

LOCAL NEWS

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

DISSUADED FROM GATHERING AT CITY HALL,
GROUP CELEBRATES EMANCIPATION AT CHURCH

When the Civil War began in April 1861, there was no commitment by the U.S. government that one of its goals was to end slavery. They were fighting to reunify the country — to save the Union.

Inevitably, as most abolitionists understood, slavery was a central issue of the war. By 1862, President Lincoln realized that and the Emancipation Proclamation became law on Jan. 1, 1863.

The black population in Syracuse greeted the news with a desire to gather and celebrate. They hoped to schedule an assembly on Jan. 20, 1863, at Syracuse's first City Hall, a building that pre-dated the current one, but stood on the same site.

There were some citizens in Syracuse, however, that frowned upon having such an event in that official public space, threatening a disturbance. Despite the city's strong abolitionist record, there was always a faction of "Copperhead" Democrats in the Salt City that disapproved



Courtesy of Onondaga Historical Society

THE WESLEYAN Methodist Church in Syracuse was the site where residents gathered Jan. 20, 1863, to celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation.

of Lincoln's presidency and his anti-slavery stand.

So the local press reported that the "colored people" of Syracuse assembled at the Wesleyan Methodist Church that evening, a building which still stands on Columbus Circle as the Mission Restaurant.

Its original congregation was one of the strongest abolitionist groups in

Syracuse and several of its members were active in the Underground Railroad. The gathering listened to speakers who include its pastor, the Rev. John Betker, Unitarian minister Samuel May, and the Rev. Strieby of Plymouth Congregational Church.

— From Dennis Connors, curator of history, Onondaga Historical Association