

## Self-Guided First Unitarian History Walk at Mount Hope Cemetery

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[www.rochesterunitarian.org/history](http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/history)

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Below are directions for a walking tour of Mount Hope Cemetery with stops at gravesites of special interest to the First Unitarian Church of Rochester. Locating some of them will require a little searching, but for many people the tour will take about 90 minutes. Links are provided to maps that show the approximate location of each of nine gravesites.

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Enter the cemetery at its north entrance on Mt. Hope Avenue near Robinson Drive. ([See map.](#)) There is no fee or check-in. The cemetery is open until dusk.

Just after passing the entrance gate, take note of an uneven road going uphill to your right. Drive past it and park in the circular area. Walk up that uneven road and turn right at the top on Indian Trail Avenue. After a short distance, go left on Maple Avenue at a sign pointing to the Susan B. Anthony gravesite. A few steps further is another sign taking you again to your left along a path to the modest **Anthony** gravestones. ([See map.](#))

(1) Susan B. Anthony and her sister Mary were members of the First Unitarian Church. Their parents, Daniel and Lucy, made First Unitarian their church home but never officially joined. They all were part of a group of progressive Quakers who joined First Unitarian in the mid-1800s.

Before the Civil War, Susan B. Anthony was an organizer for the American Anti-Slavery Society, sometimes giving speeches in the presence of disruptive actions by dangerous opponents. During the war, she and her friend Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized a national petition drive for an amendment to the U.S. Constitution that would abolish slavery. They coordinated the effort of 2000 volunteers who collected 400,000 signatures in the largest petition drive in American history up to that point.

After the Civil War, Anthony became the most prominent leader of the movement to establish women's right to vote. The Nineteenth Amendment, which does exactly that, was often called the Susan B. Anthony Amendment in her honor.

After visiting the Anthony graves, keep walking along the same path until you reach Indian Trail Avenue again. Go right on Indian Trail for a relatively long way, several hundred yards, to your next stop. Note that you are walking on top of an esker, a winding ridge of gravel left by glaciers. You will walk past Hope Avenue on your left and then past a dirt road on your left that is blocked by a large stone. Not far past that, where the road starts to bend a little to the left, watch on the left side of the road for a pullover space with a gravel path going steeply uphill. There is a small boulder in the middle of that path. If you come to Buell Avenue, you have gone a little too far.

Walk up that gravel path for several steps and look for a long, low, brown gravestone on your left with the names of four people named Brown on it. Immediately to its left is the white gravestone for **Matthew Brown**, flanked by gravestones for his first and second wives. ([See map.](#))

(2) Matthew Brown was First Unitarian's congregational president during the 1830s and 1840s, the period when the church was becoming firmly established in its own building with a full-time minister (who boarded with the Brown family). Brown was also the first chair of Rochester's Board of Town Supervisors. He played an important role in the passage of the law that abolished slavery in New York State in 1827.

Continue up the gravel path to a large sculpture on your right of a reclining man called The Weary Pilgrim. While facing this monument, look to your left for a tall, gray obelisk with dark vertical streaks on a small hill a short distance away. (An obelisk is a tall, stone structure shaped like the Washington Monument.) Walk to it to read the inscriptions for **Myron Holley** and his daughter **Sallie Holley**. ([See map.](#))

(3) Myron Holley, one of the founders of First Unitarian, was a commissioner for the construction of the Erie Canal. He worked for the abolition of slavery and was a co-founder of the abolitionist Liberty Party. This impressive monument was erected by his many admirers. His daughter Sallie was also a member of our church. She and her life partner Caroline Putnam, a Unitarian from Massachusetts, organized and taught in the Holley School for freed African Americans in Virginia for the rest of their lives in the decades after the Civil War.

Retrace your steps toward The Weary Pilgrim. Just before you reach it, turn left on a small path that runs along a low wall. You will be walking parallel to Indian Trail Avenue and in the same direction as you had been walking on that road earlier. Walk for roughly 100 paces past a deep depression on your left. Just past the tall monument for William Kidd on your left, the path splits to go around a small hill. Take the right fork for about 15 or 20 paces and then turn left up the first narrow path. Follow it for a few steps up a little hill to the gravestones for the **Porter** family. ([See map.](#))

(4) Maria Porter came to Rochester and joined First Unitarian in its early days, when the small congregation was meeting in rented rooms. She was part of the project to construct a proper building for the church. She earned her living by operating a boarding house with room for twenty guests. One of Rochester's main workers on the Underground Railroad, she was part of a network of volunteers who assisted African Americans who had emancipated themselves from slavery and were traveling to freedom in Canada.

Her parents, Isabella and Samuel Porter, and her sisters, Mary Jane and Almira, also eventually moved to Rochester from Philadelphia. They were members of the Unitarian church there, and they joined the Unitarian Church of Rochester. Isabella, Mary Jane and Almira ran a well-regarded, co-educational school in First Unitarian's basement. The entire family was very active in the abolitionist movement, helping to raise money to support Frederick Douglass's anti-slavery newspaper.

Retrace your steps down that little hill and then go left on a bigger path toward the pavement of Indian Trail Avenue. Go straight across Indian Trail and keep walking straight ahead past the Lawrence obelisk, which will be on your right. Still walking straight ahead, thread your way through a row of upright gravestones. Stop when the hill begins to drop off sharply and look to your left and right for two markers flat on the ground that are about 8 to 10 paces apart. They are sometimes hidden by fallen leaves. One is for Benjamin and Sarah D. **Fish**. The other is for Catherine and Giles B. **Stebbins**. Catherine Fish Stebbins was Benjamin and Sarah Fish's daughter. ([See map.](#))

(5) The Fishes were among the first of Rochester's progressive Quakers to join First Unitarian. Active in the abolitionist movement, they ran one of Rochester's earliest Underground Railroad stops at their farm north of downtown. They were founding members of the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, the most radical of the local abolitionist groups. Benjamin served a term as its president, and Sarah served on its executive committee. Two weeks after the historic women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in 1848, Sarah helped organize a follow-up convention at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester. She also contributed articles for Frederick Douglass's abolitionist newspaper.

The Fishes and Stebbins were part of a short-lived cooperative community (a "commune") in the 1840s at Sodus Bay, about 40 miles east of Rochester. Benjamin was its president. Catherine, their daughter, met and married Giles Stebbins at the Sodus Bay commune. Giles was a Unitarian from Massachusetts who had been a member of a similar commune there. He worked for a while as a lecturer for the American Anti-Slavery Society.

After moving back to Rochester, Catherine became the first manager of the abolitionist reading room above the office of Frederick Douglass's newspaper. She attended the women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, traveling there in the company of Frederick Douglass, Amy Kirby Post, Mary Post Hallowell and Sarah Kirby Willis, whose graves are all on this walk. She was one of the secretaries for the follow-up women's rights convention at First Unitarian. Catherine was a founding member of the National Woman Suffrage Association, which was led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and she often served on its executive board. She was one of the editors of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*, a critical examination of the Bible that says its teachings about women are flawed because they reflect the thinking of a less civilized age.

Walk back uphill to Indian Trail Avenue, turn right, and continue walking on it in the same direction as before. Pause at the next intersection and memorize where you are. Make a point of remembering the route you take during the next few minutes because you will need to return to this spot on Indian Trail.

Walk almost straight ahead and downhill on Second Avenue, a road that is roughly paved in stone. At the next intersection, zig-zag a little to the left and continue almost straight ahead on Second Avenue, which is now a grassy path, toward a massive, curved stone structure in the middle of the road. Pass by it on the left. Very near the far end of that structure, close to the road, are three small, low, brown gravestones, including those of John and Lemira **Kedzie**. ([See map.](#))

(6) The Kedzies were closely associated with the progressive Quaker group even though they were not Quakers themselves. They joined First Unitarian as early as 1853, when John paid a pew rental fee. (First Unitarian, like many churches of that time, numbered its pews and rented them to families for an annual fee.)

The Kedzies were abolitionists who provided shelter for people fleeing from slavery on the Underground Railroad. When Frederick Douglass moved to Rochester and decided to buy a house, he encountered the obstacles so often faced by African Americans. Despite opposition from some people in their neighborhood, the Kedzies sold their house on Alexander Street to Douglass, who lived there for several years. The neighbors on both sides were abolitionists, providing a degree of protection for the Douglass family.

Continue past the Kedzie graves to Evergreen Avenue. Go right on Evergreen for several paces and then bend to the left on Woodland Avenue. After another short distance you will see a historical marker on your left for Amy Post. After reading the marker, look several yards almost straight behind it for a large, squarish, gray structure built with huge rectangular stone blocks. Walk past the right side of that structure. The graves for **Amy and Isaac Post** will be on your left in the third row of gravestones beyond that structure, amid other gravestones for members of the large Post family. ([See map.](#))

(7) Amy and Isaac Post were in many ways the center of the progressive Quaker community in Rochester. They described themselves as radicals who were working toward a fundamental reordering of society. Having assisted escapees from slavery almost since their arrival in Rochester in 1836, they are credited with providing shelter for more people on the Underground Railroad than anyone else in the city.

Amy participated in the women's rights convention at Seneca Falls, traveling there in the company of Frederick Douglass and three other progressive Quaker women. She was the main organizer of the Rochester women's rights convention at First Unitarian two weeks later. She and Isaac were among the founding members of the radical Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, and they both served on its executive committee. Amy was the driving force behind its fund-raising fairs in support of abolitionist causes, such as Frederick Douglass's newspaper.

Isaac believed in spiritualism and thought he could communicate with the spirits of the dead. Amy also was interested in spiritualism but later drifted away from it. Especially after Isaac died, she regularly attended services at First Unitarian along with several of her friends and family, including her son Willit. Apparently, she never officially joined the church.

Jacob Kirby Post, another of their sons, and his wife Jennie Curtis Post were members of First Unitarian. Their daughter Jessie Post Baulch was vice president of the church's young peoples' club. Another daughter, Georgia Post Bemish, who is buried elsewhere in Mount Hope, was First Unitarian's organist.

This is the farthest point of the walk. Return now to the spot you memorized earlier at the intersection of Indian Trail Avenue and Second Avenue.

When you get to Indian Trail, turn right and continue walking on it in the same direction as before. In the distance, you will see traffic on Mt. Hope Avenue outside the cemetery. Go past the sunken pond on your left and then turn left to go uphill on Fifth Avenue. You will now be walking parallel to busy Mt. Hope Avenue. After a short distance, look for signs for the Frederick **Douglass** gravesite on your right and follow those signs. ([See map.](#))

(8) Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery and became a leading abolitionist and a skilled orator and writer. When he decided to establish his own anti-slavery newspaper, he moved to Rochester to do so because of his friendship with the Posts and other progressives in that city.

Douglass soon became the main "conductor" on the local Underground Railroad. To do that more effectively, he and his wife Anna moved from Alexander Street to near where Highland Hospital is today. That area had more privacy because fewer people lived there then. Being on

the southern edge of the city, their house was relatively easy to find for people who were traveling to it from the south.

While Douglass was in Europe in 1860, his daughter Annie tragically died at age ten. She was buried temporarily in the Porter family plot, which you visited earlier, until Douglass could return and purchase a plot for his family.

After visiting Frederick Douglass's grave, continue walking in the same direction as before. You will be walking through the grass and parallel to the traffic on Mt. Hope Avenue just over the fence to your right. When you come to the tall Wiltse monument, which has a sculpture on top, go past it on the right. Just beyond is a group of gravestones arranged in a square with a large marker in the middle that says **Hallowell** on one side and **Willis** on the other. ([See map.](#))

(9) This is the joint gravesite of the families of William and Mary Post Hallowell and Edmund and Sarah Kirby Willis. They were abolitionists, progressive Quakers, members of First Unitarian, and, obviously, very close friends. They even lived in adjacent houses on Plymouth Avenue.

They had family ties to Amy and Isaac Post, whose graves you visited earlier. Mary Post Hallowell was Isaac Post's daughter from his first marriage (his first wife died). Sarah Kirby Willis was Amy Kirby Post's sister. Edmund Willis, Sarah's husband, was Isaac Post's nephew.

Mary and Sarah traveled together to the women's rights convention in Seneca Falls in the company of Frederick Douglass and other progressive Quaker women. The two friends served together as secretaries of the Rochester women's rights convention at First Unitarian. William and Edmund worked together as partners in the wool business.

Sarah was active in the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society in Rochester. After the Civil War, she joined the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Mary joined the NWSA also and served on its national executive committee. Both were friends with Susan B. Anthony, with Sarah being an especially close friend.

The Hallowells were part of the Underground Railroad, harboring self-emancipated African Americans in their home. The Willises, living next door, undoubtedly helped with that work. Harriet Tubman, the African American woman who had escaped from slavery and then repeatedly risked her life by returning to the South to help others escape, was a dinner guest at the Hallowell home at least twice.

Keep walking through the grass for a short distance in the same direction as before. When you reach an old iron fence, go around it to the right and walk down a few steps to a paved road. Keep walking downhill on that road, and you will soon come to the place where you parked your car.