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· FORTY ACRES: The Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum

The archives at the Porter-Phelps-Huntington House Museum offer the historian of the United States a number of unique opportunities. Since the publication of Lorenzo Johnston Greene The Negro in Colonial New England in 1942, historians have been attempting to reconstruct the complex history of African Americans in colonial England. Following the lead of Greene are the works of Benjamin Quarles, The Negro in the American Revolution (1961), as well as numerous articles and at least two notable monographs: Lamont D. Thomas Rise To Be A People: A Biography of Paul Cuffe (1986) and William D. Persen's Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England (1988). The works of Thomas and Persen are example because they provided case studies of the American colonial experience in specific regions of New England. What is still needed is an historical study which places the African Americans in specific households, much like the work Our Nig: or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black [Mass, c. 1830s]. The work of Carl R. Woodward, Plantation in Yankeeland: The Story of Cocumscussoc, Mirror of Colonial Rhode Island (1971), in its attempt to reconstruct the plantations history, focuses almost exclusively on the Europeans. Blacks, who composed the major labor force, are only mentioned in passing, and as Slaves. (From other

sources we know that a significant number of the blacks, who belonged to the Updike Family, were free; and at least five blacks, who belonged to the Updike family fought in the American Revolution from Rhode Island.)

The scholars on this project seek to write that the entire history of "Forty Acres." The Porter-Phelps farm demanded labor beyond what could be provided by members of the family. Labor was available from a variety of sources, including slaves and probably some were who free. As was the pattern established in New England, Massachusetts in particular and Hampshire County specifically, African slaves (also people of African and Indian ancestry), provided an acceptable labor source in the seventeenth century. Many, not all, were Africans. According to the available family records the Porter's did actively engage in the buying and selling of African slaves. Consider for example "Samuel Porter's slave bill of sale" date 1698." (p.94) and the purchase of another slave by the Porter family in 1745 a fourteen year boy [Zebulon Prutt] (p. 96); Charles Phelps Jr. purchased at least two slaves undoubtedly to assist in the running of "Forty Acres." The "Caesar" in 1770 and "the Negro wench Peggy" in 1778 was owned by the family in the midst of the American Revolutionary War. As Quarles in his seminal work noted at least 5,000 African Americans fought

in the American Revolution. "Sezor [Phelps]" was one of those forgotten Black patriots. I say forgotten, but he is noted listed on the roles of patriots from Massachusetts nor on the pension list from the National Archives. And yet, according to the archives at "Fort Acres" he was at Ticonderoga.

The Porter family was proud of their estate and of their property. The family's property included a "'Negro Man,' valued at four hundred pounds, and a girl, 250 pounds in the depreciated currency of the time.'" [Huntington, p. 5] Slavery in Hadley, as in most of New England, was not considered wrong, indeed most prominent people, including ministers, owned slaves, this included Rev. Isaac Chauncy, pastor of the Church in Hadley and the famed Jonathan Edwards of Northampton. Zeb, as most slaves rebelled against his masters, in 1768 he ran away.

The presence of slaves, male and female, and possibly free blacks, (although I have not discovered any direct reference to free blacks at this time), apparently did not cause the family any moral or religious problems. On the eve of the American Revolution in 1773 Charles Phelps began the historic expansion of the farm. Elizabeth, his wife marked this occasion in her diary. "' . . . to-day we had twenty-five reapers." Some of these lived on the place:

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slaves, bond servants, [black/Indian/European?] indentured servants and apprentices." [Huntington, 12]

The Museum in Hadley provides the history of a unique opportunity to write an inclusive history of "Forty Acres." To be truly inclusive, such a history must focus on the contributions of African Americans to the life of the property. This essay provides only an initial glimpse at their role. Future research will tell the full story of the contribution of African Americans to the history of Forty Acres.