BROOKLINE HISTORICAL SOCIETY BROOKLINE, MASSACHUSETTS

WINTER 2025

IN THIS ISSUE

The Brookline Historical Society is dedicated to the documentation and interpretation of Brookline's diverse history, to collecting, preserving, and maintaining artifacts of Brookline's past, and to sharing the story of the town and its people with residents and visitors alike.

The Society's headquarters are located in the heart of Coolidge Corner at the Edward Devotion House, one of Brookline's oldest Colonial Period structures.

The Society also maintains the 1768 Putterham School located in Larz Anderson Park.

The Society's extensive collection of historic information, photographs, postcards, and atlases can be viewed on our website BrooklineHistoricalSociety.org

Brookline Women Against Slavery, 1837-1838 by Ken Liss

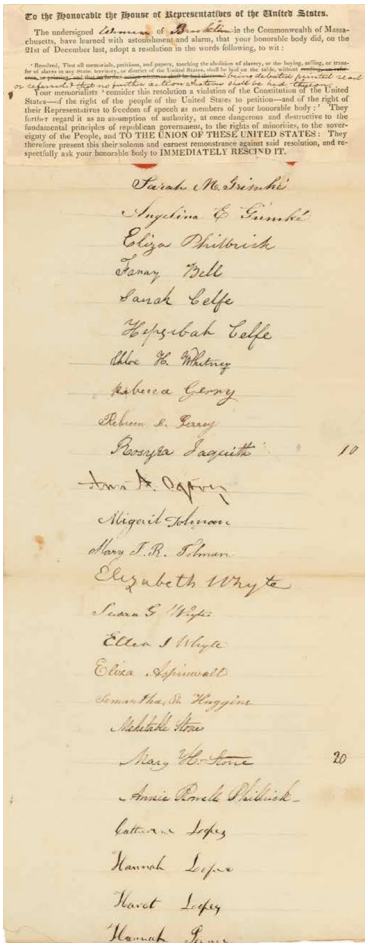
In February 1838 twenty-five women in Brookline signed a petition protesting the imposition of a so-called "gag rule" barring petitions on the abolition of slavery from the floor of the United States Congress.

The first two signatures were those of Sarah and Angelina Grimké, South Carolina-born sisters and leaders in the abolitionist movement who were staying at the home of Samuel and Eliza Philbrick on Walnut Street at the time.

Eliza Philbrick signed just below the signatures of her guests, the Grimkés. Her 16-year old daughter, Annie Rowell Philbrick, signed further down the page. Seven other pairs of Brookline mothers and their teenage daughters also signed the petition, on a sheet of lined paper with the petition text pasted at the top.

Unable to vote—that would not come, in national elections, until 1920—white women and free black women used petitions, beginning in the 1830s, as a way of engaging in, and influencing, public policy.

"[B]y petitioning against slavery," wrote Susan Zaeske in her 2003 book *Signatures of Citizenship*, "free women seized the radical potential of one of the few civil rights they were understood


To the Honorable the House of Representatives of the United States.

The undersigned [illegible] of [illegible] in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, have learned with astonishment and alarm, that your honorable body did, on the 21st of December last, adopt a resolution in the words following, to wit:

Your memorialists consider this resolution a violation of the Constitution of the United States—of the right of the people of the United States to petition—and of the right of their Representatives to freedom of speech as members of your honorable body: They further regard it as an assumption of authority, at once dangerous and destructive to the fundamental principles of republican governments, to the rights of minorities, to the sovereignty of the People, and TO THE UNION OF THESE UNITED STATES: They therefore present this their solemn and earnest remonstrance against said resolution, and respectfully ask your honorable body to IMMEDIATELY RESCIND IT.

Sarah M. Grimké
Angelina E. Grimké
Eliza Philbrick
Fanny Bell
Sarah Selfe
Elizabeth Selfe
Abba W. Whitney
Rebecca Gerry
Rebecca S. Gerry
Persyra Sagueith 10
Ann A. Dafney
Abigail Johnson
Mary F. R. Johnson
Elizabeth W. Wyeth
Susan E. Wyeth
Ellen I. Wyeth
Eliza Aspinwall
Samantha B. Huggins
Mehitable Howe
Mary W. Howe 20
Annie Rowell Philbrick
Catherine Lopez
Hannah Lopez
Harriet Lopez
Hannah Lopez

Slavery petition, 1838

to possess—the right of petition—to assert substantial political authority."
In 1832, William Lloyd Garrison, in a "Ladies Department" column in his newspaper *The Liberator*, had announced the formation in Providence of what he called "the 'First female anti-slavery society' in New-England."

Beneath an image of an enslaved woman and the slogan "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?", Garrison wrote of two errors that had hurt the cause of abolition.

Ladies Department column, 1838

"The first is, a proneness on the part of the advocates of immediate and universal emancipation to overlook or depreciate the influence of woman in the promotion of this cause; and the other is, a similar disposition on the part of the females in our land to undervalue their own power, or through a misconception of duty, to excuse themselves from engaging in the enterprise."

"The cause of bleeding humanity is always, legitimately, the cause of woman," he continued. "Without her powerful assistance, its progress must be slow, difficult, imperfect."

Women in New England responded, with many towns across the region forming their own Female Anti-Slavery Societies over the next few

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years, usually alongside separate male organizations in the same towns.

Brookline did not have its own such organizations, but the Philbricks and others—including their house guests the Grimkés—continued to work for the abolition of slavery nationwide. (It had been abolished in Massachusetts in 1783).

In April 1837, the annual meeting of the Dorchester Anti-Slavery Society featured separate speakers addressing the men and the women. The abolitionist Henry B. Stanton, addressing the men, got most of the attention in an article in Garrison's *The Liberator*.

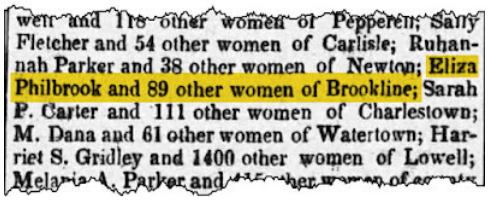
The Rev. John Pierce of Brookline "addressed the ladies" reported the paper, adding that:

"His address was to the point, and well calculated to advance the cause."

On January 2, 1838—six weeks before the petition noted at the beginning of this article—U.S. Representative William Parmenter of Cambridge introduced (despite the gag order) petitions from more than 3,700 women in 21 Massachusetts towns calling for the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia.

Among them were "Eliza Philbrook [the article got her last name wrong] and 89 other women of Brookline." (The names of the 89 other women—more than four times as many as would sign the February 12 petition—are not known.)

Other voices ridiculed the involvement of women in the movement. William Leete Stone, editor of the *New-York Commercial Advertiser* was in favor of sending freed Black slaves to Africa, mockingly wrote that:


well and 118 other women of Pepperell; Sally Fletcher and 54 other women of Carlisle; Ruhannah Parker and 38 other women of Newton; Eliza Philbrook and 89 other women of Brookline; Sarah P. Carter and 111 other women of Charlestown; M. Dana and 61 other women of Watertown; Harriet S. Gridley and 1400 other women of Lowell; Melania A. Parker and [illegible] other women of

Philbrick petition

"The spinster has thrown aside her distaff—the blooming beauty her guitar—the matron her darning needle—the sweet novelist her crow-quill. The young mother has left her baby to nestle alone in the cradle—and the kitchen maid her pots and frying-pans—to discuss the weighty matters of state—to decide upon intricate questions of international polity—and weigh, with avoirdupois exactness, the balance of power."

Garrison found Stone's diatribe so ridiculous that he reprinted it in *The Liberator*, calling it a "witless, indecent and barbarous description, from the pen of a leading conversationalist."

The Philbricks and others in Brookline continued their anti-slavery work. The Philbrick house, which still stands at 182 Walnut Street, would become a stop on the Underground Railroad after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

John Pierce and his wife Lucy—she was the sister of abolitionists Arthur and Lewis Tappan—were not as active as the Philbricks, but continued to be involved. John and Lucy Pierce were listed as the lead petitioners on an 1839 petition signed by 63 Brookline people calling for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and prohibition of the internal slave trade.

The anti-slavery movement was not monolithic, in Brookline or nationally, and Pierce fell somewhere in the middle, between the more conservative Stone, advocating sending enslaved Blacks to Africa, on one side and the more radical Garrison and more activist Philbricks on the other.

Pierce and the Philbricks had a famous falling out in 1837 when Pierce, trying to hold his congregation together amid the Congregationalist-Unitarian split, sided with the more conservative members of his church in preventing the Philbricks from letting a young Black girl sit with them in their pew.

The Philbricks left Pierce's church (now known as First Parish) in anger over the issue, never to return. But Samuel Philbrick and John Pierce continued to work together on town issues, serving together on the School Committee (along with William Bowditch, whose house was also part of the Underground Railroad). Philbrick was still on the committee in 1855 when one of Brookline's schools was named for Pierce, who had died in 1849.

Eliza Philbrick died in 1891 at the age of 98. Her husband had died on the eve of the Civil War, in 1859. Their daughter, Anna Philbrick Decatur, died in 1906. Hephzibah Bowman (neé Celfe), who died in 1912 at age 92, was the last survivor of the signers of the 1838 Brookline petition.

Philbrick house

Enslaved Individuals in Brookline's Old Burying Ground by Katie Hendrick

History of the Cemetery

The land for Brookline's Old Burying Ground, also known today as Walnut Street Cemetery, was allotted in 1779. It was the only official burying place within Brookline for 130 years.

Several well-known historical figures are buried there. Less known, however, are the enslaved, free Black, and Indigenous individuals whose final resting place is within the grounds. Thirteen of these individuals are known to be buried in the Old Burying Ground, nine in family tombs, and four believed to be buried in unmarked graves in the central portion of the grounds.

Brookline actively participated in, and benefited from, the institution of slavery. Though it was legally abolished in Massachusetts 1783, this was not the end of institutionalized racism within the state. It is essential to remember those who were forced to be property and who were dehumanized.

By naming those who once lived among us, we are able to acknowledge their humanity. The names that have been recovered thus far are: Adam, Boston (C. 1712 - 1762), Dinah, Ben Boston, Katherine Cuff (1766 - 1767), Venus (C. 1735 -1763), Charles (C. 1743 - 1771), Kate (C. 1756 - 1764), Felix (?-1765), Hagar (C. 1717 - 1767), Seco (C. 1725 - 1780), Sambo (C. 1739 - 1806), and Susanna Backus (C. 1779 - 1863). There are almost certainly others buried there.

Overview of Burial Practices

Family tombs

Throughout New England there are recorded instances of enslavers burying those they held as slaves within their family tombs (Knoblock 2015: 89). It is important to keep in mind that such a practice does not denote family ties or kindness. It may have been a financial decision on the parts of the enslavers.

This is a known occurrence within four tombs in the Old Burying Ground.

- The Boylston family tomb (#1 on map), famously the final resting place of Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, houses the remains of Boston.
- The Sewall-Walcott tomb (#2 on map) is the resting place of six individuals: Venus, Kate, Felix, Hagar, Charles, and Seco.
- The Davis family tomb (#3 on map) holds Sambo.
- Susanna Backus, an Afro-Indigenous woman either employed or enslaved by the Croft family is buried within the Croft tomb (#4 on map).

En.) Entrance to the Cemetery

Exp.) Rough location of the expansion of the Cemetery

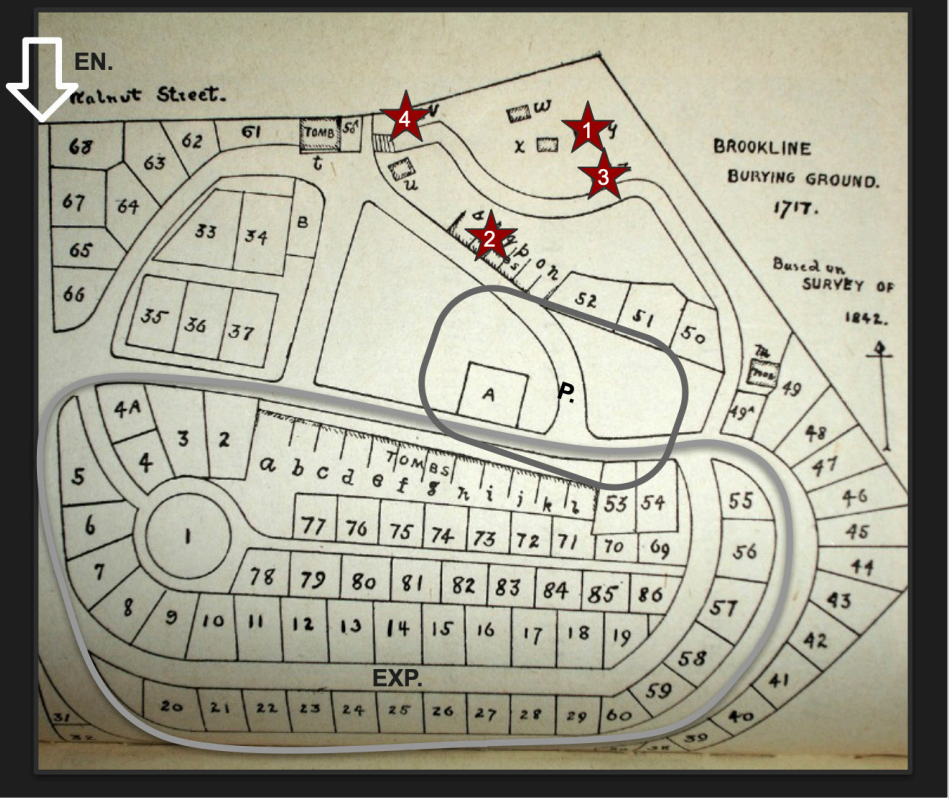
P.) Likely location of the potter's field
Katherine Cuff (1766-1767)
Dinah
Adam
Ben Boston

1.) Boston (c. 1712-1762)

2.) Venus (c. 1735-1763)
Kate (c. 1756-1764)
Felix (?-1765)
Hagar (c. 1717-1767)
Charles (c. 1743-1771)
Seco (c. 1725-1780)

3.) Sambo (c. 1739-1806)

4.) Susanna Backus (c.1779 -1863)



Map of Brookline Burying Ground, 1717

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The Potter's Field

A potter's field is a space common within historic cemeteries. It is a section of burying grounds in which those excluded from broader society were buried. This includes poor individuals, mentally or physically incapacitated individuals, people of color, enslaved individuals, and others.

The initial bounds of Walnut Street Cemetery included a potter's field, though there is little information regarding who may have been interred there. There is, however, a secondary account of the presence of a potter's field.

Harriet Woods, author of *Historical Sketches* of Brookline, Mass notes that it was on "the ground beyond the range of tombs which front northward" (Woods 1874: 221) Perhaps most significant in this recollection, Woods refers to the potter's field alternatively as the "burying place for the slaves" (Woods: 221), indicating that, at least within her memory, the potter's field was frequently used for enslaved individuals.

The only known names of those buried within the potter's field are Adam, Dinah, Ben Boston and Katherine Cuff. Unfortunately, when the grounds were expanded in 1840, the potter's field and other older portions were disrupted and destroyed by the creation of a carriage path. This even included marked gravestones which "were dislodged and removed, some being thrown in to fill up the roadway which was being constructed" (Woods: 223).

Unmarked and Marked Graves

There is a wide variety of manners in which enslaved individuals marked, or in some cases did not mark, graves. Visibility in the historical record is a nationwide issue, as many graves perceived to be unmarked are in reality marked in ways that the uninitiated or untrained are not able to see.

While many are familiar with colonial New England's usage of slate and marble stones, less common practices are harder to recognize. These practices include the use of organic and inorganic markers such as wooden markers, shells, pottery, and glass (Knoblock: 118). Such markers have the tendency to deteriorate over time or be removed by those who do not recognize their significance.

Similarly, fieldstones present issues in visibility. Fieldstones were (and are) an inexpensive means of marking graves. Their form is in the name: rough stones that were found within fields or other places. This was a method employed by individuals of all demographics within the colonies and early United States, as they were financially accessible and did not require craftspeople for shaping and carving (Knoblock: 89).

There are also recorded instances of more traditional headstones being used for enslaved or free Black individuals. This is the case in sites like God's Little Acre in Newport, Rhode Island, in which over 1000 enslaved and free Black individuals are interred. These individuals have gravestones with names, epitaphs, and even iconography.

Old Burying Ground

Unfortunately, there are no known surviving headstones for enslaved individuals in the Old Burying Ground, nor for any other individual interred within the potter's field; however there are secondary records of their existence.

Woods writes "There were few stones, but one bore the name of 'Dinah,' an old slave in the Heath family, and another the name of 'Ben Boston,' another slave of a still more ancient Heath" (Woods: 221), and Cummings lists "'Esq. Gardner's Adam,' a slave" within Burials and Inscriptions in the Walnut Street Cemetery of Brookline, Massachusetts (Cummings 1920: 9).

The other enslaved individual Cummings included stands out. Katherine Cuff's stone had an epitaph: "Katherine Cuff Daug* of Tobiah & Phillis-Cuff; She died July 12th, 1767 Aged 11 mos. and 1 day." (Cummings: 40).

Katherine was the daughter of two married enslaved individuals; Tobiah and Phyllis Cuff. Her parents were married in 1762 (First Parish: 102). She was one of their three known children. Her stone

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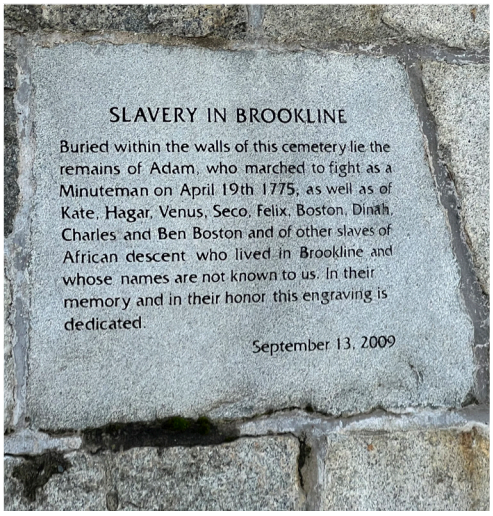
Potter's Field today

was remarkable considering many adult enslaved individuals were not provided with a headstone, and that even deceased infants of wealthier white individuals were often not marked with an epitaph.



Slavery plaque, Brookline, MA

Marking and Honoring the Graves

In September 2009, through the efforts of the Hidden Brookline committee a plaque was installed in the outside wall of the Old Burying Ground honoring the memory of enslaved persons – known and unknown – who were buried in the cemetery. Relearning their names of those we do know and finding all we can about their lives is essential in our journey towards justice and recognition.

Katherine Hendrick is a 2023 graduate of Boston University's bachelor and masters degree program in archaeology. Her thesis centered on burial grounds used by enslaved and free individuals and highlighted the threats these sites face both legally and physically. Her recent Brookline research was funded by The Friends of the Old Burying Ground.

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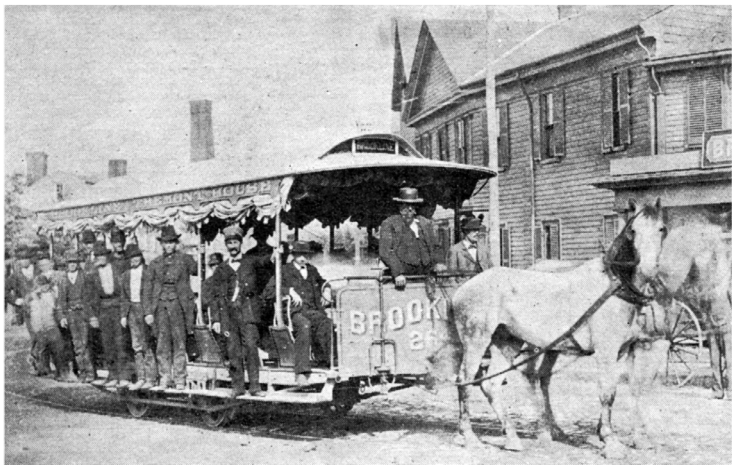
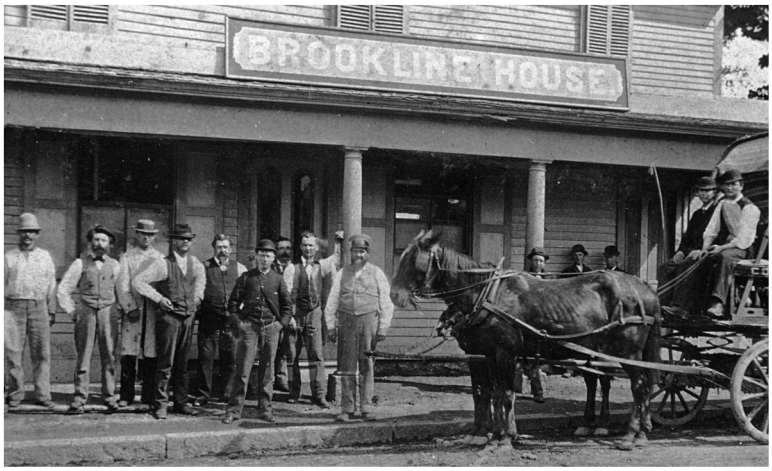
Lower Washington Street, Brookline Village by Ken Liss

Washington Street in Brookline begins at the town's border with Boston, east of the overpass that carries the Riverway/ Jamaicaway north and south. Washington Street then turns north, crossing over the train tracks in Brookline Village, while Boylston Street (Route 9) continues west. These photos show the stretch known as Lower Washington Street, a part of town that has seen—and continues to see—many changes over the years





The photo on the left shows a horse-drawn streetcar arriving in Brookline Village with passengers coming west from Boston. The Brookline House, seen at the right edge of that photo, is seen more fully in the photo on the right, with a Comstock, Gove & Co. wagon delivering bottled beverages. Brookline House was an eating establishment and boarding house that stood at that spot on the south side of the street for about 10 years, beginning around the end of the Civil War. There is a small parklet there today and - in an echo of the past - a sheltered bus stop for the eastbound #60, #65, and #66 buses.

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The block of stores on the left, shown in this 1870s photo, stood on the north side of Lower Washington Street, just before the street turned north to cross the railroad tracks. It includes the Brown Brothers fruit and vegetable store on the left and T.T. Robinson's grocery on the right. In the center, next to the doorway leading upstairs, is a sign for a hardware store advertising drainpipes, nails, powder, soft lead, and other products. The photo on the right shows Lyceum Hall, which stood just to the east. Built in the 1840s, it was a center for concerts, lectures, and plays, with retail businesses on the first floor. The sites of both buildings are now occupied by the Hearthstone Plaza office complex.

These two photos show Lower Washington Street as it approaches its turn to the north in Brookline Village. The building on the far left in the first photo and in the middle distance in the second photo is the Guild Block, a commercial building erected at the intersection of Washington and Boylston Street by grocery operator J. Anson Guild in the 1850s. It was later replaced by the Brookline Bank building, now the NETA cannabis dispensary.

The impact of the automobile is evident in these two photos. The photo on the left, from 1937, is looking west on Lower Washington Street from just beyond the Riverway/Jamaicaway overpass. It shows Gulf, Esso, Texaco, and Jenney Oil gas stations, plus billboards advertising Chevrolet and Chrysler Plymouth cars. The entrance to Pond Street is on the left and to River Road on the right, with the start of Brookline Avenue, also on the right a little further west. The photo on the right shows a close-up view of the Jenney Oil service station on the south side of the street.

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This 1956 photo shows Lower Washington Street from the west just before it makes the right turn (outside the frame, to the left of this image) north toward the split between Washington and Harvard Streets. Businesses in the block include the Davis Restaurant, Sagamore Liquors, Hughes Pharmacy, Village Shoe Store, Mutual Auto School, and the recently closed Brookline Theatre. This whole block was later demolished as part of Brookline's 1960s urban renewal effort and replaced by Hearthstone Plaza.

Photo credits: Public Library of Brookline; Brookline Historical Society

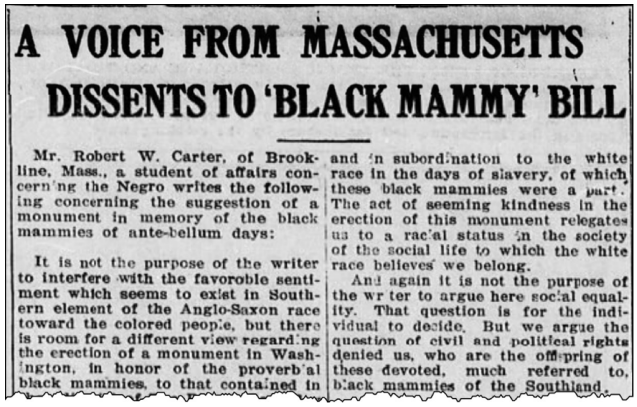
Help Keep Brookline History Alive! Renew Your Membership

Do you enjoy stories like these, plus walking tours, local history presentations, and members-only programs in historic locations? Your membership dollars and donations make all of this possible. Please use the enclosed envelope and membership form – or click on Membership on our website – to renew today. You'll continue to receive newsletters like this one and invitations to special members events, while supporting both old and new ways of discovering and telling the story of Brookline's past

Thank you for your continuing support.

February program:
Sunday, February 9, 2025, 2 pm

A Brookline Voice Raised in Protest:
Speaking out Against the
"Black Mammy" Monument
Hunneman Hall,
Public Library of Brookline



A VOICE FROM MASSACHUSETTS DISSENTS TO 'BLACK MAMMY' BILL

Mr. Robert W. Carter, of Brookline, Mass., a student of affairs concerning the Negro writes the following concerning the suggestion of a monument in memory of the black mammies of ante-bellum days:

It is not the purpose of the writer to interfere with the favorable sentiment which seems to exist in Southern element of the Anglo-Saxon race toward the colored people, but there is room for a different view regarding the erection of a monument in Washington, in honor of the proverbial black mammies, to that contained in and in subordination to the white race in the days of slavery, of which these black mammies were a part. The act of seeming kindness in the erection of this monument relegates us to a racial status in the society of the social life to which the white race believes we belong.

And again it is not the purpose of the writer to argue here social equality. That question is for the individual to decide. But we argue the question of civil and political rights denied us, who are the offspring of these devoted, much referred to, black mammies of the Southland.

In 1923, Congressional supporters of the so-called "Lost Cause" of the Confederacy pushed for the construction of a Washington, D.C. monument to the "Black mammies," African American women who cared for white children during the era of slavery and beyond. Opposition from Black leaders like W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary Church Turrell, and others helped defeat the proposal. All but forgotten are two of the strongest voices against the monument – and for civil rights: Robert W. Carter of Brookline and Maude Nooks Howard of Ohio. Ken Liss, president of the Brookline Historical Society, tells their stories.

This program will include a talk from 2 to 3:30 PM, followed by a Q&A.
Co-sponsored by the Brookline Martin Luther King Jr Celebration Committee and the Brookline Office of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Community Relations.

Published by the
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