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Cuffee & Flora

AND the Grandisons of Mount Blue

The Norwell All Are Welcome Committee recently asked the Society to research the origins of Cuffee's Lane and help create a video for Norwell Spotlight TV. The following is the script of the final piece which focuses on the Grandisons, an eminent African-American family.

written by Wendy Bawabe from the research and writings of Pattie Hainer

People of color lived in Plymouth County from the earliest days of its settlement. In towns like Plymouth, in Scituate (part of which is now Norwell), and in Hingham's Tuttle'sville community, we find information on their lives in census records; marriage, birth, and death records; and military and pension records. But writings about the *personal* history of these people—who they were and how they lived their lives—are few and far between, and they themselves left little in the way of written records.

Norwell historian Pattie Hainer has done extensive research on the history of free and enslaved people of color in Scituate and Norwell. In her research, Pattie found only one person of color from Plymouth County who was known to have a self-written account of his own life—Briton Hammon of Marshfield. He is attributed to one of the earliest narratives of enslaved people of color in this area known to exist called “A Narrative of the Uncommon Sufferings and Surprising Deliverances of Briton Hammon, A Negro Man...”.

Pattie notes that slavery in the area of Scituate and today's Norwell dates back to 1638. Perhaps due to the prevalence of abolitionist efforts in the North, it is often perceived that racism

in the North was less widespread and not as brutal as it was in the South. But Pattie notes that unmarried Black and White couples who had children were whipped and their children were sold to ensure that the town did not have to later support them. Northern ministers who performed mixed marriages were fined. And people of color in the North were forbidden to mix socially with whites at taverns, inns, and other gathering places.



Cuffee's Lane is one of two town-owned conservation parcels on Mount Blue Street associated with the Grandison family.

While Pattie's extensive research tells the story of *many* people of color, this article focuses on her study of Cuffee and Flora—enslaved people of the 1700s—and a few of their descendants.

The name “Cuffee” may sound familiar because the Town of Norwell owns two conservation parcels on Mount Blue Street named “Cuffee Hill Reservation” and “Cuffee's Lane.”

Cuffee is a traditional first name often recorded in African-American culture, and it is believed to be derived from the Akan language name “Kofi,” which means “born on a Friday.”

“Perhaps due to the prevalence of abolitionist efforts... it is often perceived that racism in the North was less widespread...”

Norwell's Cuffee was enslaved by Joseph Clapp, who lived in the house that used to stand at 122 Mount Blue Street (the house was unfortunately demolished in 2007). The barn that stood on the Clapp property still stands and has been converted into a home. Flora was enslaved by Joseph's brother, Thomas Clapp, who lived in the large white house in Scituate that is now located on the Route 3A traffic circle.

From records of the First Parish of Norwell, we know that Cuffee married Flora in 1740 and that the Rev. Nathaniel Eells performed the ceremony. Cuffee and Flora chose

(continued on page 4)

FROM THE ARCHIVES

Treasures known and treasures found in the Norwell Historical Society Archives, in the Society Research Library, and in the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum are featured here in each issue.

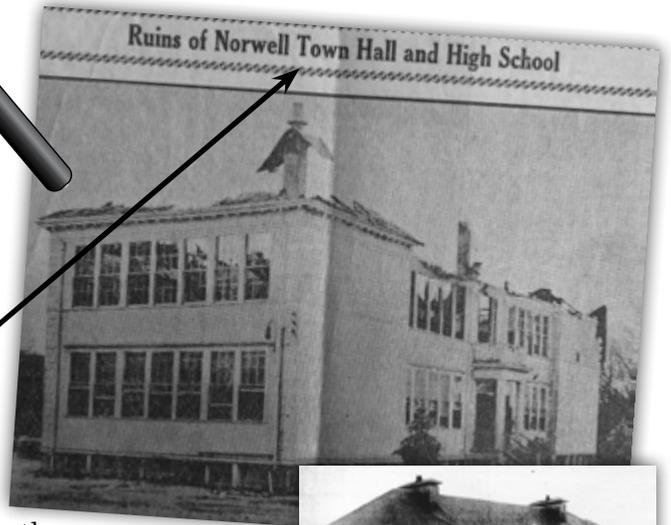


Learn more about the Weir Stove Co. in this article written by William Hanna of the Old Colony History Museum in Taunton.



Not all items in the Jacobs Farmhouse Museum are original to the Jacobs family—some are Norwell items that have been donated to the Society. This stove, however, is original to the Farmhouse and was used to heat the front parlor of the “Other House” (the connected house to the right of the main Colonial). This Glenwood parlor stove was built by the Weir Stove Company in Taunton, Massachusetts and has extensive decoration, including a women's face whose hair transforms into decorative swirls (see inset). The Weir Stove Company was founded in 1879, and twenty years later its approximately 850 employees turned out 2 Glenwoods per minute—80,000 per year!

Norwell's Town Hall and High School building burned down in December 1935. This newspaper clipping—showing the burned-out shell of the building—was recently found in the Society Archives. The inset at right shows the building prior to the fire.



Just The Facts

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Museum & Research Library

The **Jacobs Farmhouse Museum** is open at scheduled events and by appointment only. Please contact the Society to schedule a tour.

The Norwell Historical Society **Research Library & Archives Center** on the 3rd floor of the Sparrell School (322 Main Street) is open on Thursday mornings from 10:00 am until noon or by appointment.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Norwell Historical Society is to discover, preserve, and celebrate Norwell history through stewardship, education, and awareness—engaging our community, both present and future, to be vested in its history.

Mailing Address & Phone

The Norwell Historical Society
P.O. Box 693
Norwell, MA 02061
781-659-1888 (Research Library)



DISCOVER MORE ON OUR WEBSITE!

Look for the magnifying glasses in this issue—that means there is more to discover on-line at the Society's website NORWELLHISTORICALSOCIETY.ORG.

NOTE: the online version of the newsletter has other links so you can discover even more!

Below is an edited interview with former police chief **Dick Joseph** conducted by Norwell student Madhu Krishnan in 1994. Mr. Joseph passed away this past December at age 91.



Oral History Transcriptions

Volunteers are urgently needed to reformat the deteriorating oral history cassette tapes to a digital format before they are lost for good. It is an easy task that can be done at home. Please contact Janet Watson at watsonje@comcast.net.

Members of my family have lived in Norwell for three generations, and I believe farming brought them here.

I've always lived within a half-mile of the house I live in now. I live within 1,000 feet of where my grandfather and my great-grandfather lived--I've always lived in close proximity to my family. This particular area [Cross Street] and this whole surrounding area was all owned by my grandfather and it was used as farmland.

The name Joseph is usually associated with Norwell no matter where you traveled in the state, and it all comes from the same Joseph family. I'm probably not called a "native" to some because I was born in Scituate--although I never ever lived there.

When I was a youngster, there were a number of dairy farms, a large number of poultry farms, and "truck garden farms" in which

fruits and vegetables were grown and shipped to Boston.

My father owned a dairy farm here on Cross Street. I've watched dairy farms come and go. The large



Breezy Bend Farm, one of the many farms which used to be located on Washington Street in Norwell.

poultry farms up on Washington Street and South Street and High Street--all those farms are gone. Disappeared.

When I came home from [the Korean Conflict], many of the farm fields that I had worked at or the fields where I had hunted pheasant were now all blossomed out into houses and house lots, and so forth.

All people in Norwell used to have well water--there was no town water system. There was a so-called town spring located at the base of the hill which is directly behind the [former] police station. That was sort of a community spring where people could get water.

Prior to my arrival at the Norwell Police Department, it was a call-type department. They worked very, very limited hours.

When I joined the police department in 1961, it was a one-room, wooden building located behind what is [the Cushing Center today]. That was replaced in 1971 by the red brick building [on River Street --the former Police Station], and the old wooden building was bulldozed down and made into a parking lot.

I've watched the police department grown from three people to a total of twenty today [in 1994]. I was the third full-time patrolman hired, and I went to work from midnight to 8:00 am.

There were very few crimes--mostly thefts. Nowadays we have more automobiles, therefore you have more accidents.

Norwell is very, very fortunate--they have one of the best police departments on the South Shore. Highly educated, highly well-trained, well-motivated, and devoted to their job. It's an excellent department.



CALLING ALL THOSE WHO ARE LEARNING FROM HOME!

Need to get out of the house on a cold winter day?

Need to help your student learn local history?

The Norwell Historical Society is working to create a **DRIVE-BY SCAVENGER HUNT**. A link will be available on our website and an email will be sent to our on-line list as soon as the clues are finalized and the hunt is complete.

SIGN UP FOR EMAILS VIA OUR WEBSITE TO RECEIVE A NOTIFICATION!

Cuffee & Flora Grandison, cont'd.

(continued from page 1)

the surname “Grandison” and were the first generation of a long line of Grandisons—a name mentioned often in Norwell history.

In his book *Freedom Road* (available at the Norwell Public Library), author Ric Murphy (a descendant of Cuffee and Flora) noted that their marriage ceremony was unique for two reasons. First, it was unusual for a white church anywhere in the country (even in Massachusetts) to allow an enslaved couple to be married in a church. Murphy notes that the Clapp brothers “must have been progressive thinkers who had sufficient influence within the town... to facilitate the marriage of the young slave couple at... the church.” Secondly, Cuffee and Flora must have felt it was very important to marry in the church despite the potential for hostility among townspeople. By getting married in the church and not taking the Clapp surname but choosing instead to establish their own family name, the young couple were clearly independent thinkers with progressive ideas.

Although the record of the family is incomplete, based on dates, places, and the names of descendants, we believe Cuffee and Flora Grandison had at least two sons: Charles (born in 1744) and Simeon (born in 1751 and also known as “Cuff”).

Charles and Simeon Grandison are listed as soldiers in the Revolutionary War, but there isn't a specific mention of their color. These Grandison soldiers are likely the sons of Cuffee and Flora, and it is probable they returned to the Scituate/Norwell area after the Revolutionary War to settle on land that may have been granted to their parents by the Clapp family.

Norwell historian Joseph Merritt, in his book *Old Time Anecdotes of the North River and South Shore*, tells his version of Simeon's return to our town:

“One day soon after the [American] Revolution, a typical Southern Negro, accompanied by a White woman, appeared in town and

settled in this place. Nobody knew from whence they came, but it was generally believed that it was from the far South, and all sorts of stories were told regarding them and who they were. It was at one time thought that the man was a runaway slave and the woman the wife or daughter of his master. Later it was rumored that they came from the western part of the state and that the man had served in the Continental Army from the town of Adams. Paying no heed to their neighbors they proceeded to set up an establishment. The land was cleared and gradually people ceased to wonder about them and they lived their lives and ended their days in their little place in the woods...”

“*Knowing and teaching the history of the Grandison family... we can better know these early residents and better express our gratitude for their labors and sufferings.*”

While there are records of a Charles and Simeon Grandison living in Adams immediately after the Revolutionary War, it is fascinating to note that Merritt refers to Simeon as “a typical southern negro,” which implies that the Scituate residents of that time had little or no knowledge of his parents, Cuffee and Flora, or of him ever living in town.

In 1833, First Parish records noted the death of the wife of Simeon Grandison:

“a white woman, her maiden name Woolsey—of parentage and connections—they were from New York State. She died of cancer—aged 64.”

By piecing together these (sometimes contradictory) accounts, the conclusion can be drawn that Simeon returned from the Revolutionary War with a wife (who was White).

Reading between the lines of Merritt's account, there are other inferences that could be made. For example, does:

“...all sorts of stories were told regarding them and who they were”

imply the townspeople at the time were suspicious of them and there was gossip regarding their intentions?

Does

“Paying no heed to their neighbors, they proceeded to set up an establishment”

imply the neighbors specifically stated they didn't want them living there?

And does

“...people ceased to wonder about them and they lived their lives...”

mean they didn't socialize with other townspeople?

Merritt's narrative is ambiguous, so it is hard to determine if Simeon's family's life was quiet and in harmony with his neighbors, or if there was tension.

A later generation of Grandisons, one of whom was also named Charles, was also mentioned by historian Merritt:

“This Charles Grandison was one of the characters of his time. He owned what is now the Bates farm at the head of the lane of his father's and grandfather's old place. [What is today 139 Mount Blue Street] ...He was a great worker and the huge piles of stones along the walls attest to that fact. It was his ambition to equal and if possible excel his white

(continued on page 5)



THROWBACK PHOTO OF THE MONTH

During the Archives re-organization, many old photos have been unearthed. This glass negative was reversed in PhotoShop to reveal a Norwell home, a very recognizable structure in the background, and a large brook that is a mere trickle today.

The home still stands today. Do you know where it is?

(answer at the bottom of page 7)

Cuffee & Flora Grandison, cont'd.

(continued from page 4)

neighbors and he was very much respected by them."

When that same Charles' died in 1878, the Rev. William Fish of what is now First Parish of Norwell wrote:

"Attended the funeral of Mr. Charles Grandison (colored) aged 73 years—and a remarkable man for one of his position—industrious, honest, upright in his relations—a man universally respected. He was a reverent and religious man also and continued a member of the parish, a paying member to the end, though not able to attend church—a reproof to many white members who leave the parish to avoid paying the small tax assessed upon them."

In 1881, Charles' wife Harriet died, and Rev. Fish again wrote a short description of the funeral:

"Attended the funeral of Mrs. Harriet Grandison (colored) widow of the late Charles Grandison, both intelligent and excellent persons. Yet unfortunate in having three rather helpless and dependent daughters, who have been taken to the Almshouse."

Merritt noted the ailments of the three daughters that Rev. Fish referred to as "helpless and dependent":

"...one was born blind, another deaf and dumb, and the other became blind. Realizing their helpless position, just before his death Mr.



This photo of the Almshouse (on left) in Norwell Center was recently donated by the Scituate Historical Society.

Grandison deeded his farm to the Town and the family [was] cared for at the almshouse."

A sad ending to the tale of the Grandison family line. The South Scituate Almshouse (which sat at the site of what is today the Cushing Center) took care of the Town's poor, but it was a difficult place to reside. Merritt summed up the home with the following statement:

"...the old house knew many a heartache, of people who were obliged to go there and on the other hand many found a comfortable and pleasant home in which to end their days."

The Norwell Historical Society Archives has a beautiful hand-sewn table runner in its collection (shown at right). With the runner was found a note stating "Made by Abby Grandison of Mount Blue Street when she lived in the almshouse, circa 1900."

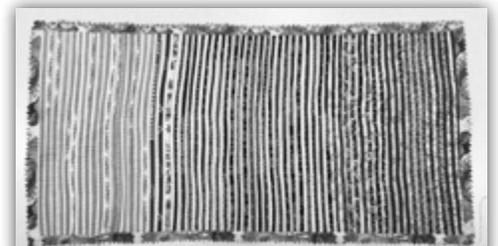


Read another story about an African-American resident of Norwell on our website. [Click here](#) or go to [Learn More > Read Interesting Articles > Article on Lucy Stewart.](#)

Author and historian David McCullough recently said:

"Knowing and teaching history isn't just a way of avoiding ignorance, it's a way of expressing gratitude to those people who went before us—who provided such gifts from their labors, their trials and sufferings—that we take for granted, and we shouldn't ever take for granted."

Knowing and teaching the history of the Grandison family through the research of historian Pattie Hainer; the stories of Cuffee, Flora, and their children; and the artifacts at the Norwell Historical Society—we can better know these early residents and better express our gratitude for their labors and sufferings.



A Norwell Family *and* the Blizzard of '78

Former Society Board member Jody Vermette recalls her young family's trials and tribulations in their High Street home during the Blizzard of '78—a February few will forget!

written by Joan Vermette

Forty-three years ago this month, on February 6, 1978, a storm began that was destined to go down in history. It is etched in my mind because it was my second son's 19th birthday. He was away at college but we were expecting him home to celebrate. Little did I know then, it would be almost two weeks before he finally made it home.

The storm began in the morning and it snowed non-stop for 33 hours. The storm hit Boston and the South Shore the hardest, with hurricane winds and the snow falling at a rate of four inches/hour at times. The final snow total in Norwell was 54 inches!

The entire South Shore area came to a standstill. The roads became parking lots. Drivers abandoned their cars when they could no longer move and took refuge wherever they could.

This Associated Press photo shows Route 128 in Dedham after the snow stopped falling from the Blizzard of '78. Cars were stranded on the highways for many days.



I was anxious until all my children were home from school, my husband made it home from work, and my oldest son (who commuted to college) was home. I felt relieved that my son who wasn't living at home was at least safe at college, but I later found out that the college ran out of food and the National Guard later brought them some in Army vehicles.

I thought that we just had to wait it out and surely the storm would end

soon—boy was I wrong! Then the power went out, and our adventure really began.

A few years prior to the storm, my parents had put in a furnace at their farm and decided to get rid of the old, fancy parlor wood stove. My family took the old stove home and, after my son polished it up, we installed it in our sitting room.

That old stove with its fancy nickle top saved our lives! We were certain it was meant to be here at our house because the stove had been made in the same year as the house: 1906.

When it became evident what we were up against, we prepared for battle. The old stove was lit; wood was brought in; all the twin mattresses were brought down and made up on the floor; candles, matches, oil lamps, and shovels were located. I checked the pantry—not too bad.

The old stove turned out to have a couple of surprises: the decorated top finial swung to the side to reveal a large lid whose main purpose was to let large logs that wouldn't fit in the front door down into the stove.

To me (used to cooking on a wood stove at the farm where I grew up), the old stove also meant hot water for drinks and washing up. We kept a pan on top whenever I wasn't cooking something.

We made toast with an old camp toaster: two wire squares with handles. The toaster opened up like a book and held four slices of bread. If we opened the stove door, we could make toast over the open fire—the best toast I ever had!

Toward the end of the storm, food was getting scarce, but I made do. I recall making a kind of stew that looked different to me, but at least it tasted pretty good. My daughter named it "snow stew!"

When the snow stopped, we then went out to shovel in shifts. I remember



The *Norwell Mariner* featured numerous photos of the storm, including this one showing firefighters Ronnie Mott, Tom Ramsey, and Kevin McIver clearing hydrants in town.

having to take four or five full shovel loads to get to the ground. We fought to get to the street (which wasn't plowed). When High Street was finally cleared, we went to the market at Queen Anne's Corner—walking in the middle of High Street and down Route 53 dragging a sled.

“ I thought that we just had to wait it out and surely the storm would end soon—boy was I wrong! ”

The store had empty shelves, but people were kind. I overheard a mother tell her little girl to get some bread, and when she brought two, her mother told her to put one back because somebody else might need it.

Around our High Street neighborhood, everyone was looking out for each other. One neighbor had a fireplace but no wood—they got wood. We all socialized while we shoveled.

(continued on page 7)

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INTERESTED IN VOLUNTEERING?

_____ Researching at the Archives _____ Other:

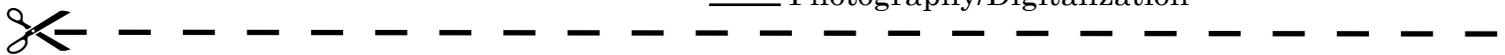
_____ Organizing at the Archives

_____ Farmhouse Tour Guide

_____ Farmhouse Maintenance

_____ Event Planning

_____ Photography/Digitalization



'78, cont'd.

(continued from page 6)

My oldest son saw a man driving a tiny sports car go into a snow bank. A policeman got him out and told him to go home immediately and if he was caught driving again, he would be arrested. No cars were allowed on the roads.

The power was out for a week but Norwell, as a community, rose to the challenge. We survived.

One of my sons likened the experience to the previous century—we went to bed when it was dark, and arose with the dawn to shovel again.

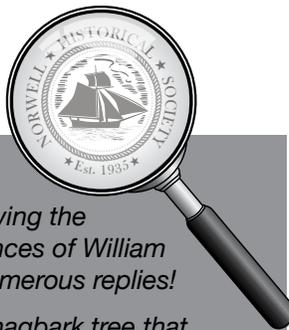
It was a true adventure, but as a family we met each new challenge with good humor (yes, we did!)... then we went out to shovel some more.



"What is a Shagbark?"

The Society asked this question following the article on the Thanksgiving reminiscences of William Tilden in the last issue, and we got numerous replies!

Shagbarks are the hickory nuts of a shagbark tree that, when roasted, are delicious to eat! Read more about roasting shagbarks [here](#).

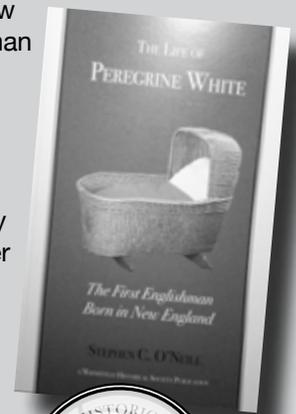


Society Board Member Stephen O'Neill Writes New Book on Pilgrim Peregrine White

The Marshfield Historical Society has published a new book on the life of Peregrine White, the first Englishman born in New England. Peregrine was born aboard the Mayflower in 1620 while it was anchored in Provincetown Harbor. He lived in Plymouth Colony and Massachusetts until his death at age 83 in 1704.

Written by Stephen O'Neill, Norwell Historical Society Board member and Executive Director of the Hanover Historical Society, the book is being sold for \$20.

Send a check to cover the number of copies you want (plus \$5 for shipping and handling) to the Marshfield Historical Society at 79 Parker Street, Marshfield, Massachusetts, 02050.



Listen to Board Member Stephen O'Neill discuss his new book and the life of Peregrine White on February 21st at a Virtual Book Launch hosted by the Marshfield Historical Society. Click here to sign up or visit the Marshfield Historical Society website.

Answer from page 5: This photograph shows the Tolman-Copeland-Waterman House at 18 Stetson Road, the Church Hill Methodist Church in the background, and the Tannery Brook in the foreground!



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Historical Society member Betsey Detwiler sent in this photo after she read the article on the Central Fire Station in the December newsletter. She wrote:

"I was just telling someone the other day how we all knew where the fire was in the old days from the sequence of blasts sent out from the horn at the Central Station. This photo is of my son Andrew watching on the day they moved the old building."

Sent
to us by
you!



Looking for the usual list of **Historical Society Items for Sale**? You can find a complete listing on our website. On our home page, go to the "Merchandise" tab and follow the simple instructions.

Remembering (and Revising) Our Earliest History

There is a phenomenon in historic storytelling called "Firsting and Lasting," and the Norwell Historical Society has been guilty of this practice in the past. The basic premise is that area narratives often overlook the earliest origins of a location (typically the Native Americans). In addition, writers can also leave off part of the story's ending when they refer to natives as "the last of their kind"—overlooking those indigenous people who still live in the area.

Previously, the origin story of Norwell has typically begun with the Stetsons arriving in Church Hill, but the Historical Society is now working to include our area's *earliest* history in its narrative.

Please visit the "Learn More" page on our Society website and read the revised story!