

*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.*

### Revolution Ends and a Long Road to Freedom Begins

By 1774 the population of Bristol was reported as 1,209: “1,079 Whites, 114 Blacks and 16 Indians”. The famous shots were fired at the Battles of Lexington and Concord in April of 1775, the official start of the American Revolution.

In our last installment we ended with the 1778 bombardment of Bristol and the story of Scipio Burt, a black man born around 1760, well known church sexton, and described as the ‘servant’ of Reverend John Burt of the Congregational Church who died as a result of the attack. On February 14, 1778, the Rhode Island General Assembly voted to enable “every able-bodied negro, mulatto or Indian man” to voluntarily enlist and earn freedom. Colonel Christopher Greene delegated James Mitchell Varnum to expand the 1<sup>st</sup> Rhode Island Regiment, also known as Varnum’s Continentals and “The Black Regiment”.<sup>1</sup>

Although Rhode Island slave owners opposed the law, and effected its appeal within a four-month period, over 100 free and formerly enslaved African Americans enlisted. After the repeal, another 44 enlisted.<sup>2</sup> At the dedication of Patriot’s Park in Portsmouth, site of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion, Allan Hoffman, President of the American Friends of Lafayette, said in his remarks: “These heroic men, I submit, are the Jackie Robinsons of the American military. Like Jackie Robinson, they blazed the trail, they led the way. Others followed.”

Among the soldiers’ names on the granite wall at Patriot Place are Prince Ingraham, owned by Timothy Ingraham of Bristol, and Juba Smith. The 1774 Bristol Census lists Josiah Smith as owning one slave, valued at \$120. Juba enlisted in 1778. In 1779 military records show him as ‘sick in hospital’. The records for 1780 show he died on April 15<sup>th</sup>.<sup>3</sup> Research is currently underway to learn more about Juba. How did he get his name? Is it a place name from Africa that came with him? Is it from the “juba” music, sometimes called hambone, where the body is used as a percussion instrument? What happened to him between the time he was in the hospital and the time he died in 1780?

*Name of slave Owner Town Value*

“	28 Juba Smith,	Josiah Smith,	Bristol,	120
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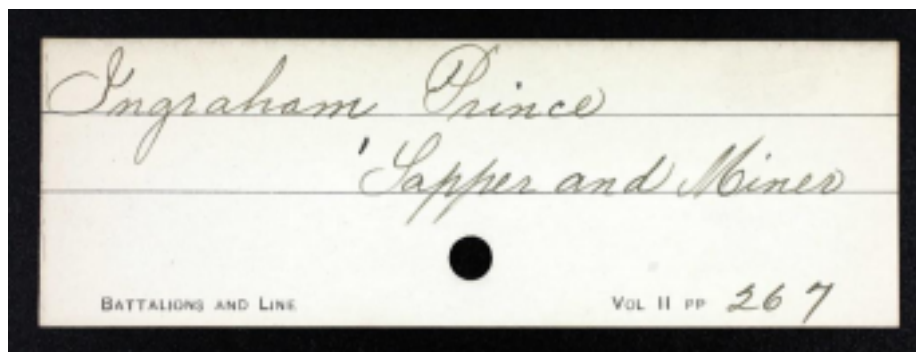
<sup>1</sup> **Another Look at Varnum’s 1<sup>st</sup> RI Regiment**, by Brian Wallin, [www.varnumcontinentals.org](http://www.varnumcontinentals.org), February 1, 2020 <sup>2</sup>

**1st Rhode Island Regiment**, by Elliot Partin, BlackPast.org, November 17, 2010

<sup>3</sup> **They Fought Bravely, but were Unfortunate**, by Daniel M. Popek, 2015

In the midst of revolution, George DeWolf, James DeWolf's nephew and the builder of Linden Place, was born 1779.

In 1780 General George Washington personally ordered each regiment of the Grand Army to detach two men to fill out a new unit – the Corps of Sappers and Miners. They dug trenches in anticipation of battle, and were tasked with weakening any enemy redoubts or barricades in advance of battle. Private Ingraham, because of his skills as a blacksmith, was transferred on June 12, 1781 to that unit, the early forerunner of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.



From a previous installment of this series of articles, we know that Mark Anthony DeWolf and Abigail Potter were married in 1744. Son James was born in 1764, which would have made him about fourteen years old at the time Privates Smith and Ingraham were serving in the war. By 1784 the Rhode Island Gradual Emancipation Act was passed. It stated that all blacks born after March 1, 1784 were to be free; slaves between the age of 15 to 25 would be become indentured servants and would be freed after seven years; and slaves 25 years and older would remain slaves for life. Scipio Burt, the servant of Reverend John Burt, would have been about 24 or 25 when the law was passed.

As the colonies were fighting for independence from Britain, individuals were fighting for freedom and independence for the enslaved people of Rhode Island. One was Reverend Samuel Hopkins of Newport, an abolitionist who published an anti-slavery and equal rights pamphlet in 1776. By 1780 he began to work with a group of free African men to create, for the first time in the Americas, a free African union society. The Newport Historical Society has the minute books and letters connected to the events organizing the society.

According to Keith Stokes in his John G. Winslow Lecture "Power, Privilege and Preservation" ..... "the society had three purposes: first, to insure that every African would have a proper burial regardless if they were enslaved or free; second, to create an 18<sup>th</sup> century census to document the lives of every African man, woman and child in Newport – their age, their lives, where they worked, where they worshipped; and then third and most importantly, they would begin to set up their own religious society, as at that time most Africans who had converted to Christianity were a member of their master's or mistress's church. This African Union Society made the decision that they would build and operate their own place of worship. By 1780 these Africans in Newport are sending letters to other free Africans in Philadelphia, Boston and Providence urging them to organize their own free African societies. Between 1780 and 1790 four more societies were formed...and these would evolve into some of the earliest free black churches in America.....So even though these Africans arrived in the worst possible circumstances, here in New England and in the Northeast and particularly in Rhode Island at Newport very early on they begin to organize and they begin to create their own African American institutions." <sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> *Power Privilege & Preservation: The History of African American Civil Rights in Newport, RI*; a virtual lecture given by Keith Stokes and Theresa Guzman Stokes, July 2020. Available on YouTube.

About the year 1850 several of the colored families on Wood street, set forth their desire for a separate house of worship. By the exertions of Dea. W. B. Spooner, in their behalf, a building was erected for purposes of religious

In 1789 the New Goree community was established in Bristol, RI by free Africans.<sup>5</sup> However, it was not until the mid-1800s that a

community church and school was built on Wood Street.

Glenn A. Knoblock writes: “New Goree” was named for Goree Island, a major slave trading center for over two hundred years located off the coast of Senegal in West Africa. This section of town, located between Wood Street to the north and Shaw Lane to the south, began its rise in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and thrived for over fifty years, establishing its own African Church,

before fading away by the 1870s.”<sup>6</sup> In the “Sketches of old Bristol” a memory is shared: “There is a tradition that Goree once had a government separate from Bristol....at any rate, they elected a governor of their own.”<sup>7</sup> Keith Stokes has lectured and written extensively on the skills and talents and traditions that enslaved Africans brought with them on their forced journey to the Americas: “Despite enslavement and political isolation, African heritage people have exercised their right to self-govern in America dating back to the 18th century. Over a one hundred year period starting around the mid-18th century, enslaved and free Africans would assemble throughout New England at the end of June to celebrate “Lection Day.” The celebration would bring together members of a community to elect a Negro Governor or more appropriately an African tribal leader of the community for the upcoming year. Many of the Africans who arrived in Colonial New England and particularly Newport, Rhode Island originated from the Gold Coast (Ghana) and would maintain their Ashanti and Fanti language and customs. The African Election Day might well have been the age-old Ashanti custom of selecting a tribal leader.”<sup>8</sup>

The full story of Bristol’s New Goree community, its church, and its residents has yet to be told in any detail.

In 1787 Rhode Island imposed a fine on any shipowner who was caught importing slaves into Rhode Island; and in 1794 The Federal Slave Act stated it was illegal for any citizens of the United States to have involvement in the slave trade – with substantial penalties for any violations. James DeWolf was in his late 20s by now, and had built a lucrative business based on human trafficking – ignoring both federal and state law.



Seven years after James DeWolf was born, a man named Isaac Tatem Hopper (pictured here) was born in Deptford Township, West New Jersey, in 1771. As soon as he was able to manage a hoe, he was put to work in the field. At nine years old, he was capable and dependable enough to drive a wagon filled with vegetables from the farm to sell in Philadelphia. A black man named Mingo lived near the farm, and shared stories with Isaac about how he was ripped from his family in Africa, sold into slavery, and dragged off in a ship, never to see his loved ones again. “This painful story made a very deep impression upon Isaac’s mind,” wrote his biographer Lydia Marie Child. “Though he was only then nine years old, he made a solemn vow to himself that he would be the friend of oppressed Africans

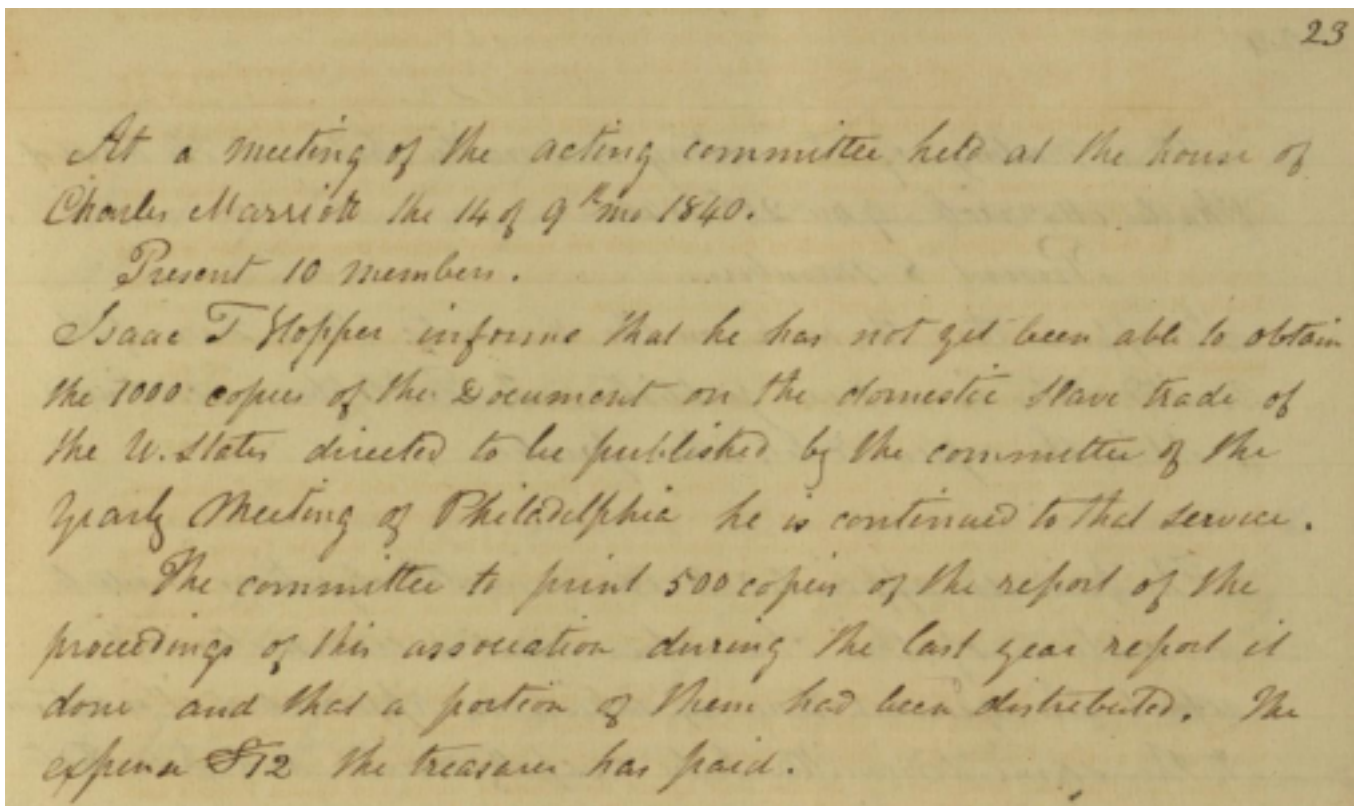
<sup>5</sup> **1696 Heritage Group**, <http://www.1696heritage.com/rhode-island-african-heritage-history-timeline-17th-through-19th-centuries/>

<sup>6</sup> **African American Historic Burial Grounds and Gravesites of New England** by Glenn A. Knoblock, 2016 <sup>7</sup>**Sketches of Old Bristol**, edited by Charles O.F. Thompson, 1942

<sup>8</sup> **Why Voting Matters**, Keith Stokes, VP 1696 Heritage Group, Facebook post, October 2020

during his whole life.”<sup>9</sup> Isaac kept his vow. He was elected to membership with the Pennsylvania Abolition Society in

1796, and soon gained a reputation for devising cunning legal maneuvers to obtain freedom for enslaved people. He eventually moved to New York City in 1829, running a bookstore that catered to the Hicksite branch of the Quakers. An anti-abolitionist mob threatened his bookstore in 1834, as by that time Hopper and his actions in sheltering fugitive slaves were well-known in New York and across the country. Isaac Hopper became book agent and treasurer of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1840.

A photograph of a handwritten document on aged, yellowed paper. The page is numbered '23' in the top right corner. The text is written in a cursive script. The first line reads 'At a meeting of the acting committee held at the house of Charles Marriott the 14<sup>th</sup> of 9<sup>mo</sup> 1840.' The second line says 'Present 10 members.' The third line begins with 'Isaac T Hopper informs that he has not yet been able to obtain the 1000 copies of the Document on the domestic Slave Trade of the U. States directed to be published by the committee of the Yearly Meeting of Philadelphia he is continued to that service.' The final line states 'The committee to print 500 copies of the report of the proceedings of this association during the last year report it done and that a portion of them had been distributed. The expense \$72 the treasurer has paid.'

*Minutes of the meeting of the New York Association of Friends for the Relief of Those Held in Slavery, September 14, 1840; 10 members present including Isaac T. Hopper*

Later in his biography, Ms. Child writes about an experience Isaac had when he was six years old, around 1777. His Uncle Tatem took him to Philadelphia for a meeting for the very first time, and Isaac recalled that the Reverend Doctor William Rogers was the first minister he ever saw preach in a pulpit. Reverend Rogers had a daughter, Sarah Ann, born in 1802 and in 1823 she was married in Philadelphia to William Henry DeWolf. They would live in Linden Place starting around 1835: William until his death in 1853 and Sarah until 1855.

Later, the life of their daughter Rosalie DeWolf, born in 1826, would intersect with that of the Hopper family in a fascinating twist.

<sup>9</sup>*Isaac Hopper*, by Lydia Marie Child, 1853

## Married,

In Gloucester, Mr. Gorham Parsons to Miss Abigail Challice; Mr. Mark Allen to Miss Clarissa Parsons.

In Boston, by the Rev. Benjamin B. Wisner, Mr. Aaron Breed to Miss Sarah Weld.—By the Rev. Mr. Sharp, Mr. Henry E. Lord, merchant, to Miss Sarah Gill, daughter of Perez Gill, Esq.

In Framingham, by the Rev. Mr. Train, Mr. Josiah Norcross, merchant of Boston, to Miss Ann Homer Mellen, daughter of Abner Mellen, Esq. of Framingham.

In Newburyport, by the Rev. Mr. Dimmick, Mr. John Stockman, jr. to Miss Sarah Greenleaf Boardman, daughter of Capt. Olin Boardman.

In Philadelphia, William Henry D'Wolf, Esq. of Bristol, R. I. to Miss Sarah Ann, daughter of the Rev. Dr. Rogers.—On Saturday, the Rev. Dr. Sitgreaves, Rector of St. Stephen's Church, Wilkesbarre, to Miss Anna Lyman, daughter of the late General William Lyman, of Massachusetts.

*Marriage notice, Salem Gazette, December 26, 1823, William Henry D'Wolf Esq.*

*to Miss Sarah Ann, daughter of Rev. Dr. Rogers*