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*Cradle of Feminism:
The Philadelphia Female
Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840*

A STRIKING feature of the radical antislavery agitation inaugurated by William Lloyd Garrison in 1831 was the prompt and energetic enlistment of women in the cause.* Among women's abolitionist organizations one of the most successful and long-lived was the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, which was founded in 1833 and lasted until 1870.¹ Its extensive records have been carefully preserved in the Historical Society of Pennsyl-

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In 1976 the Pennsylvania Abolition Society and the Historical Society prepared for sale a complete microfilm of the records not only of the Abolition Society but of other anti-slavery organizations whose papers are housed in the manuscript department of the Historical Society. The minutes and correspondence of the Philadelphia Female Society are included on reels 30 and 31 of this 32-reel set. Each reel sells for \$20.00, the complete set for \$550.00. An excellent printed guide to these papers prepared by Jeffrey N. Bumbrey is available from the Historical Society.

¹ The most extensive account of female abolitionism may be found in Alma Lutz, *Crusade for Freedom: Women of the Antislavery Movement* (Boston, 1968).

vania. It was not the first female antislavery society (several had already been organized in Great Britain and in New England), but it is of special interest because of the outstanding women who led it and because of the important part they played in the origins of American feminism.²

The founding of this Society was a sequel to the organization of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. Sixty-four male abolitionists from ten of the free states convened in Philadelphia's Adelphi Building December 4-6, 1833, and organized this national society. Its purpose was to secure the total abolition of slavery in the United States as soon as possible and without any compensation to the slaveholders. Its constitution branded slavery "a heinous crime in the sight of God" and declared that the duty, safety, and best interests of the entire country required "its *immediate abandonment*, without expatriation." The convention specifically condemned the program of the American Colonization Society for sending freedmen back to the homeland of their ancestors. Instead, it declared, American blacks should be given equal "civil and religious privileges" with white people in this country.³

Four Philadelphia women—Lucretia Mott, Lydia White, Esther Moore, and Sidney Ann Lewis—attended the convention as observers. Although not recognized as a delegate, Mrs. Mott spoke briefly and proposed several amendments to the society's declaration of sentiments which the members of the convention accepted.⁴ "I had never before heard a woman speak at a public meeting," one of the delegates recalled later. "She said but a few words, but they were spoken so modestly, in such sweet tones, and yet withal so decisively, that no one could fail to be pleased."⁵ It seems to have occurred to no one that the women should be asked to sign the society's constitution and manifesto. Before adjourning, the convention passed a resolution commending the abolition cause to

² On the connection between abolitionism and feminism see Keith E. Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Woman's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York, 1977).

³ *Proceedings of the Anti-slavery Convention, Assembled at Philadelphia, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833* (New York, 1833), 6-7.

⁴ Anna Davis Hallowell, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott: Life and Letters* (Boston, 1884), 114-115.

⁵ J. Miller McKim, in *Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at Its Third Decade, Held in the City of Philadelphia, December 3d and 4th, 1863* (New York, 1864), 36.

the attention of women and urging them to organize antislavery societies of their own.⁶

Three days later, on December 9, 1833, a small group of Philadelphia women, mostly Quakers, gathered in Catharine McDermott's schoolroom and decided to form a female antislavery society based on principles similar to those of the national organization. Two prominent male abolitionists, Samuel J. May and Nathaniel Southard, spoke at the meeting and pointed out the "important assistance" which women might render in "removing the great evil of slavery." A committee of fourteen was appointed to draw up a constitution for the society and to "propose such measures as will be likely to promote the Abolition of Slavery, and to elevate the people of colour from their present degraded situation, to the full enjoyment of their rights and to increased usefulness in society."⁷

The fourteen women to whom this task was entrusted included the following: Anna Bunting, Leah Fell, Margaretta Forten (a black), Mary Ann McClintock, Sarah McCrummell (probably a black), Catharine McDermott, Esther Moore, Lucretia Mott, Rachel Passmore, Catharine Robinson, Mary Sharpless, Mary Sleeper, Lydia Thomas and Lydia White.⁸ From the beginning the Society was racially integrated. At that time, Lucretia Mott recalled later, she had "no idea of the meaning of preambles and resolutions and votings." Women had never been in "any assemblies of the kind." She had attended only one convention previously, "a Convention of colored people in this State," and that was the first time in her life she had ever heard a vote taken, "being accustomed to our Quaker way of getting the prevailing sentiment of the meeting." There was "not a woman capable of taking the chair, and organizing that meeting in due order," she declared, "and we had to call on James McCrummell, a colored man, to give us aid in the work." "You know that at that time, and even to the present day," she continued, "negroes, idiots, and women were in legal

⁶ *Proceedings* (1833), 17.

⁷ Minutes of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Dec. 9, 1833, at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. These minutes appear to have been written at a later date, possibly some time in 1834.

⁸ *Ibid.*

documents classed together; so that we were very glad to get one of our own class to come and aid us in forming that society."⁹

Unwieldy though a committee of fourteen would seem to have been, it reported a constitution for the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society on December 14, 1833, only five days after the initial meeting. In the preamble of this document, the charter members declared that slavery and race prejudice were "contrary to the laws of God, and to the principles of our far-famed Declaration of Independence." They deemed it their duty, "as professing Christians," to manifest their abhorrence of "the flagrant injustice and deep sin of slavery," and vowed to work toward "its speedy removal" and the restoration to "the people of colour" their "inalienable rights."¹⁰

In the first article of their constitution the Philadelphia women stated that the objects of the Society were to collect and disseminate "correct information" on the condition of the slaves and "the free people of colour," and to join in a collective effort to induce people to unite in removing "this foul stain" from "our boasted land of liberty." They also promised to aim toward eliminating prejudice against free blacks and toward improving their lot in life. Membership was open to any woman subscribing to these views and contributing to the Society's funds.¹¹

Management of the Society and its financial resources was entrusted to a board of managers, which included the president, the recording secretary, the corresponding secretary, the treasurer, the librarian, and six members-at-large. The duties of the officers were specified in the several articles of the constitution. They were chosen annually. The Society was to meet quarterly, but this provision was soon changed to provide for monthly meetings. The last article, apparently added as an afterthought in January 1834, specified that members of the Society were to abstain from buying and consuming the products of slave labor, such as cotton and sugar.¹²

⁹ *Proceedings of the American Anti-Slavery Society at Its Third Decade* (1863), 42-43. McCrummell was a dentist. Garrison stayed at his house during the convention which organized the American Anti-Slavery Society.

¹⁰ Minutes of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Dec. 14, 1833.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

After adopting their constitution, the members proceeded to elect officers on the same day. The first president was Esther Moore, the wife of Dr. Robert Moore, a Quaker physician. The recording secretary was Margaretta Forten, daughter of James Forten, a prosperous sailmaker who for some years was Philadelphia's leading black. Her sisters Sarah and Harriet (Purvis) were also active in the Female Anti-Slavery Society.¹³ John Greenleaf Whittier wrote a poetic tribute entitled "To the Daughters of James Forten."¹⁴

Lucretia Coffin Mott, the first corresponding secretary of the Society, soon became its most distinguished member. Born into a Quaker family on the island of Nantucket in 1793, she was the daughter of a sea captain who moved to Boston to become a merchant in 1804. She attended the Friends' boarding school at Nine Partners, near Poughkeepsie, New York, and taught there for a time. There also she met James Mott, whom she married in 1811. They had six children. They settled in Philadelphia, where James prospered in the cotton trade. He soon decided that it was immoral to deal in the products of slave labor and became a wool merchant instead. The Motts were both active in the Society of Friends, siding with the Hicksite branch when the denomination split in 1827. The Hicksite Quakers became the mainstay of Pennsylvania abolitionism. Members of the orthodox branch were much less interested in social reform than were the Hicksites. Mrs. Mott had been licensed to preach in 1821 and was very effective as a platform speaker on both religious and social issues. She was "a diminutive brunette, with a high, broad forehead, intense, burning eyes, a vivacious manner, and a tart tongue."¹⁵ She lived until 1880.

William Lloyd Garrison, whom the Motts had met when he lectured in Philadelphia in 1830, was frequently a guest in their

¹³ On this remarkable family see Esther M. Douty, *Forten the Sailmaker: Pioneer Champion of Negro Rights* (Chicago, 1968) and Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The Journal of Charlotte Forten: A Free Negro in the Slave Era* (New York, 1953). Charlotte, granddaughter of James Forten, won considerable attention as a teacher and a writer.

¹⁴ This poem was not found until some time after Whittier's death and does not appear in his collected works. For the text see Billington, ed., *Journal of Charlotte Forten*, 20.

¹⁵ Frederick B. Tolles, "Mott, Lucretia Coffin," in *Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), II, 592. For fuller information see the work by Anna Davis Hallowell, already cited; Homer T. Rosenberger, "Montgomery County's Greatest Lady: Lucretia Mott," *Montgomery County Historical Society Bulletin*, VI (April, 1948), 91-171; and Otelia Cromwell, *Lucretia Mott* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958).

home, which for many years was at 136 North Ninth Street. "I am enjoying the hospitality of James Mott and family," Garrison wrote to his wife in 1835. In their home, he thought, dwelt "much of the disinterestedness, purity and peace of heaven." He thought Lucretia was "one of the most remarkable women" he had ever seen. He found her to be "a bold and fearless thinker, in the highest degree conscientious, of most amiable manners, and truly instructive in her conversation."¹⁶

The first treasurer of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society was Anna Bunting. Lydia White, who owned a "free labor" dry goods store, was elected librarian.¹⁷ Six other women were chosen as members-at-large of the board of managers: Catharine McDermott, Mary Sharpless, Sarah McCrummell, Leah Fell, Mary Ann Jackson and Sidney Ann Lewis.¹⁸

Meetings of the board of managers generally preceded those of the whole Society, which held its first monthly meeting on January 13, 1834. The most important item of business was consideration of an urgent request from Elizur Wright, Jr., corresponding secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, for financial assistance.¹⁹ The sum of three dollars was collected for this purpose and \$21.00 for the treasury of the Philadelphia Female Society.²⁰ Later in the year the women contributed an additional \$20.00 to the national organization and requested official recognition as an auxiliary

¹⁶ Walter M. Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, Vol. I, *I Will Be Heard! 1822-1835* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 467-468. Five years later (in 1840) Garrison wrote her that "among all the friends and benefactors of the human race" with whom he had become acquainted, no one had impressed him more deeply, or filled him with greater admiration, "on the score of intellectual vigor, moral worth, and disinterested benevolence" than had Lucretia Mott. Louis Ruchames, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, Vol. II, *A House Dividing against Itself, 1836-1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 590.

¹⁷ A "free labor" or "free produce" store was one which sold commodities certified not to have been produced by slave labor. See Ruth K. Nuernberger, *The Free Produce Movement: A Quaker Protest against Slavery* (Durham, N. C., 1942), esp. pp. 25, 63, and 81; and Norman B. Wilkinson, "The Philadelphia Free Produce Attack upon Slavery," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, LXVI (1942), 294-313.

¹⁸ Minutes of the Society, Dec. 14, 1833. Eleven names are listed in the minutes, but it appears that the last five served in this capacity at a later time.

¹⁹ Elizur Wright, Jr. to Lucretia Mott, Jan. 3, 1834, in the correspondence of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.

²⁰ Minutes of the Society, Jan. 13, 1834.

society.²¹ Lucretia Mott and Lydia White were chosen to attend the convention of the American Anti-Slavery Society in May, but they were not able to go.²²

A considerable part of the Philadelphia Society's revenues in the early years was invested in multiple subscriptions to antislavery journals such as Garrison's *Liberator* and the *Emancipator* (organ of the American Anti-Slavery Society), which were circulated among the members and their friends. The Society also accumulated a small library of antislavery books and pamphlets. It bought a dozen copies of Lydia Maria Child's *Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, which had been published in 1833.²³ In this remarkable book Mrs. Child traced the history of slavery, described its evils, denounced colonizationism, and demanded the desegregation of schools, churches, theaters, and public conveyances.

Several of the early meetings, which were usually held in Clarkson Hall, a building owned by the venerable Pennsylvania Abolition Society, were addressed by outside speakers. For example, Robert Bridges Forten, son of James Forten and brother of Margaretta Forten, spoke on December 8, 1834.²⁴ Correspondence was carried on with other societies in the United States and Great Britain. American abolitionists were keenly interested in and greatly encouraged by the fact that the British had provided in 1833 for the abolition of slavery in all their overseas possessions. (Slavery had been outlawed in England itself by judicial decision in 1773.) Robert Purvis, a wealthy Philadelphia Negro who traveled to Europe in 1834, brought back with him a long and hortatory letter from the Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society of Glasgow.²⁵ Purvis, a leader in the antislavery movement, was married to Harriet Forten (previously mentioned), a daughter of James Forten. He also was a speaker at the Philadelphia Female Society's meetings from time to time.

The culmination of its work for the first year was the opening in

²¹ Minutes of the board of managers of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, June 2, 1834; minutes of the Society, Oct. 13, 1834.

²² Minutes of the Society, Apr. 16 and May 12, 1834.

²³ Minutes of the board of managers, Dec. 1, 1834; minutes of the Society, Dec. 8, 1834.

²⁴ Minutes of the Society, Dec. 8, 1834.

²⁵ Letter dated Sept. 3, 1834, in correspondence of the Society.

November of a school for black children under its auspices.²⁶ By January 1, 1835, the Society had raised a total of \$75.06 and had spent \$54.02.²⁷ The officers who had led the Society during its first year were re-elected for 1835, except that Sidney Ann Lewis replaced Lydia White as librarian.²⁸

Early in 1835, George Thompson, a fiery English abolitionist, spoke under the Society's auspices. Nearly fifty new members enrolled at the close of his address. Robert Purvis and Robert Bridges Forten spoke on April 16.²⁹ In May a committee was appointed to "devise some means of promoting the moral and intellectual improvement of the people of colour."³⁰ In June the board of managers decided to set up an association for the purpose of making and selling "various fancy articles," on which antislavery mottoes were to be inscribed.³¹ This was the germ of the antislavery fairs which came to be such an important aspect of the Society's work.

During the summer of 1835 the Society formulated plans for circulating petitions to Congress for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and other federal territories.³² Trudging the streets soliciting signatures to antislavery memorials was a trying task. Many, probably most, of those contacted refused to sign. However, wrote Mary Grew, "we do not regard those visits as lost labor, where our request is denied, or that time wasted which is spent in unsuccessful efforts to convince persons of their duty to comply with it." Often, "the seed then laboriously sown, falls into good ground, and after a little season springs up, bringing forth fruit, some thirty, some sixty, some an hundred fold."³³

Benjamin Lundy, editor of the first successful antislavery newspaper, the *Genius of Universal Emancipation*, addressed the Society

²⁶ Minutes of the board of managers, Nov. 5, 1834; minutes of the Society, Dec. 8, 1834. Minutes of the board of managers for Sept. 1, 1835, indicate that Rebecca Buffum was the teacher and that the school was located on Lombard Street. Tuition was charged. It was disappointing to find in the minutes so little information on this important project.

²⁷ Minutes of the Society, Jan. 1, 1835.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Minutes of the Society, Apr. 16, 1835.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, May 14, 1835.

³¹ Minutes of the board of managers, June 6, 1835.

³² Minutes of the Society, June 13, 1835; July 9, 1835; and Sept. 10, 1835.

³³ *Fourth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, January 11, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 6. This appears to be the first printed report of the Society.

in August 1835.³⁴ In the autumn the Society supported the work of Samuel L. Gould as an antislavery agent in Pennsylvania.³⁵ He lectured in numerous communities, organized local antislavery societies, and solicited funds for the cause.

One of the most significant events of the Society's second year was the enlistment of Angelina Grimké (1805-1879) in the movement. She seems to have joined some time between February and April 1835. She and her older sister Sarah (1792-1873) were natives of Charleston, South Carolina, and grew up in a slaveholding family.³⁶ They left Charleston and settled in Philadelphia during the 1820s. Their firsthand testimony gave a tremendous boost to antislavery sentiment. In the winter of 1835-1836 Angelina wrote *An Appeal to the Christian Women of the South*, which was published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1836. About the same time she was appointed a lecturing agent for that organization. The Philadelphia women gave her their blessing in this undertaking. It was expected that she would address only female groups, but soon men also came to hear her. This precipitated an acrimonious controversy over whether it was appropriate for women to address mixed audiences.

We would never overstep the boundaries of propriety, we would not needlessly provoke the frown of any one [*the Philadelphia women declared in their annual report for 1836*], but when our brethren and sisters lie crushed and bleeding under the arm of tyranny, we must do with our might what our hands find to do for their deliverance, pausing only to inquire "What is right?" and not "What will be universally approved?"³⁷

In 1836 another important figure in the history of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society emerged. Mary Grew, who like Lucretia Mott was a transplanted New Englander, became corresponding secretary in that year, a position she was to hold continuously until the disbandment of the Society in 1870. In this capacity she wrote its annual reports. Born in Hartford, Connecticut,

³⁴ Minutes, Aug. 11, 1835.

³⁵ Minutes of the board of managers, Nov. 5, 1835.

³⁶ Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina* (Boston, 1967), 118-135. A short sketch by Betty Fladeland may be found in *Notable American Women*, II, 97-99.

³⁷ Annual Report of the Society for 1836 (manuscript), in minutes, Jan. 12, 1837.

in 1813, the daughter of the Reverend Henry Grew, a Baptist minister, she attended the Hartford Female Seminary during the years when it was directed by Catherine Beecher. As a young girl she taught a Sunday school class for Negro children. Her family settled in Philadelphia in 1834, and Mary and her sister Susan promptly joined the Female Anti-Slavery Society. She was also active in the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society (Eastern Branch) after its founding in 1837 and in the 1840s served as co-editor of its weekly newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. She worked in the Free Produce Society and the American Peace Society. After the Civil War she served for many years as president of the Pennsylvania Woman Suffrage Association. Apparently she never joined the Society of Friends, and evidence suggests that she became a Unitarian in later life. She lived until 1896.³⁸ Whittier wrote a poetic tribute to her, which closed with the lines:

The way to make the world anew,
Is just to grow—as Mary Grew!³⁹

Early in 1836 Senator Samuel McKean and Congressman James Harper presented the Society's antislavery petitions in Washington. Both men warned the Philadelphia women that such memorials might do more harm than good. McKean wrote that while he agreed with the ladies on the evils of slavery, he thought that, in the light of "the present excited and exasperated state of public feeling," the petitions might have an adverse effect, even "adding to the sum of moral evil and human misery" and actually delaying the consummation of "the object we devoutly desire."⁴⁰ Harper expressed the opinion that "there never has been, there never can be, a more perplexing question presented to the statesman and philanthropist than the abolition of slavery in the U. States."⁴¹ Before long, Congress adopted a "gag rule" prohibiting debate on antislavery petitions.

In 1836 the Society drew up and published an *Address to the*

³⁸ A sketch of her life by the present writer may be found in *Notable American Women*, II, 91-92.

³⁹ *The Poetical Works of John Greenleaf Whittier* (Boston and New York, 1904), IV, 127.

⁴⁰ Samuel McKean to Mary Grew, Jan. 28, 1836, in correspondence of the Society.

⁴¹ James Harper to Mary Grew, Feb. 15, 1836, *ibid.*

Women of Pennsylvania, asking support for the campaign to bombard Congress with petitions for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and other federal territories and for suppressing the slave trade between the American states. These measures were considered to be compatible with the powers of Congress provided in the Constitution. Generally speaking, not even abolitionists believed that Congress had power to outlaw slavery itself in the states where it already existed. They were simply trying to *convert* citizens of the slaveholding states to free their slaves voluntarily. Appended to the Society's address to Pennsylvania women was a suggested form for petitions, in which slavery was branded "a sin against God, and inconsistent with our declaration that equal liberty is the birth-right of all. . . ."⁴²

The Society's first annual sale of "useful and fancy articles" was held shortly before Christmas in 1836. Such fairs were held every year through 1861. A large assortment of needlework, art pieces, pottery, and other handmade articles, as well as baked goods, was put on sale to support the antislavery cause. Many items were sent over as contributions from British women. By the time of the last fair the Society had raised \$32,000 by this means.⁴³ Most of the proceeds were used to support the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society (Eastern Branch), which employed a full-time paid agent and published the *Pennsylvania Freeman* from 1838 to 1854. The newspaper was in chronic financial difficulty.

The fairs were not only a means of raising money for the anti-slavery effort but also a means of reaching the public with "the silent, unobtrusive, and extensive dissemination of anti-slavery truth."⁴⁴ Many of the sale items bore antislavery drawings and mottoes. Of these one of the most effective was a picture of a female slave in chains, adorned with the plea "Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?" Antislavery orators like Garrison and Phillips spoke at these sales, often with great effect, reaching many persons who were not members of antislavery societies. In 1839 the Society prepared

⁴² *Address of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia to the Women of Pennsylvania, with the Form of a Petition to the Congress of the U. States* (Philadelphia, 1836), 8.

⁴³ On the history of the fairs see N. Orwin Rush, "Lucretia Mott and the Philadelphia Antislavery Fairs," *Bulletin of Friends Historical Association*, XXXV (Autumn, 1946), 69-75.

⁴⁴ Annual report for 1836, in the minutes of the Society for Jan. 12, 1837.

for sale at the fair a book of poetry called *The North Star*, edited by John Greenleaf Whittier. Musical groups like the Singing Hutchinsons, themselves abolitionists, performed at the fairs from time to time. Thus the bazaars had great propaganda value.

By January 1837, the Society claimed a membership of eighty. During the preceding year it had received \$181.18 from annual subscriptions, donations, and contributions and \$228.60 from the 1836 fair—a total of \$409.78. It had spent \$154.97 for printing, books for its library, subscriptions to newspapers, and incidental items, and contributed \$40.00 to the American Anti-Slavery Society and \$100.00 to the Young Men's Anti-Slavery Society of Philadelphia. Total expenses had thus come to \$294.97.⁴⁵

In January 1837, Lucretia Mott was elected president, and another major figure in the Society's history, Sarah Pugh (1800–1884), was chosen recording secretary. Born to Quaker parents in Alexandria, Virginia, Sarah lost her father when she was two years old and moved with her family to the home of her grandfather in Chester County, Pennsylvania, and soon thereafter to Philadelphia, where her mother established a dressmaking business. Sarah was educated at the Westtown School, and at the age of twenty-one became a teacher in a Quaker school in the city; later she had her own school. She dated her conversion to abolitionism from the lecture given in Philadelphia by George Thompson in 1835. Shortly thereafter she joined the Female Anti-Slavery Society.⁴⁶ She was elected president in 1838 and served in that capacity for many years.

Several of her cousins, in a memorial tribute, characterized her as being "decided, firm, and prompt in any course of action which her judgment and conscience approved, mild and unobtrusive in manner, unruffled by opposition or difficulty, with strong attachments to friends. . . ."⁴⁷ Florence Kelley, the well-known social reformer of the Progressive Era, who was her niece and saw a great deal of Sarah Pugh while a child, was greatly impressed by Sarah's refusal to use slave-grown produce. "Aunt Sarah," she asked, "does

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Memorial of Sarah Pugh: A Tribute of Respect from Her Cousins* (Philadelphia, 1888). For a scholar's account see Larry Gara, "Pugh, Sarah," in *Notable American Women*, III, 104–105.

⁴⁷ *Memorial of Sarah Pugh*, 5.

Thee really think any slaves were freed because Thee did not use sugar or cotton?" "Dear child," came the reply, "I can never know that any slave was personally helped; but I had to live with my own conscience."⁴⁸

Early in 1837 the Pennsylvania State Anti-Slavery Society was organized by a convention which met in Harrisburg. This organization should be distinguished from the older and more conservative Pennsylvania Abolition Society, which was founded in 1775 and is still in existence today. The Anti-Slavery Society advocated immediate, unconditional, and uncompensated emancipation of southern slaves, while the Abolition Society by this time was working mainly to help Philadelphia blacks who were already free. The Philadelphia women appointed delegates to the Harrisburg convention, but, "owing to a variety of circumstances," none of them attended.⁴⁹ By 1838 women were taking part in meetings of the state society, and in 1841 Lucretia Mott and Sarah Pugh were elected to its executive committee. The state society soon split into eastern and western branches. The Philadelphia women made an important contribution to the work of the eastern branch. In 1840 J. Miller McKim became its "publishing agent"; his wife Sarah became active in the Female Society. Their daughter Lucy married a son of William Lloyd Garrison.⁵⁰

The most notable event in 1837 for the Philadelphia women was the assembling in New York City of the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. Members of Boston's female society were in correspondence with the Philadelphia group regarding this project as early as August 1836.⁵¹ Seventy-one delegates from seven states met on May 9, 1837. Lucretia Mott served as temporary chairman and supervised the election of officers. Mary S. Parker of Boston was chosen president. Mrs. Mott and Grace Douglass, a Philadelphia black, were included among the several vice-presidents; Mary

⁴⁸ Florence Kelley, "My Philadelphia," *The Survey (Graphic Number)*, LVII (Oct. 1, 1926), 54.

⁴⁹ Minutes of the Society, Feb. 9, 1837.

⁵⁰ See Ira V. Brown, "Miller McKim and Pennsylvania Abolitionism," *Pennsylvania History*, XXX (1963), 56–72.

⁵¹ Maria Weston Chapman to Mary Grew, Aug. 4, 1836 and later, in correspondence of the Society.

Grew and Sarah Pugh were listed among the secretaries.⁵² Almost a third of the delegates (22) were from Pennsylvania, most of them from Philadelphia. Several black women attended, including not only Grace Douglass but her daughter Sarah, a Philadelphia school teacher.

A strong religious tone pervaded the gathering; sessions were opened with scripture and prayer. The delegates regarded the anti-slavery cause as a holy enterprise. The convention adopted resolutions denouncing efforts to suppress free discussion of the slavery issue. It also attacked the complicity of northerners in the return of fugitive slaves and called for granting alleged fugitives the right of trial by jury. It urged women to petition their state legislatures to repeal laws permitting slaveholders to bring their slaves with them into northern states for extended visits. On motion of Lucretia Mott, the convention asked American women to boycott the products of slave labor.⁵³

Angelina Grimké presented a resolution asserting the right and duty of women to move out of their previously circumscribed sphere of influence and "plead the cause of the oppressed by voice, pen, and purse."⁵⁴ This resolution was also adopted, but not unanimously. Even more notable is the fact that the convention denounced race prejudice and called for racial integration of churches and schools.⁵⁵ Maria Weston Chapman, leader of Boston's female abolitionists, was unable to be present, but hailed the convention as "the first general one of women ever held in our country, if not in the world." "The present state of the world," she continued, "demands of woman the awakening and vigorous exercise of powers which womanhood has allowed to slumber for ages."⁵⁶ The convention proceedings were printed and widely circulated.

The petition campaign continued strong in 1837. The subject matter came to include protests against the admission of Florida as a slave state and against the annexation of Texas, which had

⁵² *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in the City of New-York, May 9th, 10th, 11th, and 12th, 1837* (New York, 1837), 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 7-8, 9, 13.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 14-17.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

recently won independence from Mexico. Former President John Quincy Adams, serving in the House of Representatives in his old age, waged a nine-year battle, finally successful in 1845, for the repeal of the "gag rule" which prohibited discussion of antislavery petitions in Congress.⁵⁷

Speakers who addressed the Female Society in 1837 included C. C. Burleigh, a gifted orator noted for his long golden curls and flowing beard, and Lewis Tappan, who was perhaps the central figure in the American Anti-Slavery Society.⁵⁸ It was becoming increasingly difficult for abolitionists to obtain the use of auditoriums (such as churches) sufficiently large to hold the sizeable crowds flocking to hear them and to find proprietors or trustees willing to risk the opprobrium and actual danger to the premises associated with abolitionist meetings. Early in 1837 Philadelphia abolitionists began soliciting funds for the construction of a large hall which would meet their needs. Both individually and collectively members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society contributed substantially to construction costs, which came to \$40,000.⁵⁹ Christened Pennsylvania Hall and engraved with the Pennsylvania state motto "Virtue, Liberty, and Independence," it was opened for use on May 14, 1838, on Sixth Street between Arch and Race, fronting on what today is Independence Mall.⁶⁰

In 1838 the Society adopted a school for black children which was being taught by one of its members, Sarah M. Douglass (1806-1882).⁶¹ The daughter of Robert and Grace (Bustill) Douglass, she belonged to a prominent Philadelphia black family. Her maternal grandfather, Cyrus Bustill, owned a prosperous bakery. Her mother kept a millinery store; her father was a hairdresser, her brother a successful portrait painter. They were Quakers, but Sarah complained that they were required to sit separately from whites in the

⁵⁷ See Samuel Flagg Bemis, *John Quincy Adams and the Union* (New York, 1956), 326ff.

⁵⁸ Minutes of the Society, Apr. 13, 1837.

⁵⁹ *Fourth Annual Report* (1838), 12.

⁶⁰ *History of Pennsylvania Hall, Which Was Destroyed by a Mob, on the 17th of May, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 3-6.

⁶¹ Minutes of the Society, Jan. 4, 1838. On support of the school see minutes of the board of managers, Mar. 1 and Apr. 5, 1838, and minutes of the Society, Mar. 8, 1838, and later.

Arch Street Meetinghouse.⁶² Mother and daughter were both active in the Female Anti-Slavery Society from an early date. Sarah was chosen recording secretary in 1838, and her mother was a member of the board of managers.

The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society hosted the second annual Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in Pennsylvania Hall in May 1838. The Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and other social reform groups held sessions there at the same time. Men and women, black and white, mixed freely in and around the building. This fact seems to have stirred the fury of an anti-abolitionist mob which set fire to the building and destroyed it on May 17, the third day after its opening.⁶³ On Wednesday evening, May 16, the women had conducted a public meeting at which speeches were delivered by William Lloyd Garrison, Maria Weston Chapman, Angelina Grimké (Weld), Abby Kelley (Foster), and Lucretia Mott.

The highlight of the evening was an impassioned speech given by Angelina Grimké, who had just been married to Theodore Dwight Weld, one of the best-known and most effective abolitionists, in an unorthodox ceremony attended by blacks as well as whites.⁶⁴ Speaking of slavery, she declared:

I have seen it. I have seen it. I know it has horrors that can never be described. I was brought up under its wing: I witnessed for many years its demoralizing influences, and its destructiveness to human happiness. It is admitted by some that the slave is not happy under the *worst* forms of slavery. But I have never seen a happy slave. I have seen him dance in his chains, it is true; but he was not happy. There is a wide difference between happiness and mirth. Man cannot enjoy the former while his manhood is destroyed. . . .⁶⁵

Mrs. Mott explained that the gathering, which was attended by men as well as women, was not an official session of the Anti-Slavery

⁶² Gerda Lerner, "Douglass, Sarah Mapps Douglass," in *Notable American Women*, I, 511-513. In 1855 she was married to the Rev. William Douglass, rector of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas. Whether they were relatives is not known.

⁶³ See Ira V. Brown, "Racism and Sexism: The Case of Pennsylvania Hall," *Phylon*, XXXVII (1976), 126-136.

⁶⁴ Lerner, *Grimké Sisters*, 233-242.

⁶⁵ *History of Pennsylvania Hall*, 124.

Convention of American Women and that indeed many of its members considered it improper for women to address audiences consisting of both sexes. She expressed the hope that "such false notions of delicacy and propriety would not long obtain in this enlightened country."⁶⁶

While the women were speaking, a crowd gathered outside and began throwing rocks at the windows. The glass was smashed, but no one in the auditorium was injured, because shutters *inside* the windows were securely fastened. Mrs. Weld continued speaking, unafraid, asking:

What is a mob? What would the breaking of every window be? What would the levelling of this Hall be? Any evidence that we are wrong, or that slavery is a good and wholesome institution? What if the mob should now burst in upon us, break up our meeting, and commit violence upon our persons—would that be any thing compared with what the slaves endure?⁶⁷

Despite this alarming experience, the women held an official session in Pennsylvania Hall the next afternoon, May 17. Again disorder threatened, and the mayor asked the abolitionists not to hold any meetings in the building that evening. They agreed to this, and the mayor came and addressed the crowd, pleading with them to go home. The rioters did not disperse. Shortly after the mayor left, the lawless element broke into the Hall (which had been locked at the mayor's request) and began destroying furniture, draperies, books, etc. Then they set fire to the building, which was left a gutted ruin within a few hours. John Greenleaf Whittier, editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, threw on a hasty disguise and pretended to be a member of the invading mob, thereby managing to save some of his valuables. The firemen made no effort to save the building, confining their attention to protecting neighboring structures.⁶⁸

Excitement continued in the city for the next several days. It appeared for a time that a mob would attack the residence of James and Lucretia Mott, but this threat did not materialize. It is said that a friend of the Motts headed the mob off in the wrong direc-

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶⁸ Brown, "Racism and Sexism," 131-132.

tion.⁶⁹ The Shelter for Colored Orphans was set afire (but saved by firemen), Mother Bethel A.M.E. Church was attacked, and people demonstrated outside the offices of the *Public Ledger*, which had upheld the right of free speech for the abolitionists.⁷⁰ Rioting against blacks, foreigners, and abolitionists was not uncommon in Philadelphia during the 1830s and 1840s.⁷¹

Garrison left Philadelphia immediately after the fire, but the women remained and held their final session in Sarah Pugh's school-room the next day. There they adopted a resolution proposed by Sarah M. Grimké denouncing race prejudice and asserting that it was the duty of abolitionists to identify themselves with black people "by sitting with them in places of worship, by appearing with them in our streets, by giving them countenance in steamboats and stages, by visiting them at their homes and encouraging them to visit us, receiving them as we do our white fellow citizens."⁷² A minority of the delegates opposed this resolution as inexpedient in the existing inflamed state of public feeling, but it was passed.

The question of interracial gatherings was evoking a great deal of controversy even among Quakers at this time. Mrs. Mott reported that the proceedings of the female abolitionists had alarmed "such timid ones as our good Dr. [Joseph] Parrish," who had left no means untried to "induce us to expunge from our minutes a resolution relating to social intercourse with our colored brethren."⁷³

The 1838 meeting of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women also adopted a resolution proposed by Mary Grew, declaring it to be the duty of abolitionists to keep themselves separate from "those churches which receive to their pulpits and their communion tables, those who buy, or sell, or hold as property, the image of the living God."⁷⁴ A number of delegates voted against this resolution. In less than ten years, the two largest American

⁶⁹ Hallowell, *James and Lucretia Mott*, 129.

⁷⁰ Brown, "Racism and Sexism," 132.

⁷¹ Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Its Growth* (Philadelphia, 1968), 125-157.

⁷² *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th, 1838* (Philadelphia, 1838), 8.

⁷³ Lucretia Mott to Edward M. Davis, June 18, 1838, Davis Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University. Davis was married to the Mott's daughter Maria.

⁷⁴ *Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women* (1838), 5.

Protestant denominations—the Baptists and the Methodists—had split in two over the slavery issue.

Undaunted by the violence which greeted their 1838 assembly in Philadelphia, the third and final Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women met again in the "City of Brotherly Love," May 1-3, 1839. It was difficult to find a suitable meeting hall. Various Quaker congregations were approached without success. Other churches also refused the use of their auditoriums. The Universalists were sympathetic but wanted a guarantee that there would be no damage to their building. Officials of the Franklin Institute refused the use of their lecture hall. Finally, quarters were obtained in the building of the Pennsylvania Riding School.⁷⁵

Fearful of a repetition of the events of the preceding year, the mayor asked the women not to meet in the evening, to avoid "unnecessary walking with colored people," and to complete their business as expeditiously as possible. On behalf of the female abolitionists, Lucretia Mott replied that they were not planning any evening meetings, that they had "never made a parade, as charged upon us, of walking with colored people," and that they would continue to walk with them "as occasion offered."⁷⁶

The convention adopted resolutions endorsing the free produce movement, censuring clergymen who opposed the antislavery crusade, and condemning any and all manifestations of race prejudice. The women also vowed to work toward improving opportunities for free Negroes in such areas as education and employment.⁷⁷ They issued an "Address to the Society of Friends on the Subject of Slavery," chiding Quakers for being unfaithful to their antislavery heritage, and also an "Appeal to American Women on Prejudice against Color."⁷⁸ They decided to meet in Boston the following year (1840).

This meeting was never held. Within a few days after the women's convention ended in Philadelphia, the American Anti-Slavery Society met in New York and granted women the right to take part

⁷⁵ Minutes of the Society, May 9, 1839.

⁷⁶ *Proceedings of the Third Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, 1839* (Philadelphia, 1839), 5-6.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 15-24.

in its proceedings.⁷⁹ In May 1840 the national society voted to permit the election of women as officers. The society had been wracked with controversy for four years over the place of women in its activities. The commissioning of Sarah and Angelina Grimké as lecturing agents in 1836 had set off the debate. William Lloyd Garrison became the chief advocate of equal rights for women in the movement, and in 1840 he and his followers took control of the American Anti-Slavery Society and placed Abby Kelley (Foster) of Massachusetts on the business committee for the national convention. Many of those opposed to women serving as officers in the society promptly withdrew and formed the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, under the leadership of Arthur and Lewis Tappan.⁸⁰ This schism was a serious blow to the antislavery movement, and it never regained the momentum it enjoyed during the 1830s. After 1840 the antislavery movement turned mainly to political action, working through the Liberty Party, the Free Soil Party, and the Republican Party, which advocated only the prohibition of slavery in the western territories, not universal emancipation.⁸¹

British abolitionists, led by Joseph Sturge and the Reverend John Scoble, issued a call to American and other foreign antislavery societies in the winter of 1839-1840 to send delegates to an international convention to meet in London in June 1840. The original invitation was addressed to "the friends of the slave of every nation and of every clime."⁸² When the sponsors learned that several American societies were planning to send female delegates, they changed the invitation to include only "gentlemen." Approximately 500 persons attended this unprecedented international conference on social reform. About fifty of the delegates were Americans, there

⁷⁹ *Proceedings of the Sixth Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, Held, for the Transaction of Business, at the Chatham Street Chapel, New-York, on the 7th of May, and the Three Following Days, 1839* (New York, 1839), 28.

⁸⁰ Walter M. Merrill, *Against Wind and Tide: A Biography of Wm. Lloyd Garrison* (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), 159; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War against Slavery* (Cleveland, 1969), 197-198.

⁸¹ See Richard H. Sewell, *Ballots for Freedom: Antislavery Politics in the United States, 1837-1860* (New York, 1976).

⁸² British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, *Invitation to the London General Conference to Commence on June 12, 1840* (London, 1839?), 2.

was a scattering from France and one or two other countries, and the remainder came from Great Britain and her colonies.⁸³

Despite the revised invitation from the London committee which was arranging for the convention, several American antislavery societies, including the state societies of Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, went ahead with their plans to send some women delegates. The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society chose Lucretia Mott, Mary Grew, Sarah Pugh, Abby Kimber and Elizabeth Neall to represent them.⁸⁴ Mrs. Mott also had credentials from the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society and the American Anti-Slavery Society. Sarah Pugh was a delegate of the American Free Produce Society. Massachusetts delegates included Emily Winslow, Abby Southwick, and Ann Greene Phillips, wife of the great antislavery orator Wendell Phillips. A number of other women were appointed but for one reason or another decided not to make the trip, possibly because they feared they would not be welcome.⁸⁵

During the informal socializing which preceded the opening of the convention, the British leaders implored Mrs. Mott and the other female delegates not to force the issue. The women refused to give in. On June 11, the day before the convention was to begin, the Pennsylvania women addressed a protest to the committee on arrangements:

The American Women Delegates from Pennsylvania to the World's Convention would present to the Committee of the British & Foreign Anti-Slavery Society their grateful acknowledgments for the kind attentions received by them since their arrival in London. But while as individuals they return thanks for these favors, as delegates from the bodies appointing them, they deeply regret to learn by a series of resolutions passed at a Meeting of your Committee, bearing reference to the credentials

⁸³ *Proceedings of the General Anti-Slavery Convention Called by the Committee of the British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, and Held in London from Friday, June 12th, to Tuesday, June 23rd, 1840* (London, 1841), 573-584.

⁸⁴ *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879: The Story of His Life Told by His Children* (New York, 1969, orig. pub. 1885), II, 353. The minutes of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (May 5, 1840) record the appointment of Mary Grew as a delegate, but not the others.

⁸⁵ Accounts of the convention may be found in Betty Fladeland, *Men and Brothers: Anglo-American Antislavery Cooperation* (Urbana, Ill., 1972), 257-273; Douglas H. Maynard, "The World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, XLVII (1960), 452-471; and Howard Temperley, *British Antislavery, 1833-1870* (Columbia, S. C., 1972), 85-92.

from the Mass. Society, that it is contemplated to exclude women from a seat in the convention, as co-equals in the advocacy of Universal Liberty. The Delegates will duly communicate to their constituents, the intimation which these resolutions convey: in the mean time they stand prepared to co-operate to any extent, and in any form, consistent with their instructions, in promoting the just objects of the Convention, to whom it is presumed will belong the power of determining the validity of any claim to a seat in that body.

On behalf of the Delegates
very respectfully
Sarah Pugh⁸⁶

The question of seating women delegates was the first item of business on the convention's agenda. The women entrusted their case for admission to Wendell Phillips, whose wife is supposed to have said to him, "Wendell, don't shilly shally!"⁸⁷ Phillips proposed the appointment of a committee to prepare a correct list of members of the convention, "with instructions to include in such list all persons bearing credentials from any Anti-Slavery body."⁸⁸ An extended debate followed. Several English delegates argued that mixed assemblies of this sort were against "the custom of the country," and that it had never occurred to members of the London committee that they were including women in the invitation to "the friends of the slaves." Many American delegates felt the same way. Indeed, the Rev. Henry Grew, father of one of the American female delegates, stated that the admission of women would be not only a violation of British custom but also of "the ordinance of Almighty God."⁸⁹ Phillips replied: "We think it right for women to sit by our side [in America], and we think it right for them to do the same here."⁹⁰ When the vote was taken on the following day,

⁸⁶ Frederick B. Tolles, ed., "Slavery and 'The Woman Question': Lucretia Mott's Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840," Supplement No. 23 to the *Journal of Friends Historical Society* (London, 1952), 28. Entry for June 11, 1840.

⁸⁷ Oscar Sherwin, *Prophet of Liberty: The Life and Times of Wendell Phillips* (New York, 1958), 113.

⁸⁸ *Proceedings of the World's Anti-Slavery Convention*, 23.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 27. It would be interesting to know what Mary Grew thought of her father's position, but surviving documents do not supply this information.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 35-36.

the members of the convention decided by an overwhelming majority to deny seats to the female delegates.⁹¹

The women were allowed to observe the proceedings from the gallery but not to take any part in debates or votes. William Lloyd Garrison, arriving several days later, refused to take his seat in the convention and joined the ladies in the balcony to show his sympathy for woman's rights.⁹² The rejected delegates received a great deal of attention in London's social circles. Lucretia Mott became known as "the Lioness of the Convention."⁹³ "Our delegation is regarded as quite a phenomenon, which every one is anxious to see," Mary Grew wrote in her diary. "We are, almost every day, introduced to numbers of persons who request this *privilege*, and who look upon us with countenances of mingled astonishment and respect."⁹⁴

The exclusion of the female delegates produced an unexpected but momentous side effect. Lucretia Mott formed an enduring friendship with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was not herself a delegate to the convention but the bride of one, Henry B. Stanton. The trip was their honeymoon. "Elizabeth Stanton gaining daily in our affections," Mrs. Mott wrote in her diary on June 20, 1840.⁹⁵ Visiting the British Museum together with a party of Americans, Mrs. Stanton recalled later, she and Mrs. Mott sat down near the entrance to rest for a few minutes, telling the others to go ahead and they would follow shortly. When the party returned, "after an absence of three hours, there we sat in the same spot, having seen nothing but each other, wholly absorbed in questions of theology and social life."⁹⁶ Before the convention was over, the two women agreed that they would work together for woman's rights as well as freedom for the slaves. The movement for woman suffrage, "both

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁹² *Garrison: Story of His Life*, II, 373-374.

⁹³ Fladeland, *Men and Brothers*, 265.

⁹⁴ Mary Grew's diary, June 17, 1840, manuscript, The Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, 33.

⁹⁵ Lucretia Mott's diary (ed. by Tolles), 41. Entry for June 20, 1840.

⁹⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, et al., *History of Woman Suffrage, 1848-1861* (New York, 1969; orig. pub. 1881), I, 420-421.

in England and America," Mrs. Stanton wrote, "may be dated from this World's Anti-Slavery Convention."⁹⁷

Eight years later, in 1848, the two women met again in Seneca Falls, New York, held the first woman's rights convention, and adopted a woman's declaration of independence.⁹⁸ After that time several of the Pennsylvania female abolitionists became active in the woman's rights movement.⁹⁹ The experience which Lucretia Mott, Sarah Pugh, and Mary Grew had gained in the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society's work proved invaluable to them in later years as they fought to achieve equal rights for women as well as for blacks.

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⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-62. See also *Eighty Years and More (1815-1897): Reminiscences of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (New York, 1898), 78-84.

⁹⁸ The later history of this crusade is effectively traced in Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959).

⁹⁹ On the woman's rights movement in Pennsylvania, see Ira V. Brown, *Pennsylvania Reformers: from Penn to Pinchot* (University Park, Pa., 1966), 17-28.