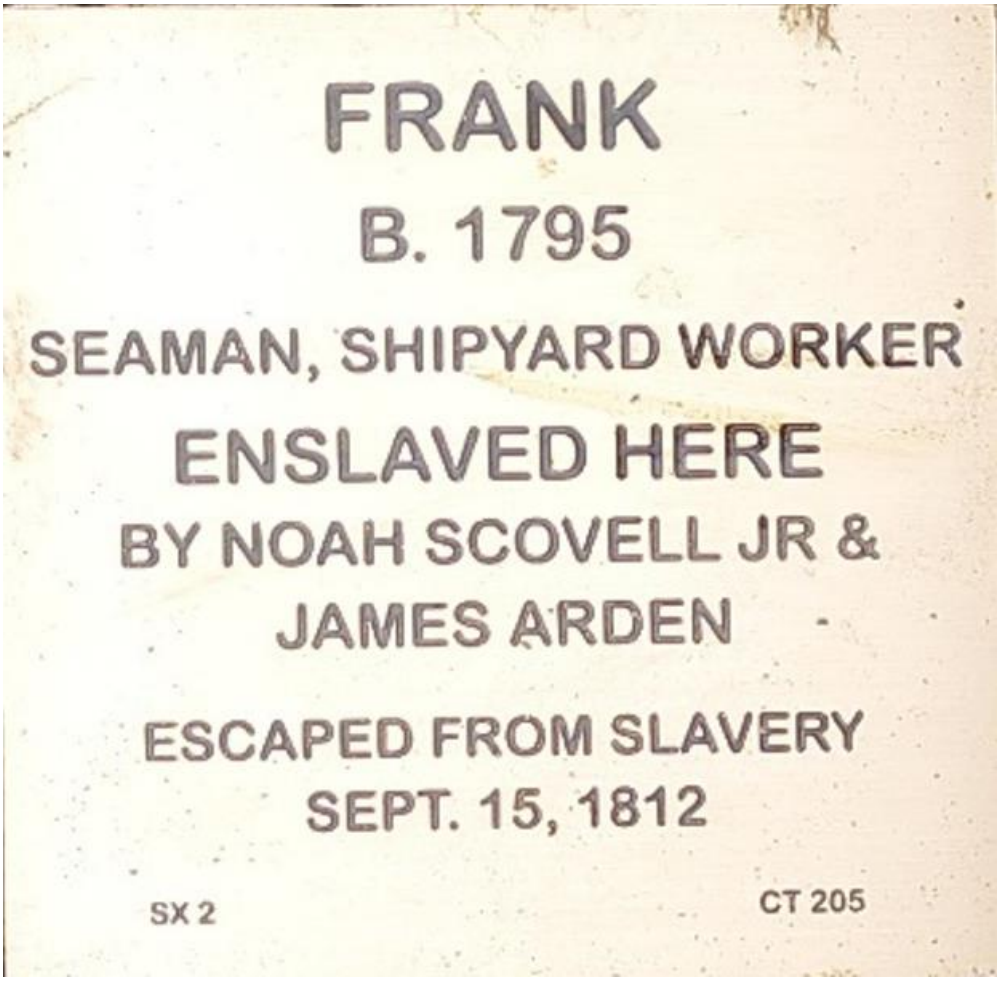


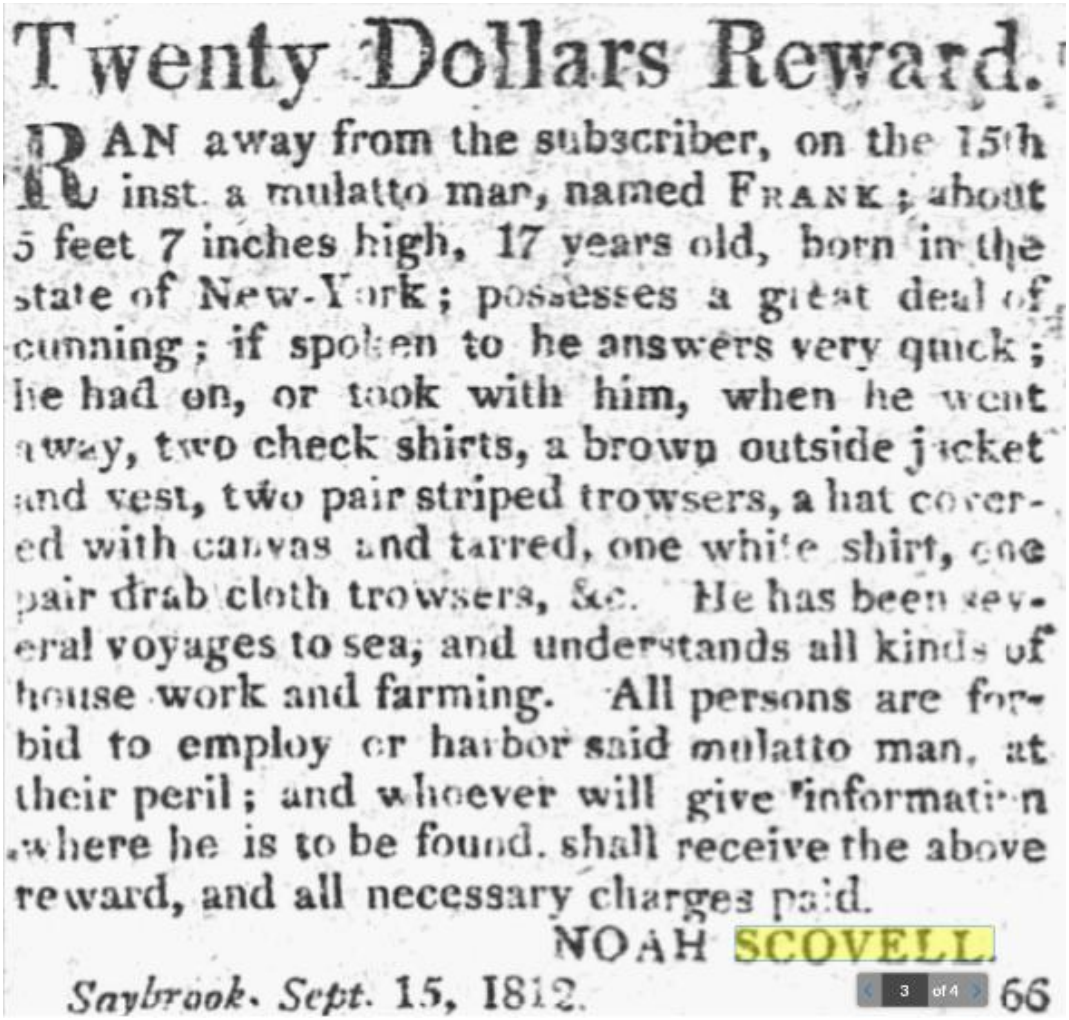
Ten years after Violet's escape, the Scovells of Essex had another enslaved person working for them: a 17 year old man named Frank. At the start of the War of 1812, Frank, like Violet before him, escaped from slavery. Unlike Violet, Frank was owned by James Arden of New York, but Noah Scovell Jr. had "bought Frank's time" from Arden, i.e. Frank was indentured to Noah Jr.

A copy of the indenture survives as part of the Noah Scovell papers (MS 81) housed in the library of the New Bedford Whaling Museum. It states that for $100, Frank was sold to Noah Scovell Jr "for and during the term of Five years and three months" from the date of the contract, December 8, 1810. Frank's age was stated as fifteen years and nine months. So, the indenture would expire on Frank's 21st birthday. New York, like Connecticut, enacted gradual emancipation. Children born on or after July 4, 1799 would be freed on their 28th birthday if male or their 25th birthday if female. Since Frank was born in 1795, he was considered enslaved for life in New York. However, Connecticut's gradual emancipation law applied to children born on or after March 1, 1784. Connecticut's original law stated that males would be freed on their 25th birthday, but by the time this indenture was made, the age of emancipation had been

lowered to 21. So, Frank would have been freed under Connecticut state law on his 21st birthday. It is possible that the intent was for Frank to return to James Arden in New York at this point and to remain enslaved.

James Arden was a wealthy New York merchant and a director of the Manhattan Company, a forebearer of JPMorgan Chase. The Scovells were partners with him in a series of vessels built between 1808 and 1811. On September 5, 1812, Arden wrote to Noah Scovell Sr that he intended to retire from business and live frugally. He goes on to say that he is "really sorry that my Boy Frank does not wish to return to me as I am without a Servant." Arden requests that Scovell sell Frank if he remains opposed to returning to New York, or if he prefers to "go Privateering" in the war, Arden would split his earnings with him.

Apparently, Frank didn't like either option. The following ad appeared on page 3 of the Connecticut Herald on September 29, 1812.



Twenty Dollars Reward.

RAN away from the subscriber, on the 15th inst. a mulatto man, named FRANK; about 5 feet 7 inches high, 17 years old, born in the state of New-York; possesses a great deal of cunning; if spoken to he answers very quick; he had on, or took with him, when he went away, two check shirts, a brown outside jacket and vest, two pair striped trowsers, a hat covered with canvas and tarred, one white shirt, one pair drab cloth trowsers, &c. He has been several voyages to sea, and understands all kinds of house work and farming. All persons are forbid to employ or harbor said mulatto man, at their peril; and whoever will give information where he is to be found, shall receive the above reward, and all necessary charges paid.

NOAH SCOVELL.

Saybrook, Sept. 15, 1812.

3 of 4

66

Frank, like Violet before him, took matters into his own hands and escaped from slavery rather than returning to New York. This ad clearly shows that Frank was valued by Scovell having “been [on] several voyages to sea and understands all kinds of house work and farming”. A Scovell ship book that is part of the collections of the Essex Historical Society records Frank travelling to Tenerife on the Brig Manufacture, and also his work in the Scovell ship yard on Little Point Street.

On October 27, 2024, St. John’s dedicated a Witness Stone in Frank’s memory. It lies next to Violet’s in our Meditation Garden on Main Street.