



**Pageant at Fitchburg Normal School, 1930**

Pageants were popular teaching tools at the Fitchburg Normal School. College students training to be teachers developed numerous plays and performances for the 1st-8th grade “training school” students with whom they worked. Photo Source: Digital Commonwealth.

# Fitchburg's Abolitionist Legacy: Anti-Slavery Pageants at the Fitchburg Normal School, 1911-1932

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**Abstract:** *This article examines the Fitchburg Normal School's anti-slavery pageant and its use as a tool for educating future teachers and public school children. The Historical Pageant to Illustrate the Contest Between Slavery and Freedom aimed to teach students about the evils of human bondage and the Northern Civil War effort to abolish it. Fitchburg was home to widespread anti-slavery activism during the decades before the Civil War. Many of the pageant's long and varied themes can be connected to local Fitchburg events. Although the pageant resisted the then-popular romanticizing of the Civil War that erased slavery and racial inequality as primary causes, it also demonstrates the limitations of early twentieth-century American progressivism. For example, it portrayed African Americans as mere bystanders to the abolitionist drama.*

*This article adds to our knowledge about the nation's first teacher training or "normal" schools by illuminating the content taught at these influential institutions, particularly on the important topics of slavery and the Civil War. More significantly, it sheds light on how normal school graduates may have translated that content material to their own students after being hired as classroom teachers all over the country. The use of historical pageants as an instrument for teaching subject matter at state teacher colleges as well as in public schools throughout the nation is an under-studied area that merits further examination. Darren*

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Given the several hundred state “normal” or teacher training schools that existed at the turn of the twentieth century, it is surprising how little is known about the precise curriculum and content material taught at the nation’s first teachers colleges. This is especially true when it comes to the topics of slavery and the Civil War. Although we know that these schools trained thousands of teachers for service in public schools, there is a substantial void in scholarship that closely investigates the U.S. history curriculum taught at these institutions.<sup>1</sup>

More significantly, it remains unclear just how normal school graduates presented content material to their own students after being hired as classroom teachers. Similarly, the use of historical pageants at teachers’ colleges and at public schools is a subject that remains largely unstudied.<sup>2</sup> One way to help fill this void is to analyze the U.S. history themes taught at some of America’s Progressive Era normal schools. Doing so will shed considerable light on how normal schools and the public school teachers they produced interpreted the nation’s most transformative events. And, most crucially, conducting studies of this kind will help reveal how the history of slavery and the Civil War has been shaped and transmitted over time.

## “NORMAL SCHOOLS” AND U.S. HISTORY TEACHING

The term “normal school” was derived from the French phrase “*école normal*.” As the name implies, normal schools prepared future teachers by imparting standards, or “norms,” for pedagogy and curriculum. By 1897 there were ten normal schools operating in Massachusetts. The first to open was the Lexington Normal School (1839), which later moved to Framingham. It was followed by Barre (1839), which later moved to Westfield, Bridgewater (1840), Salem (1854), Boston (1873), Worcester (1874), Fitchburg (1895), North Adams (1897), Hyannis (1897), and Lowell (1897).

There are only a few modern studies that examine the growth and influence of normal schools. The most comprehensive recent study is Christine Ogren’s *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (2005). However, while Ogren delivers an exhaustive look into the origins, philosophy, and pedagogy of normal schools, not much is known about the specific American history curriculum that was studied at these

institutions. Likewise, little information is available regarding how these schools presented topics such as the causes and aftermath of the Civil War other than to say that “United States History was a required subject” and that normal school students “became familiar with the broad outline of American and Western history.”<sup>3</sup>

Although nearly sixty years have elapsed since Lawrence Cremin published *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (1961), it remains the definitive statement on Progressive Era schooling in the United States. Yet Cremin barely mentions U.S. history as a topic of study in American public schools. Even when he does, his attention is limited to wide-ranging themes such as “colonial history and the revolution,” or vague assertions such as that some schools “emphasized American history.”<sup>4</sup>

While little is known about the precise U.S. history subjects taught at most of the nation’s normal schools, we do know that normal school applicants in Massachusetts were required to have a substantial background in U.S. history prior to being admitted. In addition to passing oral and written entrance exams in mathematics, geography, languages, science, drawing, and music, prospective normal school students in Massachusetts also needed to demonstrate a working knowledge of American history. The state board of education tested potential students on a wide array of topics such as the European conquest of North America, the causes and outcomes of the American Revolution, the Constitution, Washington’s presidency, and the causes and outcomes of the Civil War.<sup>5</sup>

As for the issue of slavery and the Civil War, the Massachusetts Board of Education was fairly specific about what potential normal school attendees needed to know. For example, prospective students were required to demonstrate an understanding of “Slavery before the Revolution—its prevalence, the attitude of the people towards it, and how it came to die out in the North while surviving in the South.” In addition to grasping the economic circumstances that led to an increase in the slave population in Southern states, students also had to show an understanding of “the balance of power between the free States and the slave,—what it was, why it was deemed important, and one or two illustrations of compromises made to preserve it.” Moreover, the Board of Education required incoming normal school students to comprehend the issue of slavery as it pertained to “Lincoln’s attitude towards it, what the civil war settled about it, [and] problems due to slavery but still unsettled.”<sup>6</sup> Although the Massachusetts Board of Education was detailed in its description of the relationship between slavery and the Civil War, it did not require students to discuss the cruelty inflicted upon individual slaves, nor did it ask them to explain the meaning of equality or

the devastating ramifications that slavery had on the entire African American population.

However, a closer look at some of the U.S. history textbooks used at the State Normal School in Fitchburg suggests that students were exposed to a more in-depth and more progressive interpretation of slavery and its fundamental role in U.S. history. According to the school's 1896 catalogue, students were required to read all or parts of Albert Bushnell Hart's *Formation of the Union, 1750-1820* (1892), John Fiske's *A History of the United States for Schools* (1892), and Woodrow Wilson's *Division and Reunion, 1829-1889* (1893).<sup>7</sup> While it would be inaccurate to say that any of these textbooks delved deeply into the horrors of human bondage and its devastating consequences for African Americans, each author does place slavery at the very core of the nation's history. All of these textbooks address the issue of slavery in the country's development, the history of the anti-slavery movement, and, to some degree, the struggle for African American equality. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Fitchburg Normal School later utilized the popular art form of historical pageantry to help teach its students about the primacy of slavery in U.S. history.

## EARLY 20TH-CENTURY HISTORICAL PAGEANTRY

One of the most overlooked resources of early twentieth-century American history is the plethora of historical pageants that were produced throughout the country. Although it is likely that most Americans today have never heard of this long-forgotten art form, in the nineteenth century, people in both small towns and large cities engaged in theatrical performances that ranged from modest to extravagant of local and national history. As instructive displays of public memory, historical pageants were designed to shape and perpetuate a collective understanding of past events. Furthermore, pageant organizers believed that communal renderings of "true" history could help facilitate substantive political, economic, and social change.<sup>8</sup>

Predictably, the pageantry craze that swept the nation did not feature African American history. While a few pageants acknowledged the arduous conditions of bondage and recognized the white "liberators" that ended slavery, it was far more likely that the African American past was not represented at all. Even on the rare occasion when pageant organizers included African Americans, they were usually portrayed in an unflattering light or even as being contented with slavery. In fact, most pageants in both the North and South either perpetuated the myth of the "happy slave" or depicted African Americans as docile fools. Thus, as was the case with most

historical and cultural mediums in the early twentieth century, pageants ignored the underlying issues of racial discord that precipitated the Civil War and promoted a romanticized, white supremacist memory of the conflict.<sup>9</sup>

### **FITCHBURG NORMAL SCHOOL: “A REAL RATHER THAN FORMAL EDUCATION”**

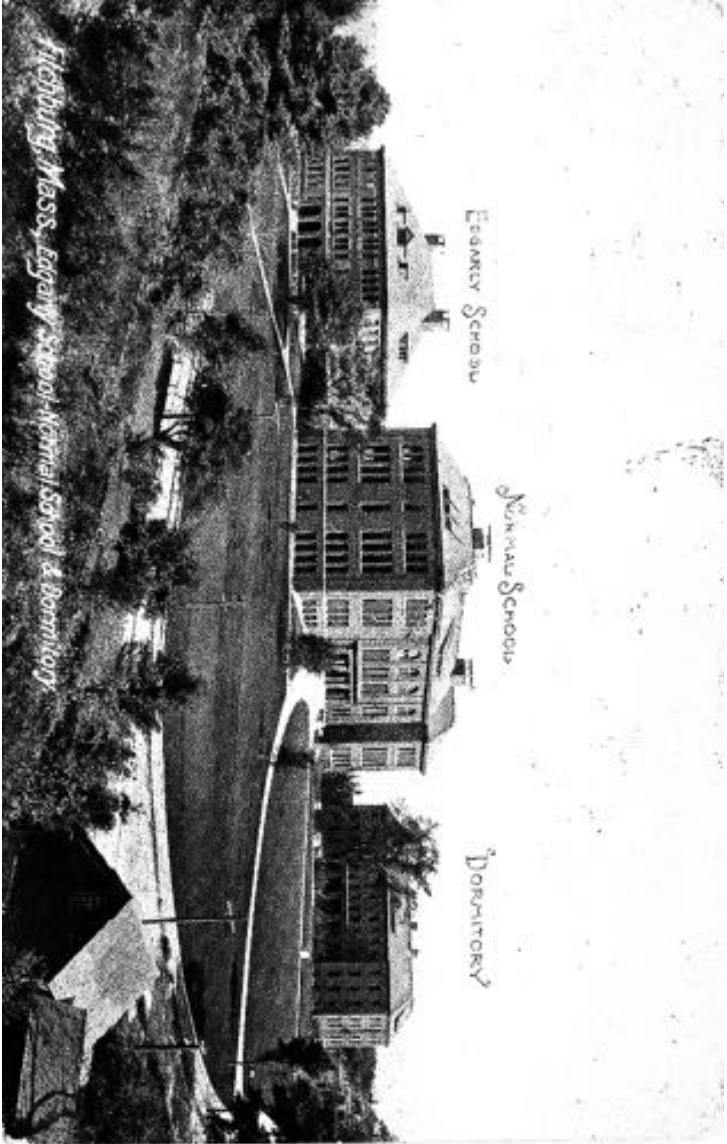
Founded in 1894, the State Normal School in Fitchburg was directly aligned with the educational reforms brought about during the Progressive Era.<sup>10</sup> Like most state normal schools, Fitchburg made practice teaching the focal point of its teacher education programs. In 1896 the college expanded to include a “State School of Observation and Practice.” Four years later the Ederly School opened as a first-through-eighth-grade model and training school. By 1910 the Fitchburg Normal School was running one of the country’s first junior high schools for seventh, eighth, and ninth graders. A new approach to education was well underway in the city of Fitchburg as the normal school, its faculty, and its student teachers quickly became an integral part of the local public school system.<sup>11</sup>

According to its own fortieth anniversary report, the school made hands-on experience the “utmost” priority of its programs. Instead of amassing an array of educational doctrines, students assumed “a purpose in education” and acquired “a greater desire for service.” Equipped with a “finer philosophy of life,” normal school students immediately went to work educating schoolchildren in Fitchburg. With the guidance of their professors, first-year students actively tutored public school students and taught smaller classes throughout the school year. And in their second year of preparation, teacher trainees in elementary and junior high school education spent half of the school year teaching a full course load of subjects in local schools. By the time they reached their third year, Fitchburg Normal School students were granted salaried positions as full-time teachers under the supervision of their advisors.<sup>12</sup> Learning more about how these active and potentially influential teacher trainees learned to teach Civil War history could shed considerable light on how those topics were transmitted through the public schools. Valuable insights can be gleaned from an analysis of Fitchburg Normal School historical pageants.

### **FLORENCE MILLER AND HISTORICAL PAGEANTS**

History Department Chair Florence Miller (1872-1956) organized the first historical pageant to mark the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln’s birth. “When the Lincoln Centenary was in the minds of all,” Miller later





**Fitchburg Normal School Campus c. 1900**

The Edgerly School was an elementary school where Fitchburg students could student teach and work directly with children during their training. It is where the pageants occurred.



**Fitchburg Normal School Students, 1904**

Source: Digital Commonwealth.



**“A Practice School - Grade One Class”**

Fitchburg Normal School Catalog, 1900-01.





**Florence Miller giving the  
Joel D. Miller Alumni Award,  
c. 1950s**

wrote, “the first draft of the Anti-Slavery Pageant was prepared.” Believed to be a vital tool in helping teachers and pupils fully realize the educational importance of history, the first pageant was presented on February 12, 1909.<sup>13</sup>

Two years later, on the fiftieth anniversary of Lincoln’s first presidential inauguration, the anti-slavery pageant was updated and expanded to include: the injustice of Southern slavery and the superiority of Northern free labor, the political struggle to resolve the slavery question, the election of Lincoln in 1860, emancipation and the end of the Civil War, and the reunification of the United States. While other, more innocuous pageants observed historical events and traditions such as Columbus Day and the Christmas customs of Old England, *The Historical Pageant to Illustrate the Contest Between Slavery and Freedom in the United States Between 1830 and 1865* (as it was officially titled)

aimed to teach students about the evils of human bondage and the North’s Civil War effort to abolish it.<sup>14</sup>

Considered an invaluable means of teaching difficult historical concepts around the evils of slavery, this comprehensive series of tableaux and plays sought to “train the imagination” of children by having them perform history for themselves. When children undertook the roles of those they were studying, Miller asserted that they developed a “sympathetic attitude” and “the constructive imagination” necessary to make history “in a very real sense” their own. Visualizing the hopes and struggles of people such as Dred Scott and other fugitive slaves as well as anti-slavery leaders allowed students to see these historical figures as authentic men and women with principled human emotions. When accepted as a routine practice of everyday schoolwork, pageants were expected to encourage compassion and service. Having empathy for those who suffered through slavery and for those who fought to end it, the program argued, gave students an appreciation for “the growth of certain ideas or tendencies from which great and important things have

come.” According to Professor Miller, lecturing and memorizing historical facts regarding the atrocities of slavery and the “divine” emancipation of four million slaves was deemed far less effective than having students reconstruct events on stage. Thus, the performance of historical pageants could become “just as natural and common in the school life as that of talking and writing.”<sup>15</sup> Miller was so enthusiastic about this mode of instruction that she described five of these pageants, including *The Historical Pageant to Illustrate the contest between Slavery and Freedom in the United States, between 1830 and 1865*, in great detail in a book published in 1911 “in the hope that other schools may be interested in this kind of work.”<sup>16</sup>

Although the expanded anti-slavery pageant was first performed in front of “a large representation of the general public” on March 11, 1911, it was designed specifically for use in elementary and secondary school history programs.<sup>17</sup> Costumes and scene preparations were intended to be very simple. Performances and tableaux could be acted out in either large auditoriums or in any classroom. Moreover, the pageant could be presented in its entirety or in parts to meet the individual needs of different schools and teachers. Thus, pageants were easily accessible to normal school professors and the student teachers they supervised in Fitchburg’s public schools. Such pageants were not intended to create an elaborate or polished production, but rather to help students fully appreciate the lessons of history in an accessible, coherent manner.<sup>18</sup>

Professor Miller emphasized the pedagogical influence of the pageant as an aspect of the mission of the Fitchburg Normal School. The Fitchburg pageant stressed an emancipationist understanding of the Civil War and, by doing so, only reiterated Fitchburg’s long-standing memory that the war was, fundamentally, about the issue of slavery and its dissolution. This understanding was central to the town of Fitchburg’s collective identity and suggests that even in 1911 the abolitionist ideal of the brotherhood of man continued to resonate in some Northern communities.

## **PART I: FREE LABOR VS. SLAVE LABOR**

The following description and analysis of each of the pageant’s three parts will demonstrate that the Fitchburg Normal School—and by extension the many student teachers who did their practice teaching in Fitchburg Public Schools—cultivated a fervent abolitionist understanding of slavery and its role in the Civil War. Contrary to arguments made by many scholars that by 1915 a romanticized memory of the war had erased the fundamental place that slavery had in the conflict, Fitchburg educators emphasized the heinous

practice of human bondage.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Fitchburg's anti-slavery pageant diverges from the prevailing early nineteenth-century memory of the Civil War.

Part I, "Antagonism Between Slavery and Freedom," opens the pageant by contrasting the deplorable conditions of Southern slavery with the liberating principles of free labor. It opens with two tableaux intended to show the conditions in which slaves lived and toiled before the Civil War. One, "The Return from the Cotton Field," depicts young slave children laboring in Southern cotton fields. As they carry "great baskets of cotton" to be weighed, a white overseer stands ominously over them with his whip. To help portray the bleak realities of this Southern way of life, Miller's program recommends playing two minstrel songs by American composer Stephen Foster (1826-1864) or "other negro songs."<sup>20</sup>

Two of those songs, "My Old Kentucky Home" and "Old Black Joe," written in 1852 and 1860, respectively, were considered by many to be the first popular songs to uplift the dignity of African Americans. At the height of their popularity in the 1850s and 1860s, each was heard as a compassionate ode to the millions of slaves who toiled in misery.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, iconic African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass said that Foster's "My Old Kentucky Home" stirred "sympathies for the slave, in which anti-slavery principles take root and flourish."<sup>22</sup>

The next scene, in order to "suggest the beginning of the contest between the two systems"<sup>23</sup> of slavery and free labor, begins with two processions of students, one representing free labor and the other representing the abolitionist movement. The first procession is led by marchers carrying a large white banner emblazoned with the words "FREE LABOR" and consists of students dressed to look like laborers carrying pickaxes, shovels, and other hand tools. The abolitionist procession is led by a student dressed to represent American journalist and staunch abolitionist Horace Greeley. Wearing a long gray coat and gray top hat, he carries a large white banner bearing the maxim "LIBERTY FOR ALL." Other anti-slavery marchers wear white shirts, white hats, and sashes bearing the names of prominent abolitionists like William Henry Seward, the political warhorse for emancipation; abolitionist poet John Greenleaf Whittier; and Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of the vastly influential anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>24</sup>

When both processions are assembled onstage, the student portraying Horace Greeley steps forward to read the following quote from "Paean," one of Whittier's anti-slavery poems:

Sound for the onset, blast on blast!  
Till slavery's minions cower and quail;



**The Abolitionist Procession**

One charge of fire shall drive them fast,  
Like chaff before our Northern gale!<sup>25</sup>

Next, the leader of the free labor procession stands at the front of both groups to recite a quote from Whittier's "The Lumbermen":

Freedom, hand in hand with labor,  
Walketh strong and brave,  
On the forehead of his neighbor  
No man writeth 'Slave'!<sup>26</sup>

Part I concludes with scenes that underscore the powerful role that poetry, literature, and song played in the crusade against slavery. In a scene titled "Apollo and the Muses of Poetry," the Greek gods and goddesses of knowledge, prose, poetry, and music convey the overthrow of Southern

oppression. A student portraying one of the muses reads from Whittier's poem "The Curse of Charter-Breakers," which begins:

In Westminster's royal halls,  
 Robed in their pontificals,  
 England's ancient prelates stood,  
 For the people's right and good.<sup>27</sup>

The curtain lifts to reveal the scene the poem describes, Westminster Abbey in the Middle Ages. Eight bishops, eight aristocrats, and five yeomen gather around a single bishop who again quotes Whittier's poem: "Make our word and witness sure, Let the curse we speak endure." Patriotic, anti-slavery songs are played as the pupils exit the stage.<sup>28</sup> Here, the abolitionist significance of Whittier's poem lies in its historical reference to England's protection of individual rights and freedoms. In thirteenth-century England, bishops declared the privileges and liberties granted to English citizens by the Magna Carta so valuable that anyone who violated them was to be cursed and forbidden from entering heaven.<sup>29</sup>

### FITCHBURG'S OWN ANTI-SLAVERY ACTIVISTS

The staunch abolitionism conveyed in Part I of Miller's pageant was entirely consistent with the widespread anti-slavery activity that took place in Fitchburg before the Civil War. For example, the Fitchburg home of Benjamin Snow Jr. (1814-1892) served as a frequent meeting place for notable anti-slavery activists and was a key stop on the Underground Railroad. In *My Father's House*, Snow's daughter Martha fondly recalled regular visits from radical abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and George Thompson. Martha often eavesdropped on late-night conversations concerning "the great problem they were trying to solve." Frederick Douglass was another perennial guest. Other powerful abolitionists who routinely stayed with the Snows when in town to perform or lecture were Henry C. Wright, who was a columnist for *The Liberator* and an employee of the American Anti-Slavery Society; the Hutchinson Family Singers, who stirred emancipationist fervor with their "songs of freedom"; and Theodore Weld.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to Frederick Douglass, countless other African Americans—both free and enslaved—were hosted by the Snow family. Martha recalled "a mulatto man" who was in town to raise money to earn a medical degree in Europe. Being that such liberties were denied to blacks in this country, the Snows and the congregation at their anti-slavery Trinitarian Church were

all too happy to help the aspiring physician. Josiah Henson, better known as "Father Henson," was another African American who often stayed with the Snows. Henson, whose life inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, often went to Fitchburg to collect donations for the purpose of buying his freedom.<sup>31</sup>

H. Ford Douglas was yet another African American abolitionist who left a lasting impression on Martha Snow and the town of Fitchburg. Fascinated by the former slave's dedication to his education and moved by his commitment to the abolitionist cause, she long remembered Douglas as a passionate lecturer and soldier who laid down his life in the Civil War. Indeed, so many African Americans were welcomed at the Snow house that when a Southerner once asked Mrs. Snow if she kept a special corner in her home for blacks, she replied, "[N]ot a corner, but every spare room in the house has been occupied by colored people."<sup>32</sup>

Many important female abolitionists were also well acquainted with the Snow house. Martha Snow vividly remembered sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimke for the inspirational lectures they gave in Fitchburg. Natives of South Carolina and the children of a powerful slave-holding father, the Grimke sisters earned Martha's admiration for having the courage to leave home and join the fight for African American emancipation. A pioneer for women's rights and abolition, "Brave Lucy Stone" was another eminent orator and prominent anti-slavery activist often hosted by the Snow family. Martha affectionately remembered Stone, a regular on the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society's lecture circuit, as "one of the guests my mother delighted to entertain."<sup>33</sup> Of the many distinguished female abolitionists who were welcomed at the Snow house, however, perhaps Maria Weston Chapman was best connected to the inner workings of the abolitionist movement. As a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society's executive committee and someone who worked closely with William Lloyd Garrison and his inner circle, Chapman was a well-respected abolitionist the world over.<sup>34</sup>

Fitchburg could also claim its own renowned female anti-slavery activist. A regular contributor to abolitionist newspapers *The Liberator*, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, and *The National Era*, poet and songwriter Caroline Mason (1823-1890) wrote with a mighty pen and far-reaching voice from her home in Fitchburg. In March 1864, the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* published Mason's "The Army to the People," a powerful abolitionist song that explicitly linked the egalitarian principles of the American Revolution and the Civil War to freedom for Southern slaves. The song called upon the "Men of the North" to make emancipation an official goal of the Northern war effort. Equating a Union Civil War victory to "Freedom for all who are



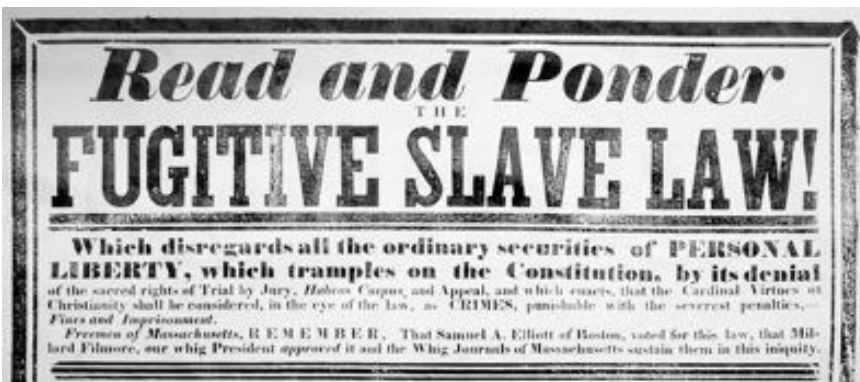
weak and oppressed,” the song supported the United States Army as a weapon in the abolitionist cause. Moreover, the song called upon the Northern Army, and all Northern politicians and civilians alike, to “Strike from the bondman his fetters and chains!”<sup>35</sup>

By evoking sympathy for the plight of Southern slaves and using poetry, music, and drama to portray freedom as a fundamental right for people of all races, the Fitchburg Normal School pageant fully reflected the abolitionist sympathies of many local townspeople.

## PART II: EVENTS LEADING TO CIVIL WAR, 1836-60

Part II, titled “Attempts of American Statesmen and the Courts to Settle the Slavery Question,” portrays the radical steps that Southern lawmakers and American courts took to maintain slavery. The opening scene is set at the U.S. House of Representatives where members discuss the controversial Gag Resolution of 1836, which prohibited congressional debate on the issue of slavery. In the scene, John Quincy Adams, the former U.S. president who later became an abolitionist congressman from Massachusetts, cries out: “Mr. Speaker I have a petition against slavery. What shall be done about it?” Three House members from slave states brandish their fists and physically threaten Adams. Pounding his gavel to demand order, the Speaker of the House declares, “[T]he gentleman from Massachusetts is out of Order!” He then calls for a reading of the proposed law, which passes by a yea or nay vote. Adams vehemently declares the resolution to be unconstitutional and acts appalled as the Speaker announces, “the Gag Resolution has passed.”<sup>36</sup>

The second scene addresses the inhumanity of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and highlights the “moral convictions” of Northerners who prohibited its enforcement. Before the scene is acted out, a brief summary of the law’s key aspects and “reasons why the extreme South urged its passage” is given.<sup>37</sup>



The Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 was part of the Compromise of 1850, which allowed California to join the Union as a free state and banned slave trading in Washington, D.C.

The act was an effort to placate Southern states that wanted more authority to capture runaway slaves. The new regulations denied alleged fugitives a trial by jury and forbade them from testifying on their own behalf. Anyone convicted of assisting fugitive slaves faced a harsh fine of \$1,000 and six months in prison. Moreover, federal commissioners who decided fugitive slave cases were paid ten dollars if they returned defendants to slavery and only five dollars if they set them free.<sup>38</sup> The act proved to be an enormous source of sectional conflict. Northerners who supported abolition and resented such strict stipulations refused to obey the new law and continued to help thousands of African Americans escape to freedom in Canada. Outraged by Northerner's brazen defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act, Southerners began to threaten secession from the Union.

Three main learning objectives anchor this particular scene of the historical pageant: first, students should understand "that it was the bright slaves who planned to escape;" second, to explain the "ready aid" that people in the North eagerly provided to fugitive slaves; and third, to illustrate "the impossibility of enforcing the law against the moral convictions of the North."<sup>39</sup>

To underscore the Northern abhorrence for the Fugitive Slave Act, the pageant again turned to Harriet Beecher Stowe. The first part of the pageant had featured scenes from Stowe's abolitionist novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This scene, however, references her second novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*.<sup>40</sup> Stowe wrote *Dred* in 1856 partly as a response to the criticism she received for depicting slaves as submissive victims in her first book. Although *Dred* did not garner anywhere near the critical acclaim that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* did and only attained a fraction of its influence, Stowe wrote *Dred* in an effort to give African Americans a more active role in their own emancipation. The title character of the book is named after Dred Scott, the celebrated slave who sued for his freedom in Missouri. Even though he was ultimately unsuccessful, Scott was able to get his case heard by the United States Supreme Court in 1856. Stowe's titular character is a righteous man of great fortitude and intelligence who helps his fellow slaves escape. Stowe gives the character a combination of qualities based on Denmark Vesey and Nat Turner, two radical slave insurrectionists who killed and died for their cause.<sup>41</sup>

Stowe's two books are similar in that both were read primarily by Northerners and were intended to strengthen the abolitionist movement.

However, *Dred* differs starkly from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in that Stowe not only offers a different take on the passive slave, but she also condones a more radical plan for emancipation. Unlike the horrific slave conditions that inspired *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, it was the violence of pro-slavery and anti-slavery zealots in the mid-1850s that motivated Stowe to write *Dred*. The Border War of 1854, the murder of five pro-slavery men by John Brown and his band of anti-slavery activists in 1856, and the vicious beating of Massachusetts senator Charles Sumner by South Carolina congressman Preston Brooks in that same year all served as inspiration for *Dred*. The inclusion of Nat Turner's legendary confessions in *Dred's* appendix also demonstrates that Stowe had vastly different motives for writing her second book.<sup>42</sup>

The Fitchburg pageant includes a scene from *Dred* that features slave owner Tom Gordon, one of the main characters of the book, and his personal slave Jim, "a very bright and witty negro." After the stage is arranged to appear as if it were a swampland, a student describes the setting for the act: "[Jim] has frequently been off into the woods in the early morning to meet others of his race that are planning an escape. His master becomes suspicious and forbids him to be away again. But Jim gets his master in good humor and begs off for an hour to attend a last meeting of the would-be fugitives."



Wearing a filthy and ragged long gray coat, Jim enters from one side of the stage and Tom Gordon enters from the other. As the two cross paths, Jim sees Tom and contemplates running but instead decides to outwit his master into believing he can be trusted. In the morning Jim is gone.<sup>43</sup>

After the scene from *Dred*, Part II of the pageant once again uses a scene from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. It opens with John Bird, Ohio state senator, sitting in a cozy room at his private home. He has just returned from the capital in Columbus where legislators passed a law to bolster enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. His wife, very animated in her compassion for the sufferings of slaves, reprimands the senator for supporting a law that made it a crime to assist fugitives. When Mrs. Bird declares that she would never turn away a fugitive slave in need of help, the senator replies, "of course it would be a painful duty." As the scene continues, the senator experiences a change of heart after witnessing a dramatic episode in which two fugitive slaves, a mother and child, collapse on the Bird's floor as the mother pleads for help. Bird then imperils his own liberty by devising an elaborate plan to usher the fugitive slaves to safety under cover of darkness. The scene ends with Mrs. Bird praising the senator: "Your heart is better than your head in this case, John."<sup>44</sup>

The next two scenes also illustrate the cruelty of the Fugitive Slave Act and the moral actions that Northerners took to rescue runaway slaves. In the first scene, "The Capture of a Fugitive Slave," two slave hunters restrain a runaway slave who is frantically attempting to escape. One slave catcher holds a whip in one hand and in the other, a long, thick chain. In the second scene, "The Rescue of the Slave," three Northerners forcefully drive the two slave hunters back. Terrified, the fugitive slave huddles next to his rescuers while one of the Northerners comforts him with an embrace. The other two rescuers then drive the slave catchers away with threats and raised fists. Miller recommended that the scene end with "appropriate patriotic" music playing in the background while a student delivers the following lines from the Whittier poem, "Massachusetts to Virginia":

The voice of Massachusetts! Of her free sons and daughters,  
 Deep calling unto deep aloud – the sound of many waters!  
 Against the burden of that voice what tyrant power stand?  
 No fetters in the Bay State! No slave upon her hand!"<sup>45</sup>

## FITCHBURG DEFIES THE FUGITIVE SLAVE ACT

The pageant's portrayal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act accurately represented both Fitchburg's view of the law when it was passed and the way many townspeople remembered it decades later. At a June 18, 1894, meeting at the Fitchburg Historical Society, Martha E. Crocker recalled the tragic consequences of the "odious . . . unjust and inhuman" law, as well as the community's heroic actions to subvert it. "No movement in favor of slavery," Crocker asserted, "ever so thoroughly aroused the contempt and scorn of the true and Christian men and women of the North, as this unrighteous law forced upon them." Soon after the law's passage, a systematic effort was underway in Fitchburg to expedite the freeing of fugitive slaves to Canada along the Underground Railroad. "Conductors" remained undeterred by the new law's harsh penalties and continued their crusade to free those "oppressed human beings, excluded from God's daylight, which was created for all his creatures, black as well as white." Fitchburg's elders, Crocker remarked, would have no trouble remembering the "inhuman and cruel deeds" committed by slave hunters under the Fugitive Slave Act. And it was not until thousands of brave Northern soldiers gave their lives in the Civil War, that "battlefield for peace and liberty," she exclaimed, that such atrocities were halted.<sup>46</sup>

Of the countless horrific instances that illustrated the injustice of the Fugitive Slave Act, none created more "excitement and indignation" among Fitchburg abolitionists than the capture of Shadrach Minkins, the first runaway to be arrested in Massachusetts. After escaping from slavery in Virginia in 1850, Minkins settled in Boston where he found work as a waiter. In February of 1851, however, he was arrested and put on trial as a fugitive under the recently enacted law. During his trial, a group of black anti-slavery activists stormed the courtroom and rescued Minkins. From there he was rushed off to Concord, then to Leominster, and later to Fitchburg before ultimately reaching Quebec on the Underground Railroad. The rescue of Minkins drew national attention as President Millard Fillmore deployed the United States Army to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act and demanded that anyone who aided Minkins be prosecuted. Undaunted, many Fitchburg residents not only sheltered the fugitive, but some also took up a collection and even borrowed money to help Minkins avoid being returned "to the vile southern domain of slavery."<sup>47</sup>

When Minkins arrived safely in Canada, he sent a handcrafted piece of artwork back to Fitchburg as a small token of his appreciation for the lifesaving deeds of Fitchburg's townspeople. Samuel Crocker, one of Fitchburg's leading abolitionists, cherished the souvenir as a potent reminder

of the evil ways of slavery and the Fugitive Slave Act, and it remained an invaluable keepsake in the Crocker family for decades. The horse used to transport Minkins and many other runaway slaves to “the land of freedom and safety” was dubbed “Shadrach” in honor of the nation’s most famous fugitive. As Martha Crocker warmly remembered, the esteemed horse gained considerable notoriety in Fitchburg and beyond: “Everybody was interested,” she said, “in the faithful animal that had done such good service in the cause of freedom and humanity.”<sup>48</sup>

Other fugitive slaves such as the Williams family and their friend Billy Fountain also found refuge in Fitchburg. Fleeing Boston after seeing numerous African Americans get captured and sent back to a life of Southern bondage, the runaways went to Fitchburg where “a little cabin was fitted up for them” and “all obtain[ed] employment.” Both of the Williams daughters worked in Fitchburg’s paper mills and Mrs. Williams was remembered as “a capable, energetic woman [who] found plenty of work to do.” Likewise, Martha Crocker described Mr. Williams as an industrious man who lived a “comfortable, contented, and happy” life with his family while in Fitchburg.<sup>49</sup>

To be sure, not all residents supported Fitchburg’s open defiance of the Fugitive Slave Act and not everyone in the community welcomed the contraband slaves who settled in town. Although most objected to the capture and return of fugitive slaves, some in Fitchburg believed the integrity of the law needed to be upheld. A June 3, 1854, article in the *Sentinel* articulated the dilemma that many had in obeying a law that they were morally opposed to: “Even in our own community a reactionary feeling will be the natural consequence of an armed forcible infraction of the law—even if it be an odious one.”<sup>50</sup> Warning townspeople that any violent obstruction to the Fugitive Slave Act would only result in a heightened resistance to abolition and a substantial delay to social reforms for African Americans, the article begrudgingly asked readers to comply with the repulsive law.

Others were not so torn over their feelings towards fugitive slaves in Fitchburg. When the Williams sisters first reported to work at Samuel Crocker’s paper mill, one of the mill’s most productive workers approached Mr. Crocker with a bold ultimatum. In what was surely meant to be a grand demonstration of protest, the mill girl declared that under no circumstances would she work with “niggers” and demanded that the Williams girls be sent home immediately or she would quit. Much to her chagrin, however, Mr. Crocker promptly paid the woman her final wages and then fired her on the spot. From that point on, no further disturbances or protests against the employment of formerly enslaved people at the Crocker mill ever occurred.<sup>51</sup>



Perhaps most revealing of the town's collective attitude regarding the Fugitive Slave Act and its enforcement was the lack of prosecution of any Fitchburg resident for aiding runaway slaves. While the likes of Samuel Crocker, Benjamin Snow Jr., and many others harbored and assisted escapees to freedom along the Underground Railroad, no one was ever accused or arrested under the Fugitive Slave Act. Again, this does not imply that all Fitchburg residents condoned blatant defiance of the federal law, but, at a very minimum, it demonstrates the community's mutual, if sometimes tacit, endorsement of what their hometown rescuers were doing.<sup>52</sup>

### **FITCHBURG SOLDIERS AND FUGITIVE SLAVES DURING THE CIVIL WAR**

Fitchburg residents' sympathy toward fleeing slaves was also evident during the war years. Some Fitchburg soldiers even brought escaped slaves back home with them when they mustered out of service from the Union Army. "Opelousas Tommy" was a well-liked escaped slave from Louisiana who arrived in Fitchburg with Dr. William Bartlett of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Massachusetts Regiment in August of 1863. The teenage runaway reportedly lived in Fitchburg and Princeton before moving to the Boston area where he worked at Young's Hotel and attended to students at Harvard University. Commander of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment, Colonel John W. Kimball brought a twenty-five-year-old fugitive slave named John Lewis back to Fitchburg when his unit returned from the South in 1863.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, some scholars have said that the more than 7,000 contraband slaves who joined the men of Fitchburg and the rest of the Union Army during the Bayou Teche campaign in Southern Louisiana "comprised an army of liberation by their example." Indeed, historian C. Peter Ripley called the five-mile long procession of Union soldiers, freed slaves, and military supply wagons that tore through the Gulf Coast a "black and white Army of the Teche."<sup>54</sup> After serving admirably in various roles with troops in Louisiana, thousands of escaped slaves traveled north with the Union Army, a considerable number of which "found their way to Fitchburg" where they were gainfully employed.<sup>55</sup>

Furthermore, some evidence suggests that the relationships between Fitchburg soldiers of the 53<sup>rd</sup> Regiment and escaped slaves crossed seemingly impenetrable social and cultural barriers. On occasion, Fitchburg soldiers were happy to attend religious services in African American churches. One such occurrence took place while the 53<sup>rd</sup> was stationed in Key West, Florida, in January of 1863. Respectfully taking their seats at the back of a "negro church," several officers soon found themselves participating in

an impassioned and inspiring prayer service. So moved by the “excellent discourse” and tangible energy of the church, the 53<sup>rd</sup> chaplain later took the pulpit to deliver a “vigorous” sermon of his own. Civil War veteran and local Fitchburg historian Henry Willis (1830-1918), who attended the service, said churchgoers were “worked up to the highest degree of enthusiasm [and] seemed perfectly carried away with the chaplain’s remarks.” Willis was also pleased to report that the more than nine hundred newly freed slaves on the Florida Keys were planning a formal celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation and that most were working “at day wages, and are getting on very well.”<sup>56</sup>

A similar occurrence took place in Washington, D.C. on May 4, 1862. This time, however, it was a civilian from Fitchburg who chose to worship with recently liberated slaves. Reporting on the hundreds of contraband slaves who had safely made their way to freedom in the nation’s capital, a correspondent from the *Fitchburg Sentinel* also described an enlightening experience he had in an African American church. Astonished by the newly freed slaves’ ability to overcome the “trials and afflictions” of bondage, the young man was “edified by their sincere and spiritual devotions.” Moved by a powerful sermon that spoke of the immense responsibility that came with freedom, the reporter was privileged to witness such a commendable service. “The remarks were exceedingly appropriate,” he wrote, “as the eyes of the whole nation were upon them now, to mark the effort that emancipation would have . . . either to elevate or degrade them.” Viewing his time at the church as a divine spiritual experience, the columnist was certain that it signified the sanctioning of emancipation everywhere: “The whole scene was interesting beyond description,” he wrote, “and may be cherished as an instructive waymark in our earthly pilgrimage.”<sup>57</sup>

### **“I’LL DIE FOR KANSAS”: FITCHBURG AND THE 1854 KANSAS-NEBRASKA ACT**

Following the anti-slavery pageant’s portrayal of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, the program next turns its attention to the violent, but liberating consequences of the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854. The act overturned the precedent established by the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which had prohibited slavery in new territories north of the 36° 30’ latitude line. Under the Kansas-Nebraska Act, a popular vote, rather than geography, would determine whether or not newly forming states would allow slavery. The result was an eruption of violence between pro- and anti-slavery settlers. In an unconventional interpretation of these events, Fitchburg’s anti-slavery

pageant presents the law's controversial principle of popular sovereignty as a catalyst for expanding the Northern ideology of free labor. Rather than focus on the violence, the tableau presents the emigration of Northern workers to Kansas as "the first and most lasting results of this legislation." Despite raids by radicals such as the one led by John Brown that left five pro-slavery settlers dead and mutilated in Kansas, or the more than 200 deaths that resulted from violence between pro-slavery and anti-slavery settlers that branded the territory "Bleeding Kansas," the pageant highlights the importance of the Northern belief in an egalitarian system of free labor over that of Southern slave labor. "The organization of a society to foster the emigration of free laborers from the North and from Europe to Kansas, for permanent settlement," Professor Miller's description of the pageant asserts, was the Kansas-Nebraska Act's key contribution to the demise of slavery.<sup>58</sup>

A scene that includes a prairie schooner, a campfire, a woman with her children preparing a meal, and three men holding rifles emphasizes this assertion. As patriotic music plays, a student in the background reads a quote from Whittier's anti-slavery poem "The Kansas Emigrants." The poem praises the "wall of men" that risked their lives to "plant beside the cotton-tree the rugged Northern pine." And all those who ultimately made Kansas "the homestead of the free!"<sup>59</sup>

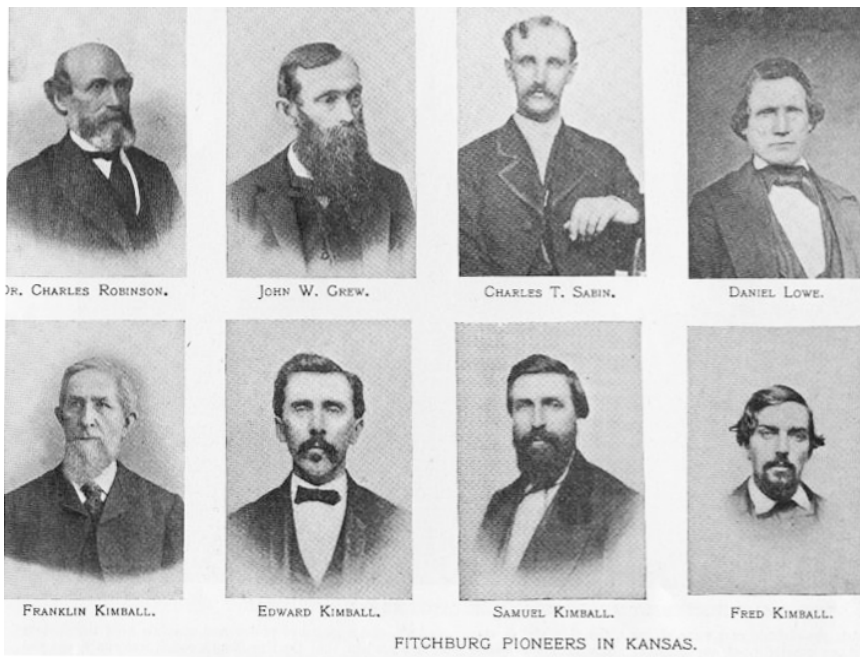
Curiously, the historical pageant makes no mention of the prominent role that the people of Fitchburg played in the battle over Kansas. As part of the newly formed New England Emigrant Aid Society in 1854, many Fitchburg residents went to Kansas to help ensure that it became a free state. In March of 1855, a throng of supporters bid farewell to an additional forty emigrants that later included Dr. Charles Robinson (1818-1894). As editor of the anti-slavery newspaper, the *Fitchburg News*, Robinson was an unyielding opponent of popular sovereignty in new territories. He especially despised the Kansas-Nebraska Act for its blatant violation of the Missouri Compromise of 1820. After settling in Lawrence with other Fitchburg abolitionists, Robinson worked tirelessly to combat the unlawfully elected pro-slavery government of Kansas.<sup>60</sup>

On May 21, 1856, the town of Lawrence was attacked by a gang of approximately 800 pro-slavery Southerners. Robinson's home was one of the many structures that were burned in the assault, and he was later captured and accused of treason. After serving more than five months in prison, Robinson was released under the direct orders of President Franklin Pierce. Immediately after being discharged, Robinson went back to Lawrence and resumed his crusade against slavery. In January of 1861, Kansas became

a free state. In February, Robinson took office as the new state's first ever governor.<sup>61</sup>

Josiah Trask (1833-1864), an affable but vehement anti-slavery activist from Fitchburg, joined Robinson in Lawrence in 1857. The son of outspoken and influential abolitionist George Trask, Josiah went to Kansas to work as editor of the abolitionist newspaper the *Kansas State Journal*. Trask's fearless and unrelenting stand against slavery made him a prime target of pro-slavery radicals. In an attempt to silence the determined and vocal Trask, Southern sympathizers attacked *Kansas State Journal* headquarters and destroyed all of the newspaper's presses. Undeterred, when asked what he would do should the border ruffians come again, Trask replied, "I'll die for Kansas!" Sadly, pro-slavery insurgents made Trask a tragic victim of William Quantrill's infamous raid on Lawrence in the summer of 1863. Murdered at his home in the early morning hours of August 21, "the body of this noble young patriot" was laid to rest in Fitchburg and remembered as a martyr of the Kansas emigrant cause.<sup>62</sup>

Part II of the pageant ends with a scene illustrating the effects of the *Dred Scott* decision. As "the most important action" taken by the Supreme Court



### Fitchburg Abolitionists Who Settled in Kansas in the 1850s

Source: Feb. 2016 Newsletter, Fitchburg Historical Society.

“in regard to slavery before the Civil War,” this scene aims to demonstrate the radical injustice of the 1857 ruling. The scene begins when a student playing the court crier announces: “The Honorable Chief Justice and the Associate Justices of the Supreme Court of the United States.” With their hair powdered white and wearing long black robes, the judges walk slowly onto the stage and sit down. A student portraying Chief Justice Roger B. Taney then reads an abbreviated version of the court’s ruling: “No negro, whether free or slave, is a citizen of the United States, and there is no constitutional process by which he can become so.” After asserting, “[T]he court has no jurisdiction in the Dred Scott case,” the Taney character proclaims, “a slave is simply a piece of property or personal chattel, to be taken from state to state like a horse or cow.” He ends by declaring, “the Missouri Compromise and the Compromise of 1850 are therefore unconstitutional, and null and void.”<sup>63</sup>

The pageant’s inclusion of the court’s decision was obviously meant to elicit a harsh reaction to the South’s dehumanization of African Americans at that time. Reducing slaves to nothing more than “a piece of property or personal chattel to be taken from state to state like a horse or cow” illustrates the cruel and feeble-minded practices of a mid-nineteenth century slave-holding aristocracy. Announcing, “No negro, whether free or slave, is a citizen of the United States,” the court’s ruling also demonstrates the pageant’s condemnation of policies that denied African Americans the dignity and legitimacy of citizenship. Finally, by declaring the unconstitutionality of the Missouri Compromise and Compromise of 1850, the play uses the *Dred Scott* decision to remind students of the historic battles fought over slavery.

### **PART III: THE LIMITS OF PROGRESSIVE-ERA MEMORY**

Part III, “Final Settlement of the Slavery Conflict,” portrays a divine end to slavery in the United States. After a student dressed as Abraham Lincoln delivers a passage from the president’s first inaugural speech, excerpts from Whittier’s poem “Astraea at the Capitol” are read.<sup>64</sup> Written in response to the District of Columbia’s banning of slavery in 1862, the poem evokes powerful images of the barbarous treatment endured by Southern slaves, while at the same time predicting the eventual collapse of the despicable institution everywhere. Gone are the sounds of “the clanking fetters of the slave” in the nation’s capital, and “the prophecies of better things” foretold of emancipation for all. Be “one with God,” the poem urges, and references a scene from Exodus 15:22 of Moses leading the slaves out of Egypt.<sup>65</sup>

After selections from *Astraea*, a tableau titled “Emancipation” conveys a heavenly freeing of the slaves. A student with thick iron chains wrapped around her wrists and dressed as a slave woman kneels before the Goddess of Liberty. Another student portraying the goddess wears a long white robe and a diadem headband to signify sovereignty. She carries a liberty pole that represents freedom from tyranny, and two American flags are crossed behind her. With Rudyard Kipling’s “Recessional” hymn playing, the Goddess of Liberty waves her hand above the kneeling slave’s head and the hefty iron chains break free, symbolizing an official end to slavery everywhere in the United States.<sup>66</sup>

The final scene titled “Union: Angel of Peace” represents a tranquil reunification of the North and South. A boy soldier dressed in Union blue and another dressed in Confederate gray kneel at the front of the stage. The Confederate soldier places his hand on the Union boy’s shoulder while the Angel of Peace holds a green wreath over each of their heads. While selections from Edward Peple’s poem “Peace” are read from backstage, the Angel crowns both the North and South, signifying the end of the Civil War.<sup>67</sup>

In some ways, this scene resembles one that took place at the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in July 1913. Historian David Blight argues that the weeklong celebration of “Blue-Gray fraternalism,” which included a symbolic clasping of hands at the site of Picket’s infamous charge represented a “reconciliationist” view of the Civil War and confirmed the nation’s full endorsement of a white supremacist Civil War memory.<sup>68</sup> The reconciliationist view emphasized the similarities between Northern and Southern soldiers, dwelling



EMANCIPATION

Goddess of Liberty



in particular on their valor and thus ignoring the conflicts over slavery that preceded the war and the conflicts over emancipation that followed it. Although Fitchburg's anti-slavery pageant ends with a ritualized joining of Northern and Southern soldiers, and the choice of Peple's "Peace" does imply a reconciliationist tone, it differs greatly from Blight's description of a romanticized Civil War memory. From the very outset—and consistently throughout—the pageant clearly demonstrates that the people of Fitchburg remembered the war and the Union victory as a Northern conquest over an oppressive Southern aristocracy and their evil institution of slavery.

It is important, however, to note the pageant's failure to recognize the prominent role that African Americans played in their own emancipation and the Northern Civil War victory. At no point does the program acknowledge the thousands of African American abolitionists and soldiers who were vital to the Northern conquest over the institution of slavery and the Confederate Army that defended it. Indeed, Professor Florence Miller and the Normal School chose to ignore the presence of iconic abolitionist Frederick Douglass and the other African American reformers who regularly collaborated with local activists in Fitchburg. Moreover, the pageant discounts the more than two hundred thousand African Americans who served in the war, and the tens of thousands who gave their lives for the cause of freedom.

In fact, the pageant's disregard for the abolitionist contributions of African Americans is so prevalent that students who performed in the program, as well as those who witnessed it, were given the impression that African Americans were merely bystanders in the nation's most transformative events. Although the pageant does emphasize the importance of slavery and racial inequality in the causes of the Civil War, its blatant omission of the vital role that African Americans played in the war's emancipationist outcomes demonstrates the limitations of early twentieth-century American progressivism.

Despite these shortcomings, the Fitchburg anti-slavery pageant was indeed a progressive educational program. At a time when most scholars believed that the country had eliminated the primacy of slavery from Civil War memory and ignored the fundamental place that it held United States history, teachers in Fitchburg emphasized the transformational events of abolitionism. Thus, Fitchburg Normal School teacher trainees and the many students they taught in their own classrooms were educated about the prominent role that slavery had in the development of the nation, and the importance of remembering it as such.

## CONCLUSION

Believing “that only events of historical importance and characters worthy of imitation should be introduced,” pageants became a mainstay in the school’s approach to history education.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, historical pageants remained a prominent feature of the school’s chief goal of “character education” into the 1930s. And the Fitchburg Normal School relied on a specific collective memory of the Civil War to help educate “upstanding, law-abiding, patriotic citizens” who “think straight,” and “walk humbly with God.”<sup>70</sup>

Between its founding in 1894 and the year 1935, nearly four thousand new teachers graduated from the Fitchburg Normal School (which was renamed the State Teachers College of Fitchburg in 1932).<sup>71</sup> Many of them went on to teach in other school systems throughout the United States. Some became administrators and superintendents. Still other graduates attained national and even international recognition for their contributions to education. Yet at one time, all of them were full-time teachers in the Fitchburg Public School system. Rather than simply lecture future teachers on theories of education, Fitchburg Normal School students “were assigned a school and given all the responsibilities of a teacher.”<sup>72</sup>

A cutting edge, “progressive” institution, the college implemented new programs in real schools and increasingly expanded its influence throughout the community with its pedagogy. This innovative approach to teaching not only mixed deeply with the progressive educational techniques of the day, but it also contributed heavily to the perpetuation of Fitchburg’s abolitionist memory of the Civil War.

HJM

## Notes

1. Christine Ogren estimates that approximately two hundred state colleges and universities in the United States began as state normal schools. For an overview of academic subjects taught at state normal schools see Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 85-106. For a brief history of the eight state teachers colleges in Massachusetts see Mary-Lou Breitborde and Kelly Kolodny, *Remembering Massachusetts State Normal Schools: Pioneers in Teacher Education* (Westfield, MA: Institute for Massachusetts Studies, 2014). For more on the origins and curriculum at Fitchburg, see Patrice K. Gray, “Life in the Margins: Student Writing and Curricular Change

- at the Fitchburg Normal School, 1895-1910,” in Patricia Donahue and Gretchen Moon (eds.), *Local Histories: Reading the Archives of Composition* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2007), 159-80.
2. For more on the use of historical pageants at state normal schools see Beth Ann Rothermel, “Acting Up: Drama and the Rhetorical Education of Progressive-Era Teachers at Three Massachusetts State Normal Schools,” *Advances in the History of Rhetoric* 8 (2005), 105-121. For a brief discussion on the use of historical pageants as history-oriented recreation and play in Progressive Era public schools see David Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry: The Uses of Tradition in the Early Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 53-67.
  3. Christine Ogren, *The American State Normal School: An Instrument of Great Good* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 98. Likewise, most Progressive Era education studies today focus almost entirely on the reformers and motives that initiated the drastic changes taking place in public schools during that time period. Any scholarly treatment given to the specific content material taught in U.S. history classes—much less the mediums used to deliver that content material—is typically done in broad generalities.
  4. Lawrence Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 139.
  5. Massachusetts State Board of Education, *Massachusetts State Normal Schools, Containing, A Circular of Information, A Circular of Advice To “One Who Wishes To Become A Teacher” and The Normal School Admission Examination Papers From 1896 to 1901 Inclusive* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Company, 1901), n.p.
  6. *Ibid.*
  7. The State Normal School in Fitchburg, *The State Normal School in Fitchburg Catalog 1896* (Fitchburg, MA: State Normal School Practical Press, 1896); Albert Bushnell Hart, *Formation of the Union, 1750-1820* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1892); John Fiske, *A History of the United States for Schools* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1892); Woodrow Wilson, *Division and Reunion, 1829-1889* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1893). For an analysis of Wilson’s *Division and Reunion* see Ronald H. Carpenter, “On American History Textbooks and Integration in the South: Woodrow Wilson and the Rhetoric of Division and Reunion 1829-1889,” *Southern Speech Communication Journal* 51:1 (1989): 1-23.
  8. Glassberg, *American Historical Pageantry*, 1-4.
  9. *Ibid.*, 131-132.
  10. *The State Normal School, Fitchburg, Twenty-Fifth Annual Catalog* (Fitchburg, MA: State Normal School Practical Press, 1920), 4.
  11. *Ibid.*, 5.
  12. *State Teachers College Fitchburg, Fortieth Anniversary Pamphlet* (Fitchburg, MA: Practical Press, 1935), 18-20.

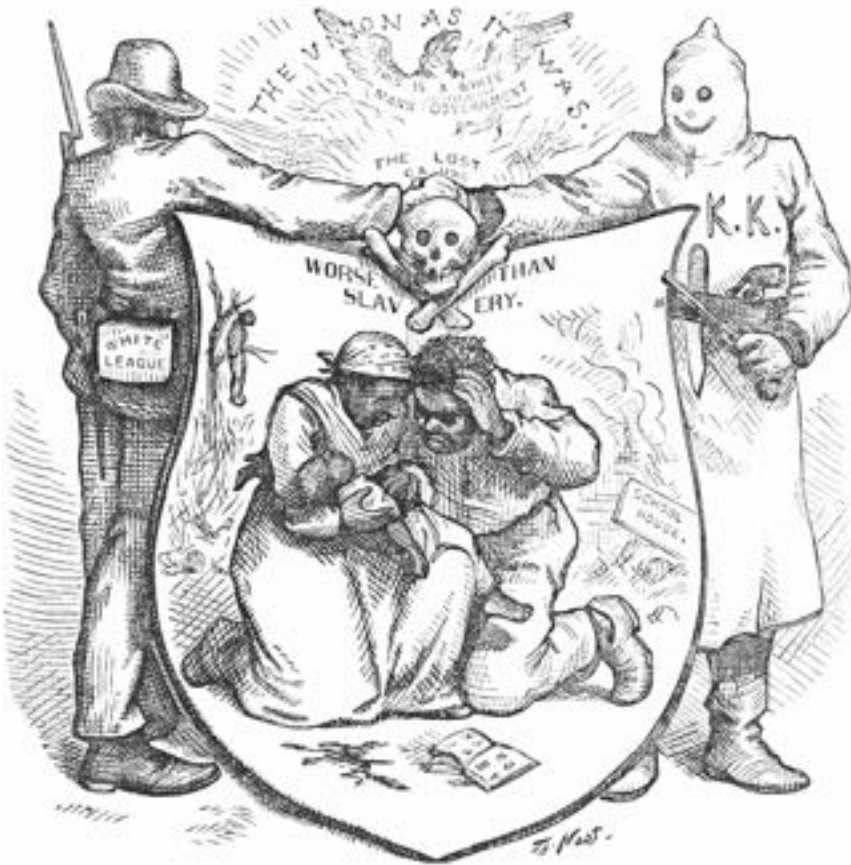
13. Florence M. Miller, *Historical Pageants, State Normal School, Fitchburg, MA* (Leominster, MA: Enterprise Press, 1911), 5-6, 39.
14. *Ibid.*, 4.
15. *Ibid.*, 10-12.
16. *Ibid.*, n.p.
17. "Historical Pageant Sunday: Delivery at Fitchburg Normal School," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, March 11, 1911.
18. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 5-6, 10-12
19. For more on romanticized and reconciliationist Civil War memory theories see David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993).
20. Miller, *Historical Pageants*.
21. Deane Root, "Biography of Stephen Foster," The Center for American Music, University of Pittsburg Library System, accessed October 15, 2018, [www.pitt.edu/~amerimus/Fosterbiography.htm](http://www.pitt.edu/~amerimus/Fosterbiography.htm).
22. Richard Jackson, ed., *Stephen Foster Song Book: Original Sheet Music of 40 Songs* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), 100, 177; "My Old Kentucky Home," Project Gutenberg, accessed October 15, 2018, [http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/my\\_old\\_kentucky\\_home](http://www.self.gutenberg.org/articles/my_old_kentucky_home).
23. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 43.
24. *Ibid.*, 43-44; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston, MA: John P. Jewett & Co., 1852).
25. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 45.
26. *Ibid.*
27. *Ibid.*, 45-47.
28. *Ibid.*, 47.
29. American Verse Project, "Anti-Slavery Poems: Songs of Labor and Reform," *University of Michigan*, 143, accessed October 15, 2018.
30. Martha Snow Wallace, *In My Father's House*, (Press of Geo. H. Ellis Company, 1915), 5-7.
31. *Ibid.*, 5-7, 10.
32. *Ibid.*
33. *Ibid.*, 6-8.
34. Boston Public Library, "Anti-Slavery Collection," Boston, MA, accessed December 10, 2018. As a member of the American Anti-Slavery Executive Committee, Maria Weston Chapman spent time in London, Paris, and Haiti recruiting foreign support for the abolition of slavery in the United States. After thirty years of fighting for emancipation in the U.S. and abroad, Chapman became

what some people called a “celebrity abolitionist.”

35. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 48-50; Caroline Mason, “The Army to the People,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, March 12, 1864, 4; Elizabeth Lorang and R.J. Weir, eds., “Will not these days be by poets sung”: Poems of the *Anglo-African and National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 1863-1864,” *The Annual of the Association for Documentary Editing* 34 (2013), accessed December 16, 2018, <http://www.scholarlyediting.org/2013/editions/aa.18640319.1.html>.
36. *Ibid.*, 48-50.
37. *Ibid.*, 50.
38. Library of Congress, “Proceedings September 18, 1850,” *Annals of Congress*, House of Representatives, 31st Congress, 1st Session, Washington: Statutes at Large, 462-465. From Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875*, accessed April 23, 2015.
39. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 50.
40. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Co., 1856).
41. Kevin Cherry, Summary of *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, *Documenting the American South*. University Library, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, accessed October 14, 2018, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/stowe2/summary.html>.
42. *Ibid.*
43. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 50-51.
44. *Ibid.*, 51-53.
45. *Ibid.*, 53.
46. Martha E. Crocker, “The Fugitive Slave Act and its Workings,” June 18, 1894, *Proceedings of the Fitchburg Historical Society and Papers Relating to the History of the Town* Vol. I. (Fitchburg, MA: Fitchburg Historical Society, Sentinel Printing Company, 1895), 220-222.
47. *Ibid.*, 223; Mark Bodanza, *Resolve and Rescue: The True Story of Francis Drake and the Antislavery Movement* (Bloomington, IN: Universe LLC., 2014), 89; for a thorough account of the life and escape of Shadrach Minkins see Gary Lee Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
48. Crocker, “The Fugitive Slave Act and its Workings,” 226.
49. *Ibid.*, 225.
50. *The Fitchburg Sentinel*, June 3, 1854, quoted in Doris Kirkpatrick, *The City and the River* (Fitchburg, MA: Fitchburg Historical Society, 1971), 261.
51. Crocker, “The Fugitive Slave Act and its Workings,” 225-226.
52. Kirkpatrick, *The City and the River*, 263-264.
53. Henry Willis, *The Fifty-Third Regiment Massachusetts Volunteers: Comprising Also*

- a History of the Siege of Port Hudson* (Fitchburg, MA: Press of Blanchard & Brown, 1889), 100; Janette Thomas Greenwood, *First Fruits of Freedom: The Migration of Former Slaves and Their Search for Equality in Worcester, Massachusetts, 1862-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 102.
54. Greenwood, *First Fruits*, 102; C. Peter Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen in Civil War Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1976), 20.
55. Ripley, *Slaves and Freedmen*, 19-20; Wallace, *My Father's House*, 11.
56. Willis, *Fifty-Third Regiment*, 52-53.
57. "Contrabands Still Coming," *Fitchburg Sentinel*, May 9, 1862.
58. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 55.
59. *Ibid.*
60. Kirkpatrick, *The City and the River*, 265-268.
61. *Ibid.*, 268.
62. Fitchburg Historical Society, *Proceedings of the Fitchburg Historical Society and Papers Relating to the Town*, Volume III (Fitchburg, MA: Fitchburg Historical Society, 1902), 97-99.
63. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 55-56.
64. *Ibid.*, 57.
65. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 56; John Greenleaf Whittier, *American Verse Project*, 235-236.
66. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 57-58.
67. *Ibid.*
68. Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 386-387.
69. Miller, *Historical Pageants*, 12.
70. State Teachers College of Fitchburg, *Fortieth Anniversary Pamphlet*, 23.
71. *Ibid.*, 22. In 1932 the Fitchburg Normal School was renamed the State Teachers College of Fitchburg. In 1960 it was changed to the State College at Fitchburg. It was renamed Fitchburg State College in 1965, and in 2010 it was changed to Fitchburg State University.
72. *Ibid.*, 10.





**“The Union as It Was: Worse Than Slavery”  
The Reconciliation Movement**

After the Civil War’s end in 1865, questions about the rights and status of former slaves deeply divided Northerners and Southerners. As early as Reconstruction (1865-77), however, many white Americans sought common ground on which they could unite. The “reconciliation movement” deliberately distorted the legacy of emancipation as well as the central roles that African Americans played in both the abolitionist movement and the war. White veterans of both sides embraced this movement in the 1880s-90s. Reconciliation downplayed the failure to secure civil rights for former slaves and the centrality of slavery to the conflict. Even in the North, reconciliation obscured the true nature and meaning of the war for over a century until the emergence of the modern civil rights movement. In this national context, it is intriguing that Florence Miller’s Fitchburg anti-slavery pageant maintained elements of an emancipationist or abolitionist interpretation as late as 1930. (Cartoon: Thomas Nast, *Harper’s Weekly*, Oct. 24, 1874).

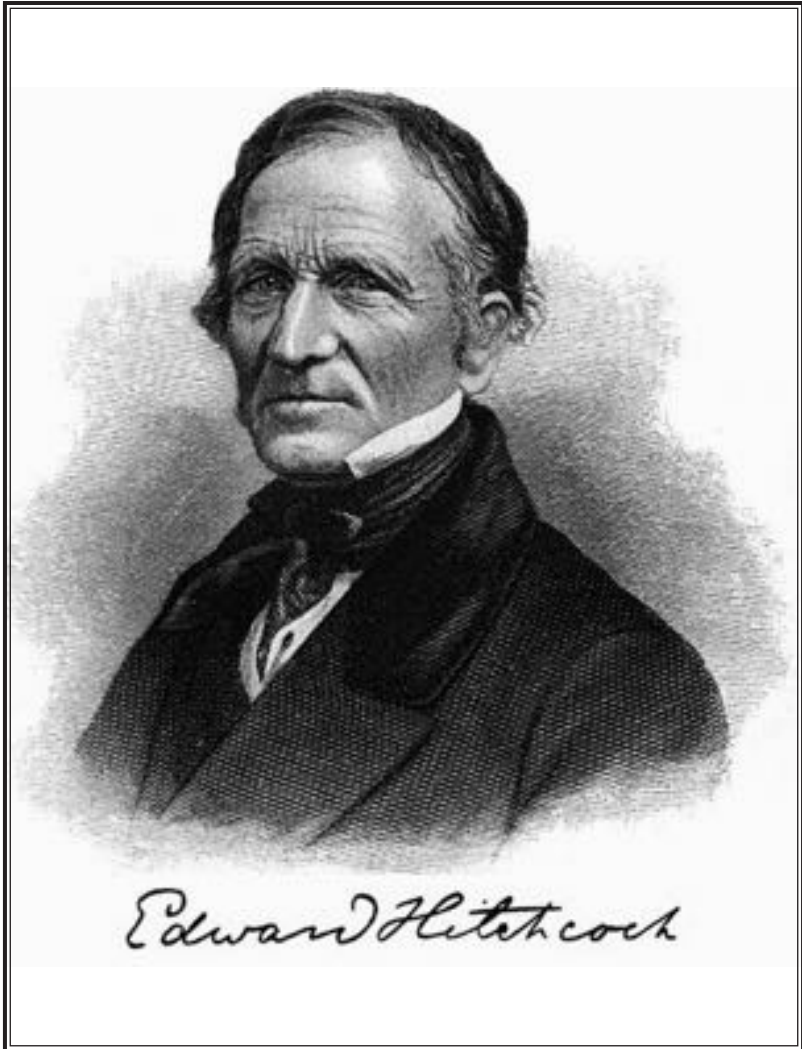


**“Compromise with the South,” *Harper’s Weekly*, Sept. 3, 1864**

The gravestone reads, “In memory of our Union heroes who died in a useless war.” Cartoonist Thomas Nast feared that war-weary Northerners were willing to compromise and reconcile with the South, which is exactly what occurred by the 1880s.



**Union and Confederate Soldiers (Gettysburg Reunion, 1913)**



**Edward Hitchcock**

Source: Steel engraving from William S. Tyler, *A History of Amherst College During the Administration of its First Five Presidents from 1821 to 1891* (New York, 1895).