

# THE AMISTAD AFRICANS IN FARMINGTON CONNECTICUT

## INTRODUCTION

These letters concerning the Amistad Africans have been transcribed by Ann J. Arcari, Farmington Room Librarian and members of the Farmington Historical Society for use in tours of Farmington's Amistad sites, and also for the use of students and other researchers. The letters (photocopies) were purchased from the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University, New Orleans, the owning institution. There are many more letters than we have in Farmington, and the Farmington Library has a few more that are not presented here. The following letters were selected for the details they provide about the life of the Mendians, as they were sometimes called, before they were set free by the Supreme Court and while they lived here in our town from March to November of 1841. Farmington Library staff may add more letters in future as time permits.

These letters reveal the thinking of local Abolitionists involved in the case. Farmington was strongly Abolitionist and by 1836 local men and women had formed a Farmington Anti-Slavery Society, and in the next year provided many of the officers and members of the Hartford Abolition Society.<sup>1</sup>

Austin F. Williams, John Treadwell Norton and Samuel Deming were in constant communication with James Birney, Lewis Tappan, Simeon Jocelyn and others concerning the fate of the Africans and were making plans to bring the Africans to Farmington, or some other small town, well before they were declared free. The letters reveal that the Abolitionists were considering resorting to force to get the Africans out of the hands of the government, a testament to the strong feelings of these church-going evangelical Christians who were the pillars of their communities. Later, when Cinque and his companions lived in our village, Williams, Deming and Norton wrote frequent letters to Lewis Tappan and the New York Committee to let them know what was happening here, both the good and the bad. Some of the letters reveal that not everyone in town was pleased to have the Africans here, as Austin Williams' letter of September 7th reveals. For the most part, however, once here, the Africans were accepted in the community and great interest in their welfare was manifested.

A word about the transcriptions may be useful. The letters were often written in haste, making legibility difficult at times. Some of the writers had better handwriting than others. Sometimes the style of the time seems cumbersome and overwrought, but we have tried to transcribe what we can read, as it was written. At times, the transcribers have added question marks, brackets or blanks to indicate words not legible, left out or questioned. We have found that going back to a letter after a time may make meaning or legibility clearer. We will make revisions to the letters as time permits. For the basic story of the Amistad Revolt or for persons mentioned in the letters, consult one of the many books available, particularly Howard Jones' *Mutiny on the Amistad*, For more about the Farmington men, see Howard Dean Myers book for young people, *Amistad, A Long Road to Freedom*. For information about the Farmington men, contact Ann J. Arcari at the Farmington Library.

Please cite the letters in footnotes and bibliographies as follows:

American Missionary Association Archives, Amistad Research Center, Inc., Tulane University.

The Farmington Library may be cited as provider of the transcriptions. Request for copies of the originals should be made to the Amistad Research Center, Tilton Hall, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA 70118; [arc@mailhost.tcs.tulane.edu](mailto:arc@mailhost.tcs.tulane.edu). Questions about the transcriptions may be made to Ann J. Arcari, Farmington Room Librarian, Farmington Library, at 860 673-6791 or by email; [arcarci@farmingtonlibct.org](mailto:arcarci@farmingtonlibct.org). The Farmington Library is indebted to the Amistad Research Center for permission to add these letters to our homepage.

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