



Maria G. Porter (1805-1896)

Miss Maria G. Porter, an aged and well-known resident of this city, died at the residence of her nephew, Porter Farley, No.67 South Fitzhugh St., yesterday morning at the advanced age of 91 years.

The last day of November she suffered a stroke, and since that time had been unconscious, and death came at last with very little suffering. Before she had the stroke, she had retained her mental faculties with remarkable clarity and vigor.

She was born in Bristol, Maine, on October 18, 1805. In 1813, her family removed to Philadelphia. The War of 1812 had practically destroyed the shipping industry of Maine, where her father was employed. In Philadelphia she spent her young womanhood, remaining there until 1836, when she came to the city of Rochester. When she came to Rochester, she took charge of the family of Hon. Thomas Kempshall, a prominent citizen, and practically brought up his children.

For many years she ran a select boarding house on Sophia Street, and also on Canal St. Her guests were among the wealthy and aristocratic of that day. She became very active in the anti-slavery movement. As a result her house became the headquarters for all who were leaders in the exciting events of that period. It was one of the well-known stations of the Underground Railway which carried slaves from the South into the North, and kept them in hiding. William Lloyd Garrison, Beecher, and other men of prominence in the abolitionist movement were among her visitors. Only a few week before her death an aged Black women named Harriet Tubman, who used to be a professional smuggler of slaves from the South, called upon Miss Porter, and recalled the time when she used to stop at her house with fugitives in charge. Sometimes she would have as many as ten or twelve of these unfortunates hidden in her house. She was an intensely patriotic woman and did much for the soldiers during the war.

Miss Porter was an active member of the Female Charitable Society and also one of the original members of Temple St. Unitarian Church, of which at the time of her death she was the oldest surviving member. No member had been more cherished and honored than "Aunt Maria," as she had long been lovingly called, and as Rev. W.C. Gannett touchingly referred to her in his church yesterday. Her church even was accustomed to celebrate the anniversary of her birth. She did an immense amount of unselfish labor for others.

Maria Porter was the oldest and only surviving sister of Samuel D. Porter, the well known abolitionist, who died in 1881 in the house which had been for 20 years his home and which was the death place of his sister on Saturday. She will be remembered by hundreds as the sister of Misses Jane and Almira Porter, who for 20 or more years from 1854 conducted a well known private school in Rochester.

Owing to her age, Miss Porter had, for many years, led a quiet and retired life, but up to





the very last her faculties were preserved and she kept in close touch with the world and its doings, in which she was so much interested. She was a woman of great individuality and character and was full of sympathy for others.

Connected by blood to many of the prominent families of Rochester in the days of its early history and also by marriage to Everard Peck, she had for many years been practically the head of the Porter, Farley and Peck families. She is survived by many relatives who, with the many who knew her, will find in her death, a great loss.

From Rochester Herald , Dec. 14, 1896

Resources

Source: Local History Division, Rochester Public Library

Hewitt, Nancy A. Women's Activism and Social Change Rochester, New York, 1822-1872. Ithaca and London, 1984.

Shirley Cox Husted. Sweet Gift of Freedom . Vol. 2. Rochester, NY, 1986.

Samuel D. Porter

A director of the Rochester Athenaeum, corresponding secretary of the Rochester Antislavery Soc. in 1838 and an early supporter of the Republican Party. A Rochester businessman, bookseller, newspaper publisher and real estate agent he was probably the city's most active white abolitionist. He kept slaves in the barn behind his home on S. Fitzhugh St. A member of the Liberty Party and its candidate for mayor, he helped persuade schools to accept black children in 1857. He went with Susan B Anthony to sell tickets to John Brown's Memorial Service. He lived at 62 and 68 S. Fitzhugh St. But after his business partner Everard Peck died in 1854, his family moved to the Peck house at the corner of Spring St. and S. Fitzhugh St., now part of the Civic Center site. His wife was Susan Farley Porter. Their son left the UR to join the Army during the Civil War and died the day after his father. The funeral for both was held in the same day in their home.

Maria G. Porter

She has harbored more runaway slaves than anyone else in the city except Amy Post. She died in 1896 having lived 12 Plymouth Ave. (10 S. Sophia St.); then 712 Main St. (299 Buffalo St.) and the old Schermerhorn mansion at 12 S. Sophia St.; 45 Canal St. (later # 12). The only Treasurer of the Rochester Ladies Anti Slavery Sewing Society through all the years of its existence. She collected money for their treasury at home and dispersed some of it to escaping slaves. According to Shirley Husted, in The Sweet Gift of Freedom , Vol. 1, p.22, Maria G. Porter was a stop on the Underground Railroad.

