

Module 04: How Did Abolitionism Lead to the Struggle for Women 's Rights?

Evidence 4: Weymouth and Braintree Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1848

A

Introduction

Women often worked alongside men in national organizations like the American Anti-Slavery Society and in local societies. Joining female societies made it possible for women to do political work while remaining safely within a distinctly female sphere of association. Most abolitionist women did not explicitly seek to reform the entirety of American social relations; they simply wanted to abolish slavery. Given the very separate cultures of women and men, many female activists likely found it more comfortable to work with other women rather than alongside men. Activist women also did not wish to participate in activities considered unrespectable or "unladylike" in society's eyes for fear of damaging their personal reputations and hindering their cause. Female anti-slavery societies thus protected female activists from public rebuke while removing an important barrier to their involvement in the abolitionist movement. Nevertheless, the women who founded anti-slavery societies still encountered serious obstacles. As Lucretia Mott, a formidable Quaker activist, wrote about her own experiences on joining the Female Anti-Slavery Society in the 1832:

"At that time I had no idea of the meaning of preambles, and resolutions, and votings. Women had never been in any assemblies of the kind. I had attended only one convention — a convention of colored people — before that; and that was the first time in my life I had ever heard a vote taken. . . . When, a short time after, we came together to form the Female Anti-Slavery Society, there was not a woman capable of taking the chair and organizing that meeting in due order; and we had to call on James McCrummel, a colored man, to give us aid in the work." (1)

Despite their lack of training, women in cities and towns across the Northeast and along the western frontier created local female anti-slavery societies like the one described in the article below from *The Liberator*. Weymouth and Braintree, small rural Massachusetts towns, were the typical

settings for such organizations.

Questions to Consider

- What kinds of projects and activities did the women of this anti-slavery society undertake?
- What does the document suggest about women's abilities to manage matters outside of the domestic sphere?
- In reading the document, what skills had women gained over the course of ten to fifteen years of activism?

Document

The Annual Meeting of this Society was held on Thursday, Oct. 5th, as the house of the President. The subjoined reports of the Secretary and Treasurer were submitted, and after some conversation, unanimously adopted.

The following officers were elected for the coming year:

Mrs. Hannah Porter, *Pres.*

Mrs. Mary H. Cook, *Vice Pres.*

Miss A.W. Weston, *Cor. Sec. [Correspondence Secretary]*

Miss Mary Weston, *Rec. Sec. [Recording Secretary]*

Miss Lucretia A. Cowing, *Treas.*

Mrs. Elizabeth H Richards }

Miss Sarah Reed } *Counsellors*

Mrs. Marcia P. Hunt }

Annual Report of the Weymouth and Braintree Female Anti-Slavery Society

Our labors for the year past have been of so unobtrusive and commonplace a character, that at first sight they may appear almost too unimportant for a formal report. No public meeting has been held by the Society, the necessity for such being obviated by various Conventions appointed by the Mass. A.S. Society [Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society], or lectures delivered by some of its individual friends and members. On seven or eight occasions, Mr. Pillsbury has spoken in this place, with all his vaunted fidelity and energy. Messrs. H.C. Wright, W.W. Brown, C.C. Burleigh, and Miss Lucy Stone, have also labored here in such a manner as greatly to forward our plans and encourage our hopes. This is not the time nor place in which to

enlarge on the zeal and self-devotion of the men and women, who, as agents of the Anti-Slavery cause are content to labor so unweariedly from year to year. The amount of discouragement, opposition and suffering encountered in such a service, is more than a mere observer can appreciate. We would thankfully record it as a privilege that we have been enabled to aid in the support of those instrumentalities by which these friends are sustained. As will be seen by our Treasurer's Report, we have contributed more money to the cause than in any previous year since the Society's formation. The receipts of our Fair were large, and the number that attended our Annual Tea Party larger than in previous years. We have distributed five copies of the Liberator and two of the Standard [two antislavery newspapers], and have circulated books and pamphlets as opportunity presented. Our Sewing Meeting has been held every week, and the attendance has of late increased. Several new members have joined us. Last winter we circulated the Disunion Petition, and obtained the names of fifty-two women. We look upon this as an encouraging fact, a petition of this nature being signed by none in a careless and irresponsible spirit, but from a conscientious and intelligent conviction of duty. . . .

ACCOUNT OF RECIPTS

Into the Treasury of the Weymouth and Braintree Anti-Slavery Society,
from 26th Sept., 1847, to 27th Sept., 1848, inclusive.

By Balance in Treasury, 26th Sept. 1847	\$3,38
" Proceeds of Anti-Slavery Fair	163,18
" Annual subscriptions	7,25
" Donations	3,65
" Work done in the Sewing Meeting	,80

	\$178,26

DISBURSEMENTS

For amount paid to treasurer of Mass. A.S. Society to redeem Pledge	\$30,00
" Donation to Mass. A.S. Society	50,00
" The Liberator	50,00
" Use of Hall for the Fair	7,50

" Printing Posters	2,00
" 3 copies of the Liberator	6,00
" 2 copies of the A.S. Standard	2,00
" The use of the Sewing Meeting	4,61

	\$172,11

Balance remaining in Treasury	\$6,15

Lucretia A. Cowing, *Treas*

(1) Anna Davis Hallowell, ed., *James and Lucretia Mott, Life and Letters* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1884), 121.

Source:

The Liberator 18.42 (20 Oct 1848).