W. Stephen Thomas, Director Emeritus of the Rochester Museum and Science Center, and a member of the Board of Trustees of The Friends of Mt. Hope, led a special 2-hour tour for approximately 50 members of the Friends and their guests on Sunday, April 29. The tour, “Famous Families of Rochester,” took members from the old section into the new section of the cemetery. Some of the graves included in the tour were those of Lillian Wald, Clayla Ward, Jacob Myers, Rufus Sibley, Frank and Caroline Gannett, Alexander Millener, and Rev. Rob Roy Converse, D.D. Most stops were not part of the regular Sunday tour. Even the weather cooperated to make the walk enjoyable. Lemonade was served midway, and other refreshments were available at the gatehouse afterwards. The Friends will have other special tours in the future. Watch for the announcement and join the next one.
Nineteenth-century America was an age of rising social concern and reform with various groups forming throughout the country. Rochesterians actively participated in these groups, often joining more than one. Among the groups was antislavery, a movement that for years caused conflict, national debate, and raised issues that only the Civil War resolved. Samuel D. Porter was part of the movement almost from its beginning. In 1838 he was elected the first recording secretary of the Antislavery Society. Later he became a friend and associate of Frederick Douglass.

Porter was born in Bristol, Maine, but eventually moved as a boy with his family to Philadelphia. By 1827 he was in Rochester, working in the bookstore of his uncle-by-marriage, Everard Peck. When Peck retired in 1831, due to poor health, Porter and David Hoyt became partners and bought the business. Later the business became William Alling and Co. when Alling became a partner.

As a young man Porter had heard and been moved by the preaching of Rev. Charles C. Finney during an 1830 revival. He was a Presbyterian, but later joined Plymouth Congregational Church. He was also an idealistic man with wide learning and interests and an outspoken abolitionist. During his early years in Rochester, he became a member of the Rochester Athenaeum, a literary group, and in 1854 he was elected a member of the Pundit Club, a group of Rochester intellectuals.

Porter married Susan Farley of Waldoboro, Maine, in 1834. The Porters worked with many community organizations such as the City Hospital (Rochester General), the Rochester Orphan Society, and the Home for the Friendless. She was a leader in the Ladies Antislavery Society and very involved in educating the public and raising funds for the cause. Their home was always open to Douglass and others in the movement.

The year 1837 was a time of change for Porter. He sold his share of the business at a profit. In a letter to his father he wrote, "...but I am free to own that I did not take this step in view of pecuniary considerations but have been led to the measure rather from moral ones. The truth was, I felt that increased riches could not add to my sum of happiness, that increase was not sure and an opportunity afforded to withdraw with a competence fully ample and quite sufficient to most my duties." Later in the same letter he said, "...if I mistake not I am called to act in some other sphere." He was uncertain what that "other sphere" was, but he felt that he would find it with God's direction. He revealed more of his intent when he wrote, "I will not be an idler for a single day. I always have been and I propose still to be busy—my pursuits hitherto have not I trust been misdirected—but I hope in the future they will be better."

Eventually he worked in real estate acting as a land agent and then opened a real estate agency in 1863. But during the years after 1837, he also became deeply involved in the antislavery movement. Was this his "other sphere"?

Porter's politics complemented his antislavery feelings. He belonged to the Liberty Party, a party that had a simple platform—the abolition of slavery. Its members felt change would occur by taking the issue to the polls. For several years Porter was his party's candidate for mayor of Rochester, even though he received at the most only a hundred or so votes. During the 1850's, he took part in political discussions that led to the founding of the Republican Party in Rochester.

When Frederick Douglass moved to Rochester in 1847, Porter began a long association with him. Before 1857, Rochester had separate
schools for black children. Douglass, William C. Bloss, Porter, and others worked to abolish those schools, and by 1857 the city opened its public schools to all children. Porter's home on Fitzhugh Street (Civic Center site) was an Underground Railroad stop, as was the home of his sister, Maria Porter. The Porter family, including sisters Maria and Almira, could be depended upon for financial aid by Douglass.

After John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry Henry Selden and Porter advised Douglass to leave the country. Both felt that the governor of Virginia would ask for extradition. Douglass left for Canada and then England. Even though public opinion was against the raid, Porter accompanied Susan B. Anthony when she went door to door selling tickets for Brown's memorial service in Rochester. He felt that she should not go alone.

While Douglass was in England, his young daughter, Annie, died in March 1860. Mrs. Douglass wondered what to do about burial, since the family had no cemetery lot. Sally Holley wrote about a visit to the Porter family lot in Mt. Hope with Maria Porter. When she noticed a small mound of earth, she asked whose grave it was. Maria's answer was, "Why that is little Anna Douglass's." Porter and his family had arranged to have the child buried in their lot. Cemetery records note the burial only on the Douglass lot drawing as March 1860, but he bought the lot on July 5, 1860, after his return from England.

After the war ended, Porter continued his extensive community work until his death on March 5, 1881. Many groups paid tribute to him, praising his character and his numerous contributions to their organizations and the community. In his day Samuel Porter was well known, but with time the memory of him has faded. He is still remembered for his work as an abolitionist. Porter had the courage to speak out and act despite public apathy and sometimes unfavorable public opinion for a cause in which he believed.

*Porter Family Papers, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Library.*

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**SYMBOLISM IN MT. HOPE**

A replica of the fireman's badge is carved on the Fireman's Monument and the gravestone of Thomas M. Rathbun, the first Rochester fireman killed in the line of duty (1827). The badge is shaped like a Maltese Cross, and inside two arms of the cross are a hook, ladder and hydrant. The initials, FBA (Firefighters Benevolent Association), stand in the center where the fireman's badge number usually is. Above FBA are the initials F.D. (Fire Department) and inscribed below it is the word, Rochester.

**A PICNIC AND TOUR OF MT. HOPE**

About 50 members of the Rochester Genealogical Society met at the cemetery for a picnic and tour conducted by Steve Thomas on June 21. The tour was based on famous Rochester families. They stopped at Philanthropist Row, where many noted Rochesterians are buried. From there they visited other graves, including those of John Snell and Isaac and Amy Post.

Genealogists may find information other than dates and lineage from visiting family graves and lots. Sometimes a symbol of a fraternal order is carved on the stone, sometimes an epitaph tells about a particular interest of the deceased or how he or she died, and sometimes a military record is inscribed on a stone, or even a likeness of the person. All of these things aid in developing an individual's personal history.
Get up-to-date information on Friends of Mt. Hope activities.

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MT. HOPE SLIDE SHOW

If you need an interesting program for your organization, schedule The Friends of Mt. Hope slide program. Please call Ellie Klein at 473-0778 for arrangements.

CEMETERY TOURS

Guided tours of Mt. Hope are given every Sunday at 2 and 3 o'clock, until the last Sunday in October.

Special tours can be arranged by calling 461-3494 and leaving a message.

SCHOOL TOURS

During the 1989-90 school year, 16 school groups, totaling about 320 children, visited Mt. Hope for special tours. Also, many teachers used the cemetery as a resource and brought classes on their own.

NEW MEMBERS

Sarah Johnson
Mr. & Mrs. Robert D. Taylor

THE FRIENDS OF MT. HOPE CEMETERY

NAME ________________________________
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I cannot join, but would like to contribute $ ______

Friends of Mt. Hope Cemetery
791 Mt. Hope Avenue
Rochester, New York 14620

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