

A Short Study on the Family Lineage of Abolitionist Poet James Monroe Whitfield of Exeter, NH*

(Updated 2/2021) By RM ALLEN Nov. 29, 2018 www.RM-Allen.com

**This report is not intended to be scholarly, only serve to inspire scholars, creatives, and other influencers.*

Part 1: Background facts on “Black Exeter NH”

Part 2: One family’s epic story - Paul, Hall, Whitfield and Hopkins

Part 3: Opportunities in Exeter today

Part 1:

Black Exeter NH Revealed 1776-1910

1. The Good

1776: Exeter becomes NH capital for the duration of the Revolutionary War. Many Black veterans settle here after the war.

1781: Exeter has 4.7% Black population, which is the largest in NH. Most live near Water, Green and Park Street area on the west bank of the river. Others live in homes both in town and on fringe, such as Jude Hall of Jude’s Pond on Drinkwater Rd, who battled at Bunker Hill, Ft. Ticonderoga and others. *(For comparison, if the 4.7% carried through to the current population of approx. 15K, there would be 700 Blacks in Exeter today.)*



1790: The 1790 census lists 1639 whites and 83 residents of African American ancestry (in 14 households, 11 of which they own), 2 of whom are still enslaved to local families. Many Black entrepreneurs owned shops and farms. Blacks and whites attend Exeter public schools together.

1809: Jubal Martin buys 66 acres at 4 Pine Rd. for \$999, and runs a successful farm. House still stands today.

1822: Abolitionist poet James Monroe Whitfield (*America & Other Poems* pub. 1853) is born and attends Exeter public school until age 9, when he moves away with his family after the death of his father in 1831.

1836: Black woman Catherine Merrill of Green St. creates a fund and names it after her mother, Kate Holland, to provide “relief of such colored persons having their settlement in said Exeter, but not paupers therein, as in consequence of sickness, youth or old age, may need occasional assistance.”

1858: Moses Hall, Jude Hall’s grandson, is most likely the first Black student at Phillips Exeter Academy.

2. The Bad

Racial undercurrents leading to Civil War begin. Grown children of Revolutionary War veterans not as welcome, many stuck in menial jobs. Mills will not hire literate Black citizens, but instead hires illiterate Irish immigrants.

1815? James Hall, 18, of Jude's Pond homestead on (70?) Drinkwater Rd James Hall is abducted by David Wedgewood for supposed payment of a debt. Two other brothers were taken into slavery, William, who was enslaved while serving on a ship and Aaron, who was enslaved after returning from a sea voyage for a concocted debt payment. William later escaped and became captain of a collier in England. Dates unknown.

1830: Mob pulls down house of Black citizen Ben Jakes. Warns out.

1834: Last Revolutionary War veteran in Exeter dies.

1835: Mob disrupts Abolitionist meeting of Exeter Methodists on Portsmouth Ave.

1844: Many destitute Blacks in Exeter Poor Farm, which slashes its budget by 60%.

3. The Ugly

1860s: Minstrel Shows begin to be popular at Exeter Town Hall, emphasizing racial stereotypes. Shows continue in town hall through 1930's.

1870: Only 54 Blacks remain – relegated to generational poverty; all listed as laborer, servant, or unemployed.

1883: Popular "Plupy Shute" *Diary of a Real Boy* stories remember faded Black community, parodies as stereotypes. Most of the Blacks in his stories are based on real Exeter citizens from his father's time, such as Hannah Blossom, Josh Zak, and Charles Tash.

1910: Only ten Blacks remain. See photo of Wallace Freeman, below, picking up trash on Water St.

1941: Exeter Newsletter prints articles on Dec. 11 & 18, that recollect the erased Black community.

"Final triumph of racism in Exeter was not only the physical effacement of its Black community but also a collective amnesia that has left little trace of its existence in white history."

~ David T. Dixon (author of the report from which this info is taken:
"Freedom Earned, Equality Denied: Evolving Race Relations
in Exeter and Vicinity 1776-1876" published 2007)

"The antidote to feel-good history is not feel-bad history, but honest and inclusive history. [...] Conflict would become part of the story, and students might discover that the knowledge they gain has implications for their lives today... and grow more thoughtful and more tolerant, rather than more ethnocentric"

~ James Loewen, (author of *Lies My Teacher Told Me:
Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*. Pub. 2007)



Sources: <http://www.daviddixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FreedomEarned.pdf>

NH Division of Historical Resources inventory #48 (Jubal), and Exeter Historical Society.

Part 2: One family line: Paul, Hall, Whitfield, Hopkins

PAUL FAMILY

Caesar Nero Paul was a “small and exceedingly dark-complexioned man”, unknown birthplace. At age 14 he was enslaved to Major John Gilman of Exeter, NH as a house-boy. Later, Caesar accompanied him to various French and Indian wars, was captured, gained his freedom around 1771, and became a formal citizen of Exeter. Caesar married a white woman, Lovey Rollins, daughter of a well-known Stratham lawyer. Caesar and Lovey had eight or ten children, among them three sons who became noted Baptist preachers. Among the daughters, **Rhoda and Nancy/Ann** and their Exeter-born progeny are of note for this paper.



Of the sons, the eloquent **Rev. Thomas Paul** (b. 1773) was the most famous of the children. After attending the Free Will Baptist Church and School in Hollis, NH, he was instrumental in founding the Baptist's first African Meeting House on Joy St. in Boston's Beacon Hill in 1805. It remains today and is currently the main campus of the Museum of African-American History (MAAH) on Boston's Black Heritage Trail. Rev. Paul began the movement to establish independent Black Baptist churches, and also was sent to Haiti and England on missions. The guide at the MAAH says documentation portrays him as a charismatic speaker similar to Martin Luther King Jr. The Rev. Paul's portrait was painted, and it is thought to be the first portrait of a Black man from NH. The inside of the African Meeting House is restored to original condition and can be seen online at MAAH.org. Rev. Paul is

listed to be buried in the famous Copp's Burying Ground in the North End, but the exact location is unknown.

Sources: <http://www.davidtdixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FreedomEarned.pdf>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Paul

<https://sites.google.com/site/1790censusotherfreepersons/caesar-paul>

http://hne-rs.s3.amazonaws.com/filestore/1/2/8/3/3_a6d0a6bca8697fb/12833_a3f973761350ffc.pdf

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History of Exeter by Charles Bell

Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Black Daughter of the Revolution by Lois Brown

WHITFIELD FAMILY

Nancy Paul, on 12/12/1797, married newcomer Joseph Whitfield (b enslaved 1762 in Virginia, escaped to Newburyport in 1797) and they had four children. Nancy was admitted as a member of the Exeter Baptist Church in 1817, and held in high regard. Historian Wm. Perry remembers her as “quite a superior woman” and Elizabeth Dow Leonard's memoirs relate “her manners would be pleasing at any court, and her cakes and ales were among the finest.” Nancy and Joseph made a family home on Whitfield's Lane, (renamed Elliot St. in 1845) which at the time ran all the way to the river, crossed a bridge at the eddy, and went on to Col. N. Gilman's farm. The Whitfield's small one-story home was located approximately where the Phillips Exeter Academy principal's house (built 1875) now stands at the corner of Court St. (which was not there yet). Joseph was remembered as a “famous gardener and hunter who was very clever, good natured, and enjoyed telling of his hunting escapades with his dog Skip.” At the age of 70, he had a sudden heart attack and “died in the lane leading to his house.” His obituary in the Exeter Newsletter on 11/27/1832 read:” *...Whitfield has borne through his life the character of a worthy and industrious man, and perhaps more richly deserves to have a paragraph penned in his praise, than many whose riches have entitled them to a column of eulogy.*” Nancy had already died. James moved to relatives in CT..



One of Nancy and Joseph's sons, **James Monroe Whitfield** was born in Exeter on April 10, 1822. He attended school here until age nine, when the family moved away after his father's death. They eventually turn up in Buffalo, NY, famed as the last stop on the Underground Railroad, and by the age of eighteen Whitfield begins his long career as a barber and abolitionist poet. He becomes active with Frederick Douglass, who called him a "sable son of genius", and Martin Delaney, MD, who refers to him as "one of the purest poets." Whitfield's book *"America and other Poems"* is published in 1853 by JS Leavitt, another son of Exeter in Buffalo, who sends 100 copies to be sold for 37.5 cents at the Lovering Bookstore in Exeter, with a note printed in the 1/19/1854 Exeter Newsletter stating such.

Eventually Whitfield moves his wife and three children to California in the 1860's, where he is "held by African Americans of the Northwest to be *the* great African American poet." He explores Black emigration issues, but eventually abandons the idea. Unfortunately, Whitfield dies in 1871 of heart disease at only 49 years old. He is buried in the Masonic Cemetery in San Francisco. His body of work fades for quite some time, but of late has been the subject of many scholars. In 2020 he was included in the anthology "African-American Poetry: 250 years of struggle and song" and he is also detailed in depth the 2011 book *The Works of James M. Whitfield: America and Other Writings by a Nineteenth-Century African American Poet*. The Amazon description reads:

"In this comprehensive volume of the collected writings of James Monroe Whitfield (1822-71), Robert S. Levine and Ivy G. Wilson restore this African American poet, abolitionist, and intellectual to his rightful place in the arts and politics of the nineteenth-century United States.

Whitfield's works, including poems from his celebrated *America and Other Poems* (1853), were printed in influential journals and newspapers, such as Frederick Douglass's *The North Star*. A champion of the Black emigration movement during the 1850s, Whitfield was embraced by African Americans as a Black nationalist bard when he moved from his longtime home in Buffalo, New York, to California in the early 1860s. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century, his reputation had faded."

James Monroe Whitfield is the hidden John Greenleaf Whittier of Exeter, NH. His poetry book is currently in print as the Library of Congress has deemed it an important piece of American culture. It can be read online for free*, or in paperback at \$12. Here is the opening of the epic poem "America."

America, it is to thee,
Thou boasted land of liberty,—
It is to thee I raise my song,
Thou land of blood, and crime, and wrong.
It is to thee, my native land,
From whence has issued many a band
To tear the Black man from his soil,
And force him here to delve and toil;
Chained on your blood-bemoistened sod,
Cringing beneath a tyrant's rod,
Stripped of those rights which Nature's God
Bequeathed to all the human race,
Bound to a petty tyrant's nod,
Because he wears a paler face.



Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930) is another intriguing descendant of Exeter's Paul family. She is Nancy and Joseph's great-granddaughter, by their daughter Elizabeth. (Pauline is the poet's grand-niece.) As a Boston-based writer, Pauline wrote a novel in 1900, *Contending Forces*, loosely based on her family's heritage and in it she describes scenes in Exeter. With artistic license she describes Joseph and Nancy, and their home in Exeter. There is 2018 scholarship on Pauline, who was quite pioneering and controversial in her many endeavors, by Oxford University Press authors who question her and others practice of textual appropriation in that era. A 2008 UNC Press book *Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Black Daughter of the Revolution* by Lois Brown tries to make sense of the blurred lines. Amazon describes this book:

"Born into an educated free Black family in Portland, Maine, Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins (1859-1930) was a pioneering playwright, journalist, novelist, feminist, and public intellectual, best known for her 1900 novel *Contending Forces: A Romance of Negro Life North and South*. In this critical biography, Lois Brown documents for the first time Hopkins's early family life and her ancestral connections to eighteenth-century New England, the African slave trade, and twentieth-century race activism in the North.

Brown includes detailed descriptions of Hopkins's earliest known performances as a singer and actress; textual analysis of her major and minor literary works; information about her most influential mentors, colleagues, and professional affiliations; and details of her battles with Booker T. Washington, which ultimately led to her professional demise as a journalist.

Richly grounded in archival sources, Brown's work offers a definitive study that clarifies a number of inconsistencies in earlier writing about Hopkins. Brown re-creates the life of a remarkable woman in the context of her times, revealing Hopkins as the descendant of a family comprising many distinguished individuals, an active participant and supporter of the arts, a woman of stature among professional peers and clubwomen, and a gracious and outspoken crusader for African American rights."

Some of her other works can be seen at: <http://www.paulinehopkinssociety.org/new-era-magazine/> . Pauline was a single Black woman living in a man's world, and died a pauper at 70 years old in Cambridge in 1930. Her gravesite was unknown until a female admirer erected a stone in the Cambridge Cemetery in her honor a couple of decades ago. What is of importance for this report is that her portrayal of the Whitfield's in Exeter, although fictionalized and written decades later, is the only familial account of the Exeter Whitfields...so far.

Sources:

History of Exeter by William Perry, with 1830 map denoting Whitfield's Lane

The Phillips Exeter Academy: A Pictorial History by Echols. map of boardinghouses on p 25.

<http://www.davidtdixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FreedomEarned.pdf>

<http://www.Blackpast.org/aah/whitfield-james-monroe-1822-1871>

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Pauline Elizabeth Hopkins, Black Daughter of the Revolution by Lois Brown

"Rethinking Pauline Hopkins: Plagiarism, Appropriation, and African American Cultural Production", read it here:

<https://academic.oup.com/alh/advance-article-abstract/doi/10.1093/alh/ajy014/5099108?redirectedFrom=fulltext>

**The Works of James M. Whitfield: America and Other Writings by a Nineteenth-Century African American Poet.* by Robert Levine. Read it here: <https://the-eye.eu/public/Books/Poetry/The%20Works%20of%20James%20M.%20Whitfield%20-%20America%20and%20Other%20Writings%20by%20a%20Nineteenth-Century%20African%20American%20Poet.pdf>

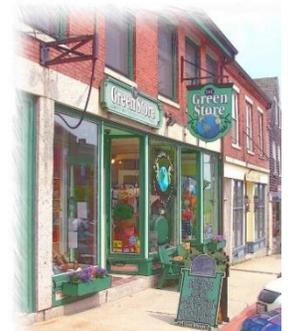
HALL FAMILY

Rhoda Paul, is Nancy (Paul) Whitfield's sister, in 1785 married renown Revolutionary War veteran Judas Hall (b. @1747), nicknamed "Old Rock" for his size and strength. He was born into slavery in NH and lived on the farm of Philemon Blake of Kensington, NH. Jude earned his freedom after serving for eight years in the war. Jude is the poet Whitfield's uncle. In 1789 Rhoda and Jude made a small two-room home on (apprx 70) Drinkwater Rd. (Jude's Pond tract owned by PEA now) near to Blake's farm and had a large family, including four strong sons. There is documentation of Jude participating in several legal actions in which he was viewed as an honorable man - one case was of witness to the murder of a neighbor. Jude died at about 80 years old on Aug 22, 1827 and his gravesite is unknown. In 2001 Edward Wall, a descendant of Philemon Blake, erected a large memorial stone in the east end of the Winter St. Cemetery in his honor.



In 1833, five years after Jude's death, there is affidavit testimony by Robert Roberts, husband of Jude and Rhoda's eldest daughter Dorothy and author of *House Servants Directory* pub. 1827 when he was butler to MA Senator Gore. The affidavit discusses the tragedy of Jude's 18-year old son James Hall: James and his mother were at home, but not Jude, when Exeter citizen David Wedgewood arrived and told his mother that James owed him four dollars. His mother said he was a minor and could not be touched. Nevertheless, James was abducted, bound, and taken off to the Newburyport jail. The next day he was loaded onto a ship owned by Johnston & ? Co of Newburyport, and the captain Isaac Stone set sail for New Orleans. The date of the abduction is unclear, but near 1815 according to a story relayed by Rhoda decades later and printed in the *Liberator*. Jude spent the remainder of his years running between lawyers and judges' offices trying to regain his son, to no avail, and he died without knowing his fate. Two other brothers suffered similar fate, and only one was ever heard from again (upon his escape to England). Wedgewood removed to Greenland, NH. Jude's only remaining son was George, who continued to live in Exeter. As an adult he and his family spent time in Exeter's Poor Farm until becoming a beneficiary of the Kate Holland Fund.

After Jude's death in 1827, Rhoda moved away to Belfast, ME and lived there with her youngest daughter **Rhoda Ann/Rhodia** the remainder of her life. (d. Feb 21, 1844 at 74 years old.) Daughter Rhoda Ann (Ames) Cook had a second marriage on March 4, 1837 to James A. Cook, a fugitive slave from Pennsylvania who came to Belfast in 1820. Cook was a long-time barber in Belfast. In 1847, after a fire destroyed his original wooden barbershop, they built a brick shop nearby at 71 Maine St. with a double entrance for two businesses, plus an apartment above for his family. They lived there until James Cook's death in 1865, (his gravesite in unknown) when Rhoda Ann sold the building. There is no further record of her. The historic shop still stands and is now The Green Store.



Moses Uriah Hall (b.1835) was Rhoda and Jude's grandson, via George. In 1855 Moses joined the First Baptist Church of Exeter, located on Water St. In 1858 Moses became possibly the first Black to enroll at Phillips Exeter Academy. He is remembered in the 1926 memoirs of Sarah Cram (b.1840 on the Blake Homestead) who often saw young Moses driving a sleigh as she walked to school at the Female Robinson Seminary. *"I used to see the horse and sleigh of Judge Henry F. French coming out of Pine St...and in that sleigh were the future sculptor and his brother William, while a stalwart young colored man filled the part of the driver, and I recall the thrill with which I heard for the first time that after the faithful driver had deposited his small charges, he drove the team home and then walked back and became a fellow pupil of his young masters."*

Moses served in the Civil War, and became a mason like his father George. He laid foundations for the Hogarth Country Day School and many other places in Epping. At eighty years old he paved the sidewalks on Epping's Pleasant St. In 1917 Moses was the recipient of Epping's Boston Post Cane, which he held until his death in 1926. He is buried in Epping's Prospect Cemetery and his gravestone and story can be viewed online.

Sources: <http://www.davidtdixon.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/FreedomEarned.pdf>

History Channel: <https://www.history.com/news/kidnapping-of-freed-slaves-Blacks-reverse-underground-railroad>

National Park Service: <https://www.nps.gov/bost/learn/education/upload/Boston%20Lesson.pdf>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m-r-FzgxSs> Exeter Historical Society/History Minute video by Barbara Rimkunas 2018

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/151977656/moses-uriah-hall>

History of the Baptist Church, Exeter, N. H., 1800-1900 by BFF Swasey

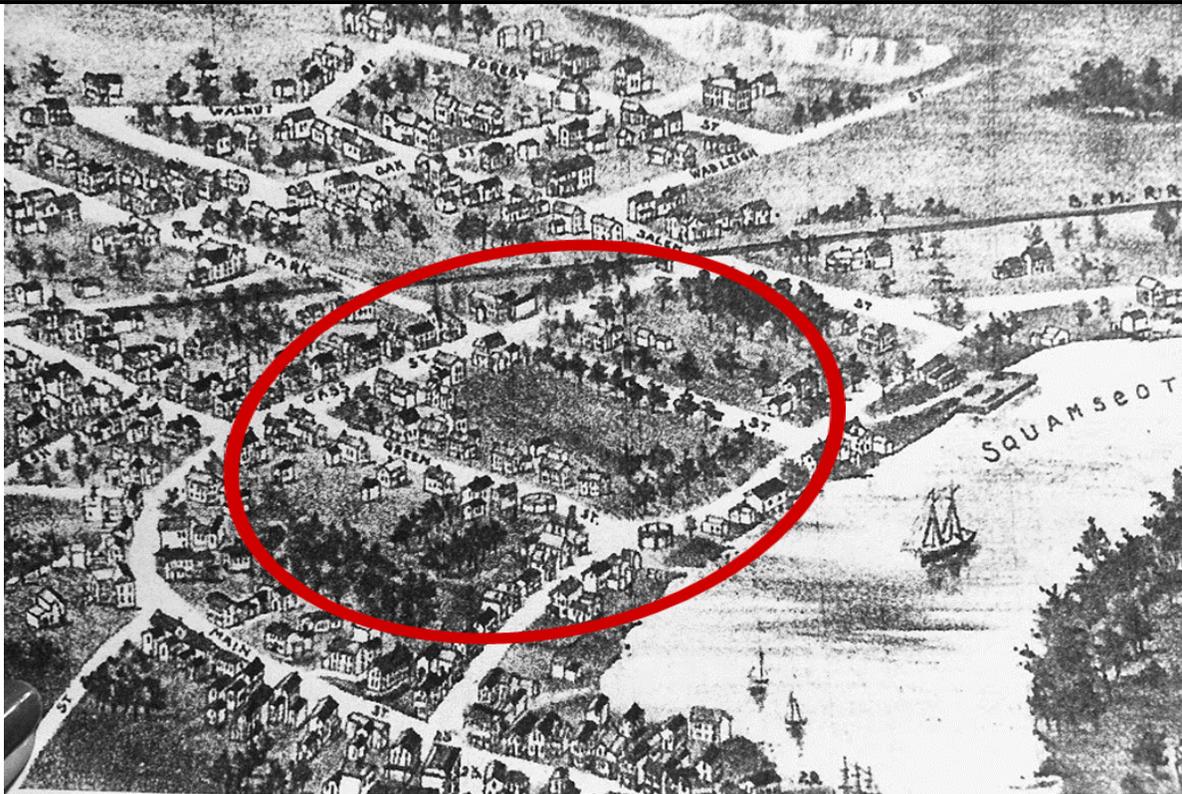
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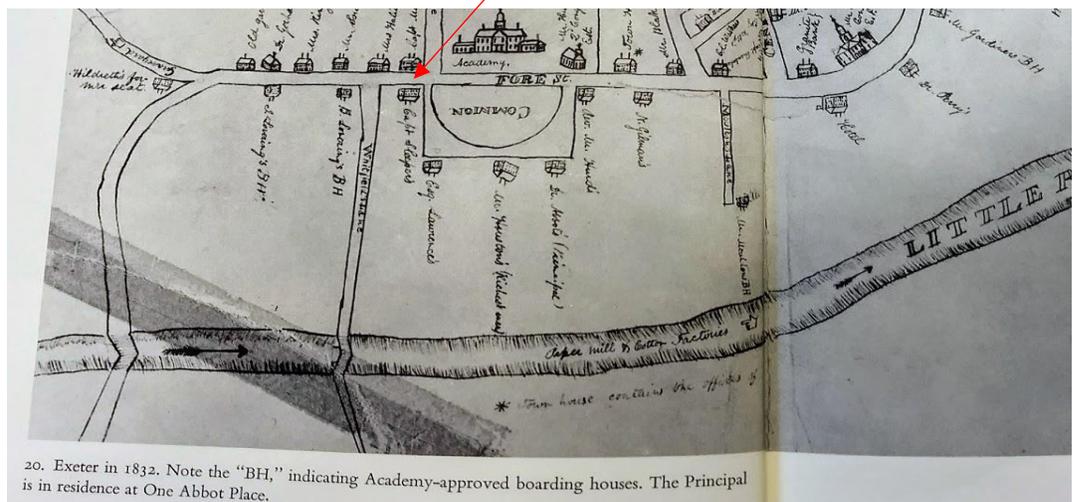
"A Ramble Through Time, Waldo 2000, notes on James Cook" Belfast Historical Museum by Megan Pinette

1896



Old Baptist Church

Whitfield's Lane, now Elliot St.



20. Exeter in 1832. Note the "BH," indicating Academy-approved boarding houses. The Principal is in residence at One Abbot Place.

Part 3: Summary and Opportunities

The above information came to my attention while researching for the new town-wide literary festival to be held on April 5-6, 2019. This festival is deliberately hung on a frame of diversity in race, gender, and preference. Each year a read a Whitfield poem from the town hall stage during the ExeterLitFest.com. In addition, a Black Heritage pocket-park has been proposed for Swasey Parkway - near the American Independence Museum – in the heart of the old enclave. A video of the discussion can be seen at <https://rm-allen.com/park-project-2021/>

This report is not intended to be scholarly, but only serve to inspire scholars, creatives, and other influencers. The history of Exeter is incomplete until the history of Black Exeter NH becomes more widely known. The Paul family and their descendants are shown to be educated and informed people who had influence on their times. (There are others in our history not profiled here, but they were outside my scope.) Exeter occupies the unique position of having had the highest percentage of Blacks in NH following the Revolutionary War. These Black Exeter citizens were fully integrated in to the town, until period before the Civil War when opportunity ceased here for them. The poet foresaw the trend towards Black disenfranchisement as “forging fresh fetters”, and we can hear his voice across the centuries asking us today “How Long?”

In the reframing of Exeter’s history through an honest lens, I offer to the community-at-large an opportunity for the poet James Monroe Whitfield to be recovered in our town’s history, as well as his relatives and other Black Exeter citizens not mentioned here. **April 10, 2022 will be the poet’s 200th birthday, let’s celebrate.**

Opportunities:

- A Whitfield poem could be read in public annually in the town hall and other places
- Whitfield & Hopkins books could be in all libraries, schools, reading rooms
- Classes could be taught on Black Exeter NH’s history as standard curriculum
- Book, plays, films, poems, paintings could be created on any/all of the above as it pertains to Exeter
- Whitfield could have an outdoor monument, similar to Jack Kerouac Park in Lowell
- Elliot St. could return to the original name: Whitfield’s Lane
- Jude’s Pond could be tamed and become a learning center, with parking for buses
- Maps could be created of #BlackExeterNH with plaques, or some distinction
- Scholars could create and contribute to a Wikipedia page entitled “Black Exeter NH”
- Libraries could name a room or collection after the poet
- Community Centers, hospitals, coffeeshops could name an item, room, building after a Black citizen
- Scholarships could bear the name of any of the Paul, Hall or Whitfield family, or others
- Churches could celebrate and educate on Exeter’s Black history
- The American Independence Festival/Museum could honor Jude Hall and others
- Eagle Scouts, Girl Scouts, Honor Students, etc could do special projects on Black Exeter NH
- Home School students, Racial Unity Team, Genealogists, and more - projects as well
- Local scholars are invited to fill in the blanks and/or pose questions that arise from the report above!

*Thank you to the Exeter Historical Society for their assistance on this report.
And thank you for taking the time to read it, please pass it on...*