



## **Rosa Miller Avery: Lake County Suffragist and Author**

When one looks into the accounts of Women of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century in Lake County, Rosa Miller Avery (1830-1894) is often missing. Born Rosa Mary Miller in 1830 in Madison, Ohio, her childhood home was a noted "Underground Railroad station." Her grandfather, Captain Isaac Miller, was a soldier in the American Revolutionary War and was wounded at the Battle of Bunker Hill. Her uncle General James Miller was an aide to General George Washington. These notable tidbits may have been precursors to her soon-to-be pioneering contributions.

Rosa's father, Nahum Miller, was one of the first settlers in the Madison area of Lake County, Ohio. He located on a clearing that would eventually become the road known as Middle Ridge. He was an anti-slavery agitator. The Miller Farm was known as a refuge for anyone in need of assistance. Rosa's mother Esther was credited with her early inspiration to work for women's advancement.

Rosa was one of seven children in the Miller household and was fostered by her father's biblical and political passions. She attended Madison Seminary, located in Madison, Ohio, near the Lake Erie coast. , Chartered in 1845 as an institute of higher education, the original wood frame building was completed in



1847. A larger brick structure was added in 1859, providing boarding for up to 150 students during the school's heyday.

The society was organized at the residence of Cyrus Avery Feb. 11th 1860 by fourteen Ladies. Mrs. Stephen Hall, Mrs. Barnard Nellis, and others. A constitution framed by Mrs. James Hall, in which is stated the object of our society, "the universal aid of the fugitive, and the present relief of those already in Canada," was read and adopted, and the following named officers chosen: Mrs. C. S. Osborne, President, Mrs. Cyrus Avery, Secretary and Treasurer, and six Directresses viz: Mrs. H. Harris, Mrs. H. C. Tombes, Mrs. B. Nellis, Mrs. E. King, and Mrs. J. D. Hulbert.

Encouraged by her mother's views, Rosa wrote stirring anti-slavery essays while in attendance at Madison Seminary. Her stance was polarizing but documents proved that several classmates achieved later fame on the Civil War battlefields for the North.

Rosa never charged the Southerners with the sin of slavery but rather maintained that wrongs of slavery permeated everyday life everywhere across the United States.

Her marriage in 1853 to Cyrus Avery of Oberlin, Ohio, catapulted her reformer status. They had one son they named Cyrus Miller Avery (1854–1919), who went on to marry another noted suffragist Rachel Foster Avery (1858–1919) in 1888.

Cyrus Sr. and Rosa moved to Ashtabula, Ohio, where she organized the first anti-slavery society ever known. Again, her views were not fully embraced by all in the county. At the start of the Civil War, using a pen name Sue Smith and unknown male pseudonyms, she engaged in writings that made her a widely read American abolitionist, political reformer and second-generation suffragist. Her topics on the subject of the union and emancipation attracted the attention of Gov. Richard Yates of Illinois, James A. Garfield, James Redpath and Lydia Marie Child.

Following her years in Ashtabula, Rosa and Cyrus spent a decade in Erie, Pennsylvania, disseminating views on a variety of social questions and societal issues. For the last fourteen years of her life, they resided in Chicago where her passion and pen broadcast in favor of suffrage work and womanhood. Her passing in November 1894 indeed left her as a leading woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and arguably one of Lake County's hidden gems.



*Susan B. Anthony & Rachel Foster Avery*

*Submitted by Dan Maxson*

*Local Lore by Max, 2010-2016 - The News-Herald, Community Media Lab ; Volunteer Trustee, Curator - FHHS / Fairport Harbor Lighthouse & Marine Museum ; Volunteer Curator / Docent - Old Stone School, Concord Township.*