

School Committee Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names
Monday, May 21, 2018
5:30 PM – 7:00 PM
Walsh School Committee Room, 5th Floor, Brookline Town Hall

Agenda

- 1) Approval of Minutes of the April 30, 2018 Meeting
- 2) Update on Town Meeting Warrant Article 23: Renaming of the Edward Devotion School
 - a. Ad Hoc Task Force Discussion
 - b. Public Comment
- 3) Presentation of Ad Hoc Task Force Research on the Names of Brookline Schools - Lawrence, Driscoll, and, if time permits, Heath
 - a. Ad Hoc Task Force Discussion
 - b. Public Comment
- 4) Meeting Schedule, Next Steps, and Agenda for Next Meeting
 - a. Ad Hoc Task Force Discussion
 - b. Public Comment
- 5) Old and New Business

ARTICLE 23

TWENTY-THIRD ARTICLE

Submitted by: Deborah Brown, Anne Greenwald

To see if the Town will change the name of the Edward Devotion School to the Roland B. Hayes School, or other appropriate name consistent with 21st century values and the Town's commitment to diversity and inclusion by September 1, 2018.

or act on anything relative thereto.

PETITIONER'S ARTICLE DESCRIPTION

This Article calls for changing the name of a popular public school named after a slaveholder, Edward Devotion. Holding a slaveholder up as a beacon of virtue to young people sends the wrong message to our youth, people of color, allies and the broader Brookline community. Brookline cannot claim to be taking the moral high ground and also be comfortable having a school named after a slaveholder.

By way of background, in 1744, Edward Devotion, Brookline resident and slave-owner, bequeathed property to the Town for the building of a new school. Over two centuries passed when some residents had an interest in establishing the role that slavery played in the Town's development. In response to such interests, in 2006, the Hidden Brookline Committee was established by the Town to bring to light the history of slavery in Brookline. In the ensuing years, the Committee performed a great deal of research which resulted in 2012 a warrant article. In it, the Town acknowledged the history and pledged "vigilance against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people." It was the first time in Town Meeting that slavery in Brookline had been discussed since the 18th century.

On May 24, 2012, the Town passed the resolution called "A Resolution Regarding Slavery in Brookline." The Town has continued its commitment to inclusion. In 2017, the Town entered into a compact with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), agreeing to implement racial equity, eliminate implicit and explicit bias, and eradicate individual, institutional, and structural racism. Signs around Town celebrate the Town's commitment to diversity and inclusion.

Despite some best efforts to support diversity and inclusion, few knew that Edward Devotion was a slaveholder. In August 2017, the Brookline School Committee received multiple requests, in writing, to discuss changing the name of the Edward Devotion School to something more compatible with 21th century values. Despite multiple attempts by residents to get the School Committee's attention, the request went without a substantive reply until a February 2017 article appeared in the *Brookline TAB*. Deborah Brown

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published an open letter to the community pressing that the School's name be changed. A subsequent editorial appeared two weeks later in the *Boston Globe* expressing a similar sentiment. The communication in the papers and direct communications with the School Committee provide actual and apparent notice of our intent to have the School's name changed. Following the Brookline TAB article, residents formed an organization to advocate for the name change. In March 2017, the School Committee agreed to discuss a renaming the Edward Devotion School.

Retaining the Edward Devotion's name on a school or a protracted debate creates a variety of issues for the Town. Beyond the social issues it has brought to light, there are potentially economic repercussions. While there are few Towns as livable as Brookline, people may choose to live elsewhere. In a competitive job market, people may actually elect to work elsewhere. Businesses may have concerns about whether people will want to travel to Brookline to do business. Finally, protracted debate may draw a heinous and horrific element to the community.

We believe that we have described why it is in the best interest of the Town to change the name of the Edward Devotion School to a more appropriate name.

MOTION TO BE OFFERED BY THE PETITIONERS

Voted: That the Town change the name of the Edward Devotion School to a name to be selected by the School Committee after receiving public input through a process to be determined by the School Committee. Town Meeting hereby requests the Naming Committee to consider the name so selected by the School Committee and make a recommendation to Town Meeting with respect thereto at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. In the interim, the name of the School shall be Coolidge Corner School.

ADDITIONAL EXPLANATION OFFERED BY THE PETITIONERS

Petitioners submitted the Warrant Article in order to accurately reflect history in its context and to acknowledge that Edward Devotion's name should not rest above a school when applying the Town's and 21st century values. We expect that removing Edward Devotion's name and renaming the School will happen in an open and transparent manner.

Slavery as an institution cruelly dehumanized and discriminated against people of African Ancestry and Native Americans in our nation. By 1700, leaders like Samuel Sewall were decrying slavery and calling for its abolition in a document called "The Selling of Joseph: A memorial." Despite protestations by Sewall and John Eliot, the abomination continued.

Slavery was legal in Massachusetts from 1638 until around 1800. "The enslavement of Africans began soon after the start of English colonization proving to be the mirror process of Indian removal. The first documented shipment of enslaved Africans arrived in 1638, eighteen years after the Mayflower's journey.

In 1744, upon the death of the second Edward Devotion, his will, executed the year before his death, decreed that any money left over after payment of his debts and funeral expenses and other bequests be used "towards building or maintaining a School as near the centre of the said town as shall be agreed upon by the town." If a site for a new school could not be agreed upon, the money was to be used to purchase a wood lot for use by the town to support the town's school and church. An inventory of his property compiled after his death included land, livestock, household goods, and "one Negrow" valued at 30 pounds. "New England colonists wrote wills when they had an idea that death was approaching, and they wrote with at least one eye looking towards prosperity. Their careful dispersal of their human property underscores how even a single slave could loom large in an owner's understanding of his or her own estate.

The former Devotion land and house on Harvard Street reverted to Devotion's widow Mary upon the failure of Solomon Hill to pay the mortgage on the property in 1762. It was then sold, and the town, as stipulated in the will, received funds. In 1837, these funds were recorded as amounting to \$2,281.01. The town added additional funds received from the Federal government, bringing the total amount to just over \$4,500.

The Town did not ignore or forget Edward Devotion's gift. As in 1844, the money in the Edward Devotion Fund was allocated toward the construction of the new Brookline Town Hall on Prospect Street, near the location of the current Town Hall. The building contained two rooms used as schoolrooms. Again in 1884, the Town Meeting, apparently considering the use of the funds for the Town Hall not to have fulfilled Devotion's bequest, voted to add \$5,000 to the Devotion Fund to be put toward expansion of the Brookline High School on School Street. A large hall in the school was named the Edward Devotion Hall in recognition of Devotion's bequest, and a plaque commemorating his gift was placed in the school. (The plaque was lost when the old Brookline High School was replaced by a new building on Greenough Street in 1893.)

It was not until 1891 that a large portion of the former Edward Devotion property, including the Edward Devotion House, was purchased by the Town from the estate of a later owner, Nahum Smith, for \$61,000. The property had passed through several owners after 1762, including William Marshall, Israel Thorndike, and George Babcock.

Finally, or approximately 150 years later in 1892 a new school named the Edward Devotion School was built on the site. (No record of a discussion of the naming at the time has been found.) Other buildings were added in 1898 and 1913. The 1892 and 1898 buildings were later replaced.

In 2006, the Hidden Brookline Committee was established by the Town to bring to light the history of slavery and freedom in Brookline.

In 2012, the Hidden Brookline Committee put forward a warrant article on slavery acknowledging the history and pledging "vigilance against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people." It was the first time since the 18th century that slavery in Brookline was discussed in Brookline Town Meeting. On May 24,

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2012, the Town passed the resolution called "A Resolution Regarding Slavery in Brookline."

In 2017, the Town entered into a compact with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), agreeing to implement racial equity, eliminate implicit and explicit bias, and eradicate individual, institutional, and structural racism.

Moreover, that is also arguably true about Edward Devotion is that he would not meet today's naming standards. Records do not indicate that Devotion set an example of outstanding citizenship; made an exemplary contribution of time, service, or resources to or on behalf of the community; represents a core value of the school system; and demonstrated lengthy and/or exemplary service to the students of Brookline. Who was he? Edward Devotion collected funds for the church and encouraged people to attend church. He also held for a brief period some public employment. He did value education and he died childless. As described above the Town has recognized Devotion's contributions to the Town, but going forward his contributions will have to be better contextualized. Tools like the yellow historic house; the Hidden Brookline materials and tour, Brookline Historic Commission materials and the School's curriculum provide forums and vehicles for everyone to learn more about Edward Devotion and the Town's history of enslaving Africans and Native Americans.

Knowing what we now know in 2018, it is unconscionable that a Brookline elementary school would continue to be named after a slave-owner, as to do so undermines the core values of equality and mutual respect that our educational system strives to impart to our children, and that form the foundation of our democracy.

Since 2006, the Town of Brookline has grappled with how best to acknowledge the history of slavery and racism in Brookline and to understand its impact on the present. Hidden Brookline has provided a great deal of education and advocacy, but many issues remain. This warrant calls for changing the name of a public school named after a slaveholder, Edward Devotion. Removing Edward Devotion's name from the grade school is the first step.

We are advocating for an open, transparent and robust public involvement process. Finally, no later than March 2019, petitioners will submit a warrant article with a new name for the school that Town meeting will vote to approve or not.

The School Committee will support the Town during this process. The School Committee has established an Ad Hoc Task Force to review the names of all of the buildings and spaces in the Public Schools of Brookline to ensure that they meet the School Committee and the Town's naming criteria. They will solicit feedback from historians and community members, including students, teachers, alumni and citizens at large. They will also review legal aspects of removing a name from a building. The Task Force will present their findings and recommendations to the School Committee and provide a written report by Labor Day 2018, with an interim update to the School Committee in early May 2018. Once the process has been completed, the School Committee will recommend a new name to the Naming Committee.

This entire process will enable the Town to better uphold its stated values by not only removing the name of a slaveholder, but also approving a process and name consistent with our values. Moreover, we can send a message to our students, their parents and the Town's ethnically diverse residents that we are willing to change according to the knowledge we have now. Let us identify the name and values of someone whom all can admire and perhaps even wish to emulate. Finally, let us acknowledge the enormous contributions made by African Americans and other People of Color in building this community and this nation.

SELECT BOARD'S RECOMMENDATION

A report and recommendation by the Select Board under Article 23 will be provided in the Supplemental Mailing. The Board is aware that a potential motion was still in flux when they met on May 1, and will take a position on a finalized motion at their meeting on May 15, 2018.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION:

A report and recommendation by the Advisory Committee on Article 23 will be provided in the Supplemental Mailing.

XXX

ARTICLE 23

SELECT BOARD'S SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

Article 23 is a petitioned article that, as revised, asks Town Meeting to rename the Edward Devotion School to a name chosen by the School Committee after a thorough public process has garnered community input to choose a permanent name for the school. In the interim this article asks Town Meeting to name the School the Coolidge Corner School until that process has been completed and a permanent name can be presented to Town Meeting. At such time the Naming Committee would also be asked for input on the name and make a recommendation in time for the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.

Although the School Committee has formed an Ad Hoc subcommittee on School Names to begin working on the effort to rename the School the Board is appreciative that the revised motion allows a more formal process to inform the name. The Naming Committee reviewed the original article at the beginning of April and recommended referral to the School Committee, via their newly established Ad Hoc Subcommittee on School Names. The Naming Committee guidelines call for a vote from the School Committee before they make a recommendation on such any proposal for the name of a school.

The Board is supportive of this article and notes that the effort to bring the history of Edward Devotion to light has been part of the ongoing efforts of Hidden Brookline, which seeks to acknowledge Brookline's history with slavery and freedom. Hidden Brookline hosts walking tours and has sponsored resolutions at Town Meeting to acknowledge this history. A plaque was installed at the Old Burial Ground to celebrate the African-American enslaved men, women and child buried there. The Board sees this proposal as a continuation of that effort.

The Board supports the revised motion and unanimously voted FAVORABLE ACTION on the motion offered by the Advisory Committee.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE'S SUPPLEMENTAL RECOMMENDATION

SUMMARY:

Warrant Article 23 asks Town Meeting to adopt a resolution that removes the name "Edward Devotion School" from the school currently bearing that name and asks for a robust public process to choose a new permanent name for the school. The Article is based on the premise that a school should not be named after a man who was a slaveholder.

By a vote of 12 in favor, 2 opposed, with 9 abstentions, the Advisory Committee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on the petitioners' revised Article 23 motion.

BACKGROUND:

In 1744, Edward Devotion, a Brookline resident and slave owner, bequeathed property to the Town for the building of a new school. In 1892 the Edward Devotion School was named in his honor.

It has not been widely known that Edward Devotion was a slaveholder. Despite the proximity of the Edward Devotion House to the school, it appears as if very little attention was paid to him over the years as part of the school's curriculum. (This is often contrasted with the attention shown to Amos A. Lawrence, namesake of the Lawrence School. Many graduates of the Lawrence School cite Lawrence's affiliation with the abolitionist movement as something they know about the history of their school.)

In recent years the Town has begun to pay more attention to the history of slavery in Brookline, establishing the Hidden Brookline Committee in 2006 to examine and bring to light the "hidden histories of slavery and freedom in Brookline." The May 2012 Annual Town Meeting by an overwhelming margin voted Favorable Action on Warrant Article 27, which acknowledged Brookline's history with slavery, called upon the people of Brookline to recognize contributions of Native-Americans and African-Americans, and pledged vigilance against practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people. It was through the work of the Hidden Brookline Committee that Devotion's slaveholding past came to light.

DISCUSSION:

There was strong support on the Advisory Committee for the spirit of this Warrant Article. Members of the Committee commented on both the ugly quality of slaveholding and the unique roles that schools and school names play in the lives of their students. Although there were members who expressed concern that the totality of Edward Devotion's life was being reduced to that of "slaveholder," most agreed from the supplied testimony that other than making a significant donation to the Town, Devotion was not a particularly distinguished resident and would not likely have qualified under our contemporary criteria for naming.

Opposition to the idea that history was somehow "being rewritten" was expressed, with Committee members pointing out that if this Article passes, there would still be an Edward Devotion House and a Devotion Street in Brookline.

Concerns were raised regarding whether the Article properly followed the process for changing the name of the school. For example, the Article, as submitted, instructed the Naming Committee to hold public hearings to select a name, failing to recognize that school names come from the School Committee. The responsibility of the Naming Committee is to review and report its recommendations on proposals for naming public facilities. It does not have the staff or the resources to organize a process for changing the

name of a school. The School Committee was consulted and has embraced this process, and the Advisory Committee amended the Article accordingly. The revised motion took the form of a resolution that included multiple “whereas” clauses and called upon the School Committee to hold public hearings, obtain public input, and recommend a new school name to the Naming Committee, which would then report to Town Meeting. The proposed resolution, particularly its “whereas” clauses was considered to be an expansion of scope of the Article and an inappropriate hybrid of a motion and a resolution. Thus, with the support of the Moderator, the petitioners are offering a new motion to reflect the Advisory Committee feedback, the Moderator’s ruling, and input from the School Committee. The revised motion has been recommended by the Advisory Committee.

RECOMMENDATION:

By a vote of 12–2–9, the Advisory Committee recommends FAVORABLE ACTION on the following motion:

VOTED: That the Town change the name of the Edward Devotion School to a name to be selected by the School Committee after receiving public input through a process to be determined by the School Committee. Town Meeting hereby requests the Naming Committee to consider the name so selected by the School Committee and make a recommendation to Town Meeting with respect thereto at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. In the interim, the name of the School shall be Coolidge Corner School.

Michael Driscoll

April 18, 1844-April 17, 1926

Sources:

- Driscoll School homepage (“Driscoll School’s Namesake”, written by Elizabeth Perry, June 29, 1951)
- Various 1926 obituaries, Brookline Chronicle & Boston Globe
- John Denehy's 1906 bicentennial history of Brookline

Michael Driscoll was born in Brookline Village to James Driscoll, a well-to-do contractor. He and his seven siblings were educated in the public schools. After leaving school, he plied his trade in the mercantile business in Boston for a bit, then began working for his father as a contractor. He had five children with his first wife, Margaret Shea Driscoll, who died in 1883. He had three more children with Ellen O’Hearn Driscoll, who died in 1898.

In 1874, Driscoll was first elected to the School Board. He served in this capacity until his death (52 years). During his long tenure, the school population rose dramatically: from 1,234 pupils in his first year to over 4,000 by the time his namesake school opened. Driscoll helped oversee the planning and construction of several new schools, including Pierce, Runkle, Heath, and Driscoll. Per Ms. Perry: “His knowledge of the contracting business , and his ambition to provide good housing facilities for every pupil in every part of town, resulted in a building program which was outstanding for those days, and which drew commendation from far and near.” The new Driscoll School was named in his honor in his 36th year of service.

In 1878, Driscoll was elected Superintendent of Streets, a position that he held until 1925, due to failing health.

Michael Driscoll was a member of the Mass. Catholic Order of Forresters, Knights of Columbus, Catholic Union of Boston, and the Brookline Historical Society.

Anecdotes:

- A proud graduate of the Pierce School, Mr. Driscoll enjoyed the annual presenting of diplomas at both Pierce and Brookline High School. Every one of his children, and many of his grandchildren, nephews, and nieces, received their diplomas from his hands. A member of the finance committee in charge of payrolls, he also personally administered the required yearly arithmetic exams.
- Mr. Driscoll was a taskmaster to students and family members alike. One of his daughters, newly-graduated from Simmons College and employed as his secretary, nevertheless felt his wrath when her handwriting didn’t measure up to his legibility standards.

Respectfully submitted, Pamela L. Roberts

Heath School

The Heath School is the only one of the eight K-8 schools in Brookline that is not named in honor of a particular individual.

The first school at the location of the current Heath School opened in 1902. It was a replacement for a school that formerly stood on Heath Street. That school, which open in the 1850s, was called the “Heath-Street School”, named for the street on which it stood not for any individual. The earliest reference to it in town records as the Heath School (rather than Heath-Street School) was in 1883.

The name Heath Street was first designated by the town in 1841 when a naming committee was formed to oversee the naming of streets. (Other streets named at that time included Washington Street, Harvard Street, Boylston Street, Warren Street, Walnut Street, Cypress Street, and about a dozen others.)

Heath Street was applied to the road “from Worcester turnpike or Boylston Street by Mr. Heath’s to Newton line.” “Mr. Heath” was most likely Charles Heath (1801-1868) although his father Ebenezer (1765-1845) would also still have been alive at the time.

My research on slavery in the Heath family of Brookline

Summary: the names of 5 slaves in the Heath family are known: Cuff, Kate, Primus, Ben Boston and Dinah. I was unable to determine which member or members of the Heath family were slave owners, other than to say that one of the sources listed a John Heath as an enslaver. Who was the Heath School named after? As Ken Liss has said, there were also Heaths who lived in Brookline after slavery had died out.

John Heath enslaved:

- Cuff
- Kate
- Primus

Source for the 1st two enslaved: *Brookline Historical Publications Society, 1929 and*

Source for the 3rd enslaved: Harriet F Woods, *Historical Sketches of Brookline Mass.*, 1874, p. 320

Comment w/ a Q: in 1776, a **John Heath** is listed as owning “2 Negroes or Molattoes”. Source: *A List or Return on Oath of the Names of Householders in the Town of Brookline*. Which Heath is this?

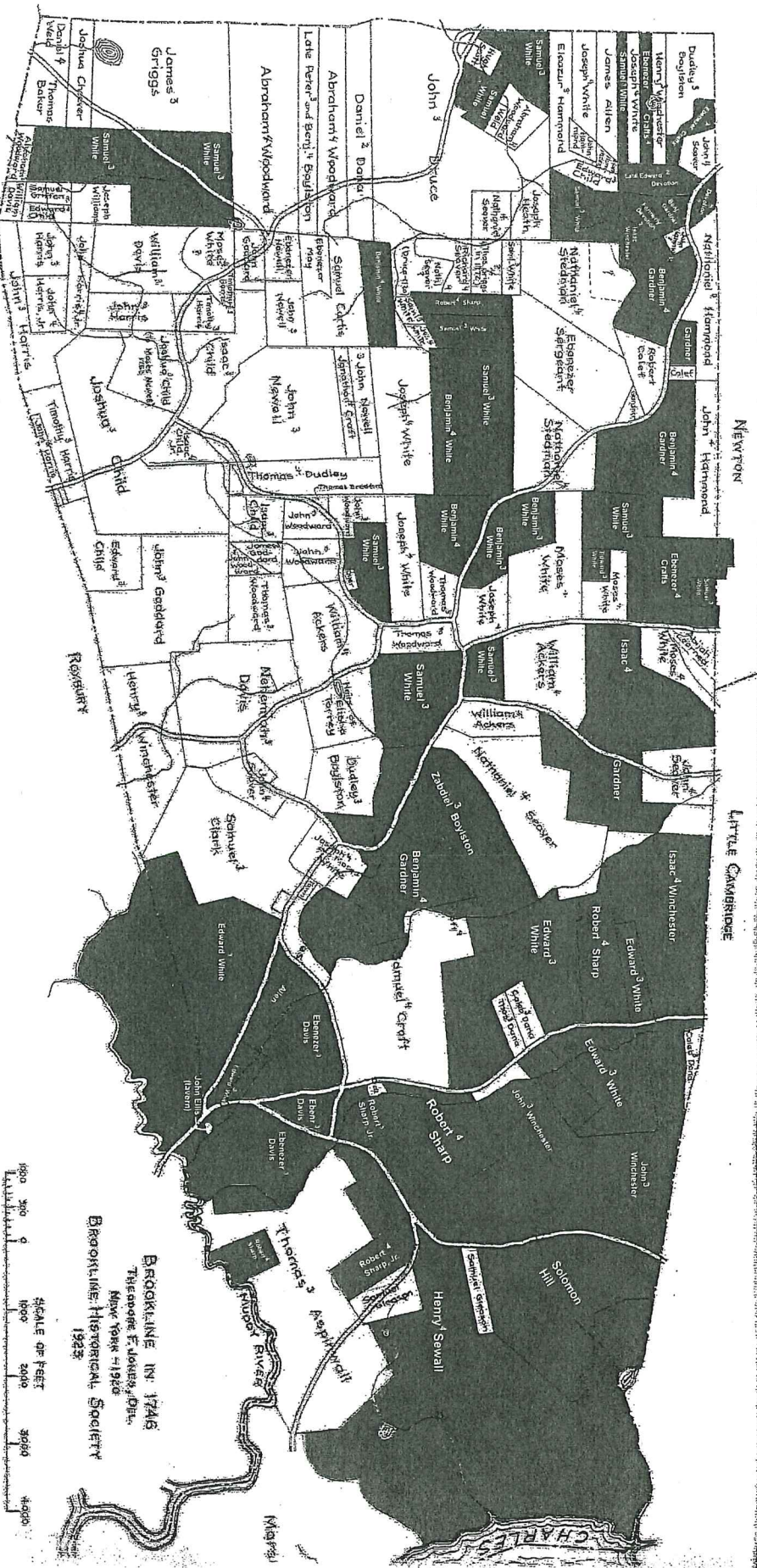
Comment w/ a Q: Harriet Woods in *Historical Sketches* p. 221 mentions a **Ben Boston** as “an old slave in the Heath family.” He and Dinah, both slaves, were buried in the Old Burying Ground (Walnut Street cemetery). Woods writes they were buried in the potter’s field, with their names carved onto stones there, though the 1920 list of burials at Walnut Street list “family servants” as buried in the Heath tomb, a common burial practice for the enslaved, who at the time were often referred to as “servants”.

Comment w/ a Q: again, from Harriet Woods, p.221, she mentions a woman named **Dinah**, enslaved to “a still more ancient Heath”. Dinah is listed as buried in the Old Burying Ground.

For those interested, I’d be happy to share information on the significance of the names of the 4 enslaved people, as their names follow the pattern for slave-naming in this region.

Slave Owners' Property in Brookline (1746)

(Blue: property of slave owners)



Map slave owners' property, created
 March 2012 by Barbara B. Brown from
 historical documents

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