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Farmington Town Clerks and Their Times (1943)

There is no official record of their being here

(with the exception of the death of Fooni who was drowned in the Canal Basin), but we have extracts from *A History of the Amisted Captives* by John W. Barber; reminiscences as told by the late Elijah Lewis to Miss Julia Brandegee in 1898; and personal recollections written in 1901 by Julia (Strong) Brown, daughter of Dr. Chauncey Brown. Sixty years after the Mendians had left Farmington, Charles Ledyard Norton recalled what he could. And in 1941 a roving reporter for *The New Yorker* magazine, chanced on a painting of Cinque in the Metropolitan Museum, sensed a story, and what with the Court Records of the case and some imagination, wrote an excellent account of these people and the important role they played in pre-abolitionist days. *East by Day* by Blair Niles, published in 1940, gave a vivid picture of the captive Africans and their self-appointed masters, with a running story of the trials by which responsibility was fixed and their status decided. Farmington was scarcely mentioned in these accounts, but it was here the black men and girls found homes and friends. They responded with loyalty and sincere interest in the efforts made to educate them. Probably what Farmington did for these captured people before they were returned to Mendi land in Africa, was equalled if not surpassed by what the Mendians did for the abolition of slavery. Every newspaper north of the Mason and Dixon line gloried in the human interest story. The entire episode of the forcible removal of the free Africans, their agonizing voyage to Cuba where they were sold and their own efforts, ill-advised, but fundamental, to return to their home, struck a responsive and sympathetic chord all through the North. ✓

Captured by slave traders in 1839, chained in the hold of a slave boat, so close to one another that one man's knees embraced the back of another, with only four feet of headroom and forcibly fattened for market, many died on the way to Cuba, but forty-nine men and three young girls lived to bring \$450 apiece.

Despite the acceptance by Spain in 1820, of 400,000 pounds from England to relinquish slave trade, business was fairly brisk in Cuba, with Government officials receiving their "cut." This particular load of Africans was sold to Don José Ruiz and

on Pedro Mantez. These two Spanish Dons set sail with their cargo for the port of Guanaja, three hundred miles east of Havana, planning to sell the men and girls there. For this purpose they chartered "a long, low, black schooner" of about 120 tons burden, with Captain Ferrer in command. Two days out, one of the captives was told by the cook, with a misplaced sense of humor, that they were all being taken away to be killed and eaten. This, one of the slaves testified later, "made our hearts burn." It was then that Cinque, vigorous, intelligent beyond the others, took command of the situation, led the mutiny, killed the captain and compelled, so far as he understood how to do so, his masters of two days, to sail the vessel back to Mendi. The portrait in the Metropolitan Museum is ascribed as being done by Nathaniel Jocelyn and owned by the New Haven Colony Historical Society. It is exactly similar in detail to a reproduction of an engraving by John Sartain, published in *Farmington Village of Beautiful Homes* and is a scintillating study of a strong, young black man. His eyes show abounding intelligence, the mouth is firm and the whole face is set in lines of courage and leadership. These qualities he demonstrated many times in the next two years.

For two months the two Spanish Dons, now not masters, but wounded and suffering after the mutiny, were forced to sail the vessel toward Africa during the day. Cinque had remembered that on the trip to Cuba the rising sun was always behind them, consequently, he reasoned, to return home, they would sail toward the rising sun. But at night, he was powerless and it was then that the two Spaniards made their desperate efforts to return to Cuba, by sailing east by day but west by night. They finally found themselves, after many adventures, off the southeast coast of Long Island where they were taken by the coast Survey brig, the Washington, Lieutenant Gedney in command. Taken from New London to New Haven for trial on charges of murder and piracy, Cinque admitted that he had killed the Captain of the Amisted and the cook, in order to gain freedom for himself and his countrymen, (a privilege understood in any country) and addressed his fellow prisoners on

more than one occasion, telling them to be brave and not value their lives above their duty to their brothers. The trial might have been extremely difficult had not Professor J. W. Gibbs of the Yale Divinity School solved the problem of language. After obtaining from the captives their names for numerals from one to ten, he visited the docks in New York harbor until he found a negro sailor who understood, when accosted, the Mendi words. With the interpreter, the story of the free black men was soon in the Court records, in every newspaper and on every tongue. Out of the original case arose others. The government of Spain demanded their extradition. Great Britain pleaded for leniency. Several abolitionists, in the name of Cinque, brought suit against Montez and Ruiz for damages for false imprisonment. "President Martin Van Buren, worried about the Southern vote in the 1840 election, sent a warship to New Haven with orders to seize the Negroes immediately if the trial should go against them." The Court ruled that the Negroes were kidnapped into slavery and therefore legally free. An appeal was taken by the government.

The case finally came before the United States Supreme Court in February 1841. Ex-President John Quincy Adams befriended the captives and eloquently argued their case. The Supreme Court ruled that the Negroes were neither slaves nor subjects of Spain, that "they must be declared free, and be dismissed from the custody of the Court, and go without delay".

It was then that they were brought to Farmington, probably in wagons, although one account puts them on a Canal boat. It was in that year that Mr. Austin F. Williams, grandfather of Miss Amy Vorce, built his new home, now the Vorce homestead and here he built adequate quarters for the men and women. Here in the stone store, now on Mill Lane, all of the Africans attended school and learned to read, write and recite. Many of the Psalms and the Lord's Prayer. Some of the girls were taken by Farmington families and given every opportunity to learn to cook, sew and garden. Mrs. Chauncey Brown took Tamie into her home, answering her many questions, teaching her to live a civilized life, and missing her after she returned to her own home in Mendiland.

One of the young men remained in Farmington. A stone in Riverside Cemetery reads: "Foone A native African who was drowned while bathing in the Center Basin Aug. 1841. He was one of the Company of Slaves under Cinque on board the Schooner Amisted who asserted their rights and took possession of the Vessel after having put the Captain, Mate and others to death, sparing their Masters, Ruiz and Montez." The day before Foone was drowned he told Chauncey Rowe, "Foone going to see his Mother, he very homesick."

The Hon. Simeon E. Baldwin of New Haven, Mr. Lewis Tappan of New York, Ex-President John Quincy Adams, Hon. Samuel Deming and John Treadwell Norton of Farmington were some of the men who took active and effective interest in the Africans.

In January, 1842, the lonely and heartsick Africans rejoiced in being back in their own native Mendi land, largely through charitable efforts of local citizens and the Missionary Society. Cinque illustrated more than any of the others, the value of his life with the white men. He lived at the mission station and served there as an interpreter until his death in 1880.