

## **Henry Clarke Wright, Non-Resistant Abolitionist**

When the reformer Henry Clarke Wright (1797-1870) set sail for England in the Spring of 1842, his crusading nature and itinerant lifestyle were firmly fixed. Endowed with a convincing oratorical style, he undertook his messianic assignments with impulsive energy. He preached and wrote about the principle of non-resistance, advocating firm but non-violent opposition to a host of phenomena: war, slavery, alcohol, improbity. Though open to new ideas and theories, he was nevertheless compulsively bound by staunch moral strictures. He prioritized character development, devoting enormous energy to improving himself and evangelizing for universal moral reform.

In the late 1830's and early 1840's, the New England Non-Resistance Society and the Massachusetts and American Anti-Slavery Societies appointed Wright agent for their causes. In 1842 his trusted friend and colleague William Lloyd Garrison convinced Wright to travel abroad and spread the societies' doctrines in England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Wright, an ordained minister, had been living in New England, in coastal Newbury and later in Boston. In the former he attracted large numbers of parishioners to a church with a foundering congregation. In the latter, he served as a youth minister, enjoying universal popularity. He penned many articles for *The Liberator*, Garrison's renowned mouthpiece for the abolition movement in the United States. In 1842, Wright accepted Garrison's advice. He arrived in the British Isles in October and would stay there well into 1847.

During those five years it was no coincidence that Wright would collaborate and share the speaker's podium with Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), who was in the U.K. from the Autumn of 1845 until the Spring of 1847, and with William Lloyd Garrison (1805-1879). Garrison toured the U.K. in the Summer & Autumn of 1846 to foment opposition to slavery in the U.S. and worldwide. Wright's letter book, found buried in piles of historic material in Annisquam's Firehouse, contains a raft of correspondence between him and like-minded friends and acquaintances in the British Isles. In their missives, his correspondents write fervently of their moral objections to slavery in the U.S. They often relate their impressions of American abolitionists, most notably Douglass and Garrison. A few letters are penned by the women who purchased Douglass' freedom from Thomas Auld, the Maryland plantation owner who considered himself Douglass' owner. It is these letters, a number of which are transcribed and re-printed on this website, that are preserved at the Annisquam Historical Society (AHS).

Wright remained an itinerant in the decades following his fruitful U.K. tour. After Wright returned to the U.S. and in the years leading up to the Civil War, his allegiance to Biblical tenets waned. Spiritualism captured his imagination, as it did that of

Garrison, his long-time colleague and a confidante. For a time, it was Spiritualism that tied him to Gloucester.

Julia Wass Friend (1835-1906), a Spiritualist clairvoyant lived in Gloucester and "treated" Wright for a number of years in the 1860's. She was acquainted with Garrison and Wright as early as 1862. That year she raised the alert about Wright's proposed return trip to the U.K. She foresaw disaster for him there. Wright never made the journey.

From 1867 until his death in 1870, Wright came and went from Gloucester, which he came to call "my home." During those years, he and Friend developed a close enough association that he called her "daughter." In his book, *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform: Henry Clarke Wright 1797-1870*, Lewis Perry notes that Wright used his contacts in the reform world to find a publisher for Friend's novel, *The Chester Family*. (Friend went on to graduate from Vermont Medical College in 1880. She is counted among the first women to earn medical degrees in the U.S.)

A search of Gloucester real estate titles turned up Gloucester properties in Henry Clarke Wright's name. These appear to have been held in conjunction with members of the Friend family. Wright's name appears alongside Julia Friend's first husband's (Elbridge Harrison Friend) in Gloucester's real estate holdings/listings in the late 1860's.

In *Childhood, Marriage, and Reform*, Perry writes that Wright, who passed away in Rhode Island, left his possessions and two lots of land in Gloucester to Julia Friend. He also "canceled" \$1,100 in promissory notes.

Wright's letter book must have found a home in Annisquam because of the Friend family web. The thread of a connection between Julia Friend and Annisquam lies with her husband Elbridge. Elbridge was Sarah Friend Roger's brother and Sarah Friend Rogers was Elliott Roger's mother. Elliot Rogers (1886-1967) and his wife Helen left many of their effects to the Annisquam Historical Society. One of Rogers' donated scrapbooks contains a letter written to Wright during the time of his U.K. tour.

Beneath the letter Rogers inscribed a caption. "The above were found among many papers of Henry C. Wright, a noted abolitionist in the U.S. Somehow he was connected with my family. I have five (5) books of his letters and papers, most of them unreadable but they may be of some interest to someone."

The 1848 letter to which Rogers' inscription refers was penned by Scottish abolitionist, Eliza Wigham (1820-1899). Its date corresponds to the dates in the Wright letter book also found in the Firehouse. The other four Wright letter books may have been donated to the Boston Public Library or to one of the Harvard libraries. Letters to and from Wright, in addition to many to and from Garrison and Douglass, are digitized on the libraries' websites.

