Slavery and its Aftermath in Cambridge

Charles Sullivan, Executive Director
Cambridge Historical Commission

January 13, 2021
Boston and Cambridge, ca. 1770

Lt. John Hills, “Boston, with the surrounding, &c.,” (detail)
Library of Congress
Winthrop-Woods Map of Massachusetts Bay, ca. 1633–37 (detail)

Red circle: Newtowne (Cambridge)
Blue circle: “Indians”
The first recorded African in Cambridge was a “Moor” caught sleeping in a student’s bed in Harvard Professor Nathaniel Eaton’s house in 1638.
First known view of Cambridge, 1693
Headstone of Cicely, "Negro, late servant of Rev. William Brattle, died April 8, 1714 being 15 years old"

William Brattle (1662-1717), Harvard College class of 1680, was a Tutor, Fellow, and Treasurer of Harvard College and minister of the First Parish from 1696 until his death.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Men's Names</th>
<th>Value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thomas Wells</td>
<td>$200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Anderson</td>
<td>$150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Jones</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John King</td>
<td>$300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Smith</td>
<td>$400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Adams</td>
<td>$500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Brown</td>
<td>$600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Webber</td>
<td>$700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Peters</td>
<td>$800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Martin</td>
<td>$900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John Johnson</td>
<td>$1,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This list represents the property valuation for the Town of Cambridge in 1749.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tons of Meadow</th>
<th>Tons of Salt Hay</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acres of Pasturage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Cow-Leases Pasturage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vessels failed to Foreign Parts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slaves between 12 &amp; 50 Years of Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian, Negro or Molatto for Term of Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horses and Mares three Years</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupation</td>
<td>Slaves Aged 12–50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>William Angier</td>
<td>tanner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moses Bordman Jr.</td>
<td>tanner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth Nutting</td>
<td>unmarried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stephen Prentice</td>
<td>cordwainer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jonathan Sprague</td>
<td>?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lieut. [Ebenezer] Stedman</td>
<td>innkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edmund Trowbridge</td>
<td>judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Watson</td>
<td>tanner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deacon [Samuel] Whittemore</td>
<td>storekeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Francis Foxcroft</td>
<td>judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry Vassall</td>
<td>merchant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>[Mrs. John] Vassall</td>
<td>widow</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Total**: 15

Sources: Town of Cambridge Tax Valuation Sheet, 1749; Paige, *History of Cambridge*, 1877; Massachusetts Vital Records
Slaves Owners in Cambridge

Samuel Whittemore house, 64 J.F. Kennedy Street, ca. 1725; demolished 1900
Colonel Henry Vassall (1721-1769) and Penelope Royall Vassall (1724–1800)
Married 1742
Henry and Penelope Vassall house, 94 Brattle Street
Loyalist Estates in 1775

Loyalist Estates:
1. David Phips 1725
2. William Brattle 1727
3. Henry Vassall 1746
4. Spencer Phips 1750
5. John Foxcroft ca. 1750
6. Ralph Inman 1756
7. John Vassall Jr. 1759
8. East Apthorp 1760
9. Judge Joseph Lee ca. 1760
10. Richard Lechmere 1761
11. George Ruggles ca. 1764
12. Thomas Oliver 1767

Fresh Pond

Hill contour
Stream
Salt marsh
Tidal flat
Open water
Structure
Fortification
Road
Lot line
Estate line
John Vassall Jr. house (Longfellow House National Historic Site), 105 Brattle Street (1759)
John Vassall’s claim to the British government after his holdings were confiscated in 1778 reported an annual income of £150 from his farm and itemized its “sundry stock:”

A Negro woman, Cuba £40
A Mulatto Man, Malcolm £50
A Mulatto Boy, James £30
A Negro Man, William £20
A Negro Woman, Dinah £30

**Two small Boys £30***

Two yoke of oxen £50
Six cows £24
A Pair Steers £6
Two heifers £5
Two Yearlings £3
A Bay Mare paid sheriff for £40
A Bay Mare £10
Two horses from England £100
Four colts £25

*One of these boys would have been Darby Vassall (1769-1861)
Doll of Darby Vassall made by Mary Saunders, 1850
Longfellow-Washington’s Headquarters National Historic Site
Tory Row in 1775, looking east along Brattle Street

Lechmere-Sewell estate in the foreground, with the John Vassall estate beyond

Attorney Jonathan Sewell represented James, a slave, who successfully sued Richard Lechmere for his freedom in 1769 on the grounds that persons born in the province were free.
Black Soldiers of the Revolution

Cato Stedman and Neptune Frost, Old Burying Ground, Harvard Square
Slavery ended in Massachusetts after 1783, when Quock Walker and others successfully sued for their freedom on the grounds that the Massachusetts constitution of 1780 (drafted in the Cambridge meetinghouse) held that all men were created equal.
# African Americans as a Percentage of Cambridge Population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>African American</th>
<th>Total Population</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1749</td>
<td>15*</td>
<td>1200**</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1765</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>1571</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2,115</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1800</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2,453</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Slaves aged 12-50

**Estimated. Cambridge includes present Arlington and Allston-Brighton until 1807.
West Boston (Longfellow) Bridge, 1793, makes Cambridge a suburb of Boston
Three villages connected by new roads, 1830
Lafayette Square, Cambridgeport, looking east toward the intersection with Main Street, ca. 1825.
New England Glass Works, North Street, East Cambridge, ca. 1825
The village in Old Cambridge (Harvard Square), 1833
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<tr>
<td>1820</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>3,295</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1840</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>8,409</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1860</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>25,706</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
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*Includes Arlington and Allston-Brighton before 1807
Known minority communities, ca. 1800-1860

A. Lewisville
B. Harvard Square
C. Harvard Hill
D. Lower Port

Henry F. Walling,
“Map of the City of Cambridge ... Massachusetts,” 1854
Lewisville, ca. 1800-1880
Part of Lewisville, showing Enoch and Samuel’s house on Garden Street, William Bassett’s house, and the Lewis family tomb, as surveyed in 1869.
The Skating Rink Troubles.—Thomas Hall, one of the firm of Rindge & Hall, proprietors of the Cambridge Skating Rink, was before the Police Court of this city, on Wednesday last, on two complaints made in behalf of the Commonwealth, for refusing to admit two colored young men, named Manuel D. Hewlett and George Lewis, Jr. to the rink, on the fourth day of the present month. Robert Morris, Esq. of Boston, appeared for the Commonwealth, and there was no appearance for the defendant, it being his intention to appeal should the case be decided against him.

It is evident that the proprietors of the skating rink have made a great blunder in their action in regard to admitting colored persons, and we are confident that they are pretty well satisfied of that fact by this time, themselves. — It is rather late in the day, when they are elected to various offices, and allowed all the legal privileges of white folks in the Commonwealth, in our cars, churches, lectures, theatres, and all other public places, to refuse to admit them to a skating rink. They have always been loyal, have bravely fought and shed their blood for our rights in contending against traitors and rebels, are orderly and well behaved citizens, and should enjoy all the rights and privileges which are enjoyed by every other race.

Cambridge Chronicle, Feb. 15, 1868
Stewards of the Porcellian Club

George Washington Lewis Sr. (ca. 1824-1876)
1852-1876

George Washington Lewis Jr. (1848-1929)
1876-1920
George Washington Lewis Jr. family at 47 Parker Street (1890). Photo ca. 1900
Jerome T. Lewis (1922-1976)
grandson of George Washington Lewis Jr.

Jerome T. Lewis, associate director of the Cambridge Library, has announced the establishment of a new scholarship for Cambridge public high school students who have made significant contributions to the city’s black community.
Lunsford Lane (1803 – 1879),
born in Raleigh, N.C.

Former slave, businessman, author
44 Webster Avenue, 1844-1860

Moved to Cambridge while Boston segregated its schools
Antebellum Newcomers to Cambridge

Lewis Clarke (1818 – 1897)
J. Milton Clarke (1820-1902),
born in Madison County, Kentucky

Former slaves, authors and lecturers

2 Florence Place, 1851-1902

Common Councillor J. Milton Clarke
First African American elected to public office in Cambridge, 1870
Aaron Molyneaux Hewitt (1819-1871)
Born in Queens County, N.Y.

First African American instructor at Harvard University
Superintendent of the Gymnasium, 1859-1871

69 Dunster Street, 1859-1871
Marginalized Communities

Thirteen Goodies outside Harvard Hall in 1862.
Native Americans

Lemuel Burr, 1814-1900
Born in Canton, Massachusetts

Abolitionist, community activist
Mixed-race member of the Ponkapoag Tribe

45-47 Hampshire Street, 1860-1900
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<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>52,669</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3,888</td>
<td>91,866</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>5,334</td>
<td>109,694</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1940</td>
<td>4,858</td>
<td>110,879</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Harriet Jacobs (1815-1897)  
born in Edenton, N.C.  

Former slave, author of  
*Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861)  

10 Trowbridge Street, 1869-1873  
17 Story Street, 1873-1876
Postwar Participants in Community Life

Joshua Bowen Smith (1813 – 1879),
born in Coatesville, Pa.

Businessman, abolitionist,
State representative, 1873-1875

79 Norfolk Street, 1852-1879
Postwar Participants in Community Life

Richard T. Greener (1844-1922)

First African American graduate of Harvard College, 1870

25 Washington Street, after 1859
College House, after 1865
Postwar Participants in Community Life

Maria Baldwin (1856-1922)
Born in Cambridge
Graduate of Cambridge High School and teacher training program
Teacher and master, Agassiz School, 1889-1922
196 Prospect Street
Clement Morgan (1859-1929) 
born in Virginia 

Harvard College 1890, Law School 1893 
First African American Cambridge Alderman, 1897-1899 

265 Prospect Street, 1898-1922
Postwar Participants in Community Life

Gertrude Wright Morgan (1861-1931)
Born in Springfield, Illinois
Married Clement Morgan in 1897
Prominent in the Niagara Movement, the establishment of the NAACP, and the suffrage movement to adopt the 19th amendment

265 Prospect Street, 1898-1922
Postwar Participants in Community Life

William H. Lewis (1868-1949)
Born in Berkeley, Virginia

Amherst College, 1892
Harvard Law School, 1895

Cambridge Common Council, 1899-1901
U.S. Attorney, 1903-1913

226 Upland Road, 1902-1930
Marginalized Communities

African American waiters at Memorial Hall, 1875
“Color Line Not Drawn,” 1903

Cambridge Chronicle, August 29, 1903

Do you know any American city where there is now or has been within a few years—

A black alderman, sitting in a board with 10 white colleagues and elected by voters 95 per cent of whom were white?

Two negro representatives in the Legislature, chosen by constituencies in which the colored vote was relatively small?

Seven members of the common council of African descent?

A negro chief of a fire department in which he was the only man of color?

A black policeman, patrolling streets occupied mostly by white residents, for 19 years in succession?

A negro at the head of the city department of bacteriology?
John H.H. McNamee (1853-1936)
Cambridge’s first Democratic mayor, 1902-04
John H.H. McNamee (1853-1936)
Cambridge’s first Democratic mayor, 1902-04

Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924)
U.S. President, 1913-1921
"Colored Citizens"

Cambridge Chronicle, December 12, 1946
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<td>4,858</td>
<td>110,879</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>5,671</td>
<td>95,778</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>10,418</td>
<td>82,888</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>12,079</td>
<td>86,692</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019**</td>
<td>11,500</td>
<td>104,338</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Excludes persons in group quarters (dormitories) after 1950

** 2019 estimate from Cambridge Community Development Department