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Race, Ethnicity and Class on Shelter Island, 1652 to 2013

Nancy Robin Jaicks

Abstract: My research attempts to answer two problems in the history of Long Island slavery and its aftermath. First, was slavery legally and culturally different from slavery in the South and second, what happened to emancipated slaves after New York abolished the institution in 1827? A third question became central to my work: did those blacks who stayed behind leave a legacy? Since Shelter Island is often pointed to as a very small and rural place where most blacks left after emancipation and those who stayed left almost no trace, I decided to use the Island as a place to research these questions. Recent work has studied eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This paper examines trends over the long period stretching to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

Keywords: Shelter Island, race and class, New York emancipation, transformation from farming/fishing to resort community, technological change, the new immigration

- 1 Less than 110 miles from Manhattan and roughly the same size, eight thousand acres, sits the place called Shelter Island. The island is nestled between the North and South Forks of Long Island. Bounded by tranquil bays rather than by oceans – Gardiner’s Bay to the north and the Peconic Bay to the south – it boasts numerous beaches and coves which have, in the past, afforded landing places for the illicit smuggling of slaves, and later, of rum. It can only be reached by boat, or today, small aircraft. Perhaps due to these fortuitous characteristics, its year-round population of approximately 2,414 men, women and children (swelling to 16,000 in the summer) have dubbed their home “the Unhamptons.”
- 2 On this island, an enslaved African American work force that represented almost a quarter of its population in Revolutionary times, dwindled to a free black population that was a much smaller percentage of the community in the centuries that followed. In New York, gradual emancipation had begun in 1785; state law required complete

emancipation in 1827. After the Civil War, the island underwent a transformation from a farming and fishing community to a resort and second home one. Such developments occurred within larger economic and military events. In this article, I try to analyze the mechanism of this change by focusing on the lives of African American families who stayed, produced, joined the churches, and educated their children at the Shelter Island Union School.

An Unusual Story: A Freed Slave in the Twentieth Century

- 3 When Albert Scott walked, his feet flopped, almost as if he were wearing flippers. It was a distinctive and very visible wound reported years later in memories written by Albertus "Toots" Clark.
- 4 Albert Scott was born enslaved in the 1850s on the Chappell Plantation near Petersburg, Virginia. It appears that the Chappell Plantation was one of those owned by the Tyler-Gardiner family or their relatives, whose largest and most famous plantation, Sherwood Forest, was also near Petersburg, Virginia. As a child during the Civil War, Scott's tendons were cut to prevent him from joining the crowds of slaves running away. Much later, he went to work for David Gardiner on Gardiner's Island. In the last decade of the nineteenth century, Scott and his wife, Elizabeth Joseph Scott, moved permanently to Shelter Island where other members of the wealthy Gardiner family lived. There, Scott and his family were active contributors to the economic and social life of the island. They worked hard as farmers, domestic servants, and parishioners of St. Mary's Church. Elizabeth Scott worked first for Sachem's Neck proprietor, Miss Annie Nicoll, and then for Miss Cornelia Horsford, owner of Sylvester Manor. Both Scotts spent time in the employ of the Nicoll, Gardiner, and Horsford families. Albert Scott died in 1941; Elizabeth in 1957. Both are buried in the back southeast corner of St. Mary's Churchyard.
- 5 Albert Scott's long life links slavery, which ended in New York State in 1827, to mid-twentieth century life on New York's Shelter Island. Elizabeth Scott's life weaves the enslavement of the Montauk Indians to the island. Astonishingly their lives and the lives of their owners knit Northern slavery, both African American and Indian, to the plantation system, the peculiar institution of the South. Further, the long life of another African American, Benjamin Chase, who married Scott's daughter Laura, means that the link endured to the very end of the twentieth century. Ben Chase died in 1997, a month shy of 98, and is buried with his Shelter Island family.^[1]
- 6 Shelter Island was once a sleepy outpost for historians but that has changed. Currently, several researchers and writers are laboring on the history of slavery, ethnicity, and class on the Island. With the discovery of the Fiske vault at Sylvester Manor, Shelter Island, and the 2010 relocation of much of its collection of documents and letters to NYU's Fales Special Collection at Bobst Library, work on these documents has accelerated. The archeological digs at the Manor from 1999 to 2006 have added another dimension to the archives.
- 7 In her recently published book, *The Manor: Three Centuries at a Slave Plantation on Long Island*, the prize-winning author Mac Griswold narrates a story of considerably more importance to the overall understanding of slavery than its local origins might suggest. Complementing and deepening the renewed interest in the story is the one Kate Howlett Hayes tells. In her book, *Slavery Before Race*, Hayes, an historical archaeologist, has transformed our view of how and where the enslaved and European populations lived on the island, particularly

on the estate of the Sylvester family.[\[2\]](#) In addition, the extremely knowledgeable local historians, Patricia and Edward Shillingburg, have been mining these rich records for more than a decade. They have recently written a history of another powerful landowning family, the Nicolls, of Shelter Island. All of these historians have benefitted from the deep vein of written and oral memories collected in the archives of the Shelter Island Historical Society.[\[3\]](#)

The Historiography of the Enslaved

- 8 These histories are restoring to memory the institutional and cultural world of early contact and the critical importance of the enslaved to the economic and social development of Long Island. We are just beginning to understand how highly different slavery in the North, and particularly on Shelter Island, was from its institutional cousin in the South.
- 9 In this article, I intend to touch upon some of those distinctions in discussing the early contact period through the Revolution. But the body of the article will be devoted to the long nineteenth and twentieth centuries on Shelter Island. What is striking here is that the most recent publications and attention have focused like a laser on the Manor. However, by the nineteenth century, most of the island lay beyond the borders of the Manor. The Nicoll family, for example, owned over 2,000 acres of the Island by 1800, while the Manor consisted of less than 300. A trove of documents lies in the climate controlled vault of the Shelter Island Historical Society as well as in the memories of many islanders. I am examining trends in ethnicity (that is the enslaved – both African and Indian and their descendants), gender, and class from the end of slavery in New York State, to the variety of immigrants who served on Shelter Island in various capacities. In early 1900, for example, a surge of immigrants from as far away as California, England, Italy, and China, arrived to fill positions on the island in the hotel and restaurant business, landscaping, housework and building trades.
- 10 My paper explores the history and offers some directions, I hope, for future analysis. I have found, for example, that historians have overlooked the importance of classification, mobility, visibility, and gender in finding ethnic groups. The United States Census reports always identified the race of each individual. Yet in each census, one single powerful person, the enumerator, decided how to classify races. Only in the Census of 2010 were respondents asked to identify their race themselves. Americans, including the enslaved and subsequently the freedmen, were highly mobile throughout the last two centuries. People left the island, were not counted, only to return again years later. Many historians established a truism that the Native Americans left after Youghco, Grand Sachem of the Algonquin, sold Shelter Island to Nathaniel Sylvester.[\[4\]](#) More recently, the work of Katherine Hayes showed that they lived and labored on the Manor for many years after. Lastly, intermarriage of Native American women with blacks became a survival strategy at a time when whaling traditionally drew male Native Americans away. The mixing of ethnic groups combined with the disappearance of maiden names in census documents meant the apparent “evaporation” of the Native American genetic strand until the discovery of DNA.

Pre-Revolutionary Contact

- 11 What history books used to call the Triangular Trade was really the first burst of the global economy and modernity. Moreover, the global economy of both Barbados and Shelter Island was based on the cheap labor of enslaved Africans and Native Americans.

- 12 Soon after the Sylvester brothers, Nathaniel and Constant and their partners, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Rous, located and bought Shelter Island from Stephen Goodyear in 1652, they brought Africans and enslaved Native Americans to work the land. The Africans came from Barbados and various parts of Africa. The Native Americans were the Manhanset, related to the Algonquin peoples, who farmed and hunted on the island. This group suffered catastrophic depopulation.
- 13 Born in Amsterdam of English parentage, Nathaniel Sylvester found Shelter Island tailor-made for his experience in dealing with multiple state rules, laws, and imposts. European demand for sugar was increasing exponentially. As his partners stayed in Barbados to oversee the arduous sugar production by African labor, Nathaniel Sylvester's role was to provision those plantations with timber, hog's meat, wheat, and tamed or broken horses and to meet the rules, regulations, and payment of duties to the authorities of the day. And authority shifted from the Dutch to the British to the Dutch and back to the English once again. Eastern Long Island was splintered into different spheres; the New England authorities had established their own rule in East Hampton and elsewhere on Long Island, the Dutch West Indies Company (the WIC) governed the lives of many Africans in other regions. Perhaps for this reason and because they were needed in the militia fighting Native Americans, treatment of the enslaved was milder than in New England.
[5]
- 14 Although Sylvester was the first to bring slaves to Shelter Island, they already populated much of eastern Long Island and lived under the following rules: they could (and some did) own their own land, serve and carry arms in the militia, testify in court against other blacks, and rarely, but occasionally, against whites. The WIC did not issue slave codes. Slave owners under the WIC did not break up husbands and wives. Lastly, there was the emergence of the "Half-Freedom" status. Those fortunate enough to achieve that status, "could enjoy all the rights and liberties of whites provided they pay an annual fee to the Dutch West Indies Company" and provided they work some days a year for that company.
[6]
- 15 Yet "Half-Freedom" status was far from freedom as the indentured servant – having served his or her indenture – experienced it. The signature inhumanity of slavery, the difference that separated the races, black and white, was the condition of the children of the enslaved. All children born of slavery were to be enslaved.
- 16 The conditions on Shelter Island and the rest of Long Island meant, however, that there was always a relatively large population of half-free and free blacks on Long Island. Members of this population were, to some extent, agents of their own lives. Newly arrived African Americans could measure their status against this populace. They could and did escape into free communities.[7] Dutch rules lasted for forty years, almost a half a century. The Dutch Company was surely not made up of compassionate souls. In fact, Higginbotham tells us that Africans and Native Americans were tortured, but "it was consistent with torture of whites in the Netherlands and within Europe."^[8] The Dutch, as merchants and businessmen, were highly pragmatic. The environmental conditions did not yield large plantations of sugar or tobacco. Farms were much smaller and Europeans owned fewer of the enslaved. The needs of the Company for timber cutting and Indian fighting molded the rules governing their much needed labor.
- 17 When the Dutch ceded Long Island to the British in 1664, the harsher Duke of York laws governing the slave trade and slave labor began to be

enforced. Yet distinctive differences between New York Colony, and especially Long Island and other British colonies remained.

- 18 On Shelter Island, more local conditions dramatically influenced the lives of the enslaved and the Sylvesters. K. H. Hayes and Stephen A. Mrozowski, together with the University of Massachusetts team who excavated on the Manor grounds from 1999-2006, discovered that enslaved Indians, Africans, and Europeans all labored and lived in the same compound. The enslaved lived in the Manor house and in its immediate outbuildings. Their living patterns differed strikingly from those that emerged in the antebellum south where slave quarters were placed separate and apart from the big house. Such close geographic proximity influenced economic, social, and sexual relations between the different groups.^[9] Montaukett and Manhasset Indians lived, farmed, hunted, traveled, and traded on these same lands. Although the Dutch taxed and had influence over Nathaniel Sylvester, the dominant authorities the Shelter Island and the Montaukett tribes came into contact with were English. After the devastating Pequot War (1637) in which English militia murdered all the women and children they found in Pequot communities, various sachems tried to ally themselves with the English.
- 19 Youghco, also called Poggaticut, Grand Sachem of the Montaukett and the Manhasset, walked a fine line between offering peaceful relations to the English and protecting the several tribes that gave their allegiance to him. In 1644, he elicited and received a document of recognition of sorts from the English Commission. Youghco's brother, Wyandanch, a Manhasset sachem who owed allegiance to Youghco, is also cited in the certificate. And in 1653, after Captain Thomas Middleton tried to dispossess the Manhasset from their lands, and following the United Colonies failure to protect them, Youghco, presented himself to Captain Sylvester on Shelter Island. They met on what at the time were equal terms. In a ceremony "Youghco ...delivered...one turfe and twige into their hands according to the usual custome of England."^[10] Then they did "willingly depart."
- 20 But although historians until very recent times have argued for the disappearance of the Manhasset from Shelter Island, they did not depart. Within a year of what became the transfer of land, Youghco had died and within six years Wyandanch also perished. Instead of simply fading away, having lost their leaders and customary use of the land for their sustenance, as well as the ability to move according to the seasons from coastal to inland homes, the Native Americans began to accept or seek labor with the Sylvester's.^[11] The terms of this labor are murky. It may have been enslaved labor. At any rate, conditions between the African enslaved and Native American labor could not have differed that much. Both groups survived. As discussed above, intermarriage meant that when it came to census reports as well as historians' narratives, Native Americans *appeared* to have vanished.
- 21 But what *were* the conditions of the laborers on the provisioning plantation of Shelter Island? Nathaniel Sylvester, as the documents show, clearly had the experience, the language facility, and the knowledge of both WIC and Colonial Commission regulations and ordinances to treat the island as a fluid frontier for establishing his own authority over the enslaved. Did religion influence him?
- 22 While Nathaniel Sylvester and his young bride Grizzel did not arrive as Quakers, Nathaniel had grown up as an English ex-patriot in an Amsterdam Separatist Church.^[12] The couple sympathized and received fugitives from Puritan New England. In addition, they entertained the

great Quaker preachers, William Edmundson and George Fox. By 1660, they were “convinced.”^[13] They had become Quakers themselves. Most Quakers at the time did not believe slave holding to be an evil. Rather they believed that Christian education was the duty of the slave owner. Not until 1773 did the Society of Friends denounce slavery altogether.^[14]

- 23 In his will, Nathaniel Sylvester showed the influence of both Dutch and Quaker attitudes. His will, probated two decades after he and Grizzel became “convinced,” left 24 enslaved. He designated the husbands and wives among his bondsmen as a unit. Enslaved children, although left separately to individual Sylvester family heirs, were also expected, it might seem, to stay within the confines of the Sylvester estate. This seems even more likely since the Will divided the Manor into five portions, one for each child. Sylvester had stated that the legacies would only remain in effect if his children lived on the plantation. His vision, then, appears to have been that not only his children but the young slaves willed to them would remain a familial unit in close geographic proximity.
- 24 Soon, however, Nathaniel Sylvester’s son, Giles, and the other Sylvester children departed for New England. Brinley Sylvester, Nathaniel Sylvester’s grandson, then challenged both his grandfather’s will and that of his uncle Giles. In 1734, after winning his legal challenge, he razed the manor house built by his grandfather. In its place he built the Georgian manor house that now stands. His records tell us that he held important county and town positions and that he engaged more in trade than in farming. That he continued to use slave labor, both African and Native American, on Shelter Island is not surprising. The island which had once been the sole property of his grandfather was now split into landholdings. The Nicolls had many thousands of acres on Sachem’s Neck, the Havens held over one thousand acres, as did the Sylvesters. These properties included the enslaved. Names, numbers, and prices that remain in the surviving letters of Thomas Dering, and also wills , yield a picture of the changing nature of slavery in the eighteenth century.^[15] This period, the Age of Enlightenment, ironically was a time when an already cruel institution came under increasingly brutal legislation. The hunger for African enslaved – sometimes brought in legally, sometimes smuggled, but always changing the demography of New York– clashed with the struggle on the part of the enslaved against their bonds.
- 25 Many African Americans, both slave and free, resided in New York City where they labored on the docks, as porters, coopers, and servants. There, the riots of 1712 and 1741 brought about additional laws to repress and control the population of color.^[16] The immediate punishments for the riot, fire, and assassinations perpetrated by 23 Africans in 1712 included burning alive and hanging. Under the new laws blacks were stripped of their ability to own property; their travel circumscribed; their general movements restricted. They could no longer testify in court. During this period, a tension evolved between the few religious and humanitarian voices that decried slavery and the many who feared a swelling black population imported to enrich the merchants and farmers of New York colony.

Revolutionary Ideas and the Freeing of Slaves on the Island

- 26 Little is known about the sensibilities of Shelter Islanders during these years. By the Census of 1771 there were 27 slaves out of a population of 167. Slave owners included names that have passed down on Shelter Island: Nicoll, Sylvester, Haven, and Dering, among others. But the

American Revolution found the island squarely on the side of the patriots and of “liberty.” And after the British offered the enslaved their freedom if they joined the King’s forces, the colonials changed their own policy. In 1781, New York Colony offered the same exchange of freedom for fighting. Many blacks had already taken up arms and, for example, fought bravely in the Battle of Long Island, in 1776.[\[17\]](#)

- 27 Responding to Revolutionary principals, New York legislators gingerly began the process of emancipation. First in 1788 and then in 1799, they passed laws that gradually freed the enslaved. Beginning with those born after 1799, men and women were to have their freedom upon reaching the age of 28 for males and 25 for females. Full emancipation was to be reached by July 4, 1827. Since owners having possession of a child born after the law of 1799 could register the infant and still retain the bondsman or woman in enslavement until ages 28 and 25 respectively, some blacks remained enslaved even after age 28.
- 28 On the Island, the new laws resulted in a cascade of manumissions well before the 1827 date. In 1795, Sylvester Dering, Henry Dering, and Nathaniel Gardiner applied to free Mathilda, a slave they had inherited. In 1799, Benjamin Havens and Renseler Havens applied to free their slave, Dick. Samuel B. Nicoll “set at liberty” the family, Cade, Elizabeth, and their child Armenia. According to the law, application had to be made to each town’s “Overseers of the Poor.” Owners were required to testify that the slave was under fifty years of age and able to support him or herself. In 1790, there were 23 free blacks and 24 enslaved. In the 1820 Census, the numbers were 40 free and 2 enslaved. Blacks began to seek lives off Shelter Island.[\[19\]](#)
- 29 Of those who remained, few documents have survived to tell their lives. A handful of sources in Shelter Island Historical Society’s Vault, in the U.S. Census, in the island cemeteries, and in the memories of their descendants provide some guidance to the lives of the remaining minority families on the Island by 2000. In this article, I have decided to focus on two families who were deeply representative of the history of Shelter Island. Each embodies the struggle to endure and prosper in place. Each resided for a century here: the Hempsteads in the nineteenth century, and them Scott/Joseph/Chases in the twentieth. Both families allowed me to recapture a “world we have lost.”

Nineteenth Century and the Hempstead Family

- 30 David Hempstead, who was born in 1808, appears in the U.S. Census reports of 1820 and 1830. He left to work on the crew of whalers leaving, out of Sag Harbor. A large poster in the Eastville Historical Society refers to his significance as a whaling sailor. The David Hempstead cited as a free black householder on Shelter Island may have been his father.[\[20\]](#) We know that several blacks born on the island left to join the Sag Harbor whaling crews in the heyday of whaling. Back on the island, they were cited in the Census reports as “mariner.”[\[21\]](#)
- 31 One such seaman (surely a nephew or grandson) who sought high adventure on the sea and then volunteered to fight in the Civil War was James Madison Hempstead. Madison Hempstead was born in 1836. He was probably at sea when he was not enumerated in the U.S. Census, Shelter Island, of 1850, but he appears again residing with his father James, mother Rachel, and siblings in the Census of 1860. In that census he is unmarried, age 24, and designated as “mariner.” He joined the Union troops shortly after the opening shots at Fort Sumter and is inscribed alongside sixteen of his white compatriots in the Shelter Island Eagle monument sitting on Wilson Circle. Do any of the students who

pass by that monument every day know of this black Civil War patriot? Do they know that the star next to his name means that he died for the Union Cause?[\[22\]](#) It is difficult to know whether Madison Hempstead was one of the eight volunteers who earned the town bounty of \$125 voted on August 22, 1862, to answer the call for 300,000 men. But whether he earned the bounty or not, it took the sense of independence and willingness to face the unknown that he had already demonstrated as a whaler to seek and face battle.[\[23\]](#) The full draft was only instituted in 1863. This is a war in which we now know that upwards of 620,000 men, Union and Confederate, perished. 178,000 volunteers for the Union joined the United States Colored Troops. Madison Hempstead's brother, Henry Hempstead, also volunteered. Madison was one of those who did not return home.



Fig. 1: Shelter Island Civil War Monument. On the monument, and just out of sight in this image, an eagle perches over those who fought in the Civil War. James Madison Hempstead, farmer and whaler, and one of the 178,000 men who fought with the US Colored Troops, is identified with a star as one of those who died. (photograph by Sara Shepherd)

- 32 The historian Ralph Duvall mistakenly wrote that James Madison Hempstead “died in a Southern camp.” Examination of his death certificate shows that he died in a Union Hospital in Beaufort, South Carolina. He served in the 29th U.S. Colored Regiment, Company D. Union troops had taken Beaufort in the battle of Port Royal early in the war. We have no way of knowing which battles Madison served in, but after almost two years of service he died of pneumonia in Beaufort Hospital #5 on May 30, 1864.[\[24\]](#) Civil War medicine, practiced before germ theory and the modern microscope, killed more than twice those who died from combat deaths. But while twice as many soldiers died of disease than from bullets, ten times as many African Americans did.[\[25\]](#)
- 33 The disparity between white and black soldiers went further. As Drew Gilpin Faust has shown, Confederate combatants, from ordinary soldiers to officers – with very few exceptions – followed a policy of murdering black combatants even when they surrendered. Well-documented is the story of the Fort Pillow Massacre of April 1864, when the three hundred black soldiers were killed, “most after they had surrendered.” It was so rare for blacks to be spared that we only know of about one hundred who were found in the infamous Andersonville Camp.[\[26\]](#)
- 34 But while Madison’s heroism is etched onto a monument, Henry Hempstead, his younger brother, is strangely invisible. He may have returned home from the war with both wounds and post-traumatic stress. He and his wife Sarah were married with three small children in the Census of 1870 but – unusual for this time period – were divorced by

1880. Henry was reported as a single head of household with his son, Mathias, age 15, living at home. Mathias had gone to sea like his uncle and father and at this young age was a ship's cook. Henry's father, James Hempstead, had been a model of family stability and had been cited as head of household from 1850 to 1870. Although born into slavery in 1805, by 1860 he owned property valued at \$500. Ten years later his property was worth \$1,200. Mary, Henry's sister, at age 30, was still living with James in 1870. From the 1870s, she attended the new St. Mary's Episcopal Church. Mary Hempstead, who had been schooled on Shelter Island, could read and write. But unlike the males in her family, she owned no property.^[27] She entered service with the Nicoll family of Sachem's Neck. A visitor to St. Mary's churchyard can find her gravestone in Ben Nicoll's family plot. When she died in 1902 at age 60 years and 8 months, she was the first black person to be buried in the churchyard.^[28]



Fig. 2: Frank Myers Boggs (1855-1926), *Clamming at Shelter Island*, 1878, oil on canvas. The Long Island Museum.

- 35 The 1870 Census counts 13 blacks – with the two Hempstead families as the only ones counted with young children – out of a total population of 649 on Shelter Island.

The Census, Classification and Ethnicity

- 36 Between the 1880 Census and the 1900 Census, there was a dramatic shift. It suggests that students of history should beware of too much reliance on one source and of declaring a trend prematurely. The Census of 1820, the last to enumerate slaves, counted 42 blacks and the 1880 Census counts only 4 blacks on Shelter Island, causing those who stopped their count at 1880 to refer to the “end” of the black population. The United States Census of 1890 was destroyed by fire. But in 1900, the census counts a sudden appearance of 32 blacks on the island. What would account for this steep decline and resurgence? Demographic shifts and economic booms and busts may be part of the change. But classification, reluctance to be counted, mobility, and mistakes are surely factors.

- 37 From the first United States Census when no Native Americans appear on the island to 1900 when “M” for mulatto is used more than in prior cases, it was the census taker or enumerator who identified, using his own sense of skin color, which person to place in which category. As discussed above, we know that early in the post-contact period a strategy for survival was the intermarriage or intermixing of Native Americans with the black population. This accounts for the rapid “disappearance” of Indians among the population of black inhabitants. In addition, many islanders of color, Native American and black, fled to the mixed community in Sag Harbor called Eastville. Eastville was a mere ferry or

small boat ride across the Peconic Bay. With the introduction of steamboats, ferries, and in the 1840s, the railroad, Long Islanders, both black and white, traveled on the East End more frequently.

- 38 The Nicolls, for example, were peripatetic between New York City, Sachem's Neck, and Albany. Their black servant, Jane Havens, traveled with them until the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 became the legal fiction for kidnapping and trafficking to the South. We also know that other Shelter Island African Americans lived highly mobile lives throughout the nineteenth century. As we saw above, David Hempstead left the island to join a whaling crew sometime in the 1840s. From that period on, he can be traced in the East Hampton Census as living in Sag Harbor. Madison Hempstead was not in the Shelter Island Census of 1850. He had left the island to be a mariner. But he returned and was counted in the 1860 Shelter Island Census. His next appearance in a document was, of course, in the records of enlisted men next to his brother in 1863. His last was his military death certificate, 29th Colored Regiment, Company D, categorizing him as a "farmer."
- 39 So we do not know what happened to Mary Greene, servant, and Perry Albert, laborer, who appear in the 1880 Census or to others who may simply not have been on Shelter Island at the time of the census. We do know that after the war many blacks migrated to New York City where work was plentiful.
- 40 But by 1900, a surprising 32 persons classified as either black or Indian were enumerated. Six were heads of families and only a few are identified as domestics living with a white family. Aron Lafferty, 65, his son Nathan Lafferty, 46, were each listed as head of household and are each classified as "Indian." Our veteran Henry Hempstead, 61, was by then a "widower." Mary Hempstead, 58, his sister, was also identified as head of household.
- 41 By 1910, the Hempstead family whose story we followed from enslavement to veteran status are no longer on Shelter Island. The family offers a window onto gender differences as well as race and class. Some of the men in the family had accumulated property. According to the census, they could read but are not tallied as writing. Educationally, Mary was a cut above. She could both read and write. But at her death in 1902, she was still a servant in the Nicoll family and she still owned no property.

Migration and the Scott Family

- 42 At the turn of the twentieth century, a second African American family story began on Shelter Island. Just as the narrative of the Hempstead family threads nineteenth century island history, from slavery and emancipation to death in the Civil War and its aftermath, the family of Albert Scott, born enslaved in the state of Virginia, is interwoven with Shelter Island's entire twentieth century.
- 43 All of the African Americans and Native Americans listed in the 1900 Census were born in New York State with two exceptions. One, Albert Scott, 41, was born in the state of Virginia. The arc of Alfred Scott's family and descendants traced the century-long history of African Americans on the island. The family worked, married, were schooled, and socialized on Shelter Island for just shy of one hundred years until Ben Chase's death in 1997. Ben Chase had married Scott's daughter, Laura, in 1922. The Scotts were critical economic producers, civic contributors, members of the community and of their parish of St. Mary's Episcopal Church throughout those years. They were also the

social and familial focus of blacks coming to and leaving the island. For example, Charles “Jimmy” Hayward lived with the Chases for two years. He was a boarder but also a friend.[\[29\]](#)

- 44 Elizabeth Joseph was born in 1872 in East Hampton to direct descendants of the Montauk Sachem, Wyandanch. She married Albert Scott, freed from one of the Tyler-Gardiner Plantations in Virginia. Their marriage united Shelter Island’s Native American heritage to a harsh Southern Plantation culture. Scott was born enslaved in the 1850s. Their marriage also linked the history of the wealthy Gardiner/Horsford families with the story of other ethnicities on the island. Elizabeth Scott worked for both Anna Nicoll (“Miss Annie”) and for Cornelia Fenton Horsford. She was the latter’s cook and trusted employee.[\[30\]](#)
- 45 I discovered the overlooked but significant connection between the Scotts, the Gardiners and the Horsfords. At its root is the institution of slavery. In the antebellum period, Julia Gardiner, cousin and friend of Mary and Phoebe Gardiner, of Sylvester Manor, married John Tyler, President of the United States. On leaving the presidency, they retired to the fifteen-hundred acre Tyler Plantation in Virginia where they owned between sixty and ninety enslaved persons. In 1852, Eben Horsford, who had married Mary Gardiner, thus becoming the patriarch of Sylvester Manor, visited the plantation and wrote of the contented nature of the enslaved in “Sherwood Forest” as it was ironically named.[\[31\]](#) But later, Scott identified his chronic limp as a result of the deliberate cutting of his tendons. Since slaves were sometimes hired out and often traded in Virginia, it is impossible to know who owned Scott then or who was responsible for this horrific abuse of the child Scott, born into enslavement on Chappell Plantation. But we know that violent abuses were practiced on runaways or perceived runaways. As James Stirling, an English traveler in 1857 noted, there were other emotions besides the passion for gain that sometimes ruled the hand of an owner.[\[32\]](#)
- 46 Julia Gardiner Tyler and the Horsfords were close. They not only corresponded but they visited each other.[\[33\]](#) Even in her advanced years, the former First Lady visited Cornelia Horsford, appearing in her Guest Registry.[\[34\]](#) At the same time that the famous Grimke sisters were leaving South Carolina to proselytize for abolition, Julia traveled to the South as a convert to Southern ways and pro-slavery ideology when she married President Tyler of Virginia. But she was born in Suffolk County, daughter of David Gardiner, the sole proprietor of Gardiner’s Island, and sister of David Gardiner, the subsequent owner. Pretty and intelligent, she captured the fancy of a sitting President, thirty years her senior. She was instantly elevated to First Lady. When the Duchess of Sutherland published her anti-slavery tract in an English journal, Gardiner-Tyler wrote a rebuttal entitled “To the Duchess of Sutherland and Ladies of England.” It appeared in English publications and also in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in 1853.[\[35\]](#) The Duchess had written her essay after reading *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In the same way, Julia’s article was one of many volleys shot in the ideological warfare that followed Stowe’s powerful work. Julia, like the more intellectual Senator John Calhoun, argued that the slave’s lot was vastly better than that of the workers in the factories of Manchester, England and Lowell, Massachusetts. She and her brother David, who was anti-slavery, broke over their differences.
- 47 After the Civil War, Albert Scott migrated from St. Petersburg, Virginia, to New York State and went to work on Gardiner’s Island for Julia’s anti-slavery brother, David Gardiner. David Gardiner had decided to dismantle the fort on the island and use the stones in a wall. Albert Scott did this work. On the island, the former slave met Vincent Joseph, a

Montauk Indian, listed as one of Gardiner's workers. Later, he and Joseph's sister, Elizabeth Right Joseph, married in East Hampton.[\[36\]](#) By 1900, the census lists Scott as living on Shelter Island, head of household with Elizabeth, his wife, and four children: Walter Vincent, Alfred, Willis Franklin, and Laura Priscilla. The latter was just two months old. Albert Scott, Elizabeth, and the Josephs all worked on Miss Annie Nicoll's property in Sachem's Neck. Scott's strength and work ethic were legendary and this despite his disabled feet. He logged trees, built roads, and farmed the land. In 1907, Elizabeth moved the family from Sachem's Neck to the Center to be closer to the island school. Was it then that she went to work for Cornelia Horsford of Sylvester Manor? A beautiful passport from the U.S. Department of State stamped with a red seal provides a tantalizing mystery. The document, citing a dark-skinned maidservant to accompany Cornelia out of the country may have been for Elizabeth.

- 48 But what could have drawn the Scotts to Shelter Island? Further, what could account for the census numbers that showed a paltry 4 blacks in 1880 and 32 minorities in 1900? The economic upheavals of the prior decade were a factor. 1893 saw a depression when many lost their jobs. Then, abruptly following the downturn, an upswing in the economy led to the increasing wealth of a plutocracy. This was the Gilded Age.

The Gilded Age and the Transformation of an Island

- 49 The ground for making Shelter Island a pleasure camp for the rich had been tilled by Samuel Benjamin Nicoll and Eben Horsford, the former a doctor, lawyer, and town supervisor, the latter an industrialist and Harvard professor. The two men used their political and economic prowess to close the multiple fish factories on the island. They transformed Shelter Island from fishing and farming to a predominantly resort and vacation community. It is true that the fish factories, frying vast quantities of oil from menhaden fish, wafted a powerful fish smell that pervaded homes and even, according to the *Suffolk Times*, stuck to the islanders' laundry as it swung in the breeze. Some reported that they could smell it in Greenport. But Bunker City, as one of the factories was called, employed substantive numbers of Shelter Island fisherman. Further, the boats anchored in Greenport to catch and process the bunkers employed both black and white. The Town Council regulated the end of bunker processing on the island. With the smell gone, sparkling white mansions began to cluster along the island coast.
- 50 Besides mansions, two storied hotels sprang up: Manhasset Hotel in Dering Harbor, built in 1874, and Prospect House, erected in the Heights barely two years before. A perusal of the *Suffolk Times* for the turn of the century depicts the changing island. It narrates a tale of the very wealthy and their retinue of servants. The transformed island now needed cooks, waiters, gardeners, chauffeurs, estate managers, and stable hands. Not only were the Heights and Dering Harbor busy with summer people of more moderate wealth, but multi-millionaires like Artemis Ward, advertising genius, and Francis Marion Smith, who cornered the market on Borax, had bought up hundreds of acres and built grand mansions. *Presdeleau*, Smith's home, boasted thirty-five rooms.[\[38\]](#) Smith moved his family between coasts by private rail car and yacht. Among Smith's servants were a team of Chinese men brought from California. Some of them stayed on the island and were counted in the Census Reports of 1910. Samuel Benjamin Nicoll, scion of the Nicoll family, had died in 1899. Almost a decade prior Eben Horsford expired. The newly rich on the island turned to the next generation of the Horsford family for the lavish charitable events popular at the turn of the century and now. Cornelia Fenton (Gardiner) Horsford was a direct

descendant of Nathaniel Sylvester. She had never married and instead led an active social and intellectual life as owner of the oldest estate, Sylvester Manor, on the island.



Fig. 3: This photograph of 1888 shows the elegant Manhasset Hotel on Dering Harbor. The resort hired African Americans as waiters and porters for the summer months. Built in 1874, to serve the new vacation visitors, it burnt down in 1896 was rebuilt and continued to serve well-heeled vacationers until another fire in 1906. Equally imposing was Prospect House in the Heights. The latter burned in the twenties but, rebuilt, survived until, as the New Prospect Hotel, it burned a final time in 1942.

(photo courtesy of the SIHS Archives)

- 51 One important event, a huge party at the Manor, was given jointly by Mrs. Francis Marion Smith of Oakland, California, and *Presdeleau*, Shelter Island, and Cornelia Horsford of Sylvester Manor to raise money for the organ of the Presbyterian Church. Gypsy fortune-telling booths were just one of the entertaining activities at this party. The Harvest Festival, an annual event to fund the library, was led by Cornelia who was president of the library.^[39] Behind the scenes and unnoticed by the newspaper accounts were the many servants needed to set up, bake, and beautify the Manor and the Chapel where events often took place. Elizabeth Scott was called on for these festivities.
- 52 Elizabeth and Albert, like Mary Hempstead, sought spiritual life at St. Mary's Episcopal Church. Perhaps the Nicolls had first taken them there. Each of their children were baptized at the church. The three boys, Walter, Alfred Jefferson, and Willis, were baptized in July of 1897. After Laura Scott's birth in 1900, both she and her mother were baptized on the same day, November 19, 1901.^[40]

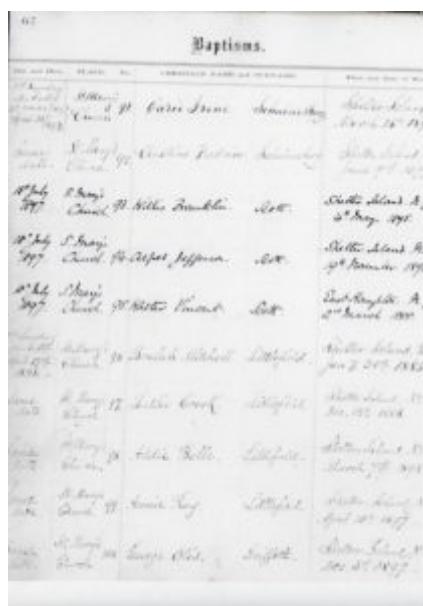


Fig. 4: This is a photograph of a page in the Baptismal Record of St. Mary's Church. The three sons of Albert and Elizabeth Scott, Willis, Alfred and Walter, were baptized together on July 18, 1897. Alfred and Walter are also buried in St. Mary's Churchyard.
(photo courtesy of St. Mary's).

- 53 The next memories we have come from Albertus "Toots" Clark's story of work on Sachem's Neck/Mashomack as it passed from the Nicoll family to the financier Otto Kahn and then to Gerard and Associates.

- 54 "Toots" Clark remembers being a kid in Sachem's Neck:

"Mr. Scott was some great character! He was a black man but all us kids called him Mr. Scott. He was the first man my father hired (about 1923). He allus said he was 75. He was 17 when he ran away + from a pine camp in South Carolina, where he cut railroad ties. Mr. Scott had long arms that swung to his knees, and he was some wood cutter! But he couldn't run. The cords in his legs had been cut when he ran away. His feet just flopped...He helped build the roads here, 27 miles of 'em. In winter at noontime he'd come in, and set by the fire. He liked it real hot. He didn't talk much, but he liked us kids." [41]

- 55 An interview with Albert Scott provided the deep background of his youth in Virginia. In 1940, *The Shelter Island News*, the paper of record at the time, quotes the Scotts. Albert Scott relates his living and “being in the employ of” the Tyler-Gardiner family. They, of course, had several plantations, among them Sherwood Forest, and in the antebellum years Mr. Scott was a slave. The following is how he told his story or how it was reported:

Mr. and Mrs. Albert Scott...live just east of Route 114 on the former F.M. Smith property. Mr. Scott was born a slave just before the Civil War on the Chappell Plantation near Petersburg, Va. After the war gave young Albert his freedom, he was in the employ of the Tyler-Gardiner family (U.S. President Tyler married Julia Gardiner of Gardiner's Island). Next, Albert as a young man came to Gardiner's Island to work for David Gardiner, Ninth Lord of the Isle of Wight in the New World (Gardiner's Island), predecessor of the late

Lion Gardiner the Tenth. In East Hampton Mr. Scott met and married Miss Elizabeth Joseph, whose mother – by maiden name Hannah Right- was a full-blooded Montauk Indian. (Authority, Mr. and Mrs. Albert Scott themselves).[\[42\]](#)

- 56 I pursued the story of Albert Scott's terrible wound. Two well-known historians responded in emails that the cutting of tendons would appear to be counterproductive for slave owners who wanted the most profit from the enslaved's labor. But a phone conversation with Dr. Maury K. Harwood, an orthopedic surgeon in Gilbert, California, brought a counter narrative to the issue: "The cutting of tendons could easily have been done with the tools available in the antebellum period, and, although painful, would heal fairly quickly. The abuse would not have hindered the victim's ability to work or to gain great upper body strength. But it would have achieved the objective of keeping him from running."[\[43\]](#)

The Scotts and Chases in the Twentieth Century

- 57 At the time of the *Shelter Island News* interview, much had happened to the Scotts. Tragedy struck twice, first when Willie Franklin fell through the ice and died at age eight. It struck a second time when Alfred Jefferson succumbed to pneumonia at age sixteen. Both are buried with one large white stone cross in St. Mary's Churchyard. More happily, second daughter Pearl was born in 1914. Laura Scott completed her studies. In 1922, she married Ben Chase, also of Native American and African American heritage. Ben arrived on the island in 1918. He was born in Brooklyn in 1899 and had run away from an orphanage where he had been placed when his mother died. We do not know what brought him originally to the island. Records do show that he went to work at Winthrop House, settled on island, married Laura Priscilla Scott, had a family, and ultimately built the Chase House, next to the Harbor Inn, on Burns Road.
- 58 By the time of the Chase marriage, Walter Scott, Albert and Elizabeth's remaining son, had left, joining an exodus of blacks from Shelter Island. To reiterate, the 1900 Census report shows 32 people of Black or Native American origin. There were 23 people of color, including 5 Chinese, in 1910. But in the 1920 Census only 10 remain. Although the economic reasons are clear – war, economic opportunity in the burgeoning cities, youthful wanderlust – a surge of racism suggests a more menacing reason.
- 59 In the aftermath of World War I, nativism was on the rise in the nation and on Long Island. Nationally in the mid-1920s, Klan membership approached two million.[\[44\]](#) It was at least in part a response to the hundreds of thousands of Italians, Irish, Jews and other ethnicities fleeing floods, droughts, hunger, and pogroms in Europe. But black migration from the South exacerbated bigotry. From the 1890s to the 1920s, and especially in the latter decade, the Ku Klux Klan gained hundreds of thousands of adherents. The Junior Order of United American Mechanics and the Klan both had a presence on Shelter Island and on Long Island as a whole.

"Greetings From Shelter Island Klanswomen"

- 60 Under a blistering July sun in 1926, the Klan held a huge three-day assembly on the Mineola Fair grounds. Not only was it well attended by throngs of the Klan, but Klanswomen from all over Long Island placed paid advertisements in the glossy magazine that accompanied the organized meeting. One of those salutations was "Greetings from Shelter

Island Klanswomen.” Another advertisement recruiting for the Klan ran thus: (*Klorero*, SIHS).

*Pioneer Klan, no. 26 Southampton, Long Island
Do You Realize that the Klan Has Become a Factor in Our
Community Life?
CAN YOU QUALIFY?
As a White, Gentile, Protestant American
If so, apply for further information
P.O. Box 537, Mineola, Long Island*

- 61 A Knight in shining Klan robe atop a rearing stallion graced the cover of the “*Klorero*,” the Klan’s magazine. It sold briskly at thirty-five cents a copy.
- 62 The *Klorero* was part of an exhibit called “Hidden and Forbidden” shown at the Suffolk County Historical Society in the summer of 2013. It included an actual Klan robe, heavy ropes, and pictures of lynching. Whether lynching ever occurred on Long Island in the 1920s or not, there is testimony that crosses were burned on Shelter Island lawns. According to Paul D. Colford, Bay Shore in Suffolk County was center of KKK activity. Some say the animosity was directed at Italians and Catholics, but whatever the case, it must have struck fear in the hearts of anyone not “white, gentile, Protestant.”[\[45\]](#)
- 63 The *Newsday* story in 1987 started with the serendipitous discovery of KKK records in a garbage pail. An antiques collector plucked out the discarded cache of records and subsequently sold them to the Queens Borough Public Library. The collection is catalogued as the Wagner Collection. Charles Wagner, the recording secretary of a group called “The Neophytes of Comus,” kept detailed records of activities, posted wrongdoing by public school teachers, and maintained lists of the organization’s members. To join the Neophytes, one needed membership in the KKK. Although no such list has come down to us for either the Neophytes or the KKK of Shelter Island, the celebration of the KKK by the Klanswomen of the Island leaves no doubt about its existence at the time.[\[46\]](#)
- 64 The 1930s blew in the dual catastrophes of extreme hurricanes and the Great Depression. A metaphor for both seems to be the Borax King’s mansion, *Presdeleau*. After Francis Smith’s first business failure in 1913, his summer “cottage” received far less upkeep. Although he regained his fortune, the banks continued to hold his debts and everything was not restored. The Hurricane of 1938 caused grievous damage to *Presdeleau*. Finally Smith’s widow, Evelyn, had its remains pulled down. The grand hotel, The Manhasset, had already burned down. New Prospect Hotel, rebuilt after an earlier fire, still stood – at least until 1942. Thirty-two blacks, Native Americans, and Chinese immigrants had dwindled to fourteen in 1930 and six in 1940.[\[47\]](#)
- 65 The Scotts, the Josephs, and the Chases had put down deep roots and remained the core group on the Island. Laura Scott Chase and Ben Chase had married in 1922. Laura Scott, born on Shelter Island, had been schooled at the Shelter Island Union School. Their children, Hope and Naomi, attended and graduated from the island school in 1939 and 1940 respectively. Thus they were the second generation to do so. Although there was still much work to be had at the various lodges – Peconic Lodge, for example, sent out brochures promising “smiling colored waiters” – the Chases believed in working independently.[\[48\]](#) Ben Chase, for example, had his own sanding and flooring business and was also a machinist. Laura Scott Chase was called on to cook for various parties

and events. But following the death of Albert Scott in 1941 and the winds of war, the Chases left the Island for over a decade. Many blacks were leaving the North and South Forks with the magnet of war work closer to the great harbors of New York City. Ben Chase found work in Long Island as a machinist and clearly thrived.



Fig. 5: Vincent Joseph and his sister, Elizabeth Joseph Scott, were identified as "full-blooded Montauk Indians". Elizabeth married Albert Scott, former slave from Virginia. This photo shows Vincent, age 83, and unidentified male members of the Scott Chase family, with Laura Scott Chase. Laura had married Ben Chase in 1918. The photo is dated 1949 after the death of Albert Scott.
(from the SIHS Archives)

The Island at Mid-Century

- 66 In 1950, Shelter Island still had farms totaling over 1,500 acres. Migrant labor was often used to plant, till, and harvest. This was the same year that the Beanery, an island industry with almost mythical dimensions in its history, began. The Beanery, a cooperative of farm and factory, harvested lima beans and cauliflower and flash froze them right here on the island for Libby, Big Valley, Snow Crop, Sea Brook, and Birds Eye among others. Ten founders of the cooperative employed 35 to 40 women, wives and mothers of the Island, and 15 viners. The viner crew was made up of black migrant laborers brought up from Alabama by a crew leader named Williams.



Fig. 6: Lima bean workers, c. 1955. In the 1950s, local farm owners founded a cooperative to harvest and freeze beans for General Foods and other food conglomerates. African American migrants were hired from the Carolinas to do the dangerous and dirty work demanded by the lima bean machines. They were housed in shacks behind the combines. (photo courtesy of the SIHS archives)

- 67 Men and women worked between 10 and 12 hours each day and the viner crew lived in a labor camp at the back of the plant where the Fire Department now sits. According to Evans Griffing there was a vibrant social atmosphere and a lot of yelling (over the machines) and hilarity:

“Now that crowd – you can imagine the fun that was going on in that room – they were always yelling and talking at each other...” The pay was good. “We even had a New State Labor Department representative come down here and force us to pay more than 25 cents per hour for every person we employed. But our bean price didn’t go up. That was in 1953.”[\[49\]](#)

- 68 And besides the long hours and good pay, there was clearly hardship. The bookkeeper, Edith Shepherd, spent her hours of working with her feet in the water since there was no place for the water to drain. Finally this was rectified.

- 69 The viner crew in the camp had nowhere to go in what was then a segregated Island. Saturday night was devoted to drinking, card playing, and dancing. When a fight would break out, Pete Hannabury, the only policeman on the Island, would escort one or more laborers to the Ferry with a one-way ticket.[\[50\]](#)

- 70 A monstrous hurricane, Carol, immediately followed by two more in August of 1954 and another in 1955, devastated the crops and the Beanery. Then a pestilence of bugs attacked the beans. Many of the viner crew returned to Alabama; the Shelter Island women workers were also let go. Evan Griffing, Richard Moser and the 8 other founding members of the Beanery lost their initial capital and the \$275,000 dollar loan they had received from the Federal Farm Loan Association in Springfield, Massachusetts. But it is interesting that this experiment which brought blacks and whites together, however tenuously, was happening just a year or two before Rosa Parks refused to get up for a white man in an Alabama bus on December 1, 1955. And it happened in the same decade that Thurgood Marshall, attorney for the NAACP, was litigating two cases that preceded the famous Brown v. Board of Education. In one, Sweat v. Painter, the University of Texas created a separate law school for a single black student. This was the case in which the Supreme Court first established that separate was not equal. In another case, McLaurin v. Oklahoma, a black doctoral candidate was forced to sit roped off from his fellow graduate students. The court decided again that this did not provide an equal education. Both cases were decided in 1950. On Shelter Island, one wonders if the Beanery had any impact on islanders or on the migrants making their way back to the South.

- 71 Whatever the answer, Laura Scott Chase and Ben Chase returned to Shelter Island at just about this time. And Charles “Jimmy” Hayward arrived as a permanent resident.

- 72 In the mid-1950s, Charles Hayward migrated from South Carolina to work for local farmers, Frank Mik and Anton Blados. Charles, like his father, had always fished – shrimp, crawfish, and lobster – and sold the fish off the back of his truck. On Shelter Island he began performing many jobs, among them driving a truck and harvesting potatoes. The latter was still a big crop on the Island. Charles Hayward found that he could pick the startling quantity of 300 bushels a day at 10 cents each making \$30 a day – far more than weekly pay for a truck driver. And he continued to fish.

73 Charles Hayward recounts that he bought a fishing boat. But soon after, islanders blasted a hole in it and Hayward discovered it foundering in the bay. He knew who the perpetrators were and told that to the Shelter Island Chief of Police who questioned him about the vandalism. Hayward said he would not name the perpetrators but warned that they should not try it again. The word must have gotten around because his new boat was safe. Among other occupations, Hayward worked as a bartender and bouncer for the Chequit Hotel and as driver and general manager for Mr. Antonucci for 46 years. Ultimately, he saved enough to buy the land and build his fish shop and restaurant on Smith Road. He opened the now thriving shop in 1984. In the meantime he brought up his daughters, Chloe and Amanda .Both graduated from the Shelter Island School and both earned advanced degrees.[\[51\]](#)

74 Ben and Laura Scott Chase had befriended Charles when they returned to the island. Charles Hayward has much to say about them:

Ben was a handsome man, around 5' 10". He was of Indian origin, you know. Laura was also Indian, very attractive, and had a straight nose and light skin. Ben walked everywhere. I never asked why, but if you have lived on the island for a few decades you would have seen him. They built a house on Burns and Cartwright. And that's where people felt at home. I asked him to rent a room to me for a while. I stayed there for two years before I built my own place. Their grandchildren, Kenny, Keith, Karen, and Jakie all came to live with them to escape the schools in Queens. It was a strong family. Laura was a great cook. Kenny starred in athletics. And a bunch of us would play pool together. Ben had a great sense of humor. People liked to be around him.[\[52\]](#)

75 Friendships were not restricted to the black population. Long-time Island resident Lauretta King also recalls that her husband Vincent King's aunt and uncle had a regular card game they played at their neighbors, the Chases on Burns Road.[\[53\]](#)

76 On Saturday night, 23 June 1973, the Chase's house on Burns Road burned to the ground. With the fire, they lost their home, their savings, and priceless memorabilia – papers and photos from much earlier times. The front page headline shouted:

**Fire Destroys Chase Home
Lack of Water is Blamed**

A fire about 10 p.m. last Saturday night all but consumed the two-story home of Laura and Ben Chase of Burns Avenue. It is believed to have started in an anti-room of the one-story wing containing the kitchen.

Firemen had all but gotten the fire under control when water supplies carried on the trucks, were exhausted. A delay of some 20 to 30 minutes in running a hose line three-tenths of a mile to Coecles Harbor resulted in the almost total loss of the dwelling.

No one was reported hurt. But the Chase family, including four grandchildren, lost all of its possessions. The family was taken in by friends and neighbors and is now living in quarters offered by the Passionist Fathers Retreat House, also on Burns Avenue.

Some twelve hours later, firemen were again called to the scene when the fire broke out again, this time in the roof of the two-story section.

Observers said that only one downstairs bedroom remains uncharred by the fire.[\[54\]](#)

- 77 Resident and writer Linda Holmes remembers the fire and its aftermath well. The family escaped with only the clothes on their backs. Family bibles, letters and documents were destroyed. Most oppressive were the delaying tactics of the company the Chases had insured their house and property with. For a while, the Chases camped out in a trailer the insurers had placed on their property. Granddaughter Karen Morgan-Wood reports she escaped the worst of the blaze having gone to a sweet sixteen party in Brooklyn.[\[55\]](#)
- 78 Ben and Laura Chase not only survived but graduated two daughters and all four grandchildren in their charge from Shelter Island High School. In 1940 and 1978 respectively, daughter Naomi Chase and granddaughter Karen Morgan each worked on the staff of the yearbook, the Pogatticut. All the grandchildren attended college. In 1993, the *New York Times* featured Kenny Morgan, who had been a star basketball player at the high school, class of 1971, as the best tennis coach on Long Island. To arrive at this pinnacle he had spent long hours at night studying the theory and practice of tennis, while teaching during the day.[\[56\]](#)
- 79 On April 4, 1983, Laura Scott Chase, native of the Shelter Island, married to Ben Chase for 62 years, died. Over 120 people attended her funeral at St. Mary's Church.[\[57\]](#) Thirty years later several islanders remember her and speak of the respect the community had for her.
- 80 Today, Karen Morgan-Wood recalls, "Grandma was about 5'8" and sturdy. She was beautiful!"[\[58\]](#)
- 81 The brief *Shelter Island Reporter* obituary lauded Mrs. Chase as "the matriarch of the Island's only black family [incorrectly]....Mrs. Chase was known to friends as a warm but determined woman who engaged in housecleaning services."[\[59\]](#) But missing on the white board of this article was the fact that Laura Chase was born on Sachem's Neck, that she attended the Shelter Island Public School, and that she was the mother and grandmother of Shelter Island School graduates. Lost for the moment was her relationship to over a century of island history. No mention was made of her father, Albert Scott, the last enslaved man, to live on the island or her mother, Elizabeth Scott, a Montauk Indian from East Hampton. Laura and her husband Ben Chase, born April 29, 1899, and who died on March 6, 1997, at almost 100 years of age, were also the last link to the Gardiner-Horsford-Tyler families roping the peculiar institution from St. Petersburg, Virginia, to Sachem's Neck and Sylvester Manor on Shelter Island, Long Island. Their endurance as free members of the community, parishioners of St. Mary's, scholars and athletes at the school, lasted just shy of the end of the twentieth century. Like the nation-at-large, their pilgrimage emerged out of slavery, Reconstruction, upheaval of peoples, two world wars, an incipient food processing business, and the island's transformative upheaval from fisheries and farming to summer residency and resort businesses. The family also experienced prejudice that infected the society at large and that perhaps worsened as the beginnings of the Civil Rights movement sparked push-back. At the same time, the children played, studied, and socialized in a predominantly white community.

My narrative is at least partially an “Upstairs, Downstairs” story. Much has been written about the “Upstairs.” It should be noted that by mid-century the wealthy, who had the resources and influence to hire, often exerted that influence to ease the path of minorities and their families. Louise Tuthill Green remembers that Andy Fiske, was instrumental in arranging for her to have the position as Director of the Historical Society. It was a position that she filled with great success for many years. Mrs. Green also remembers the migrant workers’ children who enrolled at the school and those who lived at her parents’ farm.[\[60\]](#)

- 83 As a footnote to the narrative of the Scott family, the Scotts and the Chases are almost all buried at St. Mary’s. But only the boys, Willis and Alfred Jefferson Scott, deceased at ages 8 and 16, and their sister’s Laura’s husband, Benjamin Chase, have monuments in the back of the cemetery.[\[61\]](#)
- 84 In the early 1990s, minorities from Central America – Guatemala, Ecuador, Mexico and others – had come to the island. The economic prosperity of the 1990s acted as a magnet. Civil war, drug cartels, and extreme violence repelled the newcomers from their homelands. Like the blacks, Native Americans, Irish, Italians, and Chinese who came here in and around 1900, they arrived to work in the resurgent restaurant and hotel businesses. Shelter Island’s reputation as a summer resort, but a quiet one – the “Unhamptons” – has also led to an increase in construction and lawn work. Like the vinters and potato harvesters in the 50s, many came as migrants. And some spent only the waking hours returning to Greenport, Southold, and other North Fork towns as the sun went down. Lack of affordable housing has made it difficult to settle on Shelter Island. But the US Census reports of 2000 and 2010 show that some Hispanics and other minorities have begun to reside on the Island. Children are entering the school. Minority-owned businesses have been started.
- 85 Perhaps it is too early to research and write the history of the new ethnic families on Shelter Island. Will those minorities follow the pattern of working the businesses, buying property, joining churches, sending children to attend and graduate from Shelter Island Public School? That process has already begun.

Epilogue

- 86 Many people talk about Shelter Island as a paradise, isolated from the country around it by its rural byways and tranquil history. What does examination of its history suggest? The preservation of 2,200 acres of Nicoll property, now known as Mashomack Preserve, and of almost 200 acres of Sylvester Manor, illustrates continuity and harkens back to an earlier time. On the other hand, rather than isolated, the island represents a microcosm of the larger national history, touched by wars, transformed by economic boom and bust. It paints the transformation from a farming, whaling, and fishing community to a resort and vacation location over more than two centuries. The labor of memory reveals the burden of a population formerly enslaved. The lives of the Hempsteads and the Scott/Chases provide a singular narrative of life from slavery to autonomy in the Long Island context.

Notes

[1]U.S. Census 1900-1940; St. Mary's Baptismal Registers, St. Mary's Church Archives, various. Toots Clark's Memories – SIHS LSF. 2009.56, location Clark, A.

[2]Mac Griswold, *The Manor*, 2013; Katherine H. Hayes, *Slavery Before Race*, 2013

[3]Patricia and Edward Shillingburg, *The Nicolls of Sachems Neck, An American Family, 1776-1899* (Shelter Island: Cedar Grove Press, 2013).

[4]Jacob E. Mallman, *Historical Papers on Shelter Island and Its Presbyterian Church* (New York, 1899. Reprinted 1985), 17.

[5]Leon A. Higginbotham, *In the Matter of Color, Race and the American Legal Process: The Colonial Period* (New York, 1978).

[6]Ibid, 105-106.

[7]Eastville Historical Society interview with Director, Georgette Keyes – Grier, July 2013.

[8]L. Higginbotham, 112.

[9]K. H. Hayes, 165-173.; Allegra Di Bonaventura, *For Adam's Sake*, 38-41.

[10]Jacob E Mallman, *Historical Papers on Shelter Island*, 17.

[11]Suggestions of pre-contact living patterns can be found in the Mashomack Study of 1984, unpublished, Mashomack, archives. Thanks for the loan from Mike Laspias.

[12]Mac Griswold, *The Manor*, 52-56.

[13]K. H. Hayes, Slavery Before Race, letter to the General Court, 41).

[14]Richard Shannon Moss, *Slavery on Long Island. A Study in Local Institutional and early African-American Communal Life* (New York, 1993), 136-137.

[15]Patricia and Edward Shillingburg, *Dering Letters*, Vol. 1 (Cedar Grove Press, 2014). See also facsimiles of Havens' inventories posted on the walls of the SIHS. Mac Griswold uncovered an astonishing account book kept by Brinley Sylvester from 1738-1752, *The Manor*, 250-251.

[16]Minutes of the Court of Sessions, 1742, cited in Richard Moss Shannon, *Slavery on Long Island*, 112-115. See also Leon A. Higginbotham 1978; Ira Berlin, *Slavery in New York*, 2005; Jill Lepore, *New York Burning: Liberty, Slavery and Conspiracy in Eighteenth Century Manhattan* (New York, 2005).

[17]Helen Z. Wortis, *Long Island Forum*, 149-150, The Battle is also called the Battle of Brooklyn and is presently the subject of an exhibit at the New York Historical Society.

[18]Census LSF Hist. B. H.; 2008.366 SIHS.

[19]Helen Z. Wortis, *A Woman Named Mathilda* (Shelter Island: SIHS, 1978).

[20]Wortis, *Long Island Forum*, August 1973, 151; *The Sag Harbor Express*, October 7, 1886.

[21]U.S. Census Reports, New York Public Library edition of Ancestry.com. See also James Truslow, Adams, *History of the Town of Southampton*, 1918, for lists of the whaling ships.

[22]Ralph Duvall, *The History of Shelter Island, from its Settlement in 1652 to Present Time* (1932), 164-165. Duvall identifies twenty-five men who fought.

[23]Regarding the bounty, see Shelter Island Town Minutes for 1862, Shelter Island Town Hall.

[24]U.S. Colored Troops, 29th Colored Regiment, Death Certificates, NYPL.

[25]Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York, 2008), xi, 44-48.

[26]Ibid, 44-49.

[27]U.S. Census, Shelter Island, 1860-1900. Ancestry.com edition for the New York Public Library.

[28]Thanks to the Shillingburgs for telling me the location of Mary's gravesite.

[29]Interview with Charles "Jimmy" Hayward, October, 2013.

[30]"Authority of Mr. and Mrs. A. Scott themselves." *Shelter Island News*, 8/3/1940, p. 4 LSF/SIHS, 2001, 134; email interview with great-granddaughter, Karen Morgan-Wood.

[31]Griswold, *The Manor* 299; Shillingburg, *The Nicolls*, 24-26.

[32]Quoted in Noreece T. Jones, *Born a Child of Freedom, Yet a Slave: Mechanics of Control and Strategies of Resistance in Antebellum South Carolina* (Hanover, 1990), 86.

[33]E.P. Crapol, *John Tyler: The Accidental President* (Chapel Hill, 2006,) 249.

[34]Registry, undated Sylvester Manor Collection at the Manor. Thanks to Maura Doyle for showing me the Registry.

[35]Crapol, p. 241; Also Theodore C. Delaney, "Julia Gardiner Tyler..." Diss. 1995; see SWEM, special collections, W & M. Also, phone and email correspondence with Professor Delaney.

[36]Gardiner's Island, Household Census, 1880 U.S. Census Household Record, SIHS archives; Priscilla Dunhill, unpublished manuscript, "The People of Sachem's Neck," *LSF History* 1983.184 A, SIHS; St. Mary's Register of births and deaths, St. Mary's archives.

[37]Rollie Clark, interview, September 23, 2013. The process of boiling down bunker fish was then moved to "the Promised Land," Montauk, where menhaden (bunker) are still used to catch sharks.

[38]George H. Hildebrand, *Borax Pioneer: Francis Marion Smith* (La Jolla, 1982).

[39]*Suffolk Times*, September 8, quoted in Patricia and Edward Shillingburg, *Rascals, Rogues, and Gentlemen: Frances Marion Smith The Borax King*. (Shelter Island Heights, 2010).

[40] Interestingly, Elizabeth's birth date is given as March 22, 1864 in East Hampton. Register of baptisms, confirmations, and burials, St. Mary's. This conflicts with the 1872 date given in the Census.

[41] Toots Clark's memories, SIHS LSF. 2009. 56, Mr. Clark died in the summer of 2015 at 99 years of age. His idiomatic English unchanged and also quoted in "The People of Sachem's Neck", manuscript, Priscilla Dunhill, SIHS.

[42] *Shelter Island News*, August 3, 1940.

[43] Phone and email interview with Maury K. Harwood, M.D. MPH, January 2014. Dr. Harwood is my cousin.

[44] David Chalmers quoted in *Newsday*, February 18, 1987.

[45] The *Klorero* was exhibited, along with Klan robes, heavy ropes or lynching and African American as cartoon figures in the Suffolk County Historical Society show, "Hidden and Forbidden," at SCHS, Riverhead, in the summer of 2013.

[46] Furthermore, the vault at the Shelter Island Historical Society houses some records of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics. I am indebted to archivist, Phyllis Wallace, for this information.

[47] U. S. Census, 1940, NYPL. On the tearing down of Presdeleau, see Patricia and Edward Shillingburg, *Rascals, Rogues, and Gentlemen: Francis Marion Smith The Borax King*, 22-26.

[48] See brochure, undated, SIHS.

[49] 12/18/1980, *Shelter Island Reporter*, "The Old Beanery," LSF. 2009 and 2009.427.

[50] Interviews, Charles Hayward; Maury Laspia. July 2013. Pete Hannabury later became Judge Hannabury.

[51] Interview with Mr. Charles Hayward, October 2013, See also the *Shelter Island Reporter*, "Island Profile, Jimmy Hayward, March 14, 2013.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Interview with Lauretta King, August 2013. In another interview, Linda Zavatto explained that Kenny's teenage friends loved to hang out at the Chase house, sometimes after the Harbor Inn next door had closed up for the night.

[54] *Shelter Island Reporter*, Saturday, June 30, 1973.

[55] Interview, Linda Holmes, October, 2013. Email interview, Karen Chase Morgan-Wood, September 2013.

[56] *The New York Times*, July 4, 1993.

[57] St. Mary's Register of births and burials, various.. St. Mary's Registers at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, Shelter Island, NY.

[58] Email interview, Karen Morgan-Wood.

[59] *Shelter Island Reporter*, April 7, 1983.

[60]Interview, Louise Tuthill Green, May, 2013.

[61]Interview, Linda Holmes, October 2013. In the Churchyard one can only see Ben Chase and Willis and Albert's monuments. But the Church Burial Register provides the plot numbers of Elizabeth and Laura Scott Chase. Linda Holmes told me the story of a large white stone or boulder near the other monuments. But Father Peter McClean, thinking it was unimportant, rolled it out of the Churchyard.

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