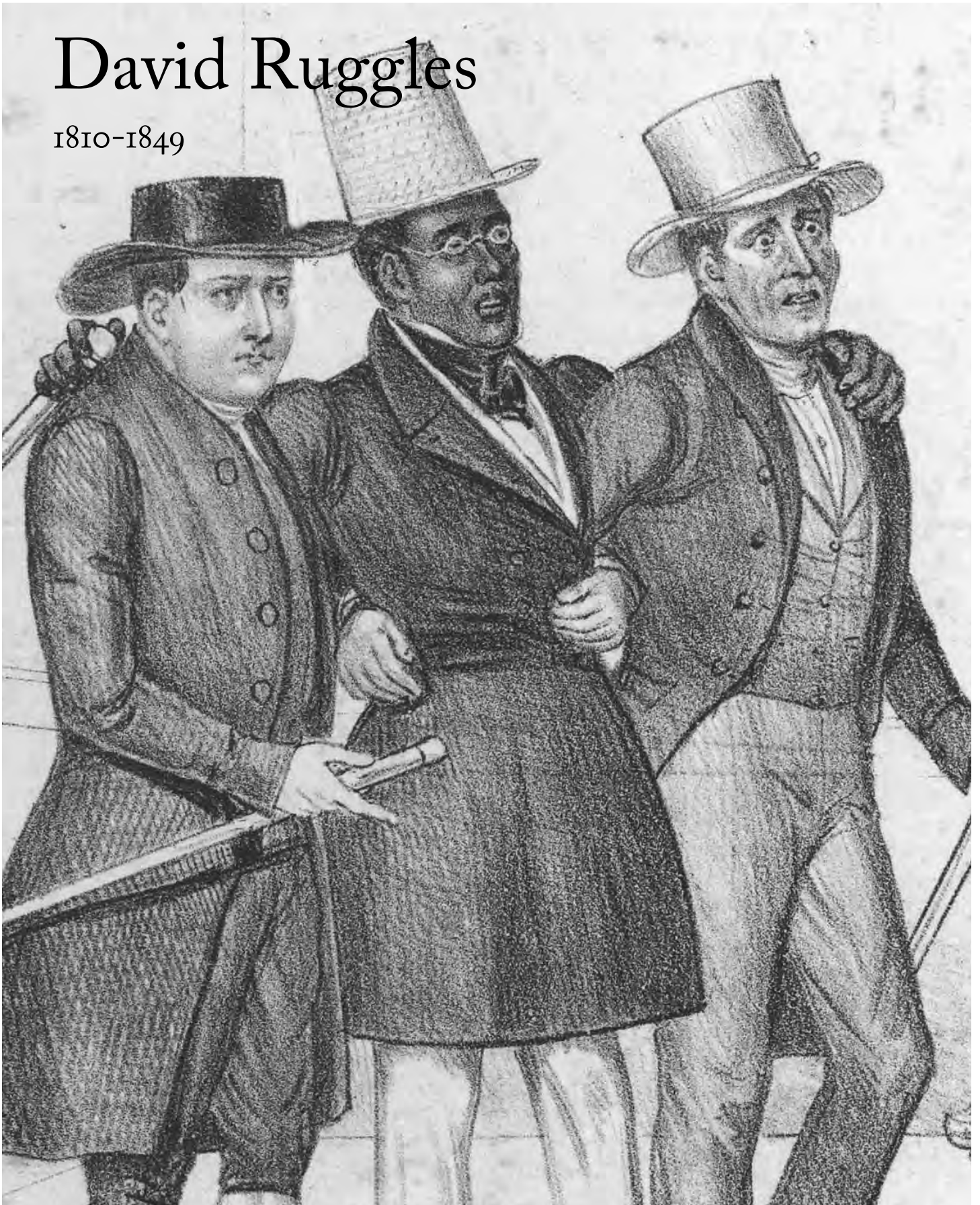


David Ruggles

1810-1849



“Who was David Ruggles and what was he doing in Florence?”

David Ruggles

Introduction:

You stand before the site of the first facility built in the United States specifically as a hydropathic hospital. This alternative medical treatment was practiced by David Ruggles, a member of the Association. He first learned the cure in order to heal himself, since he arrived in Florence with serious health problems. Ruggles’ ailments were the result of difficult and dangerous work he did assisting fugitives from slavery on their way North. He was another important hero in the fight for freedom and dignity for all African-Americans who made his home in Florence.

Who was David Ruggles?

- Briefly describe David Ruggles’ anti-slavery work in New York City before he moved to Northampton. He merged two distinct roles as a journalist and an activist. What were some of the things he did and how did he merge those roles successfully? How were anti-slavery workers like Ruggles treated at that time? (Docs. A,B,D,E)
- Why was Frederick Douglass always grateful to Ruggles and why did he remain a lifelong friend? How did Ruggles assist Douglass as he had hundreds of others? (Doc. E)
- Why did Ruggles leave his work in New York City and move to Northampton? Why do you think he chose to settle here? (Docs C,E)

Did Ruggles continue his anti-slavery work in Northampton?

- In spite of his physical ailments, we have evidence that Ruggles was still a writer and activist against slavery while living here. What do you see?
- The abolitionists in Northampton were celebrating the anniversary of “West India Emancipation”. What were they referring to and why was this so significant? This answer will require outside research. (Doc. G)
- Describe the event for us. How was it received by the people of Northampton? What was Ruggles’ role in it? (Doc. F)
- David Ruggles did not stop writing after he arrived in Florence. We have a public letter of support addressed to his friend Frederick Douglass soon after the latter started his own abolitionist newspaper, the *North Star*. What point was he making? Who was he addressing? What was he calling on them to do? What do you make of Ruggles’ writing style? (Doc. H)

What was the Water-Cure?

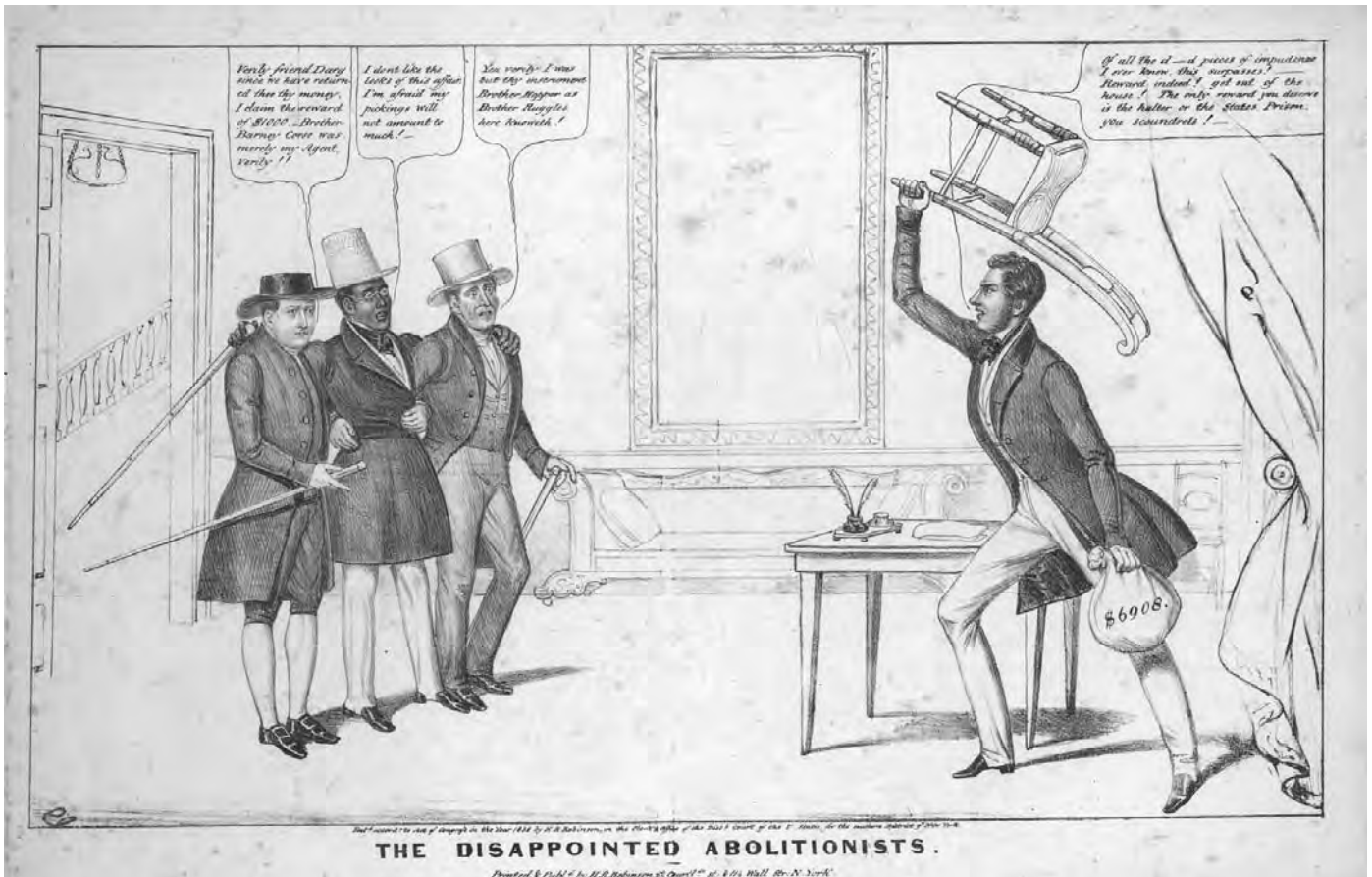
- As we have seen in Documents C and E, Ruggles arrived in Northampton a very sick man and

was offered care in the Community. Before he left New York City, Ruggles underwent a series of “conventional” medical treatments that left him even weaker and sicker. Why do you think? Can you describe some of these treatments? (Doc. I)

- Ruggles arrived here eager to try an “alternative” cure that was offered to him. The treatment helped him so much that he learned how to administer it himself and he opened his own Water-Cure establishment. He needed help to do this. What was he asking for in this public letter he had printed in a newspaper? Who was it addressed to? (Doc. J)
- Can you describe the Water-Cure for us? How were patients treated? What made for the full experience including bathing, drinking, accommodations, diet and exercise? Does this sound like a relaxing Day-Spa experience to you? (Docs. J,K)
- Ruggles wrote about his own “passage through the crisis”. Austin Ross also described his son’s “painful crisis” as a critical moment in his treatment. Describe this for us. What do you make of this? Would you try it? (Doc. L)
- Dr. Ruggles established the first Water-Cure in the United States here. Many prominent abolitionists, like William Lloyd Garrison, took the cure with him. He developed a national reputation for helping patients with a large variety of ailments. Unfortunately, his own symptoms returned and he was unable to cure himself a second time. David Ruggles died in Florence, aged 39.

NOTES ON SOURCES

- A. Chronology of David Ruggles’ life and work.
- B. From The Rising Sun by William Wells Brown (1882).
- C. From “The Hazards of Anti-Slavery Journalism” by Graham Hodges (2000).
- D. From “What I Found at the Northampton Association” by Frederick Douglass (1894).
- E. From My Bondage, My Freedom, by Frederick Douglass (1855).
- F. Open Letter published in *The Liberator* (1843).
- G. Notice published in the *Hampshire Gazette*, July 25, 1843.
- H. Letter to the Editor published in the *North Star* (1848).
- I. From The Reshaping of Everyday Life, by Jack Larkin (1988).
- J. Open Letter printed in *The Liberator* (1844).
- K. Letter from William Lloyd Garrison to his wife, Helen, July 18, 1848.
- L. Letter to the Editor written by Community member Austin Ross, published in the *Hampshire Gazette* (1847).



The Disappointed Abolitionists, cartoon by Edward W. Clay, 1838 (courtesy www.periodyssey.com)

A

DAVID RUGGLES CHRONOLOGY

- 1810 Born in Norwich, Connecticut
- 1827 Left Norwich for New York City
- 1833 Began abolitionist work as travelling agent for the Liberator and the Emancipator
- 1834 Opened first African-American owned bookstore/reading room
- 1835 Appointed Secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee
- 1838 Assisted Frederick Douglass, one of over 600 fugitive slaves he helped
- 1838 Published first African-American magazine, *Mirror of Liberty*
- 1842 Moved to Northampton Association
- 1846 Opened the Northampton Water Cure
- 1849 Died in Florence

B

DAVID RUGGLES.

OF those who took part in the anti-slavery work thirty-five years ago, none was more true to his race than David Ruggles. Residing in the city of New York, where slaveholders often brought their body servants, and kept them for weeks, Mr. Ruggles became a thorn in the sides of these Southern sinners. He was ready at all times, in dangers and perils, to wrest his brethren from these hyenas, and so successful was he in getting slaves from their masters, and sending them to Canada, that he became the terror of Southerners visiting northern cities. He was one of the founders of the celebrated underground railroad.

Harassed by the pro-slavery whites, and betrayed and deserted by some of his own color, David Ruggles still labored for his people.

He was deeply interested in the moral, social, and political elevation of the free colored men of the North, and to that end published and edited for several years the "Mirror of Liberty," a quarterly magazine, devoted to the advocacy of the rights of his race.

- C** “He was a whole-souled man, fully imbued with a love of his afflicted and hunted people, and took pleasure in being to me, as was his wont, ‘Eyes to the blind, and legs to the lame.’ This brave and devoted man suffered much from the persecutions common to all who have been prominent benefactors. He at last became blind, and needed a friend to guide him, even as he had been a guide to others. Even in his blindness, he exhibited his manly character. In search of health, he became a physician. When hope of gaining his own was gone, he had hope for others. Believing in hydropathy he established, at Northampton, Massachusetts, a large ‘Water Cure’, and became one of the most successful of all engaged in that mode of treatment.”

Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage, My Freedom*, 1855

- D** David Ruggles, an African-American printer in New York City during the 1830s, was the prototype for black activist journalists of his time. During his twenty-year career, Ruggles poured out hundreds of articles, published at least five pamphlets and operated the first African-American press. His magazine, *Mirror of Liberty*, intermittently issued between 1838 and 1841, is widely recognized as the first periodical published by a black American. Ruggles also displayed unyielding courage against constant violence, which eventually destroyed his health and career. His story reveals the valor required of a black editor struggling against the pitiless hatred of the pro-slavery forces and the yawning indifference of most Americans. He was an agent, printer, publisher and subject. He was in fact America’s first black working journalist. His career epitomized the fusion of professionalism and activism, so characteristic of later black journalists, that would propel him to the center of racial conflict.

E My impressions of the Community are not only the impressions of a stranger, but those of a fugitive slave to whom at that time even Massachusetts opposed a harsh and repellent side. The cordial reception I met with at Florence, was, therefore, much enhanced by its contrast with many other places in that commonwealth. Here, at least, neither my color nor my condition was counted against me. I found here my old friend, David Ruggles, not only black, but blind, and measurably helpless, but a man of sterling sense and worth. He had been caught up in New York city, rescued from destitution, brought here and kindly cared for. I speak of David Ruggles as my old friend. He was such to me only as he had been to others in the same plight. Before he was old and blind he had been a coworker with the venerable Quaker, Isaac T. Hopper, and had assisted me as well as many other fugitive slaves, on the way from slavery to freedom. It was good to see that this man who had zealously assisted others was now receiving assistance from the benevolent men and women of this Community, and if a grateful heart in a recipient of benevolence is any compensation for such benevolence, the friends of David Ruggles were well compensated. His whole theme to me was gratitude to these noble people. For his blindness he was hydropathically treated in the Community. He himself became well versed in the water cure system, and was subsequently at the head of a water cure establishment at Florence. He acquired such sensitiveness of touch that he could, by feeling the patient, easily locate the disease, and was, therefore, very successful in treating his patients.

F To the Liberator

NORTHAMPTON, August 2, 1843.

Yesterday was the anniversary of a day that has given birth to the most extraordinary and glorious event of the present century, the celebration of which will doubtless be observed until not a slave be left to clank his chain in any part of the world. I wanted to be at the great gathering of anti-slavery spirits at Dedham – at the convention in Lowell-and wherever jubilee meetings were held on that day; but I could only be in one place, and at one meeting and found it more convenient to be here than any where else. We made application, through a large committee, for the First Congregational meeting-house – one of the most commodious in the Commonwealth – with very little hope of success; but our request was granted, (not without hesitancy and fear on the part of the parish committee,) and we accordingly occupied it all day. Our meetings were not thronged, as they ought to have been, and as they would have been, if the clergymen of the place had exerted themselves to induce the people to attend; but, though few of the village residents were present, a respectable number convened from the neighboring towns, the members of the Industrial Community turned out *en masse*, in true abolition style. Our widely and worthily known colored friend, DAVID RUGGLES, was called to the chair, and presided in a very satisfactory manner. Until he was afflicted with ophthalmy, he devoted himself to the task of breaking the fetters of his oppressed countrymen with indomitable courage and unconquerable zeal. His sight is somewhat better, but far from being restored, the loss of which affects not only himself, but very seriously the cause of the hunted fugitive.

William Lloyd Garrison

⑥

GLORIOUS JUBILEE!

The friends of humanity in Northampton and towns adjoining, without distinction of party or sex, are requested to meet in Northampton on the **FIRST OF AUGUST**, to celebrate the thrilling event of the West India Emancipation of **EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND** of our fellow creatures from the thralldom of slavery and their restoration to manhood.—An event pregnant with interest to the whole human family; showing the progress which humanity has made over oppression, and the prospect of a coming better age. Let the humane, philanthropic, and christian—all unite in celebrating this blessed event, as the harbinger of the jubilee to be proclaimed to the 2,500,000 bondmen in the United States.

The services will be commenced in the **FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH**, at 10 o'clock, A. M., with an Address on Emancipation in the West Indies, by Professor Adam, to be continued by William Lloyd Garrison and others.

*George Benson,
Isaac Clark,
John Bridgman,
William Adam,
Sophia Ford,*

*Oliver Warner,
E. D. Hudson,
Frances P. Judd,
David Ruggles,
Eliza B. Wall,
Stephen Rush,*

July 25.

Committee of Arrangements.

H

COMMUNICATIONS.

NORTHAMPTON, Jan. 1; 1818.

DEAR FRIENDS DOUGLASS & DELANY :—

The specimen number of the *North Star*, is just what it should be—a beacon light of liberty, to illuminate the pathway of the bleeding, hunted fugitive of the South; and to arouse our disfranchised fellow countrymen and women of the North, who are lulled to sleep by the siren song of Liberty, while we are *slaves*, to all intents, purposes, and constructions, in any State within this SLAVEHOLDING UNION. Let it be seen and felt, that while our brethren and sisters of the South are slaves to *individuals*, we, of the North, are slaves to the *mass*. Let the whole truth in regard to our real condition be so clearly shown, that our colored brethren, who believe themselves free, may understand, that in the United States of America, there are no “*free colored men*,” and that there never can be, so long as there is no concert of action; and our *neutrality* continues to clog the wheels of the car—EMANCIPATION. On this subject, may the light of the North Star be like that of the inflexible Sirius, that never waxes nor wanes, until our brethren, who are sleeping in calm security, shall awake to the dangers which surround them, and take such observations from the beacon-light as shall point them to the haven where they should be, in the full enjoyment of freedom, not slavery; rights, not privileges.

Ever yours for Human Freedom,
DAVID RUGGLES.

1

“Bleeding and blistering purging and puking” were the remedies that American-physicians, and many other healers, offered their patients. The most dramatic was bleeding or venesection. The practitioner opened one of his patient’s veins with a sharply pointed lancet and let the blood flow into a basin until he judged that a therapeutic amount had been withdrawn. For localized injuries and infections patients were “blistered”; a caustic substance was applied to the skin to raise a blister and produce a serous discharge. Some physicians reached even deeper into tradition and bled by applying leeches—bloodsucking invertebrates—to the skin. The most common remedy of all was “purging”—administering massive doses of cathartics, or powerful laxatives. Almost as frequent was “puking,” or dosing heavily with emetics to induce copious vomiting. Other drugs produced different forms of fluid emission like salivation, sweating or frequent urination. Blood, pus, vomit, feces, sweat or urine were the tangible evidence that the dose had “operated.” In describing illnesses and their treatment, ordinary Americans sometimes went into graphic detail about the copiousness and consistency of the patient’s discharges.

Letter from David Ruggles.

We trust a sympathy will be awakened in behalf of this deserving brother, when his situation, disclosed by the following letter, is generally known.

NORTHAMPTON ASSOCIATION OF EDUCATION AND INDUSTRY, July 22, 1844. }

DEAR GARRISON:

I send this, to communicate my grateful acknowledgments to yourself, Wm. C. Nell, J. B. Smith, B. Weedon, J. T. Hilton and other friends in Boston, who contemplate holding a special meeting of the friends of freedom, to secure the pecuniary means to sustain me through the water cure,—and to suggest that I doubt the necessity of such a meeting, as I shall need but a small sum. Being now successfully progressing in a six months' course of hydropathy, which rationally requires an uninterrupted series of swathing, fomenting and bathing, by showering, plunging and dashing, it will be impossible for me to be in Boston until after a passage through the crisis.

Please to say to friend Frederick Douglass, that he would oblige me as he is travelling from place to place, to inform Anti-Slavery of my whereabouts, and what I am endeavoring to accomplish—that having been to a considerable expense in constructing a bathing-house where I could obtain a douche from a spring of pure water, and for other necessary conveniences, I am quite out of funds, and that I want about one hundred dollars as soon as it can be conveniently furnished, with the understanding that it will be my pleasure to return the same, should hydropathy restore my vision, that I may enjoy the blessed privilege of wearing out in the service of humanity.

Your friend,

DAVID RUGGLES.

K

TO HELEN E. GARRISON

Northampton, July 18, 1848.

Dear Helen:

Of course, I spent the night at the Infirmary. Dr. Ruggles was rather desirous of giving me a "half bath" before I went to bed, but I preferred to begin in the morning, and start, if not go through, "by daylight." My bed is a Single one, and being composed of straw, did not feel quite natural; but I shall soon get used to it, though I should prefer a good solid mattress. I awoke as early as 3 o'clock, and heard the packers stirring about, preparatory to packing their patients; and though I knew I was not to be packed, yet I lay expecting every moment to be summoned to my "half bath." It was not till 6 o'clock, however, that my turn came, and the interim I spent in dreaming that I had already gone through the process, and also of many other things. The bath was refreshing, and after taking it, I had a fine ramble, from which I have returned to write this hasty epistle to you. In half an hour, I am to be rubbed down with a wet sheet. There will be very little time allowed either for reading or writing. Indeed, the Dr. enjoins abstinence from both, as much as possible. Our breakfast was made up of wheat and rye bread, cracked wheat boiled like hominy, stewed prunes, milk, and cold water. The Dr. does not wish me to use much milk, as he says it is not good for my humor. He has now eighteen patients in all.

Ever yours,

Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

L Hydropathy.

Mr. Editor:--Although many of your readers have been made acquainted with Dr. Ruggles' skill in detecting the symptoms of disease by the sense of touch and of the happy results that have attended his application of the water treatment in remarkable cases, I should deem it a privilege, to be allowed, through the columns of your paper, to state, for the information and encouragement of such as may be suffering from scrofulous humor, the result of his treatment in the following case. My son, ten years of age, inherited this debilitating disease from his mother. From his infancy I resorted to the remedies of the regular physicians, and the various quack medicines in use, without avail. In the summer of 1845, his symptoms became more alarming. Nausea, vertigo, inflammation of the bowels, and extreme weakness of the nervous system, were among the symptoms which deeply concerned the family for his future prospects. At this time he was examined by Dr. Ruggles, who considered him a good case for the cure. I at once placed him under his care, where he remained about seven months; during which time he had a painful crisis, which commenced on the trunk of his body and extended down the legs, to the feet and toes, which became inflamed and swollen to more than twice their ordinary size; the color of his feet changing alternately, from a red to a purplish hue. They finally became suppurated, in which state they continued about six weeks, the humor exuding from the sides of his feet, and the ends of his toes, leaving the system entirely free from disease. Since leaving the Cure he has grown as fast as could be desired, and continues in the enjoyment of good health.

Austin Ross. Northampton, Dec. 16, 1847.