African Nantucketers

Vestiges

If the story of Nantucket's ancient proprietors, the Wampanoags, is one of dispossession, the story of the African Nantucketers is one of acquisition. Before the English settlers arrived, the sachems and their people had been in full occupation of the island, but in the course of a century they lost almost all their land and then almost all of them lost their lives.

The Africans brought to the island during that century so fatal to the Wampanoags had lost everything but their lives upon being taken into slavery. The survivors of the Atlantic crossing started from nothing. Arriving on Nantucket, they had no property, no personal freedom, not even their own names. The men were called by classical and biblical names: Cato, Pompey, Seneca, Nero, Moses, Jonas, Ishmael, and—ironically—Caesar and Prince. Women were given such servants' names as Hagar, Patience, Phebe, Phyllis, Rose, and Maria.

As the ancient proprietors' fortunes declined, the Africans on Nantucket acquired freedom, surnames, and families. Ultimately they gained admission to all the public schools. By then they had become entrepreneurs as well as household help, laborers, and mariners, and in the process they had put together a neighborhood of their own. Buying and consolidating land, they built dwelling houses, stores, a school, churches, boarding houses, workshops, barber shops, and a dance hall.

An 1807 deed describes this place as "The Burying Ground that Belongs to the Black People or People of Colour." The oldest known burial is from 1798. The Old Mill, built in 1746, has been a feature of the Newtown/New Guinea neighborhood from its inception. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P16020.*

All that survives today of the Wampanoag village of Miacomet is its burial ground. Less than a mile away the African neighborhood, too, has its cemetery. The difference is stark. The interments at Miacomet took place in the course of a few months under crisis conditions. There are no individual markers, no discernible family groups. For a long time it was lost completely. In "the Burying Ground that belongs to the Black People or people of Colour," tucked in behind Mill Hill Park and viewable from the windows of the island's hospital, there are family plots where succeeding generations have joined their forebears as recently as 1999 when Mattie Bagwell Pina was laid to rest beside her mother after a lifetime that spanned an entire century.[1]

Downhill from the last remaining windmill, at the confluence of streets known as Five Corners, stands the African Meeting House, which was built in the 1820s to house a school and church and to provide a public meeting space for the African Nantucketer community. There are vestiges of the African presence throughout the town, traced today by Nantucket's Black Heritage Trail®. But just as with Nantucket's Wampanoags, the descendants of Nantucket's original African families are no longer to be found on the island.

From Africa to Nantucket

On Nantucket there is disbelief that slavery ever existed on the island, since the word "slave" is absent from local court and probate records and even from deeds of manumission, where the word "servant" is used euphemistically.[2] Slavery is generally thought of as a Southern plantation phenomenon; moreover, the local Quaker community had an old and distinguished abolitionist history. As for the African community that established itself on the southern edge of town in the 1700s, popular wisdom has it that its inhabitants came to the island on whaling ships, their numbers augmented by fugitive slaves who found refuge and protection on Quaker Nantucket.

These beliefs have a basis in fact, but Nantucket history is deeper and more complex. English families first settled on Nantucket in 1659, and for the next fifty years there was little organized religion on the island among anyone but the "praying Indians." The influence of the Society of Friends, with its intolerance of involuntary lifelong servitude, is a phenomenon that evolved in the 1700s, and the documented cases of fugitive slaves resident on Nantucket are from the 1800s.[3]

Between 1659 and the late 1700s, some Nantucketers—including Quakers—owned slaves, who appear in the records with single slave names. The first documented is a man called Africa, who had the good fortune to be manumitted in the opening decade of the 1700s.[4] The next is a sadder case. In 1715

[1] An 1807 deed of sale uses those words in the earliest documented reference to the cemetery (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 22, p. 10) . Guba 1965, p. 103, states that the oldest headstone dates from 1798, but that stone is no longer to be found.

[2] See Appendix 1e for an early example of a deed of manumission. Although the word "slave" does not appear, the absence of a surname of the person being released reveals his status. Notice also that freedom is only granted upon the death of the owner. Until then, his "servant" continues in service to him.

[3] As early as 1716 the Nantucket Monthly Meeting recorded that "It is not agreeable to truth for Friends to purchase slaves and keep them [for the] term of life" (Leach and Gow 1997, p. 40). The famous instance of Arthur and Mary Cooper being concealed by Nantucket Quakers took place in 1822. In March 1826 Joseph Mason placed a notice in the *Nantucket Inquirer* that he had been living under an assumed name as a fugitive slave on Nantucket for the past 18 months. Local "friends" had made it possible for him to purchase his freedom, and he now wished to be known by his real name.

[4] See Carpenter and Carpenter 1987, pp. 19–27, for comparative biographies of two nonwhite weavers on Nantucket, Jeremy Netowa and Africa, who both died in 1728.

Jockey, identified only as a "Negro," drowned in the harbor along with four Wampanoags as they were trying to board a sloop from a sinking fishing boat.[5]

Africans brought to the island as servants did not come voluntarily, and their Nantucket-born children were born into slavery.[6] In 1716 Stephen Hussey willed one African each to his "beloved wife Martha," his son Silvanus, and his daughter Theodorata. Martha Hussey was to receive "a Negro woman named Sarah," Silvanus "a Negro boy named Mark," and Theodorata "a Negro girl named Dorothy."[7]

Four years later James Coffin sought to pass ownership of an African woman through two beneficiaries, writing in his testament that, "I will that Hagar my Negro servant shall dwell with and serve my Daughter Mary Gardner during her natural life and after her decease I give my servant to my son John Coffin."[8] Sixty-five years after James Coffin wrote his will the Nantucket selectmen voted that "the Negro Woman Hagar be considered as one of the Town Poor."[9]

African slaves appear in estate inventories, grouped with household goods, livestock, and tools. Like the other inventoried items, they have money values placed on them. The inventory of Jonathan Pinkham's estate in 1735/6, for instance, lists: "a bedstead 24 [pounds sterling] / *Sambo* 20 / 1/3 of a tenant saw 13 / a farrow hog 30 / a sow hog 25."[10] The 1740 estate inventory of Samuel Barker lists his slaves immediately after his stock of gingerbread. The youngest of them, a "Negro Child," was valued at five pounds, the same as the gingerbread. The adults were worth a great deal more.[11] Thomas Brock—investor in sloops, a wharf, and a tryhouse—left a huge estate upon his death in 1750. In the probate inventory, listed between a tablecloth valued at one pound six shillings and a "Schooner Main [sail] and Jib" valued at ten pounds, is an unnamed "Negro woman" worth one hundred twenty pounds.[12]

Roots

Those Nantucket deeds and probate records reveal that the African-Nantucketer community originated in slavery. Some of the English proprietors had slaves as well as indentured servants in their households, and both slaves and indentured servants were handed on to their heirs.

In 1710 an old man who lived on Centre Street took stock of his life and his estate and made a decision. William Gayer had been born into the gentry of Devonshire, the same west country from which the Coffins had sprung, and he had come to Nantucket to build a fortune, as they had. Upon arrival he

[5] *Vital Records of Nantucket* IV, p. 625.
[6] Even when the father had been freed, his children might be kept as slaves. In 1751 William Swain declared his slave Boston "a free man and not a slave," but children born to Boston and his wife Maria after 1751 were put on a schedule of manumission stretching into the 1770s (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 5, p. 225; Book 6, p. 264).
[7] Nantucket Probate Book 1, p. 41.
[8] Nantucket Probate Book 1, pp. 81–82
[9] Town Records for 1784–1807, p. 12.
[10] Emphasis mine. Nantucket Probate Book 1, p. 199.
[11] Primus, an adult man, was valued at sixty pounds, the woman Zubinah at eighty pounds, and the mulatto Pero at thirty pounds. Nantucket Probate Book 2, p. 39.

married into the Starbuck family, and in the course of the 1670s he and his wife had three children, Dorcas, Damaris, and William Jr. As a young man William Jr. was sent back to England to marry a cousin and hold together a Gayer family estate there. Dorcas and Damaris had made good matches on the island, Dorcas marrying a Starbuck cousin and Damaris marrying a Coffin. But loneliness was lurking around the corner for their father. Just when his three children were grown and settled, his wife died. He tried marriage again with the widowed mother-in-law of Peter Coffin, but his second wife died too, and now in the house he had bought for his family he had lived for a long time in the company of just his housekeeper and his manservant.[13]

What had gone on during those winter evenings as the three of them kept to the fire in the chamber of the otherwise dark and empty house? Did the barrier between the English gentleman and his servingfolk slip? Did they entertain each other by recounting their lives, their griefs, and their aspirations? Did Gayer pass the time teaching his servants to read and keep accounts, and did his manservant take the place of William Jr.—gone to England with no prospect of return? Who was to manage this Nantucket estate that now included the house, a barn, tryworks, a garden, land on the edge of town, sheep commons, livestock, and part of the island of Muskeget?

William Gayer took up his pen and wrote his last will and testament.

He left a share of Nantucket commons and the privileges that accompanied it to William Jr. "if my s[d] son shall ever come hither again." He left one eighth share of the Nantucket land he had from his father-in-law and half of his Muskeget land to each of his daughters. Then he divided the rest of his property in half and gave it in life rights to "Africa, a negro once my servant" and to Patience Poot "my housekeeper."[14] Within the divided house (the east chamber, half the lean-to, and half the barn to Africa; the west chamber, garret, and half the lean-to as well as half the barn and tryhouse to Patience Poot), almost as an afterthought he left unspecified space to his daughter Damaris "if she should come hither to live." The livestock Gayer bequeathed to Africa and Poot totaled sixty sheep, one horse, one cow, and commonage on which to graze them.[15]

Gayer had confidence in his daughters to carry out his unconventional wishes, for he designated them joint executrices of his estate.

With Gayer's death, Africa was a free man endowed with housing, livestock, and productive land. Subsequently he appears from time to time in town records as an entrepreneur and weaver, identified as "a free Negro."

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[12] Nantucket Probate Book 2, p. 169.
[13] Gayer's house was moved away around 1765 to make room for Peter Folger II's three-story house at 51 Centre Street (Lancaster 1972, p. 167).
[14] In Massachusett *pootop* means "whale," and Nantucket usage shortened it to *poot*. If I understand his housekeeper's surname correctly, it would appear that she was a Wampanoag. But there are no other Nantucket Wampanoags documented with Poot as a name. There are no Nantucket records of anyone named Poot, or Root for that matter. Patience was a common given name for Wampanoag and African women.
[15] Nantucket Probate Book 1, p. 26.

When Africa died, he had not written a will, and the town ordered an inventory of his estate. The value is listed at 102 pounds, 16 shillings, 11 pence, and the inventory lists a variety of possessions, including books, three guns, pewter plates, weaving materials, yarn, and cloth. There were more than thirty creditors to be paid, and a couple of men owed Africa money at the time of his death. It appears from court and probate records that part of Africa's business involved buying from, and making loans to, Wampanoags. A year before his death he had taken one to court over a bad debt and won the case.[16]

Town records show that Africa was an active businessman and that he outlived William Gayer by eighteen years. But did he have a family of his own? There is no evidence that he did. In 1721 Africa sold his dwelling house to George Hussey, perhaps to raise collateral for a business venture or to pay off a debt. By 1723 he had money available to buy the house back.[17] Selling one's home is not the act of a committed family man. That Africa made no will before he died also suggests he had no one to provide for, and the probate inventory doesn't mention survivors. On the other hand, William Gayer had sixteen grandchildren on Nantucket whom he had passed over in favor of his servants.

William Gayer's daughter Damaris survived her husband Nathaniel Coffin by over forty years. Back in 1723, when he died, she had signed and certified the inventory of his very substantial estate, which included the following items and their values: "George Negro 50 [pounds]**;** Phyllis 42**;** Sabina 15**.**" Although Africa was free, slave-owning in the family continued.[18]

William Gayer had not been a member of the Society of Friends, but his daughter Dorcas was First Clerk of the Women's Meeting. Her sister Damaris did not "come into meeting" until after her husband's death. Only then would she have experienced religious persuasion to free George, Phyllis, and Sabina. In 1716 an English Quaker, John Farmer, had visited American Quaker communities, including Nantucket, speaking against slavery. Farmer's position was denounced on both sides of the Atlantic, and in time he was disowned by the Quakers. Nantucket Friends, nonetheless, found themselves in agreement and became the first Quaker Monthly Meeting in the world to declare that it was "not agreeable to Truth for Friends to purchase slaves and keep them for a term of life." In the winter of 1729–30, in his house, which still stands in a hawthorn grove south of Madaket Road, Elihu Coleman wrote a tract in which he raised and refuted one-by-one the conventional justifications for slavery. Published in 1733, Coleman's arguments were not immediately convincing to all other Friends, neither those in Newport, the site of the New England Yearly Meeting, nor even in Nantucket. In both places slaves continued to be owned by

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[16] Nantucket Probate Book 1, p.145–147 (Africa's estate); p. 75: Africa owed Isaac Corduda's estate money in 1721 (Nantucket Probate Book 1, p. 75); in 1726 Africa was accused of selling rum illegally (Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 37); in 1727 he won a bad-debt suit against Ephraim (Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 44).

[17] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 3, pp. 136–37; Book 4, p. 18.

[18] Nantucket Probate Book 1, p. 107. A Coffin family thread connects several Nantucket slave owners, coincidentally or otherwise. William Gayer married Peter Coffin's widowed mother-in-law, and he owned Africa as a slave. When his son-in-law Nathaniel Coffin died, his estate included three African slaves. Damaris and Nathaniel Coffin's son Benjamin only manumitted his slaves in 1775. William Swain married Peter Coffin's daughter, and he owned a pair of African slaves and their children. James Coffin was also a slaveowner.

Friends for more than another half century, and in Rhode Island some Quakers amassed fortunes through the slave trade.[19]

The Nantucket Meeting, nonetheless, did not back down from its radical position, and in the course of the 1700s Nantucket's slaves were manumitted, albeit with glacial slowness. When Damaris Gayer Coffin wrote her own will in 1764, she left to her surviving children and grandchildren land, 240 sheep, sheep commons, and her personal effects. At her death her estate did not include slaves, indentured servants, or "Indian debts."[20]

Trees

From roots in slavery sprang Nantucket family trees bearing (among others) the surnames Barlow, Boston, Dyer, Pompey, Sampson, and Summons. Just as the descendants of the original English proprietors were the elite of white Sherburne (the name the town bore throughout the time slavery existed on the island), the descendants of slaves brought to Nantucket in the 1700s constituted the first families of the African-Nantucketer community that came to be called New Guinea.[21] In the published vital records for Nantucket to 1850 (births, marriages, and deaths compiled from many different sources), the English family surnames that occupy the most pages are Coffin, Gardner, Swain, Folger, and Macy.[22] African Nantucketers' births and deaths are under-recorded in the surviving vital records, but marriage intentions are better documented. In them, the three surnames occurring most often are Boston, Pompey, and Summons.[23] In Nantucket land deeds and probate records the relative frequencies of the names are directly proportional to their frequencies in the marriage records. There is no doubt that within their community those three African-Nantucketer families occupied a position corresponding to that of the white Coffins, Gardners, Swains, Folgers, and Macys in theirs.

The Boston family was much the largest and seems to have intermarried with just about every other African-Nantucketer family. The Pompey family was nearly as big and equally influential. Among other multigeneration families were the Williams family, the Warren family, the Gardner family, the Bears family, and the Maxcy family.[24]

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[19] Leach 1997, pp. 39–40 and personal communication. Coleman, 1825 (reprinted from 1733). For a summary of Coleman's arguments, see Appendix 1f. Drake 1944 provides the biographical and historical background for Coleman's antislavery tract.
[20] Nantucket Probate Book 3, pp. 38–40.
[21] Farnham 1923 distinguishes "Guinea" east of Pleasant Street from "New Guinea" west of Pleasant Street, but no other sources make such a distinction.
[22] The Coffins occupy 248 pages, the Gardners 159 pages, the Swains 122 pages, the Folgers 110 pages and the Macys 106 pages. A second tier is constituted of Bunkers and Colemans (78 pages each) and Husseys (75 pages). The Starbucks (48 pages), Chases (44 pages), Worths (42 pages), and Pinkhams (39 pages) make up a third tier.
[23] If the various spellings Summons, Simmons, etc., are combined.
[24] Keziah Coffin Fanning wrote in her diary for August, 2, 1799: " Took tea at Maxcy's, he lives in New Town in his own house." Would this be a former slave now living on his own property? (Adams 1957, July, p. 43)

"Maxcy" is a variant spelling of Macy. Since Maxcy's Pond is at the site of the seventeenth-century English settlement, it is almost certainly named for the white Macy family.[25] In the old New Guinea area, on the other hand, Warren Street, which connects lower Pleasant Street with Orange Street, probably was named for the black Warren family rather than the white Warrens. Williams Street and Bear Street, which run parallel to Warren Street, were probably named for the black Williams and Bears families. Cato Lane, which originally led to one of the cow gates on the south edge of town, bears the name of black landowner Cato Cary, who purchased land "southward and westward of the Wind Mills" in 1770.[26]

Just as a household's domestic animals do not bear the family surname, English families of the 1700s did not bestow their surnames on the Africans they owned. Early Nantucket marriage records for people identified as "blacks" or "Negroes" typically give only single names, a potent identifying flag of slavery. In the mid-1700s one finds records of unions between couples where one or both of the parties have but a single name: Bristol married Rose in 1751;[27] Nancy married Robin in 1754; Pegg married Toby in 1755; Cesar married Ann Ichabod (a Wampanoag) in 1763.; Timit married Bash Twina in 1766; and Pompey married Viner in 1767.[28]

Even as slavery ended on the island, some marriage partners were still recorded with but a single name: Cato married Violet in 1774; Prince married Patience Tompum in 1776; Mike married Sarah Cote in 1788. An early union between two people with two names each occurred in 1758, when Ruth Jones and Cuffy Fortune were married, but it is not until around 1770 that the records show most African Nantucketers as having both given name and surname.

One source of surnames was the custom of adopting a father's slave name as the family name. The progenitors of the Boston family were slaves of William Swain. Between 1739 and 1760 Boston and Maria increased Swain's holdings by producing eight children born into slavery. Toward the end of his long life, Swain gradually freed the family. He freed Boston in 1751, stating in writing that "Boston, a Negro Man lately my servant is a free man and not a slave but hath liberty to trade and trafick with any body he pleaseth."[29] Then in 1760 Swain formalized the manumission of Boston, Maria, and their infant child.[30]

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[25] Maxcy's Pond was formerly called Wyers Pond, because the house lot of settler Nathaniel Wyer (d. 1681) adjoined the west side of the pond. But by 1809 it appears on a town map as Maxcy's Pond.
[26] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 9, p. 40. See the 1821 map of roads in the Town Pasture for "Cato bars" across the end of the thoroughfare.
[27] Rose and her two sons, one of them named Bristol for his father, were still in slavery on the eve of the American Revolution. Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 27, folder 118, contains a document of manumission signed by their owner Benjamin Coffin in 1775.
[28] The name "Viner" may have been derived from Lavinia. There seem to have more than one adult "Pompey" and more than one "Boston" in the 1700s, which—in the absence of surnames—confuses marriage records.
[29] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 5, p. 225.
[30] Ibid., Vol. 6, p. 264.

Their other seven children were freed one by one over the 1760s and into the 1770s, until a 1773 court case involving one of their sons, Prince Boston, provided the impetus for the end of slavery on Nantucket.[31]

The year after gaining his freedom, their son Seneca married Thankful Micah, a Wampanoag survivor of the epidemic. Seneca and Thankful proudly named their first-born child Freeborn Boston. Fifteen years later their next-to-last child was born, and he was Absalom Boston. Although Seneca and Thankful invested their hopes first and foremost in Freeborn, it was in Absalom that their African and Wampanoag heritages came together to produce a Nantucket businessman, community leader, and significant figure in the racial integration of the island's public schools.

The Pompeys were another Nantucket family that adopted its progenitor's slave name as a surname. The earliest Pompey (locally pronounced "Pompy") was a slave of Ebenezer Gardner.[32] He resided on Nantucket through much of the 1700s, and when he died in 1791, the selectmen directed Peregrine Folger to make a coffin for "Old Pompey" at town expense. Another Pompey was a blacksmith and adopted the name Pompey Nailor.[33] Pompey Nailor's sons, however, chose to be George and John Pompey rather than George and John Nailor. The prolific Pompey family brought forth businessman Edward Pompey, whose 1848 estate inventory showed him to be the owner of a well-stocked store, a shareholder in the schooner *Highland*, and the possessor of an impressive collection of books.[34] Edward Pompey served as the Nantucket subscription agent for William Lloyd Garrison's newspaper *The Liberator*, and he was an active abolitionist during Nantucket's turbulent 1840s.[35]

For a man who made nails on an anvil to take Nailor as a surname was in line with a common practice among Africans as they were freed from slavery. Other Nantucket family names derived from professions include Barber, Painter, Dyer, Draper, Farmer, and Cooper.[36]

For a century and a half, to the mid-1800s, the children of African Nantucketers married one another in typical island pattern to create intertwined genealogies, surnames sometimes being bestowed as given names in order to recognize both sides of a child's parentage. In particular, the names Freeborn and Freeman wend their way through the town records.[37]

African Nantucketers also shared some family names with English settler families. There were both white and black Barneys, Bunkers, Carys, Eastons, Gardners, Macys (Maxcys), Warrens, Whippeys,

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[31] Nantucket Court Records 1, pp. 297-8. Prince Boston's brother Silas remained in slavery for another year. In 1775 Benjamin Coffin manumitted his slave Rose and her sons Bristol and Benjamin. The legal end of slavery in Massachusetts came in 1783, after the American Revolution.

[32] Gardner's deed of manumission of "my servant Pompy" is in Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 5, p. 184.

[33] Dorman 2000, p. 12. There are death records for two nearly contemporaneous Pompeys in the 1700s. "Old Pompy" died in 1791. Pompey Nailor's death at age 78 was recorded in 1796 (*Vital records of Nantucket* V, p. 461).

[34] Nantucket Probate Book 17, p. 354–61.

[35] Two letters from Garrison to Edward Pompey are in the manuscript collection of the Nantucket Historical Association: Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 222, folder 6, and Collection 335, folder 591.

[36] The Cooper family on Nantucket derived from Arthur Cooper, a fugitive slave from Viriginia who came with his family to Nantucket around 1820.

[37] For more names from the African-Nantucketer community, see Karttunen 1998. The youngest sister of whaling captain Paul Cuffe, born on Cuttyhunk to an African father and a Wampanoag mother, was named Freelove.

Winslows, and Wrights. Octogenarian Robin Brock, who was living in the household of Jeffrey Summons in 1810, had been a slave of Thomas Brock. According to the 1750 will of Thomas Brock, "my Negro man Robin" was to be free when he attained the age of thirty, about five years from the date of the will.[38] This list of surnames shared by white and black Nantucketers only partially overlaps the known slave-owning families of Nantucket: the Barkers, Brocks, Carys, Coffins, Folgers, Gardners, Gayers, Husseys, Pinkhams, Swains, Worths, and Wyers.

A black Tabitha Coffin appears in published marriage intentions at the end of 1769, but this is a transcription error for Tabitha Cuff, whose name was correctly recorded when she married Essex Boston at the beginning of 1770. Much later, in 1835 William Coffin, a young "coloured man," died of tuberculosis. Before the 1763–64 epidemic two Nantucket Wampanoags used the name Coffin, and in 1830 the name of a Mashpee Wampanoag veteran of the American Revolution who died on Nantucket is recorded as Obed Coffin.[39] In 1850 among the transient seamen aboard Nantucket whalers there was one Cape Verdean using the name Coffin and six nonwhite Coffins from the Hawaiian islands. Otherwise, on Nantucket people of color did not use the surname Coffin.

That there were few or no black Coffins, Folgers, Swains, Pinkhams, Husseys, etc., may have to do with objections from the white families. The black whaling captain and merchant Paul Cuffe was born on Nantucket's neighbor island Cuttyhunk of an African father and a Wampanoag mother. As a slave, his father Kofi (a day-name in the language of the Ashanti people of West Africa) had been owned by Quaker Ebenezer Slocum. In 1742 Kofi was sold to Ebenezer's nephew John Slocum.[40] Upon attaining his freedom, he called himself Cuffe Slocum, and his children began to use Slocum as a surname. According to family history, the English Slocum family objected, and Cuffe Slocum's children switched to using Cuffe as a surname.[41] It is easy to imagine the lineage-proud Coffins doing the same on Nantucket and the Macys ceding the Maxcy spelling and pronunciation of their name to a black family, possibly to distinguish former slaves from former owners.

The Gardners, on the other hand, apparently found no difficulty with the fact that for a while in the 1700s a white Daniel Gardner and a younger black Daniel Gardner shared the island. There were both white and black Easton and Warren families. White Barneys, especially Jonathan Barney and his wife Abiel Coffin Barney, had ongoing real estate dealings with African Nantucketers in the early 1800s. By the mid-1800s Jonathan and Abiel's son Nathaniel and his wife Eliza had become ardent abolitionists and integrationists. During the 1840s they and likeminded Nantucketers were the targets of insinuation in

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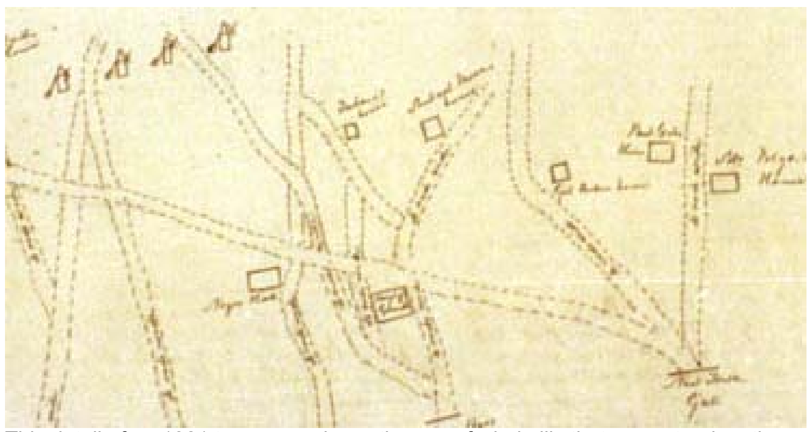
[38] Nantucket Probate Book 2, p. 141.
[39] *Vital Records of Nantucket* V, p. 172, from Private Record 62, Atheneum.
[40] L. Thomas 1986, p. 3.
[41] Salvador 1969, p. 12, reports this from an 1851 interview of Ruth Cuffe in the Cuffe Manuscripts holdings of the New Bedford Public Library.

letters to the editors of the local newspaper, the *Nantucket Inquirer*, that they sought "amalgamation" of the races first through school integration and ultimately through intermarriage.[42]

As for the Whippeys, they had no distaste for amalgamation. White David Whippey famously forsook Quaker Nantucket for life in Pacific Island society.[43] New Zealand-born William Whippey came to Nantucket, married Maria Ross, daughter of Africa-born James Ross, operated a sailors' boarding house for Pacific Islanders, and fathered at least three children before dying of tuberculosis at the end of the 1840s.[44]

Amalgamation was a fact of life on the island. By 1850, when the federal census began to divide the nonwhite population into black and mulatto, one in seven nonwhite people on Nantucket was classified as mulatto rather than black. This included the teenaged children of the Barber family, whose father was a black man with an Irish wife.



This detail of an 1821 town map shows the row of windmills that once stood on the hills west of New Guinea, "Negro Hall," the burying ground below the mills, and the Newtown Gate. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P12925, detail.*

The unions from which Nantucket's mixed-race population sprang do not appear in the island's marriage records, however, because in 1786, three years after abolishing slavery, the Massachusetts legislature enacted an antimiscegenation law that remained in effect until 1843. This "Act for the Solemnization of Marriage" prohibited anyone from joining in marriage "any white person with any negro, Indian or mulatto, under penalty of 50 pounds and all such marriages shall be absolutely null and void."

In defiance of the diminishingly small pool of legitimate marriage partners circumscribed by state law, the African Nantucketer population grew both by natural increase and by absorbing outsiders. Early unions, in particular, were blessed with a multitude of children. In less than a decade of marriage, for instance, Tobias and Falla Boston produced twins Mary and Priscilla in 1768, Phebe in 1771, Lucy in

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[42] Linebaugh 1978, pp. 30–31, quotes from such a letter to the *Nantucket Inquirer* on April 15, 1843. Nathaniel Barney was a member of the School Committee at the time, and his wife Eliza Barney was an officer of the Women's Anti-Slavery Society.

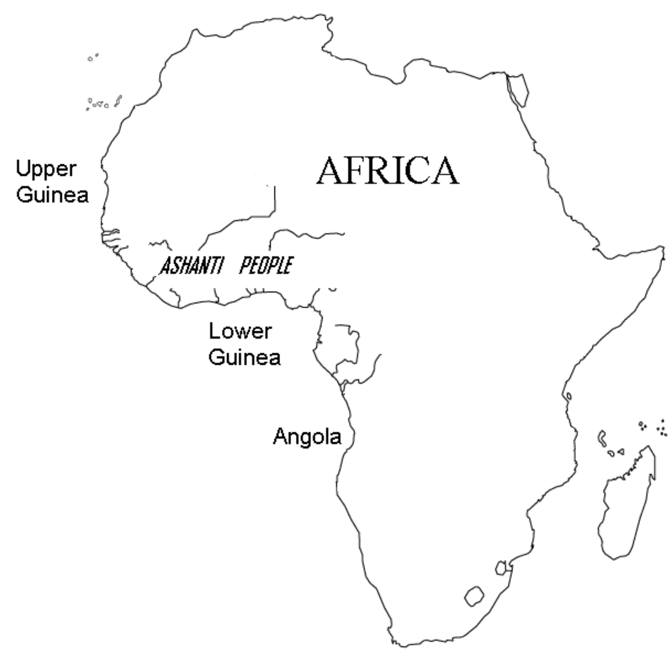
[43] Theroux 1999 provides a summary of David Whippey's career in the Pacific. The entry for David Whippey in the Barney genealogical record states that he was born in 1801, married "a native of the Feege Islands," and died in his adopted home in 1875.

[44] *Vital Records of Nantucket* IV, p. 501. *Vital Records of Nantucket* V, p. 603.

1774, and Prince in 1777.[45] The children and grandchildren of Nantucket's former slaves sometimes found marriage partners from off-island. The community also grew with the arrival of families from the mainland. Like the islanders, these newcomers—or their parents or grandparents—had once been slaves.

The 1850 federal census not only categorized residents by race, it also recorded place of birth. For that year we find that Nantucket's nonwhite population included people from mainland Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, Washington, D.C., Virginia, South Carolina, and Louisiana. Three were from Nova Scotia, where former slaves who had served with the British army against the colonists had been settled after the American Revolution. And in 1850 there were still Nantucket residents who had been born in Africa.[46]

The greatest number of nonwhite off-islanders came to Nantucket from New York, but nearly as many came from the slave states. Unlike white off-islanders resident on Nantucket, who generally had Massachusetts-born spouses, nonwhite residents from out-of-state tended to have spouses who were also from out-of-state, although not necessarily from the same state as themselves. In the Grantham family the husband was Virginia-born, while his wife had been born in Maryland. Their two young children had been born in Massachusetts. Both adults were illiterate and had probably escaped from slavery.



Africans enslaved in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been taken from the west coast of Africa.

New Guinea

By the late1700s an independent community had formed between the harbor and Popsquatchet Hills, where a rank of windmills stood. Within what had been laid out in 1726 as the West Monomoy lots, the area where the African community established itself came to be known variously as Newtown, New Guinea, and Negro Town.[47] Nearby was and still is Angola Street. Both "Guinea" and "Angola" reflect the West African origin of the village's

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[45] *Vital Records of Nantucket* I, p. 116. Prince was named for his uncle Prince Boston, who had obtained his freedom from slavery by court order four years before his nephew's birth.
[46] African-born residents of Nantucket in 1850 included Lucy Cooper, wife of pastor Arthur Cooper, and James Ross, father of Eunice Ross.
[47] In 1812, when Absalom Boston acquired land that had belonged to Freeborn Boston, it was described as "in the middle of one of the shares of West Monomoy in Newtown" (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 22, p. 168). An 1824 deed of sale (Essex Boston to brother Benajah) identifies part of town as "called New Guinea or Guiney Hill or

residents. Beyond was the Newtown Gate, through which people passed out of town onto the sheep commons, and outside the Newtown Gate lay Gallows Field, the site of executions in the 1700s.[48]

South toward the ocean shore lay Miacomet Valley, to which Nantucket's Wampanoags had been displaced from other parts of the island by the burgeoning English population and its livestock. New Guinea's situation made it a natural meeting place for Africans and Wampanoags, and alliances between the two peoples were formed through business transactions and marriages.

With the decimation of Miacomet village by the winter epidemic of 1763–64, solitary Wampanoags merged into the New Guinea community. One of them was schoolmaster Benjamin Tashama. Another was Thankful Micah.

The Wampanoag heritage of residents of New Guinea was recognized not only by Essex Boston in 1822 but by people engaged in the struggle over the public schools in 1844. In that year the integrationists attempted to force the town to go on record that it truly did "mean to deprive any child having *any appreciable mixture of Negro or Indian blood*, of the privilege of attending any schools where there are white children."[49]

Betsey Cary described the lives of the servants who lived in the garret of the Cary family's house at 117 Main Street. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P2366.*

As slaves, African men and women had lived in white Nantucket households. Just as owners sheltered and fed their horses, cattle, and pigs (sheep loose on the commons being another matter altogether), slave owners put roofs over their slaves' heads and food on their plates. Writing about the Cary house on Upper Main Street, Eliza Mitchell recorded Betsy Cary's description of living arrangements and permitted entertainment for the household servants:

> "Now, they [the Carys] were the owners of a number of slaves and cared for them as if they were house servants. The attic had several sleeping rooms and finished fireplaces, where the servants could go after their day's work was over and have all the fun they wanted in a reasonable way. They had instruments of music, fiddle, banjo, etc., etc., and sometimes [they were] allowed to have a sort of picnic and then parch'd corn and molasses and [they] lived

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Newtown" (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 28, p. 100). "Negro Town" appears in 1820 (Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 26, pp. 386-7) and in a death record (Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 37, Folder 118).

[48] In Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 24, pp. 133–142, there is a 1799 list of street names compiled by Isaac Coffin, Principal Assessor, which includes Angola Street and describes New Guinea as "the Negro Town or Negro Village at the Southward and Eastward of the Wind Mills" (p. 138). In this 1799 compilation, York Street, Warren Street, and Bear Street are also already in existence. Pleasant Street is said to run "to the Southward and Eastward to the Newtown Gate" (p. 139). Coffin also writes that "All the Blacks are situated and live in New Guinea who live at the Southward and Eastward of the four Windmills in the Negro Town or Village, New Guiney, Negro Town Village or Negro Hill" (p. 142).

[49] Emphasis mine. Town Records, 1844, p. 249. Reproduced in Linebaugh 1978, p. 36.

quite as contented and happy in their way as one can imagine. I think I never saw such large locks & keys as some I remember of seeing in my young days in that house."[50]

This vivid description of slave life on Nantucket is compromised by the fact that the Cary house was not built until after slavery had come to an end on the island. Either the people living in the attic of that house were employees rather than slaves, or the attic life, fiddling, banjo playing, and corn-popping took place in the house the Carys occupied prior to building the one that stands to this day at 117 Main Street.[51] To be fair, the chilling comment about big locks and keys that follows directly on the description of how the Carys' house servants lived is the second or third mention of household security in the account and may not have been intended to imply that the servants were locked into their upstairs quarters.

Evidence that the Carys owned slaves in the 1700s is to be found in the Nantucket records. Around 1770 Cato, a "free Negro" purchased land with a house and rights to a well in the area near the windmills. The prior owners had been Josiah Barker and Christopher Starbuck, but Cato bought his homestead free and clear from Edward Cary.[52] This has the air of manumission about it, the provision of a house and land to a person newly launched on a life of freedom and self-support.[53] In 1781 Cato Cary, having assumed the white family's surname, married Hannah Panchame, a Wampanoag woman. The marriage appears to have come rather late in life for them both, however, and there is no record of any children born to them.[54] A Cary household had been established in New Guinea, but its founders did not increase and multiply after the fashion of the Bostons and the Pompeys.

Gainful Employment on the Seas

For single persons, couples, and growing families alike, the issue for former slaves living in New Guinea was how to integrate themselves into Nantucket's economy. They could no more survive on subsistence farming alone than the Wampanoags before them. Families needed income to survive.

During slavery, owners had restricted their slaves' social and commercial contacts, as we can see from William Swain's terms of manumission for his former slave Boston, where freedom meant that

[50] E. Mitchell 1894–96 (unnumbered pages); spelling and punctuation modernized. Eliza Mitchell writes that this information was given to her by Betsy Cary in 1845. Betsy (Swain) Cary had married into the Cary family in 1798, and her son-in-law later acquired the Cary house on Main Street for himself and Betsy Cary's daughter, also called Betsy.

[51] Lancaster 1972, p. 85, with a footnote to Mitchell, repeats this assertion of slaves living on the third floor of 117 Main Street, but he also dates the construction of the house to around 1790 (either for Edward Cary or for his son Robert).

[52] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 9, p. 40. The sale was not recorded until the end of June 1774.

[53] Already back in 1718 William Worth provided two acres of land and a horse common to his slave Ishmael upon freeing him. See Appendix 1e.

[54] Hannah/Anna Panchame survived the epidemic that killed at least five members of her family. In 1769 she married John Monseur. She married Benjamin Prince in 1771. Then she married Cato Thomas in 1775, and the next year she married Robert Weomp. Her last marriage was to Cato Cary in 1781. All of the records except the last are marriage intentions.

Boston could henceforth conduct business with anyone he chose to. On the other hand, owners had sent slaves whaling, and these voyages provided access to skills and knowledge that would serve the first free black whalers and their descendants for at least a century to come. In the labor vacuum created by the epidemic, black men—enslaved and free alike—replaced Wampanoag men at the oars of whaleboats. By 1807, according to James Freeman, "The larger whalemen have three boats and twenty-one men, of whom nine are commonly blacks; and the smaller, two boats and sixteen men, of whom seven are black."[55] Freeman went on to express his opinion about this change:

> "…the Indians having disappeared, negros are now substituted in their place. Seamen of color are more submissive than the whites; but as they are more addicted to frolicking, it is difficult to get them aboard the ship, when it is about to sail, and to keep them aboard, after it has arrived. The negroes, though they are to be prized for their habits of obedience, are not as intelligent as the Indians; and none of them attain the rank of endsman."[56]

It was the practice of signing slaves onto whaling crews that ultimately brought slavery to its end on the island. When William Swain freed Boston, Maria, and their youngest child, he put their older children on a schedule for manumission. Tobias, the eldest, was to be freed at age twenty-five. The rest—from Essex, the next to eldest, to George, the next-to-youngest—had to each continue in slavery until reaching the age of twenty-eight. In other words, their most productive working years belonged to Swain, and only thereafter would they be free to go out on their own.

The Swain family sent one of the brothers, Prince—born in 1750 and scheduled to be freed in 1778—whaling on the sloop *Friendship* in 1772.[57] When the *Friendship* returned to Nantucket, Captain Elisha Folger paid Prince's lay (his share in the profits of the voyage) directly to Prince. William Swain had died, having choked to death on a piece of meat at age 82.[58] His son John Swain, nonetheless, sued to recover Prince's wages, but a jury concluded that Prince could keep what he had earned. Prince then successfully petitioned for immediate freedom, five years before William Swain's deed of manumission provided for it.[59]

This 1773 court case does not mark the absolute end of slavery in Nantucket. Silas Boston worked out a deal with the Swain family to go whaling for them one more time in exchange for his freedom in

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55 Freeman 1807, p. 29.
56 Ibid., pp. 36–37.
57 Quaker historian Zaccheus Macy was a shareholder in the sloop *Friendship* (Z. Macy 1790). Just as he derived whaling profits from indentured Wampanoag labor, he also benefited from African slave labor.
58 His death occurred in 1770 and is recorded in two sources: Private Record 38, p. 62 (William C. Folger's genealogical information held by Nantucket Historical Association) and Private Record 63 (Isaac Coffin's manuscript of deaths on Nantucket, held by the Nantucket Atheneum).
59 Nantucket Court Records 1, pp. 297–98. An account of the initial suit and its aftermath was published in the *Nantucket Inquirer* on April 14, 1822.

1774.[60] In 1775 Quaker Benjamin Coffin was still delaying manumission of his three slaves, Rose and her sons Bristol and Benjamin, when the Nantucket Meeting came close to disowning him over the issue.[61] In 1791 another case was in court over the lay of Moses, who had belonged to the Tolman family. The voyage in question had taken place back in 1775, when it appears that Moses was still enslaved. Contrary to the decision in the Prince Boston case, and even after Massachusetts had abolished slavery, the Nantucket court retroactively awarded his earnings to the Tolmans.[62]

And still slavery continued to cast its shadow across the sea to Nantucket. Benjamin Tupper, the Nantucket physician who had ceded to Zaccheus Macy and Richard Mitchell responsibility for the epidemic victims at Miacomet, had a grandson, also named Benjamin. In 1796 young Benjamin wrote a letter from Paris to his mother in Nantucket, sending warm greetings to their good friends the Carys and announcing, "I have bought a large ship of five hundred tons, and she sails this day for the West Indies.…I own one half the ship. She carries five hundred negroes. If she arrives safe, I shall have money enough to come home and live with my friends, which I should like, although I like France very much."[63]

The very waters that had borne Africans to slavery provided livelihoods for their free American descendants. The maritime career of Cuffe Slocum's son Paul Cuffe was bracketed by the American Revolution and the War of 1812, both of which had profound economic repercussions for American whaling. While still a very young man during the Revolution, Paul Cuffe began making daring runs around the English blockade to provision Nantucket. As Lamont Thomas describes these exploits in his biography of Cuffe, "He …finally succeeded in making Nantucket his first maritime market." An entry in Kezia Fanning's diary suggests that Cuffe (described as "Paul Negro") may have gone whaling out of Nantucket shortly after the conclusion of the Revolution.[64] In any case, Cuffe developed a close working relationship with Nantucket Quaker businessman William Rotch Sr., whose son William Jr. had been born in 1759, the same year as Cuffe. The mutual esteem of the Rotches and Paul Cuffe was instrumental in Cuffe's successful application for admission into the Westport Meeting of the Society of Friends.

After the Revolution Paul Cuffe and his Wampanoag brother-in-law Thomas Wainer began building a major whaling and mercantile business in Westport (near Dartmouth and not far from New

[60] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 9, p. 102. Silas's name is written there as "Cyrus." He agreed to make one more voyage for the Swains "to the coast of Guinea or elsewhere."
[61] Leach and Gow 1997, p. 117. The deed of manumission Coffin finally signed is reproduced in Appendix 1e. I have not found a record of dealings with Benjamin Coffin in the Nantucket Society of Friends Book of Objections (Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 35, book 9), and in Leach's manuscript notes (Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 37, folder 3) he only says the manumission was "probably under pressure from the Yearly Meeting" and goes on to point out that in the same year Governor Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island was disowned for his refusal to free his slaves.
[62] Nantucket Court Records 2, p. 55.
[63] Spelling modernized. Tupper's letter is reproduced in its entirety in *Proceedings of the Nantucket Historical Association,* 1937, p. 18. In the text he is confused, however, with his grandfather, who had died two years before the letter was written.
[64] L. Thomas 1986, pp. 9, 15.

Bedford). They captained their own ships, working by preference with all nonwhite crews and whenever possible with close relatives. With their income they purchased agricultural land and they built more ships. Cuffe became an outstanding figure in early United States commerce and politics and in the movement to return former slaves to Africa. He also was a generous donor to the Westport Society of Friends, more generous in fact than Friend Peleg Slocum had been in the days when he had owned Paul Cuffe's father Kofi.[65] The War of 1812 disrupted whaling and commerce once again and with them Cuffe's plans for economic development in West Africa. After the war's conclusion there was insufficient time to realize his long-held ambitions before he died in 1817.

Absalom Boston, Master Mariner

Paul Cuffe—whaling captain, ship owner, and entrepreneur—was a role model if ever there was one for New Guinea's Absalom Boston. Absalom, born in 1785, was a quarter century younger than Cuffe. When he boarded the ship *Thomas* to go whaling around Cape Horn in 1809, he was already a seasoned mariner, twenty-four years old and recently married. He was also literate. While other men signed the *Thomas*'s crew list with marks, he signed on with the same elegant signature that appears on subsequent documents throughout his life.[66]

In years to come Absalom Boston's literacy not only facilitated the advancement of his career, it had broad influence within New Guinea and beyond. White Anna Gardner, who was to become school teacher to a younger generation of New Guinea's children and then to children of former slaves in the South during and after the Civil War, wrote of how Boston introduced her to William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist paper *The Liberator* when she was eighteen years old: "Let me tell you how I came to subscribe for the 'Liberator.' Absalom Boston, a colored man who had lived in Grandfather Macy's family to do outdoor work, and who had become quite domesticated there, frequently came to see Mother. He brought the 'Liberator' for her to read. I at once subscribed for it—his name and mine coming out in the paper as the only subscribers from Nantucket."[67]

By any measure Absalom Boston enjoyed success in life well beyond that attained by his neighbors in New Guinea, but the course of his public success was punctuated by private losses. His father, Seneca, provided in his will for Thankful and made token gifts to two of their younger children, but the balance of the estate was to go all and undivided to the couple's oldest son, Freeborn, "on Condition that he reside in the House with his mother who is now in a State of infirmity."[68] The younger Bostons, including Absalom, were to make do for themselves. Then the unforeseen happened. Freeborn and his father died almost simultaneously in 1809. Thankful, who as a child had seen at least three members of her family die in the epidemic of 1763–64, was unable to manage on her own. In the 1810 census she is listed

[65] Ibid. p. 83.
[66] Barbara Johnson/Friends of Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 381, 1766–1891 (Oversize).
[67] Anna Gardner 1881, p. 30.

as 56 years old and living in a household headed by Freeborn's widow Mary Summons Boston. Two years later, when Seneca's estate was finally settled, Thankful was described as insane. Mary contracted to care for her mother-in-law for life in exchange for the dwelling house that would have been Thankful's.[69]

Absalom had lost his father and brother to death and his mother to dementia, but he and his surviving siblings gained from the division among them of all that would have gone to Freeborn. Now each of them, including their sister Mary who had just married Cape Verdean Michael Douglass, had some property and capital. There was little they could do at the time, however, beyond swapping among themselves and consolidating land, because the War of 1812 had closed down the island's economy.

During the forced inactivity imposed on Nantucket by the war (which was not concluded until early 1815), the residents of New Guinea shared the misery of interrupted income, inadequate food, and insufficient fuel during a period of unusual cold.[70] Absalom lost his first wife, Mary, and was left with a motherless young son. In 1814 he married Phebe Spriggins, their marriage being recorded in the South Congregational Church (now the Unitarian Universalist Church).[71] Not only did Phebe look after little Charles, but she and Absalom had three children together—Henry, Caroline, and an infant who died unnamed.

Absalom returned to whaling after the war, joining the crew of the ship *Independence*, but he was looking for opportunities ashore. In 1820 he successfully applied for a license to keep a public house. He also continued to engage in real estate transactions, a practice he had begun in 1812, trading on his inherited assets, and actively buying and selling land. With the capital he raised, he was in a position to make mortgage loans to other members of the New Guinea community and was becoming an influential figure. In 1822 he finally sailed as captain of the ship *Industry* with an all-black crew on a voyage to the Atlantic whaling grounds.[72]

The voyage, while a grand emulation of those of Paul Cuffe, was not a financial success. The *Industry* returned with only seventy barrels of oil, and the ship itself was auctioned for expenses. Absalom did not take command of another vessel but involved himself with community and business matters on land.

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[68] Nantucket Probate Book 5, pp. 214-15.
[69] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 22, p. 83.
[70] A public soup kitchen was set up in the winter of 1814-15. In February the temperature dropped to a record low of 11 degrees below zero. Because of particulate matter in the atmosphere from a volcanic eruption far away, 1816 was the infamous "year of no summer" with frost every month of the year, and the following year saw a snow storm on June 17. Obed Macy recorded in his journal that the temperature dropped to –11 degrees on February 1 and that on June 11 there was "a heavy white frost and ice as thick as the blade of a knife" (Nantucket Historical Association MS. Colllection 96, Journal 3). The war was over, but life continued very bleak on the island. It was at this time that David Whippey left Nantucket permanently to live in Fiji.
[71] Phebe Williams had married Henry Spriggins in 1810. There is no death record for him, but he does not appear in Nantucket censuses after 1810. He seems to have disappeared during the War of 1812. In any case, Absalom and Phebe were free to marry in 1814.
[72] The departure of the *Industry* captained by Absalom Boston and with its all-black crew was reported in the shipping-news section of the *Nantucket Inquirer*, May 16, 1822.

In 1826 his second wife was gravely ill. In order to stay at home, he signed a contract for driving cows on a daily basis from May through October.[73] Phebe died in August, and once again there were children who needed to be looked after. Instead of going to sea, Absalom bought a quarter share of the lay of another seaman who joined the crew of the *Independence* as it set out for the Pacific whaling grounds.[74] Fortunately for Absalom and his children, Hannah Cook of Dartmouth became his wife within the year. She and Absalom lived out the remainder of their lives together, adding five more children to their family.[75]

When the whaleship *Loper* of Nantucket set out in 1829 with a black crew under white Captain Obed Starbuck, Absalom Boston again stayed on land. Upon the *Loper*'s return in the fall of 1830 from a highly lucrative voyage, he and his New Guinea neighbor Samuel Harris mounted horses to lead the jubilant crew in a triumphal parade through town. The post-voyage banquet was replete with toasts, the gist of which was that scoffers had said it couldn't be done, but it was time for the naysayers to concede. The *Loper*'s crew had brought back "greasy luck" in the form of 2,280 barrels of oil and done so in record time.[76]

The whaling industry had recovered from the War of 1812 and was booming on Nantucket. Absalom's sons Charles (born to Mary) and Henry (born to Phebe) saw their future on the sea. Like their father before them, both appear in records as "mariner," but neither lived to achieve Absalom's rank of "master mariner."[77]

With the deaths of Charles and Henry as young men, the only child surviving from Absalom's first two marriages was Caroline, who married James Clough in 1839. From his marriage to Hannah Cook there was first-born Phebe Ann, and then the boys Absalom, Oliver, and Thomas, all born in the 1830s, and finally Sarah, who was born in 1841. Little Absalom and Sarah both died,[78] leaving Phebe Ann, Oliver, and Thomas as Absalom's and Hannah's hope for the years to come. They were diligent in their efforts to secure a bright future for their growing children.

[73] Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 335, folder 59.
[74] Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 334, folder 119. Absalom Boston paid $45 for a quarter of Joseph Peterson's future share of profits from the voyage.
[75] Hannah Cook was in some manner related to Paul Cuffe, whose son and daughter both married into the Dartmouth Cook family. In Nantucket the brothers Nathaniel and William Borden married Deborah Cook of Dartmouth and Lucretia Cuffe respectively. Nathaniel and Deborah moved to New Bedford soon after they were married. In 1850 fifty-seven-year-old Mary Cuffe was living in Absalom Boston's household. Absalom Boston's marriage connections to the Cuffe family are yet to be fully documented.
[76] See Appendix 1g. The *Nantucket Inquirer* recorded the toasts in "eye dialect," in which spelling is intended to suggest nonstandard pronunciation. Eye dialect was popular in the 1800s, and many examples of it are to be found in the *Nantucket Inquirer*. Absalom Boston's reception and feasting of the Loper crew upon their return implies that he had invested in the voyage, but no documentation of investment has been found.
[77] Absalom Boston is recorded in 1834 as "master mariner" in Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 34, p. 287.
[78] There are headstones with dates for Absalom Jr. and Sarah in the cemetery behind Mill Hill.

Other Maritime Careers

Most New Guinea men at sea derived their income from whaling, working on coastal freight schooners, or fishing. But there were other possibilities. Prince Boston's brothers Peter and Silas went out as seamen on privateers in the 1770s and early 1780s. Serving together on the gunship *Hazard*, they were part of an unsuccessful attempt by the Continental Navy to seize a British fort in Maine and ended up walking from the Maine woods all the way back to Boston. On the basis of this, they both applied for pensions as sailors of the Revolution. By the time Peter was in his early thirties, he was back on land, married to Rhoda Jolly (whose mother was a Mashpee Wampanoag), and on his way to being a father of four.[79]

Absalom and Hannah Boston's son Oliver emulated his great-uncle Peter by enlisting in the Union Navy during the Civil War. After his discharge in 1864, he continued a civilian maritime career from New Bedford.

Military service was a moral two-way highway. On the one hand, it was a route to productive citizenship for Peter and Oliver Boston, but it also offered opportunities to stray. At the beginning of the 1860s, when Nantucket was in deep economic depression, Charles Godfrey Jr., son of one of the founding members of Nantucket's African Baptist Church, enlisted in the U.S. Navy. The previous year he had married a Nantucket woman. A year into his hitch he married a second woman in New Bedford and managed to conceal his bigamy for decades. Eventually he disappeared from his first family. After the requisite seven years, his Nantucket wife successfully petitioned to have him declared dead, and only thereafter, when she applied to the Navy for a widow's pension, did it come to light that Charles Godfrey was still alive.[80]

Landlubbers

The most commonly listed occupation of New Guinea men was mariner, but many African-Nantucketer women and men found work on land. In legal documents and censuses men are commonly identified as laborers, but usually individuals so identified are elsewhere shown to engage in some more specific line of work as well, such as trading, trucking, or occasional whaling. In a court deposition Arthur Cooper, one of the founders of the Zion Methodist Episcopal Church, is described as a laborer.[81]

At some point in their lives, most African Nantucketers worked for a while as domestic servants. Children and young adolescents were sent to live and learn in white households. Anna Gardner wrote of

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[79] Dorman 2000, p. 13. *Massachusetts Soldiers and Sailors of the Revolution*, Volume 2, pp. 293–95. The 1795 marriage of Peter Boston and Rhoda Jolly appears in *Vital Records of Nantucket* III, 3, p. 109. Peter Boston appears as head of household in Nantucket censuses through 1830. After his death, Rhoda Boston is listed as head of household in 1840 and 1850. The children of Peter and Rhoda Boston included Benajah, Priscilla, Mahala, and Mary Ann.
[80] Franklin Dorman, personal communication.
[81] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 36, p. 268. In this document Arthur Cooper testified that he served as a shipping agent, signing John Robinson Jr. on board the ship *Three Brothers* for a whaling voyage without the knowledge of John Robinson Sr. The boy was beaten and verbally abused on the voyage and finally left the ship and refused to return. His father sued for his lay, since the *Three Brothers* took no more whales after the boy left the ship.

how Absalom Boston had formed a lasting bond with her mother from the time when he had lived with her grandfather Francis Macy's family. Since there were no public schools in Nantucket at that time, it was probably the Macys who fostered young Absalom's reading skills and handsome penmanship.

The 1800 census reports forty-three nonwhite people in white households. About the same number were live-in domestics in 1810. Not all were young. Some, it appears, had never left their former owners. An 1800 census shows six black people living with the aged Joseph Barker and his wife Elizabeth. The Barkers were both around seventy years old, and the ages of five of the people living with them ranged from forty to sixty years. The one young person in the household was a fifteen-year-old called Prince. [82]

The Cary family also continued to enjoy the services of African Nantucketers. In 1810 Phillis Hero, age forty-five, and her six-year-old son Fariud were living with the elderly Edward Carys, while William Hero (no age given) was living in the home of Richard and Margaret Cary. Clearly the tradition of live-in help for the Carys survived the end of slavery on Nantucket.[83]

Day labor and domestic service were by no means the only occupations of the residents of New Guinea. Mahalah Collins, daughter of Peter and Rhoda Boston, took in washing, while Sally Dennison, wife of trader and mariner James Dennison, was a seamstress. Phebe Lucas worked as a domestic, but she specialized in nursing.

Venus Peters is unique in being described in a legal document as a "plebian." In March of 1793 she took a man identified as "Nicholas Portugue" to court, but the case was continued to October. Venus died in April, however, so her suit didn't come up again, and we can never know the substance of her complaint against Nicholas. Since she hadn't written a will, a probate inventory was made of her belongings, which were anything but plebian. She owned bedsteads, several changes of household linen, a half dozen cups and saucers, white plates, and a milk pot. Her wardrobe included dresses, skirts, a pair of "green stays," a black satin cloak, bonnet, and gloves. In her possession at the time of her death was a two-year-old IOU from Nicholas Portugue for "eighteen pounds [sterling] on Demand." Also left behind was Henrietta, "a Minor and Orphan Daughter of Venus Peters." The court appointed Josiah Sampson as guardian to Henrietta.[84] If "Josiah" was actually Uriah, then Henrietta was placed in a New Guinea household. Uriah Sampson, identified in an 1785 debt dispute as a mulatto "now resident at Sherborn," had married into the Pompey family.[85] In 1833 Henrietta James was laid to rest in the cemetery behind Mill Hill. If she was the daughter of Venus Peters, she had lived, married, and died in a village smaller than today's Siasconset, a place where gossip about Venus's black satin cloak, green stays, and white plates must have been daily currency for a lifetime.

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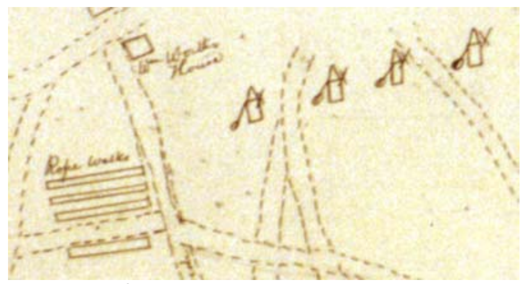
[82] 1800 local census, Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 122, Box 1, folders 2.25 and 2.50. Typed index and transcription of census.
[83] 1810 local census by Obed Macy, Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 96, Folder 25, unnumbered pages.
[84] Nantucket Probate Book 4, pp. 93-94.

New Guinea supported more than a dozen men identified as traders and merchants, including Absalom Boston and Edward Pompey, who both owned and operated stores. Stephen Pompey was specifically a grocer, William Harris was a “victualler” and William Simmons was a baker. Numbers of households took in boarders, and a few people, again Absalom Boston among them, ran boarding houses or inns.

The community also benefited from land-based work directly supported by the maritime industry. On the 1821 map prepared by Daniel Allen and Daniel P. Macy one can see ropewalks located adjacent to the windmills. Among the residents of New Guinea identified as ropemakers are Cato Cary in the late 1700s and John Sip in the early 1800s. Joseph Painter was a blockmaker, and, in addition to Pompey Nailor, Simon Borden was a blacksmith. Charles Godfrey Jr. and Sampson Pompey were coopers.



This detail of the 1821 map shows ropewalks in the vicinity of the mills. Some of the men of New Guinea were employed as ropemakers. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, P12925, detail.*

Just as African Nantucketers followed the Wampanoags into whaling, they also took up weaving, as the Wampanoags had done before. Africa is an early case. Later Seneca Boston, whose wife Thankful was a Wampanoag, became a weaver as well. His brother Essex took up the craft of shoemaking once practiced by Peter Folger’s son Eleazar.

A profession that seems over-represented among New Guinea residents is barbering. More men are identified as barbers or hairdressers than as taking in boarders. Aboard ship the jobs of cook and steward had become almost exclusively the domain of African Americans. Correspondingly, on shore barbering was considered an appropriate profession for African American men, and within African-American communities, barbering was invested with more prestige than work at sea.[86] All of Absalom Boston’s adult sons followed the sea except Thomas, the youngest, who was trained as a barber.

Young Thomas also had music lessons, and he used music as an entrée into a society he yearned to be part of. In 1895, on the occasion of the two hundredth anniversary of Nantucket Town (two hundred years, that is, since the name had been changed from Sherburne), a memoir submitted to the editor of the *Inquirer and Mirror* urged that the contributions of Nantucket’s African families not be forgotten. The writer recalled the names of a number of women who had been indispensable to the success of dances in New Guinea, for which music was provided by fiddler Harry Wheeler.[87] Thomas Boston, on the other

[85] Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 346, *Vital Records of Nantucket* IV, p. 296.
[86] Bolster 1997, p. 160, writes, “Aspiring to middle-class status, the “best” black families in the North sent their sons to sea.…But though many an enterprising black man shipped out in the early and mid-nineteenth century, seafaring never attained the status of barbering or other dignified professions in the black community ashore.”
[87] A.M.M. 1895.

hand, played his violin at parties and dances in white Nantucket households, and ultimately it was his music rather than barbering that carried him through life.[88]

Notable among members of the Boston family through several generations is their readiness to diversify their work and their investments. Seneca Boston was both a mariner and a weaver, while his brother Essex made shoes. Absalom Boston worked his way up from mariner to ship captain while operating a store and an inn. Moreover, both Essex and his nephew Absalom were identified as "yeomen," which means that they farmed their own land. On Nantucket Thomas Boston barbered and entertained with his violin. Later, he worked in a bookstore and auction house in Boston, as a portrait photographer in Westport, then in a bank in Washington, D.C. He worked in a laundry when he had to, and he gave music lessons on the side. Rarely did a Boston have all his eggs in one basket.

If there was one single occupation ashore that can be said to have rivaled whaling for residents of New Guinea, that would be the buying and selling of real estate. The 1850 census lists thirty heads of household with real estate ranging in value from under a hundred dollars up to a thousand dollars, that being Absalom Boston's second house, outbuildings, store, mowing lot, and garden. The property values are much more modest than those held by Nantucket's wealthiest white families. Merchant Philip Folger, for example, owned real estate valued at $14,000.[89] On the other hand, proportionally more New Guinea residents than whites owned bits of real estate above and beyond their dwelling houses, and they were very active in buying and selling them. Prior to 1850 over a hundred and fifty transactions involving land in New Guinea are recorded in the Nantucket books of deeds. Unlike the Wampanoag deeds, which nearly always mark the passing of land into the hands of the English settlers, the New Guinea deeds involve African-Nantucketer men and women buying land from white Nantucketers, circulating it among themselves, and only occasionally selling it to white buyers.

Population

In 1790 there were seventy-six people, about equal numbers of men and women, living in their own households in New Guinea, and another thirty-four living in white households for a total of 110.[90] By 1800 the number of people classified as nonwhite had risen to 228. Another decade later the total was 300, with 192 living in their own households. Then the censuses appear to record a decline in nonwhite population even as Nantucket's total population was in a period of rapid growth. This must be the effect of underreporting, however, because in 1840 a nonwhite population of 576 was recorded.

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[88] M. E. Starbuck 1929, p. 84.

[89] The next largest real estate holdings in 1850 were those of: Thomas Macy, merchant, $13,000; William Hadwen and Charles C. Coffin, merchants, $12,000 each; John W. Barrett, merchant, $10,500; Edward W. Gardner, merchant, $10,000; John H. Shaw, oil manufacturer, $10,000; George Easton, farmer, $10,000; George C. Gardner, farmer, $9,000; George Starbuck, merchant, $8,500; Matthew Starbuck, merchant, $7,000; and Tristram Starbuck, farmer, $2,000. But wealthier than all these men was Elizabeth Starbuck, whose commercial real estate was valued at $15,500.

[90] "Folger's Description of Nantucket," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society for the Year 1794* III, p. 154.

At this point a significant imbalance had developed in the community. Of the 576 residents counted in the census, 429 were male and 147 female. Some were children of course, so there were relatively few adult women in a context that had become very much a man's world. By 1850, after fire had devastated downtown Nantucket and many island men, black and white, had departed for the California goldfields, the male population of New Guinea had fallen to 251, but there were only 91 women and girls of all ages. The continuing departure of men throughout the next decade reversed the proportions, leaving only 53 men and boys in New Guinea to 73 women and girls.[91]

The total population of Nantucket from 1790 had risen from a bit over 4,600 to a high of close to 10,000 in 1840, before it plunged back to just over 6,000 in 1860. It would continue to fall in years to come to around 3,000, which is what the island's population had been just after the epidemic of 1763–64. A whole century passed before the year-round population began to grow again. By then no descendants of the Bostons, the Pompeys, or their neighbors had lived on the island for decades.

Troubles

Throughout its recorded history Nantucket has hosted ills, physical and social. Both have been episodic, with sudden outbreaks and more gradual rises and declines. Mostly they have been difficult or impossible for the island's residents to control. Despite the aspirations of old established families—white and black—to a quiet, orderly life, whaling made the town a place of too many loosely connected young men. Through most of the 1700s a sort of rough frontier behavior afflicted the island despite the pacific influence of the Society of Friends. The courts were clogged with cases involving thefts and assaults lubricated by improbable quantities of rum. The jail was always full, and the whipping post and the gallows were in use. Before the epidemic, Wampanoags were disproportionately represented in criminal and civil proceedings, but the children and grandchildren of the English settlers got into trouble too. English women were frequently caught illicitly selling rum, cider, and beer from their homes, and were increasingly brought to court for bearing children out of wedlock. In March 1757 Mary Johnson was so charged, "with this aggrevation that it is of a mixt blood of the negro."[92]

Meanwhile English men brawled indoors and out, and some married couples were repeatedly before the magistrates.

Particularly flagrant were Stephen Pease and his wife, who were repeatedly in court for selling rum to Wampanoags. In 1714 Isaac Coleman accused Stephen Pease of invading his home and beating him. Pease acknowledged that he had disarmed Coleman but denied hitting him. A witness had different story. He said that when Pease entered Coleman's home and threatened him, Coleman took down his gun

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[91] A list of nearly 600 transient mariners serving on Nantucket ships attached to the 1850 census shows that roughly one in four crewmembers was nonwhite. Most were African Americans or Pacific Islanders. Few were from Cape Verde or the West Indies. Whether or in what numbers these men boarded on shore when their ships were in port in Nantucket is not recorded.

but backed away. Pease, however, pursued him, knocked him down, and kicked him in the head. Pease was convicted of breach of the peace and was sentenced to being whipped or paying a fine, plus court costs and damages awarded to Coleman. Three years later, when a constable went to Stephen Pease's house with a warrant to search for illegal liquor, Pease "took an ax in his hand and swore he would cleave him down if he came on to search his house." The house was searched anyhow, and an eighty-one-gallon cask of rum was seized.[93]

The next year John Harper and William Percy teamed up with Wampanoag Andrew Bone to steal a fishing boat. They were also sentenced to whipping as well as indentured service to the boat owner.

In 1759 Tom Jesper of Sherburne accused Nathan Gershom of Martha's Vineyard of a knife attack that left him half-scalped.[94]

In 1762 a lot of men were fined for fighting, swearing, and public drunkenness.[95]

Women and men kept arriving from off-island uninvited, apparently seeking to part returning seamen from their lays.[96] A couple named Boyle was repeatedly accused of illegal liquor sales. A man named MacMurphy from New Hampshire was evicted from the island, but Joseph and Molly Quinn managed to establish a boarding house in Newtown by the early 1760s. According to one account, it was a Wampanoag washerwoman working there who first contracted the "Indian sickness" and carried it to Miacomet in 1763. Molly Quinn was said to have been the sole non-Wampanoag to have been infected, although—unlike most of the Wampanoags—she recovered. Later she denied that she had ever been sick.[97]

At the same time that the Quinns were operating their establishment, Benjamin Clark was in court for keeping "a disorderly house" where "youths both males and females" held "frollicks…contrary to the orders of their parents and masters." Clark did not deny that there was frolicking in his house at night but promised the court to keep better order.[98]

In 1807 Freeman had said that the African Nantucketers who had replaced the Wampanoags in the whaling industry were given to frolicking, which made it difficult to get them aboard ship and keep them there.

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[92] Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 192.
[93] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 3, court records in rear, pp. 166, 173.
[94] Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 196.
[95] Ibid., p. 208.
[96] Between 1760 and 1763 the following people who had come "to reside here which may be of bad consequences to the town if not removed" included Elizabeth Hutchinson, widow, and her three daughters, Jane, Katherine, and Hannah of Chilmark; Moses Blanchard, wife and child of Falmouth; Mary Gibson of Boston; Zubia Nickerson, single woman, of Chatham; Thomas James of Newport, R.I.; Zebdoyis Fish of Boston; John Wood of Newport; Thomas Chase and wife and child of Tisbury; William Kent, wife, and child of Yarmouth; Elizabeth Merrifield, a single woman, of Wells, Maine; John Colefox of "some town in the colony of Connecticut"; Joseph Coffin, wife and family of Newberry, Mass.; Clother Prier of Connecticut; Joseph and Timothy Jackson of Boston; Samuel Barret of Boston ("we are not in want of any such trademan in this town"); James MakMurfie/MacMurfie of Nufield, New Hampshire; George Cade of Boston; Elias Cotton and family of Boston; and Joseph Glasier of Boston. Nantucket Court Records 1, pp. 201, 204, 211, 212.
[97] Little 1990b, pp. 184, 189.
[98] Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 200.

In March 1811 Abigail "Nabby" Gurrell was brought before the grand jury for running an "Ill-governed and Disorderly House" in her dwelling where she admitted people, both black and white, at night as well as in the daytime for tippling, carousing, and general misbehavior "to the great Damage and Common Nuisance of all the subjects of the Commonwealth." She also sold hard liquor without a license.[99]

Nabby Gurrell's house was located in the waterfront area, but at least one black entrepreneur brought entertainment closer to home in the early 1800s. John Pompey built a dance hall in New Guinea. On the 1821 map of the area there is a large building labeled "Negro Hall," which may be it. The dance hall comes up three times in the town records for 1823, when John Pompey mortgaged it.[100]

Beginning in the mid-1700s the town's selectmen attempted to control businesses catering to single mariners by deporting people suspected of coming to set up or work in such establishments and by licensing the public houses that were permitted to operate. Applicants for liquor licenses were required to put up a bond against damage and disturbance caused by their patrons.[101] Between 1750 and 1760, the annual number of license applications rose to thirty, and those licenses were not just for retailing liquor but also for sale of coffee and tea to paying customers. No record of John Pompey seeking a license has come to light. Possibly no beverages were offered for sale at his establishment. Absalom Boston did apply for and receive a license in 1822, despite a letter to the editor of the *Nantucket Inquirer* from "A Citizen" inquiring "how many inn holders and retailers of Spiritous liquors there are in this Town, and to whom the houses of those kept by Negroes belong."[102]

Until late in the 1700s there were very few "free Negroes" on the island,[103] and discipline of slaves was the direct responsibility of their owners. Accordingly, few black men and women appeared in court. In 1726, sixteen years after his manumission, Africa was accused by a Wampanoag of selling liquor to him. Africa initially denied the charge but then gave in and paid the fine.[104] In the same year Silvanus Hussey brought Primus, "his Negro," to court, accusing him of conspiring with some Wampanoags to steal fifty pounds of meat. Primus was sentenced to a whipping and jailed until the sentence could be carried out. Then he went back to Hussey, who returned to court in 1730 accusing Moses Pomet of "beating his Negro and abusing him very much to the endangerment of his life."[105]

As the 1700s wound down, so did cases of debt, theft, and assault. The Wampanoags, who had once monopolized the courts, had ceased to be a presence, and either the recently freed African Nantucketers were uncommonly law-abiding, or they settled matters among themselves without frequent

[99] Nantucket Court Records 4, pp. 399–400.
[100] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 27, pp. 303, 417; Vol. 28, p. 14.
[101] In Registry of Deeds, Vol. 3, back section, pp. 156 and 160 are examples of sureties put up by licensed keepers of public houses where strong drink was sold retail.
[102] *Nantucket Inquirer*, September 27, 1821.
[103] Africa, James, Jonas, Cato, and Pompey appear in eighteenth-century records as "free Negroes." Ishmael was freed in 1718 and Boston in 1751.
[104] Nantucket Court Records 1, p. 37.
[105] Ibid., pp.43, 66.

resort to the courts. This is not to say that New Guinea was crime-free or that its residents were hindered in seeking redress when they wanted and needed to. The court heard the 1796 complaint of black Isaac Barlow, who had been attacked and beaten by white Elisha Folger while at sea on the ship *Olive Branch* (of all names!). Awhile later John Carter, also black, filed a complaint that John Brown assaulted him twice during the year 1803 while they were aboard the ship *Edward*, once while in Concepción Bay in South America and again half a year later while at sea in the Pacific.[106]

The Fenix family was ill-starred. George Fenix was called to court in 1799 for wife-beating, and his wife Jenny Fenix was repeatedly in court for theft. In 1804 she was sentenced to be whipped for breaking and entering, and in 1822 she stood accused, along with another woman, of robbing an inebriated off-islander. Then there was Dorcas Mingo, who was charged with repeated assaults on other women. In 1804 Essex Boston testified as a witness against her.[107] In 1804 Jeremiah Virginia broke windows in a man's house and beat him up. When two constables arrived on the scene, Michael Antonia got into a fight with them as he attempted to help Virginia get away.[108]

In 1811 came another case of broken windows and worse. One March day Abiah Golden, Joseph Capee, William Pompey, and Stephen Williams, "Black men, mariners," went on a rampage. They set upon Daniel Gardner, a black householder in New Guinea, beat him with a stone, and "did wound and bruise him the said Daniel so that he raised a great quantity of blood and other injuries and wounds to him." They broke the windows of Gardner's house and also unhinged the door. The same day the same gang attacked John Sip, ropemaker, and broke his collar bone.[109]

Social Institutions

The solid citizens of New Guinea must have been exasperated by such disturbances, but a long time passed before they turned to the political process for community improvement. It was not until 1839 that anyone from the neighborhood sought to run for public office. Predictably, the first to put himself forward as candidate for the board of selectmen was Absalom Boston. Just as predictably, no one voted for him.[110]

African Nantucketers were unencumbered by *patrones* of the sort who had interposed themselves between the Wampanoags and the English population. There was no one to compare with the Guardians for the Indians, such as Gideon Hawley in Mashpee or Abishai Folger, Jonathan Coffin, and Richard Coffin on Nantucket in the 1740s. As slaves the Africans had been owned. Because of their sojourn in white households, they did not require the services of interpreters or translators once they and their children were free. The one arena for paternalism might have been religion, but Puritan days were long

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[106] Nantucket Court Records 2, p. 139 (May 11, 1796), Court Book 3, 163.
[107] Ibid., p. 217; Nantucket Court Records 3, p. 91; *Nantucket Inquirer*, September 10, 1822; Nantucket Court Records 3, 125–26.
[108] Nantucket Court Records 3, pp. 87, 89.
[109] Nantucket Court Records 4, pp. 396–97.
[110] Town Records 1838–40, p. 118.

over in New England, and Nantucket's Quakers were not evangelical. The people of New Guinea organized their own churches.

The first English settlers on the island had spent nearly a half century in a state of religious disorganization before finding a unifying form of worship, the Religious Society of Friends. The African Nantucketers waited about as long before coming together for religious purposes. Up until then, in order to attend services they had to leave their neighborhood and go to white churches.[111] Absalom Boston's marriage to Phebe Spriggins in 1814 is recorded in the church book of the Second Congregational Church, which had separated from the First (North) Congregational Church in 1809. Although the Second Congregational Church building came to be known as the South Church, it was not located far enough south to be even on the edge of New Guinea.

In late summer of 1821 the *Nantucket Inquirer* reported that the "coloured people of this Island" had formed a society for worship with its own room and its own black leadership. A month later a visiting preacher, came to the island and spoke outdoors in fields for several days to large gatherings.[112] A Sabbath school was organized for black children, and the following year it was held again, admitting thirty for an hour of religious and moral instruction one afternoon a week.[113] On January 3, 1825, the *Nantucket Inquirer* carried the following announcement: "*African Church*. An edifice at Newtown for the purpose of accommodating the coloured population will be consecrated as a house of worship tomorrow afternoon at 2 o'clock. Seats will be provided for those who choose to attend. Sermon by their preacher, Mr. Lake. A contribution will be taken up after service to be appropriated towards defraying the expenses of completing the house."[114] Serving as trustees of the African Baptist Society in the mid-1820s were Peter Boston, Absalom Boston, Michael DeLuce, and Charles Godfrey.[115]

Nearly a decade after the formation of the African Baptist Society, in May of 1831, New Guinea residents "on this Island, far from the Churches to which some of us formerly belonged" called upon Seth Emmers of Martha's Vineyard and Edmund Harris of Hyannis to assist in organization of the African Baptist Church. Constituent members who signed the charter for the new church were John Barber (whose wife was Irish), Charles Godfrey (a trustee of the Society), Charlotte (Boston) Groves, Priscilla Thompson,

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[111] What appear to be intimations of racial segregation in Nantucket's churches are in some cases ambiguous. A Quaker writing under the name of "thy Friend" to the *Islander* on January 16, 1841, to protest the proposal to close the Atheneum to "persons of color" asked rhetorically whether there were not designated Negro seats or Negro pews in "your Christian churches" and went on to condemn a resolution of the 1841 Methodist Episcopal Church Baltimore convention to comply with state laws that prohibited blacks from lodging complaints against whites. But there is no ambiguity whatsoever to the letter from Hannah Peirce and Eliza Barney to the trustees of the North Congregational Church declining the use of the church for meetings of the Women's Anti-Slavery Society after the Society and the church were unable to reach an agreement about admission of black people to meetings in the church. This letter was published in the *Islander* on January 1, 1841, but had been written some years earlier.
[112] *Nantucket Inquirer*, August 16 and September 21, 1821. The preacher was Lorenzo Dow.
[113] *Nantucket Inquirer*, April 25, 1822.
[114] Ibid., Jan. 3, 1825.
[115] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 28, p. 438. These men are identified as the trustees in a deed of sale from Jeffrey Summons.

Mary Marsh, Sarah Dennison, Rhoda Boston, Hannah Boston, and Sara DeLuce.[116] Notable about this group is the preponderance of woman (three of them the wives of the trustees of the Society) and the absence of the names of their husbands. This regrouping was fraught with tension. Three months after the signing of the charter, former trustees of the Society—Absalom Boston, Michael DeLuce, and Charles Godfrey (who seems to have been on both sides of the issue)—were accused of breaking the lock of the church building and keeping the plaintiffs from "the use, possession and improvement of said church." The complainants were the trustees of the reorganized church: George W. Summons, John Marsh, Thomas Cooper, Philip Tyler, William Harris, Daniel Valentine, and John Peters.[117] A letter from Jeffrey Summons to the *Nantucket Inquirer* about a funeral that took place shortly before the alleged break-in mentions "two of the pretended Trustees, who now have the school house in their possession."[118] The substance of the embarrassing disagreement, which must have made for spirited debates within the Boston and DeLuce households, is nowhere made clear.

In 1832 a second church—the Zion Church—was established. Bristol Wright, Arthur Cooper, and John Cooper received a piece of land from James Ross for the purpose of "building an African Methodist Episcopal Church."[119]

Anna Gardner vividly recalled the terror of Arthur Cooper and his family during the time they were hidden away in her parents' house on Orange Street. *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, F433.*

Arthur Cooper, a fugitive from slavery in Virginia, had arrived in Nantucket with his family in 1820. Two years later an agent for his former owner came to the island to recover him and to claim Cooper's free-born Massachusetts wife and children as well. Nantucket Quakers foiled the attempt and hid the Coopers in the home of Anna Gardner's parents.[120] Local interference with the agent and his two deputies at the time (reported in the *Nantucket Inquirer* on October 22, 1822), the subsequent legal actions, and the ensuing public debate focused Nantucket's attention on the problems of a nation in which some states had abolished slavery while others continued and protected it. As for Anna Gardner, her intense childhood impression of the fear in which the Coopers lived while hiding

[116] The African Baptist Church reorganized again in 1848, when they were encouraged by the Ecclesiastical Council overseeing the reorganization to rename themselves "The Pleasant Street Baptist Church." Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 84, folder 29.
[117] Nantucket Court Records 7, p. 160.
[118] *Nantucket Inquirer*, September 17, 1831.
[119] Nantucket Registry of Deeds, Vol. 32, p. 183.
[120] Woodward 1996 is a fuller account than Stackpole 1981, pp. 61–62, and avoids Stackpole's erroneous assertion that Mary Cooper was also a fugitive slave from Virginia. In Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 222, Folder 4, there is an undated, unsigned account of the events that says the Coopers were hidden in Alfred Folger's house. Anna Gardner's recollection of the Coopers arrival at her parents' house appears in the introduction to her memoirs (Gardner 1881, pp. 14–16). Two other personal recollections of the events were published in the *Inquirer and Mirror* on May 4 and June 10, 1878.

in her family's house was a formative experience that set her on her way to a lifetime devoted to abolitionism, equal rights, and education for African Americans.

Another Nantucket churchman began his life in slavery in Virginia. The Reverend James Crawford was the son of a Virginia plantation owner and one of his slaves, Mary, who ended her days living in Nantucket with her son. The 1850 census describes Mary Crawford as a seventy-two year old mulatto woman who had been born in Virginia. It also describes her as, like Thankful Boston, "insane." James Crawford escaped from Virginia by going to sea on a merchant ship, which he managed to leave in the north. He began a life of freedom in Providence, Rhode Island, where—largely self-educated—he succeeded in being licensed as a Methodist minister. In 1848, during a visit to Nantucket, he agreed to serve as pastor to the local African Baptist Church. Moving to the island with him were his South Carolina-born wife Ann, their young daughter Julianna, who had been born in Rhode Island, and his mother Mary, who—at age 70 and suffering from dementia—had been released from slavery to the care of her son. His wife's younger sister Diana and Diana's daughter Cornelia were enslaved in North Carolina. In order to collect funds to free his sister-in-law and niece, James Crawford traveled extensively throughout the northern states and Canada, dramatically recounting his own life experiences. Then, at great risk to himself, he traveled south into the slave states, passing as a white man, bought Diana and Cornelia, and brought them to freedom in 1858.[121] Ann Crawford had died, and James and Diana married, but this second marriage was brief. Both Diana and Crawford's mother Mary died in 1860. Eight years later he married the widow Rebecca Elaw Pierce, daughter of Zilpha Elaw, a noted black Methodist preacher. James Crawford gave close to forty years of deeply appreciated service to both the African Baptist Church and the Summer Street Baptist Church, neither of which had the resources to pay a living wage to a clergyman. Not surprisingly, the Rev. Mr. Crawford supported his family as a barber.[122]


Former slave James Crawford passed as white on a trip into the slave states to rescue his sister-in-law and her daughter. Arthur Brock recalled Crawford as having "wonderful brown hair, and the merriest blue eyes and dimples, and that large, humorous, lovely mouth that spoke evil of no man." *Courtesy of the Nantucket Historical Association, GPN3441.*

As can be seen from his photo, it would have been difficult to identify James Crawford as "black," a fact upon which he staked his freedom when entering the slave states to redeem his sister-in-law and niece. Generations of involuntary childbearing by enslaved women like his mother Mary and her mother before her had so attenuated their African genetic heritage that their children and

[121] According to a March 13, 1858, letter to the *Weekly Mirror*, and to one obituary published upon his death in 1888, James Crawford brought Diana and Cornelia from North Carolina. The censuses, however, show only one young woman living in his household, Rhode Island-born Julianna, daughter of James and Anna Crawford. Two different obituaries mention that James Crawford was survived by a single grandson.
[122] Information about the life and career of James Crawford from censuses, articles published about him during his life and after his death in Nantucket newspapers, and obituaries that appeared in October 1888.

grandchildren were different in appearance from many northern "free Negroes." Jeffrey Bolster, writing about black seamen in Southern ports in the 1800s, remarks, "Free dark young men from the North stood out in the lower South—not only because of their speech, but because most local free blacks were either mulattos or older people manumitted after they became enfeebled."[123]

In 1850 the old Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 was strengthened and threatened people like the Coopers and the Crawfords living in free states. Another set of laws created in the 1830s threatened the livelihoods of free blacks. Once these laws were in place, the career of Paul Cuffe could not be replicated by other ambitious black men. Captain Absalom Boston and Captain Edward Pompey, both of whom had begun their careers on the sea, showed foresight in diversifying their investments on shore in Nantucket.[124] Had they continued to go to sea, they would have placed their freedom and their lives at risk.

In the 1700s and early 1800s, black seamen both free and enslaved (an example being Prince Boston before and after his manumission from the Swains) took to the water in great numbers. Whaling, coastal freighting, and working the high seas on merchant ships all provided employment and cosmopolitan contacts unavailable on shore. Slave owners were in a bind. On the one hand, they could earn money by putting their slaves to work on vessels, but on the other hand, they stood to either lose the men in free ports or to have them return home with news of how other black men had achieved their freedom. Slave uprisings in the Caribbean struck fear to the hearts of slave owners in the ports of Southern states.

In the 1820s, printed informational leaflets were being carried south by black seamen, appealing to Southern blacks, few of whom could actually read, to resist slavery. States reacted by passing Negro Seamen's Acts to prevent contact between black seamen and black slaves on shore. South Carolina began imprisoning free black crewmen. The state of Georgia followed by placing a forty-day quarantine on any vessel that arrived in a Georgia port with black crewmembers aboard. Since no ship could afford forty days in port, captains were discouraged from signing black men on for voyages that would put in at Savannah. Had Paul Cuffe lived another decade, his business, which took him and his ships into Savannah, would have been suspended. During the 1830s North Carolina and Florida followed South Carolina's lead. Florida's legislature banned all free blacks from coming there on pain of imprisonment. The states with ports on the Gulf of Mexico were slower to adopt restrictions, but by the end of the 1830s Alabama's ports were closed, and finally Louisiana fell in line, too, radically affecting cosmopolitan New Orleans. In the meantime the ports throughout the Spanish Caribbean closed to black seamen, and all free people of color were prohibited from landing in Cuba or Puerto Rico.

In some states the new laws went much further than requiring captains to keep their black crew members aboard ship while in port and subjecting them to imprisonment if they went ashore. Louisiana's

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[123] Bolster 1997, p. 213. In a letter to the *Islander* on January 30, 1841, "B." remarked upon "amalgamation, whose every day occurrence in the slave-holding states divests it there of the charm of novelty."

[124] When Edward Pompey died unmarried and childless in 1848, the probate inventory of his estate included not only the contents of his well-stocked store but also his part ownership of a vessel. His headstone in the cemetery identifies him as "Capt. Edward Pompey."

Negro Seamen's Act required captains to surrender their black crewmembers to be held in jail onshore for the duration of their ships' stay in port, and captains were required to pay for their men's maintenance while they were detained. Soon New Orleans jails were filled to the bursting point with black seamen, especially cooks and stewards, living in horrible conditions and compelled to work in chain gangs building Louisiana roads.[125]

This may account for the otherwise inexplicable tragedy that befell the family of Daniel Gardner in New Guinea. News made its way slowly in the 1800s, returning to Nantucket by letter or word of mouth passed from ship to ship. So it was that in 1837 widowed Anstris Gardner learned of the loss of three of her sons. Nathaniel, age 30, had died whaling "some time past, round Cape Horn." This was the loss to which Nantucketers black and white steeled themselves when their men left to go whaling. But Oliver Gardner, age 26, and his brother Joseph, age 24, had died "sometime past in New Orleans."[126] At about the same time 36-year-old David Forting of Nantucket had died in New Orleans of "fever," and a while earlier James Sims had died there too. Perhaps they were all victims of yellow fever, to which blacks were mistakenly believed to be immune. Perhaps they had run afoul of the law in Louisiana.

The lower South was a profoundly dangerous place for free black men. The year after the Gardner boys lost their lives, Isaac Wright of New York was advertised for sale as a slave in Mississippi. Years later, on the eve of the Civil War, some coastal Georgians claimed they were within their rights to sell into slavery any free blacks who entered their waters. Official representatives from northern states who went south to arbitrate for the release of imprisoned black seamen were unsuccessful.

Black captains in the tradition of Paul Cuffe, Absalom Boston, and Edward Pompey were doubly affected by Southern laws. They could not enter Southern ports with black crews, and from 1821 they themselves were prohibited from commanding vessels. The U.S. Attorney General ruled in that year that free blacks in Virginia were not citizens of the United States and by extension this meant no free blacks were qualified under federal law to command vessels engaged in either coastal or overseas trade. Until it was finally overturned by Abraham Lincoln's attorney general, this ruling was most often honored in the breach, but it made black captains extremely vulnerable. The Cuffe family enterprises collapsed.[127] Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that Absalom Boston did not captain any more ships after the voyage of the *Industry* in 1822.

In 1852 the Louisiana law was changed so that free black crewmembers were no longer taken ashore but were confined to their ships under the custody of their own captains. This was less expensive and had the advantage of making desertion very difficult. Through the years of legal restrictions, however,

125 See Bolster 1997, pp. 172–74, 197–214.
126 *Vital Records of Nantucket* V, pp. 307, 313. The original source is Private Record 62 at the Nantucket Atheneum.
127 Bolster 1997, p. 173, writes: "The precarious financial stability of old black maritime families like the Cuffes collapsed quickly. Captain Paul Cuffe's namesake son spent a life at sea as a common sailor, and his granddaughter Joanna was reduced to public assistance in New Bedford by 1864."

black crewmembers had become a liability to ship owners and captains, and they never recovered the opportunities seamanship had once offered them.

In Nantucket opportunity was already crumbling in any case. Intensive whaling had reduced the number of whales to be found, no matter how far across the oceans the island's whalers ranged. The oil-soaked business district and wharves suffered two fires, one in 1838 and a second, vastly more devastating one in 1846. Lacking the protection of jetties and without regular dredging, access to the harbor was blocked by the sandbar that continuously builds along the north shore. As a port, Nantucket was losing out to the deep-water harbor of New Bedford.

Ashore no one seemed to foresee impending disaster. The quiet, earnest consensus and simple living of Quaker Nantucket had given way to some ostentatious living on Main Street and Orange Street, and Nantucketers of all persuasions engaged in stormy public debates. Not least, the Quakers fell completely out of consensus, dividing into a number of rival meetings, each actively disowning whomever they disagreed with, until ultimately they had alienated all their own young and entered into a period of suspension that lasted into the next century.[128]

Newspapers, particularly the long-lived *Nantucket Inquirer*, provided a public forum for opinions expressed in deluges of letters to the editor. Annual town meetings and other public meetings were also venues for debate, and the establishment of the Nantucket Atheneum in 1834 provided a place for members to borrow books and to hear off-island speakers on a great range of topics. When the original Atheneum building was leveled in the fire of 1846, it was the first building to be rebuilt, opening just six months after it had gone up in flames with all its books and its irreplaceable collection of "curiosities" brought back on Nantucket ships from all the world's oceans.

The Nantucket Atheneum had not been founded as a public library, and its membership could exclude whomever they chose. The early 1840s witnessed the height of debate about national abolition of slavery and local integration of the Nantucket public schools, with hardening of opinion on both sides. Opposition to a three-day antislavery meeting taking place at the Atheneum in August 1842 turned riotous on the first day. Fearing damage to the building, the trustees denied the organizers the right to continue meeting there, and the Abolitionists had to scramble to find another meeting place.[129] The Atheneum closed its doors to African Nantucketers and did not reopen to them for two years.[130]

There were alternatives for African Nantucketers. Obed Barney had already made room upstairs over his store for a free anti-slavery library and reading room. A committee of New Guinea residents was

[128] See Leach and Gow 1997, *passim*.
[129] Arthur Gardner 1916, p. 39. Gardner states that this happened in August 1841, but he is mistaken by one year.
[130] In December 1845 Nathaniel Barney wrote a letter to Samuel Rodman about the closing of the New Bedford Lyceum to African Americans, "Our Atheneum for a time was alike proscriptive, & even more so, inasmuch as no coloured person was free to attend *any* meeting there, for, I think something like two years. During this time I absented myself from the Institution, I refused my support to it, either by tax or otherwise.…The proprietors, however, saw the wrong & they magnanimously acknowledged it, by throwing the doors wide open to all." Nantucket Historical

appointed to oversee the operation of the reading room. It consisted of Pennsylvania-born William Morris and William Harris; William Harris's Massachusetts-born son William H. Harris (a barber); and Henry T. Wheeler. On January 16, 1841, the men signed a letter of thanks to everyone who had contributed to setting up the reading room and published it in the *Nantucket Inquirer*.[131]

A reading public was developing in New Guinea, served by the antislavery library and also by Edward Pompey, who offered copies of William Lloyd Garrison's *Thoughts on African Colonization* for sale as well as subscriptions to the *Liberator*.[132] When he died in 1848, his estate inventory included an impressive list of books.[133] It is possible that they were those that had been made available to patrons of the library/reading room above Obed Barney's store. Among the more than twenty different titles, there were books about religion, law, slavery, American history and geography, English grammar and literature, biographies, bookkeeping, and human health. There were three copies of the biography of Frederick Douglass and one of the *Narrative of William Brown*, which had been published just the year before, in 1847. William Wells Brown, born into slavery, had been active in the cause of abolition since 1836 and had been hired in 1847 as a Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society lecture agent. Edward Pompey's book collection was absolutely up to date.

That there was a book on human health also points to New Guinea concerns. A Health Society was formed. At dances held twice a month, presided over by Trillania Pompey, Edward Pompey's sister-in-law, the society distributed information and promoted public health—a serious issue in the community as it suffered from tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.[134]

Another New Guinea organization was the African Society, whose 1829 Independence Day observance, dinner, and procession was reported in the July 18 issue of the *Nantucket Inquirer*.[135]

Association MS. Collection 54, folder 3. Obed Barney, who provided space for an alternative reading room, was Nathaniel's brother.

[131] See Appendix 1h

[132] Garrison wrote a cover letter to Edward Pompey in August 1832 to accompany a shipment of a dozen copies of *Thoughts on African Colonization* and expressing appreciation of Edward Pompey's efforts on the part of the *Liberator*. Nantucket Historical Association MS. Collection 335, folder 591.

[133] Nantucket Probate Book 17, p. 354.

[134] A.M.M. 1895.

[135] See Appendix 1i. The parade through town to the accompaniment of music and the dinner at which toasts were offered closely resembles the celebration following the return of the *Loper*.