

SYMPOSIUM

A Call to Action: Abolition, Activism, and the Principled Life

April 7, 2018 | 9 am – 3 pm | Cook Memorial Theater at the Whaling Museum

Registration:

\$25 for Members (Whaling Museum, Rotch-Jones-Duff, or New Bedford Historical Society) | \$35 for Non-members

Tickets: www.rjdmuseum.org or whalingmuseum.org

Brought to you by the Rotch-Jones-Duff House and Garden Museum, in partnership with the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the New Bedford Historical Society, and the New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park



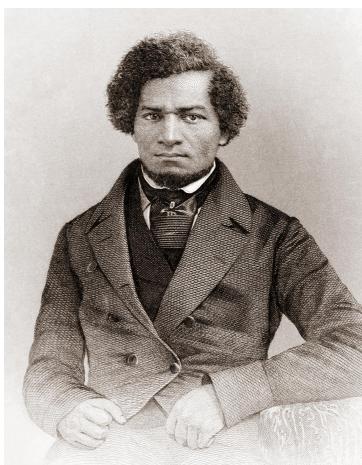
Abolition and abolition alone is the remedy that must be applied if we would relieve our beloved country from the curse of slavery.

— Constitution of the New Bedford Anti-Slavery Society, 1834

The constitution of the New Bedford Anti-Slavery Society was signed by more than 120 citizens of the town—men and women, black and white. William Rotch Jr. was the society's first president, but his efforts to abolish slavery in the United States had begun almost a half-century earlier. *A Call to Action* aims to place Rotch's life and activism in the contexts of his Quaker upbringing, the economic and political relations between North and South, and the lives of African Americans, both free and fugitive.

From the era of the early republic to the Civil War, abolitionist sentiment and action made New Bedford a destination for African Americans escaping slavery. Here men and women making new lives in the North found opportunities for work and entrepreneurial advancement in an economy dominated by the whaling industry. A liberal tradition fostered in substantial measure by the town's Quaker heritage combined with the abundant employment whaling offered both at sea and on shore to foster a diverse, relatively tolerant, and prosperous culture. Still, the connection between New Bedford's wealth and the North's dependence on the South has not been fully explored.

A Call to Action will revisit and share these stories with an eye toward connecting them to issues affecting American society today, and it aims to serve as a foundation for continued conversations as we make choices about the fabric of our communities going forward.



Above: William Rotch Jr., circa 1834

Below: Frederick Douglass, circa 1845

SYMPORIUM

A Call to Action: Abolition, Activism, and the Principled Life

Schedule

9 am

Underwater Sailors and Overground Railroads

Speaker: Edward E. Baptist, Cornell University

Edward E. Baptist digs deeper into why Frederick Douglass came to New Bedford, his first home in the free states and the site of his first encounters with the abolitionist movement. Baptist examines how the same North-South economic connections that built wealth for both regions on the backs of the enslaved also generated opportunities for their resistance and escape.

Baptist is the author of *The Half Has Never Been Told: Slavery and the Making of American Capitalism* (2014) and is directing *Freedom On The Move*, a project to compile a crowd-sourced database of all runaway slave advertisements in North American history. He is currently working on a history of the policing of African Americans and the resistance to that policing.

10 am

"What Shall be Done with the Negro?"

Speaker: Maurice Jackson, Georgetown University

In 1863, four months after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, the *New York Times* published Frederick Douglass's remarkable essay, "What Shall Be Done with the Negro?" Yet Douglass was far from the first to raise the question. In 1762, Quaker abolitionist Anthony Benezet asked, "What shall be done with the Negroes?" in *A Short Account of Africa*, and in 1775 patriot firebrand Thomas Paine asked essentially the same question. That the nation had failed to answer the question is made plain in W.E.B. DuBois's reiteration of it decades after the Civil War. Jackson will look at this perennial American query.

Jackson, associate professor of history and African American studies at Georgetown, is author of *Let This Voice Be Heard: Anthony Benezet, Father of Atlantic Abolitionism* (2010) and co-editor of *Quakers and their Allies in the Abolitionist Cause, 1754-1808*.

11 am

Bondservants of Liberty: The Jacobs Family and the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793

Speaker: Jonathan Schroeder, University of Warwick

Jonathan Schroeder will present an excerpt from his biography of the family of Harriet and John Jacobs, siblings whose family had ties to New Bedford both before and after their escapes from slavery. A lifetime before, in 1791, their great-grandparents had made a daring

escape with their five children to New Bedford. William Rotch Sr., Thomas Rotch, and Providence Quaker and abolitionist Moses Brown harbored the fugitive family, changed their names and identities, and ferried them back and forth across state lines to avoid capture. Schroeder's reconstruction of the escape and the legal proceedings that followed document the significance of the case in the political struggles of the early republic.

Schroeder holds an M.A. from Brown University and a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from the University of Chicago. Currently assistant professor of English at the University of Warwick, Schroeder is seeking fresh ways of examining the histories of race, ethnicity, and migration.

12 pm

Lunch Break

Pre-order your lunch when you register for the symposium online.

12:45 pm

Principled Lives: Quaker Abolitionists Rowland and Rachel Robinson

Speaker: Jane Williamson

Devout members of the Society of Friends, Rowland T. and Rachel G. Robinson devoted themselves to American abolition from the earliest years of the movement, even as Quakers formed a minority in the leadership of their state antislavery society. From their home in Vermont, the Robinsons actively engaged in a Quaker network that extended down the Hudson River Valley into New York City and made use of it in their efforts to shelter and provide work for fugitives from slavery and to boycott goods produced by enslaved peoples.

Williamson is Emeritus Director of Vermont's Rokeby Museum, where she served as director for more than twenty years. She holds a master's degree in historic preservation from the University of Vermont, has researched and written about abolition, the Underground Railroad, and Quaker material culture, and spearheaded the development at Rokeby of the permanent exhibition *Free & Safe: The Underground Railroad in Vermont*.

2 pm

Presenter Panel Discussion

Moderated by Lee Blake, Director of the New Bedford Historical Society, and Jan DaSilva, New Bedford Whaling National Historical Park