

Nineteenth century Fall River, Massachusetts, was the time period of the Industrial Era, where cotton mills and textiles were the power source to keeping the city intact. The cotton textiles created job opportunities for many immigrants, but had unfair working conditions. Employees worked a harsh amount of hours with little pay to show for it. Fall River was known for its workmanship and strong desire to succeed by being diligent.

Setting: Mid 1840's in New Bedford, Massachusetts at Polly Johnson's confectionary shop, a short distance away from her and her husbands' house located on 21 Seventh Street. New Bedford was a safe zone for many African American fugitives because the city was welcoming to diversity and had many job opportunities for all races in the industry. The percentage of African Americans increased in New Bedford during this time. The Johnson house is now a National Historic Landmark as an underground railroad site and shelter to fugitives. Meet Polly Johnson, the daughter of Isaac and Ann Mingo and wife to Nathan Johnson. She was born in Fall River and later resided in New Bedford. Polly Johnson was a free African American entrepreneur and a prominent abolitionist in the nineteenth century of New Bedford.

Polly Johnson: Hello eager participants of the Fall River's Quequechan River Rail Trail, I am Polly Johnson! I am a hardworking African American speculator and I strongly participate in protesting against slavery. I often attend anti-slavery meetings with my husband, Nathan Johnson, and I would do anything I could to help slaves find their way to freedom. We are all the same and black people work just as hard as white people, and sometimes they work even harder. I have worked for almost all of my life to get to where I am today! Trying my best to create a difference in the world is something I strive for every day. My husband and I own our house on 21 Seventh Street and we own four other properties on the block. I worked as a domestic earlier

in my life to earn money to possess these homes and even though I did not love working inside all day, I was still getting a sufficient profit. I personally believe that I have a strong business sense, which is a tool I used to get through life. I later took part in something I actually enjoyed and was passionate about, which was having my own confectionary shop. Baking was my true calling and was my favorite form of art that I practiced. I began exercising my cooking skills in France when I became my husband's chief assistant and created delicacies and decorated the venue of where the food would be served. That's when I knew that catering and creating food was what I desired to do so I opened up a place of my own. This was very convenient because I made more money and it was right alongside my house. I am mostly a cake and candy maker and some examples of foods served in my shop are: candy, sponge and loaf cakes, ice cream, fruit, macarons, lemonade, and blancmange (a molded pudding). The sponge and loaf cakes are extremely scrumptious and I definitely recommend it. My molded ice cream was the top pick of the city so I made them the most expensive, two dollars each. I mean I am always known to be very lady-like and pleasant, but let me tell you a secret! I know that my sweets are so irresistible and that people cannot get enough of it. I hope my foods inspire others to follow their dreams and that my tasty treats put a smile on the customers faces.

Earlier I mentioned how I am a strong believer of equal rights and that African Americans deserve to be free and equal. Nathan and I opened up our home to many fugitives to shelter at our house when they escaped. We kept them hidden and contributed to their ability to have freedom in the future. The fugitive that stayed with us the longest was Frederick Douglass. What an incredible man! He was so kind and Nathan and I loved having him stay with us. He lived with us for a year and I am so grateful to have met him. Our house was a common safe

house for slaves that were seeking freedom and we sheltered other escaped slaves including William Wells Brown and his daughters Clarissa and Josephine. Protecting slaves in our home can be dangerous if we get caught, but Nathan and I believe that it is worth the risk. Therefore, sheltering to fugitives and running my confectionary business were the highlights of my life and I am so joyous to know the impact I have left on people. You never know, maybe in the future people will honor our home and shop and continue to pass down my recipes to the New Bedford community! Well I do not know about that, but what I do know is that the love I have for New Bedford, the slaves I met and my shop is very strong and I would not trade it for anything.

Works Cited

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