

Any Colonial comparison is only as good as the records that survive and the research that has been done. Until now, Connecticut's plantations have been either unknown or ignored. Sawyer, a doctoral candidate at the City University of New York, was enlisted to work on the Salem site by a former teacher, Central Connecticut State University professor Warren Perry, who in turn learned of them from an amateur Colchester historian, Abraham Abdul-Haqq.

Perry's ongoing work on the well-known African Burial Ground Project in New York City has helped expose the fiction that the North was unacquainted with slavery. Barring new discoveries, the Browne plantation, along with Malbone's and apparently Elijah Mason's, give Connecticut the dubious distinction of having hosted three of the largest slave enterprises in 18th century New England.

Slave markets

The nature of that enterprise is what allows Sawyer to extend his excitement about the Salem plantation to, as he said, "the whole goddamn world." In all likelihood, they engaged in the same kind of early agribusiness as the plantations in nearby Rhode Island. They grew grain, made cheese, raised livestock and cut wood with one main market in mind: the Caribbean island colonies where sugar cane was a crop of such value that it was cultivated to the exclusion of food and slaves were the main source of labor.

Why should this now sound so revelatory and so shame-

ful? The Triangle Trade of molasses, rum and slaves between New England, the West Indies and Africa has long been a staple of U.S. history curriculums. Yet somehow in popular perception, slavery has been cut out of the trade triangle and transferred forward to the Civil War, where it became a moral problem confined to the South. Just as Connecticut was thought not to have "had slavery" because it did not have many slaves or Southern-style plantations, it was thought not to profit from slavery as much as the South did.

The truth, however, which ought to have been plain, is that Connecticut derived a great part, maybe the greatest part, of its early surplus wealth from slavery. Connecticut's slave population peaked at about 5,000 in 1774, but shipping records indicate its farms were feeding West Indies slaves by the tens of thousands. For a time after the Revolution, Connecticut's trade with the West Indies was double Boston's. As late as 1807, Middletown, thanks to the West Indies trade, was by one measure the busiest port

PERMIT *George Tinker* Master of the Schooner
James entered from *Port au Prince* to *la...*

SI *fifty eight hhd Molasses WC from hhd Molasses*
 GI *two hhd Molasses DD One hoghead Molasses*
 IB *One hhd Molasses H One hhd Molasses*
 DA *One hhd Molasses*

SI *Two Tuns Molasses WC One Tun Molasses*
 IC *One Tun Molasses DD One Tun Molasses*
 DD *two barrl Molasses GI One barrl Molasses*
 IE *Three barrl Molasses Sugar DD two Tuns Iron Old*
One Whage 100 Sugar One bag Coffee Ten Gallons of Stew

Given under my Hand at the Custom-House, Middletown, *7* day of
November 1795 *George Phillips* Collector.
Dickinson the Inspector of the Customs.

Connecticut River Museum Collection

On a Triangle Trade voyage, the schooner *James* delivered molasses from what is now Haiti to Middletown in 1795, as this manifest indicates.

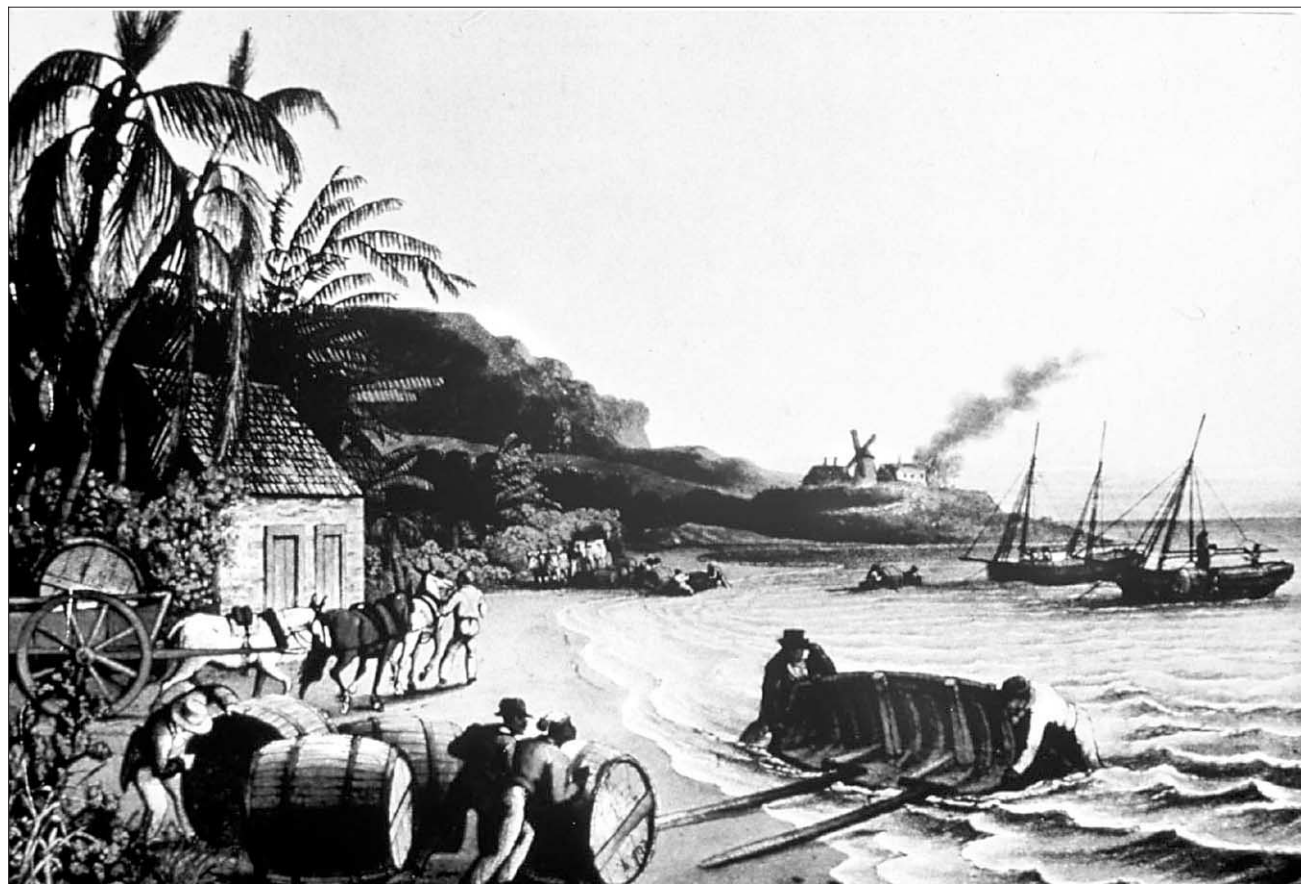
between Cape Cod and New York.

So far Sawyer, his partner Perry, who is the principal investigator for the project, and their student assistants have been more occupied mapping the dimensions of the Salem plantation than digging for the documents that will fill out the story of what went on there. Sawyer is confident they'll find much in Colonial archives, particularly in Salem, Mass., the base of the Brownes' mercantile empire.

Generous donors to Harvard College, the Brownes reputedly were the richest family in a town that rivaled Boston in wealth. It may be no coincidence then that Salem, Mass., also is where New England's slave trade may have started. In 1638, the Salem ship *Desire* sailed to the West Indies loaded with captured Pequot Indians. It sold them as slaves and returned with a "cargo of salt, cotton, tobacco and Negros."

A few years later Massachusetts Gov. John Winthrop was advised by his brother-in-law that a "just war" against Indians could provide the colony with more captives to exchange for badly needed "Moors." He warned Winthrop, "I do not see how we can thrive until we get a stock of slaves sufficient to do all our business."

Slavery was about money from the start, yet even academics like the ponytailed Sawyer and the dreadlocked Perry, who are inclined to substitute the term captive for slave, because slave connotes docility and ignorance, have prestigious company in arguing that the slave economy has been severely underrated. Of hemispheric proportions, its original capital and original sin was the nearly 12 million souls bought in Africa to be transported to the New World in what was probably the greatest and most lethal forced



Wethersfield Historical Society

A rendition of a West Indian sugar cane port contains a hint of one of Connecticut's main exports to the Caribbean: wooden barrel staves.