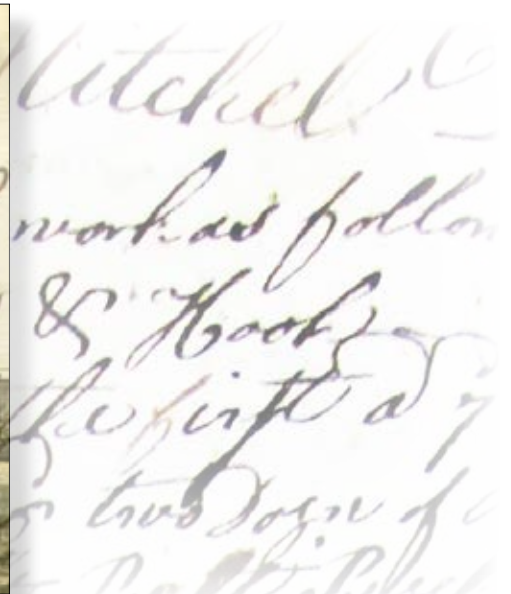




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Moses and Oliver Mitchell: Portraits of Two Late 18th-Century African Americans in Windsor

by Marcia Hinckley

Twenty-six years ago, Marcia Hinckley interviewed a number of white and African American residents, pored through primary and secondary documents, and wrote her master's thesis, "We just went on with it," The Black Experience in Windsor, Connecticut, 1790-1950. Local 19th-century historian Jabez Hayden, in his book Historical Sketches, had already written about Oliver and Moses Mitchell, both free when they appeared in Windsor at the end of the 18th century. Hinckley, using census and probate records, fleshed out a bit more of the story of these two interesting men. What follows are excerpts from her 1991 thesis. The full text is available in the WHS research library.

Moses Mitchell's house at 375 Palisado Avenue, as it looked in the early 20th century. WHS collections 1995.25.62, photo by Katherine Barker Drake.

The first black household in the area of Windsor north of the Farmington River was probably that of Moses Mitchell, who bought his first recorded piece of property here in 1791 for 16 pounds. On the main road...from Windsor to Springfield, MA, this quarter acre was just north of the former palisado in the neighborhood of Ellsworths, Stoughtons, Mathers – old or up and coming white families. Moses built or bought a house in this neighborhood which is still standing [375 Palisado Ave]. Moses's brother Oliver came from East Windsor in 1797, buying for 50 pounds a piece of property with "two dwelling houses" on the west bank of the Connecticut River near the Scantic Ferry....

[T]here was indeed a modest range among the blacks' economic levels in the town of Windsor. [T]he Mitchell family illustrates the apparent upper end of the black economic and social scale. (One must remember that this level was still far below the potential level for a white Windsor resident....) That the Mitchell brothers each had sufficient property when they died to warrant the making of a probate inventory and especially that they both had the knowledge and foresight to have drawn up wills probably reflect the relatively high stature that the two had in the town.

Almost nothing is known about the Mitchells' lives prior to their coming to Windsor. Hayden says that the brothers were "'made free' under the old charter before 1818,"

(Continued on page 3)

OUR MISSION

We aim to inspire public awareness and appreciation of the diverse peoples, places, and events that contribute to Windsor's evolving history. We preserve and interpret Windsor's historical record through active collecting, research, exhibitions, programs, and communications in the belief that an understanding of history can provide individuals and communities with connections to the past, a sense of belonging in the present, and responsibility for the future.

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Reminiscences: Windows to Another World

Just about everyone remembers a story a parent or grandparent told them about their childhood, that is memorable because it seems so foreign to how we grew up. My dad was an immigrant kid in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He described himself as "the runt of the family"—the kid who was always sick, who was not expected to live to adulthood. Milwaukee winters got cold, and in my dad's family, coats, hats, and mittens didn't come off at bedtime. That extra bulk made it hard for him and his brothers to cram into the bed they all shared. Most nights, it was my dad who got pushed out of the bed, spending the night shivering over a floor vent to catch any warm air rising up from the coal stove in the room below. Incidentally, the "runt of the family" did manage to grow up, work his way through college and graduate school, and become a college professor. And my childhood home had central heat!

Windsor today is a lot different than it was 90 years ago, as documented by town histories, town reports, and other materials in our library. But what was life like? Often it's a story or reminiscence that brings it home. Jane Zukowski Cranick, whose reminiscences were published in 1999 by the Town of Windsor in *Windsor Storytellers*, remembered life in Wilson in the southern section of town during the Great Depression. Her words:

"Our four room house was located on Olga Avenue Extension (now Matianuck Avenue). It was a small community of German and Polish immigrants who made a living by farming. The three largest market

gardeners were Kaiser, Okon, and Becker. They all took their produce to market in Hartford in the early morning hours. I would wake up and hear the horses and wagons, with lanterns aglow, on their long trek to the city."

Audrey Lee, long-time Windsor Historical Society member who passed away in August at the age of 102, was interviewed by Betsy and Gordon Kenneson in 2014 at his home on Corey Street in Wilson. Recalling Wilson in the 1920s, he said:

"There were so many vacant lots for the people who had a cow. Even Becker's cows roamed from the barn up on Matianuck Avenue all the way down here. They ate their way until when it got near four o'clock they knew they were going home to the barn to be milked. They ate their way back up there every day. When the cows got home, in the barn, we'd stop playing [and] some of us would go down and help milk those cows. Why? Because he would give us a quart of milk. He'd peddle the milk the next morning."

Jane's and Audrey's words help me visualize the sights and sounds of a past world where the clapping of horse's hoofs and flicker of lanterns was a constant, where cows roamed free, eating their way through vacant grass lots in town during the day, then eating their way back to the barn at night; a world lacking sanitary regulations prohibiting kids from stopping a baseball game to help a farmer get his herd milked in exchange for a quart of raw milk to take home.

We'll let you know when we start working with WIN-TV on a new oral history project. And please do consider sharing your own memories of 20th- and 21st-century Windsor so that people 90 years from now can visualize the sights, sounds, and the feel of our world.

Christie

(Continued from page 1)

but his information in this area is suspect. Assuming that they were slaves at one time, Moses was certainly free before 1791 when he bought property..., and Oliver's participation in the Revolutionary War probably earned him his freedom.

[Oliver's] inventory in his probate record from 1840 provides a glimpse of his life in Windsor. He died with a modest estate valued at \$1,048.75. (For the sake of comparison...one can look at the estate of Dr. Elisha N. Sill, a respected white medical doctor and the town clerk, who lived several houses south of Moses Mitchell's.... When Dr. Sill died in 1845, his estate was assessed at \$1,658.36.) Undoubtedly, Oliver was proud of owning a silver watch (valued at \$8), not a common item for white or black citizens. He had neither a copious amount of furniture nor a particularly valuable lot. He did, however, own six "black" (Windsor) chairs as well as six "old" chairs; he had a chest and drawers worth \$0.75..., two looking glasses worth \$0.42..., and a cookstove that was worth \$8.

His spectacles (and case) and his Bible indicate that he could read; his inkstand and his signature on his will suggest that he could write. Other items in his inventory suggest that he made his living in a variety of ways. He must have been a fisherman, since he had a fish pot, a skiff with oars and sails, and a corn "kanow". His spyglass and his two peacoats...also indicate that he spent a lot of time on the Connecticut River....He very likely made his own boats and perhaps boats to sell since he had planes, saws, boards, and old lead. Perhaps he also worked for one of the shipbuilding firms that existed in Windsor until about 1820....

Oliver married a white woman, Anne, but her family background is unknown. They had two daughters.... [D]aughter Ann, married Job

Holden, a stonecutter born in Rhode Island. Oliver Mitchell died in 1840 as he was rowing the eight miles home from Hartford, purportedly where he had gone to receive his Revolutionary War pension.

Moses's estate, at \$686.88, was not quite as valuable as Oliver's, and he did not have stockpiles of materials...as had his brother. He must have been a farmer, since he owned 28 acres of land and had two tons of hay and 15 bushels of corn....Moses's tastes seem to be more refined than his brother's. Whereas Oliver's wardrobe stressed warmth, Moses's suggested style. Moses had five vests, a cravat, two coats, and a great coat. He also enjoyed fine things in addition to fine clothes. In his inventory is a horse, a single harness, and a single wagon. Jabez Hayden wrote about that wagon:

"The first one-horse wagon ever seen in Windsor was made here in 1815...by David Birge...[I]t was made for Moses Mitchel [sic], a worthy colored citizen, who lived on Center Street...Mr. Birge said that Mr. Mitchel was very proud of the one-horse wagon, and when he took it from the shop he went home by the way of East Granby to show it."

Perhaps he bought this wagon upon selling his Palisado Ave. property in 1815 to James Bennett for \$1,000.

Moses had six Windsor chairs, a cherry table worth \$1.50, and a desk worth \$2. He did not have a cookstove however. The andirons, bellows, and [tin ovens] indicate that he used his fireplace.... Of the two brothers, Moses was probably the intellectual. His Bible, Testament, and 12 volumes of old books suggest he could read and that he probably read more than the Bible. His knowledge and skills were sufficient for him to be given power of attorney to sell his white neighbor's land, the neighbor's having moved to New Hampshire. While Moses was still living on Palisado Ave., he was a



Moses Mitchell house | WHS Collections

neighbor of Ethan Barker, the first minister of the Methodist Church in Windsor. Along with a small number of white men and women, Moses and his sister Mariam participated in the forming of the Methodist Church, which occurred before the 1818 disestablishment of the "Congregational" church in Connecticut.

Moses likely never married; there is no wife nor children designated in his will, which names a white man, Hiram Bennett, as his beneficiary with the condition that Hiram provide sufficient life-long care for Moses's sister Mariam Bennett. [Unfortunately, but not uncommonly, there is no record of what happened to her after Moses' 1836 will.]

Though there is really no indication of the Mitchell brothers' relationship to other blacks, they apparently achieved at least a modest level of acceptance among a certain class of whites. Hayden remembers that the brothers (who undoubtedly were unable to vote) "fraternized with the democrats and I with the Whigs." [According to census records,] Moses always had white people in his household, although one cannot tell whether there was any family relationship.

Note: Though Hinckley was able to trace Oliver's family through to the 1920s, there are still a few leads about these men that she thinks would be interesting to explore.

Windsor Winter Work and Play

by Michelle Tom, Librarian/Archivist

It can be tough getting through winters in Connecticut, but alongside the hard work, there are ample opportunities for outdoor merriment. Here are a few images from our collections showing all of the above.

This page, from top to bottom:

1. Young Robert Sibley Birge is working hard, running a snow blower in the mid-to-late 1950s. He's clearing the driveway of his next door neighbors Dorothy and Ruth Hayden of 80 Bloomfield Ave, which exited onto Spring St. WHS collections 2014.57.10, gift of Elizabeth Tonucci.

2. The photographer's label for this photo, circa 1910s, is "[Trolley] Stalled on Stony Hill 5 Days". Makes my commute seem pretty reasonable! WHS collections 1954.2.4.345, photo by William S. Leek.

3. George Bill of 860 Windsor Ave. deals with the effects of the winter of 1960-1961, during which three separate storms buried the northeast in over 60 inches of snow. WHS collections 1989.9.1.8, gift of George Bill.





This page, from top to bottom:

4. This picture was taken in the 1940s, but the children's winter activities are timeless. Left to right are Delia Sales (Jubrey), Ethel Scott (Smith), Patty Sales (Narcisse), and Nancy Scott (Craig), playing probably near the Sales house on Williams Street against a backdrop of tobacco barns. WHS collections 2009.32.11, gift of Delia Jubrey.

5. Katherine Barker Drake took this photo of a friend around the turn of the 20th century. If anyone has any idea who this well-armed combatant is (or who the people in the Hayden pond image below are), we'd love it if you let us know! WHS collections 2008.5.2.14.



6. We don't know any of these folks' names, but according to the label on the back, the date was February 2, 1919, and the pond they're skating and sledding (and falling?) on was located near "Hayden's old salt house," which probably means it was somewhere in Hayden Station. WHS collections 2017.4.254.

Windsor Founders: Bigod Eggleston

by Kristen Wands, Curator

Bigod Eggleston was a man with a mysterious name, mysterious origins, and a mysterious marital history. Baptized in All Saints church, Settrington, Yorkshire, England on February 20, 1586, he was the eldest son of James Eggleston and Margaret Harker, who were farmers. Historians speculate his name was intended to honor the Bigod family, prominent in Yorkshire. By 1611, Bigod had moved to Norwich, England, where he appears in the militia list. By April of 1612, when the baptism of his son James was recorded, he must have been married. He was still in Norwich when his daughter Mary was baptized in 1613/4. Nothing is known of what he did between then and 1630, when he appears in New England. Whatever

path led him to the New World, he settled in Dorchester, MA upon his arrival.

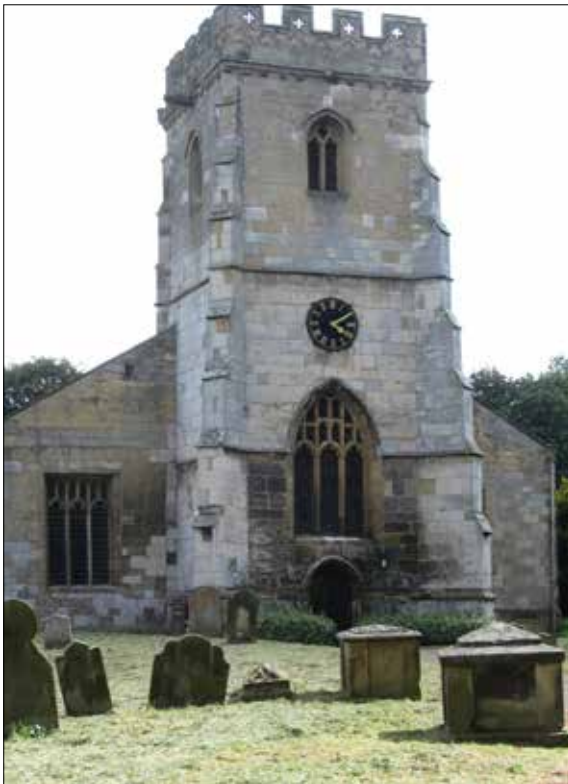
Eggleston appears to have gained the respect of his neighbors early and retained it until the end of his life. In Dorchester, Eggleston was granted church membership. He was named a freeman by 1631, and followed the Reverend John Warham to Windsor in 1635. By 1640, his landholdings included a parcel inside the Palisado, just north of the meeting house, which by 1654 was his homelot and included an orchard. He continued living there until the end of his life. In May of 1667/8, Matthew Grant recorded in the town records, "Baggot Eggleston undertakes the cleansing of the meeting [house] for this year coming for 50s, and the beating of the drum to meetings for 28s." A year later, he was paid £3.10s for "4 wolves, meeting house," meaning that, in addition to wages for maintaining the church, he was paid a bounty for four wolf pelts. The bounty, established to protect the community's livestock from predation, suggests Bigod may have been spry enough to hunt wolves as an octogenarian. The town gave him lucrative work, close to home, which made him a vital part of the community well into his 80s.

It seems a bit unfair, given his otherwise unblemished reputation, that the most fascinating snippet about Bigod to survive describes the one time he got into trouble with the magistrates. On June 5, 1645, the Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut read, "*Beggett Eggleston for bequeathing his wife to a young man is fyned 20s. George Tuckye for his*

misdemeanor in words to Egglestons wife is ffyned 40s and to be bownd to his good behavior and to appeare the next Courte." Unfortunately, no further information about this event exists, so we can only guess what happened. Whatever Bigod did, the courts decided it was monetarily half as bad as whatever George Tuckye said. Why did Bigod try to give his wife away? How did she feel about it? Who was George Tuckye? We will likely never know.

The names of Bigod's wives are unknown. It is probable he had at least two: one whom he married in England and who died there before he emigrated, and a second whom he met and married in Dorchester and tried to bequeath to someone else. Unless she died and Bigod remarried a third time, it is possible that they remained married for decades after this 1645 court appearance. He had three more children between 1648 and 1653 and lived to be 87 years old. When he wrote his will in November 1673, he had a wife who was still living. His youngest son Benjamin's inheritance was granted on the condition "that he shall maintain his mother and pay my debts." Was Benjamin's mother the same woman Bigod had tried to give away three decades prior? It is possible, but the truth is, we do not know. Whatever happened in 1645, the event does not appear to have negatively impacted Bigod's standing in the community.

One estimate suggests that Bigod Eggleston is the ancestor of more than 12 million Americans. Some of those Americans are also descended from the wife he tried to give away. Aside from that one court incident, Bigod exemplified the American dream and the Puritan work ethic, amassing wealth he could pass on to his family and continuing to work for as long as he could.



All Saints Church, Settrington, Yorkshire, UK
Photo used with permission of Gordon Hatton,
[http://www.geograph.org.uk/
photo/5074643](http://www.geograph.org.uk/photo/5074643)

Volunteer Profile: Rob Hoskin

We're bringing back the column where we feature one of the invaluable volunteers who supplement and compliment the work of our paid staff in so many ways. It is a privilege and honor to work together to preserve and share Windsor's history.

When did you start volunteering at the Society?

I started volunteering a little over a year ago.

What inspired you to be a volunteer?

I had been a member of the Windsor Historical Society for some time, having done genealogical research on my own family quite a few years ago. Having retired a few years ago and then seeing a call for volunteers at the Society I decided to attend the training to find out what kind of volunteer activities were available. I also participated in a program with the Connecticut Valley School of Woodworking and a drop-leaf table that I made is currently a part of the Strong-Howard House.

What do you like most about volunteering at WHS?

Volunteering in the research library, I like the challenge of trying to solve the puzzles that get presented to us on a regular basis. I also enjoy meeting others who are interested in their own ancestry research and in meeting people to whom I also might be related.

What is your connection to Windsor history?

I am the 7th great grandson of Anthony Hoskins (1632-1707) an early resident of Windsor, and through various maternal sides of the family, I am related to two founders: William Filley and Joseph Loomis. Although there is some doubt about this, there is a possibility that Anthony was also related to John Hoskins, who is a founder of Windsor. In addition, on the maternal side I am related to Robert Day, one of the founders of Hartford.

Do you have any advice for someone interested in volunteering but might be nervous about getting started?



The staff at the Society are very helpful in both training you and in finding the right kind of volunteering opportunity for you. You also get a chance to try out various kinds of opportunities before you are turned loose. You can “shadow” more experienced volunteers to see what it is like and then choose what you want to do. There is also a well-documented training guide for volunteers that I found quite helpful, particularly if you want to conduct tours of the two historical houses of the Society.

Many thanks to our volunteers

We are so grateful to all our volunteers. Between our volunteers, staff, and donors, we are able to accomplish so much more and even surprise ourselves!

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Visit us

Admission is free to browse the museum store, the *450 Years of Windsor Stories* galleries, and the Hands-On-History Learning Center.

Wednesdays - Saturdays
11 AM - 4:00 PM
closed on major holidays

Tours of Historic Houses
11 AM & 1 PM

Tours & Library Admission
\$8 Adults
\$6 Seniors & Students
FREE for children under 12 and WHS members

Can't make it to the Society in person? For in-depth research resources, check out our website, windsorhistoricalsociety.org

Upcoming events

For more information contact the Society at 860-688-3813 or info@windsorhistoricalsociety.org

January 25, 5:30 PM to 7 PM
“Layers of Home”

Art Exhibit Opening

Celebrate art and history by attending an opening reception for high school art inspired by Windsor’s historic district. Refreshments served.

Free. Snow date: January 26

February 1, 5:30 PM to 7 PM

First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group

Just starting out? Experienced but stumped? Want access to Ancestry.com including World Explorer? Join others for discussion and problem-solving.

Free

February 3, 9 AM to 11 AM

Mid-Winter Fun Morning for Kids

Legos, train table, whistles and whistle codes, Fisher Price toys, colonial dress-up and more in our Hands-on-History Learning Center. Balloon animals too. Get out of the house and make new friends!

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 children, \$3 members or \$12 per family
Snow date: February 4, 2 - 4 PM*

February 9, 6 PM to 8 PM

Beer and Tavern Games Night

Get out of the house, sample beers from Thomas Hooker, Back East, Broad Brook, and Connecticut Valley Brewing Companies while learning some old-fashioned tavern games like Nine Men’s Morris and Backgammon. Feel free to bring your own favorite board games to play and share.

Over 21 only. COST: \$12 adults, WHS members \$10. Snow date: February 10.

February 19, 10 AM to 4 PM

Presidents’ Day Candle-Dipping for All Ages

Dip your own candle, use engineering skills to build toothpick-and-marshmallow structures, and enjoy the Hands-On-History Learning Center.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 children, \$3 members, or \$12 per family. Snow cancels.

March 1, 5:30 PM to 7 PM

First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group

Free

March 3, 10 AM to 2 PM

Hearth Cooking and Cookie Decorating for All Ages

Mid-winter baking, anyone? A cozy fire, the smells of applesauce and waffles cooking at the Strong-Howard House, and cookie decorating and baking in the main building.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors, \$4 children, \$3 members, or \$12 per family. Snow cancels.

March 7, 7 PM to 8 PM

Civil Liberties and Women’s Suffrage Crackdowns: Protecting the Home Front During World War I

Christine Pittsley, Project Director for the Remembering World War I project at Connecticut State Library (and one of the Society’s most eloquent speakers in 2017) will speak about how our federal and state governments, disquieted by the women’s suffrage movement, socialists, and a deeply divided American public, took steps to mobilize Americans and silence critics of the war.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 members.
Snow date: March 8*

March 13, 11 AM to 2 PM

Education Volunteer Training

Love kids and teaching? Want to volunteer when it fits your schedule? Learn more about our popular school field trip programs, and see what we do with students in our galleries, historic homes, and in our historic neighborhood. Lesson plans provided. Bring a bag lunch and we’ll provide coffee and dessert.

Free

March 24, 2 PM to 3 PM

Secrets Revealed: Amazing Stories of Connecticut’s Revolutionary War Spies

Liz Burke will share fascinating information about George Washington, spymaster, and some of his agents, including Connecticut’s own Nathan Hale and Windsor’s own Daniel Bissell. What methods were used? What were some of the success stories and failures? Prepare to be enthralled.

*\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 members.
Snow date: March 25, 2PM*

April 5, 5:30 PM to 7 PM

First Thursdays Genealogy Support Group

Free

April 7, 2 PM to 3 PM

A Special Screening of *Dillon’s Market: A Look Back*, co-sponsored with WIN-TV

From 1906 to 1976, this beloved community market on Broad Street was a place where everybody knew your name. After the screening, Jenny Hawran, the film’s producer, and the Dillon siblings will reminisce and answer questions. Refreshments served!

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 members

April 11, 7 PM to 9 PM:

Sixth Annual Shad Derby Trivia Contest

Think you know everything? Test your knowledge at the Shad Derby Trivia Contest. Teams of up to 6 members (age 21 & up only) can compete. Enjoy refreshments along with friendly competition. Teams must register in advance – space is limited.

\$10/contestant or \$5/onlooker

April 22, 1 PM to 3 PM

Earth Day Spotlight: Trees in Windsor Tour

Town Tree Warden Jim Govoni will start us off with a short presentation on what Connecticut’s towns do to protect their urban forests and plant for the future. Then we’ll hop on a school bus and head out to identify some of Windsor’s notable trees. Spaces are limited! Reserve your spot by Friday, April 20. School bus will meet participants at the Society.

\$12 adults, \$11 seniors and students, \$10 members

April 25, 5:30 PM to 6:30 PM

Connecticut Homes Through the Centuries: An Architectural History

In preparation for the Society’s April 28 house tour, Christopher Wigren, Deputy Director of the Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation will talk about how Connecticut’s citizens housed themselves from the 17th - 20th centuries. See how home styles, construction techniques, and social trends evolved.

\$6 adults, \$5 seniors and students, \$4 members, FREE to house tour volunteers

April 28, 10 AM to 4 PM

House Tour

A striking selection of beautifully and creatively furnished historic Windsor residences will be open for public touring. See homes from several centuries built in a variety of architectural styles.

Advance tickets \$30, day-of-tour tickets \$35. \$5 discount is offered for House Tour volunteers.