

LINDEN PLACE

MANSION SCULPTURE GARDENS BALLROOM



As Linden Place re-examines its history as part of our preparation for the installation of a Rhode Island Slave History Medallion we will be sharing the stories we have uncovered about the house, its inhabitants, and most importantly the enslaved and free black people connected with Linden Place and our community. Here is our most recent installment. Some stories are straight forward and anecdotal, and some are nuanced and painful. As part of the medallion project, one goal is to create a safe space at Linden Place to discuss a difficult topic. We welcome your comments and insights as they will help us in our journey to that goal.

Women's History Month – Stories of the Women of Linden Place

The complex intersections of history: Rosalie DeWolf and John Hopper

William Henry DeWolf



In a previous installment, we learned that George DeWolf hired architect Russell Warren to build his new mansion on Hope Street in 1810. George and his wife Charlotte Goodwin's oldest child, Buckmaster, had been born in 1805. Mariana followed in 1811, then Charlotte, then Theodora, and in 1825 little baby Julia, who died that year on December 6th. 1825 was a horrible year for George – shipwrecks, a failed sugar crop, and investment losses forced him to sign papers of bankruptcy. According to the reports made by George Howe, his assets fell short of his debts by \$300,000. The family fled to their plantation in Cuba. Commercial Bank held the mortgage to the mansion and sold the paper to James deWolf.¹ Two years later, James sold it to his son William Henry – but the deed was ultimately transferred to the name of his wife, Sarah Rogers DeWolf. Four daughters were part of the family in the mansion on Hope Street: Rosalie, born in 1826; Sarah Ann, born in 1833; Mary, born in 1835; and Madeline, born in 1838.

Rosalie DeWolf was born in what became known as the Perry homestead, at the corner of High and Union Streets. An article in the Bristol Phoenix of January 1910 says "Soon after her birth her parents purchased Linden Place and went there to reside and there six more children were born to them, two sons and four daughters. Miss Rosalie was considered the most beautiful and attractive girl in Bristol, having a charm of manner and personality that remained with her all her life. She was finely educated and had every advantage of the best society as her parents entertained lavishly, having as guests the most celebrated literary people and actors of the day."²

Sadly, William Henry was not much of a businessman. He did own ships, he dabbled in the whaling industry, and held a share of the DeWolf warehouse on the Bristol waterfront. But some in town whispered that he was a little too fond of

¹ *Mount Hope, A New England Chronicle*, by George Howe, 1958, page 233

² *Bristol Phoenix*, January 25, 1910

hard spirits. His father James died in 1837, and William Henry used part of his inheritance to enlarge the Mansion, adding a small ballroom (which is now the gift shop). With so many daughters, perhaps he saw the expenses of multiple weddings clearly in his mind's eye. By 1847 his inheritance was gone, his prospects were dim, but with the election of 1852 the winds of fortune turned. In early 1853 President Franklin Pierce appointed William Henry to be consul at Dundee, Scotland. But the winds turned the wrong way once again.

DIED,
 In this town, on Thursday last, Mrs. Elizabeth L., wife of Mr. Joseph Wheeler, aged 60 years.
 Her funeral will be attended from the Mount Hope House to-morrow (Sunday,) at 1 o'clock. Relatives and friends are respectfully invited to attend.
 In the city of New York, on the 16th inst., at the residence of his son-in-law, John Hopper, Esq., William Henry D'Wolf, Esq., U. S. Consul to Dundee, son of the late Hon. James D'Wolf, of this town, in the 53d year of his age. His remains were brought to this place for interment.

The Bristol Phoenix printed his obituary in their November 19, 1853 edition. It read, in part: "During the last part of his life he experienced a severe reversal of his fortunes, and at the united solicitation of the representatives of Rhode Island he was chosen by President Pierce, among his earliest appointments, to the important consulship of Dundee. About a month ago he sailed in the *Baltic* for England, but had only been at his destination for two days, when he was compelled to return by the sudden illness which finally terminated his life. During his voyage he received every kindness from Captain Comstock and Purser Creary, who is also surgeon of the *Baltic*, but sank so rapidly that he died on the day after his arrival..... His death, it may be worth remarking, will make the seventh that has occurred among the consular appointments of the present administration during the eight months of its existence."

MARRIED:
 On Wednesday, 31st March, by Rev. J. N. McLeod, D. D. Mr. AUGUSTUS T. ARROWSMITH to Miss ELIZABETH, daughter of Joseph McKee, Esq. of this City.
 On Thursday, 18th ult. by Rev. M. D. Jacobus, Prof. JOSEPH BAINBRIDGE JONES to Miss S. ANNA ROOPE, daughter of David Roope, Esq. all of the City of Brooklyn, L. I.
 O. N. paper please copy.
 In Boston, 26th ult. John Hopper, Esq. of New-York, to Miss Rosalie, daughter of William Henry D'Wolf, of Bristol, R. I.

William Henry died at the New York residence of his son-in-law, John Hopper, his oldest daughter Rosalie's husband. They had eloped in 1847. They did not hold the service or celebration in the mansion's ballroom. The New York Tribune posted a notice of the marriage, in Boston, in their March 26, 1847 print edition.

John, born in 1815, was one of ten children of Isaac and Sarah Hopper. Pennsylvania had abolished slavery and many free people of color lived in the city. Isaac became an active and

leading member of The Pennsylvania Abolition Society. He often directly confronted slave kidnapers, who frequented Philadelphia and sometimes kidnapped free blacks for sale into slavery, as well as capturing fugitive slaves to return to their masters for bounties. In 1829 Hopper moved his family to New York in order to run a bookstore established by the Hicksite Quakers. Hopper became the treasurer and book agent for the American Anti-Slavery Society in New York. John Hopper earned his BA from Rutgers University in 1833 and his AM in 1836. That year he was admitted to the New York Bar.

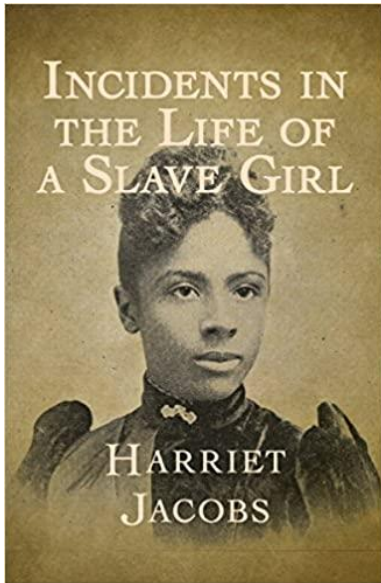


In 1837 John was on business in Charleston, and to keep a promise to his father he met with the Charleston Friends and attended their meeting house on several Sundays. While there he was given pamphlets to bring to his father, which contained information about the African slave trade in Sierra Leone. His next stop was Savannah, Georgia, and he checked into the City Hotel. Daniel Nash, a New York City marshal and well-known catcher of runaway slaves, recognized John. An angry mob led by Nash followed John to his room, pushed their way inside, and found the Sierra Leone pamphlets. Only the intervention of the mayor of Savannah kept John from further harm – which included a barrel of tar and gallows readied in the street for the "friend of the abolitionist". The Mayor escorted John safely onto a ship bound for Providence, Rhode Island, and 35 days later, with nothing but the clothes on his back, he stepped on safe New England soil. The story became a local sensation. Daniel Nash, the marshal who started the trouble, eventually was removed from his position by the mayor of New York City.³

³ The Georgia Historical Quarterly, Vol. 76, No. 3 (Fall 1992) "Ease and Elegance, Madeira and Murder: The Social Life of Savannah's City Hotel

John Hopper and Rosalie DeWolf. John, descended from Quaker abolitionists. Rosalie, descended from slave traders and Cuban plantation owners.

Interestingly, in her obituary in the *Bristol Phoenix* no mention was made of John Hopper's family politics. ".....(we) recall the excitement of the elopement of Rosalie with John Hopper....Her father strongly objected to Mr. Hopper as a son-in-law, but soon became reconciled and Mr. and Mrs. Hopper often visited at Linden Place. John Hopper, whom she married, was a son of the famous and eloquent Philadelphia philanthropist Isaac T. Hopper.....who accumulated a fortune as a merchant and then devoted himself to helping released prisoners to lead a good life. His son John was a lawyer." The newspaper story glided over the years of abolitionist advocacy of both father and son, and of Attorney John Hopper's appearances during multiple court cases in defense of the enslaved and of fugitives from slavery, as reported in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* newspaper of New York.



In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, which tells the harrowing autobiography of Harriet Ann Jacobs, she writes about going to New York to meet with her brother as they planned their escape north to freedom. "My brother reached New York on Wednesday. Lawyer Hopper advised us to go to Boston by the Stonington route, as there was less Southern travel in that direction. We reached the steamboat Rhode Island in safety.⁴ That boat employed colored hands, but I knew that colored passengers were not admitted to the cabin....Lawyer Hopper was waiting on board for us. He spoke to the stewardess and asked, as a particular favor, that she would treat us well....With these kind words and a shake of the hand he departed."⁵ Lawyer Hopper is identified by the editor Lydia Maria Child as John.

In the biography of Isaac Hopper, Lydia Maria Child writes: "When one of his sons married into a family educated under influences totally foreign to Quaker principles, he was somewhat disturbed. But he at once adopted the bride as a beloved daughter of his heart; and she ever after proved a lovely and thornless Rose in the pathway of his life. Great was his satisfaction when he discovered she was a grandchild of

Reverend Doctor William Rogers.....(who) was associated with his earliest recollections, for when he was on his visits to his Uncle Tatem, at six years old, he went to meeting with him.....Dr. Rogers was the first minister he ever saw in a pulpit."⁶

In the 1850 New York Census, the household of Isaac Hopper, age 78, included his wife Hannah, son John age 25 and daughter-in-law Rosalie age 23, William G. DeWolf age 21 of Rhode Island, and Benjamin Franklin Smith, age 18. Mr. Smith is the future husband of Rosalie's younger sister Madeline. William Henry DeWolf dies in 1853, and John Hopper is listed as the family agent in New York on the advertisements offering the DeWolf home on Hope Street for lease or sale. In the 1860 New York Census, widow Sarah Rogers DeWolf is living with John and Rosalie, as is her younger sister Madeline and her husband Benjamin Franklin Smith. John and Rosalie have also welcomed a son, born in 1858, to the household. Born William DeWolf Hopper, nicknamed Will or Willie or Wolfie, he rejected becoming a lawyer, changed his name to DeWolf Hopper, and enjoyed a long career as an actor, singer, comedian and theatrical producer, starring in more than thirty Broadway musicals. An avid New York Giants fan, he made the poem "Casey At The Bat" famous, and biographers say he did over 10,000 recitations of the poem. DeWolf married six times. His fifth wife was actress and gossip columnist Hedda Hopper. They had one son, William, who was also an actor. One of his roles was the detective Paul Drake on the hit TV show *Perry Mason* which ran from 1957 to 1966.

In the early 1860s Rosalie was busy planning the details for a new home in Milton, New York. But tragically, John, on the building site, "moving furniture from the dock on the Hudson River to the new home, complained of oppression of the

⁴ In the 1830s a railroad connected Providence RI to Stonington CT where the sound steamers from New York landed. The *Rhode Island* was part of the fleet of the Rhode Island Steamboat Company.

⁵ *Incidents in the life of a Slave Girl*, autobiography by Harriet Jacobs, published in 1861 by Lydia Maria Child

⁶ *Isaac T. Hopper, A True Life*, by Lydia Maria Child, 1853

head; and finally laid down upon his bed, dying a few moments afterwards.”⁷ He was just shy of his 50th birthday. In January 1864, Rosalie is a thirty-eight year old widow with a six year old son. On March 5, 1864 her mother Sarah dies in New York at age 62. Her remains were brought to Bristol for internment.⁸



Rosalie DeWolf Hopper lived to be 83 years old. She died in her home at 319 West 54th Street in Manhattan, and is buried next to John in the Greenwood Cemetery in Brooklyn. Research on her later life is ongoing. An 1876 letter to abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, written twelve years after the death of her own husband, has been discovered. Sending her condolences on the death of his wife, she writes: “...the absence of the actual presence is very hard to endure even when the spiritual nearness is clearly discerned. The vacant chair is so vacant!”

John Hopper and Rosalie DeWolf. John, descended from Quaker abolitionists. Rosalie, descended from slave traders and Cuban plantation owners.

A DeWolf descendant has written about the connections that research uncovers: “The thousands of people I've encountered in the scores of places I've visited around the country since the publication of *Inheriting the Trade* have convinced me that the threads in our family web may be countless and complexly interwoven, but we are cousins nonetheless. The tie that binds these disparate stories together..... (such as) John Hopper to Rosalie DeWolf.....is the same thread weaving throughout the complex human web that links us all into one, shared human family..... I hope and trust that at least some of you are pondering the implications of being related — however distantly — to virtually everyone you encounter..... What implications would it have if we treated each other like the family we are? What if we truly recognized our shared humanity?”⁹

⁷ Death of John Hopper, from the **New York Evening Post**, January 27, 1864

⁸ **Bristol Phoenix** obituary, March 12, 1864

⁹ **PowellsBooks.Blog**, “Family Threads: From John Alden and Drew Barrymore to Me and to You”; Thomas Norman DeWolf, September 2009