



# Dublin Historical Society

DUBLIN, NEW HAMPSHIRE 03444 • FOUNDED 1920

Newsletter No. 105

October 2020

## SHINING A LIGHT ON FORTUNE LITTLE, FREE BLACK IN DUBLIN 1784 TO 1793

*“The past is an inheritance, a gift and a burden. It can’t be shirked. You carry it everywhere.  
There’s nothing for it but to get to know it.”*<sup>1</sup>

*Elizabeth Yates’ Amos Fortune Free Man, the biography of an African enslaved in Boston in 1725 at age 15 who moved to Jaffrey as a free man in 1781, mentions the names of two African Americans from Dublin.*

*It’s time to discover more about Fortune Little and Caesar Freeman and other Free Blacks in the area.*

In 18<sup>th</sup> century African slaves held in New England were generally owned in urban households providing labor for household duties or trades, since large scale agriculture was unusual here. Native Americans were also held as slaves or servants with long terms of indenture. On visiting Connecticut in 1744, a physician from Maryland traveling with an African slave and wrote “[T]he children were frightened att my negroe, for here negroe slaves are not much in use. Their servants being chiefly bound or indentured Indians.”<sup>2</sup>

To trace early settlers in Dublin one turns to vital records, state and federal censuses, and local records – clerk’s and tax records when and where they exist. Dublin is fortunate because its first history was published in 1855, so personal knowledge of 18<sup>th</sup> century people and events also survives. That is where the identification of local Free Blacks is recorded. Little and Freeman are mentioned as well as Caesar Lewis, Cato Boston and a man named Dupee. The first four men appear on Dublin’s 1793 tax inventory, however only the town history tells us that Little, Freeman, Lewis and Boston were not only “colored” men but former slaves.

The details of Amos Fortune’s life traced by Elizabeth Yates likely mirror the experience of many Africans pressed into slavery in New England in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. At age 15 he and many of his At-mun-shi tribe were captured by slavers and transported to the American colonies. He was ultimately purchased in Boston by a Quaker named Caleb Copeland in whose household Fortune learned the weaving trade. He would remain a slave there for 15 years. Upon Copeland’s death in 1740 his will did not stipulate Fortune’s freedom, so as a result Fortune was sold again “at Public Vendue” to help repay Copeland’s debts.

Ichabod Richardson, a tanner from Woburn, bought Amos Fortune at the auction at which Fortune unsuccessfully bid his savings upon himself. It is interesting that as a slave he had accumulated personal savings. He would remain a slave until 1779 when Richardson’s widow granted his manumission, ending nearly 45 years in slavery.

His skill as a tanner allowed him to set up his own business in Woburn MA, where he amassed savings enough to relocate to Jaffrey in the spring of 1781. Upon arriving in Jaffrey Center with his third wife and her child, a constable warned him out, a process telling newcomers of any race that the town would not support them if they became indigent. The constable told Fortune that there were “11 other free Negroes in this town and hereabouts” (p. 104). That same day the provisional minister, Laban Ainsworth, offered the use of a piece his land to Fortune who immediately built a dwelling and tannery upon it.

The Amos Fortune biography mentions that Caesar Freeman and Fortune Little both of Dublin occasionally joined him at church services in Jaffrey; they reportedly sat in a pew restricted to Blacks in the balcony. History is silent as to whether Dublin’s meetinghouse had a pew for Free Blacks or whether they were welcome to worship there. A 1795 plan of the balcony pew ground does show two vacant (unpurchased) pews.

Gleaning information about Free Blacks from the early federal censuses is difficult. Performed every 10 years starting in 1790, before 1850 only the name of the head of household was listed. Further, unlike the enumeration of white families which showed the age ranges and gender of members of the household,

before 1820 there is no such detailed information about families in the “other free persons” column, just the total number of people in the household. Free Blacks who lived in white households remain nameless, just a number in the column.

*The History of Dublin New Hampshire* states that Gardner Town of Dublin granted his slave Caesar Freeman his freedom on his 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in 1790. This in itself is curious as New Hampshire had in essence abolished slavery with language in its constitution in 1783. Nevertheless, the 1790 Federal census enumerated 158 slaves in New Hampshire. The line in that census for Gardner Town’s household lists two “free white males of 16 years and upward..”, two “free white females” and one “other free person”. As Caesar Freeman is not listed in the 1790 census, it is possible that Freeman remained in the Town household after being freed. If so, he was the only other Free Black in town besides the Fortune Little’s family of four.

Freeman’s name does appear on the extant Dublin tax lists and inventories from 1793 through 1796. The documents tell us that although he never owned real estate, he was eligible to vote (1 pole) and in 1793 and 1794 he owned cows. His name does not appear in town records after 1796 nor on the 1800 census.

The same “warning out” process experienced by Amos Fortune in 1781 greeted Fortune Little when he arrived in Dublin in December 1784, one of 3 individuals and 7 families so warned in that year. He came as a free man, as the courts in Massachusetts had abolished slavery in 1783. The town history shows that he was freed in Shirley MA, and MA vital records show that he and Lorena (Lorancy) Tanner married in Lunenburg MA on May 12, 1785.

Presumably, they relocated to his land and dwelling in the northeast corner of Dublin in Range X Lot 3, (located on what is now Hancock Road just west of Route 137 in Harrisville) as their first child, Joseph, was born in Dublin on October 18, 1786 followed by his sisters Pearl and Lorancy in 1788 and 1791.

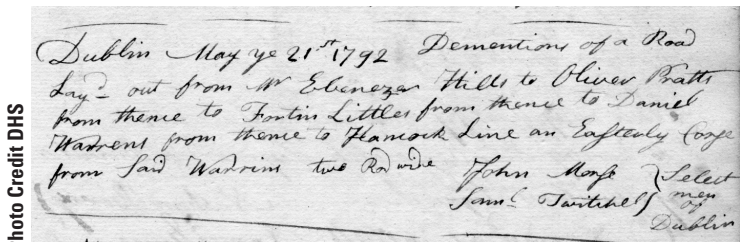
Fortune Little’s was the only “other free persons” household listed in Dublin on the 1790 census. In a cursory search of surrounding towns: Peterborough and Marlborough had no such households. Jaffrey had two - Amos Fortune with 4 persons, Widow Lois Burdoo with 6 persons. Temple also had two - John Searlet with 3 persons and Jube Savage with 3 persons. Wilton had one - George Blanchard with 8 persons. Packersfield (now Nelson) had one - Pompey Russell with 3 persons. In addition a total of 17 “other free persons” lived in white households in these six towns for a total of 54 Free Black individuals.

Propitiously, Fortune Little also appears on Dublin tax and inventory lists in 1793 showing that the constable needn’t have worried about Little’s work ethic. His property included 1 acre of tillage, 2 acres of mowing and 4 acres of pasture for his 2 oxen and 2 cows, an average holding. Because he had no horse, he would have had to walk the 10 miles or ride in an ox cart to join Amos Fortune for church in Jaffrey Center. After this date Little’s name does not appear locally.

He may have moved directly to Weathersfield, Vermont in Windsor County, for his family of now 7 individuals is enumerated there on the 1800 Federal census. Unlike New Hampshire Vermont laws were unequivocal, banning slavery in their 1777 constitution,<sup>3</sup> which may have played a role in his relocation. The last mention of Fortune Little shows a household of 10 there in the 1810 census. With the lack of vital records for the family, it is impossible to know which individuals resided with him. Were more children born or unrelated Free Blacks included in the count? After 1810 the trail of information about Fortune Little stops.

**Committed to the Vermont State Prison, on the 9th ult Joseph Little and Benj Smith, for theft—sentence (at Woodstock) three years.**

However, Fortune and Lorancy’s son Joseph, born in Dublin in 1786, does appear in 19<sup>th</sup> century Vermont records. Colleagues in Windsor have confirmed his presence there.<sup>4</sup> The earliest record is a news item published in the *Vermont Republican* on April 2, 1821, reporting his sentence of three years for theft. The next mention is in official marriage records: Joseph weds Relief Bailey on June 3, 1838. Following the federal census trail, in 1840 Joseph has his own household comprised of one boy under 10, one woman aged 24-35 and one woman aged 36 to 54. Working backwards from their ages at death, Joseph and Relief would have been 59 and 46 years old. One person, presumably Joseph, was engaged in agriculture.



Town meeting accepted this road layout in September 1794, but Daniel Albert’s name replaces Fortune Little’s as property owner.

By the 1850 census Joseph appears with 42 others at the address of the Windsor House, a three story brick hotel built in 1836 which still stands on Main Street.<sup>5</sup> Three other Blacks are noted: Thomas Little aged 15, possibly his son, although he is at least 6 years older than the boy listed in the 1840 census; Amos Newport, aged 30, a barber; and Henry Parks<sup>5</sup>, aged 30, a groom. Joseph and Relief do not appear on the 1860 census. Although buried in Windsor's Old South cemetery under a gravestone bearing no dates, their deaths are recorded elsewhere: Relief died in 1862 at age 67 and Joseph died in 1868 at age 86.

Even though the number of Free Blacks in the United States rose from 59,467 in 1790 to 186,398 in 18107, in Vermont the Little family were among only 45 free Blacks in a population of over 4000 in Windsor and Weathersfield combined in 1800. That year in Dublin only 2 Free Blacks are recorded, both living in white households. The handwritten 1810 census for Dublin doesn't even have a column labeled "all other free persons". In 1840 two Black boys under 10 years are living in white households here. One of them most have been Orrin Freeman who died at the age of 8 and is buried in Dublin.

Amos Fortune apparently declined offers of freedom before Copeland's death in 1740, possibly because he saw how difficult it was for others freed from slavery to establish themselves. Even 100 years later the handful of Free Blacks in Windsor, Vermont were living on the margins, by and large listed as day laborers and servants, not farmers or tradesmen.

The failure to abolish slavery by the framers of the constitution contradicted the seminal language of the Declaration of Independence "that all men are created equal and independent, that from equal creation they derive rights inherent and unalienable..." One only need look at the structure of federal censuses to see that so called Free Blacks were free but hardly equal. If equal, why enumerate them in a separate column entitled "other free persons". Furthermore, while there were up to ten columns describing the age and gender of white households, until 1820 only one column sufficed to describe Free Blacks. The next three censuses would be more specific and enumerate "free colored" households. Those columns disappeared in 1850 when the format of the census changed. It finally listed all names in a household but continued to distinguish Whites from Blacks by adding a column for "color" with three choices – white, black, and mulatto. The tacit discrimination by skin color reflected in these official federal counts is clearly a burden from the past which informs our present.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Lepore, Jill, *These Truths A History of the United States*, New York, 2018, page xx.

<sup>2</sup> Slavenorth.com website Vermont tab, webmaster Douglas Harper. Website had its genesis in an AOL message board debating the Civil War.

<sup>3</sup> Baker Jordan, "Native-American Slavery in New England" as published at <https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/native-american-slavery-in-new-england/>

<sup>4</sup> With thanks to Barbara Rhoad, James Haaf and Cathy Hoyt for their assistance.

<sup>5</sup> Wikipedia entry for Windsor House (Windsor, Vermont).

<sup>6</sup> Henry Parks would serve in the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment in the Civil War and return to Vermont. His was one of only 4 Black households in Windsor in the 1880 census.

<sup>7</sup> Lepore, page 176

## A PIECE OF DUBLIN HISTORY

The Dublin Historical Society recently received a donation of a corn cutter, which will be on display in the Schoolhouse museum during the Centennial Celebration.



We want to thank Linda Clukay for the donation! Her sister-in-law, Yummy Cady, sent us her memories of the corn cutter and the part it played in the history of Dublin.

"If you look on page 185 of Tom Hyman's *Dublin History*, you will see a picture of our family in the Bicentennial Parade. The text in the second paragraph is a bit wrong – my Mom was not hooking a rug, she was weaving a rug on the loom that she eventually donated to the Dublin Historical Society; it was given to my Mom by one of the Richardson's (I think Jenny), but definitely Dublin roots. Also in that picture, right behind where Mom is seated, is a corn cutter – it's hard to see, but the little boy visible standing behind it is my brother Kenny. As our float slowly climbed up Dublin Hill that day, he was "playing" with the corn cutter and cut one of his

Photo Credit DHS



# SCHOOLHOUSE UPDATE

Despite the pandemic, the DHS Board did a lot of work in the Schoolhouse museum.

We sorted and moved items to the basement, many thanks to Jeff and Ivon Clough who did the heavy lifting, and Peter Kenyon organized all artifacts in categories for future exhibits (we have the full basement thanks to Paul Tuller who spear-headed the project to move the schoolhouse forward on the property onto a foundation) Of course our Curator, Rusty Bastedo was on hand to identify and oversee the process. Sterling Abram had replaced the rotting bulkhead so we were able to safely move the items down the stairs. We had to treat the powder post beetles several times but each treatment has reduced the numbers. Paul Mahoney has kept up with the yard work and some touch up painting. Ivon Clough cleared brush for us. We were fortunate to have Gabrielle Oja work on accessioning and checking items in the museum and entering them in our accession book. Felicity Pool and Laura Elcoate set up the exhibits which will be part of the Centennial + 1 next summer (August 5, 2021). We were disappointed not to be able to have the Centennial celebration this past summer but look forward to celebrating next year.



All in all we accomplished what we needed to do to get the museum ready for visitors and we look forward to welcoming you next summer!

- Lucy Shonk, Co President

fingers pretty badly. I so clearly have memories of folks along the sidewalk offering hankies to help coral all the blood!! That corn cutter was in our dining room all through my growing up. When my parents sold what we call “The Big House” to Wayne and Jane Hopkins in 1979, they gave the corn cutter to Kenny – of course!....

I don’t actually know how the corn cutter came to the Clukay family.... I do know that it was part of our home since 1950, the year our parents bought the large colonial house, the huge barn, and 60 plus acres of land on Route 137, all built in the 1700’s. It could conceivably have been part of the property when they bought it. I will try to get more on that...But it certainly was part of the Bicentennial Parade, blood and all, as was the loom.... You know what a sentimental slob I am, so my feelings that the corn cutter and the loom belong together could be just that – sentimentality! But it is a beautiful piece of early farm equipment, in excellent shape.”

## “MY DUBLIN STORY”

We continue to collect your stories! If you have a special memory of your time in Dublin (under 125 words), please email it to [val@dublinhistory.org](mailto:val@dublinhistory.org).

## IN MEMORIAM

The Society reports with great sorrow the recent loss of **George Rublee and Daniel Burnham**  
We extend our condolences to their families

## CENTENNIAL +1 CELEBRATION

Our postponed Centennial Celebration will be Saturday, August 7, 2021.

### Dublin Historical Society

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