

FRANCES DANA (BARKER) GAGE



Born: Oct. 12, 1808 in Marietta, Washington Co., OH

Died: Nov. 19, 1884 in Greenwich, Fairfield Co., CT

Appointment(s):

National Freedmen's Relief Association

Hilton Head, SC

Fall 1862

Parris Island, SC

1863-1864

1808-1884

Francis Dana Barker was born October 12, 1808 in Marietta, Washington, Ohio to Col. Joseph Barker (1765-1843) and Elizabeth Dana (1771-1835). She was the tenth of eleven children. Her parents left New Hampshire in 1788 to settle in the Northwest Territory (now Ohio) where they lived as pioneers and farmers teaching Frances to be self-sufficient and able to take care of herself in the out-of-doors.¹ Her mother also sent her on errands of mercy to take food and clothing to the fugitive slaves who were staying in nearby cabins, so Frances became aware of the plight of slaves in her childhood.² On June 1, 1829, Frances married James Lamson Gage (1800-1863) in Washington County, Ohio who was an abolitionist banker and a Universalist from McConnellsville, Ohio.³ The couple raised eight children. In the 1850 US Census, they were living in Morgan, Ohio. Frances presided over a Women's Rights convention in 1851 in Akron, OH where she introduced Sojourner Truth as the keynote speaker who then proceeded to give her famous "Ain't I a woman?" speech.⁴ In October 1853, they moved to St. Louis, Missouri and after five months, Frances was elected as the Chair of the National Women's Rights Convention in Cleveland, Ohio.⁵ Frances was a leading

¹ Brockett, Linus Pierpont and Mrs Mary C Vaughan, . Women's Work in the Civil War: A record of Heroism, Patriotism and Patience., Cincinnati, OH: Zeigler, McCurdy & Co p 683.

² Ibid. p 684.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Holtzman, Clara Cornelia. "Frances Dana Gage", M, Columbus, OH: Ohio State University. M A Thesis Columbus, OH: Ohio State University, 1931. Ohio LINK electronic Theses and Dissertations Center accessed 19 Jul 2019.

http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?ace_num=osu1240578754.

⁵ Ibid.

FRANCES DANA (BARKER) GAGE

feminist and abolitionist who worked closely over her lifetime with Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the early women's rights movement. She visited Lucretia Mott in Philadelphia and Ms. Mott's Friends Association for the Aid and Elevation of the Freedmen donated \$150 for Gage's work, emphasizing the moral and economic benefits of employment for the freedmen up North.⁶ But she did not agree with many suffragists that the freed black men should wait for the right to vote until white women received the vote.

While living in St. Louis, Missouri, according to the passenger list, she had travelled to Santo Domingo and departed Santo Domingo aboard the ship 'H.P. Cashing' of Boston in May 1859, arriving back in New York harbor on June 1, 1859.⁷ By 1860, her husband James' health was failing, and they had suffered three fires in their house at the hands of people who did not share her anti-abolitionist views.⁸ So they moved to Jackson, Illinois. Although Frances lost journalist jobs with newspapers, her family was threatened and their home was destroyed, she felt that she could not shrink from standing up for the issues she thought important and had to speak out about what was right. One newspaper published her poem:

Dare to Stand Alone

Be bold, be firm, be strong, be true,
And dare to stand alone.
Strike for the right what'er ye do,
Though helpers there be none.
.....
Strike for the Light. Uphold the Truth.
Thou'lt find an answering tone.
In honest hearts, and soon no more
Be left to stand alone.⁹

When the Civil War broke out, four of her sons joined the Union Army and she worked for the Western Sanitary Commission as a nurse and travelled down the Mississippi River to help the injured at Vicksburg, Natchez and Memphis.¹⁰ Then, without an appointment or salary, Frances said good-bye to her husband and sailed for Hilton Head on Wednesday, October 8, 1862.¹¹ After her arrival, her daughter

⁶ Faulkner, Carol. Women's Radical Reconstruction: The Freedmen's Aid Movement. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006, p 121.

⁷ Ancestry.com

⁸ Brockett, p 686.

⁹ Ibid. p 688.

¹⁰ DePratter, Chester B, James B Legg & Stanley South. "Gone but Not Forgotten – African American Cemeteries on the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, SC". University of South Carolina: SC Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2016, p 39..

FRANCES DANA (BARKER) GAGE

Mary E. Gage was appointed by the National Freedmen's Relief Association to teach the freed slaves in South Carolina. They were both teaching in Hilton Head in 1862 and then in Beaufort in early 1863.¹² In 1863, Gen. Rufus Saxton appointed Frances as Superintendent of the Schools on Parris Island, serving 500 freed slave refugees where she remained until October 1863. By fall 1863, she had been appointed as a teacher by the National Freedmen's Association.¹³ Her residence and headquarters was on Means Plantation which Clara Barton described when she visited Frances on May 5, 1863: the mansion (it would be called a large old farm house in the North), which she [FG] occupies commands a magnificent view of the harbor and in the distance the ocean, the shipping at Hilton Head and the large fleet of war vessels."¹⁴

In June 1863, Frances was summoned home because her husband was seriously ill, but he died before she reached him.¹⁵ She stayed home until the end of July and then made a lecture tour through Pennsylvania and New England before returning to Parris Island. Before Frances departed Parris Island, she wrote a letter to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* on October 31, 1863 stating that the 'contrabands' on Parris Island "have outgrown in most cases, the need of charity except in school."¹⁶ Clara Barton mentioned Frances in her diaries as a strong influence on her own views about women's and blacks' rights. When she returned home, Frances joined the American Equal Rights Association as a paid writer. At the end of 1863, Frances suffered a debilitating stroke and in September 1864, her carriage overturned in Galesburg, Illinois. She broke several ribs, her left shoulder blade and injured her lung causing her to be bed-ridden, so she stayed with her son in St. Louis, Missouri until March 1865.¹⁷ That did not keep her from her duties with the freedmen, the temperance movement or the women's movement until she was finally disabled by a paralytic shock. Though she was forced to stay at home, she continued to write. Frances wrote several children's' books, poems, pamphlets and even a church hymn in 1875 under the penname of Aunt Fanny and she also wrote articles for the *Saturday Review*.¹⁸

¹¹ Ibid.

- Holtzman, p 20.

¹² "National Freedmen's Association Locations of Schools, Personnel and Teachers Spring and Fall 1862". <https://www.drbronsontours.com>

- DePratter, Chester B, James B Legg & Stanley South. "Gone but Not Forgotten – African American Cemeteries on the United States Marine Corps Recruit Depot, Parris Island, SC". University of South Carolina: SC Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2016, p 20.

¹³ Gage, Mrs. Frances. National Freedmen's Relief Association. "Teacher's Monthly Report", [TMR], Vol I, May 1863,

- DePratter, p 21.

¹⁴ DePratter, p 147. Barton, Clara. Diary entry for May 5, 1863 published in *New York Tribune* on 5 June 1863, column 3.

¹⁵ Ibid, p 41.

¹⁶ *National Anti-Slavery Association. 'Standard'*, 31 Oct 1863:3. Newspapers.com

¹⁷ DePratter, p 48.

¹⁸ Brockett, p 687.

FRANCES DANA (BARKER) GAGE

Oppression and war will be heard no more
Nor the blood of a slave leave his print on our shore,
Conventions will then be a useless expense,
For we'll all have free suffrage, a hundred years hence.

Frances never sought recognition for herself. She did write near the end of her life that she thought her struggle against wickedness, prejudice and bigotry was the main bravery of her life:

If as a woman to take the platform amidst hissing, and scorn, and newspaper vituperations, to maintain the right of woman to the legitimate use of all the talents God invests her with; to maintain the rights of the slave in the very ears of the masters; to hurl anathemas at intemperance in the very camps of the dram[sellers; if to continue for forty years, in spite of all opposing force, to press the triune cause persistently, consistently and unflinchingly, entitles me to a humble place among those noble ones who have gone about doing good, you can put me in that place as it suits you.¹⁹

Frances Dana Barker Gage died on November 10, 1884 in Greenwich, Connecticut and was buried in the 2nd Congregational Church Cemetery in Greenwich.²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid, pp 688-689.

²⁰ Findagrave.com Memorial ID #15549207 created 29 Aug 2006 by Laurie.
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/15549207>.