

Fall River History Tour Script for Elizabeth Buffum Chace

Context: The Quaker Sisters are Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Lucy Buffum Lovell. They were daughters of the influential Arnold Buffum who founded the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Buffum's daughters continued their father's legacy as abolitionists. The family faced much opposition, risking jail time and their lives to help both free and escaped slaves.

Script: Well hello there, my name is Elizabeth Buffum Chace, nice to meet you this fine day in Fall River. I do not think we have ever met, but you may know my father Arnold Buffum. He was a leading abolitionist in the area, founding the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832 and becoming its first president. My father had ten children with my mother Rebecca Gould, seven of which lived past their childhood. My two brothers have both been very successful in their careers, and us five girls have continued the influential work of our father. My sister Sarah married Nathaniel Borden, Mayor of this fine city and president of the Fall River Manufacturers' Association. I myself also married a Fall River man, Samuel Chace, who with the help of his brother Harvey, became one of the most influential men in regards to the cotton manufacturing industry. I was able to become more successful in my own endeavors thanks to the success of my family. Surely you would understand that being a woman in this time period, I unfortunately find my personal success to be intertwined, if not reliant on a man; whether that be my husband or father. In 1835, racism was very prevalent and opposition to anti-slavery ran high, but my sisters nonetheless helped me found the Female Anti-Slavery Society in Fall River. My husband and I moved to Blackstone Valley, Rhode Island in 1839. I entertained many of society's leading members at our home, and openly maintained my abolitionist views. This stance caused our social circle of Quakers to look down on us and exclude my family from many societal meetings. Nonetheless, I continued to allow my property to be used as a stop along what was beginning to be known as the 'underground railroad'. Many escaped slaves from the south would find passage

on the multitudes of ships coming up to the Fall River and New Bedford ports. My sister Sarah and her husband would send them to my house under the cover of night. Oftentimes, my house served as a place where escaped slaves would hide while their master's efforts to locate them cooled off. I would always give the escaped slave an envelope with my address inscribed on it to be sent to us upon their arrival in Canada. Accompanied by my husband, colored people would leave my house to meet their next conductor, then the next, so on and so on until they reached Canada. It is only until I received the letter did I know that all the danger we risked we worth it. Not only was I risking the future of myself and my husband, I had five fit children to keep in mind, whose health and prosperity are my utmost concern. My work became more dangerous with the passing of the Fugitive Slave Law in 1850, but by that time, the climate in the north had greatly changed in favor of anti-slavery. Still though, disclosing my business to anyone at that time, even you, would be an unthinkable breach of secrecy and would risk the entire operation. After slavery was abolished by the great Abraham Lincoln in 1865, I turned my efforts to women's suffrage. I formed the Rhode Island Women's Suffrage Association, and have been the president since 1870. I also have been serving as President of the American Woman's Suffrage Association since 1882. I am actually on my way to a meeting right now, and it looks like if I do not get going now, I will be dreadfully late! It was so nice to meet you, maybe one day our paths will cross again. Goodbye!