

Cora, these are copies of
captions for photos used
in an exhibit showing
the events of Sept. 25,
1992, when the Sierra
Leone delegation visited
Farmington.

I thought they'd give
you a good idea of
some of our resources
here, as well as the
photos that could be
made available if
needed.

Farmington Meadows looking northwest from Riverside Cemetery. The Mendi were given fifteen acres of meadowland to raise vegetables for their own use. Some root vegetables, pumpkins and squash raised here were taken aboard ship on the return home in November 1841. On hot summer days these excellent swimmers frequently enjoyed the cool water of the river and canal. The Farmington Canal was formerly where the new road was recently built in the lower part of the cemetery.

First Church of Christ, Main Street, Farmington. The Mendi attended church each Sunday and sat in the pews of the balcony shown here. Most of the church members' children also sat in the balcony. Members housed, clothed, educated and tried to Christianize the Mendi. For many days shortly after the arrival of the group, some 40 women of the church met in the nearby Academy building to sew shirts, coats and pants for them.

First Church of Christ, Congregational. The 1840 census shows Farmington's population at 2,041. Of these, 115 were free blacks. All families sat in assigned seats; free blacks were assigned the pews near the south tower entrance.

Gravesite of Foone: "From all accounts, he was a brave and courageous man who was anxious to return home," said Chairman Valentine Strasser, head of state of Sierra Leone during ceremonies here Sept. 25. Because the Mendi were expert swimmers, it is believed that Foone committed suicide. He was very homesick and his religion taught that when a person died he was reunited with family members.

Canal gate house and basin. The Mendi were frequent visitors to the gate house, now remodeled into offices. They often passed through the building to board canal boats, as their abolitionist supporters took small groups to towns as far away as New York, Philadelphia and Washington to earn money through performances. They sang Mendi songs and read from the Bible in English, and Cinque told the story of their kidnapping, imprisonment and trials. People were always impressed with his oratory. Collections were taken up to finance their return to Sierra Leone.

Pitkin Basin was a large pond by the Canal House, where canal boats were moored at night. It was here that Foone drowned.

The Deming Store. Samuel Deming owned this store which in 1841 was on Main Street on the present site of the firehouse. He was a wealthy farmer and merchant, a Christian gentleman and a strong supporter of the anti-slavery cause. One of the three Farmington abolitionists responsible for bringing the Mendi to the town, he gave the use of part of the second floor of his store to house them while the carriage house was being built on Austin Williams' property. The room, only 18 x 20 feet, later became their classroom. For exercise they went outside on the street while they lived here. A free black couple, who ran a boarding house about 100 rods from the store, offered to cook for the Africans and provided a place to eat.

The second floor of the Deming Store became the classroom in May 1841 when the Mendi moved into their new quarters on the Williams property. Here they were divided into four groups according to ability. They continued their education, begun by Yale students during their imprisonment in New Haven. Sherman Booth, T. F. Fessenden and the Rev. Raymond were hired to tutor them, and sons of local abolitionists, including John Pitkin Norton, also volunteered. The three girls also attended classes; their lessons were reinforced with help from the families with whom they lived.

Farmington walking tour guide,
signed by His Excellency,
Chairman Valentine E.B. Strasser,
head of state, Sierra Leone.

Chairman Valentine Strasser, 28 year old head of state of Sierra Leone. on Friday, September 25, stood at the grave of his countryman, Foone, whose actions, he said, have kept alive the spirit of freedom for black people everywhere. Standing beside Chairman Strasser are Betty Coykendall, town historian; the Rev. Lidabell Pollard of Farmington's First Church of Christ, Congregational; and Town Councilor Arline Whitaker.

Evan Cowles, a descendant of prominent abolitionist Thomas Cowles, greets Chairman Strasser at Oldgate, the Cowles family homestead for more than 200 years. One of the founders of the Anti-slavery Society in Farmington, Thomas Cowles participated in the Underground Railroad and helped to raise money for black fugitives to buy their freedom.

This letter from Austin F. Williams, addressed to Lewis Tappan in New York, contains a confidential section referring to Foone's death.

Muslim leaders who participated in the joint Christian-Muslim ceremony at Riverside Cemetery Sept. 25, 1992, are seen leaving Oldgate, 148 Main Street.

In the spring of 1841, Austin F. Williams, one of three staunch abolitionists directly responsible for bringing the Mendi to Farmington, bought this property and had a dormitory built to house the men of the Amistad group. Cinque, the Mendi leader, had his own room on the second floor, while the others were housed in larger and more comfortable space than that afforded over the Deming Store. Walls were plastered, and wood stoves kept them warm. Tables, bunks and shelves were built for their comfort, and fresh water was readily available. The four acre field provided ample room for exercise.

Chairman Strasser stands in front of Austin Williams' house, built in 1842, looking toward the quarters in which his countrymen were housed from May to November. Williams, an importer and exporter, had a store on Main Street and another in New York, as well as a lumberyard in Plainville. After the Civil War, he worked in Washington, D.C., finding jobs for former slaves.

The "outhouse" at the dormitory at 127 Main Street, used by the Mendi. This four-holer is backed by another three-holer. It was built into one corner of the dormitory, reached by outside doors.

A delegation from Sierra Leone stands in front of Samuel Deming's home, 60 Main Street. One of the three leading abolitionists in Farmington, he was known as a man of sterling character - a strong anti-slavery spokesman, a Christian gentleman and a successful, well-to-do farmer. To join the anti-slavery movement was, at this time, to risk the loss of business and the disapproval of many influential friends.

The Farmington Historical Society, at the end of its walking tour of Amistad-related sites, presented Chairman Strasser with a book containing copies of original letters written to Lewis Tappan of New York, head of the national anti-slavery movement, by Austin Williams and Samuel Deming. In addition to the letters, the book included account sheets from 1841, copies of books used to teach the Amistad story in the fifth grade of Farmington public schools, and The Amistad Event, published by the United Church Board of Home Ministries.

Chairman Strasser signs copies of the Amistad Walking Tour, published by the Farmington Historical Society, for Board members and tour guides Peg Yung and Day Ketcham.

A luncheon for the official party, sponsored by the Farmington Town Council, was held at Barney House. Now a conference center, Barney House was built by John Treadwell Norton, one of the three leading abolitionists responsible for bringing the Mendi to Farmington. An active reformer and moderate abolitionist, Norton held office in anti-slavery and harbored runaway slaves as early as 1839.

Three natives of Sierra Leone strain to read the inscription on Foone's gravestone, placed here 150 years ago.

A delegation of Sierra Leone expatriates gather around Foone's gravesite for the Christian/Muslim ceremony.

Betty Coykendall, Farmington town historian, welcomes Chairman Strasser and his official delegation to the town.

Carol Leonard, Farmington Historical Society president, greets Chairman Strasser.

Fr. James Tully, a Catholic missionary who lived for several years in Sierra Leone, was introduced to Chairman Strasser by his friends in the delegation from Boston.

Chairman Strasser, accompanied by Dr. Arthur Abraham, secretary of education, joined a walking tour of sites where the Mendi worked, played, attended school, resided and attended church services. Peg Yung was the Farmington Historical Society's tour guide for the official party.

Former U.S. Ambassador to Sierra Leone Arthur Lewis discusses the memorial event with Carol Leonard. Alfred L. Marder, president of the Amistad Committee, Inc., of New Haven, is standing to the left of Ambassador Lewis.

The Rev. Mrs. Pollard of Farmington's First Church of Christ, Congregational, leads the Christian service at the gravesite.

Dr. Leslie G. Desmangles, associate professor of religion and area studies at Trinity College, a Farmington resident and member of the Historical Society, pointed out that, as a result of this incident, the American Missionary Association went on to found some 500 schools, including some of the most prestigious black universities in the United States.

The Muslim ceremony was led by Mohammed Barrie, a Boston clergyman who conducted the service in Arabic.

The highlight of the Muslim ceremony came when Dr. Arthur Abraham, secretary of education for Sierra Leone, annointed Foone's grave with water from the Farmington River.

The Amistad Event: Farmington's
Role in the Nation's First Civil
Rights Case