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BOOK RELEASE

Lives of Consequence: Blacks in Early Kittery and Berwick in the Massachusetts Province of Maine

By Patricia Q. Wall

Portsmouth Marine Society Press, 2017

Portsmouth Historical Society

Available July 28, 2017

Public Book Signing: Friday August 4 5-8pm at Discover Portsmouth, 10 Middle Street, Portsmouth, NH

New Book Reveals Lost African Lives in Maine

You might say Pat Wall's groundbreaking new study of lost African American lives was divinely inspired. She was seated in the First Congregational Church at Kittery Point, the oldest continuously used church in Maine. Looking up at the empty white walls she imagined the segregated side galleries, now removed, once filled with faces of enslaved and freed black church members. Were there really "just a few slaves" in Kittery as the town histories claimed?

"I suddenly wanted to know who these people were. What were their lives like?" says author Patricia Q. Wall. "I decided to stop musing and find some answers."

Five years later, *Lives of Consequence*, published this month by the Portsmouth Historical Society's Portsmouth Marine Society Press, is a shockingly expansive and revealing new book. Wall's painstaking research has uncovered, not just a few, but hundreds of forgotten African and mixed race residents. Her work focuses on the large colonial parish of "Old Kittery," just across the New Hampshire border. The 18-mile wide seacoast parish now includes the picturesque towns of Eliot, Berwick, and South Berwick, Maine. Until 1820 this territory was part of Massachusetts.

"We have been too long in denial," Wall says. "Many 19th century historians, often white and biased men, created the myth that slavery was only a southern thing. Sadly, that myth continues today. It is still taught in too many American schools, avoiding the truth about New England's involvement in slavery."

The truth, Wall quickly learned, has been hiding deep below the surface. While the arrival of slaves in Massachusetts began as early as 1637 under Puritan Gov. John Winthrop, the practice slowly infected the territory of Maine to the north. The cause, initially, was economic. New England needed workers for early farms, fisheries, and sawmills. Indentured European workers could earn back their freedom over a period of years. But 20 permanently enslaved Africans,

according to a contemporary report, could be maintained for the price of a single indentured white servant.

Records of black residents are spotty, when records exist at all. Pat Wall was forced to comb through countless wills, letters, estate inventories, court and church records. She uncovered evidence of as many as 500 forgotten persons living in the Parish of Kittery from its settlement through the American Revolution.

The author names names. *Lives of Consequence* identifies 186 white slave owners plus another 57 local people possibly involved in the odious trade. Colonial slave owners included prominent families named Pepperrell, Chadbourne, Whipple, Cutts, Cerrish, Frost, and Sparhawk. Stripped of their African identities, the names of black laborers and servants (often a euphemism for “slaves”) were difficult to trace. Single names like Phyllis, Libby, Cato, Mingo, Caesar, and Pompey flicker through the public record and private correspondence. More often the reference is simply to a “mulatto woman” or an anonymous “negro man.” The birth of only a single enslaved child appeared in the official Kittery records.

For all its scholarly content, the first half of *Lives of Consequence* is supremely readable. The author of two black history novels for children, Pat Wall combines the flowing narrative skills of fiction into a powerful narrative history. The second half is an extraordinary sourcebook listing hundreds of African, mulatto, and Indian lives culled from Wall’s research. Most appear only as “one-liners,” mentioned once, only to disappear into the mists of history. More than 40 percent of the “invisible people” identified have no names at all, having been reduced to an anonymous “runaway” or “negro.”

Two characters stand out. Mollie Miles, who was enslaved by the Kittery family of Sir William Pepperrell was interviewed by a reporter in a life that spanned 108 years. William Black, often listed as “Black Will,” managed to obtain his freedom, earn income, buy property, raise a family, and live as a farmer among his predominantly white neighbors.

“Black history,” historian Valerie Cunningham points out in her introduction to Wall’s book, “is American history worth knowing and exploring.”

Edited by Gerald R. Ward and published by the Portsmouth Marine Society Press, *Lives of Consequence* will be available at Discover Portsmouth and other bookstores beginning Friday, July 28, 2017. A public book signing will take place Friday August 4, 2017 from 5-8pm at Discover Portsmouth as part of Art ‘Round Town.

About the author

For the past 48 years, Patricia Quigley Wall has been involved with New England’s colonial history through professional museum work, research, teaching, and writing. More recently, after meeting Valerie Cunningham and learning of her ground-breaking research on Black history in early Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Mrs. Wall wrote an historical novel, *Child Out of Place* (Fall Rose Books, 2004, for ages 10 and up), based on a fictional, early 19th-century Black family in that locale. Six years later, its sequel, *Beyond Freedom* (Fall Rose Books, 2010), followed that family into Boston’s 1812 Black community on Beacon Hill. Both books were based on meticulous research. Since 2004, Mrs. Wall has visited with more than 11,000 school children throughout New England, given numerous lectures and teachers’ seminars—all in an effort to awaken greater awareness of the importance of this region’s early African American history. Born in Clearfield, Pennsylvania, Mrs. Wall grew up in the Philadelphia suburb of Germantown and is a graduate of Temple University (BA ’53) and Pennsylvania State University (MS ’64). For sixteen years, Mrs. Wall was associated with the Darien Historical Society, Darien, Connecticut, as a board member and then as executive director. After moving to Kittery Point, Maine, in 1986, she worked at Strawberry Banke Museum for several years before retiring to become a volunteer docent and board member of the Warner House Museum. For five years she also served as events coordinator

for the Portsmouth Historic Sites Association, a small group of house museums and historical sites in Portsmouth. She now lives in Exeter, New Hampshire.

About Portsmouth Marine Society Press

The original Portsmouth Marine Society was chartered in 1808 as an organization of ship captains, officers, and owners who shared navigational and business information about domestic and foreign ports and provided some benefits to the families of members lost at sea. Today it is the publishing division of Portsmouth Historical Society and has published 37 titles. Topics range from Prescott Park, embroidery samplers, archaeology, Tobias Lear, and the Treaty of Portsmouth. Nowhere else can a reader find as much information about Portsmouth's naval shipyard, submarines, Piscataqua-built sailing ships, tugboats, lighthouses, privateers, whaling, and maritime Portsmouth. For more information, contact [603-436-8433](tel:603-436-8433) or PortsmouthHistory.org

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