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Abolitionists worked hard in Vermont to develop sentiment against Negro slavery . . .

## The Beginning of Antislavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832-1836

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VERMONTERS have long been proud of the antagonism against slavery voiced by so many of their forebearers in the years before the Civil War. Of the early states Vermont seems to have come nearest to applying the doctrine of natural rights to all men irrespective of color. It had the first antislavery provision in a state constitution. Some of its citizens established the nation's first state society advocating immediate emancipation. Sufficiently antislavery so that over 2,300 people in 1828 signed a petition to Congress opposing slavery, it was also where William Lloyd Garrison began his newspaper career. What is more, there is strong support for the generality of a statement by Henry B. Stanton, a Corresponding Secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, that he had been mobbed for his antislavery activities in every state from Indiana to Maine, except Vermont, and that he had never heard of anyone encountering an antislavery mob within its borders. A good case can be made for the thesis that Vermont became the first state to accept readily abolitionist doctrines.<sup>1</sup>

Vermont's attitude, particularly before its increasing militancy in the 1830's, may be explained by its geographical distance from areas of the United States which contained large proportions of slaves. Vermonters rarely had commercial connections or blood ties with Southerners. However, it is unreasonable to conclude that this attitude grew un-nurtured out of the greater goodness or more sophisticated nature of Vermont people. Geography and history had left Vermonters by 1830

1. Henry B. Stanton, *Random Reflections* (2d ed., New York, 1887), 55; David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), 5-6, 134-135, 139-140, 147-149; Wilbur H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio, 1937), 6-12.

with a more racially tolerant value system, but hard work and organization were needed to place the state in a leadership position in the anti-slavery crusade. One has only to read the columns of the *State Journal* from 1832 to 1834 to see how far an open-minded editor had to move before he could accept the fundamental tenets of antislavery doctrine; most other editors in the state had not reached that point even by 1840. The *Vermont Chronicle*, the influential religious newspaper of Windsor, was strongly colonizationist and was held responsible by Oliver Johnson for the lethargy towards efforts to eradicate slavery by Congregationalists in the state. The Rev. John Kendrick Converse, pastor of the Burlington Congregational Church beginning in 1832, and the Rev. John Henry Hopkins, who was the Protestant Episcopal bishop of Vermont, were among the prominent clergymen who opposed anti-slavery activity within their denominations. Furthermore, as this article chronicles, there is an authentic record of resistance to abolition speakers in Vermont, particularly before 1836.<sup>2</sup>

The militant antislavery movement regarded slaveholding as sinful and saw organization and agitation as necessary to gain adherents and promise hope for destroying the institution of slavery. The leaders of the American Anti-Slavery Society set out to marshal and concert the efforts of scattered individuals and groups. They were familiar with successful procedures of other humanitarian and reform societies. While they recognized the necessity for a growing abolition press, the printing and distribution of antislavery pamphlets, the speeches and private conversations of individual citizens, they had learned from experience with other humanitarian and reform groups that only an organized program of lecturing agents could carry the antislavery message convincingly to enough people. These agents were "to arouse the public mind by addresses and lectures and to enlighten and convert individuals by private interviews—especially to operate upon ministers of the Gospel." They also gathered funds to support other abolitionist activity.<sup>3</sup>

Studies of the development of militant antislavery sentiment in other states show that a relationship existed between the number and effectiveness of lecturing agents in a state and the establishment of active

2. *State Journal*, *passim* 1831–1834, particularly January 28, 1833; Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (Boston, 1880), 208; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 135; Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 16–20.

3. Dwight L. Dumond, *Anti-Slavery, the Crusade for Freedom in America* (Ann Arbor, 1961), 46–47; Wright to Phelps, December 31, 1833, Amos Phelps Papers (Boston Public Library); Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond (eds.), *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822–1844* (2 vols.; New York, 1934), I, 121.

antislavery societies, financial support of antislavery activities, pronouncements by church and political groups against slavery, or the annexation of slaveholding Texas, or the slave trade in the District of Columbia, or pronouncements for free speech and the right of assembly. For example, of the 300 new antislavery societies organized in the year following the May, 1835, annual meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, over half were in Ohio and New York; the society had assigned most of its best agents to those states. In contrast, only 26 were created in populous Pennsylvania, four in Connecticut, and three in New Jersey, and none of those had a state society; Pennsylvania had received little agency attention and Connecticut and New Jersey almost none at all. By the end of the following year, after a strong effort had been made in the state, Pennsylvania accounted for almost 10% of the total auxiliary societies in the nation, including a state organization. The Executive Committee of the national society decided in the summer of 1836 to concentrate its efforts and funds upon the agency system. The result was a doubling in the number of antislavery societies, an increase in membership in the existing societies, and increasingly stronger stands against slavery and its expansion.<sup>4</sup>

Vermont was fertile ground for organized antislavery activity. It had been settled for the most part by Connecticut people, but, in contrast to Connecticut, it was more radical in its politics and unorthodox in its religion. As characterized by David M. Ludlum, in the two southernmost counties of the state, which were predominately conservative and exercised a restraining hand, Congregationalism was in control, benevolent institutions and temperance were sustained, and colonization was favored over abolition. This study demonstrates that far less antislavery agency activity was undertaken in those two counties. Until 1850 the western area, in which the radicals were supreme, was at odds with the south. Dominated by Methodists and Separatists, it was swept by powerful religious revivals. The third section, the northern frontier and hill communities, was dominated initially by Republicanism, but later supported third parties and social reformers.<sup>5</sup>

Vermont maintained its frontier atmosphere at least through the 1830's. Yet a transformation was occurring. Newer denominations—the

4. John L. Myers, "The Beginning of Anti-Slavery Agencies in New York State, 1833-1836," *New York History*, XLIII (April, 1962), 149-181; *Idem*, "Antislavery Activities of Five Lane Seminary Boys in 1835-1836," *Historical and Philosophical Society of Ohio Bulletin*, XXI (April, 1963), 95-111; *Idem*, "The Early Antislavery Agency System in Pennsylvania, 1833-1837," *Pennsylvania History*, XXI (January, 1964), 62-86; *Idem*, "The Major Effort of National Anti-Slavery Agents in New York State," *New York History*, XLVI (April, 1965), 162-186.

5. Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 5-6, 11-18.

Unitarians, the Methodists, the Universalists, and the Campbellites—gained adherents. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, the benevolent and reform movement elicited a great following. The usual interaction between reforms prepared the way for abolition. This was, however, a two-edged sword. While this might have produced more open minds among Vermonters to tolerate new opinions and defend free speech, it also left them preoccupied with denominational and reform activities, so that the Universalists or Campbellites might tend to ignore the slavery issue or resent its demands upon their time and energy more than welcome it with open arms. In any case, the Congregationalists with 175 churches, the Methodists with 140, and the Baptists with 102 were the large denominations in the 1830's and there the battle for church support would be won or lost. The state was also influenced by Anti-Masonry, which was particularly strong in the Baptist church. Among the leaders in Anti-Masonry were antislavery agents Orson Murray and Nathaniel Colver; the leading editorial abolitionist of the state, Chauncey Knapp; and the state's antislavery spokesman in Congress, William Slade. Antislavery activities, which seldom received a hearing in the party or religious press, were well reported by the Anti-Masonic papers.<sup>6</sup>

The first antislavery agent in Vermont was Oliver Johnson, who acted under the auspices of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. Following the British model of demanding immediate abolition, the New England society had been organized in Boston in the winter of 1831–1832 by William Lloyd Garrison and a few of his supporters. The society expected to accomplish its objectives by three methods of operation: (1) petitions to Congress, (2) publication and circulation of antislavery tracts and pamphlets, and (3) employment of antislavery agents. For several months after it was founded its efforts were limited to occasional lectures by members in the vicinity of Boston. Johnson was not, strictly speaking, an agency appointee, but was allowed to deliver addresses against slavery, form antislavery auxiliary societies, and collect money for the organization during his trip home.<sup>7</sup>

A native of Peacham, educated at its schols and the academy, Oliver Johnson left his father's farm in 1825 to work in the office of the *Vermont Watchman*. In 1831 he became editor of the *Boston Christian*

6. *Ibid.*, 18–69, 86–133; Neil A. McNall, "Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Vermont, 1777–1861," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Vermont), 51.

7. New England Anti-Slavery Society, Records, 1832 (Boston Public Library), April 30 meeting; Wendell P. Garrison and Francis J. Garrison, *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805–1879, the Story of His Life Told By His Children* (4 vols.; New York, 1885–1889), II, 277–283.

*Soldier*. Hearing Garrison speak, he was converted to antislavery doctrines and became one of the organizers of the New England society. At various times during the 1830's he served as lecturing agent of the Massachusetts or American Anti-Slavery societies, in the meantime working with or replacing Garrison temporarily as an editor of *The Liberator*. He was always a strong supporter of the publisher; after the Civil War he wrote a history of the antislavery movement in which Garrison emerged as primarily responsible for abolition.<sup>8</sup>

Johnson set out northward on his 1832 tour, speaking in Montpelier on May 28, Craftsbury on June 3, Peacham on June 10, and Danville on June 17. Then he concluded his efforts with two addresses in Franklin and Concord, New Hampshire on June 21 and 24, respectively. He explained the principles of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, discussed the conditions of slavery, examined the doctrine of immediatism, and attacked the American Colonization Society, whose object of sending free Negroes to Liberia was strongly opposed by abolitionists. He boasted of converting ex-Governor Crafts of Vermont and a former secretary of the state colonization society. More important may have been his winning of Chauncey Knapp for the antislavery movement. He drew important Anti-Masonic attention to his efforts by participating in the Washington County convention in Montpelier.<sup>9</sup>

Abolitionism in the state was fortunate to have Chauncey Knapp among its supporters. He gave as much impetus to the cause as the earliest agents did. Born in Berlin February 26, 1809, Knapp began a seven-year apprenticeship at the age of 14. In November of 1831 he established the *State Journal* as an organ of the Anti-Masonic party in the state, continuing as its editor until December of 1836. Elected in that year by the Whigs as Secretary of State, he served until he refused to support the Harrison-Tyler ticket in 1840 and was superseded by another abolitionist and former antislavery agent, Alvah Sabin. Knapp ably backed the lecturers, served as a local agent himself, and became the guiding hand behind the state organization. He edited the official newspaper of the state antislavery society, the *Voice of Freedom*, from January of 1839 to 1843. He moved to Brandon and then to Massachusetts, serving his adopted state as a State Senator in 1851 and subsequently as a United States Representative to Congress.<sup>10</sup>

8. Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison, passim*; Ernest L. Bogart, *Peacham, the Story of a Vermont Hill Town* (Montpelier, 1948), 219.

9. New England Anti-Slavery Society, Records, 1832, June 25 meeting; Johnson to Garrison, June 4, 1832, William Lloyd Garrison Papers (Boston Public Library); *State Journal*, June 4, 1832; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 143.

10. *Ibid.*, 144-147; Abbie M. Hemenway (ed.), *Vermont Historical Gazetteer: a Magazine Embracing a History of Each Town* (5 vols.; Burlington, 1867-1891), IV, 63, 292, 311.

In June of 1832 the New England Anti-Slavery Society began its formal agency activities with the appointment of its President, Arnold Buffum. Garrison was also designated for two missions, one to Great Britain. Neither of these men turned to Vermont. While Garrison was overseas, the society continued its series of addresses in Boston and commissioned Johnson and Orson Murray to join Buffum in lecturing. Johnson was primarily occupied with editorial duties, but Murray devoted almost all of his time to Vermont.

Orson Murray was designated as agent for Vermont, to serve for three months at a compensation of \$125. A native of Orwell, he had joined the Calvinist Baptist church at the age of 23. He served as secretary or agent of a number of humanitarian and reform societies, drifted into Anti-Masonry, and then into antislavery. At this point in his career Murray was a strong supporter of Garrison. He was a founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Purchasing in 1835 the *Vermont Telegraph*, the influential Baptist weekly published at Brandon, he transformed it into a radical advocate of women's rights, temperance, and Anti-Masonry, as well as antislavery. He was licensed to preach in 1837, but he drifted away from his congregation's views and by 1841 he and some of his followers were expelled by his Association. By another year he had split with Garrison as well.<sup>11</sup>

Murray postponed acceptance of the agency until mid-summer because of family needs and a desire to study his subject before lecturing. He requested that antislavery publications be sent to him and that his instructions on the formation of auxiliaries be made more complete. The society went ahead and announced his appointment in May, 1833, and he undertook local assignments. Considerable effort must have been devoted to writing, for Vermont newspapers during the year are full of Murray's letters, primarily defending abolition doctrines or attacking colonizationists. One has only to read the editorial responses to conclude that the editors were not won to the support of Garrisonian abolitionism. The *Middlebury Free Press* asked Murray to spend less effort enumerating the evils of slavery and more indicating how slavery could be abolished. The *State Journal* commended him for beginning his agency in a better spirit than Garrison and Johnson were displaying in *The Liberator*, yet the *Vermont Chronicle* claimed his views bore a close style to Garrison's. After printing twelve of his articles in the late summer and fall, it reacted against his "intemperate language" and re-

11. New England Anti-Slavery Society, Second Record Book (Boston Public Library), 256, 259; Henry Crocker, *History of the Baptists in Vermont* (Bellows Falls, 1913), 124-125; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 57-61, 144.

fused to print any more. His definition of immediate abolition was moderate, compared to more radical views which would follow:

He did not mean that slaves should be turned loose and driven out to live by plunk—but that they would no longer be bought and sold—that they should have redress at law when abroad—should have the marriage institution legalized among them—should be rewarded as free laborers—and that provision should be made for their moral, intellectual, and religious instruction, &c.

The unconverted *Chronicle* testified to what Murray did achieve through writing and lecturing: he forced the people of Vermont to consider the question of immediate emancipation of slavery. Throughout 1833 the newspaper was full of arguments and denunciations of antislavery publications such as the *Genius of Temperance*, *The Liberator*, the *Lowell Observer*, and *The Emancipator*.<sup>12</sup>

Murray also lectured during the year, although Vermont and anti-slavery newspapers seldom reported these activities. On October 31 his address in Middlebury was interrupted by college students, including the “scraping of feet, frequent showering of corn over the room, and other disturbances designed to break up the meeting”; he succeeded in finishing his speech. In Castleton and Rutland colonizationists opposed him. Arriving in Bennington on Friday, December 20, he found his opposition organized. The local *Vermont Gazette* on November 5 had called the attention of its readers to his lecturing activities. The pastor of the Congregational church gave notice of his scheduled appearance. When he reached the church on Monday, December 23, he found a meeting already in progress. Several addresses were given while Murray listened and took notes. The *Gazette* reported that the speeches “portrayed in glowing clouds, the effects and consequences which must unavoidably accrue in case Garrison and his fanatical co-agitators could carry their mad project into effect.” Colonization was spoken of as offering the best hope for the Negro. Agreeing that his address would produce bloodshed and disunion, the people voted he be denied the right to speak. He did get a hearing Christmas day at Factory Village. In January he helped organize the Rupert Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>13</sup>

12. New England Anti-Slavery Society, Second Record Book, 259; Murray to Garrison March 15, 1833, Garrison Papers; *Liberator*, May 4, 1833; *Middlebury Free Press*, September, 1833; October 7, 1833; *Vermont Chronicle*, May 10, 1833; *passim* May 17, to October 4, 1833; *State Journal*, June 24, 1833; October 7, 1833; October 21, 1833; *First Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at Middlebury, February 18, 1835* (Middlebury, 1835), 9.

13. Rupert Anti-Slavery Society, Rupert Vermont, Records, 1834-1836 (Vermont Historical Society); *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston, 1834), 9; *Liberator*, January 11, 1834; *Emancipator*, February 25, 1834; *Vermont Gazette*, November 5, 1833; December 24, 1833; December 31, 1833; *Vermont Telegraph*, November 8, 1837.

By June of 1834 approximately twenty antislavery societies had been formed in various towns. These would include Jamaica, Peacham, Cabot, Craftsbury, Waitsfield, Walden, Cornwall, Ferrisburg, Ryegate and Barnet, Danville, Starksboro-Lincoln, and Rutland. The concentration of six of these in one area is impressive. Murray urged the town societies to become auxiliary to the newly-established Vermont Anti-Slavery Society. In April of 1834 the call for the state organization was placed in newspapers. Among those issuing the notice, in addition to Murray, were James Milligan of Ryegate and Samuel M. Wilson of Craftsbury, two men who would later become paid agents, and E. D. Barber of Middlebury, subsequently a local agent. The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society was founded at Middlebury on May 1, 1834; eighty-six delegates affixed their names to the constitution, including Murray, Knapp, Milligan, Barber, and Wilson. The newly-formed group expressed its gratitude to Murray for his labors.<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, in December of 1833, the American Anti-Slavery Society was organized in New York City. One of the first actions of its Executive Committee was to establish the Standing Committee on Agencies. The Agency Committee immediately set to work. It drew up formal instructions for agents, designated the society's Secretary for Domestic Correspondence to be in charge of communications with agents, and tried unsuccessfully to commission four men, two of whom were to serve in New England. The Committee would pay the expenses for supplying the pulpit while ministerial agents were absent and reimburse all travel costs. Compensation was set at \$8 per week. When none of the four men accepted the assignment, the Committee turned to the procurement of local agents, who would work in their neighborhood whenever they could. They were to submit a monthly report to include a list of expenses and a summary of the progress of the cause. None of them were resident in Vermont.<sup>15</sup>

Samuel Sewell, on behalf of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, urged the national organization to appoint Murray as its full-time representative in Vermont. The Agency Committee, perhaps objecting to Murray's reputation or to his approach to his subject, or perhaps simply recognizing its lack of financial resources to support another full-time employee, responded that the appointment was "not expedient . . . at

14. *Vermont Chronicle*, February 21, 1834; March 7, 1834; April 11, 1834; April 18, 1834; May 2, 1834; May 16, 1834; *Middlebury Free Press*, March 10, 1834; *passim* April-June 1834; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 146; *Second Annual Report of the New England Anti-Slavery Society*, 11-12; *State Journal*, February 17, 1834; April 14, 1834; Rupert Anti-Slavery Society, Records, January 1834, meeting; Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 24.

15. American Anti-Slavery Society Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of December 16, 1833, January 14, February 18, and March 11, 1834 (Boston Public Library); Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimke Letters*, I, 121, 128-130.

present." The Vermont Anti-Slavery Society then took advantage of Murray's availability. The *First Annual Report* of the society in February, 1835, stated that it had employed an agent for five months. However, newspaper and manuscript sources seem to indicate that Murray was present in an agency capacity at many activities during a longer nine-month period. Five months must have been the total days-service for which he was paid. In any case, he was reported to have circulated anti-slavery publications, collected \$400 for support of the cause, delivered 80 to 90 lectures, and established auxiliary societies in ten or twelve more towns, bringing the total in the state to 30. Three local agents, who "lectured to some extent gratuitously" also served the state society.<sup>16</sup>

There is sparse record of Murray's activities between May of 1834 and the annual meeting of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society the next February. He addressed the Rupert Anti-Slavery Society at the town's Congregational meeting house on July 4 and the Cabot Anti-Slavery Society on August 28. More widely reported was the state-wide reaction to his treatment in Burlington on September 22. He arrived in that community on Saturday, called on a local clergyman who was requested to give public notice of Murray's speech. Disapproving of antislavery discussion, the clergyman said nothing. In spite of that, fellow Baptists procured use of the Court House and Murray spoke on Monday afternoon about the sin of slaveholding. A second address was scheduled for that evening. Accompanied by Rowland T. Robinson, the leader of the Ferrisburg abolitionists, Murray ignored rumors of mobbing and entered the Court House. A local lawyer demanded to know what his intent was and whose permission he had to speak. Murray responded that the state constitution gave him that right. The lawyer thrust the agent aside and began addressing the audience. He secured a vote from the gathering objecting to the lecture. Those who protested were intimidated by what had now become a mob, so the agent left peaceably. Murray lamented that while actions against Negroes in Philadelphia and New York could be accounted for because those cities were ports with numerous Southern visitors, he could find no excuse for Burlington's conduct. The *Franklin Journal* asserted that the "resort to force in matters of argument and reason, can never be ultimately successful" and the *Vermont Chronicle* regretted the "uncivil treatment" and defended his freedom to speak.<sup>17</sup>

16. Agency Committee Minutes, February 18, 1834 meeting; *First Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, iv, 9.

17. *State Journal*, September 6, 1834; September 29, 1834; October 6, 1834; *Vermont Chronicle*, October 3, 1834; Rupert Anti-Slavery Society, Records, July 4, 1834 meeting.

The best record of his activities is of a four-week tour he undertook in the winter of 1834-1835. He helped form three societies, one in Hancock of 20 members, a second in Granville of about 30 people, and a third in Rochester of about 60. He anticipated auxiliaries would soon be organized in East Bethel, Randolph, and Springfield. In other localities he reported that his meetings were "respectfully, and in some instances quite fully attended."

Principal opposition came in three towns. After a favorable reception in West and East Randolph, he was repulsed at Randolph Center. Two lawyers excited the audience with claims that Murray should not be heard. When the time approached for his lecture, Murray and a friend went to the meetinghouse, but found it closed and they were unable to obtain a key. One of the town's selectmen subsequently ordered the house opened and rang the bell, but Murray and his friend did not return. In Woodstock all the meetinghouses were closed to him. Threats of violence were made against him in the shops and on the streets. Despite an argument, a friend secured the Court House for his use; it was half-filled. However, Murray uttered only a few sentences when noise prevented him from continuing. Snowballs and missiles were thrown, one taking out a pane of glass near the speaker's head. Several in the audience spoke in support of the right of free speech, but the agent was forced to relent.

South Woodstock offered him three choices of places to lecture. The mob from Woodstock Center followed him and held a parade in the street. Murray's friends decided to transfer the talk from a public building to his landlord's home. The ruffians followed, but they were ousted. Lay boards kept the Baptist and Congregational meetinghouses closed to him in Windsor; both clergymen were out of the community. Only a Baptist substitute pastor would read from the pulpit on Sunday the announcement of his scheduled lecture. He spoke in Hartland on Sunday evening, then spent much of Monday conversing privately in Windsor. About 75 to 100 people gathered in the Court House for the evening meeting. "Stamping, whooping, and yelling exceeded anything or everything I had ever heard or could have imagined." When the lights were extinguished and missiles were flying, he retired. The editors of the *Vermont Chronicle*, published in the town, were silent about the events. One of the editors subsequently asserted that Murray did not "Behave well," and was anything but conciliatory. The *Burlington Free Press* rejoiced that Windsor and Woodstock had been so firm against Murray's stories and appeals, calling the agent a man of "moderate talents, a sickly sentimentalist, profoundly ignorant of the subject he discusses." The *Middlebury Free Press* responded that even if the

Burlington paper's evaluation of Murray's talents were correct, he still had a right to speak, and chided the editor for condoning riotous conduct.<sup>18</sup>

At its first annual meeting, February 18, 1835, the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society presented an address in which Oliver Johnson defended the principles and objects of the society. Murray presented the annual report on behalf of the Executive Committee. Among others who participated in the activities were Knapp, Milligan, Wilson, and Barber. Milligan and Alvah Sabin, also an agent in 1836-1837, were vice-presidents of the society. On the following evening Johnson spoke in the Brick School House in the north district of Cornwall.<sup>19</sup>

Lecturing during the succeeding year in the state was continued on a limited basis. In response to a June directive to its Corresponding Secretary, Elizur Wright, Jr., by the Agency Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society to hire a "suitable clerical agent for Vermont," a letter was read at its July meeting from Beriah Green, an ex-Vermont and then President of Oneida Institute in New York, in reference to the Revs. Merrill and Goodhue. Timothy Merrill was the Congregational pastor at Middlebury and Josiah Goodhue was then at Shoreham and had been appointed a delegate of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society to the annual meeting of the national group in 1835. Wright was instructed to ascertain whether Merrill would accept an agency; he apparently declined. Goodhue did speak to the convention which formed the Addison County Anti-Slavery Society in Middlebury, July 3, 1835. Beginning around the first of September, 1835, the New England society may have sent Nathaniel Southard, an associate of Garrison, on a six weeks tour of the state, apparently to distribute publications. The Vermont *Annual Report* claimed that the state society employed an agent for five months, "who circulated antislavery publications, lectured to some extent, formed several town Societies, and collected funds, in subscriptions, amounting to upwards of four hundred dollars," but who the man was, unless it be Murray, and what else he did are not known.<sup>20</sup>

Murray's final lecturing effort, before assuming direction of the *Vermont Telegraph* in October, 1835, was in the vicinity of his home in

18. *Middlebury Free Press*, February 17, 1835; March 3, 1835; *Emancipator*, March 10, 1835; *Liberator*, February 14, 1835, quoting from *Woodstock Courier*; Ludlum, *Social Ferment*, 147-148.

19. *First Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, ii-iv; *Middlebury Free Press*, February 17, 1835; February 24, 1835; *Herald of Freedom*, March 21, 1835.

20. *Middlebury Free Press*, May 5, 1835; June 23, 1835; July 7, 1835; *Vermont Chronicle*, July 11, 1834; Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 16 and July 10, 1835; New England Anti-Slavery Society, Letter Book (Boston Public Library), Henry Benson to R. G. Williams, August 25, 1835.

the spring. He lectured in four different school districts in Orwell and took about 60 names for an antislavery auxiliary constitution. In nearby Shoreham he spoke in six school districts and claimed 234 names were about to be affixed to a constitution. In the central part of Bridport the colonizationist minister refused to give notice of his meetings, so Murray postponed his efforts until he could devise some way to get the news circulated. He lectured in the western part of the same town and claimed that the people there were ready for a society. Newbury, the only town in the state which reported its activities to the *Herald of Freedom*, the New Hampshire abolition publication, was organized in the spring of 1835 with two antislavery societies totalling approximately 100 members. The area had heard three lectures, one by Milligan, one by David Root, a New Hampshire clergyman who served occasional appointments as an agent of the national society, and one by George Storrs, leader of the New Hampshire abolitionists. In November, 1835, Milligan, the Presbyterian clergyman of Ryegate, began a public discussion with an attorney from Groton. A second meeting was planned for Newbury on October 22. A mob gathered to lock the house and prevent the meeting. Storrs responded to a call to challenge the opposition and preached on slavery in mid-November. Although quite a few men and boys gathered around the meetinghouse and talked, hooted, rang the bell, broke the door panes, and threw brickbats at the house, Storrs simply raised his voice and completed the address.<sup>21</sup>

One of the more celebrated lecturing tours through the state was undertaken in October, 1835, by Samuel J. May in his capacity of General Agent of the Massachusetts (formerly New England) Anti-Slavery Society. A Unitarian clergyman and founder of the New England society, May was one of Garrison's closest collaborators. A frequent speaker at important antislavery gatherings, his status as an agent at any one time is difficult to determine. On April 1, 1835, he began a year's tenure as General Agent of the Boston-based society, which included supervision of the lecturing activities of others, secretarial duties, and extensive travelling himself. The late summer and autumn of 1835 was a difficult time for the fledgling antislavery crusade. It is no wonder that May reported he had been insulted everywhere he went. The abolitionists by then had been heard for four years, but their viewpoints had generally been rejected throughout the North. One can see that the greatest moment of opposition had arrived and, if the mobs could be surmounted, the battle thereafter would be against a losing

21. *Herald Of Freedom*, November 14, 1835; November 28, 1835; *Middlebury Free Press*, May 5, 1835.

foe. At the time, however, the antislavery leaders did not know this and feared that the opposition to them would become progressively greater. The English lecturer, George Thompson, was essentially driven from the country and even two of the mildest speakers, poet John Greenleaf Whittier and May, were subjected to personal violence. August was marked by an assault on Thompson in Lynn, Massachusetts, a city in which he had peaceably spoken before, and the mobbings of Orange Scott in Worcester, Theodore Weld in Ohio, and May in Haverhill, Massachusetts. During September Thompson was attacked at Concord, New Hampshire and Abington, Massachusetts, and efforts were made to prevent Amos Phelps from speaking in three different communities in New York. In October the demonstrations reached their climax. During the same week that Garrison was mobbed in Boston and the convention to organize the New York Anti-Slavery Society was driven out of Utica, Stanton encountered mob opposition in Newport, Rhode Island and May in Montpelier.<sup>22</sup>

A special session of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society was called for October 22 and 23 to welcome May and hear his address. On the first night the convention met in Representatives Hall; the legislature adjourned so that some of its members could participate in the proceedings. The hostile *Vermont Patriot* characterized the size of the audience as "respectable, . . . most of whom probably attended out of curiosity." May spoke for about an hour and a half and the meeting adopted resolutions; eggs and some missiles were thrown through the window, but one member of the audience raised the window and seated himself on the sill, protecting the speaker until the session was completed. Knapp called on the sheriff to arrest the agitators, but no action was taken. The second session was scheduled the next day in the community's largest available hall, the Congregational meeting house. The *Vermont Patriot* said a "considerable" number of people were in attendance, the *State Journal* set the figure at an impressive 400. Beforehand placards were posted advising people not to attend, for violence might be used to prevent the speech. A letter, signed by the postmaster, president of the bank, an editor of the *Vermont Patriot*, and other prominent citizens of the town, requested May to leave before his next address. When the lecture began that evening, another man arose, made some remarks, and was replied to by May and Knapp. The audience voted overwhelmingly that May should be permitted to continue. However, the commotion increased and the speaker could not be heard. The lights were blown

22. New England Anti-Slavery Society, Second Record Book, 299, 302; *Emancipator*, March 17, 1835; Thomas J. Mumford (ed.), *Memoir of Samuel Joseph May* (Boston, 1837), 160.

out; Knapp was threatened with tar and feathers. While the meeting dissolved without injury to anyone, some newspapers claimed only the prestige of Colonel J. P. Miller, hero of the War of 1812 and the Greek Revolution, kept the opponents from attacking May. Because of other commitments, the agent left town the next day.<sup>23</sup>

May's efforts, even in Montpelier, were not in vain, for a week later, under the leadership of Knapp and Miller, the community's antislavery society was organized. The agent had by then proceeded to Burlington. Although a man in the gallery of the meetinghouse accosted him before the lecture, he encountered no other disturbance. At Middlebury the next day the sheriff seized an adversary who threw buckshot at May and boys who threw stones at the house were quieted by towns-people. A committee of the Congregational meetinghouse denied his use of their structure, but the Masonic Hall was obtained and crowded with people who listened for two hours as the speaker pictured the sinfulness of slavery and enunciated antislavery principles. The *Vermont Chronicle* concluded that "well-timed and well-directed energy" would prevent mob violence. Continuing southward, May lectured without disturbance at Brandon to a large audience in the Baptist meetinghouse. His Rutland lecture was cut short by disturbances from outside the church. He spoke twice in Bennington, first on Saturday to a small audience and the next day to a group which numbered around 400. He may have remained in the state longer, for his first reported public address upon his return to Boston was on November 30.<sup>24</sup>

Almost immediately following May's visit, Alvah Sabin presented resolutions by which the Vermont Legislature would note with disapproval the "riotous proceedings" against May, but the assembly agreed that the events in Montpelier had been a village, not a legislative matter, and the resolutions were laid on the table. The legislature also rejected Sabin's resolutions favoring abolition of slavery in the District

23. *Ibid.*; Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, IV, 457-462; *Liberator*, October 31, 1835, quoting from *State Journal*; *North Star*, November 2, 1835; *Vermont Patriot*, November 2, 1835; *Vermont Chronicle*, October 29, 1835; *Green Mountain Freeman*, July 11, 1877; Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, 207; *Vermont Watchman*, October 27, 1835; Samuel J. May, *Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict* (Boston, 1869), 153-154. Miller was born in Randolph, Vermont in 1797 and attended Dartmouth and the University of Vermont. In 1833 he introduced antislavery resolutions in the Vermont legislature. One biographer called him the leading antislavery advocate in the state. He died of a spine injury in 1847 (Hemenway, *Vermont Historical Gazetteer*, IV, 457-462).

24. Garrison to Helen E. Garrison, November 7, 1835, Garrison Papers; Mumford, *Memoir of May*, 160; May, *Some Recollections*, 153; *Vermont Chronicle*, October 29, 1835; *Vermont Telegraph*, November 5, 1835; *State Journal*, January 5, 1835; *Liberator*, December 19, 1835; October 31, 1835, quoting from *State Journal*; *Middlebury Free Press*, October 27, 1835; November 5, 1835; *Second Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, with an Account of the Annual Meeting, Holden in Middlebury, February 16 & 17, 1836* (Middlebury, 1836), 19.

of Columbia. After May's departure, agency activity practically ceased until the following summer. The second annual meeting of the state society convened in Middlebury, February 16, 1836, with Murray, Knapp, Beriah Green, and Johnson among the speakers. Efforts within the state concentrated upon the organization of county societies: Johnson, Barber and Robinson helped organize the Addison County society at Vergennes on January 20, 1836; the Rev. Guy Beckley, soon to be appointed a national agent, helped create the Windham County society on March 24 in Newfane; then he joined with Knapp and with delegates from 14 towns at the establishment of the Washington County auxiliary on May 18 in Montpelier.<sup>25</sup>

Theodore Weld, who was completing six months of service by climaxing the early drive of the American Anti-Slavery Society to convince New Yorkers of the worthiness of abolition principles, made one quick excursion into Vermont. Weld, from a distinguished family of ministers, was the central figure of the agency system, the most effective lecturer, the organizer and later superintendent of the program, and the man who had laid the foundations for the organization of the state society in Ohio prior to his arrival in New York. Mobs had opposed him so strongly in Troy that Weld had been forced to leave town. But he moved from defeat to triumph in a series of New York communities northeast of Albany: Greenwich, Hartford, Adamsville, Fort Ann, and West and Middle Granville. In Benson, Vermont on June 30 and July 1, 1836, he spoke so convincingly that 68 agreed to join a new antislavery society.<sup>26</sup>

Considering its size Vermont had, by the summer of 1836, received important attention from organized state, regional, and national antislavery societies. Vermonters were not as intuitively antislavery as sometimes has been inferred. Rather, the development of sentiment in the state was not left to chance. Efforts by May and Johnson, while short-lived, made converts for the cause. Murray was actively at work over three years. Short excursions by others produced results in isolated communities. These were the precursors of the more organized effort in 1836-1837. But now Vermonters who were convinced of the sinfulness

25. *Vermont Patriot*, November 2, 1835; *Green Mountain Freeman*, July 11, 1877; *Liberator*, December 12, 1835; *Emancipator*, June 16, 1836; *Middlebury Free Press*, February 9, 1836; February 23, 1836; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 25, 1836; *State Journal*, February 20, 1836; April 12, 1836; Washington County Anti-Slavery Society Records (Vermont Historical Society).

26. *Vermont Telegraph*, June 30, 1836; *Emancipator*, August 4, 1836; *Friend of Man*, July 21, 1836, quoting from *Union Village Banner*; Myers, *New York History*, XLIII (April, 1962), 176.

of slavery and the need to do something to implement their convictions, were able to undertake work more successfully on their own. Lessons learned from the experiences of these early paid lecturers could be applied by those who followed. The right of discussion of controversial topics had been forced upon the consciousness of most thinking people. All of these were necessary to move the state firmly toward the acceptance of abolition as a principle and a practicality.

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The Conference of New England Historical Societies will hold its 1968 meeting at the Sheraton Motor Inn at Burlington on October 4-6, 1968. This is the first time that this group has scheduled its annual meeting in Vermont, and we hope that many Vermonters will attend. The program will include several sessions that will be helpful to town and local historians in all New England states. Watch the newsletter of the Vermont Historical Society for details.