



Barrington Preservation Society

DISCOVER • PRESERVE • RESTORE

Fall 2020

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Barrington Preservation Society Museum

Lower Level,

Public Library

Hours

Wednesdays & Saturdays

1:00 – 4:00 or by appointment

New hours to be announced soon.

See museum news on page 4.

Phone

(401)289-0802

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RESEARCHING BARRINGTON'S PAST HISTORY OF SLAVERY

By Stephen Venuti, *President BPS*

For the last ten or more years every 3rd grade class in Barrington Public Schools has taken a field trip to the Prince's Hill Cemetery for a guided tour lead by members of the Barrington Preservation Society (BPS). One of the last stops along this guided tour is a visit to the slave memorial erected in 1903. The monument, a large white stone surrounded by 4 small black stones, bears a plaque reading "In MEMORY Of The Slaves And Their Descendants Who Faithfully Served Barrington Families". In the year 2020, however due to Covid-19 related school closures, guided tours of the cemetery (including a stop at the monument) were conducted virtually using a short video now posted on the BPS website at <https://barringtonpreservation.org/2020/04/30/video-a-tour-of-princes-hill-cemetery/>

As we all know, it wasn't just Barrington Public Schools that kept students at home in an effort to prevent the spread of Covid-19. Many colleges and universities did so as well. In a strange confluence of events, several Barrington students who would normally have been away at college found themselves stuck at home at the same time the "Black Lives Matter" movement was spreading across the country. With their consciences, as well as their curiosity raised, several students with a new found awareness of the monument at Prince's Hill Cemetery began asking questions about Barrington's past history regarding slavery. Many of those questions were directed at BPS.

What most wanted to know was "who were these 'slaves'", "what were their names", "who were the families that kept them enslaved" and "what information does BPS have in its historical records"?

Most of what we "know" regarding the first three questions can be readily found in Thomas Williams Bicknell's (1898) "A History of Barrington" along with the Colonial Census of 1774 and the Rhode Island Military Census of 1777 as well as in subsequent US Census data. But it was the last question (i.e., "what information does BPS have in its historical records") that required considerably more digging – digging that has only just begun.

It might seem an odd place to begin digging into Barrington's history regarding slavery. But Jill Lepore's (1998) book "The Name of War – King Philip's War and The Origins of American Identity" provides some valuable, yet little known, historical context with regards to slavery.

The land on which Barrington sits is part of the Sowams Purchase of 1653 when English settlers "purchased" the land from the Wampanoag or Pokanoket Massasoit Osemequin. Some 22 years later, in a dispute over boundaries and differing cultural understandings of land ownership rights, the English settlers and the "Indians" – lead by Osemequin's son Metacomet (aka King Philip) engaged each other in a bloody war.

It will seem obvious to anyone reading today that the English settlers prevailed. But what happened to the Indians who fought and lost? Their story is where the local story of enslavement begins. In her book, Jill Lepore includes the following proclamation, written September 12, 1676 by John Leverett, Governor, Massachusetts Bay Colony:

“Bee it known, and manifest that whereas Philip an heathen Sachem inhabiting this continent of New-England, with others his wicked complices and abettors treacherously and perfidiously rebelled against and revolted from their obedience unto the Government our Sovereign Lord his Majesty of England Scotland France and Ireland... sd heathen Malefactors men, women, and Children have been Sentenced & condemned to perpetual Servitude... to be made sale of in any of his sd Majesties Dominions...”

Lepore reports further that, in 1676, the “going rate for Indian prisoners was about 3 pounds a head”. And she goes on to quote this letter written July 8, 1676 by a Samuel Shrimpton to his wife Elizabeth: “I doe verriyly thinke that the warr with the Indians draws nigh an End. Wee have lately

killed abundance of them & taken as many Captives. I bought 9 the other day to send to Jamiaca but think to keep 3 of them.”

Jumping forward, one century later, to the Colonial Census of 1774 the total population of Barrington is recorded as 601 people living in 91 separate homes. Among those 601 residents of Barrington were 18 people listed as “Indians” and 39 people listed as “Black” or “Negro”. Most, if not all, of these 57 (total) people are presumed to have been either enslaved or indentured. But this is just a snapshot in time. From 1747 to 1770 Barrington was merged with the neighboring Town of Warren. Folks from the Warren “Middle Passage” project have compiled a list of at least 66 people known to have been enslaved over time in what is now Barrington. ♦

What appears below is information transcribed verbatim from handwritten documents found in the BPS Archives. This information, presented here without editorial comment, provides a tiny window into the world of some of those people presumed to have been enslaved or indentured: George Swan (Indian), Job (Negro man), Frank (Negro woman), Thomas Reynolds (Negro) and Josiah Hill (son of Susanna Hill, Indian).

“Warren March 21th, 1758 – These may certify that George Swan Indian hath this day Inlisted him Self into his Majesty’s Sarvis in the Room and Stead of Solomon Peck of Warren per me Josiah Humphry Capt.”

“This may Certifie that Job negro man and mary Frank negro woman ware(sp?) Published(sp?) hear according to Law and are Entered with me Ebenezer Allen – Barrington Town Clerk, December 18, 1738”

“Bristol Sr Barrington May 20th. 1777 – Then cam personally Mr. Nathaniel Heath & made Solemn oath that Thomas Reynolds a negro man was bona fide Inlisted by and for himself & Brother Peleg Heath before me S Townsend Jr. Treas.”

“This Indenture Witnessed That Josiah Hill the Son of Susanna Hill an Indian of his own free will and accord... doth put himself an Apprentice into Samuel Barns and Jane his wife and their heirs... to learn no art Trade or Mistery... for and During the Term of Ten years... until the Twenty fifth Day of march in the year 1768. During all which term the said apprentice his master and Mistress faithfully shall serve their Lawful Commands gladly everywhere obey... He shall not commit fornication or Contract matrimony During Said Term neither shall he play at any unlawful game whereby his master may be Damaged; nor absent himself from their Service by Day or Night without their leave...”
Attest – Matthew Allin, James Brown – Justices of Peace, March 25th, 1758

BPS Trustees & Officers

Outgoing Trustees:

As of the Annual Dinner Meeting in January 2020, we extend our thanks and bid a fond farewell to long-time Trustee and past President Van Edward who has moved to Virginia and to Jason Lawrence who has stepped down as Treasurer. We also bid farewell to Nat Taylor who leaves the Board and his post as President – but welcome him as he takes on his new role Chair of the Plaquing Committee.

Incoming & Returning Trustees:

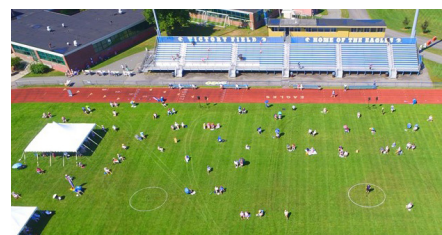
As of January, 2020 the Officers are: Stephen Venuti, President; David Stonestreet, Vice President; Julia Califano, Treasurer; Duncan Sutherland, Secretary; and Trustees Maria Bruce, Jean Douglas, Henry Feuss, Barbara Hail, John MacIntyre, Jamison Schiff, Jane Scola, Luther Spoehr & Caroline Tortolani.

SOCIETY NEWS AND UPDATES

2020: Time Of Change

Traditional high school graduation, a Memorial Day Parade, sports games, civic group meetings, religious services, concerts, even family events: all came to a screeching halt this March as news of a spreading Pandemic named **Covid 19** and its ramifications came to our State and to our Town. Most workplaces and even schools closed down, and roads carried far fewer vehicles. Nothing seemed the same, and a lot was **not** happening as it usually had.

Requirements for the wearing of *facial masks*, limits on the number of persons gathered together, and ‘*social distancing*’ became the norm. ‘*Distance learning*’ came in the Spring and continued as schools reopened in the Fall, with limited numbers of students allotted to buses and in classrooms only on certain days of the week. Until 2020, not many had heard of online meeting platforms such as “Zoom”, but online videos became increasingly relied upon for many in Town for work, meetings and even family connections. Others, deemed



▲ Financial Town Meeting Held Outside at Barrington High School Athletic Field

as ‘essential workers’ in healthcare and marketplaces, still needed to go into work to keep the most necessary going.

Meanwhile, flags supporting social movements, most notable those for PRIDE and BLACK LIVES MATTER, appeared in front of Town Hall, and marches and speeches, though with persons at a distance from one another, began to spring up. For a while, our Town began to mirror what seemed to be happening in many places around the State and around the Country.

Documenting History In Real Time: As early as March of this year, BPS began collecting photographs and images to preserve this moment in our history. We hope to present these images for display sometime in the future.

If you have images you would like to contribute to this project, please email them to Info@barringtonpreservation.org



▲ Only a limited number of shoppers allowed in stores at a time.

Celebrating Barrington's History

Years from now, many may look back and wonder what the Town of Barrington did to celebrate its 300th Anniversary. Recognizing that 2017 marked the establishment of Barrington as an independent Town, members of the Barrington Preservation Society decided that the Town's Tricentennial deserved to be recognized in a significant way.

A short video on the BPS website by volunteer and Barrington 300 Committee member Dianne Wilkin illustrates the Town's efforts, and takes us through a brief history of the Town as told through The Barrington 300 Celebration. <https://barringtonpreservation.org/2020/09/21/video-celebrating-barringtons-history/>



▲ Historic re-enactment reading of the Proclamation from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

museum news

The museum has been closed since this past spring due to Covid-19 restrictions and ongoing Peck Center construction activities. The museum is now open for research and visits by appointment-only. We hope to announce a full re-opening very soon. Stay tuned! For updates or inquiries contact info@barringtonpreservation.org

Elizabeth Sargent Warren Award Recipients

This year the award was given separately to two deserving Society Members: Van Edwards in recognition for his long-time service to BPS; and, to Dianne Wilkin in recognition for her work and dedication to the Barrington 300 Tricentennial events.

Stone Tower Farm 1941-1968

By Barbara Hail, Chair
BPS Museum Committee

In the mid twentieth century Theodore and Gervaise Belling and their three children lived in the gracious Tudor home whose acreage encompassed the end of Rumstick Point Road. The property included a manor house, lodge, stone barn, chicken house, stone tool shed, and, importantly, the stone tower that gave the property its name. The manor house looked south over a salt marsh and “the island” and had an unobstructed view of Narragansett Bay. In this idyllic setting Sallie Belling (O’Connor), donor of a recent gift of Stone Tower photographs, deeds and site plans, grew up. Her father, Ted Belling, was president of Fram Corporation.

Because World War II was in full swing in 1941, the Bellings continued working the historic farmlands, producing hay and vegetables as a contribution to the war effort. The farm was managed by Ed Tierney. The family kept riding horses, cows and chickens. Sometimes on snowy days they drove to church in a horse-drawn sleigh. Both the sleigh and a 19th century stagecoach had been discovered in the stone barn when they moved in.

Through the years a number of community events were held on the grounds, including a Dog Show in 1960 and bi-annual conferences for the personnel of the Fram Corporation. The Bellings had purchased the property from the former owner, Mrs. Howard Blanding, in a number of parcels, beginning in 1941. By the early 1950s they began to subdivide it and to create plats and a new road, Stone Tower Lane. In the ‘60’s they retired to Florida. As a parting gift to the State of Rhode Island in 1968 they donated the 33 acres of salt marsh wetlands at the tip of Rumstick Point to the Green Acres Program. This was the sixth Green Acres project undertaken in Barrington and only the second tract of land to be given (rather than sold) by individuals. In announcing the gift Governor Chafee expressed “the deep gratitude of the State” for the Belling’s generosity. ♦



plaque news

The John Martin House: New Research and a New Date

By Nathaniel Taylor, Chair,
BPS Plaquing Committee

For the last five years the Plaque Committee has been undertaking comprehensive research on the John Martin House, Barrington's oldest surviving house. Just off the east end of the Massasoit Avenue Bridge, the house marks the eastern end of the "Old Barrington Village" historic district that is centered on the stretch of County Road just north of the White Church. While it looks similar to some of the other colonial houses in Old Barrington Village, the John Martin House is by far the oldest of them. It is the only house in Barrington believed to predate the foundation of Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1717.

A 44-page research dossier is now substantially complete, documenting the history of the house back to its first owner, John Martin (1635–1713). John Martin was a weaver from Devonshire who came to New England in 1658 and was living in the new town of Swansea by 1670. John Martin and Joanna Eustance were married in 1671 and had nine children born in Swansea from 1672 to 1686. Their first house may have been burned or destroyed in King Philip's War in 1675–1676, and it is likely that the oldest part of the surviving house, the part east of the chimney, was built when John and Joanna were in their prime, probably about 1680. There are timbers embedded in the foundation of this part of the house that might have been re-used from an earlier house predating King Philip's War. The house was substantially enlarged in the lifetime of John Martin's grandson, Captain John Martin (1718–1801), around 1750, into the familiar center-chimney style visible from the bridge and Massasoit Ave. To summarize what is now known of the two periods of construction of the old house as well as later additions, the house is now formally dated by the Preservation Society as "ca. 1680/ca. 1750 et seq."

The John Martin House was owned and occupied by seven generations of the Martin family, as well as servants, possibly including enslaved servants. One black youth under 16 lived in the household of Capt. John Martin in 1774, making it one of five houses still standing in Barrington that may have been the residence of enslaved persons (free or enslaved status was not specified for black inhabitants in the Rhode Island census of 1774). In 1841, the house was divided between two brothers, Benjamin



▲ Photo : John Martin House from southwest, mid 19th c.
Barrington Preservation Society

and Joseph Martin, and the deeds specified a property line through the house. (Six years later, Joseph bought out his brother's half of the house for \$460.) From 1863 to 1893, the house belonged to Joseph Bowden, an oyster farmer, whose "Oyster House" (market) on the riverbank is visible in old photographs. His son Alfred Bowden and daughter-in-law Clara (Martin) Bowden sold the house in 1905, closing a chapter of over three hundred years of Martin family ownership.

In the twentieth century, the house was foreclosed around the time of the stock market crash of 1928, and was a rental property for two decades until it began to be lovingly restored by owner-stewards beginning with David and Louise Barrett from 1947 to 1973. Patsy Braman, who owned the house in the 1970s, was President of the Barrington Preservation Society. Jan Fancher, also a Preservation Society trustee, built the stylish back ell in 2004 on the site of a nineteenth-century addition. The new owners, Bill and Lisa May, will be receiving an updated plaque along with the research dossier. With restrictions on public events, the Plaque Committee is focusing this year on private presentations of plaques (original or replacement) to homeowners. We hope to resume public plaquing events next year. ♦



Barrington Preservation Society
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membership dues

The season for dues renewal for 2021 has begun. For 2021 we are continuing the Business Membership Category at \$250. Supporting businesses will receive recognition in our newsletters and on our website. Please use the dues form in this newsletter or return the one to be sent in December.



▲ Belling Family Sleigh Ride

*** Be a member and help preserve Barrington's rich history.
2021 dues cover from January 1 to December 31.

Join the Barrington Preservation Society!

Name _____

City, State, Zip _____

Phone _____ e-mail ★ _____

New member _____ Renewal _____

*Stay connected and help BPS reduce costs by giving us your email address. Dues are tax deductible.

Membership Categories

High School Student <input type="checkbox"/> \$5	Supporting <input type="checkbox"/> \$100
College/University Student <input type="checkbox"/> \$10	Patron <input type="checkbox"/> \$250
Individual <input type="checkbox"/> \$35	Business Member <input type="checkbox"/> \$250
Family <input type="checkbox"/> \$50	Life Member <input type="checkbox"/> \$1000

Join or renew online at barringtonpreservation.org/membership,
or clip and send this form with a check payable to:

The Barrington Preservation Society
P.O. Box 178, Barrington, RI 02806