

### **Theme III: Black Entrepreneurship in Nineteenth-Century Essex County**

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Like everyone else, African American people in Essex County in the 1800s had to make money to support themselves and their families. They faced unique challenges, however, as the gradual end of slavery in the last decades of the 1700s did not put an end to racism and bias. Still, they made their way, and a few even defied the odds by building their own businesses from nothing, creating niches in industries like catering and hairdressing, among others. Four of these early Black Essex County entrepreneurs were Joseph and Lucretia Brown, Prince Farmer, and Allen Hinton.<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Brown was born in North Kingston, Rhode Island on November 18, 1749. He was enslaved by Beriah Brown II, sheriff of Washington County, Rhode Island. Joseph's mother was most likely an enslaved woman of African descent and his father, according to tradition, was an Indigenous man from what is now Martha's Vineyard. At some point during the Revolutionary War, Beriah Brown promised Joseph his freedom on the condition that he complete his son Christopher Brown's term in the military. Joseph agreed and, after serving ten months and twenty days in a Rhode Island regiment, and fortunately surviving, he gained his liberty.<sup>2</sup>

Exactly when or why Joseph left Rhode Island is unknown, but his name appears on a list of African Americans living in Marblehead in April of 1788. In October of 1793, Joseph purchased the northeastern half of a dwelling house in town for forty-six pounds and ten shillings from a widow named Mary Seawood. Joseph mortgaged the property back to Seawood for

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<sup>1</sup> Kabria Baumgartner and Elizabeth Duclos-Orsello, *African Americans in Essex County, Massachusetts: An Annotated Guide* (Salem: Salem Maritime National Historic Site, 2022), 9-10.

<sup>2</sup> Lauren McCormack, "Joseph & Lucretia Brown," *Marblehead Museum*, accessed December 2023, <https://marbleheadmuseum.org/joseph-lucretia-brown/>; Lauren McCormack, "Lucretia and Joseph Brown: The Real Story" (lecture), Marblehead Museum, Zoom, April 27, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf0Le\\_Iz4Go](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uf0Le_Iz4Go).

thirty-one pounds and ten shillings, agreeing to repay the money in installments. It's possible that Joseph purchased this property in anticipation of his marriage to a local woman named Lucretia Thomas.<sup>3</sup>

Lucretia Thomas was born on September 15, 1773, most likely in Salem. Her mother Lucretia Trevit Thomas was of mixed race, and her father Peter Thomas was “a free Negro man,” likely from Jamaica. It's unclear whether Lucretia's mother was enslaved or free at the time of her daughter's birth. Lucretia married Joseph Brown at Marblehead's Second Congregational Church on January 5, 1794. Two years later, Joseph purchased the second half of the house they lived in from William Peach of Vermont.<sup>4</sup>



The Brown house and tavern in Marblehead in October 2016. Photo by Roger Thompson. Image: [Smithsonian Institution](#).

<sup>3</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” Southern Essex District Registry of Deeds (SEDRD) Book 156, Page 264; SEDRD Book 156, Page 275.

<sup>4</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” SEDRD Book 163, Page 49.

According to the reminiscences of Marbleheaders in the late 1800s and early 1900s, Joseph and Lucretia operated a tavern out of their home. The Browns' tavern was the center of festivities during Election Week, a regional holiday originating in colonial Massachusetts. During Election Week, observed on the last week in May when the General Court assembled in Boston, eighteenth-century slaveowners typically allowed enslaved people a day off. Over time this became known as Negro Election Day, and an occasion for enslaved people to elect their own leader to serve as "a mediator, liaison, lobbyist, and advocate between the local government and the Black community." Both Election Week and Negro Election Day continued to be celebrated in Marblehead into the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup>

White Marbleheaders who were children in the early 1800s remembered Election Week celebrations fondly. Schools were closed, crowds gathered to watch military drills, and root beer and peanuts were "provided in abundance." At their home on "Gingerbread Hill," Joseph and Lucretia Brown hosted "a continuous round of fun and frolic." Groups of men and boys played gambling games outside, and Lucretia, described as tall and dignified, sold homemade refreshments out of her kitchen, including beer, "lection cakes," and "lassy cakes." On Negro Election Day, African Americans from many of the surrounding towns gathered at the tavern. At the end of the night, the "motley crowd" would dance to Joseph's fiddling. Joseph was known for his Revolutionary War service and "highly respected by all who knew him." One Marbleheader

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<sup>5</sup> McCormack, "Joseph & Lucretia Brown," "More Reminiscences of School-days," *Marblehead Messenger*, May 28, 1886; "Reminiscences of Old School Days," *Marblehead Messenger*, January 18, 1901; J. S. Robinson, "The Story of Marblehead," *Marblehead Messenger*, April 12, 1929; "Black Joe and Aunt Crese of Gingerbread Hill Perpetuated Famous Marblehead 'lection Week and Earned Themselves Places in Local Tradition," *Marblehead Messenger*, January 29, 1937; Shane White, "'It Was a Proud Day:' African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," *Journal of American History* vol. 81, no. 1 (1994): 17; Michael McHugh, "Negro Election Day Celebrates Status as New State Holiday," *Salem News*, July 17, 2023.

remembered him as large and burly, “and though appearing very old, his countenance beamed with mirth.”<sup>6</sup>

Joseph applied for his Revolutionary War pension on October 3, 1832, which the federal government granted at \$35.53 per year. On April 3, 1834, he passed away in Marblehead at the age of eighty-four. The following week, a Boston newspaper called *The Columbian Centinel* ran a notice of the death of “Mr. Joseph Brown, (colored,) a revolutionary patriot, and highly respected.” Joseph was buried at Marblehead’s Old Burial Hill.<sup>7</sup>

Lucretia, considerably younger than Joseph, outlived her husband by more than two decades. Although the couple never had biological children, they adopted Lucretia’s great-niece Lucy. Lucretia was able to continue providing for Lucy after Joseph’s death, as she was still well known for her cooking and baking. Her wedding cakes were coveted, and their “delicious flavor made her famous for miles around.” Lucretia also generated income by distilling rose water, which she sold for fifty cents a bottle.<sup>8</sup>

Lucretia passed away at the Marblehead home of her adopted daughter on May 21, 1857 at the age of eighty-three. A week later, *The Salem Register* ran her obituary, stating that Lucretia “was a well-known, highly esteemed and respectable colored lady, who was an eminently industrious and useful member of society. She possessed a superior understanding and an affectionate heart, which endeared her to a host of friends, hundreds of whom attended her

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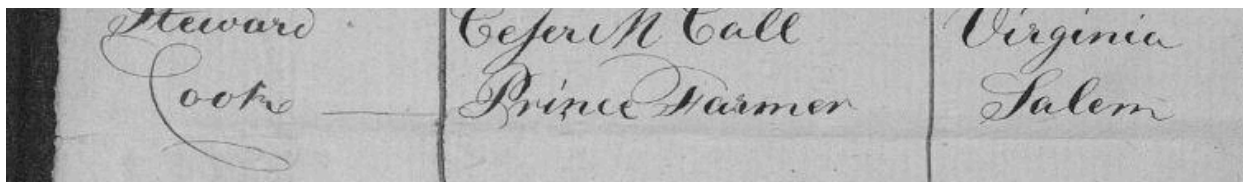
<sup>6</sup> “More Reminiscences of School-days,” *Marblehead Messenger*, May 28, 1886; “Reminiscences of Old School Days,” *Marblehead Messenger*, January 18, 1901; J. S. Robinson, “The Story of Marblehead,” *Marblehead Messenger*, April 12, 1929.

<sup>7</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” *Columbian Centinel*, April 9, 1834.

<sup>8</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” “Black Joe and Aunt Crese of Gingerbread Hill Perpetuated Famous Marblehead ‘lection Week and Earned Themselves Places in Local Tradition,” *Marblehead Messenger*, January 29, 1937; J. S. Robinson, “‘Aunt Creese’ Found Graveyards Source of Income,” *Marblehead Messenger*, October 25, 1929.

funeral obsequies, and by whom her departure, late though it be, is sincerely lamented.” Lucretia was buried with her husband at Old Burial Hill in Marblehead.<sup>9</sup>

Another early Black Essex County entrepreneur was Prince Farmer of Salem. Prince was born in the 1780s in either Salem or Danvers to parents Milord and Susan Farmer. It’s unclear whether he or his parents were born into slavery. By the early 1800s, however, Prince was certainly a free man, embarking on a two-decade career at sea. In 1803, he was employed as a crewmember on a voyage to India by the Salem ship *Two Sons*. Two years later, he was a crewmember on a voyage to the West Indies by the Salem schooner *Washington*. In 1807, he worked aboard the Salem ship *Fame* bound for both Europe and India. Many voyages would follow, taking him also to South America and Cuba. Prince was usually employed as a cook, but also as a seaman or steward.<sup>10</sup>



Detail of crew list for the Salem ship *Two Sons*, 1803. Image: FamilySearch.org

Prince made enough money as a mariner to purchase his own home. On April 16, 1816, he bought a property at auction for two hundred and fifty-two dollars on Pond Street in the Mill Hill area, Salem’s African American community. Five days later, he married a woman of mixed race named Mary Ann Black.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” *Salem Register*, May 28, 1857.

<sup>10</sup> United States Census, 1850; *Massachusetts Town Clerk, Vital, and Town Records, 1626-2001* (database online), FamilySearch.org, 2023; Prince & Mary Ann Farmer gravestone, Harmony Grove Cemetery, Salem, Massachusetts; *Massachusetts, Salem and Beverly Crew Lists and Shipping Articles, 1797-1934* (database online), FamilySearch.org, 2023.

<sup>11</sup> SEDRD Book 210, Page 106; *Salem Gazette*, April 16, 1816; Salem Directory, 1837; William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley, D. D., Pastor of the East Church Salem, Massachusetts, Vol. 4, January, 1811 - December, 1819* (Gloucester, Peter Smith, 1962), 382-38; *African American Heritage Sites in Salem*, National Park Service, Salem

Prince and Mary Ann started a family about five years into their marriage, but suffered several tragic losses. Their first child, a son named Joseph, was born about 1821, but he died of pneumonia on September 30, 1822 at just a year old. About two years later, their son James was born. The couple's third son was born about 1826, but he also died of pneumonia on August 6, 1828 at the age of two. Daughters Sarah, Caroline, and Nancy followed in about 1828, 1829, and 1833. Their son Charles was born about 1838. The couple's last child, a daughter named Susan after Prince's mother, was born about 1840. Sadly James, the first Farmer child to survive into adulthood, died of consumption in January 1845 at twenty-one years old.<sup>12</sup>

Prince continued his career at sea into the mid-1820s and also became active in Salem's African American community. In 1827, he sat on a committee, alongside Black abolitionist John Remond, responsible for overseeing the building of an African American church on Mill Street. A meeting house stood on the site by 1839, but apparently closed down around 1861, and the building was subsequently demolished with the extension of Washington Street.<sup>13</sup>

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Maritime National Historic Site, Salem, Massachusetts, 2003; *Vital Records of Salem, Vol. IV* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1924), 499.

<sup>12</sup> *Massachusetts Deaths and Burials, 1795-1910* (database online), FamilySearch.org, 2020; *Massachusetts Town Clerk, Vital, and Town Records*; United States Census, 1850.

<sup>13</sup> *Salem and Beverly Crew Lists; African American Heritage Sites in Salem*, National Park Service; "Union Bethel Church," *Salem Gazette*, June 22, 1827; SEDRD Book 249, Page 83; SEDRD Book 311, Page 308; Eleanor Broadhead, *A Brief History of the Negro in Salem* (Salem: Committee on Racial Understanding, 1969).

## Union Bethel Church.

THIS Church is to be erected on a lot of land situated in South Salem, between estates of Mr. Joseph Mansfield and Benjamsn Fabens, Esquire, for the Coloured People. Any person being desirous of digging and completing the Cellar, and taking it for a certain term of years, as a consideration, will please apply to

JOHN REMOND,  
WILLIAM WILLIAMS, } Building  
PRINCE FARMER, } Committee.

or  
June 22

Request for assistance by the building committee of Union Bethel Church, *Salem Gazette*, June 22, 1827. Image: GenealogyBank.com

By the mid-1830s, Prince was ready to begin his career as a business owner. The City of Salem granted him a common victualler's license in 1836, and a year later, he was an oyster salesman out of a market stand at 6 Derby Square. It's possible he was encouraged into this business by his friend John Remond, who was a well-known and successful caterer.<sup>14</sup>

**OYSTERS, at Boston prices.**  
**2500** BUSHELS PRIME OYSTERS,  
on board sch Excelsior, at Phillips's  
wharf, just arrived, which will be sold at Boston prices. Enquire of master on board, or of  
PRINCE FARMER,  
HOLBROOK & NEWCOMB,  
JAS. L. SHEARMAN,  
Derby Square.

Advertisement for oyster salesmen in Derby Square, *Salem Register*, January 20, 1851. Image: GenealogyBank.com.

<sup>14</sup> "Licenses," *Salem Gazette*, August 2, 1836; Salem Directory, 1837; *African American Heritage Sites in Salem*, National Park Service.

Prince's oyster business evidently did well, but he also generated income as a landlord. After his unexpected death on May 12, 1852 of consumption, his estate was inventoried and valued at almost \$7,000, the bulk of which was tied up in real estate. The family owned a two-story wooden house at 20 Crombie Street, where they had been living since the mid-1840s. They also owned their former residence at 9 Pond Street, as well as a dwelling house at 10 English Street, and another at the corner of Norman and Crombie Streets. Prince collected rent from tenants at all three properties.<sup>15</sup>

Mary Ann lived at 20 Crombie Street until her death from pneumonia on March 7, 1876 at the age of seventy-eight. The building has since been demolished. Both she and Prince are buried in Howard Street Cemetery in Salem.<sup>16</sup>

Another African American man who defied all of the odds by beginning life as an enslaved person and ending it as a successful Essex County business owner was Allen Hinton of Andover. Allen Hinton was born in North Carolina to an enslaved couple named Rosetta and Antony sometime between 1837 and 1847. He was sold at an auction block in Raleigh to North Carolina attorney William Ruffin Cox in about 1857. When the American Civil War broke out a few years later, Cox took up arms for the Confederacy, eventually reaching the high-ranking position of Brigadier General. While his enslaver was occupied, Allen liberated himself by escaping to the North, arriving in Andover, Massachusetts in the fall of 1864.<sup>17</sup>

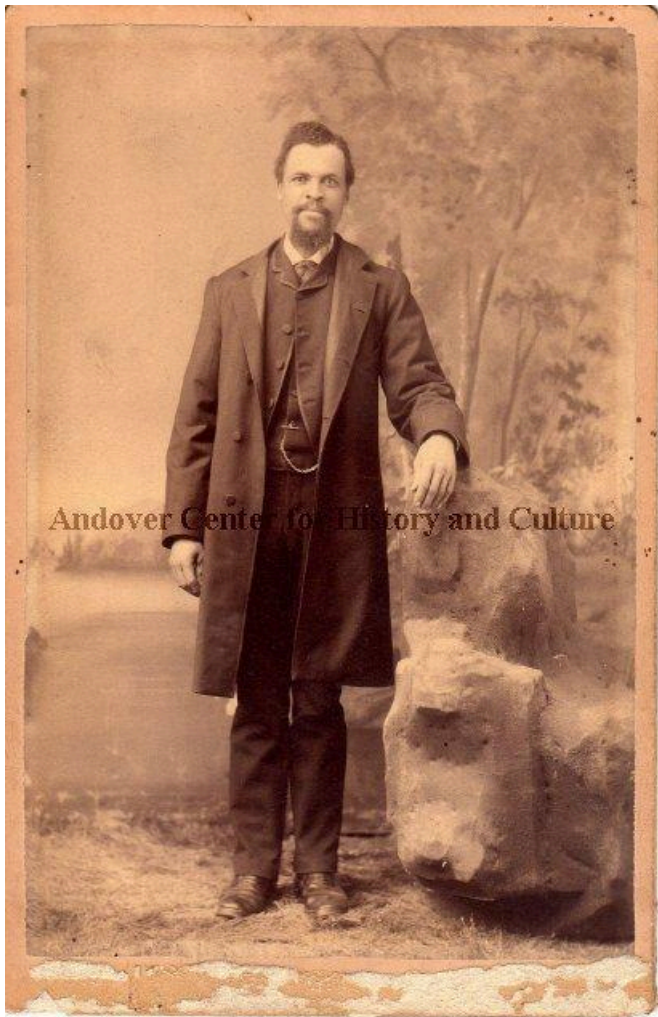
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<sup>15</sup> *Massachusetts Town Clerk, Vital, and Town Records; Essex County, MA: Probate File Papers, 1638-1881* (database online), AmericanAncestors.org, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Salem Directory, 1876; *Massachusetts, U.S., Death Records, 1841-1915* (database online), Ancestry.com, 2013; Prince & Mary Ann Farmer gravestone, Harmony Grove Cemetery, Salem, Massachusetts.

<sup>17</sup> "Allen Hinton," *Lest We Forget: Andover and the Civil War*, accessed December 2023, <https://www.andoverlestweforget.com/faces-of-andover/gleason-holt/allen-hinton/>; Edward L. Bell, *Persistence of Memories of Slavery and Emancipation in Historical Andover* (Boston: Shawsheen Press, 2021), 144n10; *Massachusetts, U.S., Marriage Records, 1840-1915* (database online), Ancestry.com, 2013; Massachusetts Census, 1865; United States Census, 1870, United States Census, 1880; United States Census, 1900; *Massachusetts, U.S., Death Records*; "Fifty-Year Class Has 60% of Living Members Present At Banquet," *Andover Townsman*, June 29, 1939.





[Allen Hinton](#) (1840s-1912). Image: Andover Center for History and Culture.

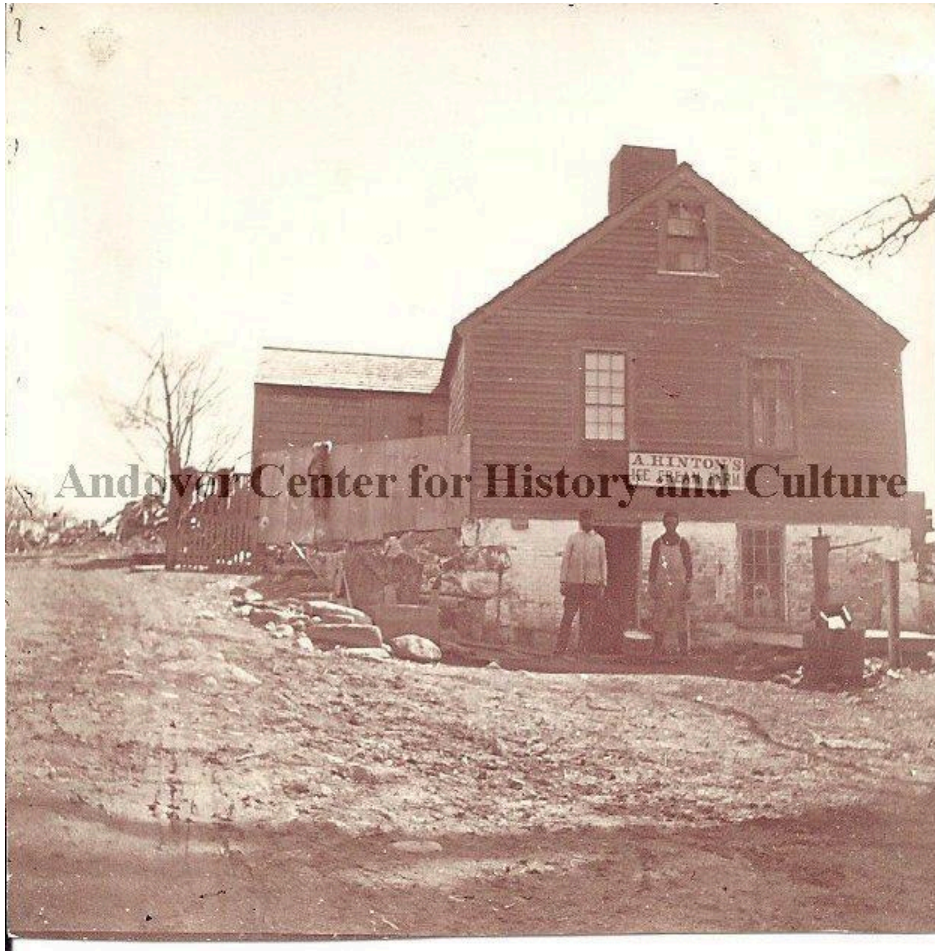
Allen settled in Andover and worked as a waiter for a time. In January 1867, he married an African American woman named Mary Jane Johnson. Mary Jane, who worked as a cook and laundress, was widowed with a young son named Charles. She and Allen had their first child together, a daughter named Alice, on September 17, 1869. A son named Edward followed on August 10, 1873.<sup>18</sup>

In 1874, the Hinton family rented a farmhouse on South Main Street in Andover. Allen supported his wife and children with work as a farm laborer, and he and Mary Jane also sold

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<sup>18</sup> Massachusetts Census, 1865; "Allen Hinton," *Lest We Forget; Massachusetts, U.S., Marriage Records*; United States Census, 1870; *Massachusetts, U.S., Birth Records, 1840-1915* (database online), Ancestry.com, 2013.

snacks to students at the nearby Phillips Academy. In the late 1870s, the Hintons started making and selling ice cream. It became so popular that they established a family business called “Hinton’s Ice Cream Farm.”<sup>19</sup>



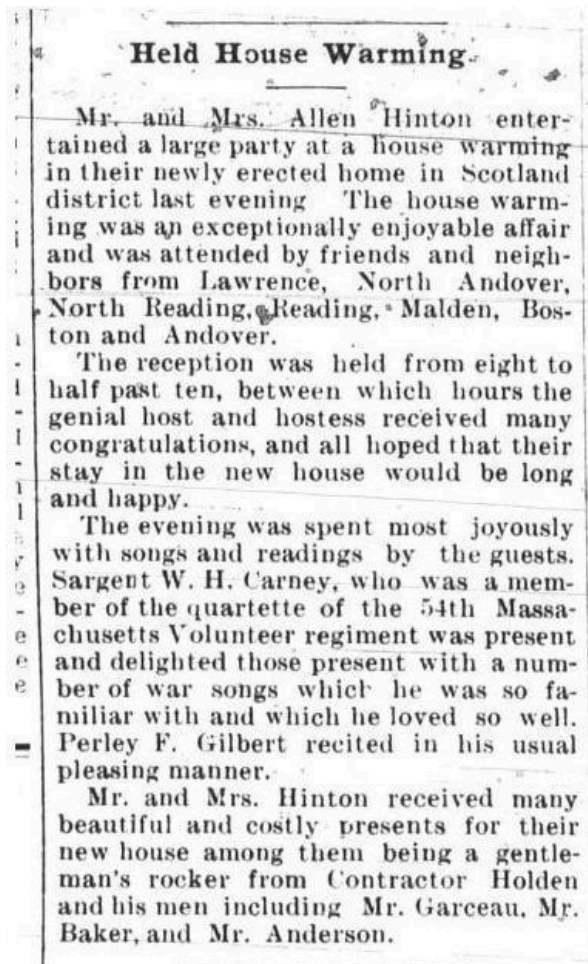
[Hinton’s Ice Cream Farm in Andover](#), c. 1880. Image: Andover Center for History and Culture.

At first, Allen sold ice cream from a wagon, traveling to Phillips and Abbott Academies, and also to the nearby town of Lawrence once a week in the summer. Eventually the Hintons opened an ice cream stand on their rental property. The business was so successful that Allen

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<sup>19</sup> “Allen Hinton,” *Lest We Forget*; United States Census, 1870; United States Census, 1880; Francesca Balboni, “Andover Stories: Hinton’s Ice Cream Was Sweet Success of Former Slave,” *Andover Townsman*, July 7, 2011, [https://www.andovertownsman.com/news/local\\_news/andover-stories-hintons-ice-cream-was-sweet-success-of-former-slave/article\\_ec77410f-0fb1-58ec-8ea1-2154b9e29de9.html](https://www.andovertownsman.com/news/local_news/andover-stories-hintons-ice-cream-was-sweet-success-of-former-slave/article_ec77410f-0fb1-58ec-8ea1-2154b9e29de9.html); Hinton’s Ice Cream Farm photograph, 1870-1880, 1989.858.1, Andover Center for History & Culture, Andover, Massachusetts, <https://andoverhistoryandculture.pastperfectonline.com/Photo/BD7DA39A-62FD-11D9-AE5D-024842286480>.

was able to buy the estate he was renting when it went up for auction in June of 1901. He had a new house and barn built on the property and expanded his ice cream-making facilities.<sup>20</sup>



Article recounting a house warming party held at the Hinton's newly built home in Andover, *Andover Townsman*, November 24, 1905. Image: Archive.org.

In the last two decades of the 1800s, Hinton's ice cream became a local institution in Andover. Allen catered graduations, weddings, church events, and various other local celebrations. He and his ice cream became especially popular with Phillips Academy students. After Allen died of heart disease on June 16, 1912, his obituary referred to him as one of the "pioneer businessmen of Andover" and "a familiar figure in town life, to both young and old."

<sup>20</sup> "Allen Hinton," *Lest We Forget*; Balboni, "Andover Stories;" *Andover Townsman*, June 28, 1901; *Andover Townsman*, November 24, 1905.

Another article labeled him “a rather remarkable man” and “a citizen who gained and held the respect of all who knew him.”<sup>21</sup>

ALLEN HINTON,  
**CATERER.**

Cream of all flavors, 50 cents a quart,  
also Orange, Lemon and Raspberry Sherbert  
at the same price.

**Special Rates to parties buying in  
large quantities.**

**FANCY CREAMS.**

Frozen Pudding, by qt.	.80
Tutti-Fruitti,	.75
Bisque,	.80
Café Pafé	.80
Fruit Creams,	.60
Individual Ices, per doz.	\$1.75

Lunches furnished for small parties  
and picnics.

**South Main Street, Andover,  
P. O. BOX 443.**

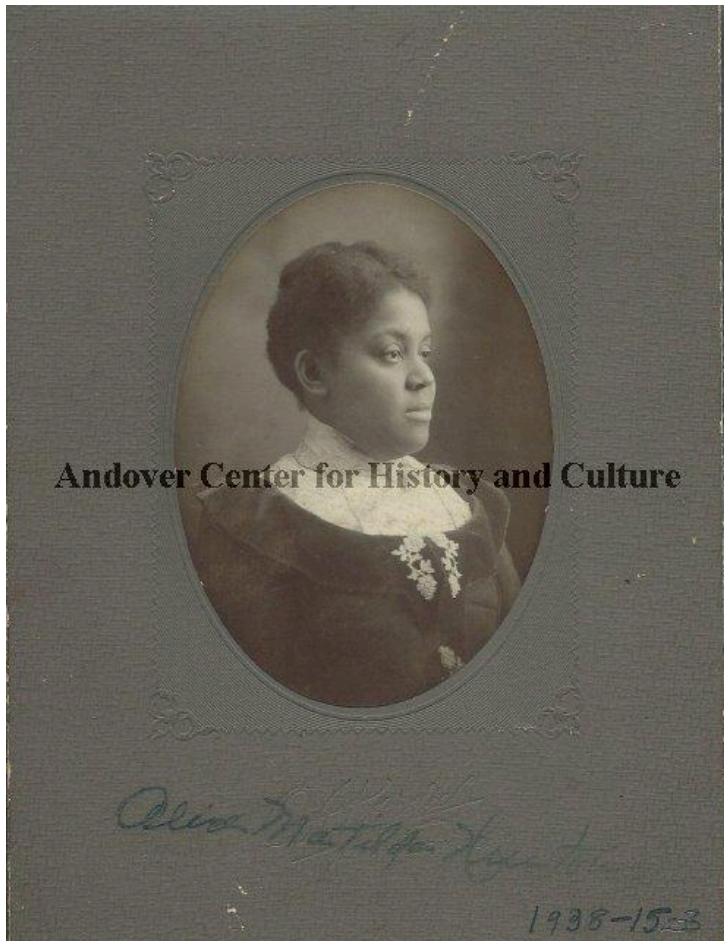
Advertisement for Allen Hinton’s catering services, *Andover Townsman*, May 5, 1893. Image: Archive.org.

After Allen’s death, his family carried on the business. In 1915, Alice Hinton gave a lecture at the annual meeting of Booker T. Washington’s National Negro Business League in Boston called “How I Have Carried on the Ice Cream Business Established by My Mother and

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<sup>21</sup> Balboni, “Andover Stories;” *Andover Townsman*, April 13, 1888; *Andover Townsman*, June 20, 1890; *Andover Townsman*, August 14, 1891; *Andover Townsman*, February 10, 1893; *Andover Townsman*, September 10, 1897; *Andover Townsman*, February 22, 1901; *Massachusetts, U.S., Death Records*; *Andover Townsman*, June 21, 1912.

Father.” She took sole control of the business after her mother died in 1921 and became “one of the most prominent African American businesswomen in the country.”<sup>22</sup>



[Alice Hinton](#) (b. 1869). Image: Andover Center for History and Culture.

Although Joseph and Lucretia Brown, Prince Farmer, and Allen Hinton were faced with seemingly insurmountable hurdles simply for being born Black, they persevered and eventually thrived as successful Essex County business owners. Today, the legacy of the Browns lives on in a gingerbread-type cookie beloved in Marblehead known as the “Joe Frogger,” which Lucretia is credited with creating and naming after her husband. Prince and Mary Ann Farmer’s gravestone

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<sup>22</sup> Balboni, “Andover Stories;” Bell, *Persistence of Memories of Slavery*, 332n38; Baumgartner and Duclos-Orsello, *African Americans in Essex County*, 24; *Andover Townsman*, February 4, 1921; *Andover Townsman*, July 22, 1921.

in Salem's Howard Street Cemetery was restored by Epoch Preservation after years of neglect and can be visited. The house that Allen Hinton had built for his family on land he once rented but became successful enough to purchase still stands, although it is privately owned.<sup>23</sup>



[A plate of “Joe Froggers.”](#) Image: Smithsonian Institution.

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<sup>23</sup> McCormack, “Joseph & Lucretia Brown;” Julia Blakely, “Joe Froggers: The Weight of the Past in a Cookie,” *Unbound*, Smithsonian Libraries and Archives, accessed December 2023, <https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2016/11/01/joe-froggers-weight-past-cookie/>; Dustin Luca, “Preserving Local History Effort Aimed at Restoring Gravestones of Salem Abolitionists,” *Salem News*, August 26, 2021, [https://www.salemnews.com/news/local\\_news/preserving-local-history-effort-aimed-at-restoring-gravestones-of-salem-abolitionists/article\\_060ca0a2-f795-5a66-9987-ea8cc27908f3.html](https://www.salemnews.com/news/local_news/preserving-local-history-effort-aimed-at-restoring-gravestones-of-salem-abolitionists/article_060ca0a2-f795-5a66-9987-ea8cc27908f3.html).



The grave of Prince and Mary Ann Farmer, Howard Street Cemetery, Salem, MA. Image: FindaGrave.com.



[The Hinton house in Andover](#) still stands today. Image: Andover Preservation Commission.