



Sojourner Truth

January 1, 1797 - November 26, 1883

Died: Battle Creek, Michigan

Interment: Oak Hill Cemetery, Battle Creek, Michigan

Sojourner Truth died in Battle Creek, Michigan, on November 26, 1883, in a small house on College Street she had bought with lecture fees and a stubborn refusal to be anyone's exhibit. She was about eighty-six. Born Isabella Baumfree around 1797 in Ulster County, New York, she grew up speaking Dutch in slavery, was sold several times as a child, and in 1826 walked away toward freedom a year before New York's last enslaved people were legally released.

She took the state to court to recover her son Peter, who had been sold south in violation of New York law, and won - a Black woman, illiterate, beating a white slaveholder in 1828. In 1843 she named herself Sojourner Truth and began the itinerant preaching that made her famous. The Akron speech of 1851 was later rewritten by others into a dialect she did not use; the force of it was hers: that womanhood and Blackness were not competing claims.

She recruited Black soldiers for the Union, rode streetcars in Washington that tried to throw her off, and after the war pressed Grant's administration for land for the freedpeople instead of another round of speeches. Battle Creek, a town of reformers and cereal fortunes, gave her a house and a hearing. She never learned to read. She dictated her Narrative, sold it at meetings, and kept the copyright.

Friends sat with her at the end. She is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek. The stone is plain. The voice was not.

Services

Died in Battle Creek, Michigan, on November 26, 1883. Interment at Oak Hill Cemetery, Battle Creek. Birth year about 1797.

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