Newport Historical Society

History Starts Here

Voices from the NHS Archives

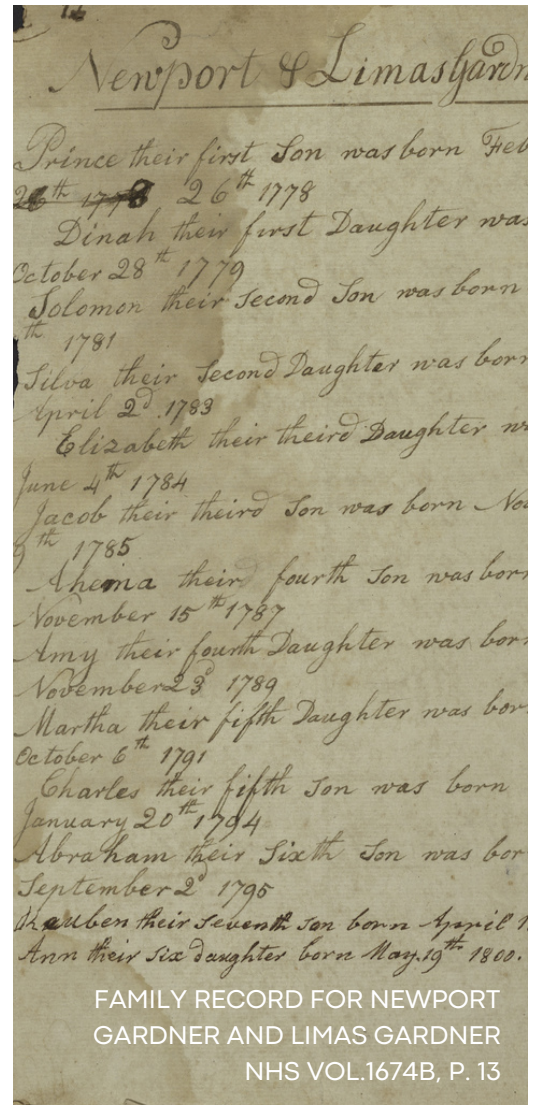## Database Guide

V3. April 2024

About This Project

Voices from the NHS Archives is an expansive research project that centers Black and Indigenous experiences recovered from the manuscript collection at the Newport Historical Society. More than a database, this project seeks to study historical documents page by page to create digital records and biographies that highlight the lives of the African, African American, and Indigenous people who lived and worked in Newport during the era of slavery.

Traditional histories of Newport in the 17th-19th centuries have centered on the white and the powerful; indeed, for much of our own organization's history, the collection and preservation of historical materials have also privileged these perspectives.

This project seeks to counter the pervasive fallacy that historical data on people of color is limited or non-existent. Here, we aim to refocus the ways in which the documentary record is examined and interpreted, to shift the emphasis away from the enslaver and instead center the personhood of those who endured enslavement.
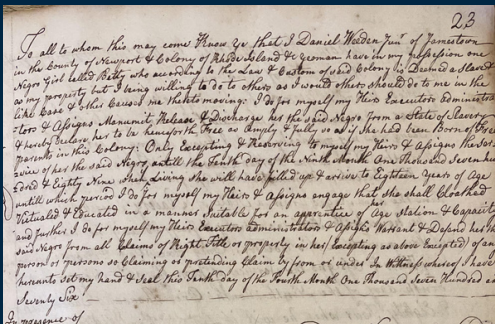
Ongoing research has revealed a wealth of voices and lived experiences relating to people of color: family relationships, business enterprises, births, marriages and more.

FAMILY RECORD FOR NEWPORT GARDNER AND LIMAS GARDNER NHS VOL.1674B, P. 13

This database contains highly searchable digital records that will allow members of the public and researchers alike to easily navigate the documents in our collection to explore the lives and stories contained within.
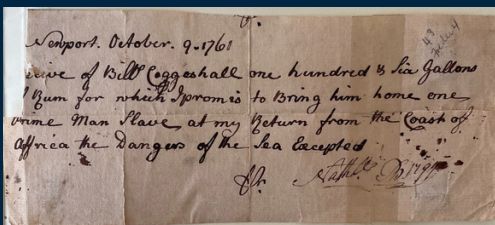
What is Included?

The online database incorporates digitized records from the NHS collection including **church records, business papers, ships logs, colonial medical records, census records, custom house records** and more. New materials are regularly ingested into the database; work on this project will be ongoing indefinitely.
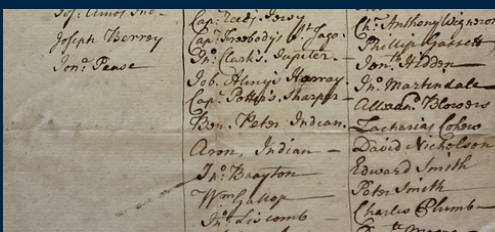
RELIGIOUS RECORDS

These contain information on marriages, baptisms, births and deaths. The NHS archives include records from the First, Second and Fourth Baptist Churches, the Zion Church, Trinity Church, the Quaker Society of Friends, the Seventh Day Baptists, the First, Second, and Union Congregational Churches, and more.
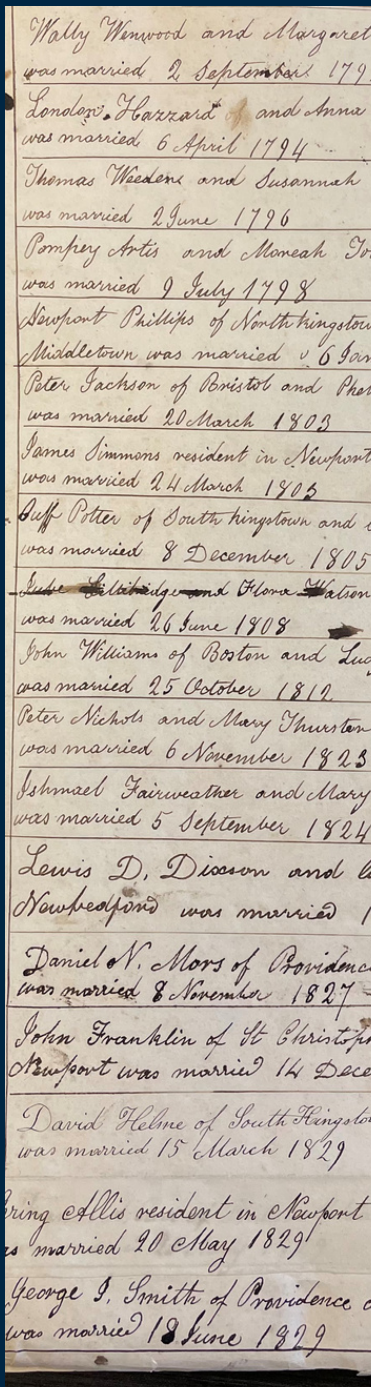
BUSINESS RECORDS

Letters and ledgers record details on Newport businesspeople who engaged in and profited from the slave trade and auxiliary trades (like rum and textiles), as well as merchants who did business with, employed, indentured, or enslaved Black and Indigenous Newporters.

MARITIME RECORDS

Ships logs, seamen protection certificates, and custom house records illuminate the lives of those who worked in maritime industries, served aboard ships, or were forcibly transported across the Middle Passage.

IMAGES (FROM TOP): EMANCIPATION OF BETTY, SOCIETY OF FRIENDS, NHS VOL.821, P. 23; BILL FOR ONE HUNDRED AND SIX GALLONS OF RUM IN EXCHANGE FOR "ONE PRIME MAN SLAVE", NHS BOX 43A, FOLDER 26; LETTER OF MARQUE FOR THE QUEEN OF HUNGARY, NEWPORT PRIVATEER, NHS BOX 69, FOLDER 16, P. 3.

A LIST OF MARRIAGES IN THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH. NHS VOL.1660, P.1.

How Does it Work?

Any occurrence recorded in a historical document is broken down into four component parts, using a data structure established by Enslaved.org: the **Source** document, the **Event** that the document records, the **Entities** (people or organizations) involved, and the related geographical **Locations**.

EVENTS

These describe something that happens in a person's life, like a birth, marriage, enslavement, or emancipation.

ENTITIES

Records for thousands of individuals—including enslaved, manumitted, and free people of African and Indigenous descent, enslavers, and slave traders—who lived and worked in Newport during the era of slavery. Refine your search by using gender, race, and freedom status as filters.

ROLES

In an Event, each Entity has a "Role", which defines how that person was involved. For example, in an Emancipation event, the people involved can be the "emancipated person" the "manumitter" or a "participant".

While the documentary record is often fragmentary, for some of these individuals we can paint a more detailed picture of their lived experiences, livelihoods, and webs of association. These are highlighted in the **Featured Stories** section of the website. These records will be continually updated as we study the documents in our archive to recover the stories of Black and Indigenous Newporters.

Page by Page

NHS Staff photograph manuscript materials and upload images to Collections.NewportHistory.org.

Each page is reviewed to see what Events it references. Records are created for Events, Entities, and Locations.

For example: This document from our archive records John Stevens "loaning" two enslaved people, Zingo and an unnamed individual, to Abraham Redwood.

In our database, this Event type would be classified as "the lease or loan of an enslaved person". For that specific event type, fixed roles include that of the enslaved persons [Zingo and the unnamed man], enslaver [John Stevens], the temporary enslaver [Abraham Redwood], and any participants, and witnesses [there are none in this case].

NHS BOX 36, FOLDER 5

1 Photograph manuscript

2 Upload images to the database
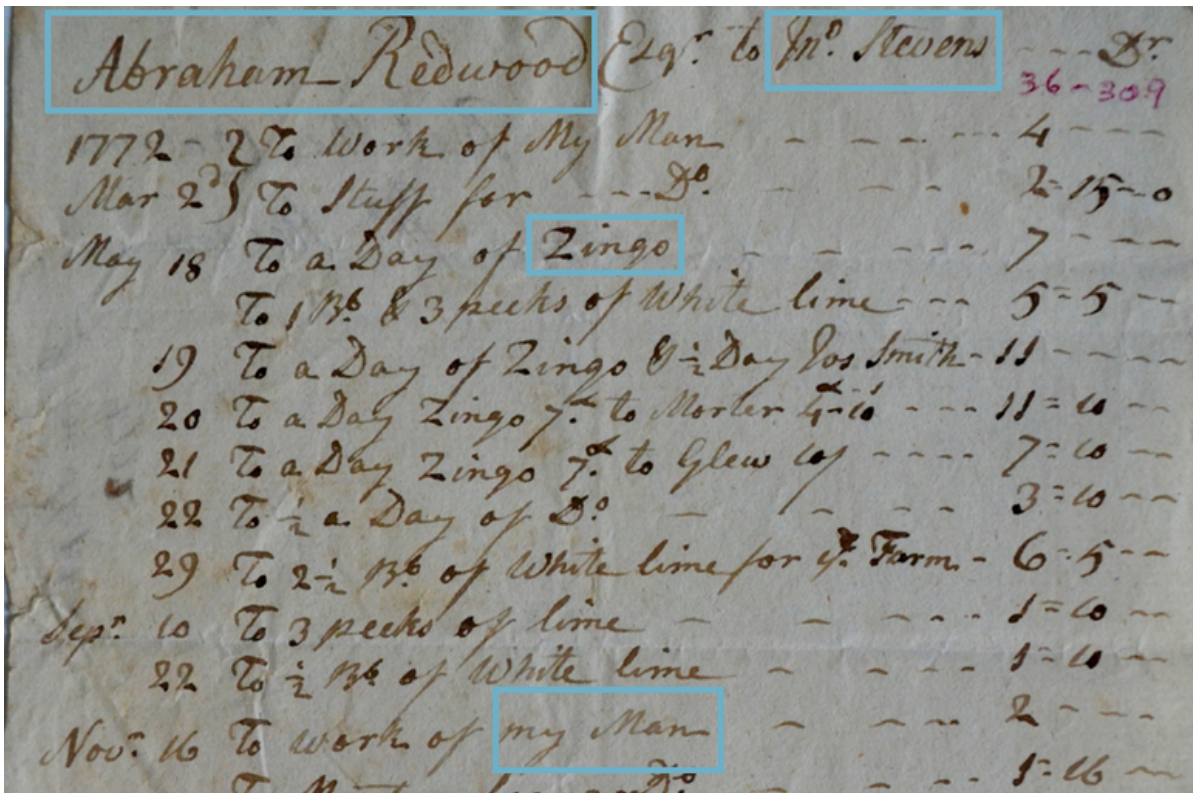
3 Create and link Event, Entity and Location records

4 Assign roles within the Event

5 Publish records at Collections.Newport History.org

Terminology

Many of the historical documents in this database contain the harmful and racist terminology that was common during the study period. The project team strives to summarize the contents of these documents without perpetuating white supremacist language and concepts. Harmful language that does appear in the database is enclosed in quotation marks, to signal it derives from the source document, and is not the phrasing chosen by the database team.

The table below documents some of the decisions made in the process of creating this database and its controlled vocabularies. This will be updated as work progresses, and user feedback is shared with us.

Term used	Description
Black	Entries in the database capitalize Black (and not white), when referring to groups in racial, ethnic, or cultural terms. Many feel that the term "Black" reflects a shared identity and community. "White" carries a different set of meanings; its capitalization has been coopted by white supremacist movements and it is therefore not capitalized here.
Enslaved	The database uses "enslaved" when referring to a person in bondage, rather than "slave". This emphasizes that being in bondage does not define the person who was enslaved; here, we aim to privilege their humanity over their freedom status.
Multiracial	Historical documents sometimes include the term "mulatto" to identify people of mixed racial heritage. It is problematic to rely on these identifiers as they reflect the views of the person recording the document rather than the individual's own preferences or personal identity. These classifications also perpetuate erasure, in that Indigenous people were often recorded as being of African or mixed heritage in historical documents. In recording metadata for race, researchers read documents carefully for context, but this is an imperfect process. Please contact Research@NewportHistory.org to voice any questions or concerns.
Native American & Indigenous	This database uses "Native American" or "Indigenous" when recording references to the Native peoples of Rhode Island; historically the Narragansett, Wampanoag, Pequot, Nipmuc and Niantic peoples. We recognize that different people have differing preferred identifiers. Both terms are capitalized throughout in recognition of a shared cultural and historical identity.
Servant	Historically, "servant" was used interchangeably for "slave". Black and Indigenous people identified as "servants" in a historical document are recorded in the database as enslaved, unless context clues or other documentation on their freedom status indicate otherwise.

We recognize that language preferences and standards evolve over time, and that racial classifications, like the ones used in this database, can be problematic. We strive to anti-racist terminology and classifications and will work to keep the language used in the database updated to reflect current usage and sensitivities.

Notes on Names

PERSONAL IDENTITY

The majority of the documents in the NHS' collection were written by white individuals: enslavers, merchants, and government officials. These records are inherently biased in that they privilege the recorder's perspective. It is difficult to ascertain if the names recorded for Black and Indigenous people would have been their preferred identifiers.

Enslaved people were commonly assigned the surname of their enslaver, if they were allowed to have one at all. Some free or freed people chose their own surnames, while others used different names in public or private settings, all acts of resistance and agency.

Where they have been identified, alternate names and spellings are included in a person's Entity record in the database.

UNIDENTIFIED PEOPLE

Many creators of historical documents intentionally excluded the names of Black and Indigenous people in the written record, a tool for erasure, dehumanization, and suppression. This database contains thousands of records for unidentified people: those whose labor and lives are referenced in ships logs, business papers, censuses, probate records and more, with the exclusion of their name.

It is our hope that through further research, we will uncover additional archival documentation that will reveal more information about these individuals and their lives.

LEDGER FOR THE SNOW "GREYHOUND" WHICH UNDERTOOK SEVERAL CROSSINGS TO MODERN-DAY GHANA TO TRAFFIC ENSLAVED PEOPLE. NONE OF THE ENSLAVED PEOPLE PURCHASED BY THE CAPTAIN OF THE GREYHOUND ARE IDENTIFIED BY NAME. NHS VOL.1342, PAGE 10.

In Gratitude

Work on this project would not have been possible without the dedication of NHS staff, research fellows, and a generous community of partner organizations, scholars, museums, and libraries.

Project leads & NHS Staff:
Kaela Bleho
Zoe Hume
Bert Lippincott
Bridget Newton
Ingrid Peters

Buchanan Burnham Fellows:
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Alexander Bice   Laura Bacon
Zoe Hume   Rebecca Farias
Hampton Smith   Maureen Iplenski

Partners, Scholars and Repositories

Ted Andrews   Ruth Taylor
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Akeia de Barros Gomes   SlaveVoyages.org
Tara Bynum   Rhode Island Historical Society
Marian Desrosiers   The Rhode Island Black Heritage Society
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Our Funders

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Gift by Mercedes Hinton in honor of James E. Hinton.

Interested in collaborating? Please reach out to us at Research@NewportHistory.org.

Other Resources to Explore

Enslaved.org

SlaveVoyages.org

The Bristol County Enslaved History Database

Little Compton Historic People of Color Database

Registers of Seamen's Protection Certificates, Mystic Seaport Museum

Black Loyalists Digital Collections

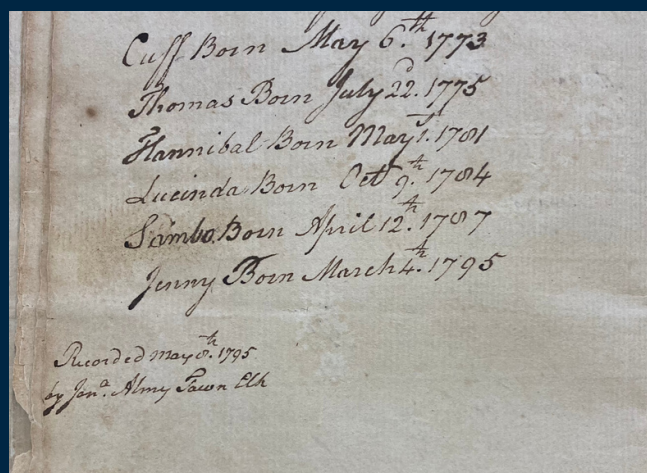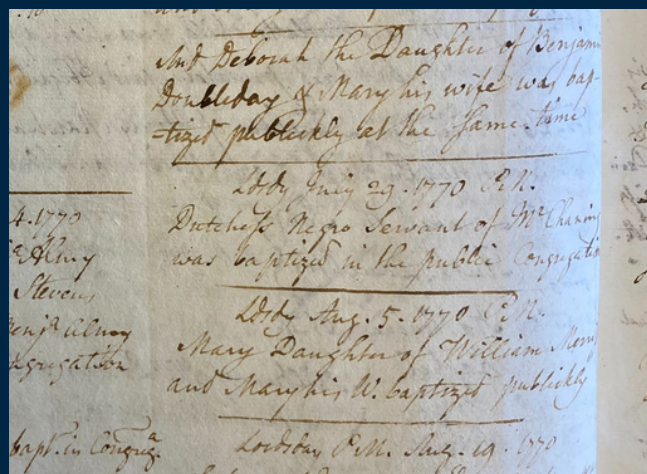Do you have resources to share? Please reach out to us at Research@NewportHistory.org.

![Newport Historical Society — History Starts Here]

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CONCERNS?

This database is a work in progress, and we welcome your feedback.

Email us at:
Research@Newport
History.org

IMAGES (FROM TOP): MARRIAGE OF ARTHUR FLAGG AND FLORAH BURROUGHS, 1763, NHS BOX 104 FOLDER 2; BAPTISM OF DUCHESS QUAMINO, SECOND CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, VOL.838B P. 40; BIRTH RECORD FOR CUFF, THOMAS, HANNIBAL, LUCINDA, SAMBO AND JENNY, ENSLAVED BY THE COLLINS FAMILY, VITAL RECORDS VOL.B, P.43B.