

Primary Sources

This packet contains the following primary sources:

- 1772 Flora Vassall Manumission Deed
- 1780 Land petition, Anthony and Cuba Vassall
- 1781 Petition, Anthony Vassall
- 1796 Laws of the African Society, Darby and Cyrus Vassall listed among members
- 1811 Petition for continuation of pension, Cuba Vassall
- 1812 School funding petition, Darby Vassall, Primus Hall, et al.
- 1861 Personal Liberty Laws petition, Darby Vassall, Frances Clark, et al.

Original scans of these and other primary sources can be found online courtesy of the following archival collections:

Petitions: <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/antislaverypetitionsma>

Laws of the African Society: <https://www.masshist.org/database/573>

1456
Benjamin Perrott
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appeared and acknowledged "his withinwritten instrument" his voluntary Act and Deed before me for Perrott Act of peace Made at Camb. Nov. 30. 1772. before me J. M. M. M. M. Reg. under,

Oliver Penrose
them?

I know all Men by their parents that I Oliver Penrose of Wyford
in the County of Wiltshire in this England. My husbandman I consider
him of the sum of sixty pounds to me in land. I have Money paid
by Oliver Penrose of Wyford in the County of Wiltshire & forward
My husbandman the receipt thereof. I do fully acknowledge do hereby
give grant sell & convey unto the said Oliver Penrose his heirs and
assigns forever a certain tract of land and township of Wyford in
the County of Wiltshire being and being in the Township of Wyford con-
taining by estimation fifty six Acres more or less being bounded at the
north easterly corner at a white oak in Oliver Penrose's lease then
northward by land of Oliver Penrose to a pitch pine tree then to
a white oak then to a pine by the said Penrose land and then north
and west by said Wood & Robert Penrose's northward to a heap
of stones by or near a pond meadow then southward to a white oak
then eastward & northward by the land of Mr. John Penrose to a white
oak then to a great Rock by the Easterly End of Wyford Pond & called
then southward to the ground first named and then eastward
thirty Acres bounded at the north northwest corner at a pine standing
on the northwest side of a Hill called the windmill Hill then
southward by Oliver Penrose & John Penrose's land to a white
oak then by the lot called the lot, one lot to a king of stones
then northward to a heap of stones by or near the hunting farms
meadow then westward by land and meadows belonging to the
owners of the hunting farms meadow to the boundary first named
To Have and to hold the same to the said Oliver Penrose his heirs to his
and their heirs forever as the lord farmer And do covenant with the said
Oliver Penrose his heirs & assigns that I am lawfully seized in fee of the
lands that they are free of all servitudes that I have good right
to sell and convey the same to the said Oliver Penrose his heirs
and that I will warrant and defend the same to the said Oliver Penrose
Penrose his heirs & assigns forever against the lawful claims & demands
of all persons. Witness my hand & seal of the County of Wiltshire the
seal this seventh day of November Anno Domini the thousand
seven hundred and fifty nine and in the ninth year of the Reign
of our Sovereign Lord George the third by the Grace of God of Great
Brittain &c. King &c. Oliver Penrose and John Penrose & John
Penrose of Oliver Penrose Penrose have signed Oliver Penrose's Will to Sep. 10. 1771.
the within named Oliver Penrose appeared & acknowledged the within instrument
to be his free act & deed before me in the County of Wiltshire of Peace
Mid. J. Lamb. Nov. 30. 1772. And testeth by the seal of the County of Wiltshire
Oliver Penrose

466,

I know all Men by their parents that I know their Keys of Weyford in the
 County of Middlebury & Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England
 german In Consideration of thirty three pounds Six Shillings & Eight pence
 lawful Money paid me by Hachar Keys of Weyford in the
 Province & County aforesaid Taylor The Knight shereof I do
 hereby

[illegible][illegible]

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To the Honble Council & House of Representatives for
the State of the Massachusetts Bay in General Court
assembled - Humbly shews the Petition of Anthony
Vassall & Mary his wife, of Cambridge in the County of
Middlesex Yeoman.

That in the commencement
of the present war, he was the servant of Adam Bane -
Squire Vassall & was the said Mary his wife the servant
of Mr John Vassall late of Cambridge. The winter - he
his little family have since that time occupied a
small tenement, with three quarters of an acre of
land, part of Mr John Vassall's estate in Cambridge
and has paid therefor a reasonable rent, and all the
taxes that were assessed upon him. They are now
considerably advanced in life, and feel an anxious
concern for their future support of themselves & children.
The earlier part of their lives is spent in the ser-
vice of their several masters, and the magistrates
will have discovered that ^{they} are self supporting in such
they might otherwise have expected from them -
the said Your Petitioners now improved is not suffi-
cient to supply them with such vegetables as are neces-
sary for their family use, and their little wo-
men are that they can't depend on or continue

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possession of the same - they might however provide
themselves a tolerable subsistence by their industry & labour
if this Honble Court would grant them a free hold
in the Premises and a one quarter of an acre of adjoining
land & that which they now improve, a detachment of so
small a parcel of land from the whole estate, they apprehend
cannot be of any disadvantage to the remainder, but if this
Honble Court should so think proper to give them so large
an interest in the Premises, as they pray that the possession
of the same may be secured to them for life, upon paying
some reasonable rent, and the taxes assessed on any other
more equitable manner that this Court shall determine

And as in duty bound will ever pray -

Anthony Vassall
Mary Vassall

in Council Sep. 28. 1780

Read & Ordered. That John Ellis Esq. with such as they
Honble House shall join be committed to take
this Petition into consideration & to report what
may be proper to be done thereon

Anthony Vassall
Mary Vassall

Harvard University - Collection Development Department, Widener Library, HCL / Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions; Massachusetts Archives Collection. v.186-Revolution Petitions, 1779-1780. SC1/series 45X. Massachusetts Archives. Boston, Mass.

1780 Land petition, Anthony and Cuba Vassall

In 1780, the Massachusetts General Court (the legislature), which had authorized the seizure of "properties abandoned by Loyalists, prepared to sell the John Vassall Estate to private owners. Anthony (also called Tony, and signed his own mark as a "T") and Cuba Vassall faced eviction. Likely with the help of a literate community member, they petitioned the General Court to be allowed to remain on their small portion of the estate and to continue cultivating an acre of land. The petition (using strategic language aimed at persuading the legislators) was unsuccessful.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts 1781
To the honorable Senate and
honorable House of Representatives
in General Court assembled

The memorial of Anthony
Vassall of Cambridge in the County
of Middlesex a negro man
humbly sheweth

That he was a Slave of Madam
Vassall, and his wife Boby the slave
of John Vassall both late of said County
bridge, till they went out of the County
they - that since their ^{small} absence, they
have inhabited a ~~little~~ ^{small} tenement
Mr John Vassall's estate, and improved
a little spot of land of about one acre
lying adjacent to their house, for which
he has cheerfully paid a reasonable
rent and all the taxes that have been
assessed upon them - that your more
valiant has a large family of children
to maintain, and being an old man and
his wife, who was of great help to him

Anthony Vassall
Petitioner

W. Hendon
Deacon
Capt. Patch

Harvard University - Collection Development Department, Widener Library, HCL / Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions; Massachusetts Archives Collection.
v.231-Revolution Resolves, 1781. SC1/series 45X. Massachusetts Archives. Boston, Mass.

1781 Petition, Anthony Vassall (first page)

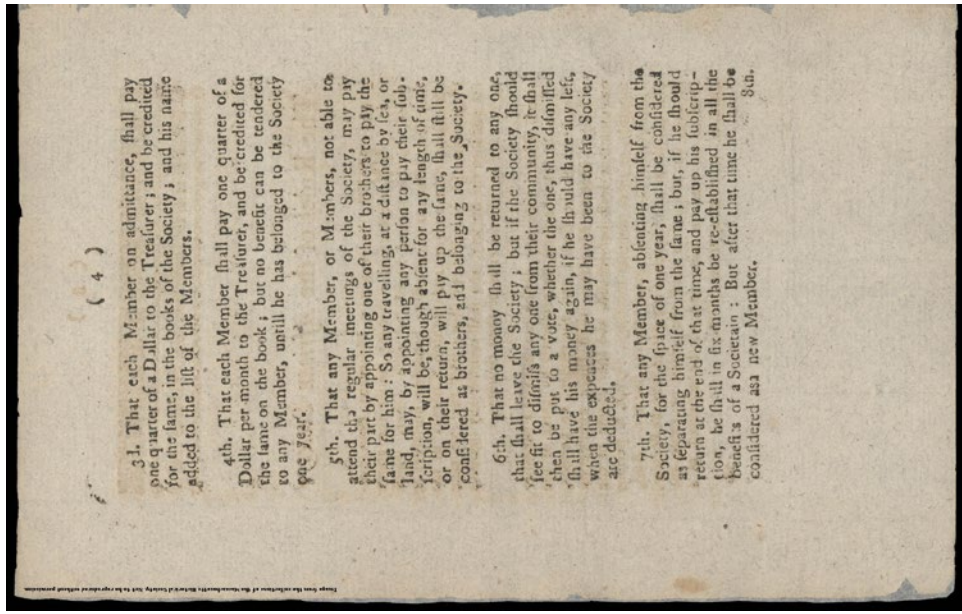
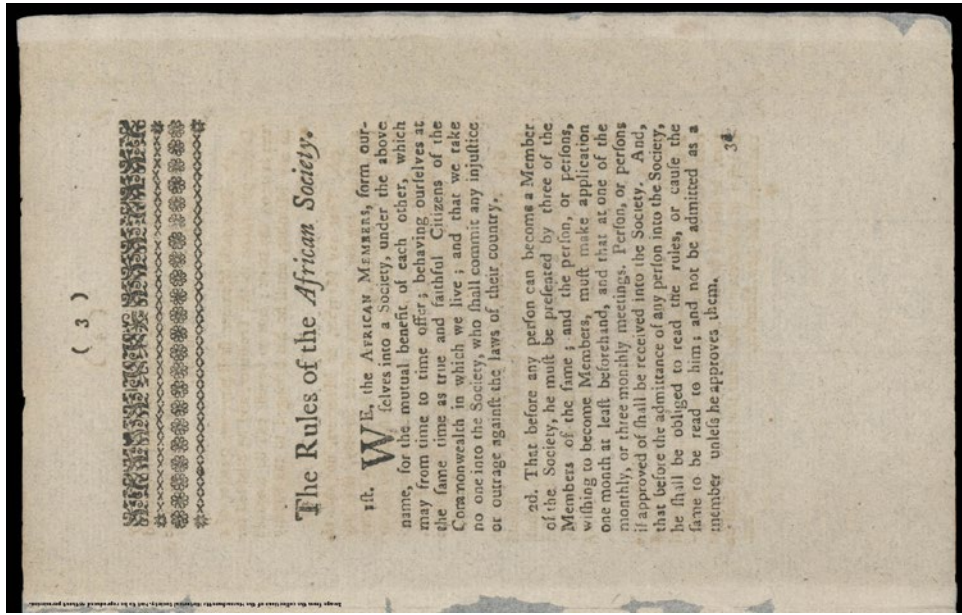
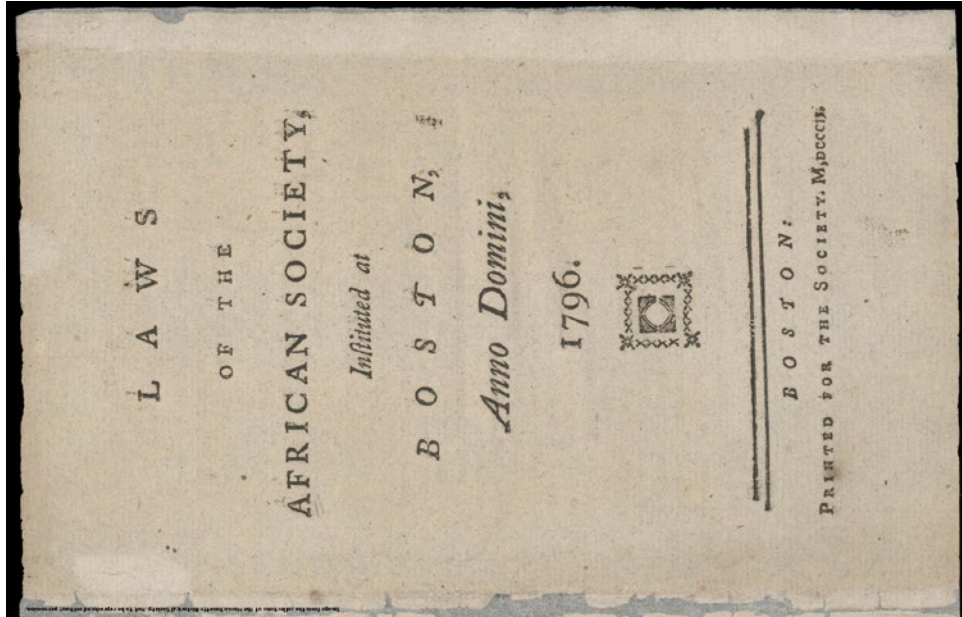
Several months after their first petition, Anthony Vassall filed a second petition, noting that "though dwelling in a land of freedom, both himself and his wife have spent almost sixty years of their lives in slavery." Though he did not retain the rights to his house or land, Anthony Vassall was granted £12 annually. This petition bears his mark, a T.

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being sick; he finds himself exceedingly
bothered to support himself, his wife
and little flock with a sufficiency of
bread; and ~~you cannot but be~~
seeing, that if his house should be
taken from him, and he be denied the
improvement of the little spot of land,
which by the most careful cultivation
has been the greatest support of
his family, that himself his wife and
little ones must ~~thrust themselves~~
~~of these upon charity of others, and~~
be reduced to wander abroad, and adopt
the hard necessity of begging for a little
bread; our honorable Court to except
by ~~these~~ honorable Court to except
the tenement and little spot of land
above mentioned from the sale of the
said Vassall's estate; and that ~~the~~ title
to the same may be vested in your memo-
rialist and his wife, during their na-
tural ~~lives~~ ^{lives} in any way and upon any
conditions, your honors prudence & huma-

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nity shall direct. Your memorialist
begs leave to observe, that though dwelling
in a land of freedom, both himself and
his wife have spent almost fifty years
of their lives in slavery; and that though
deprived of what ^{now} makes them happy he
finds satisfaction yet they have ever
lived of honesty and have been faith-
ful in their masters service. Your me-
morialist cannot therefore but hope
that your honors when you reflect
that he and his wife ~~and~~ are per-
manently in life, and in a little time
must leave it, that they shall not
be denied the sweets of freedom there
remainder of their days by being reduc-
ed to the painful necessity of begging
for bread

As an duty bound will ever
his

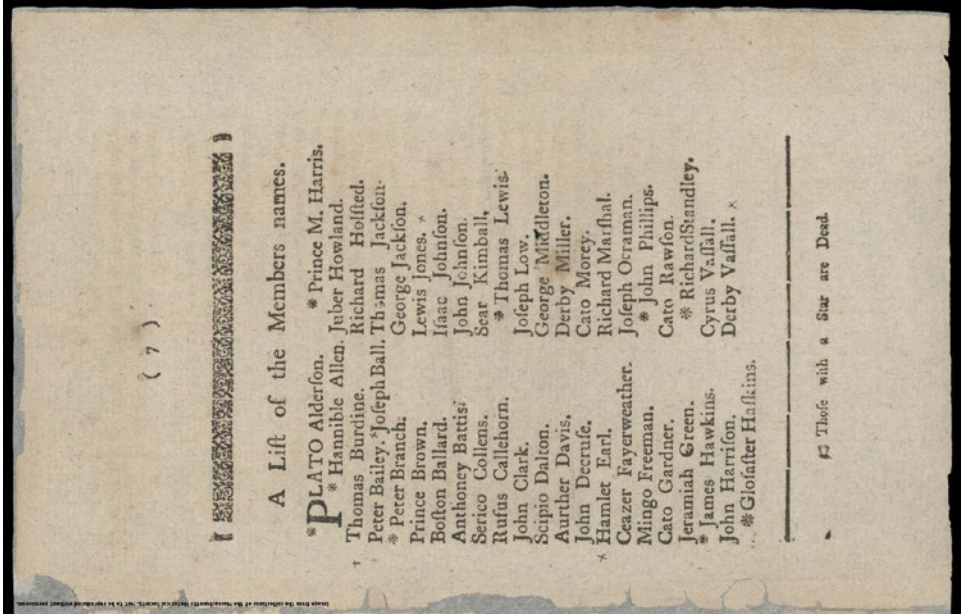
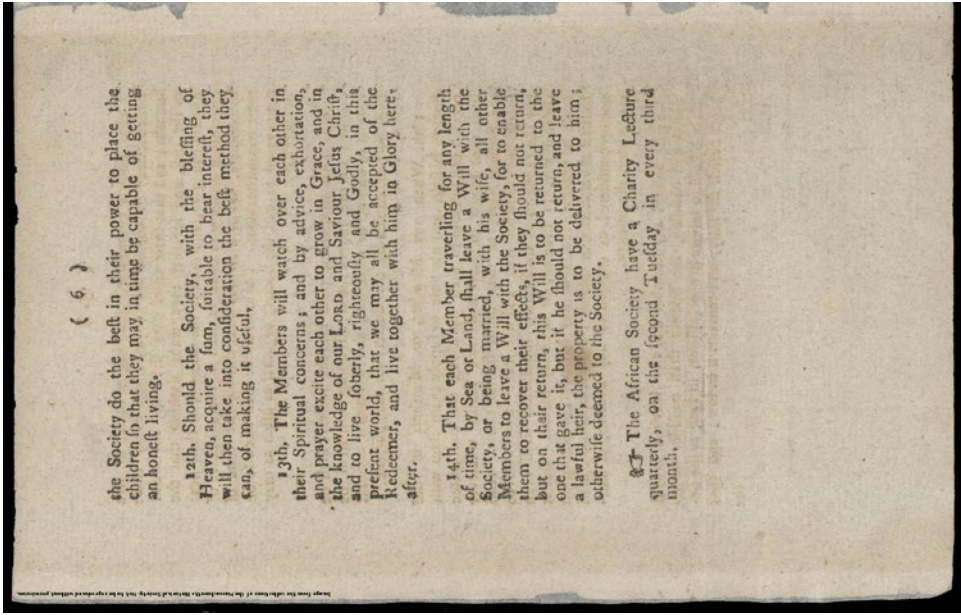
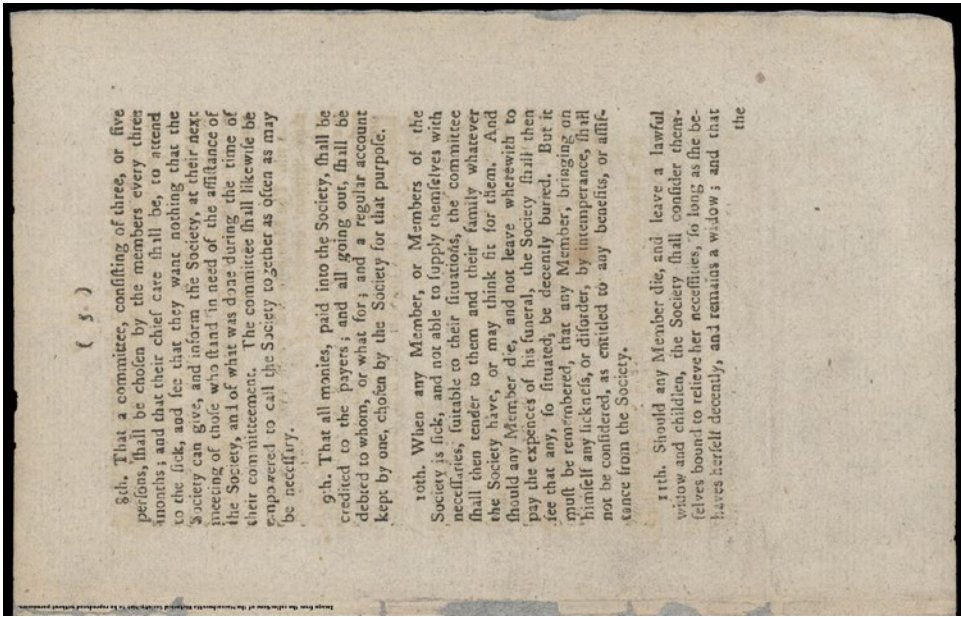
I may
Anthony T Vassall
Mark



“Laws of the African Society, Instituted at Boston, Anno Domini 1796,” Massachusetts Historical Society Collections Online.

1796 Laws of the African Society, Darby and Cyrus Vassall listed among members

Darby and his brother Cyrus Vassall moved to Boston as young adults and become deeply involved in the Black community of Beacon Hill. In 1796, they were among 44 founding members of the African Society, a mutual aid association for the community. The African society used monthly member dues and a quarterly “charity lecture” (often on the history of slavery) to support their members during illness and to provide death benefits to their families. Cyrus also served as a teacher at a new school for Black students.



To the Honorable the Senate and
House of Representatives of the Common-
wealth of Massachusetts in General Court
assembled - Anthony Vassall

Vassall a native of Africa that by a
Resolve of the General Court helped on
the sale of February seventeen hun-
dred and eighty one there was granted
to Anthony Vassall, the husband of your
Petitioner a Pension of twelve pounds
lawful money, which was duly provided
to be paid out of the proceeds of the Estates
of John Vassall Esquire late of Cam-
bridge in the County of Middlesex,
Absentee - and now your Petitioner would
represent that said Pension, as may fully
be made to appear, was granted to her
said husband on her your Petitioner's ac-
count & for her support out of the said
John Vassall's ^{confiscated} Estates, ~~unpaid~~ as he was
prior to the Revolution, and at the time
~~of the confiscation~~, the domestic slave & de-
pendent of said John Vassall & her said
husband was not. But, as the grant was
in his name, and he is lately deceased, and
he is no longer, by the terms of said

1811 Petition for continuation of pension,
Cuba Vassall

After the death of her husband Anthony in
1811, Cuba Vassall filed a petition to have the
annual pension granted in her own name.
Although her petition was successful, Cuba
died months later in 1812. This petition spells
her name "Cuby," and bears her "mark," an
X.

Resolve entitled to the benefit thereof, tho'
now at a very advanced period of life
and destitute of other regular means of sup-
port, she therefore begs your Honors
to take pity on her humble state & being
the premises, to grant the continuance
of the said pension of twelve pounds
lawful money to her during the remnant
of her life & direct the same to be paid
out of the Treasury of the Commonwealth
and as in duty bound shall ever pray -
Cuby ~~X~~ ^{by Vassall}
mark -

To the Hon. the Senate and House of Representatives
of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, in General Court
assembled, the petition of the Subscribers, citizens of
Boston, humbly represents, that the blessings of educa-
tion have been extended to the children of themselves
and other people of colour in this town, but not
in so general a manner as is believed to be
practicable; that they, and others, their associates,
have been several years united as an African
School association, and have provided an in-
structor, from whose labours much benefit has
resulted to the town; that their expenses have
been chiefly defrayed by a few benevolent
gentlemen in Boston, and partly by subscription
of the association, but that they think voluntary
subscription less likely to afford permanent support
to such a valuable institution, than the same
might receive by an act of incorporation, wherefore
they pray that they and their associates may be incorpo-
rated into a Society by the name of the African School
association, with such privileges and under such re-
strictions as to your Honours may seem good

Primus Hall
Forster James
And Vassall
John Gray
John Bacon
Dale Tattle

Massachusetts Anti-Slavery and Anti-Segregation Petitions; Passed Acts; St. 1861, c. 91, SC1/series 229. Massachusetts Archives.
Boston, Mass.

1812 School funding petition, Darby Vassall, Primus Hall, et al.

Darby Vassall, age 43, joined activist and family friend Primus Hall in a petition to incorporate the "African School Association" for Beacon Hill's Black students, eventually resulting in the construction of the Abiel Smith School two decades later. The petition notes that the small group of signatories had been providing an instructor paid by donations. Prior to his death the previous year, Darby's brother Cyrus Vassall had served as a teacher for the Association.

To the Senate and House of
Representatives of the
Commonwealth of Massachusetts,

The Colored Citizens of Boston
feeling the danger to which the English
Slave Bill exposes them though free
U. Citizens of Massachusetts, and bravely
ties closer in many instances than
those of race alone ~~to~~ fugitives from
slavery, earnestly remonstrate against
the repeal of the Personal Liberty Law

R. M. Washington

Mary Ann Washington

5. Steam-bury

Phil. A. Sardin

Cornelius Thernay

W. H. Harvey

C. d. Sterns

John Becker

John (Philes

L. A. Langsten

Mary Griffin

Wm. C. Stevenson

Dr. W. J. Johnson

L. A. Sutter

Robert Morris,
D. J. T. & Co.

Lucas Brown

Joseph Johnson
 George Hill
 Lemuel Brown
 Charles Anthony
 Ralph McKee
 Wm H Jones
 George W. Fisher
 John Scott
 Myrles Brown
 William Kant
 Wm H Morgan
 Wm Fisher
 David Willard
 Mark Howard
 J. Williams

Joseph Johnson
George Hill
Lemuel B. urr
Charles Anthony
Ralph W. Beck
Wm H. Jones
Hazen W. Fisher
John Salt
Myers Brown
William Kent
Wm B. Morgan
Wm Fisher
Dorcy Willard
M. L. Hewend
J. Williams

John Quinn