

CHAPTER VII.

SELECTION OF A SITE FOR THE MONUMENT AT ROCHESTER, N. Y.

Shortly after the passage of the bill appropriating three thousand dollars to the Douglass monument fund, Chairman Thompson was requested by many citizens to have the monument placed in Plymouth Park. The chairman appeared before the Park Board and made the request which was referred to a committee at the next meeting. The request was granted by a unanimous vote after all of the property owners had been consulted and their permission given. Many people complimented the committee upon their excellent choice for the statue of Douglass, as when placed at that park it could be seen many blocks away and would show to a great advantage from Plymouth Avenue. This was during 1897. The events of the succeeding year, however, demonstrated the fact that there were objections to the monument of the great statesman being placed in Plymouth Park, which had been asked for by the committee and granted by the Park Commissioners. This objection counted for but little, however, as there were many other sites offered. A large number of admirers of Mr. Douglass were open in their criticism of the committee for selecting the park, giving as their reason that it would only be seen by persons going that way, while the statue of Douglass was an object lesson and ought to be in the heart of the city. For that reason Chairman Thompson raised no objections believing the site near the Central station the best.

At a meeting of the Park Commissioners January 30, 1898, the following protest was raised:

To the Park Commission of the City of Rochester:

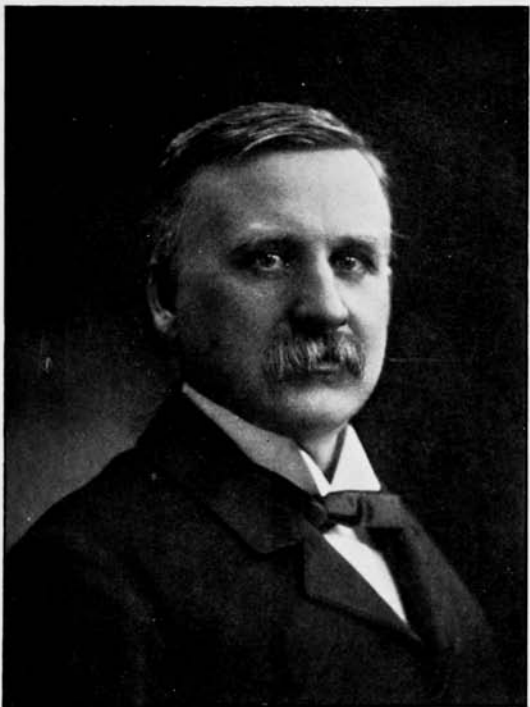
Gentlemen—We, the undersigned, residents and property owners around Plymouth Park, are informed that it is the purpose of your body to place in Plymouth Park the statue

of the late Frederick Douglass. While we feel with other citizens of Rochester that the honor is due his memory, still we think a larger park would be more appropriate. Therefore we ask your honorable body to select some other location, as we protest most emphatically against its being placed in Plymouth Park.

Signed—Helen M. Hess, L. Powis, Mary Powis, Immaculate Conception Church Association, per the Rev. James F. O'Hare, M. L. Hughes, Winifred Egan, Margaret B. Marshall, F. J. Hess, E. J. Kelsey.

After President Moore had stated that permission had already been granted to erect the monument in Plymouth Park and that such action had only been taken after the views of the property owners in the vicinity had been obtained, the privilege of the floor was granted to John W. Thompson, chairman of the Douglass Memorial Committee. Mr. Thompson said that there was no desire on his part to force the monument on any one. Personally, he favored Plymouth Park, but if the residents there did not want it, he would leave the matter in the hands of the board. Mr. Thompson said that he was sure that Mr. Douglass, if he were alive, would not care to have a monument to his memory placed in a park where it might be objectionable to the people.

A general discussion of the matter followed, several Commissioners participating in the debate. Commissioner Graham suggested that the matter ought to be treated in a public spirit. He did not think Plymouth Park was the best place for the monument. A much better place would be at the entrance to one of the large parks, particularly Genesee Valley Park. Another good place would be on the triangle at the corner of North St. Paul Street and Central Avenue, opposite the Central Railroad station, where thousands of people passing through the city could get a look at the monument which the city of Rochester had erected in honor of Douglass,



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the greatest of his race. The discussion was ended by having the matter referred to the City Park Committee with instructions to report back at the next meeting of the board. Meanwhile this committee was to confer with a committee from the Douglass Monument Committee.

It was said by some that the cause of the objections to placing the monument in the park was on account of the smallness of the park, while it was hinted by many that the protest was brought about by race prejudice on the part of the signers. The writer who attended during the four years it took for the erection of the monument every entertainment or meeting of any kind for the Douglass monument, or where the name of Douglass was discussed, desires to say, to the everlasting credit of the citizens of Rochester, N. Y., that he never observed any feeling of race prejudice in regard to the monument to Frederick Douglass. Every site in the city was offered except the one in question.

The joint committee, consisting of the city property committee of the Common Council, the City Park Committee of the Park Board, and the Douglass Monument Committee, met in the rooms of the Park Commissioners at 4 o'clock February 10, 1898. The following were present: J. W. Thompson, chairman, and Hon. George A. Benton, R. L. Kent and Benjamin Simms of the Monument Committee; Chairman Moore of the Park Board; Chairman Elwood, of the City Park Committee, and Commissioners Wright and Ritter; Chairman Pauckner, of the City Property Committee of the Common Council, and Aldermen Rauber, Edelman and Tracy.

Alderman Pauckner was elected chairman of the joint committee and Secretary Stone of the Park Board, secretary for the joint meeting. Mr. Thompson was then called on to state the object of the meeting and the status of the monument movement.

Mr. Thompson arose and said: "Some time ago in behalf of the monument committee, I made application to the park board for Plymouth Park for the purpose of obtaining a site for the Douglass monument. The commissioners granted the site by a unanimous vote. Afterwards a protest was filed by the residents in the vicinity of Plymouth Park. If Frederick Douglass were alive, I am sure that he would not want to see his statue placed among people who did not want it there. That is the feeling of his friends. To-day I come to ask you, so far as I am personally concerned, and I think that I voice the sentiments of a large part of our committee, that the proposed monument be given a site in the triangle at the corner of North St. Paul Street and Central Avenue.

"I think it will be an appropriate place for the memorial of the man who is the first statesman of my race to have a monument. The spot to which I refer is one situated in the heart of the city, and those who pass through the city from east to west will see the monument as well. There are objections to the site as it exists to-day, but I am assured that it can be made much more sightly by raising the surface of the tract in question and grading it properly, which I have been assured will be done."

Commissioner Wright agreed with Mr. Thompson. He thought that the triangle was the place above all others. People passing through on the trains would be sure to see the monument and Rochester was better known to many people as the home of Frederick Douglass than in any other way. He had when traveling many times met people who would speak of this city and refer to it as the home of Frederick Douglass. People passing through would be sure to see and speak of the monument. Mr. Wright thought that the size of the spot in question, 90x50 feet, as sufficient to afford ample room for a site. Highland Park, which had been mentioned, he considered too remote from the heart of the city;

too few people would see the monument there. It ought to have a place of exceeding great prominence.

R. L. Kent also thought that the triangle was the proper place for a monument to Douglass. He believed that the site would meet with the general approval of all.

Judge George A. Benton was called upon for an expression of opinion and said: "Before the Douglass monument was thought of I had looked at the triangle and wished that a monument might be erected there. I understand that Mrs. Douglass objects and prefers Highland Park. Aside from her objection I think that the argument is all on the side of the triangle. What better place for a monument to Frederick Douglass than this where he would face the north and the stream of travel, with his back to the south?"

Alderman Rauber, of the Fifth Ward, said that if the proposed site was large enough, he was in favor of it by all means. It was in his ward and his people wanted to get the monument located there. He had feared that the site was not large enough, but after listening to the discussion he was satisfied that he had been mistaken, and that the triangle was by all odds the place for the monument.

Dr. Moore asked Mr. Thompson to enlighten the meeting regarding the progress of the raising of funds and the plans of the committee. Mr. Thompson replied that the state had voted \$3,000, to be available when the committee had raised \$4,000. The committee had on hand in cash and good subscriptions about \$2,000 more. The monument complete, including the pedestal, was designed to cost \$10,000, and it was hoped that it could be unveiled in August. Mr. Thompson said that he saw Mrs. Douglass on Sunday, and she spoke of her desire to have the monument located at Highland Park.

Alderman Pauckner said that Highland Park was in his ward, and the Fourteenth Ward people wanted the monument up there where Douglass had once lived.

Dr. Moore objected. Said he: "A monument should be in the heart of a city among the people, where they are the busiest. At Highland Park, for many years at least, few people would see the monument. At the triangle the crowds that will see it will grow larger every day."

Reference was made to the statue of Horace Greeley, located on Thirty-second Street, New York City, and the fact was commented upon that it is situated in a cramped place, but purposely located where it would be seen by multitudes of people. It was suggested that after the triangle had been graded and raised several feet, and after Mr. Laney had exercised his skill in beautifying it, it would be an admirable site.

Judge G. A. Benton then moved that it was the sense of the joint committee that the triangle should be appropriated for the site of the Douglass monument. The motion was unanimously carried after a short discussion. Alderman Tracy then suggested that Mr. Thompson address a communication to the Common Council asking for the site, in order to bring the matter before that body in proper form, the triangle not being under the jurisdiction of the park commissioners. The meeting then adjourned.

Mr. Thompson stated before the meeting was called to order that while there had been some adverse comment on the Central Avenue site, he did not think that the objections were well taken. He thought that the spot could be made beautiful, and while the atmosphere would be smoky and sooty in the vicinity of the railroad at times, the monument was to be of bronze and would not show the effects of the state of the atmosphere. Then, too, if the monument were properly cared for there would be no trouble.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASONIC EXERCISES AT THE LAYING OF THE CORNER STONE.

That creed or color proved to be nothing to the people of Rochester when they are afforded the opportunity of paying homage to the memory of a man who was truly great, was demonstrated on the afternoon of July 20, 1898, when hundreds, including many of the city's most prominent citizens, assembled at the ceremonies attending the laying of the corner stone of the monument to the Hon. Frederick Douglass, the greatest and noblest statesman of his race and a former Rochesterian.

The circumstances connected with the raising of a fund sufficient to secure a monument in commemoration of the man had but served to increase the universal interest of the public and to render the realization of the effort put forth of greater satisfaction to those of his race who were in attendance at the ceremonies. These ceremonies, as conducted by the Grand Lodge of the State of New York, assisted by the members of Eureka Lodge, F. and A. M., of Rochester, were most impressive and were admirably arranged by the Douglass Monument Committee.

At 3.30 o'clock, Eureka Lodge, accompanied by Estella Chapter, No. 7, of the Order of the Eastern Star, the auxiliary organization, assembled at the headquarters of the lodge in the Durand building, and, headed by the Fifty-fourth Regiment Band, were escorted at 4 o'clock to Douglass Park, the new name given to the triangle at the corner of Central Avenue and North St. Paul Street, where the monument stands.

There had been built a comfortable and commodious covered platform decorated with the national colors and facing

the site of the monument. In addition to the members of the Masonic organizations there were seated on the platform Dr. E. M. Moore, Hon. John Van Voorhis, Hon. Charles S. Baker, Hon. C. R. Parsons, Hon. W. W. Armstrong, Hon. George A. Benton, Rev. J. P. Sankey, D. D., Rev. W. C. Gannett, D. D., who pronounced the benediction, Rev. R. Alonzo Scott, pastor of A. M. E. Zion Church, Mrs. A. Scott, Susan B. Anthony, Mrs. R. Jerome Jeffrey, president of the Women's Club, and others.

In the meantime a vast crowd had gathered in the streets to witness the ceremonies, and although the heat was most intense, nearly all remained that they might attest their reverence for the memory of Douglass. After a national air had been played by the band, Chairman John W. Thompson, of the monument committee, made a brief opening address, in which he said that the committee was pleased to witness the assembly of so many who had contributed to the fund, and that they were privileged to see the consummation of the project.

Grand Marshal M. R. Poole commanded silence and the Masonic services were opened by Grand Master E. R. Spaulding. Prayer was offered by Chaplain Leon J. Dubois, following which was an ode given by the members of Eureka Lodge. The list of articles placed in the corner stone was then read by Grand Secretary Benjamin Myers, after which the box containing them was placed in the stone by Grand Treasurer M. L. Hunter. The working tools were presented to the grand master by Master Architect William Oscar Payne and were distributed among the proper officers.

Then followed the grand Masonic honors and the consecration ceremony. The ceremonies, accompanied by sacred music, were very impressive and were performed by the proper officers in a manner that could only be understood in the seeing. Grand Master Spaulding then introduced as the

first speaker the Hon. John Van Voorhis, who spoke as follows:

The citizens of Rochester were proud of Frederick Douglass, and proud that he made this city his home. Considering what he was and what he did for our country and for mankind, he was pre-eminently our first citizen. It is fitting that the corner stone of the monument to be erected to his memory should be laid under the beautiful rites of Masonry. And yet Frederick Douglass was not a Mason. He belonged to no orders. Sublimier themes engrossed his whole attention. He knew no brotherhood but the universal brotherhood of man. He had a mission to perform. That mission was to elevate the republic in the eyes of mankind by wiping from it the stain of African slavery. That mission was to emancipate millions of slaves. To accomplish that mission he devoted his entire time and the energies of his great genius.

He lived to see that mission successfully accomplished. He lived to witness the emancipation of 4,000,000 of slaves. He lived to see the stigma of slavery which had attached to this republic in the beginning entirely destroyed. Monuments of bronze and marble may be erected to him here and elsewhere, but his greatest monument will be found in the history of his time. As an emancipator he stands by the side of Abraham Lincoln. It was largely his work that made the emancipation proclamation possible. He visited every free state, and every city and village therein, and spoke from more platforms than any other man in our generation. He taught the people the wrongs of slavery and prepared them to stand by Lincoln when he made his famous proclamation. There is not time to do Frederick Douglass justice on this occasion. Many of our able men preached against the wrongs of slavery. Among them were Freeborn G. Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Charles Sumner and Garrett Smith, all great orators, but Douglass was the chiefest of them all.

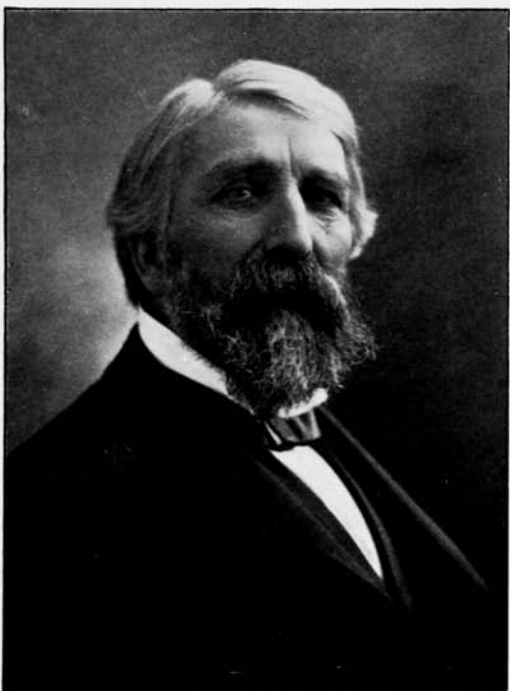
There was no chance to criticise Douglass except on account of his complexion, and educated and cultivated people never did that. The prejudice against color does not exist in other countries as it does here. If Frederick Douglass had been an Englishman he would have been awarded a niche in Westminster Abbey. He was not to be blamed for his complexion, the Almighty created him that way. Shakespeare makes the Prince of Morocco, a black man, say:

“Mislike me not for my complexion,
The shadowy livery of the unburnished sun.”

In listening to Frederick Douglass upon the platform, or in private conversation, no one thought of his complexion. He was the most magnificent orator who ever stepped upon an American platform. Although not able to read or write until twenty years of age, he became a great scholar and handled the English tongue most admirably. Whenever he was to speak crowds were there to hear him. Whenever he would stop speaking the crowd was anxious to have him continue. He never wearied an audience, but invariably left his audience anxious to hear more.

In private conversation he was a master. He always had something interesting to say, and said it in a most interesting manner. Wherever Douglass went the best people thronged around him and treated him with the greatest courtesy. Learned men like Lincoln, Seward, Chase and Sumner were proud to meet him. The argument based on complexion had no effect with such men. It is only among the ignorant and the vulgar that the complexion of Douglass is ever alluded to in an unfavorable manner. He was a man of great dignity of character. He had the power of talking into submission the most unruly audience and the most threatening mob.

I remember one occasion in our City Hall, Ira Stout had been convicted of murder and was awaiting execution. Certain kind-hearted people who did not favor capital punish-



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ment called a meeting at the City Hall with a view to ask the governor to commute the sentence of Stout to imprisonment for life. The Rev. Samuel J. May, a very eloquent pulpit orator from Syracuse, was advertised as the speaker of the occasion. When the time arrived, there marched into the hall an organized, angry and shouting mob. The mob filled the greater part of the hall. When Mr. May rose to speak, not a word that he attempted to utter could be heard, so great was the noise of the howling mob. Again and again Mr. May attempted to speak, but at last gave it up. Other persons sought to get the attention of the audience, but were shut off by the mob. Frederick Douglass was in the audience, and when it was apparent that none of the speakers would be permitted to speak, he walked deliberately upon the platform, stood before the mob for a moment or two, and surveyed it calmly. Then, with a voice of power, which none but Douglass possessed, he began to speak. He talked the mob into silence and compelled it to listen to his speech. That is only one instance of many occasions where Douglass showed his mastery over men who sought to interrupt public meetings.

The first time I ever saw Douglass was somewhere in the forties, probably about '45. I was a boy living with my father on his farm in the town of Mendon in this county. It was rumored about that Frederick Douglass and Charles Lenox Remond would speak against slavery on a Sunday afternoon in the Quaker Church at Mendon Center. It was a great novelty, and I with others went to see the performance. The Hixite Quakers were conservative then, and their managers had decided not to allow Douglass to enter their church, and to accomplish that result they locked up the church and nailed up the gates to the grounds. But the younger men of the church—Quakers only by birthright, opened the gates, confiscated a lumber yard near by, and made a platform on the church grounds with seats for the

audience, and upon that platform Douglass and Remond spoke to an enormous crowd. I cannot remember ever to have heard such denunciation of slavery and its abettors as Douglass poured forth to that audience. He paid his respects to the Quaker authorities who had denied him free speech by locking up the church. It was such an occasion as had never been seen at that Quaker church before and never since.

The impression that I got of Douglass at that time was such that I never afterwards failed to go to hear him when an opportunity offered. Those who only heard Douglass speak in his old age can form no conception of the power of his oratory in his earlier years. He was invited to speak everywhere, before senators and legislators, before lawyers and judges, before scholars and men of learning, before doctors of divinity and religious organizations, and I believe it is a fact that he never in his life made a poor speech. He was invited by the assembly of the state of New York to give an address in the assembly chamber in the presence of the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the judges of the Court of Appeals and the members of the state government. The chamber was packed to the utmost and the oration was a great success. Directly in front of Douglass sat that distinguished New Yorker, Thurlow Weed, with his hand up behind his ear so that he might catch every utterance which came from the lips of the orator.

It mattered not where Douglass went; in England, in Scotland and in Ireland he spoke to great audiences with the same success. In Ireland he was introduced to an immense audience by the then greatest orator of Europe, Daniel O'Connell, as the black O'Connell of the United States.

It is no wonder that the citizens of Rochester meet to honor the memory of Frederick Douglass and to erect a monument to him. He has honored Rochester as no other man has ever done.

“The sweet remembrance of the just,
Shall flourish when he sleeps in dust.”

The next speaker was Dr. E. M. Moore, the venerable president of the Park Commission, who, like Mr. Van Voorhis, had enjoyed the acquaintance and friendship of Douglass, and recalled incidents connected with the famous orator's life that were peculiarly interesting at such a time. Dr. Moore said:

We meet to-day to perform a duty, long since due from the citizens of Rochester to one of the striking figures in modern American history. Our great Civil War must ever remain as one of the most notable events of all time. I do not refer to the stupendous volunteering defense of the country, but rather to the emancipation of the slave. It must be recollected that it was not merely slavery that was concerned, slavery in various forms has existed the world over, but when of the same race, there have always been modifying circumstances. Time usually has softened the asperities of the condition, but when we reflect upon the fact that the beneficiaries of the emancipation were of another race and the furthest removed, the execution of the deed successfully was deemed by reasonably conservative men as a pure chimera.

The exodus of the Israelite from Egypt has perhaps been regarded as the most towering fact of liberation presented by history. But the emancipation of the slave in this country is a far greater fact of liberation. The servitude of the American slave had no modification. It was simply perfect. The man had no rights that a white man was bound to respect as announced by the chief justice of the United States. And yet with one bound the slave leaped to the status of his former master, his political equal before the law.

The fact that though fraud may deprive the voter of his right, still he is the equal of the white before the law. Among

the marked men of the oppressed race was to be seen the commanding figure of Frederick Douglass, whose ability refuted the calumnies that flowed from countless lips. In person, he was of imposing stature, and when in public speech, he was urging the claims of his race, his eloquence was lofty and fervid. The theme inspired the man. While there were many others that brilliantly proved their right to the freedom they plead for, there was perhaps, no one of them that stood upon so high a pedestal as he. But in order apparently to prove that he could play on more than one string, he appeared on the rostrum of the lyceum, while the stage still held Emerson and Holmes. His lecture on "William the Silent," settled that point.

I recollect him when a young man. He had just escaped from bondage, bright, alert with a hunted look, he came to my father's house, one of the stations on "the underground railway," for the slave. This was the era of the fugitive slave law urged and signed by Vice President Fillmore, which, perhaps the greatest statesman that the country has ever produced, received with exultation as a sort of finale. "Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by the son of York."

But great movements are not checked by unjust laws or quotations from Shakespeare. To-day we commemorate the ability and worth of this truly great man. We raise a monument of imperishable bronze and place it here in the flowing tide of commerce where the stranger that enters our gates may see in what a permanent way we have honored our slaves.

The exercises closed with the singing of "America" by the audience and benediction by Dr. W. C. Gannett.

The trowel used by Grand Master E. R. Spaulding was a handsome silver one with an ivory handle and was presented to Mr. Spaulding by the members of Eureka Lodge, No. 36,

F. and A. M., at a meeting held the night before. The presentation speech was made by Benjamin Simms and responded to by the grand master.

Among the articles which were placed in the corner stone were two leaflets furnished by Susan B. Anthony, one of which was eminently fitted to so repose, being a copy of the declaration of sentiments expressed at the first convention ever called to discuss the civil and political rights of women. This convention was held in Seneca Falls, and during the second day, which by a remarkable coincidence was just fifty years ago, July 20, 1848, a resolution was adopted urging the elective franchise for women, which was signed by Douglass. The other was a copy of an article written by Miss Anthony last year for the *Arena*, giving in brief what has been accomplished for the enfranchising of women, since the memorable convention alluded to. The other articles placed in the stone were:

Road map of Monroe county; calendar for 1898; book, "Slavery Unmasked," by Rev. Philo Tower, published by E. Darrow & Bro., in 1856, and donated by Mr. Darrow; list of those who assisted at laying of the corner stone; members of the Literary, Musical and Home Circle, of Toronto, Ont.; letter donating \$1,000 from the government of Hayti, and note from Minister W. F. Powell, accepting the gift; names of members of the monument committee appointed November 20, 1894, and names of members afterwards appointed; resolutions of committee; notes of women's clubs, Rochester; record of the Mt. Moriah Lodge, F. and A. M.; copies of the *Post Express*, *Democrat and Chronicle*, *Herald*, *Union and Advertiser*, and *Rochester Times*.