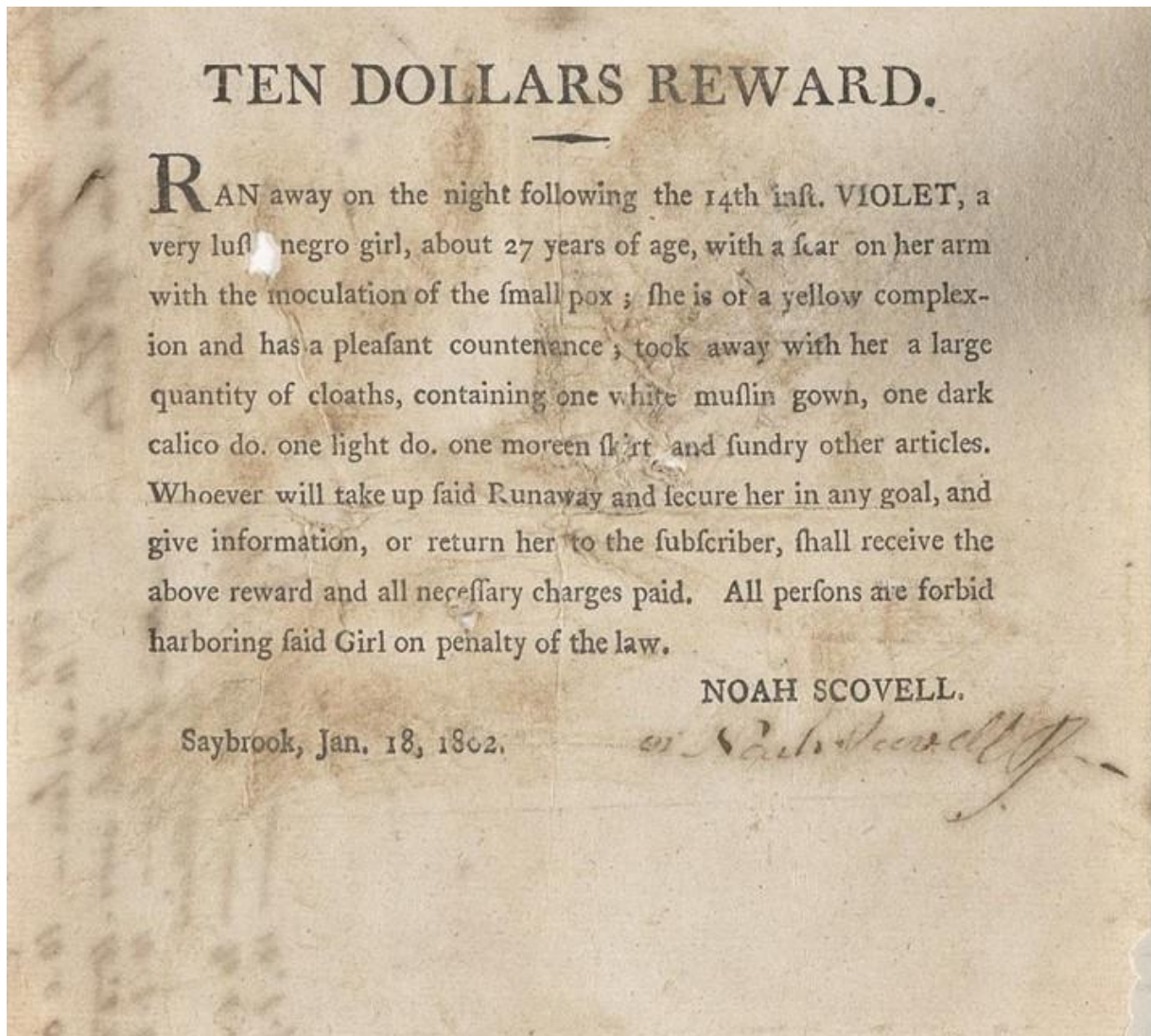


Violet

On the night of January 14th 1802, a 27-year-old enslaved woman named Violet slipped out of the house of Captain Noah Scovell of Potapaug (Essex) and began her journey northward to Massachusetts and freedom. A few days later, Scovell placed ads in Connecticut newspapers and distributed hand bills announcing a 10 dollar reward for her return.



St. John's became involved with the Witness Stones Project through the efforts of our former Deacon and Rector, The Reverends Geof Smith and Kate Wesch,

as a way to explore our history regarding race and racism as directed by the 2020 Convention of the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. We are currently focusing on the first twenty years of our existence. During this period, St. John's had a settled priest only from late 1797 through 1799. As a consequence, our records are sparse. However, three names stand out on the first page of our Parish Register:

Baptisms 1798

May 6 th	Violet	Servant of Noah Scovell
Aug ^t 8 th	Phillis	Servant of Sam ^l Hart
	Rose	Servant of W ^m Hart

Violet, Phillis and Rose are the only people designated as “servant”, as opposed to “child” or “adult”; servant being a euphemism for slave. The 1790 US Census records that Scovell and the Harts all had enslaved individuals living in their households. Since General William Hart and his brother Samuel lived in what is now Old Saybrook, we decided to begin with Violet's story. In a stroke of good fortune, many of Noah Scovell's papers have been preserved. A series of letters contained in the archives of the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History and the American Antiquarian Society allowed us to learn more about Violet, albeit through the voices of white men.

By the summer of 1803, Scovell had somehow tracked Violet down to the household of William Edwards, a tanner who lived just outside of Northampton, Massachusetts. (Edwards was the grandson of Rev. Jonathan Edwards, the famous theologian of the “Great Awakening”.) Scovell travelled to Northampton

to negotiate Violet's return. He was unsuccessful. A few weeks later he wrote to Mr. Edwards that he was determined to have her back, and, if *"she may Return Peaceable hom with Mr Jones & give me now further trouble and in case she does I will fullfill the promisis that was made to her by me when at your house. I Expect I have bought the time of Vilots brother of Capn Jones – if sow she will have her brother to Live with"*. Captain Lewis Jones of Hadley had moved from East Haddam in 1801, apparently taking Violet's enslaved or indentured brother with him. One can imagine that this may have been Violet's motivation for her escape.

Scovell further offered Edwards the opportunity to buy Violet for \$200, but only if she returned to Essex first. Edwards replied, *"I am on the whole willing to give you two hundred dollars payable in six months & will give you my note accordingly with secty if you wish – or I will pay you that sum in shipping cattle at once – on your sending a manumission of the girl to Major Taylor & authorizing him to complete the business"*. Violet, on the other hand, was not willing to return. An 1806 letter from John Taylor, a Northampton attorney, relates that Violet fled Edwards' home, most likely to Boston. Violet's voice in all of this is silent, but her actions are loud, clear and decisive.

We don't know much more about Violet's life beyond the story of her escape from slavery. She was enslaved by Noah Scovell no later than 1790 as attested by a shoemaker's account. She is recorded as a communicant, or full member, of St. John's in our Parish Register. We don't know how she participated in Sunday services or if she ever did work for the church.

On October 29th 2022, St. John's hosted a public educational event in which Violet's story was told and honored her by placing a Witness Stone in our meditation garden on Main Street. We tolled our bell 27 times in witness to each year she was enslaved. Over 100 people attended. Each year since then, we have remembered Violet at the Feast of All Saints along with all the faithful departed throughout the year. Some passers-by on Main Street have commented that they never knew slavery existed in the North. It certainly did.