



UNTOLD TALES OF FALMOUTH

from the archives of Museums on the Green

Falmouth's Abolitionists

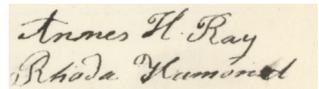
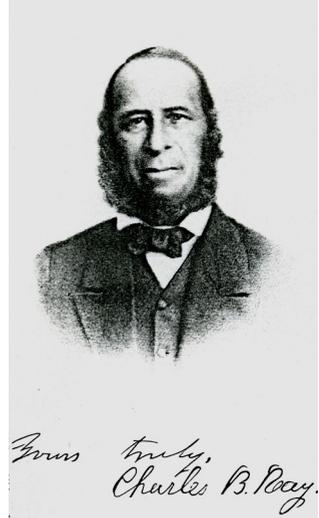
Around 1840, seventy-three Falmouth women signed a petition for the abolition of slavery. As an archives volunteer, I am working on a project to research these women and their family connections. Two signers were free black women: Rhoda Hammond and Annes Ray. Little is known about Rhoda, but Annes raised a distinguished family, and even inspired a local legend.

A story has been passed down in Falmouth that the young Annes was a slave, brought to town on a sailing trip with her southern "master." While he conducted business with Squire Palmer, whose home served as the post office, Annes went to the kitchen and was hidden inside a barrel by the Palmer women. The southerner couldn't find her before the tide turned, so he left her behind to start a new life in Falmouth.

Though this story may have a grain of truth, some of the details just don't add up. What we know for sure about Annes is far more interesting.

Annes lived in Falmouth with a black family named Harrington. She was probably related to them by blood or adoption. She got married here on March 30, 1806, to Joseph Ray of Westerly, Rhode Island. Joseph's father, Thomas, had been noted on the 1790 Census as an "Indian." The Ray family history tells us that Thomas had African ancestry as well.

Joseph and Annes settled in a house on Main Street, about where Ace Hardware (or Eastman's) is today. Joseph worked as a mail carrier. He delivered the mail between Martha's Vineyard and Falmouth. People long



Top: Falmouth native Charles B. Ray (1806-1886) was a minister, writer, publisher, and abolitionist. This picture is from A Sketch of the Rev. Charles B. Ray.

Bottom: Signatures from the Falmouth women's antislavery petition of 1840. Annes Ray and Rhoda Hammond were both free black women. Unfortunately, no photograph of Annes has yet been discovered, and little is known about the life of Rhoda Hammond.

remembered how he would row his boat across the Sound. His postal career lasted 28 years.

Annes and Joseph had seven children. The oldest was Charles Bennett Ray, born in Falmouth on December 24, 1806. He would become a big name in the Underground Railroad. Charles attended the village school and learned shoemaking. But in his teens, he left Falmouth. He attended Wesleyan Seminary in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, studying theology, after which he studied at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut. He left that school after a few months due to protests from other students.

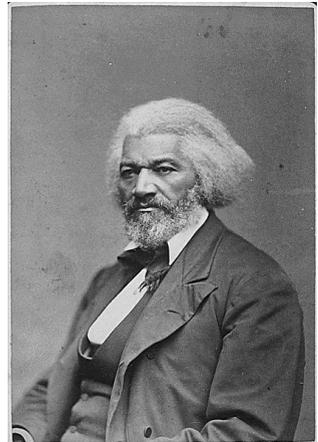
In 1832, Charles moved to New York City, where he opened a shoe store and later became a minister. In 1850 he was listed in a New York directory as “Reverend.”

Charles became involved with the antislavery movement in 1833, the same year of the forming of the American Anti-Slavery Society. He took in escaped slaves daily and hid them in his house. It was a sanctuary for them, and also a meeting place where the subject of slavery would be discussed. Whenever plans for an escape were agreed upon, Charles could be relied on to see them through.

By 1839 Charles was the sole editor of a newspaper, *The Colored American*, and continued until 1842 when he suspended its publication. In 1839-40, the Falmouth women signed their petition. Did Annes Ray, influenced by her son, bring the petition to Falmouth?

The petition was narrowly focused on abolishing slavery only in the District of Columbia. States’ rights prevailed at the time, and it made sense to start with an area where abolition might actually be approved. The petition was addressed to the U.S. Congress, which controlled the District of Columbia through exclusive jurisdiction and had the power to eliminate the slave trade within its borders.

In 1839, women could not vote, and there was



Top: The Old Stone Dock, photograph, c. 1890, in the Museums’ archives. Joseph Ray moored his boat here while delivering mail from the Vineyard.

Middle: Front page of The Colored American, April 1, 1837, listing Charles Ray as agent. Ray wrote many articles and served as editor 1839-1842. From the archives of Univ. of Detroit Mercy.

Bottom: Frederick Douglass (c. 1818-1895), abolitionist leader. He and Ray sometimes spoke at the same events. Image from the National Park Service website.

some doubt as to whether they had the right to petition Congress. The Falmouth women's petition was noted and referred to the national archives, but Congress chose not to act on it. Still, it was an important outlet for the women. Although they did not have a vote, they had done what they could to make their opinion known.

Meanwhile, in 1834 Charles Ray had married Henrietta Green Regulus, who died two years later during childbirth. In 1840 he married again, this time to Charlotte Augusta Burroughs, who was born in Savannah, Georgia around 1825.

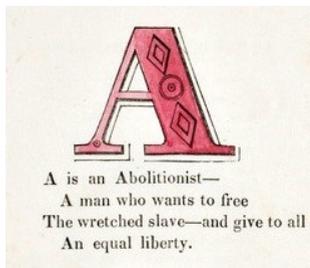
They had seven children. Three daughters (Charlotte, Florence, and Henrietta) earned a living as schoolteachers. Charlotte was the first African-American female attorney in the U.S., but turned to teaching when her law practice didn't attract enough business. Her sister Florence also became an attorney, and Henrietta a poet.

Charles's father, Joseph Ray, died in Falmouth in 1846 of consumption, aged 67. The widowed Annes went to Nantucket to live with her daughter Elizabeth, who had married a barber named Abraham Nahar. The Nahars took part in a movement to desegregate Nantucket schools. In the census of 1860, Annes H. Ray, aged 84, is listed as living on Nantucket in Elizabeth Nahar's household.

Annes spent her final years in New Bedford with her granddaughter Caroline DelPrado. She was known as a voracious reader who read almost every book in her minister's library. Annes passed away at age 90 in 1866. She lived to see the ratification of the 13th amendment abolishing slavery. Votes for women came fifty-four years later, in 1920.

Her son Charles died in New York in 1886, and was honored as a hero of the Underground Railroad.

These are the words of the women's petition:
To the House of Representatives of the United States



Top: Plymouth Church, Brooklyn, New York, c. 1870. Plymouth Church was a key station on the Underground Railroad and was well known to Charles Ray. His own church, where he presided as pastor, was Bethesda Congregational in Manhattan. Photo (public domain) downloaded from New York Public Library Digital Collections.

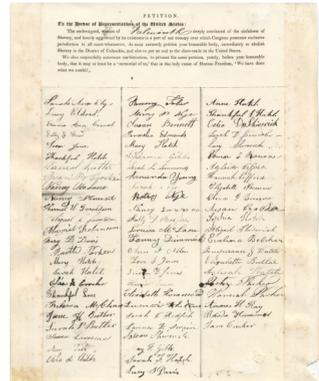
Middle: Henrietta Ray (1849-1917), daughter of Charles and his second wife Charlotte, received praise for her poetry. She was also a teacher and activist.

Bottom: Page from the Anti-Slavery Alphabet, 1846. Image from the American Antiquarian Society.

The undersigned women of Falmouth, deeply convinced of the sinfulness of Slavery, and keenly aggrieved by its existence in part of our country over which Congress possesses exclusive jurisdiction in all cases whatsoever, do most earnestly petition your honorable body, immediately to abolish Slavery in the District of Columbia, and to put an end to the slave trade in the United States.

We also respectfully announce our intention to present the same petition, yearly, before your honorable body, that it may at least be a memorial of us, that in the holy cause of Human Freedom “we have done what we could.”

*Thelma Spicer
edited by Meg Costello*



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[Memoir with quotations from Ray's writings](#)

[Opposition to Ray at Wesleyan](#)

[Annie Nahar teaches the freedmen](#)