

745 - 753 Bank Street
Antoine Desant, c. 1840-1886
Home and Store

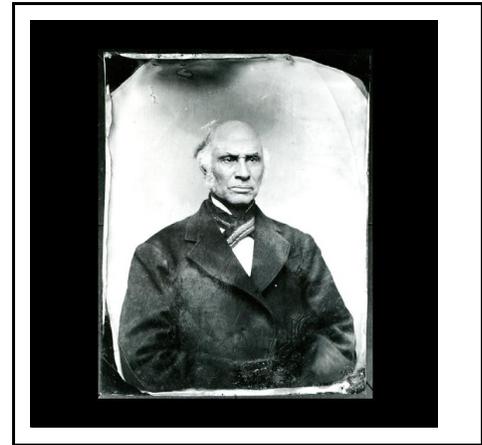
The property on the north side of Bank Street, near the busy junction with Montauk Avenue and Truman Street, remained in the same family for more than 150 years. In 1840 Antone Desant bought the property, with buildings, and it was sold out of the family by his great granddaughter, Anna Bush, in 1991.

The two wood-frame buildings (circa 1840) with later brick ground floors (1916) served as both commercial space and living accommodations for the Desants, their Bush descendants, and by tenants. Both a grocery store and a barbershop are mentioned in various records. The smaller of the two buildings has a very distinctive bowed wall, echoing the course of a nearby stream, Truman's brook, that once bounded the property.¹

Antone Desant [aka Antoine/Antonio de Santo/Dijant] was born about 1816 at Sao Vicente or Boa Vista, Cape Verde Islands, sometimes referred to as the Western Isles or just Portugal in census records.

Antone's story is well known, unlike the lives of many other Cape Verdians who settled in New London and whose stories have been lost. That these buildings can be documented as having belong to a black whaleman (of which there were many in New London) makes this property an extremely rare, perhaps unique, and in any case an important survival of America's maritime history.

Many Cape Verdians came to America aboard whaling vessels and were of mixed heritage, not only Portuguese and African, but numerous other ethnic strands, including Spanish, French, and Italian. Who Antone's parents were was not discovered in our research, but Antone Desant died a wealthy man in New London on 17 September 1886. His career as a seaman has been documented by scholars at Mystic Seaport. Seven of his whaling voyages have been catalogued.²



Antone Desant, Tintype by Bolles & Frisbie, Mystic Seaport, 1992.119.1

¹ The Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps of New London for 1891 and 1896 show Truman Brook, ending at Bank Street, with the curved building echoing curve of brook. BOTH buildings are 2 ½ stories; both are labeled *dwelling houses* but in 1891, the curved building is also "Barber" and next door is also "Variety Market." Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from NL, CT. www.loc.gov/items/Sanborn01152_0021.

² See, https://educators.mysticseaport.org/artifacts/antoine_desant_photo/;
<http://www.inmotionaame.org/gallery/detail.cfm;jsessionid=f8302134391532391299438?migration=13&topic=99&iid=580182&type=image&metadata=show&page=1&bhcp=1>

Antone arrived in New London, probably on a whaler, sometime before 1842, when he married Diana Maria Gager or Cager (1816, Lyme, Ct - 6 Sept. 1856, New London). The marriage record lists the date as 18 September 1842, performed by Episcopal clergyman, Abel McEwen. We could find no clear documentary background for Diana.

Antone and Diana had the following children:

George b. abt 1840 d. bef. 1886³

Child b. abt 1842, d. July 11, 1844

Child d. Aug 29 1847

William b. abt 1850 d. bef. 1886⁴

Since none of the above children are mentioned in Antone's will, we assume that they all died before 1886.

In the 1850 U.S. Census, Antone is listed as having left on a whaling voyage out of New London in 1848, while meantime he is also listed as a barber living in New London with wife Diana and son George. (Such duplicate listings are not unusual for the time period). Also in the Desant house in 1850 was Eunice (Abbe) Harris, wife of William Montflora Harris, and her two young children, Oliver and Ida.⁵ Further, there was Catherine Treadway, 23, of England, and there was Peter Antone, 27, of Cape Verde, who was also listed on voyage out of New London in 1848 with Antone Desant.⁶ By 1850, according to records at Mystic Seaport, Antone Desant had left for San Francisco out of Boston on a merchant vessel, the *Portland*.

By 1856 Antone was back in New London, where his wife Diana died in early September. In October he married his second wife, Susan M. Congden (1834-1876), a

³ George Desant is listed in the Navy in 1861.

⁴ In 1853 Antone Desant transfers his Bank Street dwelling and property to William E. Johnson, who may have been the 40-year old man so-named on the crew list for the ship *Brookline* out of New London, bound for the Pacific in 1851. But on the same day, William Johnson transfers the property to William A. Desant. Assuming this is Antone's son, he would have been about three years old at the time. Since there is no record of William A. Desant deeding the property back to his father, we assume it came back to Antone upon William's death, which may have occurred soon afterward this transfer, but certainly before Antone's death in 1886.

⁵ Eunice was married to William M. Harris (1819-1870) in 1846. They were separated for many years and finally divorced in 1865. She resumed her maiden name in 1867 and had her two children's names legally changed as well.

⁶ Peter Antone (or Antine), born about 1823, shows up in New London in 1860, living in a boarding establishment with a large group of other Cape Verdean seamen. Peter is shown on a number of crew lists in the Mystic Seaport database, and there is also Pedro. There are a large number of seamen with the last name of Antone in the database.

descendant of Native Americans (Ninigret), African Americans, and white ancestors. Antone and Susan had eleven children, four of whom survived to adulthood:

Cecilia A. 1857-1865

Evelina 1858 or 9 - 1865

Theressa 1861-1864

John 1863 [tintype portrait of him in Mystic Seaport collection]

Julia 1865 m. 1888 William Herbert Bush, renown organist. Julia d. 1954 at home – 751 Bank Street. (Cedar Grove Cemetery.) Julia's son was William H. Bush Jr.⁷

Ella b. abt. 1867 (Listed in State Hospital in Middletown 1900-1930)

Robert abt. 1868-1870

Antone 1869-1870

Frederic 1870

Almira 1871

Alice abt. 1872

(Names in bold are mentioned in Antone's will.)

The 1860 Census shows Antone "Dijant," mulatto, Grocer, with wife Susan, 25, and children George and William from his first marriage, Cecilia and Evalina. Antone has real estate valued at \$1,500. This record lists Antone's birthplace at Boa Vista, which is the easternmost and third largest of the Cape Verde islands.

In the 1870 Census, Antone's real estate is now valued at \$5,000. There are more children: John, Julia, Ella, Robert and Frederic. The entire family is listed as mulatto.

In 1872, Antone Desant became a naturalized citizen of the U.S.

In 1876, Susan Congden Desant died, age 42, having given birth to eleven children. She was buried at Cedar Grove Cemetery.

In 1880, Antone is listed as a widower, black, a grocer and liquor dealer. He is living with three daughters: Julia, 15; Ella, 14; and Alice, 7. Also in the household is Elizabeth Houche, 36, housekeeper, born in England, and John D^eSant, 17. That son John is listed *after* the housekeeper may indicate that he was away at the time of the census.

After Antone's death in 1886, he left property in three locations in New London: House and lot on Williams Street; house and property on Cape Ann Lane [today Jefferson Avenue]; property and buildings on Bank Street. To his only surviving son, John, he left the Cape Ann property plus his watch and clothing. Daughter Julia, the eldest girl, was appointed executrix, with the power to collect rents but not sell the rest of the property, the proceeds to be shared among the three sisters or their offspring.⁸

⁸ Mystic Seaport owns an early photo of Julia Desant as a beautiful teenaged girl. #92.131.1. Published in *And They Were Related*.

Alice disappears from the record and apparently passed away without issue. The other sister, Ella, lived at the Connecticut Hospital for the Insane from at least from 1900 until her death after 1930.⁹

Two years after her father's death, in 1888, Julia married William Herbert Bush (1861-1952), celebrated organist and music teacher.¹⁰ In 1904 Bush played a concert on the largest organ in the U.S. – at the St Louis Exposition. In 1908 he played in New York at an anniversary pontifical mass. That year he also played a special concert attended by both Mark Twain and Andrew Carnegie at St James, New London.



Sometime before the 1910 Census, Julia and William settled into Julia's family home on Bank Street, where William gave music lessons. All told, Bush is said to have taught hundreds of New London pupils in the Desant house. He served as organist at New London's Second Congregational Church for 35 years.¹¹ It was during this period that the buildings were raised up and brick ground floors were inserted. (See Property title report by Thomas Couser.)

The 1920 Census shows William and Julia with their son, William Jr. 17, at 751 Bank Street. Next door at 729 are renters: Owen Simmons, black, and his family. Owen is a railroad porter. On the other side of the Bushes, at 749 Bank, is Mrs Edith Chadwick, white, grocery store clerk, and her son Frederick, 10, and her aunt, Martha Rogers, 76. Thus it appears that Antone's grocery store was now being rented out to a white family.

In the 1930 Census, William Bush's home on Bank Street was valued at \$6,000. In 1940 it was valued at \$5,000, when son William, Jr. was still living at home. William, Sr. died in 1952 and Julia Desant Bush died in 1954. They share a headstone at Cedar Grove

⁹ The court papers are briefly discussed in *And They were Related, Too*. An examination of Antone's will and other documents would likely shed additional light on the Bank Street property.

¹⁰ William Bush, Sr. Locally he studied organ with Charles B. Jennings and Charles S. Elliott. He studied piano and organ in New York and at Yale. He served as organist for a number of NL Churches and played concerts nationwide. He was a member of the American Guild of Organists, NL Chapter. A composer and arranger as well as teacher as well as an advocate of education and of African Americans. He died 21 Oct 1952 in Colchester.

¹¹ A brief biography of Bush is included in *Tapestry* (1979) by James M. Rose and Barbara W. Brown. He was the son of Aaron Bush (1832-1894) and Henrietta Parkhurst (1835-1924) and grew up on Hempstead Street. (Census records list No.21 in 1880.) About 1882, the family moved to 7 Stony Hill, a street between Main and Huntington no longer extant. Henrietta later moved to 73 Hempstead (one of the Savillion Haley houses) when she was a widow. Aaron is listed as a mariner and later a nail maker and machinist. William's siblings died young, except Charles B., also a musician, a sister Ida. Aaron Bush is listed as a crew member out of New London on many vessels between 1807 and 1859. (See Mystic Seaport database) Henrietta Parkhurst Bush was the daughter of John Parkhurst (1814-1854), mariner, and Lavinia Ruggles (1814-1893).

Cemetery along with their son, William H. Bush, Jr.

William H. Bush, Sr. was an advocate of civil rights and education for all. Of the African American soldier (his son was one), he reflected: "Hitler called the Negroes half monkey, but they made a monkey out of him." (*The Day*, 7 Aug. 1947). In addition to being a composer and arranger, Bush was also a master at the game of chess.

William Herbert Bush, Jr. (1902-1987) was a piano tuner and motor cycle mechanic. He served in World War II. Later he worked at the Underwater Sound Lab. He died in 1987. His wife, Helen Lane (1906-1988) of Old Saybrook, had been an English teacher at Tuskegee University before her marriage. Helen's sister, Ann Lane Petry (1908-1997), was a novelist and writer of the Harlem



Renaissance, one of the most successful black writers of her day. Ann Petry helped take charge of William and Helen Bush in their old age, as described in her biography, written by her daughter, Elisabeth.

William, Jr., and Helen Bush had a daughter, Anna, who was born in 1946. It was Anna who sold the property out of the family in 1991, after the death of her parents. Anna's cousin, Elisabeth Petry, published a biography of her mother, in which she recalls her uncle, William Herbert Bush, Jr., who "lived all his life in New London in a house that had a commercial property attached to it." Elisabeth Petry writes that the Bush family traced its roots back to 18th-century Connecticut. "His maternal ancestor, Antoine or Anton DeSant, was born in Cape Verde Islands and in 1831 arrived in New England, where he became a captain of a whaling ship. . . . Uncle William [William, Sr.] was a tall, dark-skinned man who walked with a rather shambling gait. . . . Mother thought he looked like Cinque." Elisabeth also recalled that William Bush, Jr. was a talented painter, an expert piano tuner, and an accomplished pianist.¹²

Antone Desant's log books and sea chest were donated to Mystic Seaport by Anna Bush, who also recorded an oral history on file in their archives.

Earlier History

Antone Desant's property was identified and defined by a creek that once ran to the east and north of it, continuing north in a rough parallel to Cape Ann Lane (Jefferson Avenue). In the early days of New London's colonial settlement, this brook was more of

¹² Elisabeth Petry, *At Home Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry* (2009), pp. 123. Anna Bush was a graduate of Connecticut College, 1968. Anna Bush Neidig now lives in Westminster, Colorado.

a small river than a mere brook, according to Frances M. Caulkins. Early colonist, Joseph Truman (d. 1691) and progenitor of many descendants, had a tannery on this water course, which, according to Caulkins, ran into Bream Cove (later called Shaw's Cove). The location of this tannery is uncertain, but it was certainly in the vicinity of what later became Desant's property.

Truman descendants married people named Hempstead, Coit, and Lewis, among others, but we found nothing descriptive about the Thomas Lewis who sold (and later repurchased the property) to Anson Smith in 1825 and 1833. It appears that Anson Smith was the builder the surviving buildings on the property.

Anson Smith (1795-1891) married Amy C. Beckwith in 1817 in New London and had eleven children, including scientist, astronomer, tintype patent-holder, and Hobart College president---Hamilton Lanphere Smith (1818-1903). Anson Smith was a merchant engaged in woolen manufacturing and other businesses in New London and was heavily invested in New London real estate, according to biographies of his famous son. Smith may have rented the Bank Street property to Stephen Chappell and J.B. Gardner, who probably had a butcher business there.¹³ Due to business reversals, Anson Smith and family left New London for Cleveland, Ohio, in 1837, having sold the property at Truman's Brook back to Thomas Lewis in 1833. The family met with considerable success in Ohio.¹⁴

The next owner of the property, starting in 1836, was butcher, John Dennis (1799-1879), who sold the property to Antone Desant in 1840, when J.D. & Company's meat market was relocated to 18 Main Street, the Dennis home at 24 Main, according to the early city directories.

The above narrative above starts with title information supplied by Tom Couser for New London Landmarks. Please see that report. From there, we look at various primary and secondary sources, including census records, local and family histories, cemetery and military service records. It is by no means exhaustive but is meant to give some idea of the people involved in the history of this home and avenues for further research. – Mary Beth Baker, Sept. 1, 2018

¹³ A number of members of the large Chappell family were in the butcher business, most notably John Isham Chappell (1830-1927) and his father Gurdon Tracy Chappell. I was not able to find relation to Stephen Chappell, who drowned from an overturned boat off Long Island in 1843. J.B. Gardner was found living in the New London almshouse in the 1860 census.

¹⁴ *Genealogical and Biographical Record of New London County, Connecticut: Containing Biographical Sketches of Prominent and Representative Citizens and Genealogical Records of Many of the Early Settled Families* by J.H. Beers & Company, 1905 - New London County (Conn.) - 9 <http://www.davinciknight.com/>

Some Sources

Barbara W. Brown & James M. Rose, *Black Roots in Southeastern Connecticut 1650-1900* (2001), pp. 109, 110.

Fred Calabretta, "The Picture of Antoine deSant: Focusing on New London's Black Maritime History," *The Log of Mystic Seaport* (Spring 1993) 44. DeSant log book, 3 pictures, and family oral history are on file at the White Library, Mystic Seaport.

Vicki S. Welch, *And They Were Related, Too: A Study of Eleven Generations of One American Family* (2006). The book traces descendants from Cuff Condol/Congdon, a Native American slave who lived in Niantic.

Elizabeth Petry, *At Home Inside: A Daughter's Tribute to Ann Petry* (2009).