

THEIR KINDRED EARTH



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
WILLIAM EARLE WILLIAMS

Their Kindred Earth gathers images of Black Connecticut's historic sites by celebrated artist William Earle Williams (born 1950). A series of texts illuminate how these sites connect to the larger national and international narrative of Black American history. Mentored in the 1970s by the famed photographer Walker Evans, Williams attended the Yale School of Art at Evans's suggestion. From that Connecticut inception, Williams embarked on a decades-long journey to identify and photograph places across the country that hold histories of the slave trade, the Underground Railroad, and emancipation. Many remain unmarked and largely overlooked in a society that has long ignored Black history.

The exhibition's title, *Their Kindred Earth*, is drawn from a poem written by Sarah Louisa Forten Purvis (1814–1883), a Black abolitionist active in 1830s Philadelphia. Forten Purvis used the phrase “their kindred earth” in the poem “An Appeal to Woman,” in which she called for racial equality by relating women's shared experiences across color lines. She aimed her verse at white, slave-owning women, asking them to reflect on how to see themselves as good citizens without opposing slavery. In language that speaks to us today, she appealed to their shared humanity, noting that all people, regardless of skin color, return to the same earth after death.

Within this book, the photographs of William Earle Williams speak to the entwined lives that unfolded over the centuries in Old Lyme, Connecticut, and greater Connecticut.

If landscapes could speak, what would they tell us?

An Appeal to Woman *by Sarah Louisa Forten Purvis*

Oh, woman, woman, in thy brightest hour
Of conscious worth, of pride, of conscious power,
Oh, nobly dare to act a Christian's part,
That well befits a lovely woman's heart!
Dare to be good, as thou canst dare be great;
Despise the taunts of envy, scorn and hate;
Our “skins may differ,” but from thee we claim
A sister's privilege, in a sister's name.

We are thy sisters—God has truly said,
That of one blood, the nations he has made.
Oh, Christian woman, in a Christian land,
Canst thou unblushing read this great command?
Suffer the wrongs which wring our inmost heart
To draw one throb of pity on thy part;
Our “skins may differ,” but from thee we claim
A sister's privilege, in a sister's name.

Oh, woman!—though upon thy fairer brow
The hues of roses and of lilies glow—
These soon must wither in **their kindred earth**,
From whence the fair and dark have equal birth.
Let a bright halo o'er thy virtues shed
A lustre, that shall live when thou art dead;
Let coming ages learn to bless thy name
Upon the altar of immortal fame.^a

The photographs in this book encourage us to picture the layers of history held by the landscape. Using archival evidence to connect stories with place, William Earle Williams creates black and white images that summon earlier settings and evoke centuries-old narratives about people who struggled for freedom. Although the photographs lack any figurative presence, when paired with new research they invite viewers to imagine human experiences in the historic landscape where they occurred.

All photographs are by William Earle Williams and courtesy of the artist unless otherwise noted.

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WILLIAM
EARLE
WILLIAMS

Jennifer Stettler Parsons
with Frank Mitchell
Carolyn Wakeman
William Earle Williams
and Deborah Willis

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CONTENTS

1	An Appeal to Woman <i>Sarah Louisa Forten Purvis</i>
6	Plates
81	Interpretive Guide
	ESSAYS
98	Histories Beneath the Surface of Our Kindred Earth <i>Jennifer Stettler Parsons</i>
108	Interpreting Absence: Slavery’s Traces in Historic Lyme <i>Carolyn Wakeman</i>
118	Of Kindred Generations: Magic, Monuments, and Images from Sites of Black Resilience <i>Frank Mitchell</i>
128	A Conversation <i>William Williams & Deborah Willis</i>
138	CONTRIBUTORS
140	ACKNOWLEDGMENTS <i>Jennifer Stettler Parsons</i>
143	AFTERWORD <i>Joshua Campbell Torrance</i>
144	CREDITS

1a (DETAIL) Noyes Family Scrapbook, Noyes Papers,
Lyme Historical Society Archives, Florence Griswold Museum

Prince Freeman, died at sea, 1791

Slaves of Melia

Jenny, wife of the above, died Dec^r 7.th 1832, in Lyme

Nancy, daug^r of the above was born Nov. 11.th 1771 Died

Prince, son of P & J, was born, Sep^r 11.th 1774 & died Jan^y 3rd

Pompey, was born Aug^t 30.th 1776

Crausa was born Sep^r 14 1778

Temperance was born Sep^r 23. 1780, & died August 25th

the house of Col. John. Noyes Wadsworth, in a journey
Jordan was born Oct^r the 18.th 1787

Harry was born Dec^r the 3.^d 1790 & died in North fo

Sabina was born March 14.th 1793 & daug^r of Noyes

Sophia, Sabina's daug^r was born March the 9.th 1816.

Isaac Plato Freeman, son of Jordan was born

& is supposed to have perished in the fire at New

establishment, corner of Broadway Prince St, Sep^r 17.th 1833

Returned Sept^r 19.th 1838 from a long whaling voyage



CONNECTICUT WATERWAYS & THE WEST INDIES TRADE

2 *View of Goose Island and the Connecticut River from Old Lyme, 2023*

Enslavement in the United States is still largely understood as a phenomenon that took place in the South, but it was present in New England from the first years of European settlement. In the 18th century tens of thousands of people were enslaved in the North. At the beginning of the American Revolution in 1775, there were more enslaved people in Connecticut than in any other New England colony. In this section William Williams offers views of the Connecticut River from Old Lyme to contextualize the region's role in supporting the system of enslaved labor that brought expanding profits to Caribbean sugar plantations.

Connecticut exported such products as timber, salted shad (the cheapest food for enslaved plantation workers), barreled beef and pork, cattle, horses, onions, and apples—goods produced in part with enslaved labor. From the West Indies Connecticut merchants imported commodities like sugar, molasses, tobacco, coffee, spices, fruit, and slaves. The molasses was transported to places like Middletown where it was distilled into rum. In these ways, Connecticut relied on enslavement to power its economy.



3 *Railroad Bridge from Ferry Road Boardwalk,
Connecticut River, Old Lyme, 2023*

FACING PAGE

4 *Granite Cliffs, Pilgrim's Landing, Connecticut
River, Old Lyme, 2023*

5 *Old Lyme Marina, Old Lyme, Connecticut, 2023*







FACING PAGE

- 6 *Richard Lord's House at Tantummaheag,
Old Lyme, Connecticut, 2023*
- 7 *Tantummaheag Landing, Old Lyme,
Connecticut, 2023*

- 8 *Beach at Ely's Ferry Road, Connecticut River,
Old Lyme, Connecticut, 2023*

