

PEOPLE MENTIONED IN WALDEN



THE PEOPLE OF WALDEN: SIPPPIO BRISTER

In WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS, Henry Thoreau either confused or purposefully conflated Concord's Bristo or Brister Freeman (circa 1744-1822) with the neighboring town of Lincoln's Sippeo or Sippio Brister (circa 1756-1820). Sippeo was the slave of Lincoln's John Hoar. He changed his name to Sippio Brister sometime around 1791 and is buried, as Thoreau noted correctly, in the Lincoln cemetery, in a section set apart for blacks and other outcasts, including the British soldiers who died on April 19, 1775. Thoreau copied the epitaph in his journal.



May 31, 1850: Close by stood a stone with this inscription

In memory of
Sippio Brister
a man of Colour
who died
Nov 1. 1820
AEt. 64.

Was Thoreau merely confused, when in WALDEN he conflated in this manner the two black men Brister Freeman of Concord and Sippio Brister of Lincoln?

WALDEN: Down the road, on the right hand, on Brister's Hill, lived Brister Freeman, "a handy Negro," slave of Squire Cummings once, -there where grow still the apple-trees which Brister planted and tended; large old trees now, but their fruit still wild and ciderish to my taste. Not long since I read his epitaph in the old Lincoln burying-ground, a little on one side, near the unmarked graves of some British grenadiers who fell in the retreat from Concord, -where he is styled "Sippio Brister,"- Scipio Africanus he had some title to be called, -"a man of color," as if he were discolored. It also told me, with startling emphasis, when he died; which was but an indirect way of informing me that he ever lived. With him dwelt Fenda, his hospitable wife, who told fortunes, yet pleasantly, -large, round, and black, blacker than any of the children of night, such a dusky orb as never rose on Concord before or since.

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BRISTO FREEMAN
BRISTER FREEMAN



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If this was confusion, it was a master stroke of confusion, because blending the two in this manner allowed him to invoke the Roman general Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major (234-183BCE) of the Punic Wars, who defeated Hannibal at Zama -and invoking such a classic hero made his Walden Woods the locale not for a marginal and marginalized life but for an important and heroic life -and transformed Brister's Hill into a local monument both to Concord slavery and to the perpetuation in Concord, after slavery, of an aftermath that was all too similar to enslavement, too similar for anyone to feel great comfort with the community's progress. Then, insofar as Thoreau was able to associate his own experiment in his shanty on Walden Pond with Brister Freeman's post-slavery mode of subsistence living, he was able to infuse his own endeavors in voluntary simplicity with heroism. Prior to Thoreau's reformulation, Brister's Hill had been merely a hill with an old field on it, and a cellar hole. Now, of course, it's got a granite monument on it to Henry, and to the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., and to Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, and others - due to the power and authority of his chapter "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors." One may be allowed to suppose that perhaps (only perhaps) Thoreau's conflation was not confused, but purposeful. The conflation allowed him to deepen the links he needed to forge between local memory and the landscape.



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1756

Sippio Brister was born, who would be the slave of the Hoar family of Lincoln, Massachusetts.

Town Clerks of Lincoln

Ephraim Flint	1746-1752, 1754, 1756-1757	Grosvenor Tarbell	1799-1803
Ebenezer Cutler	1753, 1755, 1759	Thomas Wheeler	1804-1806
Samuel Farrar	1758, 1760-1766	Elijah Fiske	1810-1821
John Adams	1767-1777	Stephen Patch	1822-1827
Abijah Pierce	1778-1779, 1781	Charles Wheeler	1828-1830
Samuel Hoar	1780, 1782, 1787-1798, 1807-1809	Elijah Fiske	1831
Richard Russell	1783-1786		

THE FUTURE IS MOST READILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





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1775

April 28, Friday: This would be a day to remember, for a [Concord](#) resident named Titus:

*Know all men by these presents that
For and in consideration of the sum of
Fifty three pounds six shillings and Eight
pence to me in hand well and truly –
paid by Jonas Heywood of Concord in
the County of Middlesex and Province of the
Massachusetts Bay in New England Yeoman
I Ann Prescott of Said Concord Widow
Have sold and by these presents do sell
And make over unto the Said Jonas my
named Titus*

JONAS HEYWOOD

*Negro man/servant's time of
Service During his Life to be
Wholly for the Service of the Said
Jonas Heywood his heirs and assigns
at the same time I do utterly give
up and relinquish unto the Said Jonas
all my right and title in Said Negro
declaring also that before and at the
time of this*

*Sale the Negro Man was mine by virtue of
My Late Husband's purchase – In Witness
whereof I have set my hand and seal to these presents
this 28 Day of April 1775 in the 28 year of his Majesty*

Witness

Daniel — ? —

Thomas Whiting

Ann Prescott

ANN PRESCOTT

THOMAS WHITING

THE HEYWOODS OF CONCORD

There were some 20 slaves in [Concord](#), including but not limited to the following 11 adult males:

- Philip Barrett, a slave of Colonel Barrett, who would march in July 1775, enlist in Captain Heald's company in 1779, serve a 6-month tour at West Point in 1780-1781, and never return to Concord
- Cato, a slave of Duncan Ingraham
- Bristo ([Brister Freeman](#)) and Jem, slaves of Doctor/Colonel [John Cuming](#). Bristo would serve under Colonel John Buttrick at Saratoga in 1777, see Burgoyne surrender, enlist again in 1779, return to Concord, be freed, settle atop Brister's Hill, and marry. He and his wife Fenda would be memorialized by Thoreau in [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#).
- [Sippio Brister](#), a slave to the Hoar family. His burial site in Lincoln next to five British soldiers would be noted by Thoreau in [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#).



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- Caesar, a slave of Captain George Minot, who would serve 3 months during 1775-1776 and then sign for a 3-year enlistment in 1779, returning to Concord at the end of the war.
- Casey, a slave of Samuel Whitney, who would flee from his owner's son threats and snowballs to enlist in the army, achieve self-ownership, and return to Concord
- Frank, a slave of the Reverend [William Emerson](#)
- Caesar, a slave of Deacon Simon Hunt
- Cato, a slave of Doctor Joseph Lee
- Titus, the slave of the widow Ann Prescott who was being sold in this year to Jonas Heywood, as above

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT






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1820

 November 1, Wednesday: On November 1st, while in Massachusetts little [David Henry Thoreau](#) was just three years old and in [Maryland](#) little Frederick Douglass was just two or so, [Sippio Brister](#), also known as “Sippeo,” died, presumably in Lincoln, at the age of 61.

RACE SLAVERY



May 31, 1850: Close by stood a stone with this inscription

In memory of
Sippio Brister
a man of Colour
who died
Nov 1. 1820
AEt. 64.

Thoreau’s comment: “But that is not telling us that he lived.”

**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



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1850

May 31, Friday: In processing a journal entry he had made on this date into his [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) manuscript, [Henry Thoreau](#) would be creating an enduring confusion between, on the one hand, [Sippio Brister](#) of Lincoln who had been a [slave](#) of the Hoar family and who had died in 1822 at the age of 78, and, on the other, [Brister Freeman](#) who had been the slave of Dr. John Cuming of Concord and who had died in 1820 at the age of 64, his wife [Fenda Freeman](#), and the three Freeman children of Brister's Hill in [Concord](#).¹

TIMELINE OF WALDEN



May 31, 1850: Close by stood a stone with this inscription

In memory of
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AEt. 64.

1. [Thoreau](#)'s "Former Inhabitants" chapter includes some thumbnail characterizations of erstwhile neighbors, with which Thoreau "repeopled the woods and lulled myself asleep." Thoreau has attired these Concord folk in classic robes: In his imagination Brister Freeman has become the Roman general Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus Major (234-183BCE) of the Punic Wars who defeated Hannibal at Zama, Wyman the younger is said to have been read about in Scripture, the Hugh Quoil who thought of himself as a veteran of foreign war is made to hang a fresh woodchuck pelt on his house to be "a trophy of his last Waterloo." Refer to [WALDEN](#), page 257 of the Princeton edition, material added to Version E in late 1852 and in 1853 and further revised in 1853-1854. There were precisely two books published during this period which dealt in such considerate terms with the lives of ordinary persons of color, [WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS](#) and the initial 1854 version of [NARRATIVE OF THE LIFE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS AN AMERICAN SLAVE. WRITTEN BY HIMSELF](#) which is ordinarily attributed to the authorship of Frederick Douglass. We may note that at the time of the writing of [WALDEN](#) there were at least two black families in [Concord](#), and Thoreau carefully refrains from calling attention to these families. We may presume that an adequate reason for such silence was that such literary attentions would not only have been as unwelcome to them as to Concord whites, but could not have done them any good and might very well have done them harm.



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Brister's Spring on Brister's Hill in Walden Woods pertained to Brister Freeman of Concord and not to Sippio Brister of Lincoln



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[Thoreau](#) also recorded that according to William Wheeler of Lincoln, “a few years ago one [Felch](#) a [Phrenologist](#) by leave of the select men dug up — and took away two skulls” from the remains of the five grenadiers killed on April 19th near the “Ephraim Hartwell” Tavern during the retreat to Boston, that had there been interred.



To-day May 31st a red and white cow being uneasy broke out of the steam mill pasture & crossed the bridge & broke into Elija Woods grounds— When he endeavored to drive her out by the bars she boldly took to the water wading first through the meadows full of ditches & swam across the river about forty rods wide at this time & landed in her own pasture again— She was a buffaloe crossing her Mississippi— This exploit conferred some dignity on the herd in my eyes—already dignified—& reflectedly on the river—which I looked on as a kind of Bosphorus.

I love to see the domestic animals reassert their native right’s—any evidence that they have not lost their original wild habits & vigor.

There is a sweet wild world which lies along the strain of the wood thrush [[Wood Thrush](#) [Catharus mustelina](#)]—the rich intervalles which border the stream of its song—more thoroughly genial to my nature than any other.

The blossoms of the tough & vivacious shrub oak are very handsome.

I visited a retired—now almost unused graveyard in Lincoln to-day where (5) British soldiers lie buried who fell on the 19th April ’75. Edmund Wheeler—grandfather of William—who lived in the old house now pulled down near the present—went over the next day & carted them to this ground— A few years ago one [Felch](#) a Phrenologist by leave of the select men dug up—and took away two skulls The skeletons were very large—probably those of grenadiers. Wm Wheeler who was present—told me this— He said that he had heard old Mr. Child, who lived opposite—say that when one soldier was shot he leaped right up his full length out of the ranks & fell dead. & he Wm Wheeler—saw a bullet hole through & through one of the skulls.

The water was over the Turnpike below Master Cheney’s when I returned.



May 31: *{One-third page missing}* main there is a correspondence—that the fences—to a considerable extent will be found to mark natural divisions— Mowing—(upland & meadow) pasture woodland—& the different kinds of tillage— There will be found in the farmers motive for setting a fence here or there some conformity to natural limits— These artificial divisions no doubt have the effect of increasing the area & variety to the traveller— These various fields taken together seem more extensive than a single prairie of the same size would. The farmer puts his wall along the edge of his cornfield— Unless the land is very minutely divided the divisions will correspond to nature.— If the divisions corresponded to natural ones, I think that *{One-third page missing}*

NO-ONE’S LIFE IS EVER NOT DRIVEN PRIMARILY BY HAPPENSTANCE






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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: November 23, 2015



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ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT

GENERATION HOTLINE



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the



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Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.

Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.