

# LINDEN PLACE

MANSION SCULPTURE GARDENS BALLROOM



As Linden Place re-examines its history as part of our preparation for the installation of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion we will be sharing the stories we have uncovered about the house, its inhabitants, and most importantly the enslaved and free black people connected with Linden Place and our community. Here is our most recent installment. Some stories are straight forward and anecdotal, and some are nuanced and painful. As part of the medallion project, one goal is to create a safe space at Linden Place to discuss a difficult topic. We welcome your comments and insights as they will help us in our journey to that goal.

### Daniel Tanner, A Knight of the Razor

In 1853 Sarah deWolf, cash strapped after the death of her husband, rented out the conservatory of her palatial home to a local man to be run as a barber shop. That man was Daniel Tanner, a black entrepreneur.

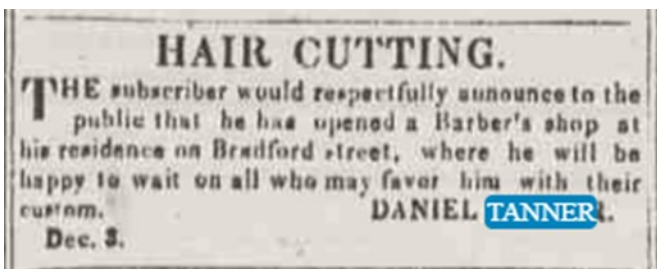
George Howe, in his book “Mount Hope” recalls a placard affixed to the iron fence at the house advertising Mr. Dan Tanner’s Tonsorial Saloon which read, in part:

***When you wish an easy shave,  
As good as barber ever gave,  
Just call on me at my saloon,  
At morn or eve or busy noon.*** (1)

Daniel Tanner was born in Bristol, the son of James; grandson of Cesar, and great-grandson of Scipio, an enslaved man. Daniel died on February 3, 1884 and his obituary said “aged 60 years and 11 months” .....which would put his birth year at around 1822 or 1823. Some census records say his birth year could have been as early as 1820.

Interestingly, the February 3, 1878 obituary of Jonathan Peck, age 82 years, a tanner by trade, lists a John Peck as his father. (2) In the “Sketches of Old Bristol” (3) there is mention of a slave named Cesar owned by a John Peck; the 1790 Census (4) of Bristol lists a Jonathan Peck as owning 7 slaves. It may well be that Scipio, or Cesar, or both, were owned at one time by the Peck family including Jonathan, the tanner - and that is how Cesar might have gotten his last name, Tanner. This is only theory, and it also shows the challenges of tracing ancestry for descendants of enslaved people.

In 1841 Job Barrus ran an ad in the Bristol Phenix, enticing patrons to his barber and shoemaker shop – the ad proclaims that “He will serve his customers from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot, body not included”.



Mr. Daniel Tanner advertised his business in the paper, as well. In 1842 the shop was located at his residence on Bradford Street; and in 1844 he announced that he “removed his barber shop from Bradford Street to a store in the Custom House building on State Street”.

The history of black-owned barber shops is fascinating, and a book highly recommended is “Knights of the Razor” by Douglas Walker Bristol Jr. Southern slave owners had a “waiting man”, a black male slave whose job it was to make sure the master of the house was well coiffed, well dressed, and presented an air of success.

From that start, Mr. Bristol follows the evolution of the black barber as “one of the most consistently successful businessmen in the country, with a well-established market niche and a white clientele”. (5) In the 1820s, located for the most part in hotels because of the air of luxury and class that came with those establishments, these saloons – which evolved into salons – were known as the palace of the people, a spot of luxury, and a place of gentility. Interestingly, by the late 1800s, many German and Italian immigrants came to the country with their own barber skills, and there was a political push for ‘sanitation’ through licensing. That licensing also served as a mechanism to limit competition, and siphon off customers from black barbers.

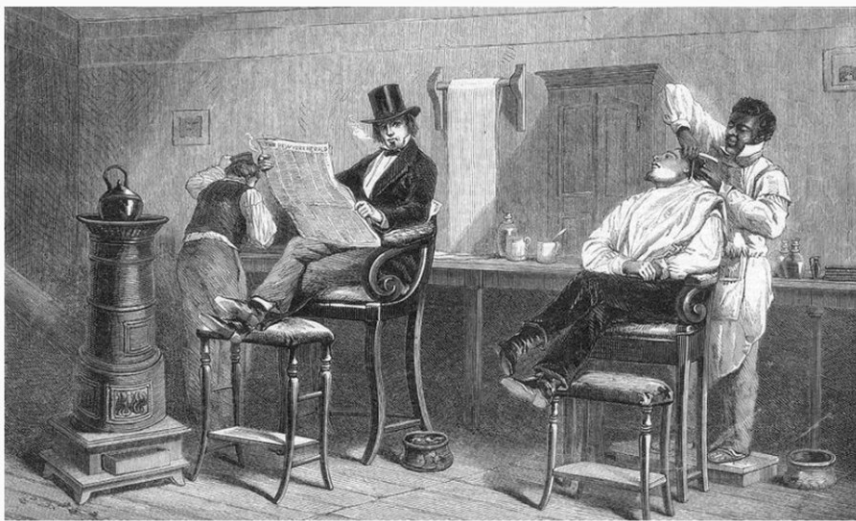
As a matter of fact, Mr. Tanner changed his ad copy in 1853 to make certain that his customers knew “particular care is taken of the mugs and brushes, and customers can be assured that they can be shaved without being liable to the humor so often caught at barber shops.” (6)

In 1848 Mr. Tanner advertised his barber shop in Warren “Over the store of Peleg Bosworth” offering hair cutting, shampooing, shaving, and his tag line read “All those who wish to have it done well, Will call next door to the Cole Hotel”. (7)

Sadly, that same year of 1848, there is a death notice in the November 25th Phenix: the death of Mrs. Mary Elizabeth, wife of Mr. Daniel Tanner (a person of color) on Saturday morning last, age 20 years. It seems likely that his wife died in childbirth, for his daughter Charlotte as listed in later census records is much older than the next child listed, James.

In 1851, July 27, a marriage notice appears in “Swanzy” of Daniel Tanner, age 30, barber, black, of Bristol (second) and Mary Eliza Williams, age 25, black, of New York (first).

The history of the George DeWolf mansion shows that in 1853 Sarah leases space to Mr. Tanner for a barber shop. We are still searching for specific records or announcements of this move, and details on how long he ran the shop here.



Source: [www.collectorsweekky.com](http://www.collectorsweekky.com)

*Representation of a typical early 19<sup>th</sup> century barber shop*

In 1855 Mr. Tanner posts an ad for his clients that he has “removed his barbering establishment to No. 6 State Street, formerly occupied by A.E. Diggs....hair and whiskers died a beautiful black or brown and warranted not to change color.”

In 1857 he lets his clients know that he has a location on “State Street Bristol a few doors west of the Bristol Hotel”.

By 1860, the census shows he has a full house: Daniel age 35, Eliza age 28, Charlotte age 15; and then James age 8, Mary age 5, Louis age 9 months, his brother Mark A D W

Tanner, age 38, seaman. As is typical of the black

barber story, he has two apprentice barbers living with him as well, Jeremiah Chambers, age 19 and Veto Gendrill, age 17.

At the end of the Civil War, when the house had been sold to Mrs. Theodora Colt, she made major changes to the structure, planted the linden trees that would give it its current name, and ended the barber shop arrangement. Eventually the space would be repurposed as the Colt brothers’ law offices.

Mr. Tanner was an excellent barber, but he also had a passion for music, and cooking. His talent for the perfect clambake was well respected. Read these two memories from the “Sketches of old Bristol”:

*“These reminiscences of my early life would not be complete without mentioning the annual Church Bake (St Michael’s) which was eagerly looked forward to, each August, as something not to be missed. Dan Tanner was the “king” for that day, for his bakes were beyond question; his reputation extended far beyond the precincts of Bristol.” (8)*



