

The Totoket Historical Society

**Isaac & Anna Freeman
1812 – 1910**

by

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Introduction:

On April 15, 2012 The Totoket Historical Society received a request from Professor Richard Archer of Whittier College, Whittier, CA via its email for information concerning Isaac and Anna Freeman, a mixed race couple living in North Branford in 1860. Dr. Archer was in the process of writing a book on racial attitudes in anti-bellum New England. I searched our computer database but found nothing relating to this subject. Having full access to Ancestry.com I began a brief search of this family. Combined with a search of the birth, marriage and death records in both North Branford and Wallingford, the following story resulted.

Isaac Freeman, a free black man, was born to Jordan and Nancy Freeman in Lyme, Connecticut on May 7, 1812. Little is known of his whereabouts until the 1850 federal census when he is found in the Northford section of North Branford as a farm laborer apparently working for Mary Noyes. He did not necessarily live in that residence. With him in the same household is Cyndarilla Freeman, black, 46 years old. Any relation between them is unknown. I should note that Isaac Freeman is likely reported also in the 1840 census in North Branford. Prior to 1850 only the name of the head of the household was reported on the census form. Others living in the household were reported as male or female within certain age groups, that is under 10, 10-23, 24-35, etc. Free blacks and slaves were listed separately. In 1840 under the household of Mary Noyes there were listed two free blacks who fit the ages and sex of Isaac and Cyndarilla Freeman.

The Mary Noyes noted above is most probably the widow of the Reverend Matthew Noyes who was the second minister of the Northford Congregational Church. He served after the death of the Reverend Warham Williams and lived in the Warham Williams house located where the Rite-Aid Pharmacy is now. Rev. Noyes served from 1789 until his death in 1839. It is known that the Rev. Noyes owned slaves. His widow Mary continued to live in the Warham Williams house until her death in 1851. Although slavery was abolished in Connecticut in 1848 freed slaves may well have continued to work and live with their former masters.

In the 1860 federal census Isaac is married to Anna, age 26. Anna was born in Ireland, and they have three children, Mary age 4, Isaac, age 2 and Bertha, age 2 months. Isaac owns \$200 worth of property. In the 1870 federal census the three mulatto children are living in Northford with Henry G. and Ann Fowler and their 2 year old daughter, Ella. There is an additional mulatto child, Hattie, age 8 in the household.

The question which brought me to investigate this family is: what happened to the parents? How did the children of Isaac and Anna Freeman come to live with the Fowlers?

A Google search for "Isaac Freeman" resulted in a marriage record for Isaac Freeman of Northford to Mrs. Dianna Low of Wallingford on January 3, 1849. Searching Wallingford vital statistics resulted in the same record but no mention was made of the races involved. Searching the North Branford Town records resulted in the following births and deaths.

Mary Freeman	No birth recorded. According to the census she was born 1856-1857.
Isaac Freeman	born March 4, 1858
Bertha Freeman	born March 14, 1860
Hattie Freeman	born March 14, 1862

The maiden name of the mother is not given in any of the above records. It simply says "Mrs. Freeman." In addition there was a May 7, 1856 death record for a Francis P. Freeman age 16 month, mulatto male, born and resided in North Branford. This would

place the birth in January of 1855. The birth is not recorded in North Branford. The child died of pneumonia. This child was most likely the child of Isaac and Anna Freeman. In the 1850 federal census Isaac Freeman's middle initial is also recorded as P.

An 1852 map of North Branford found in the Totoket Historical Society Archives shows the residence of I. Freeman at the northwest corner of the intersection of Totoket Road and Forest Road. I could find no record of a land transaction for Isaac Freeman in the North Branford Town records from 1831 to 1864. Isaac Freeman died on February 21, 1864. He was 52 years old. The cause of death is listed as "Convulsive Fits."

Further searching of the North Branford Town vital statistics resulted in a record of the marriage of Henry G. Fowler to Ann Freeman on April 2, 1867. Henry was born in New Haven and according to the record Ann was born in North Branford...not likely! Both resided in North Branford at the time of the marriage. They were married by Reverend Shelden Davis, rector of St. Andrews Episcopal Church in Northford. It is the recorded second marriage of both parties. It should have been the third marriage for Ann Freeman. Reference to an 1868 map of North Branford reveals that H. G. Fowler resided at the intersection of Middletown Avenue (Route 17) and Spruce Street just south of Northford Center.

The above information explains why the four mulatto children were living with a white couple in Northford in 1870. Ann Fowler was their mother. In addition to Ann's mulatto children she now has a child, Ella, age two, whose father is apparently Henry Fowler. The 1868 birth of Ella Fowler is not recorded in North Branford.

In the 1870 census only Mary, age 13 and Isaac, age 12 are listed as having attended school within that year. The other two mulatto children age 10 and 8 apparently did not attend school. Another curious notation is that Mary and Isaac are listed as being blind. Ann Fowler is recorded as being born in Ireland.

Isaac Freeman, age 12, mulatto, is also listed in the 1870 census in Durham, CT as a farm laborer. The census data in Durham was recorded 15 days later than that in North Branford. This is almost certainly the same individual. He is listed as having attended school within the year. He was working for Saul G. Stevens. The Fowler and Stevens families in this area were connected both by marriage and business. The census data also seems to indicate that Isaac was blind.

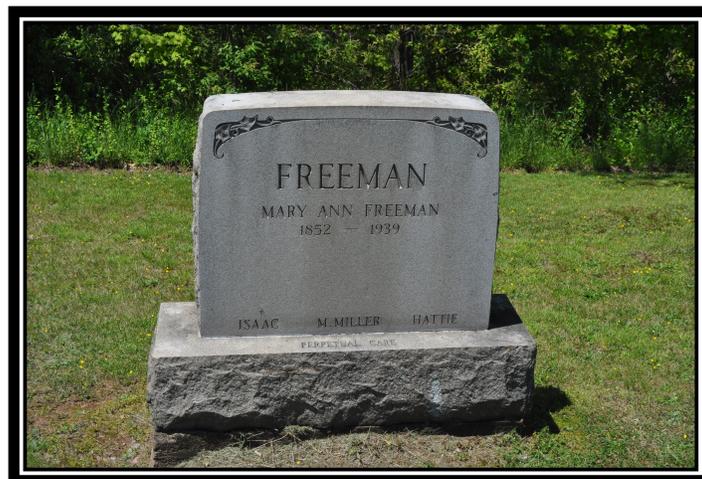
H. G Fowler is not recorded in the 1880 federal census for Northford but Ann Fowler and her daughter Ella are. Ann is listed as married, a housekeeper, born in Ireland. There is a Henry Fowler residing in Wallingford, a boarder, born in Connecticut, age 69 and a farmer. Henry reported he was 55 in the previous census. It is my belief that this Henry Fowler is the husband of Ann. He could have been working in Wallingford at that time. Hattie Freeman, age 18, is recorded as a domestic in North Branford in the home of David S. Stevens. Isaac is recorded as residing in Wallingford as a farm laborer for an Ives family.

The 1890 Federal census has largely been lost due to a small fire and bureaucratic bungling so we next proceed to 1900. In the 1900 federal census Ann Freeman is found in North Branford living with her daughter Ella. No occupation is reported for either of them. Note here that she is going by the surname "Freeman." She is reported to have been born in New York in November of 1834 and is widowed. The remarkable thing shown on this census report is that Ann states that she has had one child and that child is still living. Is she denying her mulatto children or did perhaps her daughter give the information to the census taker? Ella, the daughter is 31, single and living at home. She is reported to have been born in August of 1868. Tragedy struck the Freeman family when on June 25, 1900 Isaac Freeman, age 32, was struck and killed by a train in Wallingford, CT. Isaac was married at that time. There is a Mary Freeman residing in Branford in 1900, black, age 45 and single. She works as a cook and owns her own home. This may well be the daughter of Isaac and Anna Freeman of North Branford. She does state that both her parents were born in Connecticut. Bear in mind that the census data is riddled with errors and assumes the prejudices of the informant. We have seen many examples of that in the above census reports. A search of the North Branford vital statistics revealed that Henry Fowler died on May 18, 1891 of "old age." He was 82. His parents' names were not given.

In 1910 Ann Fowler is still living in Northford with her daughter Ella. Note here that she is again using the surname "Fowler." The form once again states the Ann was born in New York and her parents were born in the "United States." Ella is still single and is reported to be operating a poultry business out of the home. At this time in North Branford there were apparently no street names so it is difficult to determine exactly where they lived but familiar names like Maltby, Fowler, Harrison etc. indicate it is likely they resided fairly close to the center of Northford. Once again Ann reports that she has had only one child and that child is still living.

Although Ann's death is not reported in North Branford through 1919, neither she nor her daughter is to be found in the 1920 census in North Branford.

A search of the cemetery records held at The Totoket Historical Society revealed that an Isaac Freeman was buried in Lot 154 of The Northford Cemetery. With him are Mary (who died in 1939) and Hattie Freeman, his daughters. Of his children only Bertha is unaccounted for. I have found no record of burial of either Henry G. Fowler or of Ann.



As Isaac Freeman the father died in 1864 and this section of the cemetery did not open until long after that, the Isaac listed on the gravestone may not be Isaac Freeman born in Lyme in 1812. The oldest grave that I could find in this section of The Northford Cemetery is 1892. It would appear that Mary Ann Freeman purchased this burial plot and she died in 1939. The name Isaac Freeman recorded here may well be Isaac the father (Mary Ann's father) or it may be Isaac, Mary Ann's brother who died in Wallingford in 1900, or it may be Mary Ann's son, Isaac (if he existed). I have no knowledge who M. Miller, as recorded on the gravestone, is. Possibly this is Mary Ann Freeman's husband. As a non relative I cannot examine vital records newer than 1912, 100 years in the past. The Isaac recorded here may be a memorial to Mary Ann Freemans' father. It may not be.

Here ends the story of Isaac and Anna Freeman.

August 14, 2012

While searching vital statistics on another subject in the North Branford Town Hall I was given a volume titled "Misc Vital Statistics, 1734-1859, North Branford." These are a collection of the transcriptions of local church records. Within this volume is the record of the birth of Hattie Freeman. That record states "Hattie, March 19th 1861, dau Isaac & Ann McCormick Freeman. This then is the maiden name of the mother, Ann McCormick. Note that the birth of Hattie differ by one year as recorded in the church and town records. The same was noted for the church and town records for the birth of Bertha Freeman.