

Stonington middle school students uncover story of enslaved couple



Stonington Middle School eighth-grade social studies students attend the United Theatre in Westerly on Wednesday, Jan. 3, 2024, for a screening of short films they made about Mint and Rose Palmer, two enslaved Stonington residents the students researched through the Witness Stones Project. (Carrie Czerwinski/The Day)

Buy Photo Reprints



January 03, 2024 5:03 pm • Last Updated: January 03, 2024 7:55 pm

By **Carrie Czerwinski, Special to The Day**

Westerly — Stonington Middle School students gathered at the United Theatre in Westerly on Tuesday morning to screen short films they made on two enslaved Stonington residents.

The eighth-grade social studies students spent several weeks late last year researching Mintus and Rose Palmer, who married after gaining their freedom in the early 1800s.

THE DAY'S DIGITAL ARCHIVE

142 years of history at your fingertips. Search for **FREE** here.

LATEST NEWS

Several shot at Perry High School in Iowa, shooter dead by self-inflicted wound: police

12:45 pm

South Korea views the young daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un as his likely successor

06:09 am

Privacy - Terms

Norwich police investigate incident at East Main Street

10:16 pm

Unsealed court records offer new detail on old sex abuse allegations against Epstein

10:12 pm

Johnson demands hard-line policies during a border visit as Ukraine aid hangs in the balance

07:08 pm

TRENDING

The Tuesday morning event showcased eight films created as part of a Witness Stones Project overseen by social studies teachers Cindy Cassidy and Daniel Agins. It was followed by three public screenings Tuesday evening.

Last year, the district received a \$5,000 NEA Foundation Envision Equity grant for the program, which was developed by the Witness Stones Project. The non-profit organization started in Guilford in 2017.

The Witness Stones Project provides local archival research, professional development for educators and a classroom curriculum to educate students and the public about the local history of slavery and to restore the history and humanity of enslaved individuals by telling their stories.

The films were the culmination of extensive research through primary sources like probate documents, census records and historical accounts.

Will Sundman, 13, found the documents difficult to work with, but he is proud of what he and his fellow students accomplished.

“We’re the first to uncover his story, and Rose’s. Nobody really knows about them,” he said.

Agins explained to audiences Tuesday night that traces of the couple were scarce in historical documents.

“We had to learn how to use what we have access to in order to read between the lines and fill in the gaps as best we can, with what we have on hand, in order to flesh out a story. This is the work of the historian. And this was one of our main goals for this project, for the students to become historians,” he said.

Agins said the main goal of the project, beyond restoring the history of Mintus and Rose Palmer, was to get students interested in history. For Tess Jordan, 13, it worked.

She said the local focus of the project was engaging, noting she was unaware of the extent of slavery in Stonington.

“It surprised me that this happened in our town, because I didn’t know that,” she said.

Stories waiting to be told

Mintus “Mint” Palmer and Rose Palmer were born into slavery in approximately 1781 and 1780, respectively.

Records are scarce, but show Rose Palmer was owned by Elias Sanford Palmer. Mint Palmer was owned by Sarah Palmer and was listed under “residue and remainder of the estate” in property records after Sarah Palmer’s death.

Elias and Sarah Palmer were descendants of one of Stonington’s founders, Walter Palmer, who settled in the Wequetequock Cove area in 1652. The Palmers claim President Ulysses S. Grant as a descendant. Also, the Captain Nathaniel B. Palmer House and the Donald F. Palmer football field at the high school bear the family name.

Rose Palmer was freed in 1802. Mint Palmer, after his emancipation in 1805, worked as a day laborer earning \$16 a day in today’s dollars.

Around 1806, the couple married, and built a two-room home near 316 Flanders Road. The house is not standing today, but student research revealed it was located near the home of Cato Cuff, the subject of last year’s Witness Stones Project.

1 Crystal Mall food court decimated by end-of-year closings

2 Muhl has changed roles for No. 12 UConn women, but she’s still in control

3 Updated: Modern-day ‘mountain man’ decries plans for quarry in Ledyard

4 Popular New London coffee shop set to reopen months after fire

5 Gales Ferry fire chief injured in Ledyard crash

PODCASTS

An altar boy in Newport, Rhode Island

Bee rescuer Patrick Gaudin

Reporting on church sex abuse cases for over 20 years

Dictionary researcher Joshua Pendragon

Providing victims of church abuse some justice and accountability

According to a family Bible, the couple had seven children. One film noted it seemed they could not afford to support them, as all seven were “bound out,” or contracted into indentured servitude, by the town’s selectmen by 1823.

Indenture contracts, often used to skirt anti-slavery laws, legally obligated individuals to provide free labor for a set term of years. The couple’s daughters were indentured until they were 21 and their sons until 25.

Mint Palmer died Feb. 12, 1826, after approximately 20 years of marriage. His cause of death, like his burial place and the names of his parents, is unknown.

Rose Palmer survived her husband by 42 years and died March 30, 1868, two days after suffering severe burns when she walked too close to the fireplace and her clothes caught fire. She was buried in Hilliard Cemetery on Flanders Road.

In one film, student narrators Anna Cochran and Keira Lercara reminded viewers that Mint and Rose Palmer were two of the town’s hundreds of enslaved individuals, and there are many more histories waiting to be discovered.

“Stories live in the archive waiting to be told,” they said.

As part of the project, a witness stone for Mint Palmer will be placed beside his wife’s grave. The small bronze plaque is engraved with biographical information.

Comments are limited to 200 words in length.

Post your comment

We encourage respectful comments but reserve the right to delete anything that does not contribute to an engaging dialogue. Help us moderate this thread by flagging comments that violate our guidelines. **Read the commenting policy.**

Comment

Post Comment

Total word count: **0** words. Words left: **200**.

READER COMMENTS

MARIE WILEY January 4, 2024 at 10:57

Report

It was a wonderful to read this educational article this morning. I remember hearing something a year ago but that was it so today's article was fabulous. Now the big question is where can we see these films??? I would love the opportunity to view them.

ROBERT WELT January 4, 2024 at 10:02

Report

That was a great learning experience for those students. Their teachers should be congratulated.

John Russell January 3, 2024 at 22:14

Report

The headline scared me _____.

STORIES THAT MAY INTEREST YOU



High school notes: Williamson (Vikings), Hammer (Colonels) captaining Woodstock girls' hockey co-op

When she was a sophomore at East Lyme High School, Mia Williamson was too old to play any longer for the Southeastern Connecticut Youth Hockey program, where she had started out in hockey and played f...



No. 23 Providence's Bryce Hopkins out for the season with torn left ACL

Providence — Providence swingman Bryce Hopkins is out for the season with a torn left ACL suffered in the No. 23 Friars' loss to Seton Hall on Wednesday night. "We all feel for Bryce and his family in...



NCAA agrees to \$920 million, 8-year deal with ESPN for women's March Madness, 39 other championships

The NCAA and ESPN announced on Thursday a \$920 million, eight-year agreement that will give the network exclusive rights to 40 championships, including the Division I women's basketball tournament, an...



PGA Tour starts a new year that feels like the old one. There's more to golf than just the golf

Kapalua, Hawaii — One upside for the PGA Tour extending the Dec. 31 deadline to finalize a deal with Saudi Arabia is the new season starting Thursday at Kapalua can avoid a big distraction. The focus ...

▲ Back To Top

About The Day

The Day Publishing Company

47 Eugene O'Neill Drive
P.O. Box 1231
New London, CT 06320-1231 USA

Staff Profiles

President/Publisher Newsroom Advertising/Marketing
FAQs Jobs at The Day Contact Us

Connect With Us



Quick Links

E-Paper Contests Horoscopes Puzzles TV
Calendar Milestones Newsletters

Advertising

About Our Ads Advertise Place A Classified Ad Contacts
Find New London Area Jobs Business Directory

Services

Day Media Group Photo Reprints Privacy Policy/Terms RSS
Text/SMS Alerts

