

Escape of the Fugitive Esther

The *Vineyard Gazette* in its edition of June 2nd, 1854 describes another story relating to a fugitive from enslavement. In a deposition given by Thomas Taylor, mate of the sloop *Endeavor* and George Edwards, John Flowers and James Fleet sailors on that vessel, the escape of a fugitive Esther identified as an "Indian woman" is described.

We brought her from Boston to carry to North Carolina to her master which we understood belonged unto Thomas Williams of said North Carolina. And on our passage, we put into the harbor at Edgartown on the twenty seventh day of July instant: and in the evening we bound her feet to a crowbar and tied her hands behind her, and put her down into the hold, and laid the hatches. How she got loose we know not; but in the morning she was gone with the sloop's long boat. Which Indian woman, we understood, came privately in sail sloop from North Carolina. And we were all on board but asleep when she went away, and knew

nothing of her going away. And we further knew that she was kept in the jail in Boston until we were ready to sail; and just before we sailed we went up to the jail, and fetched her down, and put her on board the above said sloop to convey her, as aforesaid, to the port of North Carolina to her said master.
(*Vineyard Gazette*, June 2, 1854)

It is apparent from this deposition that there was an inquiry into Esther's escape, and that the sailors who had been responsible for returning her to North Carolina were expected to explain their failure to do so. The account that they give seems a little suspect. If indeed Esther had been confined in the brutal manner that they describe, would it have possible for her to escape? The possibility exists that her jailors were negligent or that they were compassionate. Esther was not captured so whatever the real circumstances of her escape, she must have certainly been hidden somewhere on Martha's Vineyard.

