thomas Williams charged: "Samll Hindsdell Dr. to Phleb. Yr Servt Negroe 4/," indicating that Samuel Hinsdale's (1708-1786) slave was treated by bloodletting, an 18th century cure-all.

18 Reverend Jonathan Ashley House
Jenny; Cato; Titus



Captured as a young girl in Africa, Jenny, together with her baby Cato, was probably purchased in Boston by the Reverend Jonathan Ashley (1712-1780) in 1738. Despite court rulings in the 1780s that slavery was

unconstitutional in Massachusetts, Jenny continued to serve the Ashley family until her death in 1808. The collection of small found-items that Jenny amassed while living in Deerfield, and her assurance that her spirit would return to her homeland, point to the persistence of African spiritual beliefs and traditions. Cato, baptized in 1739, and a third slave, Titus, purchased in 1750, also labored for the Ashleys and were hired out to work for neighbors. Both men served in the French and Indian War and had accounts at Elijah Williams' store, where Cato purchased a "Small pamphlet" in 1757. Titus was sold in 1760; Jenny's son Cato died in 1825.



19 Site of Jonathan Hoyt House
"Negro"; Caesar



In 1731, Dr. Richard Crouch of Hadley dressed the leg of a female in Jonathan Hoyt's (1688-1779) household, presumably the slave who received "1 Dose of Purging Pills

Negro" and "Blister Plaster" during the doctor's visits. Hoyt also owned Caesar, one of many slaves by that name. Caesar was baptized in 1741. Treated by Dr. Thomas Williams in the 1750s, he served in the French and Indian War and held an account at Elijah Williams' store, where he purchased items such as cider and gunpowder.

20 Site of the Thomas Wells House
Pompey; Adam; Peter



According to the bill of sale, Peter was about 22 years old in 1731, when Thomas Wells (c. 1678-1750) purchased him from John Cook of Windsor, CT. Peter lived in the Wells house with two other slaves,

Pompey and Adam. Peter and Adam were baptized in 1735. In 1751, Peter appears in Wells' probate inventory: "a flail 8 d, Peter Negro £160, two Bagg & a Portmanteau 4/9, Cyder 21/8..." Wells' nephew, Thomas Dickinson (site 21), inherited Peter as part of his uncle's estate.

21 Site of David Field House
"Negro"; "Neg. Fem"



Peter was acquired after 1752 by Thomas Dickinson (1718-1814) through the estate of Dickinson's deceased uncle, Thomas Wells (site 20). Numerous visits by Dr. Thomas Williams reveal that Peter was extremely

ill between 1755 and 1757. In 1758, Dickinson paid to have Peter "dressed" and, once again, treated by Dr. Williams. Ishmael and Hartford were also owned by Thomas Dickinson. Between 1753 and 1757, Ishmael purchased rum, stockings, gloves, garters, and a handkerchief at Elijah Williams' store. In exchange, Ishmael paid cash and performed manual labor such as digging a grave and delivering wood. Hartford was about 23 years old when Dickinson purchased him in 1758.

In 1762, John Russell, a Deerfield tailor, charged Dickinson for "making a Coat for Hartford." Hartford left Deerfield eight years later, when he was sold to William Williams of Pittsfield, MA.

22 Dr. Thomas Williams House
"Negro girl"



Beginning in 1748, Dr. Williams (1718-1775), a slave owner himself, recorded his care of many enslaved Africans and free blacks. Slave owners often paid their debts to Dr. Williams with their slaves' labor.

When Dr. Williams' slave fell ill in 1757, he wrote in a letter to his father-in-law: "Our poor Negro girl is yet living after 36 days confinement with ye Slow fever... medicines have not (nor ever had in my practice) much sensible effect upon that Nation."

23 Civil War Monument
"for their Country and for Freedom"



On September 4, 1867, community members gathered on the Deerfield Town Common to dedicate this "Soldier's Monument" to the 45 men who had died in the "Great War of the Rebellion." In the years leading up to the Civil War, many Deerfield residents were ardent abolitionists.

This recent history both eclipsed and marginalized more distant memories of the town's slave-owning past. There was no hint in the dedication ceremonies that only four score and seven years before, the Deerfield community had included dozens of residents held in perpetual, involuntary bondage. Instead, the monument inscription directly associated the "sacrifices and sufferings" of the town's founders with the sacrifice of its fallen soldiers. Into the monument's foundation was placed a glass time capsule, with a letter from President Lincoln, photographs of soldiers named on the monument, town records, and newspapers "for other eyes to look upon in the coming ages perhaps." With poems, odes and orations, speakers commemorated and celebrated the courage and steadfastness of this "martyr band... To break the bondman's heavy chain, That nobly great and grandly free, Our native land may smile again."