Telling Our Stories
250 Years of United Methodism
in the New York Area
1766-2016   **www.nyac.com/250years**

Abolitionist and
Social Activist

1797-1883

Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth was born Isabella "Bell" Baumfree in Swartekill, Ulster County, New York, around 1797. She was the daughter of slave parents belonging to Colonel Charles Hardenbergh, who farmed in the hilly area that is now part of the town of Esopus.

Sold upon Hardenburgh's death in 1806, "Bell" endured several cruel owners and the death of her first love when he was beaten for sneaking out to see her. She eventually married another slave and had five children, escaping to freedom in 1826 with her infant daughter just prior to the emancipation of slaves in New York in 1827. Around this time she had a life-changing religious experience and became a devout Christian.

On June 1, 1843, Bell changed her name to Sojourner Truth and told her friends: "The Spirit calls me, and I must go." She became a Methodist, and left to make her way traveling and preaching about the abolition of slavery, with the support of the Northampton Association of Education and Industry in Northampton, Massachusetts, a self-sustaining abolitionist community that supported women's rights.

Sojourner did not remain a Methodist. She joined the Millerite movement for a time, and eventually joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church. She remained an advocate for abolition, women's rights and social justice until her death in 1883.

For Discussion

• Sojourner Truth's traveling and preaching about abolition was similar to Methodist "circuit-riding." Can you think of modern-day "circuit-riders"? Is this model an effective way to communicate a message? Why or why not?

• Sojourner Truth did not remain in the Methodist church. People leave church for many reasons. What can/should a church do when its gospel message and the needs of some members do not align?

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