the mountains! the mountains!: Slavery in Williamstown, MA

Selena Castro
AMST 301: Theories and Methods in American Studies
Prof. Dorothy Wang
What are the connections between Williamstown and slavery?
Background
Ephraim Williams Sr., so Ephraim Williams dad, came out here and surveyed this area. They blocked it out and called it West Hoosic.... some of the Native Americans in this land, I think from the Schaghticoke tribes came and said this is not your land, you can’t do this, because this was a managed forest around here. It was a hunting ground. A lot of the primary roads we have laid out today follow these original Native American trails. So they said this is not your land, and he really just didn’t care.

So what they did was sell off plots of land running up and down Main Street. On each side of Main St. there were these 11 acre plots, which is a huge amount of land. So these guys enter this lottery, you pay what amounts to I think about $1,000 to $2,000 for this plot of land… Ephraim Williams gets a couple of plots… he left to go to Lake George and he wrote his will a few days before he died, crazily, and he said in his will, if you name the town Williamstown, I will leave money to the town so that you can build a free school for boys in the town, and they did that years after his death.

SARAH CURRIE
Slaves in Williamstown
Early Accounts

- Ephraim Williams buying and selling of slaves
  - never settled in Williamstown, lived in Stockbridge
- (1750) sells 9 year old Prince to his cousin, Israel Williams
- (1755) buys 16 year old J Romanoo
- practice of buying younger slaves
I John Charles Jr. of Brimfield in the Co. of Hampshire in consideration of the sum of fifty-three pounds six shillings & eight pence to me in hand paid by Maj. Ephraim Williams of Hatfield in the county aforesaid, the rec’t whereof I do hereby acknowledge & myself fully satisfied and paid Do hereby sell, assign, set over, and convey to the s’d Ephraim Williams his hiers & assigns my Negro Boy Named J Romanoo aged about sixteen years to be the sole Property of s’d Ephraim his hiers and assigns to his and their use, Benifit and Behoof, as his & their Slave, during the natural life of the s’d J romanoo, and I do hereby covenant, Promise and agree, that before the ensealing hereof, I am the Rightful and Lawful owner of the s’d slave, and have good and Lawful Right to sell and Dispose of him in manner as aforesaid, and that I will by these presents, for myself & my hiers Exec” & Adm” shall always be held to warrant and secure the s’d Negro from this Day, During his Natural Life as aforesaid as the sole property of the s’d Ephraim, his hiers & assigns, to his and their use & Behoof, against the claim and chalange of any other person, and all Rightful Pretentions of his own, to Freedom, by any Law or right whatsoever. Witness my hand & seal this thirteenth day of February Anno Domini 1755 [Italics added.]

JOHN CHARLES JR.
Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts
Robert H. Romer

Bill of sale for “A Certain Negro Boy Named Prince”.
(PVMA Library, Deerfield, Massachusetts.)
"stocks of cattle and Negro servants"
Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts
Robert H. Romer
Early Accounts

- tax and valuation lists for MA (1771)
  - Benjamin Simonds and Zebadiah Sabin* listed as owning one “servant for life”
- extract from German diary notes the presence of “Negro slaves… at most of the houses”
- slavery in Massachusetts was abolished in 1783
shirt for that time. Isn't that sad? No money and no hope of getting any. What will come of that! -- Williamstown is a pleasant village lying in a beautiful valley between the mountains called the Green Mountains. We were all quartered here in the tavern and received very good food, wine and punch. Gen. Fellows begged the officers to ask for everything they wanted. If it could be provided, they would have it. At such treatment we could easily have forgotten that we were prisoners but our miserable dress reminded us of it every moment. Each of us was surprised at the beauties of the female sex and their English style dress, but they were only country girls. We saw few or no males. At most of the houses we saw Negro slaves and many children.
Berkshire Hills
- Griffen served as president of Williams from 1821-1836
'wicked.' Milo was a barber by trade, and used to cut the hair of the Perry boys. He had a steel engraving of Charles Sumner in front of his chair, as did many of the Negro barbers in Massachusetts.

Race questions troubled us very little then. Billy Fortune, a former slave boy whom one of President Hopkins's sons had brought back from the War as a body-servant, went to school with us, and though he could never learn arithmetic, became the most romantic and popular of our school-fellows. A few French families had begun to drift down from Canada, drawn by the lure of the cotton
- 5 “all other free persons”
- shift in 1800 to 31
Census - African Americans in Williamstown (1830)

1. Adams, Primus  No whites in household; 1 col. male under 10; 1 between 24 & 36; 1 between 36 & 55.
   2 females under 10; 1 between 10 & 24, 1 between 24 & 36
2. Household of Phillip Alcombright (white): 1 colored male under 10, 1 between 24 & 36;
   2 colored females under 10
4. Working for Charles J. Benjamin: 2 colored males 24-36
5. Household of George Beverly: 1 colored M under 10, 1 36-55; 2 colored F under 10; 2 10-24; 1 36-55
6. Curtis, Daniel  No whites; 2 colored M under 10, 2 F under 10, 2 10-24, 1 36-55.
7. Working for Keyes Danforth, 2 M 10-24, 2 F 10-24
8. Working for Daniel Griffin, 1 M 36-55, 1 F 24-36
9. Holmes, Johnson  no whites; 1 colored male 10-24
10. Working for Abraham Hutchinson: 1 colored M 36-55; 1 colored F 36-55; 1 55-100
11. Household of William Jost: 3 colored M under 10, 1 10-24, 1 36-55; 1 colored F under 10,
   2 between 10 & 24
12. Inus, Susan  No whites; 1 M under 10; 1 10-24; 1F under 10, 1 36-55
13. Working for Daniel Noble: no males; 1 colored F 24-36; 2F under 10, 1 10-24, 2 36-55
14. Working for William B. Sherman: 1 colored M 36-55; 1 colored F 36-55
15. Working for John Sherman: 1 colored M 24-36
17. Household of Page (Gage?) Truman: 1 colored F under 10
18. Household of Simon Van Ranselir: 2 colored M under 10, 1 36-55; 1 F under 10, 124-36
19. Vincent, Jacob  No whites; 2 M under 10; 1 36-55; 2 F under 10, 1 10-24; 1 24-36
20. Working for John Whitman: 1 colored F 10-24, 1 24-36
21. Williams, Cato  No whites; 1 colored M under 10, 1 24-36; 1 colored F under 10, 1 10-24, 1 36-55
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Education</th>
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<td>Elizabeth Curry</td>
<td>17</td>
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<td>Ann Demming</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>B</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>(in house of Williams Prof. Josiah Alden, wife, son, &amp; Eliza Livingston, 58, white)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Isaac Porter</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>School</td>
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<td>(Prof. Shepard of Williams College, who studied the early census documents in Berkshire County, said Isaac Porter was mulatto)</td>
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<td>Nancy Porter</td>
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<td>— Marshal H. Porter</td>
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<td>435 (in house of Catherine Kellogg) (Samuel Duncan 30 M (White), doctor, MA)</td>
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<td>Louisa Z. Robins</td>
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<td>B</td>
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<td>440 (in house of Robert Noble, W farmer $5000, MA, wife Eliz., 4 children)</td>
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<td>Caroline Gardner</td>
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<tr>
<td>442 (Home of Harvey D. Pennaman, W butcher $3500, wife, mother; Charles Sanderson, 4)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thomas Todd</td>
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<td>M</td>
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A Reminiscent Williamstown Poem.

Berkshire county during the past century was notable for a colored population of great wit and eccentricity, the most of whom in their youth having sought its hills and mountains for freedom and safety as fugitive slaves, or having come hither with their masters from New York and other states. Massachusetts was the first state in the Union to abolish slavery, and after this act many former slaves refused to abandon those in whose service they had grown up, or settled themselves in humble homes near their former owners. Many anecdotes are still told of these people, both male and female, who resided in Williamstown, Adams, Lanesboro, Dalton, Pittsfield, Lee, Stockbridge and Great Barrington, but all of these dusky pioneers have long since passed from earth. Williamstown had for its citizens more of this race than any other county locality, its last prominent having been Abe Bunter, who a few years ago passed away at a great old age.
The Williams College Anti-Slavery Society
The Williams Anti-Slavery Society

- first anti-slavery society in Massachusetts (1823)
- held annual meetings until 1831, usually on Independence day
- colonizationalist views
The Williams Anti-Slavery Society

- “Several campuses had anti-slavery societies, particularly schools like Williams where evangelicalism and the Second Great Awakening were influential. However, a change comes later—certainly by 1830—when colonizationists come to dominate the campuses and abolitionism on campus comes under attack. For example, in the 1830s the faculty at Amherst force the student anti-slavery society to close. The president and the faculty were largely colonizationists. Something similar happens at Hamilton College during the same period. The colonization movements—eighteenth and nineteenth century—begin as philanthropic religious movements that include many abolitionists. The nineteenth century movement descends into deeply anti-black and anti-abolitionist politics in the late 1820s. That’s when the abolitionists abandon the movement—including people like William Lloyd Garrison and Arthur Tappan.” -CRAIG WILDER
by civilized nations; or if we would meliorate the condition of
the suffering Africans. There is manifestly a spirit of increasing
interest in regard to Colonization Societies. It is the general opinion,
that it would be better for the free people of color themselves, as well as for the country, if they were conveyed to
the colonies in Africa. Though efforts are made to improve the
moral and intellectual condition of the few negroes among us,
by affording the means of knowledge imparted in our daily and
Sabbath schools; yet a greater proportion of them, compared
with the white population, are yearly returned as convicts in our
prisons, for the imprisonment of those
convicts exceed, yearly, what would be necessary to transport
them to one of the colonies, where they might enjoy the advantages
of religious and intellectual improvement, and at the same
time subject them to such regulations, and instructions as would
be better calculated to restrain them from the commission of
vices than the laws of our country. In the state of New-York,
there are few clauses in the

Universal Emancipation, August 28, 1826
Long before 1850, the first antislavery society in Massachusetts was founded in 1823 at Williams College, a college whose initial funding came in part from the 1755 bequest of a slave owner, Ephraim Williams.\textsuperscript{10} (Williams College was founded in 1793; its first black student graduated in 1889.) At the college’s Fourth of July celebration in 1827, a member of the society gave an address and a “Hymn to the Liberated Slave” was sung. (Celebrations on that day were shared with the Temperance Society. This collaboration between opponents of slavery and alcohol was quite common at this time.) Antislavery groups in the 1800s were badly split between those who favored colonization, solving the problem of slavery by “returning” freed slaves to Africa, and those, like abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison,\textsuperscript{11} who were strongly opposed to colonization. The wording of the “Hymn” sung at Williams in 1827 makes it clear that at least the author of that hymn favored colonization.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{quote}
We are bound for the land of our fathers afar,
And the blue wilds of ocean exulting we roam –
For hope tells of kindred that watch for us there,
And glad bosoms bounding to welcome us home.
\end{quote}

The Williams College Anti-Slavery Society participated in annual Fourth of July celebrations at least until 1831. How long the society lasted after that year and what its activities were – these are matters on which no information has survived.
Runaways in Williamstown
Runaway slaves

- Physiological advantages of the mountains encouraged the pursuit of freedom
- The Underground Railroad
  - Dr. Henry Sabin* played a large role
- appearances at the homes of professors (Prof. Albert Hopkins)
A map of the Underground Railroad
The Berkshire Hills, 1901

The Northern Route.

The third main underground line was from the west over the Berlin mountains to Williamstown to Dr. Henry L. Sabin, who after secretly caring for the unfortunate would under cover of the night furnish the same with a guide to the next conductor, Dr. Henry P. Philips of North Adams. He in turn would with the little forlorn hope of abolitionists, there conceal the refugees by day, chip in for their expenses and see they were transported over the Hoosac mountain by night and safely reached Dr. Fiske of Greenfield, twenty miles away, the next conductor on that much frequented route.
grand juries. The next residence of note was that of Dr. Henry L. Sabin, on the opposite corner from the Mansion House, in which was also located his office. Distinguished as a physician and surgeon, as a trustee and promoter of the college, and for his noble stand as an abolitionist and a succoring friend of fugitive slaves this genial and talented man won high place in the regard of the entire citizenship of the county and was prominently known and respected outside of it. At this
Eulogize Life of Prof. Albert Hopkins
Conclusions and Future Directions