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“SO SUCCEEDED BY A KIND PROVIDENCE”
COMMUNITIES OF COLOR IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BOSTON

A Thesis Presented

by

ERIC M. HANSON PLASS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

August 2014

Public History Program

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COMMUNITIES OF COLOR IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BOSTON

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ABSTRACT

“SO SUCCEEDED BY A KIND PROVIDENCE”

COMMUNITIES OF COLOR IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY BOSTON

August 2014

Eric M. Hanson Plass, B.A., Pennsylvania State University
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Directed by Professor Julie Winch

The Freedom Trail has become an iconic symbol and major tourist attraction in the City of Boston. Yet since its Cold War-era inception, the Freedom Trail has remained problematically focused on a consensus history of leading white men who brought forth the American Revolution. Other heritage trails—most notably the Black Heritage Trail—have been established to correct the deficiencies of the Freedom Trail. These organizations have attempted to provide a revisionist counter-point by telling stories of internal struggle and by exploring groups traditionally overlooked by historians. However, with so many trails possessing so many particularized foci, many different narratives compete for the limited attention of visitors to Boston. This divide among the different heritage trails threatens to “resegagate” history as perceived and interacted by the public.

Using methods successfully employed in researching the antebellum black community on Beacon Hill, this thesis makes use of government minutes, deeds, court documents, census data, church records, and other public records to fill a gaping hole in the Freedom Trail's narrative. Four generations of communities and people of color were studied, spanning the entire eighteenth century. Slavery dominated the lives of people of color through much of the century. However, by the 1760s, the first landowners of color on Beacon Hill purchased and developed their land: Tobias and Margaret Locker and Scipio and Venus Fayerweather. Others, such as Lancaster Hill, organized and petitioned against slavery and exploitation alongside the freemason Prince Hall. Following the Revolutionary War, the legacies of activism and property ownership combined on Beacon Hill. The Smith, Watts, and Barnes families are used as case studies of those who subdivided, developed, and sold land and homes along today's Joy Street to house other families of color and formed a physical neighborhood that would thrive as black Beacon Hill for generations to come.

Such stories bridge the interpretive gap between the Freedom Trail and the Black Heritage Trail, deepening the narrative of the former and building a prologue for the latter. The end result offers a far more vivid, critical, and complete public understanding of Boston's history.

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and interpret significant historic sites and the stories they represent in Boston with determination and passion. This work aims to make those fascinating stories you already tell that much more valuable. Thanks to each and every one of you for supporting me throughout my pursuit of my Master's degree, and thank you to Boston National Historical Park as a whole for giving me the opportunity to begin my career with the National Park Service here at Boston.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A PUBLIC HISTORY PROBLEM

All places of human settlement have history, be they small villages or major cities. They are where individuals and groups struggled to survive and thrive. In that regard Boston is no different. Yet in the story of America, Boston is unique. Though other settlements such as Plymouth and Jamestown predate it, cities such as New York outgrew it, and the experiences of countless small towns should never be discounted, Boston offers a unique place to chronicle not just the origins and creation of America, but also the continuing story of and struggle over what it means to be American. This opportunity exists not just for the historian. Boston is one of the richest and most accessible places for the general public to explore and connect with such an extensive history.

Boston possesses a wide variety of heritage trails, museums, memorials, and markers. Such sites preserve and interpret many different facets of Boston's history. Yet one public history outlet possesses a status that could be considered near-synonymous with Boston itself: the Freedom Trail. Indeed, an average of 2.13 million visitors encountered some portion of the Freedom Trail annually, either intentionally or incidentally, over the past ten years. Guide books and travel websites of all kinds consider it a "must see" attraction. Souvenirs ranging from tote bags to tee shirts are

replete with Freedom Trail-related imagery. Even representations of Boston in the media—from Boston-focused movies and network sitcoms to major televised sporting events—inevitably feature sites along the Freedom Trail in video montages. In popular culture, the Freedom Trail is synonymous to Boston.¹

The trail itself began as an idea in the 1950s as a mechanism to tie together the major historic sites in Boston’s downtown neighborhoods. The editor of the *Boston Herald Traveler*, William Schofield, first proposed the idea in an article in 1951. Eventually it gained traction in Boston’s city hall under mayor John B. Hynes. The timing of Schofield’s innovation is critical in understanding why member sites and the City of Boston ultimately created such a trail. The postwar economy of the 1950s saw increased tourism travel as a result of expanding automobile and airplane transportation. Logistically, the physical construct of a “trail” greatly assisted these visitors in navigating the city’s confusing maze of streets while further encouraging visitation to other related historic sites. Yet the development of the trail also sought to meet an ideological demand. Post-World War II America saw democratic values and patriotic ideologies deeply shaken by both cold and hot wars against Communism. Major events such as the war in Korea and the continued nuclear arms build-up against the USSR forged a demand for an American narrative that positively reaffirmed the country’s origins and ideals. Thus, the

¹ “NPS Stats,” <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>. Report generated for Boston National Historical Park, “Annual Park Recreation Visitation” years 2003-2012. Boston NHP is the unit of the National Park Service associated with the Freedom Trail. The park collects statistics for the sites it both directly owns and/or operates (Faneuil Hall, Charlestown Navy Yard, Bunker Hill Monument, and Bunker Hill Museum), as well as sites with which it partners (Old South Meeting House, Old State House, Paul Revere House, Old North Church, USS *Constitution*, and the USS Constitution Museum). These sites are considered generally the most significant sites that comprise the Freedom Trail, therefore their combined visitation statistics are perhaps the best representative figures available for the Freedom Trail’s overall visitation.

Freedom Trail not only brought visitors to historic sites, but also connected them to a reaffirming patriotic story of America's creation.²

Boston's major historic sites along the Freedom Trail—the Old South Meeting House, Old State House, Faneuil Hall, Paul Revere House, and Old North Church—are significant because they all played roles in the coming of the American Revolution. During the development of the Freedom Trail, these sites represented legendary Revolutionary tales: the Boston Tea Party, the Boston Massacre, Revolutionary town meeting protests, and the “Midnight Ride.” Characters such as Samuel Adams, John Hancock, James Otis, and Paul Revere figured prominently in these stories as leading “Patriots” who struggled for freedom and liberty against British tyranny—stories which reaffirmed what it meant to be “American” during the trying times of the Cold War. This logistical and ideological construct proved immensely successful. The Freedom Trail as a whole saw dramatically increasing popularity and funding in the 1960s and 1970s. The nation's bicentennial commemoration drew perhaps the greatest national attention to Boston's Revolutionary story and the Freedom Trail. The most notable and lasting of these Bicentennial-era initiatives was the creation of a National Park Service unit, Boston National Historical Park, by an act of Congress in 1974. By the time of the Bicentennial, the physical concept of a trail matured, changing from irregular signage to the now famous and ubiquitous red brick and paint line. The trail also expanded as the 1980s approached, officially including the Bunker Hill Monument and the Charlestown Navy

² Susan Wilson, *Boston Sites and Insights: An Essential Guide to Historic Landmarks in and around Boston* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), pp. 56-59; William Schofield, *Freedom by the Bay: The Boston Freedom Trail* (Boston: Branden Publishing Co., 1988), Foreword, p. 11-12. Schofield's guide originally printed in 1974.

Yard in the Charlestown neighborhood. The story, however, remained largely the same: key white male leaders and their followers struggled in unison against British tyranny for their freedom, and did so without significant flaws or internal conflict.³

By the time the 1980s drew to a close, both visitation and funds began to flounder. Professionals both inside and outside the Freedom Trail responded with a determination to renew the trail's relevance and resonance with the public. Both the Old South Meeting House and the Old State House, with the assistance of the National Park Service, developed and installed new exhibits in the 1990s. The exhibits aimed to give new perspectives to the Revolution by inserting the stories of loyalists, women, the working-class, and people of color alongside the familiar white male Patriots. In 1995, Boston National Historical Park commissioned a study to re-examine the entire Freedom Trail. The study included a reassessment of overall planning, site accessibility, trail marketing, and historical scholarship. The logistical side of the initiative brought several improvements. For example, the trail's route, signage, and the visibility of the "red line" improved, and ferry service better connected visitors from downtown Boston to Charlestown. Yet the scholarship initiative did not leave much of a mark. Indeed, hardly a decade later in a 2003 issue of *The Public Historian*, historian Alfred Young lamented

³ Susan Wilson, *Boston Sites and Insights*...pp. 56-59. An original Bicentennial-era brochure from the National Park Service placed the northern terminus of the Freedom Trail at Copp's Hill Burying Ground in the North End, while encouraging visitors to make the trek off the trail to Charlestown. The Charlestown neighborhood sites were originally excluded from the trail, and sites such as the Liberty Tree in the Chinatown neighborhood remain excluded from the trail. Many "insiders" of the Freedom Trail generally agree that these exclusions were intended to keep visitors away from areas that were seen as unsavory and/or unsafe. Charlestown was a blue-collar neighborhood with public housing projects and crime, and Chinatown, once known as the "Combat zone," was notorious for having pornography shops, bars, and strip clubs. Indeed, a motivation for trail creator William Schofield to develop the concept was to help visitors avoid getting "lost in the tattoo shops and burlesque dives of old Scollay Square"—an area that was once as notorious as the "Combat zone" before its demolition for the Government Center urban renewal project.

that the 1995 report simply “gathers dust,” and the trail’s scholarship continued to struggle. “Given the re-interpretation of the American Revolution produced by a generation of scholars,” Young declared at the opening of his article, “a reassessment of the public presentation of history on Boston’s venerable Freedom Trail...is long overdue.” In his critique, Young focused a great deal of his attention on one particularly notable development since the boom of the Freedom Trail: other new heritage trails had since come into being. History walking trails such as the Black Heritage Trail, the Women’s Heritage Trail, and the Irish Heritage Trail each sought to emulate the same logistical concept of the Freedom Trail, yet they each wanted to tell particular stories that the Freedom Trail failed to address. On one hand, this response—namely the creation of other “trails”—demonstrated just how popular and desirable the “Freedom Trail” concept proved to be. Yet on the other hand, it can be seen a cautionary revelation. Perhaps these trails all exist out of a severe deficiency in what the Freedom Trail continues to present.⁴

Of the many newer complementing—or perhaps competing—heritage trails, the Black Heritage Trail is the oldest and most well-established. The trail bears the closest parity with the Freedom Trail as well. The trail features its own museum owned and operated historic sites as well as its own National Park Service unit, Boston African American National Historic Site. Yet despite this close equivalence, such a comparison

⁴ Alfred Young, “Revolution in Boston? Eight Propositions for Public History on the Freedom Trail,” *The Public Historian* Vol. 25 No. 2 (2003): 17-41, quotation from p. 18; Freedom Trail study commissioned by Boston NHP: David Dixon/Goody Clancy Planning and Urban design, a Division of Goody, Clancy and Associates, *The Freedom Trail: Foundations for a Renewed Vision* (Boston: 1995) and *The Freedom Trail: A Framework for the Future* (Boston: 1996).

between the Freedom Trail and the Black Heritage Trail illustrates in the starkest of terms how deficient the history of the Freedom Trail has remained.

Unlike the Freedom Trail, the Black Heritage Trail was the child of academic revisionism and social activism born out of the 1960s. If the Freedom Trail represented a consensus narrative of an “us versus them” dichotomy, then the Black Heritage Trail represented an “us versus ourselves” counter-narrative. Indeed, black citizens of Boston saw very little of their own story in the narrative that the Freedom Trail offered. In response, community members such as Sue Bailey Thurman, J. Marcus and Gaunzetta Mitchell, and historian and state representative Byron Rushing began working on ways to tell their own unique history of struggles for freedom and liberty in Boston. They successfully established the Museum of Afro-American History (today the Museum of African American History) in 1964 and created the first concept of what became the Black Heritage Trail by 1968. In 1972 the museum acquired perhaps the single most significant surviving structure associated with Boston’s 19th century African American community: the 1806 African Meeting House. The African Meeting House became a National Historic Landmark in 1974, and six years later Congress created Boston African American National Historic Site, a National Park Service unit to support the preservation and public interpretation of the Museum, the African Meeting House, and the Black Heritage Trail. Throughout these developments, the Black Heritage Trail itself underwent several revisions. Rather than rely on token representative characters to speak for the entire community, the trail’s developers chose instead to focus on telling the story of the African American community as a whole. The Beacon Hill neighborhood offered the best

option for such a community-based approach. Though Boston's African American history stretched across the entire city, the Beacon Hill neighborhood possessed the greatest concentration of standing historic buildings related to the community's past—the African Meeting House being foremost among them. Though the neighborhood was in actuality rather diverse along racial and ethnic lines in the 19th century, the Beacon Hill neighborhood was indeed where the largest population of black Bostonians lived, and was one of the most active free black communities in the entire antebellum North. As a result, the Black Heritage Trail today connects the places on Beacon Hill where African Americans lived, worked, worshipped, and organized social and political movements, protests, and even violent uprisings. The result is a very powerful story, because so many extant streets and structures directly relate to this past.⁵

The Museum of African American History, Boston African American National Historic Site, and other stakeholders along the Black Heritage Trail perform a vital duty in preserving and interpreting a truly unique set of resources on Beacon Hill. Their work finally brought to light a powerful story previously ignored and overlooked. They challenged the accepted story of a single one-way fight for liberty and freedom, and offered a public history equivalent of a revisionist counter-point to the traditional narrative associated with the Freedom Trail. It makes for a very rich story for the public, as it gives greater nuance and conflict within the meaning and quest for freedom and liberty. Yet because of this distinct scholarly separation between the Freedom Trail and the Black Heritage Trail, as with the Freedom Trail and other trails, Boston's public

⁵ Wilson, Susan, *Boston Sites and Insights*...pp. 229-232.

history is at risk of becoming a splintered mess. When visitors hit the historic trails in Boston, they are confronted with a decision: the traditional narrative of the Freedom Trail focusing on the Revolution, or a revisionist counter-narrative such as the Black Heritage Trail, which focuses on the antebellum and Civil War eras. Since both are prepared and packaged separately, members of the visiting public are forced to partake in each trail separately. While historians are academic professionals who advance the study of history by making and comparing arguments and counter-arguments about past and present research, visitors to public history sites are not armed with the same training or perspective. If there is no larger narrative that acknowledges different historical subjects, chronologies, and points of view, public history outlets in Boston are failing the public.

Despite initiatives in the 1990s and early 2000s for a more inclusive history on the Freedom Trail, Boston's heritage trail history remains precariously fragmented and inaccessible. A prime example is Phillis Wheatley. A young girl of color kidnapped into slavery and sold to the Wheatley family of Boston, Phillis Wheatley displayed a talent with words and poetry. Her masters provided her with an education and she would become a published poet in the Revolutionary era—quite a feat for an enslaved woman. She was a member of the church at Old South Meeting House. Rightly so, she is prominent in exhibits at this historic site and in guidebooks of the Freedom Trail. But other than this token story, she and Crispus Attucks—a man of color killed by British troops in the event remembered as the “Boston Massacre”—are often the only non-white characters inserted into the standard Revolutionary story in Boston. These two individuals, as Young points out, are just two of hundreds of men and women of color,

each with their own different stories and paths. Characters such as Wheatley “cannot contain these multitudes, any more than can Crispus Attucks...” As Young put it frankly, Boston is in danger of “resegregating American history.” If other trails tell a particular story of black history, women’s history, or immigrant history, and member organizations of the Freedom Trail do not properly engage such topics, the visiting public is left abandoned without proper guidance or perspective.⁶

Indeed, it is true that by specializing in a specific subject, these separate trails offer visitors opportunities for very deep interpretation. Yet with increasing numbers of competing heritage trails—each featuring greatly particularized versions of history—their public visibility is largely limited to self-initiated visitors who are already interested in the particular subject. The fact that the Freedom Trail remains one of the most popular and widely visited outlets of public history in a city known for heritage tourism, containing a collection of sites and resources that span virtually *all* historical periods of Boston, means that the Freedom Trail *must* ultimately carry the burden of connecting visitors to broader and more diverse historical narratives. Visitation to the Black Heritage Trail, as represented and calculated by Boston African American National Historical Site, averaged just over 300,000 visitors annually over the most recent ten years. This averages to just 14.1% of the visitation seen on the Freedom Trail as represented and calculated by Boston National Historical Park. If visitors to Boston participate in only one public history outlet during their visit, it is highly probable that the site, activity, or publication was Freedom Trail-related. If the narrative the Freedom Trail represents is incomplete,

⁶ Alfred Young, “Revolution in Boston?...” p. 35.

the narrative visitors take in is incomplete. It would be irresponsible for the Freedom Trail as a whole to simply force smaller players to carry the full burden of telling the rest of the story while also expecting visitors to consciously and actively survey multiple facets of history.⁷

Yet even Young's reassessment of the Freedom Trail is incomplete. While he rightly cautions against the dangerous segregation of public history across racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, and gender lines, Young fails to recognize the equally problematic risks of fragmenting history across historical time periods. If the Freedom Trail fails to link not only the diverse histories of the Revolutionary period, but also diverse histories across the *entire* timeline of Boston's existence, it is thwarting the collective efforts of Boston's public history outlets and performing a grave disservice to the public. The organizations along the Freedom Trail, however, should not bear the full burden of blame. The ability of sites and organizations along the Freedom Trail to connect to histories beyond the Revolution is limited by the scholarly resources available to them. While historians in the academy have produced groundbreaking research on Boston's black history in the antebellum period, the Colonial, Revolutionary, and the very early republic periods that precede the antebellum era remain terribly under-explored. Boston's public history problem is rooted in deficiencies of the historical resources made available by the academy. If research can finally bridge the gaps of not just social, racial, and gender history in Boston, but chronological history as well, then Boston's heritage trails can

⁷ "NPS Stats," <https://irma.nps.gov/Stats/>. Report generated for Boston African American National Historic Site, "Annual Park Recreation Visitation" years 2003-2012, and Boston National Historical Park, "Annual Park Recreation Visitation" years 2003-2012.

better tell a unified and compelling story that can also discuss conflicting viewpoints and controversies.

Academic Progress

James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton deserve great praise for their groundbreaking academic work that at last brought Boston's black history to the forefront. In their 1979 book, *Black Bostonians*, Horton and Horton managed to tell a story without relying upon traditional written primary sources such as correspondence and diaries—a limitation that traditionally biased history in favor of higher socioeconomic classes. By using public records as their primary sources—tax books, vital statistics, deed registries, and city directories—Horton and Horton not only proved that indeed a vibrant history existed for Bostonians of color in the nineteenth century, but also gave these people their own agency. By aggregating and interpreting the data accumulated in public records, Horton and Horton found the voices of many people long assumed to be silent in the historical record. By compiling known occupations, taxed personal and real property, home addresses, marriages, and pension applications, Horton and Horton were able to show empirically that a vibrant and self-determining black community existed on Beacon Hill in the decades preceding and during the Civil War. Reprinted in 1999, *Black Bostonians* remains a commonly cited scholarly source and one of the historiographical backbones for the history that comprises the Black Heritage Trail. Their methodology has also guided other scholars in subsequent efforts concerning black history; however, like the

Hortons, these subsequent studies focus heavily on the nineteenth century and very little on the eighteenth century beginnings.⁸

Building on the Hortons' methodology and research, Carol Buchalter Stapp's *Afro-Americans in Antebellum Boston* researched and surveyed probate records of black Bostonians in the early nineteenth century to provide a deeper study into their background. By studying probate inventories and the names of executors, witnesses, and beneficiaries of the deceased, Stapp contributed several important findings in regards to the material culture as well as the internal social networks of the community. First, the inventories of the estates of black Bostonians offer a unique look into the values and material choices of individuals. What individuals possessed and chose to purchase gives clues about their lifestyle, economic means, and aspirations. Second, in tracking names of trusted individuals who served as executors, witnesses, or beneficiaries, Stapp was able to reconstruct social connections among free black Bostonians. When an individual wrote or dictated their last will and testament, the witnesses present and the executors designated to settle the estate were often people with close personal ties to the will's author. When Stapp tracked these names, patterns emerged that illustrated social networks among people of color. Though little evidence exists in the way of letters or diaries, much like Horton and Horton, Stapp proves that probate records of black Bostonians are an effective alternative in determining the personal choices and social networks of which these people were a part.⁹

⁸ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1999).

⁹ Carol Buchalter Stapp, *Afro-Americans in Antebellum Boston: An Analysis of Probate Records* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993).

The work of scholars such as the Hortons and Stapp made it clear that a free black community did indeed exist in Boston throughout the nineteenth century, primarily in the Beacon Hill area. Their methods prove effective in at last granting agency for this community's story. Yet, while scholars continue to build upon the subject of the nineteenth century free black community in Boston, the understanding of how this community came into being is much less understood. The methodology that has been so successful for 19th century Boston has not been entirely applied to the 18th century. Indeed, the majority of sources used by Horton and Horton concerning *colonial* America and the beginnings of the black community in Boston are not primary documents at all. The Hortons failed to look directly to the colonial past with original source material. In their work *In Hope of Liberty*, which is intended to be a study of the period from 1700-1860, Horton and Horton rely extensively on secondary works for the 18th century portion. These secondary sources include histories compiled by William Cooper Nell, an African American historian from the nineteenth century born and raised in Beacon Hill. While the use of such sources can be helpful in framing how people of color in Boston viewed themselves and their past in the antebellum period, those same sources can often prove problematic when relied upon for historical information. Indeed, a number of accounts are inaccurate in Nell's work (for example, his handling of the Boston Massacre). The only exception to these deficiencies is the Hortons' brilliant use of Revolutionary War veterans' pension records. Excepting this record set, most other public records from the eighteenth century are largely ignored.¹⁰

¹⁰ James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

Such a deficiency in regards to the *colonial* aspect of Boston's black history has always been problematic. Works from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that attempted to tackle the issue of African American history in Boston were largely relegated to broad surveys rather than in-depth personal stories because they relied on traditional sources and methodologies. Early scholarly works such as George Henry Moore's surprisingly critical 1866 *Notes on Slavery in Massachusetts* and Lorenzo Greene's thorough 1942 *The Negro in Colonial New England* rely primarily on government proceedings, reports, and references to slavery and people of color that are found in the personal writings of leading white men. Moore's *Notes on Slavery in Massachusetts*, appearing just at the close of the Civil War yet before the rise of the "lost cause" mythology that denied slavery as a motivation for rebellion, does not shy away from uncovering the Bay Colony's long legacy of human exploitation and the appropriation of the labor, and indeed the very lives, of some people by others. Moore's work remains, however, more a study of the creation and eventual destruction of the institution of slavery in Massachusetts rather than a study of the lives of the enslaved. Lorenzo Greene's survey *The Negro in Colonial New England* would follow Moore's work over sixty years later. Greene's work has seen multiple reprints, and for good reason. It is a very extensive look at the lives of African Americans throughout the New England colonies. Unlike Moore, Greene expanded his survey to include explorations of what life was like for African Americans in Massachusetts and beyond. However, he, too, limited his methodology to traditional sources of government documents, the diaries and letters of leading white men, and newspaper accounts—all sources that viewed people of

color from the outside. Both Moore and Greene's studies also did little to explore the realm of free people of color. Both considered free people of African descent in colonial New England an anomaly more than anything else. Freedom was a phenomenon that only became notable following widespread post-Revolutionary emancipation in the North. Only in the final chapter of his book does Greene touch upon the subject of free people of color in New England. Virtually an afterthought, just before the conclusion of his book, the meager chapter cites little significant evidence. Because people of color possessed a limited presence in letters, diaries, and other consulted materials, both Moore and Greene imply through their silence that free African New Englanders, and any semblance of a black community, became important only long after the colonial period.¹¹

In a more recent work entitled *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860*, George A. Levesque flatly dismisses the notion that any community of color existed before, during or even after the Revolution, stating that:

There was no black community in Boston in 1790; a decade later the embryo of a community may be said to have taken form—an embryo which by then gave clear signs of developing into a recognizable community. However, it was in the succeeding ten year period (1800-1810) that [a community] became clearly recognizable.¹²

Unlike the Hortons or Stapp, who overlook eighteenth century beginnings in most of their studies, and Moore and Greene, who ignore community with their methodology, Levesque flatly denies the existence of black communities in eighteenth century Boston altogether.

¹¹ George Henry Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts* (New York: D Appleton & Co., 1866) <http://books.google.com/books?id=LC5CAAAAIAAJ>; Lorenzo Johnson Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (Reprint, Port Washington NY: Kennikat Press, Inc., 1966).

¹² George A. Levesque, *Black Boston: African American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1994), p. 31.

In hopes of giving people of color greater agency, other scholars have attempted to avoid the survey approach employed by Moore and Greene. Nevertheless, in their pursuit of personal narratives, the conflict of the American Revolution has proven extremely distracting. Such works focus on very little before or after the conflict itself. Furthermore, by focusing on individuals in unique situations, these scholars incidentally gave rise to much tokenism. Even Beacon Hill's first black historian, William Cooper Nell, devoted much of his writing in telling the story of unique nonwhite Revolutionary War veterans. His most referenced work, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*, strove to create and retell the tales of heroic black individuals such as Crispus Attucks and Primus Hall. Granted, Nell was motivated to tell such heroic stories because he wanted to respond to the narratives of great white Revolutionary heroes that were being published in his time. Nell sought to provide an equivalent history about the sacrifice of black soldiers—a patriotic and storied history of which he and his community could be proud.¹³

Ironically, in an attempt to provoke modern awareness of the heroic role of African Americans during the American Revolution, works such as Sidney Kaplan and Emma Kaplan's *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* only exacerbated tokenism. Though the Kaplans made use of a phenomenal amount of new research, their work only resulted in a modernization of Nell's. Stories focused on unique stories of individuals largely out of context, not communities. With so much emphasis on the accomplishments of a select few, the understanding of the lives of Bostonians of color

¹³ William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855) <http://books.google.com/books?id=Jy8OAAAIAAJ>.

as a whole remained very fragmented. Only recently have broader stories that broach communities of color in eighteenth century Boston become available.¹⁴

Several recent works relating to pre- and post-Revolutionary Boston society have offered tantalizing glimpses into the existence of eighteenth century communities of color. The work of Jacqueline Barbara Carr, for example, uncovered a great deal about the social history of Boston across many socioeconomic levels, during and after the Revolutionary War. In both her dissertation and her book, titled respectively, “A Cultural History of Boston in the Revolutionary Era, 1775-1795” and *After the Siege: A Social History of Boston, 1775-1800*, Carr studied Boston’s tax “taking books” from the 1780s and 1790s. She compiled the information into a database and tracked the movements, occupation, and social stature of everyone listed in the tax lists. Often, when tax assessors encountered heads of household who were of color, they left a note indicating that. Carr tracked these names and aggregated where these people of color were living, what they were doing, and with whom they lived. Though it was only one element of her dissertation, Carr’s body of work established that there was much more to discover about African Americans in post-Revolutionary Boston.¹⁵

Likewise, the Historic Resource Study (HRS) for Boston African American National Historic Site by Kathryn Grover and Janine da Silva recognized that the earliest landowners of color on Beacon Hill lived there as early as the 1760s. This places the beginnings of a community of color on Beacon Hill decades before what scholars

¹⁴ Sidney Kaplan and Emma Nogrady Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989).

¹⁵ Jacqueline Barbara Carr, *After the Siege: A Social History of Boston, 1775-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2005); Jacqueline Barbara Carr, “A cultural history of Boston in the revolutionary era, 1775-1795” (PhD Diss., University of California Berkeley, 1998).

previously believed. Grover and da Silva studied the history of the Beacon Hill landform since English settlement began in 1630. They did this in order to establish the full history of settlement and land ownership up to and including today. As a result of this process, Grover and da Silva were able to trace the earliest names of landowning individuals identified as having African descent on Beacon Hill. Yet, like Carr's work, such significant findings only formed a small element of the overall work. The HRS only intended to establish a lineage of property ownership upon Beacon Hill since 1630 so Grover and da Silva could determine what extant buildings—all from the nineteenth century—should be included within the boundaries of Boston African American National Historic Site.¹⁶

Carr, Grover, and da Silva made use of methodologies very similar to those of the Hortons and Stapp. Each scholar used different public record sources from which to identify and compile data about Bostonians of color. Yet the focuses of all these different scholars only tangentially touch a central question as yet unanswered. A significant black community existed in Boston during the nineteenth century on Beacon Hill, and people of color indeed lived in Boston during the century prior. There is a connection, but it has not yet been clarified. People of color who lived in Boston during the mid to late 1700s are present in deeds, probate records, tax rolls, court proceedings, petitions, marriage records, and the records of town officials. By using methods successfully undertaken by previous scholars in different time periods, a gaping hole in the academic understanding of this

¹⁶ Grover, Kathryn, & Janine da Silva, *Historic Resource Study: Boston African American National Historic Site* (National Park Service, 2002).

subject can finally be filled. In turn, this work can help bridge the public history chasm between Boston's Revolutionary and antebellum stories.

CHAPTER 2

THE FIRST GENERATION, 1700 – 1725

On May 4, 1708, the selectmen of Boston met to make several decisions regarding their town. Meeting in the old “Town House” that once stood at the head of King Street in the center of Boston, the seven-man executive council convened as often as they saw fit. In this particular meeting, the selectmen first agreed that they needed to remind constables from each of the eight town wards to better warn citizens about future town meetings. Next, the selectmen agreed to open a new “High way” that led from Boston Common to the open heights that towered over the town—what today comprises the Beacon Hill neighborhood. Lastly, the selectmen agreed to exercise a power newly granted to them by the Massachusetts General Court—the ability to compel free men of color to perform work in service to the town:

The Select men do order & require of the Free Negro's of this town hereafter named each one to give their Attendance Faithfully and dilligently to worke at repaireing & cleansing the High wayes of this Town at Such time and place as Mr. Salter Shall direct, for the Space of So many dayes as is Set down Against each persons name and is as followeth. viz't.

	dayes		dayes
Tom Cowell	8	Papaw Dick	12
Robin Keats	8	Joseph Jollow	8
Dick Budd	8	Graudy Eliot	8
Thom's Moscman	4	Sampson Jefferyes	6
Adam Saffin	8	a fellow came fro Charles T	4
Ned Hubbert	6	Rich'd Boreman	4

Mingo Proctor	8	Peter Quaake	4
Simpson Indian	4	Bastion Waite	8
George went wth Cap't. Green	4	Mr Hutchinson's Phillip	4
Mingo Walker	12	Sambo Monck	8
Coffee Hutchinson	4	Humphry Phips	2
Mingo Quinsie	8	Dick Dudley	4 ¹⁷

This was not the first time the selectmen attempted to assign work to Boston’s free male inhabitants of color. A year prior, on June 16, 1707, the selectmen ordered “each free negro & mollatto man of this Town, forthwith to attend and perform four days Labour.”¹⁸ Yet, judging by the actions of the selectmen in 1708, it appears these town executives did not receive the desired obedience from their drafted workers. This time, many of the men listed above received drafts for twice or even three times the labor that the selectmen had initially demanded in 1707. Mingo Walker and Adam Saffin, for example, received twelve and eight days’ worth of labor, respectively, for 1708. Furthermore, following the specific listed labor assignments, the selectmen were sure to include a stern warning to these free men of color if they again chose to resist:

And the Said Select men do hereby Appoint and Impower Mr. Eneas Salter to give necessary directions about the time place and manner of ther performing the S[ai]d Service and (if need be) to make complaint to one or more of Her Maj'ties Justices of the Peace Against any of them who Shall neglect or refuse to Attend the Same in order to the recovery of the penalty

¹⁷ Boston Record Commissioners, *A Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston*, later, *Records Relating to the Early History of Boston* (Boston, Massachusetts: Municipal Printing Office, 1876-1909), 39 Volumes. See <http://www.bpl.org/govinfo/online-collections/regional-boston-and-massachusetts/boston-records-commissioners-reports-1674-1822/> for the fully digitized 39 volume series. Many generally refer to the series as the “Boston Town Records.” From 1875 until 1909, the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston transcribed, edited, and published Boston’s government records from when Boston was a chartered town in Massachusetts (1630 – 1822). These records include minutes from town and selectmen meetings, marriage records, and other miscellaneous town government records. These valuable and extensive records will be henceforth abbreviated as “BTR” in this thesis. BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 72 & 73.

¹⁸ BTR, Vol. 11, p. 60.

of the Law in that case provided, and to render an acco[un]t unto the Select men of his doings herein.¹⁹

Three weeks later, on the 24th of May, eight more free men of color living within the bounds of Boston came to the attention of the selectmen. Determined to get what they saw as their legal due, the selectmen assigned each of these men of color six to eight days of labor. The selectmen also resolved that Mingo Walker owed four *additional days*’ labor to make up for unfulfilled service from the year prior. Walker now had a total of sixteen days of unpaid work due in service to the town.²⁰

The specific nature of the work these free men of color performed is largely unclear in the selectmen’s notes. Though the minutes simply stated that the draftees would repair and clean the “High wayes” of the town, such assignments were undeniably tedious, difficult, and infuriating—let alone exploitative and corrupt. To ensure that the town received the labor demanded of free men of color, the selectmen generally deputized a town official as an overseer. Yet the selectmen regularly chose overseers who were already receiving public funds to repair the town’s roads as private contractors. Such an arrangement suggests that these contractors-turned-overseers still received public funds for road projects, yet were now able to pocket all the payments for the labor performed by others. Standing watch at the town’s expense, the overseer looked down at his drafted laborers and ensured both he and the town squeezed all the benefit of free labor they could.²¹

¹⁹ BTR, Vol. 11, p. 73.

²⁰ BTR, Vol. 11, p. 73.

²¹ BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 72 & 73. On May 3, 1708, the selectmen budgeted £200 for “Samuell, Eneas, & James Salter” to re-grade the road bed and “carrying on the pavement in the Street towards the South end of the Town...” The selectmen agreed to pay the Salter men at the rate of 20 pence per yard of paved road. The

Cleaning the streets of Boston certainly included the removal of trash, litter, and tons of dung left by horses, hogs, cattle, sheep, and other livestock. Human and animal traffic that flooded the streets every day only trampled and contributed to the manure and refuse decomposing everywhere on the streets. Runoff from storms and sewage from homes pooled at blockages in street gutters and at low points on the roadways. Each murky puddle had to be drained and cleaned. In addition to cleansing these streets, the men had to re-grade and pave the roads. High points had to be leveled. Low points which formed a morass of mud and dirty water had to be shored up. This meant manually digging, moving, and replacing cartload after cartload of dirt, gravel, and mud. Following re-grading, wooden posts which demarcated pedestrian sidewalks from the roadways had to be set into deep holes. After this dirty and back-breaking process, the men then had to lay heavy stone after heavy stone to pave the road.²²

Unlike their overseer Eneas Salter, these men were not paid. As Salter watched over these men and demanded more labor from them, he himself enjoyed payment from the town. The men of color toiling in the streets, by contrast, most likely lost over a week's worth of wages while they worked for the town. If they were employed at a ropewalk, the docks, or at some other low-level trade, they would not receive wages for

very next day, the selectmen posted their first work list for free men of color to work on repairing and cleaning the streets of the town. Their overseer was constable and paving contractor Eneas Salter. Salter continued to receive contracts for paving over the next few years while also serving as overseer for the labors of free men of color.

²² BTR, Vol. 11, p. 115; Scouring the volumes of selectmen's records, particularly volumes 11 and 13, with keyword searches such as "paveing," "pave," "street," and "High way," the nature of Boston's street construction and maintenance is made apparent. One particular example is found in Vol. 13, pp. 105-106, when the selectmen ordered extensive work on Milk Street. The selectmen ordered posts to be placed on either side of the street to mark pedestrian walkways from carts and horses, all debris and timber removed, "And the Ground Lowred and Clensed of any Chips or Trash that the wast[e] water from Milk Street may have a free passage over that Land to the Salt water."

work they didn't perform. Likewise, if these men of color operated their own business, they were unavailable to operate it while toiling in the streets. In sum, the bottom line for these men and their families is that they suffered greatly from these assignments.²³

The selectmen justified their demands of free labor from men of color because such people were already excluded from militia service or other public duties. In the eyes of the selectmen, these men of color were otherwise enjoying public benefits without paying their due. Yet this logic only appears equal on paper. At face value, assignments of one or two weeks' labor in service to the town may seem to be on par with serving occasional stints as a nightly town watch or serving in monthly militia drills. Yet in reality, service to the town through militia service or other public office paid dividends in social opportunity and respectability that shoveling manure and wading in sewage did not. Serving in town offices meant varying levels of respect and authority within the town—often translating in economic potential. Militia trainings, though not paid, were virtually public holidays. After a few hours of drills, food and drink followed in a jovial atmosphere that was akin to a local county fair. Socializing meant making valuable connections and fostering relationships that could carry over into business. Near-universal male participation had a unifying effect and engendered community pride. Furthermore, near-universal participation resulted in a de-facto excuse from work. By effectively being holidays, militia days meant no one else was working or missing out on

²³ See previous footnote regarding the Salter family receiving up to £200 for road construction and maintenance.

economic opportunities. No one, except those specifically excluded from participating and serving in a dignifying way.²⁴

For the next two decades, the free men of color who lived in Boston could expect new labor assignments every year or two. From 1708 through 1725, the selectmen specifically listed names of free men of color on twelve separate occasions and assigned each man a set number of days of work. In addition to these official assignments, it was distinctly possible that town leaders coerced further work from men of color off the record. Indeed, on several occasions the selectmen empowered themselves or other leading men of Boston to demand from free men of color their services to clean streets or public buildings whenever it was convenient.²⁵

In the short term, every successive demand to perform the town's dirty work denied these free men of color and their families the money they depended on for self-sufficiency and dignity. In the long term, these required work assignments did something far more permanent: they effectively destroyed any meaning of the word "free" in the status of these men. These work lists give evidence that the town leaders of Boston actively sought to discriminate against, exploit, and subjugate free people of color. Yet it is because of these preserved minutes scrawled into the record books by the selectmen and town clerk that we know who these people were. Instead of single names that appear sporadically in records, these work lists give a small glimpse into a *group* of individuals

²⁴ Richard P. Gildrie, "Defiance, Diversion, and the Exercise of Arms: The Several Meanings of Colonial Training Days in Colonial Massachusetts," *Military Affairs* Vol. 52, No. 2 (1988): 53-55. Gildrie provides a concise summary of the meanings and attitude of training days.

²⁵ BTR, Vol. 11, p.144. An example of an "unofficial" assignment can be found in BTR, Vol. 13, pp. 105-106: On Nov. 6, 1722 the selectmen empowered John Marion and Richard Hubburt to "give notice" to some of the free men of color to perform the work on Milk Street, as described in a previous footnote, as they saw fit.

who were otherwise collectively silenced in public documents. Today, because of these lists, the lives of these people can be roughly sketched—lives that otherwise might have never appeared in public records. The selectmen’s work lists appeared regularly from 1708 through 1725. Two more lists appeared in the records following large gaps in 1738 and 1764. Nevertheless, the effect of these work lists took their toll well into the next century. Four successive generations either directly endured, or residually felt, Boston’s policies, attitudes, and actions regarding free and enslaved people of color. Using the Boston selectmen’s work lists as a starting guide, this thesis will begin to study different people of color who, both individually and collectively, struggled to survive and overcome.

Tradition, Morality, and Profit: Boston’s Troubled Slave Past

As the seventeenth century turned to the eighteenth, Boston was in the midst of dizzying changes. It was no longer the seat of a small proprietary colony and Puritan religious experiment. By 1700, Boston was becoming the preeminent maritime hub of British North America and the powerful seat of a royal province that now included the colony of Plymouth to the south and the territory of Maine, stretching northward to contested borders with French Canada. In the course of seventy years from 1630 to 1700, Boston grew from a village of a few dozen households into a large town of some 7,000. Yet, despite such a major transformation, Boston was still very much the town the Puritans built. For example, in 1700 only an Anglican and a Baptist church competed with the four established Congregational churches. Values attributed to Puritan ideals

such as hard work and shrewd business practices arguably permeated the dominant culture and helped drive Boston's rise to commercial prominence. Leading men of the town also still very much saw their duty as one of enforcing law, morality, and social stability. Lastly, an institution of slavery persisted in Boston and Massachusetts—an increasingly problematic inheritance from their Puritan forebears.²⁶

George Henry Moore's 1866 *Notes on the History of Slavery in Massachusetts*, Lorenzo Greene's 1942 *The Negro in Colonial New England*, and C.S. Manegold's 2010 *Ten Hills Farm* all trace the beginnings of slavery in Massachusetts to the aftermath of the Pequot War in 1637—a war initiated by the Pequots largely in response to Puritan expansion into the Connecticut River Valley. Soldiers of New England killed hundreds of Pequots and enslaved hundreds more as a result of the war. “The prisoners were divided [sic],” Massachusetts Governor John Winthrop reported in his journal, “some to those of ye river [the Connecticut Colony,] and the rest to us. Of these we send the male children to Bermuda by Mr William Peirce & ye women & maid children are disposed aboute in ye tounes [towns]. Ther have now been slaine and taken in all aboute 700.” From that point forward, slavery steadily grew. When Captain Pierce returned from his Caribbean

²⁶ For Boston's population during the colonial period, see: City of Boston, *Annual Report of the Registry Department of the City of Boston for the Year 1902* (Boston, Massachusetts: Municipal Printing Office, 1903), pp. 278-283, <http://www.google.com/books?id=0YVNAAAAMAAJ>; John Bonner, “The town of Boston in New England” (Boston: William Price, 1723). <http://maps.bpl.org/id/11122>. The map by John Bonner illustrates the town 22 years after the start of the century. Nevertheless, the map still illustrates a town in the midst of its boom. The map key lists the churches of the town, including establishment dates of each congregation. The six that existed in 1700 became twelve churches by 1722—illustrating just how quickly Boston was expanding. Though the Quaker Church, another Anglican parish, and a French Huguenot church formed in Boston during the intervening years, three new Congregational churches also formed over the same time period, maintaining Congregational hegemony in the town.

voyage, Winthrop noted that he returned with “salt, cotton, tobacco and Negroes...” in exchange for the enslaved Pequot captives.²⁷

In 1641, four years after the Pequot War, the Massachusetts General Court officially codified the *de facto* system of slavery. The colony’s “Code of Fundamentals, or Body of Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony in New-England” stated that only “lawful captives taken in just warres, and such *strangers* [italics added] as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us” could be thrown into the bonds of slavery. This act legitimized both sources of the new slave class: captive Indian women and children, and imported African men. Over the course of the next three decades, the adult slaves captured in war and those forcibly imported grew older. The children reared in bondage matured, and they began to parent a new generation of African, Indian, and mixed race children. Unlike their parents, though, these children had only known life in Massachusetts households. Technically they were not “strangers.” This new generation, it would seem, could not be legally enslaved. For slaveholders, this fact had the potential to cut off their access to cheap labor. Undeterred, the Massachusetts legislature quietly closed the loophole in 1670. In that year, the General Court reissued their code of liberties and laws. In the statute legalizing slavery, the word “strangers” suddenly disappeared. With the simple omission of one word, the colony’s leadership transformed Massachusetts slavery into a permanent and hereditary institution. Whether of African, Indian, or mixed ancestry, the offspring of slaves now legally remained slaves. This ensured that procreation maintained and perpetuated slavery into the next generation,

²⁷ Moore, p. 5; Greene, p. 17; C.S. Manegold, *Ten Hills Farm: The Forgotten History of Slavery in the North* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), pp. 36-49.

protecting and growing the “investments” of slaveholders. Perhaps unforeseen by the leaders of the 1670s, though, was the massive boom in the economy that their children and grandchildren would experience. The high demand for cheap labor far exceeded that supply of slave offspring. Forced importation of Africans via the Caribbean increased to meet demand and garner greater profit. By 1700, Massachusetts was by no means a slave society. Yet it was quickly becoming a society with a great deal of slavery. As the slave population grew with each successive generation, many more people in Massachusetts became further affected by the existence of slavery. Boston, the central port of this colony, became the town most dependent upon the institution.²⁸

While many inheritors of Puritan Boston actively perpetuated and expanded slavery for profit and power, a growing number of others became increasingly troubled by the institution. Of course, the most troubled people of all were those who were themselves enslaved. Moore and Greene, in their surveys of colonial slavery in Massachusetts and New England, note that during the push to make slavery a hereditary condition, slaves began to push for their own freedom with varying degrees of success. Some were able to earn their freedom through additional work. By working extra hours beyond what their respective masters assigned, some slaves were eventually able to buy their freedom. Other slaves entered into agreements with their masters, almost making their servitude more like that of an extended indenture. Masters also freed their slaves after what they often termed “long and faithful service.” Such acts do hint at masters’

²⁸ Greene, p. 65 and Moore, pp. 10-17. Greene wholly supports Moore’s assertions that the omission of “stranger” completely changed the legal meaning of slavery in Massachusetts. The patterns of how slave children were regularly given or sold away after birth, as attested to by the respondents to Belknap in 1795 and in newspaper advertisements from that time, all suggest that slave status was definitely something transferrable by birth in 17th and 18th century Massachusetts.

recognition of their slaves' humanity following a lifetime of close proximity.

Nevertheless, the phrasing uses magnanimity to veil the reality of exploitation: after enjoying the labors of a slave throughout the prime of the slave's life, the master was now willing to cast his depreciated property aside and cut his losses. Every situation was different and unique to every master-slave relationship. Yet in some cases during these quickly changing times, slaves took the initiative entirely by themselves by pressing charges for their freedom in court. Of all the instances recorded of a slave gaining freedom at the start of the 1700s, though, none proved more notable to contemporaries and historians alike than the case of Adam Saffin.²⁹

The same Saffin who received an assignment to work eight days of labor in 1708, Adam Saffin was previously the enslaved property of John Saffin. In 1694, Adam Saffin evidently reached an agreement with his master that after several more years of faithful service, he would gain his freedom. When Adam believed he had fulfilled the terms of his indenture, however, his master refused to free him. John Saffin claimed that Adam Saffin had violated the agreement by acting "turbulently, negligently, insolently and outrageously" throughout the agreed-upon indenture period. Denied his freedom, Adam Saffin brought suit in 1701. The legal battle proved quite messy. Over the next two years, a series of appeals and counter-suits came to the Superior Court of the province. Petitions from both parties also made their way to the General Court. Though Adam Saffin ultimately won his freedom, there were periods when he was forced into prison or back into slavery under his master John Saffin when appeals and actions by the legislature

²⁹ See Chapter 11, "The Free Negro," in Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*.

swung against him. Adam Saffin was also forced to pay sizable legal costs just to recover his own freedom. As if that wasn't enough of a cost, even in freedom, Saffin would remain a slave to his hometown for the rest of his life. The selectmen of Boston regularly required labor from Adam Saffin until he disappeared from the lists in 1716. Presumably, the labor assignments stopped because of his passing. No death record appears available, though.³⁰

To the leadership of Boston, the Saffin case proved more than just a story of one man's long struggle for freedom. It was a wakeup call. Slavery had grown increasingly defined by race since the Puritan forefathers first instituted the system. Yet with men and women such as Adam Saffin earning their freedom, an increasing number of people of color were now free. As if this wasn't alarming enough, the population of all people of color—enslaved and free—steadily grew larger year after year. All of these developments challenged the old social hierarchy and norms. In the eyes of civic and religious leaders, these changes threatened their authority, privilege, and security. Massachusetts and Boston lawmakers scrambled to enact stricter race-based legislation. If private slavery could not completely control the lowest of the low, public methods were required to maintain racial classes. Sermons and pamphlets simultaneously began to debate the issue of slavery and people of color publicly. The inheritors of Puritan slavery had to decide how to apply old customs, standards, and ideas to a quickly evolving issue. Because it was the capital of Massachusetts, the largest town in New England, and a settlement with

³⁰ Greene, pp. 296-297; Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts: Transactions 1892-1894* (Boston: 1895) Vol. 1 pp. 84-102; see work assignments table below for Saffin's assignments timeline.

the largest non-white population in a majority white municipality, Boston was the center of such changes and controversies.

The Moral Crossroads

Samuel Sewall, justice of the peace and prominent civic leader of Boston and Massachusetts, was deeply troubled by what he witnessed of the Adam Saffin case. As a justice of the peace, Sewall served as a judge during different phases of the long legal battle. John Saffin's determination to maintain Adam Saffin in a state of slavery evidently shocked Sewall. Prompted by the events, Sewall published a pamphlet entitled *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial*. Considered the first antislavery tract published in New England, in *The Selling of Joseph*, Sewall denounced the institution of slavery and the crime of what he called "man stealing." "The Numerousness of Slaves at this day in the Province, and the Uneasiness of them under their Slavery," Sewall wrote, "hath put many upon thinking whether the Foundation of it be firmly and well laid..." Sewall directly questioned the actions of the colony's fathers. He also asked whether the construct of slavery was legal or even consistent with Christianity. "It is most certain that all Men," Sewall reasoned, "as they are the Sons of Adam, are Coheirs; and have equal Right unto Liberty, and all other outward Comforts of Life." Yet despite this rather egalitarian statement, Sewall still held the prejudices of English white Protestant superiority. Advocating for the importation of white indentured servants instead of permanent slaves for "the Welfare of the Province," Sewall argued for the recognition of Africans'

humanity as sons of Adam, yet at the same time he wholly believed people of African descent were subordinate beings.

[T]here is such a disparity in their Conditions, Color & Hair, that they can never embody with us, and grow up into orderly Families, to the Peopling of the Land: but still remain in our Body Politick as a kind of extra-vasat Blood [blood escaped into nearby bodily tissue such as a bruise or internal hemorrhage].

Though human, Sewall held that people of African descent simply did not fit in white Puritan society. Far from advocating abolition in the modern sense, Sewall did not want to free and grant citizenship to those descended from Africa. Nevertheless, he did decry the kidnapping and enslaving of innocent Africans as a capital criminal act. With his strong indictment of the colony's fathers and his current society, Sewall provoked an open debate.³¹

The most direct response came from none other than the ex-owner of the slave Adam Saffin, John Saffin. Saffin attacked Sewall's arguments directly and methodically. For one, Saffin denounced Sewall's notion that all sons of Adam possessed "equal right to Liberty." Saffin contended that such a belief inverted "the Order that God hath set in the World, who hath Ordained different degrees and orders of men, some to be High and Honourable, some to be Low and Despicable..." Though Africans were sons of Adam, Saffin argued, this did not mean white people had to "make them equal with our selves," because they were "not our own natural Kinsmen...I may love my Servant well, but my

³¹ Samuel Sewall, *The Selling of Joseph: A Memorial* (Boston: Bartholomew Green and John Allen, 1700), The Massachusetts Historical Society provides the document as part of its online collections. The MHS's online exhibit includes an overview with historical context, original image scans of the pamphlet, and a transcription. http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=53; Albert J. Von Frank, "John Saffin: Slavery and Racism in Colonial Massachusetts." *Early American Literature* Vol. 29 No. 3 (1994): 254-272.

Son better...” Saffin also attacked Sewall’s charge of man-stealing. The taking of Africans from “Pagan Countreys” was not an evil, rather, “it is no Evil thing to bring [Pagans] out of their own Heathenish Country, where they may have the Knowledge of the True God, be Converted and Eternally saved.” By capturing “heathen” slaves out of Africa, Saffin believed that slave traders and masters were legally and scripturally justified in their actions. Furthermore, by bringing them to Christianity and ultimately to salvation, slave-owners were doing the slaves a favor. Saffin closed his arguments with a poem he titled “The Negroes Character.” If Samuel Sewall’s *The Selling of Joseph* represents the anti-slavery side of Puritan society, viewing slavery negatively through a very Anglo-Puritan chauvinist lens, John Saffin’s concluding poem summarized the opposite extreme:

Cowardly and cruel are those Blacks Innate,
Prone to Revenge, Imp of inveterate hate.
He that exasperates them, soon espies
Mischief and Murder in their very eyes.
Libidinous, Deceitful, False and Rude,
The Spume Issue of Ingratitude.
The Premises consider’d, all may tell
How near good Joseph they are parallel.

Scathingly racist, Saffin’s concluding poem displayed his deep-seated antipathy towards Africans. In his belief, they were to be enslaved for life. Slavery was decreed by God, good for Africans, and good for society. Not incidentally, slavery also benefitted men like Saffin economically.³²

³² John Saffin, *A Brief and Candid Answer to a late Printed Sheet, Entitled, The Selling of Joseph*, (1701) Reprinted in Moore, *Notes on the History of Slavery...*, pp. 251-256; Albert J. Von Frank, “John Saffin: Slavery and Racism in Colonial Massachusetts.”

This early eighteenth century pamphlet debate involved not just political leaders, but religious leaders as well. As early as the 1690s, Cotton Mather, the minister of Boston's second "North" church, began to view the growing number of free and enslaved people of color as a group that desperately needed proper religious conversion and teaching. Taking a stance that could be termed as moderate when compared with the opinions of Sewall and Saffin, Mather focused on the importance of Christian baptism and conversion for people of color. In his 1706 pamphlet *The Negro Christianized*, Mather wrote that "to Raise a *Soul*, from a dark State of Ignorance and Wickedness, to the Knowledge of GOD, and Belief of CHRIST, and the practice of our Holy and Lovely RELIGION; 'Tis the noblest Work, that ever was undertaken among the Children of men."³³ Instead of condemning slave traders and masters for man-stealing, Mather slyly approached the issue with traditional Calvinist dogma: perhaps it is all God's will.

It is come to pass by the *Providence* of God, without which there comes nothing to pass, that Poor Negroes are cast under your Government and Protection. You take them into your *Families*; you look on them as part of your *Possessions*; and you Expect from their Service, a Support, and perhaps an Increase, of your other *Possessions*... *Who can tell but that this Poor Creature may belong to the Election of God! Who can tell, but that God may have sent this Poor Creature into my Hands, that so One of the Elect may by my means be Called; & by my Instruction be made Wise unto Salvation! The glorious God will put an unspeakable Glory upon me, if it may be so!*³⁴

Because distinct class hierarchies are part of God's teaching and God's world, Mather reasoned that there was no question about the acceptability of slavery. In his pamphlet,

³³ Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized. An Essay to Excite and Assist that Good Work, the Instruction of Negro-Servants in Christianity*. (Boston: 1706) p. 1. An easily accessible copy with transcription is available from the University of Nebraska Lincoln at:

<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1028&context=etas>

³⁴ Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized*..., p. 2.

Mather instead focused on motivating his readers to a great duty: to Christianize heathens brought from Africa and free them *spiritually*. Indeed, such was an accomplishment far greater in the eyes of God than to *physically* free someone from bondage on Earth.

What motivated Mather to speak out on the issue was a deep concern that masters were not baptizing and converting their slaves to Christianity. Masters feared that if they Christianized their slaves, they could no longer legally hold their slaves in bondage. In *The Negro Christianized*, Mather refuted this fear as unfounded, and painted the idea of Christianizing slaves as not only the will of God, but also as a way to make slaves more productive and responsible:

And suppose it were so, that Baptism gave a legal Title to Freedom. Is there no guarding against this Inconvenience? You may by sufficient Indentures, keep off the things, which you reckon so Inconvenient. But it is all a Mistake. There is no such thing. What Law is it, that Sets the Baptised Slave at Liberty? Not the Law of Christianity: that allows of Slavery; Only it wonderfully Dulcifies, and Mollifies, and Moderates the Circumstances of it. Christianity directs a Slave, upon his embracing the Law of the Redeemer, to satisfy himself, That he is the Lords Free-man, tho' he continues a Slave.³⁵

Mather's stance on slavery was far removed from that of Samuel Sewall. Yet Mather did not display the same contempt for Africans that John Saffin did. Mather acknowledged a greater level of humanity in his fellow man. Nevertheless, like both Saffin and Sewall, Mather shared the belief that Africans and their descendants were developmentally behind white Protestant Europeans. Furthermore, Mather promoted the belief that with Christian instruction came more subservient and responsible slaves. This belief promised social order and greater economic viability. Moderated pro-slavery attitudes espoused by

³⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Negro Christianized...*, pp. 16 – 17.

men like Mather ultimately won the debate. By appealing to the reader on both secular and religious fronts, Mather gave slave owners legal safety on Earth and God's blessing from heaven. If private slavery was not only consistent with God and the law, but also *good* for the slave and society as a whole, it was not much of a stretch for political leaders to apply this belief to free people of color. Though men and women of color could be legally free, for the good of both the people of color and society as a whole, leaders believed that they needed create a kind of public enslavement.

Blurring Slave and Free

The widespread xenophobic prejudice held by colonists in Massachusetts all but sealed the fate of Samuel Sewall's arguments against slavery. Though the attacks of John Saffin were perhaps too extreme, men such as Rev. Mather moderated Saffin's views. People of color were indeed humans by virtue of being the sons and daughters of Adam and Eve. Nonetheless, these people of color were of a distinctly lower status than whites. Slavery—so long as it was Christian slavery—was seen as a good system for keeping people of color in line, making them productive, and giving them eternal salvation after a lifetime of faithful service to white masters. Motivated by racial fears and guided by the winning arguments from the pamphlet debate, the Massachusetts General Court responded with new laws and acts. As a whole, the statutes passed by the legislature intended to define what people of color—regardless of status—could and could not do. It defined non-white life for the entire eighteenth century.

As early as the 1693-1694 session of the Massachusetts General Court, racial fears over the growing numbers of enslaved and free people of color prompted the legislative body to take action. Despite being in the midst of King William's war against France, the Massachusetts Provincial Legislature feared that actively training and arming men of color was too dangerous for society. As a result, the body exempted "indians and negro's" from militia trainings. The section and wording is misleading at first glance, as "indians and negro's" are the last in a long list of people who were otherwise considered valuable to society. Members of the government, the "president, fellows, students, and servants of Harvard Colledge," ministers, "masters of art," and "allowed physitions or chirurgions [physicians or surgeons]" topped the list of exemptions because they were valuable to society. Yet, as the list progressed, the positions became decidedly lower in rank: "constant herdsmen, lame persons or otherwise disabled in body (producing certificate thereof from two able [surgeons]), indians and negro's." By the time the law reached the bottom-most rung this list was not conveying a privilege of exemption, but rather exclusion.³⁶

Below those who were by their nature transient and those who physically unable to serve, those who were not white were excluded from militia training. By excluding these men of color, regardless of slave or free status, the law robbed them of the right to be considered part of the community. The law did not exempt anyone from militia *service* during war per se, but by not training regularly (typically once a month) with the rest of the community, people of color remained strangers in their own town. By not

³⁶ *The Acts and Resolves, Public and Private, of the Province of Massachusetts Bay* (Boston: Wright and Potter, Printers to the State, 1869) Vol. 1, Acts 1693-1694, Chapter 3, §12, p. 130

participating in the otherwise mandatory militia drills, non-white men in Massachusetts towns found themselves excluded from a regular social event and important community service that included a large majority of the male populace. Regular militia musters and drills publicly singled out and differentiated male inhabitants of African and Indian parentage from their white counterparts. This act denied men of color the ability to claim any ownership of their community and restricted their ability to transcend their assigned identity of strangers.

In another act passed during the same legislative session, the General Court resolved:

...that no person who is or shall be licensed to be an in[n]holder, taverner, common victualler, or retailer, shall suffer any apprentice, servant, or negro to sit drinking in his or her house, or to have any manner of drink there, otherwise than by special order or allowance of their respective masters, on pain of forfeiting the sum of ten shillings for every such offence.³⁷

Though the racial identifier “Indian” is not present in this particular statute, the identifier “negro” has no distinction between servant, slave, or free status. This suggests that that all people identified as “negro” were subject to the law. Like the militia exclusion, the act attempted to underscore that people of color—even in legal freedom—would continue to languish under heavy public restriction and oversight. By grouping all people of color with apprentices and servants, the legislation suggests that all persons of African descent had to be controlled. Though the authors of the bill perhaps erroneously assumed all “negroes” were private slaves, one assumption is clear throughout the law’s text: people of color were immature and required the same supervision as those who were apprentices

³⁷ *The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1693-1694, Chapter 20, § 2, p. 154.

and white indentured servants in their pre-teens, teens, and twenties. Unlike the other two controlled groups, though, those people who were of African descent were banned across all ages. By not being allowed to drink and socialize in taverns, even as grown free adults, people of color were again specifically excluded from participation in the life of the community. Though many tavern keepers and operators of other drinking establishments evidently did not abide by this law, especially in the hard working and drinking maritime town of Boston, the social order that the legislators attempted to create and enforce was clear: people of color, regardless of their status and age, formed the bottom rung of society.³⁸

Following the pamphlet war and the litigation that surrounded Adam Saffin's case for freedom, another incident in the Massachusetts courts prompted the legislature to enact further social controls. A white female indentured servant named Mary Goslin became pregnant by a "negro" slave named Caesar. When Mary gave birth to a mixed-race child in 1705, their secret affair became public. Officials brought the couple to trial on charges of fornication. The court punished Caesar and Mary with whipping and fines—a standard punishment for fornication. Yet the issue of the child shook the social hierarchy of Boston and Massachusetts to the core. Mixing *racial* backgrounds in addition to *social* distinctions of class and status further confused the stability and order of society. "Mollato" children blurred the definitions of slave, indentured servant, and free. The court therefore set a precedent, sentencing the bastard child to indentured

³⁸ Joanne Lloyd, "Beneath the City on the Hill: The Lower Orders, 1700-1851" (PhD diss., Boston College, 2007). See Chapter 2, pages 126 through 133 in particular, for evidence of regular illegal activities surrounding drinking and tipping establishments during the early and mid eighteenth century.

servitude for 25 years—ensuring permanent placement well below full-blooded and free-born whites.³⁹

Just six weeks after the court case involving Caesar, Mary, and their child, the Massachusetts legislature passed an act entitled “An Act for the Better Preventing of a Spurious and Mixt Issue, Etc.” This law banned and harshly punished intermarriage and miscegenation. Though both the white and black parties engaged in a sexual union were to be punished, in all cases the non-white individual—regardless of status prior to the sexual act—was to be sold into slavery and banished from the Province of Massachusetts Bay. Any child that came out of such an illicit union was the responsibility of the white parent. However, if the mother was white and she failed to support such a bastard child, she was liable to be indentured. The act did not stop there either. Section three of the law established further protections to white hierarchy. It stipulated that “if any negro or molatto shall presume to smite or Strike any person of the English or other Christian nation, such negro or molatto shall be severely whip'd, at the discretion of the justices before whom the offender shall be convicted.” In order to maintain stability, this law effectively defined an individual of mixed European and African ancestry as being the same as someone of African and/or American Indian ancestry. Color diluted white ancestry, and though the terms “Indian,” “Negro,” and “Mollato” attempted to identify what background different people or groups possessed, they were all part of a bloc defined as non-white and unequal. Since slave or servant status could not be static, non-white skin figured increasingly in defining social stature in towns like Boston. By

³⁹ See Lloyd, *Beneath the City on the Hill...*, Chapter 1, pp. 39 – 46,

proscribing the activities and abilities of not only “servants” or “negroes” but “molattos” as well, the white leadership of Boston and Massachusetts established a caste defined by race.⁴⁰

The legislature also looked to economic means to control challenges to social stability. In the same 1705 anti-miscegenation act, for example, a later section introduced a £4 import duty per African slave brought into the colony. This move suggests several different attitudes on the part of the legislature. On one hand, by taxing African slave imports, leaders clearly hoped to discourage the growth of African populations in white Massachusetts towns—a population that evidently was growing at a pace many found alarming. The more numerous people of color became, the greater grew the threats to stability and social hierarchy. On the other hand, the fact that slave importation was not banned, only taxed, suggests that perhaps the growing importation of slaves was a source of revenue too great to be ignored. Perhaps the members of the legislature shared both points of view. Massachusetts was actively fighting a war against the French in Canada in the name of Queen Anne at the time—and like all wars, it proved highly detrimental to both government coffers as well as to young male populations. With demand for labor high, and availability of healthy laborers low, slave importation filled the gap.⁴¹

The increase in slave importations, however, also increased the fears of social instability. Within three years, the legislature was willing to actually incentivize the importation of white servants in the midst of a war. The resulting 1708 act entitled “An Act to Encourage the Importation of White Servants” spelled out this concern. This act

⁴⁰ *The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1704-5, Chapter 10, p. 578.

⁴¹ *The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1704-5, Chapter 10, p. 578.

not only retained the duty on imported African slaves, but it also closed a loophole and extended the £4 import duty to include imported Indian slaves—presumably from southern colonies such as South Carolina. Simultaneously, this act granted a forty shillings *payment* per head to any master who imported and put in to service “any male servants, of the kingdom of Great Britain, being between the age of eight and twenty-five years...” Thus, the actions of the legislature reflect the same conflict displayed by the Saffin-Sewall debate. Like Sewall, the legislature clearly wished to see greater importation of white British servants rather than African slaves. Yet despite repeated public claims that white indentured servants were better on all accounts than African slaves, forced slave importation provided a ready supply of labor that actually met economic demands. If the lawmakers truly believed that slavery had no place in Massachusetts, they would not have taxed it, but would have banned it entirely. The economic benefits of trading and owning slaves appear evident in the action of the legislature. Though slavery and the slave trade were morally unpleasant, leading white men took comfort in the profits they drew. So long as people of color could be restricted to their lot as the dregs of society, leading men of the town and the Province were willing to risk the perpetuation of slavery.⁴²

In addition to these early race-based social restrictions and economic incentives, the Massachusetts legislature aimed to assist towns in coping with growing free populations of color within their communities. In 1703, for example, the legislature

⁴²*The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1708-9, Chapter 11, p. 634; Alan Galloway, *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South, 1670 – 1717* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002). Galloway’s research shows that an Indian slave trade originated from South Carolina and stretched across British North America, including Boston, during the early 1700s.

empowered the individual town governments to collect a bond from any slave owner in the amount of £50, the purpose of which was “to secure and indemnify the town or place from all charge for or about such molato or negro, to be manumitted and set at liberty, in case he or she by sickness, lameness, or otherwise, be rendered incapable to support him- or herself.” While this law in one respect acted as insurance to protect the liberated slave, it also acted as insurance for the town against an unwanted burden to the covenanted community. Furthermore, it made liberation prohibitively expensive. At a minimum cost of £50 held in bond to the town, the manumission of a slave could easily cost more than the slave’s market value. This move by the legislature actively worked to de-incentivize the manumission of more non-white slaves living in Massachusetts.⁴³

By 1707 Massachusetts lawmakers had a rather strict discriminatory code set in place to differentiate the privileges of whites from those of non-whites. Though enforcement of these laws was a completely different matter, the passing of these sundry codes which segregated according to race rather than status suggest a great deal about the attitudes of leading political figures in Boston and Massachusetts. Yet *restriction* over what individuals or groups can and cannot do comprises just half the enslavement equation. The power to *compel* individuals or groups to perform work regardless of consent completes the definition. Certain that people of color were outsiders who posed a threat to society and stability, white leaders effectively proscribed any real notion of citizenship for non-whites. Yet because of these very same restrictions, white leaders fulfilled their own prejudiced prophecy: Free people of color were now “free loading” off

⁴³ *The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1703, Chapter 1, § 1, p. 519.

the town's services. In response, a 1707 act entitled "An Act for the Regulating of free Negro's, Etc." reasoned that:

Whereas, in the several towns and precincts within this province, there are several free negro's and molatto's able of body and fit for labour, who are not charged with training, watchings and other services required of her majesty's subjects, whereof they have share in the benefit,—Be it enacted...[t]hat the selectmen of each town or precinct be and hereby are impowred to order and require so many days' work yearly, of each free male negro or molatto, able of body, dwelling within such town or precinct, in the repairing of the highways, cleansing the streets, or other service, for the common benefit of the place, as, at the discretion of the selectmen, may be judged an equivalent to the services performed by others, as aforesaid.⁴⁴

Not residents or citizens, but rather simply those "dwelling" within the white community, men of color now owed hard physical labor to a town that refused to consider them as members. With the largest non-white population, Boston was clearly the primary town in mind—if not the instigator for the bill—as leaders considered and passed this statute. In the name of control, security, and power, the selectmen of Boston now had legal power to be part-time masters of public slaves.⁴⁵

The First Generation: Town Property

When the court battles and petition wars with John Saffin finally subsided, Adam Saffin was finally judged a free man. Two years after the dust settled, it appears that Saffin married. An entry in the marriage records list that an "Adam Negro" joined in marriage with "Tidy" on January 4, 1705/6. The official who presided over the wedding

⁴⁴ *The Acts and Resolves...*, Vol. 1, Acts 1707, Chapter 3, Preamble and § 1, pp. 606-607.

⁴⁵ This law passed almost simultaneously with the first attempt by the selectmen to force labor from free men of color. It appears that by the next year, with the ink of the law now dry and precedent well established, the selectmen then began to systematically ensure they got what they felt was their full due from free men such as Mingo Walker and Adam Saffin.

was none other than Samuel Sewall, Esq. In a sense it only seems fitting that the man who took up the greatest public defense of Saffin and made the most public denunciation of Saffin's master performed the ceremony. Yet the life Adam and Tidy would have together would not be an easy one. Despite booming economic prospects for Boston as a whole, the opportunities for people of color were decidedly more limited. Compounding these challenges, Adam Saffin came from a farming background in Bristol County in southern Massachusetts and was not necessarily familiar with the skills required to enable him to make a decent living in a major port town. Nevertheless, Boston probably offered the best chance for the Saffins to make a life. For one, it gave Adam distance from his old master, John Saffin. Additionally, a busy waterfront also offered far more opportunities year-round than the quiet countryside with largely seasonal work. Lastly, Boston offered people of color an important fallback: camaraderie and companionship. The more the town and colonial leadership segregated, proscribed, and exploited, the more men and women like Adam and Tidy would need to rely on others like themselves for mutual support.⁴⁶

Because of the work lists created by the selectmen of Boston, the names of people the Saffins may have relied upon have been preserved. Indeed, for seventeen years, the selectmen continued to assign labor to listed free men of color on an annual basis. When compiled as a timeline graph, a directory of individuals becomes apparent:

⁴⁶ BTR, Vol. 28, p. 13.

Table 1: Work Assignments from Selectmen of Boston to Free Men of Color in Days, 1708-1738⁴⁷

First Name	Last Name	Spouse? (From BTR Vol. 28)	1708	1710	1711	1712	1714	1715	1716	1718	1719	1721	1722/3	1725	1738
Mingo	Walker	Maria (p. 13)? Sarah (p. 13)?	12 +4	6	6	6	6	4	4	3	3	6			
Papaw	Dick		12	8	8	8	7	6	6						
Tom	Cowell	Pella (p. 20)?	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	6	6	6	0,8		
Grandy	Eliot		8	8	8	8	8	6	6	6	6				
Rich'd/ Dick	Patience Saylor	Hannah (p. 13)	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	5	6	6			
Bastian/ Bastian/ Boston	Waite	Jane Lake (p. 2)	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	5	4	6	6,2	8	
Joseph/Jo Robin	Jollow/Jolla Rogo/ "alias" Keats	Kate (p. 13)? Moll (p. 13)?	8	8	8	8	8	6	6	4	6	6		8	
Mingo	Quinsie		8	8	8	8	8	5	5	3		6			
Charles	Meneno	Sarah Smith (p. 19)	8	8	8	8	8					6		8	
Stabastin	Levensworth	Elizabeth (p. 13)?	8	8	8	8	6	4	3	3	3	6	5,3	8	
Mingo	Proctor		8	8	8	8	6	4				6			
Toney/ Tom?	at ye north		8	8											
Great Dick	John Budd		8	6	8	8	8	6	6	5	6	6			
Adam	Saffin	Tidy (p. 13)	8	4	3	3	2	1							
Sampson	Jefferyes		6	6?											
Tom	Rummy Marsh		6	6	8	8	6	4	4	3	2	6			
Grandey	Pirkins		6	6											
Ned	Hubbert	Martha of Lynn (p. 139)	6	4	4	4	4	3	4	4		6	3,5	8	
Dick	Dudley		4	8	6	6	6	4	3	2	3	6		8*	
a fellow came fro Charles T[own]			4	8											
Coffee	Hutchinson		4	6	4	4	2	1							
Richd	Boreman	Ann Dee (p. 3)	4	4	8	8									
"Mr. Hutchinson's Phillip"			4	4	6	6	6	5	6	6		6	0,8		
Peter	Quaque/ Quaquo	Indian Judith (p. 14)	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	2	6			
Thomas	Moseman		4	4	4	2	0								
"George went wth capt Green"			4	4											
Simpson/ Samson	Indian/ Negro?	Jane (p. 89)	4	2	4	4	2	1							
Sambo	Monck		2	8	8										
Dick	Ramshed			8											
Mingo	Winthrop			6	8	8	8	6	6		6				
Humphry	Phipps			6											
??	Chambers				8										
Butcher	Russell			6											
Ephraim	Boyser	Mary Simon (p. 18)?			4	4 †	6	5	5	6	3	6		8 ‡	
John	Freeman					8	8				6				
"Cubit a free Indian at Jos. Callenders"						8									
Exeter	Foxcroft	Lucy (p. 1)?			4	8	6	6	6	6	6	6	3,5	8	

⁴⁷ Table compiled from the lists found in BTR Volumes 11, 13 & 15: **1708**: BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 73,73-74; **1710**: BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 115-116; **1711**: BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 137-138; **1712**: BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 166-167; **1714**: BTR, Vol. 11, p. 210; **1715**: BTR, Vol. 11, pp. 232-233; **1716**: BTR, Vol. 13, p. 8; **1718**: BTR, Vol. 13, p. 42; **1719**: BTR, Vol. 13, pp. 59-60; **1721**: BTR, Vol. 13, p. 82; **1722/3**: BTR, Vol. 13, p. 109; **1725**: BTR, Vol. 13, p. 145; **1738**: BTR, Vol. 15, pp. 135-136.

Toney	at mr Gees	Maccalo (p. 6)?	4	4	3	3	3	4	6		
“Jo. Black Nannes husb'd”					5	5	4	6			
John	Bridge				6	6	6	6	6	dead,	8
Anthony	Negro/Black				6	6	6	6			2
Jo	Williams a mollattoe					6	6	6		gone,	8
Robin	Lablond/saco?					6	6	6	6,2	8	1
Peter	Milross/Melrose					6	6	6	6,2	8	1
John	Sanco					6	6	6	6,2	8	
Tom	Lawson						6	6			
Jack	Chambers						6				
John	Pearce						0	6			
	Barnes									5,3	
Sambo	Minzies									4,4	8*
James	Walker Lansester									4,4	8
	Bratle									0,8	
Wappen	Sawyer	Sarah Meneno (p. 53)								0,8	
Mingo	??										8* 2
Caezar	??										8*
John	Grandy	Susanna (p. 2)?									8 2
Onesimas	Mather										8 2
Fortune	“Baker at Mr. Jackson”										8 1
Coffee	??										8
Ebenezer	??										8
Sampson	??										8
Josse/Jesse	Appleton										8
Robert	Cumings										8
John	Beard										2
Charles	Cole										2
Felix	Doctor										2
Primus	Dyer										2
Thomas	Grandy										2
Walley	Harris										2
Prince	Holmes										2
Brackets	Indian										2
John	Leasenby										2
Tully	Saul										2
John	Woodby										2
Thomas	Culley										1
Titus	Rummy Marsh										1

* “At Keats [House]”

† “now in ye country”

‡ “At Winwels [House?]”

Note: The selectmen produced the 1722/3 list in February, which by the “Old Style” calendar is the year 1722 rather than the “New Style” year 1723. The selectmen assigned all the men eight days. The first number indicates the number of days already worked, the second indicates the number of days still owed.

Thirty men appeared on the work list issued by the selectmen in 1708. Ten years later, twenty four appeared on the 1718 work list. Over the course of those ten years, sixteen of the men from the 1708 disappeared. Fourteen of the names from the 1708 list remained on that of 1718. Of these men of color living long-term in Boston, it appears likely that half, if not more, married. Some marriage records are clear and traceable

because they contain consistent first and last names. Others marriages, however, prove difficult to confirm because the officials who presided over them only used first names—many of which were quite common. For example, the “Tom” who married a Pella on October 10, 1706 could be either Tom Cowell or Tom “Rumney Marsh”. By comparison, Ned Hubbert, or Hubbard, clearly married “Martha Negro of Lynn,” but not until quite late in his freedom on September 21, 1727. Conversely, Bastian Waite, who was free by 1708, was previously a “Negro Servent to John Wait” and married Jane Lake, “Negro Servent to Mr. Thair,” on February 13, 1700 while both were still enslaved. Sadly, little more can be determined about these families’ lives beyond scant town and marriage records. No land records appear for these men or their wives.⁴⁸

The men who appeared intermittently or for very brief periods most likely lived as mariners or other transients. If these men stayed in town for any extended period of time, though, the selectmen were sure to attempt to gain free labor from them. One free man of color named Butcher Russell, for example, only appeared on the town’s 1711 list. Another man, Jo Williams, “a mollattoe,” apparently lived in Boston from 1718 through 1721. When the selectmen assessed another eight days’ of labor from Williams in 1722/3, though, they discovered that Williams was “gone.”⁴⁹

One man who disappeared for several years, only to reappear by the 1720s, was Charles Meneno. He married Sarah Smith on May 21, 1708—just three days before he landed on the town’s first official work list. Two months later, the selectmen realized that he was not from Boston but from Cambridge. They ordered that he “do finde Security to

⁴⁸ BTR, Vol. 28, p. 20; BTR, Vol. 28, p. 139; BTR, Vol. 28, p.2.

⁴⁹ See Table 1 above.

Indemnify the Town or to depart out of Town.” Evidently he did find the legally mandated £50, because he remained in Boston for the next five years through 1714. He then disappeared from the lists from 1715 through 1719, only to reappear on the 1721 list. The very next year, Charles Meneno again disappeared. Then, in the 1725 list, a Charles shows up, but there is no last name. No other Charles appeared on any of the twelve lists, and so it is possible that this Charles is Charles Meneno. What exactly became of Charles Meneno remains a mystery, but if he was a mariner it was quite possible he was away at sea for an extended period time, or perhaps he disappeared altogether while sailing. Yet further complicating the story of Charles Meneno is the fact that Sarah Meneno, presumably his wife, married a man named “Wappen” on October 12, 1714. Apparently “Wappen” was a slave manumitted in 1720 and two men served as his sureties to the town. In 1722/3 “Wappen” appeared on the town work list as Wappen Sawyer, but he does not appear on the 1725 list or in other available records following this event. In fact, a Sarah Sawyer—perhaps the widowed or abandoned wife of Wappen Sawyer—married a Tully Salisbury on January 2, 1728. If all three marriages were with the same Sarah, marriage was undoubtedly important for her. Perhaps Charles Meneno or Wappen Sawyer abandoned Sarah altogether and she sought out a new husband, but there is no sign of a divorce in the public records. It is also possible that the town clerk or the selectmen made an error in their 1721 work list by mistakenly adding Charles Meneno. Whatever became of all these individuals, marriage was something that Sarah, or all three Sarahs, as well as Charles Meneno, Wappen Sawyer, and Tully Salisbury, all deemed important. By pooling resources, marriage offered women like Sarah greater income

potential through a husband. For men who were out at sea or laboring at low level trades, a wife could maintain a home, manage affairs while they were away, and offer a second source of income.⁵⁰

Even men of color who consistently remained on work lists year after year eventually disappeared as time moved forward. Most likely, these men died from old age or succumbed to one of the virulent epidemics that assailed the town all too often. Following 1725, the regular lists produced by Boston's selectmen disappear for thirteen years. When the selectmen finally produced a new work list in 1738, none of the names found on lists from 1708 through 1715 were present. Indeed, of the twenty-one men whose names are found in the 1738 work list, only three had lived in Boston as free men of color for twenty years, and only five other men had been free for more than a decade. In general, it appears no men of color during this time period lived freely in Boston for more than twenty years. While men who appeared only briefly on work lists likely moved on to obtain greater economic opportunity, those who stayed for many years and got married likely intended to make Boston their permanent home. When they finally disappeared from the lists, it is a likely sign that these men died. Because of the nature of slavery in New England, it would seem that most of these men could only expect to live their last decade or two of life—their fifties and sixties if fortunate—in freedom.⁵¹

Adam Saffin disappeared from the work lists in 1716 and never returned. After roughly fifteen years of freedom, it appears that Adam Saffin died. His spouse, Tidy,

⁵⁰ Charles Meneno, Negro & Sarah Smith, Negro, BTR, Vol. 28, p. 29; Demand for surety, BTR, Vol. 11, p. 76; Wappen, Negro & Sarah Meneno, Negro, BTR, Vol. 28, p. 53; Proof of surety to town, BTR, Vol. 13, p. 75; Tully Salisbury, Negro & Sarah Sawyer, Negro, BTR, Vol. 28, p. 146. It is worth noting that a "Tully Saul" is included in the 1738 work list—quite close to Tully Salisbury, BTR, Vol. 15, p. 135

⁵¹ See Table 1 above.

appears nowhere in the records after their marriage. The year before, in 1715, the selectmen only required Saffin to work one day of labor to the town. This further suggests that Saffin was advancing in age and infirmity. Other men who worked many years alongside Adam Saffin died relatively early, while others lived on into the 1720s. Mingo Walker, after receiving sixteen days in 1708, was assigned anywhere from three to eight days for the town until he disappeared from the lists in 1722. It is likewise difficult to determine what became of the two women Mingo Walker possibly married—Maria and Sarah.⁵²

The patterns of the work lists suggest that once slaves grew older and less useful, masters looked to manumission as a way to save money. Though the required £50 surety discouraged irresponsible manumission, it also made the hopes for freedom significantly more expensive. Yet despite the rather large price tag, many masters or other white members of society felt obliged to set slaves free, and men and women in bondage tirelessly fought to be free. Whether it was Adam Saffin who sued in the courts for his freedom, or Charles Meneno and Wappen Sawyer, who were able to work towards their freedom and gain the financial support of others for their surety, the goal was the same. That goal, however, took time to accomplish, and was not always achieved.

Indeed, in 1714 one touching example illustrated just how dedicated men and women of color were in the struggle for freedom with so few resources. Evidently a woman of color, referred to as “Madam Leblond,” hoped to be free in Boston yet needed the required £50 surety to stay. Adam Saffin, “Dick Negro” (possibly Dick Dudley),

⁵² See Table 1 above.

Ned Hubbard, Robin Keats, and Mingo Walker decided to collectively offer to Boston's selectmen the only thing they possessed: themselves. Approaching the selectmen in the March of 1714, these five men whose names appeared many times on the Boston work lists offered to bind themselves to the town to ensure that Madam Leblond would "be Noe [sic] way Chargeable to ye town In Sickness or any disaster." Exactly what they promised in labor, freedom, or perhaps some pooled property remains unclear, but in the hope of protecting another member of their community, these five men offered their limited freedom to the town which already controlled so much of their lives. Nevertheless, the selectmen ultimately rejected the proposal, and the fate of Madam Leblond's freedom remains unclear.⁵³

If and when these men and women finally gained their freedom, it appears that they generally could not expect to live as freed people for more than one or two decades. Without a full lifetime of work and a lifetime of savings, it appears that not one of these couples or individuals of color purchased any real estate or amassed significant personal property that could be willed to a surviving relative or friend. Indeed, throughout the deed registry and probate court records for Suffolk County, not one name from the work lists or their respective marriage records appear. Yet the lack of a legacy in the form of tangible property pales in comparison to the most basic and universal human legacy: children.⁵⁴

⁵³ New England Historic Genealogical Society, *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* (Boston: 1877), Vol. 31, p. 115.

⁵⁴ An immeasurably valuable source in completing these histories is the electronic database *Inhabitants and Estates of the Town of Boston, 1630-1800*. It is based on a card catalog created by Annie Haven Thwing in the early twentieth century and stored at the Massachusetts Historical Society. Using transactions in the Suffolk Deed registry, Thwing built a card catalog of all the individuals she could trace in colonial and

One stark detail stands out concerning the list of all 94 free men of color who worked from 1708 through to 1762: there is little evidence of fathers and sons listed together. Only two men, John and Thomas Grandy, shared the same surname across all lists. John's name appears in the 1725 and 1738 lists, and Thomas appears on only the 1738 list. The relationship is unclear, and the only further clue available is that a John Grandy married a Susanna on December 19, 1700. Given this timeline, it is possible that Thomas Grandy was the son of John and Susanna. However, it is also possible that John and Thomas were both the manumitted slaves of a family with the surname Grandy. Nevertheless, John, Susanna, and Thomas Grandy all disappear following these brief appearances in the records. Many free people of color from this early generation got married both before and after gaining their freedom. Yet, by and large, there is no clear lineage following their individual lives. After struggling more than half a lifetime to overcome slavery, the ability to have children passed before these free men and women of color had the opportunity. Any children from their younger years would have been the property of a white master—property to be disposed of as they saw fit. Thus, when these men and women of color passed away, their mark on the town of Boston virtually died with them. Notwithstanding any progress these people claimed, their children were locked in slavery and would again have to start over. This fact was neither a coincidence

early republic Boston. In the 1990s, the New England Historic Genealogical Society and the Massachusetts Historical Society jointly digitized the contents of the card catalog and then supplied additional data from probate, town, marriage, church, and other public records. The result created a 62,000-record directory of people mentioned in Boston records from 1630 - 1800. Though not perfect, it is an immensely powerful tool to enable researchers to connect names and find the most basic records regarding anyone who left a trace in the most readily available public records for colonial and early republican Boston. *Hereafter, it is referred to as the "Thwing database"*

nor an accident. The lack of a legacy was purposely destroyed by the slave masters and town leaders of Boston.⁵⁵

As the decades rolled forward into the 1730s and 40s, Boston's economic boom continued. As a result, the population in Boston and the demand for labor continued to rise. Yet sadly, and as if it were inextricably tied to Boston's economic fortunes, both public and private enslavement of people of color also continued to expand. Increased importation and birth of children in slavery would expand the role of slavery in Boston. As the first generation of people of color aged and died, their work to realize freedom all but disappeared. The next generation of color, by most accounts, would see a world that was worse than the one their predecessors had known.

⁵⁵ See Table 1 above; BTR, Vol. 28, p. 2.

CHAPTER 3
THE SECOND GENERATION, 1725 – 1750

In 1722 Boston emerged from what was perhaps the most virulent outbreak of smallpox the town had ever endured. The scourge of urban centers in early modern times, this particular outbreak of smallpox sent Boston reeling. It evidently began with the arrival of a ship from the West Indies on April 22, 1721. Several crewmembers were infected and came ashore in the town. Over the next month, the selectmen rushed to contain the infected. They placed guards in front of the houses of the sick to enforce the quarantine. The selectmen also ordered all twenty-six free men of color to work the next six days cleaning the streets of all dirt and filth and carting it away for disposal. This likely included human waste from the infected. By June, the outbreak became a pandemic. The town saw the death toll mount as the summer progressed. When the outbreak finally subsided in late 1721, nearly six thousand souls in the town had become infected, and an estimated 844 had died as a direct result. Roughly one in twelve Bostonians succumbed to the disease in just a few months.⁵⁶

Out of the twenty-six men of color who were forced to work in the streets during the smallpox epidemic, only ten reappeared on work lists for the next year. Sixteen men

⁵⁶ John B. Blake, "The Inoculation Controversy," *The New England Quarterly* Vol. 25 No. 4 (1952): 489-506.

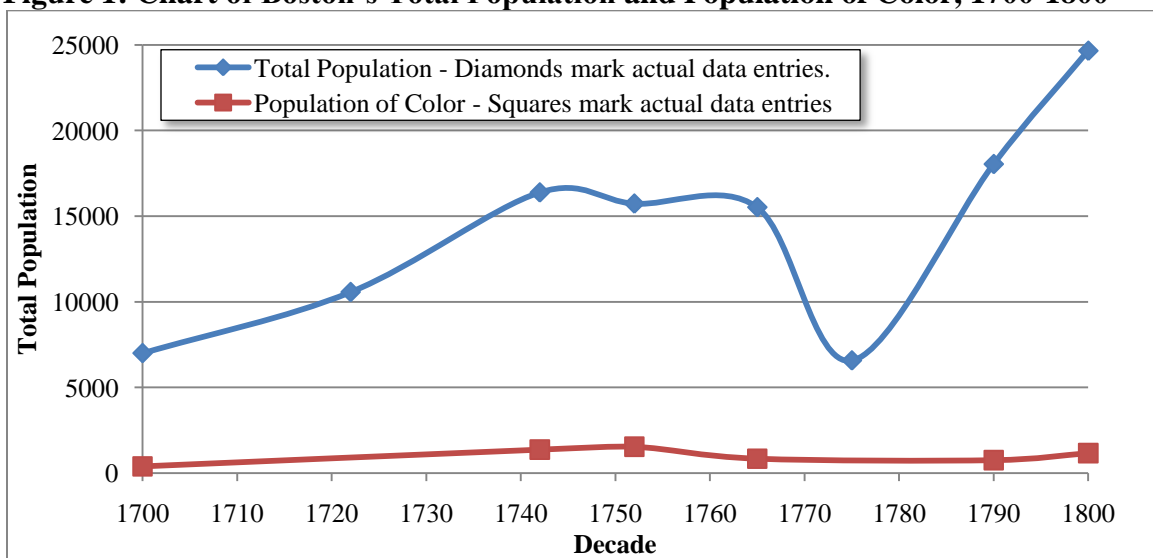
of color, Mingo Walker among them, never reappeared on the lists again. Age and preexisting infirmities undoubtedly increased the risk for anyone of dying from a smallpox infection. Yet the disappearance of more than half the free men of color living in Boston following the selectmen's decision to assess each man six days of labor leaves the observer wondering whether the work contributed to such a sudden disappearance of so many men. As the numbers thinned, the first generation left the Earth. Boston's leadership worked to ensure that these people left as little of a legacy as possible for their successors.⁵⁷

During the recovery from the smallpox crisis, the selectmen of Boston assigned Eneas Salter the task of enumerating the surviving population of the town. This was the same Salter who served as overseer of the free men of color and profited from road construction work. Salter systematically roved the wards of Boston's peninsular settlement and counted all the inhabitants. Salter reported that "beside those who had died or removed out of the town," 10,567 souls remained in town. Roughly one out of every twelve Bostonians had succumbed to the ravages of smallpox. Yet, despite enduring such an ordeal, Boston's population remained 3,500 larger than it had been just twenty years prior. Furthermore, over the next twenty years Boston continued to grow at an astounding pace despite repeated epidemics. By the year 1742 a new enumeration showed that Boston had grown by another six thousand. From 1700 to 1742, the population had doubled. Boston's residents now totaled 16,382 men, women and children. This made Boston the most populous and powerful port town in North America. Yet the population

⁵⁷ See work list table.

of color living in Boston grew even faster than the overall populace. Despite being particularly hard-hit by epidemics, it appears that importation of slaves more than recovered Boston's population of color. Indeed, by the middle of the eighteenth century, this population—the second generation of Boston's communities of color—peaked. The 1752 census calculated that one out of every ten Bostonians had African and/or American Indian ancestry. Sadly, this growth came as property, not free individuals.⁵⁸

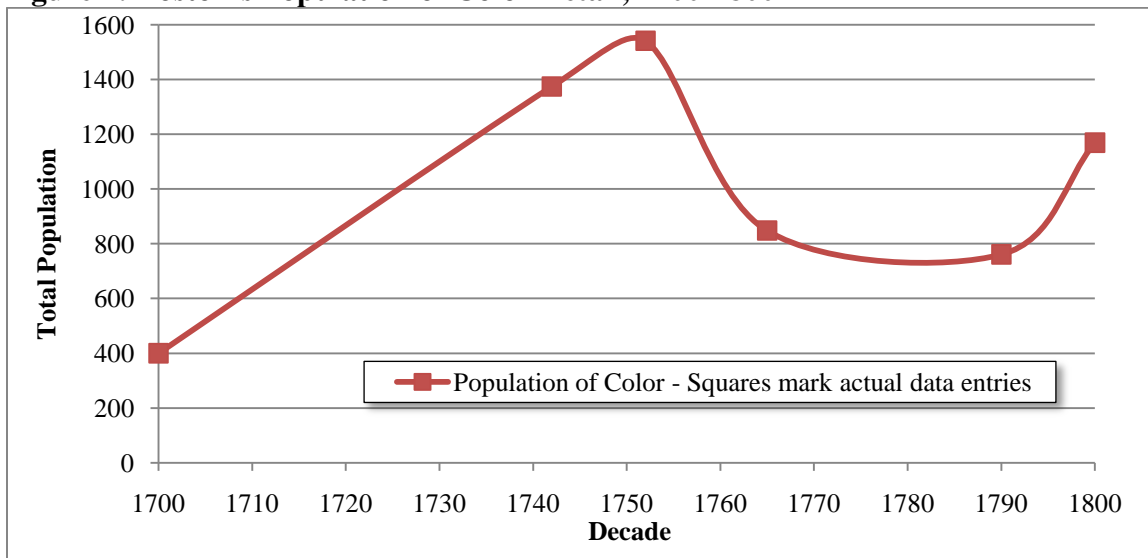
Figure 1: Chart of Boston's Total Population and Population of Color, 1700-1800⁵⁹



⁵⁸City of Boston, *Annual Report of the Registry Department of the City of Boston for the Year 1902...*

⁵⁹*Annual Report...* pp 278-283.

Figure 2: Boston's Population of Color Detail, 1700-1800⁶⁰



As seen in Figures 1 and 2, the latter half of the eighteenth century proved to be far more tumultuous than anyone could have imagined in the 1720s, 30s, and even 40s. Smallpox still wrought havoc, but war and economic downturn would deliver the most damaging blow to Boston's fortunes. Nevertheless, before this future downturn, Boston was rising to what seemed to be limitless success through maritime trade. Yet this bright future had a dark side. Enslaved men and women of color filled much of the rising demand for labor in the boom town of Boston. Throughout this time of general prosperity, people of color struggled just to taste freedom.

The Lost Generation

Though the Provincial legislature granted Boston power to control people of color in the early years of the eighteenth century, Boston's leaders apparently felt that the legislature's system of controls did not go far enough. Burials became a daily occurrence

⁶⁰*Annual Report...* pp. 278-283.

during the smallpox epidemic of 1721. The disease did not discriminate by skin color, and men and women of color clearly suffered as badly as those who were white. Because of segregation and subjugation, only other people of color were left to remember and give a proper memorial to their friends and kin. Evidently a tradition emerged as members of the older generation passed. Large funeral processions became the norm among people of color. They paraded publicly to show both their mourning and their solidarity as a community. By 1723 the town leaders had had enough. Noting that a “great number of Indians Negros & Molattoes [have] of late accustomed them Selves to attend the Burial of Indians Negros & Molattoes,” the town meeting officially stated that such a “practise [sic] is of Ill tendency [sic] and may be of great inconveniency to the Town if not prevented.” The town’s wording attempted to veil the terror and fear the meeting members deeply held. Too many long public gatherings could lead to slave revolts and uprisings against the status quo—a nightmare for those at the middle or top of the social ladder and quite an “inconveniency” indeed. The town thus ordered that all non-white funeral processions and burials were to take place well before sunset, not on Sundays, and to take the shortest route possible to the closest cemetery “where negros are usually buried [sic].” In doing so, the town leaders worked to break up a community exercise for people of color. By denying a rising generation of people of color the ability to mourn and remember the legacy of a passing generation of elders, Boston’s leaders worked to destroy community and disrupt the passing of a legacy.⁶¹

⁶¹ BTR, Vol. 8, pp. 176-177.

By insisting that funeral processions be short, on weekdays, and during daylight hours, Boston's leadership clearly wanted to ensure that many upstanding whites would be able to keep an eye on large gatherings of people of color. Unlike the funerals of white citizens, the funerals of Bostonians of color posed an immense security risk in the minds of the town's patriarchs. Yet, as if the subordinating restrictions were not insulting enough, the town statute was also sure to hammer home the legal and social inferiority of people of color in Boston even in the afterlife. Under the "pain of Twenty Shillings for Every breach," the town also restricted non-white funeral processions to a single tolling of one solitary church bell to sound their public mourning. Even when it came to death, the town aimed to ensure that the dying breath of every "Indian," "Negro," or "Mollato" passed with a quiet whimper rather than a defiant cry for deliverance.⁶²

No act of Boston's government displayed the desire to destroy families and communities of color, however, more clearly than the 1723 articles "for the Better Regulating [of] Indians Negros and Molattos within this Town." Although the colonial legislature never adopted the measures, Boston's white leaders made their attitudes about their population of color explicitly known. After the draft black code was read several times, the town meeting of white freeholders overwhelmingly endorsed it. First and foremost, the town wanted to make it illegal for any *free* person of color to entertain any *enslaved* person of color. After seeing how members of the first generation, such as Adam Saffin, inspired others to seek their freedom, Boston's leaders wanted to minimize any contact that would spread ideas to those who were enslaved. Free men and women of

⁶² BTR, Vol. 8, pp. 176-177.

color contradicted the assumed notion that black skin mean slavery. By separating and controlling both groups, Boston could better divide and conquer all people of color.⁶³

The draft black code also sought to empower “any two freeholders” to enter the home of any free person of color. They did not need any reasonable suspicion, cause, or warrant, to search for illicit meetings or for contraband. Although people of color were legally free, they did not even have the right to privacy that white Englishmen possessed. Furthermore, the town desired to completely ban the possession of firearms by any free “Indian Negro or Molatto.” Of all the measures, though, the article regarding children of color illustrated just how far the town and its leaders were willing to go to destroy and control the future of people of color:

[Fourth Article:] That every free Indian Negro or Molatto Shal bind out, all their Children at or before they arrive to the age of four years to Some English master, and upon neglect thereof the Select men or Overseers of the Poor Shal be Empowered to bind out all Such Children till the age of Twenty one years.⁶⁴

The town of Boston wished to strip from free people of color even the most basic right of being parents.

Such a law intended to make free parents of color no different than their enslaved counterparts. The children borne by slaves were slaves too, and therefore the property of their masters. Masters disposed of this offspring in whatever manner was convenient. This brutal side of Massachusetts’ slave past was not forgotten by those living in the state even following the gradual demise of the system in the 1790s. Indeed, when the founder of the Massachusetts Historical Society Rev. Jeremy Belknap forwarded queries from

⁶³ BTR, Vol. 8, pp. 173-174.

⁶⁴ BTR, Vol. 8, pp. 173-174.

Virginia judge George St. Tucker to leading Bay State personalities about the history and nature slavery in Massachusetts in 1795, one respondent, John Eliot, confessed in a post-script of his letter that:

Tho' the Slaves were not in hard Bondage, yet one thing implies the contrary, to our Reason & feelings. Lover [sic] & friends were separated & their children given away with the same indifference as little Kittens & young puppies: Upon the whole they were less favourites.⁶⁵

Rev. Belknap, in his published final responses to George St. Tucker's queries, reiterated that sentiment, stating that "Negro children were reckoned an incumbrance [sic] in a family; and when weaned, were given away like puppies. They have been publickly advertised in the news-papers 'to be given away.'"⁶⁶ Indeed, early Boston newspapers included such advertisements regularly. A small sampling includes an April 1721 *Boston Gazette* advertisement offering "A Very likely Negro Woman aged 23 Years or thereabouts, with two Children, One of about 7 Years, the other 4 Years and an half old, to be sold...together or separate..."⁶⁷ Another advertisement published in a June 1737 *Boston Evening-Post* offered "A Negro Child a few days old, to be given away." These children could be sold and resold to families and farms far away from Boston. With every successive year of separation and fragmentation, family members lost track of each other or gave up any hope of reunion.⁶⁷

Certain that the children of free parents of color were likewise an inevitable burden that would create trouble, the town wished to strip free children of color from

⁶⁵ John Eliot, "Letter from John Eliot to Jeremy Belknap," Jeremy Belknap papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, accessed 2013, http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?item_id=575.

⁶⁶ *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Series 1, Vol. 4, (Boston: 1795), p. 200.

⁶⁷ *Boston Gazette*, Monday April 24 – Thursday April 27, 1721, p. 2; *Boston Evening-Post*, June 18, 1739, p. 2. Accessed via NewsBank's Archive of Americana: America's Historical Newspapers.

their fathers and mothers without any consideration other than race. Even though the town leaders of Boston never received official legal empowerment from the Provincial Legislature to do so, there were other implicit means to this end. The Boston selectmen as well as the overseers of the poor could still remove and bind out the children of any parent on economic grounds. Any parent deemed too poor and unfit to have a family could lose their children to indentures. Although these indentures lasted until majority, children could be sent far into the countryside. If a free couple of color owned no property and struggled to earn enough money to survive on their own, little could stop town leaders from stripping away their children if those leaders were determined. Yet in available records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor, very few specific examples can be located concerning children of color being officially bound out. Without clear records, it is very difficult to determine with certainty what became of these children. In slavery, masters privately transacted the removal of these children of color. In freedom, it has already been established that most couples of color were already very advanced in age by the time they gained their manumission. Yet, even if a free couple of color had a child in Boston, a possibility remains that town leaders stripped children from free parents of color similar to how the masters of slaves routinely split up families. The record indicates their desire and intent to do so. Evidence of specific actions, however, remains unclear.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ As early as 1692 in “An Act for Regulating of Townships, Choice of Town Officers, and Setting Forth their Power,” both the selectmen and overseers of the poor in towns had the power to “bind out” children to be apprentices:

And it shall and may be lawful for the overseers of the poor or selectmen in each town where there are no other persons specially chosen and appointed to be overseers of the poor, [that] they are hereby ordered with the assent of two justices of the peace, to bind any poor children belonging to such town to be apprentices where they shall see convenient, a manchild until he shall come to the age of twenty-one years, and a woman-child to the age of eighteen years, or time of marriage; which shall be as effectual to all

What remains certain in any of the above-discussed cases is that the system as a whole overwhelmingly took its toll. This system largely dictated and controlled how people of color could and could not live, and consumed the second generation of communities of color living in eighteenth century Boston. Between advanced age, no property, limited earnings, and no children, Boston's slave masters and town leaders robbed this first generation of a true lasting legacy. The generation which followed inherited a world where slavery dominated more than ever. Hopes of freedom evaporated with each shipment of new slaves.

Awash in Slavery

The census taken by Eneas Salter in 1722 did not offer subsets of data beyond the final tally of all inhabitants. However, when the town undertook another enumeration twenty years later in 1742, perceived racial background was included as a subset of the overall count. 1,374 people of color resided in the town of just under seventeen thousand. Ten years later in 1752, following another smallpox epidemic, another census found that 1,541 people of color lived in a town of just 15,731. Ten percent of the town was of color. Nevertheless, the specific number of those who were free and those who were enslaved was not made clear. The jump from 400 to well over 1,374 in the course of two generations is a staggering figure. It does not appear that this growth came from the

intents and purposes as if any such child were of full age and by indenture of covenant had bound him or her self. (*Acts and Resolves*, Vol. 1, p. 67);

For the published surviving records of the overseers, see Colonial Society of Massachusetts, *Publications of The Colonial Society of Massachusetts: The Eighteenth-Century Records of the Boston Overseers of the Poor*, Vol. 69 (Boston: 2007).

offspring of free people of color. Forced importation instead fueled the population growth and overwhelmed what it meant to be of color in mid-eighteenth century Boston.

Only one census exists for the eighteenth century where slaves were specifically enumerated: the slave census of 1754. Unfortunately, there are no complementing figures for either the overall population or for free people of color for that year to provide a comparison. Scholars in the past have made mistakes in assuming that the number of slaves counted in Boston—989—was the figure for *all* people of color. However, in comparison to the census from 1752 which counted 1,541 people of color, this would represent over a third of all Bostonians of color disappearing from the town in just two years. If, instead, the difference between the 1754 enumeration of slaves and the 1752 enumeration of all people of color is assumed to be the number of people in freedom, it would be reasonable to expect a larger presence of free people of color in historical records such as work lists. This, however, does not appear to be the case.⁶⁹

Fortunately, the need for a second set of records to compare can be fulfilled with Boston's surviving marriage records. Boston's birth and death records for the eighteenth century are extremely varied and unreliable. Boston's marriage records, however, are astoundingly complete because of the process that officials, churches, and the town used to track unions. First, any couple wishing to get married customarily had to announce the intention, or "bann." After a sufficient waiting period, ministers and justices of the peace performed a marriage and kept a record. Sometimes ministers included the ceremonies in their respective church's record books; other individual ministers kept a personal record.

⁶⁹ See Greene, p. 84 and Appendix B and C for the 1752 census by ward in Boston, as well as the 1754 slave census returns.

Every year, the town clerk was supposed to collect the returns of these marriages and keep a public record for use in any future legal dispute. Between public intention announcements, church records, personal records, and town records, the names of some 27,000 couples—both husband and wife—have been preserved. Even more significantly, because of the 1705 anti-miscegenation law, officials presiding over marriages noted the racial background (as they perceived it) of the husband and wife to prove they did not violate the statute. Furthermore, if either bride or groom were enslaved and owned by a master, the minister often noted the owner. This was the case, because the couple needed the permission of their respective owners to proceed in matrimony. By compiling a full database of marriages, noting any racial identifier or status identifier, such a study will clarify the demographics and status of mid-century Boston.⁷⁰

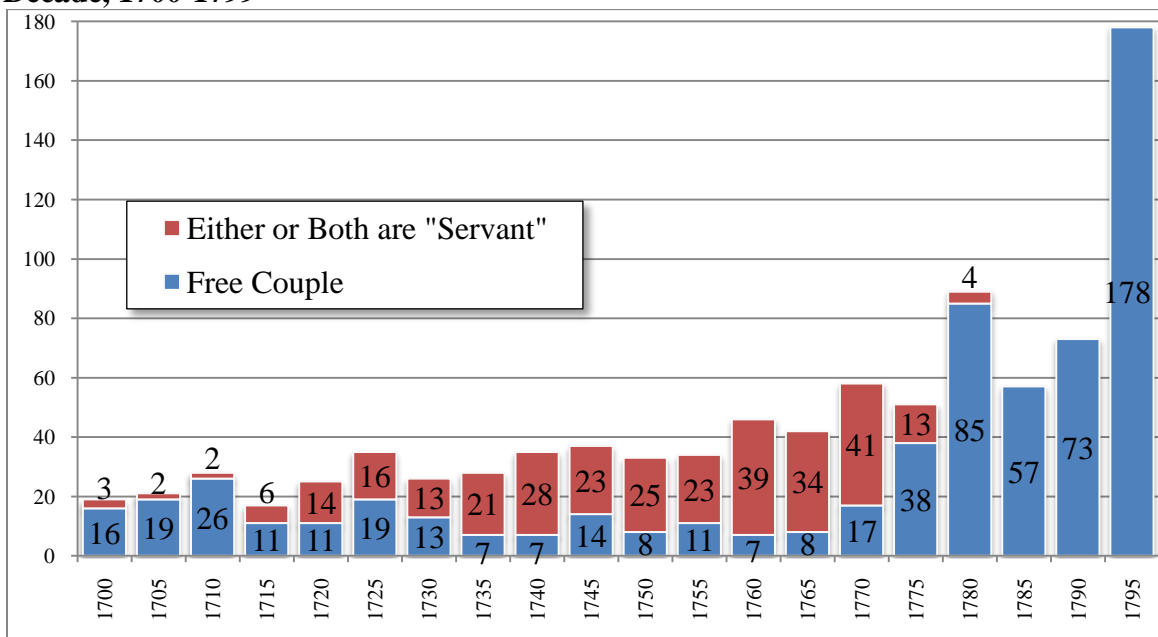
⁷⁰ BTR, Vols. 28 & 30. See the editors' notes in each volume for the specific manuscript sources and the styles of record keeping used by the town clerks.

It is very fortunate that the Record Commissioners of Boston transcribed and edited these records to the best of their abilities and published their work. Volume 28, printed in 1898, contains the marriages and intentions from 1700-1751, and volume 30 of the Record Commissioner's Reports, printed in 1902, contains the marriage and intention records from 1752-1809. When the Boston Public Library digitized these volumes, they processed the computer files through an optical character recognition ("OCR") engine. This engine scans the digital image of every page and renders computer-readable text based off the optical characteristics of each letter, number and symbol. Though the process is not perfect—for example, capital "N" is sometimes mistaken for "X" and "1737" occasionally reads "1787" due to the serifs of the numeral three, etc.—the result is immensely valuable. With all text digitally readable, the data from both volumes was copied by the author, page by page, and pasted into a table. After formatting and editing for OCR errors, each line represented one individual record of a marriage or intention to marry. Four tables resulted from all of this work: Marriages from 1700-1751, Intentions from 1707 (when intention records were first available in the century) to 1751, Marriages from 1752-1799, and Intentions from 1752-1799. Combined they form a massive 27,000 record database.

To be included in the database, the marriage and intention records at a minimum had to have the name of the bride and groom and an identifiable year of the event. Any records without names or a year were excluded. Dates also had to be standardized into a format both human and computer-readable for sorting and filtering purposes. Further complicating the issue of standardized dating was that, until 1752, Boston followed the Julian calendar rather than the Gregorian calendar. Many considered the New Year as starting on March 25 rather than January 1, however others considered the first of March as the of the New Year. When the Record Commissioners transcribed records that fell in this New Year gray area between January 1 and March 25, they used the practice of double-dating. This means they included both the "old style" year (reckoning that March 25 was the New Year) as well as the "new style" year (reckoning that January 1 was the New Year). The issue of double-dating is specific only to the first volume of marriages

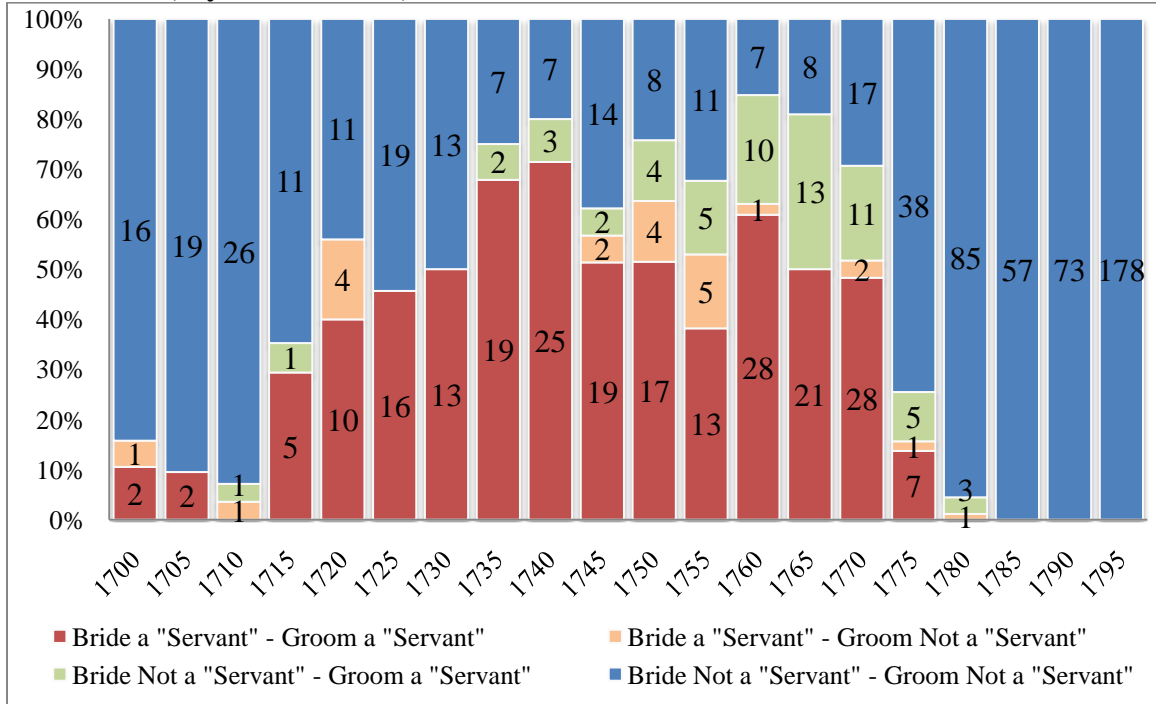
From the 27,000 record database, it appears that 932 couples marrying or intending to be married possessed an identifier as being of color. Of these 932 couples, 308 possessed some identifier where at least one member of the couple was enslaved to a master. Although the couples in slavery represent roughly only a third of all marriages for a hundred-year span, when viewed over time, the sheer preponderance of slavery during the second generation's time in Boston becomes painfully apparent.

Figure 3: Marriages among People of Color in Boston, Free and Enslaved, by Half-Decade, 1700-1799



(Volume 28). The editors purposely chose 1751/1752 as the cutoff between the two volumes because of the confusion and changeover in calendar systems. The editors include a rather verbose discussion about how they determined what year to put down when it was uncertain whether the New Year was considered to be January 1, March 1, or March 25. Since the computer database only understands dates in the Gregorian format, all “double-dated” years had to be moved forward to become Gregorian years. Although the policy of shifting forward any double-dated years will mean that January and February will not count at the end of one year and instead count towards the next year, the previous January and February will count towards any year in question, thus maintaining 12 months for each year. As long as there is consistency in this policy, only in the shift between 1751 and 1752—when the British Empire officially shifted to the “New Style” calendar and considered January 1st as the New Year—is there any potential discrepancy in the length of the year being 12 months. This one exception is negligible in ensuring a proper timeline of marriage trends.

Figure 4: Marriages among People of Color in Boston - Break-down by Groom and Bride Status, by Half-Decade, 1700-1799



When the first eighteenth century generation of color lived in Boston, those settling in Boston long-term tended toward marriage. Such early marriages overwhelmingly involved couples that were free. Yet by the late 1720s, couples entangled in slavery began to grow as a greater portion of the whole. From the 1740s through the 1760s, slavery dominated all marriages. For an entire generation, men and women of color found it increasingly difficult to marry outside of slavery. Not until the latter 1770s—the world of a later generation—did truly free married couples of color dominate once again. Indeed, the charts above illustrate quite vividly just how quickly things changed following the legal demise of slavery in Massachusetts. In fact, 42% of all marriages among people of color recorded in Boston for the eighteenth century took place in the 1780s and 1790s, when slavery was finally disappearing.

The federal censuses for 1790 and 1800 recorded the total population of color living in Boston at 791 and 1,169, respectively. Thus, the population of people of color during the 1790s roughly approximated that of the entire population of color during the 1730s and 60s (between roughly 900-1,100 people of color), and was smaller than what the population of color proved to be in the 1740s and 50s. Yet, despite a similar or even smaller population of people of color during the final two decades of the eighteenth century, marriages among people of color during the 1780s and 90s occurred at an astonishingly greater rate. It is visually clear when slavery met its eventual legal end in Massachusetts. People of color reunited and were at last free to marry long time companions or lovers. Given this background, it appears that for every marriage which *did* take place from 1730 through the early 1770s within the bounds of slavery, countless more were refused, broken up, and destroyed by the demeaning system of slavery.

Slavery dominated all aspects of life for people of color from the 1730s well into the beginning of the Revolution. Swallowed up in this preponderant system, very few free people of color were able to leave much of a mark or legacy, let alone build upon what their predecessors had established. Only one unique case provides a small glimpse into one man's choices to further advance himself. Appearing on the 1738 work lists, he lived in freedom for nearly 35 years, and was able to rise above abject slavery to leave some mark on the past. His name was Prince Holmes.

Prince Holmes

Very little is ascertainable about Prince Holmes' life before 1738. He was freed around the late 1730s, and like the generation of free men of color before him, the selectmen of Boston welcomed Prince Holmes into freedom with an assessment of required public labor. He, along with men such as Onesimus Mather, the freed slave of the Rev. Cotton Mather, worked one to two days' worth of labor each on the streets that year. Though no new work lists would appear in the records until 1762, the selectmen would continue to record motions to compel free men of color to perform work as the selectmen saw fit into the 1740s.⁷¹

It appears that Prince Holmes was baptized as an adult at the West Church of Boston on November 2, 1740. There are also multiple marriage records where a "Prince, Negro" married, but none clearly suggest if any of these marriages involved Prince Holmes specifically. Indeed, no available records indicate other men or women of color, if any, who played a role in Prince Holmes' life. Yet by the time the selectmen issued a named work list in 1762, Prince Holmes didn't need to fulfill his assignment through hard labor. Assessed 12 days of work because of his longer time in freedom, the selectmen noted in the work list that Holmes simply paid the town for his labor and was done with the whole affair. Exactly how much he paid is unclear. He was the only person, however, who was able to simply buy his way out of the requirement and continue about

⁷¹ BTR, Vol. 19, p. 195. Holmes stated to the selectmen he was free for about 23 years by 1762; BTR, Vol. 15, p. 135; BTR, Vol. 15, p. 251 includes one of the statements about assigning an undisclosed amount of work to the free men of color living in Boston.

his business. His time was too valuable to him to waste on forced labor. His colleagues, as will be discussed in the next chapter, were not able to afford such a thing.⁷²

Two years following the work assessment, Holmes was named in a will and was to receive £20. Besides the amount of the bequest being a considerable sum of money, the man who wrote the will proves even more notable: the merchant Thomas Hancock. When Thomas Hancock died in 1764, a vast fortune passed on to his nephew and future revolutionary, John Hancock. However, in Thomas Hancock's will, he requested that £20 be given to none other than "Prince Holmes, negro." Nothing in the will explains why the money was to go to Prince Holmes, let alone how and why a relationship existed between Holmes and Hancock. Nevertheless, between this inheritance and Prince Holmes' ability to pay off his labor the year before, it is clear that this man established a considerable level of financial security through hard work after twenty years of freedom.⁷³

Public records do not supply any further details. However, the private papers left behind by Thomas Hancock yield a final and critical clue to Prince Holmes' relationship with him and the nature of the work he performed. Tucked among receipts for large-sum transactions with merchants, shopkeepers, and other suppliers, an undated receipt made of scrap-paper remains filed simply bearing the name "Prince Holmes" and the memo "Prince note of Fowles" inscribed on the back. The receipt billed Thomas Hancock for the following:

⁷² *Records of the West Church of Boston*. p. 5, Accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records electronic database; BTR, Vol. 19, p. 195.

⁷³ Suffolk County Probate (hereafter, "SPR"), Vol. 63, p. 278. This relationship would not have been discovered without the digitized "Thwing database" expanded and developed by the Massachusetts Historical Society and the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

1 Doz. of Chickens @ 6/6	£ 3 : 18
1 Ditto @ 6/	3 : 12
4 [Chickens @] 5	1 : 0
18 Ducks @ 10/	9 : 0
19 Ditto @ 12/	11 : 8
Corn 8/1 Buying 67/6	<u>3 : 15 : 6</u>
	£ 32 : 13 : 6 ⁷⁴

It appears that Prince Holmes served as an agent for clients such as Thomas Hancock, procuring food and charging a small commission. According to this receipt, Prince Holmes supplied twenty-eight chickens, some at 6 shillings, 6 pence each; some chickens at just 6 shillings; and others still for 5 shillings. Holmes also supplied thirty-seven ducks at either 10 or 12 shillings per duck. The charge for corn at 8 shillings and one penny could have been for consumption in the Hancock household. However, it was perhaps more likely that it was feed used to keep the large number of fowl fed before final delivery. It appears that Holmes charged 67½ shillings, or, £3:7:6 for his work. It is worth noting that Holmes evidently possessed enough ready cash to cover the up-front expense of procuring the chickens and ducks for Thomas Hancock. Before being reimbursed, Holmes extended himself over £28—no petty sum of money.

Because Thomas Hancock listed Prince Holmes as a recipient of money in his will, it seems that the business relationship was fairly long-standing. Perhaps the £20 was a debt due for another delivery, or it could have been a gift in gratitude for Holmes' years of service to Hancock. Whatever the case, it is quite possible that Holmes built his business of procuring groceries for men like Thomas Hancock on skirting a town by-law on a technicality.

⁷⁴ Receipt from Prince Holmes to Thomas Hancock. "Hancock family accounts and receipts, 1728-1829." 1 Box, in folder titled "Undated Receipts." Massachusetts Historical Society.

Evidently, as the actions of the town meeting suggest, when competition for access to affordable food increased in Boston, wealthy masters began to send their slaves to beat other consumers to the market. By sending their slaves to the “neck” of Boston—a land bridge providing the only connection to the mainland—masters were able to have their slaves intercept sellers with fresh goods from the country before they reached public markets. In doing so, slaves working for their masters procured better quality foodstuffs at lower prices before the sellers even reached the town proper. Inhabitants were outraged when the diminished supply of goods finally reached downtown markets at inflated prices. In 1728, the Boston town meeting reacted by passing a law stating “That no Indian Negro or Molatto Servant or Slave be suffered to buy any Sort of Provisions of any Country People under the Penalty of five Shillings.” Further details in the statute sought to limit how slaves could enter public marketplaces at all, preferring instead to see white masters or indentured servants go to the market and haggle over prices.⁷⁵

By sending a paid agent and not a servant, wealthy men such as Thomas Hancock could evade town by-laws and acquire the goods they desired for lavish dinners and entertainment, while Prince Holmes could in turn draw in a small commission as a profit. Little else can be determined about Prince Holmes’ life, but he used his connections to survive and make a living. As a shrewd agent for Thomas Hancock, Holmes received a tribute in Hancock’s will. Holmes lived on in Boston until 1772, when two different newspapers printed his name in the week’s obituaries. The *Boston Evening-Post* gave Holmes the longer notice of the two: “DIED...*Prince Holmes*, a Free Negro.” It isn’t

⁷⁵ BTR, Vol. 8, p. 223.

clear who else was close to Prince Holmes and placed the obituary in the newspapers. Holmes left no will or other testament. So many people of color disappeared into slavery throughout the 1730s to the 1750s. Prince Holmes is one exception who stands out. Through a few surviving records and scraps of papers, his story of struggle to survive and make a living comes to light. Prince Holmes lived long enough only to see the beginning of things yet to come. Younger men and women of color who gained their freedom later in the 1750s and 60s would leave a much more permanent and traceable mark.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ *The Boston News-Letter*, February 13, 1772, p. 3. *The Boston Evening-Post*, February 10, 1772, p. 3. Both accessed via NewsBank's America's Historical Newspapers.

CHAPTER 4

THE THIRD GENERATION, 1750-1775

Sometime in the late 1730s or early 40s, a man of color with the given name of Scipio came into the ownership of John Fayerweather. Scipio's background prior to this event is unclear, but on November 8, 1741 he was an adult baptized in his master's church, the Brattle Square Church (the fourth Congregational church) in Boston. Three years later, on May 6, 1744, "Scipio, Negro Serv't to Cap't Fairweather" became the 320th communicant and member of the Brattle Square congregation. Two weeks following, on May 20, Scipio brought his four-year-old son, also named Scipio, and his newborn son "Cezar" for baptism at the Brattle Square Church. The church records do not name the mother of these children. Nevertheless, Scipio was evidently in a relationship with a woman before he was baptized into Brattle Square Church, and possibly before John Fayerweather came to own him. Despite being a slave, it appears that Scipio found love and started a family.⁷⁷

No marriage for a Scipio owned by John Fayerweather exists in Boston's records.

A few records, however, are possible matches. A Scipio, servant to a Hannah

⁷⁷ *The Manifesto Church: Records of the Church in Brattle Square, Boston, with Lists of Communicants, Baptisms, Marriages and Funerals, 1699-1872* (Cambridge, MA: John Wilson and Son, 1902), pp. 101, 164, & 167. <http://books.google.com/books?id=Iufi5eVXCgC>. Scipio's master and mistress, John and Jerusha Fairweather (Fayerweather), became members of Brattle Square on August 2, 1724 (pp. 98 & 106). Because Scipio was baptized at the church later in life, it suggests that he was brought into the Fayerweather family around 1740.

Fayerweather (niece-in-law to John Fayerweather), married one Jane, “servant” to Edward Tyng, on May 14, 1734. Unfortunately, this Scipio appears to have been baptized in 1736 at the Old South Meetinghouse and became a communicant of that church in 1741—the same year that Scipio, slave to John Fayerweather, became a member of Brattle Square Church. Another possible marriage involved a Scipio, “servant” to John Wheelwright, marrying Zilpah, “servant” to Thomas Lothrop, on the first of January, 1738. Yet another possibility was a marriage on September 7, 1739 between Scipio and Grace, “Negro Servt’s to Mr. Edw’d Procter.” It is possible that one of these slaves named Scipio became the property of John Fayerweather soon after getting married. However, it is also possible that none of these marriages involve the Scipio being discussed here and that Scipio the slave of John Fayerweather never legally married the mother of his sons Scipio Jr. and Cezar. Perhaps this was due to resistance from masters, or perhaps Scipio or whoever he was seeing was uninterested in marriage. Whatever was the case, it appears that Scipio—even under a new master—was able to continue seeing his partner, or perhaps different partners. Indeed, he fathered five more children over the next ten years. Each time, Scipio proudly brought his infant sons and daughters to Brattle Square Church for baptism: David on September 8, 1745, Phillis on October 12, 1746, Amoretta on April 10, 1748, London on November 26, 1752, and Jack on September 14, 1755.⁷⁸

All seven of Scipio’s children were baptized at the Brattle Square Church, yet following this event they seem to simply disappear from the records. Given these

⁷⁸ BTR, Vol. 28, p. 188; John’s relationship to Hannah Fayerweather determined with data in the Thwing database; BTR, Vol. 28, p. 209 & 213; Brattle Square Church Records, pp. 168, 169, 172, 174, & 176.

circumstances, it seems very likely that the woman, or women, who bore Scipio's children were also enslaved. This meant that the children they produced together became the property of the mother's master. Scipio had no control over what happened to his children, and could never know with certainty when he would see his family. As a result, Scipio undoubtedly endured the painful emotions of separation time and time again. Indeed, Scipio could only be with his children and whoever bore them when their duties to their respective masters did not preclude them from meeting. Depending on geography and the willingness of either master to allow their slaves personal time, visits were probably few and far between. If the family was fortunate, the children remained with their mother. But being given away to a far-off farm or town was a very distinct possibility that always loomed over the slave family. The timing of the baptisms of Scipio's children hints at when Scipio was able to be a father and a husband. If most of his children were baptized as infants in the autumn months of September, October, and November, then Scipio and his partner were together around nine months prior—during the winter when work slowed on both farms and in harbors due to bad weather. When Scipio brought his children for baptism, it was the one public moment when he could savor being a proud parent. He could not guarantee when, if ever, he would see each one of them again. Indeed, the available records comprising the rest of Scipio's life story suggest that he would not see them so long as they remained slaves, and perhaps not for the rest of his life.

For twenty years, Scipio labored for his master while he struggled to have some semblance of a family of his own. It is unclear what kind of work Scipio performed for

John Fayerweather as a slave, but John Fayerweather's surviving account books show many different goods clearing through his business—especially rope. Perhaps Scipio delivered supplies, worked odd jobs, or even lumbered up and down long ropewalks twisting heavy hemp cables in the service of his master. Any pay he earned was the property of his master, but Scipio also earned his master's respect after twenty long years. When John Fayerweather lay in his deathbed and composed his final will and testament in September 1760, he remembered his slave Scipio:

I give my Negro Scipio[,] who has behaved well[,] his freedom in one Year after my decease, and also ye Bed & Bedding he usually lodges in, and also ye Sum of three pounds lawfull money, and I order my Children to give security to ye satisfaction of ye Select Men of ye Town that he shall never be any charge to the said Town.⁷⁹

At last, Scipio was to be a free man. His master even included full surety to the town as well as some money to enable him to start out on his own. This gesture was by no means a small one. In John Fayerweather's inventory, Scipio was listed as a "Negro man" valued at £64 13s 8d. In September, 1761, the children of John Fayerweather released Scipio and fulfilled their father's wishes. But even though Scipio now entered the world of freedom, he also entered a new world of uncertainty and struggle. If he was to survive, he would need the help of others.⁸⁰

When Scipio finally became free, Boston was in the midst of a dramatic shift from boom towards bust. The French and Indian War was coming closer to an end, and though bust was around the corner, the last years of war still meant heavy wartime spending, trading, and high demand for labor. With men at war and others at sea, labor

⁷⁹ SPR, Vol. 57 p. 254.

⁸⁰ Papers of John Fayerweather, NEHGS.

was at a premium and commanded higher and higher wages. Yet Boston still had work to be done, and the town leaders always wanted to keep costs down. In 1759 the selectmen needed work done near the land bridge connecting Boston and Roxbury known as Boston Neck. Looking for a way to finance the project, they noted that “the Free Negroes of the Town have been for Several years exempted from any duty.” They therefore voted and ordered that all free male Bostonians of color appear before them in fulfillment of their service. Other men were serving and dying in the militia. It was time, they felt, to make these freeloaders carry their weight. Only six free men of color came forward. Of them, only a Bristol Jeffries agreed to do the work. Homer Blackadore was sick and unable to work, and Pompey Blackman, “Liecester” Black, Dick Tynge, and David Primus all agreed to instead “pay half a doll’r p day for so many days as [they] shall be ordered.” Evidently these men had far too much to lose by missing several days of work. It is not clear how many days of labor the selectmen tried to exact from them either, let alone if they even were able to get anyone to do the work. Yet by 1762 as war cooled and debts came due, the selectmen were adamant that they would get all the unpaid labor they felt was due to them.⁸¹

On May 12, 1762, the selectmen of Boston decided that they needed to produce a list of all the “Free Negroes” that they could find in Boston. They came up with eighteen men—some of whom they could not identify by name. Over the next week, the selectmen investigated the background and work history of these men. By the 18th of May, the selectmen produced the first work assignment list since 1738. They determined the

⁸¹ BTR, Vol. 19, pp. 103-104.

assignments based on each man's length of freedom, age, and how much or how little work each man had provided to the town in years past. The resulting list ordered some men to perform a relatively light two-day assignment, while others received assignments as outrageous as thirty days. For the recently freed like Scipio Fayerweather, a demand for two days worth of labor was the welcome he received from the town leadership. For men who had been free for some time, the charge was infuriating. Tobias Lockman, Pompey Blackman, Fortunatus Pitts, and Peter How owed eighteen, twenty, twenty four, and thirty days to the town, respectively. These charges by the town meant a loss of an entire month's worth of work—money that these men needed for survival. No previous list as far back as 1708 had ever imposed such extreme demands.⁸²

Out in his first year of freedom, Scipio dutifully fulfilled his two-day work assignment to the town. He was evidently one of only three who did so. Prince Holmes, the only man who was free in Boston as far back as the 1730s, paid his way out of working his twelve-day assignment. The third man, Scipio Gunny, was recently freed like Scipio Fayerweather and apparently fulfilled his duty as well. A fourth man, Homer Blackadore, was sick and the selectmen found him exempt from work. All the other men listed, however, apparently resisted. Six months following the work assignment, the selectmen were insulted to see that only a handful of men had fulfilled their work requirement. They ordered the town clerk to issue a warrant which threatened serious legal action if they remained derelict in their duties. Addressed to another Scipio and the other resisting men of color, the warrant read:

⁸² BTR, Vol. 19, pp. 195 & 196.

Boston ss.

To Scipio and other Free Negros residing in the Town of Boston.

You are hereby severally Ordered and Required to perform so many Days work as is here under affixed to your Names, and this at the Time and Place you shall be directed to by mr. John Swetser, appointed an Overseer for this purpose. It being such a proportion of Time as is adjudged to be equivalent to the service of Trainings, Watchings and other duty required of the rest of his Majestys Subjects, the benefit of which you share. Hereof fail not as you avoid the penalty of the Law in such case made and provided.

By order of the Select men

Boston Decem'r. 15, 1762

WILLIAM COOPER

Town Clerk.

The list which followed contained primarily the names from the May 18th list. Other names appeared for the first time, with each man named receiving his own rather harsh assignment.⁸³

With the exception of John Thurber, all the men in the warrant owed a week or more of work. For his dereliction of duty, though, the selectmen reassessed the recently freed Thurber an additional two days of work for his defiance. For reasons unknown, the selectmen also added four additional names to the December 15 list. They slammed Lancaster Hill, Cesar Clark, and Thomas Knox with sixteen days each—an assignment which meant the loss of some three weeks' worth of wages. The fourth new name, another Scipio recently freed by his master, Capt. Osborne, received an assignment of two days. These four names were originally on the May 12 list of free men of color living in Boston. However, the selectmen, for unknown reasons, failed to place these names on the May 18 list which officially assigned work to the men. Whether it was a clerical mistake in the notes, or the selectmen mismanaged their interviews and assignments, the

⁸³ BTR, Vol. 19, pp. 195, 196, & 240.

entire episode illustrates the disconnect between the selectmen and the people they had for so long subjugated to the bottom of their society. The selectmen had no familiarity with or understanding of these men of color who lived and worked in their own town. They were totally estranged both socially and economically from the world of these people. Assigning such preposterous work assignments that robbed weeks, if not months, of labor from these men of color aroused anger and resistance against the selectmen. Shocked and angered when these subordinate men dragged their feet and refused to put their income on hold to meet such massive demands for labor, the selectmen responded with all the authority and threats they could muster. No court cases or further legal action appears in any surviving records, and so it seems likely that the men did the work—perhaps just enough to get the selectmen off their backs. Whatever the actual outcome, the entire affair left an extremely valuable directory of names which represent a new generation of people of color who lived and struggled in eighteenth century Boston. This generation would experience just as much uncertainty and loss as those that came before, but this time these people would leave a mark that would affect Boston for centuries to come.⁸⁴

Though slavery remained very dominant in the lives of people of color, this generation saw distinct changes emerge in the system. The foremost piece of evidence suggesting this change was the fact that Boston's population of people of color was declining. By 1765, the population was half of what it once was in 1752. Indeed, Boston as a whole, during this time, was stagnating and struggling to maintain its former glory.

⁸⁴ BTR, Vol. 19, pp. 195, 196, & 240.

King George's War of the 1740s and the Seven Years' (or French and Indian) War in the 1750s and early 60s, though bolstering Boston during wartime, brought debts and economic recession in the aftermath. Boston had high tax burdens, high public debt, and a shrinking tax base with declining wages. As a result, the simultaneous disappearance of people of color can be explained by a large scale selling-off of hundreds of slaves. The whim of masters and the hand of market forces determined where these slaves went. Given that these urban slaves from Boston generally possessed skills in maritime or domestic trades, many were perhaps sold to growing American ports of the Mid-Atlantic, such as Philadelphia and New York. Younger slaves with little skill but many prime working years may have been sold to countryside farms in New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Either fate, however, was no doubt preferable to being sent to Southern or Caribbean plantations. For the slaves sold off by the hundreds to balance account books, their lives took yet another unpredictable turn and they disappeared from the story of Boston. However, the other half who remained in Boston became perhaps more determined to control their own fates and build lives of their own.⁸⁵

Marriages among people of color in the 1760s increased to the highest numbers the town had yet seen in the eighteenth century. This occurred despite the fact that the town had the smallest population of people of color since the 1720s. Furthermore, though more marriages for this generation were entangled in slavery rather than in freedom, mixed status marriages started becoming more common. More often than not, these mixed status marriages had a bride who was free and a groom who was enslaved. All of

⁸⁵ See Figures 1 & 2; also for the changes in North America's urban centers, see Gary Nash, *The Urban Crucible* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986).

these changes suggest that, for those who remained in Boston, slavery was somehow becoming more stable and less intrusive. Marriages were becoming possible, and with more freed women, offspring of these unions were technically born with the legal status of freedom.⁸⁶

In addition to this growing stability, manumissions appear to have been on the rise. After long service with their masters it again appears that, as with the first generation, proximity engendered respect. Masters such as John Fayerweather wished to show their gratitude by granting freedom to their slaves like Scipio. Though it veiled the fact that the masters enjoyed the prime of their slave's life, this generosity afforded men like Scipio Fayerweather an opportunity to build their own lives. Indeed, other than Prince Holmes, the selectmen discovered that all the other free men of color living in Boston had gained their freedom within the past ten years, and over a third had been freed within the past two. Nevertheless, slaves like Scipio Fayerweather could not have been any younger than 40 years of age at the time of their manumission. If his health did not stay strong, Scipio's freedom could become a greater burden than it was an asset. Nevertheless, through cooperation, greater opportunities, longer life, and luck, the men and women of this generation would at last leave a legacy. Unlike any generation before them, this generation passed on both tangible and intellectual inheritances to their successors. Their work would shape Boston for centuries to come.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ See Figures 3 & 4.

⁸⁷ BTR, Vol. 19, pp. 195 & 196.

The Fayerweathers and the Lockers

When the selectmen of Boston posted a warrant on December 15, 1762, it demanded that the free men of color fulfill their assigned labor to the town. Scipio Fayerweather, free only for one year, evidently fulfilled his work. Tobias Locker, another man whose name featured on the list, dragged his feet like many of the others. How Tobias and Scipio came to know one another will perhaps never be known. However, like Prince Holmes and his business association with Thomas Hancock, Scipio and Tobias would need to heavily rely on one another for their own survival.

Most of the scant details that seem to be available for Tobias Locker prior to 1762 are the small fragments of information provided by the selectmen of Boston when they prepared their work lists. Apparently freed sometime around 1755, Locker lived in “New Boston” or the west end of Boston on or around Beacon Hill. He filed an intention to marry Mercy Barnabas on October 15, 1755, where both he and Mercy Barnabas were listed as “free negroes.” No record shows whether they went through with the marriage, though. During the boom of a wartime economy during the late 1750s, it is not clear what Tobias Locker did for a living. He evidently was intent on working hard, though, because after working as a free man for a little under a decade, he accomplished a rare feat that makes him a significant figure. On October 1, 1763, Locker purchased real estate. It was a plot on the north slope of Beacon Hill, measuring approximately fifty-nine feet by one hundred and thirteen feet. Facing a newly laid street known as Belknap, the other end of the plot butted against a long six-hundred-foot ropewalk and other undeveloped parcels of land. Locker purchased the land from Mary Homer for the sum of £26 13s. 4p. No

improvements existed upon it, but it was an investment for the future that few people of color had ever undertaken before in Boston. Tobias was just one of a few people of color to own land in the history of Boston to that point, and indeed, he was the first landowner of color in the area that eventually became the significant black neighborhood of Beacon Hill.⁸⁸

Figure 5: Map of Boston, 1769⁸⁹

Beacon Hill Area: ■ Ropewalk/Belknap Street: ■



⁸⁸ BTR, Vol. 30, p. 17; Suffolk Deeds, Vol. 100, p. 191; In the Thwing database, only two people of color transacted land in Boston prior to the 1760s. Angola, a servant who received land near Boston Neck from Governor Bellingham for saving the Governor's life, and Zippora, a woman who purchased and later sold land near the ferry dock on the back side of the North End. The Thwing database began as a card catalog that tracked every known transaction in Boston as recorded in the Suffolk County Deed Registry from 1630 through the end of the eighteenth century. NEHGS and MHS staff added identifier codes to any African Americans or females. Successive queries of the database only show these two transactions.

⁸⁹ William Price, *A new plan of ye great town of Boston in New England in America with the many additional buildings & new streets, to the year, 1769* (Boston: 1769). Image courtesy Library of Congress. <http://www.loc.gov/item/73691791/>.

There are a number of reasons why Tobias Locker chose the north slope of Beacon Hill for his real estate purchase. First and foremost, it was perhaps the most affordable. Land in the busy and congested parts of town, such as the North End, the central waterfront along King Street, and even the northerly side of the South End, fetched far higher prices. The west side of Boston was by comparison still a backwater to the town. Far from the deeper water docks of the harbor side, most maritime industries had no use for the area. Though the north side of Cambridge Street saw development by the middle of the century, the hilly pastures south of the street on Beacon Hill left much to be desired. Maps from the first half of the eighteenth century show orchards and pastureland upon the hilly space between Cambridge Street and Boston Common. One feature which did dominate the landscape, though, was the Belknap/Jenner ropewalk. This feature may perhaps give a second reason why Tobias Locker chose Beacon Hill for his home.⁹⁰

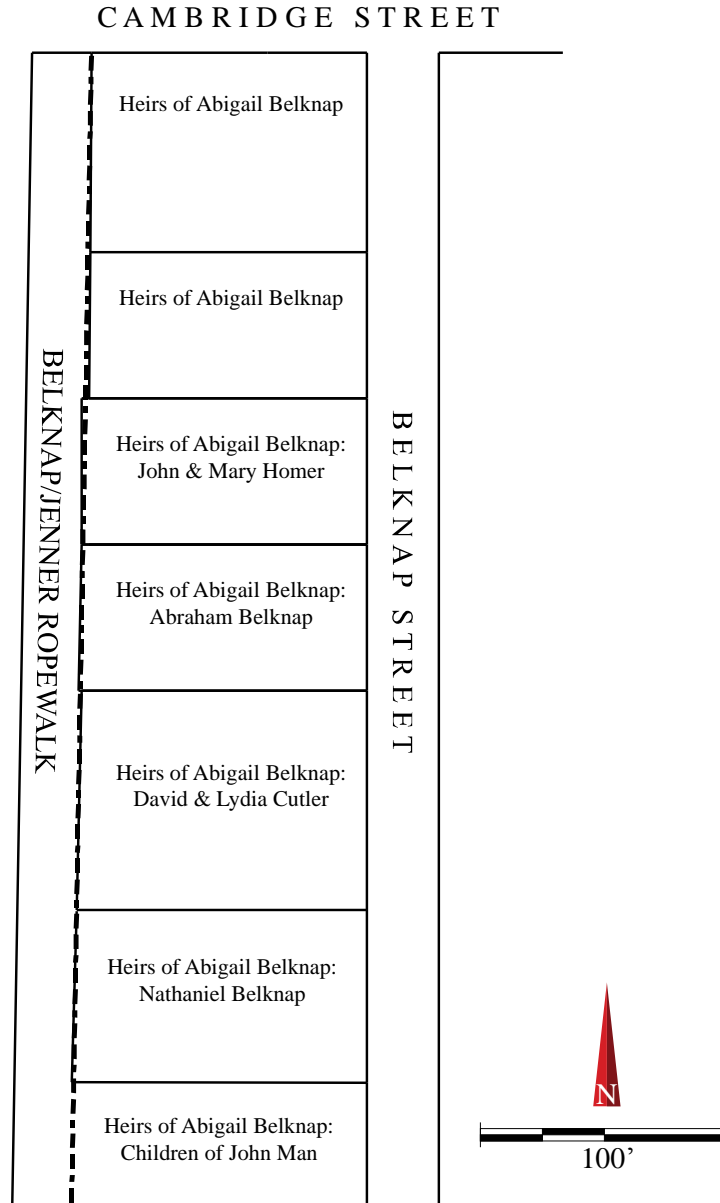
Locker's deed and other public records stated that his occupation was simply "labourer"—a detail which begs more questions than it answers. Had Locker owned a shop, worked in a specialized trade, or been skilled as a mariner, his deed would have likely stated that fact. As a laborer, however, Locker could have performed a wide variety of unskilled or semiskilled work to make a living. Given Locker's proximity to Beacon Hill, it is quite possible he found full or part-time work at the Belknap/Jenner ropewalk. Ropewalking was a semiskilled trade that was practiced everywhere in Boston. In John Bonner's 1723 map of Boston, six ropewalks were explicitly marked in open spaces in

⁹⁰ See Figure 5 above.

the south and west ends of town. Although by the time William Price updated the map in 1769 many of the ropewalks disappeared to show new streets and future developments, ropewalks were still everywhere. So long as massive sailing vessels navigated the seas, rope would always be in high demand. The Belknap/Jenner ropewalk was some six hundred feet long and was no wider than twenty-four feet. It ran straight down the steep north slope of Beacon Hill, starting just north of the hill's summit and ending just before Cambridge Street at the base of the slope. Nathaniel Belknap built the ropewalk on land he had purchased from his mother, Abigail Buttolph Belknap. After a few years of operation, Nathaniel Belknap sold the ropewalk to the businessman and merchant Thomas Jenner. Jenner continued the ropewalk's operation for the better part of three decades.⁹¹

⁹¹ Suffolk Deeds (hereafter, "SD"), Vol. 100, p. 191; John Bonner, "The town of Boston in New England"; SD, Vol. 44, p. 145, Land From Abigail Buttolph Belknap to Nathaniel Belknap which became a ropewalk 24' x 640'; Nathaniel Belknap to Thomas Jenner, SD, Vol. 48, p. 179; SD, Vol. 46, p. 287: Abigail Belknap's estate deeded equal parts of her pasture to her heirs. For more details and sources see Thwing database, particularly entry for Abigail Buttolph Belknap and the following named beneficiaries of her will: Nicolas Belknap, Nathaniel Belknap, and Abraham Belknap; Mary Homer, wife of John Homer; Elizabeth Russell, wife of Benjamin Russell; Lydia Cutler, wife of David Cutler; Lishua Yelverton; Joseph Mann.

Figure 6: Map of Belknap Street, ca. 1738

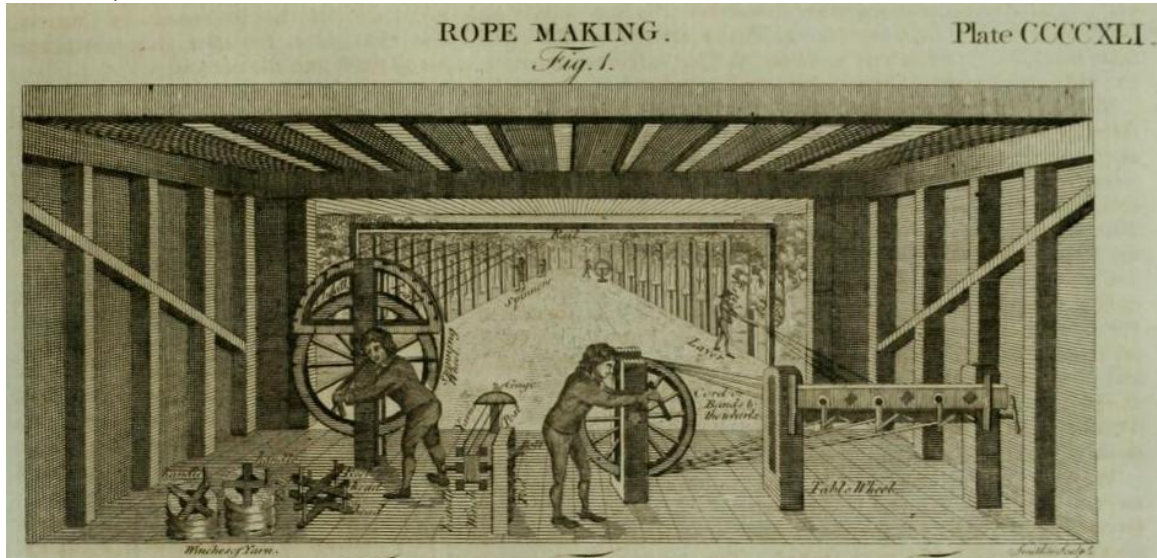


The labor in a rope walk was physically demanding and extremely repetitive. First, yards upon yards of yarns made of natural fibers such as hemp had to be spun before the walking began. Taking the stalks of hemp, men separated the material into fine individual fibers using a hard metal bristle called a hatchel. The wheelhouse of the

Belknap/Jenner ropewalk stood at the top of the plot on the hill. Inside the wheelhouse, the machinery (likely hand-operated) had multiple spinning hooks that turned in unison from a central larger wheel, connected by belts or gear teeth. First the workers spun the fiber into long rope yarns, using the spinning wheel at the top of the hill, and fed individual fibers to lengthen and strengthen the yarns. This process was repeated over and over to produce enough long yarn to then be laid out on the rope walk for twisting. When the yarns were laid out, the workers hooked spans of yarn together into groups on the separate several hooks at the wheelhouse. At the other far end of the ropewalk, all the yarns came together on a central hook. To make just one length of rope, the total amount of walking was easily several miles. All the yarn had to be strung up and separated into groups, each attached to individual hooks at one end and to a common hook on the other. Turning a drive wheel, crank, or gear, men twisted the groups of rope yarns until they wound up with sufficient tightness. Once this was complete, the separated groups of wound yarns were then allowed to twist together, starting at the common hook and working back uphill towards the wheelhouse. With all the energy built from up being wound up in one direction, the groups of yarns then twisted back on themselves, forming one long length of rope. To make the rope flexible and workable at sea, it had to then be repeatedly beaten and stretched. Lastly, to prevent unraveling and to protect the fibers from deterioration at sea, the rope was typically tarred. Sometimes workers applied tar directly to the individual yarns, and sometimes to the final cordage as a whole. All day the tar boiled and stunk, all day men spun yarns, walked and laid down the yarns, twisted, and beat the rope. Once the men finished, they did it again and again. In the summer they

sweated in the heat. In the winter they worked through the cold. This is possibly how Tobias Locker earned his own piece of land in Boston.⁹²

Figure 7: Rope Making, from 1797 Edition of *Encyclopædia; or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature...*



Spinning of yarns is to the left, twisting yarns to rope is on the right.

Whether or not this was how Tobias Locker earned his pay, the rope making activity was constant behind his newly earned property of Belknap Street. It also appears that Locker supported his purchase of land with the money he collected from an outstanding loan. In 1760 he lent £1:18:4 to a yeoman and cordwainer named Samuel Brimhall from Abington, Plymouth County, for a term of four months. By March 1762, the loan remained outstanding. Tobias sued for damages totaling £6, and it appears that debtor and creditor reached a settlement. Locker settled with Brimhall for the sum of £2

⁹² The rope making process is still preserved and interpreted at sites such as the Charlestown Navy Yard of Boston National Historical Park, Mystic Seaport, and the Chatham ropewalk in the UK. Most of these sites used or still use more advanced mechanization, but the principle remains the same. A description of the process contemporary to the time can be found in *Encyclopædia; or, a Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and Miscellaneous Literature...*, First American Edition, Vol. 16 (Philadelphia: Thomas Dobson, 1797), pp. 482-494. Digital copy produced and provided by the University of California Digital Library, hosted by archive.org: <http://archive.org/details/encyclopaediaord16ency>

3s. 1p. Pooling everything he had, Locker combined the funds from the settlement, his personal savings from eight or nine years of hard work as a free man, and perhaps some loans from others. With all this, he finally purchased his plot of land on Beacon Hill. Little did Locker know that things in Boston were about to take a turn for the worse. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 finally ended global hostilities between Britain and France. The wartime front of Canada officially disappeared. Spending declined, trade declined, and job opportunities declined. Boston's niche as a wartime supplier evaporated. Docks sat empty and ships lay in ordinary—rigging stripped off and ships moored indefinitely. All the supporting industries, from sail making to rope making, in turn felt the slowdown. Tobias Locker felt the pinch too. Evidently somewhat overextended with his purchase of land, he had to take out bills of credit for his purchases. In January 1764 Locker obtained goods or services on credit in the amount of £2 13s. 4p. from a spinster named Abigail Robinson. By August, 1765, she sued him for damages totaling £9 for the unpaid debts. Yet by that point, Tobias Locker was already on an uncertain financial footing.⁹³

Despite his mounting troubles, Tobias Locker still felt confident in his future. Apparently a free woman of color named Margaret felt confident about Locker's future as well. Again, no records mark what happened between Locker and Mercy Barnabas following their announced intention to marry in 1755. Nevertheless, after nine years of hard work and earning enough to purchase real estate, Tobias was evidently single by 1764. With marriage, Margaret certainly stabilized her life by joining a man with

⁹³ Locker against Brimhall, Suffolk Files #82819. Much of the writing on the back of the warrant is illegible, but the amount £2:3:1 appears, along with the signature of Tobias Locker and the Sheriff from Plymouth, suggesting that both parties reached some plea agreement; Robinson against Locker: Suffolk Files # 86611. Suffolk Files can be found at the Massachusetts Archives as part of the Judicial Records housed there.

property and earning potential like Tobias Locker. Likewise, Locker could rely on any money that Margaret could bring into the relationship through domestic work at home or in a wealthy house. They were joined together in marriage on September 13, 1764 at New South Church. Hopefully the financial problems confronting Tobias were made apparent to Margaret before marriage, because three months following the wedding the couple had no option but to mortgage their property on Beacon Hill to help pay off their mounting debts and meet their need for cash. The man they turned to for help was none other than Scipio Fayerweather.⁹⁴

When Scipio Fayerweather gained his freedom in 1761—one year after the death of his master—the first records to mention his name were the 1762 work lists. With just £3, his bedding, and a few personal effects, Scipio Fayerweather now had to make it on his own. Though the town explicitly attempted to separate people of color who were free from those who remained unfree, the town’s attempts to reduce all people of color to a status below that of whites resulted in inevitable intermixing among men and women of color across the boundaries of slavery. As discussed in the previous chapter, most marriages during the middle decades of the eighteenth century among men and women of color were directly affected by slavery. Scipio Fayerweather undoubtedly made connections with free people of color when he was a slave in Boston for two decades. Once free, though, he needed to rely on those connections more than ever to survive. Between the needs of finding stable employment and maintaining a place to live, it turns out that the Lockers became critically important allies for Scipio Fayerweather, and

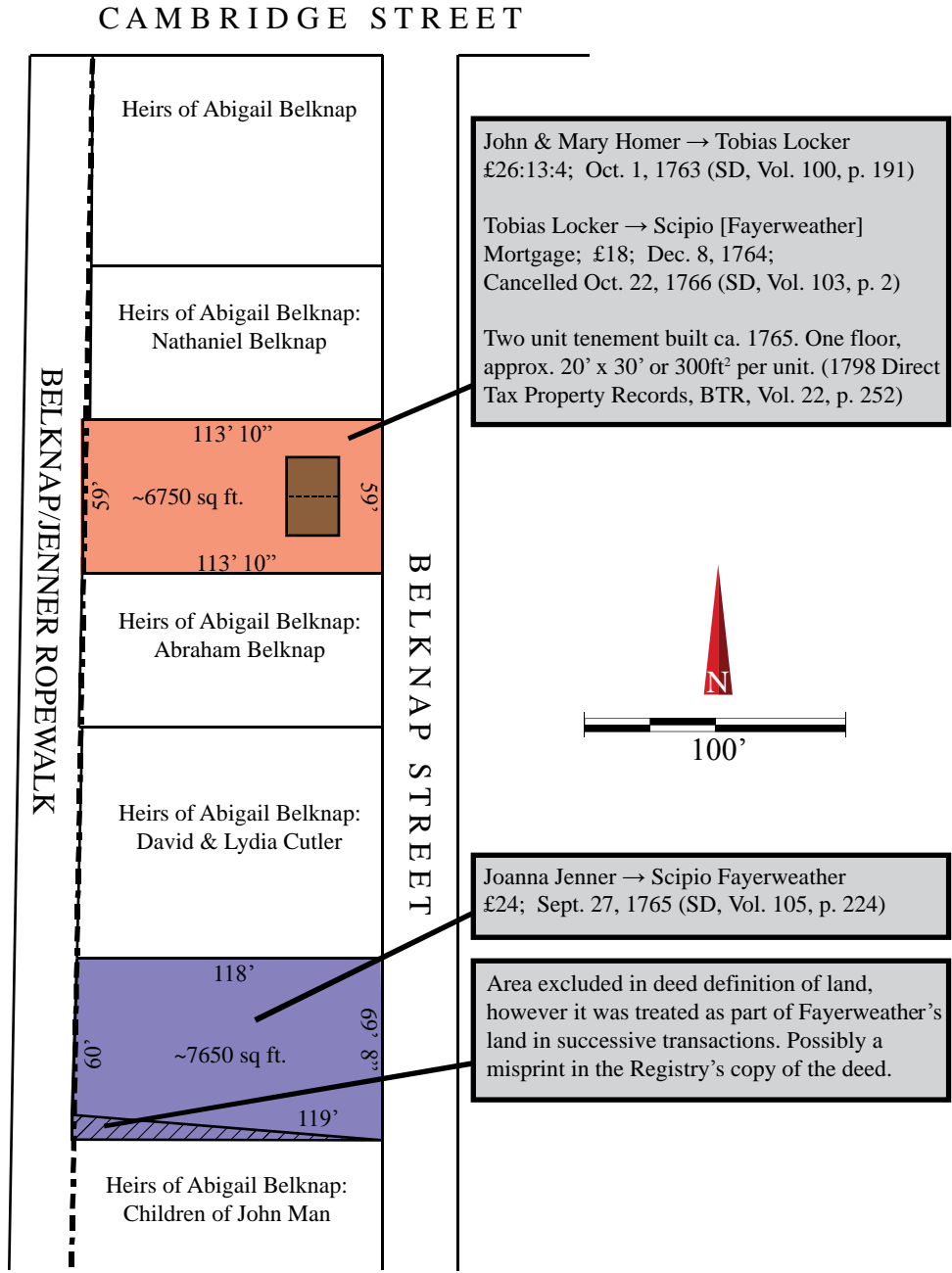
⁹⁴ Tobias Locker & Margaret, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 380.

Scipio, too, would greatly assist Tobias and Margaret Locker. Their partnership led to significant gains far beyond what anyone could have anticipated.

When Tobias and Margaret Locker found themselves short on cash and owing money in late 1764, Scipio Fayerweather gave them a vital loan in the form of a mortgage. At least one creditor, Abigail Robinson, was demanding payment from the Lockers and would eventually press charges the next year. The property also remained unimproved, and if the Lockers also wanted to finally construct a home for themselves on Tobias' hard-fought-for piece of land, they would need cash. In December 1764, Tobias and Margaret mortgaged their land to Scipio Fayerweather in exchange for £18. The mortgage promised repayment in full with lawful interest attached. The arrangement was a shrewd decision on the part of both parties. Not only did it help the Lockers in a time of need, it also protected Scipio Fayerweather from the loss of his hard-earned savings. If Tobias and Margaret Locker could not pay back the loan, Scipio could at least fall back on the value of land as collateral, protecting his investment. Yet even more significant than the loan itself, it appears that the three used the mortgage to bring Scipio Fayerweather in as a partner to construct a tenement where they all could live. This astounding detail comes to light only because Scipio had a legal dispute with a housewright.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ SD, Vol. 103, p. 2.

Figure 8: Map of Belknap Street, ca. 1765



Despite the lagging economy, the Lockers and Scipio Fayerweather struggled to make progress. In 1765, agitation and anger over Parliament's new Stamp Act led to protests and street violence. While those activities raged on the streets down by the docks

and in the densely packed areas of Boston, the open north slope of Beacon Hill remained relatively quiet. The ropewalk continued to produce cordage whenever feasible, Tobias and Margaret Locker worked to pay off their mortgage to Scipio Fayerweather, and Fayerweather was able to make an investment in his own future through his own hard work and his partnership with the Lockers. Indeed, on September 27, 1765, Scipio Fayerweather also became a landowner. He purchased land from Joanna Jenner, the widow of the ropewalk owner Thomas Jenner and possible employer of Scipio Fayerweather, for £24. Measuring roughly 69 feet by 118 feet, the plot lay just 150 feet uphill from the land of Tobias and Margaret Locker. Yet even though he acquired his own land, Scipio Fayerweather was assisting in constructing, or perhaps constructing on his own, a tenement that would house both himself and the Lockers for the time being. From 1765 into 1766, Scipio contracted with a housewright named William Dawes. The work and materials included 121 yards of wood boards for a partition dividing the tenement into two units, installing a shared front door, hanging seven window frames and sashes, work and materials for the chimney, hearth, and mantelpiece, installing a waterspout on the back side of the structure, placing two back doors for the units, and installing locks for all the doors. The total bill came to £20:8:5—more than the current mortgage between Fayerweather and the Lockers and almost the market value of the land. Some dispute over the billing or the payment eventually emerged, and on March 25, 1766, the housewright pressed charges against the mortgagee turned developer Scipio Fayerweather. In the warrant, Dawes charged that Scipio Fayerweather had failed to pay for the materials and services he provided. The housewright submitted the invoice for all

the work as evidence, and the Sheriff of Suffolk County delivered the warrant at the newly built house six days later. No further details of the lawsuit appear, and so it is likely that the two parties eventually came to an agreement. Not long after Scipio Fayerweather and the Lockers resolved their debts, though, the town authorities took notice of their successes.⁹⁶

On the north slope of Beacon Hill, Scipio Fayerweather, Tobias Locker, and Margaret Locker had accomplished the unprecedented: they were people of color who had financed and built their own home upon land that they had earned through their own labors. This reward came from the combination of good fortune and very hard work. Evidently, a good deal of their success could also be attributed to their choice to settle at the edge of town on Beacon Hill. Indeed, it appears that Scipio Fayerweather and the Lockers evaded a good deal of scrutiny as they worked to fund their modest real estate. On June 11, 1766, the selectmen of Boston finally took note. This time, the selectmen singled out the two successful men and no others, hinting that they believed a particular debt was owed by these two men above all other men of color. “Order was this Day issued to Tobias & Scepio (late Cap’t. Fayerweathers) Free Negroes, to work on the High Way before the Market, four Days each, there being several Years duty due from them.” For both the Lockers and Scipio Fayerweather this was a great inconvenience. Four days’ work was the better part of a full work week for the both of them. The Lockers still had to pay off their mortgage, and Scipio had depleted savings from the contracted work with Dawes and the purchase of his own land farther up Belknap Street. As it turns out, the

⁹⁶ SD, Vol. 105, p. 224, Jenner to Scipio, “heretofore servant and slave to John Fayerweather”; Dawes against Scipio, “late Servant of John Fairweather late of Boston,” Suffolk Files #86824.

men were too busy to give up their time. It was the busy summer season when more work could get done without the weather interfering. They ignored the demands of the selectmen and continued to work for themselves.⁹⁷

Perhaps the risk was worth it, because by the October of that same year the Lockers at last paid off the mortgage to Scipio's satisfaction. Scipio reported to the Suffolk Registrar of Deeds that he "rec'd full satisfaction for the therein mortgaged premeses [sic]" and quit any claim to the property, giving Tobias and Margaret Locker once again full ownership of the now greatly improved land. Nonetheless, the watchful eyes of the selectmen caught up to them. Just a month the mortgage cancellation and six months after the selectmen initially assigned the two men labor, the town of Boston vehemently demanded Scipio Fayerweather's and Tobias Locker's four days' labor to the town. They ordered that "a Complaint be entered to Mr. Justice Dana against Tobias Lochman, & Scipio, Free Negroes, ye. Latter late a...Servant of Cap't. John Fayweather—for not working 4 Days each on ye. High Ways this year being legally warned by Mr. Sweatsers." It appears that eventually Locker and Fayerweather begrudgingly satisfied the demands of the selectmen, and then returned to further improving their lives.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ BTR, Vol. 20, p. 218. This selectmen's specific assignment of work to these two men underscores the sense they were not only living in the same building, but were also conspicuously residing on the north slope of Beacon Hill.

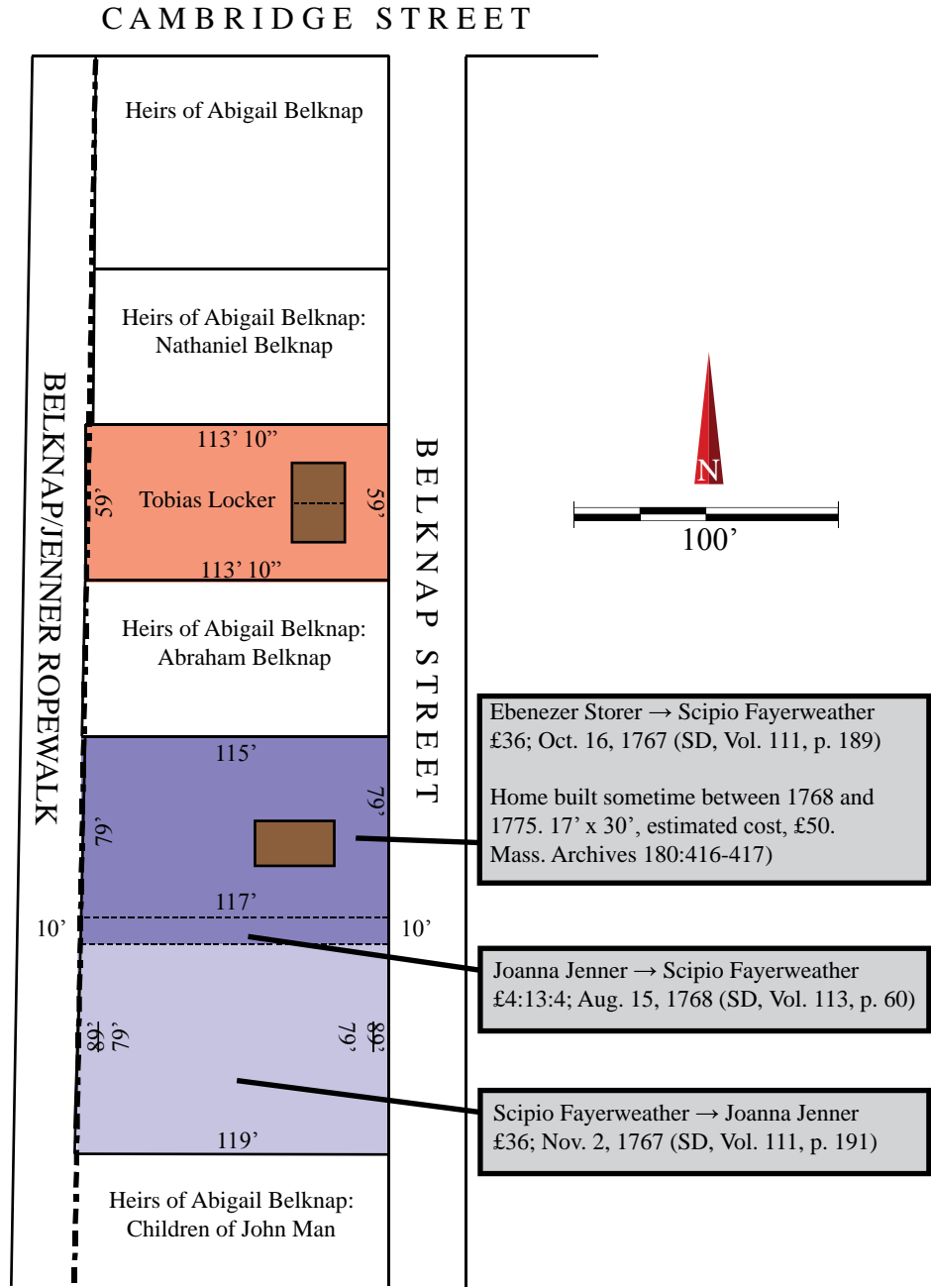
⁹⁸ SD, Vol. 103, p. 2, Memo in margin cancelling deed; Complaint of selectmen, BTR, Vol. 20, p. 236. In the Justice of the Peace records of Richard Dana, included in the Dana family paper collection at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Dana noted in his account book that he was asked by the selectmen of Boston to draft a complaint against Fayerweather and Locker. He included the amount 12 shillings, which was perhaps the town's payment for overseeing that Fayerweather and Locker received the complaint and ultimately complied with the selectmen's demands. Nothing further about the business could be located, and so it is probable the two men finally fulfilled the work in the slower winter months.

After another year of hard work in 1767, Scipio Fayerweather engaged in a property swap with his neighboring property owner and probable employer, Joanna Jenner. Jenner was the widow of Thomas Jenner, and she continued to operate her husband's ropewalk behind the Fayerweather and Locker properties following Thomas Jenner's death. What motivated the property swap between Jenner and Fayerweather is unclear, but an extended series of land transactions between the two strongly suggests a long-standing business relationship. The first transaction took place on October 16, 1767. The transaction involved Scipio Fayerweather purchasing an abutting lot of land just to the north of his existing property from the estate of one Ebenezer Storer for £36. Fayerweather's existing plot of land to the south had been purchased from Joanna Jenner just two years prior. This new plot added over 10,000 square feet of additional land to Scipio Fayerweather's holdings. Then, just two weeks later, on November 2, 1767, Scipio sold the southerly half of this newly expanded lot to Joanna Jenner for the same price of £36. This swap of property between Scipio Fayerweather and Joanna Jenner for the exact same price hints that they cooperated closely. Again, the ultimate goal of these successive transactions remains unclear. Nevertheless, the fact that Scipio's first and subsequent land transactions involved Joanna Jenner hint that they were business associates of some kind. Indeed, Jenner listed her residence in the deed transactions as being across the Charles River in Charlestown. Perhaps Jenner relied on Scipio as a nearby set of eyes and ears for the day-to-day events at her ropewalk and land, or perhaps Jenner was interested in the land but needed an agent to purchase the land in her stead. Whatever their relationship proved to be, their association continued well into the next year. On August

15, 1768 the two again engaged in a land deal. In a relatively small transaction, Scipio Fayerweather purchased a ten foot wide strip of land between his land and Joanna Jenner's parcel for £4:13:4. This purchase evened both plots to about 79 feet in width while being almost 120 feet long. Both plots abutted Belknap Street on the eastern edge, and bounded along the Jenner ropewalk to the west. With these transactions complete, Scipio Fayerweather turned his attention to a new goal: developing and building his own home and legacy in the form of real property.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Storer Estate to Scipio, SD, Vol. 111, p.189; Scipio to Jenner, SD, Vol. 111, p. 196; Jenner to Scipio, SD, Vol. 113, p. 60. It is worth noting that in none of these deed transactions, does the registry refer to Scipio Fayerweather with a full first and last name, but just a first name with the note he was once the servant and slave to John Fayerweather.

Figure 9: Map of Belknap Street, ca. 1769



Free for ten years by the time the year 1771 came around, Scipio Fayerweather remained determined to advance his situation by amassing real and personal property. Perhaps he hoped that someday his children would finally return to him. Long stripped

from him by the system of slavery which defined so much of his life, perhaps Scipio Fayerweather hoped that by owning land and a house outright, he could contribute something more to the lives of Scipio Jr., Cezar, David, Phillis, Amoretta, London, and Jack—if any of them were still alive. Nevertheless, by 1771, Scipio had not only helped construct the two-unit house on the Locker land, but he now owned a dwelling just a hundred feet up Belknap Street on his own land. Both Tobias Locker and Scipio Fayerweather, proud property and homeowners, appear in the 1771 tax valuation list for Boston. Officials assessed both with one dwelling each. Scipio Fayerweather was also listed with another man of color, a man named Cuffee, a “negro boarder.” It appears that just as the Lockers gave Scipio Fayerweather a roof, so Scipio Fayerweather too gave other people of color a place to stay. Yet despite these homes being the product of much labor, struggle, and savings, the assessors only valued the annual rents of their estate at a paltry £4—well below the minimum property requirement to vote in Boston town meetings and among the lowest valuations possible for homeowners in Boston during that valuation in 1771. Even though meeting membership and participation greatly expanded and radicalized during the protests against British Parliamentary policies, the relationship of Locker and Fayerweather with the town government remained one of domination by the leaders of the town.¹⁰⁰

Though denied citizenship, Scipio Fayerweather continued to advance his fortunes and eventually found a companion with whom he could share his home and the

¹⁰⁰ The original Valuation Lists are Vols. 132-134 of the Massachusetts Archives Collection. There is also a published version: *The Tax Valuation List of 1771*, Bettye Pruitt, ed. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1978), as well as an online database freely accessible from Harvard University at <http://sites.fas.harvard.edu/~hsb41/masstax/masstax.cgi>. Scipio Fayerweather is listed as “Sipio, Negro,” and Tobias Locker is listed as “Tobias Lockyer.”

remainder of his life—a woman of color named Venus. Perhaps Venus was the mother of his slave children all along, and at last in 1772 they re-united. Sadly, it is more probable that Scipio Fayerweather's first partner had died or disappeared long before he secured his freedom. There are no signs that Fayerweather attempted to purchase his first partner's freedom. In all deeds and actions from freedom until 1772, Scipio legally remained a single free man of color. Whatever the case, Scipio Fayerweather submitted an intention to marry Venus on September 15, 1772. Though no official marriage record appears, a later deed confirms that they were together in Scipio Fayerweather's second decade of freedom. Scipio had accomplished an astounding feat. He had his own land and his own house. Now he and Venus could furnish and live in the home. Yet nothing could have ever prepared them for the future that awaited them.¹⁰¹

In the fall of 1774, Scipio and Venus Fayerweather celebrated their second year anniversary. Yet the future of nearly every soul in Boston had never been more uncertain. In response to the destruction of the tea shipments in December 1773, Parliament passed the Coercive Acts. Reimposing military occupation, the acts also closed the entire port to commerce and introduced significant changes to both local and colonial governments. All these actions attempted to reassert royal control over a town and colony that appeared to show nothing but defiance towards the empire's authority. Yet by late 1774, the countryside had all but purged any semblance of royal authority outside of Boston. Inside the single outpost of British authority, thousands of soldiers camped and trained on the common just on the other side of Beacon Hill from the Fayerweathers and Lockers.

¹⁰¹Intention, Scipio & Venus, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 432; SD, Vol. 130, p. 90 lists Venus as Scipio's wife. This is the only document that confirms their relationship.

Behind the tenements of the Lockers and Fayerweathers, the Belknap/Jenner ropewalk suddenly had fewer and fewer seagoing vessels to supply. Business in general suffered dramatically from the closure of virtually all harbor activities. When tensions sparked into full-on violence on April 19, 1775, the quiet north slope of Beacon Hill suddenly fell squarely in the midst of a siege line.¹⁰²

Two months following April 19th, the Battle of Bunker Hill hardened tensions and siege lines circling tiny Boston. From April 1775 until March 1776, the entire peninsula of Boston became one massive fort under siege. From Roxbury to the south, and from Cambridge to the west, the New England provincial forces—later the Continental Army—surrounded the town with a massive ring of forts, breastworks, and picket lines. Inside Boston, the Neck opposite Roxbury became a massive stockade brimming with British gunnery and soldiers. On the opposite side of Boston in Charlestown, British forces capped Bunker Hill with an enormous stockade to cover the British northern flank. Between these points, the entire western edge of the Boston peninsula became a long string of mutually supporting gun emplacements, forts, and palisades. Crowning each hill above Boston Common stood fortifications and canon tubes aimed at the rebel lines across the river in Cambridge. It is not certain whether Tobias and Margaret Locker or Venus Fayerweather fled or weathered the crisis in their homes during the eleven-month long conflict in Boston. It appears that of the four, Scipio Fayerweather stayed in his hard-earned home. Nevertheless, it is certain that by the time the long and terrible

¹⁰² T. H. Breen, *American Insurgents, American Patriots* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010), and Ray Raphael, *First American Revolution: Before Lexington and Concord* (New York: The New Press, 2003) both offer excellent accounts of the events preceding the clashes at Lexington and Concord and the Siege of Boston.

nightmare of the siege ended, almost everything that Scipio and Venus Fayerweather had struggled and worked to earn was gone forever.¹⁰³

The Siege of Boston was a very dire time for countless families. Thousands became refugees beyond the town, while others became hostages within the fortified peninsula. The Lockers and Fayerweathers were no different. In fact, their situation was even more alarming than most. First, their homes were right under British guns on top of Beacon Hill. Across the river, American guns in Cambridge were trained directly at their homes on the north slope. Food would become dangerously scarce for everyone in town, as it could only arrive via ship. Equally dreadful, the supply of fuel for heating and cooking ran so low that the army demolished and gutted churches and other wooden buildings for firewood. As if this wasn't enough, the small tenements of the Lockers and Fayerweathers, like so many private homes, undoubtedly became barracks for a garrison of British soldiers. The proximity of their homes to British defensive positions made those homes likely choices for billeting soldiers. This only made a bad situation worse. As the hot tense summer of violence subsided into a cold and frustrating winter, soldiers grew increasingly depressed and angry—they were stuck in a dismal town with a bleak situation. If the Fayerweathers remained in Boston, their background of being both Provincials and people of color could have easily made them targets of harassment and violence from garrisoned soldiers. Indeed, when the long eleven-month long siege was

¹⁰³ Henry Pelham, *A plan of Boston in New England with its environs, including Milton, Dorchester, Roxbury, Brooklin, Cambridge, Medford, Charlestown, parts of Malden and Chelsea with the military works constructed in those places in the years 1775 and 1776* (London: 1777) shows details of the siege lines in and around Boston. <http://www.loc.gov/item/gm71000619/>.

finally coming to an end, a party of troops evidently vented their anger and frustration on the Fayerweathers.¹⁰⁴

As the fleet of British ships sailed out of Boston Harbor, the north slope of Beacon Hill stood littered with smashed furniture, defaced personal possessions, broken glass, and a massive heap of lumber and shingles that had once been the Fayerweathers' tenement. Everything Scipio and Venus had worked so hard to accomplish was now completely undone. In desperation, the Fayerweathers felt they had no choice but to plead with the revolutionary government of Massachusetts for assistance. With the aid of an unknown individual, Scipio Fayerweather composed a poignant and grave petition. He recounted his life's dramatic story on just two small pages, and submitted his petition one month following the dramatic evacuation of Boston.

Colony of the Massachusetts Bay

To the Honorable Council and Hon'ble House of Representatives in great and General Court for the said Colony Assembled at Watertown

Most Humbly Sheweth

Scipio Fayerweather who had (altho' a Black man) his freedom given him by his late Master John Fayerweather Esq'r, dec[eased], who was well known to your Honours for his Fidelity in his Service and that after he was thus made free he Industriously labored for an honest lively hood, and was so succeeded by a kind providence therein that he was Enabled to purchase a small Piece of Ground situate in Belknap Street in Boston in [said] Colony which Cost him Thirty Seven pounds Money on which for his Comfortable support he Built a House of the following dimensions viz. Thirty feet in length and Seventeen feet wide which Cost your Petitioners near Fifty Pounds besides about Thirty Pounds lawful Money which he laid out in furniture, that the British Troops used every method to Induce him to Inlist [sic] with them but gratitude to this beloved Country in which he has lived from a Child made him shudder at the thought of taking up Arms against a People to whom he is under many Obligations both of a Spiritual and Temporal Nature, that the [said] Tirannical [sic] troops Enraged [at this] not only pull'd his house down to the ground but Entirely

¹⁰⁴ Petition of Scipio Fayerweather, Massachusetts Archives Collection, Vol. 180, pp. 416-417.

ruined & destroyed all his [said] Furniture whereby he is reduced to very great distress[.] [He] therefore most humbly Prays (and doubts not but altho' he is a Black Man) that your Honors from your Great goodness wisdom and known Justice will be pleased to take his distress't Care into your wise and Compassionate Consideration, and Grant him such Relief therein as you shall think Just and Equitable, And as in Duty Bound.

He shall ever Pray, &c.

his

Scipio X Fayerweather

Mark

Boston April 27th, 1776

Homeless and despondent, the Fayerweathers had few options left.¹⁰⁵

Though the Massachusetts government received this heartrending petition, they took no action on the matter. Three years later, with no other option, Scipio and Venus sold their plot of land. The deed transaction spoke of no improvements or additions—their house was gone entirely. After selling to a mariner named Green Pearce for £78, Scipio and Venus Fayerweather disappeared from all records entirely. Perhaps they used the proceeds of the sale to move away from Boston to start over. However, it is also possible that with no other option, Scipio and Venus Fayerweather moved back in with their long time neighbors, friends, and allies: Tobias and Margaret Locker.¹⁰⁶

It would seem that Scipio Fayerweather, having lost his property and being completely uncertain about the fates of his children, left nothing behind after his life. Nevertheless, the Locker tenement that Scipio Fayerweather helped construct still stood after he disappeared from Boston. Though Tobias and Margaret Locker had no children who appear in public records, their small tenement and parcel of property would be where a major free black community of Beacon Hill would take root just two generations

¹⁰⁵ Petition of Scipio Fayerweather, Massachusetts Archives Collection, Vol. 180, pp. 416-417.

¹⁰⁶ Scipio to Green Pearce, SD, Vol. 130, p. 60, May 3, 1779.

later. The work of the Fayerweathers and the Lockers, for the first time in Boston's history, left a tangible legacy of *real* property for a rising generation of people of color. Another man from the Fayerweathers' and Lockers' time would help ensure that an *intellectual* legacy would follow as well.

Lancaster Hill

Lancaster Hill, like Prince Holmes, did not leave a direct legacy in the form of real estate or personal property. He, too, ran his own business. Unlike Holmes, though, Lancaster Hill had a traceable family. According to what he told Boston's selectmen in 1762, Lancaster came from Charlestown to Boston as a free man sometime in 1751. Thomas Flucker, perhaps his ex-owner as well as a merchant and town politician, paid Lancaster Hill's surety to the town and he was allowed to stay in Boston when he was investigated by the selectmen in 1756. On April 9, 1755, Lancaster Hill married Margaret, "Servant" to Silvester Gardiner, in King's Chapel.¹⁰⁷

By marrying a slave, Lancaster Hill ran a serious risk. There was a distinct possibility that Margaret's master could give away their children or sell off Margaret. However, it appears that when Lancaster Hill married Margaret, he gained useful connections as well. Though Margaret Hill remained the slave of Sylvester Gardiner for possibly the rest of her life, it seems that Dr. Gardiner was quite amenable to Lancaster Hill's regular presence around the Gardiner house. A physician by trade, Gardiner was also a member of King's Chapel who later moved to Trinity Church. The Hills followed

¹⁰⁷ BTR Vol. 19, p. 47; Thwing database entries; BTR, Vol. 30, p. 14 (Intention); BTR, Vol. 14, p. 355.

the Gardiners, remaining Anglicans all of their life. Lancaster Hill establish his shop front across the street from the Gardiner home, and in 1781, when Dr. Gardiner purchased a new slave named John, Lancaster and Margaret were the witnesses of the slave's baptism at Trinity Church.¹⁰⁸

Identified as a "Lemmon Merchant" by the selectmen in 1762, Lancaster worked as a shopkeeper in his freedom. Around the time he was assessed labor, Lancaster was finally able to establish a permanent store. Standing on Marlborough Street (today's Washington Street), it was located "nearly opposite Doctor Gardiner's" and in the shadow cast by the tall tower of Old South Meeting House. Selling probably whatever he could get a supplier for, at least on one occasion in 1788 Hill advertised in the *Massachusetts Centinel* that his shop offered cheeses "Of an excellent quality, to be sold, by the whole one, or single pound." Hill clearly chose the location of his store to be near his wife and children owned by Dr. Gardiner. However, his location on Marlborough Street also meant he could sell to people travelling on a very busy street. Marlborough Street was one section of road which formed the only road to and from Boston by land. Lancaster Hill struggled through the hard economic times, political turmoil, and even the Revolution and siege of Boston. Evidently through all these disasters, Hill kept his shop open well into the 1790s.¹⁰⁹

Lancaster Hill was fortunate in that Dr. Gardiner apparently never sold Hill's children or spouse. Nevertheless, the realities of infant mortality affected the Hills all the

¹⁰⁸ See Thwing database for church membership; Trinity Church Records, p. 65, retrieved via NEHGS Boston Church Records Electronic Database.

¹⁰⁹ BTR, Vol. 19, p. 195; "Cheeses." *Massachusetts Centinel*, April 30, 1788, Vol. 9, Iss. 13, p. 54; "On Friday morning last..." *Boston Gazette*, November 21, 1791, p. 3 – Article states that in 1791 Lancaster Hill had operated his shop for the past 28 years.

same. Their somber burials of their young children were tragic, yet these occasions also confirm that their children remained in Boston with their parents. Lancaster and Margaret welcomed their first child two years after their marriage. Baptized in the name of his father, the first Lancaster Junior died two years later. The Hills buried their firstborn at King's Chapel on September 1, 1759. Two years later, Margaret bore another son, but he died just four months later in infancy. They buried their second Lancaster Junior at King's Chapel on July 23, 1761. The next year the childless couple welcomed a daughter. Named after her mother, the young Margaret was baptized on Christmas Eve 1762. Another daughter, Patience, joined the small family three years later in the fall of 1765. By the end of 1767, the Hills had their fifth and final child. This last child they again named after his father.¹¹⁰

In the summer of 1770, the Hills suffered tragedy yet again when young Margaret died at nine years old. By this time it appears they had left King's Chapel and moved to the newer Trinity Church. Still Anglican in denomination, the first vital record they left at their new church was when they buried their young daughter at Trinity church on July 12, 1770. It was around this time that the tension, unrest, protest, and outright violence of the coming revolution rocked the town of Boston. The rhetoric of freedom, natural rights, and slavery under British tyranny from white revolutionaries was not lost on Bostonians of color. Lancaster Hill struggled to run a shop on Marlborough Street just to get by and provide a future for his wife and children—a wife and children owned by another man. So much of Lancaster Hill's future remained out of his own control. Though it appears

¹¹⁰ King's Chapel Records: First Lancaster Jr. Baptism, Sept. 1757, p. 53; Burial, p. 264; Second Lancaster Jr., reads "Lancashire", p. 266; Margaret Baptism Dec. 24, 1762, p. 70; Patience Baptism Oct. 25, 1765, p. 79; Third Lancaster Jr. Baptism Dec. 16, 1767, p. 88.

that Sylvester Gardiner was a very agreeable master, the fate of Lancaster Hill's children and wife was in Dr. Gardiner's hands, not Hill's. The death of his first three children left only his youngest daughter and son to carry on a legacy. Would they be able to live a better life while slavery still existed all around them? By the early 1770s, Lancaster Hill began to meet and discuss with other men of color the nature of their condition, their families, and the issue of slavery and the legal subordination that confronted people of color everywhere. One of these colleagues was a recently freed slave named Prince Hall.¹¹¹

The accomplishments of Prince Hall are numerous and well known. There are scores of short biographies and histories of the visionary leader and founder of black freemasonry, however many of these writings are problematically reliant on other secondary claims and myths formed over the past 200 years. Nevertheless, the most authoritative accounts of Prince Hall's life agree that Hall was enslaved in Boston, that he worked as a leather dresser, and that his master manumitted him sometime around 1770. Like Lancaster Hill, Hall's life was consumed by slavery. Though they were free men themselves, the system of laws promoting slavery and segregation destroyed any notion of freedom for people of color. It is not clear when Lancaster Hill began his association with Prince Hall, but by 1777 Lancaster Hill took part in an event which firmly established his relationship with Hall. This relationship would continue for the rest of Lancaster Hill's life.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Burial reads "Peggy." Trinity Church Records, p. 227, accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records database.

¹¹² Sidney Kaplan & Emma Nogrady Kaplan, "Prince Hall: Organizer," *The Black Presence in the Era of the America Revolution* (Amherst, Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press: 1989), pp. 202-214.

By the spring of 1776, Boston was slowly recovering from the long eleven-month siege. With British forces evacuated from Boston, the last vestiges of royal control ended in Massachusetts. Just months later, the beleaguered town of Boston heard the Declaration of Independence read aloud for the first time from the balcony of the Old State House. The principles enshrined in the document were not lost on Hill, Hall, and the other men of color who wished for an end to human bondage. The Declaration gave a purpose to the Revolution and set forth a belief that all men were created equal in the newly created nation. Yet for men like Lancaster Hill, everyone that mattered in his life remained decidedly unequal because of their birth. That winter, as people remained indoors to stay warm, Hill joined with Prince Hall and five other men of color to draft a plea to the revolutionary government of Massachusetts. If this Revolution was for freedom, then they wanted it too. The petition they produced made distinct use of language taken directly from the Declaration of Independence:

The petition of a great number of Negroes who are detained in a state of Slavery, in the Bowels of a free & Christian Country—
Humbly shewing—
That your Petitioners Apprehend that they have in Common with all other Men, *a natural and unalienable right to that freedom which the great Parent of the Universe hath bestowed equally on all mankind*, and which they have Never forfeited [sic] by any compact or agreement whatever...[Italics added for emphasis]

The men submitted this petition to the Massachusetts legislature meeting in the very same building from where the Declaration of Independence was read. At first there was a

This chapter, like many biographies of Prince Hall, relies heavily on other secondary sources and claims. The work of the Kaplans is frustratingly not footnoted, but at least they provide a list of sources at the back of the volume on pp. 289-290. Only a few sources are primary documents. Since the publishing of this book by the Kaplans, a flood of webpage histories about Prince Hall have contributed to the confusion and reiteration of unverifiable stories and claims. Prince Hall's manumission records do exist, however, and are found within the Notorial Records of Ezekiel Price, 1756-1789, housed at the Boston Athenaeum.

glimmer of hope. The petition encouraged members of the revolutionary House of Representatives to create a draft bill that promised to bring an end to slavery. But the bill ultimately died in the legislature, never becoming law.¹¹³

Five years after Lancaster Hill drafted and signed the failed 1777 petition, his wife Margaret died. On May 20, 1782, Lancaster Hill buried his wife of twenty seven years. Throughout their entire time together, it appears that Margaret Hill remained the slave of Dr. Sylvester Gardiner. Had she lived a few years longer, it was a distinct possibility that she would have finally experienced a brief period of freedom. Indeed, Margaret died just as the institution of slavery began to crumble under the new Constitution of Massachusetts. Through legal precedents established by court rulings under the new constitution, slavery became, at last, a legally untenable institution in Massachusetts during the 1780s. Gradually, slaves left their masters and ventured out on their own. Regrettably, not all of these recently freed slaves were properly prepared to support themselves. Many would struggle in almshouses and wander without a home for years. Furthermore, because of skin color and racial background, prejudice and the risk of re-enslavement loomed ominously.¹¹⁴

Lancaster Hill was now the only parent to sixteen-year-old Patience and fourteen-year-old Lancaster Junior. Even though it appeared that slavery was disappearing and his children would be free men and women of color, Lancaster Hill still feared for their future. Following the death of his wife, Hill focused greater energy on social activism and

¹¹³ Massachusetts Archives Collection, Vol. 212, p. 132.

¹¹⁴ Burial record reads “Mary Wife of Lancaster Hill,” however this is very similar to an abbreviated “Marg.” and Lancaster Hill does not have any record of remarrying anyone else. For brief memory of the end of slavery in Massachusetts, see Belknap’s response to George St. Tucker in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, Series 1, Volume 4, (Boston: 1795), page 203.

organization. Working under the leadership of Prince Hall, Hill became a member of Hall's African Lodge of freemasons, and collaborated in the drafting of more petitions. The work of men like Hill hoped to make the lives of his children significantly better, brighter, and more secure.¹¹⁵

Ten years after the failed attempt to petition for the end of slavery, slavery was finally beginning to disappear in Massachusetts. Yet the realities of prejudice and the disadvantages that people of color still endured troubled men like Lancaster Hill. Looking to fix the situation themselves, Hill joined a committee of eleven others, including Prince Hall, to draft a plan. Formulating their plan as a petition to the Massachusetts legislature for financial support, the men made their case that if they were ever to live in true freedom in Massachusetts, they would have to relocate “where we shall live among our equals, and be more comfortable and happy, than we can be in our present situation...” Petitioners like Lancaster Hill felt, after much reflection and discussion, that “to return to Africa, our native country...” would give them a better future. As they explained their intentions, though, they framed the request in a way that was entirely American in understanding:

This leads us humbly to propose the following plan to the consideration of this honourable Court. The soil of our native country is good, and produces the necessaries of life in great abundance. There are large tracts of uncultivated lands, which, if proper application were made for them, it is presumed, might be obtained, and would be freely given for those to settle upon, who shall be disposed to return to them. When this shall be effected by a number of Blacks...they who are disposed to go and settle there shall form themselves into a civil society, united by a political constitution, in which they shall agree. And those who are disposed, and

¹¹⁵ William H. Grimshaw, *Official History of Freemasonry among the Colored People in North America* (New York: Broadway Publishing Co, 1903; Reprint: New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), pp. 77-83, particularly pp. 81-82 for transcription of 1788 petition.

shall be though qualified, shall unite, and be formed into a religious society, or christian church; and have one or more blacks organized as their pastors or Bishops: And being thus formed, shall remove to Africa, and settle on said lands.

To the authors and signers of the petition, it sounded like a promising new beginning. If they could simply live where they could finally be accepted and rebuild their own society and government, then they and their children could at last truly be free. Yet they did not realize just how American they were. By wishing to form a self-reliant agrarian and Christian society under the system of their own republic, these men wished to carry Manifest Destiny on to another continent, and not actually revert to the ways of their ancestors. The legislature accepted their petition, but nothing further came of it. The idea and hope of re-colonizing African Americans back to Africa continued to be considered and debated for the next several decades. Nevertheless, this particular program never became a reality.¹¹⁶

Yet even if these people of color were more American than they realized, their color and situation in life still left them dangerously vulnerable. The events of the next year illustrated just how unprotected they were. In February 1788, a ship's captain lured three free men of color aboard his vessel docked in Boston with promises of work. Once he had them aboard, the captain kidnapped and forcibly transported the men south to be sold into slavery. Outraged, Lancaster Hill, Prince Hall, and twenty one others produced and signed a petition that demanded justice and protection. Appalled at the "inhuman and cruel treatment that three of our brethren free citizens of the town of Boston...lately

¹¹⁶ Massachusetts Archives, Unenacted Legislation, House document #2358; Also in Kaplan & Kaplan, *The Black Presence in the Era of the American Revolution* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989), pp. 206-209

received,” the petitioners demanded to know from their government if they were to be “treated in the same manner by the same sort of men?” Lancaster Hill undoubtedly feared for his own children’s future when he helped formulate the petition. What good was freedom if it was not be protected? This time their activism proved to be a success—the Massachusetts government negotiated the freedom of the kidnapped men and passed a law which made the slave trade illegal in Massachusetts.¹¹⁷

Hill remained active in the protection of the rights of people of color through his continued membership in the African Lodge of freemasons until the time of his death. His association with Prince Hall’s Masonic lodge signified his devotion to the cause of a better life for himself, his peers, and his children. In 1791, the African Lodge decided to assume the responsibilities of a greater “Grand Lodge” to serve as the central authority for other African Lodges in North America. On June 24, 1791 at the Grand Lodge’s, inaugural meeting, the members appointed Lancaster Hill to the office and title of “Grand Sword Bearer.”¹¹⁸

Just four months later, tragedy struck Hill. Early in the morning of November 18, 1791, a neighboring house caught fire on Marlborough Street. “It communicated to *Lancaster Hill’s* house,” *The Argus* reported, further commenting that Hill was “a worthy Black.” Citizens rushed to the fire and worked quickly to pull down neighboring structures to prevent the fire’s spread. An engine arrived to help douse the flames. The town was spared a destructive conflagration. However the blaze completely destroyed

¹¹⁷ Kaplan & Kaplan, pp. 209-210.

¹¹⁸ Grimshaw, *Official History...*, pp 81-82. Grimshaw included text of petition. Petition can be found in records of the Mass. General Court and the Massachusetts Historical Society has a handwritten copy from the Jeremy Belknap papers online: http://www.masshist.org/database/viewer.php?old=1&item_id=710; Grimshaw, *Official History*, pp. 84-85 discusses the creation of the Grand Lodge and lists the officers.

Lancaster Hill's home and shop. *The Argus* blamed the fire on other men of color who were "herding and carousing" in the house next door. The *Boston Gazette*, reporting the event three days later, also blamed men of color who were "carousing" for causing the fire. However it is interesting that this paper also juxtaposed these "carousing" blacks with Lancaster Hill, himself a man of color. The *Boston Gazette* commented that Hill was "a black man of repute," who sadly lost his long-operating store in the fire. Lancaster Hill slowly rebuilt his store following the blaze, likely receiving the assistance of his son and fellow Masonic brothers to recover from such a devastating loss.¹¹⁹

As Lancaster Hill struggled to recover from the terrible fire, he had two occasions to be a proud parent in 1793. On July 21, 1793, his son Lancaster Jr. married a woman named Cloe Leonard. Just months later on November 3, his daughter Patience also married, joining with a man named James Anderson. Both ceremonies took place at Trinity Church. Adding to the joy in the family, Lancaster Hill became a grandfather when his daughter-in-law Cloe gave birth to a girl. The family baptized the infant on May 4, 1794, christening her with the same name as her grandmother—Margaret. The moment was significant for the family that was once dominated by slavery. In fact, young Margaret represented something wonderful and promising: she would live her whole life without knowing slavery in Massachusetts.¹²⁰

However, the birth of this young granddaughter proved a challenge for the family. The health of Lancaster the senior was in decline due to advancing age. With another

¹¹⁹ *The Argus*, November 18, 1791, p. 3; *The Boston Gazette*, November 21, 1791, p. 3. Accessed via NewsBank's America's Historical Newspapers.

¹²⁰ Both marriages are in Trinity Church Records, p. 199; Baptism of Margaret Hill, p. 108. Accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records database.

mouth to feed, the Hill family was struggling to get by after suffering the loss of the store just three years prior. Two months after the birth of Margaret, Lancaster Hill submitted a petition to the court of General Sessions of the Peace and the selectmen of Boston to be able to sell alcohol at his rebuilt shop:

The Petition of Lank Lancaster Hill Shopkeeper—
Humbly sheweth—

That by sickness & other misfortunes & difficulties...and having a Family to support, he is under apprehensions that instead of paying considerable Taxes as he has done for many Years past he may himself become a public charge, unless the compassion of your Honors is extended to him. Your petitioner therefore humbly pray[s], he may be licensed to retail spirituuous Liquors at his Shop in Marlborough street, which will increase his present business...

[Signed] Lancaster Hill

The General Sessions and the selectmen of Boston ultimately approved Lancaster Hill's petition. Sadly, this assistance would not prevent further hardship for the family.¹²¹

One year after the birth of young Margaret, Lancaster Hill's only living son and father of his grandchild died at the age of 27. The family buried Lancaster Hill Junior at Trinity Church on June 2, 1795. The next year, after a long life and over forty years in freedom, the aging patriarch of the family passed away. Friends and family buried the senior Lancaster Hill at Trinity Church on September 15, 1796. The minister of Trinity Church estimated Hill was about 83 years old when he died.¹²²

From 1751 through 1796, Hill was legally free. Unlike so many other men and women of color, he spent over forty years as a free man—far longer than the average of his peers. Yet even in freedom, Lancaster Hill's life was always controlled by slavery.

¹²¹ Petition of Lancaster Hill, July 7, 1794, Suffolk Files # 95567.

¹²² Lancaster Jr. Burial, p. 253. Reads 28 years old, however his baptism places his birthday later in the year; Lancaster Hill Burial, p. 254.

His wife and children remained the property of someone else for most of his life. The rights he enjoyed as a free man of color likewise fell far short of those of his white counterparts. Joining in movements and organizations such as the African Lodge, Hill strove to make the future of his children and grandchild a better one. By struggling to end slavery, assisting others, and petitioning for opportunities and legal protections, Hill played a role in empowering and organizing future generations of color. What became of his daughter Patience, his daughter-in-law Cloe, or his granddaughter Margaret is a mystery. Records are not immediately clear about what happened to them. Their financial fortunes were extremely uncertain following the death of the family patriarch. Yet because of the actions of that patriarch, there was more hope for people of color living in Boston than ever before. Though intangible, the legacy that Hill contributed was an intellectual one—leaving established social and political organizations that gave a voice and identity for an entire racial group in Boston.

The next generation would carry on in the footsteps of the Hills, the Fayerweathers, and the Lockers. By merging the tangible legacy of real property with the intellectual legacy of social and political activism, the final generation of eighteenth century Boston would be one that finally completed the foundation for the Beacon Hill neighborhood, and forged a cohesive black identity in Boston.

CHAPTER 5

THE CORNERSTONE GENERATION, 1775 - 1800

Several years before the disaster that befell the Fayerweathers, another man of color joined the ranks of landowners along Belknap Street: Caesar Wendall. Like Scipio Fayerweather and Tobias Locker, he, too, originally came from a background of slavery. The first record mentioning Caesar Wendall's existence is when he, then the slave of a John Wendall, married his wife "Jenny," a free woman of color, at Boston's New North Church on September 19, 1760. Although there are no further records pertaining to Wendall over the following decade, by the late 1760s he must have gained his freedom. Indeed, on January 24, 1771, Caesar Wendall, "a free negro man of Boston...labourer," purchased his own land for £23 6s. 8d. Measuring 59 feet by 115 feet, it was the only parcel of land that lay between the Fayerweather and the Locker holdings on Beacon Hill. As with Scipio Fayerweather and Tobias Locker, it is unclear what Wendall specifically did for a living. Yet he, too, purchased land abutting the long Belknap/Jenner ropewalk. Through hard work, Caesar and Jenny Wendall must have combined their efforts to finally acquire their modest piece land, and they clearly were interested in the location, as two other families of color already called it home. With these three holdings in

immediate proximity, the embryo of a small neighborhood emerged and struggled to mature.¹²³

Unfortunately, the turmoil of the Revolution and the Siege of Boston apparently halted any plans the Wendalls had to construct a home on their plot of land. No evidence exists of any improvements built upon the land. Furthermore, by 1780, it appears that Jenny had passed away. Like so many other couples of color in Boston, there is no evidence that the Wendalls had any children, or, at the very least, any children with whom they were in contact. With advancing age and infirmity, Caesar Wendall was the lone member of his family. He had no choice but to turn to friends to pass on his legacy. On March 8, 1780, Caesar Wendall composed his last will and testament. In it, he bequeathed everything to “my Worthy and Honored Friend Jack Austin of said Boston[,] Shopkeeper.” Wendall also designated Jack Austin the sole executor of his estate. The will entered the Suffolk County Probate Court in late June, 1780. Caesar Wendall had died.¹²⁴

Three years later, in July, 1783, Tobias Locker also grew increasingly ill and infirm with age. The man had been free for almost thirty years by 1783. He had worked hard, survived a Revolution, and accomplished a great deal with his wife Margaret alongside him. But now Locker needed to safeguard his significant assets of real and personal property for future use and enjoyment. With sound mind and determination, Tobias Locker composed his final instructions. First and foremost, Tobias ordered that everything he owned should go to his beloved wife Margaret for the rest of her natural

¹²³ SD, Vol. 118, p. 170; Cesar, neg. ser’v’t to John Wendell Esq. & Jenney free negro, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 372.

¹²⁴ Will of Caesar Wendall, SPR, 79:350; Probate Letter, SPR, 79:350.

life. Following the decease of Margaret, Tobias Locker stipulated that all of their property—the land, the home, and all of their personal items—were to go to a man of color named Boston Smith. Like with Caesar Wendall, the Lockers ultimately turned to friends to carry on their legacy. It was a legacy that the Lockers spent their entire time as free men and women constructing.¹²⁵

This inheritance promised to Boston Smith begs many more questions than it answers. Indeed, it can only be surmised what kind of relationship existed among Boston Smith and the Lockers. Perhaps Margaret, like Tobias, was quickly advancing in age and infirmity. Tobias Locker’s designation of Boston Smith as the inheritor of the Locker estate following Margaret’s death suggests a confidence in a younger and healthier man to carry on the legacy of the Locker family. Nevertheless, because Tobias named Margaret the executrix of the estate, Tobias Locker still believed in Margaret’s ability to handle all affairs in the meantime. Though Tobias determined in his will what would ultimately become of his property, Margaret would settle and manage the immediate concerns of the estate. Thus, it appears Tobias and Margaret Locker agreed that once they both passed, their legacy would carry on to a new generation. Among the witnesses to the will, Boston Smith’s wife Cloe made her mark on the document to confirm that the action was of Locker’s own free will. Just weeks later, the document entered the probate court, indicating the end of Tobias Locker’s life.¹²⁶

Though many details are difficult to determine, the probate records of both Caesar Wendall and Tobias Locker illustrate how individuals needed to rely on a web of vital

¹²⁵ SPR, Vol. 82, pp. 637 & 650.

¹²⁶ SPR, Vol. 82, pp. 637 & 650; BTR, Vol. 30, p. 69.

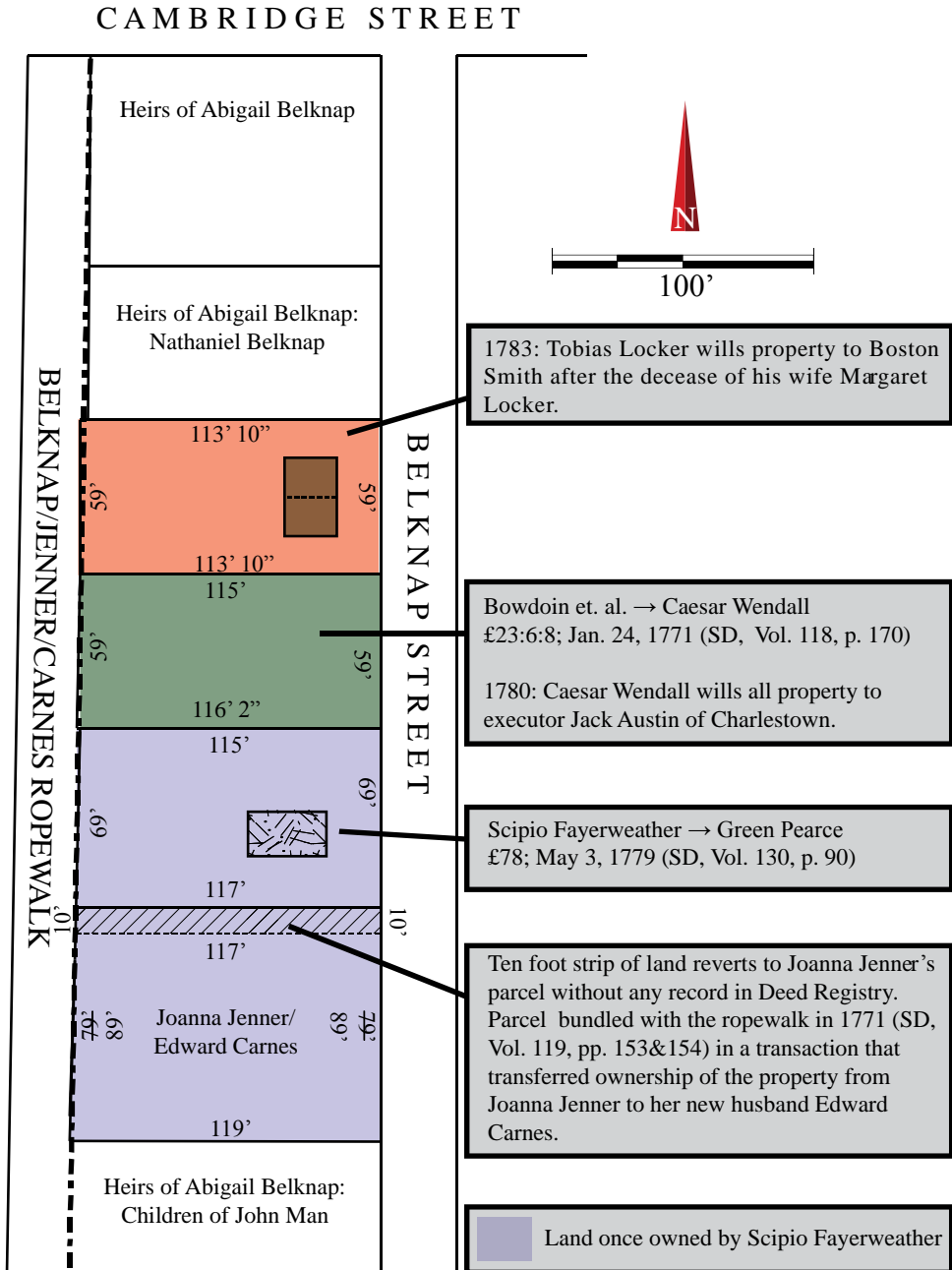
community relationships. In the case of the Lockers, it appears that Tobias and Margaret found new neighbors and allies in Boston and Cloe Smith. Scipio and Venus Fayerweather, if they were still living in Boston, would have been just as aged as the Lockers. Though the Fayerweathers lost everything following the tragedy which befell them, it would have been too risky to have named either as a beneficiary of the estate. If Scipio or Venus Fayerweather died before Margaret passed away, the entire estate could have been lost forever. The Smiths, it would seem, could expect to live longer and make use of the estate for another generation, if not for future generations to come. Furthermore, the Locker home consisted of two units, and it appears distinctly possible that Boston and Cloe boarded in the second tenement, possibly even caring for Margaret in her advanced age. Indeed, if the Smiths were not already living in the same tenement that Scipio Fayerweather helped construct in the 1760s, records confirm the Smiths were certainly living and raising their children on the land of the Lockers by the late 1780s.

Though the traceable story of the Wendalls proves far more short-lived than that of the Lockers, there are also interconnecting clues about the Wendalls' important web of relationships. When Caesar Wendall composed his will, none other than the freemason and activist Lancaster Hill served as a witness to the event. This seemingly passive act connects the brief history of the Wendall family to the story to Lancaster and Margaret Hill, and thus to a larger community which included the nascent African Lodge. Though the Wendalls, like so many other couples of color before them, did not have time on their side, by passing on their legacy and work the Wendalls gave others a chance for a better life. Indeed, the sole beneficiary of the Wendall estate, Jack Austin, eventually divided

and sold the Wendall land. The first sale conveyed the northerly half to a man of color named Prince Watts. Under the terms of the second sale, the southerly half passed to Boston Smith—the same Boston Smith who inherited the Locker estate. Through different methods, both the Smiths and Wattses built upon these two bequests to advance not only their own lives, but also assist others in the quest for a home and a close-knit community of which they could be a part. They would lay the cornerstone of black Beacon Hill.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Will of Caesar Wendall, SPR, Vol. 79, p. 350; Probate Letter, SPR, Vol. 79, p. 350. Later deed transactions involving Wendall's land do not mention improvements upon it. Austin to Watts, SD, Vol. 156, p.152 and Austin to Smith, SD, Vol. 161, p. 6.

Figure 10: Map of Belknap Street, ca. 1783



Boston Smith

On March 6, 1775, as Masonic histories retell, fifteen men approached a group of British soldiers garrisoned in Boston. The details of the event vary by retellings, however all the accounts agree on this: The British soldiers stationed in town were members of a Masonic lodge, and the fifteen men who approached them were all men of color interested in joining the fraternal organization. Grimshaw, in his history of African American freemasonry, claims the fifteen approached the soldiers at General Gage's headquarters. Such a claim seems unlikely, considering the Master Mason initiating the men appears to have been a Sergeant, not a commissioned officer. The Grand Historian of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, Raymond Coleman, believes the fifteen actually met for the initiation on Castle Island in Boston Harbor inside a fort known as Castle William. However, the Sergeant and Master Mason, J.B. Batt, was believed to be a member of the 38th Regiment of Foot—a unit which was stationed inside Boston itself. Wherever the ceremony took place, the date March 6, 1775 is agreed upon. The presumed leader of the fifteen was Prince Hall—the man who would become the founding father of African American freemasonry. Hall and the other fourteen men, “Cyrus Jonbus, Bensten Slinger, Thomas Sanderson, Prince Taylor, Cato Spear, Boston Smith, Peter Best, Fortin Howard, Prince Rees, John Cantin, Peter Freeman, Benjamin Tiber, Buff [Cuff] Bufform and Richard Lilly,” were all initiated and admitted as freemasons during that fateful meeting. This is considered to be the first time African Americans became freemasons in North America, and to this day, the event is seen as the legendary story of creation for Prince Hall Masonic lodges that operate across

the nation. A year later, before the British army evacuated Boston, Prince Hall and the fourteen were given permission to continue meeting as a lodge, convening at Hall's leatherdressing business on Water Street in Boston.¹²⁸

This event is the earliest mention of Boston Smith's name. A year later, on November 14, 1776, Boston and Cloe married. Both had neither the name of a master nor surnames attached to their first names. The Baptist minister who joined the couple in marriage, Samuel Stillman, only noted that they were "Negros." Given the preponderance of slavery in the decades prior, it is probable that both Boston and Cloe came from a background of slavery. Nevertheless, in the turmoil of the Revolution, it appears that both had managed to find freedom by the time they married and started a family. As they settled down together in the town recovering from a siege, they worked to build their own lives together in freedom. In 1780, Boston Smith appeared in a tax assessor's "Taking Book." He was assessed a poll tax—due of all able-bodied men over 16—but nothing else. The Smith household was assessed in the ninth ward of Boston at this time. This places them in the historic South End of Boston, south of King (today's State) Street,

¹²⁸ Raymond Coleman, "Prince Hall History Education Class" (2007), <http://www.princehall.org/history.html>; Grimshaw, *Official History...*, pp. 71 - 72; Most Worshipful Prince Hall Grand Lodge, *Proceedings of the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Granting of Warrant 459* (Boston: Franklin Press, 1885), p. 25. The story of the initiation of the first African American members into freemasonry has been told and retold in Masonic circles. There is considerable variance in the details, and some of the claims are completely false. All agree on the date, the number and the identities of the original fifteen men, and the master who initiated them—J. B. Batt. Grimshaw states that the fifteen met the Masons at the quarters of General Gage on Copp's Hill. Gage's quarters were not on Copp's Hill, and the claim that such a meeting would be in Gage's own quarters seems impossible. Other accounts, such as the one written by the Grand Historian of the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons, Raymond Coleman, claims that the fifteen men met the Masons in Castle William on Castle Island in Boston Harbor. The biggest challenge to this claim, however, is the fact that the Worshipful Master J.B. Batt is believed to have been a soldier in the 38th Regiment of Foot. This unit was garrisoned in Boston proper during the occupation and not Castle William—only the 64th Regiment of Foot was garrisoned in Castle William during the siege. (See David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) Appendix E.) Nevertheless, it is not impossible that Batt took leave to go to Castle William for the meeting.

somewhere in the vicinity of the old South Meeting House. The next mention of the Smiths was in Tobias Locker's 1783 will, where Boston was named as a beneficiary of the estate, and Cloe Smith served as a witness. The next year, Boston Smith appeared again in a tax "taking book." This time, the family was in the seventh ward, which included the north slope of Beacon Hill. Smith was now liable not only for his poll tax, but also for the value of a home—the Lockers' home that Scipio Fayerweather had helped construct in the mid 1760s. This would be the place that the Smith family called home for the rest of their lives. It was in this home upon Beacon Hill where the Smiths welcomed at least three children into their lives: Peter, Paul, and Margaret—perhaps naming young Margaret in the memory of Margaret Locker. Though no baptism or birth records can be located, the three children were all born sometime during the 1780s according to later court documents.¹²⁹

Already, the personal lives of the Smith family were a far cry from those of people of color who had lived before them. Though Boston and Cloe were probably slaves at birth, they lived their married life in freedom. They also raised their children in freedom, and they lived together in a home they eventually came to own. It appears that Boston and Cloe Smith were able to raise their children without the interference of a slave master and without any significant intervention from town officials. Furthermore, unlike Scipio Fayerweather, Tobias Locker, and Caesar Wendall, who were each "labourers" and practiced semiskilled crafts at best, Boston Smith was skilled in the trade

¹²⁹ Boston & Cloe, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 69; Bostonian Society, *Assessors' "Taking Books" of the Town of Boston, 1780* (Boston: 1912), p. 34; Boston Assessor's Taking Books, 1784, Ward 7, Bound Ms. From Boston Public Library Rare Books and Manuscripts Collection; Guardianship of Peter, Paul, and Margaret Smith, SPR Vol. 96, p. 108.

of boat building. By having a trade, Boston Smith possessed far greater earning potential than his predecessors. Between possessing a trade, a home, land, and an intact family, Boston Smith could better provide his family with stability. It appears that he used his situation for the benefit of others as well.¹³⁰

In addition to raising and providing for a family, Smith remained a leading member of the African Lodge of freemasons. After Prince Hall, Boston Smith, and thirteen other men of color formed their African Lodge in the midst of the American Revolution, they failed to gain acceptance from their white Masonic peers. Finally, following the end of the Revolutionary War, the fledgling lodge appealed directly to the Grand Lodge of England in 1784. The Grand Lodge of England granted them a charter, which arrived in Boston in 1787. “Know ye,” the charter stated “that we, at the humble petition of our right trusty and well beloved brethren, Prince Hall, Boston Smith, Thomas Saunderson, and several other brethren residing in Boston...do hereby constitute the said brethren into a Regular Lodge of Free and Accepted Masons...” The charter installed Prince Hall as the Master of the Lodge, and Boston Smith as second in command with the title “Senior Warden.”¹³¹

Notwithstanding such gains of personal freedom and real estate, inequality and racism permeated the lives of people of color living in Boston. Despite the fact that they were free parents, Boston and Cloe undoubtedly worried about the future and security of their children. Their concerns were much like the concern of Lancaster and Margaret Hill. Yet even with land, a man of color like Boston Smith still could not freely enjoy the

¹³⁰In all deed transactions, such as SD, Vol. 161, p. 6, Boston Smith identified himself as a “Boat Builder.”

¹³¹Grimshaw, *Official History...*, pp. 77-78.

legal rights of citizenship that his white counterparts could exercise. As a result, in the winter of 1786/7, Boston Smith joined Lancaster Hill, Prince Hall, and nine other men of color in forming the committee which produced the petition that asked the Massachusetts government for support in their plan of removing back to their ancestral land of Africa. As discussed above with Lancaster Hill, Boston Smith, too, contributed his feelings and thoughts in this heartfelt request. The petitioners indeed hoped that they could “live among our equals [in Africa], and be more comfortable and happy, than we can be in our present situation...” The legislature failed to take any action on the petition, but this would not discourage Boston Smith from ensuring that he, his family, and his neighbors in his community gained greater comfort and happiness while remaining in a larger society which did not regard them as equal to whites. Indeed, when Prince Hall organized his African Lodge into a regional Grand Lodge in 1791, Smith was selected as “Senior Grand Steward,” reflecting recognition for his long-time leadership within both the organization and the community.¹³²

Though his residence on Beacon Hill was some distance from the waterfront where he likely practiced his trade of boat building, Boston Smith’s connection to Belknap Street only strengthened with every passing year. Not only did Boston Smith inherit the Locker home and land sometime in the 1780s, he also helped acquire land for the benefit of others. Indeed, on May 14, 1787, Boston Smith purchased a plot of land just to the south of his own—the southerly half of the land that Caesar Wendall had bequeathed to his friend Jack Austin. Austin and his wife Sylvia, who had since relocated

¹³² Kaplan & Kaplan, p 205-208; Grimshaw, *Official History...*, p. 84.

their residence and shop to Charlestown, sold Smith the southerly part of Caesar Wendall's land for £30. Immediately following the transaction, Smith divided the land into equal eastern and western halves. He sold the western half of the land to a man of color named Cromwell Barnes, a peruke or wig maker, for £21. He also established a two foot passageway that connected this plot of land to Belknap Street, running along the northern edge of the plot purchased from Jack Austin. The eastern half of the land went to another man of color, Britton Balch. The deed transferring the land to Britton Balch, a hatter by trade, did not appear in the Suffolk Registry of Deeds until 1801, and the deed itself was dated August 20, 1793. Despite these discrepancies, Boston Smith clearly had intentions of selling the land to Britton Balch as early as 1787. Smith mentioned in his quitclaim to Cromwell Barnes that the eastern boundary was "on land now sold to Bretton Brown [Balch] there measuring twenty nine feet six inches..." Perhaps Smith gave Balch the use of the land without payment, or in installments, until Balch wished to sell the plot. The final settlement recorded on the deed dated August 20, 1793 stated the transaction price at £25 10s. The next day, on August 21, 1793, Britton Balch sold his half-parcel to Cromwell Barnes for £31—a £6 gain. Boston Smith served as a witness to the transaction, suggesting that Smith's role in the transaction was more than just a passive one. Barnes' purchase of Balch's land reunited the two parcels that formed the southern half of Caesar Wendall's own land. Beyond his relationship concerning the property deeds, Barnes does not appear to have had any connections to the African Lodge or any other social organizations. Balch, however, appears to have had freemasonry ties. Most notably, he signed his name alongside those of Lancaster Hill and Prince Hall in the

1788 petition that demanded that the government of Massachusetts rescue the three male citizens of color who had been kidnapped into slavery. This connection may explain why Smith may have been so willing to work closely with Balch to obtain, hold, and sell the land over the course of six years. Boston Smith would transact sales of land again with other men to whom he had close freemasonry ties.¹³³

In addition to the transactions involving the land once held by Caesar Wendall, Boston Smith also engaged in transactions involving the land he had inherited from Tobias Locker. Though the records do not indicate when Margaret Locker passed away, by 1789 Boston and Cloe Smith possessed full ownership of the Locker property and tenement. Smith ultimately decided to divide the property in half. On December 17, 1789, he sold the northerly half of the Locker property and all rights to the northerly unit of the building to Samuel Bean for £49 10s. This was the same tenement that the Lockers had called home for some two decades, and was the same building that Scipio Fayerweather helped construct. Bean, a signer of the 1787 petition to re-colonize Africa that Boston Smith, Lancaster Hill, and Prince Hall—among others—composed, would own the land and his half of the tenement into the nineteenth century.¹³⁴

Four years later, Boston Smith again subdivided his land holdings. He apportioned a 40 foot by 80 foot piece of land on the southwest corner of his lot to a man named Hamlet, or sometimes “Hamblet,” Earl. Earl was yet another signer of the African

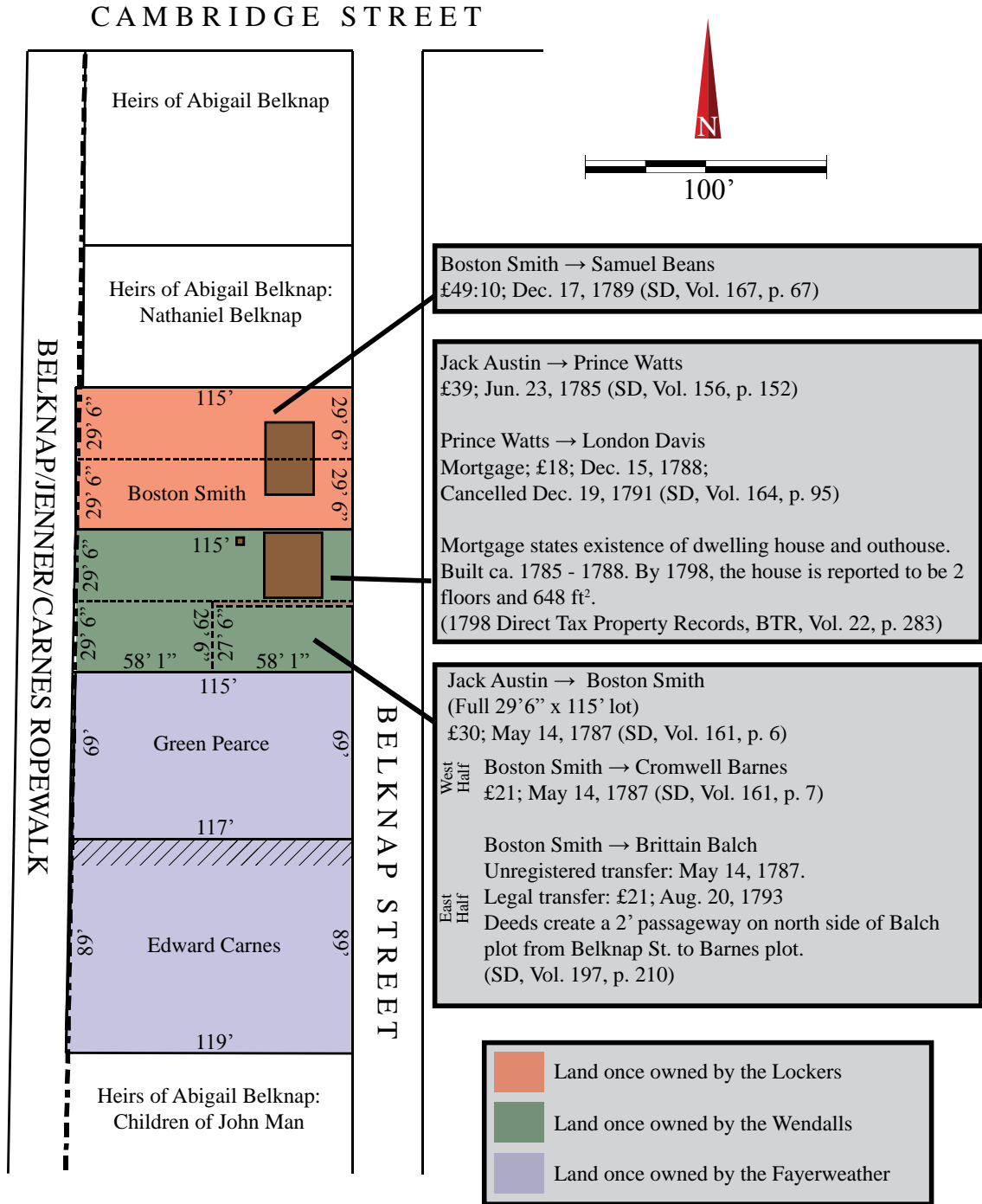
¹³³ Austin to Smith, SD, Vol. 161, p. 6; Smith to Barnes, SD, Vol. 161, p. 7; Smith to Balch, SD, Vol. 197, p. 210; Balch to Cromwell Barnes, SD, Vol. 178, p. 9; Cromwell Barnes to Ezekiel Barnes, SD, Vol. 178, p. 256; Petition of 1788 can be found in Grimshaw, *Official History*... p. 82.

¹³⁴ Smith to Bean, SD, Vol. 167, p. 67. The name in the deed is “James” Bean, however all other sources pointing to the same plot of land state “Samuel” Bean or Beans. This is likely a misprinting in the Deed Registry; Africa petitioner names, see Kaplan & Kaplan pp. 206 & 207, or Massachusetts Archives, Unenacted Legislation, House Document #2358.

re-colonization petition, and on April 17, 1793, he purchased the land from Boston Smith for £21. The deed also gave Hamlet Earl an easement of unimpeded access to and from the plot to Belknap Street through Boston Smith's land. Though this act was the last direct land transaction involving Boston Smith, the property that went through his hands from 1787 through 1793 would continue to be developed, subdivided, and shared with other families of color. Smith's actions would provide homes and build a community for men, women, and their children of African descent. Yet even though Smith was integral in these changes, those who purchased land from Smith and others who bought their own property adjacent to Smith took their own independent paths and still operated with their own agency. Boston Smith's actions were fundamental in bringing a physical neighborhood from its embryonic form of the previous generation into infancy. It was now a community united by social ties through freemasonry and political activism, and it was anchored to physical space through landownership along Belknap Street. Men such as Hamlet Earl and Cromwell Barnes would likewise further develop and improve the land obtained from Boston Smith. They subdivided land and homes that they constructed for the benefit of friends and family.¹³⁵

¹³⁵Smith to Earl, SD, Vol. 175, p. 196; Kaplan & Kaplan pp. 206 & 207.

Figure 11: Belknap Street, ca. 1789



Prince Watts

When Boston Smith purchased the southerly half of the old Wendall lot, the northerly half of the land had already been sold to another man of color named Prince Watts. Though Smith sold off his piece of land connected to the Wendalls, he would live and raise his family on the old Locker land that abutted Prince Watts' land to the south. Though they would remain immediate neighbors along Belknap Street, Prince Watts chose a distinctly different path compared to Boston Smith, but aimed for a similar goal: stability, freedom, and a future for his family and friends. Watts' background prior to the 1780s is difficult to determine. Like others of his generation, he, too, probably came from slavery. A possible marriage involving Prince Watts was the joining of "Prince, servant of Cap. Watts" with "Zilpa [servant] of Cap. Freeman" on March 12, 1766 at the Brattle Square Church. Whether or not this was the same Prince Watts, Watts was definitely a free man in Boston by 1780. Indeed, he appeared in the ninth ward of Boston in the tax books for that year. He was liable only for his poll tax. Four years later in 1784, he was assessed for half of a house in addition to his poll tax in the neighboring tenth ward of Boston. This still placed Watts in the South End of Boston. The next year, Prince Watts bought his own parcel of land on Belknap Street once owned by Caesar Wendall from Jack Austin. He was identified as a soapboiler in the deed. It would be on this land that he began to build a home and operate his business for himself and his family. By this point in time, documents suggest that Prince Watts was married to a woman of color named Amelia. Together, they had one son, Isaac. By 1788, the Watts family had their own home. Nevertheless, the expenses of building such a home evidently strained the family's

finances. In December 1788 Watts made an agreement with a man of color and fellow soapboiler named London Davis to mortgage his land and home for the sum of £18. Two years after the agreed loan took effect, Watts fulfilled the terms of his mortgage with Davis, paying £22 4s. 9d.¹³⁶

The relationship that developed between the Watts family and London Davis was apparently something akin to the relationship between the Lockers and the Fayerweathers. When one associate was short of money, the other lent the needed cash through a mortgage. But the relationship went deeper than financial aid. Though little evidence about London Davis' background prior to the mortgage agreement appears in available records, the surname "Davis" would become increasingly intertwined with the surname Watts with each passing year. Indeed, on June 13, 1796, Prince and Amelia Watts celebrated their son Isaac's marriage. At the nearby West Church Isaac married a woman of color identified in the church records as Cloe White. However, in subsequent records at Trinity Church, each of their baptized children was identified as the offspring of "Isaac Watts by Cloe *Davis* his wife [*italics added*]." It is unclear whether or not Cloe was related to London Davis. Nonetheless, other individuals with the Davis surname would continually stay in close proximity with the Watts family over the next decade.¹³⁷

Unlike Boston Smith, Prince Watts apparently did not join the African Lodge or other similar fraternal organizations. He was, however, quite active in Trinity Church.

¹³⁶ Prince & Zilpa, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 328; *Assessors' "Taking Books" ... 1780*, p. 35; Boston Assessor's Taking Books, 1784, Ward 10; SD, Vol. 156, p. 152; SD, Vol. 164, p. 95 names Watts' wife as "Arminnear." In Thwing database, Isaac Watts is listed with three daughters. Daughters are named as grandchildren in Prince Watts' will, SPR docket No. 22623. London Davis' profession is identified in Executrix Bond in same probate docket.

¹³⁷ SD, Vol. 164, p. 95; Isaac Watts & Cloe White, BTR, Vol. 30, p. 416; Trinity Church Records, pp. 117 & 125, accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records database.

Attending the same church as Lancaster Hill's family, Prince and Amelia Watts served as witnesses to the baptisms of other individuals of color on numerous occasions. It suggests that the Wattses were active in reaching out to other people of color through religion. In 1786 Prince Watts served as a witness to the baptism of a "Negro adult" named John Harrison. In 1791, the baptism of "Lucinda, adult Negro of Mrs. Jarvis" was witnessed by both Prince and Amelia Watts, and Amelia Watts served as a witness alongside Prince Hall for the baptisms of Joseph Hicks and Elisabeth Hunter, "adult Negroes." On June 29, 1793, Prince Watts received a rather notable distinction in addition to being a witness for the baptism of the young son of Butterfield and Clarissa Scotland. The Butterfields named their son "Prince Watts Scotland," clearly after Prince Watts himself. The next year Prince Watts served as a witness and perhaps a namesake yet again. He witnessed the baptism of "George Watts Allison," son of Plato Allison and Lucy Rea, at Trinity Church on November 9, 1794. Clearly, the Watts family played quite an important role in the lives of these many other families of color. Though not involved in petitions or freemasonry, Prince and Amelia Watts were active in their own community and social circle.¹³⁸

In 1797, Prince and Amelia Watts became grandparents, welcoming the birth and baptism of twin girls Hannah and Tamar Watts. Amelia died the next year and was buried at Trinity Church on August 22, 1798; the minister noted that she was about 46 years old. Two months later, Prince Watts remarried to a woman named Lucy Davis—yet another connection to the Davis surname. They wed at Brattle Square Church on November 29,

¹³⁸ Trinity Church Records, pp. 85, 99, 105, & 109, accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records database.

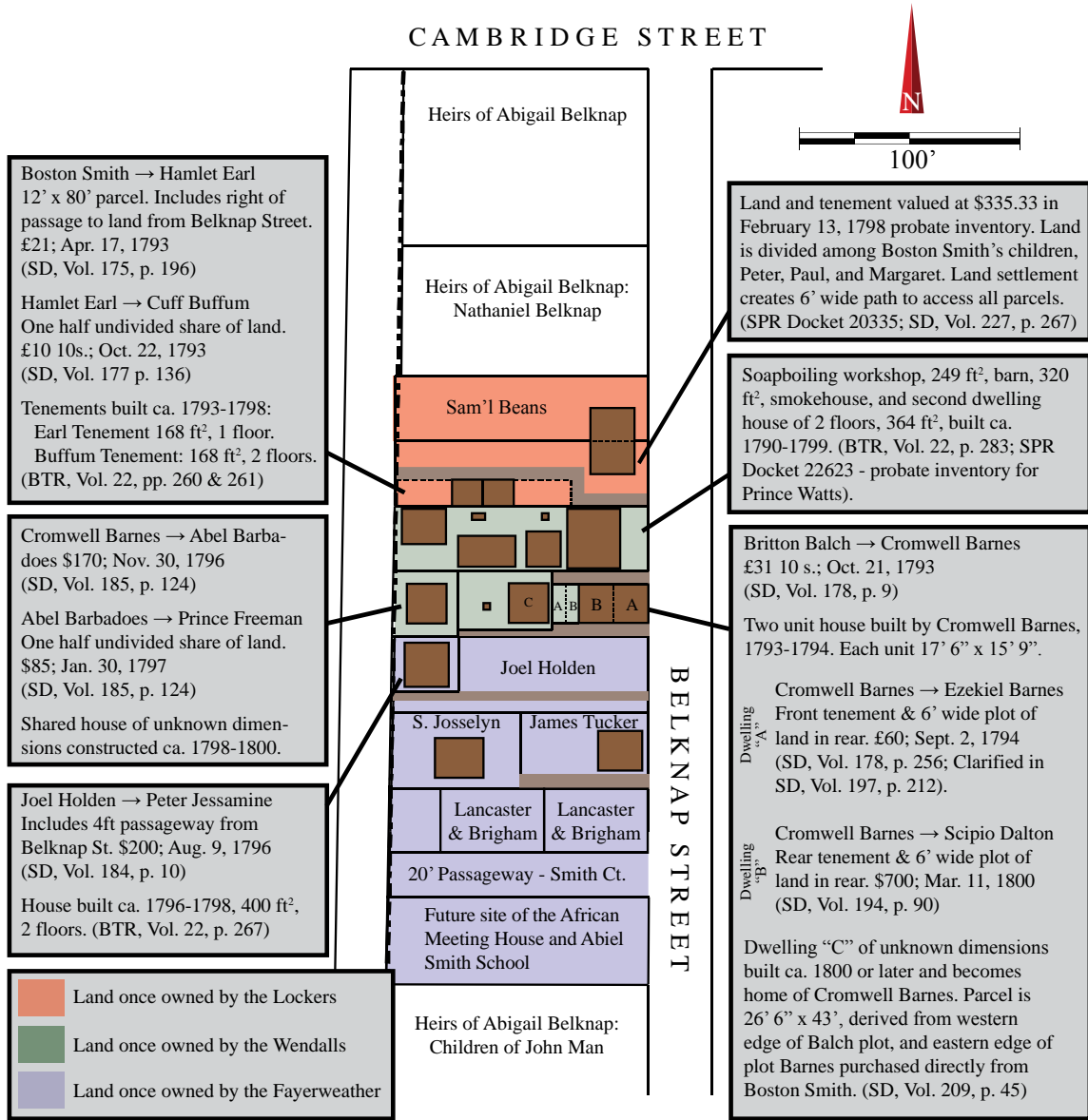
1798. Though the precise relationships among London Davis, Lucy Davis, and Cloe Davis are not clear, the marriage of Prince and Lucy inextricably tied the Davis name to the Watts clan. Later records indicate that another Lucy Davis, a daughter-in-law to Prince Watts, lived in the Watts' household. This younger Lucy must have been the daughter-in-law of Lucy Watts, née Davis, from a previous marriage. This suggests that it was a second marriage for Lucy as well as Prince Watts. Both were also in their late fifties or early sixties when they married. Given these facts, the move to marry was likely driven primarily by a desire to create stability for themselves in old age, and for the benefit of their children and grandchildren. Perhaps Cloe, wife of Prince's son Isaac, was also the daughter of the elder Lucy. Though the existence of London Davis only adds to the confusion of familial relationships, London Davis' appearance in Watts family affairs only further underscores the theory that all the Davises were interrelated, and strongly aligned themselves with the Watts household. Perhaps London was an uncle to the younger Lucy and Cloe, and a brother-in-law to the elder Lucy. Or, perhaps, London and the Davis women all emerged from the same family of slave-owners, and remained bound together through their common experience. The particular complexity of the relationship is not clear, but the marriage of Prince Watts and Lucy Davis bound the two surnames together.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Trinity Church Records, pp. 117 & 256 & Brattle Square Church Records, p. 180, Accessed via NEHGS Boston Church Records database; See Prince Watts' Will, SPR docket No. 22623: Watts' will lists the members of his extended family living under his household that are to keep their rooms for so long as they live; Watts' burial record at Trinity Church in 1806 places his age at 70, therefore he was approximately 62 or 63 at his remarriage. Lucy Davis Watts' burial record at King's Chapel in 1822 places her age at 81, therefore her age was approximately 57 or 58 at the time of her remarriage.

As the Watts family grew in size through the ties of blood and marriage, Prince Watts continued to develop his real estate holdings. After paying off the mortgage to London Davis in 1791, the Watts family added a barn and a workshop for the family soap works operation, as well as a small smokehouse. By 1798, the family had also constructed a second dwelling in the backyard, housing both family members and tenants. At least two households—those of Peter Bayley and Mrs. Bostille—lived in the second house as boarders in 1798. Both appear to be households of color. Two years later in 1800, tax records show that four different heads of households of color lived in the Watts tenements: a ropewalker James Melmoth, a longshoreman Jack Phillips, a laborer Easton Freeman, and a mariner gone to sea named Thomas Bostick. That same year, Isaac and Cloe welcomed another daughter to the family, Jenny. Her birth only underscored the demand for more living space. In the 1798 property valuation, the total real estate held by Prince Watts was valued at \$800—the result of a lifetime of hard work, built upon the work of others a generation before. This amassed estate would house the grandchildren of the Watts family and the Davis family and grant them greater economic stability well into the next century—giving birth to a new black neighborhood upon Beacon Hill.¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ BTR, Vol. 22, p. 283.

Figure 12: Belknap Street, ca. 1800



Black Beacon Hill

As the long and tumultuous eighteenth century finally edged to a close, the world of the Wattses, the Smiths, and other families of color was dramatically different than the world of a generation before, let alone the first generation of the 1700s. Beacon Hill and Belknap Street, no longer a quiet backwater of the town, now became a rapidly urbanizing neighborhood. More families of color moved there to call it home, many settling on the land once owned by the Fayerweathers, the Lockers, and the Wendalls. By bequeathing, inheriting, trading, and developing the land along Belknap Street, two generations constructed a tangible legacy of real property before the end of the 1700s: The first set the base of the foundation, and the second would lay the cornerstone from which a vibrant neighborhood would rise and thrive. Yet the final decade of the eighteenth century also saw an intangible legacy of social and political activism intertwine with tangible real estate holdings. Church membership, Prince Hall's African Lodge, and other organizations such as the African Society tied together different families of color who held varying beliefs about how to live both in the growing community of color within Boston, as well as in the broader society of Boston as a whole.¹⁴¹

In regard to tangible holdings, Cromwell Barnes proved to be one of the most active agents who promoted the further advancement of real estate ownership. After he had already acquired the western half of the land Boston Smith had bought of Jack Austin in 1787, Barnes purchased the complementing eastern half of the land from Brittain

¹⁴¹ See *Laws of the African Society, Instituted at Boston, Anno Domini 1796* (Boston: 1802), <http://www.masshist.org/database/573>.

Balch six years later in 1793. After rejoining the two half-parcels, Barnes began developing and subdividing the land to his own needs. During the ensuing year, Cromwell Barnes constructed a two-unit building on the easternmost portion of his land fronting Belknap Street. By the fall of 1794, Barnes sold one of the tenements to Ezekiel Barnes for £60. Ezekiel owned the front tenement facing Belknap Street, while Cromwell held the tenement in the back. The situation was clarified in a later deed, explaining that Ezekiel Barnes' tenement also included the right to a small six foot by seventeen and a half foot parcel of land in the back of the two-unit building. It is distinctly possible that Ezekiel and Cromwell Barnes were related, but their relationship is not readily apparent in the records. What is known is that Ezekiel Barnes remained a "mariner" by trade while he owned the front tenement on Belknap Street, and he failed to appear in any available tax records following his purchase. This suggests that Ezekiel was out at sea for extended periods of time, and he likely purchased the tenement as a rental property. Cromwell Barnes could have very well managed affairs at home, while Ezekiel received extra income from the rents. Indeed, one of the families placed adjacent to Cromwell Barnes in the 1800 Boston tax records was the family of Butterfield and Clarissa Scotland, boarding in one of the Barnes tenements immediately adjacent to their son's namesake: Prince Watts.¹⁴²

After the construction of the tenements, Cromwell Barnes subdivided his land and sold a plot on the western edge of his holdings. Barnes sold the plot of land to Abel Barbadoes, a man of color, in the November of 1796 for \$170. Two months later, Abel

¹⁴² SD, Vol. 178, p. 9 & p. 256; SD, Vol. 197, p. 212; *Boston, MA: Taking Records, 1800*. (Original Online Database: AmericanAncestors.org, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014.)

Barbadoes sold one undivided half interest of his land to Prince Freeman for exactly half the purchase price. The two men presumably worked together to build the home that they would eventually share and rent to others by 1800. That year, Prince Freeman, Abel Barbadoes and two additional households called the Barbadoes/Freeman tenement home. Both boarding households were headed by men of color—the mariner Isaac Curtis and the servant Casar [sic] Davidson.¹⁴³

While Barbadoes and Freeman built their tenement, Cromwell Barnes looked yet again to development and expansion. Between the Barbadoes and Freeman parcel to the west and the original tenement fronting Belknap Street to the east, Barnes still held ownership to a piece of land approximately 43 feet long. By 1800, it appears that he had constructed a second dwelling in that middle lot. Upon its completion, Barnes sold his old tenement which adjoined to the rear of Ezekiel Barnes' tenement to a man of color named Scipio Dalton. The sale took place on March 11, 1800, for \$700. It included an adjoining six foot by seventeen and a half foot plot of land. The transaction meant that Cromwell Barnes empowered yet another household of color to possess their own home and land. In the course of just twenty years, the empty strip of land once owned by Caesar and Jenny Wendall had now become home to at least seven households of color. Five men of color now owned, for both personal and rental use, pieces of this land.¹⁴⁴

While Cromwell Barnes developed and subdivided property on the land once owned by the Wendalls, Hamlet Earl began to cooperate with another man of color named Cuff Buffum on his land behind the Smith family home. On October 22, 1793,

¹⁴³ SD, Vol. 185, p. 124; *Boston, MA: Taking Records, 1800.*

¹⁴⁴ SD, Vol. 194, p. 90.

Earl sold to Buffum an undivided one-half share of his twelve-by-eighty-foot strip of land. The transaction took place six months after Earl's original purchase of the land from Boston Smith. The agreed-upon price was also exactly half of the original purchase price. By 1798, both Cuff Buffum and Hamlet Earl had each constructed their own small tenements. Hamlet Earl owned his own small one-story unit, while Cuff Buffum owned a two-story unit and lodged with another man of color named Boston Faddy. This cooperation had an astounding effect over just the course of just one decade. From the early 1790s to 1800, the number of landowners of color along Belknap Street grew from five to eleven heads of households. They held not just land, but also improvements upon the land. These buildings housed their own families as well as other boarding families. Beyond these physical connections to Belknap Street were the complementing social ties.¹⁴⁵

Boston Smith, founding member of the African Lodge, first anchored social organizations and activism to the land along Belknap Street. Following his settlement around the year 1784, he drew other freemasons and black activists to live nearby. Cuff Buffum, for example, was a founding member of the African Lodge alongside Prince Hall and Boston Smith in 1775. Later, Cuff Buffum, Hamlet Earl, Boston Faddy, and Samuel Bean—all immediate neighbors to Boston Smith—signed the petition drafted in 1787 asking the Massachusetts legislature for assistance in re-colonizing Africa. Brittan Balch, one-time owner of a parcel of the Wendall land, signed his name alongside those of Lancaster Hill and Prince Hall on the 1788 petition which demanded the end of the

¹⁴⁵ SD, Vol. 175, p. 196; SD, Vol. 177, p. 136; BTR, Vol. 22, pp. 260 & 261.

slave trade in Massachusetts and the rescue of three kidnapped men of color. Lastly, Hamlet Earl and Scipio Dalton were among the founding members of the 1796 African Society, created “for the mutual benefit of each other,” whereby members assisted other members and their families in times of sickness, hardship, and death.¹⁴⁶

Conspicuously absent from these names, however, was that of Prince Watts. Instead, Watts relied on his religious and familial connections. Through collaboration and marriage, the Watts family became almost synonymous with the surname Davis. Furthermore, the Wattses possessed social connections with their congregation at Trinity Church that they clearly valued. Likewise, their friends at Trinity Church valued their relationships with the Watts family, as evidenced at the very least by the naming of young Prince Watts Scotland by his parents in honor of their neighbor and friend. Prince Watts still had connections through other people to the social organizations developing around him, however. Plato Allison, or Alderson, who gave his son the middle name “Watts,” was a founding member of the African Society. Peter Bayley, a one-time tenant of the Watts family, was also a founding member. Though the Watts family circle of relationships appears socially separate from families such as the Smiths, they still shared a physical connection by being in the same neighborhood.¹⁴⁷

This dynamic web of social relationships and physical proximity illustrates that all of these men of color—and the women of color hidden behind such men’s names found in tax books, property transactions, and fraternal organization membership lists—formed a broader community of people of color that collectively attempted to better their

¹⁴⁶ Grimshaw, *Official History*... p. 82; Kaplan & Kaplan pp. 206 & 207; *Laws of the African Society*...

¹⁴⁷ *Laws of the African Society*...

situation in life. At its heart, this community was no different than Adam Saffin and his peers attempting to produce surety to the town for a slave woman's freedom, or the free men of color who resisted the labor demanded of them by the town in 1762. But now that the shadow of slavery no longer cast darkness over every aspect of life for people of color, individuals and families could accomplish far more on their own terms than ever before. Legacies both in tangible and intangible forms had been established across the work of two generations. These legacies would be passed on to the next generation for further advancement.

When Boston Smith passed away in the winter of 1797/8, and Prince Watts passed in the April 1806, their deaths marked the end of a generation that emerged from slavery and fought for a home, a community, and a fledgling neighborhood. They were still marked by their slave past, however, condemned to enjoy their freedom all too late in their lives. Boston Smith died while his children were still in their minority, and his wife Cloe had passed perhaps as early as the late 1780s. It appears that Prince Watts, though struggling to keep a large family together and successful, lost his only child, Isaac, while his granddaughters remained quite young. The Smith children, Peter, Paul, and Margaret, and the Watts grandchildren, Hannah, Tamar, and Jenny, all would live their lives after the ending of slavery in Massachusetts. They inherited the land, the homes, and the personal effects of their parents, bringing those resources into their marriages, or living off of the land's promise into adulthood. Unfortunately, Boston Smith's will is missing from the Suffolk County Probate records. His inventory, however, survives. A decision regarding the guardianship of his children is also contained in the probate records.

Smith's longtime associate Prince Hall served as the executor of Boston Smith's estate. One of Smith's neighbors, Boston Faddy, assisted in the inventorying Smith's estate. Eventually, the land of Boston Smith was equally divided among his three children once they attained their majority. When Prince Watts passed, he gave everything to his second wife, Lucy. He also asked that each of his granddaughters, Hannah, Tamar, and Jenny, as well as his daughters-in-law Cloe and Lucy, would each be guaranteed a place to live in either of Watts' two homes off Belknap Street. Prince Watts designated Lucy as his executor. Assisting Lucy through the process would be Prince's long time associate and fellow soapboiler, London Davis. A death notice appeared for Prince Watts in the *New-England Palladium* on April 8, 1806. It stated that he was "a respectable and honest African." His funeral was held at his hard-earned home along Belknap Street on April 9 at 4 o'clock—right in the heart of a strong African American neighborhood that began as far back as the 1760s.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁸ SPR, Docket No. 20335; Guardianship of Peter, Paul, and Margaret Smith, SPR, Vol. 96, p. 108; SD, Vol. 227, p. 267; SPR, Docket No. 22623; "Died," *New-England Palladium*, April 8, 1806, p. 2. Accessed via NewsBank's Archive of Americana: America's Historical Newspapers.

CONCLUSION

The preceding chapters tell stories of people who struggled to survive in Boston during the eighteenth century. They attempt to look at individuals, families, and communities of color with their own agency placed front and center. Yet even with these many different accounts, many more stories have yet to be told. For one, the use of public records has biased this study toward those who later gained their freedom. Property ownership, marriage, and the attention of town officials were factors which heavily influenced what stories could be told. Furthermore, there were other men and women that simply could not fit in the scope and time for this particular study. Jack Thurbur, for example, owned land contemporaneously to Scipio Fayerweather and Tobias Locker in the South End of Boston along the Harbor's waterfront. His legacy proved dramatically different than that of the men and women upon Beacon Hill, in that he left the land he acquired to the children of his ex-master.

Despite these drawbacks, the study lays the groundwork in territory largely overlooked and underdeveloped. It helps explain and gives deeper understanding about how the antebellum community which emerged on Beacon Hill came into being. Furthermore, the work broadens the narrative of Late Colonial and Revolutionary Boston. There were more people of color than just the poet Phillis Wheatley, the martyr Crispus Attucks, and the lone visionary Prince Hall during this time. There were individuals,

families, and entire communities who struggled to survive and obtain something better for themselves, their children, and their peers. Their stories are fundamental threads in the story of Boston's and America's past. Instead of particular, stand-out stories, which appear by themselves and without proper context, the narratives of the Fayerweathers, Lockers, Hills, Smiths, and Wattses, among others, can be spun into of the larger story and framework of Boston, and its premier public history outlet—the Freedom Trail.

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