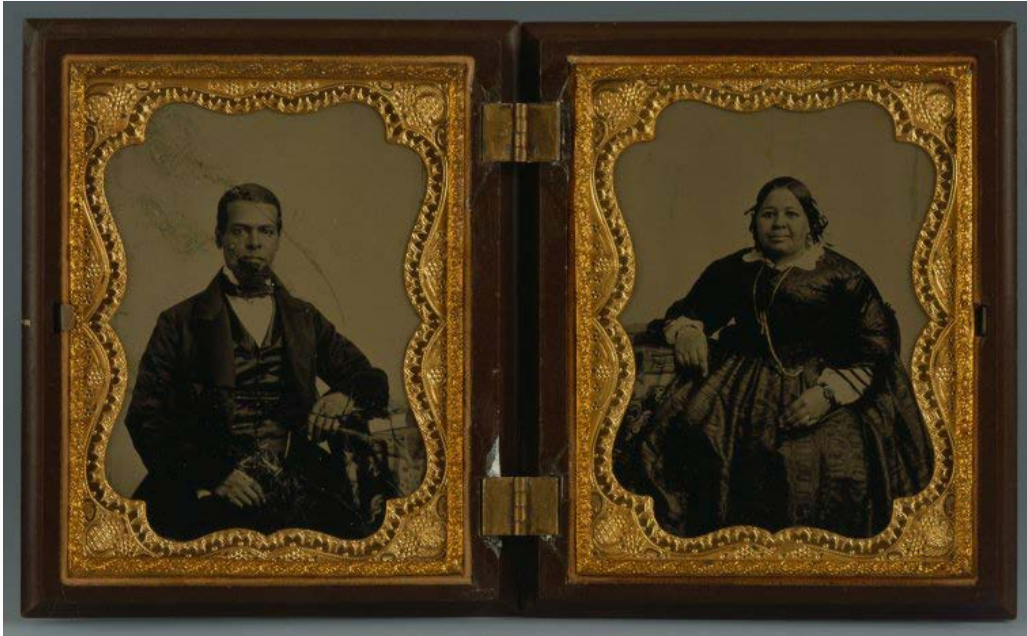


LYONS FAMILY



ABOUT THE FAMILY

Albro and Mary Lyons were dedicated abolitionists in 19th-century New York who fought to end slavery and protect those escaping bondage. The Lyons family ran a boardinghouse for Black sailors near the East River docks that doubled as an Underground Railroad station for hundreds of enslaved people fleeing slavery in the South.



Double ambrotype portrait of Albro Lyons, Sr. and Mary Joseph Lyons. ca. 1860, Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and

The Lyons' boardinghouse was attacked during the Draft Riots of 1863, incited by the federal government's announcement that it would draft men for mandatory service as soldiers in the Union Army during the Civil War. The new law allowed drafted men who paid \$300 (a sum only the rich could afford) to hire a substitute to take their place on the battlefield. Rioters targeted African Americans and abolitionists for their support of the war to end slavery, and the riot resulted in over 100 deaths and widespread destruction—the worst episode of mob violence

in New York City history. To avoid the violence of the Draft Riots, the Lyons family—including children Maritcha, Therese, Pauline, and Albro, Jr., then ages 10-16—fled New York for Rhode Island.

ACTIVISM IN THE NEXT GENERATION

The Lyons family continued their activism for racial equality in Rhode Island. When Maritcha was prevented from enrolling in Providence High School because of her race, the Lyons joined a state-wide campaign for desegregation. As part of the campaign, Maritcha testified before the Rhode Island State Legislature. When Providence High School was eventually desegregated, Maritcha was the first Black student to graduate.

As an adult, Maritcha Lyons returned to New York and built a career as a teacher and activist for racial justice and women's suffrage—the fight to ensure women could vote. Lyons became an elementary school teacher at Colored School No. 1 (later P.S. 67), and later the assistant principal of P.S. 83. She saw elementary education as an important vehicle for the advancement of the next generation of Black Americans as well as learners of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, the majority of whom received only an elementary education in the 19th century. Lyons was a founding member of the Woman's Loyal Union of New York and Brooklyn, a Black women's club dedicated to fighting for racial justice that funded the work of pioneering Black journalist Ida B. Wells, whose journalism brought widespread attention to the horrors of racist violence against Black people in the United States.

REMEMBERING THE LYONS FAMILY



In 2019, the New York City Mayor's office announced plans for a new monument honoring Albro Lyons, Mary Joseph Lyons and their daughter Maritcha Lyons to be built in Central Park, north of the original site of Seneca Village. The Lyons family might have owned property in Seneca Village, which was one of the first free Black communities in New York before residents were displaced for the construction of Central Park. The Lyons family represents multiple generations of activism through their dedication to abolition, equal education, women's rights, and racial justice.



Maritcha Lyons and her younger sister Pauline. ca. 1860, Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.

QUESTIONS

How do you think Maritcha Lyon's experiences as a child shaped her career as an educator and activist for racial justice and women's rights?

How can family play an important role in Black activism?

How did Maritcha Lyons' career as an educator, suffragist, and activist contribute to the ongoing fight for full emancipation for Black Americans?

ACTIVIST NEW YORK

Albro and Mary Lyons are featured in the *Activist New York* exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York.

Visit the [Activist New York](#) exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York to learn more about the city's history of activism and the people who have propelled social change from the 1600s to today.

Explore the [Activist New York](#) online exhibition and discover classroom resources and [lesson plans](#) by visiting activistnewyork.mcnyc.org.

LEARN MORE

Information about the Museum's programs for teachers, students, and families, as well as online lesson plans and educational resources, can be found on the Museum's Digital Education Hub: mcny.org/DigitalEd.



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SUPPORTERS

Education programs in conjunction with *Activist New York* are made possible by The Puffin Foundation, Ltd.



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The Frederick A.O. Schwarz Education Center is endowed by grants from The Thompson Family Foundation Fund, the F.A.O. Schwarz Family Foundation, the William Randolph Hearst Endowment, and other generous donors.