

Born the son of a slave, **Paul Cuffe** rose to great success with his countrymen still in bondage. Now, local historians seek to establish Westport African-American's importance to region and nation.

# A man for all SouthCoast news

## The Trail

**1&2. Friends Meeting Memorial and Grave Site**  
530 Main Road, Westport Village

A monument to honor Paul Cuffe was placed in the yard of the Friends Meeting House in 1913. Cuffe was a member of the committee responsible for constructing this Meeting House in 1814 and contributed a major share of the cost. Gravestones commemorating Cuffe and his wife, Alice Abel Cuffe, are located in the cemetery behind the meeting house.

**3. Cuffe Windmill**  
1853 Main Road, Westport

The site of a windmill owned by Paul Cuffe at Westport Point. Though no structure remains, the location at the crest of a hill was favorable for a wind-powered mill to grind grain.

**4&5. Cuffe Wharf and Homestead**  
1430-1436 Drift Road, Westport

Located at the end of what is now a private drive, the wharf was on the west bank of the East Branch of the Westport River and where Cuffe docked most of his ships. He also built a substantial house at this location and his free integrated school was established nearby. No structures remain.

**6. Wainer Homestead**  
1510 Drift Road, Westport

Cuffe purchased this 100-acre property in 1799 and sold it to his brother-in-law and sister, Michael and Mary Wainer, in 1800. Parts of the main and rear buildings remain. Descendants' hands today.

**7. Cadman White Handy House**  
292 Hix Bridge Road, Westport

The 19th century home of Dr. James Handy. Records include his treatment of Cuffe in the last months of his life in 1817. The Handy House is now owned by the Westport Historical Society and open to the public.

**8. Cuffe Sluicem Farm**  
761 Old County Road, Westport

Paul Cuffe's father, Cuff Sluicem and his wife, Ruth, purchased a 120-acre farm at this location in 1766 and moved their 10 children from Cuttyhunk the following year. Now private property and not accessible to the public, the farm remained in the family's hands for 50 years. A solar farm, named for Cuffe Sluicem, was recently established here.

**9. Cuffe/Howard Cemetery**  
665 Old Westport Road, Dartmouth

Located on high ground at the northeast corner of the Cuff Sluicem Farm, this is believed to be the burial site of many of the Sluicem and Cuffe family members. Following Quaker and Native American traditions, only unmarked fieldstones mark the graves.

**10. Wainer Early Home Site**  
1228 Russells Mills Road, Dartmouth

Home and business site of Michael and Mary Wainer, this is now the site of Davoli's Store. It is believed they operated a leather tannery and show-making business here.

**11. The Captain Paul Cuffe Park at the New Bedford Whaling Museum**  
18 Johnny Cake Hill

The park commemorates the life and legacy of Cuffe. He ran a store at the Four Corners near the intersection of Union and North Water Street. The Cuffe Kitchen, located on the second floor of the museum, exhibits some of his artifacts.

By Steve Urbon  
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NEW BEDFORD — "We're reclaiming our history," Leo Blake, president of the New Bedford Historical Society, says with determination.

Blake was referring to the 200th anniversary this month of the death of Capt. Paul Cuffe, a Southeastern Massachusetts African-American man who is, or at least should be, a towering figure in this nation's history and even world history. His wealth and influence were vast, and he was known and welcomed by prominent people on both sides of the Atlantic.

Born on Cuttyhunk Island in 1759 to a former slave and a Native American woman, Paul Cuffe led a remarkable career as a skilled businessman, navigator, educator and political advocate. He is known for running the British naval blockade to supply Nantucket with goods during the Revolutionary War. Later, he and his Native American brother-in-law and business partner Michael Wainer built, owned and operated a fleet of ships, manned by African-American crew members that sailed up and down the Eastern Seaboard and to Africa and Europe. It was at that time that Cuffe became one of the country's wealthiest African-Americans.

Cuffe was part of several historically important efforts, both locally and nationally. He and his brother John and others petitioned both the state of Massachusetts and the town of Dartmouth for the right to vote, arguing that they should be exempt

from paying taxes unless they had the same voting rights as white citizens. Their effort is seen as part of the impetus for Massachusetts reforming its voting laws and freeing its slaves in 1783.

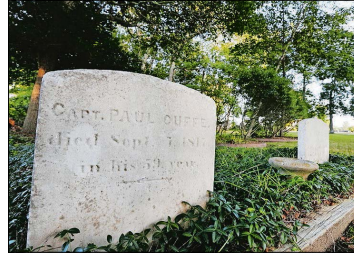
On his own property in Westport, Cuffe established a racially integrated school for his children and those from the community. He would also pay half the costs of a new Quaker meeting house for the town.

Cuffe was deeply engaged in another venture: after freed African-Americans colonized Sierra Leone in West Africa, Cuffe made two trips seeking to develop agriculture as a substitute for slaves in the notorious triangular trade. That trade for three centuries brought slaves to the West Indies in exchange for sugar, which was then shipped to New England to make rum, which was then shipped back to Africa in exchange for slaves. Cuffe's plans, however, stalled during the War of 1812 and he died five years later.

Cuffe at one point had his ship *Traveller* seized by a U.S. revenue cutter along with his cargo. Alarmed, he rushed to Washington D.C. and using his political and religious connections obtained a meeting with President James Madison, an unprecedented event for an African-American. Madison released the ship.

### Overdue recognition

Blake said the 200th anniversary of Cuffe's death spurred the New Bedford, Westport and Dartmouth historical societies and others to jointly sponsor a symposium aimed



**RIGHT:** The Paul Cuffe grave site, next to that of his wife, Alice Abel Cuffe, on the right, is located near the Westport Friends Meeting House, which Cuffe helped fund. Cuffe died in 1817, and his wife Alice, died in 1819, the stones show. **LEFT:** The Captain Paul Cuffe Park is located adjacent to the New Bedford Whaling Museum. (MIKE VALERIO PHOTOS/THE STANDARD-TIMES/SCMG)



at raising consciousness about his achievements.

"We have this wonderful opportunity to reclaim this person who was very important for the state of Massachusetts and the nation and who because he was black was not recognized," she said.

Cuffe, she said, "is the most historic figure from the town of Westport, both nationally and internationally. He traveled around the world and met many influential people of his time."

He also left behind an enormous resource of his writings, his thoughts. "We can see how his ideas evolved," she said.

Jenny O'Neill, executive director

of the Westport Historical Society, said she finds it remarkable what an influence Cuffe and his family had "at a time when over a million African-Americans in the United States are enslaved," she said. "His inspirational life might still be gathering dust on a library shelf."

Eight years ago, on the 250th anniversary of his birth there was a renewal of interest among the local historical societies in Cuffe that, with the advocacy of James Lopes of New Bedford, eventually resulted in the establishment of a Whaling Museum park near his former New Bedford store and Cuffe exhibit inside the museum.

caught hold of the fame bestowed on other New Bedford figures like abolitionist Frederick Douglass, or even toggle harpoon inventor Lewis Temple. If it weren't for the continued attention given by local historians to the life of Paul Cuffe, his inspirational life might still be gathering dust on a library shelf.

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## Following in his footsteps

African-American and Native American Heritage Trail

On Saturday, Sept. 16, five local historical organizations will commemorate the 200th anniversary of the death of local hero Paul Cuffe with the inauguration of an African-American Native American Heritage Trail designating key points in the life and heritage of Cuffe.