



1816 Farmington Quaker Meetinghouse

1816 MEETINGHOUSE AND FEBRUARY BIRTHDAYS

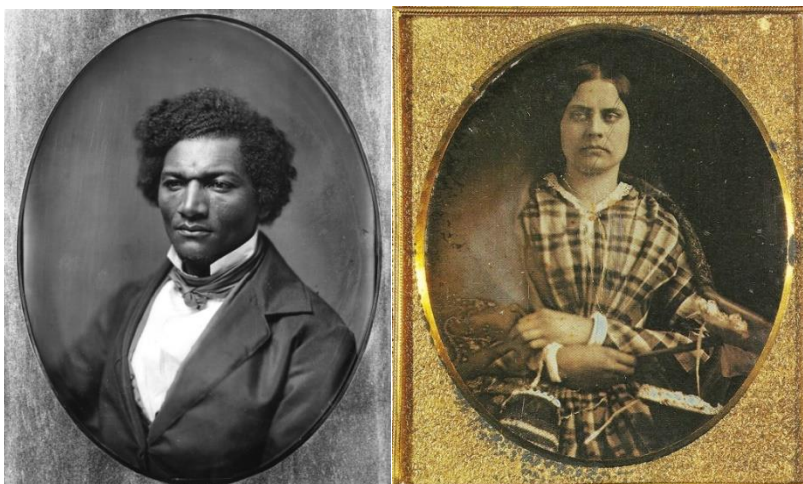
*A History Spotlight article by Judith Wellman
1816 Farmington Quaker Meetinghouse Museum
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In honor of the February birthdays of Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony, we focus this newsletter on the connection of these two national figures to Farmington.

Each February, Americans regularly commemorate the birthdays of George Washington (February 22) and Abraham Lincoln (February 12) on President's Day. This tradition is not new. It dates to the mid-nineteenth century. On February 22, 1843, Quaker women from Farmington, Rochester, and Waterloo (Amy Post, Sarah A. Burtis, Abby Kelley, Phebe Hathaway, and Mary Ann M'Clintock) celebrated George Washington's birthday with a sense of irony by holding in Rochester the first Anti-Slavery fair organized by the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. They invited Black women to join their sewing circle in Rochester and collected goods for sale from as far as away as Utica, Boston, England and Ireland. They raised \$300. Quaker J.C. Hathaway wrote to Abby Kelley that "Considering the shortness of the time to prepare to prepare in, and the dreadful dull and 'hard times' it was quite a magnificent *affair*."

But other famous people also had birthdays in February. Frederick Douglass never knew his exact birthday, but since his mother called him "Little Valentine," he chose to celebrate on February 14. Susan B. Anthony was born February 15.

¹ J.C. Hathaway to Abby Kelley, February 26, 1843, Abby Kelley Foster Papers, American Antiquarian Society.



Frederick Douglass, c. 1848. Courtesy Onondaga Historical Association

Susan B. Anthony, c. 1848.

Ann Gordon, ed., *Selected Letters of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*, Vol. I, and <http://coffeewithken.blogspot.com/2011/03/susan-b-anthony-casting-her-first-vote.html>.

Both Douglass and Anthony lived in Rochester for most of their lives. And both also had connections to Farmington. Susan B. Anthony had relatives in Farmington, and her parents Daniel Anthony and Mary Anthony attended annual meetings of Genesee Yearly Meeting every June in the 1816 Meetinghouse. Along with many other reformers, the Anthonys left Genesee Yearly Meeting in 1848 to form the new Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends. Daniel Anthony sent an account of this meeting to his daughter Susan, then teaching in Canajoharie:

Farmington Yearly meeting at thier [sic] last getting together divided—That portion of its members who take the liberty of holding up to view the wickedness of War—Slavery Intemperance—Hanging &c . . . That portion of the society who are not exactly satisfied to confine their operations for ameliorating the conditions of man within the compass of an old shriveled up nutshell [. . .] and who are of opinion that each individual should have a right to even think as well as act for himself & in his own way to assist in rooling [sic] on the wheel of reform has left the more orthodox—wise and self righteous part of the society to attend to nothing but matters of pure & undefiled religion.

As for himself, Anthony declared, “I am a member of that Society which has for its Teretory [sic] no less sphere than all creation & for its members every rational creature under Heaven.”²

On June 1, 1873, before her famous trial for voting in the 1872 presidential election, Susan B. Anthony spoke in Farmington in the Orthodox Meetinghouse. Most likely, she gave a version of her famous speech, “Is It a Crime for a U.S. Citizen to Vote?” Two weeks later, on June 15, 1873, her friend and fellow suffragist Matilda Joslyn Gage also spoke in the Orthodox Meetinghouse. Both women were crisscrossing Ontario County, as they had done in Monroe County earlier, generating

² Daniel Anthony to Susan B. Anthony, July 16, 1848, Susan B. Anthony Papers, Schlesinger Library.

support for Anthony's right to vote, in preparation for her historic trial in the Canandaigua courthouse. Spoiler alert: she lost her case, and women could not vote in the U.S. until 1920.³

Frederick Douglass became the best-known and most powerful African American voice in the mid-nineteenth century. He spoke often in Farmington and the surrounding area, and, as he made clear in his 1893 autobiography, his speeches in western and central New York helped shape his powerful personal style.

I did not rely alone upon what I could do by the paper, but would write all day, then take a train to Victor, Farmington, Canandaigua, Geneva, Waterloo, Batavia, or Buffalo, or elsewhere, and speak in the evening, returning home afterwards or early in the morning, to be again at my desk writing or mailing papers. . . . I have come to think that, under the circumstances it was the best school possible for me. It obliged me to think and read, it taught me to express my thoughts clearly, and was perhaps better than any other course I could have adopted. Besides it made it necessary for me to lean upon myself, and not upon the heads of our Anti-Slavery church. To be a principal, and not an agent. I had an audience to speak to every week, and must say something worth their hearing, or cease to speak altogether.⁴

Douglass first came to this area in 1842 on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society, crisscrossing upstate New York with Quaker Abby Kelley. Even though accompanied by Quakers Thomas M'Clintock and Margaret Pryor, both associated with the Farmington Meetinghouse, they were severely criticized for including both men and women, Blacks and Whites, in their entourage. "Even Aunt Margaret Prior's Quaker bonnet and honest, almost angel face was not sufficient to shield us," noted Kelley. "We were sometimes called a 'traveling seraglio.'"⁵

In 1843, Douglass spoke again in western New York, accompanied by Charles Lenox Remond. They were not always welcome. The Mendon Quaker meeting denied them entrance. But Quakers affiliated with the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society were impressed with Douglass.

After his return from a triumphant tour of the British Isles in 1847, Douglass made another tour of northern cities. His meetings in Rochester "continued two days, and were interesting and spirit-stirring to the last. I have seldom seen more intellectual looking persons than those who attended our afternoon and evening meetings in that place." From Rochester, Douglass went to Farmington, where he spoke in the 1816 Meetinghouse. In a letter to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, he wrote:

A change has come over those in authority in that region, which promises much to the cause of the slave and the character of that society. There are a number of the truest friends of the slave connected with that society, whose hearts will leap up with delight at this pleasing indication.

From Farmington, Douglass went to Canandaigua, Waterloo, Seneca Falls, Auburn, Syracuse, and West Winfield, "all of which were well attended, and left a good impression," he remembered. "The

³ Susan B. Anthony, "Diary," June 1?, 1873; *Geneva Gazette*, May 30, 1873; "Historian's Newsletter," Ontario County, January 1985. Research by Mary Ellen Sweeney and Diane Robinson.

⁴ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times*, 269-70, www.docsouth.edu.

⁵ Abby Kelley to Maria Weston Chapman, August 13, 1843, Abby Kelley Foster Papers, American Antiquarian Society.

people are anxious to hear, and I believe are ready to embrace the truth, as they have never been before. The bloody war with Mexico, the extension of Slavery, the Aggressions of the slave-power, and the mean and servile cringing of the Northern press to Southern dictation, and the cowardly backing out, on the part of the Northern politicians, from the Wilmot Proviso, is leading the people to investigate for themselves the cause of all this.”⁶

When Douglass decided to start in his own newspaper, *The North Star*, in 1847, the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society welcomed him to Rochester, where he received both personal and financial support. Quakers and members of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society immediately adopted Douglass as a key leader. At its fourth annual meeting, held in Minerva Hall, Rochester, December 12, 1847, the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society elected Joseph C. Hathaway of Farmington as President, William C. Nell of Rochester (working with Douglass on the *North Star*) as Secretary, and Frederick Douglass as a member of the Business Committee, along with Phebe Hathaway and R.G. Murray, both of Farmington Monthly Meeting; Sarah D. Fish and Mary Hollowell, Rochester M.M.; Nelson Bostwick; and Charles L. Remond, of Boston. All of these except Nelson Bostwick were either African Americans or European American Quakers.⁷

“From the first,” Douglass remembered,

I was cheered on and supported in my demands for equal rights by such respectable citizens as Isaac Post, Wm. Hollowell, Samuel D. Porter, Wm. C. Bloss, Benj. Fish, Asa Anthony, and many other good and true men of Rochester. . . . I know of no place in the Union where I could have located at the time with less resistance, or received a larger measure of sympathy and cooperation, and I now look back to my life and labors there with unalloyed satisfaction, and having spent a quarter of a century among its people, I shall always feel more at home there than anywhere else in this country.

Four of the six people he mentioned by name were Quakers with connections to Farmington.⁸

Douglass also mentioned other Quakers from the Rochester area who helped support *The North Star*, including Isaac and Amy Post, William and Mary Hollowell, Asa and Hulda Anthony, and indeed all the committee of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society. “They held festivals and fairs to raise money,” he wrote, “and assisted me in every other possible way to keep my paper in circulation.” All of these people were originally affiliated with Farmington Quarterly Meeting and Genesee Yearly Meeting but all of them broke away to become part of the new Yearly Meeting of Congregational Friends in 1848.

In July 1848, Douglass attended the country’s first women’s rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, accompanied by five Quaker women from Rochester. Quakers helped organize this meeting, and about one-third of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments were Quakers.

Douglass continued to visit Farmington, speaking there with Martin Delany in August 1848. He spoke in Farmington again in August 1849, “attended by a large audience” in the Orthodox Meetinghouse, as part of a tour that included a talk in the biracial Baptist Church in Macedon and

⁶ *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 7, 1847.

⁷ “Fourth Annual Meeting of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society,” *North Star*, January 7, 1848.

⁸ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times*, 269-70.

another talk in Palmyra. Douglass also continued to speak regularly in Wayne County towns, including in the Williamson Baptist Church (1848. “Men, women and children, age, youth and beauty, were there,” reported Frederick Douglass, “and all alive in the cause of freedom.”) and Macedon Academy (1861).⁹



Baptist Church, Williamson



Macedon Academy



Macedon Baptist Church

Among Farmington Quakers, Douglass mentioned several people, both in his correspondence and in the *North Star*, who were especially important to him. These included J.C. Hathaway, Esther Hathaway, and sister Phoebe Hathaway, all Orthodox Quakers, as well as Susan and Elias Doty and Griffith and Eliza Cooper, from the Hicksite Quaker tradition. Homes of all of these families –along with many others associated with abolitionism, women’s rights, and Indigenous rights–still stand.

For more information, see *1816 Farmington Quaker Meetinghouse: Historic Structure Report* (2017, <https://farmingtonmeetinghouse.org/historic-structure-report-2/>). For details about Douglass’s work in Wayne County, see Judith Wellman, Marjory Allen Perez, with Charles Lenhart and others, *Uncovering the Underground Railroad, Abolitionism, and African American Life in Wayne County, 1820-1880* (Lyons, New York: Wayne County Historian’s Office, 2008, <https://waynecountyny.gov/483/Uncovering-the-Underground-Railroad>).

⁹ *North Star*, August 31, 1849.