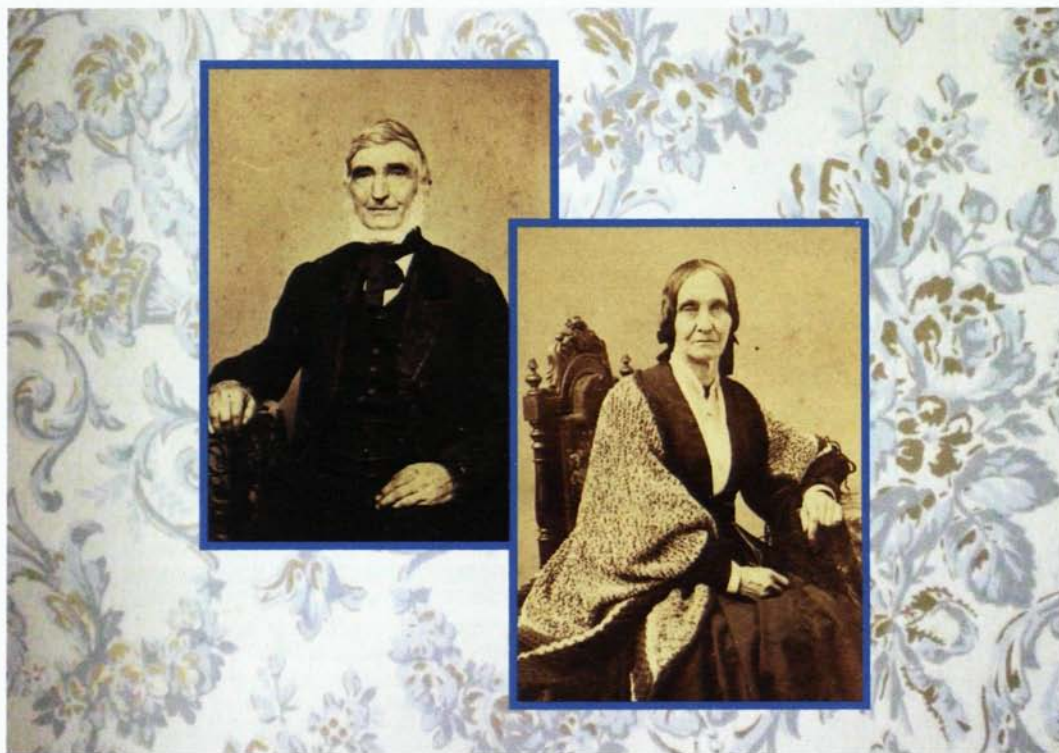


ROCHESTER HISTORY

Radical Transmissions: Isaac and Amy Post, Spiritualism, and Progressive Reform in Nineteenth-Century Rochester

By Caitlin Powalski



Vol. 71

Fall 2009

No. 2



A Publication of the Central Library
of Rochester and Monroe County



*Built in 1856 and previously owned by the Plymouth Congregational Church,
the Plymouth Spiritualist Church purchased this building in 1906.*

This picture was taken c. 1950.

From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

ROCHESTER HISTORY

STAFF

INTERIM EDITOR: Cheri Crist

EDITOR: Christine L. Ridarsky

ASSISTANT EDITOR: Larry Naukam

PROJECT COORDINATOR: Anita Hartwig

LAYOUT AND DESIGN: Inge Munnings

EDITORIAL BOARD

Jennifer Gkourlias
Rochester City School District

Michelle Inclema
Democrat & Chronicle

Meredith Keller
Rochester Historical Society

Leatrice M. Kemp
Rochester Museum and Science Center

Jeff Lurie
*Jewish Community Federation
of Greater Rochester*

Larry Naukam
Rochester Public Library

Christine L. Ridarsky
Rochester City Historian

Victoria Schmitt
Corn Hill Navigation

Carolyn Vacca
*St. John Fisher College/
Monroe County Historian*

Dear *Rochester History* Reader,

The nineteenth century was a time of great social and cultural change for the Rochester region. As the city grew and the region prospered from the growth of business and industry, people longed for a connection and struggled to find their place in the universe among such rapid and significant change. Rochester in the nineteenth century is commonly referred to as a "hotbed" of religious revival, and no region was more appropriate for the birth of a new religion, Spiritualism, than this one. This issue of *Rochester History* explores the early years of the Fox sisters, founders of Spiritualism, and also examines the social and cultural events that conspired to assist in the development of this new religion. Travel back in time with *Rochester History* to relive the gatherings where the Fox sisters communed with the dead, then make a visit to the Rochester Historical Society, located in the Rundel Memorial Library, to see the table they may have used to create the "Rochester Rappings."

Patricia Uttaro, *Library Director*

About Rochester History

Rochester History is a scholarly journal that provides informative and entertaining articles about the history and culture of Rochester, Monroe County, and the Genesee Valley.

In January 1939, Assistant City Historian Blake McKelvey published the first quarterly edition of *Rochester History*. Subjects researched and written by him and other scholars were edited, published, and distributed by McKelvey with the goal of expanding the knowledge of local history. Studying local history as a microcosm of U.S. history has brought insight and understanding to scholars and researchers around the globe.

Today *Rochester History* is published biannually (spring and fall) by the Central Library of Rochester and Monroe County, with the exception of 2009 and 2010, when three issues will be published in order to make up issues not published earlier. The journal is funded in part by the Frances Kenyon Publication Fund, established in memory of Ms. Kenyon's sister, Florence Taber Kenyon, and her friend Thelma Jeffries.

Rochester History invites submissions of manuscripts of 5,000-6,000 words that further its mission of increasing knowledge of and interest in local history and culture and of placing local issues into a national or global context. To receive a copy of the journal's complete submission guidelines, send a request to HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org or call (585) 428-8095.

Annual subscriptions to *Rochester History* are available for \$8.00. Send a letter and a check, payable to the "Rochester Public Library," to:

Rundel Library Foundation
Rochester Public Library
115 South Avenue
Rochester, NY 14604

If you have a comment, a correction, or more you would like to add to this story, please e-mail the editors at HistoryJournal@libraryweb.org.

© Rochester Public Library

Radical Transmissions: Isaac and Amy Post, Spiritualism, and Progressive Reform in Nineteenth-Century Rochester

By Caitlin Powalski

The tumultuous religious and social change that occurred in the early part of the nineteenth century left an indelible mark on the city of Rochester, New York, which still reverberates through the area. An Erie Canal boomtown, Rochester and the surrounding area stood ready to be defined by the influx of foreigners, pioneers traveling westward, laborers, and traveling evangelists. Beginning in the 1820s, the rejection of old religious orders and acceptance of new and increasingly more progressive beliefs, combined with the frontier-like setting, paved the way for the expression of increasingly liberal beliefs and laid the foundations that led to the rise of Mormonism, Millerism, and Spiritualism. A hotbed of varied religious groups and individuals, Western New York came to be known as the “Burned-Over District.” The religious fervor added fuel to an area already alight with social and political activism. The local roots of the abolition, women’s rights, temperance, and nonviolence movements would emerge from the energy lingering throughout the Burned-Over District. It was during this period of rapid and chaotic change that Amy and Isaac Post moved to Rochester, New York, becoming key players in the social and spiritual changes taking place in Rochester at the time.

Isaac and Amy Kirby Post were modest Quakers who were born and raised in Long Island, New York. Originally from Westbury, Long Island, Isaac married Amy’s sister, Hannah Kirby, in 1822. Shortly thereafter, Isaac and Hannah moved to Scipio, New York, in the Finger Lakes region where Isaac resumed farming. The couple had two children, Mary and Edmund. When Hannah took ill, Amy served as a devoted caretaker and stayed on to look after the family after Hannah’s death in 1827. Amy and Isaac wed the following year.¹ By the time of their 1836 move to Rochester, the Post family had grown to include two additional sons: Jacob Kirby (b. 1829) and Joseph (b. 1832). However, their world was turned upside down when Edmund was killed at the age of five in a threshing accident.² His violent death, as well as later family losses, would haunt the Posts, propelling their tireless work in social reform and advocacy, and providing the impetus behind their eventual involvement in the Spiritualist movement.

When the Posts and their children relocated to Rochester, the city was abuzz with a vibrant economy thanks to the power supplied by the Genesee River and the construction of the Erie Canal, which expedited the movement of goods across the state. People were moving

inland from the coast to seek their fortunes in new, unexplored territories in the West. As they left behind their families and the familiar, these travelers experienced a mixture of isolation and unprecedented freedom, and many sought the comfort, fellowship, and excitement provided by the freewheeling tent revivals happening at the time. The Posts became caught up in the fervor of the changing times, becoming staunch advocates for abolition, women's suffrage, temperance, and nonviolence, and eventually separating themselves from the Quaker faith they had known their whole lives.

As social unrest grew in the area, so did the Post family. In the years following their move west to Rochester, Amy gave birth to two additional sons, Henry (b. 1837) and Willet E. (b. 1847), and one daughter, Matilda (b. 1840).³ Meanwhile, Isaac established himself as a local druggist, opening the apothecary firm of Post, Coleman and Willis in the Smith Arcade on Exchange Street in 1839. Jacob joined his father in the apothecary as a clerk in 1844 and later became a full partner.⁴ As they settled into Rochester, the community became a place for the Posts to foster their progressive and, as many would argue, radical ideas for social and religious change. As their involvement grew, the Posts experienced two more devastating losses with the deaths of their children Matilda, aged five, in 1845, and Henry, aged ten, in 1847.⁵ Matilda's death would instigate a chain of events that affirmed the Posts' commitment to social reform, spurred their interest in Spiritualism and the ability to "speak" with deceased spirits, and caused their ultimate split from the Quaker faith.

A Quaker Upbringing Leads to Reform

Amy and Isaac's Quaker upbringing had an enormous impact on their early development as social reformers in Rochester. The Quaker congregation (also known as the Religious Society of Friends) to which the Posts belonged focused on a personal, unmediated experience with God.⁶ During such experiences, Friends would receive spontaneous inspiration from the Holy Spirit to preach at congregational services. Unlike many other religious groups, the Quakers allowed women to actively participate in the congregation, giving them permission to preach and providing an additional, separate meeting space.⁷ The greater emphasis on egalitarianism gave women a



The Post home at 36 North Sophia Street (present-day North Plymouth Avenue) was a station on the Underground Railroad. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

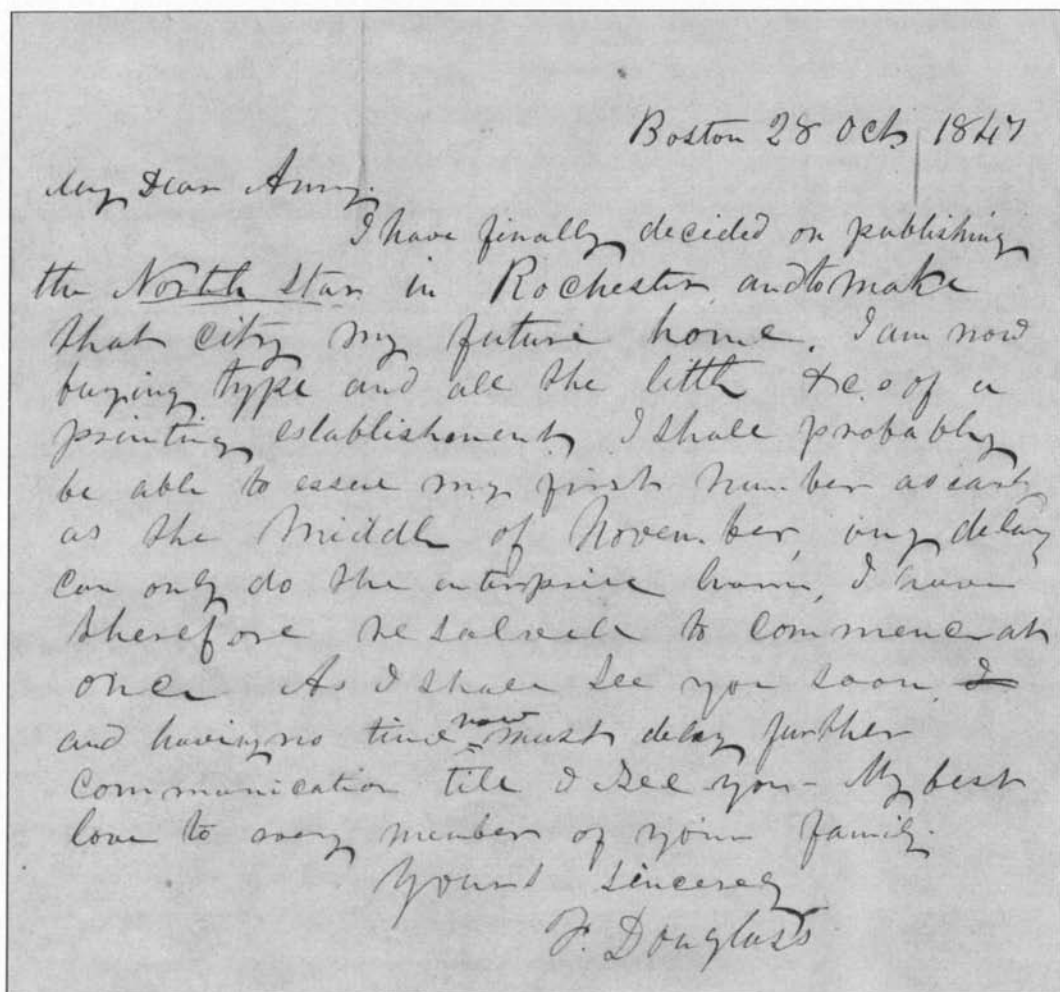
profound sense of independence and self-reliance that prepared them to pursue leadership roles in their communities.⁸ As a Quaker woman, Amy Post took advantage of this freedom to voice her opinions and to take action to improve a society she saw as unjust. Isaac supported his wife and these movements, both from a religious and personal standpoint, helping his wife organize events that advanced the causes of abolition and women's rights. However, while Isaac and Amy's personal religious convictions moved them to advocate for change in what they saw as a flawed societal structure,⁹ they met with opposition from some members of their congregation.

The Posts, like many members of the Quaker faith, felt that slavery was immoral. But many Quakers equally disapproved of the type of radical activist mentality displayed by pro-abolition members like Isaac and Amy. Traditional Quakers viewed reform movements as activities that brought the Society into dangerous proximity to the secular world, thus posing a threat to the purity of the congregation. These issues proved pervasive, and the unresolved tension within the Society of Friends resulted in the Separation of 1827, a full-out schism within the Quaker congregation that resulted in the creation of the Hicksite and Orthodox sects.

Elias Hicks, a strong opponent of evangelicalism and slavery, and his followers withdrew from the Orthodox sect, forming the Hicksite Quakers. Although the roots of the rift originated in Long Island, New York, the movement spread throughout the Northeast and Midwest parts of the country. While the Orthodox Quakers were generally urban and well-to-do, the rural Hicksites were generally far more active in anti-slavery activities, and many Hicksite women took on leadership roles in the early women's rights movement.¹⁰ As followers of Hicks, Isaac and Amy identified with the Hicksite emphasis on personal activity and community involvement as outward manifestations of their faith.¹¹ Unlike most Quakers who believed in a homogeneous religious society, the Posts and other reformers viewed a heterogeneous society as an important and necessary component of their faith.¹² However, as the Posts became even more immersed in the progressive culture brewing in Rochester, they discovered that even their own faith, though very liberal for the time, did not mesh with their extensive reform activities. The Posts' active involvement in the reform movement did not win them much support among those Friends who wanted a more quietist Quaker congregation.¹³ In addition, Isaac disagreed with the Quaker practice of passive resistance towards slavery and its refusal to embrace the abolition movement and confront slavery directly.¹⁴

The year 1845 proved momentous for the Posts. Not only did the disenchanting Quakers lose their daughter Matilda, they also made the decision to withdraw completely from the Society of Friends rather than give up the abolitionist cause.¹⁵ Both Amy and Isaac were involved with the Western New York Anti-Slavery Society from its inception¹⁶ and also helped the cause by organizing anti-slavery awareness fairs in the Western New York region. Their

efforts helped to secure funds for the movement and also helped finance Frederick Douglass' abolitionist paper *The North Star*.¹⁷ On October 28, 1847, Douglass wrote Amy from Boston: "I have finally decided on publishing *The North Star* in Rochester and to make that city my future home."¹⁸ As their involvement with abolition and other local movements grew, the Post house became a spot frequented by many local and national reformers speaking and traveling in the area. Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, and Lucretia Mott, among other leading public figures, were frequent guests in the parlor of the Post house at 36 North Sophia Street (present-day Plymouth Avenue).¹⁹ In addition to providing housing for well-known activists, Isaac and Amy offered their home as a "station" for the weary travelers of the Underground Railroad, a discreet, nocturnal operation that helped move escaped slaves from the South, through the Union states, and on to freedom in Canada.²⁰



Boston 28 Oct 1847

My Dear Amy,

I have finally decided on publishing the *North Star* in Rochester, and to make that city my future home. I am now buying type and all the little *trifles* of a printing establishment. I shall probably be able to issue my first number as early as the middle of November, my delay can only do the enterprise harm, I have therefore resolved to commence at once. As I shall see you soon, I and having no time ^{now} must delay further communication till I see you. My best love to every member of your family.

Yours sincerely
F. Douglass

Douglass writes Amy to say he will set up *The North Star* in Rochester in October 1847. From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.

The kindness Isaac and Amy showed their guests was not forgotten. As Douglass wrote to the Posts, “Your family was always dear, very dear to me, you loved me and treated me as a brother before the world knew me as it now does, & when my friends were fewer than they are now.”²¹ The Posts welcomed all into their home, and did not believe in discriminating on the basis of race, promoting the essence of humanitarianism that Isaac and Amy taught by example throughout their lives. Harriet Jacobs, a former slave, stayed with the Posts for most of 1849.

I passed nearly a year in the family of Isaac and Amy Post, practical believers in the Christian doctrine of human brotherhood. They measured a man's worth by his character, not by his complexion. The memory of those beloved and honored friends will remain with me to my latest hour.²²



The Posts' parlor was a gathering place for local and traveling abolitionists and reformers who gave talks and garnered support as well as a place for local Spiritualists to hold séances. The women in the photo are unidentified. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

Later, Amy encouraged Harriet Jacobs to write an autobiography about her encounters as a slave-woman. In a poignant conclusion to Harriet's book, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Amy wrote, “Her story, as written by herself, cannot fail to interest the reader. It is a sad illustration of the condition of this country, which boasts of its civilization, while it sanctions laws and customs which make the experiences of the present more strange than any fictions of the past.”²³

While the Civil War represented victory over slavery, both Isaac and Amy continued to push for true equality among different races and ethnicities, as well as between men and women. As with abolition, many Quakers were also strong supporters of women's suffrage.

Amy and other Quaker women, including Susan B. Anthony, Lucretia Mott, and Sarah and Angelina Grimké, pioneered women's rights causes both locally and nationally.²⁴ In 1848, Amy traveled to Seneca Falls, New York, to take part in the Women's Rights Convention, where she spoke and signed the *Declaration of Sentiments*.²⁵ Such a move was radical both politically and socially; however, Amy went even further when, in 1872, she registered to vote (she was prevented from actually casting a vote). In response, she received a letter from A. Crum, a member of the Rochester City Clerk's Office, who wrote, "After due deliberation and acting on the advice of the City Attorney, we have decided that we are not allowed by any state or United States law to register the names of any females."²⁶

Though Amy's actions were in line with the Posts' liberal interpretation of the Quaker faith, they contrasted sharply with the conservative politics of the day. Although they gave up their formal affiliation with the Society of Friends, the Posts continued to hold strongly the Quaker belief in the experience of an inner spiritual light, in which the Holy Spirit would "possess" a believer and allow him or her to share God's word. Similarly, as a religion that believed in the "possession" of the living as a way to speak to the dead, Spiritualism would prove a natural progression for the Posts.



Portrait of Susan B. Anthony, women's rights leader and dear friend of the Posts. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

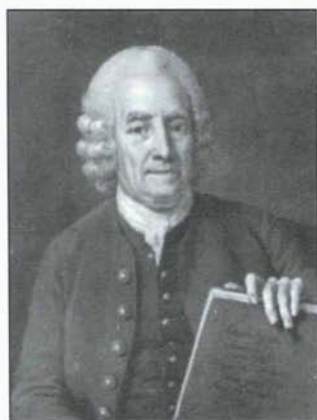
The Transatlantic Rise of Spiritualism

Spiritualists believed in the ability to communicate with the disembodied spirits of the dead and practiced this belief through the use of a human medium.²⁷ For many of the living, such communications provided consolation for the death of loved ones and promised the hope of salvation at the hands of a redeeming God. Mediums experienced a trancelike state during which time they spoke, wrote, or otherwise communicated the alleged "thoughts" of spirits. These practices were based on the belief that the mind (or soul, or spirit) was not always dependent on the body, and that an entranced medium had the power to receive messages from such entities residing in the spirit world.²⁸ However, the role of a medium varied among practitioners because, as a movement, Spiritualism was not unified. Different sects of the movement grew worldwide from its European origins, spreading across the Atlantic in the early nineteenth century. The terms *mesmerism*, *somniphathy*, *magnetism*, *trance*, and *medium* were

all used more or less interchangeably throughout the 1840s.²⁹ While Spiritualism as a movement in America grew out of the religious revivals that included Millerism, Mormonism, and the tent revivals of the 1830s and 1840s sweeping from east to west across America, it claims much earlier origins, most notably in the work of Swedish mystic, scientist, and philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772).

A fervent Spiritualist, Swedenborg attempted to bridge the gap between the natural world of the living and the spiritual world of the dead. Swedenborg's scientific and academic accomplishments ranged over several disciplines, but he set himself the following objective in the early 1730s: "Ut ipsis sensibus demonstretur animae immortalitas" ("To prove the immortality of the soul to the senses themselves").³⁰ His scientific studies of human anatomy and physiology — combined with his growing interest in spirituality — resulted in his attempts to communicate with a spirit world. As a first step, he attempted to explain the relationship between a soul or spirit and an earthly body. For Swedenborg, science and religion were complementary, and he claimed to write the words of spirits, namely angels, through divine inspiration. As a medium, Swedenborg experienced trances, visions, dreams, and automatic, or "spirit" writing, and professed to have traveled often between the realms of heaven and hell while in a trance state. By the nineteenth century, with the growth of hypnotism, mesmerism, and telepathy alongside the technological advancements of Morse code and the telegraph, Swedenborg's ideas were highly accredited and provided a precedent for the rapid rise of American Spiritualism that took place in the 1830s and 1840s. Famous adepts of Spiritualism throughout the nineteenth century included Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Horace Greely, and even President Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, who would eventually hold séances at the White House in an attempt to connect with her young son, Willie.³¹

Attempting communication with the dead through mediums became an early form of local Spiritualism and was popularized in Rochester and the rest of New York State by Andrew Jackson Davis (1826-1910). Known as the "Poughkeepsie Seer," Davis was an early Spiritualist convert and practiced magnetism. Davis believed in magnetism, which involved inducing a trance-like or hypnotic state in an individual acting as a medium so they could serve as the messenger for spirits. Davis alleged that while magnetized, he had communicated with Swedenborg's spirit³² and that Swedenborg subsequently became Davis's mentor.



Emanuel Swedenborg, one of Spiritualism's forerunners, c. 1763. Image from Wikimedia Commons, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Emanuel_Swedenborg_full_portrait.jpg

For believers in Spiritualism, the trance state produced by mesmerism was similar, if not identical, to the heightened fervor of religious enlightenment at a revival meeting. In accordance with the religious revivals going on in the area, these trances would be familiar to individuals who experienced a spiritual awakening at a Christian revival. For ex-Quakers like the Posts, these states corresponded to the Quaker belief in the Inner Light, or the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, which enabled a Friend to preach at a meeting.

Spiritualists believed that both the body and spirit were natural entities. There was nothing “supernatural” about the existence of spirits. Instead, life simply transitioned at the moment of death from a physical life on earth to an existence in the spirit world. Such a natural progression rendered science and religion plausible counterparts for the Spiritualists. The trancelike state experienced by mediums provided the necessary gateway to the spirit world. Notably, many Spiritualists also rejected orthodox Christianity, with its strict interpretation of the Bible, in favor of a more liberal and progressive faith. Spiritualist beliefs appealed to the more liberal religions of the time, including the Unitarians, Universalists, and Quakers like Amy and Isaac.³³ Overall, Spiritualism held two attractions that proved “irresistible to thousands of Americans: rebellion against death and rebellion against authority.”³⁴ In their activism, the Posts and their contemporaries had shown their disapproval of the societal status quo. Their “rebellion against death” came later as a result of the mysterious spirit communications that began at the Fox household in 1848.

Who’s “Rapping” in Rochester?

In nearby Hydesville, New York, two young sisters, Margaretta (known as Maggie) and Kate Fox, were to become the catalysts that would give the Spiritualist movement its momentum in Rochester and Western New York. It began on a cold March night, when Maggie and Kate (who came to be known as the Fox sisters) claimed that they heard the sound of knocking along the floorboards of their bedroom. The girls identified the raps as a form of communication from the spirit of a dead peddler. When the girls posed questions to the spirit, it allegedly answered questions by rapping out yes or no responses.



The Fox home in Hydesville, New York, where a series of mysterious rappings gave rise to the Spiritualist movement in Western New York. The people in the photo are unidentified. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

The spirit would go on to correctly answer questions about the Fox family and neighbors who had been called in to witness and investigate. Initially, however, few believed that the Fox sisters were truly communicating with the beyond and most dismissed them as humbugs, although the sisters were later endorsed by local celebrity medium Andrew Jackson Davis.³⁵

Local rumors spread, eventually bringing news of the Fox sisters to the Posts. Isaac was surprised to find he not only knew of the girls, but had once been the Fox family's landlord.³⁶ In November 1848, a few months after the knocking started, Isaac wrote to his brother Joseph and sister-in-law Mary explaining his relationship with the Fox family.

To begin, I do not recollect wither [*sic*] we talked with you about some strange rappings or noises being heard about 30 miles east of here, which caused much to be said. But such was the fact I haeard [*sic*] much of as well as read, but paid no more heed to it than I did of the Old Salem witch stories. But we afterwards found we were well acquainted with the family. One Sister of the family still lived in Rochester who on hearing strange stories whilst there to see and hear for herself and also some others of our Rochester people who found it all they had heard and much more.

...Girls of 12 & 14 years who used to live in our house at cornhill [*sic*] and with whom we always had good understanding. They felt very anxious that we should enjoy what they did there...They went in the bedroom with one of the girls and Amy and obtained liberty for me to hear. And as they called me I suppose I went with as much unbelief as Thomas felt when he was introduced to Jesus after he had ascended. When I looked in the door with my countenance so doubting and saw Abigail & Henry looking as tho they stood before the Judgement seat, I felt rebuked and much more so when Abbi in her most gentle manner asked some questions. I heard very distinct thumps under the floor apparently and several apparent answers. I turned away after that. I have had many conversations as also Amy, Sarah, Jacob & Joseph as well as our little Dutch girl who love very much to ask questions. And little Willie has been and put his ear down to hear it. But you must understand, we do not get answers without one of the sisters are present and not always then, for I have been in quite large companies and all would be still. It is natural to suppose it is very difficult to converse where there is nothing said but thumps...

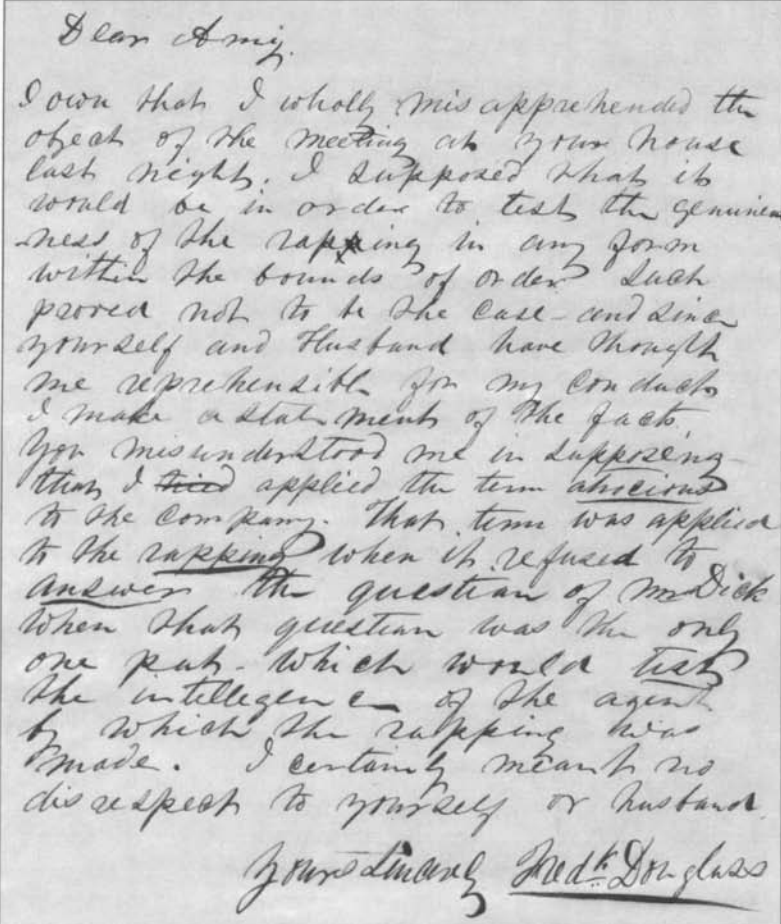
...It has been investigated by so many and I believe every candid person admits that the girls do not make it. We have seen it in so many different positions that we see no possibility for man to do it. It breaks out into new subjects foreign to any ones [*sic*] thoughts. The girls are sometimes magnetized, they and the rapping seen to be in unison. I believe they always speak of seeing Matilda, they say she is happy around us.³⁷



The Fox sisters, c. 1852. From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.

Continued correspondence between Isaac and his brother and sister-in-law suggest that his family was critical of his Spiritualist beliefs.³⁸ Although both Amy and Isaac would remain lifelong Spiritualists even as the movement as a whole came under intense criticism, skeptics—including close friend Frederick Douglass—dismissed the idea of being able to communicate with the dead. Douglass wrote to Amy in March 1850, “I own that I wholly misapprehended the object of the meeting at your house last night... You misunderstood me in supposing that I... applied the term atrocious to the company. That term was applied to the rapping when it refused to answer the question of Mr. Dick when that question was the only one put which would test the intelligence of the agent by which the rapping was made.”³⁹

Despite his friend’s disbelief, Isaac remained a devoted adherent to Spiritualism. In a letter to his brother, Isaac’s awe and excitement were evident as he related how spirits had communicated with raps during a séance held at the Fox home.



Dear Amy,

I own that I wholly misapprehended the object of the meeting at your house last night. I supposed that it would be in order to test the genuineness of the rapping in any form within the bounds of order. Such proved not to be the case and since yourself and Husband have thought me reprehensible for my conduct I make a statement of the fact. You misunderstood me in supposing that I tried applied the term atrocious to the company. That term was applied to the rapping when it refused to answer the question of Mr. Dick when that question was the only one put. Which would test the intelligence of the agent by which the rapping was made. I certainly mean no disrespect to yourself or Husband.

Yours sincerely
Fred^d Douglass

In a letter to Amy, Douglass expresses his disappointment in the veracity of the rappings of the previous night. From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.

...The question was asked wither [*sic*] the Spirit had anything to communicate. The thumps were heard in the affirmative. How shall we find out? By repeating the alphabet. A RAP, then the alphabet was repeated. Byron & so much of Halsted as for some one to ask if it meant that name. Byron Halsted the Dr's son that died last summer. Then other questions followed that he was with his father and mother, that he had appeared to him in outward manifestations...Dr. Chase who had lately lost his Mother, asked if his Mother's Spirit was present. The answer was, she was. Whether she was happy/she was, wither [*sic*] her knowledge had increased since she passed away/it had. Wither [*sic*] she continually watched over him/she did. Then he asked about another I do not know how related, but suppose a sister, wither [*sic*] his suspicions [*sic*] in regard to her death were correct. The answer, they were not. Would she have lived if other means had been used? The reply, she would not. Then he asked if [he] could be convinced that there were spiritual manifestations, then he could get no more answers.⁴⁰

Isaac outlines how the spirits the girls communicated with provided consolation to those who had lost loved ones, and makes mention that the sisters reputedly spoke with his deceased daughter Matilda. The raps created much sensation in the small village both among skeptics and believers, and the young sisters went to Rochester to stay with their older sister, Leah Fox Fish.⁴¹ Once the girls moved closer, the Post household became a gathering place for the séances that eventually led to Isaac's own growth as a medium.⁴²

Isaac Becomes a Medium

Isaac sought out his deceased family members very early as a Spiritualist, and the more he was able to communicate with his loved ones through mediums, the more his interest in Spiritualism grew. When entranced, the Fox sisters often mentioned the well-being of the spirit of Isaac and Amy's young daughter, Matilda, who had died in 1845, as well as other family members. Isaac wrote to his brother Joseph, explaining how he had talked to the spirits of their sisters: "The other evening I had the younger Magnatized [*sic*]. I asked if she should see my sister Phebe, at which there came a rap she said. She said that is her. I then asked if she saw my sister Lydia then came another rap."⁴³ Like her younger sisters, Leah Fox proved to have connections with the spiritual world and often provided spiritual communications while entranced. Isaac often sought to have Leah serve as a medium and Leah consented, claiming that being magnetized provided relief from her headaches. Leah served as a medium for numerous communications from deceased Post children, and importantly, the spirit of Hannah Kirby Post, Isaac's first wife and Amy's sister.⁴⁴

Searching for solace from his grief, Isaac communed with spirits while continuing to work on his reform agendas. His progression as a medium paralleled that of many mediums of the time as they established more direct ways to communicate with spirits. Mediums often

began by communicating, indirectly through other entities, with the spirit that they wanted to reach; such was the case with Isaac Post in his early sessions with the Fox sisters. By communicating with other spirits, Post learned, indirectly, that his daughter Matilda was well. Further, as he looked for answers about his deceased sisters, Phebe and Lydia, he still had to go through other spirits, or other mediums such as the Fox sisters, in order to find answers. As he became a more confident medium, however, Isaac was able to establish direct contact with spirit subjects through automatic writing sessions in which he purportedly penned the words of spirits who compelled him to write down their thoughts.⁴⁵ The stimulus for this new talent allegedly came at the behest of his mother's spirit, who curiously refers to a reform movement of sorts taking place in the spirit world.

Aunt Phebe Carpenter presents her
 self
 Brother I & sister A The vastness of
 your work is wonderful, the sublimity
 of the work of human progress, is beyond
 description and fast finding out by mortal
 vision, consequently the great father hath
 ordained a plan to lighten the mind of
 mortals by his wisdom using his angels
 as ministering spirits unto you. How it
 behoves you, Oh ye inhabitants of the Earth
 to listen and hearken unto my counsels
 saith the Lord. that ye may grow wise
 unto salvation, for even now is the day of
 judgment, then your salvation is at hand
 Therefore speak brother & speak sister.
 let your voices be heard in the streets,
 and never seek to suppress your utterances
 for in so doing you keep bread from
 the hungry, bread of life I mean,
 which springs from the tree of life,
 that tree of life within your own souls,
 and do you not know that the leaves of
 that tree of life are for the healing of the
 nations, so do not withhold for in
 so doing you will impoverish your own
 souls, thus is thy sister who loveth right
 over-rep, and seeks to work with the

An example of Isaac's spirit writing. These are notes he took during a "communication" from the spirit of Aunt Phebe Carpenter, in which she praises Isaac and Amy for their work in "human progress." From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.

she seeks to work with you both even
 unto the end. He encouraged Travel
 on and we will strengthen your frail
 back and add to you a vigorous
 and life eternal, which is better than
 gold, until ye shall be happily borne
 to the haven of rest. I will tell you about
 that rest in some future time when the
 conditions are favourable.

Mr. Mott & Cooper and many are here
 strengthening and preparing you for some
 thing, and they see that you will have suffi-
 cient aid to bear you out in it.

I see a long poem in the hand of one
 they want the Isaac to write whenever
 the impression comes. The instrument
 they have had in former time must be
 brightened - the War has absorbed their powers
 but now they will work more for individual
 ails. Cooper says his especial business is
 going to be to make the women talk, he &
 Francis Wright. *Edmund*
 Tuesday Evening Feb 12

The second page of Isaac's notes from his "communication" with the spirit of Aunt Phebe Carpenter.
 From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.

Isaac, my son, thy feeling is not exactly right towards low spirits, as thee calls them. A reformation is going on in the spirit world, and these spirits seek the company of honest men like you. It will do them great good and thee no harm.⁴⁶

Amidst grief and tragedy, human beings have always searched for answers—a way to make sense of the world. Isaac's motivation for becoming a medium may have been heavily influenced by the sudden, tragic losses of three of his children. As a medium, Isaac sought out unknown or unrecognized spirits in an attempt to contact the spirits of his loved ones. Isaac called out to an entity named L.E.L, a female spirit with whom he frequently communicated and enabled him to write the spirits' words. In response, he received the following message:

"No, Father, she has gone to join the throng
 Of heavenly angels dear;
 To unite in song, and the joys prolong,
 While we are lingering here.
 Edmund"⁴⁷

In an unpublished communication, Isaac served as the medium for his uncle, Isaac Post, for whom he was named. The spirit of Isaac's uncle shared a hopeful and reassuring message about the spirit world with his nephew, noting that spirits possessed the ability to influence the living, and that he and Isaac's sister Phebe were often in communication with other family members—all of which offered much consolation to Isaac.⁴⁸

As a result of his mediumistic abilities, Isaac published *Voices From the Spirit World, Being Communications From Many Spirits By the Hand of Isaac Post, Medium* in 1852 to document his spirit communications. In his introduction, Isaac offered some insight into the goals he hoped to achieve by publishing his book.

To me the subject of man's present and future condition is of vast importance; and, since I have found my pen moved by some power beyond my own, either physical or mental, and believing it to be by the spirits of those who have inhabited bodies, and passed from sight, I feel it best to allow those, who desire to read the words of many individuals, as they have written with my hand, the privilege of doing so.⁴⁹

Significantly, the spirits that Isaac recorded helped him understand the afterlife by providing consolation and the promise of a chance at salvation. Concurrently, Isaac's role as a medium also helped promote his social reform activities and served to articulate the positions that the Posts took on social reform.

Spiritual Telegraph: Science and Religion

The union of religion and science in Spiritualism is best exemplified by the spirit of Benjamin Franklin, who purportedly "wrote" the introduction to Post's book. By the nineteenth century, Franklin was world-famous for his work with electricity. In the introduction, Franklin's spirit clearly linked and, subsequently legitimized, Spiritualism and science in much the same way Swedenborg had a century earlier. Many Spiritualists believed that spiritual communication was the result of electrical impulses.⁵⁰ Similarly, the raps and knockings paralleled Morse code and the rapid growth of the telegraph. Mediums became known as "spiritual telegraphs," a scientific, and now, religious concept that people who lived in the nineteenth century understood. Given his scientific background, it seemed natural for the spirit of Franklin to "write" the introduction to Post's book by means of an automatic writing session with Isaac serving as medium.

It seems to me best to give a few words on the subject of clairvoyance...I will consider only the most enlightened subjects. They gradually lose their hold on earth and pass to the company of spirits who have left their bodies, and at times, freely converse with them, and are often so happy in the company of these, that they dread the thought of leaving. These, when they get in conversation with pure enlightened spirits, give such words of council and encouragement as is delightful to their embodied friends.

It remains to give a few ideas on the subject of the spirits using the hands of their embodied friends. This is the most interesting, because of its more general application, but the evidence is not as convincing as either of the other modes, to the observer, for there is no sound to strike the ear, nor voice to enlist the attention of the mind; but him who suffers his hand to be controlled [*sic*], knows that his hand writes what his mind does not dictate; he finds too, as in the other case, it depends upon the intelligence that controls, what is brought to light by the communication.

Thus it is, if the medium, being susceptible, gives up to the direction of a spirit, and if sufficiently passive, the spirit gives such sentiments as it desires. Here again, it depends upon the knowledge or wishes of the communicator, what writings are given; hence then the importance of being controlled [*sic*] by the individual spirit who professes to govern.⁵¹

Based on this account, the spirits with whom Post claimed to communicate reached out to him as a medium because they had a message that they wished to share with the living. The first communication in Isaac's book was from the spirit of Adin T. Corey, one of the many entities who inspired Isaac to record his thoughts during automatic writing sessions in 1851 and 1852. He and many of the other spirits stressed the importance of progressive reform activities including women's rights, temperance, abolition, and pacifism. Corey's communication is typical of the correspondence recorded in Post's compilation. Often the communicating spirit had failed to live a wholly good life on earth, but the now-disembodied spirit residing in the spirit world found a God who offered redemption for earthly sins and eventual salvation—themes that consistently appeared throughout Post's spirit communications. Consequently, Corey's spirit tells Isaac, such spirits use mediums to communicate warnings to the living based on their own earthly mistakes.

Mine is the privilege to often visit those in the body, and impress upon their minds their duty to themselves; their God, and their fellow men. I am permitted to encourage the reformer to do what I so failed to do. I see that I can do much in this way, to carry on the great work of reforming men. It is my business to impress the minds of those that are engaged in spreading the peaceable spirit of Jesus. It is my business to impress the minds of those engaged in the Anti-Slavery, Temperance, Woman's Rights, and other reforms. I often inspire them with courage and determination, to persevere through all opposition.⁵²

Interestingly, as in the spirit communication from Isaac's own mother, Corey's spirit also uses the opportunity to speak of reform.

Among the many prominent political and social figures with whom Isaac communicated was the spirit of George Washington, whose messages lent powerful support to Isaac's reform agenda. Isaac claimed to have served as the medium for Washington's spirit multiple times between July and August 1851. In the first communication, Washington's spirit echoed Isaac and Amy's call for equality for all members of society. Washington explained that

the spirit world offers equality for all, and that fame and notoriety on earth held no importance in the afterlife. "All honors in the bodily state, fall with the earthly tabernacle."⁵³ Slaves, sinners, good men, and warriors were equal. Washington's spirit denounced the evils of slavery, remarking upon how during his life slavery was accepted and justified politically.

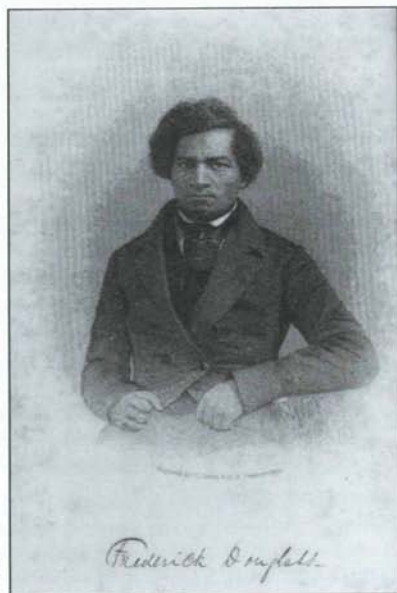
I regret the government was formed with such an element in it...I cannot find words to express my abhorrence of this accursed system of slavery. It not only causes those who are immediately or personally concerned, but its deadly influence is extended widely.⁵⁴

Washington's spirit went on to describe the bleak afterlife for politicians who promoted slavery, including John Calhoun, James Polk, and Andrew Jackson. By the middle of August, Washington's spirit communicated even stronger anti-slavery sentiments.

Slavery is a hideous evil to master and slave; it makes the master domineering, and blunts those finer sensibilities that can only make the man, or the woman happy in themselves.⁵⁵

Significantly, all of the communications published in Post's book occurred after the Fugitive Slave Law was passed in September 1850, after which abolitionist activities saw a marked increase.⁵⁶ The Fugitive Slave Law, which strengthened existing slaveholding legislation and stipulated that runaway slaves be returned to their owners, became a major point of contention between the slaveholding South and the free North. While southern slaveholders felt they were entitled to have their slave property returned and resented the northern states—some of whom had already abolished slavery and helped runaway slaves secure their freedom—many Northerners resented the fact that they were being asked to become, in essence, "slave catchers." Slavery became a hotly debated issue between the North and the South, and the spirits with whom Post communicated helped illustrate this tension. Even the spirit of proslavery senator John Calhoun communicated with Post, echoing Washington's thoughts on slavery.

A Southern congressman from South Carolina who went on to become Vice President of the United States, Calhoun strongly advocated for the rights of slaveholders and pushed for the continuation of slavery, as well as the right of states to nullify federal actions. Calhoun died in March 1850, the same year in which Congress passed the



Portrait of Frederick Douglass, 1856. A former slave and close friend of Isaac and Amy's, Douglass supported the Posts' reform agenda but privately disagreed with their belief in Spiritualism. From the collection of the Rochester Public Library Local History Division.

Fugitive Slave Law. However, when Calhoun's spirit "communicated" with Post, he shared a very different viewpoint. Calhoun, like many of the other spirits in Post's published collection, stressed the possibility of redemption for a poorly lived life. His low position in the spirit world, he lamented, was a direct result of his proslavery stance.

I had given my life to accomplish ends for the people, my desire had been as devoted as any to promote the stability, the unity and the harmony of the government to continue it on the same ground, that those worthies that formed the Constitution intended, and now to find myself far, very far, behind these, was cause of surprise as well as of remorse, I inquired for the cause and was told while Washington and Jefferson, with others, were laboring to set bounds to Slavery... There you see was a wide difference between us, while they were anxiously watching every opportunity to let the oppressed go free, I diligently and continually developed my mind to fastening the chains more securely, and extending the wrong to other lands that was free from the curse, for such I find it. I looked with astonishment upon the delusion with which my mind had been filled. The powers with which I had been favored, had been worse than wasted; I should have been a leader in good, instead of evil; I should have been foremost in promoting liberty, instead of slavery.⁵⁷

Such support strengthened the reform efforts of nineteenth-century progressives and lent credibility to their movement among the believing public.

For Isaac, Spiritualism became a means to legitimate his social reform agenda and the promotion of a more humanitarian lifestyle, regardless of race, gender, or religion. But not every spirit in Post's published book held a high political or public status. In fact, some spirits, such as Sarah Sharp, may have been ordinary acquaintances of the Posts from the Rochester area. Compared to the spirits of prominent American men with whom Post communicated, Sarah Sharp was an anomaly. Not only was she a young woman, she was not of any obvious political standing. Sarah lived in Penfield, New York, a village near Rochester. Perhaps Post knew her, or at the very least, was familiar with the teenager's tragic story, which made the headlines of the *Rochester Daily Advertiser* in 1851.

Miss Sharp lay upon the ground, with her throat cut from ear to ear, in the agonies of death, and near her lay Everets in nearly the same situation, with the bloody knife laying beside him. Both the murdered girl and her suicide brother-in-law expired on the spot.⁵⁸

Sarah's spirit was eager to communicate with Post. She reported from a lowly spirit condition, much like that of Calhoun, but for different reasons. The story she allegedly conveyed to Isaac corresponds to the newspaper's account.

One evening as I was attending to the duties that devolved upon me, while with my sister, I stepped out the door, intending to return immediately, but I was accosted by him that had been the cause of all my troubles, who said he wished to speak to me upon a very important subject; I stepped to him, when he put his arm around me, and instantly plunged his knife in my throat, severing the main artery, which at once

terminated my bodily existence. My exertions were used to the uttermost to part from him, but all was over; he gave no time to dread death, for my fate was sealed almost instantly. I only had time to think he was determined to kill me. The next I knew, I was looking at my bleeding and lifeless body, as well as his. I asked him why he had done this thing? He replied he was determined I should not outlive my love for him.⁵⁹

Isaac's account of Sarah's experience not only served as a warning to the living, but also helped advocate nonviolence, another social concern of the Posts.

I do wish to warn every one against the dangers that are strewn in life's path; to shun the unhappy life that I lived; and to encourage all to do what they can to save an erring brother or sister; for, depend upon it, each has his work to do; and he or she that lives to elevate, to reclaim, is building on a foundation that must last them when their bodies fail.⁶⁰

Like her husband, Amy also promoted Spiritualism because of the consolation it provided and the reform agendas its believers supported. At one time Isaac believed Amy too might become a medium. Following the automatic writing session with the spirit of Adin T. Corey, Isaac reflected: "You need not think I am crased [*sic*] for I don't think I am in other respects. I take these developments coolly. Amy, I think will also soon write for Spirits[:] she has once."⁶¹ However, Amy did not become a medium.

Instead, she advanced the Spiritualist movement in other ways. In a speech given in April 1868 and printed by the *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, Amy

Post spoke about the origins and influence of Spiritualism. In talking about her close connection with the Fox sisters, Amy stated clearly that because of their crusade "thousands have been made happier by the knowledge gained through these spirit communings; they have learned the certainty of a conscious future existence, and also that the purer and more unselfishly we live here, the better prepared we are for joy and usefulness in the higher and ever progressive realm of spirit life."⁶² Throughout her speech, Amy sought to dispel skepticism against Spiritualism and the critics of the "knocking." She claimed that in Rochester, they had brought "science" to their religion by allowing skeptics to attend their séances, alongside devout believers, to watch and learn. Until their dying days, both Isaac and Amy remained faithful followers of Spiritualism. Indeed, Amy noted such consolation as essential to Spiritualism. "While to me the knowledge, for such it is to me, that my departed loved ones can and do come to me is a blessing so great that I cannot describe it."⁶³

Horrid Murder and Suicide!

We are called upon to-day to record the most horrid case of murder and suicide that has ever occurred to this county. It took place in the town of Penfield, about eight miles from this city, between six and seven o'clock last evening.

The person murdered was a young lady of respectable family, named Sarah Sharp. The murderer was John Everets, the husband of Miss Sharp's sister. After Everets had committed the horrid deed, it appears that he took his own life with the same weapon he had used in taking that of his sister-in-law.

The circumstances, as we have received them, are nearly as follows: Miss Sharp was attending her sister, a Mrs. Campbell, who was ill, at her residence, about two miles and a half from the

Headline from the Rochester Daily Advertiser, January 27, 1851. Sarah Sharp was an anomaly among Isaac Post's spirit "communicators."

MRS. POST'S NARRATIVE.

According to history there have been spiritual manifestations from time immemorial, in every clime, and in every age, but they were ever regarded as fearful forebodings of some evil, or, as witchcraft, or ghosts of some murdered person, coming up out of the grave, seeking revenge.

Therefore mysterious lights, and all unaccountable phenomena of every description, were looked upon with horror: everybody shrank away from all such manifestations as they would from an evil genius, or from a pestilence. None seemed to see or understand that in all these varied manifestations was contained the evidence of the immortal spirit. None seemed to realize that they came laden with blessings and healing to the anxious, enquiring minds respecting the truth of that great problem, until the advent of the manifestations in 1815, through the mediumship of the Fox family, in Hydesville. This advent we have met for the first time to commemorate. From that beginning Spiritualism has become a power in our country and the world.

Thousands have been made happier by the knowledge gained through these spirit communings, they have learned the certainty of a conscious future existence, and also that the purer and more unselfishly we live here, the better prepared we are for joy and usefulness in the higher and ever progressive realm of spirit life.

Hence it is well that we should meet here with thanksgiving to the dear angels, and thanksgiving to the Fox family, through whose united agency these blessings first came to us and the world.

I was acquainted with this family long before the appearance of these extraordinary Rochester knockings, so called in derision. John and Margaret, the parents of these medium daughters, were of German and French extraction, and members of the Methodist church; and oh, how earnestly did they daily unite in vocal prayer, "that if this thing was of the devil, that it might be removed from them," but if of God; they resolved to bear all the scorn, derision and persecution that might be heaped upon them.

I often feel that the extraordinary fidelity, and unselfish devotion to this unpopular truth, of the Fox family, has never been justly appreciated by Spiritualists.

*To commemorate the 20th anniversary of the founding of Spiritualism,
Amy Post wrote a speech that was published in the
Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser on April 1, 1868.*

Death Is Another Beginning

On May 9, 1872, Isaac died of pneumonia, the same illness that took Amy's life seventeen years later.⁶⁴ Isaac's funeral was described as "somewhat peculiar, very lengthy and withal impressive."⁶⁵ Although his friend and fellow abolitionist Frederick Douglass did not attend the funeral, Douglass sent an address from his home in Washington that was read during the funeral proceedings. "A man more just, simple hearted, charitable, unselfish and full of good words I never knew."⁶⁶

Following Isaac's death, Amy remained a strong feminist advocate and ardent supporter of Spiritualism. However, despite her close friendship with Douglass, he remained skeptical of Amy's Spiritualist involvement. "I am always so happy to agree with you generally that I almost regret that I am not a Spiritualist and the same feeling makes me regret that you are one."⁶⁷

FUNERAL OF ISAAC POST.—The Unitarian Church was filled yesterday afternoon on the occasion of the funeral of the late Isaac Post. The services were somewhat peculiar, very lengthy and withal impressive. Rev. C. C. H. Mills delivered the discourse, which was appropriate. He presented the deceased as a man who lived to do good, and pointed to the ambition to be thus engaged in doing good the true aim of life. He illustrated his position with much force and by the use of impressive language.

Mrs. Watson, a distinguished trance speaker, made an address of one hour's duration, also a prayer to a trance state. Her address was listened to with marked attention throughout. Her language was eloquent and many of the thoughts were beautiful.

Rev. Mr. Mann, pastor of the Unitarian Church, made a short address. He stated that Frederick Douglass was an intimate friend of the deceased and he was expected to be present on this occasion but failing to do so had sent a dispatch which he read as follows:

*A description of Isaac Post's funeral
in the Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser,
May 13, 1872.*

Rochester, Jan. 4. 1872.

My dear Friend,

After being snowbound fifteen miles from Corfu all night Saturday and all day Sunday, unable to get east or west. I was able, by the assistance of seven locomotives to reach here last night about nine o'clock. My next point is in Northwestern Wisconsin but how and when I see to get there I do not know. I see snow about as high as my torso and with my self back under your hospitable roof, but the idea of duty which has hitherto commanded me is still my master and will compel me to go on. I leave here to day for Berlin and thence to Frankfort. Please let the dear Kalmoull and William know this for

I had hoped to have spent some time with them before leaving Rochester during my present tour. Tell Doctor Fildes that I read every word of his able letter and while I admit that he puts Bishop in a bad fix, he does not much help the case of the Abolition. I am always so happy to agree with you generally that I almost regret that I am not a Spiritualist and the same feeling makes me regret that you are one. Kind regards to Dear Mother, Mrs. M. and a whole heap on "Uncle" to the Doctor.

*Always yours truly
Frederick Douglass*

Amy Post

*In this correspondence, Douglass shares his regret that his friend Amy Post is a Spiritualist.
From the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, University of Rochester Libraries.*

Yet even after her death in 1889, Amy's connection to her Spiritualist friends continued, and even drew the attention of the press. The headline for the *Rochester Union and Advertiser* on May 21, 1889, read, "Back to Earth: The Spirit Forms of Amy Post and Sojourner Truth Appear." The article reported on a séance occurring at the home of the recently deceased Amy Post. Avid Spiritualist believers were present alongside skeptics, including the disguised *Union and Advertiser* reporter who recounted the séance.

About forty people assembled in the parlors at the residence of the late Amy Post, last evening, to witness a number of materializations of deceased persons through the mediumistic powers of Mrs. Sawyer, a Washington lady, now on a visit to this city... Dr. Farlin, the well-known lecturer... requested any one present to examine the small room in which the medium was about to sit. A *Union and Advertiser* reporter, who obtained admission to the séance *in cognito*, and several others, made a strict examination and found no evidence of collusion. Every hole and corner of the small apartment was scrutinized but nothing found that could in any way help the medium to perpetrate fraud. The window of the room was fastened.

Some one was requested to tie the medium to a chair. This was done to the satisfaction of the audience, among whom were several skeptics who had never attended a séance before.

The lights were all turned out except one, which burned dimly at one end of the parlors, throwing sufficient light to enable everyone to see the curtains which separated the medium's room from the guests.

In the course of a few minutes the white form of a woman came out from the curtain and a name was given which caused one of the audience and her husband to step toward the figure and clasp it by the hand. A little girl who accompanied this lady and gentleman was lifted up and kissed by the spirit, which was that of the gentleman's first wife. Other spirits kept appearing—some walked well into the room faint, shadowy, and again bright and distinct, all of different sizes. The spirit of the late Amy Post came, and some of her friends shook hands and conversed with her. The reporter remembered seeing the lifeless form of Mrs. Post lying in the very room then occupied by the medium. Mrs. Post spoke cheerfully to all present, admonishing all to live nobly.

LOCAL NEWS.

BACK TO EARTH.

The Spirit Forms of Amy Post and Sojourner Truth Appear.

About forty people assembled in the parlors at the residence of the late Amy Post, last evening, to witness a number of materializations of deceased persons through the mediumistic powers of Mrs. Sawyer, a Washington lady, now on a visit to this city. The séance was under the supervision of Dr. Farlin, the well-known lecturer, and Mr. Burke, a friend of Mrs. Sawyer's. Both these gentlemen addressed the meeting, saying in substance that Spiritualism still progressed in spite of the fact that it had been in the hands of charlatans and knaves. It was quite natural that a philosophy so sublime, so consoling, so completely satisfying to the human soul, should have enemies in the persons of those who are hired to promulgate mere theories and creeds which land their adherents in the regions of doubt. Spiritualism was coeval with the universe and has been known by the thinkers of all nations. It is the chief topic of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures and is the theme of all sacred writings. It embraces all the moral teachings of every faith, and proves by demonstration the immortality of the soul.

Back to Earth: The Spirit Forms of Amy Post and Sojourner Truth Appear, Rochester Union and Advertiser, May 21, 1889.

The spirit of "Sojourner Truth," the tall negress, came next and shook hands with some who knew her in life... There came some strange appearances after this, like lace fabrics, which seemed to be woven into shape by invisible hands. Forms came out of the floor, and down from the ceiling, all of which was very remarkable. The reporter then had an idea at first that he could "catch on" to some trickery, but the manifestations were so different to the usual cut and dried performances that he was nonplussed, and had to remain a quiet and interested, not to say scared, observer.⁶⁸

Throughout their lives, Isaac and Amy Post actively contributed to social change, taking the implicit hope embedded in abolition, women's suffrage, and Spiritualism and elevating it to the pursuits of equality, social justice, and comfort in the knowledge of an afterlife. The Posts were tireless activists who did not retreat from what they felt was right due to political, religious, or other pressures, even in the face of vehement skepticism from close friends and family. While Frederick Douglass and Susan B. Anthony were leaders of reform movements that would help shape the social and cultural mores of the nineteenth century, we should also remember Isaac and Amy Post, who dedicated themselves daily, in ways both large and small, to securing racial, gender, and religious equality for all.⁶⁹ Although they now rest in Mount Hope Cemetery, their lives and work as reformers remind us that society's most radical changes are often borne of the kind of tragedy and loss that leads to a revolution not only of the mind, but also of the spirit.

Notes

1. Nancy A. Hewitt, "Amy Kirby Post: 'Of Whom It Was Said, "Being Dead, Yet Speaketh,"'" *University of Rochester Library Bulletin* 37 (1984), <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4018> (accessed December 10, 2009).
2. Nancy F. Owen, e-mail message to author, January 9, 2007. Hannah Kirby Post's Bible. *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and the New Testaments* (Daniel D. Smith: New York, 1823), private collection, Nancy F. Owen.
3. Ibid.
4. "Introduction," Isaac and Amy Post Family Papers, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservation, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=1096> (accessed January 1, 2010) (hereafter cited as IAPFP).
5. Nancy F. Owen, e-mail message to author, January 9, 2007.
6. Robert W. Doherty, "Religion and Society: The Hicksite Separation of 1827," *American Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1965), 63-80.
7. Margaret H. Bacon, *On the Verge: The Evolution of American Quakerism* (State University of New York Press, 1995), 69.
8. Bacon, 70.
9. Laura A. Goodwin, "Practical Faith and Faithful Practice: Religion and Reform Among Congregational Friends, 1840-1852" (master's thesis, Sarah Lawrence College, 2000), 10.
10. Bacon, 73.
11. Doherty, 66.
12. Goodwin, 7.
13. Goodwin, 10.
14. *Appletons' Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, eds., James G. Wilson and John Fiske (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1888), s.v. "Post, Isaac."
15. "Introduction," IAPFP.
16. Goodwin, 26-27; Hewitt.
17. Goodwin, 26-27.
18. Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, 28 Oct 1847, Frederick Douglass Project, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books and Special Collections and the Frederick Douglass Institute, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2521> (accessed January 1, 2010).
19. *Daily American Directory of the City of Rochester for 1847-8* (Rochester: Jerome & Brother, 1847), <http://www.libraryweb.org/rochcitydir/images/1847/1847complete.pdf> (accessed January 25, 2010).
20. William F. Peck, *Semi-Centennial History of the City of Rochester* (Syracuse: D. Mason, 1884), 460.
21. Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, 28 April 1846, IAPFP.
22. Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written By Herself* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 284.
23. Jacobs, 304-5.
24. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 49.
25. "The Seneca Falls and Rochester Conventions," Upstate New York and the Women's Rights Movement, University of Rochester Rare Books and Special Collections Library, 1995, <https://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=1800> (accessed January 27, 2010).
26. Nancy F. Owen, *Private Collection*, A. Crum to Amy Post, 1 November 1872.
27. Catherine L. Albanese, "Homesteads of the Mind: Occult and Metaphysical Movements," in *America Religions and Religion* (Belmont, California: Wadsworth Company, 1992), 264.
28. David L. Edwards, *After Death? Past Beliefs and Real Possibilities* (London: Cassell, 1999), 51.
29. Edwards, 138.

30. Erland J. Brock, ed., *Swedenborg and His Influence* (Bryn Athyn: The Academy of the New Church, 1988), 33.
31. Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1987), 216-225.
32. Bret E. Carroll, *Spiritualism in Antebellum America* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997), 16, 19-20.
33. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 165-68.
34. Braude, 2.
35. Carroll, 21.
36. Isaac Post to Joseph and Mary Post, 23 November 1848, IAPFP.
37. Ibid.
38. Mary Robbins Post to Isaac Post [1848?] and Mary Robbins Post to Amy and Isaac Post, 2 February 1850, IAPFP, quoted in Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 32-34.
39. Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, March 1850, Frederick Douglass Project, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books and Special Collections and the Frederick Douglass Institute, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=2583> (accessed February 2, 2010).
40. Isaac Post to Joseph and Mary Post, 23 November 1848, IAPFP.
41. Barbara Weisberg, *Talking to the Dead: Kate and Maggie Fox and the Rise of Spiritualism* (San Francisco: Harper, 2004), 46.
42. "Back to Earth: The Spirit Forms of Amy Post and Sojourner Truth Appear," *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, May 21, 1889.
43. Isaac Post to Joseph and Mary Post, 23 November 1848, IAPFP.
44. Braude, 15.
45. Bette London, in discussion with the author, March 22, 2007. London's work *Writing Double: Women's Literary Partnerships* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1999) discusses mediums, automatic writing, and literature.
46. Jenny M. Parker, *Rochester: A Story Historical* (Rochester: Scrantom, Wetmore, and Company, 1884), 268-69.
47. Isaac Post, *Voices From the Spirit World: Being Communications From Many Spirits, By the Hand of Isaac Post, Medium* (Rochester: C.H. McDonell, 1852), 273.
48. Spirit writing, Isaac Post (uncle) to Isaac Post (nephew), 7 July 1851, Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College.
49. Post, iii.
50. For further information on Franklin's connection to Spiritualism and science see: Werner Sollors, "Dr. Benjamin Franklin's Celestial Telegraph, or Indian Blessings to Gas-Lit American Drawing Rooms," *American Quarterly* 35, no. 5 (1983): 459-80.
51. Post, xi-xii.
52. Ibid., 19-20.
53. Ibid., 31.
54. Ibid., 36.
55. Ibid., 52.
56. "Fugitive Slave Act, 1850," *National Center for Public Policy Research*, <http://www.nationalcenter.org/FugitiveSlaveAct.html> (accessed January 3, 2010).
57. Post, 88.
58. "Horrid Murder and Suicide," *Rochester Daily Advertiser*, January 27, 1851; Larry Naukam, interview by author, March, April 2007. The 1850 Federal Census shows Sarah Sharp living in Penfield, Monroe County, New York, and John Everett living in Walworth, Wayne County, New York.
59. Post, 133.
60. Post, 134-35.

61. Spirit writing, Aden [sic] T. Cory [sic] to Isaac Post, 8 July 1851, IAPFP, #895a. The spelling of Aden T. Cory's name differs here from its appearance in Isaac's book, in which it is spelled Adin T. Corey.

62. "Anniversary of the Spiritualists," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, April 1, 1868.

63. Lucy N. Colman, *Reminiscences* (Buffalo: H.L. Green, 1891).

64. *Mt. Hope & Riverside Cemetery Records*, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books, Special Collections and Preservations, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=3310> (accessed January 1, 2010).

65. "Funeral of Isaac Post," *Rochester Daily Union and Advertiser*, May 13, 1872.

66. *Ibid.*

67. Frederick Douglass to Amy Post, 15 Jan 1877, Frederick Douglass Project, University of Rochester Department of Rare Books and Special Collections and the Frederick Douglass Institute, <http://www.lib.rochester.edu/index.cfm?PAGE=4545#a> (accessed February 2, 2010).

68. "Back to Earth: The Spirit Forms of Amy Post and Sojourner Truth Appear," *Rochester Union and Advertiser*, May 21, 1889.

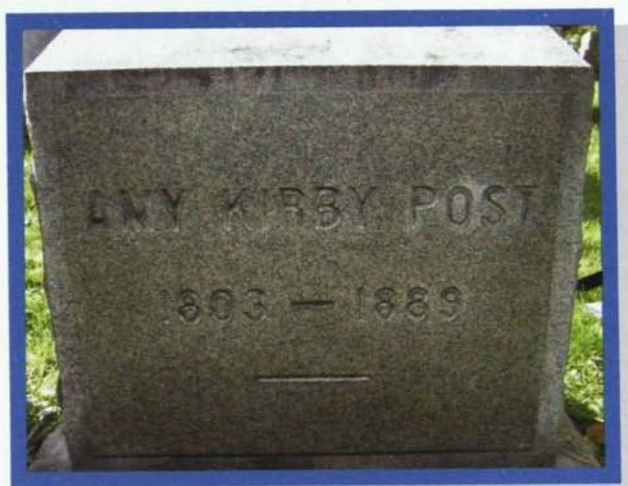
69. Frank Gillespie, in discussion with the author, March and April 2007.

About the Author

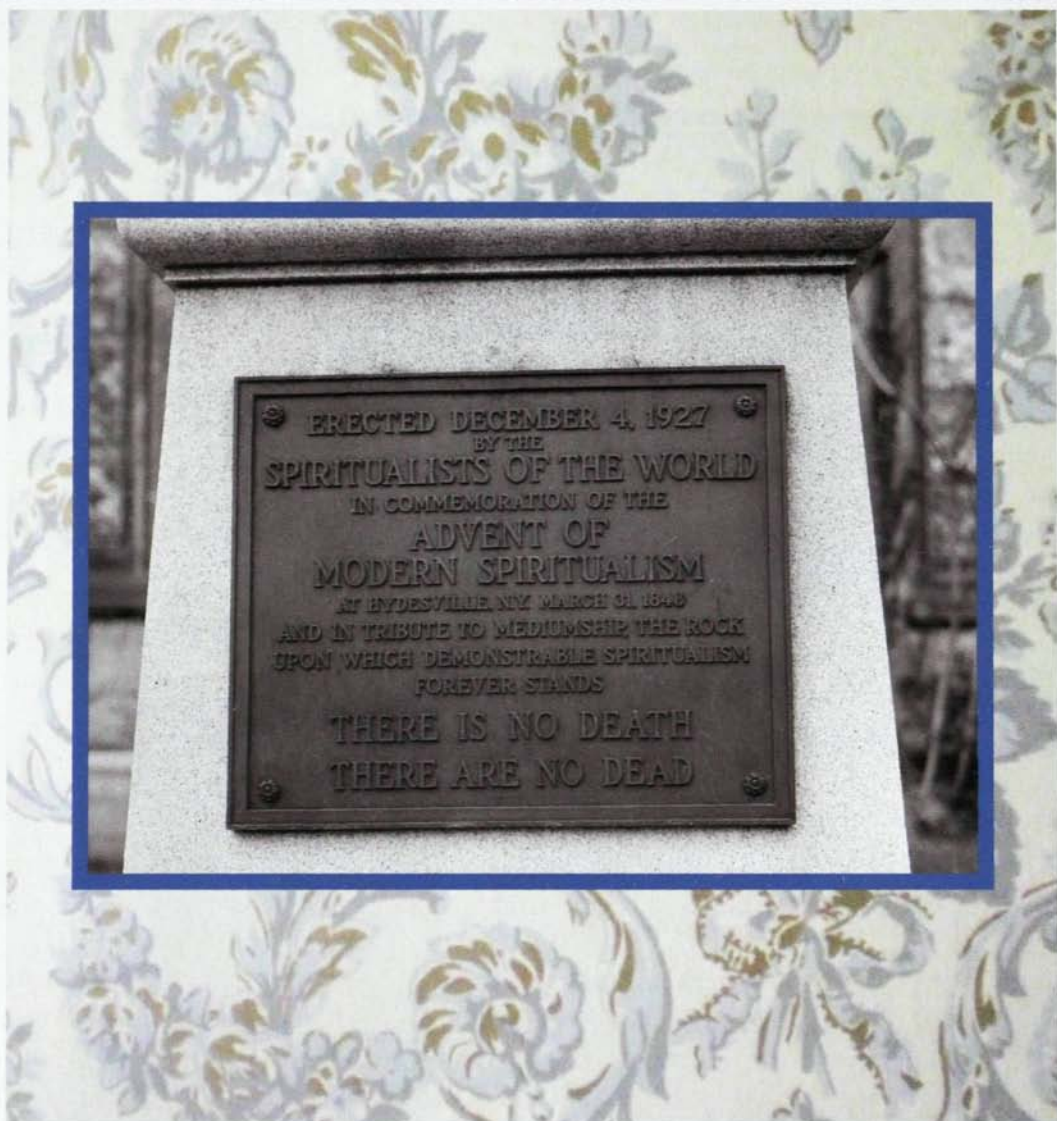
Caitlin Powalski graduated from the University of Rochester in May 2009 with a B.A. in History with a concentration in Early American Studies. She is currently working on her Masters in Public Health at the University of Rochester School of Medicine and Dentistry.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Dr. Emil Homerin and Dr. Larry Hudson of the University of Rochester for their guidance throughout this entire process; Nancy Foster Owen (descendent of the Posts); Larry Naukam (Rochester Public Library, Local History Division); Frank Gillespie (Friends of Mount Hope Cemetery); Melissa Mead and Mary Huth (University of Rochester Rare Books and Special Collections Library); and Susanna Morikawa (Friends Historical Library, Swarthmore College) for their research expertise, and also to James Morris, William Chesebro, Lynn Carrier, Matthew Lindeboom, the members of the Rochester History Editorial Board, and Bob and Cathy Powalski for their thoughtful comments on my drafts.



Isaac and Amy Post's final resting places in Mount Hope Cemetery. Photographs by Caitlin Powalski.



Inscription on monument in the former Plymouth Spiritualist Church building, the text of which was suggested by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. From the Albert R. Stone Negative Collection, Rochester Museum & Science Center Rochester, N.Y.



Central Library
of Rochester
& Monroe County
www.libraryweb.org

