

ON FREDERICK DOUGLASS'S CONNECTION TO ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

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Jan 1, 1863— The "day dawned chilly and depressing. A driving snow and rain had racked the Atlantic coast during the night, and the morning sun struggled to pierce the veil of murky vapors." Perhaps he was weary from the journey between Rochester and Boston. Yet, there in the city in which Crispus Attucks had been the first to lay down his life for the colonist's independence from English rule, Douglass, the man, who once had been a slave, was poised to celebrate a new age; an age in which slavery would be conquered.

Three days earlier, he had forecast it from the pulpit of Rochester's Zion Church. Licensed to preach by the clergyman who had started that African Church, Douglass had reassured fellow Rochesterians that President Lincoln would indeed issue an executive order outlawing slavery.

Reassurance. That had been Douglass's self-appointed charge since 1838, when Anna Murray had risked her own freedom to free him. Anna Murray Douglass had ironed his shirts to perfection; had birthed their five children; had maintained their home, that in spite of his frequent absences operated as Underground Railroad station;

Douglass had experienced privations and had been the beneficiary of courageous action by others. Thus, was he able to enlist others in the cause. In Rochester, Douglass got his footing, hit his stride: Underground Railroader, publisher of the *North Star* and the best of three autobiographies; colleague to Susan B. Anthony. Oh yes, he was uniquely suited to reassure the many who were anxious about the President's resolve.

Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and Douglass did not miss a step. He put out the call, "Men of Color, to Arms! Now or never!" And they answered—two of his sons among the 200,000 men of color— stepped up. In time, they would prove the margin of Union victory. A nation would be preserved; a people—a multi-hued people would be freed of the sin of slavery.