

Recognizing the Forgotten Patriots and Enslaved of Westerly

A personal journey to discover the history of some who were enslaved in Colonial Westerly.

Pete Ogle

Growing up and educated in the Northeast, I assumed that slavery was just a Southern thing, south of the Mason Dixon line. I got launched into this research because of my wife Sue's work as a volunteer consultant for the Center for Reconciliation of the Episcopal Dioceses of Providence back in 2018. That exposed me to the movie ***Traces of the Trade***, and a lot of enlightening discussions about slavery in Rhode Island.

A second catalyst for this research were the events following the killing of George Floyd and controversies about statues of Columbus. Sue was head of the Board for Westerly Library and Wilcox Park and was dealing with how to protect our beautiful statue of Columbus. A statue that was carved here in Westerly by local Italians of granite quarried in Westerly. Again, many enlightening discussions about History and how it is written and remembered.

And finally, I wish to thank Ellen Madison of the Babcock Smith House Museum, Kaela Bieho of the Newport Historical Society, Nina Wright of the Westerly Library and Wilcox Park and Mark Murphy for their help in uncovering these histories.

What I have learned is that Rhode Island had a central role in the slave trade. It was focused in the towns along Narragansett Bay with their strong shipping industry. Rhode Island's agricultural plantations of South County also had a significant role. They used slave labor to help produce food and other goods to supply the sugar plantations of the West Indies and Colonial South. But how significant a role did slavery play in lives of the people living in the greater Westerly area?

History shows that slavery in the Westerly area began with the enslavement of Indians in the aftermath of the Pequot war of 1635 and King Philips war of 1675-76. The two wars provided a catalysts for an expanded use of slave labor. Much of the Indian Lands in the Westerly area were now available to the colonists for farming, but there was a shortage of laborers. Participants in these wars were rewarded with Indian slaves which they either kept or sold, often out of the islands and colonies in the south. Early records are scant as to the number and ownership of the enslaved.

The Rhode Island Colonial census of 1774 provides the first clear picture of RI's population and who had slaves. This census is readily found on the Web and was my starting point. In 1774 there were 70 Blacks and 29 Indians living in Westerly in about 30 of the 274 households. All but one of these households were identified as white. This one nonwhite household was noted as Indian, but with no name provided. The census does not identify any of the enslaved by name.

The enslaved made up about 8% of Westerly's total population of 1774. Most of the 30 households had one or two enslaved workers. A few had 5 or 6, presumable on farms. Only a couple of households in Charlestown and North Stonington had more than a dozen. Notably, these were the Wheeler, Stanton, and Champlin families who had extensive farm plantations with a dozen or more enslaved Blacks and Indians.

These statistics gave only a limited insight into who these enslaved people were. To find out more I started with ***Westerly and Its Witnesses*** by Rev. Frederic Denison and books on the Pequot War of 1635 and King Philips War of 1675. *Witnesses* provides a good picture of the white population but very little on the enslaved. Only two Black families are briefly noted by name.

As a result, I focused on the time from about 1750 and Westerly's archives of Land Evidence, Probate, and Town Meetings. Records of Revolutionary War Soldiers and their pensions have also proven invaluable. From this material I have only been able to flesh out details of the lives of three of the 90 enslaved families or individuals which I am pleased to share with you.

In 1774 there was no downtown Westerly, just a few houses and businesses. Westerly was more a scattering of villages strung out along the Pawcatuck River mostly at mill sites. Downtown was also known as Pawcatuck Bridge.

What is now Rt.1 and Broad Street had been an Indian trail leading to the *Stepping Stones* ford crossing our Pawcatuck River. A river and wetlands area that was many times wider and shallower than it is today. Rock ledges probably divided the saltwater estuary from the freshwater river. Fording would have depended upon the tides and the river flow.

1774 Census Category	Above 16	Under 16
White Males	421	441
White Females	443	401
Indians Male	8	12
Indian Female	10	7
Blacks Male	11	15
Blacks Female	20	23

The census of 1790 and 1800 show that slavery decreased very rapidly after the Revolutionary War. The census of 1790 indicates that there were 68 free blacks and Indians and 10 enslaved. Only 26 of the free Blacks and Indians maintained their own households. These families are identified by name. The others resided within 30 White households and remain unknown. This significant drop in the enslaved population was apparently driven by a number of factors including loss of markets for agricultural goods, an abundance of white labor to work in our relatively small areas of good farmland, and laws phasing out slavery.

From this material I have been able to flesh out details of lives of three and their families of the 90 enslaved individuals which I present here.

Names of some Enslaved

Identified Enslaved	
Bours	Cato (Sharper)
Ward	Cudjo
Babcock	Asa
Babcock	Primus
Bent	Prince
Gavit	John
Primus	Jabez
Quaco	James
Quaco	Jehue
Ray	Thomas
Saltonstall	Britton
Thompson	Joshua
West	Timothy
Quaico	Sabia
Quaico	Sabria
Quaico	Sally
Palmer	Cathrine
Quaico	Pero
Codan	Mary
Haden	Mary
Noyes	John
Champlin	Alice
Quash	Mary
Burdick	Affata
Rhodes	Henry
	Hannah
	Dinah
	Jeffery
	Mercy

The Households with Slaves:

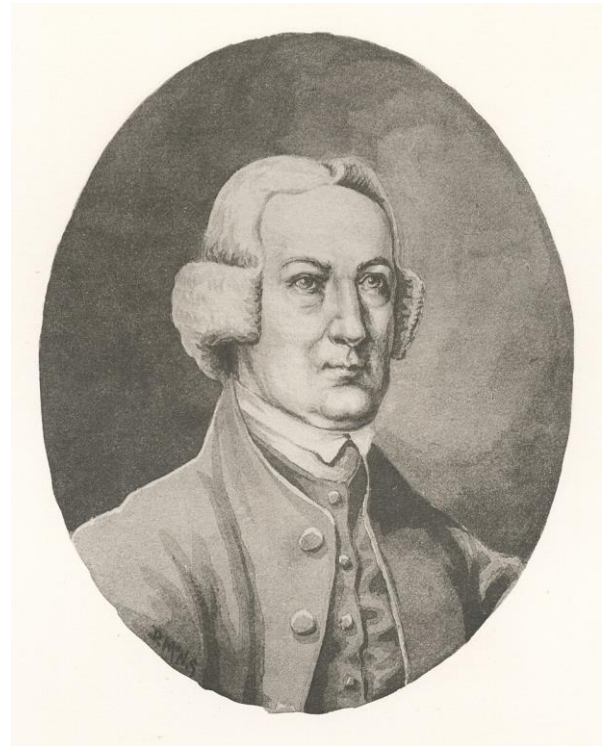
Household Last Name	First Name	RI 1774 census probable slaves	
		Black	Indian
Babcock	Ichabod		1
Babcock	James	3	
Babcock	James	3	1
Babcock	Joshua	2	
Babcock	Joshua	2	
Babcock	Nathan	1	
Babcock	Nathaniel	1	1
Babcock	Oliver	1	
Bliven	William		1
Burdick	David	1	
Champlin	Samuel	5	
Enos	Benjamin	1	
Hiscox	William	1	
Hull	Benjamin	1	
Lewis	Elias		1
Maxson	John	1	
Mustee	Codandro	6	
Noyes Col	Joseph	5	
Noyes	Joseph	5	
Pendelton	Amos	2	
Pendelton	John		6
Pendelton	William	1	
Peter	Junius	1	
Rhodes	James	3	4
Saunders	Stephen	1	
Scims	Jerusha	2	
Stetson	Thankful	1	1
Thompson	Elias	4	
Thompson	Joshua	2	1
Thompson	Samuel	1	5
Thompson	Thomas	3	
Ward Gov.	Samuel	5	
Wilcox	Arnold	2	
Wilcox	Jeremiah	3	
		70	22

Cudjo and Peggy Ward:

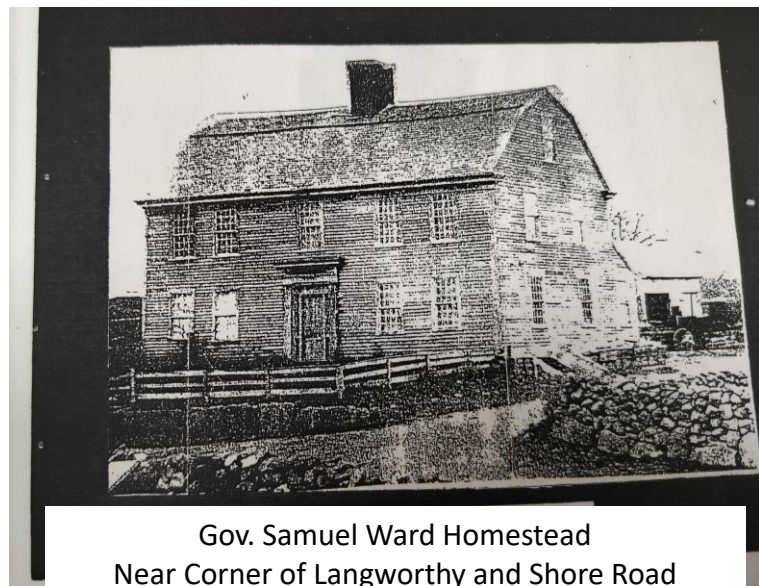
According to the 1774 RI census, Gov. Samuel Ward owned five slaves in Westerly. They were: Cudjo and Peggy Ward, Philis, and negro boys Sampson and James. One of these individuals who shows up prominently in history is Cudjo Ward, the personal servant of Gov. Samuel Ward. Cudjo's wife Peggy is also noted in several documents.

Gov. Ward purchased a Negro Man slave named Cudjo, age about 33, in 1768 from Isabel Marchant, Ward's sister. Cudjo accompanied Gov. Samuel Ward to Philadelphia when Ward was a Rhode Island Delegate and a leader in the Continental Congress in 1775-6. At Ward's insistence Cudjo was vaccinated for smallpox and survived an epidemic. Gov. Ward was apparently could not take the time for the vaccination and its recovery. Ward died of smallpox on 3/25/1776. Cudjo transported Ward's belongings back to Westerly. He first had to be provided with appropriate documents to show that he was not a runaway slave.

Ward's estate of 1776 listed two slaves, presumably Cudjo and his wife Peggy. Cudjo is noted in the DAR's list of Forgotten Patriots. Cudjo and Peggy were both manumitted by Ethan Clarke, the administrator of Ward's estate, in apparent "recognition of Ward's desire and their fidelity and good conduct to their Master".



Gov. Samuel Ward



Gov. Samuel Ward Homestead
Near Corner of Langworthy and Shore Road



Approximate location of Gov. Samuel Ward homestead

Cudjo's wife Peggy purchased a two-acre lot in Westerly from Edward Bliven in 1777 and she was noted as being free. The area around this land became known as Guinea Hollow. Cudjo is noted as head of a household of two in the census of 1800 in Westerly.

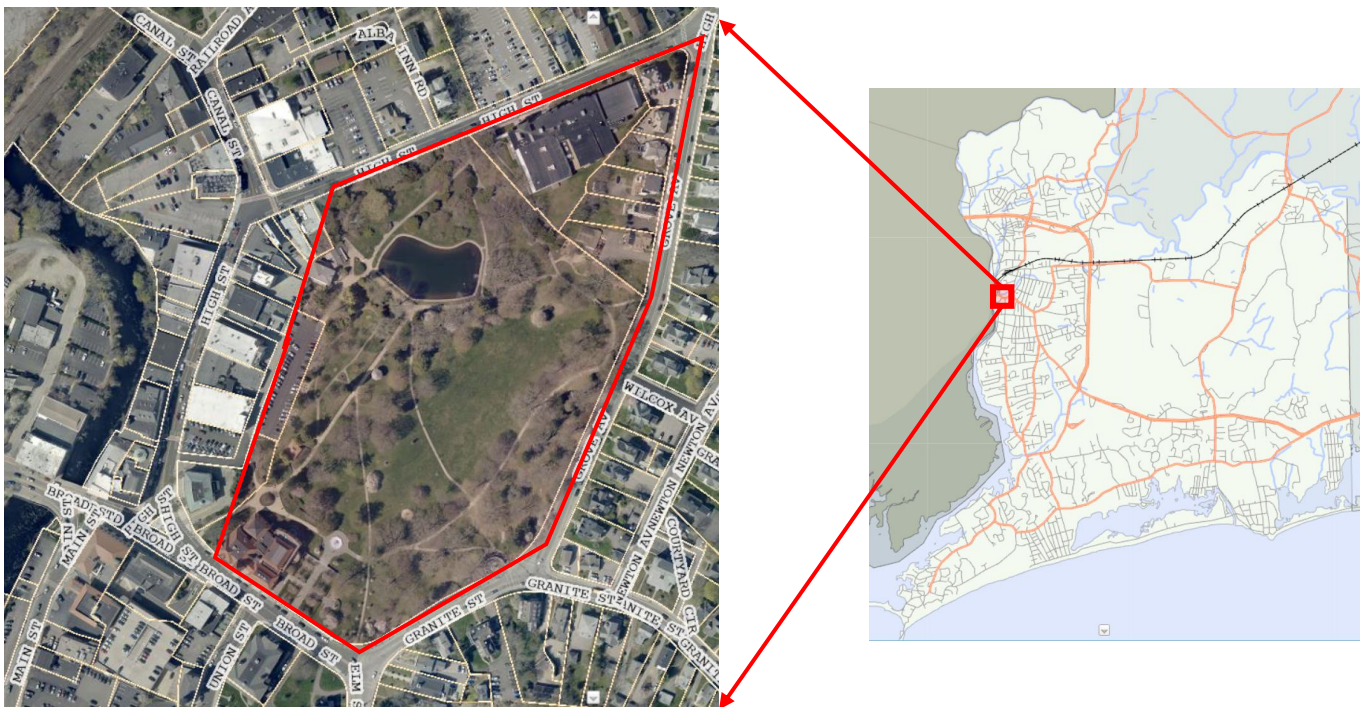
Cudjo and Peggy Ward are also noted in 1806 in the Westerly Town Council records. Council records note that Cudjo, who had belonged to Col. Samuel Ward's father and another slave named Pegg who "hath for some time past and still remain in want and need some speedy support from Governor Ward's heirs". Cudjo would have been about 72 years old in 1806. At the time they apparently were under the care of Oliver Wilcox. Peggy died in 1806.

[illegible]

Manumission of Cudjo and Peggy Ward after Death of Gov. Samuel Ward

Sharper Bours:

Another enslaved person from that time, but relatively unknown, is Sharper (Cato) Bours. Sharper came to my attention in 2021 as I was researching the history of the land where Westerly Library and Wilcox Park is now located. In March 1777, John Bours and Hannah (Babcock) Bours purchased an 18 acres parcel with a **dwelling house** located in Westerly. They made the purchase at a public auction of the Samuel Brown estate. The 18 acres of land encompassed the area of present-day Wilcox Park. The house and lot faced Broad Street. Bours likely chose Westerly as it was his wife Hannah's hometown and its proximity Dr. Joshua Babcock.



Location of Bour's property in Downtown Westerly

The census of 1774 lists John Bours in Newport with two slaves. The British occupied Newport from December 1776 until October 1779. As a prominent citizen of Newport, Bours had signed an Oath of Fidelity to the Colonies in 1775. Bours was also a friend of Dr. Joshua Babcock, an active patriot and local postmaster, and had married Babcock's daughter Hannah (1742-1796).

John Bours sold this Westerly land to Rouse Babcock in 1783. In the census of 1800 John Bours is living in Newport and is listed with one enslaved person.

I found documentation of Sharper's manumission while looking for other records of John Bours. In February 1778 Bours and his wife signed a manumission document that would free Sharper when he reached the age of 30. This document can be found in Westerly's Land Evidence Records. The document stipulates that "he will behave himself honestly and faithfully in their said Master and Mistress Service and shall readily and cheerfully obey all reasonable commands to do, tend, perform farming or any other his master and mistress, their heirs or assigns may require of him and does not under any pretense absent himself from their service without liberty or permission first."

Accepted and Ordered to be Recorded
 Test Joseph Grandall Town Clerk
 Entered March the 27th 1778
 J^o Joseph Grandall Town Clerk

Be it remembered That the Subscriber Master and Mistress and
 Owner of a certain Negro Man Slave named Sharper Do hereby Covenant
 with him their said Negro Man That provided he will behave himself
 honestly and faithfully in their said Master and Mistress Service and shall
 readily and cheerfully obey all their reasonable Commands and do tend
 perform Farming or any other Business this said Master and Mistress their
 Heirs and Assigns may require of him and does not on any pretence whatever absent
 himself from their Service without Liberty or Permission first, Obtains then
 and in that Case the Subscriber promise and Oblige themselves to Manumit
 and set free their said Negro Man Sharper upon his Arrival at the Age
 of Thirty Years to which Agreement they bind themselves their Heirs and
 Assigns
 Witness our Hands and Seals
 Westerly February 9th 1778 John Bours
 Hannah Bours
 Entered March 2^d 1778
 J^o Joseph Grandall Town Clerk

Manumission of Sharper Bours by John and Hannah
 Bours



John and Hannah Babcock Bours

Sharper was owned by John Bours, a prominent merchant in Newport who was a leader in the Episcopal Church and founding member of the Redwood Library. Bours, his father and friends were active in the slave trade. John Bours was a co-owner of the ship *Newport Packet*, a brigantine. In 1764-5 it sailed from Rhode Island to the Gold Coast and Anomabu then to Charlestown, SC delivering 154 slaves. The ship then returned to Newport.

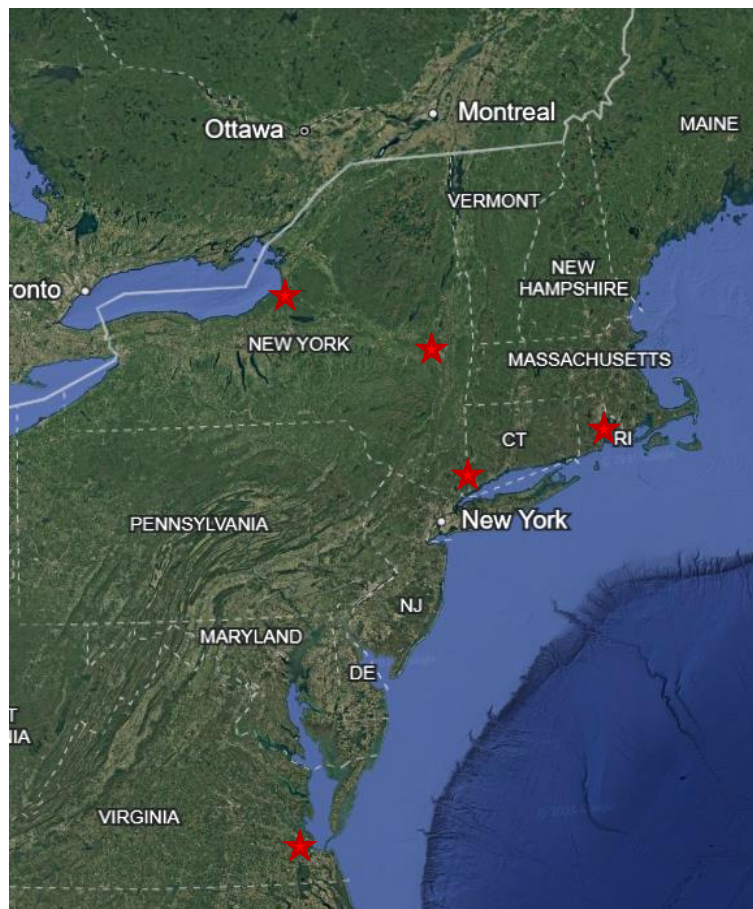
With help from the Newport Historical Society, I found Sharper's baptismal record of 1759. Bours had a Black girl baptized at the same time. The Newport census of 1774 shows that the Bours had a male slave and female slave each over the age of 16. The 1777 military census listed Bours in Westerly with two male slaves over the age of 16. One of his male slaves was likely Sharper.

This would indicate that Sharper was about 19 when the manumission document was written in 1778 and that he had another 11 years to serve. It would appear that Sharper decided not to wait 11 more years for his freedom. In the spring of 1778 he signed up to serve in the newly formed Black RI 1st Regiment and gain his freedom. The regiment was made up of new Black and Indian recruits many of whom had been enslaved as well as a number of experienced Black and Indian soldiers drawn from current RI Regiments.

The RI's Regiments were much depleted by 1780, so they were combined for the long march to the battle Yorktown, in Virginia. The RI regiment they took part in the storming and capture of the critical British redoubt #10 with Lafayette and Hamilton. Their final deployment was to upstate NY and they attempted to attack the British fort at Oswego. The regiment was disbanded 1783 in Saratoga, NY where they were left to find their way home. All told Sharper serving at least 22 months in the RI Regiment and more likely until the end of the war in 1783. Sharper is noted in the 1790 census as living in Newport apparently as a freeman.

Sharper aka Cato Bours' name is inscribed in the monument at Patriot Park in Portsmouth, RI that commemorates the Battle of Rhode Island that occurred in Aug 29, 1778. His military service was attested to by Benjamin Cowell, the author of *Spirit of '76 in Rhode Island*, a definitive history of those who served from Rhode Island. Sharper appears in the 1790 census in Newport as a freeman head of a household of 4.

The NHS also found records of Sharper serving at least 22 months in the RI 1st Regiment led by Col. Greene. Sharper's military service started when he enlisted in March of 1778 when the 1st RI "Black" Regiment was formed by Col. Greene. John Bours received 120# in compensation for Cato. He was assigned to Capt. Dexter's Company. He served through the Battles of Rhode Island the attack by Loyalists in White Plains where Col. Greene was killed and Maj. Olney took over leadership.



1st Rhode Island Regiment Battles and Deployments 1778-1783

Revolutionary War Pension records provided a clear picture of Sharper's life after the War. The Pension application petition included testimonials from many residents of North Kingston, Providence and Newport, RI attesting to Sharper's marital status and general good standing in the community. He apparently settled in South Kingston and married **Esther Irons** in 1787. The ceremony was performed by Rev. William Smith in the Narraganset Episcopal Church in a joint ceremony with Jack and Patience Stanton. Esther and Sharper as well as the Stantons were apparently working on Smith's farm and were living at the home of Zebulon Warmesley of South Kingston.

Sharper and Esther had four children: **Margaret, Lucy, John, and Anthony**. Daughter Margaret Gray settled in Providence and worked for Nicholas Brown. Daughter Lucy and son Anthony settled in South Kingstown. Son named John Bours apparently died at sea while in the employ of Nicholas Brown.



Narraganset Episcopal Church in Wickford

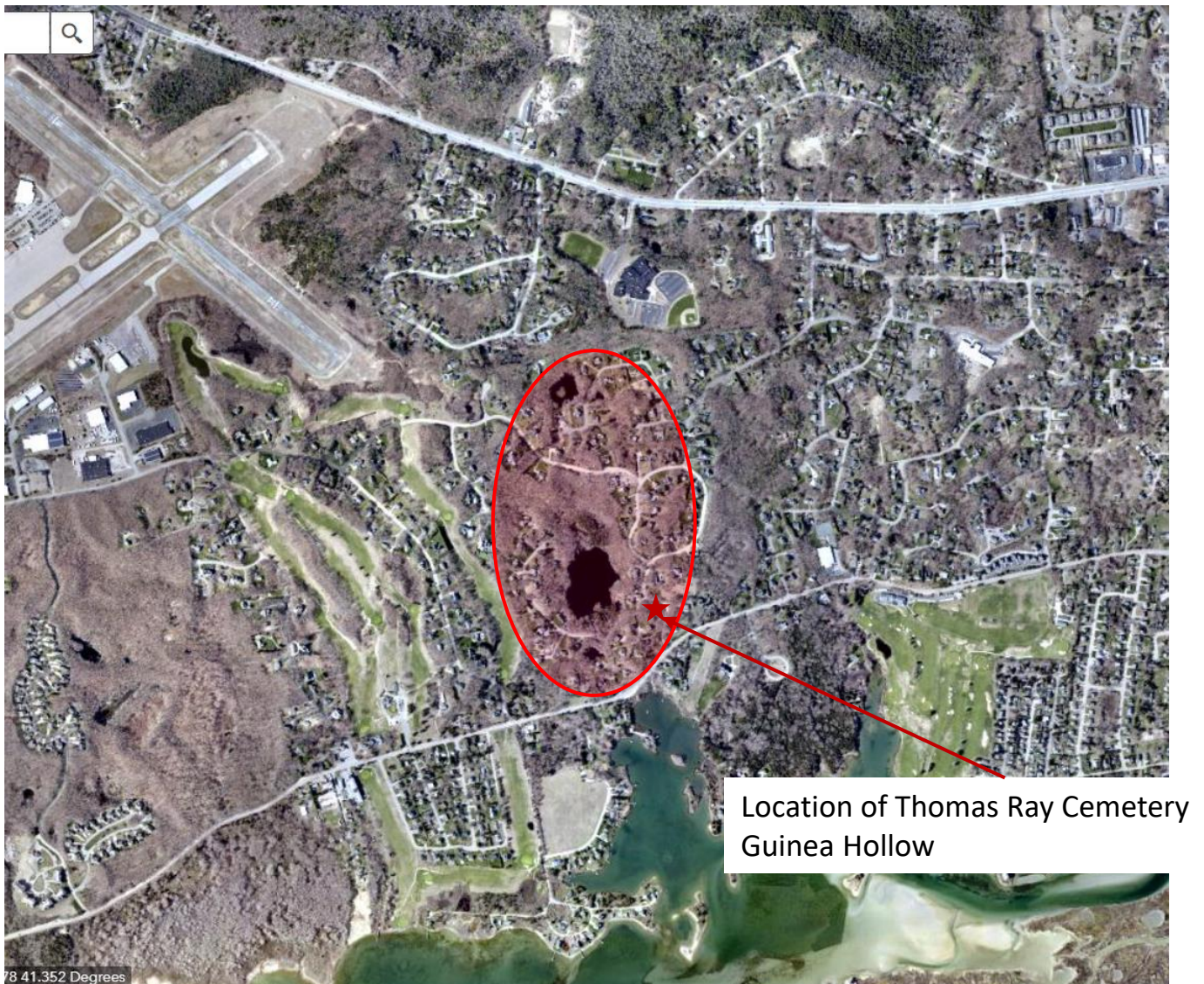


In his later years Sharper and Esther lived with their daughter Margaret in Providence where he died 2/28/1839 at an age of about 80. The ceremony was presided over by Rev. Crocker of St John's Episcopal church in Providence where Margaret attended. Esther died in South Kingston in a house owned by William Peckham in 8/15/1846.

Sharper had apparently received a pension from RI of \$7.29/yr from 3/4/1831-1839. Being illiterate he apparently had not known of or how to apply for the Federal pension from the acts of 1832, 1838, 1843, & 1844. In 1855 his daughter Margaret succeeded in receiving a pension of \$74/year from the government for his Revolutionary War service.

Thomas & Sarah Ray

Thomas Ray came to my attention as he is noted in *Westerly and Its Witnesses* as “head of a colored family of excellent repute living in Westerly in Guinea Hollow”. That name apparently relating to the Guinean heritage of some of the Blacks who lived there. Thomas Ray is identified as an Indian in the 1790 census. He is also identified as Black, and mulatto man during his serves in the artillery during the Revolutionary War. There is much written about Ray and subsequent generations of his family, but his parentage and early history in Block Island and first years in Westerly are not known. It is not known if he was enslaved or how he came to be a free man. It is also not known if he had any connection with the Simon Ray family of Block Island which owned a large estate in Westerly. Gov. Samuel Ward acquired this Westerly land with his marriage to Simon Ray’s daughter Anna Ray in 1745.

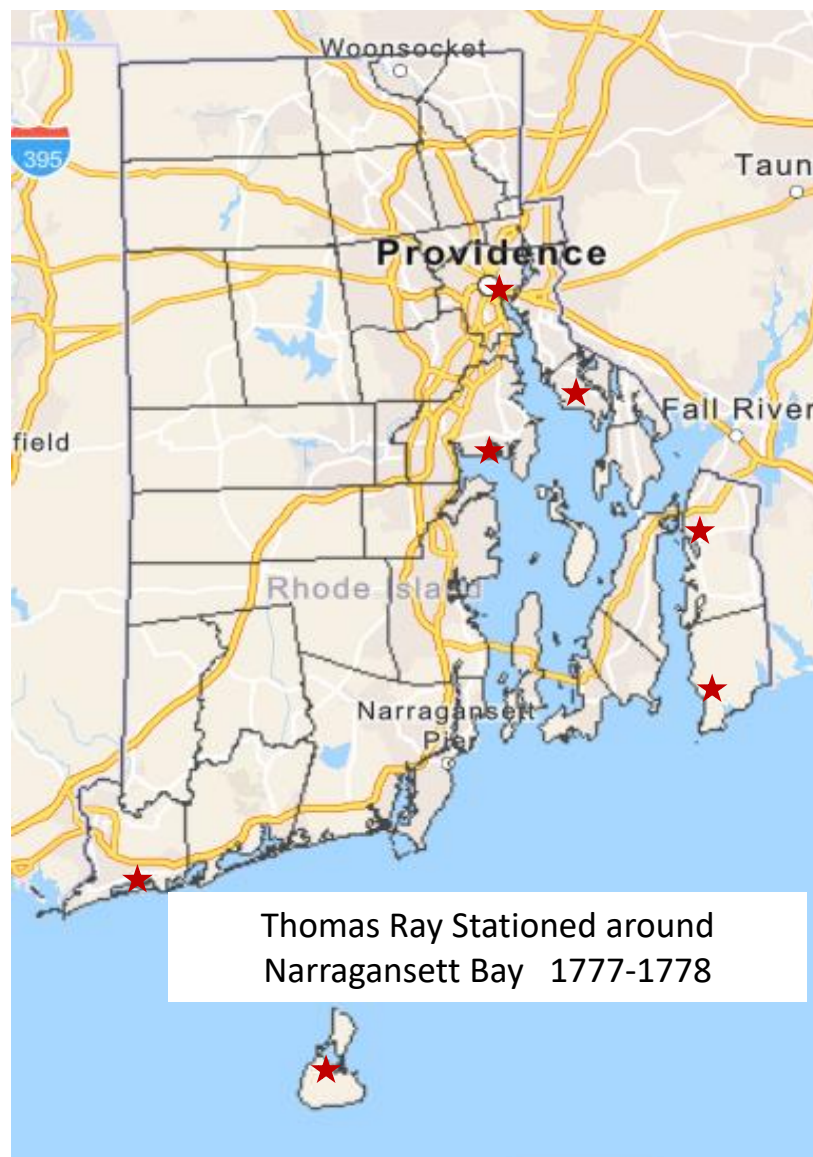


Much of what is known about Thomas Ray is found in his pension application records. It is known that Thomas was born on Block Island on October 11, 1752, and died in Westerly 21 March 1837. Ray is first noted in Westerly in 1774 and may be the Tom Ray who is noted as being owed 19 shillings in Gov. Samuels Ward's probate documents. Thomas married Sarah Bennet in the winter of 1776-7. Sarah was a black woman who had moved with the Job Bennet family from Newport to Westerly in 1776 around the time of the British occupation of Newport. The two Bennet's were a prominent Newport family with several slaves. Sarah and Thomas Ray were married in the Bennet house by Justice of the Peace Joseph Clark. Neighbors had noted that the wedding procession made "quite a splendid appearance" as they were dressed "in a style that was not used in the County". After the wedding they went to Thomas' mother's home and the next day to visit Joseph Babcock.

Demond	14-13-10 1/4	07-15-7 3/4
1-15		1-15
12-15-4 3/4	0-17-11 1/4	13-13-11 1/4
3-17-4		3-17-4
2-10-0		
15-4-1	2-0-5 1/4	17-4-6 1/4
1587-12-0 1/4	43-19-5 1/2	631-11-5 3/4
1144-14-10 3/4	10-11-11 1/4	155-6-10
231-15-4	17-6-10 1/4	249-2-2 1/4
0-18-0		0-18-0
37-0-9	2-14-5 1/4	39-15-2 1/4
0-19-0		0-19-0
1-11-11 1/4		4-11-11 1/4
Carried forward		108-2970

Gov. Samuel Ward Inventory 1777
Tom Ray owed 19 shillings

Ray enlisted as a private in the artillery company commanded by Col. Elliot in Providence in the month of March of 1777. Note that this was a year before Rhode Island established its "Black Regiment" "He was first quartered about two weeks in the college of Providence, employed in making cartridges, after removed to Warwick Neck and was stationed with our piece? in the battery; And continued through the spring and summer. e was then ordered in said company in September to go to Rhode Island in xxxx expedition. First marched to Tiverton and quartered a short time to wait further orders then marched to Little Compton, and afterward returned to Tiverton and was stationed in Fort Barton, and there served until March 1778, then his time expired making one year's serves, he was then honorably discharged. Signed Thomas Ray"



The Rays had three sons: **Joseph** b.11/8/1777- 1/28/1846; **Gideon** b.1/6/1779-1839; **Thomas** b.5/18/1784 -?. In 5/8/1804 all three sons signed up for Seamans Protection in New London. This document attested that they were free American Citizens. Both Joseph and Thomas Jr were seaman for parts of their lives. **Gideon** remained in Westerly helping to run the family farm.

Thomas Ray appears in the Westerly census of 1790, 1810, 1820, & 1830 as head of a household of as many as 5. Thomas, Sarah, and Gideon Ray are buried in a family cemetery just east of Dr. Lewis Pond next to Rock Ridge Road and just north of Shore Road in Westerly. Records indicate that his house was 30 rods north and east of this location. This appears to be the location of the 12-acre farm that he purchased in 1802 from Joshua Kinyon. I have not been able to get a clear picture of his farm due to the lack of clear landmarks in the deeds.

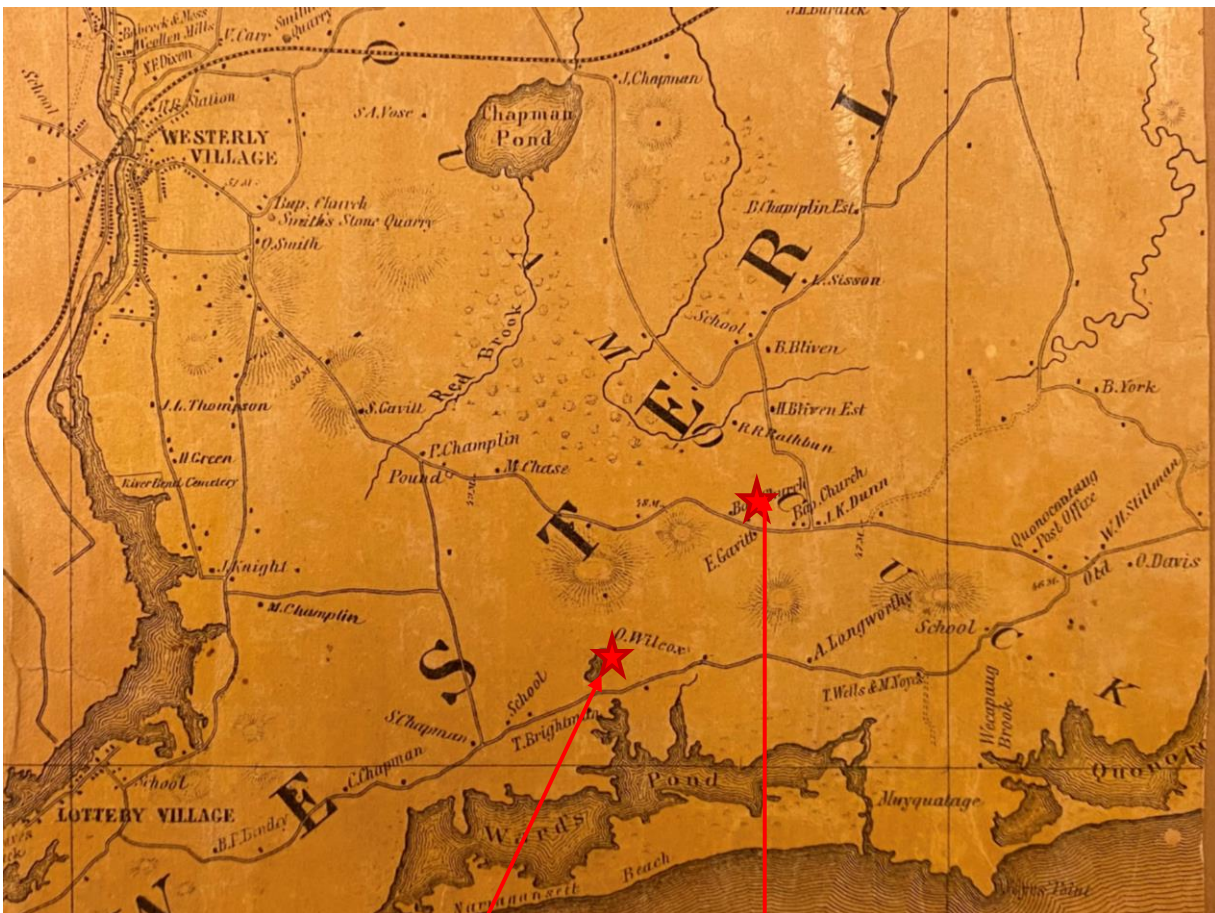
The area was called Guinea Hollow in the 1800's. At the time, Dr. Lewis Pond was apparently known as No Bottom Pond. Ray also owned land along the Post Road just west of Dunn's Corner. The listing in the 1790 census seems to indicate that other nonwhite families of Prince Bent, Cudjo Ward, and Mary Hedan were neighbors of Thomas Ray in Guinea Hollow.

Thomas Ray purchased at least three parcels of land between 1802 and 1835. A portion of the land abutted Cudjo Ward's land. He sold 19 acres of this land to his son Gideon in 9/7/1835. Gideon bought an additional 8 acres in 1839. Gideon is reported to have drowned in Worden Pond in 1839. The 1840 census indicates that he was living with his mother and a younger woman who may have been a visiting niece in Westerly in 1840.

Thomas Ray applied for his Revolutionary War pension and received \$50/yr starting in 1834. There is a receipt from Rowse Babcock to that effect. His widow Sarah received his Revolutionary War pension in 1838. Sarah Ray lived until 3/30/1852. Pension and family records indicate that some of Ray's grandchildren spent time at the Ray farm both in their childhood and later caring for Sarah.

The Rays were members of the 7th Day Baptist Church of Westerly for many years. The congregation built its church in Dunn's Corners on the north side Post Road just west of the corner with Langworthy Rd. The land had been previously owned by Thomas and son Gideon Ray.

The Guinea Hollow land was eventually sold by Ray's heirs to Albert Langworthy adding to his already large estate. The other land along the Post Road at Dunns corners was sold to William Barnes in 1918.

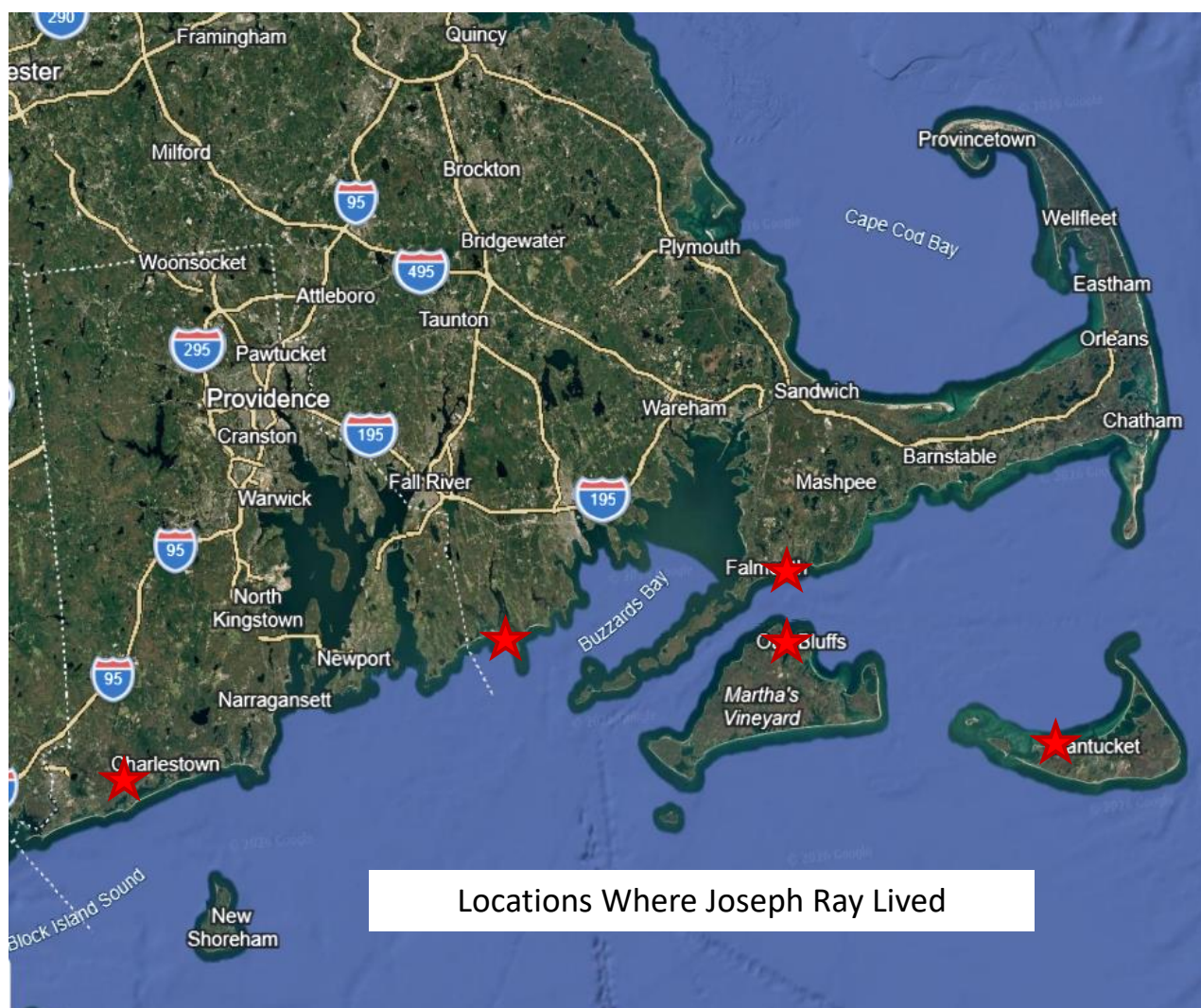


Ray Cemetery

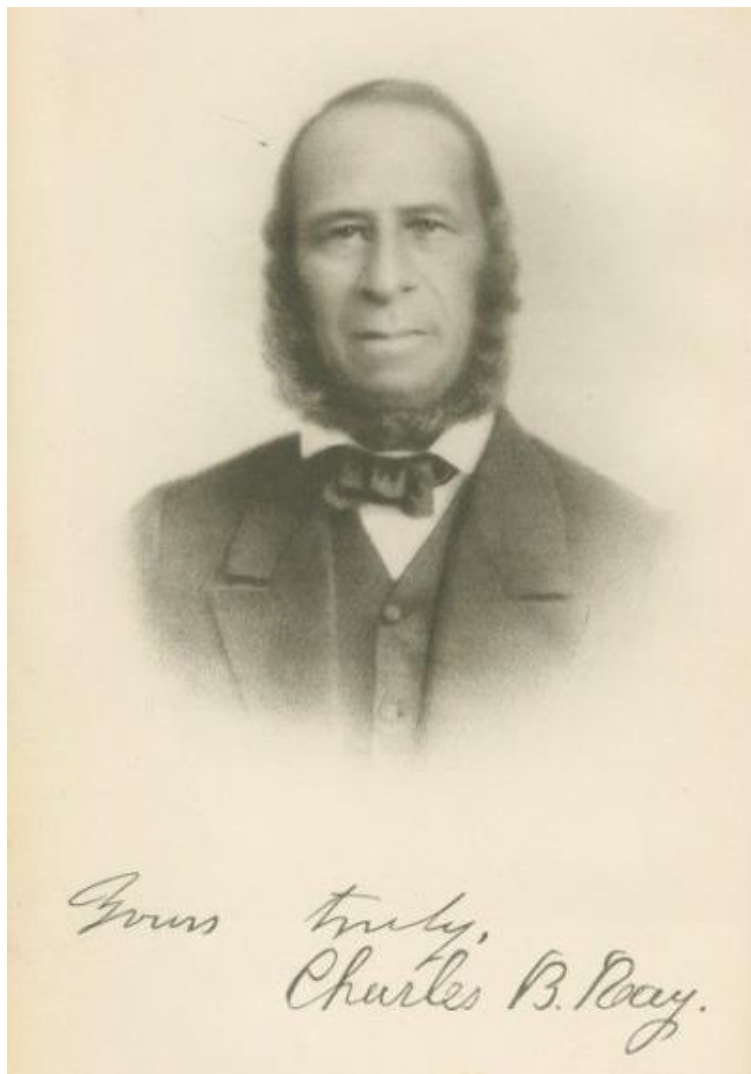
Baptist Church

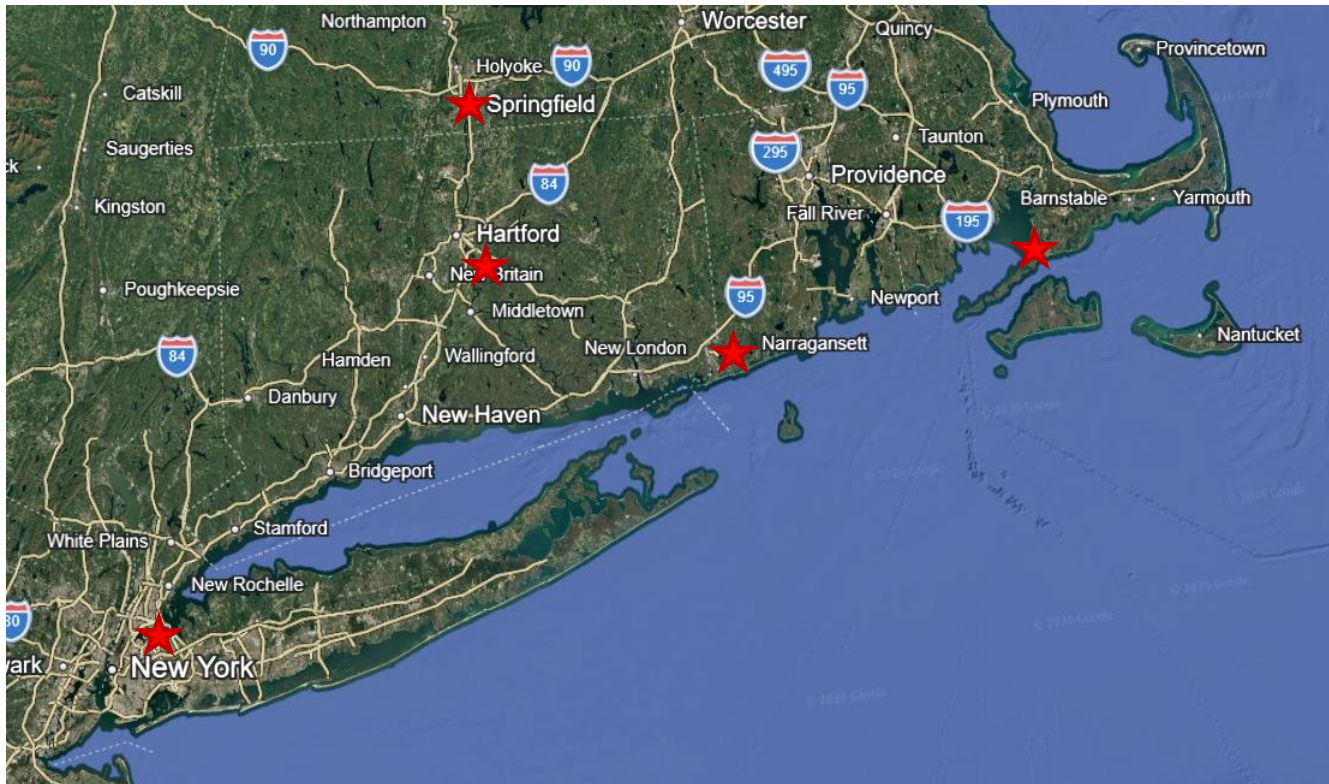
Thomas Ray's son **Joseph Aspinwall Ray** became a seaman and eventually settled in Falmouth MA. He served as the postman for Falmouth and Marth's Vinyard for many years. He would row or sail his boat across the Sound to deliver the mail to Martha's Vinyard. His postal career lasted 28 years. Joseph married Annis Harrington of Falmouth. They had six children: **Sarah, Charles, Thomas, Joseph, Elizabeth, Anna**. Joseph Ray, died in Falmouth in 1846 of consumption, aged 67.

The widowed Annis went to Nantucket to live with her daughter Elizabeth, who had married a barber named Abraham Nahar. In the census of 1860, Annis H. Ray, aged 84, is listed as living on Nantucket in Elizabeth Nahar's household. Annis spent her final years in New Bedford with her granddaughter Caroline DelPrado. She was known as a voracious reader of almost every book in her minister's library. Annis passed away at age 90 in 1866. She lived to see the ratification of the 13th amendment abolishing slavery. Votes for women came fifty-four years later, in 1920.



Among Joseph and Annis Ray's children is **Charles Bennett Ray** (1807-1886). Charles went to Wesleyan Academy in 1830 to study the ministry. He then went briefly to Wesleyan University but was ostracized by a largely southern student body. He later became a Methodist minister of the Bethesda Congregational Church in NYC. He was an active abolitionist before Frederick Douglas came on the scene. Charles, who was Light Skinned, was quoted in a book by his daughters as saying that he would need to go back 3 to 4 Generations to find an Ancestor of Unmixed Blood.





Locations Where Charles Ray Lived. He Also Traveled Extensively In The Northeast On For The Abolitionist Cause

In 1833 Charles Ray joined the American Anti-Slavery Society and was a “conductor” on the Underground Railroad. He wrote for and became the publisher of *The Colored American* from 1839-1842. Charles Ray married Augusta Burroughs Ray in 1840 who was born in 1825 Savannah, GA. They had three daughters **Charlotte**, **Henrietta**, and **Florence** and possible three sons.

All three of Charles Ray's daughters went to college. Several of his daughters became notable professionals in law and education. Daughter **Charlotte** E Ray (1/13/1850-1/4/1911) became a teacher, graduated from Howard University Law School in 1872 and became the first African-American women attorney in the United States. Although well respected for corporate law skills, she was unable to make a business of practicing law because of discrimination against women and Blacks. She returned to teaching and married a man named Daniel Fraim.

Poet **Henrietta** Cordelia Ray was her sister. Henrietta Cordelia gave up teaching to obtain her master's degree and write poetry. **Florence**, another sister, also became a lawyer. At one point all three sisters were teachers.



Elizabeth Ray, Joseph Ray's daughter marries Alexander Nahar of Nantucket. In 1845 they successfully petition Mass to integrate the Nantucket schools. They adopt **Annie Mattie** Nahar who arrived in Nantucket probably through the efforts of Elizabeth's brother Charles Ray and the Underground Railway.

Annie Ray graduates from high school and moves with the Union Army to New Orleans in 1864-1868 as part of the Freeman's Bureau to teach Black children. She then moved to San Antonio and back to New Orleans as principal of the McDonogh School. Annie marries Andrew Finch Mangin of NYC and New Orleans in 7/1877 at age 33.

They run a catering business in New York City. She designs and patents a pastry fork and exhibits it in 1893 Columbian Exposition. She also worked with Women's Loyal Union that supported the Protective Union House for Working Girls. She helped operate their Star Booth with her aunts Florence T. Ray and Henrietta Cordelia Ray. In 1900 Annie moves to Queens NY with her son Andrew jr. In 1902 moves to Brookfield Ct and died 1931.

