Learning the Hard History of Slavery in the Northeast
Mansfield Middle School
What is the Witness Stones Project?

The Witness Stones Project identifies an important purpose: “to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved who helped build our communities.” This project, inspired by the Stolpersteine Project in Berlin, Germany, which seeks to honor Jews who were murdered by the Nazis, asks students to engage in similar work here in the northeast so that they can honor enslaved people who lived in their own communities. Once students research, question, and explore their individual in the classroom, they culminate their investigation by placing a Witness Stone in front of the place where an enslaved person lived, worked, or worshiped.
Were people enslaved in Mansfield?

Our Project:
- Restore History of the Enslaved
- Honor their Humanity and Contributions
- Research Enslavement
- Engage the Citizenry
- Educate Students

As this document shows, there were enslavers in the town of Mansfield Connecticut. Some of who were people of much leadership who many looked up to. And because of this respect, places in town were named after them, despite there entanglement with slavery.
What did we learn about slavery?

Analyzing local slavery through recurring themes.

1. Dehumanization; Enslaved as Property
2. Treatment of the Enslaved
3. Paternalism = Inequality
4. Economics of Slavery and Freedom
5. Human Agency

Who was Titus?

Titus was an enslaved person in our town. Shubael Conant labeled him as 30 pounds (38 dollars). For his whole life, Shubael Conant enslaved him. As the son of Tobias and Peg, Titus grew up with a large family, and we know that he did many different jobs around the property. For instance, he worked as a blacksmith, tanner, and butcher. In 1776, around the end of Titus’s life, he fought in the Revolutionary War. Based on primary sources, we can conclude that Titus seemed to be fighting for his freedom, and that he enlisted for less than a year. Titus died shortly after his term in the Revolutionary War. One of the only pieces of evidence proving that Titus even existed were the four words on Conant’s Estate Deductions: “One Negro Dead - Abated - £30.” What would be of Titus if these records were not kept? Would he be just another slave, another life lost in a fight for freedom?

We understand this about Titus because of primary sources. Much of it was briefly indicated in town listings or Shubael’s documents. These sources were given to the school by local organizations that preserved records and documents from the time period. However, most of the information was very vague and we had to make lots of inferences because of the lack of details. Obviously, this isn’t a proud part of Mansfield’s history.
Who was Shubael Conant?

Shubael Conant was born in Windham, Connecticut, on July 15, 1711. He was the only son of Josiah and Joanna Conant – they moved to Mansfield when he was still young. After graduating from Yale in 1732, (the type of education Titus was barred from pursuing), Shubael came back to Mansfield as a lawyer. Thus, Shubael started his climb to become an acclaimed member of society. In 1739, he was made a lieutenant colonel in a local militia. To add on, he did important work in court: Conant represented Windham in the Connecticut House of Representatives from 1741 to 1760. He served as a judge of the Windham County Court and was also a Windham County Probate Court judge. He had three wives, and after his death, one of his sons briefly “inherited” Titus. While Shubael was a well respected man in society, his actions don’t justify the fact that he *owned* another human being, Titus.
How will we honor Titus? Why did we choose the public library?

The real question is this: What will we do to honor Titus? Mistakes have been made in the past, but we can make the effort now to amend them. The things we do to try to heal these wounds in our history will never be enough because we cannot turn back time and change what has already happened. However, simple actions showing we will attempt to learn about Titus, know him through the little information we have, and remember all those who were in similar situations are all actions to honor Titus. It is disappointing that Titus probably never could have imagined this happening and that he is not here to share the moment, so we are here to ameliorate the embedded racism many people like Titus faced by placing his Witness Stone at the Mansfield Public Library.

We chose the library not only because of the foot traffic, but also because we recognize that Titus never had a chance to be educated. It is not known if Titus even had the privilege to touch a book. For that reason, the library is a fitting place. The Mansfield Public library is a location where people come together to learn and witness different narratives. This is what we hope people will do for Titus and his Witness Stone.
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