

Early Slave Owners and Vine Lake Cemetery

Composed by Robert Tucker Gregg, April 2014

In early Medfield, a society of slaves prevailed to an unknown extent. Buried at the cemetery are these town leaders who were slave holders.

The Reverend Joseph Baxter [1676 - 1745]

He was Medfield's second minister, and his will was probated in 1745. In it he bequeathed to his wife his slave woman Nanny and named certain conditions of good behavior by which she could eventually gain her freedom.

"...and the service of my Negro Slave, Nanny, I give her freedom at my wife's decease." He afterwards added, "It is my will that upon condition my Negro woman shall not in all things carry and behave dutifully and well towards her said mistress, my wife, then shall she not have her freedom; but I give to my wife full power to sell or dispose of her for life at her discretion."



Nanny, or Ann as she was also known, had been baptized by her master on September 12, 1736, the same day in which she owned the covenant (a public profession of faith).

Reference is also made to Tony, Baxter's man who is paid for ringing the church bell in 1714. On November 7, 1758 his death is recorded. Less than a year later, record is made on August 24, 1759 of the death of Freelove Tony, perhaps his wife.



Doctor James Gerauld [1687 - 1760]

A native of France, he settled in the eastern part of Medfield by 1718 and operated a large estate there, cultivated with slave labor. His woman slave Ellen was baptized on July 16, 1738 and her son Nathan on July 11, 1742. Dr. Gerauld's Negro girl Deliverance was baptized July 16, 1738, and of his Negro women, Bethuel was baptized March 30, 1740 and Ketlin became a church member on December 9, 1744.

His will gave to his wife Martha "...other property, including negroes, excepting negro Cesar, who is not to be sold out of the family during his life..."

The death of an unnamed Negro of Gerauld's is recorded September 25, 1753.



Colonel Ephraim Wheelock [1733 - 1826]

While serving in the Revolutionary War, Ephraim kept as his body servant Worwick (or Warrick or Warwick) Green, a slave from Africa, who settled in Medfield and died in 1815.



Captain Samuel Sadey [1681 - 1744]

One of the founders of Keene, New Hampshire and an innkeeper at North and Dale streets in Medfield, he had a Negro woman servant named Keturah who was baptized September 12, 1736, owned the covenant the same day, and died March 15, 1742/3 at an unknown age.

Note 1: There were other slave holders in early Medfield, but this article only addresses slave holders buried in Vine Lake Cemetery with marked graves. The others {and their slaves with death dates}:

Deacon James Boyden {Violet d. June 3, 1780}
Jonathan Boyden {Kuce d. 1718}
Thomas Boyden {John d. August 1746}
Major James Cunningham {Violet d. June 3, 1780}
John Draper {John d. ?}
John Fisher {Pompey d. April 21, 1745}
Doctor Jabez Fuller {unnamed d. July 1, 1749}
Moses Hartshorn {Newport Green d. June 3, 1816}
John Greene
Joshua Morse {Dinah d. ?}
Nathaniel Smith {Jane d. March 27, 1745}
John Wight {unnamed d. June 6, 1767}

Note 2: There are no marked graves in Vine Lake Cemetery for any slave listed above or otherwise.

(Sources: *History of the Town of Medfield, Massachusetts 1650-1886*; *History of Norfolk County, Massachusetts, 1622-1918*; *Vital Records of Medfield, Massachusetts to the Year 1850*; Douglas L. Winiarski, Associate Professor of Religious Studies, University of Richmond, Virginia; *New England Historic Genealogical Society Register, Volume 62*).