

Cora - John Pitkin Norton  
and Charles Ledyard Norton  
were the sons of John  
Tredwell Norton. They  
lived in his home on  
Mountain Spring Rd - now  
Barney House, where  
we held the luncheon for  
the Sierra Leone visitors  
last September. One of  
our members read these  
pieces during the luncheon.

From John Pitkin Norton's diaries:

March 12. Captives set free.

March 16. The captives of the Amistad are coming en masse tomorrow (to Farmington) to stay for a time and continue their education. They are to be located in the upper story of Mr. Deming's building.

March 17. Father went to Berlin for Amistad freemen but their coming was delayed. Carpenters (are) at work on their bunks, bedding to be mere straw and a blanket. They sleep in their clothes.

March 18. Went to RR at Berlin with Father. Found a dozen sleighs waiting. 30 arrived by RR - small men, respectable appearance, more so than any other body of colored persons I have seen. They have the look and actions of men. I brought seven of them and to my surprise found that I could easily talk with them. They talked to each other in their own language, laughed and joked a lot. They suffered such from the cold - plenty of blankets in the sleigh but they were still cold. They have now taken possession of their new quarters and in a few days people will probably learn that these thirty Africans are not about to murder every inhabitant.

March 19. The three girls arrived here this afternoon with Mr. Lewis Tappan.

March 20. I went to see the Amistad negroes. Cinque is very suspicious and looked with evident uneasiness at us. His face is capable of a most savage expression. Kinna, the one that came up from New Haven yesterday with the little girls, is a very fine looking, intelligent man.

March 23. Went to hear a class of Africans read. It is a most interesting employment. They are so willing and eager to learn that teaching them is a perfect pleasure. Some of them read very well, indeed - Kinna with fluency.

March 24. I saw one of the Africans tumble today. His agility is most astonishing. They will not show their feats unless paid. Even Cinque descends to tumble for money.

March 25. Went into African room this morning. I found Mr. Booth (a tutor engaged to teach them) trying to give them directions respecting their future conduct. Among other things, he mentioned the tumbling for money. At this there was a general burst, all talked together and Cinque strode across the room, his voice raised, his eyes flashing and his arm stretched. For a few minutes all was confusion, but they soon became quiet and expressed through Kinna their acquiescence in Mr. Booth's wishes.

March 26. Improvement in reading. Kinna reads with perfect propriety, proper emphasis and inflection.

March 27. Heard Africans again this morning. One of them, to detect the truth of my explanation, asked me a word of which he knew the meaning and seemed much pleased to find I gave him the right signification. "Now I know you no tell me bad," he said. They like employment and work at piling wood.

May 4. Assisted in raising the new building for the Africans. It is so constructed as to be used for a barn after they leave.

May 20. Anti-slavery meeting in Hartford. Mendi present for an exhibition. They read, spelled, sang and spoke, doing very well in all their performances.

May 26. Africans engaged in moving (into their new quarters in Austin Williams' barn).

May 28. Taught Africans for an hour in their new home. They will be quite comfortable there.

July 8. Funeral of Foone. Africans sang at the grave. He was buried within a few feet of the Indian monument.

Sept. 7. Terrible stir among the Mendi last night. Henry Hart, with three other villains, assaulted Grabbeau. He escaped

from them and went home. Cinque and the rest became anxious and half of them marched up the street. A rascally gang collected in front of Phelps' and were with great difficulty restrained from making an attack on the Mendi. It was Noble Andrus that struck Cinque and, as Cinque this morning expressed it to me "He put his hand on him and he fell down." Andrus was pretty well flogged and if the flogging had extended to Henry Hart, it would have p3...Norton diary

been an excellent thing. If the Africans had not been restrained, they would have routed the whole crew and most probably killed some of them. The general feeling of the town is one of deep indignation against Hart and his comrades.

Sept. 8. Kinna and I cut up milkweeds and docks. (He was) very communicative, saying that Cinque is very strong and brave, never gets angry. If Cinque had told them to fight, they would almost have killed someone. He told the story of their capture and conveyance to Cuba and facts about the Mendi country. On the way to Cuba, they had scarcely any water and were sometimes brought up on deck to take fresh air and chained there in the full blaze of the tropical sun. This was so intolerable that they often begged to go below again.

Nov. 17. Grand farewell to the Mendis at church. A great crowd, house and gallery filled. Dr. Hawes preached the sermon and there were exercises from the Mendi as well as several songs. Cinque delivered a speech in Mendi. Mr. Williams explained the need for funds and in a few minutes \$1150 was subscribed.

A reminiscence by Charles Ledyard Norton, John's younger brother:

In 1841, the case of the Amistad captives was of international importance, and never has Farmington been so truly the center of public attention as when these distinguished foreigners were among her visitors.

Their story is quite as romantic as those served up in the modern novel, and I am permitted briefly to recount it here for I can clearly remember -- as clearly, that is, as a child who was barely three years old at the time -- how this Black Prince used to toss me up and seat me upon his broad shoulder while he executed a barbaric dance on the lawn for my entertainment.

During all the weary months since their capture, the Africans had been kept in confinement in New Haven. When it was decided to quarter them in Farmington pending arrangements for their return to Africa, there was consternation among the timid souls in the quiet village. Stories of cannibalism were plentifully circulated, and there were formal protests against forcing such a burden upon the community. But Mr. Tappan and his friends prevailed at last and with but little delay the whole band of thirty-seven embarked on the journey.

Barracks were erected on land at the rear of the old Wadsworth house adjoining the cemetery and here the former captives made their home. .... Cinque was a born ruler and, ably seconded by his lieutenant, Grabbo, he maintained a very creditable degree of discipline among his followers. They were, for the most part, free to roam about, except for regular school hours, and townsfolk soon ceased to fear them. Anxious mamas at first trembled and kept their children behind bolted doors, but before long ....it was no uncommon sight to see the big grown-up blacks playing with little white children in village dooryards.

The African visitors ... were often welcomed by my father, the late John T. Norton, at his home (now known as Barney House and the site of our luncheon today). I retain dim, childish memories of these strange, kindly black men. A broad flight of steps led down from the southern piazza of my father's house, and I distinctly remember seeing the athletic Cinque turn a somersault from these steps and then go on down the sloping lawn in a succession of hand springs, heels over head, to the wonderment and admiration of my big brothers and myself. Again, I recall a visit to the barracks, where I beheld the whole company clad, as it seems to me, in dark brown or gray jeans. In my childish eyes they seemed a mighty host and as such will always remain in my memory.

I was a favorite, too, with Foone, who was allowed sometimes to take me out for excursions in the neighborhood.

The ex-captives were expert swimmers and very fond of bathing in the canal basins or in the mill pond until, unfortunately, poor Foone, on a day in July. was taken with a cramp and drowned, in spite of the efforts of his companions to rescue him. A messenger came at once for my father. We were sitting on the

piazza in the cool of the evening; it was early dusk when we saw a dark figure striding up the path. Taking no notice of the rest of us, he went straight to my father and said in broken accents - "We want you -- Poone he daid" - and with that he turned about and sped away, big tears chasing one another down his dark cheeks.

After so long a time, I may easily be at fault in details, but these are some of the memories that linger with me concerning this singular episode of sixty years ago.

One additional comment. You would probably be interested to know that during the Civil War, this Charles Ledyard Norton was the commander of the Connecticut 29th Regiment -- the state's first black regiment.