

Sallie Holley Attends Frederick Douglass Meetings Buffalo 1843

Sallie Holley attended Frederick Douglass's first lectures in Buffalo during August of 1843. By the 1850's, Holley joined the ranks of anti-slavery lecturers and after the Civil War, worked in promoting education among the formerly enslaved. Due to both their careers in the anti-slavery field, the story of how they met in Buffalo is worthy of repeating. It also gives a few more details to add to Douglass's first visit to Buffalo.

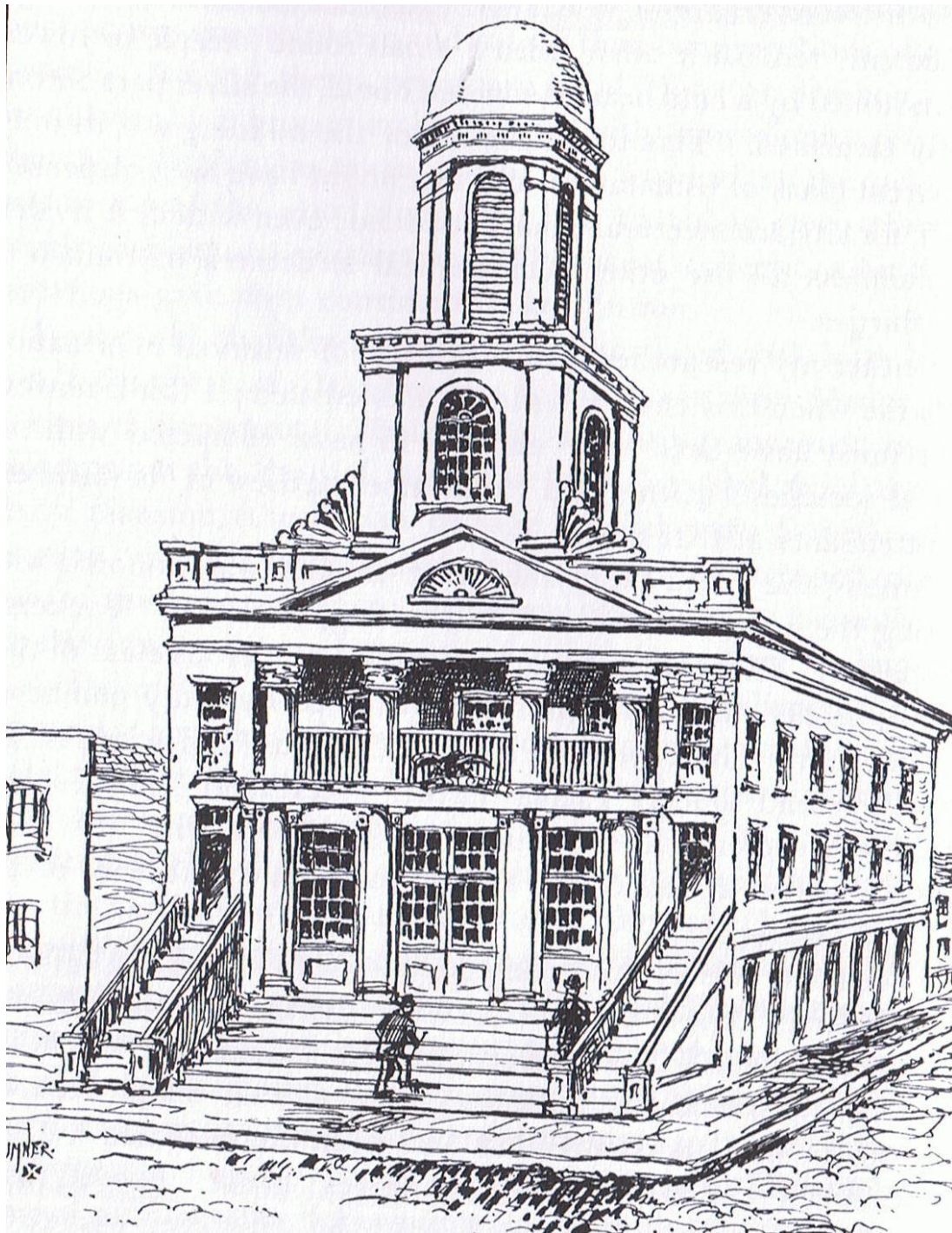
Sallie Holley (1818 – 1893) Background

Sallie was the 5th of 12 children born to the Holley household. Living initially in Canandaigua, the family moved to Lyons and finally to Rochester. Her father, Myron Holley (1779 – 1841), played a significant role in the creation of the Erie Canal and, later, in the formation of the Liberty Party. It was within this household that Sallie developed her views on abolitionism that would play such a role in her life.

Frederick Douglass (1817/1818 – 1895)

By 1843, Frederick Douglass, now in his mid-twenties, was only five years removed from slavery. It had been a little over two years since he had made his first public speech; one in which he described himself as terrified and shaking throughout and remembering nothing else of it. Since then, however, he had become passionately involved in the abolitionist movement, with William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of *The Liberator*, serving as his mentor. Garrison was not shy about his hatred of slavery. He espoused immediate emancipation, education and equality for the African-American, advocate for women's rights and was committed to a biracial society. He believed the U. S. Constitution to be a pro-slavery document and thus politics and compromise were useless for emancipation. "Moral suasion", or converting the public to a hatred of slavery, was the only way in which it could be eradicated and racism destroyed. And in 1843, this was the thought process of Frederick Douglass as well.

Douglass arrived in Buffalo early in the month of August in 1843. Edwin A. Marsh, a local abolitionist, had worked hard to acquire a room for the meetings, eventually finding one. Douglass described it as "an old dilapidated and deserted room, formerly used as a post office." This "old dilapidated" room was originally part of a Baptist Church located on the northeast corner of Washington and Seneca. The Post Office had purchased it in 1837 and used it for four years prior to moving to another location. Their office was located on the second floor, which was accessed by an outside flight of steps from Washington Street. It was in a room on this second floor, now abandoned for some two years, that Douglass was to give his first lecture in the city.



Former Baptist Church and Post Office
Located at Washington and Seneca

Sallie Holley and Frederick Douglass (August 1843)

History is fortunate to have the views of both Sallie Holley and Frederick Douglass concerning their first encounter. Holley was visiting her sister who lived in Buffalo when she heard about speeches in the city being given by a former slave. Fascinated, she was determined to attend these anti-slavery lectures. Expressing her views about it in a later letter of Recollections, Holley recalled the event and also portions of Douglass's speech

In the early autumn of 1843, at an anti-slavery meeting in Buffalo, I first had the happiness to hear Frederick Douglass make a speech. He was then a young man, only in the faint dawn of his splendid day. It was a poor little meeting – the odds and ends of the city – not a soul there I had ever seen. I had never heard a fugitive slave speak, and was immensely interested to hear him. He rose, and I soon perceived he was all alive. His soul poured out with rare pathos and power. Among other things, he told how a slave-holder would preach to an audience of slaves and take the text:

“Servants, be obedient to your masters’, and then proceed to say “The Lord in His Providence sent pious souls over to Africa – dark, heathen, benighted Africa – to bring you into this Christian land, where you can sit beneath the droppings of the sanctuary and hear about Jesus! The Lord has so established things that only through the channel of obedience can happiness flow. For instance, Sam, the other day, was sent out by his master to do a piece of work that would occupy about two hours and a half. At the expiration of that time, Sam’s master went out; and lo! And behold! There lay Sam’s hoe in one place, and Sam in another, fast asleep! The master remembered the words of Scripture: ‘He that knoweth the master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.’ So, Sam was taken up and whipped, so that he was disabled from doing any work for the short space of three weeks and a half. ‘For only through the channel of obedience can happiness flow’”.

Sallie Holley has left us with a portion of Douglass’s talk in Buffalo; something we do not otherwise have.

Frederick Douglass also recalled this series of meetings in Buffalo in which he met Ms. Holley. He mentioned the event in 1893 at Holley’s funeral where was asked to give a few words:

An Anti-Slavery Convention was appointed to be held in Buffalo, New York, where Miss Holley then resided. [She was actually just visiting her sister.] It was in the year 1843. The abolition question was then so unpopular that no church or public hall could be obtained in which to hold the meetings; so we went into an old deserted warehouse, without door or windows, and began with an audience of six or seven men who stood about the open front of the building.

I continued for six days to speak in this place to an audience, which at last crowded the house, of the common people, who came in their common clothes.

On the third day of our motley meeting, made up entirely of men, I observed with some amazement, as well as pleasure, a stately young lady, elegantly dressed, come into the room, leading a beautiful little girl. The crowd was one that would naturally repel a refined and elegant young lady, but there was no shrinking on her part. The crowd did the shrinking. It drew in its sides and opened the way, as if fearful of soiling the elegant dress with the dirt of toil. This lady

came daily to my meetings in that old deserted building, morning and afternoon, till they ended. The dark and rough background rendered her appearance like a messenger from heaven sent to cheer me in what then seemed to most men a case of utter despair. The lady was Miss Sallie Holley, and this story illustrates her noble, independent, and humane character. She was never ashamed of her cause nor her company.

Douglass delivered a week's worth of lectures in Buffalo beginning on August 7th and ending on Sunday August 13th. Although he did begin as the lone speaker, by August 10th, Charles Lenox Remond had arrived. The two of them worked together for the rest of the week, culminating in a Sunday evening gathering in Court House Park (now Lafayette Square) before some 3,000 to 5,000 individuals.

Please refer to <https://buffaloah.com/h/fagant/Douglass.pdf> for more information on Douglass's time in Buffalo 1843.

The "beautiful little girl" that Douglass mentioned most likely was Holley's niece, daughter of her sister. In the late 1840's, Sallie Holley attended Oberlin College in Ohio, the first one in the nation to accept both African-Americans and women as students. The 1850's saw her on the lecture circuit as a Garrisonian abolitionist and a member of the American Anti-slavery Society. After the Civil War, she served as an educator to the African-Americans and was a co-founder (with Caroline Putnam) of a school in Virginia known as the Holley School.

Sources

Sallie Holley & John White Chadwick, *A Life for Liberty; Anti-slavery and other letters of Sallie Holley, 1899*

Old Baptist Church at Seneca and Washington used as Post office from 1837-1841

First floor: public use with four stores

Second floor: Post office – entered by long flight of stairs

Third floor: offices

Buffalostamptclub.org

Frederic May Holland, *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator* (Negro Universities Press 1891) 1970 p. 93-95

Gregory P. Lampe, *Frederick Douglass, Freedom's Voice, 1818-1845* (Michigan State University Press, East Lansing

Frederick Douglass, *Autobiographies*, (1994 the Library of America p. 671-674)

History of the Buffalo Post office

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