

# CAPTAIN PAUL CUFFE 1759-1817



1754-1763  
French and Indian Wars across interior America and Canada

1759  
Slave revolt in Jamaica

1760

1759 Paul Cuffe is born January 17th on Cuttyhunk Island in Massachusetts. His father, Cuff Slocum, is a freed slave and a farmer. His mother, Ruth Moses, is a native American. He is the 6th of 10 children and youngest son of the family.

1767 He moves with his family from Cuttyhunk to a 120-acre farm on Old County Road in Dartmouth (now mostly in Westport).

1770

1773 He joins the crew of a whaling vessel, learns navigation and teaches himself to read and write.

1775-1783  
American War of Independence

1776  
The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting prohibited members from owning slaves

1776 He is captured by the British in New York harbor while crewing on a whaling ship, imprisoned for three months, and released. He goes to Dartmouth (now mostly in Westport) to the farm left to him and his brother John by his father at his death in 1772.

1777-1783 He repeatedly slipped through the British Navy's blockade to deliver goods to residents of Nantucket. He was intercepted once by the British and once by pirates, but otherwise successful. His boyhood spent on the Elizabeth Islands probably helped him navigate these waters on moonless nights.

1780

1780 Paul Cuffe and his brother John with others petitioned the State to exempt free African Americans and Mulattoes from taxation because they could not vote, providing an impetus to the 1783 voting reform in Massachusetts.

1781

A slave, Elizabeth Freeman "Mum Bet" is the first black woman to file and win a case in Massachusetts and is set free

1783

Slavery abolished in Massachusetts

1783 He marries Alice Abel Pequit, a native American. Over the next eighteen years they have eight children.

1787

On February 22, (Old) Dartmouth divided into Dartmouth (Westport and Dartmouth) and New Bedford (New Bedford, Fairhaven and Acushnet). On July 2, Dartmouth divided into present-day Dartmouth and Westport while New Bedford did not change.

1789-1799  
French Revolution

1790

1789-1797 He purchases a 0.2-acre property on the Acoaxet (now Westport) River from Lemuel Soule, establishes wharf and boatyard where he builds a fleet of ships and partners with his brother-in-law, Michael Wainer, to expand their trade network up and down the Atlantic Coast.

1798

1798 By now he has built a substantial house and out-buildings on the boat-yard property that is among the top 10 high value properties recorded in the 1798 national property tax assessment in Westport.

1799

1799 He purchases two properties on the Acoaxet (now Westport) River from Ebenezer Eddy—the 100-acres Eddy Homestead that he sells to Michael and Mary Wainer the following year, and the 40-acre Allen Lot that he retains as farmland.

1800

1801  
Haitian rebel leader Toussaint L'Overture abolishes slavery on Haiti

1801-1807 His ships with all black crews and himself or Michael Wainer's sons as captains, trading along the US coast. He builds an integrated public school-house on his own property. He trades in Sweden and takes on two Swedish apprentices. Paul Cuffe was one of the wealthiest African-Americans at his time.

1807

US Congress passes legislation forbidding importation of slaves

1808 Cuffe is accepted in the Westport Friends Meeting. He has gained the admiration of influential Quakers and abolitionists around the world who rally to him in difficult times. He enters a business partnership with his sons-in-law in New Bedford.

1810

1810-1811 He commits to helping his African brethren. He sails to Sierra Leone and then to Liverpool, where he may have been the first black captain of the first all-black crew to enter that port. He meets with Thomas Clarkson, William Wilberforce, William Allen, and other abolitionists in England. He returns to Sierra Leone and then to Westport.

1812

War of 1812-14 between US and Great Britain

1812-1814 The War of 1812 halts his efforts to assist the people of Sierra Leone. On his return, his brig Traveller is seized by US customs. He successfully petitions President James Madison for its release. He was granted a meeting with the President at the White House, perhaps the first African-American to be so honored. The Senate approves, but the House rejects his petition to continue trade with Sierra Leone despite the war with Britain.

1813-1814 He is appointed to a committee to determine whether to build a new meeting house for the Westport Friends Meeting and then plays a leading role in supervising and funding the new Meeting House.

1815-1816

1815-1816 End of the war with Britain allows Cuffe to return to Sierra Leone. On this, his third voyage, his passengers included 38 people of color including 20 children emigrating to Sierra Leone. They mainly had farming skills which were utilized in various ways.

1817

1817 His health deteriorates and he is treated by Dr. James Handy. He dies in Westport on September 7, 1817. He is buried the next day on the grounds of the Westport Friends Meeting House. He is eulogized around the world.

1820