

Julia Ward Howe

1819 – 1910



Julia Ward Howe wrote the “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” That one sentence biography obscures her deep commitment to abolition and women’s equality and suffrage.

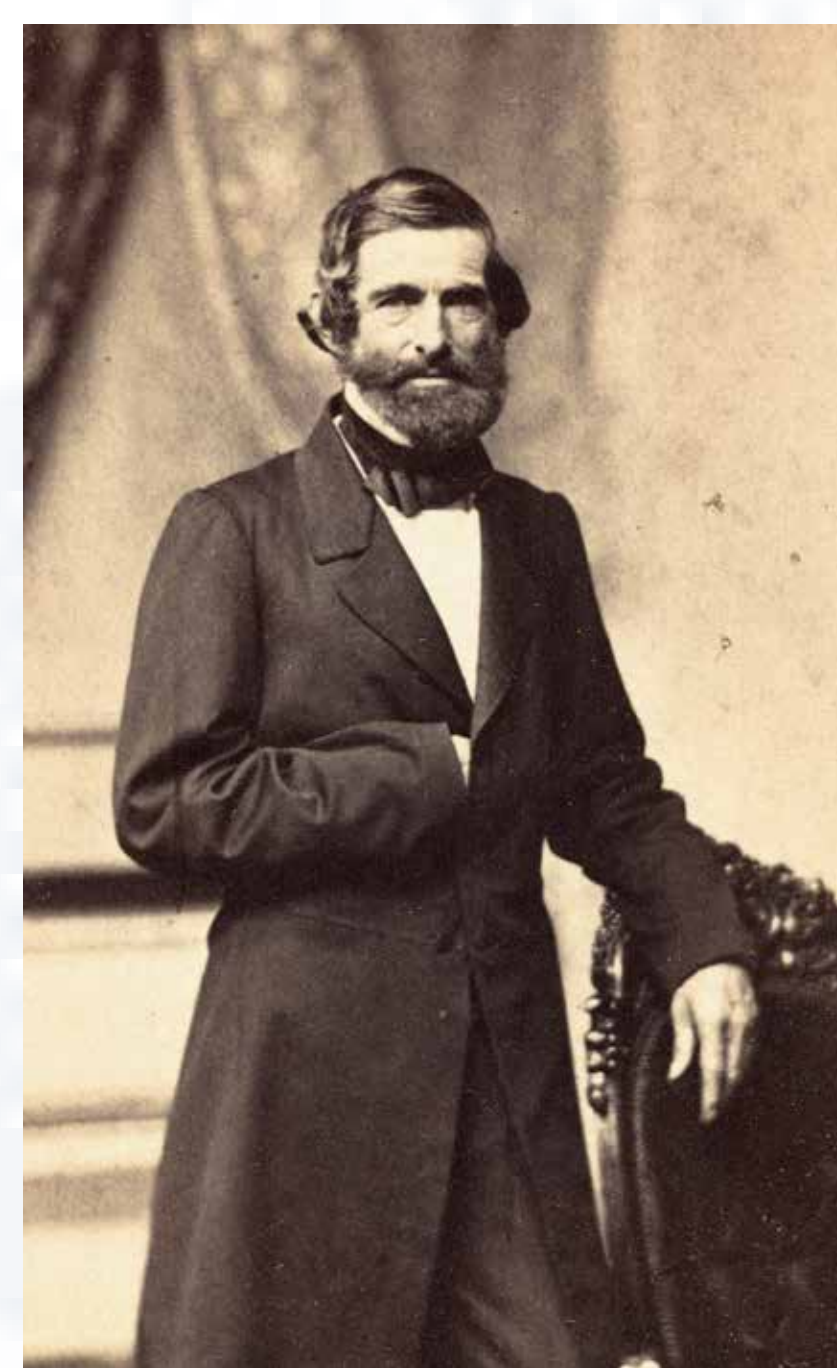
“Lastly and chiefly...I have had the honor of pleading for the slave... and helping to initiate the women’s movement in many States of the Union.” Julia Ward Howe, Reminiscences, 1899



Julia Ward Howe. NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Coming to Boston

Julia Ward’s father was a wealthy New York banker. On a visit to Boston she met the noted reformer Samuel Gridley Howe, eighteen years her senior. A celebrated figure, Howe had volunteered in the Greek war of independence, a romantic cause aimed at restoring democracy to its birthplace. He was known internationally as director of the Perkins Institution for the Blind. Abolition of slavery was another of his causes. The couple married in 1843.



A charismatic figure, Samuel Gridley Howe rode down Beacon Street on a black horse saddled with a bright red blanket. His nickname “Chev” was a contraction of “chevalier,” the French word for “knight.”

A Marriage Made in ...

On her honeymoon in England, Julia saw that her status had changed “from my position as a family idol... to that of a wife...overshadowed by the splendor of her husband’s reputation.” Unwilling to share the spotlight, he discouraged her aspirations for a literary career. Over time Julia felt that her accomplishments did not match her talents.

Out of the Shadows: The Battle Hymn of the Republic

On a visit to Washington D.C. in 1862 Julia Ward Howe listened as soldiers sang “John Brown’s Body,” eulogizing the radical abolitionist hanged for raiding the arsenal at Harper’s Ferry. Staying at the Willard Hotel, she awoke during the night with an idea for new lyrics. She wrote a draft, fearful that she might forget them. Majestic and inspiring, her words for the “Battle Hymn of the Republic” cemented her place in American history.



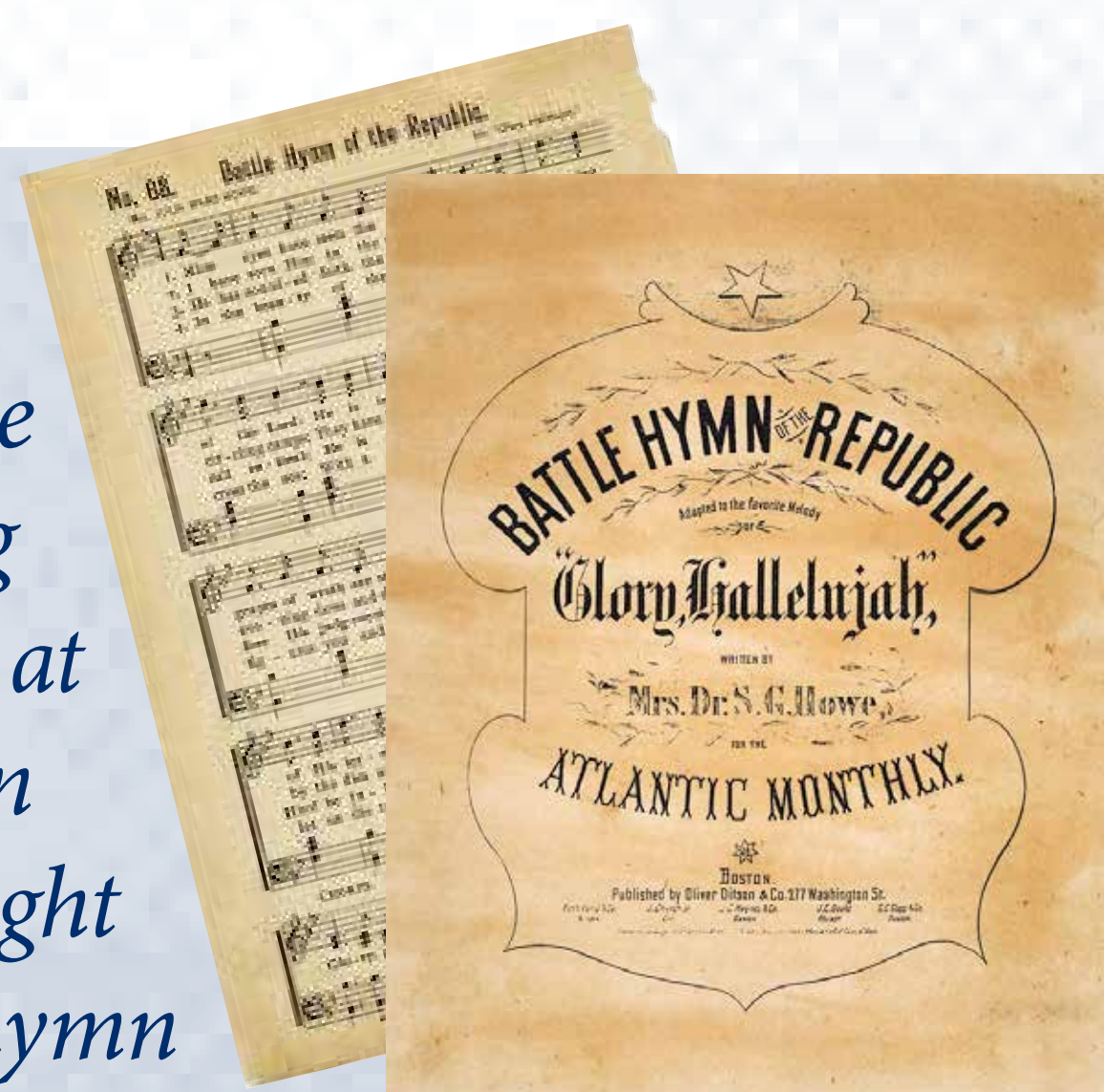
Julia Ward Howe.
FROM HISTORY OF WOMAN SUFFRAGE PRODUCED BY ELIZABETH CADY STANTON, SUSAN B. ANTHONY ET AL., 1887

Her Own Woman

In 1868 Julia Ward Howe attended an organizational meeting at Boston’s Horticultural Hall. Suffragist Lucy Stone spoke and Julia felt that her ideas “harmonized with my own aspirations.” Invited to speak the next day she said only, “I am with you.” Howe became a close friend of Lucy Stone and an editor of the influential *Woman’s Journal*. On cross country lecture tours she learned to set aside her upper class, socialite persona and relate to women of all backgrounds.

Marching On

Winston Churchill requested that the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* be sung at his funeral. It was also performed at the funeral of Robert Kennedy. Martin Luther King Jr. quoted from it the night before his death. The music for the hymn has been traced to a Swedish drinking song.



Sheet music for the Battle Hymn of the Republic



In the March 3, 1913 women’s suffrage parade in Washington D.C., the Massachusetts delegation carried a banner with the image of Julia Ward Howe. The suffrage cause was a central concern during her later years. SCHLESINGER LIBRARY, RADCLIFFE INSTITUTE, HARVARD UNIVERSITY