

African American History in Waterbury: Sources from the Max R. Traurig Library and Archive at the Mattatuck Museum

A Subject Guide created by Stephanie Crawford, Archivist at the Mattatuck, for more information or to schedule a research appointment, please email the archivist at scrawford@mattmuseum.org

[a quick note to thank former Archivist Michael Dooling, and former Assistant Curator Raechel Guest for their research and hard work – which I am mostly reformatting with small additions, contextualization, and clarifications]

This subject guide is a work in progress and will be updated as more documents are found, purchased, or donated to the museum.

Slavery and Pre-Civil War Documents:

First, we need to have a quick discussion about archives and black lives. Historically speaking, archives have documented “significant” and/or “important” events and people - archives cannot save everything and choices historically have been weighed by importance. This translates to collecting the papers of the wealthy, heterosexual white men who have held office, been CEOs, built bridges, etc. etc.

Twentieth and twenty-first century historians, librarians and archivists have analyzed the collecting strategies that have led to a homogeneous collecting habit and have written extensive articles discussing the need for archives to reflect a wider variety of peoples and lived experiences. Mario H Ramirez’s “Being Assumed Not to Be: A Critique of Whiteness as an Archival Imperative” is a wonderful place to start, or anything written by Michelle Caswell. Both authors have articles for free online.

Finding black people in archival collections can be difficult - slaves are often only listed in financial ledgers. Their lived experience -as slaves or as freed persons- is often only shown in memoirs. Paul Jennings was owned by President James Madison and after he bought his own freedom from a different master, he wrote his

The act of archiving black lives is radical in and of itself.

to upper Leather 22 to a peice of a calf skin 6/6 L	1 8
to Sole Leather 3/6 to Leather fragments 6/6	1 17
to a Sheep skin 3/6 to a goat skin 1/6	0 7
to 3 pair of old Boots 5/6 to 5 Baskits 6/6	0 11
to Dry Skins 5/6 to a cow hide 9/6 to a steers hide 10/6	1 5
to a waddels hide 3/6 to 2 Calves skins 2/6	0 6
to tobacco	2 14
to a gallon Bottle 2/6	0 2
to 2 Sacken Baggs 6/6 to one twoid Bag 2/6	0 8
to 6 Bagg 6/6 to one Bag 3/6	0 9
to flaxe not Dressed	0 15
to flower 2/6 to 2 Barrels of meat 12/6	7 7
to a hives of Bees and 5 Beehives	2 0
to a negro man named mingo at	42 0
to a negro girl called Silve	20 0
Books	
to a Bible 2/6 to one Little 1/6	0 3
to a testament 1/6 to a psalm 13/6 to a Dictionary 16/6	0 18
to a vaine man 3/6 to a Bannard Journal 4/6	0 7 6
to a Mr Shepards Book 1/6 to 3 part of a book called w ^m Cypers 5/6	0 2 0
to a Core convert 1/6 to a hian 13/6 to a small Dictionary 5/6	0 11 6
to old Books 4/6 to 2 Hards of a Law Book 7/6	0 6 6
to a Copy Book 6/6 to a Rite in the Lybrary 6/6	0 4 0
to a Book of Whitfield 4/6	

This detailed breakdown of Humaston's estate to his widow and children lists 2 slaves: "A negro man named mingo" valued at 42 pounds and "a negro girl [] Silve" valued at 20 pounds." The two are listed as property of the widow, and are in the same section with leather, calf skins, boots, beehives, and other items.

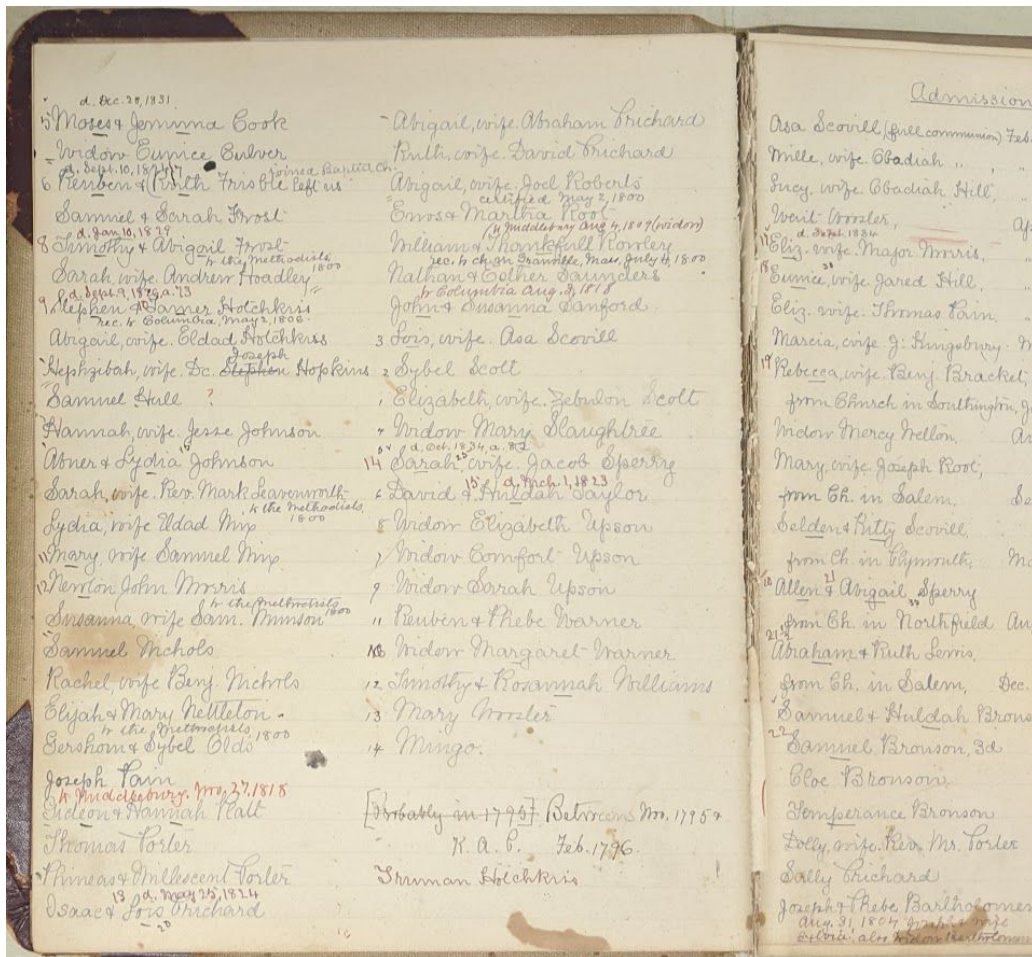
The History of Waterbury, Connecticut, The Original Township Embracing Present Watertown and Plymouth, and Parts of Oxford, Wolcott, Middlebury, Prospect and Naugatuck. With an Appendix of Biography, Genealogy and Statistics – Henry Bronson

The truth is, the great proportion of them were too poor to own that kind of property. Luxuries of all kinds were beyond their reach. They lived in the plainest manner and did their own work. Owing to a lack of tools, machinery, roads and productive lands prepared for tillage, or in other words, capital, the surplus products of labor were small. Comparatively, a man could do but little more than maintain himself. Hence the necessity that all should work, young and old, male and female. If the addition of a negro to a family increased production, it also increased consumption; and if a support in infancy and old age is taken into the account, almost in an equal ratio. Hence the inducement with the early planters of Waterbury, to own slaves could not have been great, even could they have found the means to purchase them. The profits of slavery in Connecticut were never large, and the sacrifice, when it was finally got rid of, was not serious.

The first slave in Waterbury, of which I have certain knowledge, was Mingo, who was the property of Dea. Thomas Clark, about 1730. He was then a boy. His master used to let him for hire by the day, first to drive plow, then to work with the team. At Dea. Clark's death in 1764, Mingo was allowed to choose which of the sons he would live with. He preferred to remain at the old homestead with Thomas; but after the latter commenced keeping tavern, he did not like his occupation and went to reside with Timothy on Town Plot. He had a family, owned considerable property, and died in 1800.

Parson Southmayd owned two slaves at the time of his death, Sampson and Phillis. Parson Leavenworth owned two, Peg and Phillis; Parson Trumbull of Westbury, two or more; Parson Scovill, two, Phillis and Dick. Dick died so late as 1835, aged 90. He used to tell the story of his capture on the shores of Africa when a boy, as he was playing in the sand. He was sold several times, always with the understanding that he might return when he chose. He was at one time the property of Dea. Stephen Bronson. After his old master removed to New Brunswick, he usually worked for Dea. Bronson or Mr. James Scovill, and was always regarded as a member of the family. He was a faithful negro. The writer remembers with affection his kind offices, in child.

In Henry Bronson's History of Waterbury, Connecticut, originally published in 1858, he writes at some length about slavery in Waterbury, including to his knowledge the first slave named Mingo. A second History of Waterbury was published in 1895 by several historians and didn't mention slavery over the course of 3 volumes. Mingo - according to Bronson was owned by Deacon Thomas Clark, and after Clark's death went to live with one of Thomas' sons. Supposedly Mingo had a family, owned a plot of land, and died in 1800. Bronson's [History of Waterbury](#) can be found via google books for free.



M-20 Churches and Religious Organizations, Selected Records of the First Church - Box 1 Folder C.

This small bound book is a copy of early church records, probably transcribed by one of the Pritchard sisters who were both interested in writing about local history. Mingo is listed as a parishioner of the First Congregational Church of Waterbury, circa 1795. On a separate page regarding Deacons, in 1796 Timothy Clark was offered Deaconship and declined Dec 20, 1797, possibly serving for one year.

Silve:

[illegible]

An Image from the Estate of Caleb Humaston, 1777. [Currently unprocessed - will probably be found in collection M-12 Personal Papers.] This detailed breakdown of Humaston's estate to his widow and children lists 2 slaves: "A negro man named Mingo" valued at 42 pounds and "a negro girl [] Silve" valued at 20 pounds." The two are listed as property of the widow, and are in the same section with leather, calf skins, boots, beehives, and other items.

Further on in the above document “a negro wench” is mentioned, though not named. In the remarks made for the Fifth Daughter, Phebe, the document begins discussing land. Further, it states “all so a rite in the negro wench.” Above that line, a crossed out section reads similarly - possibly referring to Phebe not owning the negro woman - but being allowed to utilize her.

To Phoebe the first Daughter in Lands
to about three acres and three quarters of Land lying
Eastward the dwelling house East the high way
where the sycow mill stands beginning at a heap of stones
about a bow west the gate and runs across the wheats
to David Humphreys land to a heap of stones bound East on
David Humphreys land ^{at the} South End runs to a point bound West on
high way North on land set to the roads said Land at 11-11 0
the one half of asycow-mill and house owned 2-10 0
It's a kile in the Barn cald Yeager of 9 0 0
the one third part of a sabara house at 1-13 4
the in Land about twelve ^{off hand} acres lying South of the
Thumers forty rods by the high way bound north on huger
^{own} land ^{of the} East end on the West line of ^{land}
the South Line ^{bound} East on Kings set to 17 16 0
Charles Duns purchased of Curtis said Land at 17 16 0
also about twenty five ^{half} acres and to the west End the
Joining on the John Humphreys Land it is
partly rode at the North and South Ends and is
about an 100 rods Long Bound South on high way 17 10 0
North on Lewis Land said Land at 17 10 0
the one quarter of six acres of Land
more than one ^{four} ^{rod} ^{Land}
near J^r. Barstow in partnership with
J^r. Barstow and James Barstow said Land at 5 10 0
89-10 00

Mowables		
to a pair of two year old Steers		9 5
to a Buck Cow 7/6 to 5 bunches of 5 pr 25/		5 2
to 3 bushels of oats 3/6 to a shire 12/6		0 16
to 8 sheep 3 lambs 6/6 to Cheek 12/6		3 18
to 3 bushels of wheat 11/6 to 5 bushels of rye 11/6		1 3
to 7 bushels of buck wheat 11/6		0 17
to 10 pound 2/4 hog gut 4/4 to a beaver 1/2		0 5
to sheats N36 at 11/6 ditto N36 at 12/6		1 13
ditto N36 at 12/6 Numb 20 at 12/6 N 11/14		1 18
to 4 yd 3/4 at 1/6 syder barrels 11/6		1 5
to 20 pounds of tobacco 6/8 a gallon of molasses 5/2		0 8
to 2 quart of molasses 2/6 to one yard 3/4 of low Coath 2/8		0 4
to 2 yards 3/4 of low Coath 3/6 to one yard 3/4 of low Coath 2/8		0 3
to two pounds and 3/4 of woollens yarn 2/4		0 2
to 2 silver spoons 32/		1 12
to a silver spoon 16/		0 6
to what she believe before		82 8
to 1/2 lb of Lyring yarn		0 4
also a kite in the Negro wench		1 55
of twenty year palmda the wench		1 12
to a quarter part of one third part		24 00
of a saw mill and one quarter of one		14 00
fourteen acres of land in part of a ship		4 30
with John and David Humpton		1 38 00
Convergence of the mill according to a report		1 38 00

Philas:

While there were several African American women named some form of Philas (Fillis, Phyllis) living in Waterbury, in our collection we have a document from 1750 which details a bill for care performed by various women for Lydia Cossett. Listed as number 8, is Philas, the negro of Mr. Southmayd took care of Cossett for one day for 10 schillings.

An account of and Bill of Cost. of what the select men
of waterbury have due for Lydia Cossett daughter of Benjamin
Cossett of Simsbury from the fifth day of January A D 1749/50
In and Acknowledged in said waterbury which is as follows

1: the wife of Nathaniel M. still five days	X	2 = 8 = 00
2: the wife of Roger Prichard five days	X	5 = 0 = 00
3: the wife of Thomas Burtis Eight days	X	4 = 0 = 00
4: the wife of Prichard one day	X	0 = 7 = 00
5: the wife of Robert Josson one day paid by The Burying	X	10 = 00
6: the wife of Benjamin Judd one day	X	0 = 10 = 00
7: the wife of Eleazer Benson one day	X	0 = 10 = 00
8: Philas the negro of Mr. John Southmayd one day	X	0 = 10 = 00
9: the daughter of Dr. Post one day	X	0 = 10 = 00
10: Rachel Baldwin	X	0 = 10 = 00

This image is a detail from the document in M-22 Waterbury Town Records. Box 1 Folder M.

Other African American women named Phyllis are not represented in our collections.

Comfort Homer:

The Mattatuck has two documents related to Comfort. One is the bill of sale transferring her ownership from John Thompson to Miles Newton in 1795. While the document estimates her age at 14 - she was likely 11 based on other documents in our collection. It is interesting to note that in the 1800 census - the only one which would have counted Comfort Homer - she is most likely counted in the category "all other freed persons" - although she was not free.

Waterbury Feb. 17 1795

Know all Men by these presents that I John Thompson of Waterbury in the County of New Haven for the Consideration of twenty eight pound Lawfull Money reciev'd to my full Satisfaction of Miles Newton have bargain and sold and by these presents do bargain and sell unto the said Newton a certain Negro Girl called Comfort about fourteen years of age to have and hold unto him said Newton for and during the term of her natural life and I the said Thompson do by these presents Covenant and agree with the said Newton his heirs and I have a good right to sell the said Girl and that she is free from all demands from any person whatever In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand

In presence of

John Thompson

David Bronson Junr

Nannah Newton

Miles Newton Jnr

M-12 Personal Papers, Comfort Homer.

In the second document Comfort Homer petitioned a local judge - Noah Benedict - for her own freedom. Noah Benedict, the son of Reverend Noah Benedict served as the Judge of Probate for Woodbury from 1805-1816, according to the [Litchfield Historical Society](#). It's possible that Comfort Homer tried to negotiate with Newton before going to Benedict. It's worth noting that Comfort was also owed wages, in Benedict's opinion, for the year she worked after her technical emancipation.

Comfort Homer a negro woman who now lives
with Miles Newton has called on me - states
that she is twenty six years old ~~this~~ this
month. This being true she became free on the
first of March 1809 - from that time to the
present has been at perfect liberty to leave
the service of Mr Newton. He has no claim
over her person or property & will be liable
for false imprisonment if he retains her in
his service against her will. - And it is my
opinion that since the 1st of March 1809
she is intitled to recover of him payment
for her labour.

May 8th 1810

Noah B Benedict

M-12 Personal Papers, Comfort Homer.

This document is a good way to speak about [Connecticut's Gradual Emancipation Act](#). Any enslaved person born after March 1, 1784 was mandated to be freed after age 25. Slavery would be outlawed in CT in 1848. Henry Bronson also discussed gradual emancipation in his history of Waterbury, as well as other laws that slaves, mixed race, and indigenous peoples needed to abide by:

that no negro or mulatto child, born in this State after March 1, 1784, should be held in servitude any longer than till he or she should arrive at the age of twenty-five years. In the same act, there were restraints put upon slaves similar to those we find at the South at the present day. Any Negro, Mulatto or Indian servant found wandering beyond the bounds of the town to which he belonged, without a ticket or pass from a justice of the peace or the owner, might be seized by anybody as a run-a-way. If a slave was caught out at night, after nine o'clock in the evening, without an order from his master, any person might apprehend and bring him (or her) before a justice, who might sentence him (or her) to be publicly whipped on the naked body. Without such order, the ferryman who passed a slave over his ferry, or the tradesman who bargained with him, was liable to a fine. So was the taverner who "entertained" him, or permitted him to be in his house, after nine o'clock at night. Free negroes traveling without a pass might be arrested.

In 1848, the Legislature enacted, for the first time, that no person should be held in slavery in this State.

Individually, our Puritan ancestors were very much such men as we are—little better, no worse. There were among them men eminent for virtue, knowledge and patriotism; while there was about the ordinary proportion, found in the farming communities, of the worthless and the vile. A very slight inspection of the records of the criminal courts, will dissipate the dreams of those who contend that our great grandsires were perfect beings. They were bred in a rigorous age, and were exposed to peculiar hardships, dangers and temptations. These gave origin to peculiar moral characteristics—to virtues and to vices which were a little different from those of other ages and communities. But, on the whole, they, like us, were average men. We have more science, a more widely diffused literature; better roads and bulkier ships; but our *men* are like their men—shoots from the same stock. Undistinguishing eulogy cannot properly be applied to any of the generations of New England; nor will truth justify indiscriminate censure. Saints and sinners, wise men and foolish, have been (and will continue to be) found, in fair proportion, among all.

Bronson's [History of Waterbury](#) can be found via google books for free.

Fortune:

The story of Fortune's life has changed greatly over the past 100 years.

More information can be found at [Fortune's Story](#). The Mattatuck will be dedicating time to updating Fortune's Story in the next few years.

Rosetta:

We the undersigned both of the Town of Waterbury Conn. do hereby pledge ourselves to the observance of the following agreement - viz -

The first undersigned possessing a right to use & dispose of the services of the colored girl Rosetta until she arrive at age doth transfer that right to the second undersigned, for and in consideration, that He, the second undersigned, shall, as an equivalent for the services of said girl, keep, clothe, & support her in Health & sickness during the time of her Minority: and furthermore, allow her a reasonable time to attend the District, or any other School he may judge best, for the purpose of obtaining instruction suited to her Station in Life - And the first undersigned doth declare that the full & exclusive right to the services of said girl, for said time, on the above mentioned conditions, is hereby granted to, and rested in the second undersigned - Who on his part accepts the transferred right, & faithfully promises a strict adherence to the Letter & Spirit of this agreement -

It is understood by both parties the Girl is now Eleven Years of Age

In Witness of the above agreement We have hereunto affixed our signatures this 20th Day of November 1837 in the Town of Waterbury New Haven County, Connecticut

Timothy Church
Robert Seymour

S B Chipman
C D Kingsbury

Transcript of Agreement between S.B. Chipman and C.D. Kingsbury regarding "the colored girl Rosetta, Nov. 20th, 1837.

We the undersigned both of the Town of Waterbury Conn. do hereby pledge ourselves to the observance of the following agreement - viz -

The first undersigned possessing a right to use & dispose of the Services of the colored girl Rosetta until she arrive at age doth transfer that right to the second undersigned, for, and in consideration, that He, the second undersigned, shall, as an equivalent for the Services of said girl, keep, clothe, & support her in Health & sickness, during the time of her Minority:- and, furthermore, allow her a reasonable time to attend the District, or any other School he may judge best, for the purpose of obtaining instruction suited to her Station in Life - And the first undersigned doth declare that the full & exclusive right to the services of said girl, for said time, on the above mentioned conditions, is hereby granted to, and rested in the second undersigned - Who on his part accepts the transferred right, & faithfully promises a strict adherence to the Letter & Spirit of this agreement - It is understood by both parties the Girl is now Eleven Years of Age

In Witness of the above agreement We have hereunto affixed our signatures this 20th Day of November 1837 in the Town of Waterbury New Haven County, Connecticut

Witnesses
Timothy Church
Robert S Seymour

S B Chipman
C.D. Kingsbury

Charles Kingsbury purchased the colored girl Rosetta in 1837. Rosetta was 11 years of age, and was to be in service to the Kingsbury family until she was "of age" - possibly referring to the Gradual Emancipation Act in CT -allowing her to be free at age 25. Rosetta and the Kingsbury family provide more questions than answers.

our family at
men) F.J.K. - my sister
are, Miss Rebecca Blake
take care of white & Rose (BLK)
(boy who works on farm) a young
ceasant. Mr. [unclear]
my father is making
mistakes. Rev. Mr. [unclear]
dust - David E. [unclear]
least, to

FJ Kingsbury's diary from 1841 lists a "Rose (BLK)" amongst family and others at the Kingsbury residence.



Unidentified person, circa 1860. Daguerreotype.

This photograph of African American Woman can be found in the Kingsbury Papers. It was taken around 1860. Who was she? Was she free? Was she an indentured servant? Is she Rosetta? If Rosetta was like family, how does that complicate her existence as someone who was bought? Why didn't these photographs stay with her and her family?

There are many unknown people in archives. This image, to me - the archivist- is a haunting but also filled with possibility.

Cemetery Records:

Another way to find people of color in colonial records can be found in cemetery records. The book [*Ancient Burying-Grounds of the Town of Waterbury, Connecticut*](#) is the Mattatuck Historical Society's publication about early graveyards and records of deaths, published in 1917. It was compiled and edited by Katharine A Pritchard. It includes Waterbury and surrounding towns' records.

Waterbury's Grand Street Cemetery had a colored section a la Sturges Judd map – and his register – but the records of the deaths of people of color in Waterbury weren't kept officially. If you know of records of early colonial people of color in the Grand Street Cemetery, please reach out to us.

Timothy Judd Records in Westbury include people of color.

April 11 1753, died Andrew Sol. Moss negro man

April 28 1759, died Hagar wench to Mr. Trumble

July 7, 1762, died Liet. Hickcox's wench

Jan 20, 1763 died a negro child of Capt Scovills

Jan 7, 1766 died Elnathan Judd's negro child named Trial

Jan 4, 1767 was buried the negro child of Benjamin Richards Jr. Still born

May 18, 1767 died a negro child of Josaiah Moss

March 27, 1769 died, ensign David Scott negro child

Sept 21 1771 died Jack negro man to Benjamin Richards

July 11 1774 died Isaac Woodruffs Indian wench

Feb 13 1775 Died Joseph Garnsey's Negro wench

Feb 5 1778 died Joshua moss negro man

July 1 1779 died Grigg Negro man to Mr. Trumbull

Skilton Records from Westbury:

1791 : Amy Negro Girl of Titus Hotchkiss (Possibly May 19) (page 234)

1792 : Abijah Guernsey's Negro Boy, January

1798 : Jan 19, Jenny, Jonathan Scott's Negro Girl – died of smallpox

1798 : August 24, Sam, Negro fell from a tree aged 65. at Abijah Guernsey's

1802: Black child at Young L Cutlers, died of rickets 1 year 6 month dec 16

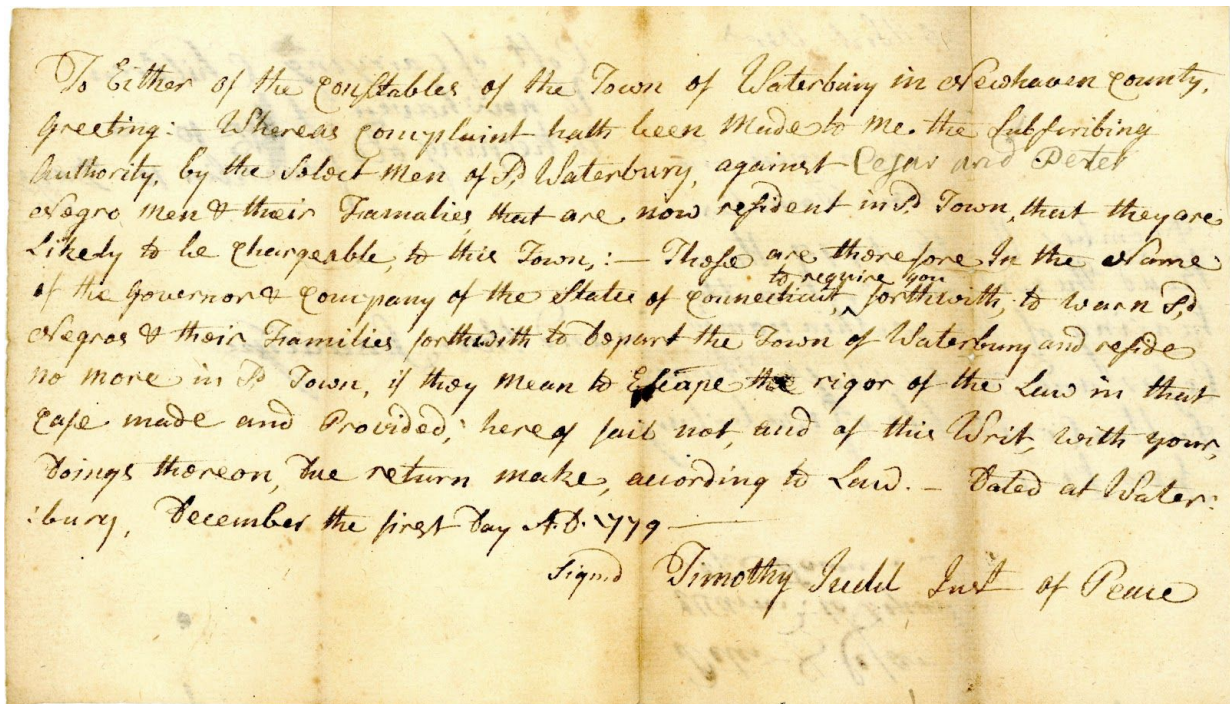
1804: Pomp Negro (Pomp Freeman, a fit. Age 83) March 5

1804 Ama Negro Girl at YL Cutlers, died of consumption June 28th

Transient Warrants:

Cesar and Peter:

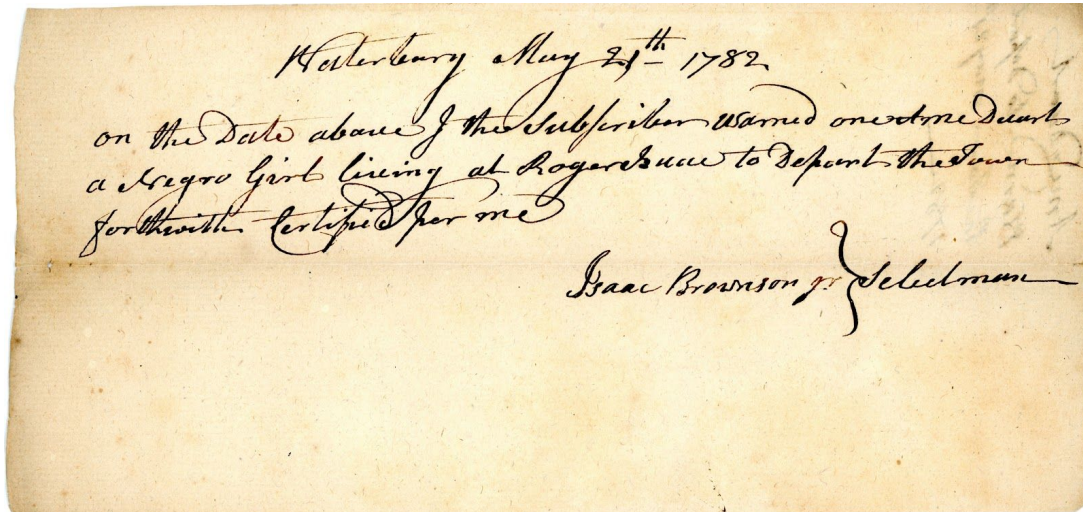
In 1779 a warrant for transient persons to leave the town of Waterbury was issued for Cesar and Peter, Negro men, and their respective families. Their names were filled in later -evidenced by the ink change and the reverse listing them as only as negro men and their families. There appears to have been a hearing on Dec 16 1779, of which Thomas Dutton, constable of Waterbury collected 1 pound and 1 shilling fine. The two men and their families left - possibly to New Haven or were split up. The cost of carrying the children to New Haven and keeping "old Franklin" for 10 days was 15 pounds and 10 schillings.



To Either of the Constables of the Town of Waterbury in New-Haven County,
greeting:—Whereas complaint hath been made to me, the Subscribing
Authority, by the Select Men of D Waterbury, against Cesar and Peter
Negro men & their Families that are now resident in D Town, that they are
likely to be chargeable to this Town:—There are therefore In the Name
of the Governor & Company of the State of Connecticut, ^{to require you} forthwith, to warn D
Negroes & their Families forthwith to depart the Town of Waterbury and reside
no more in D Town, if they mean to escape the rigor of the Law in that
case made and provided, hereof fail not, and of this Writ, with your
doings thereon, the return make, according to Law. — Dated at Water:
bury, December the first day A.D. 1779 —
Signed Timothy Tudd Just of Peace

Anne [Durant?]:

A warrant issued in 1782, for a Negro girl named Anne to depart from Waterbury.



Waterbury May 21th 1782
on the date above of the Subscriber warned one Anne Durant
a Negro girl living at Rogerssue to Depart the Town
forthwith Certified for me
Isaac Brownson } Selectman

M22 Waterbury Records Box 1 folder FFF

Hannah

A warrant issued in 1784, warning Hannah, Phillips' mother to depart from Waterbury.



Waterbury January 28 1784 then Hannah a Negro
woman was warned to Depart this town according
Law by me — David Hotchkiss Select man

M-22 Waterbury Town Records, Box 1 Folder FFF

Cato and Pitty

Slaves or indentured servants belonging to Samuel Bartholomew of Branford were warned to depart Waterbury. The pair were husband and wife.

Waterbury September 14th AD 1784
then I warned Cato a Negro and Pitty his wife both of
them belonging to Samuel Bartholomew of Branford
to Depart this town forthwith with all their affects on
Penalty of the Law in Case Provided
Charles Wyson } Select man
 } of Waterbury

M-22 Waterbury Town Records, Box 1 Folder FFF