

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL RESEARCH AT THE CESAR AND SIM PETERS HOUSE SITE (67-7), HEBRON, CT

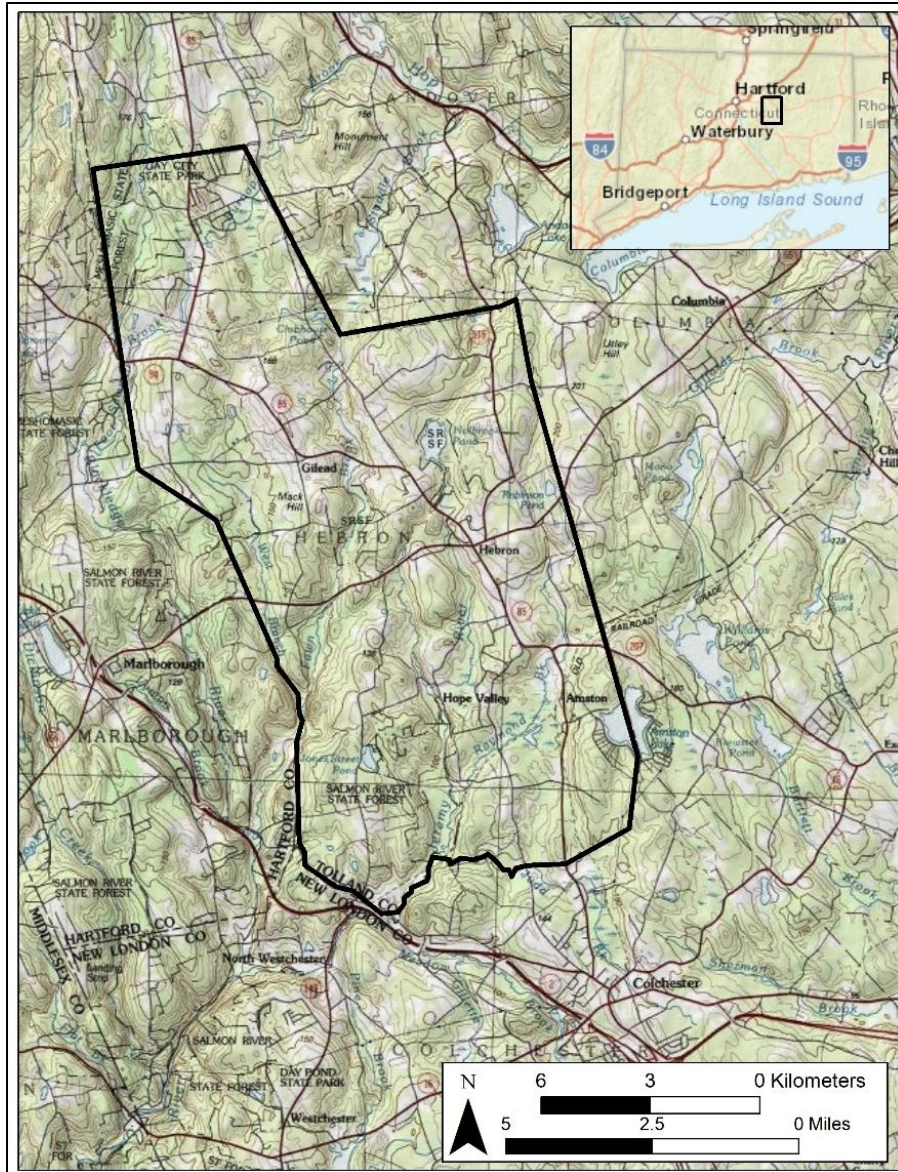
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### *Abstract*

*In 2020 we initiated a long-term research project to explore the lives of the free African American Peters family in early 19<sup>th</sup>-century Hebron, Connecticut. The project includes historical research and an archaeological investigation of the remains of the house that Cesar and Sim Peters purchased in 1806. This work is part of a larger collaborative project that is being carried out by Hebron historian John Baron, the Connecticut Office of State Archaeology (OSA), the Friends of the Office of State Archaeology (FOSA), Peters family descendants, the Hebron Historical Society, teachers and students from the Regional Hebron, Andover, and Marlborough (RHAM) school district, and the Witness Stones Project, to raise awareness of the African-American history of Hebron through public history and archaeology events, popular publications, curriculum building, and the installation of Witness Stone monuments at significant locations in town. This paper presents a summary history of the Peters family and their home site, and reports the preliminary results of the first season of archaeological work at the site.*

### INTRODUCTION

Cesar and Sim Peters were free people when they moved to Hebron, Connecticut (Figure 1) and purchased two acres with a house in 1806, but the Peters family had a much longer history in the community. For nearly 30 years, Cesar lived as a captive of the wealthy and influential Peters family (from whom he received his surname) in Hebron until he was freed by the Connecticut General Assembly in 1789. The Peters family's story is remarkable. It is a tale of perseverance, friendship, and community, and it is a proud episode in Hebron's history. Nonetheless, the established narrative about the Peters family focuses on their dramatic rescue from southern slavery by their white neighbors. The event is marked by a site on the Connecticut Freedom Trail, was featured in a play written for the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hebron in 1958, and is the subject of a short 2009 film, *Testimonies of a Quiet New England Town*. The story is an important episode in Connecticut's history and was likely a defining moment for the Peters family. However, the prominence of the rescue story in local history frames the Peters family as victims, dependent on the good will and kind sentiments of the white residents of Hebron. It diminishes the fuller story of their perseverance and resourcefulness first as captives, and later as free people. Our research focuses on the Peters as free people and aims to tell a more complete story about the family through an investigation of their home site, material culture, and the documentary record.



**Figure 1: Location of Hebron, Connecticut.**

**BACKGROUND**

***History of the Peters Families***

In the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the widow Mary Peters of Hebron purchased a young African American boy named Caesar, often rendered in documents as Cesar or even Sessor (J. Peters 1789). Little is known about Cesar’s early life, except that he was born and purchased in Massachusetts. The Peters’ home was north of what is now Burnt Hill Park on East Street in Hebron. From his youth, Cesar impressed the Peters family with his skill and intellect, and Mary’s son John Peters later testified that his mother had planned to emancipate Cesar as a result. However, John also testified that Mary Peters changed her mind about Cesar’s emancipation in 1770, when he married

a woman named Lois (also recorded as Lowis) without her permission. It is not known if Lois was also part of the Peters' household, enslaved in a neighbor's household, or from another community, but Mary Peters was clearly angry about the unapproved marriage. Rather than have the marriage dissolved, she sold Cesar to her son, the Reverend Samuel Peters, also of Hebron, for £110 (J. Peters 1789). Rev. Peters had also recently acquired another captive, a man by the name of Pomp Mundo.

Mary Peter's decision to sell the couple tied Cesar and Lois Peters' destiny to the Rev. Samuel Peters. Samuel Peters, an Anglican minister, was born in 1735 (Hebron Births, Marriages and Deaths 1922), the same year the Hebron community was split apart by issues concerning the location of a new meetinghouse. Fueled less by religious doctrine and more by economics, the town split in a north/south geographic divide with the northern party eventually declaring themselves as an Anglican parish. The split affected Hebron deeply; in 1747, to force a decision on the location of a new meeting house, an intellectually disabled youth was coerced into burning the old meeting house to the ground (Bicentennial Committee 1910:48). Eventually, Hebron split into five parishes; four were Congregational and one was Anglican.

The Rev. Samuel Peters came of age during this controversy. After graduating from Yale in 1757, he sought ordination in the Anglican Church in Great Britain. The Rev. Peters' time in England exposed him to high Georgian society and more worldly ideas than his fellow Hebron citizens. His faith and his time England also influenced his politics. As part of his ministerial duties, Peters was required to pray for the continued prosperity and good health of the royal family, and his loyalties were decidedly British.

When Peters returned to Connecticut in the early 1760s, tension was building between the colonies and Great Britain over the cost of the French and Indian War. Peters quickly became an influential member of the Hebron community and was outspoken about political issues. Reverend Peters hosted a meeting of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Hebron and became rector of both the Hebron and Hartford Anglican churches (Bicentennial Committee 1910:47-49; Mampoleng 1936). Local friction built as Connecticut's government fell under the radical control of Governor Jonathan Trumbull and the Sons of Liberty. Reverend Peters soon became both an economic and political rival to Governor Trumbull. The tension between them came to a head in 1774 over the question of food relief for the citizens of Boston after the destruction of the British East India's Company's tea during the notorious Boston Tea Party. In response, the British Parliament passed the Coercive (Intolerable) Acts, one of which provided for a blockade of Boston Harbor until restitution was made to the East India Company for the destroyed tea. At Governor Trumbull's request, Connecticut towns were urged to hold meetings to sponsor cattle drives for the relief of Boston citizens whose livelihoods had been compromised by the closure of the port. Hebron held their first town meeting in July of 1774, and the Rev. Peters convincingly argued that the destruction of private property demanded compensation and Hebron should send no relief until Boston paid for the tea. Peters repeated his argument at a Hartford meeting shortly thereafter, and again spoke convincingly, outraging Connecticut's patriots (Mampoleng 1936).

Rev. Peters' eloquence quickly set him on a collision course with Governor Trumbull. Twice in the late summer of 1774, the Rev. Peters received visits from the Sons of Liberty. By the second visit, on September 6, Peters realized that he was no longer safe in Hebron. Reportedly, Governor Trumbull sent his son David with the Sons of Liberty to the Rev. Peters' house to coerce him to take up the Patriot cause. There are varying reports of what transpired that day, ranging from a heated verbal confrontation to a violent altercation, where the windows of Peters' house were broken out, his mother shot at, and the Reverend himself stripped to the waist and brought to

the local Liberty Pole to be tarred and feathered (Cohen 1976: 15-17; Bicentennial Committee 1910: 50; McCormick 1877: 261-265). The African-American captives of the Peters' family certainly witnessed the event and likely pondered its consequences for them.

Reverend Peter's third wife, Mary Birdseye Peters had died in childbirth shortly before the Sons of Liberty arrived. Fearing for his life, Peters left his young children, his estate, and his human property in the care of his mother and fled to Boston (Pendleton and Gilbert 1933), and then to England. For much of the rest of his life Rev. Peters would administer his American holdings, including his human captives, from Pimlico, London. Rev. Peters described his extensive property at the time of his departure in a letter he sent to Dr. Markan on March 7, 1775 (Mampoteng 1936):

600 acres of improved land  
 Sufficiency wood land  
 8 dwelling houses, one cost 700 pounds, 4 not so valuable  
 7 barns, 2 cow houses  
 Nigh 100 head horned cattle  
 80-100 sheep, 10 horses  
 Nigh 70 swine  
 1 double chaise, 1 single chaise  
 Many farminng utensils (sic), house furniture  
 6 negroes  
 Nigh 4000 fruit trees, apple, pear, etc.  
 On said land is annually produced nigh 2,000 bushels grain, wheat, rye, barley, oats, Indian corn, etc.  
 Nigh 120 tons hay, and grazing for above stock.  
 I have one daughter about eleven years old, one son about two months old. My daughter I left at Boston at the expense of one guinea per week, my son not less than two guineas per month, my own expenses about two guinea per week.

The "6 negroes" mentioned in the letter were Cesar, Lois, James, and Theodorus Peters, as well as Pomp Mundo and his wife, Rachel. When the Rev. Peters left Hebron, the fates of the two captive families became inextricably linked to national events. Their stories can be partially pieced together from documentary sources, including evidence given during their manumission case in 1789. Since Rev. Peters departed well before shots were fired at Lexington and Concord, no immediate action was taken with his Connecticut property, which remained in the care of his mother, Mary Peters. The documents indicate that Cesar and Lois Peters and Pomp and Rachel Mundo continued initially to live on individual farms owned by Samuel Peters. However, as Connecticut Colony became the State of Connecticut, the estate was soon leased by the state to Thomas Brown. At that time, the two captive families were neither freed nor sold to new owners. Instead, they were turned off Peters' estate and left, with uncertain legal status, to fend for themselves (Sutton 1789).

There is scant record of the African American Peters and Mundo families during this period, but by 1783 Cesar Peters' family was recorded as living in a blacksmith shop at what is now known as Burnt Hill Park, on a property Rev. Peters' had acquired from his brother and fellow loyalist Jonathan Peters (Clouette 2007; Mentz 1974). Of the six Peters brothers, the three youngest, Rev. Samuel, Jonathan, and Bemslee Peters, were all ardent Loyalists. Bemslee and Jonathan left Hebron during the war and left their wives in control of their estates, which in actuality were owned by the Rev. Peters (Bissell 1907). Jonathan Peters died early in the Revolutionary War leaving his widow Abigail in charge of their home farm, which included the

property that is now 150 East Street. She was the one who allowed Cesar Peters' family the use of the blacksmith shop on the property when they were turned out of their home. A letter dated August 7, 1783, from David Sutton to Ralph Pomeroy and Rev. Peters stated that, "Negro Peters lives in widow's Abigail Peters's shop, cares for the glebe, and has five children" (Cameron 1978:100).

It is not clear where Pomp Mundo's family resided during the 1780s, but letters collected by Wayne Mentz for his 1974 dissertation on Rev. Peters provide some clues. A 1785 letter from Nathaniel Mann to Samuel Peters suggests that for a time, at least, Pomp rented Bemslee Peters's property from the state, but struggled to pay the rent. Pomp and his family appear to have left Hebron sometime between 1785 and 1787, as in April of 1787, Rev. Peters wrote to Mann, "Sorry poor Pomp has departed from your country, for I wished to have seen him again in the Body, and obtain information that none now can give me" (Mann 1785 and Peters 1787, cited in Mentz 1974).

While both captive families were owned by Rev. Samuel Peters, they had very different histories. Pomp Mundo's life was heavily influenced by 18<sup>th</sup>-century laws that strongly discouraged the emancipation of slaves, due to the fear that they would be unable to support themselves and become a burden on local communities. These laws, passed in 1702 and 1711, held former owners financially responsible for any slaves that they freed. According to Brown and Rose (1980:263), Pomp Mundo, also known as Pomp Edgerton, was about 15 years old when he was purchased by Hezekiah Edgerton of Norwich. Pomp Mundo remained part of Edgerton's household until he was 34 but was allowed to keep his outside earnings which amounted to 68 pounds. Hezekiah Edgerton was reluctant to free Pomp Mundo for fear of being held responsible if the man became unable to support himself. In 1768, Edgerton sold Pomp Mundo to Ozias Hawkins of Coventry, with the understanding that Pomp Mundo's earnings would pay for his freedom. Yet, Pomp Mundo's new owner also was reluctant to assume responsibility for his support. At this point, the Rev. Samuel Peters purchased Pomp Mundo for 12 shillings and brought him to Hebron with the intent to free him. Unfortunately, the Selectmen of Hebron refused Rev. Peters' request to free Pomp Mundo. The direct cause of their reluctance about assuming responsibility for Pomp Mundo's support remains unclear, but it may simply have been driven by a general fear of financial responsibility. Mundo ostensibly remained the property of the Rev. Samuel Peters, and he married a woman named Rachel in about 1774. The couple had seven children between 1775 and 1785. Thus, as Pomp Mundo and his wife were settling down to their new married life, their owner fled the Colonies, leaving them, like Cesar and Sim, with an undefined status in the eyes of the new state government of Connecticut. The fate of the Mundo and Peters families was unusual and presented each with unique challenges for their survival. Their situation was a marked contrast to that of the captives from the Browne Plantation in Salem, for instance, where the estate was confiscated, and the captive residents were freed (Brown and Rose 1980).

Available information from surviving letters between Rev. Peters, Nathaniel Mann, Samuel Peters' friends and family in Hebron, and Cesar Peters himself indicate that the relationship between the captive Peters and Mundo families and Samuel Peters was complex. Documentary sources suggest that it was characterized by mutual dependence, and at times, real affection. In fact, at the height of tensions Hebron, the Rev. Peters' survival may have depended upon Cesar and Pomp. When Samuel Peters was attacked by the mob and nearly tarred and feathered, he reported that, "my Negroes were permitted to carry me home" (Peters 1782). Shortly thereafter, when Peters fled to Boston under cover of darkness, he escaped on a horse that was

hidden for him in a field by one of his captives. In both cases it was likely Cesar and Pomp who came to his aid (Mentz 1974: 46-49).

Samuel Peters' letters from England provide additional insight into his relationship with Cesar, Pomp, and their families. In a letter to his sister Margaret and her husband (John Mann) after the war, Peters asked for information about the wellbeing of his captives by name (Peters 1783 cited in Mentz 1974). Then, in a 1785 letter to Nathaniel Mann, Peters asked, "Where and how lives honest Pomp? – it seems to me that he and Ceser might be better Tenants than Mrs. F. Brown...". Later in the letter he wished them all well and indicated his desire to free them: "as to Ceser, Lois and the Negroes, their case will be perfect freedom by your Laws very Soon, and if they are hereafter permitted by your State to be my Property again, Ceser and Lois shall be free - by my Law" (Peters 1785 cited in Mentz 1974).

Samuel Peters' care and affection is real, but notably paternalistic and an unequal power dynamic underlies all of their recorded interactions. At times, Samuel Peters' feelings seem to have been tempered by his stressful financial situation. His letters to Nathaniel Mann vacillate between concern for his captives as people and a consideration of them as assets. He also expressed anger and frustration at times about Cesar Peters' lack of submission. In November of 1787, after the failed abduction, Rev. Peters wrote to Mann. "...I wish Cesar might not be sold but he must obey you if he intends to secure my friendship (Peters 1787b). After Cesar was freed, he wrote to Mann, "If Cesar, since his emancipation, cuts timber, sue him and let him pay for his folly in slavery again" (Peters 1789).

### ***Abduction and Rescue***

The attempted sale of Cesar and Lois Peters' family in 1787 has its roots in the economic struggles of Samuel Peters and his nephew, Nathaniel Mann. After Peters fled Connecticut for England, his finances were tight. Peters was compensated for only a fraction of the massive losses he claimed, and the status of his property in America was complicated by the political situation and very likely by his own political leanings and contentious personality. Mentz (1974:87) indicates that Peters was poorly compensated because his estate was never officially confiscated. Once Peters learned that he still held title to his landed estate, he determined that the situation was orchestrated by his enemies to further punish him. He clearly could not return home, nor would he be compensated for the estate he felt forced to leave behind. Reverend Peters' financial troubles were further magnified by the fact that some of his properties were leased out to people who failed to maintain them. Additionally, his agents in America made some poor financial decisions. In a letter dated August 7, 1783, Dr. David Sutton informed Peters that he sold the Reverend's livestock for Continental money, which is "now worthless." Sutton mentioned the sale again in a letter from November 18, 1783, when he wrote about his regrets for accepting the "Damned Continental Money," which ruined thousands of people (Sutton 1783a, 1783b).

In 1784, Nathaniel Mann, Rev. Samuel Peters' sister's son, spent some time with him in London. Mann had graduated from Dartmouth and then went to England to train as a physician and surgeon. He hoped to establish his own medical practice with the financial support of his uncle. Rev. Peters extended his line of credit to Mann, who returned to the newly formed United States to start his career as a physician and apothecary. Dr. Nathaniel Mann soon established his practice in Hebron and his business is reflected in the collected papers of Samuel Peters (Cameron 1978:41, 43, 56, 58), which include several notes, receipts, and bills regarding Mann's purchases and shipments of drugs, medicines, and ingredients such as potash, ginseng, and myrtle from companies like Chamberlain and Moore and Saltonstall and Mumford. However, Mann's



correspondence with Rev. Peters indicates that he was soon struggling to pay his debts (Cameron 1978; Mentz 1974).

In 1786, Samuel Peters gave Nathaniel and his father, John Mann, his power of attorney, and with it, control over his holdings in Connecticut (Cameron 1978:152). In 1787, Nathaniel Mann was struggling financially and he was unable to repay his uncle, who was, in turn, being pressed for repayment by the London merchants. Nathaniel Mann's financial issues certainly impacted his management of his uncle's property in Hebron, and the situation was exacerbated by Rev. Peters' own financial concerns.

In the summer of 1787, John and Nathaniel Mann hit upon a scheme for retiring some of their debt. Taking advantage of the ambivalent status of Cesar's and Lois' family under Connecticut law, the Manns arranged to sell them to a planter in South Carolina. This agreement presented certain legal problems that were apparently overlooked by the parties involved. Most notably, the two youngest Peters children were born after 1784 and were technically free by Connecticut State law.

By the summer of 1787 Cesar and his family had been reinstated at one of Samuel Peters' most profitable properties, known as the Shipman Farm. Cesar, Lois, and their children were living at the farm and managing the property, but that arrangement apparently did not sit well with John and Nathaniel Mann. A letter from Reverend Peters to Nathaniel Mann dated July 13, 1787 suggests that the Manns had been complaining about Cesar's family. Rev. Peters' correspondence, however, indicates that he felt that the root cause of the issue was the Manns' mismanagement of his estates and human property: "Ceser you say cannot support himself and family – my Estates are not worth much at present – cannot you and your family put things in order and make them useful – how do you live and buy farms?" (Peters 1787). In fact, information presented in the testimony of David Sutton in 1789 suggests that the Manns actively hindered Cesar's ability to support his family:

"...He livd in a Comfortable Thriving Situation, until Sd. Peters appointed Mr. John Man & Nathanl. Man his Agents in America after which sd. Cesar was forbid to collect or pay Debts or to trade in the most trifling Affairs, a Privilage that he always enjoyd, when under his sd. Master Peters..." (Sutton 1789).

Cesar and Lois apparently were aware that the Manns planned to sell them. In early September of 1787, a group of men from Hebron sent a joint letter to Samuel Peters at the request of the couple. Samuel Gilbert, John Wells, David Sutton, Joseph Mann, and Ezekiel Brown wrote Peters to let him know that the Manns were planning to sell the family into Southern slavery in South Carolina. They further noted that Cesar feared that Rev. Peters had been misinformed about his behavior, and the authors attested to Cesar's abilities and good character. The letter, however, failed to reach Peters in time to halt the sale (Gilbert et al. 1787).

On September 27, 1787, John and Nathaniel Mann appeared at Shipman Farm with David Prior, an agent for a South Carolina Planter, along with "a Waggon and Horses and nine or Ten men that were ruffians armed with Clubs and staves" (C. Peters 1787). The men attempted to force the Peters family into a wagon and transport them south to Norwich, where they were to be put on a ship headed for South Carolina. The Manns may have chosen September 27 for the capture and transport of the family because it was militia training day and many of the men from the surrounding Burnt Hill neighborhood were in East Haddam for training. Fortunately for the Peters family, most of the local women *were* at home. As Mann and Prior attempted to shackle the Peters and load them into the wagon, one of the older children escaped and raised the alarm with some

of their neighbors. Patience Graves and number of other local women, along with a few men who were unable to train, soon arrived and tried to intervene in the abduction. However, Nathaniel Mann brandished a sword and threatened violence, and the unarmed neighbors backed down (P. Graves 1787; Case 1787).

When the Burnt Hill men returned from militia training, they were informed of the day's events and the community quickly devised a scheme to stop the sale of the Peters family. Elijah Graves, a tailor and husband of Patience Graves, had recently mended some clothing for the Peters, but had not yet been paid. Importantly, Graves accused the *entire* Peters family of the theft of the clothing in his complaint:

To Elihu Marvin Esq a Justice of the peace within and for the County of Tolland Come Elijah Graves of Hebron In the County of Tolland and Complaineth in his name as well as in the name of the Govr. & Company of the State and gives said Justice to understand that Cesar commonly known By the Name of Cesar Peters and Lowis his wife and James & Dorus and Salle & Iri and Susanna and Ziba & Lowis and Cesar children to said Cesar and Lowis his Wife all Negro Persons Belonging to Said Hebron are all guilty of theft in that they did in Said Hebron on the Night N\_\_\_\_\_ after the 24th Day of September Instant feloniously Steel and Carry of [sic] from Your Complainant's Dwelling house in Sd. Hebron the following articals viz. one Blue Broad Cloth Coat with white mettles Buttons Worth Six Shillings Lawfull money, one pr. of Coduroy Briches partly worn worth three Shillings L. money, one Coduroy Vest part finished worth two Shillings and six pence L. money, one pr. flower-Silver knee Buckles worth three Shillings L. money, all the Property of Your Complainant and is to Your Complainant's Damage the sum of Eighteen Shillings Lawfull Money and against the Laws of this State therefore, Your Complainant Prays that they the above-Persons may be apprehended and Delt with according to Law.

Dated Hebron the 27th Day of September AD 1787.

[signature of] Elijah Graves (Hebronthistoricalociety.org)

Once the complaint was filed, Elihu Marvin, the Justice of the Peace, quickly drew up an arrest warrant for the entire Peters family. Enlisting the help of the Hebron Selectmen, a party was immediately sent out to apprehend the "thieves." The group from Hebron caught up with the Peters' family and their abductors near Norwich and persuaded the Norwich Selectmen to honor the warrant and unpaid debt by releasing the Peters family into their custody. The next day, the group returned to Hebron and presented the town with a bill for food and drink for the rescue party and the Peters' family, including "7 breakfasts 7sh., 8 negro breakfasts 5s, 7 horses bait 2sh. 4d, bitters 1s 10d" and large quantity of alcohol (Bissell 1899:5). The town paid the bill, with the exception of the alcoholic beverages consumed by the rescue party.

To resolve Graves' complaint and the subsequent arrest warrant, the Peters family was brought before the Justice of the Peace by Constable John Gilbert. They were all found guilty of the theft and sentenced to pay damages of £2, fines of £6, and costs totaling £7, 2sh. On November 10, 1787 an application to the court was made for the indenture of the family to Elijah Graves for a period of two years to pay off their debt for the "stolen" clothes (Bissell 1899; Susan Pendleton Gilbert 1933). The arrangement ensured that the family would be spared another attempted sale.

Shortly after the attempted abduction, Cesar and Lois wrote to Rev. Peters in England and described their experience. While we have not yet tracked down a copy of the actual letter,



Cameron (1978:325) provides a summary: the couple recounted their attempted abduction and sale to South Carolina and indicated that Nathaniel Mann orchestrated the sale with David Prior who “made large profits by buying up Northern servants and selling as Southern slaves.” They expressed their fear, at the time, that their family would be separated, sold, and likely abused in South Carolina. Cesar said he would be sorry if Reverend Peters was behind the sale, but he hoped he was not. He also said that he continued to serve Peters’ interests and would be happy to see him again. The letter spells out Cesar and Lois’s experience during the attempted abduction and lays bare their fears for their family. They were fully aware of the implications of being sold in South Carolina and it was terrifying. The letter is extraordinary because to-date, most of the Peters family’s story has been told by others.

### ***Emancipation and Freedom***

When their indenture to Elijah Graves was completed in 1789, Cesar and Lois Peters petitioned the Connecticut General Legislature for the emancipation of their family (C. Peters 1789). It was an unusual case. First, letters sent from London in 1787 by Rev. Samuel Peters made it clear that he did not want to sell Cesar Peters’ family; the plan for the sale originated with John and Nathaniel Mann. In November of 1787, shortly after the attempted abduction, Peters wrote to his agents, “I hope you will not have sold Cesar before this time...I wish Cesar might not be sold...” (Peters 1787b). The manumission petition also was strongly supported by Hebron citizens and town officials, several of whom provided testimony on behalf of the family. The testimonies highlight Cesar Peters’ intelligence, work ethic, and strong morals, his ability to support his family, and the dreadful treatment of the Peters family at the hands of John and Nathaniel Mann (Case 1789; E. Graves 1789; P. Graves 1789; Kellog et al. 1789; Sutton 1789). Other testimony recounts past conversations with Mary Peters and letters from Samuel Peters indicating that they had always intended to one day free Cesar and his family that they never gave permission to sell them (Gilbert 1789; J. Peters 1789; Sutton 1789). It is clear from the depositions that the Cesar and Lois’ family was respected and well-liked by their neighbors in Hebron.

The 1789 testimony also provides many details of the attempted abduction of the Peters family. For instance, the deposition of David Sutton, who was neighbor of the Peters family, provides particularly strong support for Cesar and his family and outlines what Sutton clearly viewed as unfair treatment at the hands of both the Manns and the State of Connecticut:

The Deposition of David Sutton of Lawfull age is as follows. I have been well acquainted with Cesar a Negro, and his Family; Servants to the Rv. Samuel Peters late of Hebron, now of Great Britain, said Negroes Servd their Master faithfully, & was treated by him tenderly during the Time that they livd together; after S. Peters left Hebron which was in Sept. 1774 Cesar livd in his House, & Conducted his Business with Prudence, until sd Peters’s Lands were taken, & Leased out by the State of Connecticut; at which time sd. Cesar and his Family were turnd off and Supported themselves Comfortably for about five or Six years, without any Assistance from their sd. Master, or his Estate, except the Privilage of Fire wood, although at that Time sd. Cesar had a Number of Small Children unable to do any Business towards their own Support. After the National Peace sd. Cesar returnd to one of his sd. Masters Houses, & Cultivated the Farm which was much Damagd by Tenants, and by Industry & Frugality Supported his Family, and at the Same Time was at no Small Cost in Reparing [sic] the Fences & Buildings & he has given his Family good Schooling, and has been at Considerable Expence by Sickness, & I understand that he has paid all the Taxes that have been calld for. He livd in a Comfortable Thriving Situation, until Sd. Peters

appointed Mr. John Man & Nathanl. Man his Agents in America after which sd. Cesar was forbid to collect or pay Debts or to trade in the most trifling Affairs, a Privilage that he always enjoyd, when under his sd. Master Peters, and the said Man's, made it their Constant Practice to See sd. Negroes, by thretning to Sel [sic] them; and I understood that they the Sd. Negroes were in fact Sold to one Prior, to be Sent to South Carolina, & were forcibly taken & Carried as far Norwich but they were Persud by a Small Number of People from Hebron, & Rescud but a few Moments before their intended Incarcation, we brot. Sd. Negroes back, & returnd them to the Home from Whence they were taken and Said Negr. are now in Daily Expectation of being Sold & Departed. Said Cesar, for a long Time after his Return, was unable to do any Business as I understood being badly hurt by Irons being put on his Wrists. Said has Eight Children, the oldest about Eighteen years of age & the Youngest about a year & half old, two of sd. C'ren [children] which were Carried away by sd. Man's & Prior were free Born, agreable to a Law of this State. Soon after the Return of Said Negroes, I Saw a Ltr from sd. Peters, to one Mr. Buckinham [sic], in which [he] wrote to Said Buckinham to tell Doct Man not to Sell his Negroes, but to let them Remain in Statu Quo.

Question, Have you ever heard sd. Agents thretton to sell sd. Negros since they were Rescued from Prior

Answer, I have heard Mr. John Man say that he believd must turn out one of sd. Negroes to Settle an Execution in Favour of Col. Elderain

(s) David Sutton

Tolland County SS Hebron January 5 1789

Then personaly appeared David Sutton the Subscriber to the foer going Depositions and Made Solomon [sic] oth [sic] to the truth of the same Befoer me.

- Benjamin Buell Justice Peace

Supported by the testimonies of their neighbors and Hebron town officials, the Peters family was freed by the Legislature, and although the documentation is lacking, it appears that Pomp Mundo's family was also freed at this time.

According to Rose and Brown (1980:31), following their manumission, the Mundo family tried to relocate to Lebanon, but they were unable to support themselves and the town sent them back to Hebron in 1792. The Mundos' financial troubles seem to have continued back in Hebron. Following the death of Rachel Mundo in Hebron in 1795, the town filed suit against Rev. Peters, as their former owner, for the cost of expenses sustained during her final illness, suggesting they were financially dependent upon the town. After Rachel's death, it appears that Pomp Mundo moved to Vermont. A letter from Jedidiah Buckingham of Thetford, Vermont to Rev. Peters and dated April 20, 1796 included news of Pomp Mundo. Buckingham wrote:

“We have two or 3 domestics among whom is one formerly yours. You made him an episcopalian and all the world cant make him a dissenter – he often speaks of you with tears in his eyes and prays night and morning for a sight of you - his name is Pomp Mindo...Pomp desires to be remembered and wishes you every thing” (Buckingham 1796).

The letter does not mention any of Pomp and Rachel's children, and it is unknown where they lived or how they fared. A letter to Rev. Peters from Gilbert Sylvester in 1822 indicates that Pomp Mundo died insolvent, still owing rent to Peters, but fails to provide the year of his death (Sylvester 1822).

Not long after Cesar Peters acquired his freedom, he instigated a case against John and Nathaniel Mann, suing them for £1000 for the attempted abduction and sale of his family. Although the case was never brought to court, the fact that it was ever begun is suggestive. First, the lawsuit suggests that Cesar Peters felt that he had the right to demand restitution for his family's harrowing experience. It also suggests that Peters had access to knowledge and support systems that were not available to most of his peers in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Connecticut. Letters from Nathaniel Mann to Samuel Peters suggest that the Manns anticipated the suit and were afraid that Cesar would win (Mann 1790); it is unclear why the suit was eventually withdrawn.

Following their emancipation, Hannah Peters Jarvis, the daughter of Rev. Peters, offered to take Cesar and Lois' family to Canada as servants, but they refused. In the spring of 1793, they relocated to Tolland. A letter from Silvester Gilbert to Rev. Peters dated November 25, 1793 stated, "Cesar has taken considerable land to improve and appears to be pleased with his prospect for gain; he thinks he can support his little black Brood comfortably where he is, and has not courage enough to attempt Canada." The letter goes on to say that the three oldest boys have hired themselves out and "are doing as well as any of their colour" (Sylvester 1793). This suggests that Cesar was likely farming, with the paid labor of his older sons to help support the family.

On December 18, 1793, the Peters family was struck with tragedy when Lois passed away just a few weeks after giving birth to a daughter. Cesar, widowed at 43 and with young children to care for, soon remarried a widow named Sym or Sim. At this time, there is no record of Sim's maiden or married surnames. By 1800, the Peters family had once again moved, this time to Coventry, where Cesar was listed in the Federal census with five people in his household. Around 1803, Cesar and Sim returned to Hebron, likely with the younger children. In 1806, the couple purchased a dwelling with two acres of land and a barn in Hebron (Rose and Brown 1980; HLR 12:45). That property, which has been identified through extensive land records research, is the focus of ongoing archaeological investigations carried out by the Connecticut Office of State Archaeology.

### ***History of the Cesar and Sim Peters Site Property***

The remains of the house and property that Cesar and Sim Peters purchased in 1806 exists today on private property in Hebron. Although the site is now named after early 19<sup>th</sup>-century African American owners of the property, the home site, which is located about a mile north of Hebron Center on Wall Street, has a long history that reflects the town's development. Much of the land records research on the property was compiled by Joan Rowley of Hebron (Rowley 2007). Her work permitted the identification of the house site on Wall Street. We should note here that other researchers (Forest et al. 2005) have suggested that Cesar and Sim Peters' home site was actually located on Main Street. The report, which was prepared as part of an archaeological survey of the Hebron Village Green Development project, notes that the proposed potential location of the family's home was based on circumstantial evidence and not the extensive chain of title research carried out by Joan Rowley; that level of documentary research is generally beyond the scope of a Phase I Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey.

Several historic maps of Hebron survive today. The earliest of these, created in 1744 by Isaac Pinney, shows the locations of the town's roads, as well as all of houses and their owners.

Based on the Pinney map, the property that Cesar and Lois purchased in 1806 belonged to the Mann family in 1744. The first known reference to the property in the land records dates to January 1, 1698 (Hebron Land Records [HLR], Land Volume 100), when Nathaniel Mann (grandfather of the Nathaniel Mann who attempted to sell the Peters family) bought a parcel of land in Hebron from Paul Welch of New Milford Connecticut. By April 5, 1713, Nathaniel and Mary Root Mann were likely living in Hebron, as the birth of their first child, Joseph, is recorded in the register of Hebron Births, Deaths and Marriages. On March 16, 1719, Samuel Clark of Saybrook sold to Nathaniel Mann of Hebron the “first division lott” #51 for 2 pounds 10s (HLR 1:222). The record describes a lot bounded south and east on the highway, north by Hezekiah Gaylord, and west by common land. This deed most likely references land originally associated with the current archaeological site, a property that today fronts Wall Street (Route 316).

The first definitive legal reference to a house standing on the property appears in a deed dated December 6, 1723 (HLR 1:341) to land “land lying adjacent to sd Man’s lott on which now dwelling house stands... with ye highway on ye southeastward.” The property seems to have passed within the Mann family from Nathaniel to his son John (b. 1727). In 1740, John Mann married Margaret Peters, daughter of John and Mary Peters and sister of the Rev. Samuel Peters (Hebron Births, Deaths and Marriages). On March 8, 1796 (HLR 9:84) John Mann sold “2 acres more or less with a dwelling house and a barn” to Oliver Phelps. Then, on March 29, 1805 Oliver Phelps’s son, also named Oliver, conveyed the property to John Mann’s son Elijah Mann.

Cesar and Sim Peters became property owners on September 2, 1806, when Elijah Mann of Hebron conveyed to Cesar Peters for \$186.68 (the equivalent of about \$4,266.13 today) “a certain parcel of land bounded as follows: North and East on Highways West and South by land of David Owen containing two acres with the buildings thereon conveyed to me by Oliver Phelps of Hebron by Deed bearing the date the 29<sup>th</sup> day of March A.D. 1805 duly Executed and recorded.” (HLR 12:45). The deed was not recorded until March 2, 1807. This commonplace land transaction belies the complicated history between the Mann/Peters family and the family of Cesar Peters, as the house Cesar and Sim purchased was likely the former home of his abductors, John and Nathaniel Mann. Mann family tradition indicates that the extant Mann house, located across from the Hebron Burying Ground on Wall Street, was built in 1782 (Phelps 1900).

The 1806 property transaction also marks the Cesar and Sim Peters House Site as an important landmark in the story of free African Americans in Connecticut and in New England. It serves as a material reflection of the Peters family’s transition from captivity to freedom and property-ownership within a well-established community, a trajectory that was not possible for many freed captives in the region. Over the course of 20 years, Cesar Peters had transitioned from a captive of uncertain legal status, living with his young family in Abigail Peters’ blacksmith shop, to purchasing the childhood home of his abductors—a two story house situated near Hebron’s newly developing Center Village. The purchase proved initially challenging; in 1807, Cesar wrote to Reverend Peters, who had returned to the U.S. was living in New York. He wished the Reverend well and said he’d like to see him again in Hebron. He also noted that he was struggling to pay for the property he’d purchased. Despite some evidence of hardship, Cesar and Sim made a living and spent the rest of their lives in their house in Hebron. The 1812 tax list for Hebron indicates that the Peters had one three-year-old cow, two acres of mowing land, and a house with two fireplaces (Hebron Tax List 1812). Cesar Peters worked providing farm labor for Hebron’s Center Village professionals, and he and Sim became part of a community of other African Americans who lived, worked, learned, and worshipped side by side with their Yankee neighbors.

On June 25, 1814, near the end of his life, Cesar Peters created a will to ensure that his property was distributed to heirs. The sums of money he provided for his children and grandchildren were small: 10 cents to each child and a penny to each grandchild. Cesar's assets were primarily in his modest real and personal property, the bulk of which he left to "my well beloved wife Sim Peters, so long as she remains my widow." His will further directed that if Sim remarried, his estate would "go to such one of my children as she shall direct, but if she neglects to make such a decision, the estate shall go to my son Henry." Cesar also added a codicil to his will leaving to his wife Sim "to be hers forever" articles "which she brought with her at the time I married her together with my set of china ware" (C. Peters 1814).

Cesar Peters passed away at the age of about 64 on July 4, 1814. His will was probated on August 16 (Hebron Probate Records [HPR] 6:114). The will is accompanied by a probate inventory, which begins with a reference to a two-story house and a barn, and goes on to list a variety of household goods including clothes, bedding, furniture, cooking and table ware, storage containers, farm implements, and tools. The inventory lists equipment used in a range of activities commonly carried out on New England farms: combing and spinning wool, pressing cider, making cheese, brewing beer, growing and storing grain, dairying, and barrels for preserving meat, among others. The list also includes a prayer book, reflecting Cesar's literacy and religious background and a number of middling-income consumer goods including tea equipment, a set of fashionable chairs, eight wine glasses and the set of china referenced in the codicil of his will.

Later that year, on December 25, 1814, Sim Peters "being somewhat in a low state of health" made her own will. At that time, she quitclaimed two acres with a dwelling and a barn to Henry Peters, discharging her responsibility for her husband's will (HLR 12:254). Following her death in early 1815, a probate inventory was also prepared for Sim Peters, and the inventoried materials include a smaller range of items than was listed in Cesar's probate: women's clothing, bedding, cooking and table ware, and furniture (HPR 6:186).

After the deaths of Cesar and Sim Peters, the Wall Street property passed through several owners. On December 25, 1815 Benjamin Bliss (b.1776-d. 1858) acquired two acres with buildings thereon from Henry Peters, who at that time resided in Chatham, Connecticut (HLR 12:174). Bliss held the property for just five years before he sold it to Davis Norton (b.1782-d.1856) in 1820 (HLR 13:163). Two year later, Davis Norton conveyed the property to George Crain (Crane) for \$280 (HLR 13:209). The property remained in the hands of various members of the Crane family until 1856. On March 10, 1823, the property was conveyed to Adria Crane of Hebron. On January 25, 1828 (HLR 15:54) Adria Crane quitclaimed the property to Ralph Crane (Crain) of Glastonbury. A series of quit claims were made on the property from 1828 to 1839. On March 10, 1839 Ralph Crane of Glastonbury quitclaimed the property to Harvey Crane of Hebron, who owned the property until 1856 (HLR 17:114). At that time, Harvey Crane conveyed the property to Charles G. Buell, also of Hebron (HLR 20:114).

Buell owned the property for only a short while. On January 5, 1857 (HLR 22:3) he transferred the property to Ezra L Backus, a farmer and a tanner, who owned it for seven years. On January 28, 1864 (HLR 22: 230) the property was conveyed to William Brown. The property remained in the Brown family until 1924. In 1869 "half the dwelling and other buildings" were conveyed from George Brown to James K. Brown (HLR 21:386). In 1876 the property was conveyed to Clarinda Brown (wife of James K Brown) and described as four acres with buildings. The next recorded land transaction occurred on August 20, 1924, in a warrantee deed to Louise Blume for \$1.00 (HLR 31:90). The record does not mention a house or other buildings, suggesting

that the house and barn were destroyed or demolished sometime in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT THE PETERS SITE (67-7)

### *Site Setting*

The Cesar and Sim Peters' site is located on Wall Street (Route 316) in the town of Hebron. Hebron is an eastern Connecticut upland town characterized by rolling hills and thin, but fertile soils (Barber 1836: 550). Like much of eastern Connecticut, Hebron was settled in the early 18<sup>th</sup>-century on the boundary of lands that were traditionally part of Mohegan territory. There are no identified pre-colonial Indigenous archaeological sites recorded in town, but local lore and region-wide archaeological data suggests that the area comprising Hebron was likely part of the seasonal round of Indigenous lifeways for thousands of years before European settlers arrived. Oral tradition and archaeological evidence indicate that Native people hunted animals and gathered plants for food and medicine in the interior upland areas of Eastern Connecticut, particularly in and around wetlands. Small family groups often broke off from their larger communities and headed into the interior in the winter months, where they hunted and camped. Documentary evidence from the historic period illustrate the continuity of Indigenous inhabitation of the area, as Native people continued to visit Hebron seasonally into the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (Parker 1848-58).

The town of Hebron was officially incorporated in 1708 and most of the early settlers came from Windsor, Saybrook, and Long Island. In the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the Peters family lived in Hebron, it was primarily an agricultural town. There was a small town center near the intersection of present-day Routes 66 and 85, surrounded by scattered farmsteads. While some small-scale industry developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, intensive modern industry was never established in Hebron.

The Peters House site is situated on Route 316 (Wall Street), in what is now the yard of a private residence. The extant portion of the site consists of the remains of a partially filled cellar hole, a covered well, and subsurface archaeological deposits and features related to the former house. There is a large soil berm on the north and west sides of the cellar hole that has been incorporated into the present-day landscaping of the yard (Figure 2). The soil, which was excavated and redeposited when the current garage was built, covers much of the west wall and part of the north wall, and soil from the berm has slumped into the cellar hole on those sides. The cellar hole contained thick vegetation and was partially (and intentionally) filled with debris, including cement chunks and large sections of sawn trunk from a large tree that had grown up in the middle of the cellar hole. The visible rings on the tree stump indicate an age of about 90-100 years for the tree, in keeping with an early 20<sup>th</sup>-century date of demolition for the house.

### *Preliminary Archaeological Investigations*

Prior to initiating fieldwork, OSA and John Baron reached out to Ms. Zakiyyah Peters Hassan, who is a descendant of Cesar Peters. We spoke with her about the idea of a project at the house site and expressed our desire to have the family actively involved in the research. We had originally planned to have family members out to the site in September, 2021 for a day of excavations, but unfortunately, due to concerns about the Covid-19 pandemic, that event has been postponed until sometime in 2022.

The initial research goals for the archaeological fieldwork at the Peters House Site included understanding the architecture of the structure, as well as any additions or outbuildings;



understanding the chronology of the house (when it was constructed, how it was altered over time, and when it was abandoned); ascertaining whether stratified archaeological deposits are present at the site, and if so, determining if there are deposits related to the Peters family’s occupation in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.

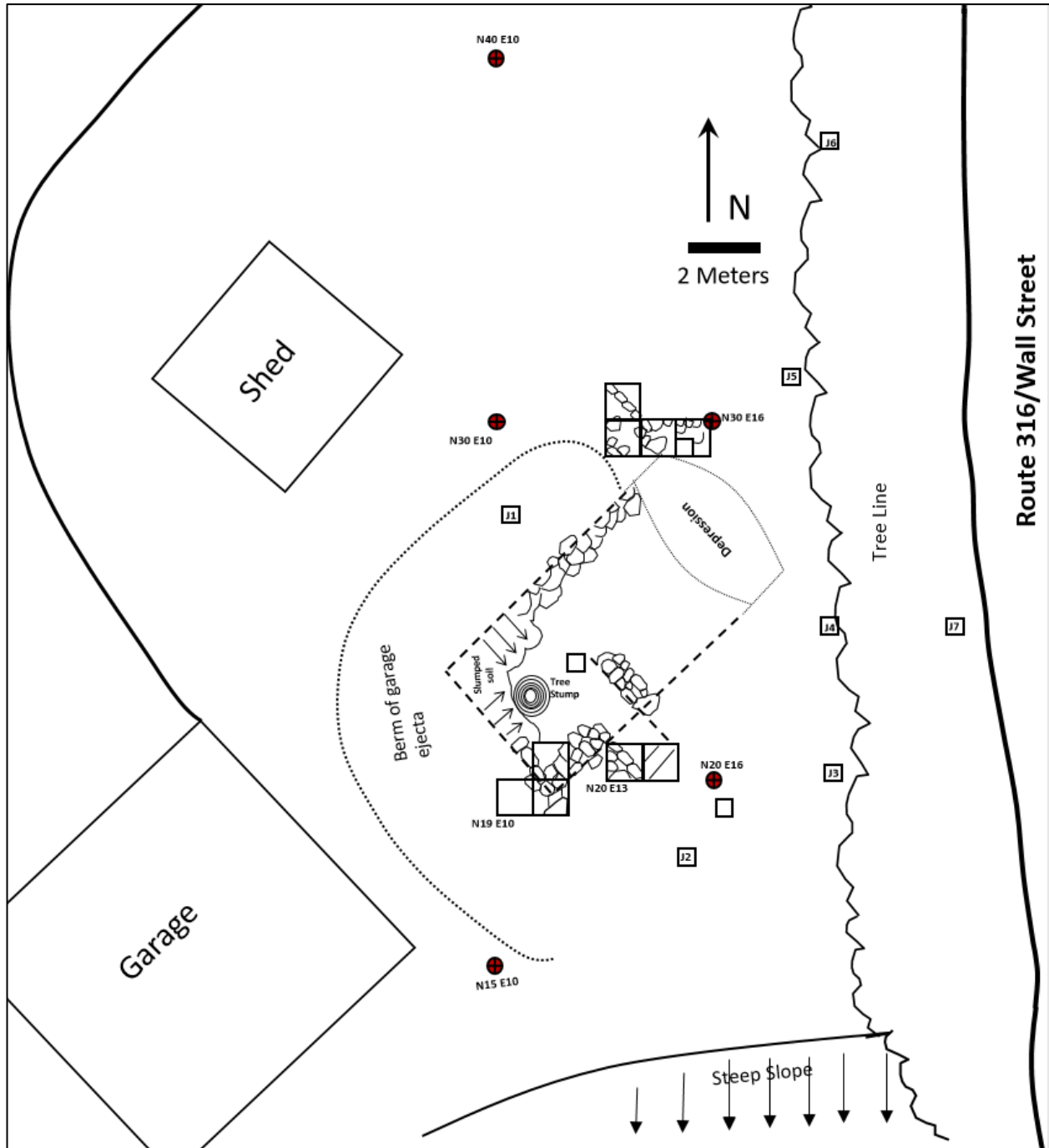


Figure 2: Map of the Peters House Site (67-7), showing the locations of archaeological testing to date.

A total of about two weeks of fieldwork was carried out at the Peters Site in the spring, summer, and fall of 2021. In May 2021, we established several datum points and set up a grid over the site with a total station. Then, with help from FOSA volunteers, we cleared the cellar hole of debris, mapped it, and excavated a total of seven shovel test pits and eight 1m-x-1m units. At the time of this publication, the recovered artifacts have been washed, processed, and partially inventoried at the OSA lab in Storrs. Therefore, the results discussed below are preliminary.

### Archaeological Testing: Shovel Test Pits

To date, a total of seven 50cm-x-50cm shovel test pits (STPs) and nine one-meter units have been excavated at the Peters House Site (see Figure 2). The first two STPs (J1 and J2), were excavated in December of 2020, prior to setting up the grid, as an initial test to determine if there were intact archaeological deposits and verify the age of the site. J1 was excavated immediately north of the cellar at the edge of the soil berm, and J2 was placed a few meters south of the cellar. J1 was very shallow; a large, flat stone was encountered at 10cm below surface (bs) which covered the test pit floor and prevented additional excavation. The soil above the stone was almost black in color and we recovered a large assemblage of burned machine-cut and hand-wrought nails and melted glass fragments, suggesting that there had been a fire at the site. STP J2 was excavated to a depth of 65cmbs and produced a fairly dense assemblage of domestic materials including creamware, pearlware, flat and curved glass, nails, animal bone, and shell. It was enough material to convince us that the site had strong potential to contain intact, early 19<sup>th</sup>-century archaeological deposits.

In May and June of 2021, we returned to the site to carry out additional testing of the area around the cellar hole. We excavated three STPs: N19E16, N23E12 (in cellar hole), and N29E15. N19E16 was excavated to a depth of 60cmbs and contained three soils layers atop large stones that prevented further excavation. The pit contained a mix of domestic materials similar to those recovered from J2: machine cut and hand wrought nails, ceramics, kaolin pipe fragments, bone, shell, and glass, some of which was melted. The test pit that was placed in the bottom of the cellar hole, N23E12, was shallow and contained little material culture. A large rock that comprised half of the pit was encountered just below the surface, and the excavation only extended to 35cmbs. The artifacts included a mix of modern trash (bottle cap, screw), as well as whiteware, melted glass, and nails. STP N29E15, excavated north of the cellar hole, contained a layer of fill over what appeared to be a layer of architectural stone. The stone was encountered at 35cmbs. Recovered artifacts included creamware, pearlware, stoneware, whiteware, bottle and window glass, machine-cut and hand-wrought nails, kaolin fragments, bone, and mortar. Once again, many of the artifacts were burned or melted.

In the summer of 2021, we excavated a series of shovel test pits along the eastern edge of the site adjacent to and within the tree line that borders Route 316. The STPs were placed in this area to determine the extent of archaeological deposits related to the house site. Four 50cm-x-50cm shovel test pits, each measuring 50-x-50cm were placed between one and four meters from the edge of the road cut (see Figure 2). Three of the test pits, J3, J4, and J5 contained cultural materials. STP J3 was excavated along the hedge a few meters south of the cellar hole. The soils in the test pit, which was excavated to a depth of 50cm, included a thick layer of topsoil, overlying historic-period fill. The artifacts recovered from the test pit consisted of domestic and architectural materials related to the former house, including kaolin pipe stems, creamware and red earthenware ceramics, bone and shell, window and vessel glass, nails, brick fragments. STP J4 was placed just east of the east end of the former house, right at the edge of the tree line. This test pit was only

excavated to a depth of 40cm, as a possible cultural feature, visible as a dark soil stain, was identified at the depth. As in J3, the soils in this test pit consisted of a thick layer of topsoil underlain by a layer of historic fill, which contained the possible feature. The test pit contained similar materials, including redware, creamware, kaolin, bone, glass, and nails, along with two brass buttons. STP J5 was excavated in the tree line about 6 meters north of J4, four meters east of buried section of stone wall believed to have been part of an addition to the main house. This test pit contained a thick layer of topsoil over apparently intact subsoil. Recovered artifacts included nails, iron fragments, bone, and ceramic fragments. A fourth STP, J7, was excavated 3 meters east of J4, and placed just one meter from the edge of the road cut. This test pit contained intact soils and no cultural material (Sportman 2021).

### Archaeological Testing: Excavation Units

As noted above we excavated a total of nine 1m-x-1m excavation units across the site. Three units, N19 E10 and 11 and N20 E11, were placed within and around the southwest corner of the cellar hole. The first of these, N20 E11, was excavated in the corner of the cellar. The upper soils in this unit were mixed, and a late 20<sup>th</sup>-century beer can was buried about 25 cm below the top of the fill. This suggests that quite a bit of dirt slumped into the cellar, here and probably all along the west wall, from the berm created after the garage was built. The stone walls of the cellar appear to be relatively shallow, with only 2-3 courses of stone below the ground surface, suggesting the cellar may not have been deep enough to stand up in. It may have been more of a crawl space than a full cellar; there is no clear indication that the extant cellar walls were built up above the ground surface (although it is possible that stone may have been robbed for other purposes once the house was demolished). Artifacts recovered from the units in the southwest corner of the house include primarily domestic and architectural materials, which are discussed in more detail below. The upper levels of soil in N19 E10 and 11 contained burned soils and charred wood.

Two units, N20 E13 and 14, were excavated adjacent to the break in the south wall of the cellar hole. Unit N20 E14 contained two quarried stone steps that extended down into the cellar (Figure 3). No evidence of a third step was encountered, supporting the idea that the below-ground portion of the cellar was shallow. The stairway is lined on both sides with fieldstone wall sections consistent with the foundation. The eastern wall section extends into the cellar and halfway across. Artifacts recovered from the two units also consisted primarily of domestic and architectural materials. No evidence of burned soil or artifacts was found in this area.

Finally, four units, N29 E13-15 and N30 E13, were placed north of the cellar hole, to investigate the apparently architectural stone layer found in STP N30 E15. The excavations were shallow, extending only to about 30-35cmbs. Partially collapsed stone wall sections were found in N29 E13 and 14 and N30 E13; N29 E15 contained only rubble from the adjacent wall section. The most intact wall section was uncovered in N30 E13 (Figure 4). The wall extended north/south through the unit, on the same orientation as the cellar walls. The large amount of stone rubble in the other units made it more difficult to discern the intact portions of the wall. To clarify the intact wall remains, deeper excavations and removal of the loose rubble will be required. Burned soil was encountered in units N29 and 30 E13, and large quantities of burned nails and melted glass were found in all four of the units in this area.



Figure 3: Buried stone steps leading down into the cellar on the south side of the foundation.



Figure 4: Shallowly buried wall footing in N30 E13.



### ***Cultural Materials***

The artifacts recovered from the test pits and one-meter units include a mix of 18<sup>th</sup>- and 19<sup>th</sup>-century materials that are primarily domestic and architectural. The oldest materials recovered to date were found when we excavated unit N20 E11 in the SW corner of the cellar hole, and include English white salt-glazed stoneware sherds (ca. 1720-1770) and a Wood's Hibernian copper coin dated 1723. These coins are believed to have come to colonies in the mid-1730s or later, when they were demonetized in Ireland (Danforth 2001).

Based on what we have inventoried so far, the recovered ceramics are dominated by creamware table wares (ca. 1760-1820) and utilitarian redwares, which are common throughout the historic period (Figure 5a and 5b). We have also recovered sherds of pearlware (ca. 1775-1840) (Figure 5c) and whiteware (ca. 1820-1900) table wares, and 19<sup>th</sup>-century American stoneware storage vessels sherds. Kaolin pipe stem and plain and molded bowl fragments were also recovered. The majority of the pipe stems have bore sizes of 5/64" and one nearly complete molded pipe bowl is identified as a type that dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup>-early 19<sup>th</sup> century (Figure 5d). To date, most of the bottle glass fragments recovered have been too small or too melted for specific identification. The two brass buttons recovered from STP J3 are similar in style and material. They are one-piece, flat front, plain buttons with a brass eye with a foot soldered on the back. One is plain and the other is stamped "Treble Gilt." This type of button was most common between about 1810 and 1830 (Olsen 1962).

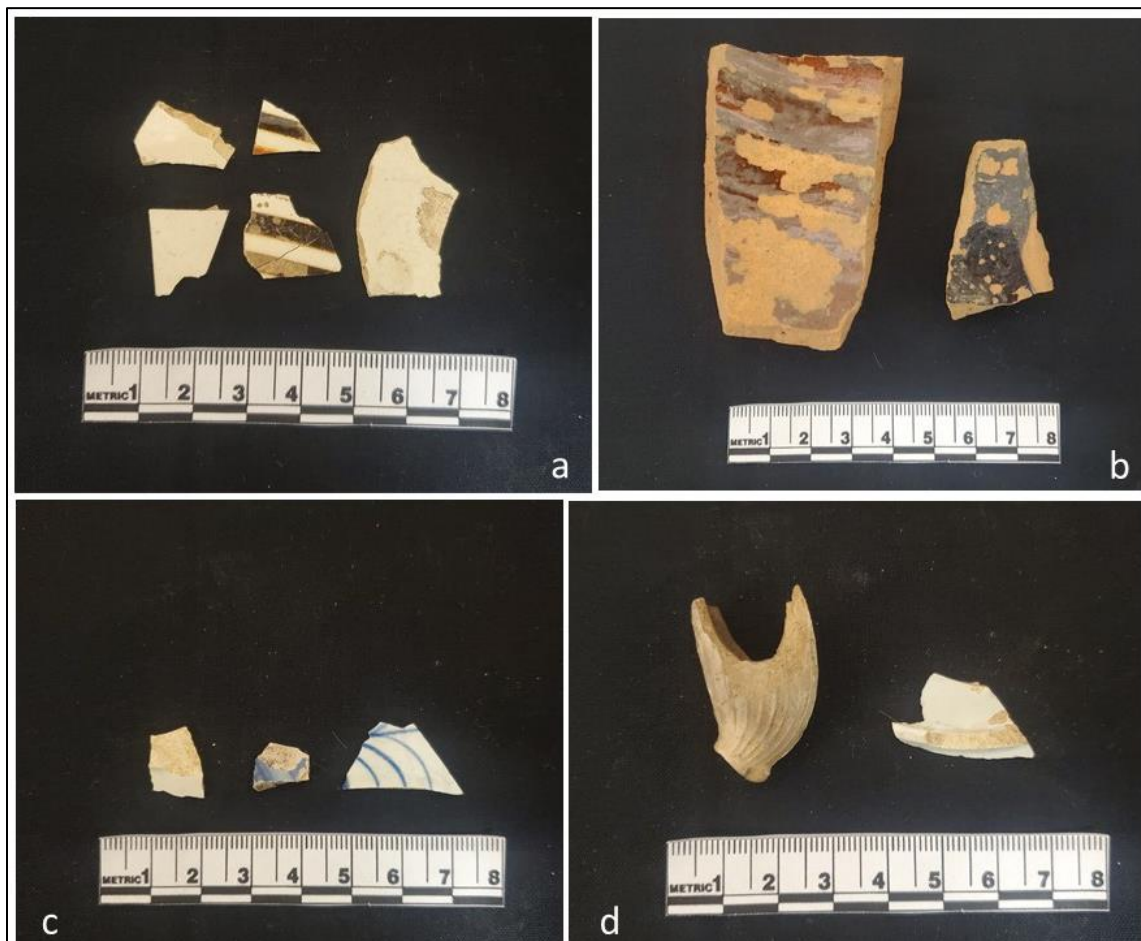
A small assemblage of food remains was recovered across the site. Based on bone, shell, and tooth fragments, the animal species in the assemblage include cow, pig, and sheep, as well as fish, clams, and oysters. Soil samples from 2021 have yet to be processed, so it is not yet clear if plant remains are preserved at the site.

Architectural materials from the Peters House Site include a mix of hand-wrought and machine-cut nails, window glass, and several pieces of well-preserved door hardware dating to the second and third quarters of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century. Hand-wrought nails were the most common type used in construction until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Machine-cut nails increased in use and popularity around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as they could be mass produced. The recovered door hardware includes latches, a lock, hinges, and a doorknob. A few years prior to the archaeological work, the property owner found a complete, well-preserved iron door latch while gardening near the cellar hole (Figure 6a). The latch is a Norfolk style thumb latch with a lift bar mechanism. While these latches originated in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century, they were most popular in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the availability of rolled bar and plate metal made them, "the standard cheap door latch of its time" (Priess 2000; Streeter 1971). The recovered lock is of the mortise type with raised letters reading "M.W. & CO New Haven" and wood screws still in place (Figure 6b). The doorknob, which was recovered in several fragments, is a ceramic mineral swirl or "Bennington" type; these knobs were patented in the 1840s and common in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The doorknob was burned and shattered from the heat. The doorknob and mortise lock are contemporary and may be a set.

The condition of the door hardware is consistent with burning. Except for the Norfolk latch found by the property owner, most of the door hardware was recovered at shallow depths from the units excavated in and around the southwest corner of the cellar (N19 E10 and E11, N20 E11). This concentration of hardware, which includes more than would be associated with a single door, suggests that doors from the structure may have been piled in this area prior to the fire. If so, this implies that the house may have been abandoned and partially demolished prior to the fire.

In the northern part of the site, in the area around the likely addition, extensive evidence of a fire was identified. The four units excavated in this area contained several hundred burned nails and melted glass fragments. Although they have not yet been inventoried and quantified, machine-cut nails appear dominate in this area, suggesting that it may be a 19<sup>th</sup>-century addition to the house. Once all of the recovered artifacts are identified and inventoried, an assessment of the ceramics and any identifiable glass or other materials from this area will help to narrow down the date of the northern part of the house.

Finally, a chert Atlantic projectile point (Late Archaic; 4,100-3,600 BP) was recovered from N20 E14, near the cellar stairs. The point was likely integrated into archaeological deposits when the cellar and stairway were originally excavated. At this point it is not known if the point is an isolated find, or if the Peters House was located on an earlier Native American site. The presence of the project point reflects the long history of Indigenous peoples in the Hebron area.



**Figure 5: Representative domestic artifacts from the Peters House Site: a) creamware sherds, b) red earthenware bowl sherds, c) pearlware sherds, d) molded kaolin tobacco pipe bowl and pearlware sherd with footring.**





**Figure 6: Selection of door hardware recovered at the Peters House Site: a) Norfolk style thumb latch and bar latch; b) mortise lock with wood screw in place, “M.W. & CO New Haven.”**

### *Discussion*

Through a combination of available documentary sources and the archaeological work conducted in 2021, we are starting to build a picture of the structure that once stood on the Peters Site. Hebron land records indicate that there was a house on the property by the 1720s (HLR 1:341), suggesting that the house Cesar and Sim purchased in 1806 was already quite old. There is no information in the existing records about the condition of the house in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but we know it was sturdy enough to survive for another hundred years. Tax and probate records dating to the Peters family’s occupation indicate that at that time, the dwelling was two stories high with two fireplaces and house had an associated barn and two acres of property (Hebron Tax List 1812; Peters 1814; Peters 1815).

The extant cellar hole is shallow, and stone-lined. It is oriented north-south and measures 24ft-x-16ft. An approximately 6-foot-long segment of stone foundation wall also extends halfway across the cellar, dividing it into two equal parts measuring 12ft-x-16-ft (Figure 2). There is a clearly defined opening in the south wall of the foundation, suggesting a bulkhead or other entrance. The two units (N20 E13 and 14) excavated in this area revealed stone walls on either side of the opening and two stone steps that provided access down to the cellar (Figures 2 and 6).

The wall that divides the cellar in half extends north from the east wall of the stairway. Excavation of unit N20 E11 in the southwest corner of the cellar, confirmed that the cellar was shallow, with only 2-3 courses of stone. This is consistent with the discovery that there are only two steps leading down into the cellar from the surface.

The archaeological work suggests that the house itself was larger than the extant cellar hole and extended beyond the cellar to the east and north. There is a shallow depression east of the cellar that appears to be part of the house (see Figure 2), and our excavations just north of the cellar in units N29 E13-15 and N30 E13, exposed shallowly buried (~10-15cm) stone footing walls which line up with the walls of the cellar, suggesting an addition to the north part of the house. It is possible that the house was initially quite small, comprised only of a 24ft-x-16ft wood-framed structure that sat atop the cellar. Like many Colonial period New England houses, it may have been expanded over the years as the residents' financial situations and family sizes changed. The dominance of machine-cut nails recovered from the northern addition area suggests that it was probably built in the 19th century and may post-date the Peters family's occupation.

The door hardware recovered from the units placed in and around the southwest corner of the cellar large dates to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1840s-60s). This, along with the numerous machine-cut nails found in this area suggests that the interior of the house was renovated sometime in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, long after it passed out of the Peters family. It is possible that this renovation occurred at the same time that the addition north of the cellar was built.

While the artifacts from the 2021 field season have not yet been systematically identified and inventoried, the material culture recovered at the site to date, which includes artifacts dating from the 1720s through the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, seems to support documentary evidence of a house that was built in the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and occupied throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although none of the recovered artifacts can be conclusively associated with the Peters family at this time, much of the recovered material broadly dates to the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century, which is consistent with the Peters family's occupation of the site. Overall, the site has the potential to contain intact archaeological deposits associated with the Peters family.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Peters family's story provides important insight into the complicated history of enslavement in Connecticut. While aspects of the family's experiences were unique to their extraordinary circumstances during and after the Revolutionary War, the Peters confronted many situations that would have been familiar to their peers. As unfree people, their survival was often under threat. At times they faced economic uncertainty, potential homelessness, and the fear that they might be separated and sold into far worse circumstances. Later, as free people, they continued to struggle to make ends meet, moving several times before saving enough money to buy a home and settle permanently in Hebron.

The house and property are part of the Peters family's story and their purchase reflects a lifetime of struggle and hard work. Seventeen years after gaining their freedom, the Peters family bought a house that was centrally located in Hebron. While they initially had some trouble with the mortgage, in the end they persevered. Cesar's probate includes many of the same goods his Yankee neighbors would have had in their own homes, and when he and Sim died in 1814 and 1815, they were able to pass the property down to the next generation. The house itself was located in a prominent position not far from the center of town and in the midst of the homes of some of

Hebron's leading families. The location was attractive and the house was occupied by white families of means both before and after the Peters family's time there. The structure was apparently substantial, as it was two stories with two fireplaces. While the house was already quite old when the Peters purchased it, it was solid. We know the house stood for another hundred years after Cesar and Sim passed away.

It is not clear why Cesar and Sim chose to return to Hebron and buy a home, but we can speculate that Cesar probably felt comfortable in the town where he spent most of his life and where his family had proven friends. It may be that the house they purchased was simply available at the right time for the right price. However, it is difficult not to read more into the purchase. While the acquisition of a house and property was itself likely an important milestone for the Peters family, the purchase of this particular house made a bold statement. Land records suggest that the house was originally constructed by the Manns; it was most likely the childhood home of the men who tried and failed to sell the Peters family into Southern slavery. During the years Samuel Peters was in England and the Manns held his power of attorney, they essentially owned Cesar and his family. By purchasing the house, Cesar Peters claimed his rights as a free person, equal to the Manns and with a recognized place in the Hebron community. There is no record that Cesar and his family were met with local resistance when they purchased the former Mann property. Perhaps the family's friends in Hebron could appreciate the irony.

Finally, it is important not to let the dramatic story of the Peters family's attempted abduction, rescue, and emancipation overshadow the fact that the Peters family were remarkable people. Throughout his life, people recognized Cesar Peters' intelligence, skill, and character. While by all accounts he was well treated by Mary and Samuel Peters and permitted a good deal more autonomy than many of his captive peers in the period, for most of his life, Cesar was not free. However, he constantly resisted that status by testing the boundaries of his autonomy. For example, he married Lois without Mary Peter's permission. She could have had the marriage dissolved, but she did not. Instead, she sold Cesar to her son, a man she knew would also treat him well. In that case, Cesar gambled and won; he may have suspected that his punishment would be light. Cesar also clearly formed important relationships outside of the Rev. Peters home. During the years Samuel Peters was in England and Cesar and his young family were living on their own, he found work, shelter, and support in the local community. People knew him, trusted him, and respected him; there is no doubt that he was a member of the community in 1787, so it is perhaps not surprising that he chose to return to Hebron in 1806.

While the nature of the Colonial period documentary record and the relationship between Cesar and Samuel Peters means that Cesar features most prominently in this history, it is important to remember that his wives and children are also central to the narrative. When the family returned to Hebron, they helped to establish an African-American community in town that continued for generations. Peters family descendants remained in town well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century; in 1958 a descendant of Cesar Peters portrayed him in the play "Quest for Home," which was written for Hebron's 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration (Summers 2006) and one of the authors grew up in Hebron with descendants of the family.

History remembers the Peters family for the story of their abduction, rescue, and eventual emancipation, but we know the story doesn't end there. The significance of the Peters House Site lies in its potential to shed light on the next chapter of their family's story—their lived experience as free people. The documentary research and preliminary archaeological work at the Peters Site provides important baseline information for moving forward with this project. We ascertained that the site contains intact archaeological deposits, and we recovered artifacts that may date to the

Peters family's occupation of the site. Information about the domestic architecture, along with the archaeological materials, and the existing documentary record, including probates for both Cesar and Sim, provide an important resource for learning about the daily lives and material world of the Peters family. As we continue our investigations of the site, we hope to be able to determine the chronology of the house and additions. Continued archaeological work will hopefully result in the identification of outbuildings and yard features such as middens and workspaces, that will shed light on the Peters family's day-to-day activities.

The story of the Peters family is uncommon and well-documented. The Peters House is a significant site in the African American history of Hebron, and it is a powerful vehicle for exploring and sharing the history of Connecticut's Black communities. The site will soon be marked with a Witness Stone monument researched by middle school students from Regional Hebron, Andover, and Marlborough (RHAM). In the spring and summer of 2022, if pandemic conditions allow, we'll invite the middle school students, Peters family descendants, and interested members of public out to the site to participate in the excavations, providing these groups with a tangible connection to the past.

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