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Anna Murray Douglass, first wife of Frederick Douglass. Image online, courtesy U.S. National Park Service.

Anna Murray was born of slaves and would have been a slave herself had she entered the world one month earlier. Frederick met his future wife while he was still in bondage; she helped him attain his dream of escape with money she had saved. At the time, his name was still Frederick Bailey.

In a later tribute to her mother, whom the Douglass children credited with part of their father's success, Rosetta Douglas Sprague observed:

*Her courage, her sympathy at the start was the main-spring that supported the career of Frederick Douglass. As is the condition of most wives her identity became merged into that of her husband. Thus only the few of their friends in the North really knew and appreciated the full value of the woman who presided over the Douglass home for forty-four years.*

The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave - originally published in 1845, and naming slaveholders who had made life miserable for Douglass - caused Frederick to leave the country:

*The narrative of Frederick Douglass with its bold utterances of truth, with the names of the parties with whom he had been associated in slave life, so incensed the slaveholders that it was doubtful if ever he would return to this country. There was also the danger that mother and those who had aided in his escape might be pursued.*

Consistent with the concept of chattel slavery, people were bought and sold with Bills of Sale. Douglass was no exception. While the newly famous author was abroad, his former "owner," Thomas Auld, sold Frederick Bailey (Douglass) for \$100 to Hugh Auld on November 30, 1846. This is the Bill of Sale for that "purchase," which was signed by N.H. Arrington, a Talbot County, Maryland justice of the peace.

According to a much-later-published news article (which is part of the *American Memory Collection* at the Library of Congress), the Bill of Sale was issued seven years after Douglass ran away. Captain Auld said that the "bill was executed with the idea that the fugitive [Douglass] could be recovered, although at the time he was in England."

Whatever the original intent of the 1846 Bill of Sale, Hugh Auld set Douglass free soon thereafter, on December 5, 1846, when he received payment (\$71.66) from Walter Lewis of New York. A "deed" was issued to mark that purchase.

Life in Rochester, New York - where the family lived for many years and Frederick (in 1847) started his abolitionist newspaper North Star - was not easy for an African-American family. Even though the North was free, prejudice abounded. Douglass found that he was:

*doomed by an inveterate prejudice against color to insult and outrage on every hand ... - denied the privileges and courtesies common to others in the use of the most humble means of conveyance - shut out from the cabins on steamboats - refused admission to respectable hotels - caricatured, scorned, scoffed, mocked, and maltreated, with impunity by any one, (no matter how black his heart,) so he has a white skin.*

Notwithstanding the treatment he and his family received, his motto for living was the same as the motto of his *North Star* paper:

*Right is of no sex  
Truth is of no color  
God is the Father of us all, and  
All we are brethren.*

Mrs. Douglass was not really understood in Rochester and, according to her daughter, life there was a struggle for her. Among other things, she missed her friends in Boston:

*Her life in Rochester was not less active in the cause of the slave, if anything she was more self-sacrificing, and it was a long time after her residence there before she was understood. The atmosphere in which she was placed lacked the genial cordiality that greeted her in her Massachusetts home.. Prejudice in the early 40's [that is, the 1840s]in Rochester ran rampant and mother became more distrustful...Being herself one of the first agents of the Underground Railroad she was an untiring worker along that line...She was a woman strong in her likes and dislikes and had large discernment as to the character of those who came around her.*

Guests in the Douglass home were from many different backgrounds:

*Perhaps no other home received under its roof a more varied class of people than did our home. From the highest dignitaries to the lowliest person, bond or free, white or black, were welcomed, and mother was equally gracious to all.*

Although Anna was born free, she was not educated:

*Unfortunately an opportunity for a knowledge of books had been denied to her, the lack of which she greatly deplored. Her increasing family[she and Frederick ultimately had five children]and household duties prevented any great advancement, altho' she was able to read a little...I was instructed to read to her. She was a good listener...*

Working hard to abolish American slavery, Frederick had become friends with abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison, John Brown, Wendell Phillips, and Senator Charles Sumner. Those people, together with Douglass' considerable oratory skills, helped propel this former slave into the national limelight.

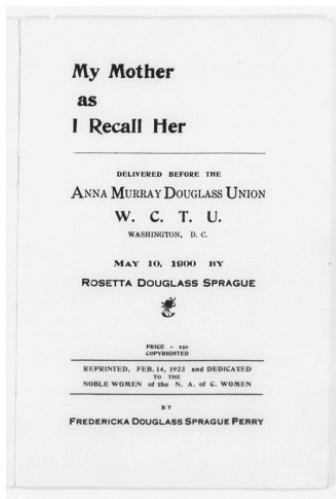
See [Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/ANNA-MURRAY-DOUGLASS-Frederick-Douglass-From-Slave-to-Leader)

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See [Learning Tasks for this story online at:](http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/ANNA-MURRAY-DOUGLASS-Frederick-Douglass-From-Slave-to-Leader)

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Media Stream



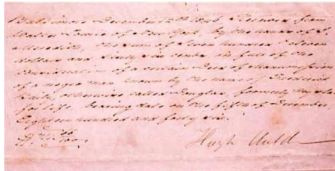
### My Mother as I Recall Her - by Rosetta Douglass Sprague

Image online courtesy, [U.S. Library of Congress](#).

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View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/My-Mother-as-I-Recall-Her-by-Rosetta-Douglass-Sprague>



### Hugh Auld Purchase - Deed Freeing Frederick Douglass

Image and quoted passage from the National Park Service, Frederick Douglass Historic Site.

The deed is written on paper measuring 18.9 cm in length and 20.1 cm in width.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hugh-Auld-Purchase-Deed-Freeing-Frederick-Douglass>



### Douglass Family Home

Image online courtesy, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, DC, WASH, 166-12.

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### The North Star - Frederick Douglass' Newspaper

Image online courtesy, U.S. Library of Congress.

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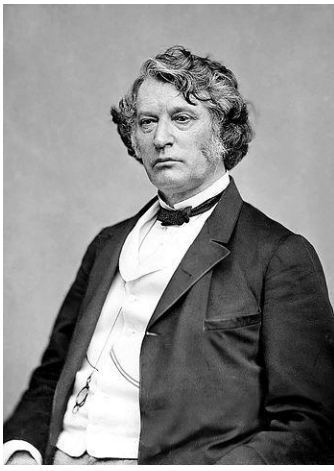
<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/The-North-Star-Frederick-Douglass-Newspaper>



### William Lloyd Garrison - Abolitionist

Photographic image of painting by Billy Hathorn, online courtesy, Wikimedia Commons. License: CC0 1.0.

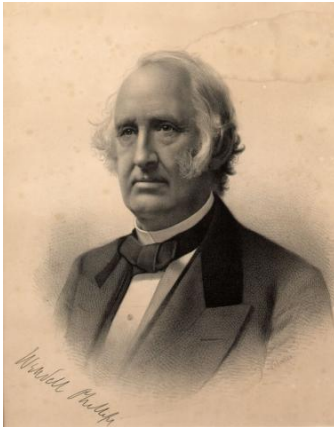
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### Senator Charles Sumner

Image online courtesy, U.S. Library of Congress.

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### Wendell Phillips - Abolitionist

Image online courtesy, the National Park Service.

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