



# “Women were among our primeval abolitionists”: Women and Organized Antislavery in Vermont, 1834-1848

*Vermont’s reputation as a bastion of antislavery and women’s extensive involvement in antislavery societies elsewhere in the Northeast suggests that Jonathan Miller was not just boasting. But if so many women were involved, as Miller contended, why are they absent from these histories?*

BY MARILYN S. BLACKWELL

In June 1840, abolitionist Jonathan Miller of Montpelier traveled to London to attend the World Anti-Slavery Convention hosted by the British and Foreign Antislavery Society. After a successful campaign to eradicate slavery from the British colonies in 1838, abolitionists had reorganized to promote an end to the slave trade throughout the world. They had circulated invitations to the convention widely, seeking delegates from the United States, Europe, and the Caribbean to coordinate the campaign. Before deliberations began, Wendell Phillips of Boston sparked a heated debate about whether to admit women as voting members, not just observers. Controversy over the role of women had provoked a split in the American movement a month earlier when moderate abolitionists resisted the efforts of Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Samuel May, and others to allow women equal partici-

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*Col. Jonathan P. Miller (1797-1847) of Montpelier attended the World's Antislavery Convention in London in 1840 and championed women's role in the abolitionist movement.*

pation and leadership roles in the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). Now the “woman question,” as it was commonly called, threatened to derail the world convention even before it began.

Colonel Miller, who maintained an international reputation as a champion of Greek independence, argued in favor of the “right of women” to participate in “this cause of humanity.” Vermont had “never been troubled with the woman question,” Miller insisted, and “women were among our primeval abolitionists,” having “established a standard of liberty” that their husbands followed. No women from Vermont were at the convention, but if our “female friends” were here, he boasted, “this Hall would not hold them.” There were, however, seven female delegates from Massachusetts and Pennsylvania, including Lucretia Mott, waiting expectantly outside the hall to join the convention. Despite the insistence of Phillips and other advocates, the women were not seated, leaving Miller to abide by the convention’s rules.<sup>1</sup>

Who were these “primeval” female abolitionists of Vermont? The state’s reputation as a bastion of antislavery and women’s extensive involvement in antislavery societies elsewhere in the Northeast suggest that Miller was not just boasting. But other than Rachel Gilpin Robinson of Ferrisburgh, who along with her husband Rowland T. Robinson

was a committed abolitionist, no other women and only a few female antislavery societies appear in historiography on Vermont's antislavery movement.<sup>2</sup> If so many women were involved, as Miller contended, why are they absent from these histories? Why did he assert that the "woman question" was a non-issue in the state at a time when it had become so disruptive to the national movement? These questions led to my search for women's participation in Vermonters' crusade to eradicate slavery.

Scholarship on abolitionism in Vermont has focused on its radical male leadership, highlighting the religious and political roots of the movement, the rapid injection of antislavery into Vermont political discourse, and the direct action of a small number of Vermonters, including the Robinsons, who sheltered fugitives from slavery. Sources for these accounts include antislavery newspapers, reports of state and county societies, local membership records, memoirs, letters, and local histories, most of which reveal little direct evidence of women's participation or that of black abolitionists, with the exception of itinerant speakers from outside the state.<sup>3</sup>

Little attention has been given to antislavery petitions to Congress and the Vermont legislature, and that is where I found the names of many women committed to the cause. In small agricultural towns abolitionist men repeatedly urged women to join their ranks and assist in the task of awakening every family and neighborhood. They believed that the virtue, patriotism, and benevolence attributed to educated white women would validate the moral integrity of the movement. Women's presence as followers rather than leaders of this radical fringe element in Vermont politics has rendered them largely invisible in association records. Their history remains buried within the contours of the larger movement.

#### ORGANIZING ANTISLAVERY ACTIVISM

Abolitionists were an unwelcome addition to the state's religious and political landscape in the 1830s. Driven by moral principle and often by the same evangelical fervor that spurred religious revivals, they were concentrated in agricultural towns in the Champlain Valley, on the flanks of the Green Mountains, and in the Upper Connecticut River Valley. After they began demanding immediate emancipation in 1831, Vermonters who held little economic interest in slavery or consideration for racial equality responded with ridicule and resistance, which precipitated several notable mob actions against abolitionist speakers. Undeterred, a small group of men, composed of religious evangelicals, Quakers, and sympathetic Antimasons, founded the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society (VASS) in Middlebury in 1834; it became the first affili-

ate of the AASS, headquartered in New York. They dedicated themselves to a campaign of moral suasion to convince the public that slavery ought to be eradicated immediately, a goal that set them apart from more pragmatic reformers who sought to end slavery and racial strife by exporting blacks to Africa. With the help of outside agents, VASS helped organize close to ninety local societies with approximately 6,000 members in the next three years, and launched campaigns to petition the state and federal governments on the issue. Evangelical ministers and their followers, including men and women who sought to rid the nation of sin, were key players in this mass mobilization by persuading friends, neighbors, and the reading public of the immorality of condoning human chattel.<sup>4</sup>

Vermont's national reputation for antislavery radicalism arose from the success of this grassroots effort to bring the issue to the forefront of political debate within the state, and from the capacity of Vermont's congressional delegation to articulate moral outrage over slavery. Compared with other Northern states, where economic ties to the South undergirded resistance to the reformers, Vermont's economy benefited less directly from slave production. Yet most Vermonters did not readily embrace abolition, even if they were willing to admit slavery was morally reprehensible. Gradual emancipation as proposed by the Vermont Colonization Society appeared more practical than the call for immediate emancipation, which threatened to dismantle the Union; gradualism was still the favored position of Vermont's Congregational leadership until the mid-1840s. At the same time, the moral issue provided evangelicals within the Baptist, Congregational, and Methodist churches and political liberals such as the Antimasons with a potent ideological message of freedom and equality that resonated with the public.<sup>5</sup>

As contention over abolition mounted, passage of the "gag rule" in Congress tabling petitions against the slave trade and slavery in the District of Columbia shifted the debate markedly in mid-1836. The state gained notoriety when Congressman William Slade of Middlebury, an Antimasonic representative who subsequently became a Whig, vigorously defended the right of petition. Many Vermonters, infuriated at the suppression of free speech, adopted the antislavery cause without condoning immediate emancipation. By 1837, antislavery had become politically potent in Vermont, prompting abolitionist James G. Birney to remark on a visit to Montpelier, "I have never seen our cause stand on such high ground among political men." Vermonters were ready to acknowledge that slavery was immoral, but it was unclear how to convert those convictions into political change without threatening to divide the Union.<sup>6</sup>

Research on women in northeastern states has shown that they were deeply involved in a parallel rise of antislavery sentiment throughout the region. Historian Julie Roy Jeffrey insists that they constituted a “great army of silent workers” who played a key role in shaping public opinion.<sup>7</sup> The moral values and persuasive methods of the crusade were in keeping with the contemporary presumption of female virtue and with the benevolent goals of women’s previously organized religious and charitable associations. Since the post-Revolutionary period, women had been encouraged to fulfill their duties as citizens by becoming the moral guardians of the nation through their virtuous influence over husbands and children. As religious revivalism spread during the late 1820s and 1830s, educated women committed to universal salvation expanded the role of republican wife and mother outward through missionary and benevolent associations and soon began to press for moral reform and temperance, both of which arose from home concerns.<sup>8</sup> Like most of their male colleagues, abolitionist women believed slavery was a national sin, abhorrent in a supposedly free nation, and it was their sacred duty as Christians to combat it despite popular condemnation of the reform. To that end, they hoped to overturn widespread public apathy about the issue by distributing antislavery literature and displaying their moral convictions widely to prick the conscience of the nation.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it was difficult to contain antislavery activism within this moral and familial framework, especially after abolitionist leaders urged women to exert themselves in the public sphere through writing, organizing, and petitioning. To bolster their personal efforts, women either followed family ties into local antislavery associations or formed their own separate societies along the lines of their previous benevolent organizations. With inspiration from British women who lobbied effectively for emancipation, they raised funds, boycotted slave-made products, educated free blacks, and formulated petitions to state and federal governments, helping to create a mass populist movement. Radical abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison became a key sponsor of women’s activism through his paper, *The Liberator*, in which he published some of the first writings of abolitionist Angelina Grimké and initiated a Ladies Department. He embraced Boston’s female abolitionists, who collaborated with ministers and agents of the New England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS) to help create a network of local female auxiliaries. Women circulated some of the first petitions to Congress in 1834, and thereafter they readily joined mass petition campaigns against slavery, which clearly politicized their activity. While female societies nurtured women’s organizational skills, they also sent delegates to meetings of

the AASS and eventually represented approximately eleven percent of its membership.<sup>10</sup>

Women's engagement in the movement, especially petitioning and the entrée of a few women as abolitionist lecturers, provoked the debate over women's role in politics. Abolitionist women were even more subject to condemnation than their male colleagues, especially from conservative clerics. They were criticized for acting independently of male authority to mobilize the public and straying from women's domestic sphere into political debates normally reserved for men. In 1837, leaders of the Congregational clergy in Massachusetts condemned Angelina Grimké for her lectures to mixed-sex audiences on behalf of the AASS; her appearance before the state legislature was considered inappropriate for a woman. Grimké and other outspoken women, including Lucretia Mott and Abby Kelley, challenged established authority by insisting upon their rights as human beings to vote and hold office in associations. In the process, they began to assert their equal political rights as women.<sup>11</sup>

These feminist demands raised fundamental questions about women's place in American society, which not only helped fracture the male leadership but also the majority of female abolitionists. Even if they valued women's moral influence in the cause, many reformers and ministers disapproved of women's engagement in politics and resisted their attempt at gaining equal status within male institutions. Evangelical women tied to the movement through their religious affiliations readily signed petitions, but they often preferred traditional forms of female association and disdained politics as a corrupt male sphere of action. The leading women from New York, for example, favored organizing a separate society at the national level whereas Angelina Grimké and others insisted upon gaining equal representation within the AASS. To resolve these differences and to organize a mass petition campaign in response to the "gag rule," the women's leadership from Boston, New York, and Philadelphia staged their first national convention in New York City in May 1837. They developed state-based networks spearheaded from urban societies and gathered 175 delegates from nearly every northern state. Although they remained at odds over separatism, they agreed on a state-based plan for the petition campaign.<sup>12</sup>

Conspicuously absent from this event or even listed as correspondents were women from Vermont. Only three local female societies, in Weybridge (1834), Waitsfield (1836), and Cornwall (1837), had been formed by the time; four more, in Randolph (1838), Stowe (1843), Norwich (1844), and possibly Montpelier (n.d.), were created in the next decade. This compares with ninety-six in Massachusetts and nineteen in

New Hampshire.<sup>13</sup> Most of the delegates to the convention came from Massachusetts, New York, Pennsylvania, or large commercial towns such as Concord, New Hampshire, or Providence, Rhode Island, where large female societies were responsible for informing and gathering delegates from the rural hinterland.<sup>14</sup>

Living in small, rural communities separated by the Green Mountains, Vermont women were geographically isolated from each other and from the women's recruitment network. The role of separate female associations was crucial to raising the visibility of women in the movement and the development of feminist demands. Functioning as a female support system, they incubated women's organizational and leadership skills. Previous association with women's groups provided leaders, such as Abby Kelley and Lucretia Mott, with the capacity to assert their rights after joining mixed-sex associations and to face popular disapproval for stepping outside the boundaries of traditional womanhood. In rural areas beset with religious dissension, it was difficult to sustain separate groups; they were dependent upon the support of like-minded family members, ministers, and visiting agents, as well as access to antislavery literature, traveling speakers, and regional women's groups. Sectarian divisions and widespread public criticism of women's activism after 1838 compounded the difficulty.<sup>15</sup>

Lacking sufficient numbers or support for separate organizations, Vermont's abolitionist women joined mixed-sex societies to create a cooperative, less contentious movement with men. As Julie Roy Jeffrey and other scholars have shown, women's involvement took many forms in different regions and evolved over the course of three decades. Women's participation in mixed-sex antislavery societies formed the backbone of a massive grassroots movement that reached into every neighborhood and social gathering to reshape public opinion.<sup>16</sup> Yet, collaboration also limited women's access to leadership and their visibility in the movement. Even if they joined local groups, they remained largely anonymous because they did not become officers, whose names were published in annual reports and antislavery newspapers. Equally hidden were the few women who worked with their husbands to shelter fugitives. Women's names appear in rare manuscript records of local societies, but these records provide only partial membership rolls; a male signature was often enough to represent the family. Petition campaigns, on the other hand, required individual signatures to demonstrate popular support for abolition. After petitioning waned in the 1840s, VASS disintegrated, and the campaign of moral suasion was redesigned to influence voter behavior and recruit candidates for the Liberty Party, collaborating with men became more problematic. Some women became

enthusiastic supporters of the party, but others preferred separating their antislavery activism from the taint of political involvement.

#### WOMEN'S VOICES

During the heyday of abolitionist organizing, two Vermont women ventured outside woman's traditional sphere to publicize their commitment and recruit other women to the cause. Unfortunately, they chose to remain anonymous, but their writings reveal how and why abolitionist women felt compelled to act. By addressing women readers and writing in a womanly style, both writers circumvented prohibitions against involvement in male affairs. Driven by religious conviction, they alerted other women to their responsibilities to God and the nation; they insisted that northerners were complicit in the crime of slavery and sought to awaken their readers to the common humanity of enslaved women. This gender-based style of writing was typical of abolitionist women and helped them establish a political voice outside the realm of electoral politics.<sup>17</sup>

In November 1834, when the president of the Weybridge Female Anti-Slavery Society (WFASS) offered her opening address for publication in the *Middlebury Free Press*, she exhibited little concern about engaging in public affairs. Jehiel K. Wright, a local Baptist minister and member of VASS, may have urged her to publicize the address to advertise the new society, hoping that such a pious woman would testify to the virtue of abolitionism. She expressed her firm commitment to following God's laws while also proclaiming her maternal role as a moral guardian of the nation. Humbly disclaiming her capacity to serve as president, she appealed to members' "hearts . . . bound by every tender feeling of humanity," to their "affectionate sensibilities," and to their consciences. She alerted them to their kinship with enslaved women as wives, mothers, and sisters and advised them to teach their children that "the poor degraded black boy too is their brother." We are "made of the same blood," she insisted, and therefore "we cannot suppose that the color of the skin, renders these ties . . . valueless"; blacks "have by nature the same tender ties to bind them together—they are prone to the same failings—and they have the same need of a companionate Saviour." Slavery was "legalized oppression," she concluded, lamenting that the enslaved woman was even more degraded than the poor widow in India enflamed on her husband's funeral pyre. Her grasp of the humanity of blacks clearly surpassed that of many contemporary Americans, yet her promotion of racial uplift also reflected the privileged position of a white, educated woman.<sup>18</sup>

Drawing parallels among women worldwide was one way to create a

sense of sisterhood, but what action could northern women take to change the laws or undermine the system? Let us “wash our own hands” of the crime of slavery, the president of WFASS begged. She vowed not to “partake of the blood of my fellow creatures” by purchasing slave-made products. Just as patriotic women during the Revolution boycotted British imported tea, so too abolitionist women could use their growing power as consumers to avoid slave-made sugar, cotton, or dyes in the commercial marketplace of the 1830s. Although she recognized the impracticality of such a commitment, participation in the free-produce movement represented an ethical stance against slavery and a form of direct action that resonated with many white and black women. Initiated by Quakers in Delaware and Pennsylvania who eventually established networks of stores to distribute freely made goods, the movement spread among a minority of ardent abolitionists in the Northeast, including Rachel and Rowland Robinson of Ferrisburgh.<sup>19</sup>

In a bolder, more political move addressed to men as well as women, the president of WFASS also forwarded the society’s constitution with a letter to William Lloyd Garrison for publication in *The Liberator*. The constitution, which she appears to have written, linked her belief in a higher law of justice to American Revolutionary ideals, to that “liberty which is surely the inalienable right of all mankind.” Like their Revolutionary forbearers, women needed to fulfill their patriotic duty. “Historic records portray in lively colors the services of females for the good of the State,” she asserted. We must “do all within our sphere of action to wipe from the tarnished glory of our beloved country this foul blot!” In her letter, filled with political invective and sarcasm, she blamed the nation’s legislators for passing tyrannical laws. Pleading the “requirements of humanity and religion” as justification for voicing her sentiments, she directed her ire at slaveholders and their enablers. They were hiding behind unjust laws such as those that banished and hanged Quakers, executed witches, and drove the “poor Indians” from their “native homes,” she argued. “Even in our own happy republic—this boasted asylum of the oppressed,” she remarked sarcastically, laws “have been enacted, which cannot be ranked on the side of justice.” Equally guilty was a southern editor who had rationalized the crime of slavery by suggesting that the enslaved were well-treated and content. He is either blind or ignorant, she surmised, and doubted his commitment to the “law of Heaven” because most of the enslaved are not allowed to read and must suffer with a perverted Christianity. As for our unjust laws, she concluded, “Our humane editor doubtless thinks this all right, as our government can do nothing wrong; and he seems to think slavery . . . [is] a merciful dispensation!”<sup>20</sup>

The president of WFASS was not the only woman engaged in political debate about slavery, but her pointed critique of lawmakers was unusual for her day. Lydia Maria Child's *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*, published in 1833, detailed the sufferings of slaves, including those of women subject to sexual exploitation and mothers robbed of their children, and argued against race prejudice. Hugely influential, it awakened the compassionate sensibilities of educated women like the president of WFASS, who responded keenly to the comparison between slave conditions and her own comfortable domestic world.<sup>21</sup> Whether Child's *Appeal* had inspired her or not, she challenged the unjust legal system and the hypocrisy of politicians who had designed it. Under cover of female piety and sympathy, she circumvented the bounds of feminine propriety several years before the question of women's participation in public debate exploded in the press and pulpit alike.

By 1838, when another nameless Vermont woman published *An Appeal to Females of the North, on the Subject of Slavery by a Female of Vermont*, a public furor had erupted over the appearance of antislavery women as speakers, organizers, and petitioners. Congregational leaders in Massachusetts had denounced Angelina Grimké for presuming "the place and tone of man as public reformer," and Grimké noted that "the whole land seems aroused to discussion on the province of woman." Vermonter Oliver Johnson, who had moved to Boston to assist Garrison, later explained that conservative ministers "were more afraid of those two women [Angelina and her sister Sarah] than they would have been of a dozen lecturers of the other sex."<sup>22</sup> Undeterred, Grimké had published, *An Appeal to the Women of the Nominally Free States*, to persuade northern women to overcome their scruples about public activism and to galvanize them into a national petition campaign. A few months later in February 1838, the editor of the *Brandon Vermont Telegraph* published the *Appeal to Females*, and leaders of VASS subsequently circulated it in pamphlet form. Reformer Orson Murray of Brandon, editor of the Baptist paper since 1835 and an officer of VASS, recommended the tract as a "gold mine" for his readers while assuring the author he would "make no remarks" that would reveal her identity, which is still unknown.<sup>23</sup>

Like the president of WFASS, the author appealed to women's maternal sympathies and their Christian obligations, but she also responded keenly to the new political environment by defending her outspokenness and highlighting female influence rather than petitioning, which had become so controversial. It was disingenuous of critics to "divert our attention" with claims of "feminine impropriety," she in-

sisted; they simply wish to “prevent a concentration of our influence.” To prove that abolitionism was not outside the bounds of “female decorum,” she cited the active role of female missionaries in India and China and others committed to temperance, peace, and even Greek and Polish revolutionary movements. “Shall our religion be dishonored and our country disgraced by crime, and Christian mothers and daughters remain unmoved amid this awful accumulation of guilt?” she queried. To alert northern women to their complicity with slavery, she explained that slave-made products pervaded their households while their husbands had surrendered to “Southern dictation.” Rather than succumb to the arrogance and lies of southern men, she urged northern women to sympathize with enslaved mothers. “Is there no chord within the hearts of Northern mothers that vibrates, as the grasp of avarice and lust tears the clinging daughter from the arms of a fond mother, and consigns her to perpetual ignominy and servitude?” Do not “shrink” from such “wretchedness,” she warned; a “great responsibility rests upon the Christian females of the North.” Yet, when it came to direct action, instead of signing petitions, she urged women to recognize their capacity to shape “the moral sense of the nation” by pressuring male relatives, enlightening neighbors about race prejudice, and teaching their children “that all mankind are the children of one common father.”<sup>24</sup> This moderate but determined approach to antislavery activism characterized much of women’s independent action in Vermont and allowed them to maintain their political activity within the confines of the ideal republican wife and devoted mother of the 1830s.

While gender constraints shaped the *Appeal to Females*, the religious experience of its author underlay her response to slavery. Her sense of personal accountability only to God, her firm but humble resistance to any authority other than that of “Holy inspiration,” and her willingness to endure any “reproach cast upon us,” indicates that she was probably a Quaker. Moreover, after its publication in Vermont, the *Appeal to Females* was reprinted and circulated by the Philadelphia Association of Friends for Advocating the Cause of the Slave, and Improving the Condition of the Free People of Color. Founded in 1837, this Quaker society published antislavery tracts, promoted free produce, petitioned state and federal governments, and organized a school for black women in the city, all the while avoiding non-Quaker civic engagement.<sup>25</sup>

Many Quakers in Addison County participated in Vermont abolitionism in the 1830s, and it is likely that the network of Friends in Ferrisburgh, Starksboro, Lincoln, Monkton, and Shoreham was responsible for shepherding the pamphlet to Philadelphia, where leaders often traveled for meetings. Quaker women in these groups maintained an equal

but separate position within the community. They operated and presided over women's meetings and held leadership positions as traveling elders. The authority to speak about their religious faith provided some women with the experience and self-confidence to write or lecture on abolition. Yet Friends also disagreed over how to abolish slavery; they argued internally over strategy, and many preferred not to agitate with outsiders or enter politics for fear of compromising their commitment to Quaker belief.<sup>26</sup>

Without igniting controversy over women's political action, the *Appeal to Females* was a persuasive plea to engage all women and the perfect recruitment tool for Vermont's male abolitionists. As the petition movement advanced, men in the movement not only appreciated women's effectiveness at the local level, but also recognized that their patriotism and virtue would testify to the pure goals of abolitionism. In 1839, leaders of VASS concluded that the *Appeal to Females* had "done essential service to the interest of the slave." Jedidiah Holcomb of Brandon was so moved by the tract that he exhorted, "let us have a little *more* from the same fountain." He heralded women's activism, comparing it favorably to the heroism of Revolutionary-era women, some of whom prepared and furnished cartridges on the battlefield. To "aid this peaceable warfare," he urged women to substitute words for guns, circulate articles and pamphlets to friends and relatives, "make abolitionists of their children," and even petition Congress. Like David who faced Goliath with only a few stones, Holcomb argued, they would confront the overwhelming slave power. Southern congressmen would surely foresee the end of slavery, he surmised, if all or two-thirds of the women of the North signed petitions to abolish it. With women on our side, he predicted, "freedom will prevail,—not by sword . . . but by truth, love, free discussion, and perseverance."<sup>27</sup> By invoking the memory of female patriots, Holcomb recognized women's role in the nation, not just their moral obligations, and hoped to convince them to overcome their lack of political experience by signing petitions without fear of admonition.

#### ANTISLAVERY SOCIETIES

In a similar vein, VASS officials, local ministers, and abolitionist agents eagerly solicited women to join local societies, raise funds, distribute literature, and assist with petition campaigns. Between 1833 and 1838 agents from outside and within the state solicited funds and stimulated the organization of approximately ninety local societies. A year after Orson Murray, acting as an agent for NEASS, helped community members in Jamaica organize the state's first local society, the women and men presented separate but identical petitions to Congress. By

1838, Murray was also urging women to organize separate cent-a-week societies devoted to the cause. Whether women joined a mixed-sex society along with their male relatives or organized separately was largely dependent upon initial and sustained support from a local minister. Women were accustomed to organizing separately within their religious congregations in support of preaching, foreign missions, and other charitable endeavors, and therefore a “ladies” antislavery society was a logical extension of the movement.<sup>28</sup>

Yet these efforts were often short-lived. Despite the leadership of a committed minister in Weybridge and a fearless president, there is no record indicating that the WFASS survived for long.<sup>29</sup> Rev. Amos Dresser, an agent for AASS from Massachusetts, helped fourteen women form a society in Randolph in March 1838, but it lasted only two years. Women of the Norwich Congregational Church, who organized a society in 1843 with the encouragement of the local church deacon and Rev. Alanson St. Clair, met and sewed together for seven years. They may have been more successful because by the mid-1840s they were able to connect with the network of black abolitionists who had developed a system for aiding fugitives.<sup>30</sup>

Spreading information, mutual support, and benevolence characterized much of the work of women’s separate societies. By educating themselves and distributing antislavery literature, women bolstered each other as abolitionists and extended their influence over local opinion about slavery. Members of WFASS, who included any woman who paid dues and supported antislavery principles, dedicated themselves to spreading “correct information” about slavery. They also sought to take direct action by buying free produce whenever possible and to assist in the “laudable undertaking of raising [blacks], according to the requirements of Christianity, to an equality with the whites.” Women of the Norwich Female Abolition Society also vowed to “elevate the character and condition of the people of color,” a commonly expressed goal among white evangelical abolitionists who believed in universal salvation. Driven by missionary zeal and sympathy for the oppressed, they adopted benevolent goals but were unable to address the practical realities of enacting human equality. The women in Norwich sewed clothing, which they forwarded to a Canadian mission for fugitives. Black women provided support for fugitives as well, but they were often situated in communities where they could also extend their antislavery work by operating black schools and educating the public about white racism.<sup>31</sup>

With little experience, women needed guidance to operate and sustain societies outside the realm of religious benevolence, especially for such an unpopular cause. The demise of the promising Randolph Fe-

male Anti-Slavery Society (RFASS) shows the difficulties they faced. Rev. Elderkin J. Boardman and his wife Ann, who served as the first president, had enlisted 190 members by June 1838. He exalted their special role in the movement, comparing them to the early Christians who suffered with Jesus at the cross, and insisted that God had given them “more moral courage, fortitude and influence” than men; “in the hour of peril,” they would “go where men cannot and dare not approach.” Though Congress had shelved their petitions and rioters had burned Pennsylvania Hall during the second national convention of antislavery women, he defended women’s right to “organized action” and “free discussion,” asserting that women were “peculiarly fitted” to this “field of moral and religious enterprise.”<sup>32</sup> The members voted to affiliate with the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS) for special “counsel and instruction.” Closely associated with William Lloyd Garrison, the BFASS mentored women’s auxiliaries, but this regional network barely reached Vermont. The women in Randolph raised nearly thirty dollars, circulated antislavery pamphlets, and sent three petitions to Congress, but as Secretary Elizabeth Bancroft explained, “our cause has many opposers, and presents few inducements of a worldly nature to enlist advocates in its favor.” Imbued with a combination of patriotism and missionary zeal yet wary about the future, Bancroft prayed for “beloved America,” and believed that “the Lord will open a high-way for emancipation, but it may be a judgment that will pain the nation.”<sup>33</sup>

Bancroft’s apprehensions were realized when religious controversy engulfed Boardman and severed the society’s link with the BFASS. Members of the affiliate in Boston disagreed vehemently about whether to associate with clerical leaders who disapproved of women’s activism and women’s rights. When the BFASS ceased to function and eventually dissolved in 1840, the 210 members of the RFASS were left without guidance and a vital connection to the regional network of female abolitionists.<sup>34</sup> The subsequent loss of Boardman, who was dismissed from the Randolph Congregational Church at the end of the year, was an even greater blow. An outspoken abolitionist, he no doubt offended some members of his congregation and Vermont’s conservative Congregational leadership as well. Boardman and his followers were caught in the same dilemma: Should they persist with radical abolition or adhere to religious authorities? To follow their consciences and criticize or even leave the church would render them outcasts from the community. Though independent-minded abolitionists, such as the Grimké sisters and Lucy Stone, summoned the courage to take such a step, most did not.<sup>35</sup>

Women’s lack of experience, their sensitivity to critics, and the difficulties of sustaining separate societies in rural Vermont led most of Ver-

mont's abolitionist women to participate in the movement through mixed-sex groups, especially after men urged them to join. The secretary of the Hardwick Anti-Slavery Society urged all "ladies of this town" to read Mrs. Child's *Appeal* and "to enroll their names as members of this society."<sup>36</sup> Yet documentation of women's participation in local societies has rarely surfaced. Records from the Rupert Anti-Slavery Society, organized in January 1834, list 133 members; seventy-two or 54 percent were women. Quakers, who initiated the Starksboro and Lincoln society with sixty-three members in May 1834, sent petitions to the Vermont legislature the following year urging abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia signed by 332 men and 420 women. Of course, not all were members of the society, but the same year Rowland T. Robinson boasted that "nearly the whole adult population, of both sexes" joined the antislavery society in his section of nearby Ferrisburgh. Even if Robinson was guilty of inflating the membership, it is clear that women were engaged in antislavery activity in their communities and participating in petition drives with men.<sup>37</sup>

It was easier for women to participate in local gatherings than to travel to meetings of county or state societies. Such a venture normally required a male chaperone who was also involved. During the mid-1830s, members of VASS organized county societies throughout the state to help coordinate the network of local groups. Only three women, Quakers Rachel Robinson, Rachel Hoag, and Huldah Hoag, were present at the organization of the Addison County Anti-Slavery Society, which enrolled thirty-eight members in 1835. The Washington County Anti-Slavery Society was organized in Montpelier a year later with eighty-four members, including nineteen women, about half of whose surnames match those of men on the list. But county societies were also difficult to sustain, especially after controversies arose over strategy within the movement. Leaders of the Washington County society, who expected a "full and spirited meeting" in early 1839, discussed whether to convene more frequent meetings in different towns, presumably to bolster participation. "Heretofore, the ladies have, as in duty bound, furnished their quota of numbers at the county meetings," they recalled. "So may it be again," they hoped, if only the women would turn out.<sup>38</sup>

Involvement at the state level was an even more significant step toward non-traditional political activism for women. Orson Murray, corresponding secretary for VASS, was as enthusiastic as Rowland T. Robinson about women's participation; his wife Catherine and Delia Higgins of Brandon became members of VASS at its founding meeting in May 1834. The society affirmed women's role in the movement by resolving that "the ladies of our Country can do much if they will take

up this subject and act with concert and decision.” According to the constitution, “any person” who supported immediate emancipation through non-violent means of persuasion and who contributed was eligible to join and vote at meetings. The strategy of moral suasion was ideally suited to enlisting the army of benevolent women into a righteous war on the sin of slavery and to exposing “the guilt and danger of holding men as property.”<sup>39</sup>

In addition to spreading abolitionist principles, leaders of VASS hoped women would provide funds to support lecturers and publications. “Great sacrifices must be made,” the executive committee insisted, “every friend of Humanity, who has a heart to sympathise with the suffering slave, must contribute.” The Cornwall Female Anti-Slavery Society sent funds regularly for three years, beginning in 1837 with an unusually large contribution of \$20.25. More typically, ardent women sent a few dollars, such as: “2 Female Friends [Quakers],” an “aged female,” and “two young Ladies” from Rochester; “Mrs. Stewart of Westford” sent a “string of gold beads.” Individual women and their societies also contributed directly to AASS, the national society. Rev. Justin Parsons of Jamaica sent \$111 to AASS “on account of [his] pledge and to constitute his wife, Hannah Parsons, a life member.”<sup>40</sup> After the Panic of 1837, when financial constraints forced AASS to decentralize the movement, VASS enlisted women in a system of volunteer antislavery agents organized by county and town. Local societies were instructed to appoint “one man and one woman” as agents in each school district to sell newspaper subscriptions, develop libraries of antislavery literature for parents and children, supply every family with the Anti-Slavery Almanac, and circulate petitions “to every man and woman of lawful age.” To applaud and encourage this effort members of the Washington County society resolved that “woman [has] already done much for the cause of abolition” and would do great service to “this nation and the community of nations” with “her energetic and mild, yet irresistible influence.”<sup>41</sup> This conception of women’s role, rather than that of political activist, was common among men in the movement and most women as well.

#### PETITIONING

Signing and circulating petitions did not change the perception that women’s sympathetic influence and virtue would enhance abolitionism, but petitioning gradually transformed their volunteer labor from pure benevolence into political activism. Spearheaded by AASS and NEASS, petition campaigns against the slave trade and slavery in the District of Columbia and territories, where federal law prevailed, began

in 1834 and became the dominant strategy to influence Congress until 1839. Local societies organized the most successful petition campaigns, but even without a society, advocates copied or clipped forms for circulation from the abolitionist press. Despite initial concerns that women were not voters and should refrain from political involvement, by 1835 itinerant agents from AASS were enlisting local women as well as men to gather signatures, following the example of British women who had been effective in petitioning Parliament. For most women signing a petition was their first political act and far different from exercising a customary female right of petitioning the government for redress of personal grievances. Angelina Grimké, known for her assertion of women's citizenship, insisted that it was a woman's duty to exercise the only right she possessed. VASS leaders believed that women's moral influence was even more persuasive than men's within some households, and that women would be effective in gathering signatures, if not money, from relatives and neighbors. To gain local support, women needed to venture outside familiar networks, but going door-to-door with a petition advocating a radical, unpopular cause could jeopardize longstanding relationships in the community. A woman's social standing could easily be undermined by the perception that she was engaging inappropriately in political affairs; she could be greeted with rudeness and closed doors when confronting friends and acquaintances.<sup>42</sup>

Despite these risks, Vermont women were enthusiastic petitioners. One historian has counted 22,381 female signatures on petitions from Vermont to the 25th Congress (March 1837 to March 1839), during the most successful petition campaigns. In some cases such as Jamaica, where women gathered 218 signatures and men supplied 580, abolitionists circulated separate petitions and forwarded them together to the Vermont Legislature or Congressional representatives. More typically, men signed in one column and women in another, such as the "Memorial of Paul Champlain & 32 other men & Sally Hill & 27 other women of Middlebury, Vt." The arrangement followed the customary separation of the sexes and clearly identified voters from the disenfranchised. Separate women's petitions came from towns where men were also active or female societies had been organized; they represent only about 10 percent of those that exist from Vermonters to Congress and only one to the Vermont Legislature. The impressive number of women's signatures from Vermont is further evidence that women were devoted to the cause, despite the dearth of separate societies in the state. By contrast, fewer women's signatures appear on petitions from both Ohio and Pennsylvania, though each state had more than twenty female societies.<sup>43</sup>

Women who formulated their own petitions were clearly sensitive to the propriety of their actions and felt compelled to justify their political activity by expressing their sentiments in gender-specific language. The women of Starksboro (420) sent a petition to the Vermont General Assembly in October 1835 urging legislators to instruct the state's congressional delegation regarding slavery. Opening their plea with a typical line of reasoning, they asserted that slavery in the District of Columbia was "incompatible with justice and humanity, the spirit of our free institutions, and the gospel of Christ." As women, they also defended their right to stray "from the customary walks of female life," by noting "the tremendous physical sufferings, — the sighs, and groans, and mental agonies of three thousand, three hundred American females." Pleading for their sisters in slavery, "for the sake of female innocence, unprotected, — of conjugal and maternal ties, rudely severed," they appealed to the sympathy of legislators and connected these familial concerns with the fate of the nation at home and abroad. "For the sake of national prosperity, — the permanence of our free institutions, — and the stability of the Union," they argued, and "for the sake of our country's tarnished fame, — the cause of universal freedom, — and the cause of righteousness and peace." For their part, 332 men from Starksboro sent their own petition with a lengthy but similarly patriotic plea that "freedom is the 'inalienable right' of all men." Instead of a mother's woes, however, they detailed slaves' sufferings from a male perspective: the physical harm black men endured, their lack of education and religion, and the substitution of a "system of concubinage, adultery and incest" for the institution of marriage. The greatest wrong in their estimation arose not so much from inhumane treatment as from slaves' "inability to ask redress," the absence of the right to petition the government for relief.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike black slaves, Vermont women were able to affirm that right for themselves, despite concerns about intruding on male affairs. In 1836, the women of Sterling tread carefully around the issue in a humble petition to Congress, noting that when pleading for the "downtrodden and despised" they were not "violating the proprieties of that relation to society and government our sex should sustain." It has "never been considered unbecoming the female character," they contended, to show that "our hearts are easily moved with tenderness and pity." In fact, they reminded the lawmakers, these traits are "so much esteemed in us by your respectful and honorable body." Committed to a faith that only "God should be our guide," they insisted that slaves were "made by the same Being that we were." Yet the "inalienable rights such as life Liberty and the lawful pursuits of happiness" did "not seem to exist" for those in bondage; nor did "the conjugal and parental rela-

tions established by our Maker," even while "female virtue" was exposed to "every inconceivable indignity." Southerners who "traffick in the bodies and souls of their fellow beings only because they have a black skin" as well as the nation would soon be subject to "God's wrath," they warned.<sup>45</sup>

Similar themes based upon women's piety, their patriotism, their obligations to God, and their sympathy with "the disgraced and afflicted of our sex" also appear in petitions from women in Washington and Addison counties. Endorsed and circulated by members of AASS or NEASS, who championed women's moral influence as "Christians" and "daughters of America," these printed forms standardized the expression of female sympathy and virtue; more importantly, they were effective vehicles to highlight the benevolence of white women, thereby cloaking abolitionism in republican virtue while masking women's political activity.<sup>46</sup>

The wording mattered little to members of Congress, who debated how to dispatch the flood of antislavery petitions, not just from Quakers who had led previous campaigns, but from fervent agitators in communities all over the Northeast. Southern congressmen hoped to silence the abolitionists, but John Quincy Adams of Massachusetts advised referring them to the committee on the District of Columbia. Braving the wrath of southerners and Democrats alike, Vermonter William Slade insisted upon a special committee and asserted, "we must not bury these petitions." Moreover, though he favored gradual not immediate emancipation, Slade pursued the issue further than any other congressman by exposing the horrors of the slave trade, challenging the biblical defense of slavery, affirming the humanity of blacks, and insisting upon congressional action. Rising at one point to display his constituents' support, he presented a petition from a hundred women of Cornwall, Vermont, and several others against slavery in the district. Despite his efforts and those of Adams, they were all tabled in May 1836 when congressmen passed the first gag rule. Renewed the following February and regularly thereafter, the rule became permanent in 1840.<sup>47</sup>

Meanwhile, the gag rule had energized a larger "army of women" to join the petition campaigns. A deluge of petitions in 1837 and 1838 (many with fewer words in the hope they could be easily read) included an additional set of related issues: the admission of Texas or other territories as slave states into the Union, the recognition of the revolutionary black Republic of Haiti, and the unconstitutional tabling of petitions. Presenting each issue on a separate printed form effectively multiplied the number of signatures that could be gathered at one time.

The decidedly political nature of these pleas did not inhibit women from signing petitions; their numbers rose dramatically, slightly surpassing those of men.<sup>48</sup> Legislators in Vermont also witnessed a rise in petitions. In October 1838, 2,220 Vermonters, approximately a third of whom were women, protested against slavery and congressional denial of their rights.<sup>49</sup>

In response, congressmen, conservative ministers, and newspaper editors either denounced or ridiculed women, effectively telling them to stay out of politics. Angelina Grimké defended women's petitioning on the grounds that "we are citizens, of this republic, and as such, our honor, happiness, and well being, are bound up in its politics, government and laws." Without endorsing full citizenship for women, John Quincy Adams and a few others testified to the petitioners' benevolence, patriotism, and integrity on the floor of the House, though Slade was silent on the issue. But the critique took its toll. The surge of petitioning waned because it was no longer deemed effective, and so too did women's political engagement.<sup>50</sup>

That a few defiant women were keenly aware of their critics and the congressional debates is evident from an 1847 petition to Congress from seventy-two "Ladies of Vermont" from Windsor County. They continued to believe in their responsibility for the moral integrity of the nation and showed their frustration with seven years of congressional inaction by reasserting their "right of petition." They had not forgotten the rebuff from a "distinguished Senator," Benjamin Tappan of Ohio, who had refused in 1840 to "recognize the right of country-women to interfere with public affairs" because "we were 'out of our appropriate arena;'" nor the advice of a New York editor "that we 'had better be shaking *bedticks* rather than *poli-tics*.'" Coming from a northern Democrat who reportedly held strong antislavery convictions, Tappan's critique of female petitioners had been even more frustrating than those of southern slaveholders. Imploring Congress once again to end the "National evil" of slavery and the slave trade, the women defended their actions by invoking the memory of their Revolutionary grandmothers who had helped "to 'shake the red-coats.'" With a heightened political consciousness, they expressed their indignation at being "governed by Laws which we have no voice in making." To prove congressional complicity in the trade, they cited the recent seizure and sale of two enslaved women from a dispossessed debtor to replenish the U.S. Treasury. "Is not the whole Nation responsible for this outrage on humanity? The buying and selling of human beings as the herds of the field! Separating them from their friends, Separating husbands from their wives, parents and children brothers and sisters." By showing that

politics could not be divorced from morality or from family life, these women protested their exclusion from politics and reaffirmed their right as citizens, if not voters, to participate in the debate over slavery.<sup>51</sup>

#### THE "WOMAN QUESTION" IN VERMONT

The controversy over women's antislavery activism did not disrupt the movement in Vermont as much as the internal conflicts over political strategy and constant sectarian strife. By 1839, abolitionists were impatient with church leaders for failing to condemn slavery forcefully and divided over whether political action would effect their goals. Despite initial support for the radical leader William Lloyd Garrison, a number of Vermonters were dismayed by his increasing extremism and confrontational style. Garrison stood at one end of a spectrum of interrelated conflicts within the movement: He condemned church authorities for refusing to preach against slavery as a sin or disassociate from southern slaveholding ministers; he characterized the U.S. Constitution as pro-slavery and repudiated all violence or political action under it, a stance known as non-resistance; and he was outspoken in his endorsement of women's participation, their leadership, and their full political rights. A minority of VASS members, such as Rowland T. Robinson and Orson Murray, followed his lead, but most believed Garrison's tactics would backfire and doom the movement. These disagreements, disruption within the churches, and lack of funds weakened organized antislavery. Even in the stronghold of Ferrisburgh, Robinson feared that the movement was "dying away," and he exhorted abolitionists to "cast aside all sectarian and party jealousies" in an effort to regain momentum.<sup>52</sup>

Nationally, these divisions simmered until the controversy over the status of women within the AASS eventually sparked a fatal split in abolitionism, causing Vermont leaders to reconsider their connection with the national movement and their longstanding support for women's participation. Chauncey Knapp, editor of the *Voice of Freedom* and advocate of political antislavery, and Jedidiah Holcomb of Brandon believed that women were effective abolitionists and noted that the constitution allowed any person to be a member. But after the AASS endorsed membership rights for women in May 1839, they denied the measure's full implications.<sup>53</sup> At the next annual meeting, when Abby Kelley was appointed an officer of AASS, a cadre of dissenters from New York walked out, rejecting women's demand for rights as an extraneous issue that would taint the movement with radicalism. Equally frustrated with Garrison's leadership and eager to adopt a political strategy, they organized the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society

(AFASS) as an alternative. The Vermonters followed their lead by vowing to endorse candidates who expressed strong antislavery views, but they were wary of entanglement with either party or a single-issue third party. They subsequently affiliated with the AFASS, but back home they continued to foster women's cooperation by granting them voting rights in VASS in January 1841. Orson Murray, a notorious radical and dissenter from political action, was euphoric, boasting that at least the Vermonters had not "the shameful inconsistency to gag [women] and nail them to their seats." He insisted that only one negative vote had been cast, and he published women's voting record from the meeting. "The voice of *Females* is in future to be heard," he proclaimed, "on the mountains and in the valleys of Vermont, in behalf of perishing humanity." Societies under Garrison's leadership and Rhode Island's state society granted women similar rights, but others in New England did not.<sup>54</sup>

For all the furor regarding women's role in the AASS, the issue did not cause as much disruption at VASS meetings as sectarian dissension. Nor did it change the trajectory toward political antislavery and the eventual formation of the Liberty Party in 1841. VASS needed women's labor and their influence, and no woman had challenged the male leadership by seeking office or lecturing in public. Murray's support represented his effort to maintain the morally pure, non-partisan nature of the movement, to resist mounting pressure for a third political party, and to galvanize women in his campaign against the religious establishment. Five women voted in favor of his resolution in 1841 demanding that ministers condemn slavery and repudiate slaveholding ministers or face dismissal.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, Murray's notoriety—his attacks on Baptist leaders, his interference at VASS meetings, and his non-resistance—may have also solidified the link between women's rights and radicalism, discouraging female involvement. The association of women's rights with Garrison and with his critique of established religion led to the charge that feminist abolitionists were infidels lacking Christian sympathies.<sup>56</sup>

For most abolitionist women, political rights were not as immediate a concern as the assault on religious belief and dissent within Vermont's churches, which forced them to reexamine their faith and affiliations. In the early 1840s, abolitionist agitation peaked within the Congregational, Baptist, and Methodist churches. State leaders and local congregations readily dismissed ministers who were either too zealous or too moderate on the issue. Congregations splintered and separate antislavery sects emerged. Just as Reverend Boardman's dismissal in Randolph undermined the female society there, so too religious con-

flicts in Cornwall, where women had organized their own society, disrupted community connections. Twenty-seven men and women opposed to the moderate antislavery stance of Cornwall's Congregational minister left the church in 1841 to form a Free Church with Baptists and Methodists. They installed an abolitionist minister, proclaimed their strong belief in human rights, and refused to worship with Christians who remained "silent and inactive" on slavery, but the new congregation faced an uphill battle to gain members.<sup>57</sup> As abolitionists struggled to forge new but weakened institutions, women faced the prospect of losing the vital support of ministers whom they had relied upon for religious guidance and severing longstanding ties with female religious groups, relatives, and neighbors to adhere to antislavery principles.

Abolitionist Rachel Robinson encountered such a dilemma when controversy engulfed the Society of Friends. As a Hicksite Quaker, she believed strongly in following God's will and her own conscience more than any religious leader. Though she accompanied her husband into the movement, Robinson acted upon her own firmly held antislavery principles within the confines of her family life; she purchased free-labor produce and welcomed fugitives at the Robinson home in Ferrisburgh. The Robinsons bemoaned the apparent decline in antislavery sentiment in the early 1840s, but they persisted with their efforts to rejuvenate the movement locally and within the Society of Friends. Unhappy with the



*Rachel Gilpin Robinson (1799-1862) was an ardent abolitionist who sheltered fugitives at her home in Ferrisburgh, now the Rokeby Museum. Courtesy of Rokeby Museum.*

conservatism of the New York Yearly Meeting of Friends, the couple eventually left the society in the mid-1840s.<sup>58</sup> As a result Rachel also resigned from the Ferrisburgh Women's Monthly Meeting, which meant abandoning her role as a leader since the 1820s. Though bereft of religious community, Robinson was unlikely to follow the independent stance of feminist abolitionists. Like many wives, she sought to do good in the world in companionship with her husband; her antislavery zeal did not prompt her to assert her rights as a woman separately or to speak out in public forums. During a visit to Pennsylvania, she wrote Rowland about the brave and singular work of Lucretia Mott and her endurance under a mountain of public criticism. Rachel sympathized with the "suffering through which minds like her have to pass," yet she clearly instructed her husband not to share her thoughts on the matter with others. As the public critique of women like Mott, Grimké, and Kelley mounted, it was increasingly difficult for women to speak out.<sup>59</sup>

#### WOMEN AND POLITICAL ANTISLAVERY

Regardless of women's views about their political rights, the emergence of the Liberty Party clarified women's subordinate status in Vermont's antislavery movement, resulting in more diffuse forms of female activism. Women's participation in the party nationally varied greatly by state and region, depending upon the attitude of male leaders and the capacity of abolitionist women to overcome the risks of associating with a political party. Providing customary female support or organizing separate fundraising was a safer bet for most abolitionist women who recoiled from the controversy over women's rights. Yet, their attendance at Liberty conventions was almost always applauded, and their presence distinguished these events from other political gatherings of the era.<sup>60</sup>

With its members divided over both religion and politics, VASS eventually disintegrated, and those men who had favored a political strategy assumed control of the Liberty Party in Vermont. They had rejected feminist abolitionists' claims for equal status, but they championed women's moral influence in the family and remained as driven by religious conviction as ever. Between 1841 and 1848, they sought electable candidates from both parties and anticipated luring voters to the moral purity of a single-issue platform. Abolitionist leadership shifted away from the Champlain Valley to the center of the state, with strongholds in Montpelier, Randolph, Rochester, and Brandon. With the exception of a failed campaign to protest the annexation of Texas in 1845, there was little effort to organize petitions. The party became increasingly pragmatic over the course of the decade until Liberty men eventually

found common ground with disaffected Democrats in the newly organized Free Soil Party, which captured approximately a third of the electorate in 1848.<sup>61</sup>

Following the national leadership, Liberty men in Vermont did not expect women to partake of politics but to resume the supportive roles in which they had been so effective. Believing “that our females are equally interested in the cause of *Liberty* with us,” party leaders saw no impropriety in welcoming women at annual conventions and meetings, but they were clearly cheerleaders and symbols of the party’s ideological purity. Liberty Associations, organized to educate voters, were composed only of “male citizens,” who vowed to vote for antislavery candidates. Women were included in their grassroots campaign to persuade voters and distribute antislavery literature in school districts, but even if a woman gained political experience through the process, it represented an indirect form of influence compared with signing a petition.<sup>62</sup> After the party’s organization floundered, in 1847 leaders rejuvenated and centralized the operation in a State Liberty Association. Recognizing that they needed women’s fundraising capacity, they expanded membership to anyone who paid a dollar in dues; twenty-two women and 288 men became members that year. At the same time, according to one report, the women formed an auxiliary “Female State Anti-Slavery Society,” indicating that they preferred separating their activism from male politics.<sup>63</sup>

Despite their small numbers, as long as the Liberty Party represented a single-issue moral crusade, women felt welcome in the army of recruits, and for some the experience no doubt raised their political consciousness. Politics infiltrated the personal relationships of Liberty women, who readily expressed political opinions and support for candidates. In 1842, Harriet Wood of Shelburne wrote her sister that she had decided to become an abolitionist and support the Liberty Party.<sup>64</sup> Liberty conventions, where families gathered to hear rousing abolitionist lecturers, were little different from religious revivals. Party leaders preached abolitionist principles, decried partyism, and sponsored fugitives as speakers, who could elicit feminine sympathies by testifying to the oppression of slaveholders. Jedidiah Holcomb of Brandon, editor of the *Voice of Freedom*, heralded the patriotism of the “host of men and women, of varied talents and constitutional temperaments, now battling for humanity...who have enlisted for the war, and will not lay down their arms until victory is won, or death shall remove them from the field of battle!” Joseph Poland, a Liberty official and influential editor of the *Green Mountain Freeman*, was solicitous of women’s engagement if only in traditional benevolent activities. In “An appeal to the

Friends of Common Humanity” in 1844, he addressed the “*Mothers of Vermont*” with a plea for aid: “is there no way in which women can act for the removal of this evil?”<sup>65</sup> After Liberty women expressed their enthusiasm by forming the Female State Anti-Slavery Society, former slave and speaker Henry Bibb reported, “The Green Mountain ladies are awake to the subject. They have hearts to feel and tongues to speak; hands to work, and the ability to carry out.” No records of the auxiliary have been found, but involvement with the party heightened women’s political awareness and encouraged separate female activism. It may have also stimulated a few independently organized petitions to Congress, such as the “Ladies of Vermont” petition in December 1847.<sup>66</sup>

Separate organizing was also the preferred form of activism for benevolent women who supported Liberty’s goals but either lacked male sponsorship in the party or disdained politics. By sewing and sending clothing and goods to fugitives, they could aid blacks directly without straying from the bounds of womanhood. Women in Stowe showed their frustration with politics by noting the “inhumanity practiced upon a large portion of the American people, by the politicians of our land.” Instead, they formed a Ladies Female Anti-Slavery Society with 117 members in November 1843, and vowed to educate themselves, to spread abolitionist sentiment, and to aid fugitives. The following year they sent over \$40 to a mission in Dawn Mills, Canada West (now Ontario), founded to support refugees from slavery.<sup>67</sup> Parallel sympathies and activities motivated women of the Norwich Female Abolition Society. Rev. Alanson St. Clair from Massachusetts and Chester Briggs were Liberty Party agents and editors; their wives and the local deacon’s wife were among its seventeen members. The women avoided any connection with political controversy by affirming that, “denunciation of those who hold their fellow in bondage, forms no part of the object of this Society.” Especially moved by the “suffering of our own sex who are deprived of personal liberty,” they forwarded boxes of goods to Hiram Wilson, a black minister at the mission in Dawn Mills; to Henry H. Garnet, who harbored fugitives in Troy, New York; and eventually to the American Missionary Association, dedicated to abolition, black education, and civil rights.<sup>68</sup>

The plight of fugitives captured the sympathies of these benevolent women, who found a meaningful outlet for their antislavery zeal either through their religious associations or directly to the network of black abolitionists, rather than through regional women’s groups. Women in more populous areas often donated their home production to antislavery fairs, which had become the dominant form of female activism in the 1840s and a powerful tool to raise money and focus public atten-

tion on slavery. With little direct access to fair organizers in larger commercial markets, women in rural Vermont resorted to traditional means of organizing. Abolitionist and Presbyterian minister Nathan R. Johnston linked members of Topsham's Anti-Slavery and Sewing Circle to Benjamin Still, who ran the Vigilant Committee in Philadelphia in the mid-1850s. They wrote Still explaining that they had never seen fugitives in the region, but "we want to give the little money raised, in such a way that the fugitives who are really needy will be benefitted." In this way, they were able to contribute directly to the relief of former slaves and to express their antislavery convictions.<sup>69</sup>

. . . .

Fifteen years earlier, when Jonathan Miller had touted the abolitionist fervor of Vermont women in London, he had not only applauded their moral convictions but also recognized their right to participate fully in the movement. Most other male abolitionists in the state, with the exception of Orson Murray, were reticent about the broader issue of women's rights despite their unwavering enthusiasm for female influence and support. Women's participation in joint societies, their willingness to sign and circulate petitions, and their symbolic role in legitimating the moral purity of the movement confirmed Miller's assessment that women had contributed significantly to the change of heart among Vermonters, if as followers rather than leaders. Yet they did not become political enough to disrupt VASS by pressing for women's rights, affirming Miller's insistence that the "woman question" was hardly controversial in Vermont.

As it turned out, abolitionist women had already reached the height of their effectiveness in the state. As petitioners, they had exercised their political rights directly to help influence the opinions of lawmakers. Without a network of separate societies that would foster female organization and leadership, most abolitionist women in Vermont were comfortable working alongside their husbands, their ministers, and other male activists or performing benevolent work in the name of anti-slavery. Only a few women's groups, such as the Randolph Female Anti-Slavery Society, were large enough to launch petition drives. Recast in the 1840s as political cheerleaders and functionaries of the Liberty Party, women were drawn into political organizing, but their influence was indirect and anonymous. Nor did abolitionism engender a women's rights movement in the state as it did in New York, Massachusetts, and Ohio. Journalist Clarina Howard Nichols, who supported temperance and initiated reform of married women's property rights in 1847, was not previously involved in organized antislavery. As editor of

a Democratic paper, she refrained from endorsing abolitionism, despite her highly moralistic views on slavery, until she was able to champion Liberty principles as part of the more moderate Free Soil Party in 1848. Thereafter she became a proponent of free soil and a lone voice in support of women's rights.<sup>70</sup>

By that time Jonathan Miller was no longer a key player in antislavery politics. His early death in 1847 at the age of 50 was a significant loss to the movement and to the men and women largely responsible for convincing Vermonters that there was no place for slavery in a nation founded upon liberty.<sup>71</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Garrison and three other men protested women's exclusion by refusing to be delegates and sitting in the gallery with the women. *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), 31-32; Kathryn Kish Sklar, "Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation: American and British Women at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840," in *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, eds. Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne (Ithaca, N.Y., and London: Cornell University Press, 1994), 302-313. For Miller, see D. P. Thompson, *History of the Town of Montpelier, from the Time it was First Chartered in 1781 to the Year 1860* (Montpelier: E. P. Walton, 1860), 249-262.

<sup>2</sup> For the Robinsons, see Jane Williamson, "Rowland T. Robinson, Rokeby, and the Underground Railroad in Vermont," *Vermont History* 69 (Winter 2001): 19-31; Ronald Salomon, "Being Good: An Abolitionist Family Attempts to Live up to Its Own Standards," *ibid.*, 32-47. Delia Webster of Vergennes became an abolitionist after leaving Vermont and had little connection with Vermont's movement after returning briefly in 1845-46. See Randolph P. Runyon, *Delia Webster and the Underground Railroad* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York: AMS, 1966), 134-151; Randolph A. Roth, *The Democratic Dilemma: Religion, Reform, and the Social Order in the Connecticut River Valley of Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 178-183; Raymond P. Zirblis, "Friends of Freedom: The Vermont Underground Railroad Survey Report," Typescript, Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 134-151; Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 178-183; John Myers, "The Beginning of Antislavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832-1836," *Vermont History* 36 (Summer 1968): 126-140, and "The Major Efforts of Anti-Slavery Agents in Vermont, 1836-1838," *ibid.* (Autumn 1968): 214-229.

<sup>5</sup> Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 147-156; Roth, *Democratic Dilemma*, 178-183.

<sup>6</sup> For Birney's comment, see *Emancipator*, 9 November 1837, quoted in Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 168. See also Andrew S. Barker, "Chauncey Langdon Knapp and Political Abolitionism in Vermont, 1833-1841," *New England Quarterly* 73 (September 2000): 444-455.

<sup>7</sup> William Lloyd Garrison Jr., quoted in Julie Roy Jeffrey, *The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism: Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>8</sup> For the republican mother and wife, see Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 227-231, 283-288; Jan Lewis, "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 44 (October 1987): 689-721. For ideal womanhood and Christian benevolence, see for example, Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: 'Woman's Sphere' in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 126-159; Lori D. Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics, and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2-35; Anne M. Boylan, *The Origins of Women's Activism: New York and Boston, 1797-1840* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 136-153.

<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 4-5, 54-55; "Permeable Boundaries: Abolitionist Women and Separate Spheres," *Journal of the Early Republic* 21 (Spring 2001): 79-93; Beth A. Salerno, *Sister Societies: Women's Antislavery Organizations in Antebellum America* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2005), 11-22.

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<sup>10</sup> Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 134-149; Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 24-48; Larry Ceplair, "Women Organized Against Slavery, 1688-1870" (2003), unpublished ms, available at <http://www.larryceplair.com/anti/antiintro.php>.

<sup>11</sup> Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 63-76; Susan Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 108-131. For Kelley and Mott, see Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1991); Keith Melder, "Abby Kelley and the Process of Liberation," in Yellin and Van Horne, eds., *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 231-248; Carol Faulkner, *Lucretia Mott's Heresy: Abolition and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Sterling, ed., *Turning the World Upside Down: The Antislavery Convention of American Women Held in New York City, May 9-12, 1837* (New York: Feminist Press, 1987), 3; Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 11-75; Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 79-103; Amy Swerdlow, "Abolition's Conservative Sisters: The Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Societies, 1834-1840," in Yellin and Van Horne, eds., *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 31-44; Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 43-46, 56-57, 81-85, 90-93.

<sup>13</sup> Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 184; Ceplair, "Women Organized Against Slavery," Table 2. Listings of female societies in antislavery newspapers and state society records are probably incomplete. Ceplair lists only three in Vermont; Salerno errs in listing Bellingham as a Vermont town. No information about the Montpelier, Vermont, Female Anti-Slavery Society has been found except from a list of donors to the Amistad Committee in 1841. See *Emancipator*, 2 December 1841. (I would like to thank Jane Williamson for this reference.)

<sup>14</sup> Sterling, *Turning the World Upside Down*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 24-47; Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 53-86; Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*, 43-46; Stacey M. Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty: Women Abolitionists in the Old Northwest* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 11-36. For separatism, see Estelle Freedman, "Separatism as Strategy: Female Institution Building and American Feminism, 1870-1930," *Feminist Studies* 5 (Autumn 1979): 512-529. For the role of regional agents, see Myers, "Major Efforts of Anti-Slavery Agents," 214-229; Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 152-162, 188-189.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 2-6; Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change*, 46-50; Robertson, *Hearts Beating for Liberty*, 4-5; Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 168-173.

<sup>17</sup> Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 54-66; Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 72-76; Jeffrey, "Permeable Boundaries," 88-92.

<sup>18</sup> "An Address," *Middlebury Free Press*, 23 December 1834.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* For the free-produce movement, see Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 17-19; Salmon, "Being Good," 35-38.

<sup>20</sup> "Another Female Society," *The Liberator*, 13 December 1834.

<sup>21</sup> Carolyn L. Karcher, *The First Woman of the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1994), 182-192; Elizabeth B. Clark, "The Sacred Rights of the Weak: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82 (September 1993): 465-486.

<sup>22</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Grimké Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Woman's Rights and Abolition* (New York: Schocken Books, 1967), quotation on 183; Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, (Boston: B. B. Russell, 1880), 261, quoted in *ibid.*, 188.

<sup>23</sup> *An Appeal to Females of the North, on the Subject of Slavery by a Female of Vermont* (Brandon, Vt.: Telegraph Press, 1838; reprint, Philadelphia: John Thompson, 1838); "Appeal to Females of the North," *Vermont Telegraph*, 21 February 1838.

<sup>24</sup> *Appeal to Females of the North*, 4-8, 10-11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 10; *Annual Report of the Association of Friends for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, and Improving the Condition of the Free People of Color* (Philadelphia: Merrihew & Thompson, 1847), 3-6. Jane Williamson, director of the Rokeby Museum, suggests that the *Appeal* may have been written by either Rachel Robinson or Ann King, a Quaker who lived intermittently at Rokeby.

<sup>26</sup> Hugh Barbour, et. al., *Crosscurrents: Three Hundred Years of Friends in the New York Yearly Meetings* (Syracuse, N.Y.: New York Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends and Syracuse University Press, 1995), 122-129, 184-189; Charles W. Hughes and A. Day Bradley, "The Early Quaker Meetings of Vermont," *Vermont History* 29 (July 1961): 153-67.

<sup>27</sup> *Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society Presented at Middlebury, February 20, 1839, with Minutes of Proceedings at the Annual Meeting* (Montpelier, Vt.: Allen and Poland, 1839), 14; *Vermont Telegraph*, 7 March 1838. For male support of abolitionist women, see also, Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 139, 168-170.

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<sup>28</sup> Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 146; Myers, "Beginning of Antislavery Agencies," 131-135; "Major Efforts of Antislavery Agents," 214-229; *Vermont Telegraph*, 28 March 1838. For the Jamaica petitions, see note 43. For women's religious associations, see Cott, *Bonds of Womanhood*, 132-135, 142-146; Marilyn S. Blackwell, "Surrogate Ministers: Women, Revivalism, and Maternal Associations in Vermont," *Vermont History* 69 (Winter 2001): 68-70.

<sup>29</sup> "Another Female Society."

<sup>30</sup> Myers, "Major Efforts of Antislavery Agents," 226; Elderkin J. Boardman, *Immediate Abolition Vindicated. Address, Delivered June 26, 1838, Before the Randolph Female Anti-Slavery Society, at their Annual Meeting* (Montpelier, Vt.: Walton, 1838), 15; Records of the Norwich Female Abolition Society, 1843-1850 (Transcription), Norwich Historical Society, Norwich, Vermont. Nancy Osgood of Norwich provided a transcription of these records.

<sup>31</sup> "Another Female Society"; Records of the Norwich Female Abolition Society, 1843-1850. For black abolitionists and racialism, see Newman, *Transformation of American Abolitionism*, 98-129; Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992), chs. 2-4.

<sup>32</sup> Boardman, *Immediate Abolition Vindicated*, 11-13.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 15-16.

<sup>34</sup> Debra Gold Hansen, "The Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Limits of Gender Politics," in Yellin and Van Horne, eds., *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 45-65. Orson Murray mentions the 210 members of the RFASS in *Vermont Telegraph*, 22 January 1840.

<sup>35</sup> For Congregational leaders and antislavery, see Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 157-158. The Randolph Congregational Church split, c. 1839-1840, perhaps because of Boardman, resulting in a new missionary church at West Randolph. See, *Extracts from the Minutes of the General Convention of Congregational Ministers and Churches in Vermont, 1839;1842* (Windsor, Vt.: Chronicle Press, 1842).

<sup>36</sup> *Vermont Telegraph*, 1 November 1837. For another appeal including women, see *Address of the Starksborough and Lincoln Anti-Slavery Society, To the Public* (Middlebury, Vt.: Knapp & Jewett, 1835), 13, 36.

<sup>37</sup> Records of the Rupert Antislavery Society, 1834-1836, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vt.; *Middlebury Free Press*, 2 June 1834; Petition of 420 females of Starksborough and vicinity praying the Legislature to instruct our Senators and request our Representatives in Congress to use their endeavors in favor of the abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia; and Petition of 332 of the inhabitants of Starksborough and vicinity praying . . . District of Columbia, 14 October 1835, Manuscript Vermont State Papers, vol. 64, pp. 125, 127, Vermont State Archives and Records Administration, Middlesex, Vt; *Vermont Telegraph*, 24 April 1839.

<sup>38</sup> Addison County Anti-Slavery Society records, 1835-36, Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vermont; Washington County Anti-Slavery Society, Record Book, 1836-41, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vt.; *Voice of Freedom*, 2 February 1839.

<sup>39</sup> "Vermont Anti-Slavery Convention," *State Journal*, 12 and 19 May 1834; Vermont Anti-Slavery Society Records, 1834, Rokeby Museum, Ferrisburgh, Vt. The women are listed in the record book as members but not in the account in the *State Journal*, an omission that may have occurred in other published material as well.

<sup>40</sup> Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Account Book, 1838-1842, Special Collections, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont, Burlington; *Voice of Freedom*, 19 January 1839; *Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 6-7, 30-33.

<sup>41</sup> *Voice of Freedom*, 19 January, 8 February 1839; see also, *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society: With Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, Holden at Middlebury, February 21 & 22, 1838* (Brandon, Vt.: Telegraph Press, 1838); for women as subscribers, see "Anti-Slavery Subscriptions," *Voice of Freedom*, 30 November 1839.

<sup>42</sup> Gilbert Hobbs Barnes, *The Antislavery Impulse, 1830-1844* (New York and London: D. Appleton-Century and the American Historical Association, 1933), 109-111, 140-144; Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 86-92; Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 13-28, 36-46; Mary Hershberger, "Mobilizing Women, Anticipating Abolition: The Struggle against Indian Removal in the 1830s," *Journal of American History* 86 (June 1999): 24-35. For petitioning in Vermont beginning in 1828, see Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 139-141, 152-153.

<sup>43</sup> Petition of 420 females of Starksborough; Petition of the Female Citizens of Jamaica, in the County of Windham, and State of Vermont and Vicinity, 5 March 1834; Vermont—Inh. of Jamaica-agt. Slavery in the Dist. of Col., 5 March 1834, both in HR 23A-G4.3, fl. 4; Petition of Paul Champlain & 32 other men & Sally Hill & 27 other women of Middlebury, Vt. praying that no State may be admitted into the Union, whose Constitution tolerates domestic Slavery, 26 March 1838, HR25A-H1.7, fl. 7, all in Record Group 233, National Archives, Washington, D.C. [hereafter RG 233, NA]. For an accounting of signatures, see Ceclair, "Women Organized Against Slavery," Tables 2 and 4. The totals are incomplete because many petitions were destroyed, and some signatures were duplicates. See Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 173-174.

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<sup>44</sup> Petition of 420 females of Starksborough; Petition of 332 of the inhabitants of Starksborough.

<sup>45</sup> Petition of Sundry females of Sterling Vermont, praying for the abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia, 29 February 1836, HR24A-H1.3 [filed in fl.3, NA box 14 of LOC box 75], RG 233, NA.

<sup>46</sup> Petition of 426 females of Addison County, State of Vermont Praying for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia, 18 January 1836; Petition of Sundry Females in the County of Washington Vermont Praying for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia, 29 February 1836, HR24A-H1.3 [filed in fl.3, NA box 14 of LOC box 75], RG 233, NA. For the political uses of women's rhetoric, see Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 48-68.

<sup>47</sup> Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 112-145; Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 152-153; William Lee Miller, *Arguing About Slavery: The Great Battle in the United States Congress* (New York: Knopf, 1996), 52-58.

<sup>48</sup> Miller, *Arguing About Slavery*, 201-202; Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 118-119, 130-145. Ceplair counted 318,003 female signatures versus 299,434 male on petitions to the 25th Congress, see Ceplair, "Women Organized Against Slavery," Table 3.

<sup>49</sup> My tally of signatures is derived from existing Vermont petitions from 1838. See Manuscript Vermont State Papers, vol. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 105-144; quotation on 121, from *The Liberator*, 2 March 1838; Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 140-145.

<sup>51</sup> Petition of 72 Ladies of Vermont for the Abolition of Slavery and the Slave Trade in the District of Columbia, 17 December 1847, HR 30A-G5.1, fl. 1, RG 233, NA; see also Deborah Bingham-Van Broekhoven, "'Let Your Names Be Enrolled': Method and Ideology in Women's Antislavery Petitioning," in Yellin and Van Horne, eds, *Abolitionist Sisterhood*, 197-198. For Tappan's speech, see *Congressional Globe*, 26 Cong., 1 sess., 4 February 1840, 161. The older brother of Lewis and Arthur Tappan, Benjamin Tappan deplored slavery but also derided the abolitionist movement for its Christian pacifism and sentimentality. See Daniel Feller, "A Brother in Arms: Benjamin Tappan and the Antislavery Democracy," *Journal of American History* 88 (June 2001): 48-74.

<sup>52</sup> Barnes, *Antislavery Impulse*, 88-94, 146-152, 161-164; Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 155-179; "Fifth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Anti-Slavery Society of Ferrisburgh and Vicinity," *Vermont Telegraph*, 24 April 1839.

<sup>53</sup> *Voice of Freedom*, 18 May, 8 and 22 June 1839; for Knapp's support of political action, see "The Debates," *Voice of Freedom*, 24 August 1839; Barker, "Chauncey Langdon Knapp and Political Abolition in Vermont," 457-458.

<sup>54</sup> Nine of thirteen delegates, all clergy and advocates of political action, voted to affiliate with AFASS, see Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 179-181; *Vermont Telegraph*, 22 January 1840, 20 January 1841. Connecticut's antislavery society excluded women; in New Hampshire and Maine women attended meetings but without voting rights. See Ceplair, "Women Organized Against Slavery," ch. 8.

<sup>55</sup> The women voters were Elizabeth Carpenter and Eunice Eastman, probably from Randolph, Ann King, who lived with Rachel and Rowland Robinson, Phoebe N. Hurlburt, and Elizabeth D. Ingraham. See "Seventh Anniversary of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society," *Vermont Telegraph*, 20 January 1841.

<sup>56</sup> Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 179-181. For VASS resolutions on political action, see *Vermont Telegraph*, 22 January 1840, 20 January 1841. For Murray's support of women's rights, his anti-clericalism, and frustration with VASS, see *Vermont Telegraph*, 11 November 1840, 20 October 1841, 9 March 1842, 11 and 25 January 1843; and *ibid.*, 164-165; Thomas D. Hamm, *God's Government Begun: The Society for Universal Inquiry and Reform, 1842-1846* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1995), 22-29.

<sup>57</sup> Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont*, 157-166; Lyman Matthews, *History of the Town of Cornwall, Vermont* (Middlebury, Vt.: Mead & Fuller, 1862), 182-185, 200-201; quotation on 201. See also Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 139-161.

<sup>58</sup> Salomon, "Being Good," 34-44; Williamson, "Rowland T. Robinson, Rokeby, and the Underground Railroad," 20-23, 28. For controversies within New York Monthly Meeting, see Barber, et. al., *Quaker Crosscurrents*, 122-129, 184-189. For Rowland Robinson's distress regarding the movement, see Rowland T. Robinson and Charles Gilpin to Rachel Gilpin Robinson, 23 January 1842, box 55, Robinson Papers, Rokeby Museum, available at Sheldon Museum, Middlebury, Vt.

<sup>59</sup> Ferrisburgh Monthly Meeting of Women Friends, Ferrisburgh Monthly Meeting Record Book, 1831-1846, Microfilm, #544, Bailey/Howe Library, University of Vermont; Rachel Gilpin Robinson to Rowland T. Robinson, 7 September 1839, box 1, fl. 17, Robinson Papers. For abolitionist women and religion, see Anna M. Speicher, *The Religious World of Antislavery Women: Spirituality in the Lives of Five Abolitionist Lecturers* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 61-97.

<sup>60</sup> Reinhard O. Johnson, *The Liberty Party, 1840-1848: Antislavery Third-Party Politics in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009), 276-285; Robertson, *Hearts*

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*Beating for Liberty*, 37-66; Alice Taylor, "From Petitions to Partyism: Antislavery and the Domestication of Maine Politics in the 1840s and 1850s," *New England Quarterly* 77 (March 2004):73-75, 77-79; Michael D. Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes: Gender and American Antislavery Politics* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), 27-46.

<sup>61</sup> Reinhard O. Johnson, "The Liberty Party in Vermont, 1840-1848," *Vermont History* 47 (Fall 1979): 258-275; map on 266; Johnson, *Liberty Party*, 111-120; "State Liberty Convention," *Voice of Freedom*, 26 October 1843; "To All Opposed to the Annexation of Texas," *Green Mountain Freeman*, 30 October 1845.

<sup>62</sup> *Green Mountain Freeman*, 24 March 1844; *Voice of Freedom*, 13 July 1843, 26 October 1843, 1 Feb 1844; Johnson, *Liberty Party*, 237-238, 276-285.

<sup>63</sup> Green Mountain Liberty Association Records, 1845-1847, Vermont Historical Society, Barre, Vt.; *Green Mountain Freeman*, 4 March 1847; R. L. Morrow, "The Liberty Party in Vermont," *New England Quarterly* 2 (April 1929): 242; *The Emancipator*, 17 February 1847.

<sup>64</sup> Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 162.

<sup>65</sup> *Voice of Freedom*, 22 February 1844; *Green Mountain Freeman*, 20 September, 11 October 1844. Holcomb left the Liberty Party and became a Whig in 1846 after a dispute over finances. For antislavery poems and stories of interest to women readers, see, *Green Mountain Freeman*, 23 August, 19 November 1844.

<sup>66</sup> *The Emancipator*, 17 February 1847. A former slave from Kentucky with white ancestry, Henry Bibb lectured widely in the North. Women's petitions include: "Petition of 72 Ladies of Vermont," 17 December 1847, HR 30A-G5.1 fl. 1, RG 233, NA; and twelve "Women of America" petitions, 2 February 1849, Sen 30A-J3, fl. 4, RG 46, NA; for the latter, see Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 158-160.

<sup>67</sup> *Green Mountain Freeman*, 10 May 1844.

<sup>68</sup> Records of the Norwich Female Abolition Society, 1843-1850, 16 May 1844; Hiram Wilson to "Dear Sister," 13 June 1844, in *ibid.*, 11 July 1844. St. Clair and Briggs edited *The People's Advocate and Norwich Vermont Freeman*.

<sup>69</sup> Salerno, *Sister Societies*, 128-135; Jeffrey, *Great Silent Army*, 108-125; quotation on 186; see also William Still, *The Underground Railroad* (Philadelphia: Porter & Coates, 1872), 585-589. For a list of benevolent women and groups who sent clothing to Hiram Wilson's mission in Canada, see "Canada Mission," *Green Mountain Freeman*, 27 November 1845.

<sup>70</sup> For Nichols, see, Marilyn S. Blackwell and Kristen T. Oertel, *Frontier Feminist: Clarina Howard Nichols and the Politics of Motherhood* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2010), 71-75; Pierson, *Free Hearts and Free Homes*, 57-58, 60-61.

<sup>71</sup> Thompson, *History of the Town of Montpelier*, 249-262; Abby Maria Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer* (Montpelier, Vt., 1882), 4: 457-462.