

# THE PLANTATION NEXT DOOR ; HOW SALEM SLAVES, WETHERSFIELD ONIONS AND WEST INDIES SUGAR MADE CONNECTICUT RICH; CHAPTER ONE: [STATEWIDE EDITION]

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[ProQuest document link](#)

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## ABSTRACT (ABSTRACT)

PHOTO 1: (b&w), Wethersfield Historical Society PHOTO 2: COLOR, Photograph by Stephen Dunn PHOTO 3: (b&w), Wethersfield Historical Society PHOTO 4: (b&w), Connecticut River Museum Collection PHOTO 5: (b&w), Photograph by Stephen Dunn MAP: COLOR, Map by Wes Rand PHOTO 6: COLOR, Connecticut River Museum Collection PHOTOS 7-8: (b&w), Photograph by Stephen Dunn; PHOTO 1: An illustration of a sugar cane harvest in the Indies. PHOTO 2: Archaeologists [Jerry Sawyer], left, and [Warren Perry] are piecing together evidence that a massive plantation operated in Salem, Conn., during the 18th century and was worked by as many as 60 African slaves. Here they stand in a burial ground for slaves. Sawyer is an adjunct faculty member at Central Connecticut State University, where Perry is an associate professor. PHOTO 3: On a Triangle Trade voyage, the schooner [James Mumford] delivered molasses from what is now Haiti to Middletown in 1795, as this manifest indicates. PHOTO 4: A rendition of a West Indian sugar cane port contains a hint of one of Connecticut's main exports to the Caribbean: wooden barrel staves. PHOTO 5: The red onion of Wethersfield now is thought to have fed slaves on West Indian sugar plantations. [Brenda Milkofsky], director of the Wethersfield Historical Society, believes the decline in onion exports coincided with the end of slavery. Warehouses like this one on the Wethersfield Cove, a deep port in the 1700s and 1800s, stored ropes of onions and other goods before shipping to the Indies. MAP: The Plantation Here at Home The 18th century land holdings of Col. [Samuel Browne] and his family extended as far north as Mason's Pond (now Gardner Lake) and covered much of present day Salem, Conn. The rough boundaries of the Brownes' personal 4,000-acre plantation are shown by the shaded area. Archaeologists have expanded their search for evidence of slave labor far beyond the original plantation. This map is adapted from one that appeared in "Chronicles of a Connecticut Farm" published in 1905. PHOTO 6: The brig Matilda carried goods from Connecticut to Martinique to feed sugar cane slaves in the Indies in 1795. Notable among the items on this manifest are 300 ropes of onions, listed third from the bottom, that were probably grown in Wethersfield. PHOTO 7: Slaves commonly belonged to merchants in 18th-century Connecticut. When Wethersfield merchant Joseph Webb died in 1761 at age 35, he held four slaves, believed to have lived in the attic of his house, now part of the Webb Deane Stevens Museum in town. Trade goods were also kept in the attic, which served as quarters for visiting slaves and servants as well. PHOTO 8: Warren Perry and Jerry Sawyer, the archaeologists working at the Salem site of an 18th century plantation, uncovered the remnants of the home of Tapheny, an Indian/African healer and one of the plantation slaves. There they found some plant species believed to have been brought from Africa.

## FULL TEXT

The most disturbing evidence of Connecticut's long and profitable complicity in slavery lies hidden in plain sight in the town of Salem, in the fields and woods around an ice cream bar near Routes 11 and 82.

There, archaeologists from Central Connecticut State University are painstakingly uncovering the remnants of a plantation worked by as many as 60 slaves in the years before the American Revolution.

What they have found after three summers of exploration will never become a Sturbridge Village of Colonial slavery. Their discoveries are too humble for that. They've identified foundations of sawmills that slaves may have operated,

huge root cellars they may have dug, rude stone shelters they may have lived in after being cast off, and stone cairns marking where they probably were buried. To the untrained eye, the burial cairns appear merely to be odd arrangements of rock and the slave hovels, animal sties built into a hillside. Still the plantation remnants that had been slowly sinking back into the earth, ugly companions to Connecticut's treasured stone walls, tell a story of global dimensions.

"One of the things we do as archaeologists is look beyond the little bit of a hole we are digging and relate to everything around us," Jerry Sawyer, the Salem site director told a field school class before the start of last summer's work. "We initially looked at very tiny things, a burial ground, a few stone piles, which later became something enormous. [Now] we've begun to paint a much broader picture. We've come up with what looks like a 13,000-acre plantation and associated archaeology [extending] across surrounding towns and this state and the whole goddamn world ... "

Sawyer's excitement begins with the fact that slavery in Connecticut, if recognized at all, was generally thought to be limited to household servants or farmhands and, unlike slavery in the South, a benevolent family affair. Yet the Salem plantation, previously no more than a footnote in history books, is stunning in scale.

In 1718, a wealthy Salem, Mass., merchant, Col. Samuel Browne, began amassing so much land in what was then Lyme that the area soon was reorganized as New Salem Parish. He rented out large tracts, but retained about 4,000 acres for himself that passed to his son and then his grandson. It was an investment that at some point became a bona-fide plantation. The Brownes, who never lived there, hired overseers to run it and, according to one old authoritative account, may have imported 60 slave families to clear the land.

Even if the number was only 60 individual slaves, it was huge for the time. For perspective on the Salem plantation, Sawyer refers to new research done by anthropologist Robert Fitts in southern Rhode Island, an area better known for having had slave plantations. Combing Colonial records, Fitts found that most Rhode Island plantations had fewer than a dozen slaves, numbers similar to those in Virginia's famed Tidewater region, and that only three had as many as 19 slaves.

Fitts also documented only one Rhode Island plantation of more than 4,000 acres. Thus in sheer size alone, never mind its slave population, the Browne plantation in Salem ranks as the second largest in southern New England. Counting the tenant farms that Sawyer believes also may have depended on slave labor, Browne's holdings, covering about half of present-day Salem, dwarfed even the average Southern plantation.

Nor were the Brownes without company in Connecticut. There was a plantation, or very large farm of 3,000 acres, in Pomfret with two dozen slaves. Its owner, Godfrey Malbone, the son of a Newport, R.I., merchant who trafficked in slaves, was once thought to be the largest slave owner in Connecticut history. The evidence comes from the deed by which the elder Malbone transferred ownership of the Pomfret estate to Godfrey and his brother in 1764.

The inventory of living creatures listed 80 cows, 45 oxen, 30 steers, 59 young cattle, six horses, 600 sheep, 180 goats, 150 hogs and 27 Negroes, in that order. The document did at least take care to identify most of the slaves by the names their owners gave them. "Prince, Harry, Pero, Dick, Tom, Adam and Christopher, all Negro men, and Dinah, Venus, Rose, Miriam, Jenny and [a second] Rose, all Negro women ... " Their children were "Primus, Christopher, Sias [sic], Sharper and Little Pero."

Unlike Malbone, very little is known about Elijah Mason, a Lebanon farmer and slave master. According to the first federal census done in 1790, Mason owned 28 slaves. That number is extraordinary because slavery waned rapidly after Connecticut passed a gradual emancipation act in 1784, freeing children born to slaves after that date once they reached adulthood. Mason may have been a descendant of Capt. John Mason, who in 1637 was dispatched from Windsor to lead the attack on the Pequot Indian fort in Mystic that ended in a massacre and later the enslavement of some of the survivors. Soon afterward, Mason moved to Norwich, (where descendants of the nearly exterminated Pequot would 350 years later build the Foxwoods casino). The Browne plantation proper covered the southeast quadrant of Salem, but his other holdings stretched miles north to what used to be called Mason's Pond, now Gardner Lake.

Any Colonial comparison is only as good as the records that survive and the research that has been done. Until

now, Connecticut's plantations have been either unknown or ignored. Sawyer, a doctoral candidate at the City University of New York, was enlisted to work on the Salem site by a former teacher, Central Connecticut State University professor Warren Perry, who in turn learned of them from an amateur Colchester historian, Abraham Abdul- Haqq.

Perry's ongoing work on the well-known African Burial Ground Project in New York City has helped expose the fiction that the North was unacquainted with slavery. Barring new discoveries, the Browne plantation, along with Malbone's and apparently Elijah Mason's, give Connecticut the dubious distinction of having hosted three of the largest slave enterprises in 18th century New England.

#### Slave markets

The nature of that enterprise is what allows Sawyer to extend his excitement about the Salem plantation to, as he said, "the whole goddamn world." In all likelihood, they engaged in the same kind of early agribusiness as the plantations in nearby Rhode Island. They grew grain, made cheese, raised livestock and cut wood with one main market in mind: the Caribbean island colonies where sugar cane was a crop of such value that it was cultivated to the exclusion of food and slaves were the main source of labor.

Why should this now sound so revelatory and so shameful? The Triangle Trade of molasses, rum and slaves between New England, the West Indies and Africa has long been a staple of U.S. history curriculums. Yet somehow in popular perception, slavery has been cut out of the trade triangle and transferred forward to the Civil War, where it became a moral problem confined to the South. Just as Connecticut was thought not to have "had slavery" because it did not have many slaves or Southern-style plantations, it was thought not to profit from slavery as much as the South did.

The truth, however, which ought to have been plain, is that Connecticut derived a great part, maybe the greatest part, of its early surplus wealth from slavery. Connecticut's slave population peaked at about 5,000 in 1774, but shipping records indicate its farms were feeding West Indies slaves by the tens of thousands. For a time after the Revolution, Connecticut's trade with the West Indies was double Boston's. As late as 1807, Middletown, thanks to the West Indies trade, was by one measure the busiest port between Cape Cod and New York.

So far Sawyer, his partner Perry, who is the principal investigator for the project, and their student assistants have been more occupied mapping the dimensions of the Salem plantation than digging for the documents that will fill out the story of what went on there. Sawyer is confident they'll find much in Colonial archives, particularly in Salem, Mass., the base of the Brownes' mercantile empire.

Generous donors to Harvard College, the Brownes reputedly were the richest family in a town that rivaled Boston in wealth. It may be no coincidence then that Salem, Mass., also is where New England's slave trade may have started. In 1638, the Salem ship *Desire* sailed to the West Indies loaded with captured Pequot Indians. It sold them as slaves and returned with a "cargo of salt, cotton, tobacco and Negros."

A few years later Massachusetts Gov. John Winthrop was advised by his brother-in-law that a "just war" against Indians could provide the colony with more captives to exchange for badly needed "Moors." He warned Winthrop, "I do not see how we can thrive until we get a stock of slaves sufficient to do all our business."

Slavery was about money from the start, yet even academics like the ponytailed Sawyer and the dreadlocked Perry, who are inclined to substitute the term captive for slave, because slave connotes docility and ignorance, have prestigious company in arguing that the slave economy has been severely underrated. Of hemispheric proportions, its original capital and original sin was the nearly 12 million souls bought in Africa to be transported to the New World in what was probably the greatest and most lethal forced migration in history.

A collection of essays published two years ago by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston in advance of establishing a museum of New England economic history contains an astonishing judgment by Harvard Professor Bernard Bailyn. Considered the dean of Colonial historians, Bailyn wrote that by 1770 New Englanders generally had achieved the highest standard of living the world had ever seen. Fortunes made in the West Indian trade would seed the industrial and financial fortunes to follow. "How was it that this unpromising, barely fertile region, incapable of producing a staple crop for European markets, became an economic success by the eve of the Revolution?" Bailyn asked.

His own unequivocal answer to New England's prosperity: "The most important underlying fact in this whole story, the key dynamic force, unlikely as it may seem, was slavery. New England was not a slave society. On the eve of the Revolution, blacks constituted less than 4 percent of the population in Massachusetts and Connecticut, and many of them were free. But it was slavery, nevertheless, that made the commercial economy of 18th-century New England possible and drove it forward. ... The dynamic element in the region's economy was the profits from the Atlantic trade, and they rested almost entirely, directly or indirectly, on the flow of New England's products to the slave plantations and the sugar and tobacco industries they serviced."

Crediting the work of others, Bailyn wrote that the slave plantations must be seen as "the great powerhouse" of the entire Atlantic economy. "Only a few of New England's merchants actually engaged in the slave trade, but all of them profited by it, lived off it," he wrote.

The global importance of sugar itself requires freshening.

Before Columbus brought the cane plant to the West Indies, sugar was an exotic luxury in Europe, more likely to be used in medicine than tea. But it soon passed tobacco as a mass addiction. Shipments to England alone increased a hundred-fold to 100,000 barrels a year between 1660 and 1730. Demand for Africans kept pace. Sugar plantations were labor intensive, crosses between farm and refinery. During the 18th century, just the island of Jamaica absorbed 650,000 slaves.

Bailyn did not claim the slave plantations were the only New England dynamo. Second to it was the region's miraculous population growth. It roughly doubled every generation, thanks to the family farms that spread over the countryside. They supported a high birth rate and long lives. And one by one they produced enough surplus, by husbandry or industry, to also supply a growing merchant class. Foodstuffs such as grain, preserved beef and pork, or livestock on the hoof, along with made goods such as shingles and barrel staves, trickled toward river ports like Hartford and Middletown and seaports like New London, Newport and Boston, where they joined a trade stream flowing south to the West Indies and also to the lower American colonies.

The trade fueled secondary industries like shipbuilding and distilling. Hundreds of vessels were launched from Connecticut River towns. Rum and gin poured from distilleries in New London and Hartford. Fairfield County was known for its horses, as were the farms of Hartford's merchant prince, Jeremiah Wadsworth. In Lebanon, Jonathan Trumbull, the governor who saw Connecticut through the Revolution, followed his father into the cattle business and became a major meat packer. In one year 1,000 mules were shipped from New London. Wethersfield became famous for the odor rising from its onion fields and for the "maidens" who first cultivated the pungent red variety in their kitchen gardens.

The onion brought so much wealth to town, said Brenda Milkofsky, the director of the Wethersfield Historical Society, that the First Congregational Church there is still sometimes called the church that onions built. Over a century, onions grew into a cash crop. In 1801, a peak year, nearly 100,000 ropes of onions, each weighing 5 pounds, were shipped from town, most destined for the West Indies.

"Nobody in Wethersfield ever asked where they went," Milkofsky said, "but when you look at the white population of the islands, you have to know that amount of onions was going to feed slaves." She said the onion probably was a cheap food that gave variety to the slaves' bland diet. After the onion trade died in the 1830s, people blamed a blight, Milkofsky said. But shipping records point to another cause. "I've always believed the decline in the red onion was directly related to the end of slavery in the islands," she said. "It began in 1833 [when Britain abolished slavery] and comes down like a cleaver in 1835." By then the cane plantations were losing value, their monopoly broken by the newly developed sugar beet.

The West Indies trade shifted with the tides of war and politics. Much took place off the books, in smuggling, and many shipping records were destroyed in 1781 when Benedict Arnold led British troops in torching New London. Also early in the Colonial period much Connecticut produce was shipped out of Rhode Island and Massachusetts. But after the Revolution, Connecticut came to dominate the West Indies trade more directly. In some years, more than half its exports went to French islands, especially the one known then as Santo Domingo, then the leading sugar producer in the West Indies.

Connecticut newspapers followed the slave revolts that occurred there in 1791 with dispatches that took weeks to arrive. On Oct. 24, The Courant carried vivid accounts of revolts the previous August. A writer from Cape Francois reported, "No longer than Monday last this large space was filled with beautiful villas, elegant seats and nearly the whole covered with sugar cane; the greatest part of which are laid [waste] and now lying in ashes. Almost the whole is destroyed! If the infernal devils were content with this destruction, it would be happy for the colonists, but they add the cruelty of savages to their incendiary conduct, inhumanly murdering all the whites they catch, sparing neither age nor sex."

Before the slave revolts, Santo Domingo may have been the world's richest colony. Columbus had named it Hispaniola when he discovered it. Today, the island is desperately poor, comprising Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

#### Owners and overseers

As scant as information is about the plantation in Salem, Conn., there is enough to show its owners and their elite circle were closely bound to the slave economy. According to David Wordell, a founder of the Salem Historical Society, the first owner, Col. Samuel Browne, hired Samuel Gilbert, the son of a Hartford innkeeper, as property superintendent soon after he began buying up land in what was then Lyme.

Orders Browne wrote in 1727 to the captain of one of his ships are proof of his interest in the West Indies trade. "You may touch at Barbados, St. Christopher's, or Antegoa [sic] or Jamaica, and if any good markets at any of those places, then you may dispose of my cargoes," Browne wrote. "If the markets are low at ye English islands, then you may go and trade at Guardeloupe, Cape Francois or any of the French islands." Browne's instructions ran on in more detail and closed with a personal postscript, "Bring some oranges and limes."

After Browne died in 1731, the plantation passed to his son Samuel and then after his premature death to his grandson William Browne. His is a case study in powerful connections. A contemporary described his family as "the most respectable that has ever lived in the town of Salem ... possessing great riches." William Browne himself was surrounded by governors. His mother was a Winthrop, he attended Harvard with Jonathan Trumbull, a future governor (as well as John Adams, a future president), and married the daughter of Joseph Wanton, a future governor of Rhode Island. It was Wanton, whose family reputedly made a fortune in the slave trade, who found a new overseer for Browne when he needed one.

He was John Mumford, who came from another prominent Rhode Island slave-owning family. His father's farm, though not rated as a plantation by Fitts, sprawled over the Point Judith peninsula. Mumford apparently became an ancestor of the illustrious Bingham family that is one of the present day occupants of the land.

In an article he wrote for the Connecticut Historical Society in 1976, the late Alfred Bingham cited an old family letter that recounted how Mumford got the overseer's post. At dinner one night in Providence, Browne asked his father-in-law, "if he knew of a young man of character and energy whose services could be secured by him for some time, to enter upon the subjugation of a large tract of land he owned in Salem, Connecticut, build a house and bring the land under cultivation." Mumford jumped at the opportunity, the letter said, and "entered immediately upon his labor employing a numerous gang of blacks ... "

He speculated that outcast slaves, or Indians, built some of the stone hillside structures Sawyer and Perry are now examining. "It comes as a shock to learn how extensive was the use of black slaves in New England, yet the unsavory leadership of New England ship owners and merchants in the slave trade has long been recognized," a disillusioned Bingham wrote.

John Mumford arrived in Salem in 1759, according to Wordell, the town historian, who knew Alfred Bingham and has collaborated with Sawyer and Perry. Like them, he gleaned a lot of information about the plantation from an odd book titled "Chronicles of a Connecticut Farm."

Written in 1905 by Mary Perkins for Bingham's grandfather, "Chronicles" is a rambling and mostly rosy genealogy of the intermarried families who eventually came to own pieces of the plantation. Its few references to slavery are either mild or myopic. Describing a dinner in the "happy years" after the Revolution, Perkins wrote of "stores of ham and huge cheeses, casks of West Indian rum and brandy, and all sorts of West Indian preserves, and all the

concoctions for which good housekeepers were famous in those days." At another gathering, Caesar and Pompey, "two old negro servants," provided the music.

But "Chronicles" contains one startling reference to the cauldron simmering beneath New England's supposedly benign slavery. In 1707 in Newport, John Mumford's father's first wife was impulsively murdered by a slave she ordered whipped. The panicked slave drowned himself, but he did not escape punishment. According to a court record, the Newport authorities ordered "that his head, legs and arms be cut from his body and hung up in some public place ... and his body burned to ashes, that it may, if it please God, be something of a terror to others from perpetrating a like barbarity."

John Mumford was not the only family member to move to Connecticut. A half-brother, Thomas, leased what is now the Bluff Point preserve in Groton from Gov. John Winthrop. Another older half-brother, Capt. George Mumford, leased Fisher's Island. At his death in 1756, George's estate listed 14 slaves as part of his property, including a woman named Morocco whom he'd inherited from his father. The names of the others were Great Fortune, Little Fortune, Isaac, Pompey, Will, Caesar, Toby, Barree, Sue, Patience, Hannah, Cate, and a child, Mint. (Fitts, the Rhode Island researcher, contends in his book, "Inventing New England's Slave Paradise," that slave owners used new, diminutive names as a psychological method of controlling their human property and that beatings were routine.)

#### Life as a slave in Connecticut

The fact that the Mumfords owned so many slaves has led Sawyer and Perry to conclude that they probably supplied the labor for the Salem plantation. Though slave names like Pompey and Caesar were common, it is possible the Pompey and Caesar owned by Capt. George Mumford were the "old servants" who later played music on the plantation. Sawyer and Perry also are intrigued by the possibility that one of Connecticut's few famous slaves, Venture Smith, passed through the plantation. There's no question he was Mumford property, and it appears the Mumfords were at least part-time slave traders.

Smith is remembered because his account of his passage from son of an African prince to slave to citizen is one of the earliest, and therefore probably most credible, of the type of slave narrative that would multiply before the Civil War. Published in New London in 1798 when he was an old man, Smith's narrative states he was born with the name Broteer in 1729 and sold into slavery at age 6. He was among 260 captives loaded onto a Rhode Island ship where the mate was Thomas Mumford and the steward was Robertson Mumford. On board, Robertson bought Smith for 4 gallons of rum and some calico cloth, and changed his name to Venture to signify the child was his private investment.

Crossing the Atlantic, a quarter of the captives died of smallpox. Most of the survivors were sold in Barbados, but Smith was brought to Narragansett where he was left with his master's sister to await transfer to his home on Fisher's Island. Thus the Mumford link is solid, except for confusion over which family member actually owned the child slave.

According to a Mumford family tree in "Chronicles," Capt. George Mumford had a nephew named Thomas and a son named Robinson, but he died young. The one son who grew to adulthood was named James and in his narrative Smith identified James Mumford as his master's son. Smith said his worst period of enslavement occurred during his adolescence when James would countermand his father's orders. Once James started to attack Smith with a pitchfork for ignoring his instructions, and Smith warded him off by grabbing a pitchfork himself. Neither harmed the other, but as punishment Smith was hung for an hour on a gallows used to slaughter cattle.

His narrative contains several more accounts of beatings or threatened beatings by later masters. He was sold three times, but the overall tone of his narrative, set down by a white ghostwriter, is self-satisfied, even triumphant. The bonds of slavery were loose enough that by age 36 he earned enough money to buy his freedom and later that of his wife and children. He also bought several slaves himself, but soon freed them, and eventually acquired more than 100 acres in Haddam Neck. (The land he owned is now occupied by the Connecticut Yankee nuclear power plant. For the last several months, his descendants have been in federal court trying to stop the power plant owners from building a waste storage facility on the site until it can be excavated for archaeological remains. Sawyer has

testified on their behalf.)

There's no indication in Smith's narrative that he ever stopped in Salem, but like many slaves he was often rented out and worked all over southeastern Connecticut. For a brief time he was "pawned" in Hartford.

#### Confiscated

John Mumford's tenure as overseer of the Salem plantation lasted about 10 years until 1768, when he was succeeded by his son, John Mumford Jr. According to Wordell, Browne had a house built for his new overseer that is still standing. The plantation's days, however, were numbered.

William Browne was loyal to the British crown and at the beginning of the Revolutionary War he fled to England. His property in Salem, Mass., and Connecticut was soon confiscated. An initial inventory put the size of his holdings here at about 13,000 acres, but a later one reduced it to about 9,500 acres. The nine slaves he owned at the end were appraised individually. The names of the men were Great Prince, Little Prince and Luke. The rest were a woman named Prue and children named Cato, Phillis, Rose, Jimm and Caesar. Most were valued as worth between 200 and 450 pounds each. But Jimm, who was only 6 months old, and Caesar, who was a sickly 11-year-old, were valued at only 10 pounds.

The slaves asked the General Assembly to prevent them from being sold to raise money for the war effort. "Your memorialists," as they called themselves in their formal petition, "though they have Flat Noses, Crooked Shins and other Queerness of Make Peculiar to Affricans are yet of the Human Race, free born in our own country, taken from thence by man-stealers, & sold in this Country as Cattle in the Market ... " Their petition was rejected, but according to "Chronicles" they were eventually freed. How they fared is not known. A certain Prince Brown, perhaps Great Prince, later became a landowner. The sickly Caesar probably stayed with John Mumford as a servant.

Mumford himself did not lose his home. His daughter, Elizabeth, had married into New London's Shaw family, whose wealth came from the West Indies trade. The Shaws bought a portion of the confiscated plantation, and Mumford lived there with his daughter for the rest of his life. William Browne, according to his entry in the "Dictionary of American Biography," got himself appointed governor of Bermuda, where he served well for several years before returning to England.

He never attempted to resume residency in Salem, Mass., and the Browne family mansion, kept ready by caretakers for a homecoming that never happened, became something of a haunted house. Nathaniel Hawthorne, a son of Salem, told the story that curious children as time passed began to sneak into the vacant mansion, known as Browne's Folly.

"There was one closet in the house which everybody was afraid to enter, it being supposed that an evil spirit -- perhaps a domestic demon of the Browne family -- was confined in it. One day three or four score years ago, some school boys happened to be playing in the deserted chambers, and took it into their heads to develop the secrets of the mysterious closet. With great difficulty and tremor, they succeeded in forcing the door. As it flew open, there was a vision of people in garments of antique magnificence -- gentlemen in curled wigs, and tarnished gold lace, and ladies in brocades and quaint head-dresses, rushing tumultuously forth, and tumbling on the floor. The urchins took to their heels in huge dismay, but crept back after a while and discovered that the apparition was composed of a mighty pile of family portraits."

Hawthorne, who liked ghost stories, claimed this was a true tale, told to him by one of the boys many years later. Embellished or not, it suggests a lost and hidden wealth that came, history tells us, from the West Indies trade. One wonders how literal Hawthorne meant to be in identifying the demon in the closet as "domestic." What kind of spirit might have haunted the Brownes more: a shameful black sheep or a vengeful black slave?

#### Digging for new clues

One bright blue cloudless day a couple of weeks into their summer dig, Jerry Sawyer and his students took a lunch break in a shaded driveway off Witch Meadow Road in Salem, Conn. They were several miles from the stone cairns where their archaeology had started. They'd spent the morning across the road on one of the big farms the Brownes rented or sold. In the afternoon, they planned to go up to Colchester where they'd begin looking for the remnants of a hamlet slaves might have occupied and the foundation of a house that belonged to a free black carpenter, Daniel

Galusha, who built the Brownes' first plantation house.

"We're expanding way beyond the Browne plantation," Sawyer said, sitting on the tailgate of his small pickup truck. "What we're finding is there were a whole bunch of big farms, some of a thousand acres or more, all of which had captives."

He said that by next year he hopes to have written his doctoral thesis on what he's found so far, but that he expects to keep coming back to Salem as long as the present day property owners to whom he is grateful let him keep digging into the past.

"As far as the work here goes, this is my life's work," Sawyer said. "I'm trying to show the extent of the landscape in the 18th century of enslavement ... It's a larger, more populated landscape than most people imagine."

Written sources for this article include: "Merchants and Trade of the Connecticut River Valley, 1750-1820," doctoral thesis by Margaret E. Martin "The Economic Revolution of Late 18th Century Connecticut," doctoral thesis by Gaspare John Saladino "Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in 18th Century Narragansett, Rhode Island" by Robert K. Fitts "Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History" by Sidney W. Mintz "Chronicles of a Connecticut Farm" by Mary Perkins "Engines of Enterprise," published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston "The Meaning of Slavery in the North" edited by David Roediger and Martin Blatt

### **Illustration**

PHOTO 1: (b&w), Wethersfield Historical Society PHOTO 2: COLOR, Photograph by Stephen Dunn PHOTO 3: (b&w), Wethersfield Historical Society PHOTO 4: (b&w), Connecticut River Museum Collection PHOTO 5: (b&w), Photograph by Stephen Dunn MAP: COLOR, Map by Wes Rand PHOTO 6: COLOR, Connecticut River Museum Collection PHOTOS 7-8: (b&w), Photograph by Stephen Dunn; Caption: PHOTO 1: An illustration of a sugar cane harvest in the Indies. PHOTO 2: Archaeologists Jerry Sawyer, left, and Warren Perry are piecing together evidence that a massive plantation operated in Salem, Conn., during the 18th century and was worked by as many as 60 African slaves. Here they stand in a burial ground for slaves. Sawyer is an adjunct faculty member at Central Connecticut State University, where Perry is an associate professor. PHOTO 3: On a Triangle Trade voyage, the schooner James delivered molasses from what is now Haiti to Middletown in 1795, as this manifest indicates. PHOTO 4: A rendition of a West Indian sugar cane port contains a hint of one of Connecticut's main exports to the Caribbean: wooden barrel staves. PHOTO 5: The red onion of Wethersfield now is thought to have fed slaves on West Indian sugar plantations. Brenda Milkofsky, director of the Wethersfield Historical Society, believes the decline in onion exports coincided with the end of slavery. Warehouses like this one on the Wethersfield Cove, a deep port in the 1700s and 1800s, stored ropes of onions and other goods before shipping to the Indies. MAP: The Plantation Here at Home The 18th century land holdings of Col. Samuel Browne and his family extended as far north as Mason's Pond (now Gardner Lake) and covered much of present day Salem, Conn. The rough boundaries of the Brownes' personal 4,000-acre plantation are shown by the shaded area. Archaeologists have expanded their search for evidence of slave labor far beyond the original plantation. This map is adapted from one that appeared in "Chronicles of a Connecticut Farm" published in 1905. PHOTO 6: The brig Matilda carried goods from Connecticut to Martinique to feed sugar cane slaves in the Indies in 1795. Notable among the items on this manifest are 300 ropes of onions, listed third from the bottom, that were probably grown in Wethersfield. PHOTO 7: Slaves commonly belonged to merchants in 18th-century Connecticut. When Wethersfield merchant Joseph Webb died in 1761 at age 35, he held four slaves, believed to have lived in the attic of his house, now part of the Webb Deane Stevens Museum in town. Trade goods were also kept in the attic, which served as quarters for visiting slaves and servants as well. PHOTO 8: Warren Perry and Jerry Sawyer, the archaeologists working at the Salem site of an 18th century plantation, uncovered the remnants of the home of Tapheny, an Indian/African healer and one of the plantation slaves. There they found some plant species believed to have been brought from Africa.

## **DETAILS**



<b>People:</b>	Sawyer, Jerry; Browne, Samuel; Perry, Warren; Mumford, George; Mumford, John Jr
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