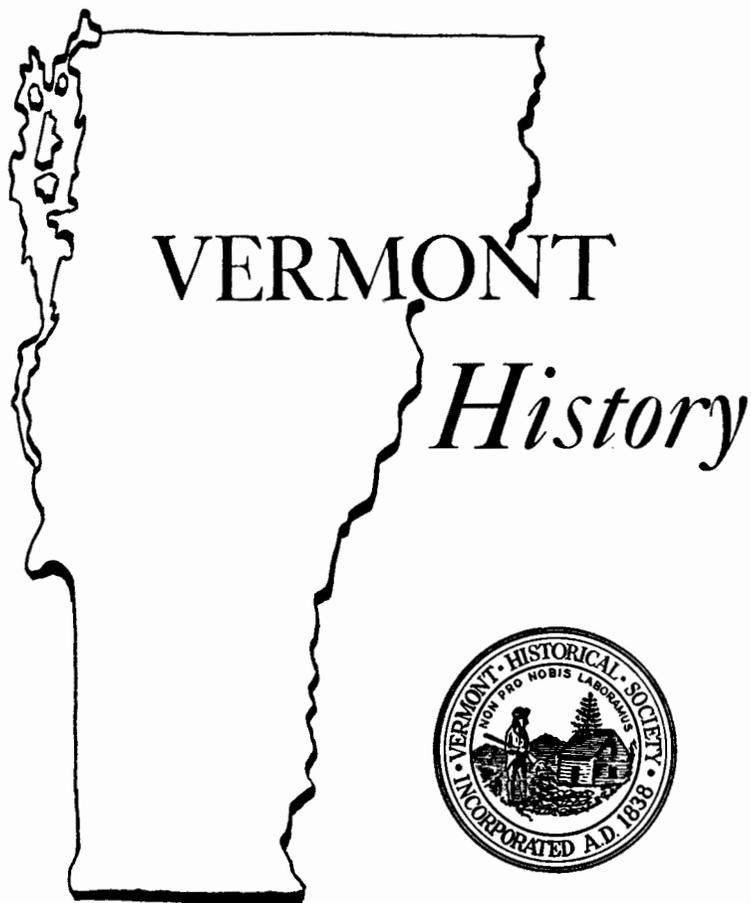


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By early in 1837, according to one report, Vermont was "becoming abolitionist to the core."

The Major Efforts Of Anti-Slavery Agents In Vermont, 1836-1838

By JOHN MYERS

In an article entitled "The Beginning Of Antislavery Agencies in Vermont, 1832-1836," published in the previous (Summer, 1968) issue of Vermont History, Mr. Myers explained that Vermonters were not as intuitively antislavery as sometimes has been inferred. Considering its size Vermont had by the summer of 1836 received important attention from organized state, regional, and national antislavery societies. The development of sentiment in the state was not left to chance. Short excursions by lecturers from outside the state, particularly trips by Samuel J. May and Oliver Johnson, supplemented the work by Orson Murray for over three years. These antislavery agents had convinced Vermonters of the sinfulness of slavery and the need to act upon their convictions. They were the precursors of the more organized effort in 1836-1837.

THE officers of the American Anti-Slavery Society, by the summer of 1836, were convinced that an organized system of paid agents was the most effective means to arouse opposition to slavery and to organize those who agreed with their objectives. The national society, founded in December of 1833 to bring about the abolition of slavery in the nation and to improve the condition of the free Negro, tried with varying success a number of methods to achieve its aims. A program of lecturing agents was clearly the most effective at this stage of the North's development in its perception of slavery. Since 1832 these representatives of state, regional and national societies had converted hundreds of Americans to abolition principles and had set up over 500 auxiliary societies. Massachusetts alone was estimated to have 9,000 abolitionists by May

of 1836. Most significantly, these states which had received the greatest attention from agents had the largest number of auxiliary societies. The Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society determined to reduce its expenditures on publications and add to its agency force. The name given to the agents of 1836-1837 was "The Seventy," in accordance with the Biblical precedent. Theodore Weld, the movement's most successful lecturer, was assigned to recruit the men and subsequently directed a two-week training session for many of them. The plan was successful. While the number seventy was never attained and the Panic of 1837 intervened before the end of the projected full year of effort, those men who did serve doubled the number of anti-slavery societies in the nation, won thousands of Americans to support of their cause, increased donations to the national society by 65%, and induced churches, legislative bodies, and other groups publicly to announce their opposition to the South's "peculiar institution."¹

The antislavery movement in Vermont was better established by the summer of 1836 than that in many other states. Yet much remained to be one. The Vermont legislature at its previous session had refused to endorse antislavery resolutions presented by Alvah Sabin, a leading abolitionist of the state. Most communities still did not have antislavery auxiliaries. Church assemblages were reluctant to take a forthright stand. Furthermore, the state had been without an agent engaged either by its own or the New England antislavery society for many months, and a national agent had never served in Vermont for any length of time. Realizing the need, the Agency Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society in June of 1836 promised the Vermont abolitionists that Charles Stuart, who had experience lecturing in England as well as in the United States, would be dispatched to them. However, when Theodore Weld's voice failed from over-use, Stuart was shifted to New York. Orson Murray, writing in behalf of the state society, reluctantly assented to the change, but he reminded the national officers that Vermont, with the exception of a short excursion of Samuel J. May in October of 1835, had received no outside assistance and that the auxiliary, in spite of several efforts to do so, for ten months had been unable to employ an agent of its own. The Agency Committee in June responded to this plea with the appointment of Alvah Sabin for one year at \$500 salary plus travel expenses. However, Sabin declined to serve. Fortunately, when Weld arrived in the state on his tour to recruit agents, his persuasiveness was so effective that six lecturers, Sabin, Guy Beckley,

1. John L. Myers, "Organization of 'The Seventy': To Arouse the North Against Slavery," *Mid-America*, XLVIII (January, 1966), 29-46.

Ichabod Coddington, James Milligan, William McCoy, and Samuel M. Wilson, joined from time to time by other speakers, were soon traversing the state.²

Agency activity in Vermont increased somewhat in the summer and early autumn of 1836. Charles Storrs, who did more than any other man to promote abolition in New Hampshire, crossed the Connecticut River for a lecture at Newbury on July 1. In late summer en route to his new agency assignment in New York state, he delivered three more addresses in Montpelier. In the first, on Tuesday August 30, he attacked the Bible defense of slavery propounded by Southerners. Many of those attending the Methodist Conference in the community heard him. Two days later he spoke on the right and duty of Northerners to be concerned about slavery. He concluded on Monday, September 5, with the answer to those who objected to antislavery principles and measures. The New Hampshire Conference closed its sessions on September 7 with a unanimous agreement to support the abolition course of their delegates who had been bitterly assailed at the General Conference of the church in Cincinnati. Milligan spoke to the Cabot Anti-Slavery Society in August. Then a special meeting of the state society breathed new life into the design to abolitionize Vermont. The conclave at Montpelier on October 19 attracted attention to the success of the movement so far. The Governor-elect was a Vice-President of the state society and the state Treasurer had been one of the first Managers of the national antislavery organization. The conclave was a part of a ten-day anniversary period which included the annual meetings of many state humanitarian and reform societies. Henry B. Stanton, a close associate of Weld, and soon to be designated as a Corresponding Secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, was in the vicinity of Montpelier between approximately October 9 and 21. He lectured twice on Sunday and twice on Thursday in the Free Church, speaking each time between one and two hours. Both Coddington and Joab Seeley, an agent of the American Bible Society, also addressed the antislavery meetings.³

Ichabod Coddington probably accomplished as much for the antislavery movement between 1836 and 1840 as any man. A native of Bristol County, New York, Coddington was born in 1810, three months after the death of his father. At the age of seventeen he penned his first temperance

2. American Anti-Slavery Society Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 5 and July 19, 1836 (Boston Public Library); *Vermont Telegraph*, June 30, 1836; *Herald of Freedom*, December 3, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*; *Friend of Man*, December 8, 1836.

3. *Middlebury Free Press*, September 27, 1836; *Herald of Freedom*, July 9, 1836; October 8, 1836; October 15, 1836; November 12, 1836; *State Journal*, September 6, 1836; *Friend of Man*, August 25, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*; *Liberator*, November 5, 1836; *Emancipator*, November 3, 1836.

pledge and delivered his first public address. Before he was twenty-one, he had given over 100 temperance lectures. He also was a critic of corporal punishment in the schools. Following three years preparation at Canandaigua Academy, where Stephen A. Douglas was a fellow student, Coddling enrolled at Middlebury College in 1834. Disturbed at what he was learning about the condition of the slave, he asked faculty authorization to leave school for a few weeks during his junior year to lecture. His addresses kindled so much opposition that the faculty announced he was absent without permission. Coddling returned to school, defended himself, forced the faculty to retract its statement, and honorably withdrew from the institution. The story is told he and Weld prayed all night for divine guidance prior to his enlistment as an anti-slavery agent. Murray had recommended him to the Agency Committee on August 17 and the Committee appointed him on October 25.⁴

Coddling was a telling addition to the lecturing force. His address was described as uniting "a great deal of geniality and suavity of manner" with earnestness, "clear, frank and winning." He seldom lost his self-control in face of mob opposition, but in a logical manner he would quote passage after passage from the Bible to prove his argument. A contemporary later contended that Salmon Chase rated Coddling as the country's greatest orator, specifically superior to Clay and Webster. Yet he was also praised as a talented conversationalist. In personal appearance he was described as rather rough, of medium height, with dark hair. One biographer designated him as a model reformer, one who scarcely ever indulged in denunciations of his opposition. He seldom acquired enemies, for even those who clashed with him respected him. At the same time, he remained rigid in principle.⁵

Before he received official announcement of his agency appointment, Coddling commenced his work. He joined E. D. Barber on July 4 to speak before the annual meeting of the Addison County Anti-Slavery Society in Middlebury. In September of 1836 he delivered 22 addresses in west-central Vermont, five in New Haven, eleven in Shoreham, and six in Sudbury. He established a society of 103 members in the former and another of 50 in the latter. The organization which already existed in Shoreham increased its membership to about 100. From Sudbury he steered towards Brandon for lectures on September 30 and October 1

4. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of August 17 and October 5, 1836; James Wilson and John Fiske (eds.), *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography* (6 vols.; New York, 1888-1889), I, 673; David W. Bartlett, *Modern Agitators, or Pen Portraits of Living American Reformers* (New York, 1855), 56-59; Hannah M. Coddling, "Ichabod Coddling," Wisconsin State Historical Society, *Proceedings* (Madison, 1897), 171-174.

5. Bartlett, *Modern Agitators*, 56-72; Coddling, Wisconsin State Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 175, 182; Wilson, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, I, 673.

and 2 before what the *Vermont Telegraph* termed audiences of respectable size. In the week before the special state meeting, he probably was working with the ministers who were attending the anniversaries in Montpelier. No record has been discovered of his activities from the close of the antislavery conclave on October 13 until he participated in the training convention for eastern agents in New York City a month later.⁶

Codding tarried in New York City at least through December 6 and then deviated into Westchester County until the Christmas holidays. Again no record has been discovered of his activities between December 24 and the Vermont anniversary in Brandon, February 15 and 16, 1837. However, since the Minutes of the Agency Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society indicate that it received reports from him on both February 14 and February 22 and authorized payment of \$28.48 to him for expenses on February 13, he must have been working. After the Vermont convention adjourned, Codding invaded Windham County for six lectures in Townshend, seven in Grafton, four in Windham, and five in Jamaica. He participated in a county meeting at Fayetteville and arrived in Wardsboro by March 17. Following appearances at Dover and Wilmington, he lectured at Halifax from March 27 through March 30. Societies were founded at Dover and Grafton shortly after his visit, and the society at Townshend greatly increased in size. His effort at Jamaica was described as bringing out "the Bible argument" in "a clear, logical manner."⁷

Codding remained in Vermont throughout April, May, and possibly most of June, 1837. The only record of his activities which can be established is found primarily by piecing together the list of towns in which he reported having collected money. He had been in Guilford and West Brattleboro by April 2, in Putney by April 17, and in Grafton by April 20. By May 1 he had visited Chester and Perkinsville, Ludlow, Saxtons River, and Duttonsville. Societies were founded in Duttonsville and Guilford. Continuing his operations northward, he stopped in Warren, Waitsfield, and Waterbury, and arrived in Montpelier in early June. He

6. *Middlebury Free Press*, July 12, 1836; *Emancipator*, October 20, 1836; November 3, 1836; *Vermont Telegraph*, October 5, 1836; *Herald of Freedom*, November 12, 1836; December 3, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*.

7. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of December 6, 1836 and February 14 and 22, 1837; *Third Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at Brandon, February 15, 1837* (Brandon, 1837), 4; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, with the Proceedings of the Annual Meeting, Holden in Middlebury, February 21 & 22, 1838* (Brandon, 1838), 31; Codding, Wisconsin State Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 175; *Emancipator*, January 12, 1837; March 9, 1837; March 30, 1837; April 13, 1837; April 25, 1837; *Liberator*, March 4, 1837; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; April 12, 1837.

was joined by Guy Beckley and local agent Chauncey Knapp for a June address to the Montpelier Anti-Slavery Society at the Free Church. He must have remained in that vicinity for several weeks, then spoken in Williamstown, Brookfield, and Newbury. Although he had in the meantime written of his willingness to transfer to the West, the Agency Committee on June 15, 1837 assigned him to Massachusetts.⁸

Codding served in Massachusetts from July of 1837 through January of 1838, and subsequently in Maine until he resigned in June of 1840 to accept another agency in Connecticut. He was a Vice-President of the 1840 convention which created the Liberty party and a founder of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. In 1843 he visited his mother in Illinois, intending to remain only a short time. When the Illinois Anti-Slavery Society offered him an agency, he accepted. He served as Congregational pastor at Princeton, Lockport, and Joliet. While he was in Wisconsin between 1846 and 1849, he established the state's first antislavery newspaper. He also spoke in every county in Iowa. He died in 1866.⁹

Alvah Sabin, who declined an agency appointment in the summer of 1836, succumbed to Weld's persuasion and was commissioned again on September 20. Sabin was born in Georgia, Vermont, October 23, 1793, was given little formal childhood schooling, was graduated from Columbian College in Philadelphia, and was ordained by the Baptists. Assigned to many churches, he held a wide acquaintance in the state; Crocker's *History of the Baptists in Vermont* speaks of him on 24 pages. He had a pastorate in Westford for seven years and in Georgia between 1825 and 1867; he was a supply pastor on occasion in Burlington. In 1826 while he was absent, the town selected him as its state representative, the first of ten terms in a 35-year period. In 1812 he supported Madison, in 1824 John Quincy Adams; he was a Whig, an Anti-Mason, then a Whig again, a Republican after 1854. He also served in the state Senate for two years, as Secretary of State two years, as an assistant judge in Franklin County for four years, and as United States Representative, 1853-1857. Shortly

8. *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 31; *Emancipator*, April 13, 1837; May 25, 1837; July 13, 1837; September 14, 1837; *Vermont Telegraph*, June 14, 1837; *Vermont Watchman*, June 13, 1837; *Liberator*, July 14, 1837, quoting from *Vermont Watchman*.

9. Codding, Wisconsin State Historical Society, *Proceedings*, 175-196; Bartlett, *Modern Agitators*, 61-70; Wilson, *Appleton's Cyclopaedia*, I, 673; *Liberator*, August 14, 1840; Dwight L. Dumond (ed.), *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857* (2 vols.; New York, 1938), I, 448; Austin Willey, *The History of the Anti-Slavery Cause in State and Nation* (Portland, Maine, 1886), 143-144; Merton L. Dillon, "The Anti-Slavery Movement in Illinois: 1809-1844" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of History, University of Michigan), 366; Elizur Wright, *Life of Myron Holley and What He Did for Liberty and True Religion* (Boston, 1882), 254.

after the tour of Samuel J. May into Vermont in October, 1835, Sabin introduced into the state legislature resolutions which advocated the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. In childhood he read a book called "Horrors of Slavery" which engendered his antislavery zeal. He was Vice-President of the state antislavery society at the time of his agency appointment and subsequently was a conductor and director of the Underground Railroad.¹⁰

Antislavery publications never printed a letter in which Sabin chronicled his activities. In his diaries, written many years after the fact, he reported that he had been engaged to lecture in northern Vermont for three months. Soon afterwards he was notified of the agents convention in New York City "for general consultation and exchange of views with an eye to unity of effort." His expenses there were paid by the national society and he was given \$50 worth of antislavery pamphlets to be sold wherever he lectured. After his return, on December 22, 1836, he addressed a meeting of the Georgia Anti-Slavery Society in his own church. He lectured for three months in every town of Franklin and in several towns of Chittenden, Lamoille and Grand Isle counties. On February 15 and 16, 1837 he was one of the most active participants at the state antislavery conclave, and on July 4 he spoke before the Franklin County Anti-Slavery Society in the St. Albans Congregational meetinghouse. The national society authorized payment of \$21.75 in expenses and credited other costs against amounts which he owed for publications; payments were voted on April 19, 1837 and March 1, 1838. However, long before the latter date, the Committee in the autumn of 1837 decided not to recommission him. The only other record of his activities is to be found in reports of collections which he forwarded to New York City. Between February 12 and July 3, 1837 the national treasury received from him over \$112 which he gathered at Georgia, Swanton, Franklin, Westford, Johnson, Cambridge, North Fairfax and Jericho.¹¹

10. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 5, July 19, and September 20, 1836; *Liberator*, December 12, 1835; William H. Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery and Underground Railroad Record* (Columbus, Ohio, 1937), 435; Lewis C. Aldrich, *History of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties, Vermont* (Syracuse, New York, 1891), 584-585; Henry Crocker, *History of the Baptists in Vermont* (Bellows Falls, 1913), 358; Alvah Sabin Papers (Vermont Historical Society); *First Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at Middlebury, February 18, 1835* (Montpelier, 1835), 111; *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), 2.

11. *Emancipator*, February 9, 1837; February 22, 1838; April 26, 1838; July 20, 1837, quoting from *St. Albans Journal*; Alvan Sabin Papers; *Herald of Freedom*, December 3, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; *Liberator*, March 4, 1837; Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of April 19, 1837 and March 1, 1838 *Third Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 3; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 32; 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, 464.

Sabin subsequently served as a local agent for the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society in 1838. Although he attended the Albany convention to consider the expediency of antislavery political action, he remained a Whig, on the grounds that a divided Whig party would elect Democrats to state office. He moved to Sycamore, Illinois in 1867, returned to Georgia, 1870–1876, and died in Illinois in 1881.¹²

William McCoy, a minister of Lyndon, Vermont, who had also served Methodist parishes in Rochester, Brookfield and Northfield, was appointed on September 20, 1836 with a joint assignment to Vermont and New Hampshire. In his only report, written on April 2, 1837 and printed in *Zion's Watchman*, the weekly newspaper of the Methodist abolitionists, he disclosed that during the previous four or five months of his agency he had served primarily in his native Caledonia County, although he had spent a few weeks in Essex and Orleans counties. In the latter two, he asserted, little had previously been said about abolition. He had organized or others were soon to organize about a dozen new societies of 40 to 100 members each. Within those months he also participated in the agents training convention. He apparently did not attend the state antislavery anniversary, February 15 and 16, 1837. The Agency Committee authorized payment of \$15 for his travel costs until March 4. Although antislavery publications printed no further report of his activities, McCoy on February 1, 1838 was authorized \$60 more for expenses. In the meantime the Agency Committee voted in the autumn of 1837 not to re-employ him. The only dates which can be ascertained are for an address at Newark, Vermont on September 10, 1837, and for his participation in the first anniversary session of the St. Johnsbury Anti-Slavery Society in the Congregational meetinghouse in Center Village on September 6, 1837.¹³

A Methodist clergyman of considerable renown in Vermont and New Hampshire, Guy Beckley was also appointed on September 20, 1836. Beckley helped organize the churches at Wardsboro and Newfane and held other pastorates in the state, including Brattleboro. He was a temperance advocate. By February of 1835 he was edging towards involvement in the antislavery movement. He wrote to the editor of the

12. Aldrich, *History of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties*, 584–585; Crocker, *Baptists in Vermont*, 358; Alvah Sabin Papers; *Emancipator*, February 22, 1838; August 8, 1839; *Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, Presented at Middlebury, February 20, 1839, with Minutes of Proceedings at the Annual Meeting* (Montpelier, 1839), 32.

13. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of September 20, 1836, March 15 and September 7, 1837 and February 1, 1838; *Emancipator*, November 23, 1837; *Zion's Watchman*, April 22, 1837; November 11, 1837; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; *North Star*, September 16, 1837; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimke Letters*, I, 464; Abbie M. Hemenway, *The History of Washington County, Including a County Chapter, and the Local Histories of the Towns* (Montpelier, 1882), 650; A. L. Cooper (comp.), *Methodist Appointments in Vermont, from 1788 to 1844* (Montpelier, 1888), 6.

Herald of Freedom that, while he had agreed that slavery was an evil and while he had never had any confidence in colonization, he had been unable to find anything in abolition doctrine which specified what a northerner really could do for the slave. He continued to think about the problem and in November of that year he wrote again, publicly announcing his advocacy of abolition. In March of 1836 he organized an antislavery society in Windham County and two months later he presided over a convention in Montpelier. Although he expected to begin his agency about November 1, 1836, no record has been discovered of any speeches which he might have delivered before he attended the agents convention. He set out upon his long journey to New York City about the first of the month; he received \$65.96 for expenses and salary for the trip.¹⁴

Until February of 1837 the national headquarters did not publish any report of Beckley's agency. He supplied the major address for the meeting of the Washington County Anti-Slavery Society in the Free Church in Montpelier on February 7. During the second week of the month he delivered three lectures and formed a society of 81 members in East Bethel and gave three more addresses and organized another auxiliary of 63 people on February 10 in East Barnard. Instead of attending the state anniversary in Brandon, he continued lecturing. Between February 7 and March 14 he delivered 28 addresses at Bethel, Barnard, Rochester, Brandon, Montpelier, Middlesex, Northfield, and Warren, and scheduled three additional appointments which snow drifts prevented him from discharging. He assisted with the formation of the Berlin Anti-Slavery Society by 63 abolitionists at the Methodist church on February 27. Although he encountered some opposition during this period, he was encouraged by the response he received. He reported that people were eager to hear him. Calls for his services were more numerous than he could answer. He adjudged Vermont as "becoming abolitionist to the core."¹⁵

He returned to Northfield by March 14, probably not to lecture again so steadily for a month. On April 6 and 7 he spoke in Brookfield and organized a society of 100 members. Between April 14 and May 24 he

14. Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimke Letters*, I, 337; Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of September 20 and November 29, 1836; Cooper, *Methodist Appointments in Vermont*, 6-8; *Herald of Freedom*, March 7, 1835; December 12, 1835; April 6, 1836; December 3, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*; *Zion's Watchman*, November 9, 1836; *Emancipator*, June 16, 1836; *Vermont Chronicle*, January 31, 1834; Joseph J. Green, Charles Burnham and John H. Merrifield, *Centennial Proceedings and Other Historical Facts and Incidents Relating to Newfane, the County Seat of Windham County, Vermont* (Brattleboro, 1877), 201; Washington County Anti-Slavery Society, Records (Vermont Historical Society).

15. *Ibid.*; *Emancipator*, April 20, 1837; *Zion's Watchman*, March 18, 1837; April 8, 1837; *Vermont Watchman*, February 7, 1837; March 7, 1837.

worked in Hardwick, Woodbury, Calais, Bethel, Tunbridge, Roxbury, and Strafford, usually delivering between one and six lectures in each. According to his report, the people were so eager to hear him that they abandoned their fields and jobs; eighteen out of every twenty who arrived unconvinced went away abolitionists.¹⁶

Beckley's summer activities were not reported in the press. The Agency Committee authorized \$34.62 for his expenses between March 14 and June 29 and another \$48.77 between July 1 and October 31, 1837. Until the end of October his collections totaled only \$6.52. One newspaper reported that he lectured to the Montpelier Anti-Slavery Society on June 13. He collected at Hardwick on August 10. He also wrote articles from Northfield on July 17 and August 26 about episcopal prerogatives and conference rights. On September 7, 1837 the Agency Committee voted to reappoint him for another year, with the reservation that he raise his own salary and expenses.¹⁷

In late September Beckley embarked upon another speaking tour. He approached Woodstock with some apprehension, recalling that Orson Murray, the only agent who had tried to lecture there, had been mobbed. Yet he spoke twice on September 28 and 29 and met no disturbance. When he asked all those who agreed with his principles to rise, he was supported by every man in the house. He continued his work with a sermon on Sunday morning, October 1, and a lecture to a full house of an estimated 400 people in the evening. On October 2 the village was encumbered with rumors of violence and the agent was advised not to hold his meeting. He persisted with his plans. Near the close of his address that evening, someone outside yelled loudly and stones were thrown against the house, but only one window pane was broken, and the speaker was able to continue. He proceeded to Stockbridge Narrows for a lecture on October 4, where he again heard threats of violence, but encountered none. After an address in South Stockbridge to full houses on October 5 and 6, he assisted in the organization of a society of 62 members. He concluded his efforts with meetings at East Bethel on October 9 and Bethel on October 10. He had spoken twice in the former community the previous winter; this time he organized a society of 65 members. By the time he returned to Northfield on October 11, his health was poor and his voice so hoarse he could not speak.¹⁸

16. *Emancipator*, June 15, 1837; *Zion's Watchman*, May 20, 1837; *Vermont Watchman*, April 18, 1837.

17. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of July 8, September 7, and December 21, 1837; *Liberator*, July 14, 1837, quoting from *Vermont Watchman*; *Emancipator*, July 20, 1837; September 14, 1837; *Zion's Watchman*, August 5, 1837; September 9, 1837; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 32.

18. *Emancipator*, October 19, 1837.

Beckley's vigor must have returned rapidly, for he was able to boast by early February, 1838 that he had been at work the entire 15 months lecturing and raising funds for the American Anti-Slavery Society. While he continued to meet some opposition, violence was rare. One can follow his efforts primarily by listing the towns in which he collected money: Berlin November 2, East Williamstown November 3, Rochester November 18. On November 16 he attended Thanksgiving services in Rochester, then lectured to a combined meeting of the Congregationalists and Methodists. He returned on November 18 and 19 to Warren, a community in which he had delivered five lectures the winter before; he reported between 60 and 70 more people in the town had become abolitionists. From November 25 to 27 he was in Hardwick for three addresses. He forwarded collections from East Bethel December 6, West Randolph December 7, Marshfield December 13, Cabot December 15, Peacham December 16, St. Johnsbury December 20, Barnet December 21, Lyndon December 22, Greensboro December 27, Craftsbury December 28, and Hardwick again December 29. In January he was in Danville on the tenth, St. Johnsbury, Peacham and Lyndon on the eleventh, in Berlin on the thirteenth, and in Northfield on the twenty-ninth. He participated in a public debate in Morrystown with a local judge on February 5. After an appearance in Middlesex on the sixth, he attended the annual meeting of the Washington County Anti-Slavery Society at Montpelier on the seventh, and he was back in Rochester on the twenty-first. Collections totalled almost \$250 in the three months.¹⁹

Appointed as an American Anti-Slavery Society agent for Michigan in July of 1839, Beckley arrived in that state in December. He subsequently became active in the Michigan Anti-Slavery Society and helped edit its *Signal of Freedom*.²⁰

Little has been ascertained about the activities of Samuel M. Wilson except that the state abolitionists knew about his appointment and anticipated that he would serve. Wilson in 1833 became the first pastor of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in East Craftsbury, but Census reports indicate that this was a part-time responsibility, with agriculture his primary employment. He attended the first annual meeting of the state antislavery society and served as Vice-President of that organization for both 1835 and 1836. His only recorded appearance was at the formation of the Orleans County Anti-Slavery Society on January 11,

19. *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 32; *Zion's Watchman*, December 23, 1837; *Liberator*, February 23, 1838; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1838; *Emancipator*, January 11, 1838; February 15, 1838.

20. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of May 8, 1838 and July 18 and December 5, 1839; *Emancipator*, October 1, 1840; Dumond, *Letters of Birney*, II, 740, 1025; Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 413.

1837 in Irasburg; he called the meeting to order, presented the constitution, and was selected as Corresponding Secretary.²¹

James Milligan was the sixth member of the band of Seventy to serve in Vermont. He was characterized as a fine classical scholar, a man of great eloquence, a person who resembled Daniel Webster. In 1816 he accepted a call to the Reformed Presbyterian Church at Ryegate, including supervision for a time of the Topsham and Craftsbury congregations; he remained there until he left for New Alexandria, Pennsylvania in 1840. In the 1820's he was active in the temperance movement. A participant in the meetings of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society in February of 1835, he was chosen a Vice-President. Three months later he accepted the position of Manager of the national organization. He delivered addresses before the Plymouth, New Hampshire society on February 10, 1836 and the New England Anti-Slavery Convention in June, 1836. In the early autumn, 1836, he was selected President of the newly-founded Caledonia Anti-Slavery Society. He later was active in the political antislavery movement and in the Underground Railroad. The only accounts of his activities during the agency period of his life tell of his chairmanship of the meeting which established the Orleans County society on January 11, 1837; his active participation, including the position of chairman pro-tempore, in the state meeting in Brandon, February 15 and 16; and his presiding over the annual meeting of the Caledonia County Anti-Slavery Society in Danville, September 21, 1837.²²

On September 20, 1836 the Agency Committee also appointed Chauncey L. Knapp to lecture in central Vermont. Although several newspaper articles subsequently identified him as a national agent, little record of his service, with the exception of a March 23, 1837 address in the Union meetinghouse in Brookfield, has been discovered. The Agency Com-

21. *First Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, ii-iv; *Second Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 2; *Herald of Freedom*, December 3, 1836, quoting from *State Journal*; February 18, 1837; *Vermont Watchman*, February 21, 1837; *North Star*, February 13, 1837; Edward Miller and Frederic P. Wells, *History of Ryegate, Vermont*, (St. Johnsbury, 1913), 128; Hamilton Child (comp.), *Gazeteer of Caledonia and Essex Counties, Vt., 1764-1887* (Syracuse, New York, 1887), 249; United States, Bureau of the Census, *Sixth Census of the United States: 1840*, Vermont, Roll Number 174.

22. Miller and Wells, *History of Ryegate*, 127; Abbie M. Hemenway (ed.), *Vermont Historical Gazeteer* (5 vols.; Burlington, 1867-1891), I, 384-385; *Second Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 2; *Third Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 3; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 2; *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1835), 6; *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1836), 24; *Herald of Freedom*, March 21, 1835; March 5, 1836; May 28, 1836; December 3, 1836; quoting from *State Journal*; February 18, 1837; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; February 28, 1837; *North Star*, October 3, 1836; February 23, 1837; *Friend of Man*, March 7, 1838; *Vermont Watchman*, February 21, 1837; Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 406.

mittee did authorize in February of 1838 the payment of \$23 to him for his expenses until January 31.²³

Since by the winter of 1837–1838 Beckley was the only holdover of the 1836 agency appointments, the national society directed Amos Dresser to proceed to Vermont. Dresser's name was by then well-known in the nation. A student at Oneida Institute, Lane Seminary, and Oberlin College, he had been repeatedly exposed to abolition ideas. En route to visit a missionary uncle in Mississippi, Dresser was seized by a mob in Nashville and charged before a kangaroo court with membership in an antislavery society and with selling abolition literature. He was publicly stripped, tarred-and-feathered, and driven from the city. The Agency Committee employed him in December of 1836 and he served for the succeeding five months in Massachusetts. His effectiveness came not from his speaking ability, but from the personal nature of his narrative. After returning to Oberlin for instruction in May of 1837, he was free again the following winter for an agency assignment to Vermont.²⁴

The primary records available of Dresser's activities are taken from reports which he submitted to the national and state societies of his collections. Receipts were recorded from Dresser of \$254 for the period ending February 5, 1838 from individuals in Panton, Bristol, and Monkton and from antislavery societies in Cornwall, Hinesburg, Weybridge, Starksboro, Ferrisburg and Addison. In the period ending March 5 he collected \$36 at Charlotte, Brandon, Hubbardton, Whiting, Cornwall and Vergennes and from antislavery societies of Weybridge and Shoreham. His well-attended addresses in Brandon February 3, 4 and 5 were at three different locations—a schoolhouse and the Baptist and Congregational meetinghouses. By April 2 he had transmitted \$200 more to the national society from antislavery groups in West Randolph, East Bethel, Snowsville, Brookfield, Montpelier, Williamstown, and Middlesex and from individuals at East Rutland and Fair Haven. Final receipts of \$165 were recorded by April 30 from societies at West Brattleboro, Rockingham Center, Springfield, Perkinsville, Ludlow, and Chester and from people at North Springfield and Proctorsville and of \$10 by May 14 from the Ludlow Anti-Slavery Society. The Agency Committee paid \$56 to

23. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of September 20, 1836 and February 15, 1838; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; *Vermont Watchman*, April 18, 1837.

24. *New York Evangelist*, November 1, 1834, November 29; 1834; January 10, 1835; Agency Committee Minutes, December 6, 1836 meeting; *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1837), 17; *Fourth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 20–31; Amasa Walker, *A Memoir of Rev. Amos Dresser* (no title page), 103; Oberlin College, Alumni Records (Oberlin College, Ohio), file on Dresser.

him for his expenses. He returned to college in May and in 1839 embarked as a missionary to Jamaica.²⁵

A measure of what the agents had accomplished by their endeavors in Vermont was shown by the favorable reception accorded to James G. Birney in two 1837 appearances in the state. Born in Kentucky, an important figure in early Alabama history, Birney freed his slaves, moved his family first out of the Black Belt of the deep South and eventually out of Kentucky as well, and became an antislavery editor in Cincinnati. In 1834 he served as agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society and by 1837 he was speaking as one of the three Corresponding Secretaries of the organization. In June of 1837 he made his first Vermont appearance for speeches in Montpelier. In October, just two years after the attack upon Samuel J. May in the same community, Birney returned to the capital for lectures on four evenings, October 25–28, addressing himself primarily to the different schemes of emancipation: colonization, gradual, and immediate. Weather was poor, but audiences were reported as large. With the legislature in session, many representatives heard him. He immediately pressed onward to Burlington, which he termed the most anti-abolition community in the state. There he also lectured for three evenings in the White Church. Murray in his newspaper could not help reminding the people of the state what great progress the cause of abolition had made in two short years.²⁶

At the third anniversary of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society at Brandon, February 15 and 16, 1837, agents Knapp, Milligan, Coddling, and Sabin attended. They were joined by Nathaniel Colver, an agent enroute from Massachusetts to New York. The state organization proudly announced that four new county and a large number of town societies had been established during the year. What was more, 70 of the 75 voters in one town had joined an antislavery society, seven of the nine Baptist associations in the state had passed antislavery resolutions, and mob activity had virtually disappeared. By another year the accomplishments were even greater. The first abolition society in the state was established in Jamaica in 1833 with only eight members; it had 167 in 1837. An early society at Ferrisburg increased from 67 to 205

25. Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 7 and August 16, 1838; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 14, 1838; *Emancipator*, February 8, 1838; March 8, 1838; April 5, 1838; April 14, 1838; May 3, 1838; May 17, 1838; *Fifth Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society*, 31–33.

26. Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney, Slaveholder to Abolitionist* (Ithaca, New York, 1955), *passim*; *Vermont Watchman*, July 13, 1837; October 23, 1837; November 13, 1837; *Burlington Sentinel*, November 17, 1837; *Emancipator*, November 2, 1837; November 9, 1837; *Liberator*, November 17, 1837; *Herald of Freedom*, November 4, 1837.

members. Other auxiliaries had even more: Cabot had 300 and Starksboro and Lincoln had 485. The state had approximately 90 societies, a large number considering its population. Of the 46 societies in which membership was known, the number of abolitionists totalled 5,897; Siebert estimated the whole number at not less than 8,000.²⁷

If one measures the development of antislavery sentiment in the state by another measure, the reaction of churches to the strong efforts to win their support, the success is also unmistakable. The Freewill Baptists embraced antislavery principles at the outset. The primary Baptist association, prodded by Murray and Sabin and instructed by the *Vermont Telegraph*, labeled slavery "a direct and palpable violation of the great law of love" in 1836 and a year later formed a standing committee on slavery, accepted the report it presented, and ordered the report to be dispatched to all Baptist ministers in southern states. By 1839 a Baptist antislavery convention was meeting at Murray's call. With so many of the agents Methodists, that denomination also responded to abolition arguments. The eastern slope of the Green Mountains belonged to the New Hampshire Conference which in 1835 condemned slavery as a "sin against God" and urged a peaceful and rapid abolition of it. The Troy Conference was less advanced, but attempts in 1838 to censure those who preached about emancipation were defeated. Naturally the conservative Congregationalists were least responsive to the antislavery arguments. Yet at Springfield on September 12, 1837 the General Convention of Congregational and Presbyterian ministers of Vermont resolved that slavery was "an enormous evil, . . . the instrument of immense wrong, cruelty and oppression," that it could see no remedy for evils of slavery short of its termination, and that immediate measures should be taken by concerned Christians to produce its abolition, and that Vermonters were duty-bound to use every means possible to bring about its early removal in the South. A similar resolution was adopted in 1838. This was not as strong a ground as antislavery leaders would have liked, but it was well advanced over what the group would have agreed to a few years earlier.²⁸

27. *Third Annual Report of the Vermont Anti-Slavery Society, passim*; *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society: Liberator*, March 4, 1837; *Vermont Telegraph*, February 22, 1837; Siebert, *Vermont's Anti-Slavery*, 24, 33; *Vermont Watchman*, March 28, 1837.

28. *Vermont Chronicle*, October 4, 1837; Crocker, *Baptists in Vermont*, 463; General Convention of the Congregational and Presbyterian Ministers in Vermont, Records (Vermont Historical Society), Book II, 89-90, 111; Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism* (New York, 1849), 41; David M. Ludlum, *Social Ferment in Vermont, 1791-1850* (New York, 1939), 157, 164; Neil A. McNall, "Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Vermont, 1777-1861," (unpublished Master's thesis, University of Vermont) 49.

In the political arena Vermont had also become a supporter of abolition. William Slade was one of the few Congressmen in the nation actively working for abolition. The state's delegation consistently opposed resolutions in the House of Representatives which would automatically table all petitions on the subject of slavery in the District of Columbia. The Vermont legislature was recognized as being in the forefront in the nation.

The antislavery agents had done their work well. The financial hardships of the Panic of 1837 first curtailed then virtually halted the system of paid lectures of the national society. At about the same time internal antagonisms within the antislavery crusade prompted by tactical and personal differences shifted the responsibility for further propaganda to the state societies and to greater use of press, pamphlets, and unpaid lecturers. However, these handicaps could be overcome. The successors of these 1830's agents would continue to promote the objectives of the cause, building on the strong foundations for which the agents more than anyone else had been responsible.

The Vermont Legislature became known throughout the nation for its abolitionist sentiment. Vermont's delegation to Congress, likewise, consistently supported abolitionist measures.