

ANECDOTES OF DOUGLASS

Early Career of the Negro Leader as an Editor in Rochester.

SPELLING WAS DIFFICULT FOR HIM

He Enjoyed a Joke at His Expense as Well as Others—Assisted Many Slaves to Escape to Canada.

ROCHESTER, N. Y., Feb. 24.—"Throw the nigger printing press into Lake Ontario and banish Douglass to Canada." This was the advice of a New-York daily, back in ante-slavery days, given to Rochesterians, advice which it is needless to say was not heeded. That it was not heeded is something of which Rochester is now and has been for years proud, though at the time it must be confessed that the status here of Frederick Douglass, at whom the imprecation was made, was not an enviable one, except in a limited circle of Abolitionists. But he outlived that prejudice before leaving here, and became a



Frederick Douglass

recognized leader and a man of influence, for which he might have returned thanks to "the nigger printing press" which the people of Rochester were good enough not to throw into Lake Ontario as advised. He gained his first publicity, it might be said, through the publication of a paper which he printed here for several years.

It was in 1847 that Frederick Douglass first came to this city, and he lived here for nearly a quarter of a century. It was here he spent the years of his most vigorous manhood, during the period when the institution of slavery in the Southern States was most arrogant and aggressive, and the opposition to it in the Northern States was most bitter and uncompromising. It was only nine years after his escape from slavery that he came here. Rochester was then a stronghold of the anti-slavery advocates, and there was great sympathy for him.

When he announced that he intended to start a paper in the interests of the then all-absorbing cause, he met with opposition from those who had been his warmest friends, as it was beyond the belief of even his most ardent admirers that one who was but nine years removed from the dense ignorance of the plantation slave should be fitted to attempt editorial work. However, he established his paper, named it *The North Star*, but afterward called it *Frederick Douglass's Paper*, and kept it afloat in the face of many difficulties until the Union of States was assured and emancipation was accomplished. It was a weekly of large size, and cost about \$30 a week to publish. There were times when all the money of the editor was in the venture, and he was deeply in debt in addition.

The publishers, editors, and printers of the city were then in the habit of holding a banquet annually on Franklin's birthday. Soon after Douglass started his paper such a banquet was held in the old Irving House, kept by an old printer named Haskell. Mr.

ed in on 'The Irish Washerwoman,' and the couple began to dance for dear life. When the music and dancing stopped, Frederick tendered the dealer the 5s., but his performance on the violin had greatly enhanced its value in the mind of the storekeeper, and, as he hurried it away to a place of security, he exclaimed:

"If a black nagur can git sich chunes out of that fiddle, I'll niver sell it at any price, begorra!"

The father of Mr. Post, Isaac Post, was one of the greatest Abolitionists here during the war, and many a fugitive slave was sheltered and secreted in Mr. Post's barn and helped across the Canadian line to freedom.

"The most we ever had at our place at one time," said Mrs. Amy Post, "was twelve. They were brought to me without a word of warning one Saturday, and they staid over Sunday. They were so happy to think that they were so far North, so near Canada, that we had hard work to keep them out of sight. Many a time I crept out to the barn after dark with a basket of food."

It was Frederick Douglass who secured this retreat for the fugitives, and many others he secured as well. He was in secret communication with the leading anti-slavery people in all parts of the country. It was well known that Rochester was doing a great business at underground railroading in those years, but the officials were too circumspect for detection. Douglass was the superintendent of this terminus of the road.

"I remember," says an old neighbor of Frederick Douglass, "that sometimes father and the horse and wagon would drive away early in the evening and be gone all night. We never asked any questions, nor saw him go if we could avoid it, but he would be remarkably cheerful at breakfast, and possibly let out something if we pressed him hard, but that was against the rule. The excitement was like that of living on a smuggling coast."

William S. Falls, in speaking of what used to be done here for fugitives by persons unsuspected of anti-slavery proclivities, says:

"The poor creatures were usually penniless. I used to solicit donations in the Arcade, and our citizens would give freely. Uncle Dave Richardson of Henrietta never refused. Once E. C. Williams and myself, east side of the river, each taking a side of Main Street, collected all we needed. The railroad fare only of the refugees was paid by the agents in the several States while passing on our way to dinner on the from funds raised in England."

It was when the Fugitive Slave bill was passed that the indignation of Frederick Douglass found its fullest vent here. His contempt of compromising legislation, the highest attainment of his eloquence, was listened to by those who packed the hall where he was to speak. There was one scene in old Corinthian Hall that is recalled, and will never be forgotten by those who were present. Douglass was condemning the bill, and said:

"Is there a man here who dares to say that he has a right to sell his brother?"

A voice clearly responded, "I do."

In an instant every eye saw the speaker—the finger of Douglass pointing him out as he stood.

"Turn your face to the wall, then," said Douglass, in contemptuous sarcasm.

An intimate friend of Douglass relates an interesting anecdote about how Douglass and others helped three negroes to escape. They were all men, two brothers and a cousin, and said to be exceptionally intelligent. One was harbored at the home of Mr. Douglass, another at the home of Asa Anthony, and the third at the home of a farmer in Irondequoit, north of the city, near the lake. On the day it had been planned to get the fugitives safely out of the city there happened to be held an anti-slavery meeting here, at which somebody foolishly mentioned the fact that the negroes were in the city. So it was thought best not to carry out the plan proposed. In fact, it was even thought best to get them to a more secluded hiding place than they were then in, for it was learned that warrants for their arrest were out.

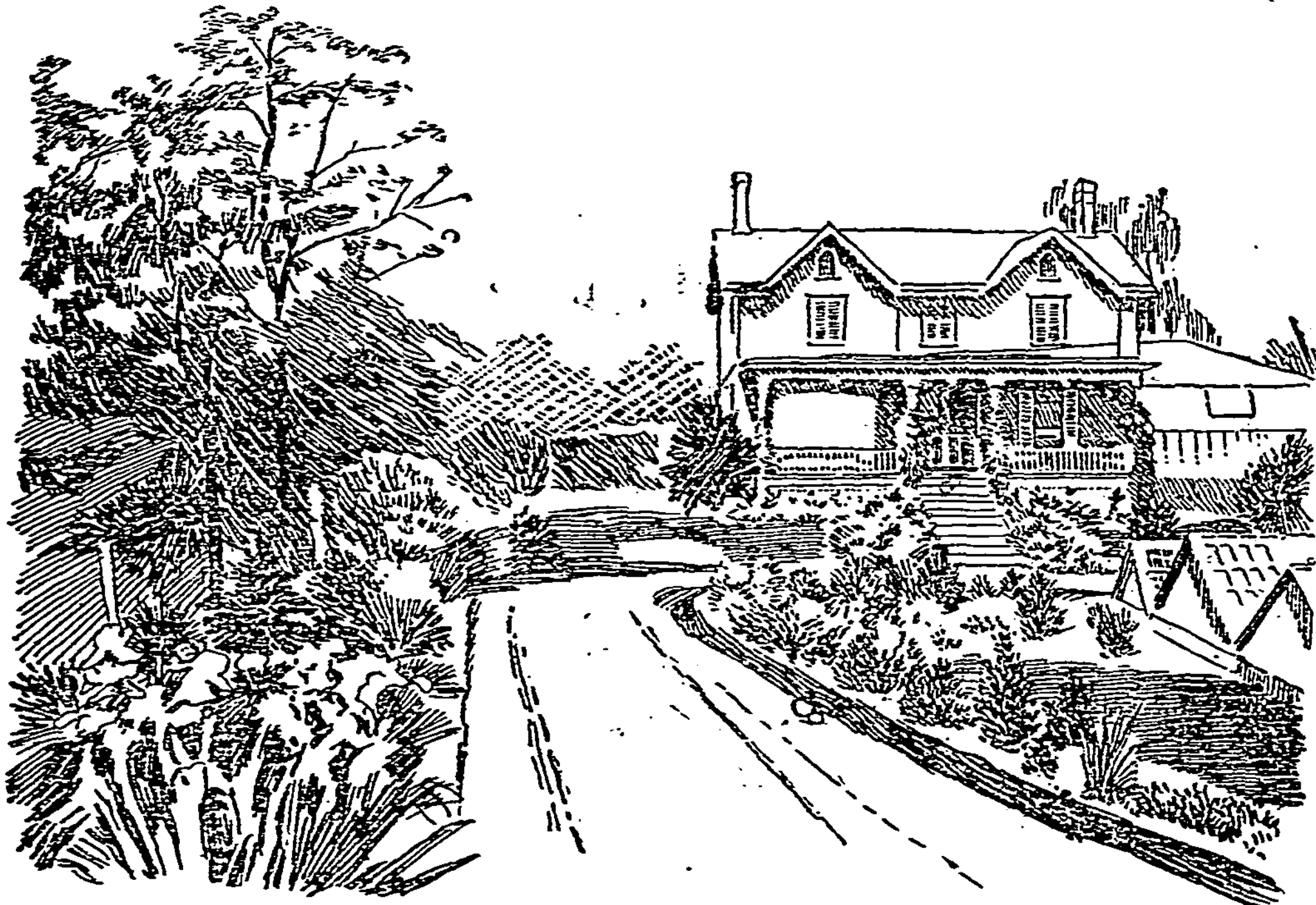
Accordingly Douglass took the man who was at his house over to Mr. Anthony's, by making a roundabout drive, but there was no way of getting to the Irondequoit man without going through the heart of the city, there being no bridges then on the lower river by which to get across. A plan had to be devised, and Douglass was equal to the emergency.

Two revolvers and two bowie knives were purchased and given to the two men. Then they were painted white, dressed in women's clothes, and driven through the town with instructions to shoot or kill the first man who might attempt to interfere with them. But they were not detected and they made their way to Irondequoit in safety. There the other member of the trio was found, and the company started east along the lake shore, going as far as Williamson, where they remained a couple of weeks. A vessel going to Canada was finally hailed, and the fugitives put aboard for the land of freedom.

Almost an endless number of similar anecdotes can be gained from the numerous friends a co-laborers of Douglass of those exciting days. At the funeral exercises held in this city after the death of Lincoln, the principal speaker was Mr. Douglass, and his effort on that occasion was one of the most eloquent speeches ever heard in this city.

At his home on the little hill approaching what is now Highland Park, Frederick Douglass had many a distinguished visitor. Among them was John Brown, whose "soul goes marching on." Here it was that "Old

of Mr. Douglass will be brought to this city, and interred in Mount Hope Cemetery, which is in the immediate vicinity of the old homestead, and looks across to the height where he spent so many years of his life. It is probable that there will be some imposing ceremonies in connection with the funeral, as the interest in the life and work of the dead orator has never abated in this city.



Frederick Douglass's Homestead, Rochester, N. Y.

Douglass had not been invited, and was not expected. But he went to the banquet, nevertheless, accompanied by a young colored man, his associate in editing *The North Star*.

They were denied admission at the door, although they had procured tickets from one of the printers in the employ of Mr. Douglass. The matter was brought to the attention of the assembly by Alexander Mann of *The Rochester American*, who was the presiding officer. The question of admission was put to a vote, and carried in the affirmative. This little episode in the life of Mr. Douglass in Rochester worked greatly to his advantage.

The career of a journalist for Frederick Douglass was not one strewn with roses, as the disadvantages of his early life were keenly felt all the time. It was not until he was twenty-one years old that he managed to learn to read and write, and spelling continued to be difficult for a long time, Jacob K. Post of this city relates an incident in this connection. It was at the home of Mr. Post's father that Douglass first lived when coming to this city. Mr. Post says:

"I remember once when he left our house to go on a lecture tour we found in his room a slip of paper on which was written a long list of words in common use. They were hard ones for Frederick, for across the top of the slip he had written, 'Words that I find hard to spell.'"

"Frederick was a lover of fine horses, and I could tell you many stories in this connection."

"He liked to tell jokes about his race as well as at the expense of any other. Once when he was in Dublin he felt very lonesome. He was wandering about the streets, when he was attracted by two violins in the window of a second-hand dealer. Frederick entered and asked the price of one of the instruments."

"'Five shillings, Sor,' said the Irish dealer."

"Frederick tuned the violin and began to play, 'Rocky Road to Dublin.' Soon the proprietor's wife heard the music and entered the rear door. Then Frederick start-

Ossawatomee" unfolded the plan of the Harper's Ferry raid. Brown and Douglass took many a stroll over the neighboring Pinnacle Hills and discussed measures for the improvement of the condition of the negroes and ways and means of liberating them from bondage.

Gov. Wise of Virginia, in 1859, believing that Mr. Douglass was implicated in John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry, made a requisition for him upon the Governor of Michigan, to which State Mr. Douglass had temporarily gone. He heard of this and fled to England, where he remained six or eight months. In a lecture on John Brown many years later, Mr. Douglass said he had been charged with inciting John Brown to his rash undertaking, but the charge was not true. As a matter of fact, he did his best to dissuade him from such a forlorn hope.

"There was nothing remarkable about John Brown," said Mr. Douglass, "except his mission. He was a wool dealer, with a good judgment about wool as a good wool dealer ought to have. It was his hatred of slavery that made him a hero."

The most recent relations of Mr. Douglass with Rochester and its people has been in connection with the movement of the colored people of this city to erect a monument to the memory of those of their race who fell in the civil war. It was decided some weeks since that a statue of Douglass shall surmount this monument. A public mass meeting in memory of Douglass is now being planned, and will probably be held in a week or two.

The home in which Frederick Douglass lived so long here was burned in 1872, after which he sold the property to J. B. Keller, a florist, who rebuilt the house, utilizing the same foundation and some of the walls. The illustration herewith shows the old Douglass homestead, with the house as it now stands. This spot was the hotbed of anti-slavery in ante-bellum days; it was over these rolling hills that Douglass and John Brown wandered, formulated plans, and discussed ways and means to liberate the negroes from their shackles. In the cellar of this house and in the woods near by many a slave found a safe hiding place while on his journey to freedom. Mr. Keller, who has owned and occupied the property ever since Douglass sold it to him, says that every time Douglass came to the city since leaving he always visited him, as he loved to walk over the old ground, which was sacred in his memory; he loved to renew the thoughts and associations of former days. This spot, Mr. Douglass claimed, always seemed the most homelike of all places in the world to him.

It has been announced that the remains