

WHAT TO THE SLAVE IS THE FOURTH OF JULY?

Owen D. Corpin, a native and current resident of Peterboro NY, whose family heritage traces directly to former slaves freed by the local abolitionist Gerrit Smith, will deliver parts of one of Frederick Douglass' most famous speeches on Friday, July 5 at 7 p.m. at 5255 Pleasant Valley Road, Peterboro NY 13134.

In 1852 Frederick Douglass was asked to present a speech on the Fourth of July, at the Corinthian Hall in Rochester, to commemorate the signing of the Declaration of Independence seventy years earlier. Douglass refused to speak on July 4th, but agreed to do so the next day, stating "This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn." He asked, and explained *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*

Owen Corpin was an honor graduate of Morrisville-Eaton High School and went on to be an honor graduate and Trident Scholar from the United States Naval Academy. He spent over twenty years in the Navy as a Naval Aviator flying fighter aircraft making over five hundred carrier landings during six deployments in defense of the United States. Performing in many assignments, including as an NROTC instructor at an HBC, he also earned a Masters degree from Central Michigan University. After retiring from the Navy at the rank of Commander, he returned to the local area and worked as a substitute high school teacher for three years. Owen then joined Morrisville State College as an EOP advisor for seventeen years until he retired. During this period, he served on the Madison County Head Start board and the local library board before joining the National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum (NAHOF) Cabinet of Freedom in 2012. Owen serves on the Education/Programs committee and coordinates the yearly NAHOF Watchnight/Watchfire observance on the last day of each year.

Norman K. Dann PhD, biographer of Gerrit Smith, and a transcriber of letters between Frederick Douglass and Gerrit Smith for the editor of the *Frederick Douglass Papers*, will briefly describe the unusual friendship of Douglass and Smith that Dann has studied in the scores of letters written between the two abolitionists. The Douglass-Smith relationship was unlikely for the 19th Century: A formally uneducated, powerless base, assertive, younger black man and a formally well educated, wealthy, influential, white elder. The two men bonded for the cause of the abolition of slavery, and that bond lasted throughout their lives. The influence of Smith's educated logic and defense of the *Constitution* changed Douglass' antislavery tactics from moral suasion to political activity. Smith's philanthropy was a major support of Douglass' newspapers and speaking activities. Douglass dedicated his second autobiography to Smith.

The public is encouraged to attend this free program.

The National Abolition Hall of Fame and Museum will be open at six o'clock for visitation before the program. For more information: NAHOFm18352gmail.com, 315.308.1890

www.NationalAbolitionHallofFameandMuseum.org,.



Owen D. Corpin, a native and current resident of Peterboro NY, whose family heritage traces directly to former slaves freed by the local abolitionist Gerrit Smith, will deliver parts of one of Frederick Douglass' most famous speeches on Friday, July 5 at 7 p.m. at 5255 Pleasant Valley Road, Peterboro NY 13134.



Frederick Douglass portrait by artist Joseph Flores 2005



Gerrit Smith portrait by artists Joseph Flores 205