



Subject Guide Project

Providing Access to Traditionally Excluded Voices

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Windsor Historical Society
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<https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/>

Scope of Collection:

Windsor History – Land and water shaped Windsor’s settlement patterns from its earliest years. Along the Connecticut and Farmington Rivers, on land that later became the town of Windsor, small tribes like the Poquonocks, Sicaogs, Tunxis, and Podunks (or Nowaas) collectively known as the River Indians to the early English settlers, who first arrived in 1633. The first recorded Windsor resident of African descent was a man named Cirus. He was enslaved by the Wolcott family and appears in Henry Wolcott Jr.’s 1680 estate inventory.

With acres of fertile meadowland, a significant portion of Windsor’s early economy relied on the agricultural industry, livestock, ship building and fur trapping. With direct access to the Connecticut river, settlers built a thriving transportation and shipping port serving merchants on both sides of the river. Windsor shipped agricultural goods and livestock to supply plantations in the West Indies while importing products such as sugar, molasses, and British manufactured merchandise among other items.

As the community grew, and flourished Windsor’s commerce expanded to include brickyards that helped to supply Hartford and other growing industrialized areas. Windsor also saw an increased demand for agricultural products including tobacco. With imported tobacco seeds from Virginia the first shade-grown tobacco produced in the United States was grown in the village of Poquonock, a northern area of Windsor, starting in 1900.

The agricultural industry faced challenges during World War I as immigration restrictions impacted the availability of European immigrant workers into Windsor. With an expanding industry, tobacco growers began recruiting African American college students from southern states for summer work. Further labor restrictions were imposed during World War II, and tobacco growers began recruiting men from the West Indies. In 1947 Puerto Rican men were recruited for seasonal work. Many West Indian and Puerto Rican workers eventually settled in the area.

Immigrant settlers, formerly enslaved people, and their descendants along with skilled and unskilled workers from Hartford increasingly populated sections of Windsor closest to the capital

city. Over the years Windsor's demographics have continued to diversify. By the 2020s, over 50% of the population identified as people of color. Today, Windsor is a town rich in history. It has a strong sense of community and with institutions like the Windsor Historical Society, it continues to work towards community building.

About Windsor Historical Society – Windsor Historical Society was established in 1921 to serve as the leading historical institution for Connecticut's oldest town. The historical society works to illuminate the history of Windsor by preserving, interpreting, and sharing the community's artifacts and stories. Windsor Historical Society's collections include objects from Native American settlements and the English founding of Windsor in 1633 through the present. The library and archives house extensive historical resources relating to the town of Windsor and its people. Highlights include thousands of photographs, 17th-21st-century documents, archival collections, oral histories, published and unpublished family genealogies, family files, subject files, vital records, cemetery records, land records, probate records, regional and state histories, town annual reports, local newspapers, yearbooks, city directories, maps, and ephemera.

A series of articles and collection guides on Windsor's Black history can be found on our website at <https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/windsors-black-history/>.

Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) Subject Guide

This Subject Guide presents information on resources in our archives that document the experiences, contributions and representations of African Americans, Native Americans, African Caribbean, Latinx Americans, and other people of color in Connecticut from the colonial era to the present. These resources reveal the stories, experiences, and history of these traditionally excluded voices.

Finding aids that contain these records can be found at our page on Connecticut Archives Online:

<https://archives.library.wcsu.edu/caoSearch/catalog?f%5Blevel%5D%5B%5D=Collection&f%5Brepository%5D%5B%5D=Windsor+Historical+Society>.

List of Collections Containing BIPOC Records (not exhaustive)

1. Old Documents Project Collection, 1640-1992, bulk 1760-1899

https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/fa_old_document_project.pdf

1.1 Old Documents Project Collection Index

Digital copy of Collection Index available here: https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/old_doc_index_updated_20230530.pdf

Annotation: The Old Documents Project is an artificial collection of some of the Windsor Historical Society's primary source documents. It contains over 3,000 items dated from 1640

to 1939 and a handful of holdings from the mid-late 20th century. Each has been indexed by date, name, document type, and a brief description.

The collection includes land records, business documents, legal documents, town records, military documents, and personal documents, as well as a host of miscellaneous documents, primarily relating to people who lived in Windsor at the time the document was created.

At least 30 documents in the collection relate to people of color (most, if not all, African Americans). They range in date from 1735-1891. Some documents contain language identifying the individual/s by race in the description. For example:

- OD 2-83 – A bill for medical services, "Capt. Bissell dr. to Abel Simmons for attendance upon Mabel, a black girl", 1811
- OD 19-1426 – A will for Israel Stoughton, in which he wills his enslaved "negro man Caesar" to his daughter, 1735

Other documents do not call out the race of any individuals, however, the names either indicate there is a person of color involved, or the names are of known BIPOC. For example:

- OD 26-1792 – Berzellai Hennary (Barzilla Henry) Revolutionary War enlistment, May 17, 1777
- OD 35-2318 – Prince Hopkins estate summons to pay James Sheldon, 1824

Not all BIPOC-related Old Documents are cited above; however, all related documents are listed in the spreadsheet index for review. More documents will be added to the index as discovered.

2. Account Books Collection 1733-1954, bulk 1760-1900

https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/fa_account_books_collection.pdf

2.1 Account Book Inventory

Digital copy of Collection Inventory Digital available here:

https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/fa_account_books_collection_inventory.pdf

Annotation: The Account Books Collection is an artificial collection of more than 150 day books, ledgers, and personal accounts of individuals and businesses in Windsor, Connecticut and the surrounding area. The collection represents a wide variety of merchants, artisans, agricultural enterprises, early manufacturing, and community organizations. Individual businesses include general stores and grocers, brick makers, distilleries, tanners, doctors, and farmers.

The account books provide distinctive evidence of the intricate economic and social network which supported the pre-industrial New England economy from the early-18th century until the mid-19th century. They offer an objective glimpse into the social and economic life of a household, small business, or large manufacturing concern. They may reveal the extent of a craftsman's output, sources of raw materials or supplies, contact with distant or urban

markets, or the seasonal nature of certain professions. A book might record the diversity of methods of economic exchange used by one individual – buying and selling, trading, lending, renting, boarding, and extending credit. Account books offer evidence of personal and family circumstances as well as the breadth or narrowness of the interrelationships between an individual and his community, a true mosaic of goods, services, and relationships. In addition, a few volumes record the management of probate or estate accounts, the finances of local civic organizations, minor town and church accounts, and the early 20th century Windsor Fire District tax lists. Each account book has been indexed by creator, date, type of business, and a brief narrative summary. Names of people of color appear throughout these account books, which show activities they were engaged in, the kinds of work and services they provided, and relationships among neighbors.

3. Oral History Collection, 1952 to present

<https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/home/collections/oral-history-collection/>

Citation: [Oral history interview], Oral History Collection [accession #]. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: Windsor Historical Society's Oral History Collection is a collection of oral history interviews and other recorded memoirs, public presentations, and short historical essays that have been transcribed by Society staff and volunteers. Oral history themes and topics include neighborhood and family history; childhood chores and fun; school days; learning to drive; hunting, fishing, and other sports; working tobacco; church activities; and fondly remembered local stores, shopkeepers, and home delivery services.

There are over 100 transcripts in the collection, most with a detailed index. The earliest recordings were made in 1952, and we continue to record new interviews and reminiscences to this day. Most of the recordings have been copied into a digital format.

In particular, oral histories conducted as part of a push during Windsor Historical Society's 100th anniversary year contain many interviews with people of color living in Windsor as of 2021. Interviewees include Nuchette Black-Burke (later elected the first Black Mayor of Windsor in 2023), Elizabeth Horton Sheff (mother of the named plaintiff in the historic civil rights lawsuit, [Sheff vs. O'Neill](#)), and [Maryam Khan](#) (later elected to the CT state legislature, representing Hartford and Windsor, becoming the first Muslim member of the Connecticut House).

Oral histories recorded earlier than 2021 include interviews with:

- Daniel Scott (1884-1986) on his 100th birthday in 1984. An African American laborer, Scott talks about managing the farm of Col. Ellsworth Phelps in Windsor
- [Carlton Parkinson \(1957-2018\)](#), whose father Roy Parkinson was a Jamaican migrant worker, who served as a cook on Windsor tobacco farms in the 20th century
- [Grace Lucretia Clapp \(1881-1965\)](#), a white woman from the Hayden Station neighborhood of Windsor, where African American camp meetings were held before the official formation of the Archer Memorial AME Zion Church in the same location.

4. Jerijah Barber Sr. and Jr. Papers, 1718-1886, bulk late-18th century

http://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/fa_barber.pdf

4.1 Series II-B: Jerijah Barber Jr. Papers – Business Records

4.2 Series V: Account books

Citation: Jerijah Barber Sr. and Jr. Papers. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: Jerijah Barber, Sr. and Jerijah Barber, Jr., were both tanners and lifelong residents of Windsor, CT. They left behind nearly 20 account books and day books from their tanning business. The account books name enslavers, showing entries like “Roger Newbery to apron for yr Negro” and “William Russel mending sho yr Black girl,” as well as showing the Barbers doing business with or for known free Black people in town, like Revolutionary War patriot John Brister.

Item-level processing was not performed for this collection. Windsor Historical Society expects that further collection research will likely uncover additional BIPOC materials.

5. Hayden Family Collection

5.1 Levi Hayden account book, 1800-1814

Citation: Hayden Family Collection, Levi Hayden Jr. account book, 1976.20.2. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: Levi Hayden Jr. was a member of the family for which the Hayden Station neighborhood in Windsor was named. From the late-18th century to the early-20th century, Hayden Station had a higher concentration of Black residents compared to the rest of town. Accordingly, Levi Hayden Jr.’s account book (primarily for his distillery business), shows the names of many Black men he worked with, including known neighbors.

Interestingly, Hayden placed almost all the Black accounts in the back of his book. Names like Caesar and Peter (with no surnames) are listed alongside known Black residents like George Turrer (whose emancipation record lies in the Windsor Town Clerk’s office among the land deeds), suggesting that others in the account sequence were also BIPOC. There are a couple of exceptions to the book segregation, perhaps indicating a special relationship with the Black men who appear mixed with the white accounts. Or perhaps indicating those men had lighter complexions and/or were thought of differently from the men in the back of the book.

Item-level processing was not performed for this collection. Windsor Historical Society expects that further collection research will uncover additional BIPOC materials.

6. Ralph C. Lasbury Jr. Collection of Shade Tobacco Growers Association Records

https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/fa_lasbury_shade_tobacco_growers.pdf

6.1 Series II-British West Indies Employers Association, 1951-1969 (File D)

6.2 Series III-Regional Labour Board and British West Indies Employers’ Association joint meetings, 1970-1983 (File F)

Citation: Ralph C. Lasbury Jr. Collection of Shade Tobacco Growers Association Records. 1983.36, 1984.62. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: The collection documents a significant portion of the professional activities of Ralph C. Lasbury, Jr. over a period of fifty years as the head of Connecticut regional agricultural marketing and employer groups. Minutes, correspondence, reports, leases, fiscal reports, copies of state legislative activities, and newspaper articles document the establishment, opening, and operation of the Connecticut Regional Market, a venue for the sale of Connecticut agricultural commodities.

It also contains minutes, correspondence, membership lists, reports, and negotiations on behalf of the British West Indies Employers' Association. The BWI records contain information not just on Jamaican workers but also Puerto Rican, Mexican, and migrant workers from other areas. Lasbury represented the interests of tobacco growers, traveled extensively for the Association's executive committee, and met regularly with Caribbean governmental officials.

Item-level processing was not performed for this collection. Windsor Historical Society expects that further collection research will uncover additional BIPOC materials.

7. Windsor Afro American Civic Association Collection

<https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/home/collections/windsor-afro-american-civic-association-collection/>

Citation: Windsor Afro American Civic Association Collection. 2022.012, 2022.029, 2024.050. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: Founded in 1982 by social activist Willie Graham, the Windsor Afro American Civic Association (WAACA) was a community service-based organization dedicated to serving the town's Black residents. For over 30 years, the group actively worked to increase the social and political participation of Windsor's Black population by informing voters about upcoming elections, hosting a variety of fundraising events, and providing scholarships for students.

The Windsor Afro American Civic Association Collection features over 100 photographs and documents collected over the course of WAACA's life span, which last from 1982 to around the year 2006. It includes meeting minutes, treasurer's reports, event programs, by-laws, and a variety of physical artifacts that document the organization. This collection also contains oral history interviews conducted with former members and associates of WAACA.

8. William H. Best Collection

<https://windsorhistoricalsociety.org/windsor-history/william-h-best-collection/>

Citation: William H. Best Collection. 1990.035, 1991.020, 2007.005. Windsor Historical Society, Windsor, CT.

Annotation: William Howard Best was born May 11, 1924 and was a lifelong Windsor resident. Best's family roots go back in town at least to 1800. The family has had a home in the Hayden Station area of town at least since the 1870s when his great grandparents, James and Charlotte Thompson, bought land.

He was a member for nearly fifty years, and was a past master, of the Masons, Excelsior Lodge P.H. A. (Prince Hall Affiliate) in Hartford. He was a Shriner (Shrine Temple #40 in New Haven) and a participant in the Brotherhood in Action.[...] As part of Brotherhood in Action, he also helped young people find jobs and visit other Masonic temples.

Church played a big part in his life.[...] His family always belonged to the First Congregational Church in Windsor. He attended Sunday school there as a child – a van would come and pick up the children in the neighborhood. As an adult, he fully participated in the life of the church in many ways. He taught Sunday school for five years and was an usher and a deacon. He was particularly loved for the visits he made as a member of the church's Visitation Committee. He had a way of making people feel heard and valued, a gift that he shared with Kimberly Hall residents every time he visited his wife.

His participation in his community showed also in his love of history. He was a walking Windsor history book with most stored in his memory and in the photographs that he preserved of town, his neighborhood, and local African Americans. He and his friend Floyd Rising made a map of the Hayden Station area [which is included in this collection]. He wanted to make sure that black history, as part of Windsor's story, was documented and acknowledged.

He generously shared his extensive and invaluable knowledge with researchers and with others who were interested. Both Bill and Jean were active members of the Windsor Historical Society. Bill was a member of its Board of Directors. In recent years, Bill participated in the NCCJ's ('The National Conference for Community and Justice) Conversations on Race and found pleasure and meaning in revealing his confrontations with racial issues in town and in the United States Marines during World War II.[...]

In his own life, Bill challenged the limitations that had been placed on blacks in this society. He worked for Colt Industries for several years before and after enlisting in the Marines. but left when working with plastics was harming his hands. Following Preston Pope's success at obtaining a job as the first African American to drive a commercial bus in Connecticut, Bill got a job as another of the early African American bus drivers.

But he then set his sites on becoming a policeman. In spite of high scores on the tests, it took three tries before he was accepted on the Windsor Police force in 1951 and became Windsor's first black policeman. He was on the force for eighteen years, until an injury received on the job resulted in his having to retire. But even years later, people would come up to him and tell him how much he helped them or, even, saved their lives.

Politically, he was proud of the time he recruited local blacks to register to vote so that they would have a say in town government. A reflection of his lifelong efforts to bridge the gap between whites and blacks was his being chosen as one of the first recipients of the Bridge-Builder Award, an award sponsored by Citizens for a United Windsor and the Windsor Human Relations Commission beginning in 1994.

Following his retirement from the police force, Bill took one of his hobbies that he'd done for years only in his basement, and created his own successful company, Wil-Bes Printing.