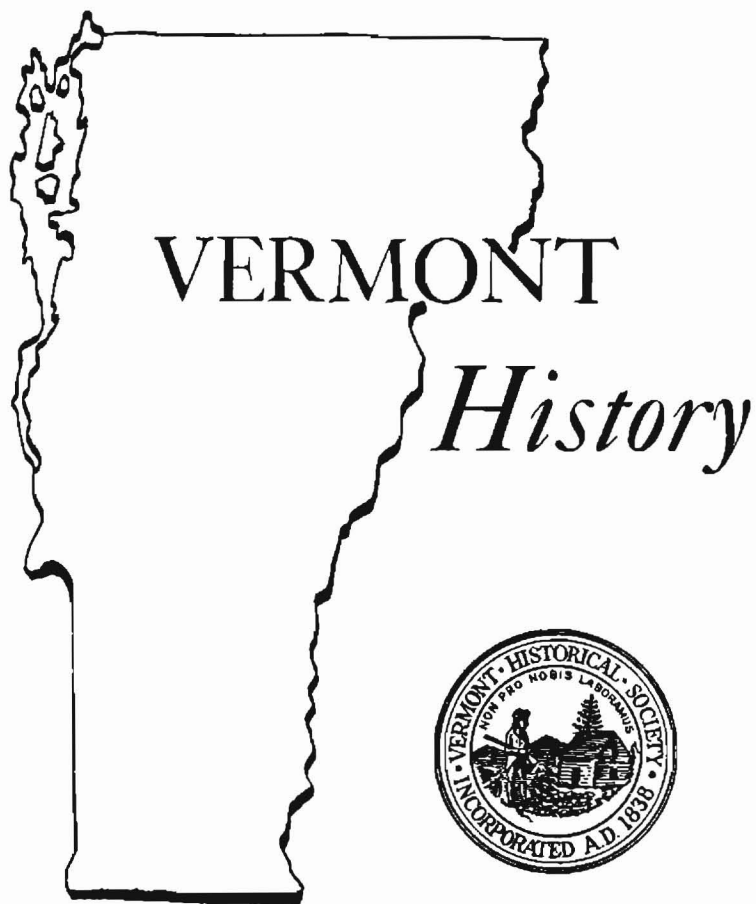
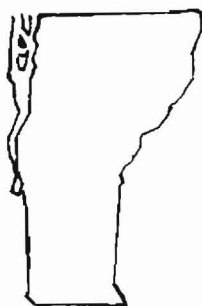


Winter 1975

VOL. 43 No. 1



The PROCEEDINGS of the
VERMONT HISTORICAL SOCIETY



Freedom-loving and self-sufficient as Vermonters may indeed have been in 1870, these traits by no means guaranteed their easy acceptance of such a radical idea as woman suffrage.

An Invasion Of Strong-Minded Women: The Newspapers And The Woman Suffrage Campaign In Vermont In 1870

By DEBORAH P. CLIFFORD

AT 3:00 o'clock on a cold February morning in 1870 a train pulled slowly into Montpelier. The temperature hovered around zero in that sleepy little Vermont capital as a number of women, most of them middle-aged, emerged from the various cars. They all carried suitcases and their boots squeaked in the snow as they made their way to the warmth of the station. One woman, looking particularly cold and forlorn, suddenly brightened as she spied a familiar figure walking some yards ahead of her. "Oh you great big Livermore!" she called out, a note of relief in her voice. Mary Livermore turned and recognized her friend, Julia Ward Howe. Meanwhile more sounds of greeting were heard as the other women gradually recognized one another, and the "comrade feeling and the bond of good fellowship which unite workers in a common cause quickly dissipated the forlornness" which they felt upon arriving in a strange cold place. These women, all members of the American Woman Suffrage Association, had journeyed to Vermont to attend the opening convention of a suffrage campaign scheduled to begin that morning.

It was soon understood by the few who happened to be about the Montpelier station at that hour that the "strong-minded" had arrived, and the fact was broadcast in loud whispers as the ladies gathered in the waiting-room. One lean, unshaven fellow with unkempt hair sauntered up to the group, looking them over in what Mary Livermore later described as a "threatening manner." "If my wife even wanted to vote, I wouldn't live

with her one hour," he announced to the women huddled around the warmth of the stove. The women, however, had already concluded that "one hour would be sixty minutes longer" than any of them would consent to live with him and decided to ignore the remark. Presently a stagecoach arrived to conduct them to their lodgings and breakfast, and the unpleasant encounter was, for the moment at least, forgotten.¹

The Woman Suffrage Convention was to open in Montpelier's Village Hall at 10:00 A.M., with Julia Ward Howe, Mary Livermore, Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell as the principal speakers. Julia Howe and Mary Livermore were both recent converts to the suffrage movement. The former was known and respected chiefly as the author of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic," while the latter had earned a national reputation as director of the great Woman's Sanitary Fair in Chicago in 1863. The Sanitary Commission, under whose auspices the fair had been organized, was a volunteer auxiliary to the Army Medical Corps. Samuel Gridley Howe, Julia's husband, was one of the Directors of the Commission, and Julia herself had helped to conduct several wartime bazaars for the organization. It was this war work which had led her, like Mary Livermore, to a realization of the unrecognized capacities of their own sex, and in 1868 both had joined the woman suffrage movement.

Lucy Stone, on the other hand, was an experienced suffragist. She had campaigned all over the country, including Vermont, in the 1850's, and had the reputation of being one of the nation's best female speakers. A small woman, with a low but engaging voice, she spoke clearly and strongly, and the sincerity and eloquence of her speeches were said to have been deeply moving. Her husband, Henry Blackwell, whose name she had refused to take at the time of their marriage, was a loyal supporter of woman suffrage, and though an experienced and thoughtful speaker he tended to be eclipsed by his wife on the lecture platform.

The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), which in early 1870 was conducting a number of suffrage campaigns in various states and territories, comprised the moderate wing of the national woman suffrage movement. The radical wing, led by Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and known as the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA), was less concerned with local and regional campaigns, and worked instead to secure the passage of a federal suffrage amendment. The passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1866, granting the ballot to all male citizens over the age of twenty-one, had precipitated the division in

1. Report of an interview with Julia Ward Howe in *Rochester Post Express*, October 21, 1890, newspaper clipping in Julia Ward Howe Scrapbooks, Howe Papers, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe College, Cambridge, Mass.; *Woman's Journal* (Boston) February 19, 1870.

the suffrage movement. The radicals were outraged by the inclusion of the word "male" in the amendment, believing that it was just as important to grant the vote to women as to give it to blacks, and perhaps more so. Lucy Stone and the moderates disagreed. When the Fifteenth Amendment came up for discussion in 1868, proposing to prevent suffrage discrimination on the basis of "race, color, or previous servitude," they agreed not to press Congress to include the word "sex." After the long and bitter war just ended, they reasoned, it was only right that former slaves should have the vote first. Julia Howe, whose husband had been active in the antislavery crusade, certainly agreed.

Other matters also led to disagreement between the radical and moderate suffragists. The most controversial issue of all revolved around their differing views on marriage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had lately become embarrassingly outspoken on certain issues. Favoring both divorce and birth control, she also felt that society, and not just the individual, should bear the blame for the evils of prostitution. The moderates, particularly Mary Livermore, felt that the suffrage movement should disassociate itself from any unorthodox views on marriage and relations between the sexes. Therefore, in the spring of 1869, the moderates decided to part company with Stanton and Anthony. In November, 1869, at a convention in Cleveland, they formed their own organization — the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).²

The tactics employed by AWSA in its suffrage campaigns bore a striking resemblance to the organized efforts of the abolitionists in the decades before the Civil War. This is not a particularly surprising fact considering the number of antislavery men, including William Lloyd Garrison, who supported the new association. The constitution of AWSA explicitly described the methods to be employed. First, "auxiliary state associations were to be formed in every state where none such now exist." Secondly, tracts, documents and other printed matter were to be provided to state and territorial legislatures, demanding the introduction and passage of suffrage legislation. Finally, the Association must employ lecturers and agents "to educate the people of the various states on the matter of woman suffrage."³ In short, they espoused tactics of gradualism, preferring to achieve their ends by working from the ground up, through the state legis-

2. For more details on the split in the woman suffrage movement see: Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, 1959), Chapter X; Elinor Rice Hays, *Morning Star: A Biography of Lucy Stone* (New York, 1961), pp. 205-214; Louise R. Noun, *Strong-Minded Women: The Emergence of the Woman Suffrage Movement in Iowa* (Iowa City, 1969), pp. 104-105. For excellent short biographies of woman suffrage leaders, see Edward T. James (ed), *Notable American Women: A Biographical Dictionary* (Cambridge, 1973).

3. The constitution of the American Woman Suffrage Association is published in the *Woman's Journal*, January 15, 1870.

latures, rather than concentrating on change from the top, by seeking to have the federal government take initiative. They were convinced that as women gained the right to vote on limited issues, they would be able to exert more pressure for national suffrage.⁴

Why choose Vermont as one of their first targets in the campaign for suffrage legislation? The woman question was by no means a matter of general concern among the citizens of the state. Certain newspapers, such as the Brattleboro *Phoenix*, had kept the subject before the public, but for the most part the issue had been in abeyance since the 1850's. The passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, however, had the effect of raising the question again. In the summer of 1869, when a committee of prominent citizens was appointed to the Council of Censors to prepare for the required bicentennial review of the constitution the following June, Jasper Rand of St. Albans had suggested the inclusion of an amendment giving women the vote. He, together with Charles Reed of Montpelier, the State Librarian, and Henry Powers of Morrisville succeeded in securing enough support from the Council to have the measure approved.⁵

The chief argument in support of suffrage put forward by its defenders in the Council emphasized that the ballot was a political right which had been denied to one-half the human race. This was despite the fact that this half had all the qualifications necessary for voting: "the capacity to understand the effect of public measures and a desire for the public welfare." Furthermore these members of the Council insisted that women were the moral superiors of men and therefore their addition to the electorate would have the effect of reforming politics.⁶

In January, 1870, the same men who had successfully submitted the Woman Suffrage Amendment to the Council of Censors proceeded to organize the Vermont Woman Suffrage Association (VTWSA). Entirely composed of men, this association included newspaper editors, clergymen, lawyers, businessmen and at least one Congressman.⁷ Despite their lack of public support these advocates of suffrage in Vermont shared a certain optimism about their cause. If the nation had granted the ballot to the freed slave, they assured themselves, then surely the moment was propitious for giving it to women as well. How could anyone possibly object to such an

4. Hays, *Morning Star*, pp. 213-235.

5. An editorial in the *Burlington Daily Free Press and Times* (hereafter referred to as *Free Press*), June 7, 1870, implies that the five members of the Council of Censors in favor of the woman suffrage amendment threatened to call off the Constitutional Convention (it took only five members to do so) unless the other members agreed to allow suffrage to "come in as one of the proposed amendments."

6. For more on the early agitation of the woman question in Vermont and on the discussion of the suffrage amendment in the Council of Censors see, T. D. Seymour Bassett, "The 1870 Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Vermont," *Vermont History*, XIV (1946) pp. 47-61.

7. For list of members of VTWSA see *St. Johnsbury Caledonian*, January 7, 1870.

eminently rational proposal? It would take only a thorough exposition of the arguments favoring woman suffrage to win over their fellow Vermonters, and to this end it was decided to invite a number of the representatives of AWSA to attend a convention in Montpelier in early February. Delegates to the Constitutional Convention would be elected in the various towns in mid-May, so VTWSA with the aid of AWSA would have three and one-half months to convince the citizens of Vermont that they should give their women the ballot.

Early in January Henry Blackwell wrote an article in AWSA's new publication, the *Woman's Journal*, in which he declared Vermont to be especially promising ground for a suffrage campaign. "It is probable that nowhere in the United States can a community be found so well prepared to take this crowning step in political progress." He cited various reasons for his optimism. First of all, he noted that more than four-fifths of her people were of native stock, meaning that Vermont was relatively untainted by corrupt foreign influences. Presumably Blackwell had in mind the Irish and other northern Europeans who were then arriving in the coastal cities, and who he imagined to be less open to his ideas. Secondly, the religious and secular educational system of the State had the reputation of being superior. Thirdly, there were no extremes of wealth and poverty in Vermont. Finally, and most importantly, "her people have been reared in the tradition of liberty. No slave ever breathed the elastic air of her hills," and in Vermont, as perhaps nowhere else to the same degree, her "men and women have learned the invaluable lesson of self-help."⁸

Freedom-loving and self-sufficient as Vermonters may indeed have been in 1870, these traits by no means guaranteed their easy acceptance of such a radical idea as woman suffrage. When the proposed amendment had been publicly announced by the Council of Censors the previous summer, the majority of newspapers throughout the State made it very clear that the reform was not going to be popular. They indicated, perhaps correctly, that the average Vermonter had little interest in the question and the women least of all. The *Burlington Free Press*, in response to Henry Blackwell's optimistic view toward the prospects for suffrage in Vermont, warned that if anything the women, when they did express an opinion on the question, "throw their influence against the extension of the ballot to their sex." Given such a situation, the *Free Press* warned, the amendment "is sure to

8. *Woman's Journal*, January 15, 1870. Others were as sanguine as Blackwell about the prospects for woman suffrage in Vermont. At the first AWSA convention in Cleveland in November, 1869, Judge Bradwell, the chairman of the meeting declared that in all probability "Vermont will soon confer on women the right of suffrage." See Elizabeth Cady Stanton et al. *History of Woman Suffrage* (New York and Rochester, 1881), vol. II p. 758.

be defeated.”⁹ Other papers concurred. The Montpelier *Watchman & Journal* declared that until the success of the suffrage campaign was demonstrated in other parts of the nation, Vermont would surely not pass such a measure, and boasted that Vermont women had yet to be “agitated and stirred with the fiery sentences of impassioned orators and enthusiasts.”¹⁰ A number of papers were outraged that such an amendment should have been even considered by the Council of Censors.¹¹

A few newspapers, however, were optimistic about the prospects for suffrage in Vermont. The Rutland *Herald*, the only other daily paper in the state besides the *Free Press*, was strongly in favor of giving the ballot to women. After quoting from an anti-suffrage article in the Burlington paper, the *Herald* editor noted that

the opponents of Woman Suffrage may be sure that its friends are in earnest in this movement. They have begun none too early and the *Free Press* may be somewhat surprised at the final result of the settlement of this question in Vermont.¹²

In fact the campaign got off to an amazingly promising start, judging by the numbers of people who attended the opening convention in Montpelier. Every effort had been made to attract as large an audience as possible. Among those who helped Lucy Stone to organize the first meetings was Abby Hutchinson, the “sweet canary of New Hampshire.” Singer, suffragist, and reformer, she, together with her brothers, had performed for audiences all over Europe and America in the 1840’s. In the 50’s they had sung at abolitionist rallies in Boston’s Faneuil Hall, and now Abby was singing for woman suffrage. Any gathering at which the Hutchinsons performed could be counted on to draw a large audience, and the evening before the convention officially opened there had been an informal gathering with speeches and singing. The audience was made up mostly of Montpelier residents, but even so the hall was crowded and the aisles were filled “with attentive listeners, who stood patiently through the session of two and a half hours.” All the other meetings were equally well attended and Mary Livermore reported back to the *Woman’s Journal* after it was over that “there is little doubt but the vote of Vermont in May will be for Woman Suffrage.”¹³

9. *Free Press*, January 20, 1870.

10. *Vermont Watchman and State Journal* (hereafter referred to as *Watchman*) January 12, 1870.

11. See for example *Windsor Vermont Chronicle*, August 28, 1869.

12. *Rutland Daily Herald* (hereafter referred to as the *Herald*) January 13, 1870. The Brattleboro *Vermont Phoenix* (hereafter referred to as the *Phoenix*) was also optimistic about the prospects for suffrage. The *Middlebury Register*, though pro-suffrage, was unwilling to press the matter until the people of the State were ready for it.

13. *Woman’s Journal*, February 19, 1870.

Some of the Vermont papers were not so sanguine. They saw the large audiences in Montpelier as the result of curiosity rather than indicative of support for suffrage. As one editor put it, Vermonters were ready to "find in the subject of Woman's Rights, food for laughter, wonder and reflection."¹⁴ Many were skeptical of the effectiveness of a group of woman speakers supporting any cause. One the whole, however, those who attended the convention were pleasantly surprised with the way the women spoke. A Rutland reporter, prepared to discover a group of "harpies and Amazons" ready to "rant and tear" through the state in behalf of their cause, was delighted to discover that Lucy Stone was "a modest, quiet, little lady of some forty summers."¹⁵

Even the Montpelier *Watchman*, the most outspokenly anti-suffrage of all the Vermont papers, conceded that the women speakers were better than the men. But, the *Watchman* insisted, even they were unsatisfactory. Some were accused only of poor delivery, but the paper was more critical of the substance of the talks. Lucy Stone, for example, was said to misrepresent Vermont laws as being unduly harsh on women, when in fact they were more favorable than the laws of most states. Still other speakers were accused of making false charges concerning the oppressed condition of Vermont women. And it was the *Watchman* itself which provided the fireworks at the first official meeting of the convention on the morning of February 2nd. Joseph Poland, its editor, had that same day printed an article which accused the woman suffrage movement of being found often in "low company." "If we are not mistaken," the article had declared,

many of its leading advocates, at many of its public conventions have thrown their scorn and contempt upon the Christian idea of marriage. upon the sacredness of that institution, upon the authority of the Living Word. which has been the basis of our freedom and progress as a nation.

The article further accused the proponents of woman suffrage of being advocates of free love, and since "birds of a feather flock together by resistless instinct," there must be a logical connection between these radical and un-Christian notions and the question of woman suffrage.¹⁶

Mary Livermore was quite properly outraged by these accusations, all the more so since it was precisely to disassociate themselves from such unorthodox views on marriage that AWSA had been organized in the first place. Turning to Joseph Poland, who, she was told, was seated somewhere in the audience, she dared him to defend his statements. When he

14. *Caledonian*, February 11, 1870.

15. *Herald*, February 4, 1870.

16. *Watchman*, February 2, 1870.

refused to speak she accused him of being a liar and a coward. This drew cries of "good, good, good!" and applause, but Poland was silent, determined nonetheless to denounce Mrs. Livermore later in the columns of his paper for her "unwomanly behaviour."¹⁷

In contrast to Mary Livermore's rather heated attack upon the editor of the *Watchman*, Julia Ward Howe appeared to be careful to say nothing that could possibly offend anyone. A scholar herself, and an avid student of German and French philosophy, her speeches seem to have gone over the heads of her Vermont audiences. She also tended to make too much of the fact that most women led frivolous and unproductive lives, that they had been "educated to waste themselves on indifferent things."¹⁸ Indifferent matters indeed! "It touches our sense of the ludicrous," wrote one Vermont woman several days after the convention, "to see people coming to the hard-working women of Vermont to tell us we are dying of ennui."¹⁹

Despite the *Watchman's* criticism of what it termed Mary Livermore's "unwomanly behavior," Julia Ward Howe's insensitivity to the realities of life in Vermont, and Lucy Stone's apparent ignorance of state laws, the convention in Montpelier was considered a success by most of those who attended it. Mary Livermore, despite her attack on Joseph Poland, was generally regarded as a favorite.²⁰ At the end of the convention one hundred and fifty people, both men and women, had joined VTWSA, hundreds of pamphlets had been distributed, and plans made to hold conventions in all the larger towns of the state, at which one or more of the leaders of AWSA would be present. Evening meetings in many of the smaller towns were also planned.

The next convention was held in Rutland later in February. William Lloyd Garrison and Julia Ward Howe were to be among the principal speakers, and they travelled together on the train from Boston on the 21st. It took nine hours to reach Rutland, during which time the old abolitionist and his companion had to feast on words rather than food, since only popcorn and lozenges were served in the cars. The two managed to enjoy one another's company enough; after nine hours of almost incessant conversation Mrs. Howe was in danger of losing her voice.²¹ She managed, however, to regain it sufficiently for the opening meeting that evening in the

17. *Free Press*, February 24, 1870.

18. The most complete report of Julia Ward Howe's speech at the opening of the Montpelier convention is in the *Watchman*, February 2, 1870.

19. *Watchman*, February 7, 1870.

20. The *Middlebury Register*, for example, applauded Mary Livermore's behavior; "the manner in which she disposed of a boorish man or two was a caution." February 8, 1870.

21. There are several descriptions of this journey: Julia Ward Howe, *Reminiscences, 1819-1899* (Boston, 1899), p. 380; *Rutland Herald*, February 21, 1870; *Woman's Journal*, March 5, 1870.

Rutland Opera House, where a large and appreciative audience had assembled. The Rutland *Herald* had given the speakers encouraging press coverage, a not surprising fact since Henry Clark, the editor of the paper, was also Secretary of VTWSA. He had pressed the people of Rutland to attend the meetings, pointing to the arrival of Garrison, "the great American Liberator," whose appearance "should of itself be sufficient to draw largely upon the presence of our citizens." And he assured his readers that "Mrs. Howe is a pleasing speaker, well worth hearing," and "one of the brightest thinkers of the age."²²

Julia Howe's talks at the convention were as usual, elaborate and scholarly. In the opening speech on the evening of the 21st, she was careful to link the cause of woman's advancement to their role as mothers. The following day she refuted the charges that she and her fellow advocates of woman suffrage favored free love. She assured her audience that she too believed that woman's place was in the home, fulfilling the offices of wife and mother, as well as voter.²³

Five hundred people attended the last meeting of the convention on Tuesday evening, the 22nd. Garrison, who inevitably tied the cause of woman to that of the slave, insisted that woman suffrage was both sound in principle and certain of success. He cited the length of time it had taken to convince the American people that slavery was wrong, and assured his listeners that the acceptance of the idea of woman suffrage would also be only a matter of time.²⁴

Julia Howe later described the Rutland convention as a "feast," and even the opponents of suffrage were forced to admit that it had been a success. The usual pamphlets were distributed and a number of memberships to VTWSA were taken.²⁵

In early March a third convention was held in Brattleboro, where the local paper, the *Phoenix* was also very sympathetic to the cause of suffrage. As Addison Brown, the editor, had pointed out some months previously, the *Phoenix* was the only newspaper in Vermont which had kept the matter of woman's rights at all before the public in the early 1860's. Brown's frequent editorials on the subject were invariably well-reasoned and convincing, and it is therefore not surprising that the suffrage meetings in Brattleboro on March 1st and 2nd were the largest and most enthusiastically attended. Lucy Stone was the principal attraction in Brattleboro. She spoke of the ballot as power, and proceeded to set aside in the "most effec-

22. *Herald*, February 17, 1870.

23. *Herald*, February 24, 1870.

24. *Herald*, February 24, 1870.

25. *Woman's Journal*, March 5, 1870.

tive, convincing and amusing way" the most common arguments against women enjoying political equality. Addison Brown concluded that the convention in every respect was "an entire success, most gratifying and encouraging to the friends of the cause."²⁶ Over 300 tracts were distributed, one hundred copies of the *Woman's Journal* were sold, and a meeting was shortly to be called for the purpose of forming a Windham County Woman Suffrage Association.²⁷ Early in March smaller conventions were held in both St. Johnsbury and St. Albans, and a final one opened in Burlington on the 10th of March. Here the prospects were not very encouraging. The Burlington *Free Press* had been forthright in its criticism of the cause and progress of the campaign, and as the Rutland *Herald* and the Brattleboro *Phoenix* had contributed to the success of the meetings in those towns, so the *Free Press* surely influenced the poor reception which greeted the advocates of woman suffrage in Burlington.

The subject of woman suffrage had been much discussed in all the Vermont papers in the weeks which followed the opening of the campaign in Montpelier. The *Free Press* and the Montpelier *Watchman* had come out most strongly against the proposed amendment, and letters and editorials filled both papers giving arguments for and against the change, but mostly against. In fact the editors of the *Free Press* did their best to give the impression that the campaign was making little or no impression on the people, and particularly on the women of Vermont, a view which is sharply contradicted by such papers as the *Herald* and the *Phoenix*.

The most often repeated argument against granting women the vote was a simple one: the women did not want it. Lucy Stone might argue that it was their right whether they wanted it or not, but until the men of Vermont were convinced that their women actually desired the onerous burden of the ballot there was no way that it could be forced upon them. A number of women found the arguments of the campaign leaders unconvincing. A lady writing to the *Watchman* by no means shared Julia Howe's opinion that women would purify politics. They were as susceptible to corruption as men, the Vermont woman argued.

Let no woman think she can stand too near the 'dirty pool of politics' and escape the contagion of its foul vapors . . . Let her keep her place in the pure, clear mountain air, at the sources of those streams that go down to form the troubled sea with all its dirty pools.²⁸

The "elastic air" of Vermont's hills might not be as freedom-loving as Henry Blackwell had supposed, but at least it was uncontaminated.

26. *Phoenix*, March 4, 1870.

27. *Woman's Journal*, March 12, 1870.

28. *Watchman*, February 7, 1870.

Other Vermonters questioned the validity of such arguments as Garrison's — that the crusade for woman suffrage was comparable to freeing slaves, and unpopular though such ideas might be it was simply a matter of time until everyone came to accept them. The fallacy of this struck one reader of the *Rutland Herald*; just because something was unpopular it didn't follow that therefore it was necessarily a good thing. "Why not say," this Vermonter argued, "Fulton [the inventor of the paddle wheeler] was once thought to be a fool, *therefore* people will soon abandon the railway to patronize balloons?"²⁹

Vermonters also, with some justice, resented the charge that their womenfolk were the equivalent of oppressed slaves. The *St. Johnsbury Caledonian* assured its readers that women had essential advantages in Vermont that they lacked elsewhere, and that the laws of the state "delivered them from many grievances now laid upon the shoulders of *men*."³⁰ It was true that a number of the legal restrictions on women in the state had in fact been removed, largely due to the efforts of Clarina Irene Howard Nichols, an early advocate of woman's rights, who in the late 40's and early 50's had campaigned for reform of Vermont's laws as they affected women. As a result divorce could now be obtained under certain conditions and women could now inherit and bequeath property; they could own property jointly with their husbands, and finally the inheritance rights of widows were increased. Yet Clarina Nichols, who had moved to Kansas, felt that this was but a small step in the right direction, and she wrote the *Woman's Journal* that Lucy Stone, when she had spoken at the Montpelier convention, had in fact drawn "a very mild picture of the effect that the laws of Vermont have upon its women."³¹

Anti-suffrage Vermonters tended to get around the question of legal restrictions by saying that the laws of the state protected women from unnecessary burdens, including the responsibility of the ballot. They also danced around the demand for political equality with the argument that women were equal with men in the married state and that a husband could properly represent his wife outside the family circle. The entrance of women into the political arena they considered not only unnecessary but dangerous. It would take woman out of her proper sphere, destroy the cohesiveness of family life by allowing women to act independently of men, and finally destroy the respect which men felt for women. A few Vermonters claimed that women were unfit for political life, being natur-

29. *Herald*, February 22, 1870.

30. *Caledonian*, March 4, 1870.

31. James, *Notable American Women*, see biography of Clarina Irene Howard Nichols: letter from Clarina Nichols to the *Woman's Journal*, June 4, 1870; Bassett's article on the 1870 Campaign also discusses the legal question.

ally unreasonable creatures, but for the most part they relied on a theory of woman's rights, functions and duties being separate but equal. They were content to admit woman as man's equal but careful to describe her sphere as one confined to domestic and religious duties.

Occasional letters appeared, even in the anti-suffrage newspapers, favoring the granting of the ballot to women. Generally, however, these papers tended to emphasize any misstep on the part of the suffrage promoters, while at the same time ignoring or underplaying the misbehavior of the anti-suffrage Vermonters. Mary Livermore's attack on the editor of the *Watchman* at the Montpelier convention received ample comment from editors as well as readers. In fact it led to a newspaper war between those who supported the reform and those who opposed it, including a number of papers from outside of the state. Emotions ran high over the whole question of the connection between the crusade for woman suffrage and the doctrine of free love. By the time Mary Livermore and Julia Howe returned to Vermont in March for the Burlington convention they were aware that a considerable opposition to suffrage had been built up in that town.³²

The two women arrived in Burlington shortly before dinner on the evening of March 10th. They discovered to their dismay that the VTWSA member who had charge of the meeting had left town suddenly, "as if unwilling to befriend us." The mood of the town appeared very hostile. Among other things a vulgar ballad was being passed around, which referred to Julia Howe, Mary Livermore and Lucy Stone as "three old crows." The prospects for the evening were not encouraging," Julie Howe recalled many years later:

We deliberated for a moment in the anteroom of our hall, I said, "Let me come first in the order of exercises, as I read from a manuscript and shall not be disconcerted even if they throw chairs at us." As we entered some noise was heard from the gallery. Mr. Garrison came forward and asked whether we were going to be given a hearing or not. Instantly a group of small boys were ejected from their seats by someone in authority.³³

Julie Ward Howe then stood up and read her address through without interruption. She told her audience that she had come as a peaceful ambassador, "not to destroy, but to build up." The *Free Press* printed only snatches of her talk, which it said "went rather above the heads of most of

32. The papers involved in the war over the question of whether or not woman suffrage was found often in "low company" included: the *Free Press*, the *Watchman*, the *Woman's Journal*, the *Springfield, Mass. Republican*, and the *New York Independent*.

33. Howe, *Reminiscences*, p. 380. Julia Ward Howe gives a somewhat different account of the proceedings here than the *Free Press* did. She has herself coming last in the order of speakers, instead of first, as the *Free Press* reported it.

the audience in some parts, . . . but [it] was listened to quietly, and was as well heard perhaps as her voice in our City Hall could be."³⁴

After the first evening the Burlington assembly proceeded without incident, but it was hardly the success that previous conventions had been, and a woman correspondent from the *Boston Post* (who had attended the meetings) described the feeling in Burlington as being "very strong against woman suffrage."³⁵ The *Woodstock Standard* noted the want of sympathy between the speakers and their hearers.

The eloquent periods of the most impassioned orators failed utterly to awake a response in the hearts and sensibilities of the audience . . . One could scarcely resist the conviction that the speakers themselves were hired advocates having but little heart or faith in their work.³⁶

When Julia Ward Howe reported the convention in the *Woman's Journal* she was careful to say as little as possible concerning the unpleasant atmosphere they had encountered in Burlington. Playing the role of peacemaker, she insisted that the convention had been fairly reported by the *Free Press* and that the interest of the public had increased with every meeting.³⁷ Mary Livermore, Lucy Stone and the other leaders of AWSA were more than willing to express their dissatisfaction with their treatment at the hands of certain Vermont editors. Mary Livermore, in an editorial in the *Woman's Journal* on April 9, declared that she was

impressed anew with the vulgarity and abuse, the vilification and misrepresentation, the obscene ridicule and ribald jests to which the press of that State resorts in its opposition to the woman suffrage movement . . .

She insisted, however, that all "this newspaper abuse" had helped the cause, and pointed out that over 200 subscriptions to the *Woman's Journal* had been bought in Vermont and that letters of "sympathy and interest" poured into the office of the editor every day.³⁸ Lucy Stone, though less acrimonious in her criticisms of the Vermont press, was nonetheless disturbed by the disparity between the "low and bitter opposition from certain newspaper editors" and the "often cordial sympathy with the cause itself on the part of the people." She blamed the editor of the *Free Press* for the behavior of the audience at the Burlington convention, and claimed that the consequence of this was that "the impression had gone abroad that Vermont has turned a cold shoulder to woman suffrage."³⁹

34. *Free Press*, March 11, 1870.

35. Quoted in *Free Press*, March 16, 1870.

36. Quoted in *Free Press*, April 28, 1870.

37. *Woman's Journal*, March 19, 1870.

38. *Woman's Journal*, April 9, 1870.

39. *Woman's Journal*, April 30, 1870.

It was precisely this impression that the anti-suffrage press was determined to make. Over and over again the *Free Press*, the *Watchman* and the *Windsor Chronicle*, along with other papers in the state, insisted that the women of Vermont were not interested in this reform. They accused the leaders of AWSA of being professional agitators determined to force an unwelcome burden on the shoulders of their Vermont sisters. As the time approached to choose the delegates to the Constitutional Convention in June the *Chronicle* warned its readers not to relax their vigilance on the matter for one moment. The movement for woman suffrage, they warned, was not child's play; "the agitators mean victory . . . Apathy in those who do not sympathize with them is a practical help to their cause."⁴⁰ Other papers were less alarmist than the *Chronicle*, but nonetheless, words such as 'agitators,' 'sensational reformers,' and 'foreigners' were frequently applied to the out-of-state suffrage advocates. One letter to the *Watchman* referred to them as "peripatetic foreign vagabonds" who were swarming all over the state spreading their unwelcome doctrines.⁴¹

The abolitionists had been greeted with similar hostility when they had crusaded for antislavery in many Northern communities back in the 1830's. Just as the anti-abolitionists had feared organized agitation and the popular excitement that would inevitably follow, so the opponents of woman suffrage feared the consequences of the well-organized campaign for granting women the ballot. In Vermont it was the press, at least a certain segment of it, which played the role of defending the established order against the encroachment of internal subversives and "foreign" agents. There appeared to be a very real fear that giving women the vote would disrupt the social order, as there had been a similar dread in the 1830's of the result that would follow the emancipation of slaves. The years immediately following the Civil War had seen enormous changes in the social, political and economic life of the country. Few of the changes had affected rural Vermont, and perhaps underlying the almost panicky response of the anti-suffragists was a fear that giving women the ballot would somehow disrupt the whole way of life of this peaceful, uncorrupted, rural state.⁴² The *Chronicle* warned its readers that none of the other proposed constitutional reforms touched "the core of society . . . On no other issue has there been so much discussion and concern."⁴³

40. *Vermont Chronicle*, April 16, 1870.

41. *Watchman*, March 9, 1870.

42. For a discussion of the threat of woman suffrage to the social order, see Aileen S. Kraditor, *The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement, 1890-1920* (New York, 1965), pp. 28-32. The anti-suffrage arguments which appeared in the Vermont press would be echoed throughout the nation in the ensuing decades. For more on anti-abolition, see Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs* (New York, 1970).

43. *Vermont Chronicle*, May 7, 1870.

Certainly not all Vermont women were as reluctant to accept the burden of suffrage as the anti-suffrage press made them out to be. Nor were they as satisfied with their lot as some of their menfolk claimed. A lady doctor from Bridgewater had written the *Watchman* and the *Christian Repository* (a pro-suffrage weekly published in Montpelier) that if one went from house to house in the state she doubted if there could be found one-third "who are happily married and do not have a life of toil and exhaustion." The *Watchman* had refused to publish this correspondence at first because "of the effect such a letter would have on the minds of inexperienced young women."⁴⁴ They might decide they didn't want to marry!

There was no question that the woman suffrage campaign was having its effect on the minds of the women of Vermont. If the numbers who openly supported the reform were far from a majority, nevertheless, there were indications that support had grown since the onset of the campaign. During the month of March it was the chief topic of conversation in Montpelier. "Two persons cannot meet in the street without discussing woman suffrage," a lady wrote the *Woman's Journal*, "and we may add that it is also discussed, and quite ably, in many parlors."⁴⁵ In mid-March the Brattleboro *Phoenix* was optimistic concerning the ultimate success of the campaign. Almost everyone, the paper declared, was saying that it was sure to succeed.⁴⁶ Such optimism was short-lived, however. Either the pro-suffrage press had overestimated the support for suffrage in the state, or the anti-suffrage press eventually succeeded in its attempt to quash the reform. By early April the quarrel between the *Woman's Journal* on the one hand, and the *Free Press* and *Watchman* on the other had reached a climax, each accusing the other of vulgarity and vilification. Though Henry Blackwell insisted that such opposition as the suffrage question had aroused in Vermont would only aid the cause, the abuse which poured from the three papers must have succeeded merely in confirming the viewpoint of many Vermonters that suffrage was indeed a cause found often in low company. But if the quarrel between the newspaper editors added to the ranks of those opposed to the reform, it also persuaded others to support it. A number of sympathizers were as aware as Lucy Stone of the unfairness of certain papers in reporting the progress of the campaign. The assertion that "in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, Vermont women have expressed their utter repugnance to the constitutional right of suffrage is a wild assumption and a gross perversion of the facts," declared a correspondent of the *Phoenix* on April 22.⁴⁷ The New York *Independent*, which had joined

44. *Watchman*. March 2, 1870.

45. *Woman's Journal*, April 2, 1870.

46. *Phoenix*, March 11, 1870.

47. *Phoenix*. April 22, 1870.

the newspaper war, accused the *Free Press* of "appealing to popular prejudice against such a catastrophe" as the passage of the suffrage amendment, and of "showing clearly enough that its only hope of defeating the cause depends upon its ability to exclude the light."⁴⁸

The last weeks of the woman suffrage campaign were somewhat of an anti-climax. The final convention, the one in Burlington, was in mid-March, and by the end of April the last organizer had left the state. The number of articles on the question in the various newspapers declined considerably, particularly in the dailies. The readership claimed they were tired of the subject. The chief activity of the anti-suffragists at this time was to encourage a thorough canvass of Vermont women to find out how many really wanted to vote. The *Free Press* printed a petition listing the arguments against the reform, and hoped that 40,000 women of the state would sign it. One reader noted that those who had devised the petition were "men who dislike their wives holding opinions different from theirs."⁴⁹

Meanwhile much of the optimism so evident on the part of the leaders of AWSA in the early months of 1870 had largely abated. The cause of woman suffrage in the nation at large had not fared as well as they had hoped. Henry Blackwell felt that a reaction had set in, for even though suffrage measures had been adopted in Wyoming and Utah, and one was in the process of being submitted to "the masculine half of the people of Vermont," measures granting the ballot to women had been defeated in Colorado and Kansas and vetoed by the Governor of Minnesota.⁵⁰

The election of delegates to the Vermont Constitutional Convention took place on a cold, rainy day in the middle of May, and only one-sixth of those eligible to vote went to the polls. At the convention in June, when the time came for those delegates to cast their ballots on the woman suffrage amendment, no discussion of the question was permitted and all but one of the delegates voted against it. The one man who voted for the amendment, Harvey Howes of West Haven, declared that he had done so not because of instructions from his constituents but rather from his own high sense of duty. He had found that the prevailing atmosphere at the convention indicated a strong opposition to woman suffrage. But he was convinced nonetheless, as were a number of other Vermonters, that "many of the best and most progressive minds" of the state were decidedly in favor of the measure and that he was sure a number of other delegates would have voted for it if they had not lacked moral courage.⁵¹

48. Quoted in *Free Press*, April 12, 1870.

49. *Free Press*, April 11, 1870; April 29, 1870.

50. *Woman's Journal*, March 26, 1870.

51. Harvey Howes, "A Last Report," pamphlet (Fairhaven, Vt., 1870).

The anti-suffrage press was, of course, delighted at the outcome of the election on the suffrage question. They claimed it proved how little the reform had taken hold, and blamed the presence of outside agitators for the failure of the campaign. "Their outlay of time and money and vituperation had the good effect to settle the question more firmly than it otherwise would have been."⁵² The Brattleboro *Phoenix* agreed with Harvey Howes, however, that many of the delegates had been either too timid or too conservative to vote for the measure, and that the small vote in favor was by no means indicative of support for the amendment.⁵³ It cited the large number of petitions which had been laid before the convention supporting the suffrage measure, far outnumbering those which opposed it. "Seven hundred and three women of lawful age sent petitions to the late convention at Montpelier asking for the adoption of the amendment, . . . and three hundred and sixty-two sent remonstrances against its adoption."⁵⁴

The *Woman's Journal* claimed that "the opinions and wishes of Vermont women had been ignored as ruthlessly as their rights" and was outraged at the way the amendment was handled at the convention. "They flouted all discussion of the question and voted it down with utmost alacrity." But, the *Journal* assured its readers, it was not surprised by the outcome. "No one cognizant of the bigotry, narrowness and general ignorance that prevail in Vermont will be surprised at this result. It is not a progressive State but the contrary."⁵⁵ The liberty-loving Green Mountain State, which the *Journal* back in January had predicted would be so receptive to political progress, had fallen from grace.

A month after the convention was over Henry Blackwell, in an article entitled, "The Lesson of Vermont," reasonably concluded that the small vote in favor of woman suffrage merely served to indicate how new the question was for the people of Vermont, and the very fact that so much opposition had resulted from the agitation of the issue was indicative of the interest generated by the campaign.⁵⁶ Surely, the very fact that discussion of the amendment at the Constitutional Convention had been overruled pointed to a considerable fear among the anti-suffrage delegates that any debate of the question might well have encouraged more support for the measure. After July the subject of woman suffrage in Vermont was all but totally ignored by the press in the state and elsewhere. The danger had passed as far as Vermont's anti-suffrage editors were concerned. At the same time AWSA, having lost its chance to make Vermont a shining ex-

52. *Free Press*, June 14, 1870.

53. *Phoenix*, June 17, 1870.

54. *Phoenix*, July 8, 1870.

55. *Woman's Journal*, June 18, 1870.

56. *Woman's Journal*, July 7, 1870.

ample of progressive reform for the rest of the nation, turned to other matters.

The 1870 campaign for woman suffrage in Vermont was therefore neither the success its promoters had hoped for, nor the failure its detractors claimed. The optimism generated by the Montpelier, Rutland and Brattleboro conventions and the welcome reception accorded the "strong-minded" women of AWSA in those towns quickly dissipated when it became obvious that every element of opposition to the reform had been aroused, creating an obstacle that would be difficult to overcome. It also became increasingly evident, even to those Vermonters who supported the reform, that the people as a whole were simply not ready to take what they considered to be a very radical step, whose consequences they could only fear. After all, suffrage had only recently been extended to the women of Wyoming and Utah, and there had hardly been time to measure the effect. The "strong-minded" could insist as much as they liked that, while women should have the right to vote whether they wanted it or not, there was no way of forcing it on the women of Vermont unless they demanded it, and only a few of them had. All worthwhile reforms take time, Addison Brown of the *Phoenix* had concluded, when he heard the result of the vote in the convention. "Two hundred and thirty-one male citizens of Vermont are not a match against the onward march of events."⁵⁷

But the "onward march of events" was destined to be very slow as far as woman suffrage was concerned, not only in Vermont but in the rest of the nation as well. Not for another fifty years would the Nineteenth Amendment to the Federal Constitution be ratified and Vermont women win the right to equal suffrage.⁵⁸ These were fifty years which saw considerable social and political change in the country, years which saw American participation in a world war, surely itself the greatest catalyst to the granting of the vote to women.

Does this mean that the invasion of Vermont by "strong-minded" women in 1870 ultimately was repelled and thus without effect? At this point, it is impossible to give a definite answer to this question. Unfortunately, while work has been done in recent years on the suffrage movement in this country, the attention of scholars has concentrated primarily on the 20th century and the efforts to secure legislation on the federal level. State campaigns, such as the one with which this article has dealt, have largely been ignored. Not until more work is done in state and local history, will it

57. *Phoenix*, June 17, 1870.

58. Women did however obtain certain limited voting rights. In 1880 the Vermont legislature gave them the right to vote in school meetings and serve on school boards. In 1906 they became eligible for certain town offices. See Bassett, "The 1870 Campaign for Woman Suffrage in Vermont," p. 61.

be possible to make any kind of accurate assessment as to the effect of the kinds of campaigns which AWSA mounted. Certainly in 1870 the women were defeated; Vermont's libertarian tradition, which had originally given them cause for hope, turned out to include the concept of freedom from outside intervention, and the editorial treatment of Mary Livermore and her friends is uncomfortably reminiscent of the Southern treatment of civil rights advocates in the 1960's. It is also true that when, in 1919, the Nineteenth Amendment became part of the law of the land, the Vermont General Assembly still had not ratified it. Nevertheless, it may not be unreasonable to suggest that the Vermont campaign of 1870, and other similar campaigns at the state level, played a considerable role in the final adoption of the principle of granting political rights to women.

Strange Happenings In Vermont

"We learn from Pownal, in the state of Vermont, that a mountain in that town had lately burst, with a most terrible explosion; by which rocks of an amazing bulk were thrown a great height into the air, which, in their fall, broke and destroyed the trees, &c. for a considerable distance, and left a chasm upwards of one hundred rods in length, and eighty feet in depth. We leave the naturalist to speculate upon this strange phaenomenon."

— item in the *New Jersey Gazette* (Trenton), January 27, 1784.

"A Mr. Hamilton of Vergennes, who the doctors supposed dying from consumption, vomited an enormous green lizard (alive) recently and is now rapidly recovering. Before his sickness Mr. Hamilton weighed 217 pounds, but at the time the lizard was rejected he was reduced to a little over 100."

— item in the *Rutland Weekly Herald*, September 13, 1860.