

# Exploring the Early History of Brooklyn, NY

## Francis Guy's "Snow Scene of Brooklyn in 1820"



This painting by Francis Guy shows an interracial Brooklyn Heights street scene about 1820. African American men are shown in the foreground center. An African American man named Jeff is working as a chimney-sweep. In Brooklyn at this time, African Americans could be either free or enslaved. At least two local White men, Thomas W. Birdsall and Abiel Titus, are known to have owned slaves.

### Characters from the Early History of Brooklyn

Henry R. Stiles (1867-1870). *A History of the City of Brooklyn including the Old Town and Village of Brooklyn, the Town of Bushwick, and the Village and City of Williamsburgh, vol. II*. Brooklyn, N.Y.: Pub. by subscription.

A. The north-east corner of Prospect street and Stewart's alley, is most pleasantly associated, in the mind of early Brooklynites, with a famous restaurant kept there for many years, by John Joseph, otherwise better known as Johnny Joe. He was a native of Martinique, West Indies, from whence he was brought, about 1795, by a Frenchman, who left him in New York, to serve for a time as a waiter in several families. At the commencement of the war of 1812, he accompanied Captain Alexander Hamilton (son of the great statesman), to Governor's Island, which was then occupied as a recruiting station. From there he went to Canada with Captain Jeremiah Hayden. He returned here in 1825, with a snug little fortune of some \$1,600 in gold, the result of diligent industry and careful economy; married a West Indian mulatto woman, and taking a lease of the building on Prospect Street, opened a restaurant which he continued for some twenty years. He expended (spent) considerable money in the repairs of

these buildings, and was not fortunate in his tenants. In the end, although his immediate business had been popular and successful, the expenses of his real estate swallowed up his earnings. He surrendered his lease and retired upon a small piece of land in Queens county, near Jericho, at a place called Bushy Plains, where he resides with his wife in a settlement of colored people, working very diligently for a living. . . .

B. Israel and Timothy Horsfield were men of mark [wealth] in their day. They were the sons of Timothy Horsfield, of Liverpool, England, where they were born. Israel came to this country in 1720, and became a freeman [citizen] of New York, on the 13th of December, of the same year. About three years after, his brother Timothy arrived and entered into business with him, as butchers. Long Island at that time furnished the New York market with most of its live stock. They built a wharf at the foot of the present Doughty Street, together with a slaughtering place and the necessary buildings for residence. The next year they leased the two best stands in the Old Slip Market in the city of New York; their dressed meats being brought over daily, in rowboats by their own slaves, to their stands in the market. Israel Horsfield, in 1738, had a family of ten persons, three of whom were colored men, and slaves. He and his brother afterwards had the misfortune to lose some of their “chattels” [slaves] who were put to death for complicity in the “Great Negro Plot” of 1741. The Horsfields accumulated a large property and owned a considerable amount of land on the Heights, near the ferry. Israel, Jr succeeded his father in the business of a butcher, but not with the same success. In 1755, he had one slave, Chalsey. John Carpenter was also a butcher. He and his brother Benjamin were sons of George and Elizabeth Carpenter, who came from Long Island, about 1718, to the city of New York, of which the father became a freeman [citizen], entering into business as a butcher, which he continued until his death, about 1730. His widow then carried on the business, with the help of her sons, and became a very successful butcheress. In the Negro Plot of 1741, she lost two of her most valuable butcher slaves, one of whom was burned at the stake, and another transported; while in 1756, she lost one by running away, and again in 1759.