

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 10, 1938.

Freedman's Bureau Originator Buried In Hebron Grave

Special to The Hartford Times
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Hebron—From "Gone With The Wind," that remarkable novel of Civil War days soon to be screened, to an isolated and neglected Hebron graveyard seems a fantastic step to take, yet there is a vital connection.

The novel brings back scenes and incidents which had dropped into past history and been almost forgotten. Few in New England know much about the Freedmen's Bureau, so scored by the novel in question and so cordially detested by southerners in general, from its connection with "Reconstruction Days."

Yet in a humble grave in the Burrows Hill cemetery in Hebron lie the remains of the woman who was the originator and prime mover in the establishment of the Freedmen's Bureau, organized to take care of hordes of helpless, bewildered ex-slaves. The casual visitor to this little graveyard may sometimes pause before an unostentatious stone to read the name of Josephine Sophia Griffing, and then, with quickened interest to note the inscription below:

"A friend to the slave,
The poor and oppressed,
With unswerving faith in
God's eternal justice
Her life was given in their
service."

She was the friend and confidante of such men as Abraham Lincoln, William Lloyd Garrison, Edwin L. Stanton, Secretary of War in Lincoln's cabinet, U. S. Senator Charles Sumner and many others.

Mrs. Griffing was born in Hebron Dec. 18, 1814, the daughter of Joseph and Sophia Waldo White. On her father's side she was a descendant of Peregrine White, first white child born in New England, in The Mayflower off Cape Cod. Peregrine White's grandson, Ebenezer White, born in Marshfield, Mass., 1691, came to Hebron in 1725, dying there in 1733.

Josephine Sophia received her education in the Burrows Hill schoolhouse, still standing, and in Bacon Academy, Colchester. In her 22nd year she was married to Charles Stockman Spooner Griffing, a mechanic. They moved to Litchfield, Ohio, in 1842.

Here Mrs. Griffing became famous for her anti-slavery and Women's Rights crusade. In much of this work she was accompanied by her younger sister, Mrs. Almira E. Douglas, who helped with her talent as a public singer.

Crusade Begun

In the West this brave woman commenced the same crusade that William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips were waging in the East. In her own neighborhood and in surrounding regions she lectured in schoolhouses or other places where the people could be assembled. The novelty of a woman engaged in public speaking attracted more than ordinary attention.

During these years Mrs. Griffing's humble home in Ohio was one of the way stations of the "Under Ground Railroad" and the asylum of runaway slaves. In 1861 she was traveling in the northwestern states organizing sanitary help in behalf of the absent soldiers and later she lectured in the ranks of the Loyal League.

During these journeys it was impressed upon her mind that great suffering to the colored people must necessarily follow the transition from slavery to freedom, and from this period to the end of her life her whole energies were spent in work for the betterment of the colored race. In Cleveland she conferred with the members of the Freedmen's Relief Society, urging the formation of what later became known as the Freedmen's Bureau.

and the foundations of the Freedmen's Bureau were laid.

While the bill was pending Mrs. Griffing visited the stopping places of the wretched Negro waifs floating into Washington on the tidal waves of the war. She counseled President Lincoln and with his approval applied to the Secretary of War for flannel blankets, which were granted. She then walked with the agonized, leaving at each a few skeins of wool and a blanket.

Aid soon reached her from the North. The warmhearted Quakers of Philadelphia were among the first to respond to her calls for assistance, and with the help she established three soup kitchens where from three to five hundred beings were daily kept from starvation.

A letter from Horace Greeley received by Mrs. Griffing elicited his disapproval of her work. The letter was dated Sept. 7, 1870, and the writer appeared to think that the freedmen should be able in that short time since emancipation to stand upon their own feet and be self-supporting.

But the work went on. Two industrial schools were founded, and women too ignorant or too feeble for active work were taught to make garments from materials furnished by northern relief associations to be distributed among the most destitute.

After the Freedmen's Bureau was established, it was recommended that Mrs. Griffing should be appointed commissioner. But a military man was finally placed at the head of it, and Mrs. Griffing

was made assistant commissioner of the District of Columbia. She remained in that office for five months, then she was displaced by a military man.

While holding the office Mrs. Griffing was appointed general agent of the Relief Association of the District of Columbia. In 1865 a large quantity of the sanitary stores were turned over to that society and all material, clothing and money sent from the North were almost entirely disbursed through her hands. Later she brought about the plan for finding homes in the North for the freed people and transporting them here. More than 7,500 were cared for in this way.

Mrs. Griffing died at the age of 69 Feb. 18, 1872, leaving two unmarried daughters to fight their way in the world. Though thousands of dollars passed through her hands, she retained not the smallest portion for herself and her children.

Of her two daughters, Helen, who was married to Judge George Driggs, died in 1933. Her other daughter, Cora, lives in a New York suburb, and is unmarried. Dr. Charles J. Douglas of Boston, is a nephew of Mrs. Griffing and a summer resident of Hebron.

Every Memorial Day the humblest soldier lying in the Burrows Hill graveyard gets a wreath or some kind of floral remembrance for his grave. For Mrs. Griffing there are no flowers. No taps are sounded, no salutes fired. Yet perhaps she was the bravest, most intrepid fighter of them all.