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## Island historian Barbara White talks about integration

BY MARY LANCASTER INDEPENDENT WRITER



PHOTO BY ROB BENCHLEY Barbara White

There are some similarities between retired middle school history teacher Barbara White and long-ago island educator Anna Gardner. Gardner is featured for teaching at the African School and southern schools for children of freed slaves in White's new book "A Line in the Sand: The Battle to Integrate Nantucket Public Schools, 1825-1847."

White, who taught here for 25 years before retiring in 2004, was raised during the Civil Rights Movement and has since then been drawn to learning as much as possible about African-American history and the injustices rendered on black citizens.

Gardner, also a white woman, was only six when bounty hunters came here in 1822 to capture Arthur Cooper, a runaway slave from Virginia who settled on Nantucket. Cooper and his wife, Mary, were living on Angola Street when the slave hunters arrived. Discovering what was happening, Gardner's father, her uncle and Maria Mitchell's

father, William, helped the frightened couple escape their home and hid them for several weeks in Gardner's house.

"I think that's where her motivation came from as an adult teacher — the injustice and the motivation of her parents," said White, explaining that at 18, Gardner subscribed to the abolitionist newspaper *Liberator*, and later wrote of how she and Absalom Boston, who became a whaling captain and wealthy Nantucket landowner, discussed the paper's articles.

Gardner taught in island private schools, then in the 1830s was hired by the school committee to teach black students at the oneroom African School, now the African Meeting House. Gardner went to the South to teach at "Freedman's Bureau Schools," educating children of families who were no longer indentured slaves.

"I truly believe for her, it was [about] remembering the Cooper family," said White. "For me, I'm a teacher and fascinated by the history of education. I think the story of everyone here on Nantucket who fought to integrate the schools is compelling and is a story of courage. There are lots of heroes."

White will discuss her new book at the Whaling Museum tonight at 7 p.m. after a reception from 4 to 6 p.m. at the Chicken Box hosted by Augie Ramos and Rocky Fox, one of White's former students. The reception was organized by Frances Karttunen, Helen Seager, Jean Duarte, Catherine Stover and Georgia Ann Snell, who formed a committee to assist in publishing White's book.

In 1978, when White was just 28, she researched, wrote and published "The African School," based on local integration and including Gardner. The new book is an expanded version containing all the additional information on Nantucket's integration White found during the last 30 years.

"It's been bothering me for years that the book was incomplete, and I didn't have time to correct it until I retired," said White. "I'm pleased with [the new book's appearance]. It has photos and more substance with stories about what went on during the controversial years of 1840 to 1846 when the school committee and town refused to allow [black] kids into schools other than at York Street, the African School. This was mostly a segregated community. My main focus is the schools opening up. It really is a cool story. Honestly, I think it should be a movie."

White's new book was just released last week and will be available for purchase and signing at the NHA museum lecture. General admission is \$15.

White said she is currently working on biographies of Anna Gardner and Cyrus Peirce, for whom the island's middle school is named and who also played an important role in local integration. I

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