the REVERE HOUSE
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# Through the Eyes of a Merchant: Part II

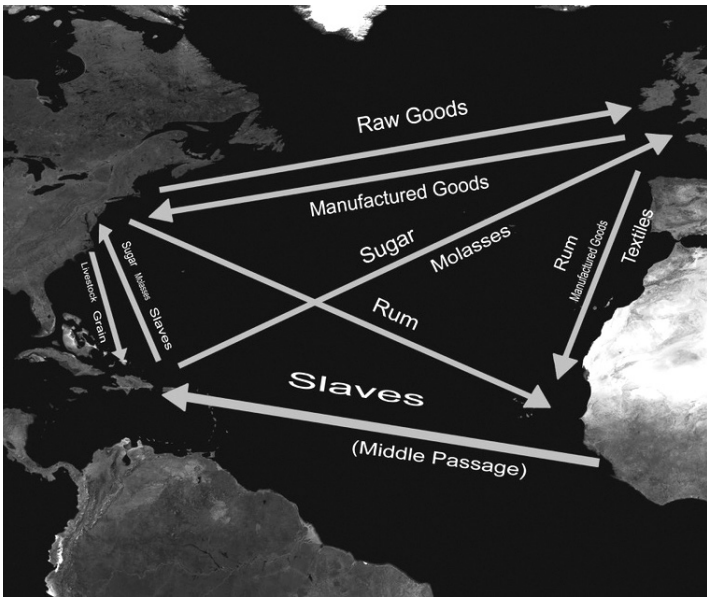
BY RUAIDHRÍ CROFTON

*Editor's Note: Part one of this article ran in the Spring 2020* Gazette. *This article is the long-planned conclusion to that previous* Gazette. *Its publication was delayed due to COVID-19 and the decision not to run a Summer issue. This article serves as a joint issue for the Fall and Winter of 2020.*

Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, roughly thirteen million Africans were enslaved and shipped west across the Atlantic Ocean. In that same period, between two to four million Native Americans were similarly enslaved on their own lands and traded for labor and profit in the growing colonial economy.[i] As historian Wendy Warren argues, slavery and colonialism went hand-in-hand in these formative years for North America, forging a deadly symbiosis, for "without colonies to grow staple crops…there would have been much less need for slaves. Without [slaves], there would have been no labor to grow the crops or to extract those minerals…cost-efficient enough to create the profits that made the whole system viable."[ii] Included in those numbers and personal stories were one to perhaps up to four other individuals who were enslaved by the original owner of the house at 19 North Square in Boston, the merchant Robert Howard.

Though slavery is most often associated with agricultural plantations in the American South, it also played a central role in Boston in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Massachusetts Bay Colony formally recognized and regulated slavery by adopting the "Massachusetts Body of Liberties" in 1641.[iii] While this legal code for the colony guaranteed civil rights to British colonists, under Article 91 it paradoxically stated that slavery would be allowed in cases where slaves were "lawfull captives taken in just warres, and such strangers as willingly selle themselves or are sold to us [sic]."[iv] Under these guidelines, the Massachusetts Bay Colony sanctioned the future importation of thousands of slaves from Africa to be 'sold to us' for use in colonial society.

In most communities in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, slavery was an ever-present part of daily life. In 1687 a European observer noted that "you may also own negroes and negresses [in New England] for there is not a house in Boston, however small may be its means, that has not one or two."[v] Although exaggerated, as for the most part only relatively wealthy homes and businesses could afford enslaved persons, the perception that almost every home had at least one slave speaks to a sizable number of enslaved Africans present relative to the town's population in the 1680s. There were fewer than 200 slaves in Massachusetts in 1676, though that number grew to 550 by 1708, and approximately 2,000 by 1715.[vi] Many enslaved people, referred to as "servants" or "perpetual servants" by their white owners, worked on farms




*Robert Howard's work as a Boston merchant was an essential cog in the complex and infamous triangle trade, which took on multiple iterations across the Atlantic Ocean. Public Domain Image accessed via Wiki Commons.*

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## *From the Executive Director…*

When I began drafting this in late March, it was assuming that by the time this issue was printed in late May, we would "be back on a path to normalcy." On so many levels nothing could be farther from the truth. Eight months later, we are all still coping with an unprecedented situation and have come to realize how vulnerable we are despite all of the presumed benefits of modern life. The disruption of this "pandemic moment" has been exacerbated by political and racial strife along with severe weather and fires that have further raised concerns of climate issues. It is exhausting for all of us having to balance new regulations and shifting expectations with no real end in sight. Yet there is important work to be done.

Suffice it to say that I believe that many of us now have a better appreciation for how health crises played out in the past. It is far easier to imagine Paul Revere quarantined with his family at home after one of his children was diagnosed with smallpox. Unable to work as much as he needed to, he certainly had concerns about how he would provide for his family and if his silver business would survive. Later in his life, as President of the Board of Health, he worked to advance common sense protocols to promote healthier hygiene practices in Boston and remove, or at least mitigate, unnecessary sources of germs and contagion. Again, in this current pandemic, it seems it is the rather simple measures – masks, distancing, and hand washing – that provide the best measure of protection as we wait for a vaccine.

Of course, we are also experiencing a tipping point on issues of racial justice and equity. It has caused me to consider that so much of the history we learn is linked to memory and in many cases, beloved national mythology. In part, our success as a museum is directly tied to how often Paul Revere's name continues to be invoked. Much has been made of, and rightly so, the fact that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's poem, by naming only Revere, helped to push names like Dawes and Prescott into obscurity. As a result, we have the challenge and opportunity to use Revere's legacy and popularity to share the names and experiences of lesser known characters: Dawes, Prescott, and all of the many riders out on the evening and morning of April 18 and 19, 1775; Samuel, a Black man enslaved by Robert Howard, the first owner of the Revere House; Deborah Sampson, who was initially denied her military pension though she served in the American Revolution disguised as a man, and who Revere helped to ultimately secure her pension; Thomas Eayres, Revere's son-in-law who he helped when mental illness overcame him as others turned a blind eye; and Mrs. Santosuosso and all of the people who lived in, owned, or worked at 19 North Square before and after the Revere family. Our task is to speak the names of those whose history has been forgotten or marginalized as they intersect with Revere's legacy and the long history of our properties.

We also need to reinforce with our many visitors that the history of our site begins not in 1630 when Boston was settled, but when indigenous people came to the Shawmut Peninsula to live and access resources. Indeed, the location that the Revere House sits on was Massachusett land long before Boston was founded. Our goal is to be better, to be more authentic, and to be more welcoming by remembering that it is the shared experiences of life that bind us.

Of course, the closure and now our severely restricted capacity and modified operations have had a dramatic impact on our finances. Still we made a commitment to retain staff, knowing that they are the most critical resource we have. All that we have accomplished in the past, on hiatus during the closure, now, and into the future is due to their dedication, creativity, and hard work. Though the Association will be okay, we still need your assistance to support our recovery from a significant loss of earned income from admissions, museum shop sales, and education programs. I hope you will consider a donation. Now is a great time to give, as your contribution will be matched up to $50,000 by a generous anonymous supporter. To everyone who has wished us well, attended a virtual program, read a Revere Express blog, listened to an episode of Revere House Radio, faithfully renewed your membership, or made a contribution; thank you so much.

Nina Zannieri

harvesting crops in more rural communities, or alongside merchants and traders performing the more mundane tasks of commerce and housekeeping in Boston. Despite his participation in the extensive trade between New England and the West Indies, there are no records that suggest Robert Howard ever directly dealt in the trade or transportation of enslaved people. However, even without direct connections to the slave trade, his trade in commodities such as logwood and fish played an important role in the infamous triangle trade. Howard's products were exchanged for rum, sugar, and molasses in the West Indies and, in turn, for slaves in West Africa. Similarly, as a result of the wealth he accumulated, Howard and his family enslaved perhaps as many as five individuals at different times.

Records confirm only one name of a permanently enslaved person in the Howard household, Samuel, though contextual evidence hints at greater ownership. For instance, a 1698 document from Cotton Mather and the Second Church of Boston confirms Samuel's baptism, his enslavement by Howard, and that two of his infant children were also baptized.[vii] Presumably Samuel's children were also owned by Howard, though the official record does not state so specifically. Additionally, the infants do not appear in any further records related to Samuel or the Howards, so it is possible, perhaps even likely, that they died early in their childhood.

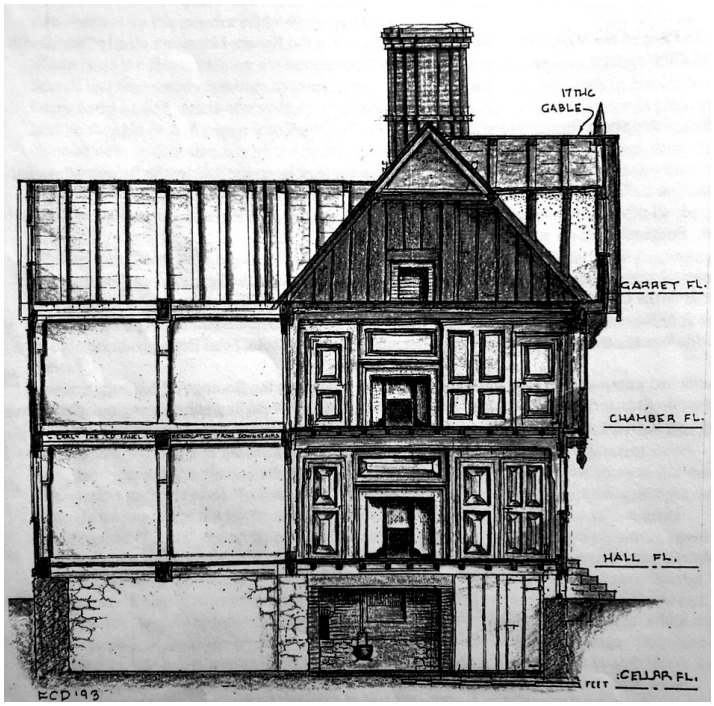
Further, a 1703/4 Suffolk County deed shows Robert Howard manumitting a Black man named Frank, who Howard then contracted to a seven-year indenture period. The document refers to Frank as the "sometime slave of Robert Howard."[viii] This, with the manumission, makes it almost a certainty that Frank was indeed enslaved by Howard, though cases of enslaved individuals being rented out to other owners was not uncommon. Whether Frank lived in the house at 19 North Square is unclear, as is the case with Samuel, as Howard ultimately bought another house and property on the adjacent lot to 19 North Square.[ix]

Finally, according to the register of admissions of the Second Church of Boston, two admitted members in Howard's lifetime are listed only by their first names and marked with the phrase "A Negro." Both individuals were admitted on August 23, 1702, following their 1698 baptism.[x] The aforementioned Samuel is joined on the registry by a woman named Katharine. Given the timing of their joint admission and listing, it is plausible that Katharine was enslaved alongside Samuel by the Howard family.

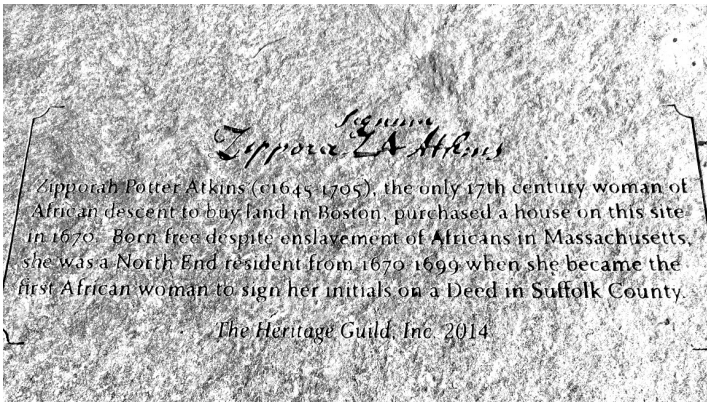
Samuel and Katharine's daily life would have centered on performing various household chores and duties. If indeed under the Howards' ownership, Katharine would have helped Sarah and Elizabeth Howard clean, spin and weave, tend to the garden, do laundry, and cook. Samuel certainly aided in some of these responsibilities but would have primarily served in a capacity more akin to an attendant for Robert Howard.[xi]

Unlike other enslaved persons in New England who would have worked alongside their owners in their trade, as a wealthy merchant, Robert Howard would not have performed much, if any, manual labor. Instead, Samuel might have tended to office work and building maintenance, delivered messages, or driven Howard around by carriage. Despite the clear racial distinctions in Puritan New England, both Samuel and Katharine would have still found themselves more intimately involved in the Howards' family life compared to slaves on Southern plantations whose lives were often kept entirely separate from the family for which they worked. For instance, it would not have been uncommon for New England slaves like Samuel and Katharine to eat the same food that they prepared for the Howards. As one New England visitor remarked with surprise, they might have even been allowed "to sit at Table and eat with them" in the house's main hall.[xii] Similarly, given the more urban location of the Howards' home, their slaves would likely have lived in the same vicinity as the rest of the family instead of in separate slave quarters seen on more rural estates outside Boston, such as the Royall House in Medford.[xiii]

As members of a Puritan society, albeit of a lower social standing, Samuel and Katharine attended services at the Second Church. Their full membership is rare, though the rigorous membership standards that governed Howard's status in the 1680s were being loosened by the early 18th century. Among the advocates for converting slaves to Christianity was Cotton Mather, the minister of the Second Church. Mather believed it was the religious community's responsibility to convert slaves, arguing that it would make them more submissive since it would teach them that their enslavement was the will of God and therefore obedience to a master was equivalent




*This rendering gives us some understanding as to what the layout of the house at 19 North Square might have looked like during the Howard ownership period. Drawing by Rick Detwiller.*




*After extensive research by Dr. Vivian Johnson, the city of Boston unveiled this commemorative marker for Atkins on the Greenway in 2014. Photo by the editor.*

to obedience to Him.[xiv] Mather had long sanctioned slavery itself, arguing "there must be a Superiority and an Inferiority; there must be some who are to Command, and there must be some who are to Obey."[xv] In Mather's view, among those who "are to Obey" were servants and slaves, those who "are under the Yoke of Servitude by a perpetual Vassalage, to those who have by Sword or Price purchased a Dominion over [them]."[xvi] According to his interpretation of scripture, slaves held in perpetual servitude were perfectly legal and in fact warranted by God's design.

Opposition to his religious inclusion arguments, but not slavery writ large, came from fear that it might cause slaves to see themselves more as "equals" to their white enslavers and in turn demand greater rights and privileges as fellow Christians and church members.[xvii] This was evidently not a concern for Robert Howard who placed enough emphasis on his religion to not only have his slave(s) attend services, but apply for membership. Although Howard's views on slavery are unknown aside from the fact that he was a slaveowner, his membership in Cotton Mather's church suggests he would have heard, and likely aligned himself with, the views of the well-known Puritan minister.

In contrast to Mather, Boston's Judge Samuel Sewall fiercely opposed slavery using different biblical interpretations. In 1700, Sewall penned *The Selling of Joseph,* arguing that "Originally and Naturally, there is no such thing as Slavery" and that no amount of money was a fair price for freedom, and therefore all enslavement was illegal and immoral.[xviii] Much like Mather, Sewall also pointed to scripture and God's order that "He that Stealeth a Man and Selleth him, or if he be found in his hand, he shall surely be put to Death [sic]."[xix] Unlike those who spoke out against slavery for the ill treatment slaves received at the hands of their masters, Sewall emphasized that it was not merely mistreatment, but the sale of another human to begin with that was contrary to the will of God. A prominent member of the Third Church of Boston, Sewall's opinions were sure to have been heard across town by the Howards.

Although slavery was not outlawed in Massachusetts until nearly seventy years after Robert Howard's death, he would not just have known of Black individuals as slaves. During his lifetime, he lived alongside a small number of free African Americans in his own North End neighborhood. Perhaps most famous among these individuals was a woman named Zipporah Potter Atkins. Born free circa 1645, Atkins purchased her house, next to Mill Pond and Hanover Avenue, in 1670, mere blocks away from the Howards' house.[xx] Atkins was truly exceptional at the time, being both a woman and among the first Black homeowners in Boston.[xxi]

Though few in number, other Black residents of Boston earned their freedom after a period of service or following the death of their masters. Despite this freedom, most found the economic situation to be impossibly hard in competing with white laborers and often being barred from most trades. Even with their freed legal status, their dark skin marked them as social inferiors of whites and forced them to live under similar limitations and discrimination that burdened slaves.[xxii]

While he flourished economically from Boston as a slave society, Robert Howard's written silence on slavery continued

## New Content Available on The Paul Revere House Website

During the *Gazette's* hiatus, you may have noticed new content from the PRMA in the form of our recently launched podcast, Revere House Radio, and blog, The Revere Express. Both have proven to be great ways to broaden our virtual footprint, expand the stories and histories that we can share, and connect with existing and new audiences. You can find both on our website through links on our homepage


at www.paulreverehouse.org, and you can download and subscribe to Revere House Radio on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or the iHeart Radio app.

If you have enjoyed this new content and are interested in continuing to support our work, please do consider a donation. For a limited time, all donations up to $50,000 are being matched by an anonymous donor, so it is the perfect time to double the impact of your gift! ❖

# In Memory of Thomas M. Desloges

When a young life is cut short there is great sadness and thoughts of what might have been. The Association was honored when the Desloges family asked us to help them find a way to honor Tom. After careful consideration, we agreed to place commemorative plaques on two Visitor Center display cases.

His father Art noted: "As a recent graduate of Florida Gulf Coast University with a degree in History, Tom brought his passion for early American History to his life and love of storytelling. His dream was to work in a museum like the Paul Revere House." We were taken by the fact that though he had just begun his journey, Tom's desire was to pursue a career in history museums – in effect he was one of us.

We are grateful for the family's trust and generosity. ❖

to his death, as the last document in his own words made no mention of Samuel or slavery as a component of his life. On December 25, 1717, "being now grown in years and apprehensive of [his] mortality [sic]", Robert Howard penned his last will and testament in the presence of Judge Samuel Sewall, as well as several of his close friends and neighbors.[xxiii] Of most pressing importance to the devout Puritan was what would become of his soul and body, stating that "Principally, and first of all, I give and Recommend my Soul into the hands of God that gave it: and my Body I Recommend to the Earth to be Buryed in a descent manner [sic]."[xxiv] His faith had guided him into his life as a merchant, informed his decision to own slaves, and justified his accumulation of wealth. As he had in life, his intention was now to return to God who he believed had made all aspects of his privileged life possible.

Next, Howard identified three individuals, his wife Elizabeth, his daughter Sarah, and his grandson Howard, as recipients of his estate. Howard first stated "I give and bequeath unto Elizabeth my beloved wife…the use and benefit income and improvement of my whole estate…one hundred pounds in money and the whole furniture of my Best Chamber."[xxv] His grandson would "be supported and educated out of my estate until he arrive unto the age of twenty one years," and his daughter would receive "one half part of the Residue of my whole estate…after my wife's decease."[xxvi] Given his stature as a successful shipping merchant, Howard was able to provide a substantial inheritance to the three people that clearly meant the most to him. Finally, the inclusion of several close friends and neighbors who he hoped would "advise and assist" his wife after his death, as well as the signature of the prominent Judge Sewall as his witness, served as one last reminder of his connectedness and prestige within a tight-knit community in Boston's North End.[xxvii] The will ends with no mention of any enslaved persons whom he bought, owned, freed, profited from, and lived with throughout his life. Howard's story and the story of those he came in contact with still serves an important role in understanding life in colonial Boston: a society defined by great disparities in wealth, freedom, and opportunity yet united by a shared religious foundation.

Thus, the story of Samuel and Katharine ends as inconclusively as it began. In 1716, an advertisement placed in the *Boston News-Letter* accounted the sale of a "Likely young Negro Fellow."[xxviii] Although the slave was to be sold by Captain Daniel Wyborn, Robert Howard's son-in-law, they were to be seen at "Robert Howard Merchant, his House in Clark's Square Boston."[xxix] Whether this is Samuel or another slave is impossible to tell. With no mention of the Howards' slaves in any official documentation after this, the experiences of Samuel, Katharine, Frank, and the two unnamed children are relegated to the edges of documented history in Boston, though the world in which Howard lived could not have been maintained without them. ❖

**Endnotes:**

[i] Warren, Wendy. *New England Bound:* Slavery and Colonization in Early America. New York, NY: Liveright Publishing, 2016, p. 1.
[ii] Ibid.
[iii] Public Broadcasting Service. "Slavery and the Making of America," 2004. www.thirteen.org/wnet/slavery/timeline
[iv] Body of Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony in New England, 1641.
[v] Warren, p. 19.
[vi] Johnson, Claudia Durst. *Daily Life in Colonial New England.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002, p. 147.
[vii] Cotton Mather Diary, 13 November 1698, in MHS, Collections, Seventh Series, 7, 8, and transcribed in Roper, Stephen J. *The Early History of the Paul Revere House, North Square, Boston.* June 1974; 13 November 1698. "Records of the Second Church" Vol. 4, MHS, transcribed in Roper.
[viii] As copied from the Suffolk County Registry of Deeds in Roper, p. 95-97.
[ix] Roper, p. 61-64.
[x] Cotton Mather Diary, 23 August 1702, MHS, in Roper; 23 August, 1702, Records of the Second Church of Boston, Volume VIII. Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society.
[xi] Johnson, p. 151.
[xii] Warren, p. 240.
[xiii] The Howards owned a second house adjacent to their property which would have provided additional accommodations.
[xiv] Johnson, p. 154.
[xv] Warren, p. 229.
[xvi] Ibid.
[xvii] Ibid, p. 155.
[xviii] Warren, p. 228.
[xix] Warren, p. 155.
[xx] "The African American Trail Project: Map of Significant Sites." Tufts University, 2019.
[xxi] Today, a plaque marks the location of her house on the Greenway. https://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2014/05/19/centuries-ahead-her-time-black-woman-bought-property-century-boston/aNCFsgPX2ywG8lTxjKdDfI/story.html
[xxii] Johnson, 156.
[xxiii] Howard, Robert. "Last Will and Testament, December 25, 1717." Suffolk County, MA: Probate File Papers. Online Database. AmericanAncestors.org. New England Historic Genealogical Society.
[xxiv] Ibid.
[xxv] Howard, Robert. "Last Will and Testament, December 25, 1717."
[xxvi] Ibid.
[xxvii] Ibid.
[xxviii] *Boston News-Letter,* November 19, 1716.
[xxix] Ibid.

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