

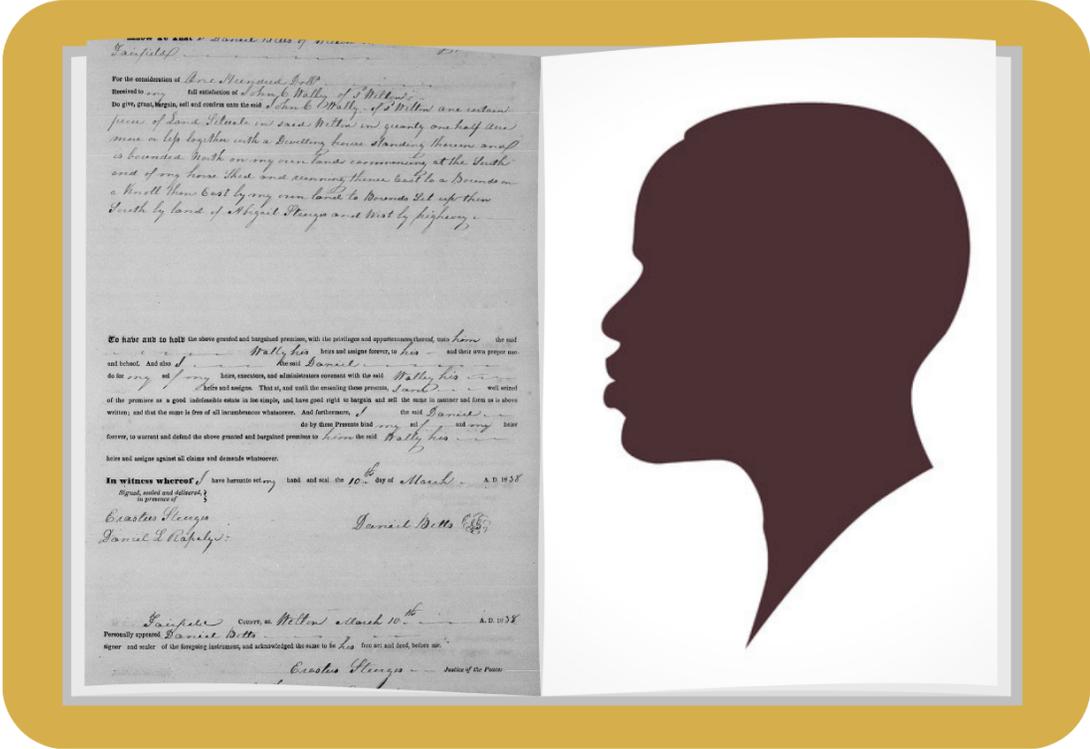


Witness **STONES**

# Installation Ceremony HONORING JOHN C. WALLY

JUNE 10, 2023

WILTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the spirit of collaboration, we give thanks to all who supported this work in a multitude of ways: spiritually, financially, and educationally.



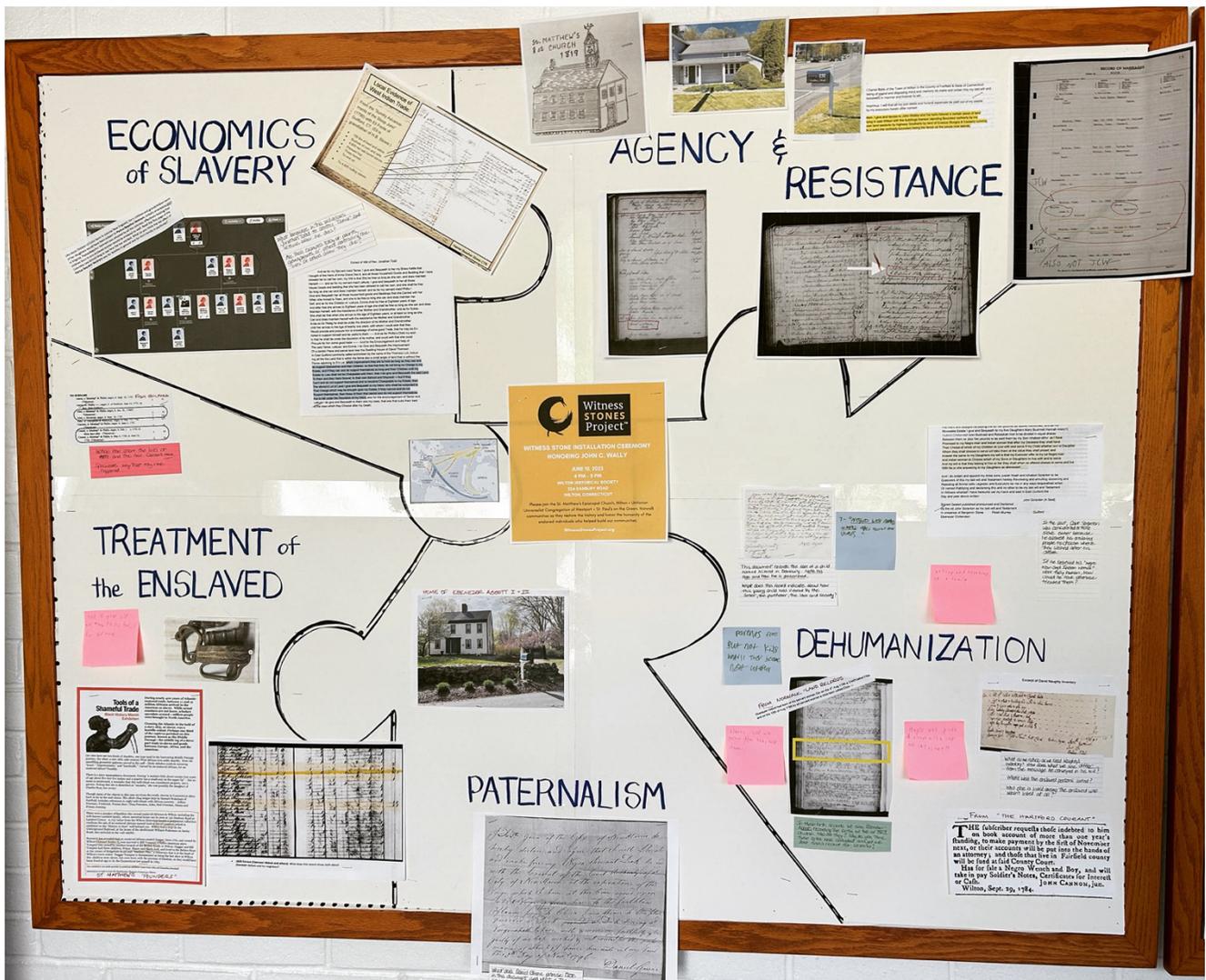
In gratitude for our collaboration, we give thanks to the research, expertise, and passion that **Dr. Julie Hughes** continues to give to all of us in uncovering the stories of those enslaved persons who might otherwise have remained forgotten in our communities.

## PROGRAM

Welcome	Nick Foster, Executive Director <i>Wilton Historical Society</i>
Opening Words of Prayer and Invocation	The Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse, Senior Minister <i>Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Westport</i>
The Witness Stones Project	Dennis Culliton, Executive Director Liz Lightfoot, Director of Operations <i>The Witness Stones Project</i>
A Collaboration of Churches	Sharon Pearson, Project Coordinator <i>St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Wilton</i>
Researching Enslavement in our Communities	Dr. Julie Hughes, Archivist <i>The Carol &amp; Robert Russell Wilton History Room, Wilton Library</i>
Learning the Truth About Slavery's History	Reed Fontilla, rising 8 <sup>th</sup> grade student <i>Unitarian Universalist Congregation</i>
Meet John C. Wally	Doug Gubner, rising 7 <sup>th</sup> grade student <i>St. Matthew's Episcopal Church</i>
Witness Stones Project Teacher Acknowledgement	Nate Pawelek, Acting Lead for Children and Youth Faith Formation <i>Unitarian Universalist Congregation</i>
"The Bell Ringer" by David Whyte	Becky Hudspeth <i>St. Matthew's Episcopal Church</i>
Witness Stone Unveiling	Students of our congregations
Closing Words and Prayer	The Rev. Marissa Rohrbach, Rector <i>St. Matthew's Episcopal Church</i>

# THE FIVE THEMES OF SLAVERY

using  
JOHN C. WALLY (and other) DOCUMENTS



**Dehumanization:** The process of depriving a person or group of persons of positive human traits. Demonizing an enemy, making them seem less than human and hence not worthy of humane treatment.

**Paternalism:** The practice of people in power to restrict the rights of their subordinates while claiming it is for their own good.

**Treatment:** Enslaved people were regarded and treated as property with little to no rights.

**Economics:** Slavery benefited the slaver-holder and the economy overall; it was cheaper to enslave someone rather than to pay someone to do work.

**Agency & Resistance:** These are decisions that the enslaved can make independently showing free choice. This includes deciding who to marry or having their children baptized, running away, or other acts of resistance.

## LEARNING THE TRUTH ABOUT SLAVERY'S HISTORY

*by Reed Fontilla*

Hello, my name is Reed Fontilla. Did you know that even some enslavers thought their own practices of slavery were horrible? That's how awful it was! In our Faith Formation classes this year, we learned about the history of 17<sup>th</sup> century colonial Connecticut, and how settlers from Europe treated indigenous people and eventually Africans. We took a trip to Washington DC to visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture, so we could see eye witness accounts of what slavery was like from the perspective of those enslaved, not just the enslavers. This was part of a larger project called the Witness Stones Project or WSP. We got to learn from Dennis Culliton, the co-founder of the Witness Stones Project, about why he started this program. WSP is an organization that sets out to learn about the lives of enslaved persons and to honor their stories.

Slavery in the Americas began when Columbus colonized what he called Hispaniola and what is today known as Haiti and the Dominican Republic. He was searching for India and gold. Similar to most Europeans of the time, he was looking for a way to make easy money. When he arrived in this new land, he claimed it as property of Spain in the name of Christianity. He forced people from the gentle native tribe, Taino, to mine for him without pay. Columbus and his entourage brought disease to the tribe. Without immunity to new diseases many of the Tainos (shockingly, almost 90%), died. Columbus was eventually imprisoned for his barbaric acts in Hispaniola. We don't often learn that in school.

Did you know that Columbus captured thousands of healthy Taino people to bring to Spain as slave gifts for Queen Isabella? Almost all of them died, but the idea of slave transportation didn't die. Explorers and traders who came *after* Columbus took his idea to import slaves and simply changed the direction. Instead of the West Indies to Europe, why not Africa to the Americas?

Africans had already been introduced to European diseases, and they were seen as hardy farmers. Because of Columbus, a cycle was established. People from Africa would be used to mine for gold, and later to work on plantations. These raw materials were exported to Europe in exchange for molasses, rum, spices and firearms. These were then brought to Africa and traded for people who had been captured by local tribes there. The captured Africans were shipped west and used to start the cycle again. The cycle, or Triangle Trade, continued for two centuries.

The Triangle Trade made enslavers and many of the towns along the Triangle Trade route incredibly wealthy. Whether by participating in slave labor as an enslaver or by providing the basic needs of the slave labor force elsewhere, the industry was incredibly profitable, and you may be surprised to learn, it enriched many of the towns on the shores of Connecticut.

Traveling across the Atlantic was a dangerous trip for the enslaved. 1 in 6 people died during the trip. Of the 12 million people taken from their homes in African countries, over 2 million died en route. That's like everyone in Chicago dying!

This year, we set out to learn about one specific enslaved person to fully understand the impact of the Triangle Trade. Thanks to the WSP, we are slowly starting to imagine slavery from the perspective of individual enslaved people. One of these people is a local man named Lazarus, (aka John C. Wally) from Wilton, CT. He had been born into slavery in the early 1800s and became a freeman sometime between 1820 and 1830.

The Triangle Trade imported Gin, an African woman brought to America in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. She had children and grandchildren born into slavery. One of whom is John C. Wally. Interestingly, she was brought from Guinea, prompting her name. She survived the horrible trip, and being forced to have children.

After John C Wally became a free man, he married Harriett Brush and had at least one child. Unfortunately, we do not know the record of John's child or birthdate. Details of enslaved people were often not recorded because their lives weren't valued by those keeping records. However, we do know that John C. Wally was a bell ringer for the St. Matthew's Episcopal Church in Wilton, and his salary was \$9 per year. We also know he owned a house on Danbury Road in Wilton, as the sale of the property was recorded in 1848. He sold the house (which still stands today) for \$412. The house today is worth around 1.6 million dollars!

Obviously, slavery worked really well at making some people money. But it also was cruel and unjust. If slavery were so horrible, why did it continue for so long?

Slavery made some people rich, and when some people are wealthy, they try to cover up the harsh truth behind how that money was earned. Enslavers justified the horror by creating a conspiracy theory of racial inequality. They used passages from the Bible to support it, and laws were passed to make sure it would never go away.

Eventually, it did go away. We no longer have slavery, but the belief of racial inequality still lives on. I believe the best way to stop racial inequality is to learn the truth and history of slavery. And the truth is, despite all odds against him, John C. Wally was a dignified individual with a family and a contributor to our community. If we can work together to learn the history of more enslaved persons, we will be fighting to end racial inequality together.

## MEET JOHN C. WALLY

*by Doug Gubner*

The year is 1859. At his bedside, Sarah Cam prays for her friend and neighbor. “Tuberculosis is a serious disease,” the doctor’s voice was clear inside her head. “There’s nothing you can do, unfortunately.” John C. Wally, a freed man of color, husband of the deceased Harriet Wally and father of Samuel Wally, then died.

John C. Wally was first documented as an enslaved boy named Lazarus scrawled across slips of paper left by one of his master’s descendants. He grew up being owned in Wilton by Ebenezer Abbott II who is listed as owning 3 slaves in 1790, 2 in 1800, 1 in 1810 and 1 in 1820. Abbott gave Lazarus to his son, Nathan (who was rumored to be in cahoots with the devil) in his will. Lazarus changed his name sometime between 1820 and 1829 when he was freed. Lazarus, now John C. Wally, married Harriet Brush by a justice of the peace in December of 1829 and by Reverend Origin P. Holcomb in St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church the following January.

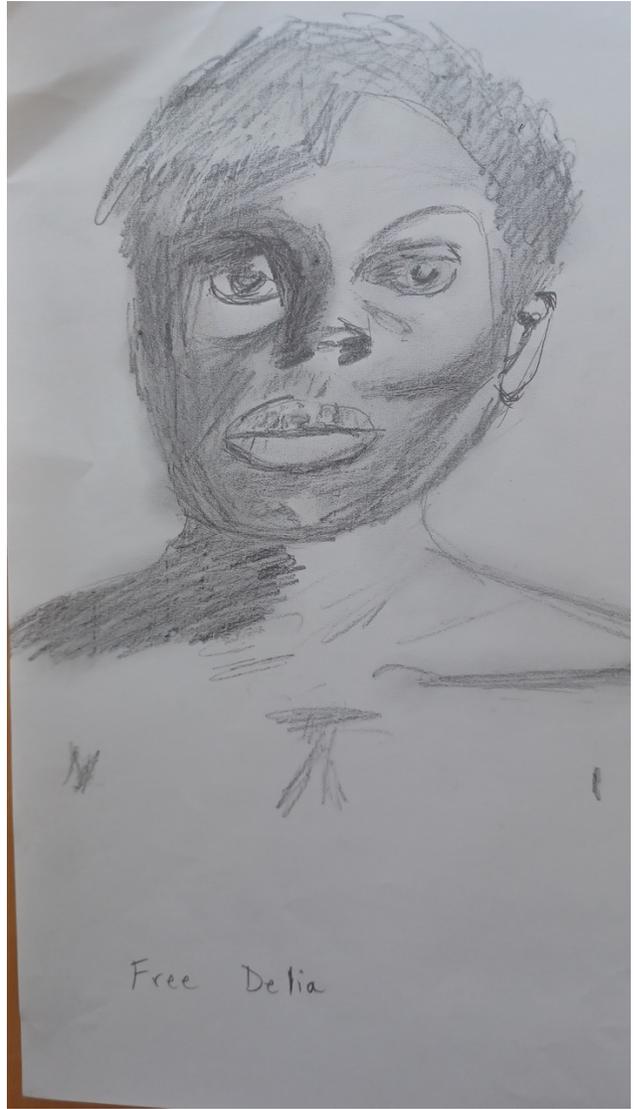
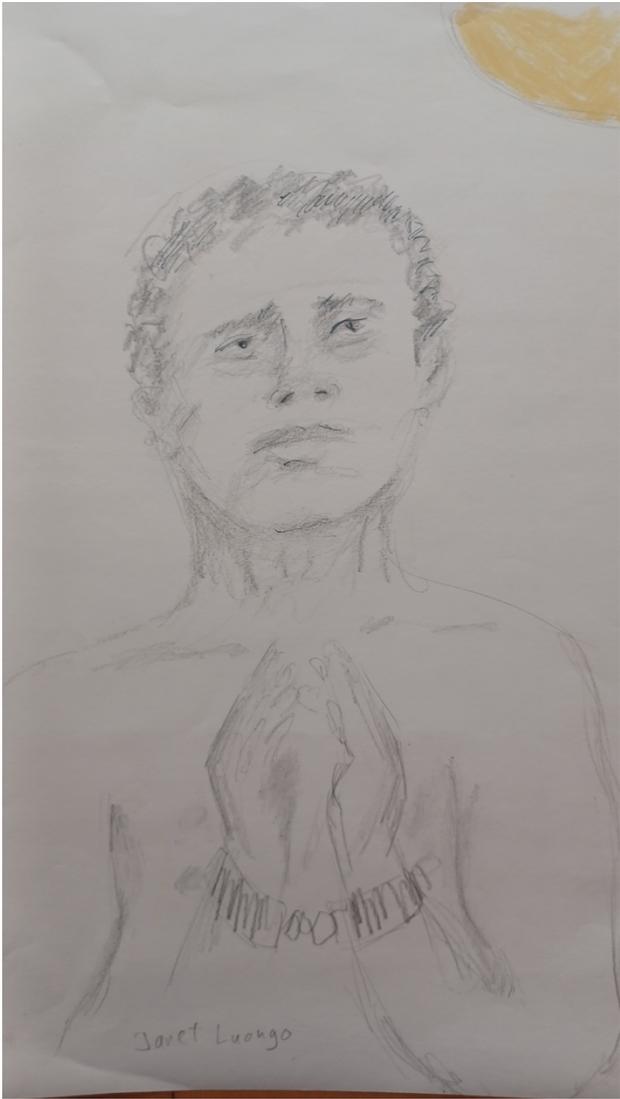
The church is now part of the WEPCO complex, but was originally on Route 7. The stone church now on the property is the second of three versions of St. Matthew’s. John C. Wally worked for the first version made of wood, resembling the Wilton Congregational Church. John was paid an annual salary of \$9 to ring the church bell, sweep the floor, and start the fire. He appears as a freed head of household of three (himself, his wife, and his son Samuel Solomon Wally who was baptized at St. Matthew’s in 1842).

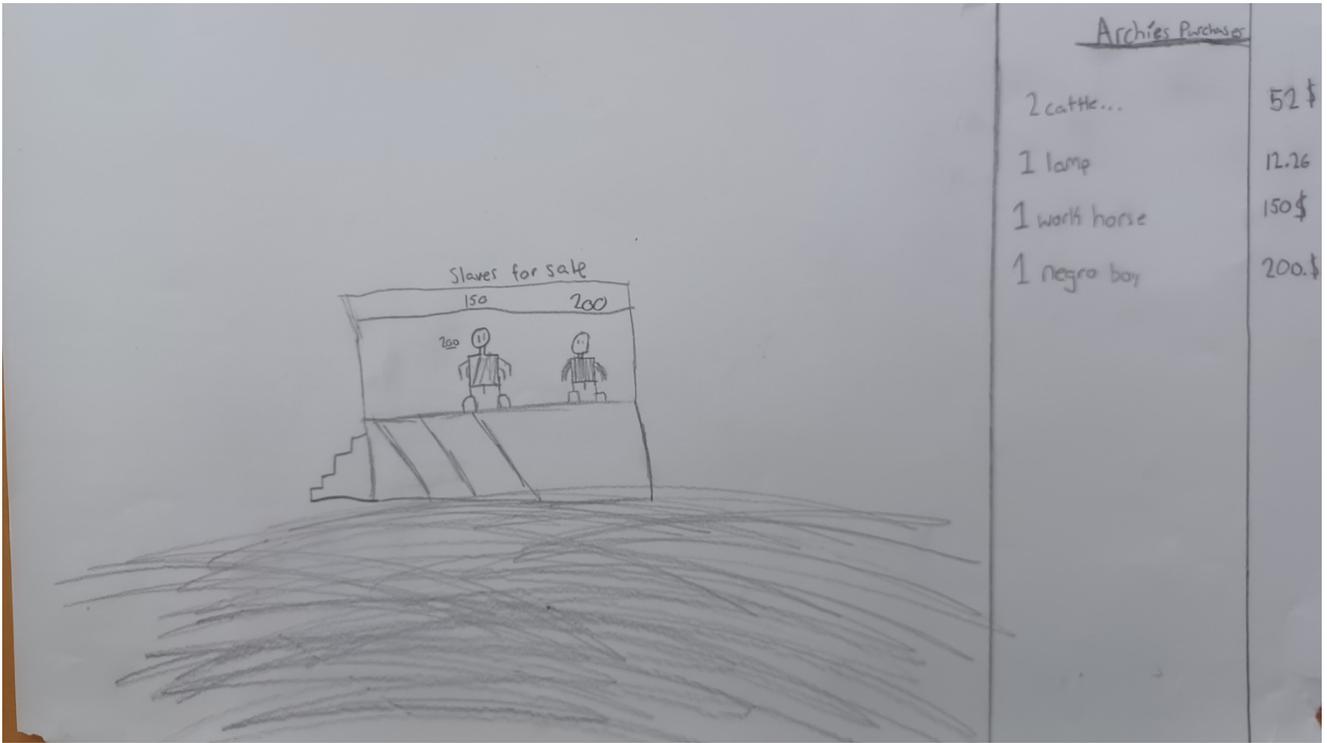
He then worked as a free man, possibly tending to horses belonging to Daniel Betts. John purchased .5 acres of land with a dwelling on it across the street from Bett’s home and next door to Bett’s own stables. This was very near St. Matthew’s. When Daniel Betts passed away, in his will it stated that the .5 acres of land was previously gifted to John C. Wally was to be passed on to him, ensuring Wally would continue to live on that property. Soon after this, John sold the property - for a tidy profit - and then he disappeared without any records of him or his family.

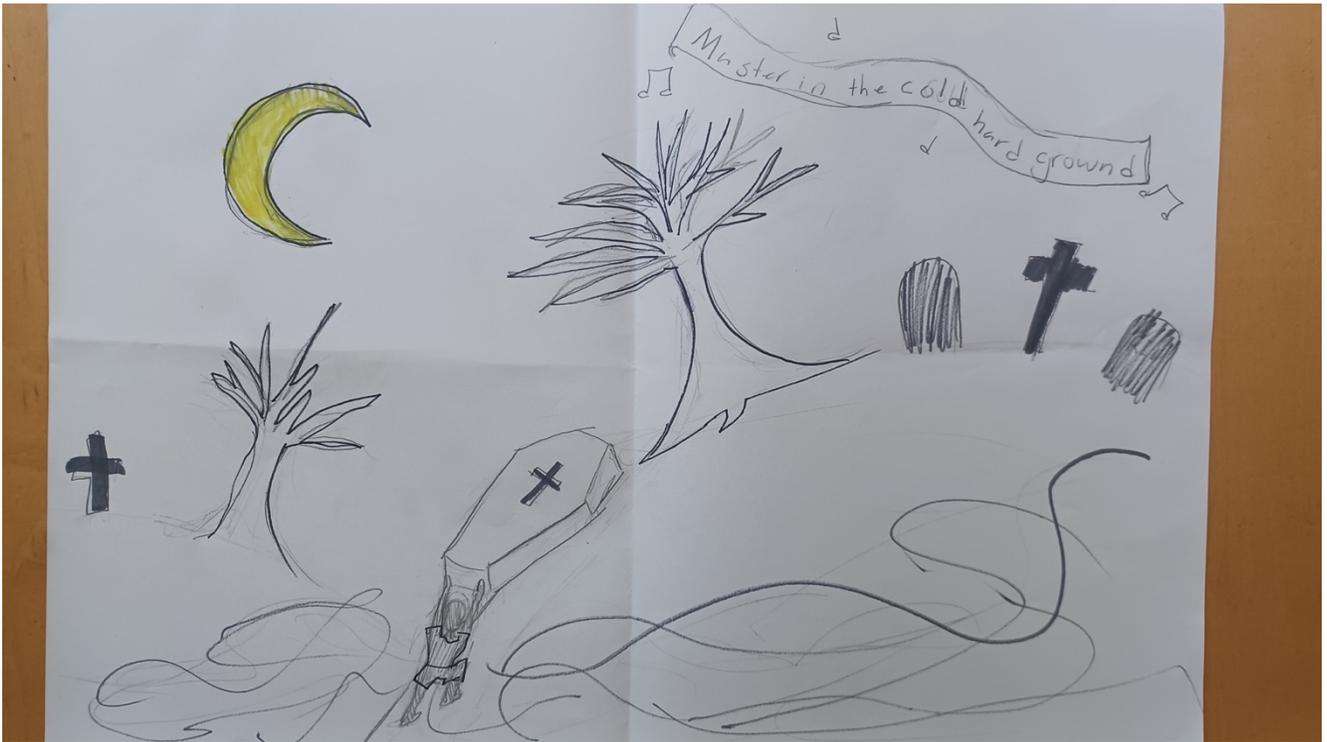
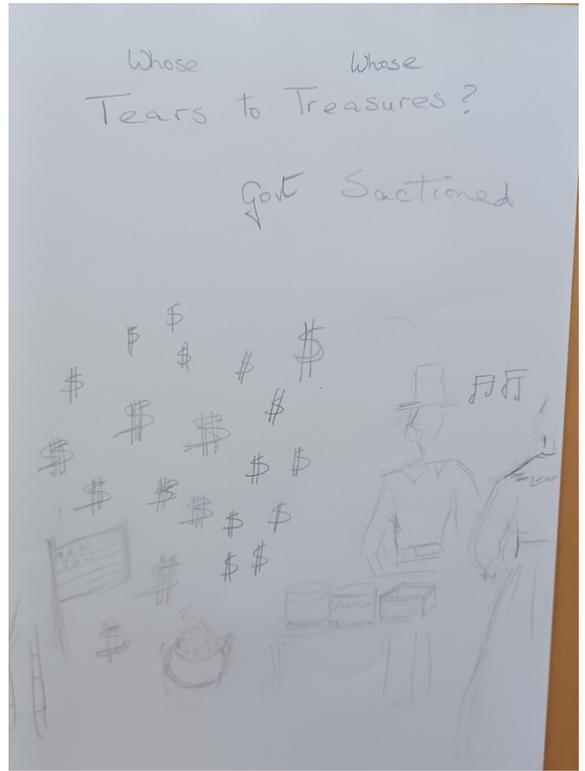
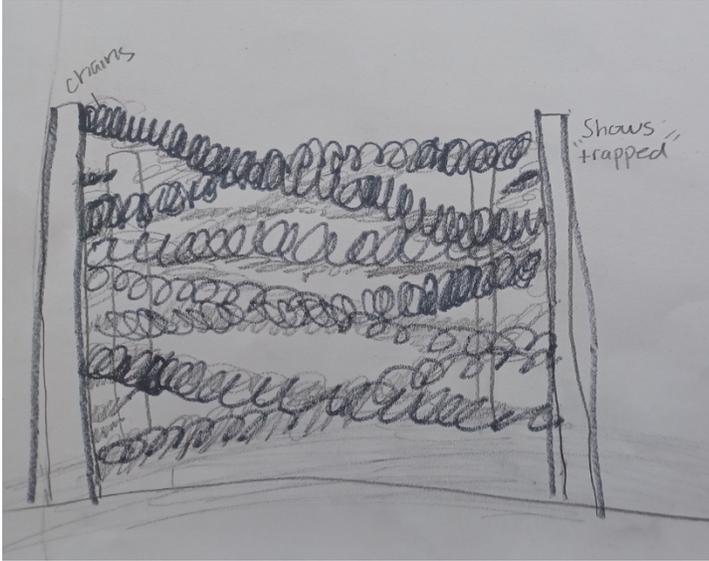
For 175 years, no one knew what became of Harriet, Samuel, and John Wally. Until a short time ago, as Mrs. Sharon Pearson was updating the Wally family tree, she stumbled upon a hint under Harriet Wally. Investigating, she found that Harriet and an unknown daughter (to us) named Betsey had died and were buried in Bridgeport! Dr. Julie Hughes quickly got on the case and discovered the family showed up in Bridgeport, Connecticut in the 1850 census along with a daughter, Betsey. She also uncovered loan papers that stated he owned 2 feather beds and one bedstead, six chairs, a table, a clock, and a mirror. As previously stated, John C. Wally died of consumption, a.k.a tuberculosis in January 1859. His son Samuel was never heard from again, and is still missing to this day.

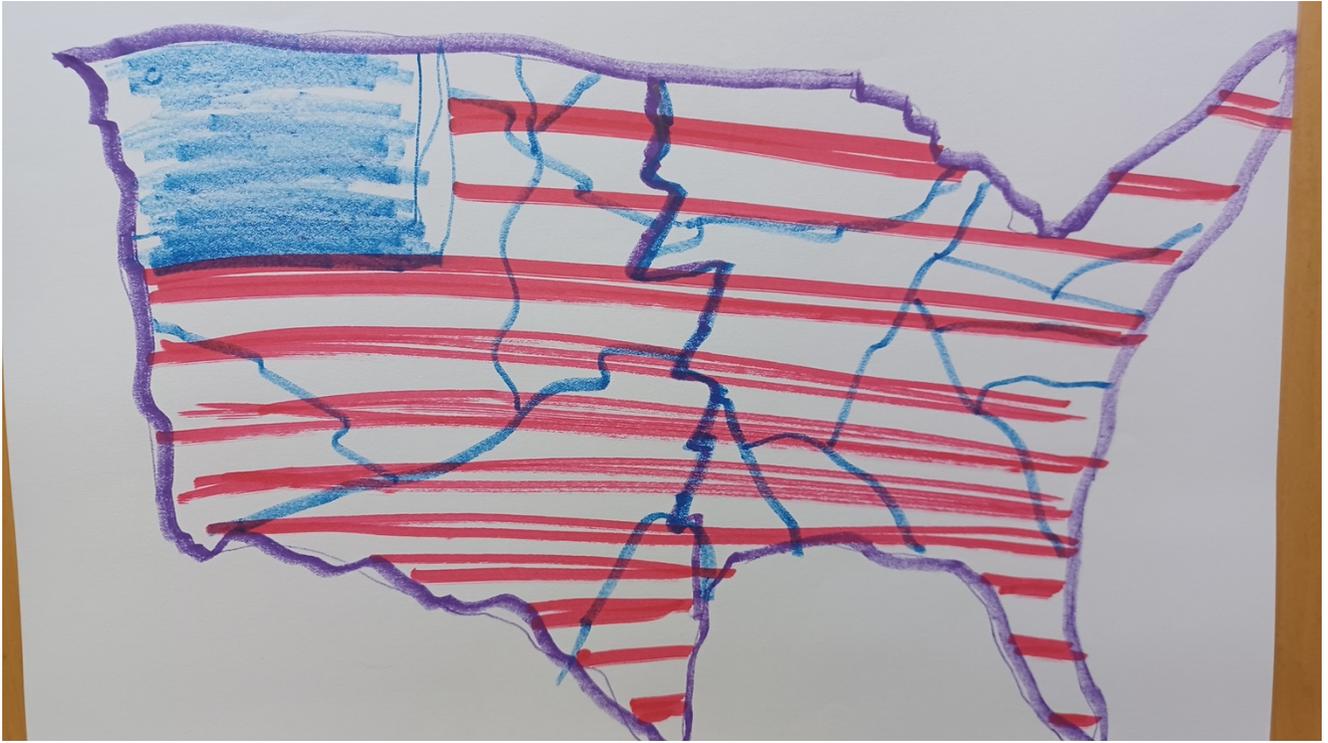
# STUDENT ARTWORK











*“Emancipation”*



## THE BELL RINGER<sup>1</sup>

*by David Whyte*

Consider the bell ringer as an image of the human soul, he stands foursquare on the stone flagged ground, and surrounded by a circle of communal concentration searches in his fixed aloneness for a world beyond straight, human, eye to eye, discourse, in this case above him, the collision of metal worlds chiming 'to each bend and lift of the knees, letting his weight bear down on the rope, creating out of the heave and upward pull, a hollowed out brass utterance, a resonant on-going argument for his continued presence, independent of daily mood or the necessities for a verbal proclamation.

Consider the reason for his continued attendance to the art. Caught in a committed circle of constant practice yet freed in the vertical from a horizontal ever present and exhausting human participation, the ultimate arbitration an over arching, straight-out relationship with sound.

Somewhere above in the vertical he touches another firmament, his face line, preoccupied or even set against the world, can still announce joy in the sweet resonance of birth, of drama in the long, extended, over and over carillions of marriage.

No matter the clarity or cloudiness of the day, he can follow that out-going tide of sound right to the very edge of the circled horizon until it ebbs back around him into the center of things, pooling to a more rhythmic toll, a deeper, more concentrated commemoration, the knelling way the world sounds inside when we've heard the ease and release of a last breath.

Let him stand there then for the human soul, let his weight come true on the rope, the way we want to lean into the center of things, the way we want to fall with the gravity of the situation and then afterwards laugh and defy it with an upward ultimately untraceable flight, a great ungovernable ringing announcement to the world that something, somewhere, has changed.

Consider the bellringer as one of us, attempting some unachieved, magnificent difference in the world, far above and far beyond the stone-closed space we seem to occupy.

Below we're all effort, listening and wilful concentration, above like a moving sea, another power shoulders just for a moment the whole burden, lifts us against our will, lets us find in the skyward pull a needed antidote to surface noise, a gravity against gravity, another way to hear amid the clamor of the heavens.

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<sup>1</sup> *River Flow: New & Selected Poems 1984-2007* (Langley, WA: Many Rivers Press, 2007), 62-65. (This poem has been reformatted to fit to the page.)

## STUDENTS

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Nathan Pawelek  
Sharon Pearson

Ravi Sankar  
Sudha Sankar



*"Imagining a Free John C. Wally" by Nate Pawelek*

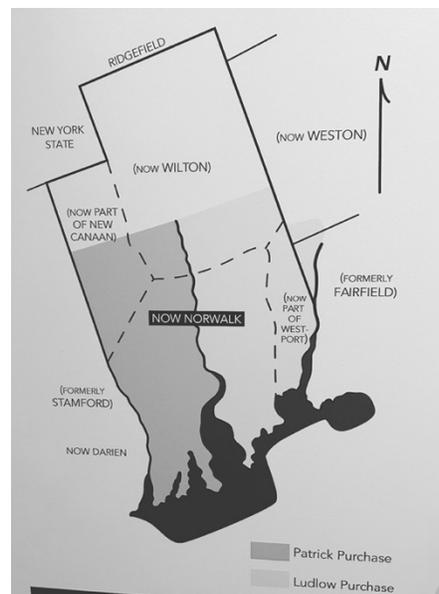
## A BRIEF HISTORY OF EARLY NORWALK & SLAVERY (INCLUDING WILTON & WESTPORT)

The city of Norwalk derives its name from a mispronunciation of the Native American name Naramoke or Naramake. The native people who first contacted European settlers at Norwalk were the Norwalke Indians, a small tribe of the Siwanoy, an Indigenous band of Munsee-speaking Eastern Algonquian people, from what is now southern New York and western Connecticut, including Fairfield County and its coastline. By 1640, their territory extended from Hell Gate to Norwalk, and as far inland as White Plains. They were farmers and lived peacefully on the land; most likely succumbing to disease from the European explorers or at the hands of the Dutch when our area was first colonized by the English.

Norwalk, which included all of Wilton and parts of Westport, Weston, and New Canaan, was first settled by farmer-settlers who were called “Proprietors,” who first lived along the mouth of the Norwalk River (now East Norwalk) and established their own congregational (Puritan) parish.

### Early Settlement<sup>2</sup>

- |              |   |
|--------------|---|
| 1614         | First recorded European contact with Norwalk by Dutch navigator Adriaen Block   |
| 20 Apr 1640  | Daniel Patrick purchased land west of the Norwalk River and east of the Five Mile River   |
| 26 Feb 1641  | Roger Ludlow purchased land east of the Norwalk River   |
| 1649         | The first settlers arrived from Hartford  |
| 11 Sept 1651 | Norwalk was incorporated as a town  |
| 1659         | Congregational Church in Norwalk was founded  |
| 1704         | Families from Norwalk began to move north along the Norwalk River and settle near today’s Cannondale  |
| 1726         | There are enough families (in what is now Wilton) to petition the Assembly for a separate church or society (today’s Wilton Congregational Church)  |
| 1737         | St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was founded after a growing number of Church of Englanders who were worshipping at the Congregational Church petitioned the Norwalk Town Assembly for the right to establish their own parish.  |
| 1802         | Despite Norwalk’s objections, the people of Wilton sought and were granted separate town government status by an act of the Connecticut General Assembly.   |
| 1 July 1802  | Episcopalians (living in Wilton but members of St. Paul’s in Norwalk) petition to establish a Wilton Episcopal Parish.  |
| 20 Dec 1802  | They decide to build a church on a 50’ x 65’ plot owned by Capt. Samuel Belden that was located across from his tavern on “Old Highway.” ( <i>Note:</i> Capt. Daniel Betts, who also owned another nearby tavern, was the collector of funds for the church building.) They also vote to acquire 1/6 <sup>th</sup> share of the minister from St. Paul’s. |
| 11 Aug 1819  | The Rt. Rev. John Hobart, bishop of New York and Connecticut, formerly consecrates St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church.  |
| 28 May 1835  | The town of Westport is officially incorporated, with lands from Fairfield, Weston, and Norwalk.  |



<sup>2</sup> Map from Norwalk Historical Society, Mill Hill history exhibit

## Slavery

Slavery in Connecticut dates as far back as the mid-1600s. Initially enacted in 1662 in Virginia, *Partus Sequitur Ventrem* was adopted by all the colonies, effectively holding that children born to any enslaved woman would be enslaved as well. Connecticut's growing agricultural industry fostered slavery's expansion, and by the time of the American Revolution, Connecticut had the largest number of slaves in New England.

9 Mar 1748/9	The earliest written record extant pertaining to slaves in Norwalk is a deed of sale recorded for the transfer to Moses St. John of Dick, a black man, by his five co-owners. <sup>3</sup>
1756 census	94 recorded slaves in Norwalk
1774 census	136 recorded slaves in Norwalk
1784	Connecticut Gradual Abolition Law (official name: <i>An Act Concerning Indian, Mulatto, and Negro Servants and Slaves</i> ).
1790 census	67 families held a total of 117 slaves
1810 census	12 slaves listed in Norwalk (the decrease in number was most likely due to the 1784 Act)
1817	The Connecticut Supreme Court clarified the 1784 Act in the case of Windsor v. Hartford that such a child was not enslaved but in servitude until age 25.
1848	Slavery is completely abolished by law in Connecticut (the last of the New England states)

In 1790, the US Census listed enslaved people owned by households. In that census Greenwich, Stamford, and Norwalk are all listed together. Based on research done by historian Judy Cobin of Norwalk, the number of free African Americans in Norwalk was 53 and the number of enslaved people was 68. A listing of these families is noted on a display at Norwalk Historical Society at Mill Hill; four ministers are listed as enslavers in the 1790 census data, including Wilton's Ebenezer Abbott with 3 slaves.

A series of enactments gradually gave freedom to Connecticut slaves. No Negro or mulatto born in the state after March 1, 1784 could be held in servitude after age 25. It did not free the mother, the father, or any other adults. Neither did the children gain their full freedom until they reached, for men, age 25, and for women, age 21. However, this rule did not apply to enslaved individuals sojourning or traveling in the state with their masters. After 1792 slaves could not be transported out of the state for sale in another state. When Stephen Betts 2<sup>nd</sup> of Norwalk sold four Negroes out of state, Isaac Hillard, a zealous abolitionist from Redding, brought charges against him.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ray, Deborah Wing & Gloria P. Stewart. *Norwalk: Being an Historical Account of That Connecticut Town* (Norwalk Historical Society Inc., 1979), 118.

<sup>4</sup> Ray, 119.

## HISTORICAL DATA<sup>5</sup> ABOUT JOHN C. WALLY

- 1786 & 1789 “Ebenezer Abbott II had born of his servant woman Gin on the 4<sup>th</sup> Aug 1786 a Child called Fillis and on the 12<sup>th</sup> of Aug 1789 by sd servant woman a child born called Clois ---” (note: Gin is Philis/Philes – grandmother of Lazarus)
- 1790-1789 Ebenezer Abbott II (living at 51 Shadow Lane in Norwalk/Wilton) is shown owning slaves in the 1790 (3), 1800 (2), 1810, and 1820 (1) censuses: Clois/aka Chloe, Dorcas/aka Dark, Philes/aka Gin, Philes Eliza/Manning Treadwell Mead, Thomas/Tom, unknown woman, Lazarus (who takes his own name on his emancipation: John C. Wally)
- c. 1804 Birth of Lazarus
- c.1804-1821 Ebenezer Abbott II “gifts” Lazarus to his son, Nathan Abbott who was born 1782. (Ebenezer Abbott II died in 1821),
- 1820 census 1 slave owned by Ebenezer Abbott
- 1820 census 1 free colored person living at Nathan Abbott household [we do not know it was John]
- 14 Dec 1829 John C. Wally marries Harriett Brush by a Justice of the Peace
- 3 Jan 1830 John C. Wally marries Harriet Brush by Rev. Origin P. Holcomb of St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church, Wilton
- 1830 census John C. Wally shows up as free-colored and head of household of 3 (1 male, 1 female, 1 male under 10) (Note: this may have been his daughter Betsey, not a son)
- 1 Oct 1832 St. Matthew’s pays John C. Wally \$9 annual salary for ringing the bell, sweeping the floor, and lighting the fire
- ??? Works as a free man for Capt. Daniel Betts IV (possibly tending horses; his house was next to Capt. Betts’ stables)
- 10 Mar 1838 Purchases land and a dwelling house from Daniel Betts (adjacent to Bett’s own land, and across Danbury Road from Betts’ own dwelling house). Wally was either the 2nd or 3rd Black person in Wilton to own land.
- Nov 1841 Samuel Solomon Wally, infant son of John C. and Harriet Brush Wally is baptized at St. Matthew’s Episcopal Church
- 1847 Daniel Betts estate notes property owned by Wally [In his will, Daniel Betts left Wally the same property that Wally had already purchased from him in 1838; it was a weird thing to do, because Betts no longer owned the property, and it is a good thing he didn’t, because if he had owned the property Wally would never have gotten it: Betts died insolvent and all his lands were auctioned off to pay his debts; it is unclear why Betts tried to leave Wally the land: did he forget he’d sold it to Wally? Luckily, the sale had been recorded and the property legally was Wally’s]
- 28 Nov 1848 John C. Wally sells his .5 acres of land (near the Episcopal Church) with building for \$412 (4 times the original price) to Robert Green (now a commercial/office building at 232 Danbury Rd, listed in 2008 for \$1,574,900)
- 1850 census John C. Wally lives near the corner of High Street and Washington Avenue in Bridgeport (4th Ward); he is listed as a laborer.
- 4 Mar 1852 Betsey Walley, daughter of Harriett and John C. Wally, dies at age 13; buried in Mt. Grove Cemetery (northwest section), Bridgeport.
- 18 Aug 1854 Harriett Walley, wife of John C., dies at age 46; buried in Mt. Grove Cemetery (northwest section) in Bridgeport alongside her daughter Betsey.
- June 1858 Wally owns two feather beds and one bedstead, in addition to six chairs, a table, a clock, and a mirror; they are collateral for a loan of \$33 from his neighbor Sarah Cam (located on 1850 Bridgeport as “S. Scam”). The agreement specifically says he was using those items for “housekeeping,” in other words, he still had a house (or other residence).
- 22 Jan 1859 John C. Wally (spelled Walley) died in Bridgeport, CT from consumption at the age of 55. His burial spot is currently unknown.

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<sup>5</sup> Research of Dr. Julie Hughes and used by our students to grasp what we know of the life of John C. Wally.



The Witness Stones Project™ is an educational initiative whose mission is to restore the history and honor the humanity of the enslaved individuals who helped build our communities.

The Project provides local archival research, professional teacher development, a classroom curriculum, and public programming to help students discover and

chronicle the local history of slavery. The final component of the work in each community is the placement of Witness Stone Memorials™ that honor enslaved individuals where they lived, worked, or worshiped.

The Project has been supported financially by school fees, individual donations, local grants, and countless volunteer hours. We are now seeking philanthropic support so that we can continue reach every interested community, regardless of the local resources. Our vision is communities committed to learning their history, dismantling current inequities, and building a just future.

<https://witnessstonesproject.org>

### **The Inspiration of the Sankofa Symbol<sup>6</sup>**

The word Sankofa is from the Asante Twi language of the Akan people of Western Africa. This area, which we now know as Ghana and the Ivory Coast, is where many (if not most) of those who were captured and sold into slavery bound for the “New World” originated. The word itself means, “to return and get it” (*san* – “to return”; *ko* – “to go”; *fa* – “to fetch, to seek and take”).

The most prominent of the Asante Adinkra symbols for the concept of Sankofa “depicts a mythical bird flying forward with its head turned backward. The egg in its mouth represents the ‘gems’ or knowledge of the past upon which wisdom is based; it also signifies the generation to come that would benefit from that wisdom.”<sup>7</sup> Other descriptions of this mythical bird symbol describe its feet firmly planted forward with its head turned backwards to take an egg off of its back.

In either case, the Sankofa symbol is associated with the proverb, “*Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi*,” which translates to “It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten.” The symbol has been embraced by a number of Africana Studies departments and institutions to signify the quest for wisdom, acquired by reflecting on the past, in order to help build a stronger future.

### **The Witness Stones Project aspires to be an expression of Sankofa.**

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<sup>6</sup> Artist Cathi Bosco created this symbol for the Witness Stones Project based on her interpretation of the word Sankofa.

<sup>7</sup> The Spirituals Project at the University of Denver. “African Tradition, Proverbs, and Sankofa”. 2004. Archived from the original on 20 April 2011. Retrieved 19 February 2010.