

Manchester's Bunce House: Monument to an Early Stonemason

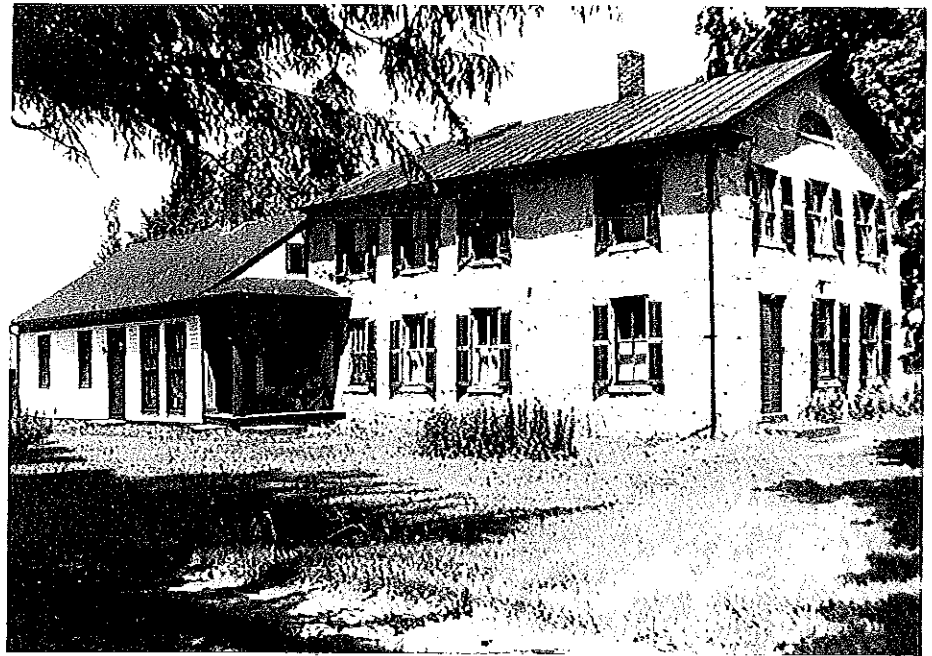
by Stuart Brodsky

Though New England's anti-slavery sentiments have been well documented and discussed by historians, there is little evidence about the lives of Connecticut's antebellum African-Americans.

The absence of material artifacts makes the Walter Bunce house in Manchester all the more significant. Its builder, Alpheus Quicy, was born in Windham in 1774 to Cudgo Quaggeryquise and Cudgo's wife, Milcha Perkins. His parents were freemen, so Quicy and his brother Henry were born into freedom.

The family was in the real estate business in southeastern Connecticut and Quicy became a stonemason. His farmhouses are known to have been sturdily built. One was built for the abolitionist Sidney Olcott (1795-1883). Of this house, Olcott's son wrote: "She got afire several times in the heavy oak chimney jamb and it took all the oxen in the West District to pull the old house down." That house is said to have been used as a station in the underground railroad during the Civil War.

Quicy died in 1876. In his lifetime he built other houses, as well as dams and a building for Union Manufacturing Company near Manchester. The Walter Bunce house, though, is



The Walter Bunce House in Manchester

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the last to remain and it stands on its original site just to the south of State Route 384, known locally as Bidwell Street.

After a recent inspection of the Bunce house, restoration specialist Brian Kronenberger said that the straightness of the corners and the plumb and level conditions of the mortar joints indicate advanced craftsmanship on the part of the builder.

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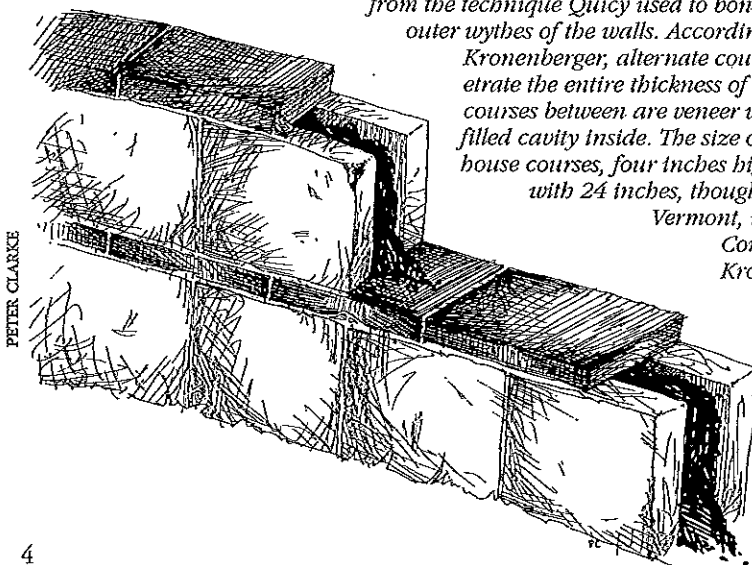
important, as important to town life as ever. A local arts group recently petitioned to use the old Tolland town hall, facing a corner of the green, because "...things are popping around the green," their President said.

The *Historic Town Greens Survey Project* is unbound, and at well over 500 pages is somewhat unwieldy, but it is available for use at the Trust offices, at the offices of the CHC, and at the Babbidge Library, University of Connecticut, Storrs. The Connecticut Historical Commission plans to publish the results of the survey next year.

The thick masonry walls of the Walter Bunce house are constructed of blocks of granite, hand hewn. The strength of the walls comes from the technique Quicy used to bond the inner and outer wythes of the walls. According to Brian

Kronenberger, alternate courses of stone penetrate the entire thickness of the wall while the courses between are veneer with a rubble filled cavity inside. The size of the Bunce house courses, four inches high alternating with 24 inches, though common in Vermont, is rare in

Connecticut. Said Kronenberger, "I don't know where he would have learned it locally."



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