

THE SYPHAX/SYFAX FAMILY Late 1700s – 1800s

The Syphax/Syfax family is represented on the mural with a silver shoe buckle. The buckle is a symbol of their strength and resilience living in colonial Glastonbury.

Syphax was the first name of an enslaved man from Glastonbury. His owner, Joseph Moseley, was an officer in the Revolutionary War. In September of 1777, Syphax signed a document which promised he would be emancipated in exchange for his service in the Continental Army, serving in Colonel Samuel Wyllys' Regiment. Syphax agreed to give his enlistment bonus to Capt. Moseley in exchange for the emancipation. He is listed as Syphax Moseley in military records.

Syphax and his wife Mary (also known as Polly) were married in Glastonbury and had five children born between 1773 and 1784. When Syphax returned from the war, he began to purchase several different plots of land in town. Early records of Syphax's purchases list him as Syphax Moseley. Over the course of the next 30 years, his children, and then even his wife, began to use Syphax's first name as their last name. The Syphax Moseley family became, on property records, the Syphax or the Syfax family. They remained in Glastonbury for many years, acquiring property and two homes and selling and renting property to other free African American families in town. Syphax died in 1808 at the age of 71. He owned a total of 17 acres of property in Glastonbury, including land on Main Street adjacent to Joseph Moseley, his former enslaver, and a parcel on the "road to the East Parish" (probably on Neipsic or Chesnut Hill Road).

On January 29, 1816, at the age of 63, Mary made her last will and testament. She states that her name is Mary Syfax. The Syphax name is spelled many different ways in town and church records over the years. Mary died in March of that year. The inventory of her possessions is two pages long. It is astounding that any woman in a rural town owned so many things, let alone an African-American woman and the wife of a formerly enslaved man. It is likely that Mary could not read or write since she signed deeds and her will with her mark, an "X."

The inventory of Mary's possessions includes 6 dresses, some made of calico and one made of silk, cloaks, shirts, aprons, silk stockings, silk bonnets, blankets, and bedding. There are six silver teaspoons and a pair of silver buckles, several necklaces of gold-colored beads, rings, furniture, dishes, baskets, a cider barrel, a spinning wheel, a large chest, dishes and cows. Her estate was valued at \$599.25.

We do not know much more about the Syfax family in Glastonbury after Mary's death. Several of the children inherited Syphax's land holdings. In the 1820 census, their daughter Sylvia Freeman was listed as the head of the household with nine people in the home. Their daughter, also named Mary, had married in Glastonbury, was widowed, and in 1824 remarried a man named Providence Freeman at the Hartford First Baptist Church. Some of the children continued to live in Glastonbury and lease and sell land until 1831, when Asher sold the last piece of land to Chester Jones.

The story of Syphax Moseley and Mary Syfax will likely always lack many details of their daily lives, but what we have learned about this family tells an important part of the history and successes of an African American family in early Glastonbury.

Information contained herein was compiled by the Historical Society of Glastonbury for the Glastonbury MLK39 Mural Project dedicated in September 2024.

