



# 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.*

## ***George DeWolf builds his home on Hope Street, financed by the business of slavery***

In ***“Mount Hope, a New England Chronicle”***, George Howe wrote: “Russell Warren, the carpenter-architect...could build a portrait in brick and clapboard as a painter does in oils. The house he had built for Levi deWolf was ascetic, John’s was thriftily comfortable, William’s was lavishly careless, and young George’s was flamboyant – all like the owners themselves.” <sup>1</sup>

Mr. Howe said of George: “There was not a more dashing man in the state than George deWolf. He had wide black eyes, and long lashes, a romantic flood of dark hair...a chiseled nose, a thin lipped mouth, and a small pointed chin.” Cousin John DeWolf was quoted as saying: “A smiling, quick-spoken man, but a cruel one withal.” <sup>2</sup>

George DeWolf, born in 1778, son of Charles and nephew of James, never served on a slave voyage. But he owned slave ships, and he made money from buying and selling enslaved people, and from his sugar plantation in Cuba – Noah’s Ark – where he owned enslaved people.

In 1809 George DeWolf purchased land in Bristol from his wife Charlotte’s mother Mary (Bradford) Goodwin, at a cost of \$3,000. He hired Russell Warren in 1810 to build his home, which today is called Linden Place. His participation in the business of slavery provided him the \$60,000 to build his lavish home. Estimates by online conversion calculators say that the total sum of \$63,000 in 1800 dollars is equivalent in purchasing power to about \$1,300,000 today. But to put it in clearer perspective: when buying or building a house in the early 1800s cost between \$400 and \$2000, \$60,000 is an enormous sum.

Christy Clark-Pujara, in her book ***“Dark Work”***, writes: “Throughout the North slavery permeated nearly every business of early America – from trading to banking, from insurance to shipbuilding, from rum distilling to agricultural production, from textiles to tool making.” The DeWolf family was involved in most of those described enterprises. Clark-Pujara goes on: “The **institution** of slavery was central to the social and economic development of the northern colonies and states,” and she defines the **business** of slavery as “all economic activity that was directly related to the maintenance of slaveholding in the Americas, specifically the buying and selling of people, food, and goods.” Rhode Island, and the

<sup>1</sup> ***Mount Hope: A New England Chronicle***, by George Howe, 1958

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

DeWolf family, had a large role in that business.<sup>3</sup> Between 1784 and 1807 88 slave trading voyages were financed by the DeWolf family.<sup>4</sup> In addition, the family ran banks, insurance companies, distilleries and textile mills.

## The Slaving Voyages

Scholars at Emory University have been working since the 1990s to create and expand a database of slave trading voyages. In 1999 a CD-ROM included 27,000 slave trade voyages, and in the mid-2000s grant funding provided the opportunity to revise and expand the database, and make it available on the internet, free, for the first time. David Eltis, Robert W. Woodruff Professor of History at Emory and a research associate at Harvard University's DuBois Institute is a driving force in the success of the database, which now contains information on more than 35,000 slave voyages involving the forcible transport of more than 12 million Africans to the Americas between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Using that database, [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org) and searching by the name d'Wolf as owner in the database, information appears for 101 voyages. A search for owners using *D'Wolf, Geo* lists information for 14 voyages with principal ports of disembarkation of Charleston (8) and Havana. (5)<sup>6</sup>

Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade - Database										
Year range ▾ Ship, nation, owner (1) ▾ Itinerary ▾ Enslaved people ▾ Dates ▾ Captain and crew ▾ Outcome ▾ Source ▾ <a href="#">View all</a> <a href="#">Reset all</a> <span style="float: right;">⚙️ ⭐</span>										
Results Summary statistics Tables Data visualization Timeline Maps Timelapse										
Showing 1 to 14 of 14 entries <span style="float: right;"><a href="#">Configure columns</a> <a href="#">Show 15 rows</a> <a href="#">Download</a></span>										
Voyage ID	Vessel name	Vessel owner	Place where voyage began (IMP)	Principal place of purchase (IMP)	Principal place of slave landing (IMP)	Total embarked (IMP)	Total disembarked (IMP)	Year arrived with slaves (IMP)	Slaves arrived 1st port	Captain's name
36746	Sally	Dickens, Edw Baker, Thom D'Wolf, Geo	Rhode Island, port unspecified	Africa, port unspecified	Havana	111	148	1800	148	Baker, Thom Davis, Joe
36781	Punch (a) Dolphin	D'Wolf, James D'Wolf, George	Bristol (RI)	Cape Coast Castle	Tybee Island	132	110	1803	110	Sabens, John
36782	Minerva	D'Wolf, Geo	Bristol (RI)	Quilimane	Havana	205	160	1804	160	Collins, William
36801	Charlotte	D'Wolf, Geo Sabens, John	Bristol (RI)	Iles de Los	Havana	285	345	1805	345	Sabens, John
36848	Rambler	D'Wolf, George Tayer, Edward	Bristol (RI)	Gold Coast, port unspecified	Charleston	189	169	1805	169	Tayer, Edward
36831	Charlotte	D'Wolf, Geo Sabens, John	Bristol (RI)	Gold Coast, port unspecified	Havana	212	260	1806	260	Sabens, John
36880	Rambler	D'Wolf, George Tayer, Edw	Rhode Island, port unspecified	Africa, port unspecified	Havana	182	170	1806	170	Tayer, Edward
36883	Jane	D'Wolf, James D'Wolf, George	Bristol (RI)	Cape Mount (Cape Grand Mount)	Charleston	129	98	1807	98	Richmond, William
36890	Monticello	D'Wolf, George	Bristol (RI)	Iles de Los	Charleston	174	155	1807	155	Champlin, William Phillips
36916	Charlotte	D'Wolf, George Sabens, John	Bristol (RI)	Gold Coast, port unspecified	Charleston	370	330	1807	330	Sabens, John Tayer
36917	Eliza	D'Wolf, George Almy, Job	Bristol (RI)	Goree	Charleston	78	70	1807	70	Almy, Job
36923	Hope	D'Wolf, George Greene, William C	Bristol (RI)	Gold Coast, port unspecified	Charleston	109	97	1807	97	Greene, William C
36925	Jane	D'Wolf, George Martin, Steph	Bristol (RI)	Goree	Charleston	60	54	1807	54	Martin, Stephen
36926	Eliza	D'Wolf, George Almy, Job	Bristol (RI)	Saint-Louis	Charleston	90	79	1807		Almy, Job Miller

What is extraordinary about George's business is his involvement even after 1808, when the United State Congress banned the import of slaves into the United States. George is reported to have continued until 1820, when Congress made slave trading a hanging offense.<sup>7</sup> "Today, there are as many as half a million living descendants of the people traded as chattel by the DeWolf (family)."<sup>8</sup>

A quick review of the family genealogy reminds us that Mark Anthony DeWolf married Abigail Potter, sister of Simeon Potter, in 1774. They had 15 children; Charles, the eldest, is the father of George; James, #12 of the 15, is considered the patriarch of the family business. James' son William Henry, born in 1802 (and whom you may remember married

<sup>3</sup> *Dark Work, The Business of Slavery in Rhode Island*, Christy Clark-Pujara, NY University Press, 2016, p. 2

<sup>4</sup> *The Notorious Triangle, RI and the African Slave Trade*, Jay Coughtry, Temple University Press, 1981, p.89

<sup>5</sup> [www.slavevoyages.org](http://www.slavevoyages.org)

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> *POV Background, Traces of the Trade*: <http://archive.pov.org/tracesofthetrade/background/>

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

Sarah Rogers, daughter of Rev. Dr. Rogers of Philadelphia) would eventually own The Mansion after George and his family fled from Bristol in 1825. And many years later, his little girl Theodora, who left with the family that night, would come back to Bristol, buy the house that William Henry and Poor Sarah had lived in, restore her childhood home, and rename it Linden Place.

## The Plantations



Historians estimate that more than 600,000 Africans were kidnapped, enslaved, and shipped to Cuba over the course of three centuries. Tens of thousands died during the horrific Atlantic crossing. Between the 1780s and 1860s the slave population of Cuba increased from 39,000 to 400,000. Slavery was established in Cuba by royal edict in 1513. It was not abolished until 1886.

James DeWolf was an early investor in Cuba, starting in about 1790, and familiar with the laws that allowed ownership of property. He purchased special citizenship status that allowed him to conduct business. In addition, he counseled his brothers, and other Bristolians, in similar investments. According to historians, his first property was called Mount Hope (Esperanza), which started as a coffee plantation, or cafetal, near the city of Matanzas. One sugar plantation, or ingenio, was called New Hope. Another ingenio was named the Mary Ann (Mariana). Ownership or partial ownership in other sugar plantations followed. George DeWolf's sugar cane plantation was named Arc de Noe.

Using the map above, and the description written by George Howe, we have clues as to the plantation's possible location: "Noah's Ark lay on the waistline of Cuba, where the north coast is only 25 miles from the south. The present highway from Havana to Pinar del Rio passes near its ruins. Its walls were three feet thick, built of stone and plastered, with portholes for defense. From his patio he could walk in a half hour to his landing dock on the Gulf of Batabano.....Slaves were openly advertised for sale in the nearby markets of Artemisa and Canderlaria."<sup>9</sup>

The Bristol Historical and Preservation Society is currently doing an in-depth study of plantations in Cuba and their connections to Bristol. Needless to say, Bristolian-owned sugarcane and coffee plantations were a central component of the Atlantic slave trade, and the business of slavery. The additional research will no doubt add nuanced detail to the story. But we know that because of the forced labor of large numbers of enslaved Africans, Cuba became the largest producer of sugar in the world by the 1840s.

<sup>9</sup> *Mt. Hope, A New England Chronicle*, by George Howe, p. 235

Most of the buildings of the plantations of that era are now gone from the Cuban countryside. We know from archeologists that typically the compound was surrounded by a wall. Bell towers were built that rang out reminders to the enslaved – when to arise, when to go to the field, when to return. The enslaved lived in either *bohios*, small timber-framed thatched-roof huts; or in *barracones*, which were prison-like barracks, some of which held well over a hundred workers. There would be an owner’s house, and then the commercial buildings such as a saw mill, or boiler house, or separate kitchen, perhaps an infirmary, all organized around a central open space called a *batey*. Some plantation owners allowed the enslaved to maintain small plots of land, called *conucos*, on which to raise fresh vegetables and grain to supplement their diets.



*Bell and watch tower, Angerona Plantation, Cuba*

In Matanzas the fear of rebellion was high: building codes required fencing around the enslaved quarters to be at least 4 vars high – about twelve feet. Provided sustenance was minimal; punishment was quick and cruel; the work was brutal: the average life expectancy of an enslaved plantation worker was about seven years. But the enslaved did make strong efforts to maintain their African heritage, and interestingly the only form of celebration allowed and protected by Cuban law was dance. ‘Slaves danced not only to celebrate special fiestas such as the Holy Week and Corpus Christi, but also to celebrate baptisms, marriages, funerals, religious rituals, and even for battle. On many occasions, dancing, just like singing, constituted acts of resistance circumspectly performed before the eyes of the masters and overseers.’<sup>10</sup>

Dancing was accompanied by song, and by drumming. Drums became an integral part of the numerous rebellions led by the enslaved while fighting for their freedom. When planning the Triunvirato rebellion in 1843 in Matanzas, slaves of the Ácana and Triunvirato sugar mills communicated through drums. According to Manuel Barcia in his book *“The Seeds of Insurrection”*, singing, dancing, and drumming played an important role in some of the most important and largest revolts of the period, such as in the revolt of Guamácaro in June 1825, the uprising of the Alcancía ingenio in March 1843, and the Triunvirato rebellion in November 1843.<sup>11</sup> Because of the thatched roof on the bohios, or huts, they were often set on fire as a sign of rebellion – a sign that there was no turning back, that the rebels knew they would either die in battle or be executed after capture.

Slaves in rural Matanzas led rebellions for close to two decades and the greatest concentration of these rebellions took place in the 1840s, culminating in the two slave insurrections of 1843—the Bemba and Triunvirato rebellions. More erupted in 1844.

From the May 1844 newspaper archives, we have a letter to the Bristol Phoenix newspaper which states “through the politeness of a friend in this town we have been favored with the following extract of a letter from the proprietor of a plantation in Cuba, dated March 24, 1844” which then describes heavy losses of property, fires, and unrest. The letter goes on to say “George D’Wolf’s family left me a few days ago, had been with me more than a month, as their estate was earlier implicated than those in this neighborhood. I trust tranquility will soon be restored, but there must be heavy losses of property. Fires take place almost daily.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2170&context=gc\\_etds](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2170&context=gc_etds)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, page 225

<sup>12</sup> Archives of the Bristol Phoenix, May 4, 1844

About a month after this letter was published in the newspaper in 1844, George DeWolf was dead. Back in 1825 his crop failed, he lost ships at sea, his investments went bad, and he spirited his family out of town, leaving a trail of financial destruction in his wake. It is said that his debts exceeded \$300,000. The five banks in town lost \$210,000, about half their capital. Townsfolk owed money lined up at The Mansion, and curtains and chandeliers and furniture and anything not nailed down were used as payment, distributed and documented by the local collector and bankruptcy attorney.<sup>13</sup>

The Commercial Bank foreclosed on the mortgage to the mansion, and James DeWolf bought it for one hundred dollars over what was owed. He never lived in the home. Two years later he sold it to his son William Henry and his wife Sarah.

You may remember from earlier newsletter articles that it was their oldest daughter Rosalie who married John Hopper, the activist attorney of New York, son of abolitionist Isaac Tatem Hopper.

As Howe wrote about George DeWolf: "He spent lavishly, borrowed heavily, and almost everyone in town, even the Negro servants, had lent him money."<sup>14</sup> George and his family took refuge in his Noah's Ark plantation for almost twenty years.

In 1844 George and his wife Charlotte quietly returned to the states, incognito. He died on June 7, 1844, in Dedham, MA "just short of Boston, at the inn where the stage changed horses. For twenty years more, none of his children set foot in Bristol."<sup>15</sup> But that would change.....



*Cuba sugar plantation, c. 1850s, painting attributed to Charles DeWolf Brownell (1822-1909)*

<sup>13</sup> Howe, pp. 229-231

<sup>14</sup> Howe, p.232

<sup>15</sup> Howe, p.237

It Through the politeness of a friend in this town, we have been favored with the following extract of a letter from the proprietor of a plantation in Cuba, dated  
ESPERANZ, March 24th, 1841.

"I wrote you hastily some days ago, that I believed my estate quiet—but to-day how different! At this moment a sentinel parading before my house from end to end and 25 lancers under arms—and last night I was with all my children to have been assassinated! The intended Captain made his escape with another principal, (last night) and several are not yet apprized that their plot is fully discovered, so of course we must keep our eyes about us. The guard leaves us to-day to apprehend other culprits. The country is as in time of war. We have the troops and horses to maintain among us—they move from estate to estate according to circumstances. You may imagine our anxiety, although we are probably more safe now than before—we are less implicated *as yet* than any estate in this vicinity. A negro has declared that fire arms furnished by the English are secreted, and the officer leaves here immediately to investigate the subject.—It seems too atrocious to believe—there is too much to write of declarations taken of the culprits in course of examination which I have myself seen and heard. Be it observed that two of the negro convicts have never received a lash since in my possession, and one is a favorite, and has as much care, and dresses us well as my own boys. I still hope he is less guilty than they say—the others came late into my possession and are not of good fame. George D'Wolf's family left me a few days ago, had been with me more than a month, as their estate was earlier implicated than those in this neighborhood. I trust tranquility will soon be restored, but there must be heavy losses of property. Fires take place almost daily. A large Sugar estate near here was destroyed three days ago. I have written

here was destroyed three days ago. I have written in haste from the circumstances of the moment, and agitation. Do not infer from it that I feel in any immediate danger: quite to the contrary, as there is a thousand horse ready to rush at any moment if an insurrection should be attempted."

APRIL 1st.—Two of my negroes have been executed since I wrote the foregoing—several are under arrest, but the estate is quiet, crop going on as usual.

*The Bristol Phoenix, May 4, 1844*



*Sketch from the Diary of George Howe, Esq. (1791-1837) who worked as an administrator on the James DeWolf plantation "New Hope" 1832-1834*