

# BRISTER AND FENDA FREEMAN OF CONCORD<sup>1</sup>

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). Whether purposeful or not, the conflation allowed Thoreau to meditate in WALDEN on the link between race and the politics of local memory, the subject of his chapter "Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors." Thoreau rightly noted in WALDEN that Brister Freeman was "'a handy Negro,' slave of Squire Cummings once."



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.

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? 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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1. The materials in this file are provided by Professor Elise V. Lemire of the Department of Humanities of Purchase College.

**1744**

It was in approximately this year that Brister Freeman of Concord was born. We don't know whether his enslavement was something that happened in Africa, or whether he was born in slavery here on the American continent. As a young child, we may presume, he was the property of housewright Timothy Wesson of Lincoln, because Wesson owned a child whom he had baptized as "Bristol" just before the wedding of his daughter Abigail Wesson to John Cuming in Concord on February 8, 1753.<sup>2</sup>

**1751**

Fenda was born. Since this name is African, possibly Muslim, and doesn't match the pattern of slave naming in Concord, possibly she was brought to Concord at a later date, possibly even from Africa. She would get married there with another former slave, Brister Freeman, and bear at least three children: Nancy (born on March 9, 1772), Edward (born on November 17, 1781, died on September 13, 1788), and Amos (born during 1784). Both Nancy and Amos would marry, Amos twice. Nancy would be married by the Reverend Ezra Ripley, although it is not clear whether this wedding took place in the church. She would have two children, a son named Jacob in 1791 and a daughter in 1798 who would die in 1803. Amos would have two children, both of whom would die young.

**1753**

February 8: In Concord, Massachusetts, Dr. John Cuming married Abigail Wesson, a daughter of housewright Timothy Wesson of Lincoln. The father-in-law had just had a slave child baptized as "Bristol" and the wedded couple would later be in possession of a slave bearing that name — so we presume this black child to have amounted to a wedding present.<sup>3</sup>

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2. "Bristol," "Boston," and "Cambridge" were relatively common slave names. The child, who may have been the father-in-law's present to the bride and bridegroom, would grow to be 5 feet 7 inches tall.

3. "Bristol," "Boston," and "Cambridge" were relatively common slave names. The child would grow to be 5 feet 7 inches tall, and eventually would choose to be known as Brister Freeman.

1777

September 28: The slave who would eventually come to be known as Brister Freeman was enlisted in the American revolutionary forces under the name “Bristol Cuming,” to serve alongside his master, Colonel John Cuming (1728-1788), a wealthy Concord physician and land speculator. “Bristol” was a relatively common slave name, as were the names of other cities such as Boston, Cambridge, etc. Cuming and his enlisted slave would be present at the surrender of Lieutenant General John Burgoyne and his British troops on October 17, 1777.

In subsequent enlistment and military records, Dr. Cuming’s slave would appear during November 1778 as “Brister” Cummings [*sic*], in 1779 as Bristol Freeman, in 1780 as Bristo Freeman, and on a 1786 payroll as Brister Freeman, the name he would bear for the rest of his life.



Above is the home of Dr. John and Abigail Wesson Cuming (photo by Elise Lemire), where the slave they referred to as “Bristo” would serve them until sometime in 1778-1779. Now, as the Victim Service Unit of the Massachusetts Correctional Institute at Concord, it is not open to the public:

National Register of Historic Places, Middlesex County:  
 Cuming, Dr. John, House (added 1977 - Building - #77000175)  
 West of Concord at 999 Barretts Mill Road and Reformatory Circle, Concord  
 Historic Significance: Person  
 Historic Person: Cuming, Dr. John  
 Significant Year: 1754  
 Area of Significance: Social History, Military, Health/Medicine  
 Period of Significance: 1750-1799  
 Owner: State  
 Historic Function: Domestic  
 Historic Sub-function: Secondary Structure, Single Dwelling  
 Current Function: Domestic

Current Sub-function: Secondary Structure, Single Dwelling

Since his name signified his enslavement, Brister dropped the name Cuming and chose the name Freeman upon acquiring the power to fashion his own identity sometime between November 1778 and 1779.

At some point Brister Freeman married a woman named Fenda, who according to Thoreau “told fortunes.” Since this name is African, possibly Muslim, and doesn’t match the pattern of slave naming in Concord, possibly she was not born in Concord, and possibly she was from Africa. The couple registered the births of three children: Nancy (born on March 9, 1772), Edward (born on November 17, 1781, died on September 13, 1788), and Amos (born during 1784).

1780

By this year in which, in Bohemia and Hungary, serfdom was being discontinued, in Concord, Massachusetts, Brister Freeman had become a free man (probably he became free in 1778 or 1779). In this year, therefore, his name appeared on the tax roll, as a single person. In the years ahead, struggling financially, he either could not or would not pay taxes.

In *THE FIRST EMANCIPATION: THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE NORTH* (1967), Arthur Zilversmit wrote:

Despite growing antislavery sentiment, when the General Court drafted a constitution for the new state it took no steps to end slavery. On the contrary, the 1778 constitution (which was rejected by the electorate) recognized slavery and denied Negroes the right to vote.... The new charter that was finally adopted did include a bill of rights that ... declared all men to be free and equal by birth. But the new constitution did not mention slavery, and there is no evidence that the convention considered its abolition. Nonetheless, the 1780 constitution became the means for eliminating slavery in Massachusetts. In a new series of freedom cases, the abolitionists succeeded in persuading the courts to interpret the constitution in a way that was probably never intended by its framers. (112-113)

In Concord, as throughout Massachusetts, slaves won their freedom on a case-by-case basis.<sup>4</sup> Caesar Robbins, who had been the slave of Simon Hunt who lived near the North Bridge, was in this year freed.<sup>5</sup> Here is a synopsis of the Robbins family in Concord:

- Rose Robbins was Caesar Robbins’s wife. She bore at least two children, Peter Robbins and a daughter for whom we have established no given name.
- Peter Robbins, son of Caesar Robbins and Rose Robbins, also lived in the area. It would have been either Peter Hutchinson or Peter Robbins that was the origin of the place-names “Peter’s Field” and “Peter’s Spring.”
- The Robbinses lived across from the old Manse in the Great Meadow and the Great Fields. “Caesar’s Wood,” as part of the Great Meadows, was named after Caesar Robbins.

4. Later, in the Quock Walker cases of 1781 and 1783, “bold judicial construction” would gradually transform the 1st clause of this Declaration of Rights until by re-interpretation and construction it had been made into a virtual abolition of slavery.

5. Would Miss Martha Emmeline Hunt the schoolteacher who evidently lived at her parents’ home on Ponkawtasset Hill, and who committed suicide in 1845 by drowning herself in the Concord River, be a descendant of this slaveowning Simon Hunt who had lived near the North Bridge in Concord?

1782

When Dr. John Cuming, a prominent citizen of Concord of the most impeccable revolutionary and social standing, fell ill in this year, he made a will in which he declared: “I give and bequeath to my two negros (that was) viz. Bristo and Jem thirty pounds sterling each, the expending of which money to be under the Special Directions of the Selectmen of Concord.”<sup>6</sup>

April 8: The town of Concord disbursed to Brister Freeman more than £2 for “keeping” Thomas Cook. (There were no almshouses in Massachusetts until the year 1790. By March 1784 Thomas Cook would have died and the town would vote to sell his house. Where it was that Freeman would live between his years at the Cuming estate and his inhabitation of Walden Woods is unknown. In 1783, Freeman would again provide board for an impoverished Concord resident — he would receive more than £2 from the town for “keeping” Betty Russel [*sic*].)

1783

The town of Concord disbursed to Brister Freeman more than £2 for “keeping” Betty Russel [*sic*].<sup>7</sup>

1785

December 9: Humphrey Barrett, Concord constable, was reimbursed for more than £1 in taxes that Brister Freeman had left unpaid.

December 23: Brister Freeman and another former slave, Charlestown Edes, formerly of Groton (Isaiah Edes of Groton is listed as having owned two slaves), purchased an acre of Concord land from Jacob Potter for £15, 18s. In a 1784 mortgage, the plot had been described as a “piece of old Field lying up Stratton Hill.” In this deed the property was again described as “on the top of Stratton’s hill.” The subsequent designation of the hill as “Brister’s Hill” helps place Freeman there from 1785 until his death in 1822 and points out to us that although the white inhabitants of this town always carefully referred to each other by their family names, they were continuing to refer to this black man by his familiar name even after he was no longer anyone’s slave. The original deed included the provision that the transaction would include “a small frame of a corn barn to be put thereon.” Whether Freeman and Edes succeeded in growing enough Indian corn to provide their own bread is unknown, but it certainly would have been difficult to do so in such infertile droughty depleted post-glacial podsol. The early white settlers who had attempted to raise farm crops in Walden Woods had soon learned better. Impoverished former slaves, abandoned without assets after a lifetime of labor, could subsist only on various out-of-the-way parcels that whites had found thus undesirable. It is for this reason that former slaves were able to purchase, rent, and squat on property in Walden Woods.

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6. Note that as “Bristo” was short for “Bristol,” so also “Jem” was short for “James”; in the context of a legal document what we have here is two adults being diminished. The designation of the Town Selectmen as custodians for the fund makes it clear that Cuming’s bequest was in no sense largesse, but was intended merely to reassure his fellow white townsmen that after his death his manumitted slaves would not make themselves a financial burden on the town. (Cuming would live until 1788 and then it would require several additional years before this will would be settled.)

7. There were no almshouses in Massachusetts until the year 1790.

1788

Brister Freeman was paid 18 shillings for making repairs to the Old North Bridge, which had been erected in 1760 and was in such terrible condition that it would have to be abandoned and demolished in 1792. (From 1793 to 1874 no bridge would exist at this exact historic site.) Peter Wheeler also worked on these repairs and received £2, 13s. Later it would be this Wheeler who would play a near-fatal trick on Freeman.

Dr. John Cuming of Concord died in this year at the age of 60 after being bled over his objections by the physician of neighboring Chelmsford, and was buried in the Old Hill Burying Ground beneath a headstone carved by Thomas Park. Dr. Cuming left some clothing and some military equipment to Waldo Emerson's father, the Reverend William Emerson of Boston. He left £300 pounds sterling to Harvard College, the income from which was to endow a chair of physics (medicine), that would be useful as seed money for the establishment of Harvard Medical School with Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse and Surgeon John Warren as its 1st professors. In addition, he left £150 sterling to benefit private schools in Concord, and £150 sterling to be distributed among the poor. He also left behind a small sum to ease the anxieties of the Selectmen, with which they could care for Bristo and Jem, his two former slaves, should they ever become a burden upon the town.

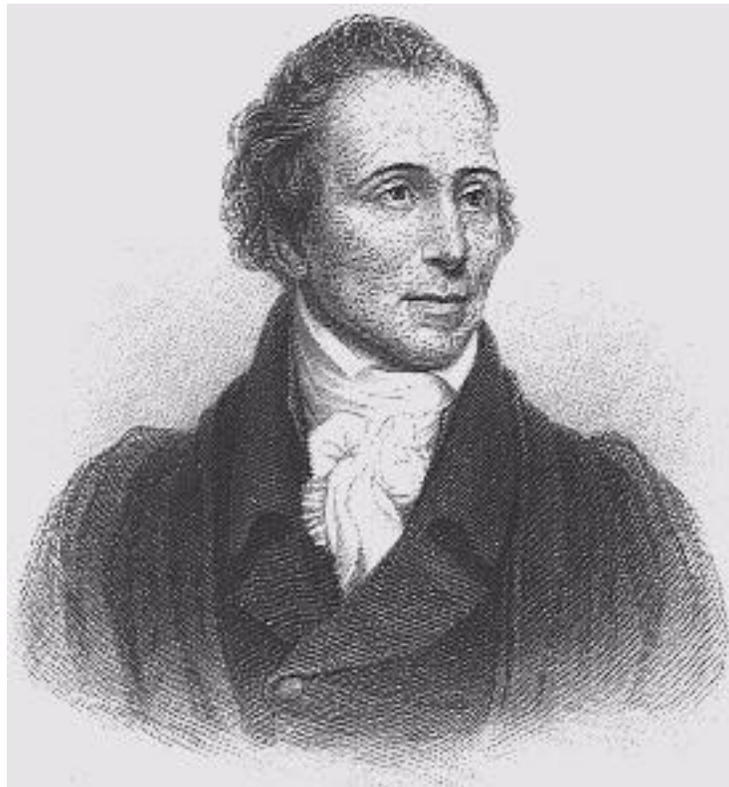


WALDEN: Down the road, on the right hand, on Brister's Hill, lived Brister Freeman, "a handy Negro," slave of Squire Cummings once, -there where grow still the apple-trees which Brister planted and tended; large old trees now, but their fruit still wild and ciderish to my taste. Not long since I read 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.

(Dr. Benjamin Waterhouse, a Quaker, would later be dismissed as a Professor at the Harvard Medical School on account of his principled opposition to war (the Quaker Peace Testimony) and because he persisted in administering inoculations against the small pox.



However, below, in a depiction dating to 1783, is the righteous surviving professor, Surgeon John Warren, no deluded Quaker, who righteously **did** believe in war and righteously **did not** believe in vaccination — and was therefore entitled to teach Harvard men to become physicians.)



**1790**

March 1: On March 1st in our national capital, New-York, the federal congress enacted a Census Act calling for a census every tenth year effective immediately. Domesday was an idea whose time had come. When conducted, this 1st US census revealed us to be a nation of 3,929,214 persons eligible to be counted. When analyzed, the census data would indicate that our 13 states consisted of roughly 500,000 slaves and 3,500,000 free citizens. About 92% of black Americans, with the Freeman household of Concord, Massachusetts being among the few exceptions, were enslaved.<sup>8</sup>

The census that would be completed by August 1st would list seven members in this Freeman household on Brister’s Hill, although now we can identify but five: Brister, Fenda, Nancy, Amos, and Charlestown Edes. Whether Edes also had family or whether Brister and Fenda had additional children is unknown. These five persons definitely did not fit in among the enumerated roughly 500,000 American slaves, since they were no longer slaves, but then, again, they did not exactly fit in among the enumerated roughly 3,500,000 free citizens either — since it is quite a stretch to think of them as being treated as citizens.

Squire Duncan Ingraham, owner of the slave Cato Ingraham (or, we might say, “former owner and present master” — since in 1783 slavery had allegedly been done away with entirely in the sovereign state of Massachusetts, and for some seven years there had been “no slaves in Massachusetts at all”), was in about this decade the most prominent citizen of Concord, having made his pile in part, but only in part, in the slave trade. The indications of this census are that more than 90 out of 100 of the persons in the United States at this point with identifiably French surnames were descended from Huguenot refugees, mainly in the 3d or 4th generation but with a few survivors of the 2d and 3d generation after flight still alive (for instance, Pierre Thoreau had

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8. The rise in manumissions in the post-Revolutionary period would increase the proportion of free black Americans to about 13.5% by 1810, where it would remain through 1840. A decline in manumissions in the late antebellum period, combined with the lesser fecundity of free black Americans, would then move the free-to-enslaved proportion back down to about 11% when we reached the point of civil war:

Year	% in Population
1790	8
1810	13.5
1840	13.5
1861	11

represented the 1st generation of the Thoreaus, the generation that had fled from the Poitou-Charentes district of France in 1685 to find refuge in St. Hélier on the island of Jersey, the 2d generation had been represented by Philippe Thoreau (1720-1800), the 3d generation had been represented by Jean Thoreau who had come to America in 1773, and in Boston, John Thoreau had just been born as a member of the 4th cohort after the great diaspora that had begun during the 16th Century, and in 1817, Henry Thoreau would be born in Concord as a member of the 5th cohort of this diaspora).

This figures out to be a little over 60,000 diaspora persons.

More on our 1st national census:



The population of Massachusetts remained overwhelmingly English in origin through the end of the eighteenth century. The first census, in 1790, reported a total population of 378,556 in the state. of those 373,187 were white and 5,369 "colored" (presumably "Indians" and blacks); to each 100 white inhabitants, there were only 1.4 "colored." Of the 373,187 white residents, 354,528 (95%) were of English origin; 3.6 percent were Scots and 1 percent Irish, making a total of 99.6 percent from the British Isles. French amounted to only 0.2 percent, Dutch to 0.1 percent. Germans, "Hebrews," and all other nationalities were represented by less than one tenth of 1 percent.... Boston was growing again after the decline brought about by years of Revolutionary agitation; the 18,038 inhabitants reported in 1790, however, seem a modest increase over the 1743 peak of 16,182, when the town was the largest in British North America. The census reported forty towns in the state with populations in excess of 2,000; those were almost evenly divided between the coast and inland areas. The four of these forty that exceeded 5,000 were, however, all seaports: Boston, Salem (7,921), Gloucester (5,137), and Marblehead (5,061). The situation was about to change radically and rapidly.

**1791**

January 17: Brister Freeman signed a deed selling "one half of the house and land that I now live in and upon" "on the county road leading from Concord to Boston" for £7, 19s "to me paid by Ephraim Woods Esq, Jacob Brown and Asa Brooks Gentlemen and Selectmen of Concord and Trustees of the Legacy given me in the last will of John Cuming, Esq.," who had died in 1788. (Freeman did not, however, seem to relinquish possession of the plot on "Brister's Hill," for in another title document in 1797 Duncan Ingraham would sell John Richardson a piece of land "bounding northwesterly ... to land in possession of Brister Freeman, a black man.")

August: Charlestown Edes, Brister Freeman's land partner, died in Concord at the age of 32. The cause was scurvy, which is due to a diet lacking in fresh fruits and vegetables and indicates that Edes and Freeman had been struggling financially.

October 27: The Reverend Ezra Ripley of Concord officiated at the wedding of Brister Freeman's daughter Nancy and Jacob Freeman of Lincoln. The couple would name their infant after its father. Jacob Freeman, Jr. would survive only to the age of 19.

1792

February 7: During the years since they had purchased their acre of land on Brister's Hill, the two former slaves Brister Freeman and Charlestown Edes seem to have been having difficulty with their taxes and other expenses. At some point Charlestown Edes had died. The deed for the acre they had purchased in 1785 was on this day belatedly delivered to the county by the previous owner, Jacob Potter, due to the fact that Freeman was needing to turn over half the property to the Concord Selectmen. Freeman's inability or unwillingness to pay taxes may be why the Selectmen were insisting that Freeman sacrifice half the property, or for a more benevolent spin, were providing him this opportunity to hold onto some of it. It is not now clear whether Freeman was abandoning his share or Edes's. Indications are that Freeman continued to reside in the house.

According to a survey note by Henry Thoreau, Brister's land to the east of Walden Street, with his cider-apple orchard, was seized because he "was a foreigner."

Brister Freeman was a passionate negro, profane and suspicious. He was said to have once stolen a haddock and was therefore tormented and hooted by boys. Then he would swear and storm. This gathered boys and men about him who insulted and violated him to greater passion. This want of respect for humanity and disregard of men's feelings was extended to many of these classes of the weak, and the higher cultured had not power or did not see their way to overcome it. They did not approve nor encourage these waywardnesses, but they endured and even found amusement in relating them to their families and neighbors.

(Since we have a record of a property transaction in 1811 in which Freeman sold the property, or an interest in the property, for \$20 to Rachel Harrington LeGross, and a record of a property transaction in 1822, the year following his death, in which LeGross resold what she had purchased for \$10 to William Lawrence of Weston, Thoreau seems to have been referring in his survey note to this 1792 surrender of a portion of his property to the town Selectmen.)

April 1: Brister Freeman acquired a new neighbor when Stephen Nutting, a bachelor, purchased a house and barn on 113 acres adjacent to the Concord-Lincoln-Wayland Road. Like Brister, Nutting would be mentioned by Thoreau in WALDEN:

WALDEN: Once more, on the left, where are seen the well and lilac bushes by the wall, in the now open field, lived Nutting and Le Grosse.

1798

A daughter was born to Brister Freeman's daughter Nancy and her husband Jacob Freeman. We do not know this child's name. She would survive only until age 5.

1800

In Concord, John Wyman (or Wayman) the potter, one of Brister Freeman's neighbors in Walden Woods, a person who like Brister would be mentioned in Thoreau's WALDEN, died.



WALDEN: An old man, a potter, who lived by the pond before the Revolution, told him once that there was an iron chest at the bottom, and that he had seen it. Sometimes it would come floating up to the shore; but when you went toward it, it would go back into deep water and disappear. I was pleased to hear of the old log canoe, which took the place of an Indian one of the same material but more graceful construction, which perchance had first been a tree on the bank, and then, as it were, fell into the water, to float there for a generation, the most proper vessel for the lake. I remember that when I first looked into these depths there were many large trunks to be seen indistinctly lying on the bottom, which had either been blown over formerly, or left on the ice at the last cutting, when wood was cheaper; but now they have mostly disappeared.

The new census of Concord, Massachusetts recorded four residents in the Freeman household on Brister's Hill. We know this included Brister, Fenda, and their son Amos, age 16. The identity of the 4th person is, however, unknown.

1807

Amos Freeman, Brister Freeman and Fenda Freeman's son, married Sally Coffey of Medway. (Although we don't have a record, Sally must have died shortly thereafter as Amos would remarry with Love Oliver on September 6, 1809.)

1809

September 6: Amos Freeman, Brister Freeman's son, had married Sally Coffey of Medway during 1807. Sally must have died, as at this point Amos again married, with Love Oliver.

1810

July 20: In Concord, Massachusetts, Amos Freeman and Love Oliver Freeman's infant died at 3 months of age.

November 2: Jacob Freeman and Nancy Freeman's son Jacob Freeman, Jr. died at the age of 19.

1811

February 27: Fenda Freeman of Brister's Hill in Concord died of "dropsy" at the age of 60.

September 1: Brister Freeman sold his land on Brister's Hill in Concord, Massachusetts for \$20 to Rachel Harrington LeGross, a white orphan who, on January 14, 1804, had been permitted by her guardian Jonathan Maynard, Esq. of Concord to marry a neighbor, Francis Le Grosse. The land deed listed Freeman as a barber, although he performed various day jobs around town and Thoreau would rightly term him a "handy" man.



WALDEN: Once more, on the left, where are seen the well and lilac bushes by the wall, in the now open field, lived Nutting and Le Grosse.

The LeGross couple had resided on nearby property they rented from Peter Wheeler in Walden Woods. Francis had died at the age of 45 on September 11, 1809. There is no evidence that Brister Freeman would move out after this sale. Rather, given the recent death of Fenda Freeman, it seems likely that he cohabited with the widowed Rachel Harrington LeGross and that this land transaction was meant to insure her possession of the property if she was predeceased by Brister Freeman. The couple obviously could not formalize their relationship, as interracial marriage was impossible in Massachusetts. The race aspect of this bonding and the fact that LeGross was Peter Wheeler's former tenant may explain the harassment Freeman would experience from Wheeler in the following year.

In WALDEN; OR, LIFE IN THE WOODS, Henry Thoreau would be able to write of Brister's relationship with Fenda, but not with Rachel.



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.

**1812**

Winter: On a cold day toward the end of the year, Brister Freeman sought work at Wheeler's slaughterhouse. Peter Wheeler was, as a result of the British fleet's embargo of the port of Boston, undergoing severe financial hardship, and he quite possibly was unwell (he would expire the following May). What then transpired survives in Cyrus Stowe's 1857 "Memoir of Peter Wheeler" as published in THE CENTENNIAL OF THE SOCIAL CIRCLE IN CONCORD, 1782-1882 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1882):

Mr. Wheeler once had a most ferocious bull to kill. He and his men succeeded with some difficulty in getting the animal into his slaughter-house. They were afraid, however, to go in and encounter his fury, and, while outside conferring upon the safest mode of proceeding, Brister Freeman, the celebrated negro, happened along. Wheeler, giving his men the wink, inquired very affectionately after Brister's health, and told him if he would go into the slaughter-house and get an axe, he should have a little job to do. Brister never suspected mischief, at once opened the door and walked in, when it was quietly shut upon him, and the appalled negro found himself face to face with the enraged bull. It was already a "case of fight or die," after sundry minuets about the house, the celerity of which would have established a French dancing-master, Brister fortunately spied the axe he had been sent in for, and, seizing it, commenced belaboring his adversary, giving him a blow here and there as he had opportunity. All this while stood Peter and his men watching through the dry knot-holes the valiant exploits of Brister, and cheering him on with the most encouraging roars of laughter. Fortune at length decided in favor of the negro; he laid the bull dead upon the floor, and casting down his weapon of fight, came forth unharmed. But imagine the amazement of his tormentors when at length he emerged, no longer the dim, somber negro he was when he entered, but literally white with terror, and what was once his wool, standing up straight like so many pokers, they could hardly persuade themselves to believe it was Brister; but without waiting for them to identify him, or receive their congratulations for the notable manner in which he sustained himself, the affrighted and indignant negro turned his back upon them and departed.

**1814**

In this year Amos Freeman and Love Oliver Freeman had a son John who would survive only to the age of 8 years.

**1817**

Brister Freeman took financial responsibility for his grandson John, then three years old. Concord's Overseer of the Poor paid him 50 cents for so doing. Freeman's son Amos, John's father, must have died or abandoned his family. The mother, Love Oliver Freeman, continued to live with her father-in-law and her young son on Brister's Hill.

1818

Brister Freeman again, as he had in the previous year, took financial responsibility for his grandson John, then four years old. Concord's Overseer of the Poor again paid him 50 cents for so doing.

July: The Concord Female Charitable Society donated 9½ yards of cotton cloth to be made into clothes for "Love Freeman's boy." Later, the Society would add two yards of gingham and a "small shirt."

1820

The census of Concord, Massachusetts recorded three residents in the Freeman household on Brister's Hill: Brister Freeman, Love Oliver Freeman (who was presumably ill, as she would die in August at the age of 49), and her young son John. A question obviously arises as to the whereabouts of the widowed Rachel Harrington LeGross — did these black Concordians perhaps see fit not to apprise the white visitor of the presence of a white Concordian? [ADDITIONAL RESEARCH HERE: PERHAPS THIS TWO-ROOM HOME WAS CONSIDERED TO BE TWO HOUSEHOLDS AND THE HOUSEHOLD OF THE WIDOW LEGROSS IS LISTED ELSEWHERE IN THE CENSUS? -- NEED TO CHECK]

August 11: On Brister's Hill in Concord, Massachusetts, Love Oliver Freeman died at the age of 49.

1822

January 30, Wednesday: Brister Freeman, former slave, died of "fever and age" at the age of 78. In his final months he had been loaned "a pair of sheets, and woolen bed quilt" by Concord's Female Charitable Society, which noted in its records that he was "sick." Freeman's burial place is listed as Concord but of course it would have cost money to mark the spot with a stone.

February 17: Eighteen days after the death of Brister Freeman, his grandson John Freeman for whom he had been providing, an 8-year-old whose father was long gone and whose mother had died a year and a half earlier, also died.

1823

November 13: Rachel Harrington LeGross sold the Brister's Hill property she had acquired for \$20 from Brister Freeman, to William Lawrence of Weston for \$10.

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