

LINDEN PLACE

MANSION SCULPTURE GARDENS BALLROOM



As Linden Place re-examines its history as part of our preparation for the installation of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion we will be sharing the stories we have uncovered about the house, its inhabitants, and most importantly the enslaved and free black people connected with Linden Place and our community. Here is our most recent installment. Some stories are straight forward and anecdotal, and some are nuanced and painful. As part of the medallion project, one goal is to create a safe space at Linden Place to discuss a difficult topic. We welcome your comments and insights as they will help us in our journey to that goal.

The Land and the First People

First, there was the land. Before 1744 and the partnership of Mark Anthony DeWolf and Simeon Potter, before James DeWolf was born in 1764, or his brother Charles in 1745; before Charles' son George DeWolf was born in 1778, before Russell Warren designed George's house in 1810, before James' son William Henry, born in 1802 and married to Sarah in 1823, there was the land.



On the walls of the Linden Place Gift Shop, once the small ballroom (and in another life the billiard room), there is wallpaper that depicts a lush open landscape. "Le Bocage" and "Les Lointains" – the deep and distant woods – a panorama created by the craftsmen of Zuber, a company in France in business since 1797, from 250 antique woodblocks carved in 1825. Although it is *not* our Rhode Island landscape, it sparks the imagination of what once might have been. The University of Rhode Island Cooperative Extension and the Rhode Island Natural History Survey have identified 1,300 species of plants native to Rhode Island growing here prior to European movement to the area in the 15th century.

In the U.S. Dept. of Interior study done in 1971 by Alonzo Quinn, he notes that Bristol is in the northern Appalachian Mountains – "to be more precise, about in the middle of the system that runs from Alabama through Newfoundland."¹ Bristol's landscape sits on bedrock some 300 million years old.

Some historians argue that there is evidence of a Norwegian settlement that was here about AD 1000 to AD 1010.² 600 years after the possible Viking voyage, the Mt Hope lands were under the rule of Massasoit – the great sachem.

The sacred center of the Pokanoket land was called **Montaup** – and from that comes today's name, Mount Hope. The photo below is of King Philip's Seat at Mount Hope.³

¹ Bedrock Geology of Rhode Island, Alonzo Quin, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1971

² Historical Bristol, Richard Simpson; and his reference to J. Earl Clauson's "These Plantations"

³ Photograph of King Philip's Seat at Mount Hope from Trail and Walk RI



There is a detailed informational website about the Sowams Heritage Area that tells the rich story of the Pokanoket people and Sowams, their homeland. Here is a brief excerpt from www.sowamsheritagearea.com:

“From the time of the last glacial retreat.....these lands and waters have proven to be a bountiful resource for those making this area their home. The land came to be known as Sowams or ‘south country’. The original Algonquian people came to be known as the Pokanoket which refers to the “place of the cleared land” and, starting in the 18th century, by the Colonists as the Wampanoag, “people of the first light”.⁴

As we research and re-examine the story of the DeWolfs, and the Triangle Trade, and slavery, and Linden Place, the story of the indigenous people of this area must be honored as well. We have been advised by social justice leaders that the descriptor that is preferred if no tribal name is used is American Indian. The Pokanoket have not been vanquished, they are here, they are resilient, and they connect the ancient story to the present.



Sagamore PoWauipi Neimpaug, Winds of Thunder, Bill Guy, is the ninth great grandson of PoMetacom, also called King Philip, the son of Massasoit. This photo is from the East Bay Newspapers of October 17, 2020. He tells the story of the outlawing of the use of the name Pokanoket: “After the King Philip War, the word Wampanoag was the name given to the tribal members by whites. If you were male and over 14 years of age and dared utter the word Pokanoket, you could be shot on sight.”⁵ Faced with this level of erasure, since the 1990s the Pokanoket have organized steadily and worked diligently to tell their story, and now number over 300 members.

The tragic enslavement of indigenous people, the American Indian, is a part of that story. From the same website⁶:

“Following the close of the King Philip War in 1676, those American Aborigine who were not killed in the War were either enslaved locally, sold into slavery in Barbados or banished to Maine or tribes outside of the region. In the 19th Century, American Indians were designated as “black” in censuses beginning in the 1920s. In 1880-1884 the state of Rhode Island “detrribalized” the Narragansetts.”⁷ Further research is ongoing as to American Indians being enslaved and sent to the Azores, the Caribbean, and to the Carolinas. But we do know that during King Philip’s War there was a drastic increase in Indian enslavement.

Roger Williams University recently hosted a series of online presentations called “Hidden Truths: Stories of Race and Place”. RWU Associate Professor of Anthropology Jeremy Campbell’s conversation can be found by following this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KInC667vNTI&feature=youtu.be>

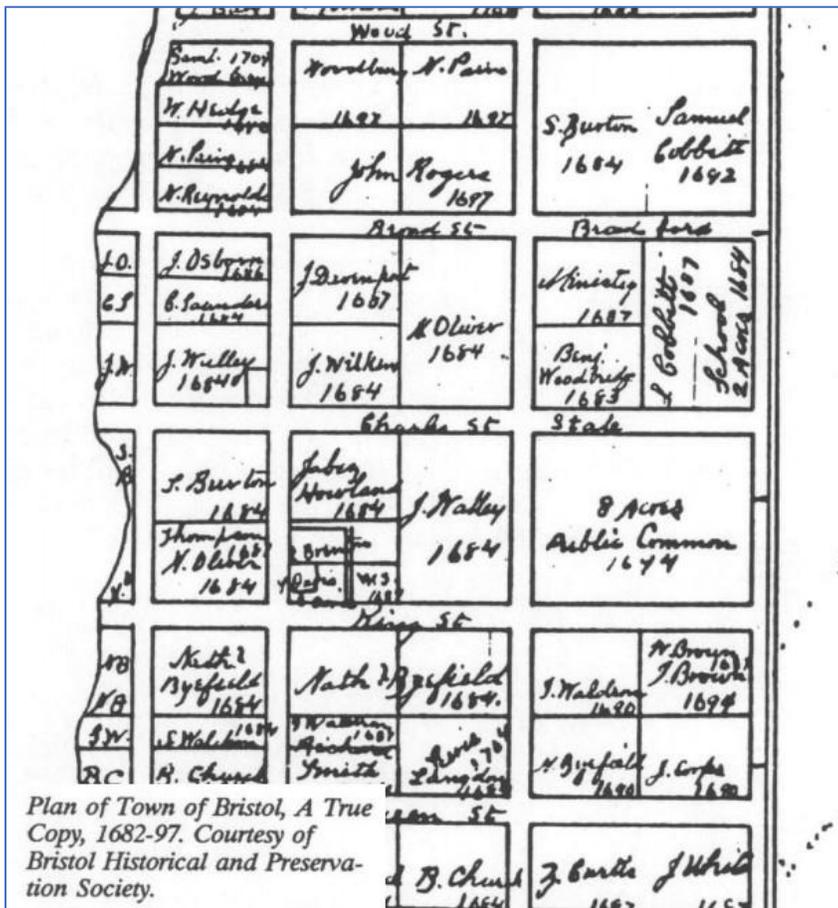
Dr. Campbell’s class covers the colonization and enslavement of the Pokanoket Nation, but highlights the special focus on resilience and survival. One discussion point was the “turf and twig” ceremony that led to the “ownership” of the land. The Pokanoket insist that they never ceded Potumtuck, their sacred land. However, the Plymouth colonists transferred King Philip’s – PoMetcom’s – land to four investors named Byfield, Walley, Oliver and Burton.

⁴ SowamsHeritageArea.com

⁵ “Decolonizing Sowams: Resisting the Erasure of Indigenous Lives in the East Bay of Rhode Island” presented by Dr. Jeffrey Campbell, September, 2019

⁶ Sowams Heritage area.com

⁷ “Why shall we have peace to be made slaves” – Indian Surrenders During and After King Philip’s War, by Linford D. Fisher, Brown University, 2017



The first town meeting was held in 1681, and 76 people were admitted to the town government as householders. The town was named Bristol, after the port in England. On a ship out of that Bristol in 1497 John Cabot, a Venetian, had been the first European to land on mainland North America. Ironically, from that same port from 1700 to 1807, more than 2,000 slave ships carried an estimated 500,000 people from Africa to slavery in the Americas.⁸

Because the householders agreed to abide by the Grand Articles, each received one or more house lots in town, the right to share the common land, and some land in the outlying area. Agriculture was the main business of the day. The town was laid out in a grid pattern - Thames, Hope, High and Wood north to south, and nine cross streets now renamed Oliver, Franklin, Bradford, State (then Charles); Church (then King), Constitution (then Queen), Union, Burton and Walley.⁹ We can see the current location of the house built by George DeWolf in 1810 on this 1682-1697 plan, in the

Davenport/Wilkins/Oliver block.

The 1680 Rhode Island State Census lists “175 Native and Negro slaves” in RI; in 1696 the first documented slave ship “SeaFlower” is reported as having docked in Newport on its way to Boston.

By 1774 the population of Bristol is reported as 1,209 -- 1,079 Whites, 114 Blacks and 16 Indians.¹⁰

You may recall in a previous article that one of the goals of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallion project is to “help us create a tapestry of angels around Rhode Island”. Some of those angels in Bristol are the ancestors of our present-day Pokanoket tribe. We at Linden Place respect the ancient bedrock beneath us, and we honor the Pokanoket Nation, whose land and water we benefit from today.

⁸ Wikipedia

⁹ Rhode Island Historical Preservation Commission, 1990 report

¹⁰ Sketches of Old Bristol, Charles O.F. Thompson, 1942

