



*The Austin Williams House  
127 Main Street, Farmington, Connecticut*

*Thank you for touring this very special home and property today!*

The Austin Williams House is located on the east side of Main Street surrounded primarily by other eighteenth and nineteenth century homes in the historic village of Farmington. It is a grand Greek Revival-style house and faces north, away from the road. It features ornate open porches, a fully pedimented gable end, heavy corner pilasters, decorative eyebrow windows, and the original roof balustrade.

The home was constructed in 1841-42 by Chauncey Wells for a reported sum of \$2000. The large mahogany doors were crafted by Leonard Winship, renowned cabinet maker and Farmington postmaster. Wall and ceiling murals in the hall and four rooms were completed in 1852 after four months of work by three Italian artists: Nolte, Eiffie, and Lickert. The murals present today were restored in 1948 by artist Ellen Hatch, a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design, who came and resided with the Hoffman family while completing this project.

This property has been owned by only two families. Austin Williams' youngest daughter, Catherine Williams Vorce, received title in 1872. Her family retained the ownership until selling the property in 1948 to the Hoffman family, the present owners.

**WILLIAM RAVEIS**

REAL ESTATE

EXCEPTIONAL PROPERTIES



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The additional two-story, wood-frame building on the property also has Greek Revival-style characteristics. It is now a carriage house/garage and apartment, but was once the building used as living quarters by the Mendi Natives while they resided in Farmington. The cellar under the carriage house was part of the underground railroad and used as a refuge for runaway slaves. It is reported that the present owners discovered five layers of sound-deadening flooring over the trap door leading to this secret cellar. As a humorous side note, this building also contains two "four holers".

*If you have any further questions, or would care to retour this property, please feel free to call us at any time. Thank you!*

*Sincerely,*

*Betty Vernes*

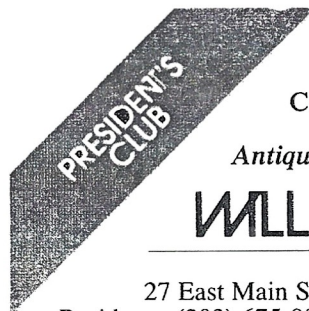
*Carleen Conroy*

*Betty Vernes and Carleen Conroy*

Betty Vernes, GRI  
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**WILLIAM RAVEIS**  
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Carleen R. Conroy  
Manager  
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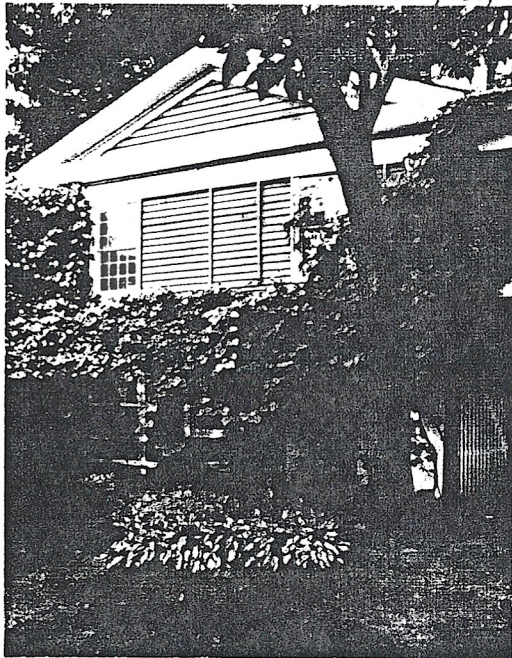
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AUSTIN WILLIAMS, abolitionist, was born in East Hartford in 1805. He was a poor boy, but grew up to become rich as a merchant and owner of a lumber yard. He built the big house at 127 Main Street and decorated it with fancy railings and murals. He was anti-drinking and would not allow any of the men building his house to drink liquor. He belonged to the Congregational Church and wrote some of its hymns. He also liked to sing for fun and led a glee club.



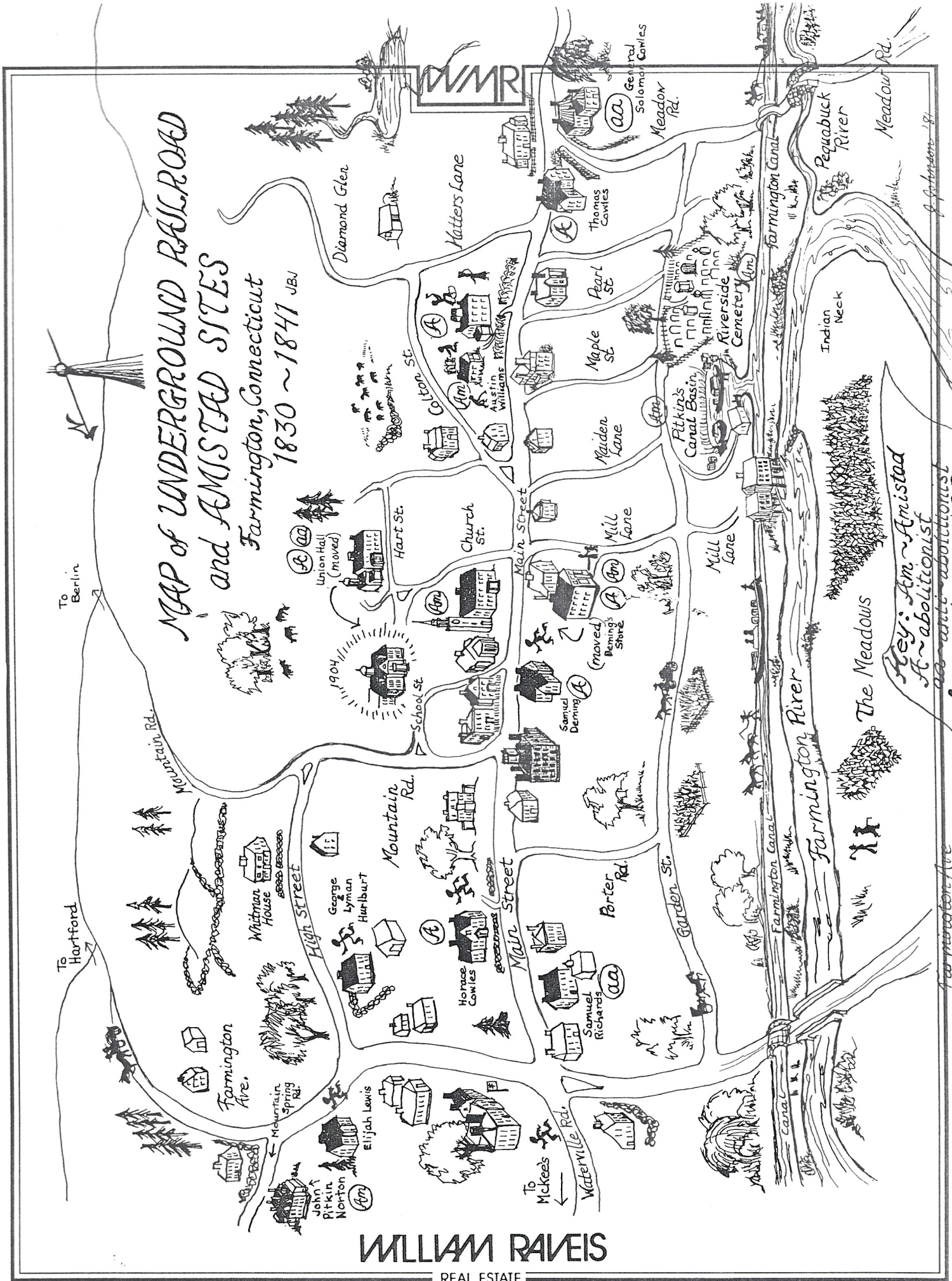
A member of the anti-slavery society, he was warned that talking too much about abolition would hurt his business. A friend wrote that a possible customer had "told me he would not buy goods of any Abolitionist, but. . .if. . .you will avoid unnecessary conversation with him on the subject, we shall succeed in selling him a good Bill." Behind



his house, Williams built a carriage house, which he gave to the captured Africans from the Amistad while they were in Farmington. After the Civil War, Williams ran an employment agency for freed and escaped slaves.

Austin Williams' carriage house, where the Amistad men lived





# MAP of UNDERGROUND RAILROAD and AMISTAD SITES Farmington, Connecticut 1830 ~ 1841

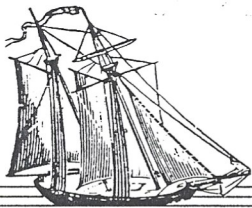
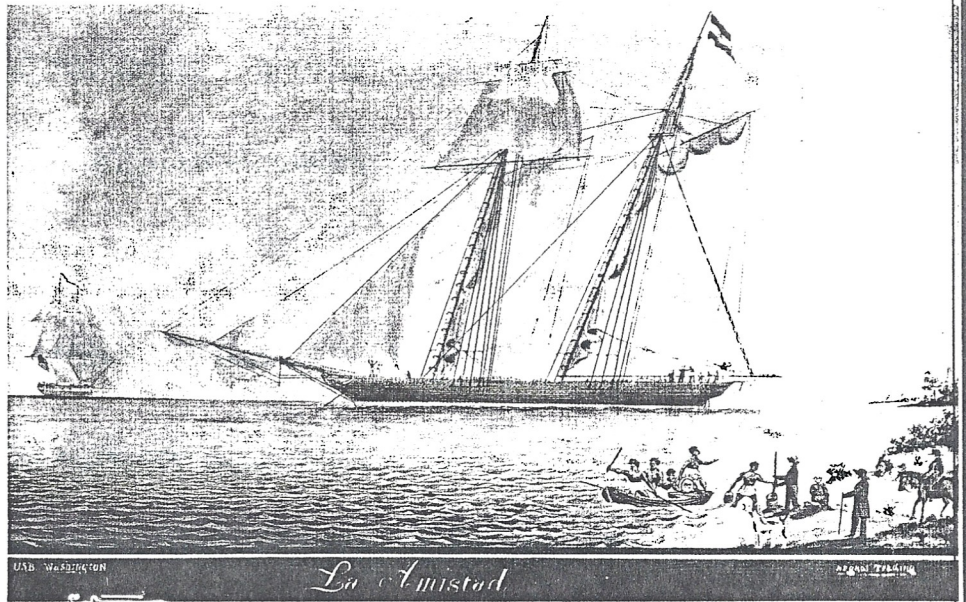
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Key: Am ~ Amistad  
A ~ abolitionist  
aa ~ anti-abolitionist

# The Amistad Event



LIKE SO MANY ships sailing the Caribbean 150 years ago, *La Amistad* was nothing unusual. It left Havana on June 26, 1838 carrying 53 black Africans and their Spanish owners towards two very different futures—profit for one, slavery for the other.

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## THE AMISTAD EVENT

On June 28, 1839 the Spanish ship Amistad sailed from Havana to transport 53 Africans kidnapped from their homeland to the other end of Cuba, there to spend the rest of their lives in slavery. Before the ship reached its destination, the Africans revolted against their captors and seized control of the ship, which they tried unsuccessfully to sail back to Africa. Finally the Amistad was taken into custody by a U.S. Navy ship off Long Island and brought into New London, Connecticut.

The issue of whether the Africans were slaves or free men became a major legal case that required two years to proceed through the American judicial system, including trials in Hartford and in New Haven, before reaching the United States Supreme Court. In the process the Amistad incident focused public attention in the United States as never before on the volatile issues of slavery and the human and legal rights of black individuals, and raised basic moral, social, religious, diplomatic and political questions. Former President John Quincy Adams defended the Africans before the Supreme Court, which in February of 1841 declared the Africans free men.

In November 1841, the 35 survivors of the 53 Africans originally on the Amistad sailed for Africa, where they arrived in January 1842. The Amistad Africans' determination to be free, the efforts of numerous individuals to restore them to liberty and return them to their homeland, and the schools, many still in existence, established by the American Missionary Association, which had its origins in an organization established to aid the Amistad Africans, constitutes a legacy that endured to the present.

*Courtesy of Diana McCain of The Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut*



## FARMINGTON-UNIONVILLE

Phone: 225-4601

Mendi remembered  
in graveside service

By Lin Noble

HERALD CORRESPONDENT

FARMINGTON — Chairman Valentine Strasser, the 28-year-old head of state from Sierra Leone, yesterday stood at the grave of Foone, a countryman who had died in Farmington 150 years ago.

Strasser joined in a Christian/Muslim ceremony at Riverside Cemetery on Garden Street to consecrate Foone's grave, while town officials, local citizens, history buffs and Secret Service agents looked on.

"From all accounts, he was a brave and courageous man who was anxious to return home," Strasser said of the Mendi tribesman. 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. //

A century and a half after the Amistad affair, people continue to focus on the small group of captured Africans who had been brought to Cuba, sold to a planter, and loaded aboard the ship Amistad.

Strasser saluted Foone and his companions, whose actions, he said, have kept alive the spirit of freedom for black people everywhere.

During a voyage north, they mutinied killing the ship's captain and turning the ship east. Their dream was to return home, but the ship's crew took advantage of their ignorance of navigation and reversed course, sailing north during the night. Finally, the ship was captured off the coast of New Haven.

After lengthy legal maneuvers, the Africans were freed, but they had no money for a voyage home. They were brought to Farmington, where a local committee had been formed to raise money for their defense and passage. In the meantime, local farm families provided them with food, clothing, housing and education.

"What courage the people of Farmington had, to do what they did at that time," marveled Town Councilor Arline Whitaker, who chaired the brief ceremony yesterday at Foone's grave.

The 38 young men and women of the Amistad, she added, epitomized the spirit of freedom and brotherhood beyond the times in which they lived.

The Rev. Lidabell Pollard, of Farmington's First Church of Christ, Congregational, where the Mendi attended services, said they were "shackled and bound but, in

their spirit, were forever free."

Leading a brief Christian service at graveside, she contrasted their era with the present when people continue to oppress and be oppressed.

"Until all are free, no one is free," she said.

Dr. Leslie G. Desmangles, associate professor of religion and area studies at Trinity College, pointed to the irony in the name of the Amistad, which, in Spanish, means friendship. A part of friendship, he said, is to be responsible — willing to respond to the needs of others, adding, "Those who had come before us felt this sense of responsibility."

He also pointed out the greater responsibility felt by the Amistad Committee, which became the American Missionary Association. The group went on to found 500 schools, including some of the most prestigious black universities in the country. Howard University in Washington is one of them.

The Rev. Mrs. Pollard concluded the Christian ceremony with the singing of the hymn, "Amazing Grace," which, she said, was especially appropriate. The song was written by John Newton, an English slave trader. Newton said that, while standing on the deck of a slave ship, God told him that all people should be free. Newton subsequently became an Anglican priest.

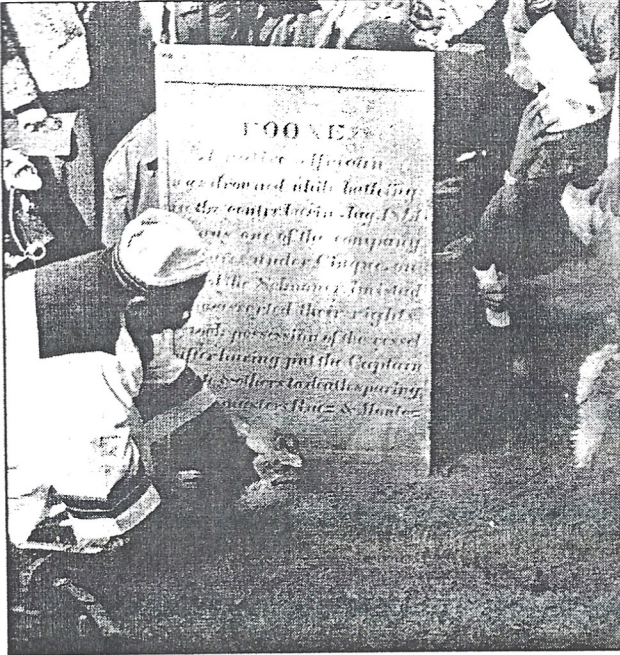
The Muslim ceremony was led by Mohammed Barrie, a Boston clergyman who conducted the service in Arabic.

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

Father James Tully, a Catholic missionary who lived for seven years in Sierra Leone, explained that Abraham held two glasses, one with water from the Farmington, and a second with a clear whiskey.

First, he tasted the two liquids, then offered them to the leaders of the ceremony, including Strasser, who said that respecting and honoring those who have gone to the Great Beyond was in accordance with Sierra Leone custom.

Following the ceremony, the Africans joined a walking tour of the sites where the Mendi had worked and lived in Farmington Village. These included the homes of abolitionists, the Village Store on Mill Street, where the Mendi lived, the place where Foone drowned, and the First Congregational Church.



HERALD PHOTOS — PHOEBE HAMILTON

## THE TIE BETWEEN FARMINGTON, AFRICA

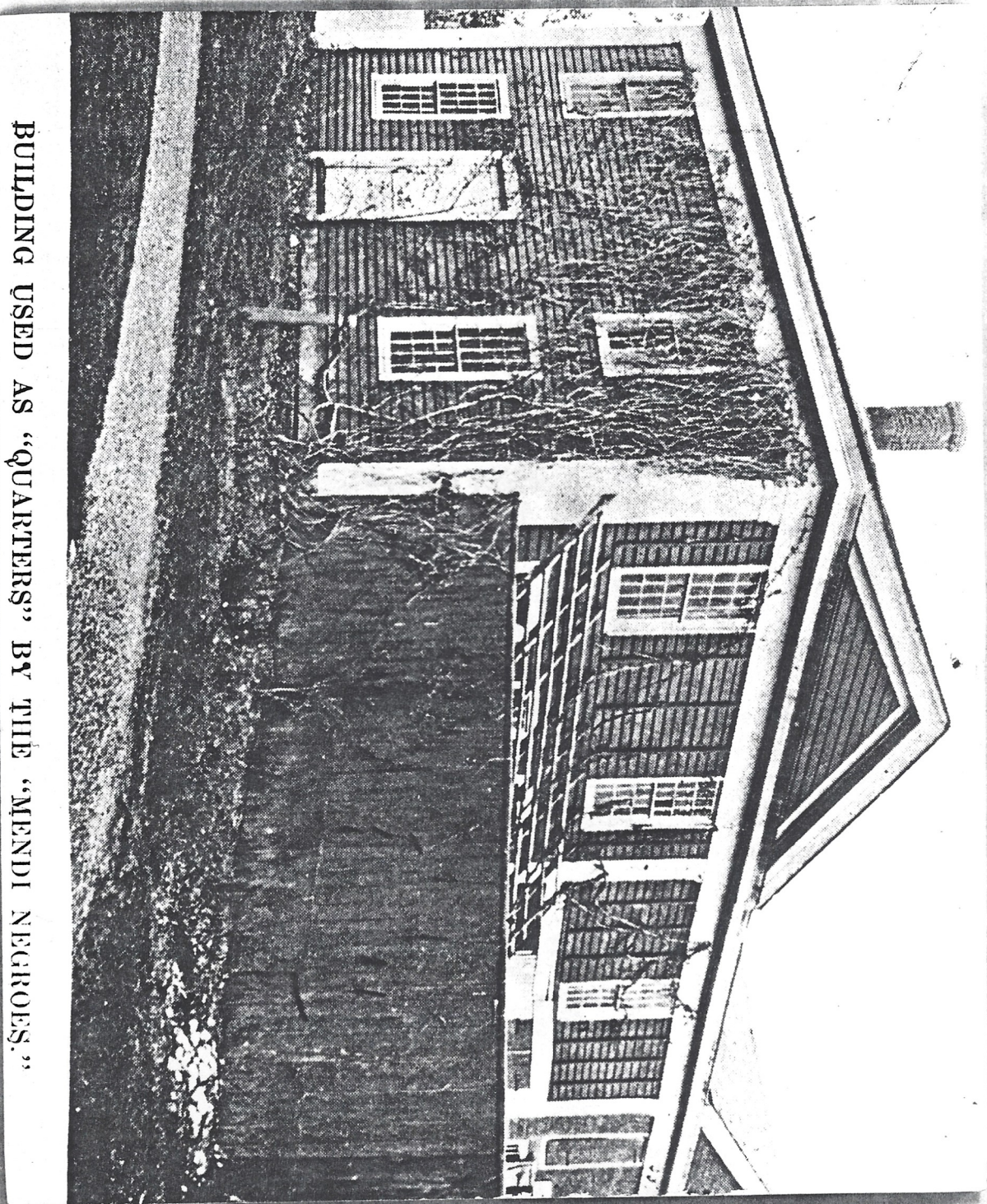
Dr. Arthur Abraham, secretary of education for Sierra Leone, above, anoints the grave of Foone, a Mendi tribesman who died in the Farmington River in 1841. Dr. Abraham traveled to the United States with his chief of state, Chairman Valentine Strasser, photo to left, to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Amistad incident marked at local ceremonies yesterday.

WILLIAM RAVEIS

REAL ESTATE

EXCEPTIONAL PROPERTIES





BUILDING USED AS "QUARTERS" BY THE "MENDI NEGROES."