



# Longfellow House Bulletin

Volume 7 No. 1

A Newsletter of the Friends of the Longfellow House and the National Park Service

June 2003

## New Research on the Earliest Households at 105 Brattle Street

New research by Longfellow National Historic Site's Museum Manager Jim Shea and others has helped piece together the story of the pre-Longfellow residents and the composition and activities of the earliest households at 105 Brattle Street.

It is well known that John Vassall built and occupied the Georgian mansion in 1759, but only fragments of information existed about his slaves Anthony and Cuba Vassall and their children who lived with him. Henry Longfellow cherished his house because George and Martha Washington had lived there, but little was known about the "servants" they arrived with.

To fill in the gaps in our knowledge of the early inhabitants, Shea compiled materials from such sources as Harry Dana's papers, African American historian William Cooper Nell's 1855 book *Colored Patriots of the*

*American Revolution*, Samuel Batchelder's 1917 writings on the Vassalls at the Cambridge Historical Society, and a Vassall family genealogical website. He also culled information from Washington's papers and account books in the Library of Congress. Susan Long, an anthropology student at Harvard College, combined Robert Tracy Jackson's 1907 history of the Vassall and Royall family houses, Massachusetts court records and deeds with archaeological excavations on the grounds of the House.

Many articles throughout this issue



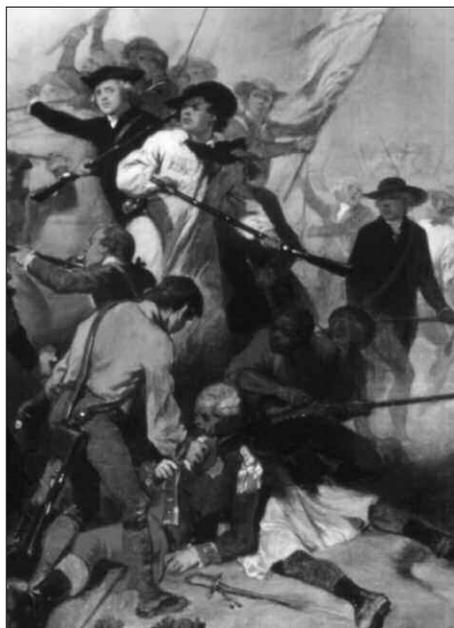
"Washington's Headquarters at Cambridge/Present residence of Mrs. Craigie," c. 1830. One of the earliest known images of 105 Brattle Street, now the Longfellow National Historic Site. The elms became diseased and were removed in the 1840s.

explore the early history of the House and all its residents, a project close to the hearts of Longfellow's family and an unfolding topic for our archivists and other researchers.

## Longfellow House to Participate in "Patriots of Color" Celebration

On June 16, 2003, the 228th anniversary of the Battle of Bunker Hill, the Longfellow NHS will join a wide range of Massachusetts historical and cultural organizations to honor African American and Native American soldiers who fought in this early battle of the American Revolution. Sponsored by the Boston National Historical Park, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Old South Meeting House, and the History Channel, the "Patriots of Color" celebration will take place at Boston's Old South Meeting House on Washington Street from 7:00 to 8:30 P.M.

The evening will be moderated by Massachusetts State Representative Byron Rushing, former director of Boston's Museum of Afro-American History. Prof. James Horton of George Washington University and adviser to the NPS on this subject will be the keynote speaker, giving an overview of the complexities of the patriot



Detail of Alonzo Chappel's 1859 painting "The Battle of Bunker Hill" showing African American soldiers. Courtesy of the Chicago Historical Society

of color experience in the Revolutionary War. Performances will include period music and a Revolutionary War re-enactment by the Natick Indian Plantation Group, simulating the multi-racial regiment at Bunker Hill. Neil and John Brooks, descendants of Barzillai Lew—an African American Cambridge resident who fought at Bunker Hill—will be guests of honor.

The "Patriots of Color" celebration derives from the National Park Service report entitled "Patriots of Color, 'A Peculiar Beauty and Merit' African Americans and Native Americans at Battle Road and Bunker Hill" by George Quintal Jr. Quintal examined militia rolls, pension rolls, town histories, and other military records to identify American soldiers in the initial years of the Revolution with African or Native American ancestry and created a kind of biographical dictionary of approximately

(continued on page 2)



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## In the Churchyard at Cambridge

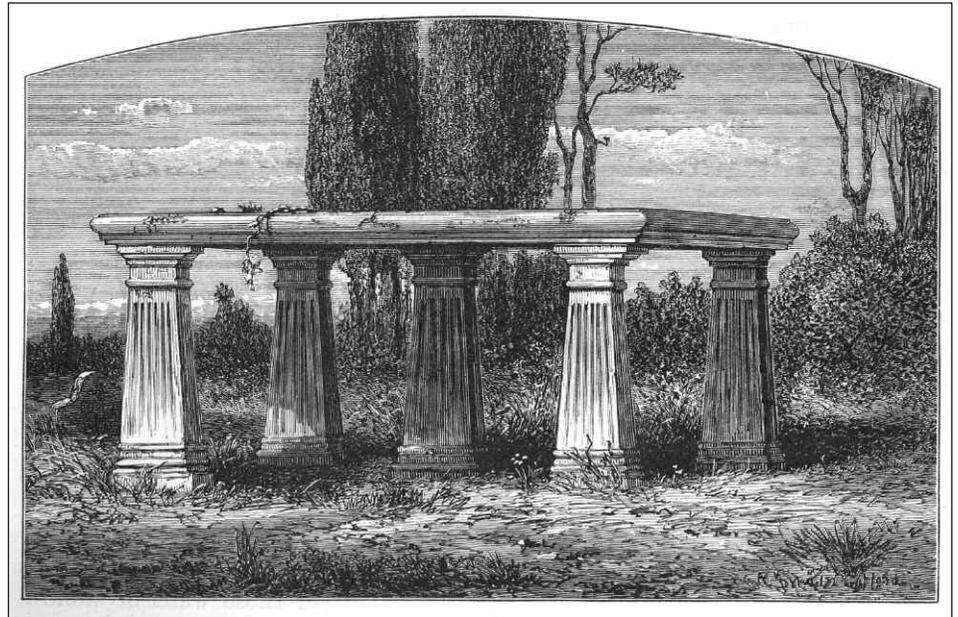
by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

*In the village churchyard she lies,  
 Dust is in her beautiful eyes,  
     No more she breathes, nor feels, nor stirs;  
 At her feet and at her head  
 Lies a slave to attend the dead,  
     But their dust is white as hers.*

*Was she a lady of high degree,  
 So much in love with the vanity  
     And foolish pomp of this world of ours?  
 Or was it Christian charity,  
 And lowliness and humility,  
     The richest and rarest of all dowers?*

*Who shall tell us? No one speaks:  
 No color shoots into those cheeks,  
     Either of anger or of pride,  
 At the rude question we have asked;  
 Nor will the mystery be unmasked  
     By those who are sleeping at her side.*

*Hereafter?—And do you think to look  
 On the terrible pages of that Book  
     To find her failings, faults, and errors?  
 Ah, you will then have other cares,  
 In your own shortcomings and despairs,  
     In your own secret sins and terrors!*



“The most impressive of all [the tombstones] was the Vassall monument, raised on pillars above the rest, and bearing no words, only the carved goblet and sun (vas—sol), —the monument beneath which lies, according to tradition, the bodies of two slaves.”

[Nearby were some of the markers with] “eloquent fissures in the flat stones where the leaden coats of arms had been pried out to be melted into bullets for the Continental Army.”

—Thomas W. Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (1898)

### “Patriots of Color” Celebration (continued from page 1)

120 individual soldiers at the Lexington and Concord, and Bunker Hill battles. It includes invaluable information about their military careers and lives beyond the war.

“Every once in a while a piece of scholarship comes along that changes the way you look at a historical event,” writes Alfred F. Young in his introduction to the report. “After almost three years of research George Quintal reports that there very likely were 103 ‘patriots of color’ at Bunker Hill (and may have been as many as 150). If there were as many as 3000 American sol-

diers at that Battle, this would mean that men of color might have been five percent of the total, which makes the percentage almost as high as at the Battle of Monmouth, New Jersey, when an estimated 800 men of color were seven per cent of a likely army of 12,000 soldiers.”

Martin Blatt, historian for the Boston National Historical Park, was the main organizer of this event. This celebration is free and open to the public and will be web-cast live by the History Channel at WGBH.org.

## Interview with a Friend...Meet Jim Shea

Jim Shea came to the Longfellow House as Site Manager and Museum Curator in 1992, continuing a distinguished career that included senior positions with the National Park Service in Virginia, Cape Cod, and six historic house museums in Manhattan.

**Longfellow House:** What were some of your impressions of the House when you first arrived?

**Jim Shea:** I really didn't know as much about the Washington connection when I came here. Also, I was told that everything was finished here—that everything was catalogued. That was not the case at all. In every room, closet, and drawer throughout the House, there was a vast array of paintings—some by Corot and Allston—and books, clothing, and thousands upon thousands of family letters, journals, and artwork.

**LH:** The amazing variety of treasures in the House was not fully realized as recently as ten years ago?

**JS:** Many people didn't know we had archives here. And the Japanese collections too were really unknown. I started a campaign to invite neighbors, community groups, and scholars into the House, and developed a "Troubles and Treasures" tour. It generated a lot of interest in the House and made me realize that there is so much more here than just the story of Henry Longfellow and his family.

**LH:** The Longfellow family considered this a house of great historical importance.

**JS:** For them, of course, it was the Craige House and before that Washington's headquarters. They took that history very seriously. Alice Longfellow began researching and writing what she called "The Chronicles of the Craige House." It begins in 1759 with the house being built and occupied by the Vassall family and continues through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When she died in 1928, her nephew Harry Dana continued and expanded upon her work. This book was never published, but their research material is still in the house archives. The Longfellow NHS staff and I continue the efforts of the Longfellow family with ongoing research and documentation. I hope someday this book can be published.

**LH:** So you're following their lead.

**JS:** They were very conscious of the potential here for education and inspiration. It became a passion on my part to get at the stories that weren't being told. Now we have a growing number of theme tours and pub-

lic programs that highlight the art in the house, or the rare books, or Longfellow and his circle of friends, among other topics.

**LH:** Tell us about some of your current research.

**JS:** There are really compelling stories of the many families that called this house their home over the years. Only recently we learned the names of the children of John and Elizabeth Vassall, most of whom were born in this house. Also, the names of the children of Tony and Cuba Vassall, all born into slavery and some born in this house. The white Vassalls were loyalists who fled to England at the start of the Revolution-



ary War. This history of the black and white Vassall families from Brattle Street deserves a greater amount of attention. I hope to attract a scholar who will continue this research.

**LH:** And after the Vassalls, Washington took over the house?

**JS:** Well, a few months before that, in June of 1775, the house became a barracks for John Glover and the 405 men of his Marblehead Regiment. They were recruited for naval duty in the absence of an official navy. One of the most colorful regiments in the Continental Army, Glover's men were mainly fishermen and sailors from Marblehead.

Later that year the House became George Washington's official headquarters. He and Martha, along with her son and daughter-in-law, lived here with their many servants and slaves. Members of Glover's Regiment became Washington's personal Headquarters Guard.

Tony Vassall and his family remained on the premises at this time, and Tony later worked for the Craiges who purchased the

house in 1791. This is a very important site because it is such a wonderful capsule of American history in one place.

**LH:** This research is real detective work:

**JS:** Uncovering information on these many people does take a lot of detective work—following a lead from a footnote in a book, or digging for the original source of a particular quotation, or searching the internet for relevant material. The internet makes a huge difference. I can sit at home and search archives around the country. But it is still a slow process.

There is an enormous amount of information on the Web pertaining to Washington and his headquarters in Cambridge. One of the best sources is the Library of Congress website with Washington's letters, general orders, and other primary source material searched by date. Also, over a hundred Continental Army orderly books from 1775—arranged by unit, date, location, and source—can be found at [www.revwar.com](http://www.revwar.com).

One of the biggest surprises was reading the expense account books kept by Ebenezer Austin. They record vast quantities of supplies, food and wine, small furnishings, and payment for various services. He was responsible for the supervision of laundry and food services for Washington and his staff at the Cambridge Headquarters here at the House from July 1775 through April 1776. In the account books, I uncovered many of the names and duties of the servants and slaves who worked at the headquarters.

**LH:** Don't such discoveries raise as many questions as they answer?

**JS:** Absolutely. For example, Where did all these people sleep? Were there outbuildings for domestic help? Were there slave quarters? Future research will be quite valuable in understanding the management of Washington's personal household as well as his headquarters.

**LH:** And after Washington left the House?

**JS:** Nathaniel Tracy purchased it as one of several "trophy" homes. He was famous for lavish parties and general high living—until he went bankrupt. Frances Ackerly is researching that period before the Craiges owned the House.

**LH:** What are among the greatest satisfactions of working here?

**JS:** The people I work with. I never would have stayed this long if it weren't for the wonderful staff here.

## A Brief History of the White and Black Vassalls

The patriarch of the Vassall clan was Major Leonard Vassall who owned vast property in Jamaica. His son Colonel John Vassall was born in the West Indies but emigrated to Cambridge and bought seven acres of land on the corner of what is now Brattle and Ash Streets, where he built his house. His son John Vassall Jr., born in 1738, built the mansion at 105 Brattle Street as another summer country estate—complete with formal gardens, orchards, and farm buildings—in 1759 on property belonging to his father. Two years later he married Elizabeth Oliver, and



Henry Vassall

together they had eight children during the following sixteen years.

In addition to three other Vassall relatives who lived within a half mile, across the street was John Jr.'s uncle Henry Vassall. In 1742 Henry Vassall had married Penelope Royall, daughter of Isaac Royall Sr., and together they moved to 94 Brattle Street. Penelope had inherited from her father's estate "One Negro girl call Present, One Negro Woman called Abba and her six children named Robin, Coby [also called Coby or Cuba, who was maid to Penelope], Walker, Nuba, Trace, and Tobey." Henry Vassall already had his own slave who served as a coachman, named Anthony, said to have been born in Spain in 1713, taken to Jamaica and then to Cambridge around 1741. When Anthony's owner married Penelope, her young slave Cuba, of African descent, was married to Tony as he was called, a number of years her senior.

As was common at the time, slaves were given the surname of their owners; hence Tony, Cuba, and their six children—Eliza, Abigail, Flora, Catherine, Darby, and Dorinda—were also "the Vassalls."

When Henry died in 1768, his widow sold Cuba and her children to her late husband's nephew John Vassall Jr. at number 105 Brattle Street. She kept Tony who oversaw the management of both households.

Tony and Cuba's young son Darby was given as a gift to the George Reed family of South Woburn, described in contemporary documents as "considerable slaveholders

[who] made a specialty of getting their stock very young."

Ten years later, following his master's death in the Revolutionary War, Darby made his way back to his parents' home in Cambridge, but found it had been commandeered by General George Washington. Samuel Batchelder describes the story: "For when the General arrived at his house he found the youngster disconsolately swinging on the gate. The Virginia planter, who had handled slaves all his life, good-naturedly proposed to take the boy in his service." Darby asked Washington the rate of compensation and according to Batchelder, "Such a left handed manifestation of the new and much vaunted 'sprit of liberty' was not at all to the taste of the commander-in-chief, and his emphatic remarks on the subject caused Darby Vassall to declare to the day of his death that "General George Washington was no gentlemen, to expect a boy to work without wages."

When the white Vassalls fled Cambridge in 1775, they left their Brattle Street houses in Tony's care. Records during this period refer to Tony not as a slave but as a wage laborer working on the confiscated estate of Penelope's brother in Medford. Tony had moved his family into a small house on the Vassall property. In late 1780 Tony Vassall petitioned the Commonwealth for the house and one-and-a-half acres of abandoned Vassall land he and his family occupied as renters and taxpayers. This request for land was denied, but he was given a modest pension which was conveyed to his wife upon his death.

In the year 1787, Tony Vassall purchased a quarter acre from Aaron Hill, a bricklayer, at what is now Massachusetts Ave. and Shepard St. He purchased five more acres either adjoining or across the street by 1793. In the deeds for these transactions, Tony was listed as a laborer, yeoman, and farrier respectively. The value of his land purchases was quite significant, especially for an ex-slave. Some of his money appears to have come to him through the estate of John Vassall Jr. in



Penelope Vassall

## Paine's Influence

In January 1776, Thomas Paine published *Common Sense*, hailed by many as the single most important document to move the general population toward independence. It sold an estimated 100,000 copies within a few months. Paine wrote an earlier essay pleading the cause of the Negro slave. Washington first read *Common Sense* at the Headquarters in Cambridge and wrote to Colonel Joseph Reed on January 31, 1776, "*Common Sense* will not leave numbers at a loss to decide upon the propriety of separation [of the colonies from England]."



Thomas Paine

1778. Tony died in 1811 at the age of 98.

Tony and Cuba's children became quite successful also. In c. 1814-1816, their daughter Catherine Vassall married Adam Lewis, who acquired the Tony Vassall house and a portion of his land. Their son Darby left Cambridge to settle in Boston. In 1802, he married Lucy Holland and had many children. He purchased his first property on May Street with his brother Cyrus. After his father's death, he purchased all of the property in Cambridge from his father's other heirs, and in 1827 he built a house there. Darby Vassall was employed and befriended by some of the city's most important and wealthiest residents, including the Shaws, Curtises, and Browns. His close friend Samuel Brown bequeathed clothing, provisions, and fuel, but most significantly, he released Darby from the \$2,000 mortgage on the May Street property that was used to build a "new brick mansion house" thereon.

In his later years, Darby fell on hard times and was forced to rely on charity. Throughout his life he had become such a respected member of the community that he was granted a place in the Vassall family tomb in Cambridge. (See poem on page 2.)

## The Vassalls and New England Slavery

On June 28, 1854, Charles Sumner declared in the United States Senate that "...[S]lavery never flourished in Massachusetts," that "Her few slaves were merely for a term of years or for life," and furthermore, "In all her annals, no person was ever born a slave on the soil of Massachusetts." Longfellow's dear friend was adamant, but wrong.

It is generally agreed that the first slaves in Massachusetts arrived in Boston harbor in 1638 aboard the trading vessel *Desire*. Certainly slavery in New England never reached the dimensions of plantation slavery in the South. Nonetheless, slaves could be sold away from their families, were subject to physical abuse, and had limited rights under the law.

Not all African Americans in early New England were enslaved. Some were born into free black families, some escaped from their masters, some managed to save enough money to buy their freedom, and some were set free after a designated period of bondage. Through resistance, petitions, and lawsuits, blacks fought to end slavery in Massachusetts. The Revolutionary War, in which thousands of African Americans fought and proved their valor, was a crucial turning point. By 1800, slavery was reaching an end in the region.

Generations of the Vassall family had depended upon enslaved blacks to keep their households running smoothly. Abruptly in 1774, the Cambridge branch of the family, who were Loyalists, abandoned their Brattle Street mansions, their property including their slaves, and fled before the tide of revolution. Those Vassalls remaining on the estate were the family of Tony Vassall.

In late 1780 Tony Vassall petitioned the Commonwealth for the small house and one-and-a-half acres of abandoned Vassall land he and his family occupied as renters and taxpayers. (See "Brief History..." on page 4.) The request for land was denied, but he was given a modest pension which was conveyed to his wife upon his death in

1811. While such petitions brought by slaves who had been abandoned by Loyalist owners were fairly common in that period, 1780 was an eventful year in the history of the demise of slavery in Massachusetts. The State Constitution was adopted that year; the first article within its Declaration of Rights proclaimed that "all men are born free and equal." The War inclined public opinion toward abolition, and the courts were willing to hear cases brought by slaves against their masters. In one of the first such trials, ten years earlier, James, a slave of Richard Lechmere of Cambridge, sued for his freedom. Local blacks raised money to carry the case forward, and the court found for James. Other cases followed, freeing individual plaintiffs around the state. In 1781, two important suits signaled the

waning of the slaveholders' rights.

Elizabeth Freeman, known as Mum Bett, was a slave in Sheffield. Following an assault with a hot kitchen shovel by her mistress, she called upon attorney Theodore Sedgwick who won her case before the county court in Great Barrington. She was set free and awarded damages and costs. At the same time, Quock Walker, a slave in Barre, sued for his freedom from a violent master. Suits and counter-suits were filed until in 1783 the Supreme Judicial Court, meeting in Worcester, upheld Walker's claim. Slavery continued after these decisions which freed only the litigants, but the highest court in the Commonwealth, citing the Declaration of Rights, made it clear that it would no longer support the legality of slavery. The census of 1800 recorded no slaves in Massachusetts.

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## Glover's Marblehead Regiment at the House

With the help of documents at the Peabody Essex Museum and some excellent histories, Jim Shea has unearthed more on a large collective resident of 105 Brattle St.—John Glover's Marblehead Regiment, which fought in many important battles throughout the Revolution.

Comprised of ten companies, numbering 405 men—some of whom were African American—they have been described by historian George Billias in his book *General John Glover and His Marblehead Mariners* (1960) as "rugged fishermen and sailors from Marblehead, who could handle oars as well as muskets." Glover's Regiment was authorized on April 23, 1775 as a militia, and transferred to Continental service about a month later. On June 14, 1775, the regiment was adopted into the Continental Army and became the personal Headquarters Guard to General George Washington and on June 22 took over the Vassall house and grounds for housing.

In August 1775, Washington corresponded with the Provincial Congress of Massachusetts as to the advisability of fitting out armed vessels, since there was no Continental Navy. Glover's Regiment was recruited for this purpose, and the first vessel was the schooner *Hannab*. On January 1, 1776 the regiment was reorganized and redesignated the 14th Continental Regiment.

According to Samuel Adams Drake's 1899 *Historic Mansions and Highways Around Boston; Headquarters of the Army*, "It is related that one morning Colonel Glover came in

haste to headquarters to announce his men were in a state of mutiny. On the instant the General arose...galloped to mutineer's camp accompanied by Glover and Hon. James Sullivan. Washington arrived on the spot...riot between Marblehead Fishermen and Morgan's riflemen. The Yankees ridiculed the strange attire and appearance of the Virginians.... He [Washington] ordered his servant, Pompey, to dismount...this the negro was in the act of doing, when the General, spurring his horse, leaped over Pompey's head...dashed among the rioters..."

According to Billias "If such a scuffle did take place between Virginians and Marbleheaders, it is more likely it was caused by the presence of Negroes in Glover's regiment. There was at least one colored soldier officially on the regimental rolls at the time, and probably a number of others were present unofficially. When Congress declared in 1776 that Negroes who had served faithfully at Cambridge could re-enlist, a number of them joined Glover. An officer who saw the regiment for the first time in 1776 wrote, '...there were a number of negroes, which, to persons unaccustomed to such associations, had a disagreeable, degrading effect.' But Glover was accustomed to 'such associations.' Negroes served aboard vessels in Marblehead's fishing fleet, lived in the same town that he did, and even attended the same church. Having worked and prayed with Negroes, Glover apparently had no qualms about fighting alongside them."



Vassall fireback in upstairs bedroom

## George Washington's Letters Reveal His Views of Black Soldiers

Among the many questions George Washington faced during his first months as commander of the American army was whether to accept African Americans as soldiers. From the Library of Congress's online collection of George Washington's letters, Jim Shea collected all references to black soldiers written while the general was headquartered at 105 Brattle Street. The sequence of some excerpts from Washington's correspondence tells the story in his own words.

On October 5, 1775 after convening eight top officers, Washington wrote: "An additional query was laid before the meeting: "Whether it will be advisable to enlist any negroes in the new army? Or whether there be a distinction between such as are slaves and those that are free? Agreed unanimously, to reject all slaves, and, by a great majority, to reject Negroes altogether."

Later in October, officers decided to bar slaves and free blacks from the Continental Army, and the Continental Congress approved such a resolution. Washington issued General Orders: "Any person therefore (Negroes excepted, which the Congress do not incline to enlist again) coming with a proper Order and will subscribe the Inlistment, shall be immediately supplied."

For the next two months, the general's orders to recruiting officers reminded them: "Officers are to be careful not to enlist any person, suspected of being unfriendly to the Liberties of America, or any abandon'd vagabond to whom all Causes and Countries are equal and alike indifferent... [Neither] Negroes, Boys unable to bare Arms, nor old men unfit to endure the fatigues of the campaign, are to be enlisted."

As 1775 drew to a close, however, two developments forced Washington to rethink his policy. First, in early November, Lord Dunmore, Virginia's royal governor, promised freedom to male slaves who joined the British army. Second, most militia enlistments would expire at the end of the year. With thousands of the soldiers around Boston planning to go home, the army could no longer afford to discriminate against men willing to fight.

On December 30, 1775, Washington issued new orders: "As the General is informed that Numbers of free Negroes are desirous of inlisting, he gives leave to the recruiting Officers to entertain them, and promises to lay the matter before Congress, who he doubts not will approve of it."



Edward Savage's "The Washington Family, 1789-1796" with George and Martha Washington, her two youngest grandchildren, and slave Billy Lee[?]. Courtesy of National Gallery of Art, Washington

On January 16, 1776 the general wrote to the Continental Congress: "It has been represented to me, that the free Negroes who have served in this Army, are very much dissatisfied at being discarded. As it is to be

apprehended that they may seek employ in the Ministerial Army, I presume to depart from the Resolution respecting them and have given licence for their being inlisted. If this is disapproved by Congress I shall put a stop to it."

Congress resolved: "That the free negroes who have served faithfully in the army at Cambridge, may be re-inlisted therein, but no others." Hundreds of blacks, including twenty who recorded their home as Cambridge, joined the Continental Army that same day. The resolution also led to the formation of the all black First Rhode Island Regiment, composed of 33 Freedmen and 92 slaves, who were promised freedom if they served till the end of the war. They distinguished themselves at the Battle of Newport.

On February 21, 1776, Washington "expressly forbid enlisting any Boys—Old Men—or Slaves," but put no limits on free blacks. The attempt to limit black soldiers to those who already served seems to have been ignored in the field.

### Recent Research at the House

*The Longfellow House archives contain over 700,000 manuscripts, letters, and signed documents and are used extensively by researchers from around the world. Here are a few recent researchers of the several hundred who use the archives annually.*

As part of a cultural exchange, in September 2001 a group of Park Service cultural resources staff visited the Gulag Museum in Kutchino, Perm, Russia. In return, Longfellow NHS hosted Gulag Curator Igor Lateshev in November 2002. Lateshev was invited to the Northeast Region Training Center to learn collections care procedures and discuss issues shared by these historic sites. Longfellow NHS staff demonstrated preservation techniques from unpacking and examining paintings to collection storage planning to rare book rehousing, museum security, archeology, and prioritizing workloads with limited staff.

The Gulag Museum at Perm preserves, documents, and interprets the last surviving forced labor camp for high Soviet officials, dissidents, and human rights activists of the Soviet era. Constructed in 1946 and in use until 1987, it stands as the best-preserved reminder of Soviet oppression when an estimated 20 million people were imprisoned and over one million people worked as camp personnel.

Michael Hill, researcher for historian David McCullough, was excited to find the Revolutionary War soldier's diary (transcribed by Frances Ackerly), a letter from Joseph Reed, and minutes of a conference with Ben Franklin, all unpublished.

## George and Martha Washington's Household

Judging from household expense account books kept by Ebenezer Austin, the steward at Headquarters, and information from Mount Vernon collected by Jim Shea, the Washingtons' Cambridge household appears to have been more crowded and diverse than previously thought.

Under the direction of Colonel Joseph Reed and then Lieutenant Colonel Robert H. Harrison, who served as George Washington's private aide and secretary, Ebenezer Austin oversaw the food and laundry for Washington and his staff. Austin kept detailed accounts of cash expenditures for such things as food, drink, clothing, and household furnishings. He also kept track of all people residing at the House, including family members, staff, guests, and servants. Austin's records first note the presence of himself, his wife and daughter just six days after the general's arrival.

Washington moved into the Vassall mansion on July 13, 1775. He brought with him a young enslaved man as a valet, who took care of the general's clothes and hair: William "Billy" Lee, purchased as "Mulatto Will" for £62 in 1767. On July 24 Austin recorded the

name "Adam Foutz, French cook."

On August 5 there were entries for "Edward Hunt, a cook; Mrs. Morrison, kitchen-woman; Mary Kettel, washerwoman; Eliza Chapman; Timothy Austin; James Monroe; Dinah, a negro woman; Peter, a negro man; and William Lee." These descriptions do not tell us who were free citizens, indentured servants, or slaves, but we do get a picture of a bustling multi-racial household living side by side in tight quarters.

In August, Giles Alexander was hired as a tailor and remained to the end of the war. Beginning in October, Josiah and Moses Fessenden were frequently employed by Washington as express riders.

Martha Washington, her son Jackie Custis (from her first marriage), his wife Nelly, and friends arrived after a two-week journey from Virginia at the Cambridge headquarters in December for Christmas. They too were accompanied by servants/slaves.

The account books also record many

food and wine items: "Cabbage, veal, butter, eggs, wild duck, salmon, cod, pears and apples, pigeon, tongue, calves head, oysters, beef, mutton, lemons, fowl, sausage, turkeys, goose, pig" and "One cask Me-deirra wine for Negroes." Furnishings for headquarters included spoons and forks, damask table cloths, linen, and candlesticks." Entries were made for clothing items for servants.

After her husband's departure in April 1776, Martha stayed on for a few weeks at Headquarters with her pregnant daughter-in-law and her husband's nephew, George Lewis—and certainly numerous "servants."

*Henry W. Longfellow's Journal,  
March 22, 1855:*

*Lundy Lane and old Mrs. Vassall (born a slave  
in this house in 1769) came to see me, and  
stay so long that Fields is driven away. . ."*

### Recent Donation

Professors Stanton and Lydia Garner of San Marcos, Texas, recently donated a two volume set of Ralph Waldo Emerson's prose works to the Longfellow NHS. Presented to Henry Longfellow by Emerson, the books were originally part of Longfellow's library. The first of two volumes is inscribed "Henry W. Longfellow/with old regards of R.W. Emerson/Oct. 30, 1869."

It is not known when the volumes left the House. The Longfellow House Trust gave a number of books to Harvard University in the 1960s and earlier, but *Emerson's Prose Works* show no sign of having been in a public repository. Family members received material from the House prior to its transfer to the National Park Service in 1972, and some of this material was subsequently sold. Possibly, sometime in the early twentieth century a family member sold these books on the open market.

The Garners purchased the books "decades ago" from a rare book dealer. Thanks to a series of fortuitous telephone calls, the couple learned of the Longfellow site and generously offered to donate the Emerson books to the House.

## Longfellow Summer Festival Schedule 2003

Sponsored by Friends of the Longfellow House, New England Poetry Club, & Longy School of Music

*All programs take place on the side lawn at Longfellow NHS and are free and open to the public.  
Seating is limited so blankets and lawn chairs are welcome. No parking available.*

Sundays at 4 P.M., unless otherwise noted

- June 15 Italian Cultural Day:** Celebrate the Longfellow family's love of Italian culture with special programs, including Dante-themed house tours.  
4 P.M. Poetry reading and booksigning by Maria Mazziotti, author of *Italian Women in Black Dresses* and *Things My Mother Told Me*.  
4:30 P.M. Greenland String Quartet performs Corelli, Vivaldi, and others.
- July 6 The Spirit Lives!** 12-4 P.M. John Glover's Marblehead Regiment re-enactment of Revolutionary War encampment, military demonstrations, & sea chanteys.  
4 P.M. Synergy Quintet, brass ensemble, period & patriotic music for all ages.
- July 20 Robert Pinsky**, former U.S. Poet Laureate, reads from his works, including *Democracy, Culture and the Voice of Poetry*. He will receive the Golden Rose Award from the New England Poetry Club. Booksigning.
- July 27 Longy School of Music** presents Mozart's *The Magic Flute*.
- Aug 3 Frank Bidart**, poet, editor of *Collected Poems by Robert Lowell*, reads his own work, including *Music Like Dirt*. Booksigning.
- Aug 10 String Quartet** featuring Raphael Hillyer, viola; Eugene Kim, cello; Gabriella Diaz & Edward Wu, violins. Pieces by Mendelssohn and Haydn.
- Aug 17 Mary Oliver**, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *What Do We Know: Poems* reads from her work. Booksigning.
- Aug 24 JasMiNe Trio**—Vanessa Breault Mulvey, Rebecca Jeffreys, & Michelle Nover—classical, romantic, & modern music for c-flute, alto flute, & bass flute.
- Sept. 14 Family Day** 1-4 P.M. Poetry, music, special house tours, 19th-century games, painting, and outdoor activities for all ages.  
2 P.M. **Envisioning the Poems**, talks & booksignings by Glenna Lang and Christopher Bing, illustrators of Longfellow poems.  
4 P.M. Musical concert featuring Armenian Children's Chorus.

## Spotlight on an Object

In each issue of the newsletter, we focus on a particular object of interest in the Longfellow House collection. This time our spotlight shines on a hand-stitched cloth doll made as a tribute to and said to be the likeness of Tony Vassall (1713-1811), a slave who became a businessman, landowner, and Cambridge legend.

The doll stands about eighteen inches tall and is attached to what seems to be the remnants of a doll-stand. The cloth-covered buttons and lined vest were all created from luxurious fabrics. The hair is made from human hair, and the eyes are ceramic. The three-cornered hat recalls Tony's vivid presence in the Revolutionary War history of the House.

According to a receipt and a note alongside the doll in the House archives, it seems that Longfellow's grandson Harry Dana purchased the Tony Vassall doll in 1943 from an elderly woman whose mother had lovingly crafted it when she was a girl and claimed to have seen Tony in 1820. Both Tony and his son Darby were well-known and respected figures in early Cambridge history and were often confused in local lore.



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Special area(s) of interest in the Longfellow House: \_\_\_\_\_

- I would like someone to call me about volunteer opportunities.

*Contributions are tax deductible to the extent provided by law.*

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