



## Washington Historical Society Newsletter

WWW.WNHHS.ORG

SPRING 2024 EDITION

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### PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Steve Yusko

As I write this hopefully the ongoing April snowstorm will be our last. Last winter's five Zoom presentations were well attended and we must thank the New Hampshire Humanities to Go in Concord for providing funding and excellent programs.

In addition we would like to thank all our donors and members for their financial contributions which keep our historical society up and running in good shape! As we reopen for our spring and summer season there is much in the offing.

First, we have an unusual event planned in May at the East Washington Schoolhouse. Join us for a day in the life of an elementary school child of 90 years ago as students from the Washington Elementary School recreate our educational past. Details inside.

We have planned in-person potlucks and meetings at the Camp Morgan Lodge from June through October. Our presenters will cover a wide variety of topics: boundary history of NH towns, electrification in our state, cemetery gravestone carvings, the secret life of Beryl Mountain in South Acworth, and more.

And last, but certainly not at all least, is our invitation to visit all three of our one-of-kind museums: the Historical Society Museum and Barn Museum on Halfmoon Pond Road (these 2 open Saturdays 10-2, July-Labor Day) as well as the District No. 5 One-Room Schoolhouse in East Washington (also Saturdays July-Labor Day, but 1-3).

Happy Spring!

Louisa Phillis: Early Black Resident of Washington, NH  
By Bill Mulcahy

Ken Brummell and his wife Marsha visited the historical society in the summer of 2023, asking for our help in solving an interesting mystery. Ken is the site director for Washington's historic Seventh Day Adventist Church (SDA), and Marsha assists with visitor tours, educational programs and hospitality. They had long been hearing stories about early Black membership in the Washington church but hadn't been able to determine if the stories were true. Could we help them find out if they were?

I volunteered on behalf of the WNHHS to see if I might be able to find out for them. After quite a bit of research, I was able to identify a woman named Louisa Phillis as both an early Black resident of Washington and a member of the Washington SDA Church. Not long after sharing my detailed research with Ken and Marsha, the SDA Office of Archives, Statistics and Research in Michigan was able to confirm that Louisa Phillis was accepted as a member on October 21, 1871, making her the earliest known Black member of the Washington church!

That task accomplished, I wanted to find out more about Louisa Phillis. Who was she? Where did she come from? Had she been enslaved in the past? Was she possibly the first Black resident of Washington? Visitors to our museum have sometimes asked about the racial makeup of early Washington: were there indigenous and Black peoples living among the white population? This would be an opportunity to learn. I set out to see if I could shed any light on these questions using Federal Census (FC) data.

Not all these questions can be answered with certainty. The challenge is even greater when trying to research a nonwhite person. When the first FC took place in 1790, and for several decades after, usually only the names of free white heads of households were recorded. The names of other white males, women and children weren't recorded, they were just counted by age groups. Even less detail was collected on the nonwhite population. Free Black and indigenous peoples were initially combined under classifications such as "all other free persons" or "free colored persons" and totaled as a group (there were some exceptions — as early as 1790 the names of some nonwhite heads of household were recorded, but not often). This changed slowly over the next 50 years. Finally, starting with the 1850 FC, information on free peoples of all races — name, color (to track racial identity), sex and country or continent of origin — was included together. Sadly, enslaved people continued to be recorded without their individual identities — with numbers used in place of their names — until slavery was abolished by the ratification of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment on December 6, 1865.

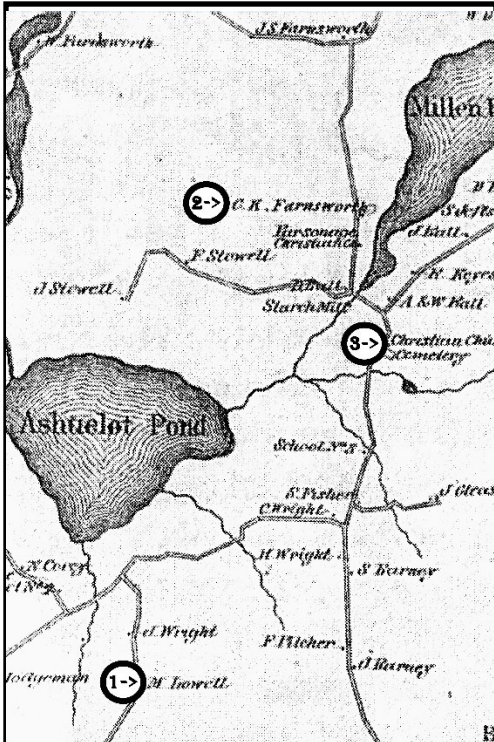
Louisa Phillis was born in Pepperell, MA on January 27, 1827, to Peter Phillis (1775-1856) and Jane "Jenny" (Mitchel) Phillis (1791-1868). The family name was sometimes spelled as "Filis" or "Fillis."

We know that Louisa was born, in the parlance of the times, "a free person of color," because Massachusetts had abolished slavery in 1783. Her mother, who was born after 1783, was also born free, and her father appears to have been born free as well. I have not been able to trace her grandparents far enough back to know if they were all born free, but both of her grandfathers, Pompey Phillis and Abner Mitchel, served during the American Revolution from Massachusetts.

Louisa married a man named George H. Lewis, most likely by the time she turned 20, in 1847. The sole reference to this first marriage comes when Louisa remarries later in life. The later marriage is recorded as her second marriage and gives her name as Louisa Lewis. The marriage to George may have been short-lived. Possibly he died or they divorced. I haven't been able to trace him further. Louisa is never recorded as living with him. In the 1850 FC and the 1855 Massachusetts State census she is living with her parents in Pepperell, and neither George nor her sons Andrew and George are listed with her. In all records that I found before her second marriage, Louisa is always recorded as Louisa Phillis. Her sons are also recorded as Phillis, not Lewis in the 1860 FC (her son

George begins using the Lewis name by 1870).

The 1850s were a difficult time for Louisa and her extended family. Her father Peter was a skilled craftsman — a cooper (maker of barrels and casks), but by 1850 he was in his seventies, and may have no longer been able to continue to support the family through such physically demanding work. Sadly, the 1850 FC finds Louisa, 23, her parents, and youngest brother, Albert, all listed as paupers and living on the Pepperell poor farm. They were off the poor farm by 1855, but tragedy struck again the following year when Peter Phillis passed away on January 29, 1856, from “old age.” He was 80.



Detail of the southwest corner of Washington, NH showing the locations of (1) the Moses Lowell farm, (2) the C.K. Farnsworth farm, and (3) the Seventh Day Adventist Church (labeled as the “Christian Church”). Credit: H.F. Walling’s “Topographical Map of the County of Sullivan, New Hampshire” published in 1860.

Louisa came to Washington somewhere between 1855 and 1860: she appears in the 1860 FC, aged 33, living on the farm of Moses Lowell and his 2<sup>nd</sup> wife, Nancy (Jenkins) Lowell. (The Lowell farm was in the southwest corner of town, below Lake Ashuelot and just above the border with Stoddard.)

For the first time Louisa’s two young sons are listed in a census with her: George L. Phillis is 10, and Andrew W. Phillis is 13. The census indicates that the boys have not attended school in the past year. The “color” indicator of all three is “B” for Black. I can find no trace of Andrew after this. Louisa was known to have two children, only one of whom was still alive in 1900. Her son George lived until 1913, so her son Andrew died between 1860 and 1900, and very possibly between 1860 and 1870.

What brought Louisa Phillis and her sons to Washington? Most likely the promise of a job. Though no occupation is listed for her in 1860, the next census identifies her as a “House Keeper.”

The following is speculation, but Nancy (Jenkins) Lowell dies of “consumption” (tuberculosis — a debilitating illness) in 1866. It is very possible that Louisa was hired to live on the Lowell farm and handle the work that Nancy could no longer manage. As to how Louisa may have learned of such a job opportunity, I discovered that her brother Alonzo Phillis and his family were living on a farm in Stoddard during this same period. With the Lowell farm so close to the Washington border with Stoddard, it’s reasonable that she could have learned of a job through her brother.

The Civil War was raging during this time, and the Phillis family did not go unimpacted. Louisa’s youngest brother Albert Phillis joined the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Massa-

28	400	411	Moses Lowell	62	m		Farmer	✓	1500	350								
29			Nancy "	50	f													
30	410	412	Louisa Phillis	33	f	B							✓	Maids				
31			George L "	10	m	B												
32			Andrew W "	13	m	B												

Detail of the 1860 Federal Census for Washington, New Hampshire showing the Louisa Phillis family living on the Moses Lowell farm.

achusetts Cavalry, a Black regiment that saw action in the Virginia theater of operations. Her brother-in-law, Nahum Gardner Hazzard, served with the 54<sup>th</sup> (made famous by the movie “Glory”) and 55<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts Infantries — early Black regiments that saw combat in the deep South. Both men survived the war.

Louisa is still living in Washington on Moses Lowell’s farm at the time of the 1870 FC. Louisa’s son George is still with her, aged 19, now listed as George Lewis, and there are two new minors recorded with them: Herbert Jackson, 10, and Catherine Phillis, 16. All 4 are recorded as “B” (Black).

The 1870 FC is the first to track literacy by asking if someone could read or write. It’s indicated that Louisa could not read or write, but that Herbert, George and Catherine could read and write.

The Catherine Phillis listed here is, I believe, Catherine Ashcroft, Louisa’s niece, and the daughter of Louisa’s late sister, Catherine (Phillis) Ashcroft, who died in 1853. In the 1855 Massachusetts State census, Catherine Ashcroft and two of her siblings are living in Pepperell, MA with Louisa and Louisa’s parents. It seems likely that Louisa and her parents have taken the Ashcroft children into their care in the wake of Catherine (Phillis) Ashcroft’s early death.

I have not yet been able to identify who Herbert Jackson is or to trace him any further.

12	189	200	Lowell Moses	75	M	W	Farmer	700	100	NH								
13			Petty	72	F	W	Without occupation			NH								
14			Phillis Louisa	44	F	B	House Keeper			Massachusetts								1 1
15			Jackson Herbert	12	M	B	Farm Work			NH								1
16			Lewis George	19	M	B	Farm Work			Massachusetts								
17			Phillis Catherine	16	F	B	House Work			Massachusetts								

**Detail of the 1870 Federal Census for Washington, New Hampshire showing the Louisa Phillis family living on the Moses Lowell farm.**

The final records discovered so far for Louisa in Washington are of her acceptance into the Washington SDA Church on October 21, 1871. According to her obituary published in the SDA’s “Atlantic Union Gleaner” magazine, Louisa’s desire to become a member of the church came through her connection to a prominent Washington citizen, Cyrus K. Farnsworth. The Farnsworth family was instrumental in the founding of the SDA Church, and Cyrus was an important early church leader. He was chosen as the church’s first deacon at its founding in January of 1862. Louisa was employed doing domestic work for Farnsworth and his family. His farm was near the western shore of Millen Pond, less than 2 miles North of the Lowell farm.

It is difficult to prove with absolute certainty that Louisa Phillis and the children living with her were Washington’s first Black residents, but in a page-by-page review of all Washington census records between 1790 and 1950, they are the only persons of color recorded by name in the 140 years up through 1930. Two are named in the 1940 census, and none are named in the 1950 census.

At the time Louisa came to Washington, free nonwhites made up only a tiny fraction of New Hampshire’s population. In 1860, out of a total of 326,073 people, there were only 494 “free people of color” recorded in NH — accounting for less than 1% (.1515%) of the state’s total. The population of enslaved people was even lower. While slavery wasn’t officially abolished in NH until 1857, census numbers reflect a low incidence of slavery during the period from 1790 through 1860. There are 158 enslaved people counted in the 1790 FC, 8 in the 1800 FC, none in the 1810 FC and the 1820 FC, three in the 1830 FC, and one in the 1840 FC.

As for the town of Washington, no enslaved people were recorded there in any FC.

Because the names of nonwhites were not always recorded in the early censuses, I also looked at the total counts for nonwhite residents in Washington. The number “8” appears in the totals column for the “All other free persons, except Indians not taxed” column in the 1800 FC for Washington (but no other information is provided). With that one exception, no nonwhite residents are recorded in Washington for any other censuses between 1790 through 1930 except for Louisa Phillis and her family.

We don’t know exactly when Louisa Phillis left Washington, but it was sometime before 1879. When her son George Lewis marries in Swanzey, NH in March of 1876, he gives Washington as his place of residence. When Louisa remarries in Harvard, MA in 1879, she gives Boxboro, MA as her place of residence.

Louisa’s marriage, on September 23, 1879, was to a man named Elbridge Gerry Gigger. At the time Louisa was 52, and Elbridge was 67. This was a second marriage for both of them.

Elbridge Gigger has a story every bit as fascinating as Louisa’s. His maternal grandmother was a Native American — a full-blooded member of the Hassanamisco tribe, which at the time of Elbridge’s birth owned the land that later became the town of Grafton, MA. His maternal grandfather was a mix of Native American and Portuguese. In 1827, when Elbridge was 15, the state of Massachusetts made a deal with the Hassanamisco tribe to buy their land and open it to settlement. The agreement was that adult tribal members and their children living at the time would receive their money in the form of a pension – but the money was not paid. In 1897, Elbridge, his brother and the few other remaining members of the tribe still eligible under the terms of the 1827 agreement petitioned the state for their promised pensions and won! For his few remaining years, Elbridge received a pension of \$250 a year, paid to him on a quarterly basis. When he passed away at the age of 91 on September 3, 1903. Elbridge Gerry Gigger was the last surviving member of the Hassanamisco tribe eligible for

this pension. He was buried in the Old Burying Ground cemetery in Gardner, MA.

GIGGER.—Died June 20, 1902, in Temple, N. H., Mrs. Louisa Gigger (colored), aged 75 years. Many years ago she did domestic work in the family of our esteemed Brother C. K. Farnsworth, of Washington, N. H. She became imbued with a love for the third angel’s message, which followed her during a long life of toil and pain. Her husband was an Indian. He read the *Signs* to her and the Bible. In doing this, he, too, found the Sabbath truth and embraced it.

Her last years were full of suffering. Her disease (arterial gangrene) was a lingering one. A year and a half ago she had one limb amputated, hoping to arrest the dire disease, but all in vain. When I visited her last, her hope for eternity was bright, and we trust she will come up in the morning of the first resurrection. Her aged husband mourns, but not without hope.

P. A. FISH.

**Louisa (Phillis) Gigger’s obituary.**  
Credit: Seventh Day Adventist Church publication “Atlantic Union Gleaner.” Written by P.A. Fish. Volume 1, Issue 27, published July 9, 1902

Louisa and Elbridge had a happy and loving marriage, splitting their time between Gardner, MA, where Elbridge was employed as a chair maker, and Temple, NH, where both had strong familial ties. If you remember from the 1870 census, Louisa could not read or write. It was Elbridge who taught her these skills by reading to her from the Bible and from *Signs of the Times*, a monthly magazine published by the SDA that Louisa enjoyed. Reportedly, through these readings for Louisa, Elbridge also became a Seventh Day Adventist. In the 1900 FC, Louisa records (I like to think *proudly*) that she now reads and writes!

Louisa’s final years were filled with much illness and pain. She suffered from arterial gangrene, which occurs when the blood flowing to certain areas of the body becomes constricted. Sadly, about a year and a half before her death one of Louisa’s limbs was amputated in an effort to stop the progression of the disease, but to no avail. Despite the suffering, a visitor seeing her shortly before her death found her at peace and that “...her hope for eternity was bright.” Louisa (Phillis) Gigger passed away on June 14, 1902, in Temple, NH, where she lays at rest among extended family in the East Cemetery.

**Readers with any questions or comments about this article are invited to contact me at [bill.mulcahy@wnhhs.org](mailto:bill.mulcahy@wnhhs.org)**

## News from the East Washington Schoolhouse Museum

A series of events are planned for the East Washington Schoolhouse in the coming months.

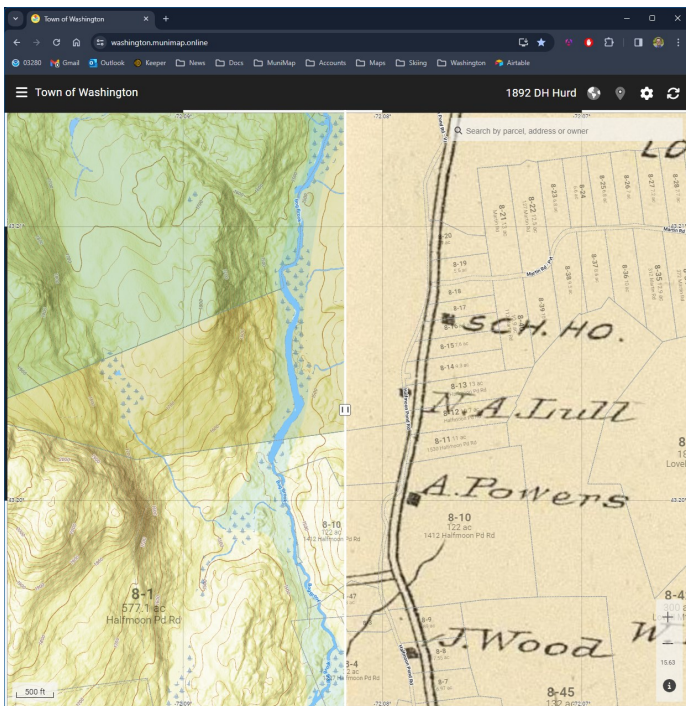
Do you know how many one room school houses there used to be in Washington? Did you attend one? This winter, I visited the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade in Washington Elementary School. They enjoyed locating their homes on a large 3D map model I had of the town, and figuring which of the ten one room schoolhouses in the town they would have had to walk to a century ago.

This summer, the East Washington School Committee hopes to locate the sites of all the original ten schools and take pictures of them (or their cellar holes). If you are interested in this project, give me a call at 478-5650.

On April 19 the third graders will be come on a field trip to the East Washington schoolhouse and learning what a typical day was like in school one hundred years ago, (long before the computer age). Then on May 13<sup>th</sup>, together we will act out parts of a typical school day as a program for the Washington Historical Society. Any of you who attended any of the other schools years ago, are invited to come share some stories of your experiences. Put this date on your calendar and enjoy coming over to see this interesting reenactment.

The schoolhouse is being opened earlier than usual to accommodate the above events, as well as a special visit from the D.A.R. from Newport, NH to come visit the school house. On Saturday, April 13 (Weather permitting), we are expecting these visitors. If you find that you have been meaning to visit the Schoolhouse Museum, and can't seem to do it during the summer, give me a call to make an appointment to come see this gem of history.

Marian Baker



With regard to Marian's project to locate the present-day site of all 10 schoolhouses, I have some data from a project of my own that might be interesting. The first is an 1892 map of Washington that clearly shows most (if not all) of the schoolhouses. They're marked **SCH. HO.** or **S.H.** on the map.

My project recently has been to write software to overlay historical maps onto present-day data in <https://washington.munimap.online/>. In the example I clipped, you can see the location of the Halfmoon Pond Rd schoolhouse, just before present day Martin Rd. The 19th century cartography is impressively accurate!

This is now live at <https://washington.munimap.online/> (hint: click the "gear" icon at the top right). Give the software ~30 seconds to automatically reload

once launched with this latest version. If anyone is interested in digging deeper, please let me know!

Mark Florence

# Upcoming Events

## Meetings and Presentations

These events are held at Camp Morgan Lodge, 339 Millen Pond Road, Washington, NH and are preceded by a pot luck supper at 5:30 and a members meeting at 6:30. The presentation begins at 7:00.

June 10     David Mann — Boundaries, First Proprietors & Roads  
                  An explanation of the Lot and Range system that laid out many colonial towns.

July 8        Stephen Taylor — Late in Arriving, How Electricity changed Rural NH

## Summer Saturdays at the Museum and the Barn

The Museum and Barn at 100 Half Moon Pond Road are open every Saturday from July through Labor Day 10-2. Bring your family and friends. Admission is free and all are welcome.

The special display in the museum this summer will feature the schools of Washington, NH. There will be pictures of the District Schoolhouses and information about them as well as some items from the collection that relate to the Schoolhouses.

As always, the museum has the large loom on display, historical postcards of Washington, and merchandise for sale.

## Summer Saturdays at the East Washington School House

The District #5 One-Room Schoolhouse at 2750 East Washington Road in East Washington is open every Saturday July through Labor Day 1-3 pm. Admission is free.

On Friday, April 19 the 3rd grade of Washington Elementary School will attend school in the District #5 Schoolhouse and experience what school was like for children 100 years ago.

On Monday May 13, the Washington NH Historical Society will meet at the Schoolhouse to act out parts of a typical school day. Watch the website for more information.

Washington Historical Society

PO Box 90

Washington, NH 03280

ANNUAL MEMEBERSHIP LEVELS are changing. If you are already a member, you will be receiving a notice to renew in the mail or via email. If you would like to join, you can join on-line and pay by credit card, or visit the museum.

Donations can be made online using a credit card or by check to WNHHS, PO Box 90, Washington, NH 03280

PLEASE NOTE: As a non-profit historical society, we qualify with many companies for matching grants provided the company you work for, or are retired from, supports such benefits.

Please accept my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to help WNHHS continue its work.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

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