

Letter from Susan B. Anthony with her memories of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester

Commentary by Bill Fugate, 2024

www.rochesterunitarian.org/history

In 1892 Susan B. Anthony, the national leader of the women's suffrage movement, wrote a letter to be read aloud to the congregation of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester during a church heritage celebration. Lovingly written, it recalled some of her warmest memories of her many years in our congregation. The letter is preserved at the University of Rochester Library. Part of it can be viewed at <https://rbscpexhibits.lib.rochester.edu/exhibits/show/anthony-heroic-life/1891-1900>

This document has four parts:

1. A note from Susan B. Anthony to Rev. Gannett, asking him to arrange for Mary Anthony, Susan's sister and also a member of First Unitarian, to read the letter to the congregation.
2. The letter itself, written on letterhead stationery of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, of which Anthony was president. The footnotes in this section are not part of the original.
3. A hand-written note from Mary Anthony that was attached to her sister's letter.
4. A scan of the first page of Susan B. Anthony's letter

1. Susan B. Anthony's introductory note. Formally addressed to Mr. (Rev. William Channing) Gannett, it concludes with a personal postscript that includes his wife Mary Gannett, Anthony's close friend. Note that the partial sentence at the end combines with the signature to form a single thought.

May 1, 1892

Dear Mr. Gannett,

Here is my little word for I cannot bear that my name shall not be recorded with the loved and loving ones who gather today and tomorrow in the Church and Parlors. My sister will read it – loud and plain – if you will permit her to do so. She is my representative – and in good works for humanity she always has and always will outstrip her

Sister

Susan B. Anthony

Love to Mary and William with a soul full of regret that duty calls me away

2. Susan B. Anthony's letter to the congregation:

Rochester N.Y., May 1892

Dear Friends of the Unitarian Church of Rochester

It is with regret beyond reach of words that I am compelled to be absent from this memorable anniversary! One of the pleasantest memories of Rochester -

my home - the past forty years - are associated with the ministers and friends who will have honorable and loving mention during the gatherings of these two days!

Under the preaching of my revered friend William Henry Channing¹ my spirit was born anew. For the first time in my life I listened to an educated, cultured presentation of the Doctrines of Friends of "the light that lighteth every man that cometh into the world." It was during Mr. Channing's ministrations that my dear Quaker Father contributed his first ten dollars for the support of a "hireling ministry," so contrary to the testimonies of his religious sect; and it was then that my father and my mother and my, now, only remaining sister – Mary - regularly attended church.

And I can remember the Wilder Family Pew - in that old church on the west side of Fitzhugh Street - the Porter Pew, the Angle Pew, the Curtis Pew, the Danforth Pew, and others - so few of the occupants of which still linger with us - for though absent in body I am with you in spirit and thought in the sermons this morning of my second guide to good of head and heart. Whenever it was my good fortune to have a Sunday at home during the eighteen years that Newton M. Mann² was with us - and what feasts of soul those hours were to my over hurried life - and now for the last three years I owe a debt of gratitude to our present loving minister - William C. Gannett³ - who so perpetually stirs us up to rigorous thought and self-requirement.

These are my three helpers to my Sunday up-lifts in this city for the last forty years - and what a help it is to have another put your own best thoughts and aspirations into more beautiful words than you could even dream!

Then I wanted today and tomorrow to sit close to dear, noble true - ever present - Maria Porter, Maria Wilder (DePuy), Mrs. Angle, Mrs. Hallowell, Mrs. Willis, Mrs. Blackall⁴, and all the dear friends I love to meet every Sunday time I am at home. And I hope my coming to you all has been of some little good to you as it has to me. That you may have the most joyous soul-feast is the hope of your

*Sincere Friend and Coworker,
Susan B. Anthony*

1. William Henry Channing was minister of First Unitarian from 1853 to 1854.
2. Newton Mann was minister from 1870 to 1888.
3. William Channing Gannett was minister from 1889 to 1908. More information about these three ministers can be found in the Wikipedia [article on the First Unitarian Church of Rochester](#).
4. Many of these women were, like Anthony herself, part of a group of Quaker social activists who began attending services at First Unitarian in the late 1840s. Some had attended the [Rochester Women's Rights Convention](#) that was held at First Unitarian two weeks after the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.

3. Attached note from Mary Stafford Anthony, Susan B. Anthony's sister:

Not in very good shape to hand down to posterity. If the copy you have is way better, perhaps you better use that. She was so hurried at the last moment but she felt she must have a hand or a thought "in it" if not as good as she could desire.

M. S. A.

4. Scan of the first page of Anthony's letter

