

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

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**AMST 301: Theories and Methods in American Studies**

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**What are the connections between  
Williamstown and slavery?**

# Background

# The Colonization of Williamstown

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- 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

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- 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<sup>d</sup> Ephraim Williams his hiers & assigns my Negro Boy Named J Romanoo aged about sixteen years to be the sole Property of s<sup>d</sup> Ephraim his hiers and assigns to his and their use, Benifit and Behoof, as his & their Slave, during the natural life of the s<sup>d</sup> 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<sup>d</sup> 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<sup>rs</sup> & Adm<sup>rs</sup> shall always be held to warrant and secure the s<sup>d</sup> Negro from this Day, During his Natural Life as aforesaid as the sole property of the s<sup>d</sup> 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

For and in consideration of the sum of Two hundred and  
twenty five pounds, old ten to me Ephraim Williams, well used  
truly paid by Israel Williams of Kaffee Point I do hereby assign full  
tenancy to him a certain Negro Boy named Prince aged about  
nine years, a servant for life doth hold to him his heirs and assigns  
claim of any Person whatsoever as witness my hand this 25th  
day of September anno domini 1750. Eph Williams just

Bill of sale for "A Certain Negro Boy Named Prince".  
(PVMA Library, Deerfield, Massachusetts.)

Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts  
Robert H. Romer



College. ...  
his brothers. Romanoo, purchased only a few months earlier, was presumably among the "Stocks of Cattle and Negro Servants now upon the place" that his brothers inherited.<sup>56</sup>

In the name of God Amen. I Ephraim Williams of Hatfield in the County of Hampshire in New England, now at Albany in the Province of New York, on my march in the Expedition agains Crown-point, being of Sound & perfect mind and memory (blessed be God therefor) But not knowing how God in his Providence may dispose of my life, and remembring the uncertainty of it at All times, I do therefore make and publish this my last will and Testament in the following manner ... I give and bequeath unto my beloved brothers, Josiah Williams, and Elijah Williams, and the heirs of their bodies my homestead at Stockbridge, with all the Buildings and Appertenances therunto belonging, with all the Stocks of Cattle and Negro Servants now upon the place, to be Equally Divided between them ...

**"stocks of cattle and Negro servants"**

**Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts**

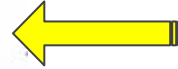
**Robert H. Romer**

# Early Accounts

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- 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.



**German Diary - August 19, 1777**  
**Julius Friedrich Wasmus, Company Surgeon of**  
**Brunswick Dragoon Regiment**

in town for his ability to break hard object with his head.

Berkshire Hills also mentions "two Negro servants (who) played as important a role in the intimate history of the college (Williams) as the presidents." They were "Aunt Hagar," who served in the household of Doctor Griffen, the third president, and is described as "the power behind the presidential chair," and "Aunt Dinah," about whom scant information is given. Although we have no materials

## 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

## MASSACHUSETTS.

TOWNS.

	Number of houses.	Number of families.	Free white males of 16 years and upwards.	Free white males under 16 years.	Free white females.	All other free persons.	Total of each town.
<i>T. Allen junr's return.</i>							
Lanesborough	346	522	547	1058	15	2142	
Adams	325	473	560	1003	4	2040	
Pittsfield	312	492	496	957	45	1992	
Williamstown	270	445	454	865	5	1769	
Richmond	176	336	291	624	4	1255	
Lenox	181	279	299	574	17	1169	
Hancock	190	297	325	588	1	1211	
Partridgefield	172	250	279	500	3	1041	
Windfor	151	222	233	454	7	916	
Washington	96	143	160	283	2	588	
Dalton	94	129	134	283	8	554	
New Ashford	78	92	126	240	2	460	
In the gore adjoining Adams & Windfor	73	102	121	191	11	425	
In the gore adjoining Williamstown	7	8	22	21		51	
Total of T. Allen jun.	2257	2471	3792	4047	7650	12415	
<i>H. W. Dwight's</i>	2207	2416	3558	3726	7117	19914	
Zoar, a plantation returned by W. Shepherd	12	12	16	20	42	78	
Total of Berkshire,	4476	4899	7366	7793	14809	32330	

- 5 "all other free persons"
- shift in 1800 to 31

First U.S. Census - 1790



- 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
- 3 Working for Fisk Armor: 1 colored male 36-55; 1 colored female between 10 & 24, 1 between 36 & 55.
- 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 Lhus, Susan No whites; 1 M under 10; 1 10-24; 1 F under 10, 1 36-55
- 13 Working for Daniel Noble: no males; 1 colored F 24-36; 2 F 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
- 16 Working for D.W. Sloan: 1 colored M 36-55
- 17 Household of Page (Gage?) Truman: 1 colored F under 10
- 18 Household of Simon Van Ranselier: 2 colored M under 10, 1 36-55; 1 F under 10, 1 24-36
- 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

## Census - African Americans in Williamstown (1830)

Elizabeth Garity	13	F	B		
375 Ann Demming	60	F	B	unknown	Illiterate
(in house of Williams Prof. Josiah Alden., wife, son, & Eliza Livingston, 58, white)					
378 Isaac Porter	36	M	White	Laborer	MA
(Prof. Shepard of Williams College, who studied the early census documents in Berkshire County, said Isaac Porter was mulatto)					
Abby Porter	34	F	M	VT	Illiterate
Charles F. Porter	15	M	M	MA	
William D. Porter	12	M	M	MA	School
Edward L. Porter	8	M	M	MA	School
Frances M. Porter	7	F	M	MA	School
Hellen M. Porter	1	F	M	MA	
Mary A. Todd	2	F	M	MA	
379 David Porter	75	m	M	CT	
Dinah Porter	66	F	M	NY	Illiterate
Henry Porter	30	M	M	VT	
Nancy Porter	27	F	M	NY	Illiterate
— Marshal H. Porter	5	M	M	MA	School
Harriet G. Potter	2	F	M	MA	
435 (in house of Catherine Kellogg) (Samuel Duncan 30 M ( <u>White</u> ), doctor, MA)					
Louisa Z. Robins	18	F	B	Unknown	Illiterate
440 (in house of Robert Noble, W farmer \$5000, MA, wife Eliz., 4 children)					
Caroline Gardner	11	F	B	MA	School
442 (Home of Harvey D. Pennaman, W butcher \$3500, wife, mother; Charles Sanderson, 4)					
Thomas Todd	25	M	M	MA	

## Census - African Americans in Williamstown (1850)



## Berkshire Hills, Jan 1906

### 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 green old age.

# **The Williams College Anti-Slavery Society**

# The Williams Anti-Slavery Society

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- first anti-slavery society in Massachusetts (1823)
- held annual meetings until 1831, usually on Independence day
- colonialist views

# The Williams Anti-Slavery Society

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- “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. X 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

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 slaves.

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.<sup>10</sup> (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,<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.



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.

## Slavery in the Connecticut Valley of Massachusetts

### Robert H. Romer

# Runaways in Williamstown

# Runaway slaves

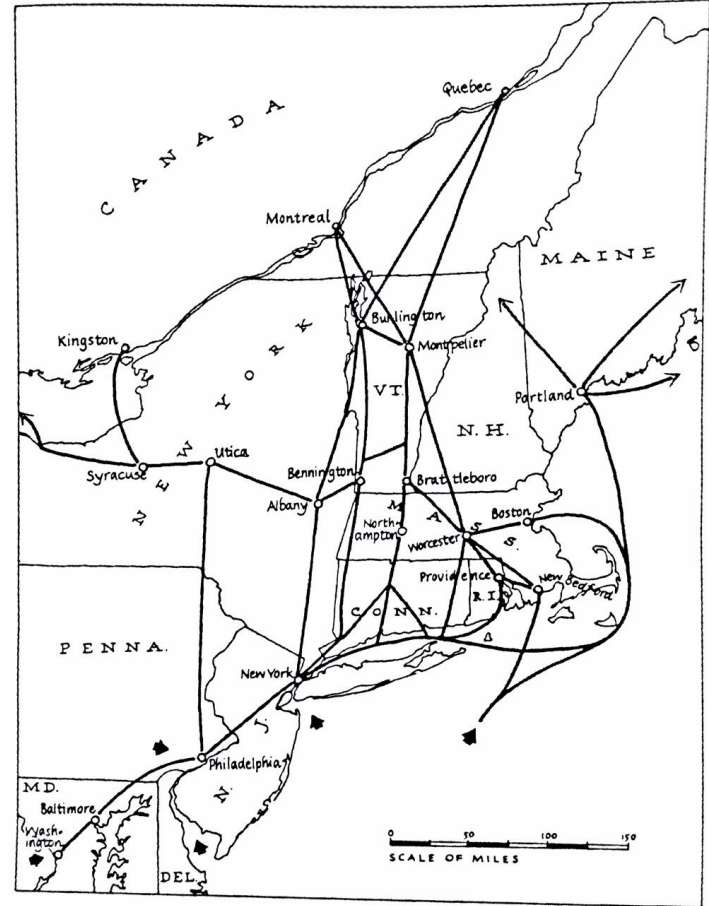
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- Physiological advantages of the mountains encouraged the pursuit of freedom
- The Underground Railroad
  - Dr. Henry Sabin\* played a large role
- appearances at the homes of professors (Prof. Albert Hopkins)



# A map of the Underground Railroad

*The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*  
Horatio T. Strother © 1962 by Wesleyan University



## 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. Phillips 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

J. Fred Walden

## Eulogize Life of Prof. Albert Hopkins

One story I must relate here, told by a very intelligent woman, a native of Stockbridge, which I think may be new to you all. During those months and years that his rest was much broken by attendance to the requirements of his invalid wife, very early one morning there was a knock at the outside door of his house on Main street where he resided, where Currier hall now stands. He went to the door. A fugitive slave stood before him who, coming from the South with longing for freedom was at last scarcely more than 200 miles from Canada. There no fugitive slave law could hurl him back into bondage. He had hidden days and travelled nights already several hundred miles. Professor Albert invited him in. He told his story and begged for a speedy breakfast as he must soon be again in hiding. It was long before Professor Hopkins' breakfast hour, and he told the poor fugitive, over whom his heart yearned, that his wife was very ill and that the woman who ministered to them was working every day to the extent of her strength and that he could not waken her to prepare food at that early hour, urgent as the case was. The poor slave added details of his hardship and still urged. The professor was firm and time slipped away. Suddenly the door into the room opened and the maid appeared to say that the professor's breakfast was prepared. She had mistaken the time and risen and made ready the breakfast an hour earlier than usual. So he sat down with the poor wayfaring man and sent him on his way rejoicing. The story fits in so well with the prophetic character, and could so easily be transformed in circulation into a miracle that I could not forbear to relate it.

Love of Nature

One can almost picture him going into the wilderness to commune with God, or approaching in the sublime dignity of his mission, an idolatrous king, to speak no honey words of Oriental adulation but to announce impending doom, or bending down with sweet sympathy to some broken hearted Shunamite woman, or calling with relentless grandeur fire from heaven to the brutal tools of a mad despot. But even with such surroundings in the picturesque and softened distance of a remote past, proclaiming himself the prophet of God, denouncing governmental measures, persecuted by potentates or mocked by infidels, he would not be for me more truly a heroic, majestic character than he was when pastor of the Church of Christ in his White Oak valley.

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PROF. ALBERT HOPKINS  
(Deceased)

here and there expression in a smile. After a moment or two that tall form with silvered head rose to move up the aisle, and all irreverence fled at once. He announced his text, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise." He had no notes but spoke with the utmost ease, giving logical arrangement to his thoughts and producing a profound impression. Heaven was brought very near and I remember that some of us talking his discourse over that evening doubted if there was another man in the world who could have preached that sermon.

In 1833

I am not able to say exactly when the Sunday school, of which this church enterprise was the fruit, which he conducted in this region had its beginning, but it is to be remembered that he taught a Sunday school class over here and gained an interest in the people of this region as early at least as 1833, when professor of mathematics in the college. That would be 33 years before this building was erected. There were interruptions in his service here, as when he went abroad, but it was probably more or less continuous from that beginning. Certainly this school and religious worship were in operation

# Conclusions and Future Directions