

Self Guided Tour: Abolitionists of Plymouth

Walking Tour
of Plymouth's Abolitionists homes and more....
Off the Freedom Trail in Plymouth, Mass



By Andrea M. Daly

Stephens Residence: William Stephens m. Esther (Allen) had three children: Lemuel. b.1787; Phebe,b.1790, and Sarah aka Aunt Sally b.1788. on Stephen's Lane.

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Pilgrim families of Plymouth Massachusetts will surprise you with their involvement abolishing black slavery in the 19th century. One of the youngest female characters went from learning to help the town's poor, to collecting pennies for helping African black slaves, to becoming a writer for children and, later, a co-founder of the Women's Industrial Educational Union in Massachusetts. Walk the tour to get a sense of their trails within the town.

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Acknowledgments

When I began researching for this book, my interests were inspired by listening to my grandmother's tales of growing up in Plymouth and by my own experiences. I am the fifth generation living in Plymouth on my maternal side of my family. I was a researcher in the Plymouth Public Library's History Room and a member of their Oral History Project; a docent for a couple of the local historical houses; a historical tour guide for Plymouth tourism; and an avid participant in the preservation of history for the local Antiquarian Society. All my experiences helped me find the diamond in the rough, the abolitionists of Plymouth.

As a docent in Plymouth's historic homes, I unraveled the owners' lives in their letters with stories of Plymouth I never learned as a school-aged child. The political figures, writers, seafarers, and unique individuals who lived in Plymouth centuries ago always fascinated me. I was intrigued with the unknown or lost history of people who were significant in making a change in 19th century Plymouth, at the time a remote town.

It's easy to misunderstand my town's complete history when it's been monopolized with the Landing of the Pilgrims and the early colonial era. I immersed myself reading books and articles of local 19th century authors, homeopathic women doctors, founders of local industries and others. I am a fifth generation of Plymouth descendants on my maternal side.

Most of my articles were found in forgotten files or book shelves at Smith College, Harvard University, on microfiche at the Plymouth Public Library, and at Pilgrim Hall Museum. Internet access made it easier to locate period books all over the world. Computers can be helpful and also track keywords, and once I started doing my research, I noted more information springing up on my main character, Abby Morton Diaz.

After years of doing my own historical tours on foot, in and out of costume, I put together this walking tour narrative, focused in part on

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Abby the “Silver Tongued Prophetess,” I hope my interests in preserving these stories of local history will inspire you to walk the tour.

A special thanks to S. Mabell Bates of the Maxwell Library at Bridgewater State University; Smith College’s Sophia Collection Librarians; Radcliffe’s Reference Librarians; Photograph Coordinator at Radcliffe’s Schlesinger Library, Marie-Helene Gold; Peggy Baker, Director/Curator of Pilgrim Hall Museum; Librarian Bev Ness at the Plymouth Public Library; Plymouth’s Oak Hills Cemetery Supervisor, Bradford Bartlett; the Belmont Cemetery’s Supervisor; Dr. Donna Curtin, Director/Curator of the Antiquarian Society and always, my many supportive family members and friends.

Andrea M. Daly
Plymouth, Massachusetts

Introduction

Who were the abolitionists? In 19th century Plymouth Massachusetts, they were people who banded together to fight for the freedom of black slaves. This booklet will teach you about abolitionists who lived and visited Plymouth.

After years of researching local history, I came across an interesting article named, “Anti-Slavery Times in Plymouth”, by Abigail Morton Diaz. I found this article hidden in the archives of Pilgrim Hall Museum, a nationally known museum of Pilgrim history, not the place one would expect to find 19th century materials. Abigail’s youthful activities as “secretary” for a juvenile abolitionist group in Plymouth made her an eyewitness to the town’s local anti-slavery movement; her lineage connected her to Plymouth’s early history. She was a direct descent of Pilgrim Ephraim Morton whose youngest brother Nathaniel was Secretary of Pilgrim Colony. Even though the museum had only one article by Abigail Morton Diaz, this key source allowed me to research other avenues and discover more information about this abolitionist and others in the 19th century.

Abigail Morton was the daughter of Ichabod and Patty (Cole-Weston) Morton. Patty Morton died when Abigail was only seven years old. Her father remarried to Betsey Holbrook. Five brothers soon came from that marriage. Abigail was raised by a father who was very religious, coupled with high standards for human kindness and a belief in the betterment of all mankind. Abigail learned that even though her father’s values were highly admired by some, they did not reflect all who lived in her hometown.

The majority of people in Plymouth were descendants of English settlers, and at first did not look kindly upon the abolitionist cause. Desire Harlow was one of the young abolitionists in town; her obituary and an article written by W.L. Garrison spoke of her courage as a watchman for anti-slavery meetings. Following one such meeting, the sign to the anti-slavery reading room was tarred.

Abigail was a special person because she learned to rise above those who tried to keep her from learning more. Whenever things looked dark and the struggle was harder, it gave Abigail a reason to do more and be heard. Abby married Manuel Diaz, a man from Cuba. She met him when teaching at the Transcendentalist utopian community at Brook Farm. She attended higher education and was in the first graduating class at the Normal School in Bridgewater, later known as Bridgewater State College. Later she gave lectures, taught dance as well as school for young children, was a co-founder of the Women's Educational and Industrial Union in Boston, and authored children's literature and numerous articles, including religious essays for the *Christian Science* founded by Mary Baker Eddy.

If you choose to walk this Abolitionist Tour, you will have the opportunity of mirroring their footsteps in the dirt paths from well over a hundred years ago. Addresses are provided to allow you to GPS the locations.

You will see abolitionists' homes, the sites where they worshipped, listened to lectures and learned about other abolitionist friends who frequented Plymouth. The most popular site for anti-slavery lectures was the home of Bourne Spooner in North Plymouth. Spooner was a very religious man, an industrialist and quite a story teller, admirably mentioned by all who were welcomed into his home. His interest, wealth and wit, along with the efforts of the Morton family, appeared to be the backbone of the Anti-Slavery Society in Plymouth.

This booklet gives you a lot of information where you may see sites from this period. Read the timeline of Abigail Morton Diaz and maybe purchase one of the children's books which she illustrated and authored. Local newspaper obituaries collected on microfiche in the Plymouth Public Library reveal her dedication as an activist.

Today, people are still fighting for their freedom in other parts of the world and on our own soil. Abolitionist work will go on as long as people are being kept as slaves by other people. Will slavery ever end? What have we learned from history, from past attempts to end slavery? Can brotherhood and sisterhood be strong enough to abolish slavery everywhere? Can we cut through political, religious, ethnic and tribal

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barriers which keep slavery alive? Nearly two hundred years ago, the focus was on freeing black slaves. Today we still, hear the cry for freedom and human compassion around the world.



Abby Morton Diaz

Photo: Courtesy of The Plymouth Antiquarian Society

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*“The seed of anti-slavery fell in Plymouth on sandy soil, but watered
By heavenly dew, it soon took root and broke through the conservative
Crust which under the influence of the commercial and financial
interests of
Town, for a time obstructed its growth.”*

– Wm. T. Davis

**Site 7:
Ichabod Morton's Homestead, circa 1750
212 Sandwich Street**



This was the home of Abigail (Abby) Morton as a child. Abby is the youngest known abolitionist in Plymouth. The area where this house is located was known as Wellingsley or Hobshole. This homestead was a “safe/station house” as described by Abby in published interviews. It’s also the site where well known literary men came to visit Ichabod to discuss the need for change and growth in various aspects of life.

Men such as Bronson Alcott, Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison and Horace Mann were friends with Ichabod Morton, (b. 1790 - d. May10, 1861), his brother Edwin and brother-in-law Lemuel Stephens. These same men organized Plymouth’s first Anti-Slavery Society on the July 4, 1835, according to town historian William T. Davis. Ichabod’s daughter Abby told the New England Magazine editor that she became a member of the Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society when she was eight years old in 1829.

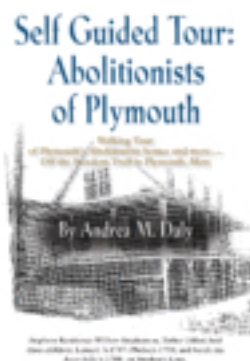
After the early death of Abby’s mother Patty Weston, her father Ichabod married Betsey Holbrook. Abby soon had five brothers: George, Nathaniel, Ichabod, Austin and Howard. Abby described her father as “tall, erect, earnest in bearing, usually of serious aspect and much given to planning for the kingdom of heaven to come on earth.

He felt he needed to free people from the cruel old orthodox ways and was an earnest worker for temperance, anti-slavery and the educational movement.” In later years, family descendents began to speak about their findings in the homes from the days of slavery. The slaves would scratch (Sanskrit) their names in the wall near fireplaces or on a piece of wood to show their passing on through to Canada.

In 1851, Jonathan Walker, branded “SS” slave stealer, came to Plymouth while on his three week lecture circuit and to stir up a vigilance committee to assist runaways. While in Plymouth he and some fugitive slaves stayed in “a rough and humble cabin.” Unable to find steady work after three weeks he moved on to Vermont.

President Theodore Roosevelt wrote in his autobiography, both my wife and I have the bound volumes of *Our Young Folks* which we preserved from our youth. I have tried to read I enjoy going over *Our Young Folks* now nearly as much as ever. “Cast Away in the Cold,” *Grandfather’s Struggle for a Homestead*,” “*The William Henry Letters*” (written by Abigail Morton Diaz) and a dozen other like them were first –class, good healthy stories, interesting in the first place , and in the next place teaching manliness, decency, and good conduct.

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