



# Pages in Time



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## Elijah Parish Lovejoy of Albion was "freedom of the press" pioneer

by Lyn Rowden with research by Edward E. Cogswell

Native son of Albion and Colby College graduate, Elijah Parish Lovejoy became, in 1837, abolition's first martyr, fighting for freedom of the press.

Elijah, the son of an Albion minister, in 1835 edited a religious paper, *The Observer*, in St. Louis, Missouri. Lovejoy, hating slavery, attacked it: "The cry of the oppressed has entered...into my soul so that while I live I cannot hold peace."

His stance against lynching, mob rule, and a judge who supported them, offended the citizens of pro-slavery St. Louis. They sacked *The Observer*, tossing the press into the Mississippi.

In 1836, clergymen invited Lovejoy to Alton, Illinois, dangerously split between the pro-slavery Mint Juleps and abolitionists. When the press arrived by riverboat, was unloaded, and left unprotected as Lovejoy attended church, Mint Juleps dumped it in the river.

Supporters purchased a new press. As abolitionism strengthened, the paper's circulation grew. Lovejoy was accosted and harm threatened. The office was sacked and the press destroyed again and again.

A show of arms seemed the only way to preserve the press free. Congregations of abolition-

ists were guarded by guns. Bricks were hurled. Assaultants breaking into Lovejoy's house were fought off by his younger brother, Owen. When thugs came for Lovejoy he leveled his



The hearthstone from the Elijah Parish Lovejoy house is now a memorial to him at Colby College. Photos by Edward Cogswell

rifle and threatened to open fire.

At a meeting to halt violence and keep freedom of the press, Lovejoy testified, "I have asked for nothing but to be protected in my rights as a citizen...This right was given me by my Maker; and is solemnly guaranteed to me by the Constitution... Why am I waylaid every day...my life in jeopardy every hour?...If the civil authorities refuse to protect me, I must look to God, and if I die, I have determined to make my

grave in Alton." Businessmen and Mayor Krum prohibited the paper's publication, with no enforcement except mob rule. With a new press arriving, Krum said Lovejoy could defend it but would not stop the mob.

The press arrived at 3 a.m., escorted to a stone warehouse. Under the command of War of 1812 veteran Captain Enoch Long, 60 men



came, many, just to protect free press. By nightfall only Lovejoy and 18 others stood guard. News reached the bars where Dr. Horace Beall urged a march on the warehouse. Long erroneously ordered the defenders to hold fire. The small gang could have been dispersed, but it became re-enforced with drunks and the support of leading citizens.

The attackers demanded the press' surrender. Lovejoy

refused, summoning Krum, who fled when his hat was shot. A minister's wife tolled the church bell frantically, for help that never came.

"Kill every damn abolitionist in town!" shouted Beall. Riflemen fired while mobsters set ladders against walls. Torchbearers set the roof afire. Lovejoy, with two others, fought the blaze. Silhouetted by moonlight and flames, they made easy targets. Lovejoy, hit in the chest by a blast of buckshot, stumbled inside, crying, "I am shot, I am shot. I am dead!" The mob surged in and destroyed the press.

Two supporters guarded Lovejoy's body. His riderless horse trotted home; at dawn friends carried his body home, followed by jeering crowds. He was placed in a plain pine box in the parlor. It was his thirty-fifth birthday.

The secret funeral left a barely marked grave. A road, cut through the cemetery, obliterated the site. Rediscovered in 1864 it was moved, with a marble memorial inscribed, "Here lies Lovejoy. Spare him now in his grave."


Lovejoy's death shook New England. "A shock as of any earthquake throughout this continent," John Quincy Adams stated. New York's Evening Post warned: "To say that he who holds unpopular opinions must

hold them at the peril of his life...is to strike at all rights, all liberties, all protection of law." Bostonians offered to rebuild *The Observer*, rallying for free press for abolitionists. Owen, a brilliant abolitionist, became the antislavery Congressman from Illinois.

Albert Rowe, of Albion, born in 1842, enlisted in the Civil War's 19th Maine Infantry, as a private in Company G. He fought in Fredericksburg, Gettysburg, and others and was at the surrender at Appomattox Court House. Albert lived until 1911, and is buried in South Cemetery, Pond Road, Albion. In 1905, his son, Asher Addeus Rowe, with horse and wagon, moved a 1300 pound chunk of granite from the hearth of Lovejoy's home on Lovejoy Pond, to Colby College, in Elijah's honor. It was dedicated in 1921 with a plaque and rests near the flagpole in front of the library.


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