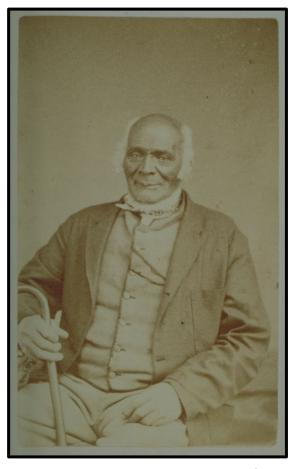
James Mars

1790-1880 | Writer & Community Leader

James Mars helped people understand the cruelty of slavery and fought for equal rights. He was born into slavery in Canaan, Connecticut in 1790. James, his parents, and siblings were considered the property of the town's minister. At that time, the law in Connecticut said that when James turned 25 years old, he would automatically become free. The minister wanted to move to Virginia and take James and his family with him, so James and his family fled to the neighboring town, where people helped hide them.

After several years, the minister tracked

down the Mars family. James' parents and sister were set free, but James and



James Mars, courtesy Connecticut Museum of Culture and History

his brother were sold. The new slaveholder, named Munger, worked James very hard and beat him frequently. When James was 21 years old, Munger finally agreed that James could buy his freedom for \$90.

James got married and had two children. The family moved to Hartford. James worked in a grocery store and became a leader in the free black community. In 1837, when slavery was still legal in most states, James helped an enslaved woman from Georgia named Nancy Jackson win her freedom in a Connecticut court.

	1842
To the Honorable, the House of Representatives of the State of Connecticut:	
To the Homoston, the Bound of Representatives of the State of Control of the town of the town of the State of the Constitution of this State as shall secure the elective franchise to	
respectfully pray your honorable body to pass a resolution proposing such amendment in the second	
section of the sixth article of the Constitution of this State as snall secure the elective framemor to all men of the requisite qualifications, irrespective of color.	
	-1-11
Habyt Brown	Social Crofs 938
Makent Drawn	Miny. M
William Jaunded	James dew
Thornfor Fruth	John Bleedom
Within A Burket	Dancel 2 Johnson
	Rough & mitchet
Mileium Mitchele	
Benjaman Brown	John Harden
Benjamin Randall	Joseph Foreinen
Ishmal hagura	Henry Johnson
9th mark Maguira	
Lamon I Allow	Milliam Milliands
Trinee Swan	Ergelet Auguston
Louis It Heamiltone	Rellis Car
Secrica Doshum	Henry ofclass
Secreta Sespena	William Mason
Galloman tophus	Herry Sorder
Perry favis	Isaak Soulers
Lory Cine	Jumes Il le Genning to
George Comp	Aliti to Figh
Spin lamp	Hali to Fish Ross
Stejumo Smith	Chancy Fineemun
Thomas Hong	Henry Howey
Walter Fuller	Cultur Williams
John but	Hours Randal
Samuel Austin	Menny Monnis
Hery Elkey	Turnest Muny
Ida Worthinton	James Williams
Western Fisher	Edward Michals
Henry Plate	Chancy Edans
Timothy Ofiner	Menry & lehantin
Imos Robbins	Hongry It Jane
	Mullen Strong
James Willes	George Not
gibbert April	Sumuel Mason
thing the	Voumber mason

James Mars' petition to the General Assembly, courtesy Connecticut State Library

It did not seem fair to James that he could not vote because of the color of his skin, despite being free. In 1842, he sent a petition signed by many men to the Connecticut General Assembly (the part of the state government that makes laws) asking that black men be given the right to vote. That petition failed, but James lived long enough to get the right to vote. He proudly voted for Abraham Lincoln for President of the United States.

James moved to Massachusetts, but he returned to Norfolk, Connecticut in 1864. A few years later, he wrote an autobiography: Life of James Mars: A Slave Born and Sold in Connecticut. Although he was old and had a bad leg, James traveled around selling his small book door-to-door. One reason that he wrote the book was that some people had

told him they did not know slavery had ever been allowed in Connecticut. He wanted to make sure that the cruel treatment of enslaved people was never forgotten, even after slavery became illegal throughout the United States.

For more information, visit:

https://connecticuthistory.org/james-mars-words-illuminate-the-cruelty-of-slavery-in-new-england/ https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/mars/mars.html

Created for Teach It, a program of Connecticut Humanities, 2021.