KIDS TALES FROM JAIL
Bristol Historical & Preservation Society
48 Court Street Bristol, RI 02809
401-253-7223 www.bhpsri.org/kids

KIDS TALES FROM JAIL

Slavery in the Revolutionary Era

Slavery in the North and South

Slavery was a legal proceeding the day America declared its independence from England. In the Declaration of Independence, the idea of "Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" did not apply to African Americans or women. In fact, 41 of the 56 men who signed the official declaration owned slaves, as did many of the first presidents. Later, when the Constitution was written, slaves were mentioned and regarded only as three fifths of a person.

During the Civil War, which raged in the United States from 1861 to 1865, the southern states separated from the country to form the Confederate States and the northern states continued to support the Union. The North was fighting for the abolishment of slavery while the South was vying to keep it. There were eleven Confederate states and twenty in the Union. To each, slavery meant different things.

In the South, the economy was getting richer with crops such as cotton, sugar cane, and tobacco. These cash crops —crops that were grown to sell, as opposed to eat—were grown and tended to on plantations by slaves. This work was incredibly difficult and as the economy grew, the dependency on the slaves also grew. For this reason, the South fought to keep slavery; the slaves were holding up the U.S. economy, and without them, the plantations would have to hire workers in place of the slave labor.

In the North, the soil was not fit for growing cash crops, so instead of thriving on agriculture like the South, they prospered in industrial businesses. They made products in factories and sold them around the


TO BE SOLD on Thurſday next, at publick vendue,
TEN LIKELY
GOLD COAST NEW NEGROES,
Juſt imported from the Weſt-Indies,
Conſiſting of eight ſtout men and two women.
To prevent their receiving the infection of the ſmallpox, they have been kept conſtantly on board the veſſel ſince they arrived, where they will be ſold.—Any perſon inclining to purchaſe them at private ſale may apply to Meſſrs. Johnſon and Wylly.

An advertisement for the sale of slaves
from a newspaper in Ipswich, Massachusetts.

A Message from the Director:

I am so proud to announce that this KIDS newsletter is our first to be written, edited, and designed entirely by kids! This fantastic team of kids (see page 4) selected the theme, brainstormed the topics, did their own research (with a little bit of help) and wrote the articles. They also laid out the text, found images, and made everything look beautiful on the page. What an impressive team!

The theme they selected, Slavery in the Revolutionary Era, is a difficult one. I am especially proud that, as budding historians, they wanted to take on such a challenge. As you read, please take time to recognize the remarkable achievement our youngsters have made.

Catherine W. Zipf
BH&PS Executive Director

> "When the Constitution was written, slaves were mentioned and regarded only as three fifths of a person."

country and the world. Factories relied on immigrant labor, instead of slaves, to manufacture products.

Living conditions for slaves were different in each part of the country. Slaves in the southern states living on large plantations were housed in separate living quarters apart from the master's house, whereas in the North in places such as Narragansett, they lived in separate rooms in their master's house. This arrangement enabled Northern slaveholders to keep a closer eye on their slaves. But in the house, they could not practice their rituals brought with them from Africa, and they could not openly speak to each other. In the slaves quarters in the South, which were separated from their masters, slaves could talk freely between themselves and take time to practice their cultural rituals.

A painting of slaves working on a Southern plantation, 1862.

The Civil War was fought over the economy and politics of slavery. The North thought it was outrageous for African-Americans to be enslaved for life and wanted the new states in the growing country to be abolitionists. In the South, the Confederates were fighting to preserve slavery in the new states because they depended on them to maintain the steadily growing economy. At the end of the Civil War, the Confederate States surrendered and slavery was abolished by the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which was ratified in 1865.

—Elsa White, Mount Hope High School student

Louisa DeWolf Munroe:

Born in Africa, Louisa DeWolf was enslaved at twelve years old, after her village was attacked and her family was murdered. She escaped by hiding in the jungle but was found and captured by a native, who then sold her to another native. She was sold twice more, moving each time farther from her home and closer to the coast, before being bought by Henry DeWolf. DeWolf had her trained in Charleston, South Carolina, as a pastry chef, then brought her to his house in Bristol to work as his cook.

Around 1815, the teenage Louisa had a mulatto son named Alex, who lived with her and the DeWolfs. To the best of our knowledge, he was her only child, as she had none with her husband in later years.

Louisa married Carrington Palmer Munroe, a mulatto cooper, in 1835, and in 1837 they bought a house located at 698 Hope Street. In 1855, they rebuilt the house, which still stands today.

Lousia DeWolf Munroe died in 1861, at 61 years old. After her death, Carrington remarried, had four daughters, and died in 1871, at 59 years old. He is buried beside her at the North Burial Ground in Bristol.

The Munroes' headstones in the North Burial Ground.

—Isabelle Courtney, Mount Hope High School student

Rum Distilling and The Slave Trade in New England

If you read the classics and old history books, you would hear about rum, and lots of it. Until the early to mid 19th century, rum was popular in the United States. In fact, at its peak, it was just as popular as coffee!

Trading rum was a way for colonists to make money in the emerging economy. Rum was especially valuable in the Transatlantic Slave trade because it could be traded for enslaved Africans. Although the slave trade gave the colonists a profit and helped America grow, it did so on the backs of black people from Africa.

Trading began in the 17th century as a way for New England merchants to exchange wheat, timber, and fish for English goods that they couldn't have gotten otherwise. This simple trade between England and the colonies soon evolved into a complicated network of international markets. At this time, the slave trade was controlled largely by the Dutch and English, and New England merchants were only a small part of the slave trade. However, after the English Civil War, New England was forced to trade with other areas, including the West Indies.

In the West Indies, sugar cane plantations needed exorbitant amounts of slaves to farm and process sugar. It was in these circumstances in which the triangle trade developed. Molasses from the West Indies was brought to New England's rum distilleries. Some slaves were also brought back to the Northeast, including Rhode Island, where at its peak they made up about 11.5% of our population.

A drawing of a rum distillery in 18th-century America.

From New England, rum and other New England commodities were brought to West Africa to exchange for enslaved Africans. Enslaved Africans were loaded onto ships and endured cruel, horrible conditions; nearly 15% of them died on the way. Many of those who survived were taken to Brazil or the Caribbean, where they had a life of labor and suffering. The ships who brought the slaves were then loaded with molasses, which they took back to Rhode Island.

> "Rum was especially valuable in the Transatlantic Slave Trade because it could be traded for enslaved Africans."

Until the early-mid 1800s, rum distilling was a major part of the lives of New Englanders. In 1770, New England imported nearly 6 million gallons of molasses from the West Indies, most of which went directly to distilleries! To make rum, molasses was mixed with water in an open air vat and allowed to gather yeast from the air. This process is called inoculation. Then, the mixture was allowed to ferment for 2 to 11 days.

Once fermented, the molasses mixture was placed in a still, which had a heat source, an alembic (a piece of equipment used to distill the rum), a metal tube, and a condenser. The mixture was heated and the vapor that boiled off was cooled into rum. Larger stills used at large pre-revolutionary distilleries were made of brick and clay that the alembic was put into.

Distilleries needed tons of space for the inoculation of molasses in the open air, which took almost 14 times more space than distilling itself. One distillery in early 18th-century Boston could distill 470 gallons and had fermenting vats that contained 6400 gallons of molasses. These early distilleries made a tremendous amount of rum, as much as 5 million gallons per year!

—Liam Reich, Mount Hope High School student

Can you find these names and places?

ABOLITION
DEWOLF
DISTILLERY
EMANCIPATION
LAURENS
MANUMISSION
MOLASSES
MUNROE
NARRAGANSETT PACER
PLANTATION
RUM
SLAVERY
SLAVE TRADE
SUGAR
TOBACCO
VARNUM

N	A	R	R	A	G	A	N	S	E	T	T	P	A	C	E	R	V	M	W
A	B	U	F	B	W	X	V	D	T	I	H	A	B	Z	F	G	T	A	Z
S	R	M	O	L	A	S	S	E	S	M	U	U	O	L	K	P	C	N	R
P	A	Q	T	C	E	E	Y	N	G	B	V	J	L	Z	B	I	L	U	G
N	V	A	R	N	U	M	O	B	Z	N	B	O	I	O	L	D	A	M	A
X	Y	Z	D	M	O	H	N	M	A	P	V	T	T	V	P	U	V	I	G
U	Y	O	O	B	X	W	T	C	S	Y	S	I	I	H	K	F	M	S	J
T	E	X	Q	N	C	H	T	O	B	A	C	C	O	M	Z	H	C	S	Y
R	W	C	N	Q	D	M	M	M	T	X	Y	J	N	S	J	K	F	I	I
S	L	A	V	E	R	Y	K	C	L	I	S	L	V	T	Y	H	Y	O	W
L	S	L	S	P	G	D	G	C	P	L	A	N	T	A	T	I	O	N	I
A	Q	O	D	F	F	W	N	H	X	A	F	I	R	D	U	X	I	J	R
V	U	F	V	D	C	E	L	W	M	U	N	R	O	E	N	E	U	I	D
E	K	E	B	U	Q	E	O	N	C	R	A	M	R	J	Q	J	G	D	E
T	X	R	D	I	S	T	I	L	L	E	R	Y	W	X	B	H	H	P	W
R	S	A	Q	L	D	R	R	J	S	N	G	W	K	O	O	V	G	K	O
A	P	T	T	K	A	K	Q	P	M	S	U	G	A	R	P	F	F	E	L
D	U	U	G	Z	L	V	J	A	Z	Z	E	L	B	H	E	W	I	Q	F
E	M	A	N	C	I	P	A	T	I	O	N	P	X	J	S	Q	Y	J	N

KIDS BH&PS Tales from Jail *is published by the Bristol Historical & Preservation Society*
Contributors to this issue:
Isabelle Courtney
Leah Dieterich
Liam Reich
Elsa White
Edited by Isabelle Courtney, Catherine Zipf and Dory Skemp
Attention KIDS members: Would you like to contribute to a future issue? Let us know!!!
Email us at info@bhps.necoxmail.com or call 401-253-7223

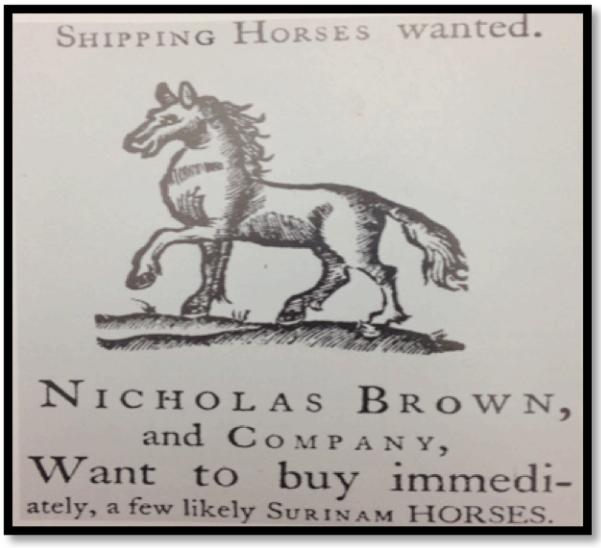
Slavery, the Narragansett Pacer, and Horse Breeding in Revolutionary-era Rhode Island

During the seventeenth century, people in New England brought horses over from many other countries to use for travel and draft work (draft work is the heavy work, like plowing on a farm). Most of the first horses that were brought over were a breed called Flanders, which was generally a more heavyset horse that was meant for draft work. Many people let their horses roam free, which caused confusion as to whose horse was whose. In 1688, the Massachusetts Bay Colony Court decided that all horses had to be branded so it was easier to tell who each horse belonged to.

Over time, Rhode Islanders began to raise horses for export to the sugar colonies, for travel, and to trade to other countries. William Brenton and William Coddington realized that they could make a profit off of breeding horses and selling them. They bred a strain of horse that was less of a draft horse and more of a riding horse that could make travel easier for people, called the Narragansett Pacer. Narragansett Pacers were sought after because they could cover ground quickly and smoothly. People would often put up signs when their Pacers got stolen, offering a reward as high as $10 to whoever could find the horses.

Although many people did not like the look of the Narragansett Pacers, they were still popular in countries such as France and Cuba. The people of these countries did not want to spend time training horses if they could get horses imported from Rhode Island and other places in New England. Many of the horses that were shipped across the water perished from the hard journey. However, if the horses did survive the harsh conditions, their breeders would make lots of money.

> "Rhode Islanders began to raise horses for export to the sugar colonies, for travel, and to trade to other countries."



An advertisement for a Narragansett Pacer in the *Providence Gazette*, 1764.

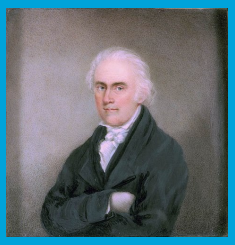
Horse breeding operations increased during the seventeenth century as people began to want more riding horses and as sugar plantations had their draft horses dying from the hard work. The owners of the sugar companies would overwork their horses and then do nothing about the diseases that the horses caught because of their weakened immune systems. Many of the Narragansett Pacers had a longer life as they were never destined to go to the sugar mills. Often when slaves would try to escape the plantations they were working on, if their owner had a Narragansett Pacer, they would take the Pacer so they would be able to escape quickly.

Slavery and horses were entwined. Many horse breeding operations were successful because of slave labor. The slaves would do the hard labor of breeding, raising, and training the horses. Then, the owners would collect the money for the horses without having to do any of the hard labor. Slave owners would also purchase horses with slaves as a currency, and the slaves with horses as currency.

Rhode Islanders regularly shipped horses to the sugar plantations in the Caribbean until Britain passed the Sugar Act in 1764, which affected the Rhode Island horse trade. Then, the Revolution diminished the horse trade even more. The exportation of horses

James DeWolf and the DeWolf Family:

The DeWolf family led one of the largest illegal slave trades in America, lasting from the early 1800s until 1820 and possibly even later, although new laws made it more risky than ever to continue. James DeWolf led the business through a network of agents from his large family in various cities throughout the country. He founded the First Bank of Bristol and created an insurance company to fund his business, and owned sugar plantations in Cuba and a rum distillery in Bristol, in addition to going on voyages himself to buy slaves in Africa, controlling all three aspects of the triangle trade.



A portrait of James DeWolf

When the slave trade was outlawed, DeWolf encountered an obstacle in the form of William Ellery, the collector of customs in Newport, who stopped slave trading ships on their way out of the harbor. To get around him, DeWolf persuaded the government to separate the districts of Bristol and Newport, giving Bristol its own customs collector. He then maneuvered his friend Charles Collins into the position. Collins turned a blind eye to DeWolf's ships, allowing them to pass through unhindered.

Many DeWolfs went on slaving voyages, but James was one of the most well-known. One story tells of a captive woman who fell ill with smallpox, whom he isolated by tying to a chair on deck. When she didn't recover, he dumped her overboard, then lamented the loss of the chair. The illegal incident was reported by two of his sailors upon reaching the shore, and a warrant was put out for his arrest.

DeWolf fled to a Dutch island in the West Indies, where the American authorities couldn't reach him. He continued to direct the family business from afar, sailing under the Spanish flag from his plantations in Cuba to evade the American law, until the warrant was dropped and he was able to return to Bristol.

The fall of the DeWolf empire was caused by George DeWolf, nephew of James, who lived in Linden Place. In 1825, he took out more loans to fund his business than he could afford in assets, relying on the incoming sugar crop to pay for them. However, a series of unexpected storms interrupted the production of his sugar crop, and when the sugar finally made it to the market, it was worth much less than it should have been. He was unable to pay all his debts and went bankrupt, fleeing to Boston in the night to escape the furious mobs of unpaid people, and from there escaped to one of his plantations in Cuba.

The event plunged Bristol into a financial depression. The DeWolfs' attempts to reinvigorate their business empire failed, and they never regained their status as the richest slave trade empire in America.

—Isabelle Courtney, Mount Hope High School student

declined until Cuba began cultivating sugar extensively. The people of Cuba wanted Narragansett Pacers so they would be able to get around faster.

Beginning in the early 1760s, people began to want a more versatile horse, so the popularity of the Narragansett Pacer breed began to decline, as it was only meant to be a riding horse. Furthermore, as roads became better, there was even less need for the Narragansett Pacer because people could use coaches. Because of these developments, owners began crossbreeding the Narragansett Pacers with other breeds to create horses that could both trot and pace well. Soon, people began to value their cross-bred pacers more highly than the Narragansett Pacers.

By the mid 19th century, the Narragansett Pacer died out as people began to only breed them to Arabians to make a good riding horse. Although the Narragansett Pacer is no longer a surviving breed, it still lives on in many modern breeds that were devised from it. Many breeds were influenced by the Narragansett Pacer, such as the Standardbred, the Canadian Pacer, and the Tennessee Walking Horse. Continuing the longstanding relationship between the pacer and slavery, the Tennessee Walking Horse was often used on Plantations in the South.

—Leah Dieterich, Mount Hope High School student

Abolitionists of the 18th Century

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

This famous quote was written by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence in 1776. However, while Americans fought for freedom from England, demanding these "certain unalienable rights", they oppressed and abused their African slaves, denying them exactly those rights for which they themselves fought. At the time the Declaration of Independence was written, 40% of the American population was enslaved.

A large portion of the profit of the southern United States in the 18th century came from the sale of products made by enslaved people. Many owners of large plantations owed money to England and refused to free the slaves so they could use their labor to pay off these debts. Jefferson, the owner of about 200 slaves at his mansion, Monticello, claimed to oppose slavery and wished to abolish it but was unable to do so due to his incredible debt.

Despite this, there were Revolutionary-era abolitionists who took action against slavery. By 1784, laws had been passed outlawing slavery or paving the way to its eventual end in Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Pennsylvania, Vermont, and Rhode Island. The first antislavery organization was created by Quakers in Philadelphia in 1775, and more were created in the years since. For example, the New York Manumission Society campaigned widely against slavery. Their most notable efforts including creating the African Free School to teach black children and petitioning the New York legislature for a gradual end to slavery. First Treasury Secretary Alexander Hamilton was one of the leading voices in the battle against slavery, supporting a petition to end the slave trade in New York. However, before further progress could be made, fierce debates about the Constitution and the organization of the new federal government overwhelmed the slavery issue.

A contemporary depiction of soldiers at Yorktown. On the far left is a soldier from the 1st Rhode Island

"One of the most passionate abolitionists of the time was John Laurens, a young soldier from Charleston, South Carolina."

One of the most passionate abolitionists of the time was John Laurens, a young soldier from Charleston, South Carolina. He had been introduced to antislavery essays while studying law in London and lobbied against slavery for the rest of his life, despite the fact that he had been raised on a large slave-run plantation. He dreamed of creating a battalion of freed black soldiers to defend the colonies during the Revolution. In late 1779, when South Carolina was under attack by the British, Laurens brought his plan to Congress, with the support of Alexander Hamilton. Despite a favorable response from Congress, the South Carolina legislature was firm with its refusal. South Carolina played a large role in the slave trade, with Charleston serving as the largest port for slaves entering the colonies. If not for Laurens's premature death in 1782, he may have succeeded in finally forcing the South Carolina government to agree to his plan and greatly assist the fight for the abolishment of slavery.

A portrait of John Laurens

A portrait of James Mitchell Varnum

While the Laurens Plan failed in South Carolina, Rhode Island succeeded in raising a battalion consisting entirely of African Americans, who contributed greatly to the American victory. In the winter of 1777, while the American army was camped at Valley Forge, many soldiers died or deserted and more were needed to enlist. Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum, a soldier from Rhode Island, suggested creating a regiment of freed slaves to boost the army's numbers. The plan was accepted and a call was put out, offering a position in the Continental Army for any person of color in exchange for being freed of all bonds. In the first few weeks alone, eighty-eight men signed up. The total registration for the 1st Rhode Island Regiment, also known as the "black regiment", was two hundred and twenty-five men, one hundred and forty of whom were listed as "negro, mulatto, or mustee". (The latter two terms refer to being part black).

After the Revolution, abolition became a dangerous topic in the 19th century that, while raised, was often pushed aside by other matters. While antislavery organizations did exist and worked to abolish slavery, they could only do as much as the government would agree to, causing many of their endeavors to be in vain. Despite this, some abolitionists did manage to make progress and would continue to work until slavery was officially ended in 1865.

—Isabelle Courtney, Mount Hope High School student

"Brigadier General James Mitchell Varnum, a soldier from Rhode Island, suggested creating a regiment of freed slaves to boost the army's numbers."

The Gradual Emancipation Acts

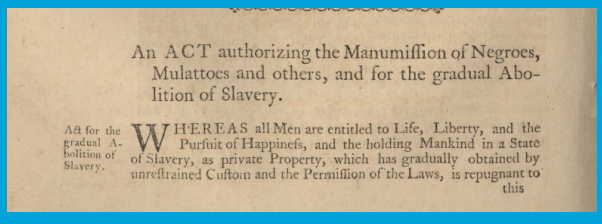
Between 1780 and 1804, laws were passed in all the northern states to gradually put an end to slavery. Pennsylvania was the first state to attempt to establish such an act, presenting a bill to the General Assembly in 1778, but it was tabled in order to focus on supporting the Revolutionary War.

The idea of gradual emancipation reemerged in 1779, when George Bryan, vice president of the Pennsylvania General Assembly, drafted a bill stating that children born into slavery would be freed after a certain amount of time: women at age 18, men at age 21. The assembly appointed a small committee to write up a similar law, which was passed on March 1, 1780, calling for children born to enslaved mothers to be considered "indentured servants" rather than slaves and to be freed at age 28.

In 1788, the law was revised to resolve the loopholes that some slaveholders exploited to avoid having to free their slaves. The updated law prohibited slaveholders from moving pregnant enslaved women outside the state so that their children would be born into slavery, so as to avoid freeing them when they reached the appropriate age. The law also dictated that slaves owned by people who intended to move permanently to Pennsylvania should be immediately freed.

Other northern states later passed abolition acts, following Pennsylvania's lead. In 1784, Connecticut and Rhode Island passed their own acts for gradual emancipation, which established rules on the status of children born to enslaved mothers and on the importation of slaves. In 1799, New York adopted a gradual emancipation act based on Pennsylvania's model. New Jersey was the last northern state to pass a gradual emancipation act in 1804.

—Isabelle Courtney, Mount Hope High School student



An ACT authorizing the Manumiſſion of Negroes, Mulattoes and others, and for the gradual Abolition of Slavery.

Act for the gradual Abolition of Slavery.

WHEREAS all Men are entitled to Life, Liberty, and the Purſuit of Happineſs, and the holding Mankind in a State of Slavery, as private Property, which has gradually obtained by unreſtrained Cuſtom and the Permiſſion of the Laws, is repugnant to this

An excerpt of Rhode Island's gradual emancipation law, which was passed in 1784