

Descriptions of the Hopedale Community's Annual Celebrations of the Emancipation of the British West Indies

The following are two excerpts from chapters of *Hopedale Reminiscences*, a book of stories of people who lived in the Hopedale Community as children. This book was compiled by the Hopedale Women's Sewing Circle in 1910. The first excerpt is written by Anna Thwing Field, the daughter of abolitionist Almond Thwing. The second was written by Nellie Gifford, who used the name "Nelson's Grove" to describe the area and has become the terminology for it in this lesson, as well as on the commemorative plaque.

This document also includes a history of the gatherings by the minister Adin Ballou and newspaper articles from William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*.

Anna Thwing Fields in *Hopedale Reminiscences*:

"...annually in August, in a small pine grove near where the High School building now is, Hopedale had an Anti-Slavery meeting. I recall many earnest men and women who spoke from that platform. There came Parker Pillsbury...[a] scowling man, who stormed across the stage, shook his clenched fists and said things that scared one; ably seconded by Charles Burleigh, who wore his hair and beard long, having vowed he never would cut them till the slave was free.

William Lloyd Garrison, always in earnest but more moderate in voice and wiser in counsel, was always present, and usually Wendell Phillips with his gentlemanly, polished ways and scholarly oratory.

Among the women speakers were Lucy Stone Blackwell, Abby Kelley Foster and Anna Dickinson. Mrs. Foster was a sister of Grandmother Earl who lived where Mrs. Sornborger now lives. Stephen Foster and his wife were from Worcester and were always friends of the slave.

Frederick Douglas, a colored man who was an escaped slave, was an interesting speaker. The weightier matters discussed were advocated in the *Practical Christian*, the newspaper published by the Community, but I was too young to appreciate the ideas that were advanced, that were afterwards the occasion of national dissension and civil war.

I was more interested when a man arose on the platform and showed branded in the palm of his uplifted hand the letters S.S. He had labored among the slaves to aid them to escape from slavery and as a punishment was burned S.S. for Slave Stealer. He [[Jonathan Walker](#)] afterwards married Dr. Emily Gay's sister and lived in Hopedale."

Twing also recalls the arrival of fugitives who claimed their own freedom, including Henry Box Brown.

"I well remember the black, black man of large stature who was called Henry Box Brown. He was a slave and had come all the way from the South, sent by friends in a dry goods box with holes in the cover, and labeled, 'This side up. With care,' and shipped, if I remember rightly, to Isa T. Hopper, New York."

Nellie Gifford in Hopedale Reminiscences:

“The Community was strongly Anti-Slavery in sentiment, and the celebrations of Emancipation in the West Indies, held in "Nelson's Grove" were enthusiastic events, enjoyed too by the children. Some noted speakers would be present, among them Garrison, Phillips, Abby Kelley Foster, Charles Burleigh, whose features so strongly resembled pictures of Christ, and Sojourner Truth, once a slave, a powerful, if not cultured, advocate of freedom for those of race in bondage. She was a large, very black woman, very witty and an inveterate smoker. The late Theodore Tilton once asked her how she expected ‘to enter Heaven with a tobacco scented breath.’ Her reply was, ‘When I die and go to Heaven, I 'spect to leave my bref behind me.’

The "Man with the Branded Hand" [[Jonathan Walker](#)] was at one time a resident of Hopedale. He was called so, as in aiding slaves to escape, he was caught by owners, and the letters S. S. (Slave Stealer) burned in his hand.”

The next piece is an excerpt from Adin Ballou’s History of the Hopedale Community, which describes the gatherings.

“It was our custom in Hopedale, as radical Abolitionists, to celebrate from year to year the Anniversary of the Emancipation of 800,000 slaves in the British West Indies: an event which took place by decree of the English Government on the first of August, 1834.

This was done on the year in review in a pleasant grove near the southerly borders of our domain, half a mile from the central part of our village. It was estimated that an audience of about eight hundred persons was in regular attendance upon the exercises and that not less than a thousand visited the grounds during the day. Besides speakers of our own, Adin Ballou, William H. Fish, and William S. Heywood, there were present from outside, Rev. James T. Woodbury of Milford, Rev. Robert Hassall of Mendon, Rev John Boyden of Woonsocket, Rhode Island, Rev. George S. Ball of Upton, Rev. Daniel S. Whitney of Southboro, and those well known redoubtable champions of Impartial Liberty, Henry C. Wright and Charles C. Burleigh.

There was also with us a remarkable colored woman, once a slave in the State of New York, Sojourner Truth, whose impassioned utterances on the occasion were like the fiery outbursts of some ancient prophet of God ‘lifting up his voice like a trumpet and showing the people their transgressions, and the house of Jacob their sins.’

The general tone of the meeting and the nature of the testimonies given may be inferred from one of the seven resolutions passed, which, in view of what afterward transpired, seems like a veritable prophecy written by inspiration from on high, as evidenced by its reproduction here: ‘Resolved, That the celebration of this day naturally turns our eyes to the horrible abominations of American slavery and inspires us with fearful forebodings of the tremendous retribution which our professedly Republican nation is treasuring up for itself by obstinately persisting in the perpetration of its unparalleled crimes against God and humanity; that we abhor and deplore the brazen impudence with which its government justifies the wickedness of enslaving millions of beings confessedly endowed with unalienable human rights; that we behold in its merciless

Fugitive Slave Laws, in its insatiable ambition to extend the ravages of slavery into new territories, in its daily declension from all its former professed love of liberty, in its utter contempt of British emancipation, in the recklessness of its aspiring politicians, in the subserviency of all its departments to the dictation of slaveholders, in its constitutional. inherent. habitual, confirmed, and inveterate pro-slavery tendencies unmistakable evidence that it is ripening for some terrible convulsion - some overwhelming visitation of calamity in which the whole nation must inevitably share.”

MORE COVERAGE:

Read [this](#) article of a description taken from Ballou’s newspaper, *The Practical Christian*, reprinted in *The Liberator* on August 15th, 1856. Garrison often copied excerpts from *The Practical Christian* to convey news and ideas from Hopedale to a wider audience.

Another excerpt from *The Liberator*, this time from August 14th, 1857, [here](#). This article contains two separate descriptions of the 1857 celebrations.

FIRST OF AUGUST AT HOPEDALE.

FREE GROVE, HOPEDALE, }
August 1st, 1854. }

DEAR GARRISON—I came here from Boston this morning, to attend the Twentieth Anniversary of West India Emancipation. I love to visit this place; it is very dear to me. I have sacred and pleasant memories connected with it—not only for Humanity's sake, but for personal considerations. True, earnest, devoted friends of Humanity are here.

I am here on a platform, in a sweet, pine grove, noting down what is transpiring around me. Some 1500 or 2000 persons are before me; and a more intelligent and interested assembly could not well be found. The Hopedalers are posted up on all questions of radical Reform, as no community of the same number, within my knowledge, is. The meeting was organized by appointed E. D. Draper Chairman, and others for Secretaries and Committees. Adin Ballou read some Resolutions, and made a very lucid, concise, and most interesting statement of the facts respecting West India emancipation. It was of deep interest to all, and made in the happiest of his happy style.

He was followed by James T. Woodbury, formerly orthodox minister at Acton, now of Milford. At the conclusion of his speech, I made some remarks, on the necessity of a dissolution of the Union.

We have had an intermission of one hour, and our Hopedale friends supplied those who needed with a lunch on the ground, and we formed little groups, to eat and to interchange our thoughts and feelings in sweet social sympathy. It is good and pleasant to be here. There is an intellectual, social and spiritual development and freedom among these Hopedalers with which all hearts must sympathize, and which, one can but wish, may yet extend to all of human kind.

C. C. Burleigh has made a thrilling speech on the duty of the North—all tending to rouse the people to come out of this kidnapping Union. Several others have spoken, nearly all directing their remarks to the duty of this State to protect its citizens from the great kidnapper—the General Government. A feeling pervaded the assembly that *political* parties could do nothing with the General Government; and that they could serve this cause in no way but by arraying the State against the Fugitive Slave Law—on the issue that that law shall not be executed on its territory.

The day is all our hearts could wish. I know nothing that could have made this meeting more interesting and efficient than it has been, unless you and some other speakers from abroad, whom the people ever delight to hear, had been present. This is a consecrated grove. In it may there be many gatherings like this, to advocate the cause of Humanity!

HENRY C. WRIGHT.

To the left is an article from the August 11th, 1854 publication of William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*.

Henry C. Wright, who wrote this piece sent to Garrison, was a well-known abolitionist and pacifist who attended the 20th Anniversary of West India Emancipation in Hopedale. As he mentioned, he visited Hopedale on numerous occasions, as did many other abolitionists—some of whom are written about here.

Think about how his experience of the event may have differed from the previous accounts of Hopedale's celebrations, as a visitor to Hopedale, unlike Ballou, Thwing Fields, and Gifford who resided in the community.