settled on "Negro Lane" (State Street between Grove and Bradley).

William and his brothers Laban and Abel had developed considerable skill in masonry construction. Here, they established two large stone quarries on the traprock ridges east of the City.

In 1807, Lanson -- then in his early 30s -- purchased some outlying land to create a community for free Blacks. He named it New Guinea. "Soon, houses, tenements and groceries emerged. By 1825, about 150 African Americans lived there." It was visionary thinking and the investment for Lanson.

During this time, his masonry business was hired throughout the City, and his work crews provided employment for 20-30 Black workers on every job. Best known as the man who extended the Long Wharf "when all others had abandoned the idea," Lanson constructed the longest wharf in America, in the years 1810-1812. This monumental infrastructure project made possible a rapid increase in trade and the eventual development of New Haven as an industrial powerhouse in 19th century America.

In 1825 Lanson was hired to build the retaining walls of the Farmington Canal as it was dug through New Haven down to the harbor and into the Canal Basin where the barges unloaded and reversed course. The Canal was a financial failure.
Lanson paid his workers though he himself was never fully paid.

**Crossing the Color Line**

Elected New Haven’s Black Governor from 1825 to 1828, Lanson was also called King Lanson, a title that carried with it West African traditions and respect in the white community.

In the years 1814-1830, while continuing to work as a builder, quarryman, and community developer, Lanson became a champion for equality and justice for Black people.

In 1814, Lanson and another Black Freeman submitted a petition to the General Assembly requesting voting rights for ‘men of color.’ They paid taxes so they should have representation as guaranteed in the Constitution. The petition was denied. “This petition was the first in a series of protest petitions from Black men and women in Connecticut.”

In 1831, a small group including Lanson proposed the establishment of a ‘Negro College’ in New Haven. White elites believed that a Black College would “disgrace” Yale, and therefore, it was voted down in a city referendum: 700 to 4.

In 1838, the Black community petitioned the General Assembly to require jury trials for individuals fleeing slavery before they could be returned to their enslavers. That petition also was denied.

Evidence exists that Lanson and his brothers were actively involved in assisting people escaping slavery. He was publicly accused of employing or harboring “fugitives.”

Along Water Street, two blocks south of New Guinea, manufacturing developed alongside the existing maritime economy (eventually eclipsing it). In 1810, James Brewster moved his carriage factory to Water Street, putting pressure on New Guinea. In a campaign of character assassination against the Black residents whose neighborhood hindered profitable developments, a local newspaper disparaged his community as “a calamity.” Lanson vigorously defended the residents of New Guinea, but was forced to sell his property to white developers in the name of municipal “progress.”

By 1830, Lanson moved his community to the end of Greene Street on the Mill River. He converted an abandoned slaughterhouse into a hostelry named the Liberian Hotel. Nearby barns and sheds were developed into stores, a larger barn, and a livery stable. A wharf was built on the river.

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**“Obliged to Shoulder All the Sins”**

Lanson paid his workers though he himself was never fully paid.

**“Weary years and silent tears...”**

In 1842, William Lanson declared bankruptcy: “…This was about the time it was so fashionable to take benefit of the bankrupt act and I was urged ... to do so...and lost the whole of my property.”

On November 18, 1843, the Liberian Hotel burned to the ground. Firefighters did not attempt to stop the blaze.

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In the same year, Lanson was injured in a fall. His six months’ recovery prevented him from speaking out in his own defense and confronting his accusers. With no income or property, Lanson was forced to move into the Alms House.

Death Registry: May 29, 1851.
Cause of death gangrene.
Buried Alms House Cemetery.

Grave marked by sticks forming a cross, its location lost to history.