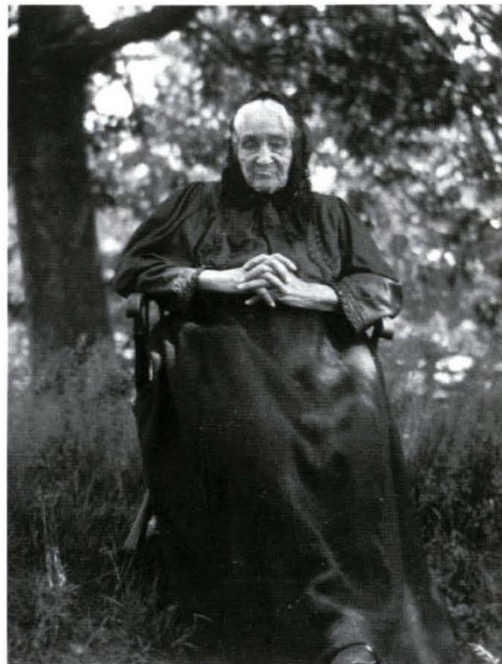


**History Tidbit**  
**From the Dedham Historical Society & Museum**

**This Week:**  
**Eunice Russ Ames Davis: Activist, Abolitionist, Dedham Resident: Part 2**  
**By Gail Coughlin**

Part 1 of the biography of Eunice Russ Ames Davis was published in the November 13<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Dedham Times* and is available at [www.dedhamhistorical.org/history](http://www.dedhamhistorical.org/history).

Eunice Russ Ames Davis' activism and work as an abolitionist tied closely into her racial identity and the experiences of her family members as mixed-race people living in the nineteenth century. Davis, whose heritage included Black, Narragansett, Penobscot, and Caucasian ancestry, answered the call found in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society Constitution "to aid and assist in the righteous cause [the abolition of slavery] as far as lies in within our power" ("Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society Constitution, 1835," [lehigh.edu](http://lehigh.edu)). Further examination of Davis' work as an activist and abolitionist provides insight into Davis' lived experiences and how Davis interpreted her own identity.



Photograph of Eunice Russ Ames Davis in her later years, circa 1890-1901 (NSDAR Archives/FindAGrave.com).

Eunice Russ Ames Davis' worldview as a Baptist highly influenced her work as an abolitionist. As a board member of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society in the 1830s, Davis agreed to the organization's constitution which states that "slavery [is] a direct violation of the law of God" ("Boston Female Anti-Slavery, 1835). Throughout the mid-nineteenth century Davis frequently attended meetings with other abolitionists in Baptist churches throughout Boston.

Although journalists in the late nineteenth century used Davis' acquaintance with prominent white male abolitionists to demonstrate her importance in the abolitionist movement, Davis always worked and advocated for the well-being of both free and enslaved people of color. Davis was mentioned frequently in the Boston-based abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*, along with her daughter, Dorcas Amos Revaleon, and her mother, Eunice Ames. Davis served on committees concerning the rights of women, equal access to schooling for children of color, and fundraising for individuals in extreme poverty and organizations that helped the abolitionist movement. She signed petitions for the abolishment of slavery and a petition declaring Massachusetts' ban on mixed-race marriages unconstitutional.

After decades as an abolitionist, Davis witnessed the enslavement of her grandsons from afar. Davis' grandsons, Charles Garrish Amos and Charles F. Revaleon worked as servants for officers in the Massachusetts 42<sup>nd</sup> Regiment during the Civil War (Sergeant-Major Charles P. Bosson, *History of the Forty-Second Regiment Infantry, Massachusetts Volunteers, 1862, 1863, 1864*). In 1863, while in Galveston, Texas, the teenagers were captured by Confederates and trafficked into enslavement. Revaleon's mother, and Davis' daughter, Dorcas Amos Revaleon, approached John L. Barbour, of the First Baptist Church of Boston, who petitioned Abraham Lincoln for Reveleon's son's and nephew's freedom. To appeal to Lincoln, Barbour highlighted Dorcas Amos Revaleon's mixed Indigenous and white heritage, while claiming that her Black ancestry was "remote" and that she easily passed as white. He stressed that the news of the boys' enslavement was deeply upsetting to their family members. Major-General of Volunteers, Commissioner for Exchange of Prisoners, E. A. Hitchcock, replied to this request and stated: "it seems impossible to do anything for the relief of the boys except as the result of success in the prosecution of the war. It is manifest that a formal demand for the boys except at the head of a conquering army would be met with insult" ("Charles G. Amos," *Lest We Forget*, [lestweforget.hampton.edu](http://lestweforget.hampton.edu)). The boys eventually freed themselves and made it back to their family in Massachusetts (Dormin, "Descendants of Prince Ames of Andover, Massachusetts).

The image shows a historical census form from 1900. The top section is titled "TWELFTH CENSUS OF THE UNITED STATES, SCHEDULE No. 1—POPULATION, INDIAN POPULATION." It includes fields for State (Massachusetts), County (Essex), and various district numbers. The main table has columns for "SEX" (Male, Female), "COLOR" (White, Black, Indian, Chinese, Japanese, Hawaiian, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, Irish, German, French, English, American, Other), "MARRIAGE" (Married, Single, Widowed, Divorced), and "AGE" (0-4, 5-9, 10-14, 15-19, 20-24, 25-29, 30-34, 35-39, 40-44, 45-49, 50-54, 55-59, 60-64, 65-69, 70-74, 75-79, 80-84, 85-89, 90-94, 95-99). The bottom section is titled "SCHEDULE No. 1—POPULATION—Continued. SPECIAL INQUIRIES RELATING TO INDIANS." and contains detailed instructions for how to fill out the form, including how to report the number of Indians in the household and how to report the names of the heads of Indian families.

Caption: Eunice Russ Ames Davis and Mary Howard on the 1900 "Indian Population" census (familysearch.org).

It is unclear how Eunice Russ Ames Davis viewed her identity. Dorcas Ames Revaleon's explanation of her heritage to Barbour demonstrates that her family viewed themselves as mixed-race. While different census records listed Davis as mixed-race, Black, and "Indian," it is not known if Davis herself decided on those classifications. The 1900 census showed Davis and her granddaughter, Mary Howard, living on Washington Street. Originally included on the regular census, their names were crossed off and placed on the "Indian Population" census. Mary Howard was noted as being Narragansett and half white. Davis, although frequently described as being the descendant of "full-blooded" Narragansetts, was identified as Penobscot and a quarter white. It is reasonable to believe that she and her granddaughter needed to specify these identities to the census enumerator. The census did not provide a place to indicate Black heritage.

Davis lived through the entirety of the nineteenth century. By the time of her death, Davis was Dedham's most famous resident although she lived in poverty. Her Indigeneity was celebrated in a town whose accepted historical narrative claimed that the "last Indians of Dedham" died in the 1770s. Despite the economic and social hardships that Eunice Russ Ames Davis experienced during the nineteenth century, she used her power to better the lives of people of color.