

CUFFEE DOLE

According to a story published in the 1840s by historian Dr. Jeremiah Spofford, Cuffee was born free in Boston. His mother left him as an infant in the care of a woman in Tewksbury named Trull, so she could continue working. The deceitful woman, not wanting to care for him anymore, sold him when he was about 3 years old to Captain Moses Dole of Rowley West Parish (now Georgetown) and told his mother that he had died. Years later, when Cuffee was around 25, Mrs. Trull, on her deathbed, sent for him and confessed what she had done to clear her conscience. When Cuffee told Mr. Dole the story, he was granted his freedom, although he remained with the Doles until enlisting in the American Revolution.

But is this story true? Our church historian went in search of the facts.

Cuffee gave his age as 32 in his enlistment papers in 1780, which would put his birth around 1748. Although there were a number of black children named Cuff or Cuffee (slaves were not given surnames) born in the Boston area around that time, one stands out. Records show that a black child named Cuff, belonging to Sergeant Trull of Tewksbury, was baptized on 11/12/1749.

Cuffee was raised on Major Dole's 100-acre farm on Baldpate Hill, along with a large family of children around his age.

Moses and Ruth Dole already had four children when Cuffee arrived and would have four more in the coming years (we wonder what Mrs. Dole thought when her husband brought home another child for her to raise). He was treated much like a family member, eating, sleeping and doing chores with the other Dole children. But unlike the others, he had to address Moses and Ruth as Master and Mistress Dole.

But did Major Dole just give Cuffee his freedom after hearing of Mrs. Trull's deathbed confession? In the Last Will and Testament of Moses Dole, dated 2/14/1772, he states, *"I give unto my Negro man Cuff and Negro woman Chloe the liberty to live with any one of my children after me and my wife decease."*

It certainly sounds like Cuffee was still considered a slave, although Mr. Dole's will may have been written before hearing the story of Cuffee's birth. After Mr. Dole's death later that same year, the inventory of his estate included a "Negro woman" valued at 33.6.8 (pounds, shillings, pence) but no "Negro man."

However, on the list of people owing money to the estate is "Cuff, a negro, for 20.6.89." It appears that he was allowed to purchase his freedom. Cuffee remained with the Doles until marching off to fight in the American Revolution. It was at this time, as a free man, that he chose the surname of Dole.

Like many other men in our community at the time, Cuffee Dole fought in the American Revolution, enlisting not just once or twice, but three times! The earliest record found shows that Cuffee was on Prospect Hill in Cambridge in March of 1776 during the siege on Boston. He was there when General George Washington ordered the construction of fortifications at Dorchester Heights, along with the installation of cannons capable of reaching the British ships, which caused the British to flee on March 17th (this is why St. Patrick's Day is also called Evacuation Day in Boston).

Cuffee enlisted again, along with 21-year-old Peabody Dole (son of Cuffee's former owner) on August 15, 1777, in the Rowley Militia with Captain Benjamin Adams' regiment, under the command of Major General Benjamin Lincoln. Cuffee was put to work as a servant for Lincoln and often related that he was washing the Major General's clothes on the banks of the Hudson River when he heard the thundering of artillery as the second battle of Saratoga began. This was the first major victory for the Patriots and a turning point of the war. Cuffee and Peabody Dole were among the 20,000 Patriot soldiers who surrounded Saratoga, where British General Burgoyne and his 6,000 soldiers had retreated to and were there when Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, 1777. Cuffee and Peabody were discharged on November 30, 1777, and returned home.

In 1780, General George Washington put out a call for new recruits in the dwindling Continental Army, and Cuffee once again answered the call, marching from Rowley on July 6, of that year.

Washington's army, including Cuffee, were encamped on the hillsides around Tappan, NY, where they witnessed another historic event. On October 2, 1780, British Major John Andre, who had conspired with the infamous traitor Benedict Arnold, was hanged as a spy at high noon in front of the assembled troops.

Cuffee was discharged from the Continental Army on December 14, 1780. Though the war continued for three more years, Cuffee's time in the army was over.

After being discharged from the Continental Army in 1780, Cuffee returned to Rowley West Parish, where he worked at various odd jobs. Known for his great strength, he was often hired to dig cellars, wells and even a mill sluiceway. He then struck out on his own for a few years, working as a cook or servant for wealthy families in places like Boston, Bradford and Andover before returning to his old home in Rowley West Parish in the early 1790s, where he helped run the Dole family farm and took care of the elderly widow Dole.

Cuffee was required to dress well when working for the wealthy families, and still having those clothes, was considered one of the best dressed men in town, often seen wearing a fine blue broadcloth coat and silk vest while the local farmers wore simple home-spun.

Cuffee was also known for his great cooking skills and created sumptuous feasts for various special occasions around town. After the death of Mrs. Dole in 1804, he was welcomed into the home of a neighbor, Rev. Isaac Braman and his family. Cuffee worked on the Braman's farm and continued doing odd jobs and cooking feasts throughout the area. Having saved up a substantial amount of money, Cuffee purchased twelve acres of land in 1806 for \$650, which he farmed. His land is now part of Georgetown's beautiful Lufkin's Brook Conservation Area.

Cuffee was a devout Christian and regularly attended services at the Old South Congregational Church, where Reverend Braman was the preacher; he sat in his own pew in the balcony, not the designated "negro seat." He always brought with him his psalm book, as he had some degree of literacy and was able to sign his name to important documents. In 1815, Cuffee was included on the list of the 79 "Proprietors of the Revere Bell," having made a donation toward the purchase of the 874-pound bell which now hangs in the First Congregational Church of Georgetown on Andover Street and continues to call people to worship each Sunday.

By April of 1816, Cuffee Dole was in declining health and sold his farm land to Isaac Spofford for \$600. A few months later, on July 29, 1816, he wrote his Last Will and Testament, "being weak in body, but of sound & perfect mind & memory, blessed be Almighty God for the same..." In it, he named Rev. Isaac Braman as his Executor. He left all of his personal belongings to Hannah Braman, Isaac's wife, and left \$400 to be divided equally between the Braman children, whose ages ranged from 3 to 18 at the time of Cuffee's passing, each to receive their share at the age of 21, along with any interest accrued. Of the Braman's five children, only four reached the age of 21, and each received their share. To put that amount in better perspective, that \$400 was more than their father made in a year (Rev. Braman's annual salary was \$300 plus 10 cords of wood).

Cuffee passed away, "rejoicing in the Lord," on August 17, 1816. There was some debate over whether it was proper to allow him to be buried in the same section of the burial ground as the other departed residents. In the end and despite being such a beloved community member, he was buried in the far northwest corner of the

cemetery, away from the graves of the white residents, in an area considered the least desirable and generally reserved for the burial of non-whites and paupers. Additional land purchases over the years increased the size of the cemetery. Cuffee's grave, once in a far corner, is now near the center of Union Cemetery.

The gravestone that now marks the final resting place of Cuffee Dole is one of the most visited in Union Cemetery, with people sometimes leaving mementos. But it was not placed there at the time of his death. How do we know? The stone cutter signed his work – "J. Marble, Georgetown." GEORGETOWN! That means the stone could not have been placed there before 1838, when Georgetown was incorporated. Cuffee died in 1816, so why did he not get a stone until decades later? The answer probably lies in our first installment of this series, when Dr. Jeremiah Spofford published the story of Cuffee Dole in the 1840s. The story was written at a time when the anti-slavery movement was gaining momentum in town.

Georgetown's Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society was established on December 12, 1837. In 1840, the First Congregational Church of Georgetown took a bold stand when they passed the following resolution: "That in view of the light that is thus upon the path of the Christian at the present day, it is a sin for us as a church and we will not hold fellowship or communion with anyone who claims the right to, or holds, his fellow beings as property. Resolved: That we feel it to be a sin, and a reproach to the cause of Christ for anyone bearing a name to continue at or apologize for the sin of American Slavery."

No records were found as to who ordered Cuffee's stone, but I think we can safely assume that it was one or more of the local abolitionists. The inscription on the stone reads:

CUFFEE DOLE

a respectable man of colour,
died rejoicing in the Lord,
Aug. 17, 1816.
Aet. 73.

White man, turn not away in disgust; thou art my brother, like me akin to earth and worms.

