

**Of Interest:** At the Yale Center for British Art from January until March 39th, an exhibit of regency portraits from the National Portrait Gallery of London, titled: **Romantics & Revolutionaries**. It shows historical figures, Byron, Shelly, Wordsworth, Austen, Lord Nelson and others, whose lives and works characterized the Regency era, 1790-1830. By counter point, the Dickerman House, built in 1792, with its modest interior furnishings is an interesting contrast to the Romantic movement with its "Age of Personality" in England. The exhibition includes works by Sir Joshua Reynolds, George Romney, Thomas Phillips and William Beechey; also showcased is a range of engraved portraits. A workshop, **Finding Your Man: Connecticut's Civil War Soldiers**, will be given on February 22, 10:00-12:00 in Memorial Hall at the Museum of Connecticut History, in the Connecticut State Library. Free and open to the public, the workshop will bring together experts in the field of the state's military history and will show participants the research methods which bring to light the sources which contain a wealth of biographical information on the individual soldier. Call Mary Donohue, 806-566-3005 at the CT Historical Commission for more information.



# THE HAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER WINTER EDITION 2003

## Dear Members

On a crisp late October Sunday, the Jonathan Dickerman House Museum was teeming with visitors. The occasion was an appreciation reception for our friends and members, especially



Photograph courtesy of R. Rovero

the Spring Glen Garden Club, who's members care for our gardens, and our summer Docents, upon whom we rely to open the House for the public. The visitors were warmed by the inaugural lighting of the museum's three fireplaces which have been unusable since the mid-1960's. We thank Bill Doheny for the glowing hearths which made the J.D. House really seem like a home. Pictured here is Chris Rendeiro, a long time Society member, in front of the kitchen fireplace.

A. Gorman

**N. Carlton Gilbert** On December 18th, the Society lost a very good friend. Lifetime member, Carlton Gilbert had served as our Vice-president and J.D. House manager for many years. Always there when needed, friendly and caring, generous and thoughtful, he was one of the best advertisements the Society could have to promote its work and mission.

**The Hamden Historical Society Library** announces its hours for the year 2003. This year the Library will open for the public on **Tuesday 10:00-12:00, Thursday 1:00-4:00 and Sunday 1:00-3:30**. Patrons can visit our web link to the Hamden Library at **www.hamdenlibrary** or email us at **hhs@hamdenlibrary.org**. or visit and browse our several items for sale such as the 3rd edition of *Hamden: Our Architectural Heritage*, *Born Among the Hills*, published Hamden Historical Society articles, reproductions of historic photographs and postcards. We encourage all members to visit our History Room on the third floor of the Miller Memorial Central Library.

## SLAVERY IN HAMDEN

New Englanders usually think of slavery as a southern phenomenon. While there were slaves in the north, the “peculiar institution” in this part of the country has been portrayed as rather benign, and slave owning as rare. However, scholars are beginning to realize that there were more slaves in the northern colonies and states than previously thought, that northern businesses and society profited greatly from trade in human beings, and that northern slavery could be every bit as cruel as in the south. Slave families could be broken up at any time, as when a master wished to avoid the cost of bringing up children, or when he died, elderly slaves were often cast aside with no one to care for them; compulsory breeding, while unusual, did occur, and Connecticut law mandated that slaves caught for minor infractions such as traveling without a pass or after curfew, or speaking back to a white person, were subjected to heavy fines, whippings, and re-sale. During the Connecticut tercentenary in 1936, historian Ralph Foster Weld in his work, Slavery in Connecticut, noted, “Relatively unimportant as was its stance in the total slave trade, Connecticut must yet bear its measure of responsibility. There were sea captains who engaged in it, slave dealers who bought and sold negroes, and public auction sales. Connecticut reproduced, on a small scale, the features of the system as found elsewhere.” With reappraisals of northern slavery receiving unprecedented attention, it is appropriate to recognize Hamden’s involvement--not for the purpose of singling out individual slave owners for blame, but to provide a profile of slavery in our town’s past.

Until 1786, when Hamden was incorporated, the communities that made up our town were a part of New Haven. Slave owning figures for the country are sporadic and probably underestimated. In New Haven county, there were at least 226 slaves in 1775, though New Haven itself reportedly had none. Yale’s president Ezra Stiles calculated 78 in the city in 1800, with the number peaking in 1810 at 310. How many, if any, slaves were in the northern parts of New Haven before the Revolutionary period is not known; however, slave-owning families that were instrumental in the settlement and development of Hamden included the Atwaters, Pardees, Munsons, and Goodriches. Figures for Connecticut as a whole are equally revealing. For example, in 1730--about the time the hamlets of the Hamden of today began to be settled in earnest--Connecticut had approximately 700 Indian and African slaves. But a quarter of a century later, the total had mushroomed to nearly 4,000--mostly Africans. And by 1774, the number of slaves in Connecticut had climbed to over 6,500.

Several factors account for this geometric increase. First, the development of the slave trade in the mid-eighteenth century made it easier--and more lucrative--to import, sell, and purchase slaves. Aside from the initial expense, owning a slave could be very profitable. Not only could owners save the expense of hired help, but they could lease out their slaves to their neighbors for a daily fee, for instance, at harvest time. For the most part, Connecticut masters--both men and women--owned one or two slaves, a male for fieldwork or millwork and a female for household chores, though there were some exceptions. For example, Col. Samuel Browne owned a Southern-style plantation in Salem, in southeastern Connecticut, on which 60 or more slaves produced cash crops. These crops in turn were sold in the transatlantic economy that connected New England, Africa, and the Caribbean--a “triangular trade” that made many Connecticut farmers, merchants and mariners wealthy indeed. Finally, owning slaves was a mark of social status and affluence. An elite group sought to own slaves to explicit their wealth.

Hamden reflected other areas in New England in an increased number of slaves as the eighteenth century progressed. In post-Revolutionary Hamden, a gentry class owned slaves.

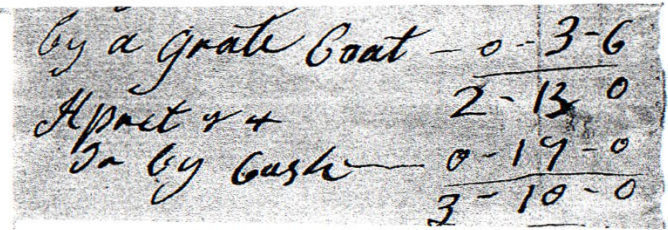
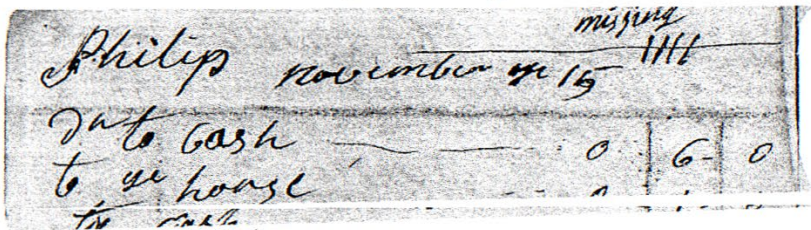
The 1790 Census lists four men in town, concentrated in Mount Carmel, as each owning one slave at the time. The wealthiest was “Squire” Bazel Munson (1730-1803), owner of an “extensive plantation” that included a sawmill and a grist mill, where his slave or slaves may have worked. The gin and dried corn that Munson produced in his mills he exported to the West Indies to feed slaves on sugar plantations. Apparently Munson owned more than one slave at some point, since in an entry in his lost account book records a “sale of slaves.” An inventory of his estate, done in 1803 for his widow listed, beneath a horse valued at \$9, a “black” valued at \$7.10—perhaps an indication that the slave was elderly.

Another “Squire” was Simeon Bristol (1739-1805). Bristol, whose house still stands on Whitney Avenue between River Road and Brooksvale Avenue, was a judge of the New Haven county court and then chief judge of the superior court. The Hamden records indicate that in 1795 Rose, “a female slave of Simeon Bristol,” gave birth to a son named Cyrus. Interestingly, at the time there were four free blacks in town named Bristol. Since freed slaves often assumed their former master’s name, this suggests that Bristol, like Munson, owned many more than the official records state. However, when the Judge passed away in 1805 (with an estate valued at over \$20,000), no slaves were included in the inventory.



The Simeon Bristol House on Whitney Avenue

Joel Bradley (1738-1801), mill owner and farmer, was another slave owner. His manuscript “Accompt Book,” begun in 1792 is housed at the Hamden History Room in the Miller Memorial Central Library. In 1794 Bradley began a page of expenses for “Phillip,” a freed black, possibly a former slave of Bradley’s. Phillip worked at a rate of a dollar a month. Bradley also records that he



sold Phillip an “old Jackit & britches” and a Grate Coat,” and soled a pair of shoes for him.

Finally, there is Col. Samuel Bellamy (1757-1839). Perhaps his slave or slaves served at his tavern and store near the Mt. Carmel Congregational Church. A relative later recalled that he “lived in great style.” Caught up in the westward movement, Bellamy moved to upper New York state in 1804. When he passed away, he left \$60,000 to Auburn Seminary.

Though these men lived through and served in the Revolution, with its call for liberty and equality, they continued to own slaves into the nineteenth century. However, the Revolution did impress upon some whites the blatant contradictions between republican principles and the existence of slavery. It should be noted, too, that the New Haven area gave rise to some of the most ardent advocates of abolition. Even so, there were many more in the state who, through a variety of motives—politically, not wishing to offend the South and cause disunion; economically, wanting to continue to profiting from slave trade and production; and racially, because of fearful of mixed-race society—resisted putting an end to slavery. It was not until 1848, after a series of gradual “emancipation” laws, that slavery was effectually legislated out of existence in Connecticut.

# ***NEWSLETTER***

**THE HAMDEN HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

**P.O. BOX 5512 HAMDEN, CONNECTICUT 06518**

**Antique Show Success** Once again the annual antiques show and sale was a resounding financial success and a joyful collaborative effort between the Hamden Historical Society and Giant Valley Association of Antiques Dealers. For twenty one years the knowledgeable dealers have created an inviting array of treasures in the warm attractive atmosphere of the Miller Library Complex. The Society is then able to serve food throughout the weekend to nourish and delight both the dealers and the ardent shoppers.

A new twist this year saw Society members as well as Giant Valley folks greeting the attendees and collecting the money. There were 1,042 people in attendance this year, an increase of 230 over last year.

The GVAAD presented a check of \$3000 to the Historical Society which will be an enormous help in our effort to fund a new cedar roof on the J.D. House.

Thank you to the five new volunteers this year--Tom Hogan, Marlene and John Corolla who did a great job at the front desk, ace sandwich maker Tom Sweeney as well as bake-table temptress, Liz Smith. Our fabulous contingent of "regulars" have not faltered in their well-practiced and joyful efficiency. So many of the workers are also talented bakers who provided fabulous goodies which are pure profit for this fund-raiser. Thanks to Lois Casey, Virginia Zukunft, Barbara Hogan, Connie and Tom Whalen, Ken and Laurie Minkema, Pam Rendeiro, Mary Embler, Nancy Faughnan, Al and Betsy Gorman. Thank you also to major contributors Pauline Doheny, Louise Ayers, Barbara Doheny and Joyce Gilbert. Photographs courtesy of the **Hamden Historical Society Library**.

