

ONESIMUS

LIFESPAN CELEBRATES BLACK HISTORY MONTH

WHO WAS ONESIMUS?

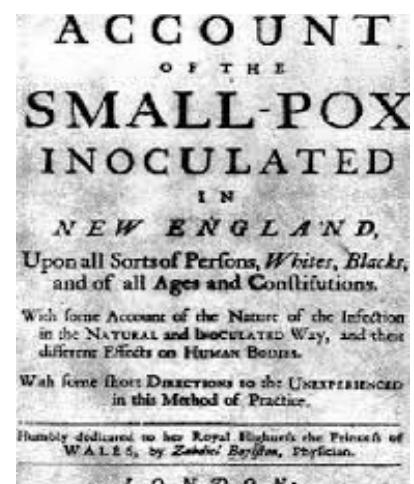
In the early 1700s, smallpox was ravaging its way through New England and other American Colonies, with Massachusetts being hit hard as smallpox was arriving with cargo ships to Boston. Quarantines were imposed and attempts to treat the sick ensued. In 1706, Onesimus was brought to North America as a slave and was "gifted" to Cotton Mather, a Puritan minister and well-known figure in the Salem Witch Trials. Mather saw Onesimus as extremely intelligent and educated him in reading and writing, while asking him about his life in Africa before coming to the colonies. One of the questions Mather asked Onesimus was whether he ever had smallpox back in Africa. This opened the door to what would lead to Onesimus being declared one of the "Best Bostonians of All Time" in a 2016 *Boston* magazine survey.



Onesimus' birth name is unknown, but Mather named him Onesimus which means "useful, helpful"

THE PROCESS OF VARIOLATION

Onesimus shared his wisdom regarding the variolation method of inoculation which was long practiced in Africa among Sub-Saharan people. Variolation was a method of immunizing patients against smallpox by infecting them with substance from the pus of patients with a mild form of the disease. While risky, the procedure usually caused the patient to develop a mild case of the disease and immunity to future infection. In 1721, at the height of the smallpox outbreak in Boston, Mather promoted inoculation as protection against it, **citing Onesimus** and African folk medicine as the source of the procedure. Despite suspicion, with the help of a physician, Dr. Zabdiel Boylston, inoculation was performed on a total of 280 patients, out of whom only 6 died due to the disease (2.2%) compared to the 844 deaths among the non-inoculated patients (14.3%). While he could have never known it at the time, Onesimus' wisdom he passed on would lead to saving thousands of lives and eventually, eradicating smallpox altogether.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ONESIMUS AND HIS CONTRIBUTIONS...

[HTTPS://WWW.HISTORY.COM/NEWS/SMALLPOX-VACCINE-ONESIMUS-SLAVE-COTTON-MATHER](https://www.history.com/news/smallpox-vaccine-onesimus-slave-cotton-mather)

[HTTPS://WWW.THE-SCIENTIST.COM/FOUNDATIONS/INTRODUCING-INOCULATION-1721-68275](https://www.the-scientist.com/foundations/introducing-inoculation-1721-68275)