

## “A DECIDED CHARACTER”: LUCY STEWART OF SOUTH SCITUATE

The following article is written by—and reprinted with the permission of—Mary Blauss Edwards, Curator of the Hanson Historical Society. Mary writes a blog named "Of Graveyards and Things" which discusses historical research—often on the South Shore. To access her blog online, please go to [www.OfGraveyardsAndThings.wordpress.com](http://www.OfGraveyardsAndThings.wordpress.com).

### PART I: THE FUNERAL OF LUCY STEWART

In the fall of 1859, an unusual obituary was published across the country:

**A DECIDED CHARACTER. Miss Lucy Stewart, of South Scituate [Norwell], Mass., recently died at the great age of 96 years.**

The following account is given of her strange personal history: Her father was a white man, a sea captain, and her mother a full-blooded Indian. She was brought up in [the Stockbridge family] one of the first families of the town of Scituate, and had, until within a year or two, lived in the family down to the fifth generation. Within that time she had been unable to support herself, and became an inmate of the almshouse.

She was a woman of good manners, and possessed a great deal of pride. She was much adverse to going to the almshouse, and until the day of her death was in the habit of dressing herself in a very gay style. She requested, just before her death, to be laid out in her bright pink dress, and to have on her lace turban, which was decked very gaily with feathers and showy ribbons, and her 'kerchief round her neck.' She also wished her coffin to be lined with flowers, and requested to be buried in the burial ground with and near the family she had lived with most of her days. She wished to be carried to the Methodist church, and have the Episcopal minister attend her funeral. She requested the minister to state—which he did—that she had never been out of the limits of the town and had never entered a church until she was carried in for burial. ["A Decided Character," *Salem Register* (Salem, Mass.), 26 Sept. 1859, p. 3.]

Hanover Episcopal minister Rev. Samuel Cutler performed Lucy Stewart's funeral, and reported several additional details in his diary:

*August 31: Miss Lucy Stewart, aged 97 years, died at the Alms House, South Scituate. Funeral from Methodist Meeting House, September 1. "Her request I should attend." A servant in the old Stockbridge family.*

According to Scituate Vital Records, Lucy Stewart died in South Scituate [Norwell] of old age on August 31, 1859, aged 96 years, single, born in Scituate to unknown parents.

### PART II: WHO WAS LUCY STEWART?

Although Lucy was born free circa 1763 to a Mattakeeset Indian mother and white father during the era of Massachusetts slavery, she spent her life in service to the Stockbridge family of Norwell.

As an adult, her residences alternated between members of the Stockbridge family, as well as with the family of Jeremiah Gunderway (1787-1875), a mixed-race man of Mattakeeset Indian and African slave heritage. She apparently never married nor had children.

In the 1830 Census, Lucy Steward, a "colored female aged 55-99" lived alone in South Scituate. In the 1850 Census, taken 30 August 1850, Lucy Stewart, 86, lived in South Scituate (Norwell) with the family of Tilden Clapp (42, shoemaker), his wife Penelope (Nichols) Clapp (44), and their children Luther (23), George H. (21), Rhoda N. (18), Lucinda (16), Lucy A. (14), Caleb N. (12), Lydia (10), Susan F. (7), and Joseph T. (5), and the family of Benjamin Otis (44, ship carpenter) and his wife Betsey (32) and their son Henry T. (10). In the 1855 Census taken 1 June 1855, Lucy Steward, 94, resided in South Scituate with the family of Benjamin Totman



*At the site of The Cushing Center today, the almshouse was a home for the poor and unfortunate of South Scituate*



(60, farmer) and his wife Eunice (59) and their children William W. (25), David O. (22), and Jesse L. (16). She became a resident of the South Scituate Almshouse ca. 1857 and lived there until her death in 1859.

Jeremiah “Jerry” Gunderway was a pilot along the North River, often shipping hay on his gundalow [a shallow boat]. [Briggs, *History of Shipbuilding on North River*, 1889, p. 59] “Jerry lived at one time in a little shanty at the mouth of the Second Herring Brook, by the



Photo of Jerry Gunderway from either the 1860s or 1870s

Chittendon yard. It is a very beautiful spot with a splendid view up river. We are told by a very old lady that when she was a little girl an old woman said to be part Indian lived in this house and sold baskets through the village. Her name was Lucy Stewart. This house...has long since disappeared. The well near by is still used by the present owners of the property, Mr. and Mrs. William E. Mills.” [Merritt, *History of South Scituate and Norwell*, 1938; p. 161.]



Courtesy of Stephen and Carol Hubert

Researchers for the Norris Reservation in Norwell believe that the Gunderway/Stewart cabin may have been located “on the east side of Second Herring Brook or across the brook where the shipyard was located.” The Gunderway/Stewart cabin and its well may be one of the “unusual array of foundations and a well, located near the southern end of the River Loop Trail.”

### **PART III: WHO WERE LUCY STEWART'S PARENTS?**

Lucy Stewart was the illegitimate daughter of a white captain from Norwell and a Mattakeeset Indian mother with the surname Stewart, and was raised in the Stockbridge family. Although her age is variably listed in records, a birthdate of ca. 1763 is listed most consistently.

The only known captain in the Stockbridge family at that time and place is a good fit for Lucy’s possible father—15 year old Samuel Stockbridge of South Scituate (1748-1802). Stockbridge likely impregnated a 15 year old daughter [name unknown] of Amos Stewart and Mattakeeset Indian Hannah Moses of Marshfield and Scituate. This unknown Stewart daughter was probably born shortly after Amos and Hannah’s 1747 marriage. Amos Stewart’s race is uncertain but he may have had African heritage, since some of his other children were described as “mulatto”.

At the age of 18, Samuel Stockbridge married Sarah Litchfield in 1766 and they raised a family in South Scituate (Norwell). Samuel later became a captain in the American Revolution and was known as a sharpshooter. Perhaps Lucy’s mother died or was too impoverished to support Lucy, so Lucy was raised in the Stockbridge family—although possibly not directly in Samuel and Sarah (Litchfield) Stockbridge’s house. Perhaps instead she was raised by her possible paternal grandparents, Samuel Stockbridge (1711-1784) and Sarah Tilden (1718-1786), who lived near Mount Blue in South Scituate, and following their deaths she lived with their descendants. No provisions for Lucy were made in the probates of either Samuel Stockbridge Sr. or Jr. [According to *The Descendants of John Stockbridge*, only Samuel Jr. (1748-1802) held the title of Captain in the family, although his father Samuel was mistakenly listed as Capt. in his death record: Register 135 (Jan. 1981), p. 42-43.]

Lucy Stewart was probably the great-granddaughter of Mattakeeset Indians Titus Moses and Rebecca Opechus of Scituate who married in 1719. Titus Moses was an Indian servant of Samuel Stockbridge (1679-1758), the grandfather of Capt. Samuel Stockbridge (1748-1802). In 1724, Titus Moses was “slain in ye service of ye Province” in Dummer’s War against the Wabanaki Indian Confederacy and their French Canadian allies. Following Titus Moses’ death, Samuel Stockbridge of Scituate petitioned the Massachusetts legislature to receive Titus’ military wages. Thus the Stockbridge family benefited financially from Titus’ death, rather than his wages returning to Titus’ widow and children. It is unclear if Titus’ children and grandchildren remained in service or enslaved by the Stockbridge family.

Lucy may have had maternal uncles and aunts living in the Indian villages at Pembroke [Mattakeeset] and Bridgewater [Titicut], since Pembroke Indian Caesar Stewart and Bridgewater Indian-mulattoes Sage, Lattice,

Margaret, and Sarah Stewart all appear in late 18<sup>th</sup> century records, all possibly the children of Amos Stewart and Hannah Moses.

Capt. Samuel Stockbridge was buried in Stockbridge Cemetery [on Mount Blue Street] in Norwell in 1802, where his parents were buried. However, he does not have a gravestone. His death was commemorated by his 15 year old daughter Penelope [in the silk embroidery work shown at right].

Lucy Stewart requested that she be buried in the same cemetery “with and near the family she had lived with most of her days.”

Though the details of her life are few and far between, a fascinating portrait emerges of Lucy Stewart: “a woman of good manners” who never attended church, prideful, a lover of fashion and flowers, with an ironic sense of humor. A lifelong servant to a family which shared her blood, but could not accept her as an heir. Employed and housed by the Stockbridge family at times, with periods of independent living through her friendships with Norwell’s mixed-race community, where she made a living making and selling traditional Mattakeeset Indian baskets. Sent against her wishes to the almshouse, when the Stockbridge family would no longer support her in her elderly years. A woman who planned her own funeral down to the very last details, to send her off in style in her bright pink dress and best accessories, surrounded by flowers, lamented by the community where she had spent her entire life, and buried alongside her family (whether publicly acknowledged or not).