The Great Silent Army of Abolitionism

Ordinary Women in the Antislavery Movement

Julie Roy Jeffrey

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Chapter 3

Persisting in the Cause

The 1840s and 1850s

Sow the seed, be never weary,
Let not fear thy mind employ;
Though the prospect be most dreary,
Thou may'st reap the fruits of joy;
Lo! the scene of verdure bright'ning,
See the rising grain appear;
Look again! the fields are whit'ning,
Harvest-time is surely near.[1]

In November 1841, as J. W. Thomas reviewed her involvement in antislavery in Kingston, Rhode Island, she confessed that many times during the year and a half that had just passed she had "felt that as a society, our work was almost done—that we sh'd have in the future to depend upon our individual effort—what was formerly all harmony, seem'd to bring forth many discordant sounds." One of many women who despaired about the future of organized antislavery work, Thomas wondered about the ultimate triumph of immediate emancipation during the troubling decade of the 1840s. Sarah Stearns, who interpreted the disunity in the abolitionist ranks as the sign of decline, remarked, "It is hard working up and interesting those whose Anti-Slavery sympathies are locked fast in the sleep of the New Organization."[2]

The division, formalized in 1840 when thirty-one prominent abolitionists, including eight blacks, withdrew from the American Anti-Slavery Society to form the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (the "New Organization"), had roots in disagreements that had simmered for years. An early expression of discord surfaced during Sarah and Angelina Grimké's speaking tour of New England in 1837. Although not originally intending to transgress gender norms, the women found themselves lecturing to audiences containing both men and woman. Attacked for their breach of conduct, the sisters defended their right to speak in public before mixed groups. Abolitionists disagreed about the validity of their argument and the wisdom of their public appearances.

Garrison came out strongly in support of both the conduct and the rationale the two sisters developed to justify it. Eventually he concluded that women had the right to participate equally with men in all facets of organized antislavery. In 1839, members of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, who agreed with Garrison, implemented his position by endorsing women as full members of the organization. The following year, the American Anti-Slavery Society followed suit at its annual meeting when a majority, including a large number of delegates from Massachusetts, approved Abby Kelley's appointment to the business committee. Abolitionists holding more conservative ideas about women's involvement in the cause or believing that debate over the woman question drew attention away from the evil of slavery were dismayed at the turn of events.

As Garrison embraced women's rights he also enlarged the reform agenda. He came to see abolitionism as only one of changes needed to restructure American society. He promoted pacifism and argued that, since both the church and the state were corrupt, abolitionists should abandon them. To the many abolitionists hungering to carry the struggle against slavery into the center of political and religious life, Garrison's advice was unwelcome and counterproductive. Even though all abolitionists supported immediate emancipation as a goal, they bitterly disagreed about how to reach that goal. The American Anti-Slavery Society remained the stronghold of Garrisonians who clung to moral suasion. Those hesitant about women's rights, or eager to enter politics and to cleanse the churches, aligned themselves with the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society.[3]

Both national organizations attempted to line up local and state associations to buttress its positions. While local groups did align with one or the other of the two national societies, sometimes dividing in the process, many grassroots organizations did not find the disputes at the top comprehensible or even important. As Maria Child noted, Northampton abolitionists "have a very dim idea of what all this quarreling is about. They have a vague notion that is a squabble between Presbyterians and Quakers." In Ohio, a center of abolitionist fervor in the 1830s, antislavery advocates

tried to sidestep the necessity of choosing sides and worked to compromise on issues that proved divisive in Boston and New York. To some black abolitionists, the disagreements diverted attention from the real struggle: the growth of slavery and the deteriorating condition of free blacks. White leaders, embroiled in controversies, were neglecting true abolitionism that ranged "from the mere act of riding in public conveyances to the liberation of every slave."[4]

As women examined the condition of abolitionism, not surprisingly they often noted strife and division. When one-time supporters abandoned antislavery altogether or gave their allegiance to rival organizations, committed women talked of apathy and slumber. Such comments suggest not only that these women accurately perceived that the days of rapid and unified growth had ended but also that they feared falling asleep or becoming apathetic themselves. And although many of them maintained their commitment (and, indeed, in a state like Rhode Island kept the cause of organized antislavery alive), they often judged their efforts insignificant in light of internal division and general indifference to the sacred cause of emancipation. "We are very feeble," wrote one Uxbridge, Massachusetts, woman, and her cry of distress was echoed throughout the decade.[5]

The experiences of working for the abolition of slavery during the 1840s were varied. Of the societies established during the 1830s, probably the majority divided into factions or died altogether, leaving those who had been members feeling frustrated and isolated. But new associations devoted exclusively to agitating for immediate emancipation continued to spring up. Because neither the old nor the new national body had the power or prestige of one unified organization or much influence over local and state associational affairs, and because there were no more meetings of the National Convention of Anti-Slavery Women to direct local energies, new societies faced the challenge of charting their own paths. In Michigan, the state antislavery society informed new female antislavery groups that they were on their own "as to the plans and manner of perfecting your organizations."[6]

Despite some women's feeling that the cause was declining or that they were laboring in isolation, and despite some scholars' suggestion that women who disagreed with Garrisonians retreated to safer causes than antislavery, the 1840s actually created new ways for women to express antislavery convictions. Working for emancipation through the program of moral suasion favored by the antislavery associations of the 1830s was only one among several alternatives. Political and religious initiatives attracted many who believed direct action could change institutions. Informal working groups like sewing circles adopted projects ranging from making items for antislavery fairs to raising money for slaves who had fled to Canada. Many women, by choice or necessity, worked alone, perhaps establishing a Sabbath school for freed blacks or concealing a fugitive slave and giving him or her a small sum to help the flight to freedom. Although historians have called some of these groups and activities conservative and others radical, in the context of the time, all these choices were radical, and often unpopular. Certainly, those espousing any form of abolitionist sentiment were firmly in the minority.[7]

The proliferation of opportunities to work for immediate emancipation had far more positive consequences than many realized at the time. On the one hand, people who disagreed with Garrison's stance on women and his insistence on linking the goal of ending slavery to other reforms could continue to pursue antislavery in ways that did not so obviously threaten gender norms or their claim to middle-class respectability. On the other hand, some men and women who had not been involved in abolitionism in the 1830s, like Rochester's Hicksite Quakers, were drawn into Garrisonian abolitionism by his emphasis on egalitarianism and his enthusiasm for reform. Others obsessed with a particular issue could concentrate their energies on that cause. Esther Moore, the first president of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society (PFAS), withdrew because she was "more interested in the Vig[ilance] Com[mittee]" that aided escaping fugitives. Different strategies also offered different possibilities for leadership. Vigilance work engaged African Americans more than white abolitionists. The committee with which Esther Moore hoped to cooperate thus provided black women with leadership opportunities that were new.[8]

Ironically, the proliferation of approaches and choices made many abolitionists keenly conscious of their minority status. In 1845, Rhoda De Garma bemoaned "the deviations and betrayals of those that once stood faithful" in Rochester. Working alone or with just a few friends, counting the defectors and those who joined competing groups, contributed to a sense of isolation perhaps sharper than that felt in the 1830s when the angry hostility at least suggested that abolitionists were modern martyrs. For some, indifference was worse than hostility. In this situation, the antislavery network created by women in the 1830s and expanded in the following decade performed a vital role in sustaining community.[9]

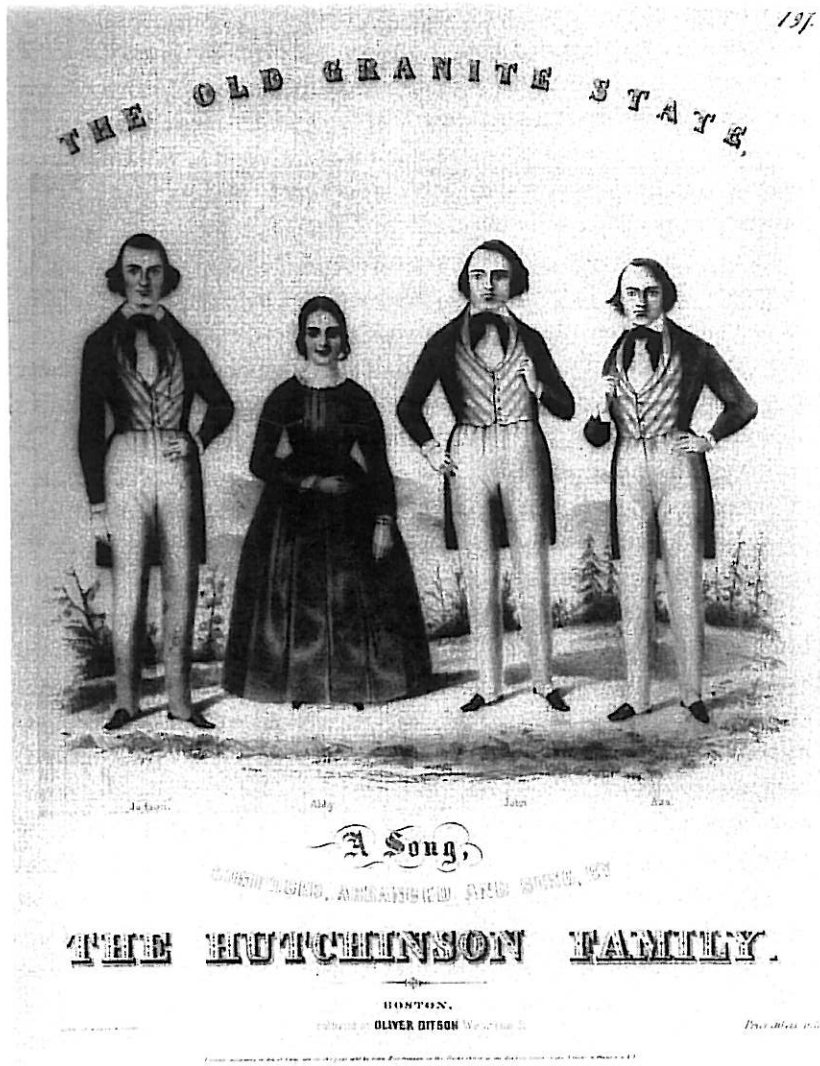
Although accounts of abolitionism in the 1840s have concentrated on male activism in politics, women continued to make significant contributions to antislavery. Collecting signatures for petitions, circulating tracts and newspapers, and fund-raising were all tasks women undertook successfully. Increasingly, they played an important role in creating propaganda

for the elimination of slavery, in mounting rituals to celebrate abolitionism, and in helping to devise a heroic history for antislavery.

In many communities, women helped to keep the spark of abolitionism alive, although that spark might appear to be a feeble one. Women who accepted Garrison's program of moral suasion rather than political action were not at the margins of antislavery but at its center. As Louisa Beal pointed out in 1845, "Most of the people here [in Hingham, Massachusetts] cannot perceive the intimate connexion they have with this diabolical institution." It was women like Louisa who kept insisting to neighbors and friends that the slavery question involved them personally.[10]

While the controversies that seemed so vital to abolitionist leaders contributed to division or disbandment of some antislavery societies, there were other reasons that associations formed in the 1830s faltered. The cause of emancipation seemed remote to many members of local antislavery societies who had never seen a slave; many of them most likely had never even seen a free African American. Certainly, most had not observed the institution of slavery firsthand. Furthermore, few could see much progress toward immediate emancipation. While the petition drives, the great grassroots effort of the 1830s, eventually resulted in some victories at the state level, there were none on the national level. The vocabulary used by female abolitionists—apathy, indifference, slumber—revealed not only their own fears about themselves but also their fatigue. "Our besetting temptation is to weary of the work," women in Weymouth and Braintree observed. Many did yield to that temptation. Eliza Boyd, a member of the Lynn Female Anti-Slavery Society, reported in 1839 that most of the "members of our society have fallen" into "a long and deep slumber." Aroline Chase felt the brunt of the apathy. Agreeing that other members of the society had given up and were going to "*dancing parties*," she feared she could "not contend much longer unless renewed." "I feel as though I stand alone," she lamented. Although a few Lynn women managed to keep an antislavery sewing circle going at least until 1846, they were, in their own view, "unorganized."[11]

Other factors, evidence of which is hard to recover 150 years later, doubtless played a part in weakening associational antislavery. One woman identified "the New Organization, pro Slavery opposition and the Harrison mania" as forces paralyzing antislavery. Religious enthusiasms, like political enthusiasms, also drew people away from associations. One woman noted the impact of the Millerite movement that convinced its thousands of adherents in New England and upstate New York that the second coming of Christ was imminent. As the 1840s advanced, she remarked, "many who



Cover from the sheet music of a song written and sung by the Hutchinson family, whose spirited singing enlivened abolitionist meetings in the 1840s. (Boston Athenæum)

have been heretofore good abolitionists, believe now that the world will be . . . [ended]," and all the slaves liberated, rendering it "unnecessary for them to do anything for the cause."[12]

Some associations did remain active during the 1840s. What differentiated these antislavery societies from those that quietly died was less the

composition of the organization than the leadership, attention to organizational details, and type of work the society adopted. The history of three local antislavery societies highlights both the differences and commonalities between antislavery associations that survived divisions, disputes, and apathy. Certain characteristics and patterns of each individual society also suggest the ways in which these local groups resembled more prominent antislavery organizations in larger places.

Like its better-known big-city counterpart the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society continued to operate as a female society through the Civil War. It remained loyal to Garrison and supported his stance on women, although members made no move to merge with a male society or to admit men. Garrison's condemnation of American churches, however, did strike a deep chord. The 1842 Annual Report emphatically rejected "the spirit of the American church, and its benevolent and religious societies, which cries union and peace before purity—we reject as antichristian the spirit which attempts to christianize far distant heathen, at the expense of heathen at home."[13]

While the Dover (New Hampshire) Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle also continued on until the Civil War, like the Ladies' New-York City Anti-Slavery Society of the previous decade, it had no quarrel with the American churches. The Dover circle enjoyed close connections with local clergy and helped to keep alive a monthly concert of prayer for the slave that rotated between the different Protestant churches. Its support of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFAS) rather than the American Anti-Slavery Society (AAS), expressed the group's evangelical sympathies. While its ideological commitments differed somewhat from those of the Salem women, the character of its work was not radically dissimilar. Despite close ties with clerical abolitionists, the Dover women were quite capable of exercising independence of judgment.

Like the better-known Western New York Anti-Slavery Society, the Portland (Maine) Anti-Slavery Society was on the cutting edge of abolitionism with both male and female members and officers. Like the Salem society, it tended to be critical of the religious establishment. The decision to hold meetings on Sunday symbolized the members' dissatisfaction with the religious status quo. Yet, the society's success probably owed more to the kind of work undertaken in Portland than its membership and meeting policies.[14]

Commonalities between the Dover, Salem, and Portland groups were more important than ideological disagreements. Each of the organizations was committed to immediate emancipation as a general goal. All three enjoyed effective leadership or had at least one person willing to shoulder the responsibility for seeing that associational life continued. Each society initiated substantial projects that involved the membership and, in two cases, reached out into the community. Surviving records make it clear that two of the groups paid careful attention to organizational issues. And all three generated enough funds to make decisions about spending them significant and engaging for the membership. Collectively, the societies made tangible for members a cause that all too easily could appear remote and abstract.

The Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, formed in 1834 and reorganized in 1836, generally sided with Garrison in the disputes at the end of the decade. Its independence of spirit, however, was clear in its ability to retain its ties with Garrison while disagreeing with some of his positions. As one member of the society explained in 1839, members did not concur in all of Garrison's "doctrines—we are not decidedly non-resistent."[15] However, the society (like the PFAS) did support Garrison's position on women. In its 1840 annual report, the women declared that the work of antislavery was so important that they could not stop to discuss with their critics "the disputed question of woman's rights or even to disprove the oft-asserted fact, that in this laboring, we have advanced beyond the limits of our 'appropriate sphere.'" The society showed no interest in playing out their views of the women question in the company of men. It continued as a female society for more than thirty years.[16]

Perhaps the Salem women had no interest in including men into their society because over the years they had built up a strong, efficient, and businesslike organization. From the beginning, the women had taken organizational matters seriously. Early on, they dealt with the issue of promptness and voted to have a class to inform themselves "on the manner of properly conducting society meetings." In 1839, they further tightened procedures by voting to have regular quarterly business meetings, with "*no business be transacted at any other time* except it be a *special meeting* called for this purpose." At the same time they established a fine for absent board members and determined that no money could be paid from treasury "without a written order from the President." When the controversies beset the movement, the Salem association had its organizational house in order and was able to withstand the divisiveness it deplored.[17]

The projects the Salem society adopted also contributed to vitality and longevity. Women selected initiatives that were tangible and put them into continuous and fruitful contact with different segments of Salem's population. The presence of black members encouraged special initiatives. As Clarissa Lawrence, the society's African American vice president in 1839,

insisted, "We meet the monster prejudice *everywhere*. We have not power to contend with it, we are so down-trodden. We cannot elevate ourselves. You must aid us." The society was responsive, and over the years, it undertook many efforts in Salem's African American community. A few examples show the range of their involvement. In 1836, the women provided supplies for the assistant teacher in the "Colored School"; in 1838, a committee studied the situation of Salem's black residents, and members decided to use some funds to help fugitive slaves. The same year, they established a sewing school for young black females. Later in the decade, they voted for funds to help in "redeeming the chapel of the colored people." In the 1840s, the society continued their commitment to African Americans, overseeing a sewing school for young girls, assisting fugitive slaves, and donating money to the Sabbath School for black children. The women also supported efforts to integrate Salem's public schools.[18]

The Salem society undertook major propaganda efforts. On several occasions, they hired traveling agents to lecture on abolitionism. Their most extensive propaganda work, however, consisted of the lecture series that they sponsored successfully for many years in Salem. Mounting the lectures involved a host of decisions, from selecting speakers, hiring halls and sometimes protection, to pricing and printing tickets, advertising the lectures, and spending the proceeds. The lecture series provided members with a sense of satisfaction, for it gave the society visibility and, when audiences were large, suggested that progress was being made toward the ultimate goal of emancipation. Members must have enjoyed hosting major figures of the antislavery movement and highlighting their society's role in connecting Salem to the larger world of abolitionism.

The Salem society funded its array of initiatives partly through the lecture series and partly through local fund-raising efforts. While Salem women contributed to fairs held in other communities, they also held several antislavery fairs in their own town. In keeping with their interest in the freed black community, the society made a point of featuring black involvement. Fairs offered goods made by black children and young people. In 1839, African American women were responsible for the refreshment room, and they furnished a dinner during the fair. On at least one occasion, some of the leftover items were given as presents to the African American children in the society's sewing school.[19]

In Salem, women who worked with the antislavery society found many rewarding projects that helped provide their organization with a strong sense of purpose and identity. Eventually, the women came to recognize that they had a history, one worth knowing and preserving. In 1852, the society decided to have one of its officers read aloud all the records of the organization, and eight years later, it voted that the corresponding secretary "be empowered to find if possible the old Record Book." The search succeeded, and, unlike most association documents, that record book has survived until the present.[20]

Another rare set of records reveals the women of Dover, New Hampshire, charting a somewhat different course than the Salem women. In 1835, a group of Dover abolitionists formed the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society. During the 1830s, they voted for funds to support the American Anti-Slavery Society, but in the ensuing controversy many of the members abandoned the AAS and Garrisonians. In October 1839, the minutes recorded that the society admitted several men as members, an action that probably precipitated the division. The following February, several women, including many of the officers, of the Ladies Anti-Slavery Society reorganized as the Dover Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle. The circle's goal of emancipation "by discussion, collecting, and disseminating information on the subject of Slavery and raising funds in aid of the Anti-Slavery cause" suggested that the inclusion of men rather than disagreement about ends had caused the reorganization.[21]

The circle's support for Lewis Tappan and the American Missionary Association further indicated its sympathy for the evangelical wing of abolitionism. But just as the Salem women believed they had the right to pick and choose among Garrison's positions, the Dover women felt a similar freedom. Despite the rejection of an organization in which men and women participated as equals, the women invited men to join as honorary and as dues-paying members. Some of the men were making motions as early as the July meeting of 1840, and minutes listed them as members by 1849. Obviously, the men were not sewing or working members, but to a limited extent, the circle united men and women in its organizational life. Perhaps the women's reluctance to include men in their original society had something to do with wanting to retain control of their own affairs. If so, we must modify the view of evangelical women's groups as being less autonomous than Garrisonian antislavery societies.[22]

While there were some lapses in organizational regularity, the circle took its purpose seriously. At the beginning of its new life, the women decided to undertake "some kind of useful or ornamental work" during meetings under the direction of the board of managers. Just as in Salem, where the women had put its organizational house in order, so too did the Dover circle attend to the relationship between organizational structure and work. During the 1840s, a "Purchasing and Appraising Committee"

was established, and there were specially appointed managers for sewing and managers for knitting. Punctuality was held up as a goal, and members were expected to be present and to work. Their desire for active membership was apparent in the circle's decision to list in the record book "only the names of those who have paid for the last year," as well as in the election of two women to visit absent members and collect fines for nonattendance.[23]

Dover women did not sponsor public lecture series, but they did keep an antislavery concert of prayer alive in their community for nearly thirty years and used the collection money for the circle's projects. While there is no evidence of their involvement with New Hampshire's free blacks, the Dover women created strong connections with black people, particularly fugitive slaves. On one occasion, a member who knew "by experience the evils of Slavery gave some account of her escape." African American "gentlemen," "Mr. Clark a fugitive slave" and "Capt Jonathan Walker with the *branded hand*," were some of those who also attended meetings and helped make real the plight of slaves and fugitive slaves. On at least one occasion, the circle decided to use its funds to circulate scriptures among slaves and, on another, to support the dissemination of abolitionist propaganda in New Mexico. But the circle concentrated mainly on projects for fugitive slaves in Canada, corresponding with, among others, Fidelia Coburn, a teacher in Canada, to discover what aid Dover women might provide.[24] Women took keen interest in those projects for which they either worked directly or to which they made financial contributions. Lively discussion preceded their decisions, and they saw new information as a reason for reviewing and sometimes changing collective agreements.[25] And, despite its ties with a wing of abolitionism often labeled conservative (especially in terms of its views on women), Dover women did not confine themselves to sewing in one another's houses. They undertook several petition drives, paid to have tracts circulated, and, by the 1850s, summoned the citizens of Dover to a meeting on behalf of Kansas.[26]

Bringing men and women into the same association was no easy task, as the defection of Tappan and other evangelical abolitionists from the AAS dramatically indicated. A tart letter to Amos Phelps from a woman who identified herself only as Phebe appeared in the *Liberator* in 1838. If men and women were together in a social setting, she asked, would it be wrong for a women to "converse freely, on any question of religion or morals that might be introduced, giving their opinions, &cc.&cc?" What if the men and women adopted certain rules for the purpose of convenience? "Would it be sinful for women to open their lips?" Could women meet alone, adopt rules, and "use prayer, exhortation, discussion" without sin? And if a man should come into the meeting, "must every woman forthwith close her lips?"[27]

These queries were not academic, although Phebe had obviously already worked out her answers. In a similar vein, writing from Northborough, Massachusetts, in 1840, Maria Rice related the problems that had cropped up during her society's annual meeting a month before. "By my simply rising and shewing that I was in favor of a certain resolve," Maria wrote, "I became so obnoxious, that a certain gentleman said he wished the Ladies would form a society by themselves as they would do no good." Such disagreements, Maria felt, would certainly end in the division of her society. Alvan Ward told a similar story of opposition to a mixed society in Ashburton, where women were advised to act alone or to talk to their husbands at home: "Now it happens that many who join a society have no husbands[,] and there are others who have husbands who do not meet with the same society[,] and still another class who have husbands, if they should as[k] them 'at home' would answer them in such a snappish way if they answered at all that they would know little or nothing the better for it."[28]

In Maine, however, the Portland Anti-Slavery Society was open to both sexes. The society's constitution, which in part was modeled on the Declaration of Independence, used both political and religious language to condemn slavery but omitted gender-specific appeals. It made no special mention of the plight of female slaves and directed its call to duty to "every individual." A majority of those present at the organizing meeting in January 1844, were women, and the slate of officers selected made a modest gesture to gender equality. The president and treasurer were male, the directors female, while a man and a woman served as vice presidents. The efforts to work toward a more inclusive antislavery organization were in the same spirit as those made in the Western New York Antislavery Society.[29]

During the first years of its existence, the meetings of the society were lively. Men and women debated the most volatile issues of the day, including the relationship between the churches and abolitionism, compensated emancipation, political action, and the propriety of adding Garrisonian to the association's title. Discussion, carried on with "the most perfect friendliness," was often stimulated by a resolution or by the presence of nonmembers, like "our liberty party friends." The most troublesome issue was clearly the relationship between the church and abolitionism, "some members . . . thinking the church much less guilty than others charge it with being."[30]

In 1850, the society was reorganized, with many of the same people playing leadership roles in getting the society going again. It seems as if

conversation alone, no matter how controversial the subject, could not ensure organizational longevity. This time the board of managers, particularly Elizabeth Montfort, took responsibility for continuity. The board made a critical decision about the function of the society. "We have proceeded immediately to action, not desiring or intending to profess merely a nominal existence," Elizabeth explained. The action consisted of lecture series, offered initially on Sundays, "that being the day when the ear of the people can be most readily gained." During the first year, the Portland Anti-Slavery Sewing Circle helped to defray the expenses and get the series off the ground. Even more than the Salem Female Anti-Slavery Society, which undertook a variety of projects, the Portland Anti-Slavery Society drew its energy from connecting the local community to some of the great figures of abolitionism, including Samuel May, Charles Remond, and Wendell Phillips.[31]

Like their big-city counterparts, small antislavery societies like Salem's embarked on a project that drew members together to labor on a common task and often linked societies with one another. The petition drives represented women's most visible and perhaps most important grassroots work for abolitionism during the 1830s. In 1834, the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society began another sort of initiative with its small-scale antislavery fair. From this modest beginning, the practice of holding antislavery fairs spread. Increasingly in the 1840s and 1850s, antislavery fairs replaced petition drives as a central activity for abolitionist women of different ideological persuasions and races. Garrisonian and non-Garrisonian women, Liberty Party women, African American women, and women who worked to help fugitive slaves all held fairs. Although undertaken primarily to raise money, women's fairs made other contributions that were less tangible than cash but no less important. Above all, the fairs fostered communication and sympathy between women that helped keep them involved in the abolitionist cause.[32]

The most elaborate fairs were mounted in cities like Boston, Philadelphia, Rochester, and Utica. The big fairs, which might last more than a week, featured goods from Europe as well as items made by scores of individual women in country towns and villages. Some fairs were extremely lucrative. Over the years, the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society raised $65,000, some of which helped to pay the debts of the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, an abolitionist newspaper based in New York. Between 1840 and 1861, Philadelphia fairs realized $32,000, most of which went to keep the state abolitionist society afloat. Fairs held in Ohio to assist the Western Anti-Slavery Society were less profitable than ones in Boston and

Philadelphia, but, as the executive committee pointed out, the proceeds were essential: "Funds can thus be obtained to aid our cause, which could not so readily be acquired by any other means."[33]

Smaller fairs, like those held in Salem, Massachusetts, and Salem, Ohio, raised less money and lasted fewer days than the major city fairs. Although unsold goods were circulated from one fair to another, smaller fairs usually had less elaborate articles more suited for their buying public than for the more sophisticated urban consumers of Boston and Philadelphia. But while there were important differences between small fairs and large fairs, rural fairs and city fairs, and perhaps even between "new organization" and "old organization" fairs, all provided a focus for women's involvement in abolitionism and raised money for which they had to make distribution decisions. Fairs provided an important and immediate purpose and gave visibility and life to the cause of emancipation.[34]

Many of the goods sold at the fairs were sewed or crafted by women. Sewing was, of course, a traditional female activity. Before the introduction of manufactured cloth, women had focused on making clothes for their families. With ready-made cloth, however, that task had become less onerous. Women now had time to do more than plain sewing. Indeed, schools and magazines like *Godey's Lady Book* encouraged women to engage in fancy sewing and other forms of handwork. The middle-class woman's productions ornamented her person and her house. Her parlor was the showcase for her most successful efforts and a testimony to her skill and genteel taste.

But the creation of items to be sold at antislavery fairs was at once well within the parameters of genteel behavior and at odds with it. Items produced at home assumed a political and public purpose and meaning when they were sold for profit in settings designed to encourage consumption and the exchange of money. Like petitioning, fair work raised all sorts of questions about propriety. Should middle-class women be engaged in what was clearly a commercial activity? Should they make and sell frivolous goods that encouraged people to waste their money? When black and white women cooperated in producing goods for a fair, as they did in the New York Anti-Slavery Society sewing circle in 1842, other questions about interracial cooperation in both home settings and public spaces came to the fore. In the name of duty, abolitionist women again demonstrated a propensity to stake out areas for action that confounded notions of public, private, male, female, white and black.[35]

Even among the women who worked for fairs there were moments of tension between the values of a consumer culture and those of a producer

culture, between standards of gentility, ostentation, and Christian plainness, and between rural usefulness and urban fashion. Yet, no matter where individual women stood on any one of these issues, their very participation in fair work enmeshed them in the modern marketplace. All of them wished to make a tidy profit.

Mounting a successful fair demanded considerable business and organizational acumen, entrepreneurial energy, and even courage. In Concord, New Hampshire, Mary Rogers reported that her society had voted to hold a fair yet were somewhat fearful about the new venture. "We felt as if we were stepping into the dark, and are still haunted by presages of failure and disappointment, but have pretty much decided to do the best we can." The experience must have been successful, for Concord women persisted in fair work. In Mary's mind, the utility of the effort surpassed profits; it was "necessary to have a common object of interest to concentrate our efforts and prevent them being diverted into other channels."[36]

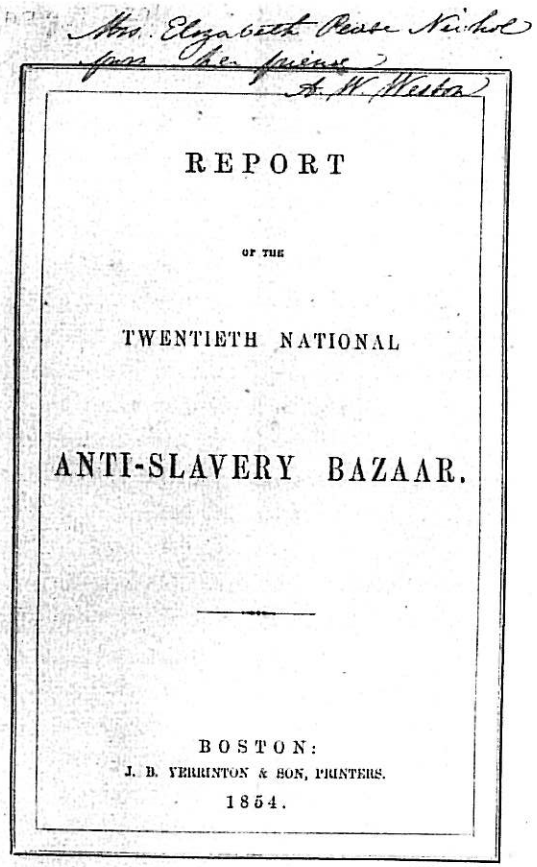
Whether the fair was to be small or large, fair managers needed to start working months in advance of the event. First, they needed to choose a date that would ensure a large crowd of buyers (i.e., the Christmas holidays, the Worcester cattle show, the Brown University commencement). Then they had to compose and send out letters and flyers carrying the date of the fair, advertising its purpose, and soliciting aid. Women were urged to organize "speedily" into sewing circles to create "gifts of beauty and fancy articles." In order to have a plethora of tempting goods, well made and tantalizing for the prospective buyer, fair organizers might specify items that were appropriate for the anticipated market. It was often necessary to follow up with more detailed assistance. Elisabeth Nile and her sisters were more than willing to work for the Boston fair, but they were "totally ignorant of the manner of cutting or making" the right sorts of garments. To ensure they did not waste their labor they asked for a line with some directions. Fair managers often found themselves not only furnishing advice but also patterns and sometimes materials, for, in some communities like Kingston, Rhode Island, "there are some whose means are small, but whose hearts and hands are willing." In order to ensure the fair's profitability, they also solicited merchants for donations of goods or money.[37]

As the time of the fair grew near, managers secured a place for the fair and arranged for advertising, refreshments, and decorations. They engaged speakers and, occasionally, entertainment. They recruited workers to unpack and arrange the goods and to take responsibility for manning the tables. In Spring Garden, Ohio, the latter tasks were fraught with anxiety. Sarah Ernst reported that all of her table tenders were "uncertain, until the very week of the sale and of course only here to take charge of tables, which I had to spread and provide for."[38]

After the fair, organizers faced bookkeeping chores and the task of publicizing fair results so that workers who lived too far away to attend the fair would know their work was not in vain. Decisions had to be made about unsold goods. As fairs became common, a network of exchange developed, allowing unsold items to be sent on to another fair. But there were other options for the remainders. After the 1839 fair in New Bedford, for example, Deborah Weston, who had intended to "raise as much money as I can on the articles I have," ended up selling the remaining articles by hawking them door to door. After Deborah had sold the last item, she was thankful that "the last fair or sale of any kind that I am to have any thing to do with for the present is over, & I feel as if the weight of mountains had been taken off."[39] Altogether, having a fair was a formidable undertaking.

The Boston and Philadelphia fairs reached far into the hinterlands as well as to the British Isles for goods to sell. Products from Birmingham and Glasgow joined objects sent from Hudson, Ohio; Minnesota territory; and Staten Island. The offerings of the British women signified their solidarity with the American antislavery movement now that their own struggle for the emancipation of slaves in the West Indies had succeeded. For many American abolitionist women during the 1840s and 1850s, the articles they made for one of the big fairs represented a vital connection, perhaps their only connection, with the larger world of antislavery. As Sarah Stearns explained, "since our socy in Greenfield has but a nominal existence and scarcely that, I rejoice in being connected with one so zealous, self-denying and efficient as the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Socy." Fair work created the connections that could keep alive energy, commitment, and faith in the cause.[40]

In Georgetown, Massachusetts, Deborah Palmer anticipated that the fair work would recruit women and provide a focus for their efforts. "I think something to interest the attention of sewing circles would be very beneficial to the cause," she wrote. "I think it would augment our numbers and cause a more punctual attendance." In addition, Deborah felt that this work would have a transforming effect on the women who did it and would be the means by which "the families where our members reside . . . [might] be *abolitionised*." Evelina Smith agreed that fair work could "waken up dormant zeal, that is slumbering in the hearts of our Hingham Abolitionists." But fair work not only provided a meaningful purpose, it also connected women to the distant goal of emancipation, a point made explicit in the 1843 Boston fair notice. "The steady continuance of such


Mrs. Elizabeth Peace Nichol
from the friend
S. H. Weston

REPORT

OF THE

TWENTIETH NATIONAL

ANTI-SLAVERY BAZAAR.

BOSTON:
J. B. YERRINTON & SON, PRINTERS.
1854.

Reports on fair results like this one were an important way of communicating with those who had produced items for the fair and of highlighting the progress of the antislavery cause. (Boston Athenæum)

efforts as our Fairs," the circular claimed, "had so greatly modified public sentiment that Slavery is half abolished. Let us then receive your aid to complete the good work so begun."[41]

The connection between the labor of individuals and small groups and the goal of emancipation was not always obvious during the 1840s, however. Frances Drake read the notice for the 1843 fair to women in Leominster, but "somehow our people cant understand an address unless it is directed especially to them. I have read again, and again the address by your committee, to the ladies, but they dont seem to feel it means them." Requesting an appeal directed specifically to the women of her town would help. But the fact that the work done the previous year had never been acknowledged was an additional obstacle. The women who had contributed to the fair expected polite recognition for their efforts and information about how their work had made a difference. "There were several who gave

something that said at the time they gave," Frances wrote, "they *did not see what good it was or going to do* . . . because they have not seen the result of our labour, they have no faith to do anything more. Therefore, when you write us I hope you will send us a very emphatick Thank you Ladies."[42]

A notice for the 1841 Boston fair acknowledged the various circumstances facing possible contributors to the fair. Some lived in communities where an antislavery society still existed to structure collective efforts. Others lived in places where there was no society, or where the one that technically existed was, in fact, dead. In these situations, women were urged not to abandon the cause because of "protracted struggle and unanticipated perplexities" but to unite their efforts. "In many places," however, the circular recognized, "the laborer bears alone the heat and burden of the day. To such we would say, be resolute and self-sustained. You do but *seem* to be alone. Within your call are true and faithful hearts. . . . Help shall arise by your side soon, and at the eleventh hour the ranks will be full."[43]

While the circular accurately identified the different circumstances that shaped the work that could be done for the fair, the scenario of help at the eleventh hour was much too optimistic. Many women who wished to aid one of the large fairs found it difficult to get assistance. In North Attleboro, Sarah Rhoads thought the people were "in great measure asleep in regard to slavery," although she was planning to get a sewing circle to meet and work for a few weeks. "I hope I shall get something," she wrote, "and I will do all myself considering the little time I can possibly spare on account of my own business." In Worcester the same year, Caroline Bartlett had a frustrating time trying to interest women in the fair. She had called on people with the plan of setting aside one day a week for work. No one came to the first meeting. The second meeting was only minimally more successful, with one old lady in attendance whose skills were such that she "could only sew a plain seam." In all, Caroline managed to round up only five people willing to help.[44]

Indifference, of course, was just one of the reasons that organizing for a fair was so difficult. Division, clerical opposition, and alternative ways to work for antislavery also played a part. In Taunton, Mrs. Woodward had a raft of excuses for her refusal to contribute to that year's fair: "She did not feel that interest in the cause that she used to, they were bedeviled, She did not know what they did with the money, and among other things, she said Mr. Emery (the minister) had not said one word on the subject for more than a year." Frances Drake faced opposition from evangelical abolitionists who advised members of the female society not to cooperate with her fair efforts. To Frances's disgust, they had some impact. "All those

who were not thoroughly abolitionised, or were deficient in moral courage," she complained, "were so foolish as to be influenced by them and were so ungenerous as to even send in some work *unfinished*." Although Frances considered these women unenlightened, they had not abandoned abolitionism. They had merely chosen to work for the Canada Mission for fugitive slaves rather than for the fair.[45]

Frances Drake remained firmly committed to Garrisonian abolitionism, and her letters written over a series of years give insight into what working for the fair meant on a personal level. They also suggest why abolitionist women often felt beleaguered during the 1840s. Her first extant letter from late in 1842 described the divisions within Leominster that left only a few women interested in joining her. The sewing circle to which she had belonged actually had thirty members. But when it had changed its constitution to favor the "New Organization," she had withdrawn. Although that circle remained active, she had no sympathy for the group and chose to labor alone.[46]

The following year, Frances was hoping to form a Garrisonian antislavery society, knowing the name would keep out any but those whom she could accept as committed abolitionists. The New Organization now dominated the Leominster Female Anti-Slavery Society, and Frances was working with some "poor common people" who could do "only plain needlework." This modest success was enhanced by an agreement she had worked out with some local shopkeepers to take farm goods in exchange for the English articles and fancy goods her workers needed. Just before the Boston fair, she sent in greens for decoration but feared that the items from Leominster would arrive too late. She could not get anyone to finish the goods with her and had, in fact, more materials than she could use. "But I cannot raise help for love or money," she lamented. "I now have to sit up till one oclock at night to get them ready. . . . Every one I have asked to assist (with one or two excepts) has refused. . . . I am at time almost disheartened, when I see what I have to do, with my poor feeble eyes, and my little ones to care for, I find it next to an impossibility for me to complete the work."[47]

Frances did not give up her struggle to arouse the indifferent women of her community. Nor did she fail to work for the Boston fair. Even in 1848, when for the first time she could not spare a cent for the fair, she sent greens to Boston and offered to cook such country delicacies as applesauce and doughnuts. In 1850, she had extended her efforts all over the county and managed to get enough women to cooperate to sponsor a country table at the fair.[48]

As the example of Frances Drake makes clear, many women persisted in their fair work despite many obstacles. When J. W. Thomas sent in fair goods from Kingston, she gave some hint of the feelings she and her friends had experienced as they labored for the fair. "Some few among us have persevered under all discouragements from the lukewarm and the indifferent," she wrote, "and have devoted an afternoon of each week for some time past in working for the fair."[49]

Fair work demanded more than persistence and sociable afternoons of sewing in one another's houses, however. Women had to coordinate work, observe timetables, and assess who could make what. A certain amount of publicity might be necessary, as it was in Rochester, New York. The work group there, concerned by its invisibility, decided to publish a notice of its existence in the newspapers. But even more public work in the community was necessary. Because "as yet we make a poor show of begging," a Rochester woman wrote, the women were buying nearly all of their materials. Now they must approach storekeepers and individuals to plead for supplies.[50]

Dunning merchants and others for free merchandise was a chore that was often part of ensuring a successful fair. Worcester women formed a committee "to solicit every family in town for aid, whether of money, refreshments or other arts." Some women were uncomfortable with the task of approaching the public for donations. When Eliza Follen asked for fruit for a fair refreshment table, she had to overcome her sense that the request was improper. "I was on the point of asking you to excuse me for this seeming freedom," she wrote to her potential benefactor, "but as fellow workers in a holy cause there should not be any [im]propriety in my doubting your entire approbation of the confidence I have shown in asking."[51]

The surviving lists of articles prepared by different groups of women only begin to suggest the effort and skills involved and the scale of work on the local level. For the Salem fair of 1839, women in Ipswich contributed two quilts, shirts, aprons, bosoms, and dickeys, nightcaps, cuffs, a muslin cape, a child's frock, a cushion, three bags, eighteen needlebooks, and a scissor chain. From Danvers came aprons, boxes, pocketbooks, needlebooks, rollups, cuffs, mittens, hose, and penwipers. The bill the Salem society paid for goods, including thread, spotted and figured lace, ribbon, calico, linen, and muslin, serves as a record of its members' activities.[52]

When local women and groups succeeded in working together for a fair, they often enlarged the antislavery network by recruiting helpers. In the process, their effort gave some form of community to those who had no formal local antislavery society upon which to depend for fellowship. Just as important, the work and the correspondence it entailed linked women to

the greater antislavery world. Organizers of the great Boston fair explicitly encouraged communication. Women were told to write to the fair's organizers and to one another. Their letters could elicit warm sympathy and helpful assistance, "for it may often be in the power of all the friends of the cause, mutually to aid each other by the interchange of materials and labor, and by furnishing the newest patterns of articles of dress, or models of articles of furniture." Even after the fair was over, ties were maintained through sending along leftover goods. As Abby Kelley remarked when she requested such items for a fair planned in Rochester, "You are well aware of the beneficial effect of the interchange of work and sympathy."[53]

While the essential function remained the same, to provide a sense of personal connection and acquaintance, the network that began to take shape in the 1830s continued with a new focus and purpose in the 1840s. At the end of her account of her small efforts for the fair, Deborah Palmer added an appeal to Maria Chapman. "Excuse me dear madam," she wrote, "I had almost forgotten that I was writing to a stranger so I have given you my thoughts just as they rose to my mind[.] I have hardly begun to write, what I feel that I could say if I could have the pleasure of a personal interview with you." Particularly for women who felt isolated and alone in their work, this network gave a sense of companionship and friendship that were otherwise lacking.[54]

In 1837, Julianna Tappan, the corresponding secretary of the Ladies' New-York City Anti-Slavery Society, wrote to Anne Weston that the New York society was having silk stamped with different scenes: a slave kneeling under a tree with a woman at work in the distance, a mother sitting under a tree with a sick child, various vignettes of slavery as it had existed in the West Indies. The silk would be used for reticules, and, since Julianna could get a good price, would the Boston women be interested in acquiring some for their handwork projects?[55] Julianna's offer not only shows the female antislavery network in use but also points to the role of women in creating material goods that served as propaganda for the cause. The material culture of antislavery has not survived, for the most part, but descriptions women gave of their work and lists of goods sent into fairs suggest what kinds of things they made. Depictions of slave scenes printed on material and made into work bags and other useful articles were popular. Mottoes either printed or stitched by individual women adorned needlebooks, penwipers, and anything that the imagination could devise. Maria Child attracted laughter for "putting mottoes on all her things," including a bachelor's bag with needles, thread, tape and "a skreed of doctrine."[56]

Mottoes captured abolitionist beliefs in abbreviated and simplified form and thus educated buyers about the essentials of the creed and the duties of an abolitionist. Penwipers instructed their owners to "Wipe out the blot of Slavery," while quills, "Weapons for Abolitionists," reminded their possessors of their responsibilities as advocates of immediate emancipation. The visual images that adorned handiwork appealed to the emotions. Scenes depicted the cruelty of slavery and undercut the southern insistence on the lower nature of slaves by emphasizing the humanity and even dignity of slaves. Representations evoking the triumphs of the abolitionist movement (emancipation in the West Indies, for example) suggested the feasibility of emancipation. Women proved to be able propagandists, both original (they might write their own mottoes, for example) and derivative (they built upon the iconography of British antislavery). Either way, they demonstrated their modern understanding of the dynamics of successful propaganda.[57]

In 1839, Mary White of Boylston mentioned in her diary that she had "assisted in getting the bed quilt at the Hall for the Antislavery cause." Boylston women, in fact, contributed two quilts that year, one for a bed, the other for a cradle. Maria Child also contributed a cradle quilt embellished with the words: "Think of the negro-mother / When *her* child is torn away." While the message of the quilts was not always so clear, familiar designs were given new meanings. Jacob's Ladder, for example, symbolized not the Old Testament story but the Underground Railroad. The most private household article, used to cover a bed, had taken on a clearly political message.[58]

As one fair circular suggested, such items were "useful in a double capacity." While the sale of these goods brought in money, their creation and use hammered in the basic antislavery message. As women made the articles, they continually recalled the purpose of their work. Those who bought them were reminded in the course of simple, daily tasks—wiping one's pen, doing mending, writing letters—of the necessity of emancipation. Recipients of letters sealed with a motto, or even guests at an evening party who glimpsed a velvet or silk reticule adorned with the image of a slave, might think about how their own lives contrasted with those of the poor slaves. While few scholars have seen the fragile material culture as particularly important, its value as omnipresent propaganda (as opposed to the visit of the lecturer) was great. Moreover, it is significant that women produced this material culture. By the act of making goods designed to carry a political and public issue into the household as well as into less private places, antislavery women, perhaps unconsciously, once again made elastic the definition of their sphere.[59]

While the subtle mingling of the private and public worlds suggested

by material productions did not raise questions of propriety, the entry of women into the marketplace did. Elizabeth Gay, who lived on rural Staten Island, described herself working for both the Boston and Philadelphia fairs in these terms: "All I can do here is to sit alone . . . and stitch stitch hoping my little aid may do something for the cause." This depiction of herself sewing alone at home was accurate, for sewing was a domestic activity, and even antislavery sewing circles usually met at one another's houses. Mingled with such domesticity, however, was an involvement in the commercial world. Elizabeth, herself, gave a baldly economic description of fairs in 1857 when she wrote, "There is a set of producers who will supply the market, and a set of consumers who will come and buy." In a similar spirit, another woman ended her letter about fair business with these revealing words: "Make 'heaps of money.' "[60]

The commonly expressed desire to make goods that were both "saleable and profitable," as a New Bedford woman described them, entangled abolitionist women in the world of fashion and taste. Even the smallest items should conform to fashionable norms. As Elizabeth Gay had learned in her fair work, there was "a vast difference between such little things well & tastefully made, and such as I have thrown under the table very often at our Fairs in Phila[elphia]." Evelina Smith was equally aware of what standards she should meet, writing for a pattern for dickies "in [the] most approved fashion for Boston folks," knowing that it would be folly to make frumpy dickies for the fair. The exchange of patterns put women in touch with one another and served as the means for instructing and acquainting them with sophisticated norms of taste.[61]

Fair workers not only asked for advice and learned about the genteel market but also tried to build up sales experience from a distance. When they worked for one of the big fairs, the women often inquired about what had sold in the past and the prices specific items had commanded. It was with these concerns in mind that Silva Jones asked to know whether the table mats made by women in Ashburnham sold and what price the buyers had paid, for place mats were one of the principal items sent into the Boston fair from that town.[62]

The pricing issue was important. Fair managers wanted the women who made goods to price them as well. Women undertook what was initially an unfamiliar chore and sent in boxes of goods uncertain about their success in understanding marketplace values. Ellen Russell struggled with appraising articles, feeling that she had "probably made many errors, over-rating some things and undervaluing others." A cape, knit of spool cotton, was "a very serviceable article" she had not marked at all, for she had "no idea of its value." Quaker women in Nantucket also debated prices. Their first attempt at pricing had set the values too low, some of the women felt, so they had raised prices. Charlotte Austin was one who "should pronounce some of [the prices] extravagant." But the point was, as one women in East Bridgewater put it, to sell goods "for what they will fetch."[63]

Over time, women developed a sense of their intended market. In Boston, managers carried useful goods, but clearly the ornamental and fancy goods drew the crowds. In Nantucket, however, these sorts of items, sent on after a Boston fair, were "too expensive for . . . [the] market." Similarly, in Worcester, "a very different set of persons" attended the fair "from those they have at the Boston fairs, . . . so of course the sale of really costly articles is rare."[64]

The market dictated what women made and what fair managers solicited in terms of goods and buyers. When Elizabeth Gay learned that her baskets "did not go off, as I would wish at Boston" but were "eagerly sought for" at Phila[delphia]," she decided to make "them for that market this year." Managers of the Lynn fair planned to provide the toys, children's stockings, and mittens that they knew would meet with a ready sale, while, in Concord, New Hampshire, women determined to sell clothing "suitable" for Irish workers and "to stir round these Irish and get them to the fair if possible."[65]

The Concord fair, with its clothing for Irish immigrants, was quite a different affair from the Boston extravaganza, where tables were piled with tempting and elegant goods, including, in 1839, many different styles of " 'Parisian Necklaces' for the promenade or drawing room." Despite their varying character, however, all antislavery fairs raised questions and occasionally exposed tensions among women who worked for them. Susan Hayward of Uxbridge, Massachusetts, was mildly uncomfortable about the connection between her moral commitment and the values of a cash economy when she sent in her "trifling" contribution to the fair. She begged that her interest in the noble cause not be measured "by *value received*."[66]

Other women worried about other fundamental issues fair work raised. For instance, a woman who had pledged a donation of money to the Boston fair declined to pay, for she became "convinced that Fairs are wrong." An undated fair circular suggested that the argument "against the moral tendency of fairs" focused on "improprieties in the management." A fair was not in itself wrong, the flyer asserted, "unless the same can be proved of the act of selling and of purchasing." But the act of buying and selling was, indeed, centrally related to the problems some people perceived in fairs.[67]

The ranks of abolitionist women included those from the city and coun-

try and from evangelical and nonevangelical denominations; they attracted both Quakers and non-Quakers, and those with scant means and others more comfortable; so fairs were bound to bring out differences in attitudes toward commercial activity. Mary Gilbert, writing from West Brookfield, Massachusetts, described a clash between standards of Christian plainness, self-denial, and rural usefulness and urban elegance, self-indulgence, and frivolity, and between a just price and an usurious price. The debate, triggered by the market and industrial revolution, was not confined to abolitionist circles;it was part of a broader cultural discussion about the threat the cash-oriented, consumer-driven economy posed to the "traditional" self-sufficient farmstead and the evangelical household. "You are doubtless aware," wrote Mary, "that many persons are scrupulous in regard to . . . *Fairs* generally, on the ground that most of the articles offered . . . possess little or no intrinsic value and are sold at exorbitant prices." New Yorker Julianna Tappan had raised similar concerns years before. "There is so much time consumed, and so much consulting of fashion, and conformity to the world, that I doubt much whether fairs, *as they are conducted* are pleasing to God."[68]

Managers of the Boston fair explained that "the interest of our clients, the honor of our cause, and our credit as its advocates, above all bid us demand the highest market price." But charging high rather than fair prices for goods that had no useful purpose seemed unethical to some abolitionist women who viewed themselves and their cause in moral terms and who deprived themselves in order to contribute to abolitionist causes. In Walpole, Massachusetts, Mary Manter had decided she would "rather dress plain and poor and live on plain and cheep food then to have the slaves in bondage." She argued that "if people would only deny themselves of some unneedful things and be less careful to adorn their poor bodies," they might be of greater use to the cause. Mrs. May took action when she worked at the Boston fair. She "fought every step about the marking. She struggled to give away every thing & *would* privately catch up a thing & mark it without saying a word. We resisted . . . but it is hard to fight over every article."[69]

In the PFAS, Quaker members were initially hostile to the whole idea of a fair. As Sarah Pugh explained, "by that Society, Fairs were regarded with much suspicion, if not absolute disapprobation. So strong were these sentiments that it was difficult to get agreement on raising money in such a way." To calm anxieties, the PFAS called its first fair an "Anti-slavery Sale," and sold only "plain and simple" goods. In time, the Philadelphia fair became an annual event and the focus of the women's work. Members acknowledged that fairs were "one of the readiest measures for increasing . . . funds" and "a means of enlisting the interest of such as need some excitement of the kind to call forth benevolence."[70]

Questionable practices at some fairs raised further scruples and questions. Fair managers sometimes sponsored raffles. One Cincinnati woman made her objections to this practice clear in her letter to a Boston fair manager. "Do discard *Raffles* from your Bazaar," she wrote. "It *is* gambling." If not gambling, selling chances could be seen as a form of trickery, encouraging people to spend money for nothing. Other practices, while not specifically mentioned, raised the issue of impropriety. As the New York *Tribune* hinted, Boston fair managers drew attention and buyers by "advantageously posting" attractive young women in the hall. The paper noted the careful way in which "good looks and good spirits are judiciously distributed throughout the hall." The interest in securing a sale might also lead to questionable behavior on the part of the women in charge of the tables. While no one ever suggested that Elizabeth Gay acted in a cajoling or seductive fashion, her own account of the way she handled her sales is evocative:

> The great thing is to know our customers and at a Boston table I should be almost as raw a hand as the greenest of your country sellers. I could work however because nine years of bitter experience has taught me how. At a Phila[delphia] table I flatter myself I am *au fait* at all the tricks of trade. I can almost take my Quaker affirmation that a man or woman has money in his pocket . . . as soon as he enters. But in Boston my sagacity would fail me. I don't know your nabobs nor your spending people from your close-fisted short pursed ones.[71]

Some of the questions raised by women's support of and work for antislavery fairs were doubtless rendered less powerful by the unmistakable morality of the cause of emancipation and the profitability of the fairs themselves. Because fairs were events with multiple meanings, anxieties about buying and selling might be stifled. While the spectacle of women hawking abolitionist wares might be offensive to some, the way fairs functioned as elaborate pieces of propaganda for the antislavery cause in addition to the rituals and myths that they created for the movement helped to justify them as suitable activities for women.[72]

Fairs were, of course, marketplaces or bazaars. The spectacle mounted in the town hall by Lynn women in 1838 was far less elaborate than that offered by city fairs, yet the effect was sumptuous and inviting. The fair did not feature furniture for the upper-class drawing room, but it did offer a profusion of small tempting items suitable for those Lynn residents who

desired goods that symbolized genteel middle-class taste. For sale for the parlor were a special English writing case for the center table, finished with pencil drawings, paintings of American scenery, wax flowers, lamp and vase stands, screens and portfolios, inlaid boxes, and glass and wood workboxes, some highly finished. There were more items ranging in usefulness from a gilt and lacquered tea caddy, to blotting books, paper, quills, and writing apparatus, needlebooks, and letter racks. Many articles were bits of finery that Lynn shoppers could afford: tippets, bags, and reticules "of every color, shape and material," capes, cuffs, and collars in a richly embroidered style, net and lace caps for the bonnet, "in a style not yet seen in the shops." Buyers could purchase eau de lavande and German cologne and the stands (one of them of Sevres porcelain) upon which to place them. Numerous toys and clothes for infants and children were for sale, and ample refreshments tempted shoppers.

Held on January 1 and 2, the fair contributed to the process of commercializing the holiday season. It invited visitors to buy New Year's presents or to acquire small luxuries for themselves. Sold by women, most of the goods seem to have been intended for women and children. In this vision of the fair women were at once the producers, the sellers, and the intended recipients of the cornucopia of articles in the town hall. The commercial nature of the fair placed women squarely in bustling world of buying, selling, and consuming.[73]

On another level, fairs operated as giant mechanisms for propaganda. Fair managers did not expect their goods to attract only abolitionists. The idea was to have a tempting enough display to bring in those who did not yet understand the need for immediate emancipation. For this audience, the fair was not just about buying but about the abolitionist cause.

The setting itself was pregnant with meaning. Anyone attending the Bangor fair in late August 1840, for example, must have been impressed with the scene the women had created. The fair took place in a hall "beautifully decorated" with paintings, flowers, and evergreens. If visitors missed the symbolism of the decoration (greens symbolizing rebirth and renewal were ubiquitous at fairs), they could hardly misunderstand the banners adorned with mottoes. In Bangor, messages like: "Emancipation," "Let My people Go," "Liberty," and "Loose the Bonds of Wickedness" were pithy and bold. Individual purchases carried these and other mottoes, reminding fair visitors long after the event had ended of the importance of abolitionism. The tables furnished by towns from all corners of Maine suggested the power of the movement and its inevitable triumph. When fair managers were able to obtain goods sent by women in the British Isles, the message was even stronger, for these goods symbolized the international dimensions of antislavery and reminded Americans that the English efforts to abolish slavery had succeeded.[74]

At the Salem fair, held in the basement of the Mechanics Building, the display at the entrance featured "wrought shoes, watch-cases, aprons, caps +c. neatly executed by the colored children." The handiwork highlighted the skills and industry of the African American youngsters and suggested their ability to become productive members of society. The center of the table—with "a barge splendidly carved by a native of Africa, filled with dolls of various sizes, with the inscription, 'We are free,' upon its pennant"—was at once an exotic evocation of a noble not servile Africa, of the tragic middle passage and enslavement of Africans, and of the heritage of freedom that abolitionists were claiming for black Americans.[75]

The tables stocked with goods made by women of Salem and other towns testified to the dedication and commitment of female abolitionists to this cause. The piles of "overwrought collars," "rich silk aprons," and "splendid knit bead workbags" offered proof of the middle-class credentials that women insisted upon so often. Even the diverse crowds, made up of Calvinists, Unitarians, Whigs, Democrats, and Liberty Party men, gave out a message about the cooperative nature and power of the cause. The presence of blacks reminded people of what the struggle was all about and made a statement against what Frederick Douglass called "the green-eyed monster—prejudice against color." But perhaps one of the most significant messages fairs proclaimed was that of free labor, freely given. In contrast to slaves who had no choice but to work, and in contrast to wage earners who worked for money, the abolitionist women had toiled freely and selflessly. The example of labor untainted by base desire for personal gain, free from the ignominy of the lash, made a powerful moral statement, one that resonated with northerners' understanding of their historical heritage.[76]

Information about fairs mounted by black women is sparse and provides little of the detail that has survived for the fairs discussed here. Given the economic circumstances of most free blacks, the fairs must have been far less lavish than the major urban fairs. The bazaar black women in Frankfort, Ohio, organized in 1847, for example, took place in Rilla Harris's home, not a rented hall. But even this modest event carried messages: about the domestic industry of black women, their status as ladies, and the capacity of blacks to rise to an equality with whites. The handbill for the Frankfort fair assured the public that "all the delicacies of the season will be served up in the most palatable style—such as *Ice Creams, Cakes, Lemonades, Jellies, Fruits, Nuts, etc. etc.*" The Women's Association of Philadel-

phia, which sponsored fairs to raise money for Frederick Douglass's paper, the *North Star*, provided the fair with respectable middle-class credentials by its support for "the elevation of the Colored People in the United States." Members of the association were, presumably, already elevated.[77]

New York African American women put on the most elaborate and lucrative fair of the prewar period in 1860. The managers, mostly the wives of clergymen, rented "a spacious and . . . elegantly lighted" room. Managers "were all decked in pretty calico gowns, all, or nearly all, of the same stripe, giving thereby a most picturesque effect." The goods were "very beautiful" and sales realized over $1,000 to benefit the Colored Orphan Asylum. The gay and elegant crowd stunned the white people who attended the fair, and the newspaper account of the event suggested that the appearance of so many genteel and well-dressed blacks dealt a blow to prejudice. The paper quoted approvingly the comments of one white visitor who remarked, "I wish . . . that the entire white population could, by some means, this night see this people. They would go from hence divested of most, if not all of their foolish prejudices."[78]

Fairs served yet other purposes, for they helped to create the rituals and history that sustained the movement for decades. Whether scheduled for the Christmas–New Year season or for the late summer, times of the year laden with meaning and sometimes marked by festivities, fairs imposed an antislavery stamp on the secular calendar. The throngs, the elegant goods, the bustle, and the noise, the mottoes and decorations—the excitement surrounding all aspects of the fairs—created a special atmosphere quite different from both everyday routines and holiday celebrations. For abolitionists, the ritual activity was less the act of purchasing goods than meeting, greeting, and, reaffirming ties with other like-minded abolitionists, both male and female. These occasions, repeated over time, helped to integrate abolitionist workers and visitors into a communion of believers. Especially for those who felt they were working alone, fairs were important moments of connection.

A young African American woman, Charlotte Forten, who breathlessly recorded in her diary that she had spent a day at the Boston fair, is an example of a woman energized by these moments of connection. "Had the good fortune," she wrote, "to be made known to three of the noblest and best of women; Mesdames Chapman, Follen, and Child. . . . Saw all the most distinguished champions of our cause." She would not soon forget "the kind pressure" of Wendell Phillip's hand and his "beaming smile." Charlotte's excited reaction highlights the role fairs played in providing opportunities to see and perhaps even shake the hand of the leaders of the movement, whether they were Liberty men, evangelical clerics, newspapers editors, or imposing women like Maria Chapman or Abby Kelley. As Charlotte's words suggest, the occasion was more than just a social one. Fairs, in fact, helped to create heroic figures by providing the audiences and admiring throngs for them. The 1847 fair broadside for the National Anti-Slavery Bazaar suggested the importance of this function when it pointed out that one of the most edifying aspects of the bazaar had been the sights of the "famous" that it had provided.[79]

In other ways, the fairs reinforced the stature of abolitionist leaders. The crayon portrait of Garrison a woman drew for one fair, and the letter written by Garrison surrounded by a wreath and leaves at another contributed to the process of heroizing him. Most fairs featured a post office where visitors could purchase letters written by leading abolitionists. At the Salem fair, many who declined to buy other items at the fair were willing to pay for a letter at the post office. Presumably, these documents were carried home to be proudly displayed or carefully preserved as sacred souvenirs. Also available for purchase at many fairs were anniversary books like the *Liberty Bell* (published by the Boston Garrisonians), the *Star of Emancipation* (published by the non-Garrisonian Massachusetts Female Emancipation Society), and the *Antislavery Autograph* (published by the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society). Such books were partly intended to spotlight abolitionist leaders. As Julia Griffiths explained, the Rochester volume would "record the testimony of as many distinguished persons" as possible "against the great sin of our age." The *Liberty Bell* was filled "with pieces (either grave or gay—lively or severe as the muse dictates) from those whose names are dear to the abolitionists." The books both acquainted abolitionists with the names of significant figures and helped to make them beloved.[80]

Seen in symbolic terms, the tables sponsored by other towns and even by women in Great Britain placed abolitionism and its leaders in an American and British context. The tables representing work donated by women from many different communities suggested the democratic setting in which abolitionists operated. The English tables signified a historical pedigree for a movement that was relatively recent.

Even the dollars earned by fairs contributed to mythmaking. In a report on one of the Boston fairs, the *Liberator* argued that the fair's profitability proved false the claim "that abolitionism is *fast dying away in Boston*." In fact, dollars could be construed as proof of the successful progress of aboli-

tionism. Certainly the presence of the crowds that often included "worldly people" seemed to indicate the strides abolitionism was making in reaching out to an ever-increasing audience.

Although fairs were the most dramatic and visible indications of women's work in abolitionism during the 1840s and 1850s, and represented crucial links for those involved in antislavery, other avenues of commitment existed, some of them individualistic and carried on outside of any organized network. In 1843, Maria Child, like others distressed by the controversies plaguing abolitionism, concluded that her feelings were "completely and forever alienated from the anti-slavery *organization*." She decided that she would "work in my own way, according to the light that is in me." It was in this spirit that Maria one week paid a "poor way-worn" fugitive's railroad fare to Hartford, with an introductory letter to a friend, and the next week gave another fugitive slave a dollar and again a "cautiously worded" letter. Not hearing from either of them, she worried that "the poor fellows were captured on the way," despite the discreet message she had provided to help them to freedom. With similar sympathies, Mary White noted in her diary in 1843 that she and her daughter had prepared a box of clothing "to send to Canada for the relief of runaway slaves," and she recorded giving lodging to "Mr. Washington a colored man."[81]

Offering hospitality or courtesy to African Americans often brought a storm of criticism down upon the women. Frances Drake learned that the reason that women would not cooperate with her on the fair was because she walked and rode with members of the Remond family (a noted black abolitionist family from Salem) when they came to Leominister. Village women reportedly said that she could be just as good an abolitionist "and still not treat niggers so familiarly." When she was asked if she would consider marrying a black man, she reported, "I answered very *frankly*. . . . Yes—if he was just as worthy in every respect as a white man ought to be. You can have no idea what a talk it has made all over town." In Utica, Paulina Wright's courtesy to one of the Remonds resulted in social ostracism. "There is scarcely a woman in the city that will speak to me because we went to the Falls with Remond[.] [T]hey are really making a worse fuss about that than anything else[.] I do sometimes feel the want of female sympathy and society."[82]

The criticism that often followed social gestures to African Americans makes clear that women who followed such advice had overcome some of the common antipathies of the day and transgressed community racial norms. Mary Manter attributed her lack of prejudice to the influence of the *Liberator*, which Garrison sent to her for free. In its pages she "learnt the cause of humanity, how to feal for the oppressed, and by reading . . . I lost entirely my prejudice against colour, and can feal just as well in the company of a coloured brother or sister as if their skin was the same colour as my own, and can sign a petition for the reapeal of that part of the Law, that makes a distinction on acount of colour, (heart and hand) wither it be to marry or ride together." Although Mary attributed her views to reading the *Liberator*, evangelical women heard the same message elsewhere. The 1849 Annual Report of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society condemned prejudice as "mean and unchristian" and encouraged all to demonstrate that they were "exempted from its turpitude." It was not surprising, however, that abolitionist women, like both men and women in our own times, often unconsciously expressed their sense of black inferiority. When Maria Child met one of the Remonds, she found herself "extremely pleased" with him. Remond was the first African American she had met "who seemed to be altogether such an one as I would have him." Her comment suggests that she could best accept African Americans when they met her white expectations of what a black person should be.[83]

Although genuine acceptance was limited, and few white abolitionists confronted the tremendous economic problems facing free blacks, white and black abolitionist women did make some efforts to work together toward equality. In the Midwest, they participated in petition drives aimed at destroying state black laws. In the East, they sought signatures to overturn antiblack legislation. Some challenged discriminatory laws and practices directly. New Bedford women refused to adhere to racial policies during an 1841 train trip and invited an African American missionary into the white car with them. When the conductor ordered the man to leave the white car, the women told the conductor "what we thought. . . . Arnold, Ann, Mary and myself—all, joined, the girls forgetting that [they] were out of their 'appropriate sphere,' in their eagerness to protect an insulted brother, did their part and our poor conductor not expecting such opposition, retreated, leaving us in possession of the field."[84]

In such encounters, white women ran the risk of insult and possible injury. Blacks, however, bore the greatest responsibility for confronting injustice and were far more likely to experience bad treatment than white women, especially when they were acting alone. When Mary Green, the secretary of the Lynn Female Anti-Slavery Society, got on a white car in Lynn and refused to leave it, "she was dragged out of the car . . . in a very indecent manner with an infant in her arm, and then struck and thrown to the ground. Her husband, when he arrived at the scene, was also beaten

for daring to interfere for her protection." Despite the rough treatment, Mary appealed to the railroad's stockholders in a letter. "I think I have a right, in common with others," she said, "to go in any car I choose. When I behave disorderly, it will be time to order me out." When Sarah Walker Fossett, a well-known hairdresser in Cincinnati, tried to ride the street car in that city, the conductor shoved her back into the street. She pursued her cause in court.[85]

Even undramatic individual attempts to help blacks could create a distance between a white abolitionist woman and her neighbors. Elizabeth Gay suggested as much when she wrote her friend, Lizzy, in Hingham and encouraged her to stand her ground. Lizzy's efforts with the "poor creatures . . . so long . . . considered the outcasts of society" included trying to find them employment. Phoebe Jackson was involved in a shelter for African American children in New Bedford. Her work there had finally conquered the "wicked prejudice" she had felt "in regard to color" but hardly endeared her to others.[86]

Simple occasions offered opportunities to make statements to the community. For her black scholars' picnic in Toledo, Ohio, Laura Haviland helped organize a parade through the town. The banner at the head of the procession proclaimed, "Knowledge is Power." The banner's motto explained Laura's decision to teach black children and their interest in going to school. Education was a transforming process, but most states provided little or no public education for free blacks. As a result, teaching became a way of expressing an abolitionist commitment.[87]

An early foray into black education occurred in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the mid-1830s, a group of young men and women, inspired by a call in the *New York Evangelist* and helped initially by the Tappan brothers, set up schools for blacks in that city. They hoped to prove wrong those who claimed that "the blacks can never be raised here, etc."[88] The teachers tried to inculcate their students with the moral, intellectual, and domestic standards of their middle-class white world. The transformation that they hoped to instigate was ambitious and daunting. Phebe Matthews reflected that the work was "*difficult*, . . . *arduous* but still pleasant and delightful," while one of her colleagues thought that "ours is not the work of a week or a year. . . . It looks more like *work* of *time* than it did when we commenced yet we feel not the least disheartened." The women's continued refrain of good cheer suggested that their task had its moments of profound discouragement.[89]

"Young and inexperienced," in "a little isolated company" in an unsympathetic white city, the white teachers made sacrifices for their work. They missed contact with "all literary and refined society" and felt keenly the difference between themselves and their students. The children were not habituated to school discipline, and many frequently missed classes because they had to work. Susan Wattles obviously chafed at the "daily hourly contact with a people whose moral sense is blunted[,] whose intellect is dimmed, and every faculty of body and mind degraded by a system of the cruelest oppression." She was further dismayed by what she saw as indifference in the families of her pupils. "I never saw a colored family who were willing to dispense with tea and coffee that they might buy books for their children," she claimed.[90]

Black women, usually from the middle class, also taught in cities all over the North. Few received the respect they believed was their professional due. Sarah Douglass, for example, dissolved into tears during a Quaker meeting after a Friend asked her, "Does thee go out ahouse cleaning?" And because they were constantly aware of the necessity of establishing their own credentials as respectable ladies and because they recognized (and sometimes overemphasized) the connections between black ignorance and white prejudice, African American teachers shared some of white teachers' dismay over their pupils' behavior and seeming lack of interest in education. Like white teachers, they frequently underestimated the way free blacks' worsening economic situation undermined educational goals.[91]

Black teachers, as did their white counterparts, often needed financial help to keep their schools open. The PFAS assisted Sarah Douglass, who ran the only academy for black girls in Philadelphia. Over the years, they provided her with an outright stipend, paid rent for her schoolroom, and bought a stove to keep it warm. White members of the society felt a genuine interest in Douglass's school, but Douglass apparently had problems with the arrangement. Perhaps she felt she was being too closely scrutinized. Whatever the reason, she refused the society's stipend after a few years, although she accepted the indirect help that came from the rent the organization paid for using the schoolroom for meetings. Other black teachers faced obvious prejudice. During an exhibition at the African Free School in New York, for example, whites ordered the black women not to sit "upon a platform that was reserved for the *trustees*."[92]

On a smaller scale than that of full-time teaching, other women established Sabbath schools and domestic skills classes for black young people. Betsy Cowles, employed as a teacher at Portsmouth Seminary in Ohio, gathered a Sunday school class of ten girls in 1842, who she remarked were "guilty of this crime, what think ye it is? why of possessing real black skins; & for this crime, have been excluded from Sabbath School." The two Stearns sisters, belonging to no society, labored on their "own respon-

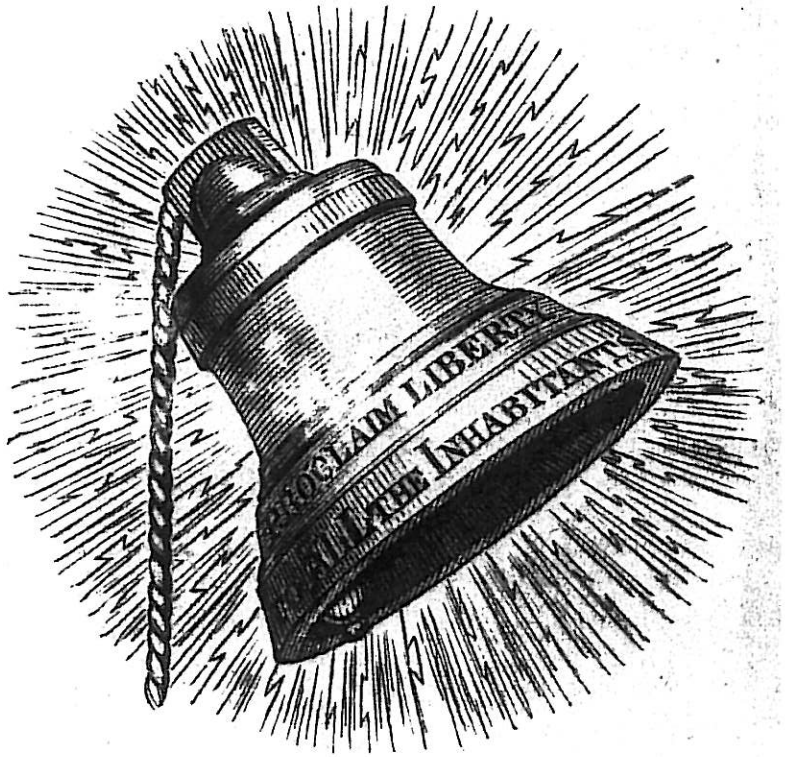
sibility" with their school for African Americans in Springfield. They had commenced their efforts after neighbors had responded to their speeches on behalf of "the *sufferings* of the poor slave" with the taunt, "Why do you not look after the colored people right here?" Like the Cincinnati teachers, the Stearns found that the cultural peculiarities they encountered in the "poor, wretched" African American neighborhood of "Hayti" made them uncomfortable. Did they experience relief or disappointment when "the worst families" and their children moved away, leaving the women with only a biweekly prayer meeting? They did not say so specifically, but they reported satisfaction with their prayer meetings: "Blessed good times, we can say just what we have a mind to."[93]

White women who dared to challenge racial norms by working among African Americans had to put up with criticism, gossip, and often loneliness. One New Hampshire woman called her opponents "*wolves*" poised to "*devour*" her little band. Writing from Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, Agnes Crain did not even have the companionship of like-minded abolitionists. She so feared "the influence of Society on my sentiments and feelings" that she stayed at home, and "thus I lose the opportunity of knowing who is disposed to learn the truth." Although she confessed that in her "single endeavors" she "got much discouraged," she persisted in her efforts to circulate abolitionist literature.[94]

Some of the material she lent may well have been written by other abolitionist women. Active propagandists, women used all the avenues of their print culture to spread the abolitionist message. Poems, songs, memoirs, short stories, novels, tracts, firsthand accounts of slavery, letters to newspapers, and pieces for fair giftbooks all were vehicles for women writers. Oddities, like the poetical alphabet a Philadelphia woman composed for the fair ("You are very young, tis true / But there's much you can do"), attest to women's inventiveness.[95]

Despite the prominence of literary women like Maria Child and Caroline Kirkland, writing for publication under their own names created for some women the familiar struggle between propriety and duty. Sarah Shaw, whose husband had agreed to contribute to the Boston fair's giftbook, the *Liberty Bell*, felt "a stronger objection than ever, to making any public acknowledgement of my principles or feelings." Her reluctance puzzled her, for her antislavery principles were growing stronger as time passed. She concluded that having her name in print was "against my taste, and my nature which is decidedly retiring."[96]

By using pen names, other women wrote abolitionist propaganda and retained their principles. As one woman explained, "I have never out of my



Emblem that appeared in The Liberty Bell, *the giftbook produced for the Boston fair. Giftbooks helped to highlight the importance of abolitionist leaders and offered a place for the work of abolitionist writers. They also made money for the cause and carried the abolitionist message into individual households. (Boston Athenæum)*

immediate family, allowed it to be known whom that name represents. If it should ever be divulged accidently, there will be an end to all literary effort on my part." Over time, some women were able to overcome norms that dictated female modesty and privacy. An acquaintance of Lucretia Mott's, for instance, had long "composed many little songs for her children in order to imbue them early with Anti-Slavery principle" and had used a pseudonym when her material appeared in print, but she agreed to have her real name appear in the *Liberty Bell*. The cause was sufficiently important for her to lay her qualms aside. And in what was a somewhat daring move, a Connecticut woman was willing to allow personal letters to be published in the *Liberator*. "They are, perhaps, of too private a nature for the general

taste," she admitted, "but are . . . not some minds better reached in this familiar way than by a more personal address?"[97]

Phoebe Stearns was unable to send in either money or articles to one of the big antislavery fairs but was glad to use her pen to "aid [the] cause" in any way possible. Her narrative, which she thought could appear in tract form or in a giftbook, was true "in every particular" (although real names were, of course, not used). A woman from the evangelical wing of abolitionism also relied on facts that she asked Amos Phelps to supply. Despite the press of the domestic duties that interfered with her writing, she was eager for "narratives of runaway slaves, and [for] facts respecting the treatment of these poor creatures in different states" for her literary efforts.[98]

While some women stuck to facts, many imaginative treatments of slavery appeared. The male abolitionist who welcomed "the novelty of seeing abolitionism in a work of fiction" because he thought the public hungered for "every new view in which the important subject is presented" overstated the public's interest in the subject. But he was right to point to the power of fiction to engage the sympathies of readers and to attract an audience that loved to read even if it did not love the slave. Novelist Sophia Little was quite conscious that, while her writing was perhaps not "a work of art," it could "reach the people."[99]

Unlike male writers, who emphasized slave rebellion as a theme and who frequently produced abstract and ideologically oriented work, women writers used the techniques of sentimental fiction to arouse readers to the horrors of slavery. "See the young mother," counseled a piece in the *Envoy*, a Rhode Island giftbook. "Whisper in her ear / Tales which might chill to the life to hear."[100] Persuaded that their audience must not merely understand the facts of slavery but empathize with the enslaved, women writers sought to move readers without offending their genteel sensibilities. In the spirit of the first female antislavery societies that had adopted immediate emancipation as a means of reaching out to suffering sisters in bondage, women writers tended to emphasize the tragedies besetting slave families and the plight of noble female slaves who honored, in so far as they could, the values of purity and fidelity so cherished by middle-class culture. The focus on slave women and their families coupled with the desire to expose the sexual rapacity of white masters required some literary gymnastics. Caroline Healy Dall, author of a short story for the 1858 *Liberty Bell*, explained, "I could not write the story as he[r informant] told it. If I were to use the English tongue with the nervous strength that he did when he told the bitterest portion of his tale, all the women in the land would tear the pages out of the fair volume: Yet, alas! if we but knew it, when we mention the word slavery, we sum up all possible indecencies as well as all possible villanies."[101]

Caroline's efforts to move her readers without offending them were just one example of the varied and significant work women undertook in the abolitionist cause in the 1840s. Although many women bemoaned the divisions that beset the movement and were discouraged when former associates became disinterested or gave their loyalties to other branches of abolitionism, women of all stripes continued to labor in their own ways for immediate emancipation. From a modern vantage point, it is not decline or the retreat of timid women from, but the proliferation of opportunities to work for, the slave and the overlapping nature of many of their efforts that stand out.

In the 1840s, women were also boldly confronting strategic issues facing abolitionists. While some abolitionist women involved themselves in associational business, worked for fairs, taught black children and sometimes their parents, and published material about slavery, others were far more concerned about the state of the Union and the state of the American churches. In 1841, "Cora" from Rhode Island reported on the election there. In her opinion, the election showed "what may be effected by abolitionists in the way of political action." When Garrisonian activist Mary Clark of Concord, New Hampshire, died, one of her last acts was writing a piece for the *Herald of Freedom*. In it she attacked the clergy for supporting slavery and threatened them with divine retribution. Striking the same note, but in words composed to be sung, Almira Seymour called out, "O, purify thy churches, / Throughout this sinful land; / Let justice, truth and mercy / Beside thy altar stand." These published pieces point to further areas of interest in 1840s: politics and religious reform, topics that will be discussed in detail in Chapter 4.[102]