

SEARCHING FOR PHILLIP FIELD

**THE CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF PERSONAL
HISTORICAL RESEARCH INTO NORTHERN SLAVERY**

SLAVERY IN MASSACHUSETTS

“There shall never be a bond slaverie, villinage or captivitie amongst us unles it be lawful captives taken in just warres and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us.”

Section 91, 1641 Massachusetts Body of Liberties

(See also Leviticus 25:39 – 55)

Phillip, a negro servant of ye
Mr. Danforth

Was baptised and owned the
covenant at First Church
in 1698

WHY SEARCH FOR PHILLIP FIELD?

CURIOSITY: THE STORIES OF PHILLIP AND OTHER ENSLAVED MEMBERS OF FIRST CHURCH ARE GENERALLY UNKNOWN.

HONOR: WE HONOR THE MEMORIES OF OUR SISTERS AND BROTHERS BY LEARNING AND TELLING THEIR STORIES

UNDERSTANDING: PHILLIP'S STORY MIGHT HELP US BETTER UNDERSTAND THE SYSTEM OF ENSLAVEMENT IN THE NORTH.

REPARATIONS: CAN WE FIND AND MAKE REPARATIONS TO THE FAMILIES OF PHILLIP AND OTHER ENSLAVED PERSONS WHO WERE MEMBERS OF FIRST CHURCH?

THOMAS DANFORTH BAPTISED 1623, DIED 1699

Freeman of the Colony, a “conservative puritan” who resisted extensions of royal authority in the colony during the late 17th century.

Treasurer, Steward of Harvard College

Magistrate, Court of Oyer and Terminer

Deputy Governor of the Colony



PHILLIP FIELD BAPTISED 1698, DIED ?

A servant in the household of Thomas Danforth, who was a freeman and full member of First Church in Cambridge.



FROM THE WILL OF THOMAS DANFORTH

“Item, to my Negro man Phillip Field, he approving himself a faithful servant to his master Mr. Foxcroft for four years time next after my Decease, I then sett him at liberty to be a free man, and his master shall pay him ten pounds money, and I also give him forty acres of Land lying at Cambridge Farmes, the same that I had of Samuel Goff Senr, provided always, in case he die not having issue of his body lawfully begotten, said lands shall come unto my grandson Francis Foxcroft.”

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? WHAT QUESTIONS DOES DANFORTH'S WILL RAISE?

WHO WAS FRANCIS FOXCROFT AND WHY WOULD DANFORTH MAKE THIS BEQUEST TO HIM?

WHY DIDN'T DANFORTH FREE PHILLIP FIELD OUTRIGHT?

DID PHILLIP FIELD ACTUALLY GAIN HIS FREEDOM AND HIS INHERITANCE?

WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW ABOUT PHILLIP FIELD OR THOMAS DANFORTH?

WHO WAS FRANCIS FOXCROFT SR.?

FRANCIS WAS A FIRST CHURCH MEMBER, A MIDDLESEX PROBATE JUDGE AND A FRIEND OF THOMAS DANFORTH.

THE DANFORTHS AND THE FOXCROFTS LIVED ON WHAT IS NOW KIRKLAND STREET.

FRANCIS MARRIED THOMAS DANFORTH'S DAUGHTER ELIZABETH.

FRANCIS WAS IMPRISONED DURING THE 1689 REBELLION AGAINST GOVERNOR EDMUND ANDROS, THEN RELEASED TO THE HOME OF THOMAS DANFORTH.

WHY DIDN'T DANFORTH FREE PHILLIP FIELD OUTRIGHT?

DANFORTH'S DAUGHTER ELIZABETH MARRIED FRANCIS FOXCROFT
SR. – DID SHE ASK FOR THIS BEQUEST?

PATERNALISTIC BIAS: DID DANFORTH ACCEPT ONE ARGUMENT FOR
“GRADUAL EMANCIPATION,” THAT ENSLAVED PERSONS NEED TIME
TO PREPARE FOR FREEDOM?

OTHER THOUGHTS?

DID PHILLIP FIELD GAIN HIS FREEDOM AND HIS INHERITANCE?

POSSIBLE OUTCOMES

FRANCIS FOXCROFT SR. FREED PHILLIP FIELD, WHO SECURED THE PROMISED 10 POUNDS AND 40 ACRES OF LAND (IN 1703, OTHER?)

PHILLIP FIELD DIED CHILDLESS BEFORE THOMAS DANFORTH DIED, AND THE LAND WAS BEQUEATHED TO FRANCIS FOXCROFT JR.

FRANCIS FOXCROFT SR. DID NOT HONOR THE TERMS OF DANFORTH'S WILL, BUT KEPT HIM ENSLAVED (UNTIL PHILLIP'S DEATH OR SALE).

HOW CAN WE ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS?

DID PHILLIP (OR FRANCIS JR.) TAKE OWNERSHIP OF 40 ACRES IN CAMBRIDGE FARMS (LEXINGTON)? CHECK LEXINGTON LAND RECORDS, LEXINGTON TOWN HISTORY, HANCOCK CHURCH RECORDS.

DID PHILLIP DIE BEFORE OR AFTER THOMAS DANFORTH DIED? CHECK CAMBRIDGE AND LEXINGTON VITAL STATISTICS, FIRST CHURCH RECORDS, CAMBRIDGE AND LEXINGTON TOWN HISTORIES.

DID PHILLIP REMAINED ENSLAVED AFTER THOMAS' DEATH? CHECK FOXCROFT'S PROBATE RECORDS

WHAT DO THESE SOURCES TELL US?

VITAL STATISTICS, FIRST CHURCH RECORDS AND TOWN HISTORIES PROVIDE **NO RECORD OF PHILLIP FIELD'S DEATH.**
(HANCOCK CHURCH RECORDS?)

LEXINGTON LAND RECORDS AND LEXINGTON TOWN HISTORY INDICATE THAT **NEITHER PHILLIP NOR FRANCIS JR. OWNED LAND IN LEXINGTON DURING THE EARLY 18TH CENTURY.**

STILL TO BE EXPLORED: FRANCIS SR.'S PROBATE RECORDS,
HANCOCK CHURCH (LEXINGTON) RECORDS

WHAT ABOUT DESCENDANTS OF “FAMOUS” EARLY AFRICAN AMERICANS IN MASSACHUSETTS?

BELINDA SUTTON

CRISPUS ATTUCKS

PHILLIS WHEATLEY

PRINCE HALL

BELINDA SUTTON

In service to the Isaac Royall Jr family of Medford

Belinda was bequeathed to Isaac's daughter

Successfully petitioned the General Court for an annual pension, (15 pounds, 12 shillings) paid from Isaac's estate

One child (Prine), no marriage or death records, no other known descendants.



CRISPUS ATTUCKS, 1723 - 1770

African/Native American ancestry, born in Framingham

First enslaved by Deacon William Brown, then freed (or escaped) to become a sailor

Died in the Boston Massacre

No evidence of marriage or descendants



PHILLIS WHEATLEY 1753 - 1784

Born in Senegal or Gambia, enslaved by the Wheatley family of Boston, joined Old South

Poet (published *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*), was an early abolitionist

Freed in 1773, married in 1778, impoverished after her husband was imprisoned for debt, both sons died in infancy



PRINCE HALL 1735/1738 - 1807

Enslaved (?) to Boston tanner William Hall, but appears to have been free by the 1770s

Supporter of the patriots' cause in the Revolution – encourage free and enslaved African Americans to serve

Founded the African Masonic Lodge in Boston

Abolitionist, advocate for Boston's African Americans

No recorded descendants



SEARCH FOR PHILLIP FIELD (AND OTHER ENSLAVED PERSONS) WAS ONLY PARTIALLY SUCCESSFUL

- We learned a little about Phillip Field and his relationship to the Danforth family.
- We learned nothing about Phillip's fate after Thomas Danforth's death or his descendants.
- The same was true for certain enslaved (and free) African Americans in Massachusetts who were better known in their lifetimes than Phillip Field.

FAMILY RESEARCH: WHAT CAN WE LEARN ABOUT OUR ANCESTOR'S PLACE IN THE STORY OF RACE AND SLAVERY IN AMERICA?

Check out your family tree ([ancestry.com](https://www.ancestry.com)).

Look for family histories, genealogies.

Internet searches can reference town histories and other documents where your family's name appears.

Where appropriate, dig into probate records, vital statistics records.

SAMPLE SOURCES

- **FAMILY HISTORIES:** E.G., F. E. Kidder. A History of the Kidder Family. Allston, MA. 1886.
- **TOWN HISTORIES:** E.G. Paige, Lucius R. History of Cambridge Massachusetts. 1630 - 1977 Boston: H.O. Houghton and Company. 1877.
- **VITAL STATISTICS, PROBATE RECORDS, OTHER PUBLIC DOCUMENTS:** E.G., RESEARCHING YOUR FAMILIES HISTORY AT THE MASSACHUSETTS ARCHIVES <https://www.sec.state.ma.us/arc/arcgen/genidx.htm>
- **OTHER COLLECTIONS:** HARVARD, MASS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

KIDDERS AND SLAVERY

Col. Reuben Kidder owned a farm in New Ipswich NH before 1763, when he sold it to Abraham Kendall, a blacksmith in the town. The farm included two dwellings, the smaller of which was nearer to the town center and was the home of “Col Kidder’s negro slave Caesar.” Charles H. Chandler *The History of New Ipswich New Hampshire 1735-1914*. 1914.

“A gentleman, now living (1852), says he well remembers when the Colonel used to come out of church, hand his wife into the curricle, and, when seated, his colored man Caesar would rein up his span of black horses and drive to his residence, much to the admiration of a large portion of the congregation, all of whom either came on horseback or on foot.” F.E. Kidder. *A History of the Kidder Family*. Allston, MA. 1886.