

Say Their Names:

Honoring the Lives of Sixteen People Enslaved
in Longmeadow, Massachusetts 1718-1780



Unidentified Woman

By Alice Willard c.1890

Collection of the Longmeadow Historical Society

Hear their names – Know their stories – Honor their humanity

**Longmeadow Historical Society, 2024
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Note: The following presentation was delivered in May 2022 at the First Church of Christ in Longmeadow, Massachusetts. It was written and compiled by Melissa M. Cybulski, vice-president of the Longmeadow Historical Society, and reflects the work of several people to uncover the true nature of slavery in this Connecticut River town. This report would not have been possible without the collaborative efforts of Longmeadow Historical Society Board Members Beth Hoff, Al McKee, and Betsy McKee, as well as scholarly insights offered by Michael Baick and Zoe Cheek and support from the wider local history community.

This project began as part of Pioneer Valley History Network (PVHN) & UMass-Amherst's *Documenting Early History of Black Lives in the Connecticut River Valley*. Special thanks to Cliff McCarthy & Dr. Marla Miller for leading that project. Visit <https://websites.umass.edu/pvhn-blackhistory/> for more information on that work.

In early 2022, members of the First Church of Christ in Longmeadow contacted the Longmeadow Historical Society seeking a way to acknowledge their church's history of complicity in the enslavement of individuals associated with the church and/or with its first minister, Reverend Stephen Williams (1694-1782). On May 22, 2022, members of the church and greater community gathered for a special ceremony at the church on the town green to hear the names and stories of these sixteen enslaved people who were either owned by the church's first minister, or baptized into the church during their lifetimes.

The presentation inspired the church community to seek a way to find a way to more tangibly memorialize these sixteen individuals. That led to a collaboration with Longmeadow Public Schools and The Witness Stones Project™. The Witness Stones Project™ is a non-profit, community initiative whose mission is to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities. In May of 2024, two Witness Stones bearing the names of Phillis and her husband Peter were installed outside the church as lasting memorials of their lives. This collaboration between the Longmeadow Public Schools, The Witness Stones Project™, the First Church of Christ, UCC, and the Longmeadow Historical Society will continue into the upcoming years with the goal of memorializing the lives of all sixteen individuals named in this presentation.

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Say Their Names

May 2022

Introduction

Thank you to the First Church Adult Education and Social Justice Teams for inviting us here today.

My colleagues, Beth Hoff, Betsy McKee, Al McKee, and I from the Longmeadow Historical Society are grateful for the opportunity to share the stories you will hear today in the very space where this history happened. Look around you, this building has been sitting on the Longmeadow town green since 1767. Before that, there was another like it right next door. Nearly every name you will hear today stood in this very building. In the 1700's this was the meetinghouse, a catch-all term for all of the functions the building was used for. Meeting for worship, meeting for town and school planning, meeting to muster the military, meeting to share news.

Before there was a bell in the belfry, there was a drummer who would walk up and down the street alerting people to gather. The rooster weathervane on top of the steeple has been there for centuries. The burying yard behind this building has been the scene of sad funerals since 1719, and continues to be so today.

The red house two doors down was a tavern and so many of the houses surrounding the green - the ones with red stars - were here and filled with families like yours working, playing and doing their best to live a purposeful life.

Today, right across the crosswalk, stands the Community House. Then, it was the parsonage - home to the first minister of First Church, Rev. Stephen Williams, who documented nearly every day of his ministry in a diary. That diary has been the foundation for much of our work, along with church and town records, wills and probates, and newspaper databases. We have all become quite adept at making our way through 18th century handwriting. You will see some of it today in the slides, where I've pulled the name for each person directly from Williams' diary in his own handwriting or other records. It will perhaps give you a sense of the immense challenges we have been up against.

For generations Rev. Stephen Williams was celebrated for his fascinating turn as "the Boy Captive of Old Deerfield." That story is still very true, and still fascinating. Yes, when he was ten, he and his family were among 112 Deerfield men, women, and children who were captured

and taken on a 300-mile forced march to Canada in harsh winter conditions after a raid led by French Canadians and their Indigenous allies. But he grew up and lived a whole life beyond that.

Rev. Stephen Williams devoted his entire pastorate life to this town and this church. He was minister for 66 years, dying in 1782 in the waning months of the American Revolution. He was 89 years old. He was an important, stabilizing figure in Longmeadow's formative years.

And Rev. Williams was an enslaver, owning at least a dozen Africans or African-Americans. They were a part of his life in his household right next door. He was not the only enslaver in Longmeadow, and definitely not the only minister who enslaved people in the Connecticut River Valley.

Because of the labor provided by these people, Rev. Williams and his family were able to focus on establishing a more prosperous quality of life for themselves. And it is important to understand that slave labor in the south and the sugar islands of the West Indies, was critical for the New England economy. Ultimately most people living in Longmeadow in the 17th through 19th centuries were benefiting in some form from slave labor.

As we gather here today to Say Their Names, many for the first time, I truly can feel their presence. Pulling together these narratives over the past month from the pages and pages of research notes we have compiled over the past few years has been an inspired process for me.

Before I was a Longmeadow historian, I was an English teacher, and I have often turned to poetry to look for the pretty way of capturing profound meaning. I found it in these lines from Phyllis Wheatley, herself an enslaved girl in 18th century Massachusetts.

In the poem, "To A Young African Painter, On Seeing His Works", she wrote:

*But when these shades of time are chas'd away,
And darkness ends in everlasting day,
On what seraphic pinions shall we move,
And view the landscapes in the realms above?
There shall thy tongue in heav'nly murmurs flow,
And there my muse with heav'nly transport glow:*

These sixteen voices have been my seraphic muses throughout this process. Today you will hear their names and what we know about their stories. And please know there are more than 16 people who lived a life of slavery in Longmeadow. Today is just a start. Today you will hear about those we know were either owned by the First Church minister and/ or present in early First Church records.

I ask you to take a moment and turn around and notice the southwest balcony. That was the “Negro Gallery.” That is where they sat¹. And today I feel their spirit with us.

Let us tell you about them...

Melissa M. Cybulski
Longmeadow Historical Society

¹ Storrs, Richard Salter, ed. *Proceedings at the Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Longmeadow*. Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood and Brainard Co., 1884. Pg 39

Nicholas

The first person known to be enslaved by Rev. Stephen Williams was a child named Nicholas. Williams was 23 years old and in the first year of his ministry when he took possession of the boy. We don't know where Nicholas came from or who his parents were or how he came to be separated from them. Though it is impossible to know exactly how old Nicholas was at the time, Williams' language indicates he was young by referring to him as "my Lad that I have bought,"² "my poor Boy,"³ "my little boy"⁴. What I do know is that Nicholas was unhappy, perhaps even miserable, which is only natural considering he was just a child. Of the approximately eleven times Rev. Williams mentions him in his diary, most are to comment about Nicholas being disobedient or deceitful. In February he wrote, "this day I had somewhat of the ill carriage of my Boy Nicholas - and so was forced to correct him in the evening - yet he seems to be penitent and promises reformation - I hope he will reform, I pray God to direct me to do my duty with respect to the lad"⁵

For good or bad, Nicholas gained a mistress when Williams married Abigail Davenport in July. Like her husband, the minister's new wife grew up in a home where enslaved people were part of the household landscape. What did her presence mean in Nicholas' young life? Judging by the diary a month into the marriage, it was not a happy household: "Aug 1st , 1718: I had occasion this day to correct my Boy for his disobedience - I am concerned about him - what I shall do with him he is so unlucky and unfaithful"

Aug 2nd, 1718: "this day more complaints come in against my boy - I don't know what to do with him..."

August 8, 1718 : "this day my boy Nicholas came home from work and said he was not well - I was somewhat thoughtful he was only lazy - but I perceived afterward that he was much amiss had a considerable fever ..." Nicholas spent much of the month of August suffering from a lingering feverish illness. Within two months, Nicholas was sold away, likely to someone up in Deerfield.

² Williams Diary, January 3, 1718

³ Williams Diary January 15, 1718

⁴ Williams Diary, January 19, 1718

⁵ Williams Diary February 16, 1718

How did Nicholas feel about leaving the Williams household? We actually have some insight through Williams' own words when he wrote, "He seemed to be very concerned, that he was sold about & truly I seemed to be grieved for him - but yet I thought it would be for his benefit to be sold to a master that would keep him to business, as well as for my profit⁶." Unfortunately, after being sold away, we lose track of the young boy.

Nicholas, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁶ Williams Diary, October 21, 1718

James

Five months later Williams tried again. He bought James, writing, “March 26, 1719: This day I bought me a Servant Man - some of my neighbours think it may be for the better, others think not. I pray to help me do my Duty towards him.” We don’t know what he looked like, how old he was, or where he came from. What we do know about James, however, is a detail we don’t have for any other enslaved person owned by Rev. Williams. We know how much he cost. In a household accounting record, Williams recorded, “to paying for my man James: 10£⁷” To give you a sense of how much 10 £ could buy you in 1719, elsewhere Williams records paying between 3 £’s and 4 £’s for cows, and 10 £ for a horse. James cost as much as a horse. Williams’ salary during his first year in ministry was 55 £.

The only other mentions of James deal with his transgressions for which “I was forced to check him⁸”: once for “being out of frame⁹” once for “being out last night unseasonably¹⁰” And what of James staying out too late one night? What might he have been up to? This is a good opportunity to talk about the Black population in Longmeadow in general in 1719. There were a few other households with enslaved people, and it is quite likely that free Blacks made up part of the workforce in town as well. In the years after James came and went, it seems that Rev. Williams himself hired a free Black man named Robin who lived in his house and worked his land. Robin exercised his freedom to negotiate better pay and his freedom to leave of his own free will¹¹. James, however, was bought and owned. His time was not his own, and there was no salary to negotiate. It is easy to imagine both free and enslaved Blacks sharing time and space and companionship together in off-hours. They certainly shared space together on the Sabbath Day here in church -up in that southwest corner of the balcony.

James appears in the diary three times between March and July of 1719 and then disappears from the record.

James, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁷ Williams Household Accounting Page, Longmeadow Historical Society Archives,

⁸ Williams Diary, July 11, 1719

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Williams Diary April 24, 1719

¹¹ Ibid, March 8, 1721

Phillis

Phillis, without a doubt spent the longest time as an enslaved person in the household of Rev. Williams. For nearly 50 years she lived and worked under his roof in the parsonage. She arrived as a girl, bore at least one child, lost at least one child, and married a man enslaved in another household in town.

Phillis first appeared in February 1728 when Williams and his wife were in their 30's and parents to four young children, though during the course of Phillis' life, the minister and his wife would welcome four more. It's unknown how old Phillis was when she arrived, but in those first years, Williams refers to her as "our Negro girl¹²." Perhaps it is Phyllis who is the "negro wench" who bore a child out of wedlock two years later causing the minister to worry that "there has been sin, & trouble...¹³" You will hear more about this child shortly.

Eight years after this birth, Phillis perplexed Rev. and Mrs. Williams by expressing her desire to marry an enslaved man in town named Peter, who was owned by Captain Colton¹⁴. More than a year later, Williams was still anxiously pondering the matter, and says that the town was "uneasy¹⁵" over the situation and his wife "averse¹⁶" to it. Church records indicate that Phillis and Peter did ultimately get their wish and marry, but not until six years and many pleas had passed¹⁷. They were never able to establish a household together as husband and wife.

Phillis was baptized at First Church, made a public profession and was admitted into communion at First Church, married at First Church, and, in death, was buried out of First Church. As a female servant in the Williams household, she likely contributed to tasks within the female sphere: cooking, washing, nursing, cleaning and mending. In 1771, an aging Stephen Williams drafted his Last Will and Testament in which he left Phillis to his sons John and Samuel¹⁸. She did not outlive her enslaver, though. On May 28, 1774, as talk of revolution was reaching a fever pitch all through the colonies, Phillis died of an 'apoplectick fit.' Williams, 80 years old himself, wrote in his diary, "Death is come into our House—...—phillis had ye character of being Honest—& I hope had had sight of Christ by faith, ye Lord be pleasd to pardon my

¹² Williams Diary, February 1, 1728

¹³ Ibid, June 12, 1730

¹⁴ Ibid, October 28, 1737

¹⁵ Ibid, January 10, 1738

¹⁶ Ibid, January 16, 1738

¹⁷ First Church of Longmeadow Records, May 22, 1744

¹⁸ Rev. Stephen Williams (1694-1782) Last Will and Testament, March 26, 1771. Original and Transcription in Box 20 of Family & Gen. Coll, SHM. SW Will.

Defects of Duty—towards her, & to my other Servants Deceasd.” But, her death does not appear in the Church records. He mentioned a considerable number of people attended her funeral the next day¹⁹. However, there is no headstone marking Phillis’ nor any other enslaved person’s final resting place in the cemetery. They are likely buried there today, along with countless other unmarked graves of Longmeadow residents whose situations, whether financial or social, prevented them from receiving permanent markers.

Phillis, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

¹⁹ Williams Diary, May 29, 1774

Scipio

Scipio was a child likely born into slavery at the Williams parsonage. I suspect his mother was Phillis. Throughout multiple diary entries, Williams refers to him as “our black boy”²⁰ or “our negro boy.” Only by matching up a baptismal record with the diary dates can we identify the boy by name: Scipio. While definitely not a common name in colonial New England, Scipio is in fact a common name among enslaved Black men in colonial New England - derived from Scipio Africanus, the ancient Roman general who triumphed over Hanibal in Africa. Which begs the question as to how the name became popular among the enslaved population. Was it chosen by their mothers? Or by their enslavers, often Harvard and Yale educated ministers who were schooled in the history of the ancient world?

That 1731 baptismal record states, “I baptized our negro boy, Scipio, I and my wife publicly promising that we would endeavor . . . that he would have a Christian education.”²¹ That Christian education was a key difference between colonial New England slavery and Southern slavery of the 19th century. Colonial ministers like Rev. Williams believed in the importance of teaching their enslaved people to read, specifically so that they could better access the word of God through the Bible - the same book that was used against them as justification for keeping them in bondage.

There was a clear closeness, if only physical, between Williams’ own young children and Scipio in his brief life. Whenever Williams’ children were sick, Scipio was sick. When Scipio was not quite 3 years old the minister’s sons brought home an illness that nearly killed them. Many other town families had sick children as well. Most recovered, but Scipio did not and died within days of the onset of symptoms. Rev. Williams wrote on April 8, 1733: “a distressed day with respect to the Black boy who has lain as we apprehended in ye agonies of death - his groans are affecting and distressing . . .” The next day, he wrote, “Last night it pleased God to take away the Black boy by death. . . - Oh Lord be pleased to teach us all by this Providence – and support the poor bereaved mother.”²²

Scipio, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

²⁰ Williams Diary, December 6, 1731

²¹ First Church of Longmeadow Records, October 17, 1731

²² Williams Diary, April 4-9, 1733

Stamford

Stamford, though sometimes called Stanford, was an enslaved man who first appeared in the Stephen Williams diary in July 1734. It would appear that Williams acquired Stamford unexpectedly from a mysterious “S.W. Esq. B.” as noted in his diary. Williams fretted that the purchase put him into debt: “S.W.Esq. B. informs me he has bought me a servant, thus I run into Debt & my care increases.”²³

Stamford’s presence brought the total number of people living in the parsonage to at least eleven. Phillis was there and Rev. and Mrs. Williams and their seven children. It is during this time that as many as three Native American boys also joined the household, coming from Stockbridge, where Rev. Williams was working to establish a school for “Mahican” boys for the purpose of receiving a Christian education.²⁴ It was expected that Stamford also would have been taught to read if he didn’t already know how. Just like the Mahican Stockbridge boys, it was important for all negro slaves to be able to read in order to be able to read the Bible and better come to know the word of God.

Stamford was bought to be a field hand, as most diary entries mention his work in the field alongside the minister’s sons and injuries he received or narrowly avoided. In 1734, we learned that, “this day Stephen and the negro man were remarkably preserved when in danger by the overturning of a cart with a plow in it....”²⁵ And then in 1735, “last night Stamford was remarkably preserved when he fell from the mow– he is something bruised....”²⁶

Two years after Stamford arrived, Williams writes of being troubled about how his oldest son, then 16 years old, was using his power towards Stamford who was likely older. He wrote, “I hear of the imprudence of my son John in dealing with the negro. I wish the child better conduct.”²⁷ This will become a repeated theme in the decades to come. Where John is involved with the male slaves, trouble seems to follow.

Stamford disappeared from the diary for fifteen years - so long that it seemed likely he was not living in the Williams parsonage anymore. He reappeared just long enough for us to learn how he died. Pleurisy, Rev. Williams called it. His knees and legs became painfully swollen. He suffered for ten days before dying. On February 1, 1752, Williams wrote of his being buried,

²³ Williams Diary, July 30, 1734

²⁴ March 28, 1735

²⁵ Ibid, September 28, 1734

²⁶ Ibid, Dec. 30, 1735

²⁷ Ibid, September 8, 1736

“this day Stamford is laid in (the) dark silent grave the place where the servant is free from his master.”²⁸

Stamford, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

²⁸ Ibid, January 18 - February 1, 1752.

Tobiah

Tobiah is a mystery among mysteries. He appeared only in First Church records, and never in Stephen Williams' diary. The church record of August 16, 1747, states, "I baptized one Negro boy Tobiah - and publicly declared before God and his people that I would endeavor and assist that he should have a Christian education if God be pleased to spare him ..." The language indicates that Williams was assuming ownership of raising this boy. It is unclear how young Tobiah was, where he came from, if he was born of an enslaved mother here in Longmeadow.

We know nothing more of Tobiah than his name and date of baptism here at First Church.

Tobiah, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

ETA (March 2023): Upon visiting the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston, I can now say Tobias was in fact mentioned in Stephen Williams's diary, and several times. MHS has a copy of what is known as the "Louisburg Diaries" which cover a period of time that Rev. Williams served as Chaplain of the Louisburg Expedition from 1745-1749. The years relating to his time at Louisburg had been transcribed in a book, but the diary continued on for a period of two years after his return that has never been transcribed.

Looking through the manuscript, you see that after he mentions a sick "negro boy" on June 10 and "our Little negro Boy seems ... to grow weaker" on August 11. Five days later, he records a note in his diary giving a similar account to what was recorded that same day in church records in 1747: August 16. "I have been somewhat (enlarged?) I pray God to pardon and guide me - ? ? ? a little negro boy - that was this day Given up to God in Baptism - I pray God to bless and sanctifie him." Seven weeks later, on October 5, 1747, he writes, "I returned home found the poor negro boy - very poorly."

On January 1st, while at Enfield he mentions, "I hear of the death of the negro child - praise be God that the rest of the family are comfortable of it ..." He mentions it again on Jnuary 9th, as part of larger prayer: "Be pleased o Lord to bless the servants - & help me to do your duty towards them - sanctifie thine hand in the death of the Little negro Boy..."

Willimas never explicitly names the child who died, but it is reasonable to speculate that this is Tobiah, who lived only five months from his baptism until his death, though it is unclear how old he was at the time of his baptism.

Saunders & Jenny

Saunders and Jenny, were a married and enslaved couple belonging to Stephen Williams. They first appeared together in a curious diary mention in September 1748 having “run away again.”²⁹ “Again,” is an important word there. They ran away “again.” Prior to this diary entry there was no other obvious or subtle reference to their existence. The fourteen year period when Jenny and Saunders are in the Williams family is an incredibly busy one in Williams' diary. His children are getting older, marrying and establishing their own homes, the town is growing, Williams is frequently called on to act as a respected leader in the greater Congregationalist world, and the Massachusetts Bay Colony is mired down in King George’s War and the Seven Years War. During Saunders and Jenny’s life in Longmeadow, as many as six enslaved people shared the labor with them at the parsonage and in the fields belonging to Rev. Williams and his eldest son, John. Rev. Williams was a mature 54 years old when Jenny and Saunders “ran away again”, and his son John was running a farm and family of his own in Somers. From the 1740’s through the 1770’s their enslaved people were frequently traveling between the two households.

When they ran away, they never got too far. John was sent in pursuit one time, but they returned on their own a few days later saying they had only wandered in the woods: “Saunders came hither - he and his wife wandered in the woods - till the Sabbath... I fear they are Great Liars.”³⁰ Saunders tried to run away again in 1752, but was captured and returned.³¹

Jenny died in 1761 at John’s house after a “long fever.” Williams wrote, “Jenny died last night. The Lord be pleased to sanctify the providence to Saunders & to all her descendants & to my son’s family - and to all of us that had a concern with her and her descendants.”³² That word “descendants” is striking. Did Jenny have descendants? Where were they? Were they taken from her when she and Saunders went to the Williams house? Or were they taken from her while she was there? These are answers we almost certainly will never have.

Saunders died one year later in 1762. “Poor old Saunders” Williams wrote, perhaps the only clue to his age. He died at 3 o’clock in the morning of December 6. Prayers were held for him at John’s house and they attended him to the grave.³³ Like Jenny’s descendants, we will likely never know where that is.

Jenny and Saunders, today in front of this congregation we say your names. We see you and we honor you.

²⁹ Williams Diary, September 10, 1748

³⁰ Ibid, September 12, 1748

³¹ Ibid, October 4, 1752

³² Ibid, Oct 31-Nov 9, 1761

³³ Ibid, December 6, 1762

ETA: March 2023. The newly researched Louisburg Diaries manuscripts housed at the Massachusetts Historical Society in Boston reveal the meaning behind “again” in Saunders and Jenny ran away “again.”

Just under one year earlier on October 8, 1747, on the same day that his son John and his wife, Ann, welcomed a baby boy named Stephen, Williams wrote, “in the Evening we heard that Saunders and Jenny had run away from the Farm & were got as far as Windsor - but were brot back to Enfield thus we are (perplexed?)? by those unhappy and troublesome creatures.” The next day he speaks to his continued concern and hints at their punishment: “this day I have been considering the case of the poor negroes and have (corrected?) them (somewhat?) -I am (concerned?) my (compassions?) moved - something is (needful?) to be done – – I pray God to (keep?) (? ?) doing wt is ? to his way of ? ” (need handwriting help)

Tom

Tom was an enslaved person owned by Rev. Stephen Williams who first appeared in Rev. Williams' diary within two years of Stamford's death. He joined Phillis and Saunders and Jenny, and like them, we don't know where he came from or under what circumstances. The first time Tom was mentioned, he was "taken cold & a violent pain in his breast & head."³⁴ The second mention is when Tom apparently "behaved Saucily & unbecomingly – that we were forced to tie him up – he appeared penitent - & I forgave him." The pronoun used there is striking: ... "we were forced to tie him up."³⁵ It begs the question, *who* is the *we*?

Tom is one of only two enslaved people for whom we have an age and a physical description. The only reason we have this information is because he ran away and Rev. Williams placed an ad for a reward for his return. The advertisement describes Tom as a "thick ... fellow; aged about 22 years, in a pair of trousers, a brown waistcoat, and a linen cap. No stockings, no shoes."³⁶ Rev. Williams placed the ad in a Connecticut paper. Perhaps he thought Tom was heading for the shore to board a ship, as many runaways of various classes and races were known to do. Tom didn't though. For many days, Williams writes of his sons' search for Tom. He hadn't run far, though. Nine days after disappearing, Tom's body was found in the Mill Pond off Longmeadow Brook.³⁷ We have strong reason to believe that this Mill Pond is today the pond at Longmeadow Country Club.

A formal inquest at the time of his death claimed that Tom, "then and there voluntarily and Feloniously as a Felon of Himself Did kill and Murder Himself by Drowning himself in a Certain Mill Pond in the Precinct of Longmeadow."³⁸ That evening, Williams recorded in his diary, "The coroner came & a jury sat upon the corpse of the poor self destroyer - oh what wretched creatures are we - how full of sin."³⁹

Tom's only freedom came in his decision to end his own life.

Tom, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

³⁴ Williams Diary, September 26, 1753

³⁵ Ibid, April 11, 1754

³⁶ *Genealogical Data from Colonial New Haven Newspapers*. Compiled by Kenneth Scott and Rosanne Conway. Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Co, Inc, 1979. Connecticut Gazette, Oct 2, 1756

³⁷ Williams Diary, October 1, 1756; Abigail Davenport Williams' Diary Transcript, p 46, courtesy Pocumtuck Valley HM

³⁸ "Inquisition on the Body of Tom (a Negro of Rev. Stephen Williams)," October 2, 1756, Copy of Suffolk County (Mass.) court files, 1629-1797. From FamilySearch.org: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSRW-P9K9-3>

³⁹ Williams Diary, October 2, 1756

Peter (1)

Peter appeared in the tumultuous mid-1750's just before Tom drowns himself, but while Phillis, Saunders, and Jenny are still enslaved at the Williams household. Like Saunders and Jenny, Peter split his time between the parsonage in Longmeadow and John Williams' farm in Somers. Most diary entries mentioning Peter show him bringing livestock or messages back and forth between houses. He was first referred to as a "boy" who got lost traveling in from Somers with a yoke of oxen on a stormy night.⁴⁰

It is intriguing to think that Peter could have possibly been Phillis' son with her husband Peter, who was owned by another Longmeadow resident. In 1771 when Rev. Williams drafted his will, he left Phillis to his sons to be given what was "proper and needful and comfortable for her so long as she lives."⁴¹ He then added, "in consideration thereof, I do give to my said sons John and Samll ... my negro servant Peter; to John and Samll ... in equal proportions, that is that one shall have one half, and the other one half of right and interest in him."⁴² Did he think this would be a comfort to Phillis because Peter was her family? Perhaps he was named for his father. At this point though this is simply a theory.

A few months before Phillis died, Peter ran away. It was 1773. Stephen Williams had grown old, John, his son, had grown mean enough to draw worry about his behavior from his father and brothers. John's own son had run away.⁴³ Then Peter ran. This grieved and angered Rev. Williams, who had gone so far as to consider giving him his liberty at a time when liberty was very much on the minds of many people in the colonies. But he didn't, and Peter ran.

Williams took to his diary to write, "this day my son John sends me word that Peter Negro is run away ungratefully, left my son - (now under difficulty) who has been kind to him & very tender of him. I had been thinking of setting him at liberty (if it could be done without injury to me, or the publick) - what measures to take now - I am at a loss - desire I may not do anything, that may be dishonorable to religion."⁴⁴

John Williams placed an ad for Peter after he ran away, calling him their "negro servant. Stout and well set fellow. Betwixt 30 and 40 years of age, very black. He took a considerable quantity of clothing with him. He can read and write well. It is not unlikely he may have a forged pass;

⁴⁰ Williams Diary, April 24-25, 1755

⁴¹ Rev. Stephen Williams (1694-1782) Last Will and Testament, March 26, 1771. Original and Transcription in Box 20 of Family & Gen. Coll, SHM. SW Will.

⁴² Ibid

⁴³ Williams Diary, November 3, 1772

⁴⁴ Ibid, August 12, 1773

he can play well upon a fiddle, and took a good one with him.”⁴⁵ An 8 dollar reward was offered for Peter’s return.

Peter may actually have secured his own freedom. There is no mention of his return nor is he ever mentioned in the diary again.

Peter, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

ETA March 2023. New research in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society reveals a previously untranscribed section of the manuscript from July 20, 1749 - August 6, 1750. It reveals a stunning mention of Peter twenty-three years prior to his 1773 escape. Per the newly found diary entries, it seems Peter had attempted to escape in July of 1750. He was apparently held in prison and visited there by his owner before being returned to his service. On 750: July 18, 1750, Stephen Williams recorded, “Returned home [from previous day visit to West Parish] - I called - discoursed with Peter - he seems very ?, from being humbled - - wont so much as promise (not?) to run away - in case - I should take him out of prison - ? pray to God to keep my spirit calm...” Two days later on July 20, he writes, “I have taken Peter Home - and design to keep him at work - ? be pleased to Give me prudence, to conduct aright in this affair-”

If Williams is still referring to him as a “boy” in 1755, how old must he have been at the time of this imprisonment? The newspaper advertisement placed in 1773 notes he is between 30 and 40 years of age. This would make him between seven and seventeen years old in 1750, though surely closer to seven if he’s still called a “boy” five years later. If I am reading the manuscript correctly, the idea that a seven year old child will not promise not to run away again is a mark of his strength, innocence and humanity.

⁴⁵ Connecticut Courant, Aug 17-24th, 1773

Cato

Cato, like many of his enslaved brothers and sisters, first appeared in Stephen Williams' diary in a time of illness.⁴⁶ Of all the enslaved people that cross the pages of Rev. Williams' diary, Cato seems the most distressed. In 1759, one year after he first appeared, Cato approached Rev. Williams and asked to be sold.⁴⁷ He didn't ask for his freedom; he asked to be sold. He wasn't. One year later, Cato entered Williams' study asking what was to be done with him after his master died: "this day poor Cato asked what he shall do when I am dead - who he shall live with."⁴⁸ This is a reasonable question considering Rev. Williams was nearing 70 years old in 1760. A year later, Cato appeared again in Williams' study to ask another version of the same question. Williams wrote that day in March 1761, "this morning Cato movingly advised me of my mortality by asking what he shall do when I am dead - which he says will be by & by. The Lord help me to realize this & give me ... repentance & new obedience till my change may come..." It seems Williams worried over his own mortality, while Cato worried over his own future.

In fact, Cato died a full two decades before Rev. Williams. The last few months of his life were a time of emotional crisis for him. At the end of October 1762, Rev. Williams wrote that, "we had an uncomfortable night – poor Cato was in a piteous case – had (I fear) drank too much cider & his mind – turmoiled."⁴⁹ The next day Rev. Williams wrote that Cato had a public outburst: "he went to the publick worship but spoke out loud at the end of the afternoon sermon"⁵⁰ Did Cato's outburst come from the negro gallery above?

Two weeks later he "stripped himself naked" and flung a woman down⁵¹. Williams wrote: "by the advice of my neighbors Cato was whipped very severely" and appeared, "somewhat penitent."⁵² Cato continued to act out over the next few days and was "severely corrected again"⁵³ with several neighbors present.

After weeks of alternating peace and tumult, Cato was sent to John Williams' farm. He appeared to be improving, until two weeks later. Williams' son-in-law "brought us an account that Cato was missing & twas supposed was drowned in the well: a most awful and affecting affair ...

⁴⁶ Williams Diary, March 3-8, 1758

⁴⁷ Ibid, January 13, 1759

⁴⁸ Ibid, January 12, 1760

⁴⁹ Ibid, October 30, 1762

⁵⁰ Ibid, October 31, 1762

⁵¹ Ibid, November 15, 1762

⁵² Ibid, November 16, 1762

⁵³ Ibid, November 17, 1762

Give us to consider our ways, our conduct & behaviour toward our servants... Samuel went out and accounted they had drawn Cato out of the well. The Lord be pleased to teach us, guide us and pardon us.”⁵⁴ It’s unclear if Williams’ was looking for a pardon for himself and his actions, or for Cato, whose suicide was considered a sin against God.

Cato, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁵⁴ Williams Diary, January 8, 1763

Joseph

Joseph first appeared in Rev. Williams diary in 1759, and would have been present for all of the hardship surrounding Cato. When Joseph first appeared, it had been more than 40 years since Williams sold young Nicholas away. With the exception of updates on Cato's and Tom's situations, months and sometimes years go by between even casual mentions of the people he has purchased to allow his busy household and farm to function so efficiently. Joseph's presence was so commonplace that Williams only wrote of him to say, "our negro Joseph has the measles - but things look favorable..."⁵⁵ And, from that point on over the next decade or so it is difficult to parse out which Joseph Rev. Williams is referring to when he mentions his name because along with him and Phillis and Peter and Cato were two white, indentured servants brought under contract from a Boston poorhouse a few years earlier: one of whom was also named Joseph - Joseph Bumstead, and he would often be referred to in the diary as "Joseph Bumstead." Joseph, the enslaved man bore no last name.

Joseph, must have been gone by 1771 when Rev. Williams wrote his will, because he wasn't mentioned among his assets to be left to someone dear to him. Williams writes so frequently and passionately of people's dying that I imagine that was not how he left. Perhaps, like Nicholas, Joseph was sold for his benefit. But it appears that Joseph may have been the last "negro servant" to be bought by Williams. By 1771, seemingly only Phillis and Peter remain to be mentioned in that Last Will and Testament..

Joseph, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁵⁵ Williams Diary, February 13, 1759

Peter (2)

Rev. Williams was not the only enslaver in the town of Longmeadow in the 18th century. What follows are the names and stories we have been able to piece together for four more people known to have been held in bondage and baptized into First Church. They would have sat in “the negro balcony,” closest to the little boys and the large boys⁵⁶.

A second man named Peter was identified as a “nego servant” to Srgt. John Cooley in February 1734 when Rev. Williams writes of baptizing him in the church records⁵⁷. The Cooleys are among the earliest settlers of Longmeadow, and Srgt. Cooley in particular is believed to be the one mentioned several times about 15 years earlier in the diary in connection with a stolen delivery of church wine that had been dropped off down by the river. To be more specific, “Cooley’s indian”⁵⁸ was suspected to be responsible for the stolen wine. This simple phrasing, “Cooley’s indian” reminds us of, or perhaps introduces us to, the fact that Blacks were not the only victims of enslavers. Indigenous people were captured, bought, traded and sold as well. In the case of the stolen wine, after many weeks of accusing “Cooley’s indian,” a white resident confessed to the crime.

Peter was baptized the same day as Phillis, but Srgt. Cooley’s Peter was not the Peter Phillis pleaded to marry. First Church records noted that Peter, among others that day including Phillis and one of Srgt. Cooley’s own daughters, “made a public profession of religion” and was “admitted to our fellowship.”⁵⁹

His last Will and Testament noted that Srgt Cooley was a yeoman, an 18th century farmer. He was also a revered and trusted member of this town and of this church, serving at various times as a town appointed moderator, Assessor, Selectman and all-important, church appointed, member of the Meetinghouse Seating Committee. Enslavers were often among men with the most status in New England towns like Longmeadow.

Per church records, Peter was “dismissed to Westfield” ten years after he was baptized.⁶⁰ Cooley’s wife was from Westfield and her father was a known enslaver there. It is likely that Peter continued his life in bondage in Westfield

Peter, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁵⁶ Storrs, Richard Salter, ed. Proceedings at the Centennial Celebration of the Incorporation of the Town of Longmeadow. Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood and Brainard Co., 1884. Page 39

⁵⁷ First Church Longmeadow Church Records, Feb 17, 1734

⁵⁸ Williams Diary, September 6, 1722

⁵⁹ First Church Longmeadow Church Records, May 25, 1735

⁶⁰ Ibid, March 25, 1744

Caesar

Caesar was an enslaved person baptized into this church in June 1741 and identified as “a negro, servant to Capt. George Colton.”⁶¹ Caesar appears to have been in town for at least 35 years, and is an example of a person we were able to trace in multiple places: Williams’ diary, church records, town tax documents, and a merchant’s ledger book. Rev Williams recorded his baptism with a prayer with no hint of irony, “Lord, let them be thy free men and graciously preserve and direct them...”⁶² Town tax records in 1751 indicate that, along with livestock, Capt. Colton paid taxes on Caesar⁶³. Seven years later Capt. Colton drafted his Last Will and Testament bequeathing Caesar to his widow and his eldest son, Timothy.⁶⁴ Timothy profited off Caesar’s labor in many ways, including financially when he hired him out to Merchant Samuel Colton for a period of months from 1769-1770, approximately thirty years after first appearing in church records.⁶⁵

In Feb. 1775, just two months before the first battle of American Revolution in Lexington and Concord, Rev. Williams set pen to paper in his diary and wrote of his concerns over Caesar: “I stayed the church and proposed to them whether it was not our duty to do something with Cesar Negro - that had been kept from the sacrament of a long time. Some proposed to have a church meeting called to consider of various difficulties among us and pressed the matter. Told the church I was willing to call a church meeting...”⁶⁶

It’s not clear what kept Caesar from communion then or if he was welcomed back.

Caesar, today in front of this congregation we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁶¹ First Church of Longmeadow Church Records, June 9, 1741

⁶² Williams Diary, June 7, 1741

⁶³ Longmeadow Historical Society Archives, Real Estate; Tax Rates

⁶⁴ Captain George Colton’s will

⁶⁵ Longmeadow Historical Society Archives, Merchant Samuel Colton Books

⁶⁶ Williams Diary, February 5, 1775

Peter (3)

The third Peter you will hear about today is actually the first Peter we discovered in the story of slavery in Longmeadow. This Peter became Phillis' husband despite many obstacles in their path⁶⁷, including community objections. He was baptized into the First Church on July 13, 1735.⁶⁸ Along with Caesar, Peter was owned by Capt. George Colton.

Unlike Caesar, we have more glimpses into Peter's circumstances, likely because of his connection with Phillis. Of those references, two important ones indicate that he likely had been sent to support the household of Capt. Colton's daughter when she married Sgt. David Burt in town. It's Sgt. Burt who knocks on the door of the Williams household twice over 25 years to share the news that Peter is ill.⁶⁹ The Burts knew that this information would matter to Phillis, or perhaps they were looking for the minister to pray over Peter lest this illness be his last. In 1751, Williams wrote, "I went over - the poor creature is in a poor case." Ten years later, Williams refers to him as "poor old Peter" who got lost on his way over to their household on a dark and rainy night in late October. He had "lay out in the rain & is poorly this morning."⁷⁰

Along with Caesar, Capt. Colton bequeathed this Peter to his wife and son, Timothy, upon his death.⁷¹ Peter outlived Capt Colton by 14 years. He died on September 9, 1774, less than four months after Phillis died at the Williams' parsonage. On the occasion of Peter's passing, Rev. Williams wrote, "this morning Sgt. David Burt came in - told me Peter Negro died last night very suddenly, and almost alone."⁷² Peter's death, like nearly all other known deaths of the enslaved, is not reported in church records.

Peter, Phillis' husband, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.

⁶⁷ First Church Longmeadow, Church Records, May 22, 1744

⁶⁸ Ibid, July 13, 1735

⁶⁹ Williams Diary, December 4, 1751, September 10, 1774.

⁷⁰ Ibid, October 25, 1761

⁷¹ Captain George Colton's will

⁷² Williams Diary, September 10, 1774

Zickery

The final enslaved person you will hear about today is Zickery. Tracing Zickery through Longmeadow, and perhaps beyond, has been a journey through varied spellings and plain old misspellings, various wills, probates, and online genealogical and newspaper databases. Within a 10 year period, Zickery would pass from Nathaniel Bliss to Joshua Field⁷³, from Joshua Field to his brother Thomas Field, and then from Thomas Field to his son Moses Field, all of Longmeadow.

Zickerie first appeared before us in 1737 in Nathaniel Bliss' last will and testament, where Bliss states, "I give and bequeath also to my beloved cousin Joshua Field my Negro boy Zichries as also my cart plows, harrows, chains, axes, hoes, scythe, sickles, yay all my husbandry tools or implements. Whatsoever to him and his heirs forever." When Bliss died, his probate valued "one Negro Called Ziccery £110 00."

Zickerie was admitted to the First Church of Christ membership on the same day as Caesar. It would appear that Zick took his faith seriously because he appeared at Rev. Williams' door one July morning soon after his baptism. Williams wrote, "poor Zich comes to me this morning giving me an account of the distress he is in. The word touched him yesterday..."⁷⁴ ETA: This is within days of Jonathan Edwards appearance in Enfield to preach his sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, which Williams attended and which deeply impacted members of his own Longmeadow congregation.

The last record of Zicherie in Longmeadow is in 1747. However, a curious lead has popped up in Simsbury, CT thirteen years later in yet another man's will. Joseph Phelps of Simsbury states in his will, "I do order that my Negro man Servant Zickery, and my Negro Woman Servant Citty that are Husband & Wife, shall not after my Decease be parted asundor, but have liberty to Choose their Master and Mistress among my Children to live with," Though we have found no link between Phelps and Moses Field, it is possible that this is the same Zickery. And if it is indeed the same Zickery, it is likely that this man had enlisted in a Connecticut battalion to fight for three years in the American Revolution. The math could make sense if Zickery truly was a "Boy" in 1737 when Nathaniel Bliss first mentioned him in his will. More work needs to be done to look into these connections, but if true, it is exciting to think that in his 50's Zickery could have fought for such an important cause.

⁷³ <https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/482323:9069>

⁷⁴ Williams Diary, July 13, 1741. Vol 3, P. 379.

Zickery, today in front of this congregation, we say your name. We see you and we honor you.