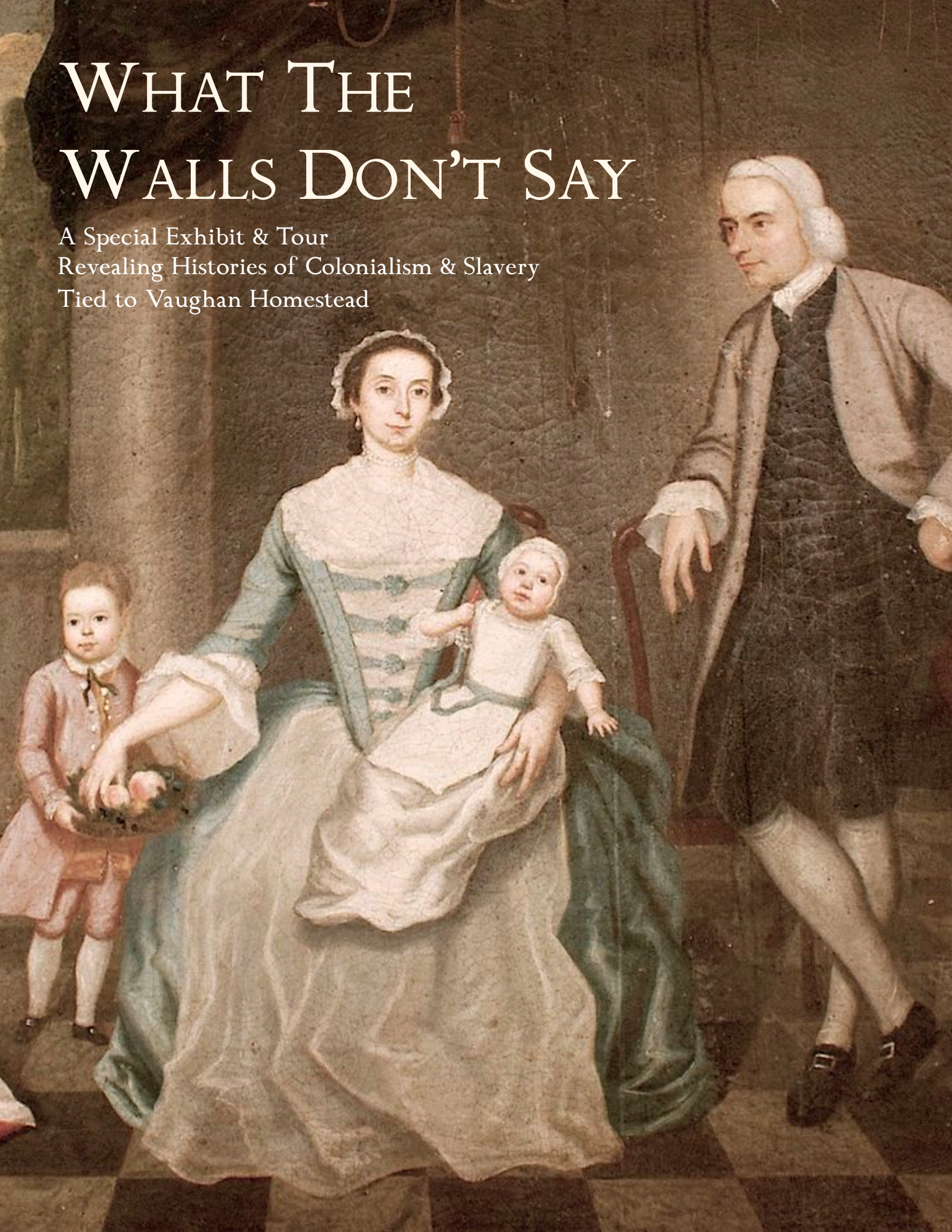


What The Walls Don't Say

A Special Exhibit & Tour
Revealing Histories of Colonialism & Slavery
Tied to Vaughan Homestead

Acknowledgments

Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead sits on the unceded lands of the Abenaki Peoples—past and present—who have lived in Maine and along the Kennebec River Valley for thousands of years. The Cussenocke, a band of the Kennebec Tribe from the Hallowell area, endured over a century of violence and land dispossession beginning in the early 1600s. Many were forced upriver to Norridgewock or into Canada, yet some continued to return, and today, members of the Wabanaki Confederacy still honor their Kennebec roots. Their ancestral territory includes Keedumcook—also known as Hallowell—and we honor their enduring connection to this place.

We also recognize the enslaved people whose forced labor on Jamaican sugar plantations built the wealth of British merchant Samuel Vaughan. Though Samuel never lived in Hallowell and no enslaved people were held at the Homestead, his fortune enabled the purchase of this land, which has remained in the Vaughan family for seven generations. His son Benjamin, who settled here in 1797, remained financially tied to that legacy.

We are grateful to live, work, and gather on this land. Acknowledging this complex history of colonization and slavery deepens our commitment to preserving this landscape and ensuring its use for future generations. We remain dedicated to exploring and sharing these truths and understanding their impact—especially on present-day Wabanaki communities.

We recognize that this acknowledgment only becomes meaningful with relationship building and informed action. May this serve as a step toward inclusion and reconciliation.



Exhibit Overview

This special exhibit confronts the complex legacy of the Hallowell-Vaughan family, prominent 18th and early 19th-century figures in both British and New England society. While the Vaughans were outwardly espousing Enlightenment ideals and civic virtue, the family's wealth and influence were deeply entangled with colonial expansion in the Kennebec Valley, the exploitation of enslaved labor in the Caribbean, and active participation in the North Atlantic slave economy through merchant trade. By examining letters, ledgers, and artifacts, the exhibit reveals the stark dissonance between their personal beliefs and professional actions, inviting visitors to reckon with the enduring impact of slavery and settler colonialism in shaping regional histories.

The exhibit also invites visitors to question whose stories are told, whose are omitted, and how these omissions impact our understanding of history. It critically explores how traditional commemorative devices—such as portraits, and themed rooms—can shape or distort aspects of a house museum's narrative, focusing on elite figures while overlooking the lives of marginalized people who also inhabited or shaped the story of the space. The exhibit offers interpretive labels, juxtaposed artifacts, and interactive media to encourage a more nuanced engagement with historical memory.

GENEALOGICAL RELATIONSHIP OF EXHIBIT SUBJECTS

Benjamin Hallowell (1669-1773) *& Rebecca (Briggs) Hallowell*

|

Sarah (Hallowell) Vaughan (1727-1809) & **Samuel Vaughan** (1720-1802)

|

Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835) & **Sarah (Manning) Vaughan** (1754-1834)

|

William Oliver Vaughan (1783-1826), **Petty Vaughan** (1788-1854)

Front Parlor

SAMUEL VAUGHAN'S PORTRAIT

A portrait is more than just a likeness of an individual; it serves as a tool of commemoration and interpretation. While portraits capture the external appearance of those depicted, they also carry subtle cues and narratives that help shape our understanding of their lives. But can this process sometimes obscure the full complexity of a person's story?

Take, for example, *Samuel Vaughan's Portrait* (1720-1802). Vaughan married his business partner's daughter, Sarah Hallowell, and their son, Benjamin, established the Vaughan Homestead on land acquired by Sarah's father. Samuel was a British political radical who supported the American Revolution, yet he was also a prosperous merchant whose wealth was built on the labor of over 700 enslaved people on his sugar plantations in Jamaica. Samuel's life was marked by significant contradictions—his political ideals and commercial success were intertwined with the exploitation of human lives.



Samuel Vaughan by Charles Peal Polk, 1790
Note Benjamin Franklin in the background and the Constitution in his hands.

What does Samuel's portrait, displayed here, reveal about his legacy? What does it leave unsaid?

As you examine *Samuel Vaughan's Portrait*, take a moment to explore the documents alongside it. These historical records provide insight into his multifaceted life, inviting you to consider the broader context behind the image. How does the portrait influence our perception of Samuel, and what does it omit from his story?

SPECIAL EXHIBIT

On special exhibit are original documents from the Vaughan Enslavement Papers and, by permission, prints of original supporting documents from other institutions.

- **Plan of Mantica [Montego] Bay, 1763**, by Samuel Vaughan, print of original drawing and watercolor, includes a depiction of the buildings and fields of a sugar plantation.
- **Valuation of Vaughansfield Plantation, Jamaica, 1802**, taken upon Samuel Vaughan's death, includes a list of people enslaved on the plantation at that time.
- **Samuel Vaughan, Jr. Letter from Jamaica May 18, 1815**, in which he describes the total number of people enslaved on his family's plantations between 1757 and 1802.

Back Parlor / Study

TRIBUTE TO BENJAMIN VAUGHAN

This room, along with the collection of objects within it, serves as a tribute to its original owner, offering a glimpse into the life and legacy of Benjamin Vaughan, the first resident of the Homestead. Rooms like this one are used by museum staff to interpret the life stories of those who lived here, much like portraits do. However, as with any interpretation, there's always the potential for a skewed or partial narrative.



Lafayette, Washington, & Franklin

Benjamin Vaughan (1751-1835) was the son of Samuel Vaughan and grandson of Benjamin Hallowell. A British physician, a member of Parliament, and a staunch supporter of American independence, Benjamin played a key role, prior to emigrating to America, in negotiating the treaty that ended the American Revolution. However, his legacy is more complex. Both Benjamin and his wife Sarah were born into families who profited from enslaved labor on sugar plantations in the West Indies—an uncomfortable yet undeniable fact that framed much of their lives.

When Benjamin's descendants renovated this room in 1889, they carefully curated a collection of artifacts, books, and portraits reflecting how they chose to remember him. But what does this carefully assembled collection reveal about their desire to shape their ancestor's legacy?

As you explore this room, consider how the narrative of Benjamin's life is being told. The documents included in the special exhibit offer new perspectives that may challenge or enrich your understanding of him. How do these historical records, when juxtaposed with the curated collection, alter your view of this man and his place in history?

SPECIAL EXHIBIT

On special exhibit is an original document from the Vaughan Enslavement Papers and one print from the public domain.

- **Abstract of the Settlement of Benjamin Vaughan Esq. on his Marriage with Miss Sarah Manning, 1781**, outlines the money that will come to the couple from both Benjamin's *and* Sarah's families' enslaved labor sugar plantations in the Caribbean.
- **Debate On A Motion For the Abolition of The Slave-Trade in the House of Commons, 1792,** in which Benjamin Vaughan argues against abolition.

Music Room

VAUGHAN CONVERSATION PIECE



Vaughan Family by John Cornish, 1754

In the 18th century, displaying a portrait was a powerful way to communicate one's social status. Portraits served as carefully crafted narratives, designed by the artist and often influenced by the desires of the subjects themselves.

Take, for example, the *Vaughan Conversation Piece* of 1754. This portrait depicts Samuel Vaughan and his young family shortly after their return to England from Jamaica, where they had been deeply involved in the lucrative sugar trade, supported by enslaved labor on their plantations. The painting is an elegant snapshot of their newly acquired position in British high society. The term *"conversation piece"* refers to a genre of portraiture that was popular in the 18th century. Such paintings were meant to be displayed in domestic spaces, acting as a subtle form of self-promotion for the subjects. They often conveyed not only personal relationships but also the wealth, sophistication, and social connections of those portrayed (note the envelope on the table addressed to Benjamin Hallowell). In the case of the Vaughan portrait, we see a family returned from the colonies, dressed in the latest English fashions and arranged in a manner that speaks to both the affluence they've accumulated and the civility they wish to project. However, the portrait omits any direct reference to the means by which this wealth was amassed. This absence highlights an intriguing aspect of the *conversation piece* genre: it was often a way to present a carefully curated image of one's life, obscuring inconvenient truths. Having profited immensely from the plantation economy, Samuel and Sarah could afford to return to England and re-enter the social circles of the British elite. By framing their portrait this way, the Vaughans were able to position themselves as cultured, respectable members of the British gentry—suggesting a life of leisure and refinement, free from the harsh realities of colonial exploitation. What the painting leaves unsaid, however, is just as important as what it includes: the absence of the enslaved people who made their wealth possible.

As you consider this portrait, ask yourself: What did the Vaughans want to convey about their identity? And what does the painting reveal—or conceal—about the world in which they lived?

SPECIAL EXHIBIT

On special exhibit find original documents related to Benjamin Hallowell's colonial land holdings and his Vaughan grandsons' shipping activities from the Vaughan Wharf in Hallowell.

- **List of Property left by B. Hallowell, the Grandfather, with Circumstances in 1789**, showing vast tracts of Hallowell-owned lands in the Kennebec region and the state of settlers and squatters.

- **William Oliver Vaughan's Waste Book & Petty Vaughan's Ledger, 1805-1819,** documenting the brothers' Kennebec-West Indies merchant trade and shipping business.

INTERACTIVE STORYMAP

On special exhibit we invite you to explore the interactive ArcGIS StoryMap of Samuel Vaughan's family business of trade and shipping, all dependent on the Atlantic slave economy. This digital narrative presents a new way to examine the Vaughan family's legacy spanning transatlantic commerce, plantation slavery, revolutionary politics, and philanthropic ideals. Weaving together the Vaughan Homestead's primary source collection of archival documents, maps, correspondence, and more, the StoryMap provides a compelling and interactive storytelling experience that encourages a deeper engagement with the Vaughans' family history. By recognizing that the Vaughans' wealth and influence were built on the exploitation of enslaved labor, we aim to challenge and confront these historical contradictions while honoring the lives of those whose labor made the Vaughans' contributions possible.



Explore the StoryMap by using the touchscreen to:

- Trace the movement of Samuel's sons on both sides of the Atlantic and learn how each son played a role in perpetuating the family business.
- Zoom in and examine plantation maps and slave records from the Vaughans' plantations in Jamaica.
- Read Vaughan family letters revealing conflicting views on emancipation and religion.
- Visit the Vaughan Homestead's public catalog featuring the Vaughan Enslavement Papers and learn more about items in the collection.

OR, scan this QR code to look at the exhibit on your phone:



Earliest known photograph of Vaughan Homestead, c. 1860

Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead is a nature preserve and non-traditional house museum. Built in 1794, it was home to the same family for over 200 years. Diana Vaughan Gibson and her husband George created the Vaughan Homestead Foundation, now Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead, to oversee both Diana's ancestral home and the adjacent 197-acre nature preserve. Their vision was to preserve and interpret the property for its historical, educational and environmental values. The 501(c) (3) non-profit organization became operational in 2002 and seeks to make both the Homestead and Woods useful and accessible to the people of Hallowell and surrounding areas.

Today, year-round programming for the public and area schools and groups takes place in and around the Homestead. While it functions as a house museum, the Homestead also continues to be lived in, with the intention of maintaining it as a living, working, dwelling.

Vaughan Woods & Historic Homestead | 2 Litchfield Road, Hallowell, ME | (207) 622-9831 | vaughanhomestead.org