THE WORCESTER WOMENS RIGHTS CONVENTION OF 1850: A SOCIAL ANALYSIS OF THE RANK AND FILE MEMBERSHIP

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PREFACE

This study analyzed the membership of the Worcester Women's Rights Convention of 1850, to compare the major characteristics of this group to the general population of Worcester, Massachusetts in 1850.

The members of the convention were urban, white, Protestant and different from the general population. The city of Worcester's population was much more diverse. Within the membership group it was found that they were not all of the same socio-economic background. By dividing the one group into three categories--antislavery organizers, women, and men--the study found that there were working class as well as upper and middle class individuals at the convention. The class diversity occurred almost wholly among women.

The bulk of the research of this study was conducted at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. Sources were also located at the Worcester Historical Museum and the Worcester Room at the Worcester Public Library.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The origins, development, and composition of the women's rights movement in the nineteenth century have long intrigued historians. Almost all historians who have studied the subject have agreed that women engaged in reform tended to be native, white, urban, middle class Protestants. In their analysis of the women's rights movement, most historians of women reformers have emphasized the importance of the development of "separate spheres" and of the Second Great Awakening. They have also generally tended to view the women's rights movement as a point of departure for women's rights activism.

More recently, some historians, while agreeing with others on most issues, have argued that the women's rights movement should be considered distinct from other types of female reform because it was the first women's group that openly confronted the domination of men. Most recently, Nancy Hewitt, in her study of Rochester, New York, found that women in reform organizations actually came to activism through at least three different paths: benevolent, perfectionist, and ultraist. Like Ellen DuBois, she argued that women's rights activists should be considered apart

from other reformers, due to their openly confrontational tactics. Aside from Hewitt's path-breaking study, however, few historians have been able to examine the grassroots composition of the early women's rights movement due to a lack of source material[1].

The Worcester Women's Rights Convention of 1850 presents an unusual, perhaps unique, opportunity to study grassroots participation in mid-nineteenth century reform. Lists of individuals who participated in the daily routine of the convention were kept and published as part of the proceedings. These lists, which included the place of residence of the individuals, when analyzed in conjunction with the manuscript schedules of the U.S. Census of 1850, city directories, newspapers, and other primary sources have made possible a detailed social analysis of the participants who lived in Worcester.

This analysis sheds some new light on questions about the composition of the women's rights movement. While affirming that most participants were native-born, white, urban and Protestant, it offers some evidence to doubt whether the emphasis on the middle class origins of the reform impulse is entirely correct for the city of Worcester, Massachusetts. Moreover, the results of this

[1]Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984); Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: The Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978)

study suggests that the emphasis on antislavery origins of the women's rights movement may be mistaken. Participants may be viewed as falling into one of four distinct groups: the leadership, the antislavery group, a group of moderate male reformers, and a group of young women of very modest means. While it is clear that the leadership of the movement is middle-class and that antislavery was one important source of support for women's rights in Worcester, this analysis of grassroots supporters shows that other participants followed alternative pathways to reform.

This chapter offers a brief survey of the relevant secondary literature, discusses the background to the Worcester Convention, and then discusses why the convention was held there. Subsequent chapters will then describe the proceedings in some detail and provide a social analysis of the leadership and the participants.

The history of women's activism, as related by historians such as Nancy Cott, Keith Melder, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, begins with the privatized family and the Second Great Awakening. By the 1920's, as men began to leave the home in search of employment, women began to congregate at the local churches in ever increasing numbers, convinced by sermon and scripture that they were the guardians of morality and spirituality in their increasingly secular communities. As women and men began to occupy separate spheres, women and ministers saw the need to reform

communities led astray by the materialistic economic agenda of the male. Evangelistic denominations preached the duty of women and men to reform all aspects of society. Sanctioned by the pulpit, women launched themselves into the public world of voluntary and moral reform associations. The above mentioned historians claimed that while working to improve the conditions of the poor, homeless, and intemperate, women of the early nineteenth century were exposed to greater social problems and felt the need to further expand their influence. In an attempt to expand this influence, women found that they were denied them many of the fundamental freedoms and liberties afforded men. Without these liberties they could not adequately reform the immorality plaguing the country. These barriers to activism were enough to inspire some women to campaign for their own political and social rights and freedoms.[2]

Cott, Melder, and Smith-Rosenberg all conceive the path to reform as a single line of progression that began in the churches of the Second Great Awakening in the 1820's and the moral reform crusades of the 1830's and then culminated in the women's rights organizations of the late 1840's and 1850's. They agree that the women involved were native-

[2]Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Keith Melder, *Beginnings of Sisterhood: The American Women's Rights Movement, 1800-1850* (New York: Shocken Books, 1977); Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Religion and the Rise of the City: The New York City Mission Movement, 1812-1870* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971).

born, white, middle class, native born, and Protestant. While Melder states that these organizations brought women an experience and identity separate from men, Cott is unsure. She explains that while such organizations helped women to gain a separate identity, they were also reinforcing women's secondary status.[3]

Ellen DuBois questions this interpretation and claims that the women who campaigned for women's rights should be considered a distinct group apart from the many antebellum benevolent and perfectionist societies because they were alone in challenging the domination of men. She does, however, claim that these women were all middle class, white, and from an urban environment, as do Cott, Melder, and Smith-Rosenberg. She also agrees that women attacked these social constraints across separate spheres. But she does not adequately explain why the women's rights advocates diverged from other reforming women, considering their similar backgrounds. Blanche Glassman Hersh agrees with DuBois that there was no connection between benevolent work and the women's rights movement. She states that benevolent women "in no way defied tradition or questioned male authority."[4]

Suzanne Lebsock, finds that many women joined benevolent societies without ever involving themselves in

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ellen Carol DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage;* Blanche Glassman Hersh, *The Slavery of Sex: Feminist-Abolitionists in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978),4.

feminist organizations, in her investigation of the southern town of Petersberg, Virginia. This absence of feminism suggests that the formation of benevolent organizations is not always a definite precursor to feminist ideas. This finding supports the interpretation offered by DuBois and Hersh.[5]

Nancy Hewitt, in her study of Rochester, New York from 1822-1872, analyzes the development of women's organizations as well. She finds three distinct women's groups: benevolent, perfectionist, and ultraist. The three groups had different backgrounds and defined the role of women in society very differently. However, they all agreed that women needed to look after the welfare of society. Like the other historians, she does find that female reformers were all middle class, white, and Protestant.

Hewitt identifies multiple paths to reform that did not all originate in an urban setting. However, Hewitt classifies those individuals who participated in the women's rights movement to be from the ultraist group. The ultraists, both women and men, were from either an agrarian or shopkeeping background and had initiated campaigns for the abolition of slavery, women's rights, Indian rights, the integration of public schools, and spiritualism. Hicksite Quakers were at the center of this group, which also

[5]Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: Norton, 1984).

included such individuals as Wendell Phillips, Ernestine Rose, William Lloyd Garrison, Abby Kelley Foster, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton.[6]

Anne Boylan, like Hewitt, also finds more than one type of female reform group in the nineteenth century. In her study of women's organizations in New York and Boston, she finds that women were members of one type of organization or another and did not join more than one type. These types were benevolent, reform, and feminist. She views the women's rights movement of the 1840's and 50's as a separate tradition. She describes the women's organizations of the nineteenth century as "creating parallel sets of societies that often had little in common."[7]

The Women's Rights Movement already had quite a history before the convention of 1850. The first meeting calling for expanding rights for women was held on July 19 and 20, 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. Upset by the treatment of women at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, her good friend Lucretia Mott, and a few other Quaker women agreed that a women's rights convention should be called. At this first convention, Mott's husband James was asked to preside, for none of the women were confident enough to speak in public at first.

[6]Nancy A. Hewitt, *Women's Activism,* 22-23, 254-257.
[7]Anne Boylan, "Women in Groups: An Analysis of Women's Benevolent Organizations in New York and Boston, 1797-1840," *Journal of American History,* 71 (1984), 514.

They did, however, overcome their anxieties; both Mott and Stanton gave excellent lectures. Among those in attendance was the black abolitionist, Frederick Douglass.

The convention was a huge success, drawing over three hundred persons. During the convention the women drafted the *Declaration of Sentiments*, modeled after Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence. The right to vote was included in this document, but only after much debate. Many women were unsure if women needed the vote or deserved it. The resolution finally passed by a narrow margin.[8]

The convention was such a success another convention was planned for Rochester, New York, two weeks later. This meeting introduced the family of Susan B. Anthony to the leadership of the movement. Most of the leadership of the Women's Rights Organization in Rochester were also involved with antislavery groups. Indeed, it has been surmised that through the support for the liberty and freedom of slaves activist women realized they too were oppressed. This convention was also successful, drawing many women from Rochester and surrounding counties. The women of this convention read aloud the *Declaration of Sentiments* drafted

[8] For the general history of the women's rights movement see Doris Weatherford, *American Women's History* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1994), 136-137, 165-166, 311-313, 324-325; Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle eds., *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections From the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage and Harper* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978); Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959).

by the Seneca Falls Convention and voted for its acceptance, including the demand for the vote.[9]

Both of the conventions, Seneca Falls and Rochester, were regional meetings. No established national network for women's rights existed at this time. But the success of these two conventions led its leaders to attempt a national convention the next year. Drawing support from women previously involved in the antislavery movement, the women's rights leaders were able to recruit those already familiar with public speaking and national organization.

The idea of a national convention was first discussed at the meeting of the New England Antislavery Convention in May 1850. Interested women convened in the foyer of Faneuil Hall in Boston, Massachusetts, to begin the planning of a national women's rights convention. These women were Abby Kelley Foster, Lucy Stone, Paulina Wright, and Dr. Harriot Hunt, among others. The women wanted to give proper organization to the burgeoning women's rights movement and felt a national meeting was in order.

Paulina Wright, who recently had married Thomas Davis, a wealthy reformer from Rhode Island, had ample leisure time to do most of the planning. Although Paulina took most of the credit for making the arrangements, Abby Kelley Foster also had much to do with the planning and success of the convention. The first convention in Worcester proved so

[9]Hewitt, *Women's Activism*, 131-135.

worthwhile, that a second convention was held in Worcester in 1851. Both conventions boasted of attendance over a thousand people and of crowds over-flowing into the streets. Although some local newspapers were unkind in reporting on the convention, no public outcry or disapproval arose from the general population of Worcester.[10]

The women's rights convention of 1850 took place on October 23 and 24 at Brinley Hall on Main Street Worcester. To attract a "national" audience to this growing city in central Massachusetts, the organizers published a "call" to the convention inviting both men and women to Worcester."

The selection of Worcester as the site of the convention was wise, as it was a town tolerant of reform issues and large enough to accommodate an event the size of the 1850 convention. In the twenty years before the convention, the city of Worcester grew rapidly and would continue to do so for the next twenty years. In 1840 the population was 7,497. By 1850 it had grown by 120 percent to 17,000. Improvements in transportation were the primary cause of this population expansion. The Blackstone Canal opened in 1828, and between 1835 and 1847 the railroad added

[10]A few negative comments appeared in a local paper, but there were no incidents or protests during the convention. "The Convention," *Worcester Daily Spy*, 23 October 1850.

[11]*The Proceedings of the Women's Rights Convention, Held At Worcester, October 23d 24th, 1850* (Boston: Prentiss Sawyer, 1851), 3-5.

various connections in and around Worcester, making travel to and from the city faster and more economical. Around this time, moreover, Worcester liberated itself from waterpower by adopting steam, creating opportunities to develop manufacturing[12].

These improvements attracted manufacturers to the city. One historian of the labor history of Worcester found that the value of the city's manufacturing product rose from one million in 1837 to 5.5 million in 1855. This was due in large part to the increase in boot, shoe, and cloth factories that arrived in Worcester during those years.[13]

This period was also one of transition for Worcester farmers. In the early part of the century they operated self-sustaining farms that would once a year take crops and livestock into Boston to sell or trade. By 1845 the farmers discovered that the increased population of Worcester allowed them to sell their excess locally. Many farmers by 1845 were dealing directly with Worcester grocers thereby increasing their income.[14] For the city, this meant an increase in fresh dairy products as well as fresh meat.

Other changes to the city included immigration. In

[12] Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 11; Charles C. Buell, "The Workers of Worcester: Social Mobility and Ethnicity in a New England City," Ph.D. diss. (New York University, 1974), 65.

[13] Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours,* 11.

[14] Andrew H. Baker and Holly V. Izard, "New England Farmers and the Marketplace, 1780-1865: A Case Study," *Agricultural History* 65 (1991), 29-30, 33, 46-48.

close proximity to Boston, Worcester began to feel its effects as early as the 1820's. The Irish were the first immigrant group in Worcester, and many found employment in the construction of the Blackstone Canal. After the famine in Ireland in 1845, a massive influx of Irish into Worcester surprised even those Irish already there. By 1850 the city was 17 percent Irish, and they already held most of the city's laboring jobs. However, native-born Americans still held about four-fifths of the boot and shoe making jobs and nine-tenths of the manufacturing positions. Behind the Irish were the English, who made up 2.4 percent of the population. Until the 1860's when the French Canadians immigrated in great numbers, the Irish were the only non-English immigrant group to arrive in large enough numbers to develop into a cohesive community.[15]

Little to no outside capital flowed into Worcester until the late nineteenth century. Almost all the new ventures in Worcester were owned and financed by residents, such as Ichabod Washburn, who owned a large wire-making factory. This plant grew from thirteen employees in the 1820's to over two hundred by the mid-nineteenth century. Other notable industrialists include Stephen Salisbury II and William T. Merrifield.[16]

The increase in immigration along with the increase in

[15] Manuscript Census of the Population Schedules of Worcester County, Massachusetts, 1850 (Washington, D.C.: National Archives of the United States).

[16] Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, 13.

manufacturing gave rise to two separate cultures in Worcester. On the west side of the city the homes of the "Yankees," or native-born, were found. On the east side, immigrants built a complex society. By 1850, the city was so thoroughly divided that a Worcester native could determine a person's country of birth by the house number on a given street. Immigrants and the natives interacted very little outside of the workplace. Although the natives ran the factories and city government, the Irish built a tight ethnic community with networks of support that allowed them a degree of autonomy once they left the factory gates at the end of the day.[17] The Irish were primarily Catholic, a religion foreign to many Worcester natives; more importantly, immigrant culture included drinking alcohol.

The issue of temperance became a major social and political issue in the city throughout the nineteenth century. Many industrialists and shopkeepers, finding workers to be less productive when allowed to imbibe throughout the day, began to halt all consumption of alcohol during working hours. Many factory owners went on to found and join local temperance societies. Reform associations became increasingly attractive to natives as the immigrant population rose.

The city reformers saw alcohol as the primary source of poverty, abandonment, vice, and crime. Many women and men

[17] Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours,* 27; Buell, "The Workers," 73.

began to campaign actively for nonconsumption. Temperance establishments became popular in Worcester. There were temperance lectures, temperance boarding houses, and temperance eating establishments. A temperance newspaper, *The Cataract,* informed upon those in society who continued to serve alcohol in their parlors by name, and reported on various temperance organizations within the city. One historian claims that by the 1840's, not only the manufacturers but also many of the well-to-do and highly respected members of the community were in favor of prohibition. This increased community concern for temperance was not shared by the immigrant community. For the most part they did nothing to change their patterns of alcohol consumption.[18]

In addition to the growing temperance movement in Worcester, the city could also boast two antislavery societies, Worcester County Antislavery Society North Division and Worcester County Antislavery Society South Division. These groups drew their membership not only from the city of Worcester but also the surrounding towns of Leominster, Shrewsbury, Princeton, Lancaster, and Leicester. Stephan and Abby Kelley Foster were members of both

[18] Worcester Children's Friend Society, "Record of the Origins and Proceedings of the Worcester Children's Friend Society," Worcester Children's Friend Society Manuscript Collection, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester MA; Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, 37; Paul E. Johnson, *A Shopkeeper's Millennium: Society and Revivalism in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 38. Buell, "The Workers," 73.

societies, which attracted large numbers of speakers and lecturers to Worcester.[19]

The two societies were active organizations in the city and served, in a sense, as the focal point for reformers of all sorts. The members were involved in temperance societies, peace societies, and the mechanics association (a men's civic group). They were the upper middle class of Worcester. The societies also attracted many Quakers from the Worcester Society of Friends, and many of the guest lecturers at their meetings were Quakers. Of the recorded meetings, there was no instance of any antislavery gatherings ever experiencing a negative response from the Worcester community, physically or verbally.[20]

The lack of a negative reaction to radical thought and reform activity was probably a major reason for holding the Women's Rights Convention at Worcester. Those involved in the planning of the convention were very familiar with the dangers of speaking publicly on controversial issues. Both Stephen and Abby Kelley Foster had been frequent victims of mob violence during their careers. Although the Fosters were undaunted by this reaction, other women newly come to the reform network might have been reluctant to take part

[19] The Record of the Worcester North Division Antislavery Society Commencing March 14, 1846, to 1860, Antislavery Collection, Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, MA; Record of the Worcester County Antislavery Society- South Division Record Book, 1840-1865, Antislavery Collection, Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, MA.

[20] Ibid.

had the convention been held in a more volatile location.

Abby Kelley's first attempt at public speaking was marred by the violent crowds that stood outside the Ladies' Antislavery Convention in May of 1838 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Men throwing rocks and breaking windows eventually forced the meeting to be canceled by the mayor of the city. Once the women left the hall, the crowd burned the new building, recently dedicated to free speech, to the ground. Abby watched the place burn as the firemen did nothing to put out the flames, as they wanted to prevent further antislavery meetings in their city. It is estimated that over 20,000 people gathered to watch the destruction.[21]

Later that year a similar convention hall was built in Boston, dedicated to free speech and liberty. When the New England Antislavery Society made plans to meet there, rumors circulated that it too would be burned to the ground. When the society convened, the mayor threatened to call out the constabulary in order to subdue the mob. The mayor was not an abolitionist, but the close proximity of other buildings to the convention hall raised the specter of citywide fire. The mayor was not concerned with the safety of the antislavery members, but rather the city and the danger of its catching fire[22].

After that incident, Boston continued to be a dangerous

[21] Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Anti-Slavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 64-66.

[22] Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time*, 67-68.

place to speak aloud for antislavery. Stephen Foster was run out of town by mobs many times, and Abby Kelley and other women were subjected to showers of eggs and rotten vegetables. Understandably, Boston seemed an inhospitable setting for the first national meeting of the Women's Rights Organization. Moreover, the previous conventions at Seneca Falls and Rochester suggested that smaller towns did not hold the danger the larger cities did.[23]

Worcester, the hometown of Abby Kelley Foster appeared as the most inviting place to hold the lecture. Foster owned a large farm in the city, and she had spent her childhood on her parent's farm nearby. The town's support of temperance, peace, and antislavery movements was encouraging to Foster and the other organizers. The city was growing rapidly, was easily accessible, and contained many boarding houses and a few hotels. Geographically it was in the center of Massachusetts, and an easy trip by highway or rail for those individuals coming from New York, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania.[24]

Many members of the organization were familiar with Worcester, in that the Fosters often had large numbers of guests out to their farm. William Lloyd Garrison, Lucy Stone, William Channing, and Paulina Davis had all passed through Worcester to visit them. The Worcester Lyceum had

[23] Ibid.

[24] Nancy Burkett, *Abby Kelley Foster and Stephan S. Foster* (Worcester, MA: Worcester Bicentennial Commission, 1976), 29.

also invited many prominent speakers to the area, making it a familiar lecture stop for many. Indeed, Abby's first exposure to the antislavery movement was a lecture given by William Lloyd Garrison at Worcester's City Hall in the 1830's.[25]

After the convention in 1850 the women voted to hold a second convention in Worcester in 1851. This second convention was also a success, drawing a larger crowd than the first. No protest or violence was perpetrated against the women or men at this convention either.[26]

In later years the people of Worcester continued to participate in reform associations, and as the Civil War drew near the antislavery organization grew more and more radical in its actions. Many joined the battle over "Bleeding Kansas," including Thomas Wentworth Higginson, Dr. Seth Rogers, and Martin Stowell, a free black from Worcester. Others lent moral support to John Brown while Higginson and others from his Free Will Baptist Church gave monetary support for Brown's raid on Harpers Ferry. It was a sad day in Worcester when John Brown was hanged in 1859. The bells tolled and the free blacks of Worcester dressed in mourning. The Worcester citizens who supported his cause held a memorial service led by Higginson that was widely attended by the community, including nine other ministers

[25] Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time*, 32.

[26] *The Proceedings of the Women's Rights Convention Held At Worcester October 15th and 16th, 1851* (New York: Fowlers and Wells, 1852).

from the area.[27]

It is clear how the organization of the convention went about planning and securing a site for the assembly

[27] Tilden G. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 217, 231; Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time*, 302-303.

CHAPTER 2

THE CONVENTION

The legal status of women was of great importance to the leadership as well as the rank and file of the women's rights convention, perhaps more than women's suffrage. At the time of the convention several states were in the process of revising for the better laws governing married women's property and women's rights to their children. Unfortunately, legislation was adopted that hindered the women's movement concerning government restrictions on the teaching of birth control. This change, along with the organizing of the first national convention, made the 1850's the true beginning of a national women's movement. Although the women could do little more than make speeches and resolutions, the convention allowed them to organize on a larger scale and outline a specific set of goals. Organizing, even in a loose alliance, allowed the women to put forth a more united front. This chapter will detail the events of the convention as well as discuss those who made speeches. More importantly, it will outline the various resolutions put forth by the Business Committee and later adopted by the membership of the convention. These resolutions make clear the goals and aspirations of the

antebellum women's movement; yield important insights into the lives and minds of women in the mid-nineteenth century.

The convention began at 10 o'clock in the morning on Wednesday, October 23, 1850. It was called to order by Sara Earle of Worcester. Joseph C. Hathaway was elected president *pro tem,* and he read aloud the "call" issued months earlier[1].

Published in newspapers nationwide the "call" outlined the organizers's position on the issue of women's rights. It specified that, "The sexes should not, for any reason or by any chance, take hostile attitudes toward each other, either in the apprehension or amendment of the wrongs which exist in their necessary relations." The call went on to add that women, condemned for their delicacy, forfeited "great social, civil, and religious privileges." It stated that marriage meant enslavement for women and the relegation of single and widowed women to a "disabled caste". The "tyranny which crushes wives and mothers" was becoming harder and harder for society to ignore and that was why it was time for the women to stand up and demand greater rights for themselves.[2]

The many signers of the call, who considered the movement high and holy in nature, included men and women

[1]*The Proceedings of the Women's Rights Convention, Held At Worcester, October 23d 24th, 1850* (Boston: Prentiss Sawyer, 1851), 3-5.

[2]"Forty Years of Progress," (n.p. n.d.). Pamphlet found in the Worcester Public Library clippings file labeled "Worcester Women"-Women's Equal Rights,1-2.

from Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New York, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Ohio. Among them were many famous names from the antislavery movement: Abby Kelley Foster, A. Bronson Alcott, William Garrison, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and William H. Channing (see Appendix A).[3]

The call specified that the discussion at the convention would focus on "the general question of Women's Rights and Relations," which included "Her Education. . . Her Advocations. . . Her Interests. . . in a word Her Rights as an *Individual,* and her Functions as a *Citizen.*" After being elected president of the convention, Paulina Wright Davis gave an address in which she made clear that women must acquire the rights as explained in the call, but that these rights should not be obtained through violence or antagonism. The granting of equal rights to women was to Davis the next step to a more perfect society and should not occur through the warlike barbaric actions that had plagued society in the past. The movement, she stated, "seeks to replace the worn out with the living and the beautiful, so as to reconstruct without overturning, and to regenerate without destroying." Paulina explained that the inequality between men and women did not exist in nature, and that differences between them did not make them unequal. She viewed this unlikeness as making for mutual dependence and balance, and not a bar to equality[4].

[3] Ibid.
[4] *Proceedings*, 4,7,9; "Forty Years of Progress," 2.

After Davis's address, the Business Committee proposed several resolutions to be voted on by those who had enrolled as members of the Convention. The first resolution called for the right of suffrage and office-holding for women, stating they were residents of the United States and paid taxes for its support. The resolution also called for equality before the law "without distinction of race or color." The second resolution demanded that the word "male" be stricken from all state constitutions and that property laws be thoroughly revised to ensure equal rights for both husband and wife. The Business Committee justified this proposal by saying that women toiled and sacrificed equally with their partners to obtain property and should therefore have equal rights to it under all circumstances.[5] After this, the convention adjourned, agreeing to reconvene at nine-thirty in the morning on October 24.

On the second day of the convention the Business Committee issued another resolution, calling for the dissolution of a prescribed sphere for women, stating that "women alone can learn by experience, and prove by works, what is their rightful sphere of duty." The committee then recommended that to gain further experience, women, should demand education, partnership in the labors, gains and risks of productive industry, and an equal share in the formation and administration of law. The resolution also called for

[5] *Proceedings*, 15,16.

the doors to various civil and professional employments to be thrown open to women. The final resolution made at the convention was for the need to continue the struggle for women's rights until the slave women of the South were able to enjoy these same liberties[6].

The convention continued late into the night as many speakers took the floor. Lucy Stone, Stephan S. Foster, Lucretia Mott, Abby K. Foster, Sojourner Truth, and Frederick Douglass all spoke at length. They covered topics such as suffrage, health reform and, slavery, and frequently citing about Biblical references on the status of women. All the resolutions presented passed unanimously and the movement collected $11,965.00 in contributions.

All of the resolutions made at the convention were considered radical by those against the movement as well as those involved. The women were asking for an immediate reversal of the existing laws and religious custom, not a gradual change in society. Historian Robert H. Abzug describes the women's rights movement as "rewriting Genesis [a move which] cast into doubt the legitimacy of the traditional family structure as well as traditional interpretations of Christian prooftext." Both men and women comprised the committee that proposed these resolutions. Among them were William Lloyd Garrison, William H. Channing, Frederick Douglas, Ernestine Rose and Lucretia Mott. All

[6]*Proceedings*, 16,17.

who prepared the initial drafts were abolitionists, who had made a habit of proposing shocking statements for immediate and radical reform.[7]

These resolutions reflected the issues that were being debated in state legislatures across the nation. In the early part of the nineteenth century, the laws of Massachusetts and many other states, still considered married women as subject to "coverture." This meant that when a woman took her husband's name, she became one with her husband in the eyes of the law. The wife forfeited her previous rank, property (both real and personal), and the right to sue and be sued; limitations were put on the drawing up of wills. A woman could neither testify against her husband nor enter into contracts with him. She had very little right to her children in cases of divorce or separation and child custody be awarded to the mother only when the father could be proven unfit.[8]

In 1845, the Massachusetts legislature passed a law granting women the right to the property specified in an antenuptial agreement. This allowed the woman title to whatever property was set forth in writing by her husband

[7] Robert H. Abzug, *Cosmos Crumbling: American Reform and the Religious Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 228.

[8] For further discussion of the laws governing women and the family, see Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Michael K. Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth: Law and the Family in Nineteenth Century America* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1985); *Proceedings*, 3,4.

after the marriage. This established a precedent for gender equity in control of property but the requirement of a written agreement maintained the women's relegation to an inferior position within the marriage[9].

Many women involved in the 1850 convention were also involved in the struggle to pass the Married Women's Property Act in New York and used the convention to reintroduce the issue. Ernestine Rose, Paulina Wright Davis, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were instrumental in the changing of the state constitution in 1856 after many years of campaigning. Rose and Stanton both addressed the state legislature in person. Many other women circulated petitions and spoke to legislators from their area. This activity brought the issue of women's property rights to the forefront of state politics. Many wealthy families supported the act, as they were worried about the inheritances of their daughters. The antebellum feminists, according to Norma Basch, used the married women's property issue to "construct a bridge between spheres." The integration of law and political thought, by the women, thrust them into the realm of political thought and allowed them increased individualism within the domestic sphere. The women viewed the current state of most marriages as indicative of women's social, political, and economic subservience. The married women's property acts included

[9]Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law,* 17, 27-28.

the right to own property, seek a divorce, retain custody of their children, and control their wages.[10]

Another important position discussed at the Women's Rights Convention was the need for women to better understand their physiology and the use of contraception. A first step toward greater equality with men involved gaining control of their bodies and the prevention of pregnancy. At the convention, Dr. Harriet Hunt spoke at length on the issue of making available greater information on birth control to women.

In Massachusetts in the 1830's there was no legal statute regulating the distribution of materials explaining contraception. Most believed it was a matter unfit for discussion in polite society or on the floor of the state legislature. Because of greater interest in the subject in the late 1840's and 1850's this was soon to change.

In 1832, Charles Knowelton, a doctor in Massachusetts, published *The Fruits of Philosophy*. This treatise on contraception, as Knowelton explained, was meant to improve the lives of women, encourage early marriage, and discourage prostitution. The *Boston Medical Journal* castigated Dr. Knowelton, who was promptly arrested and charged with peddling obscenity. He was sentenced to three months hard

[10]Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law,* 162-168; Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle eds. *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections from the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage, and Harper* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 12, 64-65.

labor, which was eventually rescinded on appeal. Since there were very few persons who dared to speak out on the issue of female physiology, statues guarding against their message were not needed.

In 1847, around the same time women were beginning to speak out on female anatomy, a formal statute in Massachusetts declared the public discussion of contraception illegal. The members of the *Boston Medical Journal* felt that the less the public knew about the matter the better. By disallowing women to broach this subject from the platform, the statute condoned the idea that women were to be relegated to child care, or to accept their husbands' entanglements with prostitution.[11] When it came to the discussion of birth control, legislation actually moved backward, instead of forward as the women of the convention would have liked.

It is interesting to note that the proponents of the women's rights movement did not support abortion as a means of birth control. The women's rights reformers felt that the answer to unwanted pregnancy lay in the granting of equality and the suffrage to women. Once women achieved this, they could control information concerning birth control and would be equals within marriage. This equality would give them the right to curtail their husbands' advances; thus there would no longer be a need for abortion

[11] Grossberg, *Governing the Hearth*, 158.

services. Abortion was viewed as a symptom of the real problem-- the servitude and degradation of women in marriage. Although they did not condone abortion, they did not condemn women who were forced to resort to it. Instead, they condemned their husbands for being unable to control their "sensualism".[12]

In discussing such hotly debated issues, the convention received much attention from the press both nationally and locally. As might be expected attitudes toward the meeting varied greatly. Three local newspapers reported the event-- *The Worcester Daily Spy, The Daily Tribune,* and *The Worcester Palladium. The Spy*'s editor was John Milton Earle, the husband of Sara Earle, who was an organizer and speaker at the convention. *The Spy* was a liberal newspaper and supported the convention as it supported other reform movements in the community. In an article published on October 23, 1850, *The Spy* stated that, "We are not among those, therefore, who would meet such a movement as this with either opposition or ridicule. We pity those who would." *The Spy* reported on the convention every day and always portrayed those involved in a favorable light as did the *Daily Tribune*. However, the *Daily Tribune* did not concede that the women were as oppressed as they claimed, but did state that "all would be much better secured, if

[12] Elizabeth Cady Stanton "Infanticide and Prostitution," *Revolution,* I (1868): 65; James C. Mohr, *Abortion In America, 1800-1900* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 111-112.

intelligent, high-minded females were permitted to have a voice in the councils of the nation." This attitude was not shared by the *Worcester Palladium*[13].

The *Palladium* viewed the convention with contempt. It teased the men who attended, calling them "old women in breeches." It continued in the same article to say that if women "are going to *make men of themselves,* should make up their minds to take the *burdens* as well as the *honors* of men" and also accused the women of wanting to "*unsex themselves.*" *The Palladium's* biggest complaint concerning the convention was that it was "but *a new form of anti-slavery agitation.*" These remarks clearly reveal the paper's disapproval of the antislavery and the women's rights movements[14].

The women also attracted ridicule and praise on the national level. The *New York Times, New York Herald, New York Tribune,* and The *Providence Journal* all commented on the event. Of all the negative publicity printed, that of the *Herald* was by far the worst. It accused the convention-goers of advocating "Socialism, Abolition and Infidelity," and of calling for the abolition of all laws of the United States, including the Constitution, and the Bible. The paper labeled them "crazy old women," "fugitive lunatics,"

[13]"The Convention," *Worcester Daily Spy,* 23 October 1850; "The Convention," *Daily Tribune,* 23 October 1850.

[14]"Women's Rights Convention," *Worcester Palladium,* 30 October 1850. It may be that historians have relied too much on newspaper editorial opinion in framing their own view about the close association between the two movements.

and "fanatical mongrels." The *Times* went as far as to insinuate that the women were infringing on the rights of men and called for a "Rights of Man Association," saying the "anti-masculine agitation must be stayed by some means."[15]

The *Tribune,* however, was one New York paper that reported on the convention in a positive light. Owned by Horace Greeley, the *Tribune* printed the proceedings of the convention in their entirety and supported the convention wholeheartedly. Greeley even printed a post-script to its article warning the readers of the false and slanderous reports of other papers. "P.S.- Do not be deceived by the reports of the Boston papers. Some of them have sent reporters here to caricature the proceedings. Shame on a corrupt and venial press."[16]

The convention of 1850 was the first attempt by women to organize on a national scale. In coming together they were able to agree upon formal resolutions that would set the agenda for the movement for years to come. These resolutions were radical and shocking to the public, but for the women of the convention they were essential rights and liberties.

[15]"Women's Rights," *New York Times,* 18 October 1851; "Women's Rights Convention," *New York Herald,* 25 October 1850; "Editorial," *New York Herald,* 28 October 1850; "Women's Rights Convention," *Providence Journal,* 25 October 1850.

[16] "The Proceedings of the Women's Rights Convention," *New York Daily Tribune,* 25 October 1850.

Most importantly, the resolutions made at the convention cut across class lines. The issues addressed in the resolutions appealed to women of the working class as well as upper and middle class women. Issues such as equal pay for equal work, greater job opportunities, and women's right to their own wages, when achieved were beneficial to all women, especially those that worked outside the home.

The fact that the convention made a point to address so many different issues that could appeal to so many different women is interesting. It prompts further investigation into the composition of the convention attendees. The next to chapters will first examine the leadership of the convention and then the rank and file to determine the level of homogeneity within this group that had resolved to campaign for so many different changes.

CHAPTER 3

THE LEADERSHIP

The convention in Worcester, Massachusetts, in 1850 was organized by Paulina Wright Davis. She brought social prestige, as well as wealth, to the convention. Thanks to Davis and the other organizers, it was this convention that brought national prominence to the leadership, who were now publicly considered leaders of the women's movement. However, the leadership of the women's rights movement shifted with each convention. Some grew old and retired and new faces became part of the leadership every year. Those who orchestrated the conventions at Seneca Falls and Rochester, did not play a large role in the national convention. For example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton did not attend the 1850 convention because of family obligations. This chapter will focus on those women who provided leadership at the 1850 convention. It presents a collective biography of those women and includes a brief history of the role each woman played in the movement.

Although the leadership of the women's rights movement has been discussed in detail by many prominent historians, it is necessary to look at each individual leader to help in understanding the differences between the leadership and the

rank and file. When looking at any group or organization it is easy to assume that the attitudes, objectives, and experiences of the leaders are reflected in the membership. After examining the each of the leaders and then their followers in the next chapter, the inaccuracy of viewing the women's rights organization from the top down becomes obvious.

The leadership of the women's rights organization in the antebellum years grew out of women's participation in the antislavery struggle. William Lloyd Garrison's agitation for the abolition of slavery drew many free blacks and women to that cause. Women attracted to the movement beheld those who were against slavery on one side of the fight, with the entire nation on the other. Even those who did not own slaves were viewed as guilty conspirators. These women sought redemption for society and the individual through aggressive moral appeals. Women such as Lydia Maria Child and Elizabeth Chandler published antislavery tracts, while Abby Kelley Foster stirred up public sentiment throughout the North. Their participation in the movement was controversial and eventually split the movement in 1836. The question of a "woman's sphere" had advanced a crisis in the American Antislavery movement by 1840[1].

[1]Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, eds., *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage: Selections From the Classic Work of Stanton, Anthony, Gage and Harper* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), 1-13; Ellen Carol DuBois, "Outgrowing

Controversy over the participation of women in antislavery organizations prompted many women to speak out on their own behalf. Women in the 1840's were active in both antislavery organizations and had become experienced and self-confident in their abilities not only to participate but also to claim leadership roles in the movement. As speakers and writers for antislavery, these women endured hostile reaction from the press, threats to their persons, and mob violence. As a result they began to compare their experience to the oppression of blacks and argued that true progress demanded universal freedom as a societal goal.

There is some historical debate over the origins of the women's movement of the 1850's. Some feel that the movement originated from the antislavery movement, while others believe that antislavery played only a small part in its organization. They state that women would have recognized their oppression without the help of the Garrison and his organization.

Ellen Carol DuBois and Paula Baker are two historians who do not find the origins of the movement in antislavery. They state that women did not need abolitionism to realize their oppression. The abolitionist movement merely taught the women to turn the women's rights reform into a political

the Compact of Our Fathers: Equal Rights and Women's Suffrage, and the U.S. Constitution," *Journal of American History,* 74 (1987): 840.

movement.

Disagreeing with DuBois and Baker, Eleanor Flexnor states that, these women were the first conscious feminists. She credits the abolitionist movement with educating women on organization, public meetings, and the staging of petition drives. She also explains that within the anti-slavery movement itself, women won the right of public speech, and were able to formulate a knowledge of their basic rights. Flexnor states that through the campaign to free the slave, women began to "evolve a philosophy of their place in society." Agreeing with Flexnor, Ann Boylan in her study of women's reform organizations, describes women rights reformers as "cutting their teeth in abolition or moral reform work[2]."

The breakdown of the second party system in the 1840's and 1850's was further encouragement to certain women to demand their rights. Popular politics became attractive to both women and men at this time. As more and more men received the vote and became politically active, women began to question their exclusion from the political triumph of the individual. The first women's rights activists were groomed by the antislavery movement to answer such a question. Women like Lucretia Mott, Ernestine Rose, Abby

[2]Eleanor Flexnor, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959), 41; Paula Baker, "The Domestication of Politics" 634; Boylan, "Women in Groups: An analysis of Women's Benevolent Organizations in New York and Boston, 1797-1840" *Journal of American History,* 71 (1984), 514.

Kelly Foster and Paulina Wright Davis, used natural rights theory as the advanced theology of the women's rights movement. These women were well educated, economically well off and were all weary of fundamental institutions that had long held women in bondage. Although they argued that the root of antislavery existed in southern paternalism and lethargy, they still exclaimed that oppression and servitude existed in every Northern home[3].

The women's rights leaders in the 1830's and 1840's showed less interest in the vote than in other issues. Property ownership, rights to earnings, greater educational and employment opportunities, and legal status were the main areas of reform. As the women began to agitate for these reforms they found it hard to make themselves heard. The press was often uncooperative in helping women to get their message out, and the clergy was increasingly hostile toward the movement. By the 1850's women realized that the surest way to enact necessary reform was through suffrage. The achieving of social change through the ballot seemed increasingly more effective to both men and women in an era when many who had the vote exercised it. Although the right to vote was not achieved until 1919, these women helped to keep the issues most important to women alive in national politics[4].

[3]Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle, eds., *The Concise History of Woman Suffrage*, 4; DuBois, "Outgrowing," 841.

[4]Flexnor, *Century of Struggle*, 82-83; DuBois "Outgrowing," 840; Lori Ginzberg, "'Moral Suasion is Moral

Paulina Wright Davis, the president of the 1850 convention, was instrumental in launching an active women's rights campaign before the Civil War. Having already been involved in the crusade for a Married Women's Property Law and active in her hometown of Utica, New York, she was drawn to the movement by Abby Kelley Foster. In 1845, upon the death of her husband, Paulina toured with Foster as an assistant during her antislavery lectures. At the end of the circuit through New York, Davis decided against becoming an antislavery lecturer and chose to agitate for health reform. She and Abby remained close friends, and Paulina moved to New York City to receive a better education[5].

Medical schools did not admit women at this time, so Davis was forced to piece together information as best she could. She paid for private instruction from a physician, bribed librarians for medical books, and purchased an anatomically correct mannequin from France. Determining that Davis's knowledge of the female anatomy was complete, Foster refused the care of physicians during the birth of her daughter, having only Davis there for assistance. Foster's daughter was named Paulina Wright Foster after Davis[6].

Balderdash': Women, Politics, and Social Activism in the 1850's," *Journal of American History* 73 (1986): 610-615.

[5]Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley Foster and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991),159-160; Mary Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 227.

[6]Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time,* 202.

Davis was a gifted orator and a pioneer in the struggle for women's rights. Radical in her beliefs, she criticized the doctrine of separate spheres and saw that the structure and organization of society had to change. Her feminist pronouncement of "self-ownership" allowed her to be free from the demands of a husband which she saw as the cause of perpetual unwanted pregnancy[7].

After the 1850 convention Davis's vision of the future of the women's rights movement deviated from that of Foster. Davis wanted to divorce the organization from the slavery issue in order to concentrate more fully on the rights of women and to create a sense of respectability. This change in attitude may be credited to her change in lifestyle.

In 1849 Davis married Thomas Davis, a U.S. congressman with a considerable fortune. She summered in Newport and wintered in Washington. Traveling in upper class circles, she wished to bring women such as Elizabeth Oaks Smith and Caroline Dall into the movement, hoping to lend a more sophisticated air to the convention. For Abby Kelly Foster, the daughter of poor Irish Quakers, the finery and sophistication seemed isolating and elitist. Their friendship was finally severed in 1855. Foster refused to attend the Women's Rights Convention that year and Davis attempted to nominate Oaks Smith to the presidency[8].

Abby Kelly Foster grew up in a family of modest means

[7]Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class,"* 228-229.
[8]Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time,* 264-267.

in the area near Worcester, Massachusetts. Although she was well educated at the New England Friends Boarding School in Providence, she was probably the only farmer's daughter there and was forced to borrow tuition from her older sister to attend. She became a teacher in a Quaker village and was there introduced to many members of the antislavery movement[9].

In 1838, while attending the Antislavery Women's Convention in Philadelphia, she was called upon to take the podium for the first time. After that she was hired by the American Antislavery Association to speak on the lecture circuit. The public was not always receptive to what Foster had to say or the fact that she was female. Unexpectedly, in 1840, she came under the attack by her peers[10].

At the American Antislavery Society Convention in 1840, Foster was elected to the Business Committee. This provoked a heated debate over the extent of women's participation in the society. Many men did not want women voting or passing resolutions for them and the society broke permanently[11].

Shortly after this incident she met and married Stephan Foster, a man more radical than herself. Their marriage was very unconventional as it was to be equal in all respects. Abby and Stephan spent much time apart, both unwilling to give up their careers for married life. Stephan eventually

[9] Ibid., 15, 24-25.
[10] Ibid., 63-65.
[11] Ibid., 104-106.

bought a farm in Worcester and Abby gave birth to her daughter there. After a short confinement Abby went back to lecturing while Stephan stayed home to tend the farm and care for Alla[12].

Several times during their marriage they refused to pay property taxes on their farm. They stated that Abby was being taxed without representation which made the taxes unconstitutional. The Fosters attempted this three times and three times their farm was auctioned off. The farm was always bought by friends who later returned the farm to the Fosters[13].

Abby spoke at the convention of 1850 and again in 1851. Unfortunately, her 1850 speech was not recorded. However, it must have been quite forceful as Lucretia Mott felt obligated to stand and explain that Foster's speech "must not be construed to favor violence and bloodshed." Mott continued to mediate between Foster and William Channing throughout the convention, as both were forceful, dynamic speakers who did not always agree on the issue of women's rights[14].

Lucretia Mott's afterword to Foster's speech was well noted, as she was one of the most respected members of the convention. Active in both the antislavery and women's rights movement, she was a vital member of both of these

[12]Ibid., 220-221, 242-253.
[13]Ibid., 367-371.
[14]Ibid., 235-236.

groups. Raised a Quaker, she first became an abolitionist and later turned her attentions to the women's rights movement. Unlike many abolitionists who gradually moved away from organized religion, Mott remained deeply religious throughout her life. She was considered the moral force of the women's rights movement. Mott never prepared her speeches in advance. She instead relied on her Quaker training and spoke through inspiration. Mott was very gifted in advancing scriptural arguments for the equality of men and women. She also agreed wholeheartedly with Catherine Beecher, a proponent of women's education. In her speeches, Mott would quote often from Beecher, stating that women should be admitted to the professions and given opportunities to increase their mental faculties[15].

Mott did speak at the Worcester Women's Rights Convention, assuring those in attendance that all men and women were created equal. Mott was in her late fifties during the convention, a decade older than many of her colleagues. One account of the convention described her as "wearing a her modest Quaker gown, muslin cap, and scarf, and a white silk shawl. At the age of fifty-seven this veteran reformer was the most venerated and respected figure in the hall[16]."

As a Quaker, Mott was a pacifist and did not condone

[15]Margaret Hope Bacon, *Valiant Friend: The Life of Lucretia Mott* (New York: Walker and Company, 1980), 134-135.

[16]Yuri Suhl, *Ernestine Rose and the Battle for Human Rights* (New York: Reynal and Company, 1959), 110.

any action in which blood would be shed, for either the antislavery organization or the women's rights movement. Her temperament often placed her in the position of mediator between members of the antislavery organization and the women's rights organization. In 1869 the women's rights organization split over the issue of giving black men the vote. Mott was one of the few who continued to work for both sides, constantly encouraging the resolution of differences[17].

Throughout her life, Mott, was first and foremost concerned with human rights and equal treatment for all. She made numerous trips to both the North and South and continued to petition and raise funds in support of the women's rights movement until her death in 1880. While attending the Worcester women's rights convention, she was introduced to and became instant friends with Lucy Stone. Stone was many years younger than Mott but they remained friends and colleagues for many years[18].

Lucy Stone was one of the best educated women as well as the youngest women on the platform of the 1850 convention. She was a graduate of Oberlin College and taught school. Soon after her graduation she was recruited by Abby Kelley Foster and William Garrison to lecture for the American Antislavery Society. However, she constantly peppered her lectures with women's rights issues, which

[17] Bacon, *Valiant Friend,* 205-206.
[18] Bacon, *Valiant Friend,* 137.

upset many members of the antislavery organization who did not want the two issues on the same platform. Feeling strongly about women's rights, she agreed to lecture on weekends for the American Antislavery Society and during the week for women's rights at her own expense[19].

Stone was one of the nine women who met in the anteroom of Faneuil Hall to discuss the conducting of a national women's rights convention. She was a great help in that she was responsible much of the correspondence to encourage supporters to sign the "call." She was the one who initially approached William Garrison on the issue, who then agreed to support the movement. His signature on the call brought many others[20].

Stone spoke at the convention of 1850, and afterward devoted all of her time to the women's rights movement. She was instrumental in the planning of each convention after 1850 and was responsible for publishing the proceedings afterwards, often with her own money[21]. In 1855 she married Henry Blackwell and had a daughter. Many of her enemies hoped this would restrain her in some way. It did not, as Alice Stone Blackwell continued in her mother's footsteps and lived to see women's suffrage realized[22].

Ernestine Rose is one of the least remembered leaders

[19]Alice Stone Blackwell, *Lucy Stone: Pioneer of Women's Rights* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1930), 72, 73, and 89.

[20]Blackwell, *Lucy Stone*, 90.

[21]Ibid.,100.

[22]Ibid., 161-170, 195, 272.

of the women's rights movement. She was, however, a vital member of the organization for over thirty years. She was born in Poland in 1810, and as a teenager went to court there to protest limitations on her inheritance from her mother. After winning her suit, she emigrated and in 1836 married a London jeweler. Soon after their marriage the Roses moved to the United States. Only months after arriving in New York she became involved in the debate concerning the rights of women[23].

Rose was actively involved in the struggle for a married women's property legislation in New York. Through her involvement with this cause she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Paulina Wright Davis. The women petitioned, raised public awareness, and Rose eventually spoke on the floor of the New York legislature[24].

Rose was an active campaigner for women's rights. She spoke so often and persuasively that, she was called the "Queen of the Platform." Although she had a slight accent, she mastered English and was a powerful orator. Despite this, the press often spoke of her as a foreigner and a Jew from Poland. In fact, Rose renounced her Jewish roots and became an agnostic. Moreover, Rose felt that religion was the root of women's oppression and spoke out regularly against it. This activity made her unpopular with many ministers in the Boston area who publicly denounced her from

[23]Suhl, *Ernestine Rose*, 14,15,33,48.
[24]Ibid., 59-65.

the pulpit.

Rose spoke eloquently at the convention of 1850. She spoke up at one point saying, "We are not contending here for the rights of women of New England or of Old England, but of the world." As Rose was a world traveler and had experienced the plight of women in several countries, she may have had a more global insight than the other leaders[25].

Rose remained active in the movement until 1869, when she and her husband returned to London. She became more and more reclusive after the move and never again took up the cause of reform. She was asked by Susan B. Anthony to write a chapter of the *History of Women's Suffrage*, but declined[26].

As all of these women had some tie to the antislavery movement, they also shared hostility to organized religion. Although moral reformers and benevolent societies embraced the church and founded their organizations upon the improvement of society and the spread of Christianity, radical reformers did not. The women's rights leaders, a part of the radical reform movement, moved from merely changing people's habits to "rethinking the basic sociological foundations of Western culture[27]." This "rethinking" included the basic tenets of Christianity.

Having grown up in Massachusetts and western New York,

[25] Ibid., 112.
[26] Ibid., 263.
[27] Abzug, *Cosmos*, 228.

the women were all members of the Society of Friends or were Calvinists, except for Rose. Yet all but Lucretia Mott chose to forsake the teachings of their childhood religion in favor of a more egalitarian religion and were unorthodox in their religious views. While they did not renounce belief in God, they were adamantly against organized religion that taught that women were to be subservient to men and not to speak aloud in public. In order to recreate the social order, the leaders knew that they would have to directly challenge the church, the backbone of American society. In retaliation, ministers called the women "jezebels" and other names and openly lectured against women's rights from the pulpit. Although brought up in church-going homes, the women could not reconcile the teachings of Christianity and the women's rights organization[28].

Even Mott, who remained tied to her faith throughout her life, chose to join the Congregational Friends, an unorthodox group of Quakers. This society taught that "it is not Christianity but priestcraft the has subjected women as we find her." The Congregational Friends labeled no man as minister. They felt that all men and women communicated with God, and that an interpreter was not needed. They also taught that men and women had too long worshipped the

[28]Blackwell, *Lucy Stone*, 59; Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 227; Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time*, 363; Suhl, *Ernestine Rose*, 130-131.

writings of other men, who were propagating the servitude of women and blacks. This denomination was one of many formed in response to the challenge to orthodox Christianity. The leaders of the women's rights organization understood that the role of the church as a moral force in American society was in question. In its place, the force of individuality and freedom was exercised at the ballot box. This shift in power away from religion toward politics made the women's rights organization different from the benevolent organizations that had come before[29].

Although these women chose to tackle different issues in their individual speeches for women's rights, they were all working toward the independence of women from all societal restraints. They viewed all women as victims of societal organization and sought its demise. These women were quick to realize that the only way to achieve this goal was to demand suffrage. Many accused these women of doing little more than talking. This may be true, but through this talking a definite agenda was set for the movement for the next fifty years. In a world where women had little or no political power, the leaders of the women's rights movement managed to place "the women question" at the forefront of popular politics. In addition, they continued to agitate for the resolutions of the 1850 convention until

[29] Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 141-142.

another generation could take up their struggle.

It is important to note that the leaders of the movement as described above, all fit the stereotype put forth by many historians of the period. But what about the hundreds of women who came to hear their speeches and voted on their resolutions? This brings into question whether the composition of a group can be surmised by the attitudes, objectives, and experiences of its leaders. This study finds that in the case of the women's rights convention, it is inaccurate to assume that those who attended the convention shared similar objectives, experiences, or attitudes with their leaders. In looking at the rank and file in the next chapter the obvious differences between the leadership previously discussed and their followers is examined. With the use of census materials and quantification the differences in occupation, residence, and social status among the women in attendance is revealed.

CHAPTER 4

THE RANK AND FILE

Historians have thoroughly examined the leadership of the Women's Rights Organization of the mid-nineteenth century but know comparatively little about the rank and file membership of the women's movement. Such scholars have relied on abundant literary evidence left by such individuals as Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Abby Kelley Foster, and others who figured prominently at the women's rights conventions held at Seneca Falls, Rochester, Worcester, and Ohio. Evidence concerning rank and file members is more elusive, and the temptation has been to generalize about the movement from what is known about the leaders. This chapter focuses on the rank and file members of the Worcester Women's Rights Convention of 1850 and develops a socio-economic profile of that group. Membership lists, local records, and manuscript census schedules enable the researcher to shed more light on this anonymous group of men and women who believed in and identified with the cause but did not take a public role outside of convention attendance.

The *Proceedings* of the 1850 convention listed two hundred and fifty-five names as "Members of the Convention." Of these, eighty-eight (forty-seven women and forty-one men)

listed their address as Worcester, Massachusetts; they are the focus of this study. By tracing these individuals back to local sources and to the manuscript schedules of the 1850 federal census, it has been possible to construct a collective biography of Worcester's women's rights supporters. This profile reveals evidence of dimensions of the movement that other historians, who have emphasized the middle class origins of reform, have generally ignored. This evidence suggests that the supporters of the women's rights movement were more diverse than historians have suspected and that their interests in the movement extended beyond the ideological ones generated by antislavery and the middle class.[1]

The 1850 membership list was more than a mere sign-in sheet for those who attended the convention. Newspapers report a crowd of over a thousand who participated in the convention in some fashion or other. The membership role only lists two hundred fifty five names. This disparity may be explained by viewing those who signed the membership sheet as publicly committing themselves to denouncing contemporary societal customs and conventions. Although many people were interested in attending the convention, not all who participated were willing to join an organization calling for radical reform, even though they could not vote

[1]For a list of members from Worceseter, see appendix B; *The Proceedings of the Women's Rights Convention Held at Worcester* (Boston: Prentiss Sawyer, 1851), 80-84.

without first becoming a member. The membership lists, therefore, appear to be comprised of those individuals who were more deeply committed to the expansion of women's rights than the many interested bystanders[2].

Most interpretations of nineteenth century reform have found that the reformers tended to be native-born, urban, white Protestants of the middle class. Indeed, many historians believe that the reformer mentality or morality helped to shape and define what it meant to be middle class during the first half of the nineteenth century. By examining such variables as age, marital status, number of children, occupation, property holdings, and residence by ward within Worcester, a more accurate description of the types of persons who became members of the women's rights organization emerges. While the analysis affirms most aspects of the standard interpretation about the social composition of reformers, it also yields some unexpected results, showing that women's rights supporters in Worcester did not always fit the mold described by other historians.[3]

[2] *Proceedings*, 14; Elinor Rice Hayes, *Morning Star: A Biography of Lucy Stone, 1818-1893* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1961), 84; "Women's Rights Convention," *Worcester Daily Spy*, 24 October 1850.

[3] Stuart Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle-class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 1-16; John S. Gilkeson, *Middle Class Providence, 1820-1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 56,93; Nancy Hewitt, *Women's Activism and Social Change: Rochester, New York, 1822-1872* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 22; Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 9; Paul

This chapter first contrasts the members of the convention to the general population of Worcester to establish the ways in which reformers, considered as a single group, were distinguishable from other citizens. More important, it then analyzes socio-economic differences among the reformers. This analysis reveals that reformers may best be viewed as comprising three distinct groups of people: first, antislavery activists, individuals whose interest in women's rights seem to stem from their antislavery ideology and organizations; second, reformist males, a group of men who may have been part of a general reform network but were not antislavery activists; and third, a fascinating group of women whose interest in women's rights may well have been quite different from the other two groups. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, the evidence from this study suggests that many men and women from the second and third groups were from the working class.[4]

All three groups were, on average, younger than the general population of Worcester, with few people over age fifty in attendance. The median age of the native population of Worcester was thirty seven, while the members of the women's rights organization averaged twenty-five years

E. Johnson, *A Shopkeepers' Millennium: Society and Revivals in Rochester, New York, 1815-1837* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 8.

[4]See Appendix C for the sampling method and explanation of quantification.

old(see table 1). The antislavery group was the youngest group of the three, with 65 percent being between ages sixteen and twenty-nine. The other two groups had 41 percent between ages sixteen and twenty-nine (see table 13).[5]

All members from Worcester were native born. This is interesting since Worcester was home to many Irish immigrants. In 1850 the city was approximately 17 percent Irish. It is not surprising that they did not participate in the reform associations of the native born. Vincent E. Powers, a historian of the Irish in Worcester, states that it was entirely possible for an Irish immigrant to live in Worcester without ever assimilating to his host culture. The natives and the immigrants rarely mixed apart from the workplace, and the women's rights convention was no exception.[6]

The biggest difference between those who attended the women's rights convention and the general population of Worcester was the number of children per household. The men and women of the convention had fewer children than the

[5]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census.

[6]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; Vincent E. Powers, "The Irish and Worcester," *In Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Irish Community of Worcester* (Worcester: n.p., 1977), 21-35. Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours For What We Will: Workers In an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 27; See also, Vincent E. Powers, "'Invisible Immigrants': The Pre-Famine Irish Community in Worcester, Massachusetts, from 1826-1860," Ph.D. diss. (Clark University, 1976).

general population. However, these women were all native-born Protestants and the general population was 17 percent Irish Catholic with traditionally large families. To counter the immigrant influence on the general population, table 3 examines only the native population, with the immigrant population filtered out. This provides a more accurate comparison between those who attended the convention and the larger population from which they came(see table 4).

The relative absence of children may be a result of the youthfulness of those attending the convention. Of the seventeen households having no children, eleven were under twenty-nine years old. Although it should be noted that even though the general population had larger numbers of children than the attendees, the birth rate in Central Massachusetts was the lowest in the state, and Massachusetts had the lowest birth rate in the country between 1800-1850. The mean number of children per household for the general population of Worcester was only 1.9, while the national average was 5.5 (see tables 2 and 3).[7]

Another explanation for the lower numbers of children among convention members is outlined by Maris A. Vinovskis in his theory on the nature of nineteenth century reformers. He explains that persons who maintain a fatalistic attitude

[7]Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts From the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Academic Press, 1981), 23; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census.

about life rarely bother to curtail fertility. Those who feel they have control over their life tend to practice birth control and bear fewer children. Reformers tend to have this outlook, and in nineteenth-century Massachusetts many people adopted the positive attitude of the reformer. This attitude encouraged taking control of one's surroundings in an attempt to improve one's life. Vinovskis points out that liberal American theology also encouraged the controlling of one's own destiny by removing the doctrine of original sin. This emphasis could have reinforced the tendency to decrease the number of children per family. Nineteenth century reforming couples may have felt they could improve their lives and control their future by limiting the number of children, rather than believing that the number of children they conceived was determined by the will of God.[8]

Other historians have posited economic reasons for the decreased fertility in Massachusetts. They view the decline of the family farm and increased industrialization as the main factor controlling birth rates. People did not need large families to survive economically. Moreover, they realized that fewer children meant less expenditures. While this theory helps to explain the lower birth rate in Massachusetts, Vinovskis' reformer theory may best explain the lower number of children in the homes of women's rights

[8]Maris A. Vinovskis, *Fertility in Massachusetts*, 138-144.

reformers.[9]

Understanding female physiology and the right of women to control pregnancy was encouraged by the women's rights organization. For example, Paulina Wright Davis often lectured on female anatomy and used a lifelike dummy to illustrate her point. This was very upsetting to many women who felt issues of contraception and intercourse were not meant for polite conversation, even among women. Although records concerning the use of contraception by women in the nineteenth century are difficult to locate, the lower birth rates are strong evidence that women practiced birth control at this time. It seems quite possible that the members of the Women's Rights Organization were practicing some form of birth control. Moreover, the diet and lifestyle prescribed by Sylvester Graham advised abstinence before marriage and moderation afterwards. This lifestyle and diet were very popular beginning in the 1830's and were practiced by many Quakers and reformers, including Abby Kelley Foster and her friends. Foster had only one child during her marriage to Stephan.[10]

[9] Ibid.,142-143.

[10] Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 29-204; for discussion of female contraception in the nineteenth century see Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family In America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Linda Gordon, *Women's Body, Women's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman, 1976); James Reed, *From Private Vice to Public Virtue: The Birth Control Movement and American Society Since 1830* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

The status of the general population was overwhelmingly married, while the marital status of convention members varies. Table 5 shows that 91 percent of the general population was married. In contrast, only 63 percent of convention members had a spouse. Interestingly, 36 percent of convention members were single. The convention stressed the importance of female independence and this may have been the attraction for such inordinately large number of single persons. However, this finding could also be attributed to the youthfulness of the organization. 14 of the 22 single persons were between the ages 16-29 (see table 9 and 15).

Much like the general population of Worcester, few members of the convention owned property. Forty-six people, or 68 percent, owned no property at all. This figure is close to the 65 percent of propertyless in the general population. Although the number of propertyless individuals in attendance is proportional to the general population, the number of people owning $10,000.00 or more is not. The top 5 percent of the general population owned $10,000.00 or more in property, but of those who attended the convention, 10 percent had more than $10,000.00 (see table 6). This indicates that the elite of Worcester were disproportionately members of the convention. Dramatic difference in wealth-holding among convention members suggest that the group is not as homogeneous in socio-economic terms as previous interpretations suggest. However, property-holding is not the only measure of socio-

economic status.

Occupation is another vital indicator of socio-economic status. The general population of Worcester consisted of primarily skilled and unskilled workers. Only 20 percent of the population was in a non-manual or proprietor position. The members of the convention, however, had 44 percent in the non-manual and proprietor positions, a much higher incidence than the general population (see table 7). Although 44 percent is a much higher percentage than that of the general population, it is lower than what would be expected. Previous interpretations state that the majority of women's rights reformers were of middle-class origins. This interpretation leaves out the 55 percent of the grassroots membership who worked as manual laborers.

In a town highly segregated by place of birth and wealth, the membership boasted large percentages of members living in the more affluent sections of Worcester. Wards 2,6,7,and 8 were traditionally middle- to upper-class neighborhoods, while 3,4,and 5 were either immigrant or working-class areas. Forty-three of the sixty-two persons whose residence is known lived in wards 2,6,7,and 8. Twelve members lived in the other four wards. The forty-three are exactly what one would expect to find in a group of reformers. The surprise is the other twelve members. According to the current interpretation, they should not show up in this group in such numbers. The members living in these wards, except for one, had no property and all but

four were manual laborers. However, as expected, the convention attracted a greater percentage from wards 6,7,and 8 than is represented in the population (see table 8 and 16).

The city of Worcester was becoming an industrial city in 1850. There were already many factories and the economy was moving from "The Age of the All Purpose Merchant" to "The Age of the Wholesaler." This change, as explained by Glen Porter and Harold Livesay, was the switch from the single merchant who was all things to the city-- banker, retailer, wholesaler, importer, and exporter-- to the merchant who was able to specialize in particular merchandise. The merchants in the "Age of the Wholesaler" could occupy their time becoming knowledgeable about his specialization and thus helped to elevate the status of the small business-owner above that of the manual laborer or artisan. In 1850, there were numerous specialized retailers in Worcester. The city had grocers, druggists, furniture, and hardware dealers, book sellers, bankers, and insurance salesmen. The market was open to any man with enough capital to invest. Those men with enough capital to open a small shop or restaurant were becoming the new middle class and enjoyed an elevated status in the community over the working class, who took jobs at the numerous boot, shoe, textile, and envelope factories.[11]

[11]Glen Porter and Harold Livesay, *Merchants and Manufacturers: Studies in the Changing Structure of*

In comparing the data of the members of the convention to the general population, it becomes obvious that the reform group is not as homogeneous once thought. To better explain the differences within the group the members were separated into three mutually exclusive groups: antislavery activists, women, and men. Of those members of the convention who hailed from Worcester it is possible to identify twenty persons connected to antislavery organizations, either in Worcester or on the national level. The records of both Worcester antislavery organizations provide information about offices held, money contributed, and general interest, and were used to determine whether individuals were active in the antislavery movement. In addition, the Abby Kelley Foster papers and the Earle and Chase family papers helped identify friends and relatives who were antislavery sympathizers. This group justified the struggle for women's rights in terms of their belief that all human beings were equal and deserved the same liberties and opportunities. While promoting the ideology of emancipation of the slaves, the men and women of the antislavery movement realized that all those in bondage were not south of the Mason-Dixon line.[12]

Nineteenth Century Marketing (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1971), 5-10; For advertisements and retail listings see Henry J. Howland, *Worcester in 1850* (Worcester: Henry J. Howland, 1850).

[12] The Record of the Worcester North Division Antislavery Society Commencing March 14, 1846 to 1860, Antislavery Collection, Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, MA; Record of the Worcester County Antislavery

Thomas and Alice Earle may be viewed as typifying the members of the 1850 convention whose interest in women's rights represented an extension of their antislavery activism. They were twenty-seven and twenty-three years old, and belonged to one of the most influential Quaker families in New England. Thomas was a thriving lumber dealer. He was an independent merchant and had a strong Quaker background. Several other members of their family attended the convention with them. At the time of the convention they were expecting their first child. After the convention, Thomas was a soldier in the 25th regiment of Massachusetts Volunteers during the Civil War. He went on to be elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in 1870. Thomas and Alice divorced some time before his election to the state legislature, and Alice was awarded custody of their children. The divorce created a public stir in Worcester. Thomas later remarried. He never saw his two children from his first marriage, even after calling for them on his death bed in the Massachusetts State Lunatic Asylum in 1871.

The awarding of the children to Alice Earle is an example of the shift in precedent in the Massachusetts

Society- South Division Record Book, 1840-1865, Antislavery Collection, Worcester Historical Museum, Worcester, MA; Abby Kelley Foster Papers, American Antiquarian Society; Chase Family Papers, American Antiquarian Society; U.S. Bureau of the Census. Population Schedules of the Seventh Census of the United States, Massachusetts, Worcester County, Bureau of the Census (Washington, D.C., 1850).

courts. Prior to the Civil War, judges routinely awarded the custody of children to the husband unless proven to be unfit, which Thomas was not.[13] The granting of the divorce as well as the awarding to Alice custody of the children may be due to the reformist nature of the Earle family. Thomas may not have contested the granting of custody to Alice, feeling that she was perfectly capable of raising her children without his help.

Another couple, Joseph and Adeline Howland, also attended the convention together and were members of the Worcester County Antislavery Society (South Division). In 1850 Joseph was on the Business Committee and was a representative of Worcester in the national Anti-Slavery Bazaar. The Howlands owned a thread store on main street and lived in ward 6, a middle to upper middle class neighborhood on the west side of town. Like most persons of the antislavery group they attended the convention together. After the convention the couple continued their support for antislavery and became members of Thomas Wentworth Higginson's Free Will Baptist Church. Joseph Howland was a staunch abolitionist and kept company with Stephan Foster and Martin Stowell, a free black from Worcester. All three of these men attended the convention. Howland, Higginson, Stowell, and Foster were part of the underground railroad

[13] *Proceedings,* 80-84; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; "Closing Scenes of a Sad Drama" *Worcester Daily, Spy* 24 May 1871; "Death of Thomas Earle" *Worcester Daily, Spy* 24 May 1871.

that existed in Worcester prior to the Civil War. In 1854 Howland, Foster, and four other men were jailed, for starting a riot with the intent to injure deputy marshal Butmen who had come to Worcester to capture runaway slaves. Deputy Butmen escaped the mob with the help of the abolitionists who had originally started the riot. After the men were jailed the *Daily Spy* reported the men to be "brave" and "valiant" abolitionists.[14]

All who attended the convention did not lead such public lives. Moreover, most members were not members of antislavery organizations. Of those who were not identified as an antislavery activist, two gender groups may be identified. The women's group consisted of thirty women. The men's group numbered sixteen. Although most of these men and women were married, their partners did not attend.[15]

The marital status of rank and file members varied between groups. The average age of marriage in New England from 1845 to 1860 was twenty-four for women and twenty-six for men. The antislavery group consisted entirely of married individuals, except for two, while the other two groups varied (see table 13). In the women's group 41

[14] *Proceedings*, 80-84; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; For a complete recounting of the infamous "Butman Riot," see Tilden G. Edelstein, *Strange Enthusiasm: A Life of Thomas Wentworth Higginson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 168, 170; "Our Citizens Bespattered," *Worcester Daily Spy*, 31 November 1854.

[15] *Proceedings*, 80-84; U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census.

percent were unmarried, while in the men's group 58 percent were unmarried.[16] The antislavery group not only boasted greater numbers of married people, but also greater numbers of couples attending the convention together. Only one couple attended together from the other two groups, while ten of twenty antislavery activists attended the convention with their spouse. This may be because those involved in antislavery held jobs that allowed them to be absent from work for two days. Working-class men and women most likely did not have that luxury.

In evaluating the membership as a whole, the data support previous interpretations that consider nineteenth-century reformers to be Protestant, white, native-born, and clearly different from the general population. However the differences among reformers as suggested by this study were equally significant if not more so. The most interesting finding of the study was that those belonging to the women's group and men's group were primarily working class. Many historians of the women's rights movement have found it composed of middle- and upper-class women. Many go so far to state that the inability of the women's movement to attract working-class women prevented it from becoming more successful in the antebellum period. In analyzing the socio-economic status of those who attended the women's

[16] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; Vinovskis, *Fertility In Massachusetts*, 49.

convention, it becomes clear that previous interpretations are incorrect, at least for Worcester.[17] The previous studies are correct about the composition of the antislavery group, but not even half of the members listed were part of that group. The antislavery men and women were all proprietors, professionals, or of the nonmanual category except one, who was a skilled artisan. All lived in more affluent sections of town and a large number owned some property. Although the other two groups did include some members of the middle and upper middle class, a large group held working-class occupations, had no property, and lived in the poorer sections of town(see tables 10, 11, and 12).

The distinctions used to separate the working class from the middle class were occupation, property value, and ward of residence. By the 1850's society viewed those who worked with their hands as manual laborers, regardless of their level of skill. Those who held nonmanual positions worked with their minds and were thus considered as having higher status than a manual laborer. Nonmanual laborers usually received a salary rather than an hourly wage, and this too was a mark of distinction. It was also important to own property. Property ownership permitted the owner a level of independence. Greater independence meant the owner was beholden to no one and was free to make personal

[17]U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 6.

decisions for himself. This study uses property value as a measure of wealth because the 1850 census records only this figure. Unlike many other antebellum cities, Worcester was rigidly segregated. Wards 2,6,7,and 8 were the middle- to upper-class wards of the native-born, while wards 3 through 5 were either working-class or immigrant communities. Occupation, property ownership, and ward provide sufficient information to determine the socio-economic status of the rank and file of the convention(see table 10, 11, and 12).

The motives for the men who attended are not as easy to discern as the antislavery group. There were large differences in their property holdings. Over half were single, and only 41 percent were of a non-manual profession. Many were like Daniel Knowelton, a thirty-three year old carpenter with a wife and two young daughters. He held $1,000.00 in property. His wife did not attend the convention with him, unless she was there and chose not to sign the membership list. Most likely she was at home with her two daughters, ages one and three, since reports indicate there were very few children present. Another male attendee, J.G. Warren, unlike Knowelton, was unmarried, lived in the Temperance Executive boarding house, owned $11,000.00 in property, and was thirty-one years old. The property was probably a furniture manufacturing shop. Warren lists himself as a carpenter, but his large property value indicates something greater. Men like Knowelton and Warren may have attended because they were part of the

Worcester general reforms. They were propertied and had a skilled occupation. Warren's living at the Temperance Executive indicates his preference for temperate company, an important issue among the reform-minded of Worcester. Men like these probably attended all manner of reform conventions in the area, and considered themselves forward thinkers in favor of an improved society.[18]

But not all men who attended were propertied. Isacc Norcross was a forty year old, propertyless carpenter living in a boarding house. There is no other record of Isacc anywhere other than his membership in the Women's Rights Convention of 1850. Exactly why he was there is unknown.[19]

The convention also attracted men from various political parties. Edward Southwick was a Democrat who was on the Committee of Arrangements to nominate Cass and Tyler to the state convention in 1848. In contrast, William Coe and his wife were Whigs and were invited to Zachary Taylor's inaugural ball. Both men had considerable property and standing in the Worcester community, Coe as the local druggist and Southwick as a successful coal dealer. It seems odd that Southwick would be a member of the women's rights convention as it was connected to abolition. Southwick was obviously high up in the state campaign of a candidate running on a platform of popular sovereignty and expansion, not reform or abolition.

[18] Ibid.
[19] Ibid.

This study found that of the large portion of working-class persons who attended the women's rights convention, many were women. The 1850 census did not specify the occupation of women. Therefore, if the women was married or living with parents the husband's or father's occupation was used to determine status. However, 30 percent of the women's group listed no occupation and lived in a boarding house or in a home with a family other than their own. As these women must have been receiving financial support from somewhere, they probably found employment as seamstresses, maids, or some other menial work. The socio-economic status of the unattached women without an occupation was considered working class for the purposes of this study because they were propertyless and lived in the working class sections of town(see tables 10 and 11).

The motives of middle-class reformers, such as those in the antislavery group, have been discussed in many histories of the women's rights movement. The motives of non-middle class reformers have received less attention from historians. It seems plausible to assume that these women did not attend the convention and sign the membership list for the same reasons as those linked to the reform network of the antislavery organization. Working women were probably less interested in the principles of humanity, in the emancipation of slaves, or the high-minded rhetoric of equality, most likely they were not there to petition for the right to vote.

One may speculate that the motivation of the working-class women was largely economic. The resolutions calling for equal pay for equal work, increased educational opportunities, and increased job opportunities for women were probably the main interests of these working-class women. Better jobs and better pay would mean a better lifestyle and increased independence for these women. Although these resolutions may have been important in the abstract to all those who attended, married, middle class, antislavery women were hardly as burdened with the economic issues of daily existence. Women who were unmarried or married to working class men faced harsh gender inequality when looking for work. Working-class women, in the event of their husband's death or abandonment, could be left with no economic support apart from the meager earnings gained from women's occupations. Those of the middle- and upper-classes could often lean on friends and family in time of desperation, but those of the working class probably had friends and family unable to carry an extra burden. The expansion of the women's sphere meant more than achieving equal status, it meant a greater chance of survival in the event they lacked the support of a husband[20].

The convention attracted many working-class women like

[20]Alice Kessler Harris, *Out To Work: A History of Wage Earning Women in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 72; Susan Eastabrook Kennedy, *If All We Did Was to Weep at Home: A History of White, Working-Class Women in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), 68-69.

A.H. Metcalf. She was single, fifty-four, and lived in a boarding house with her daughter Serena, who was fifteen years old. They held no property, and listed no occupation in the 1850 census. There were no men living with them, and it is unclear how they earned a living. As a woman with a teenage daughter but no husband, the economic proposals of the convention were probably very attractive, if not to her then to daughter, who would be a part of the next generation of women seeking employment.[21]

There were other women at the convention like Metcalf. Sybil Worcester was fifty-one and a widower. She had four daughters, the oldest being Phoebe and Adelline, twenty-six and twenty-one years old. Worcester, Phoebe, and Adelline attended the convention together. Worcester was lucky. She had a small boarding house with which she could support her daughters. The raising of four children while running a business was probably somewhat empowering to Worcester. Existing without the supervision of a man, these women were probably eager to join an organization that promised to fight for increasing the educational and economic opportunities of women like themselves and who were managing on their own in a male-dominated society.[22]

By subdividing the group of individuals from Worcester that attended the convention, it becomes clear that not all

[21] U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Schedules of the Seventh Census; *Proceedings*, 80-84.

[22] Ibid.

who attended the convention fit the stereotype of the middle-class reformer. Many men and women in attendance were from working-class neighborhoods and saw the women's movement as including them as well as those of a more bourgeois background. The feminist movement in the nineteenth century has often been criticized for its lack of attention to the needs of working-class women and historians have too long considered the movement the property of the upper classes. This study confirms that in Worcester the women's movement did involve and was supported by people from the working classes. The Women's Rights Convention of 1850 was considered a success by the leadership of the movement because of the skillfully written resolutions, great oratory, and national participation. It should also be considered a success for bringing together if only for a few days, two classes of society growing steadily apart.

Although there was no recorded membership list for the 1851 convention, there is evidence that working-class participation did not continue at the same level the next year. Dorothy Sterling points out in her biography of Abby Kelley Foster that she was "obscurely troubled by the number of fashionably dressed affluent women and their emphasis on, what seemed to her, their selfish concerns." This change in composition also concerned Susan B. Anthony, who disliked the low-necked dresses with flowing sleeves worn by Davis and Oaks-Smith at the convention of 1852 in Syracuse. Anthony did not think their attire was representative of the

"earnest, solid, hardworking women of the country." However, Davis maintained a certain amount of control over the organization and by 1855 Foster stopped attending. This change in the socio-economic status of convention members may be what has prompted historians to assert that all of the members of the women's rights movement were of middle- and upper-middle class backgrounds.

The attitudes of Foster and Anthony lend support to the argument that working-class women were active members at the 1850 convention. Why else would they have felt such contempt for women such as Davis and Oaks-Smith in succeeding years. Foster, of all the convention leaders, was the closest to being working class. She was born poor, the daughter of an unsuccessful farmer, and many of her friends went off to work in the mills of Lowell. Instead, Foster chose to lecture for antislavery which elevated her above manual labor. The Fosters rarely had extra money and she understood the plight of the working women. Although her schedule required her to hire help at her farm, she often worked alongside them.

The inclusion of the working-class the women's rights movement goes back further than 1850. There is evidence of working-class women attending the conference at Seneca Falls in 1848. Charlotte Woodward was nineteen in 1848 and a glove maker out of her home in rural New York. She and six of her friends traveled by wagon to the convention. She claimed her reason for attending was that "all the hours

that I sat and sewed gloves for a miserable pittance, which after it was earned could never be mine. I wanted to work but I wanted to choose my task and I wanted to collect my wages." Woodward's name appears on the list of those signing the Declaration of Sentiments in July 1848. This was probably the attitude of many working-class women including the ones who attended the Worcester convention in 1850.[23]

In examining the leadership of the women's rights conventions, historians have unfairly generalized about the membership. In focusing on the rank and file members of the Worcester convention of 1850 and developing a socio-economic profile of that group, the once apparent homogeneity disappears. While the study does confirm that as a group the members were distinct from the general population, the socio-economic differences within the group are too great to ignore. Individuals who were of the working class in Worcester did choose to attend and join the convention of 1850. Although probably motivated for different reasons from the antislavery group, the working class women seem to have felt a need to alter their role in society as acutely as those of the middle and upper middle classes.

[23] Miriam Gurko, *Ladies of Seneca Falls: The Birth of the Women's Rights Movement* (New York: Shocken Books, 1976), 99-100.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOWARD THE FUTURE

The origins, development, and composition of the women's rights movement of the nineteenth century have long been a source of debate among historians. Historians such as Cott, Melder, and Smith-Rosenberg see the origins of the movement in the benevolent societies of the 1820's and 30's. Hewitt, Boylan, and DuBois view the movements beginning with women abolitionists and their fight for equality within the antislavery movement. However, they all agree that those involved in the women's rights movement were middle-class, native-born, and Protestant.

In examining the 1850 convention, this study finds that the movement did have its origins in the antislavery movement, but that it was not an extension of the earlier benevolent associations. Benevolent and moral reform associations usually grounded their activities in orthodox Christianity. The women's rights movement, with its condemnation of the male domination of the church, moved away from moral suasion and the influence of Calvinism. They opted instead to confront the dominance of men directly

through politics and the right to vote.

While this study does find that all members of the convention were native and Protestant, it questions the interpretations stating that the women involved in the women's rights movement were middle-class. There was indeed a group of antislavery organizers that fit the standard interpretation, but many did not. Several men and women at the convention possessed a working class backgrounds. They lived in working class neighborhoods, owned no property, and held manual labor jobs.

The motivation for the working class to attend the convention was probably different for these people than for the leadership of the movement or the antislavery supporters. The latter were interested in human rights, suffrage, and the emancipation of the slaves. The working class, dealing with the harsh realities of a new industrial economy, probably better understood the economic advantages that greater equality of women would yield them. Increased wages, new jobs, greater access to education, and the right to own property apart from their husbands was probably more important to these women than the theory and rhetoric espoused by the leadership.

The support of the working class was valuable to the organization, if only in adding to their ranks. They should not be left out of the history. They were active

participants in the launching of a new and formidable political movement.

An effort to uncover and further determine the extent of working-class participation in the movement would help provide further proof of their participation in later years. Unfortunately, in a community study generalizations about the whole women's movement are speculative. In examining the membership of the conventions held in Syracuse, Boston, and Philadelphia in the later years of the nineteenth century, historians may be able to further document the existence of the working class in the movement.

The convention of 1850 marked the beginning of a national women's rights movement in the United States. Its continued success into the twentieth century is due, in part, to the first feminists who saw the inherent need of women to achieve individualism in a country where conformity, submission, and domesticity marked the true lady.

The convention was radical in that participants who had first-hand experienced the injustices perpetrated against women joined together for two days to proclaim to the world that the current state of American society was unacceptable. One half of the nation held political, social, and economic control over the other, and the leadership as well as the rank and file of the women's rights movement were successful

in bringing this to the attention of the entire country. The members of this convention understood that in order to bring about the change their resolutions called for, a radical reordering of society would have to take place.

All of the members of the convention were pioneers of a new progressive organization, unlike any women's group that had come before. The women of the convention distinguished themselves from previous organizations by openly challenging the current customs and standards of society and directly confronted the domination of men, even when it meant taking on long-established religious convention. The movement came of age in a time of popular politics and the rise of the individual in society. Understanding this, reform women gave up on moral suasion and petitions and took their cause directly to the legislatures and congressmen. While agitating for the vote, the women continued to organize and lecture those in power in their attempt to improve the lives of women.

The women's rights organization met every year after the 1850 convention, except for a period during the Civil War. The organization split in 1869 over the issue of suffrage for black men and its place on the platform of the women's movement. Although many leaders had been trained by antislavery organizations, most of them saw they believed the need to devote the entire organization to the needs of

free women was more important than to agitate for the suffrage for the former male slaves. Women committed to the antislavery cause like Abby Kelley Foster left the group, while others like Lucy Stone and Paulina Wright Davis embraced it.

The women's movement although unable to secure the vote until 1919, was able to improve the lives of women in the nineteenth century. They managed to obtain the vote in several western states, secured mothers the right to their children, made great strides in education, employment, and property ownership, and gave women the right to their earnings. All of these goals were discussed at the 1850 convention, and they were made possible by the agitation of the women's rights organization throughout the nineteenth century.

It is well known that the progress of the women's rights movement was painfully slow and a few of the resolutions of the 1850 convention are not completely realized today. The failure to achieve equal pay for equal work and discrimination against women continue to plague women as we enter the twenty-first century. The women of the 1850 conference wanted to reorder society entirely; they had no idea just what a task it would be.

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APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

The Names of Those Who Signed the Call to the Women's Rights Convention of 1850

Massachusetts

Lucy Stone
William H. Channing
Harriet K. Hunt
A. Bronson Alcott
Eliza Barney
Wendell Phillips
Ann Greene Phillips
Adin Ballou
Anna Q.T. Parsons
Mary H.L. Cabot
B.S. Treanor
Mary M. Brooks
Thomas Wentworth Higginson
Mary E. Higginson
Emily Winslow
R. Waldo Emmerson
William L. Garrison
Helen E. Garrison
Charles F. Hovey
Abby K. Foster
Dr. Seth Rogers
Eliza F. Taft
Dr. A.C. Taft
Charles K. Whipple
Mary Ballard
Emma C. Goodwin
Abby Price
Thankful Southwick
Eliza J. Kenney
Louisa M. Sewall
Sara Southwick

Rhode Island

Sara H. Whitman
Thomas Davis
Paulina W. Davis
Joseph A. Barker
Sarah Brown
Elizabeth B. Chace
Mary Clarke
John L. Clark
George Clarke
Mary Adams
George Adams

New York

Gerritt Smith
Nancy Smith
Elizabeth C. Stanton
Catherine Wilkinson
Samuel J. May
Charlotte C. May
Charlotte G. Coffin
Mary G. Taber
Elizabeth S. Miller
Elizabeth Russell
Stephen Smith
Rosa Smith
Joseph Savage
L.N. Fowler
Lydia Fowler
Sara Smith
Charles D. Miller

Pennsylvania

William Elder
Sara Elder
Sara Tyndale
Warner Justice
Huldah Justice
William Swisshelm
Jane G. Swisshelm
Charlotte Darlington
Simon Barnard
Lucretia Mott
James Mott
W.S. Pierce
Myra Townsend
Mary Grew
Sarah Lewis
Sarah Pugh
Hannah Darlington
Sarah D. Barnard

Maryland

Mrs. Eliza Stewart

Ohio

Elizabeth Wilson
Mary A. Johnson
Oliver Johnson
Mary Cowles
Maria L. Giddings
Jane Elizabeth Jones
Benjamin S. Jones
Lucius A. Hine
Sylvia Cornell

APPENDIX B

Names of Members of the Convention from Worcester, Massachusetts

Adams, Mary
Ball, Catherine A.
Barbour, C.M.
Binney, C.M.
Bigelow, Silence
Briggs, E.B.
Capron, Effingham L.
Carter, Mrs. C.M.
Chaplin Mrs.
Chase, Lydia E.
Chickery, Mrs.
Clark, Elizabeth A.
Coe, William
Crandell, D.R.
Crowl, Mrs. A
Cummings, J.M.
Davis, Jane
Dodge, Eliza M.
Dowe, CS
Earle, Alice Chase
Earle, Elizabeth
Earle, Martha B.
Earle, Sara Hussey
Earle, Thomas
Fairbanks, H.N.
Foster, Abby K.
Foster, Stephen
Fuller, Asenath
Fuller, J.A.
Fuller, Susan
Gleason, Louisa
Goddard, E.
Goulding, Anna
Green, Adeline S.
Hadwin, M.R.
Hall, Sara E.
Harrington, W.H.
Harris, Julia
Harris, O.F.
Hill, Ophilia
Howland, Adeline
Howland, Joseph A.
Jilson, C

Johnson, Alexander H
Johnson, Elizabeth
Johnson, W.H.
Joslin, Perry
Knowlton, Daniel H.
Lane, C.D.M.
Loveland, Emily
McLane, C.D.
Metcalf, A.H.
Metcalf, Mary R.
Norcross, Isaac
Ober, Ora
Ober, L.H.
Parrington, Elizabet
Parrington, Mary E.
Parsons, K.H.
Partridge, J.T.
Perry, Adeline
Perry, John S.
Pierce, Felicia A.
Prentice, Emily
Prentice, Sarah
Prince, A.
Rawson, A.P.B.
Rogers, Dr. Seth
Ruggles, Anna E.
Safford, Lucinda
Southwick, Anne H.
Southwick, Edward
Southwick, Maria A.
Stamp, Mrs. E.
Stone, Andrew
Stowell, Martin
Stowell, Elizabeth A
Taft, Sophia
Thayer, A.W.
Thompson, E.W.K.
Thompson, M.A.
Tracy, Dwight
Trenor, C.M.
Warren, J.G.
Wilmarth, Lydia
Worcester, Adeline
Worcester,Mrs. Sybil
Worcester, Pheobe

Appendix C

Sampling Method

Tables one through fifteen record the social, family, and economic characteristics of 623 households whose names appeared on the census tracts for Worcester, Massachusetts in 1850. It represents a 20 percent sample from each of the eight wards. Using Matlab, a mathematical software program, a list of random numbers was obtained. The equation x=rand([239 1])*1000 for ward one, x=rand([482 1])*1000 for ward two, x=rand([472 1])*1000 for ward three, x=rand([356 1])*1000 for ward four, x=rand([384 1])*1000 for ward five, x=rand([453 1])*1000 for ward six, x=rand([431 1])*1000 for ward seven, x=rand([333 1])*1000 for ward eight was entered into the computer. The computer printed eight sets of random numbers. The numbers were then ordered numerically by ward. All of the information was converted into numerical codes. The information was transcribed directly from the manuscript census. Most of the variables in the tables are the answers given to the question of the census marshal. In only a few cases was it necessary to reorganize the census data into new categories of analysis. The only complicated procedure of this sort involved the creation of a manageable number of occupational groups from the 114 jobs listed in the census itself. The occupational classifications that appear in the tables combine many different job titles into a maximum of

five ranks. The following list details the entries in each of the five major occupational groupings. and the corresponding household numbers were coded.

The occupational groups used in this study were devised using the classifications specified by Stephen Thernstrom in *Poverty and Progress.*

Occupation

Professional/Proprietor/Merchant

Physician
Manufacturer
Card Manufacturer
Attorney
Merchant
Boot Manufacturer
Manufacturer of Scrap Iron
Insurance Company Officer
Publisher of Paper
Carriage Maker
Counselor
House Wright
Judge Probate
Architect
President of Bank
Teacher of Ministry
Publisher
Pump Manufacturer
Pump Maker
US Senator; John Davis
Manufacturer of Castings
Shoe Manufacturer
Surveyor and Engineer
Manufacturer of Machinery
Justice
Property owning farmer

Non-Manual

Accountant
Coal Dealer
Stove Dealer
Stable Keeper
Parisian Dealer

Inn Holder
Book Seller
Deputy Jailer
Cashier at Bank
Auctioneer
R.R. Conductor
Mail Carrier
Baggage Master
Constable
Leather Dealer
Lumbar Dealer
Trader
Shoe Dealer
Car Inspector
Professor of Music
Victualer
Horse Dealer
Hotel Keeper
Clerk
Grocery Clerk
Telegraph Office
Cashier
Teacher
Daguerreotype Artist
Apothecary
Surveyor
Shoe Dealer
Plow Maker
Overseer
Horticulturist
Confectioner
Dealer of Wire

Skilled

Engineer
Baker
Carpenter
Stone Mason
Gun Smith
Car Builder
Tailor
Printer
Barber
Plumber
Book Binder
Painter
R.R. Repairman
Machinist
Cabinet Maker

Semi-skilled

Boot Bottomer
Miner
Shoe Maker
Boot Dicker
Boot Maker
Wool Carder
Book Keeper
Boot Treer
Boot Finisher
Sash and Blind Maker
Ereptsman
Boot Crimper
Boot Cutter
Carder and Spinner
Gardener
Paper Maker
Faller
Spinner
Carder
Dyer
Stone Trimmer
Soap and Candle Maker
Melter
Wire Drawer
Wool Sorter
Wire Worker
Nail Cutter
Cloth Dresser

Unskilled

Watch on Railroad
City Watch
Laborer
Truck Man
Teamster
Sexton
Seaman
Non-Property owning farmer

The long string of numbers found in the tables constitutes descriptive statistics. All were created by some

simple arithmetic operation, chiefly calculating a percentage. Relationships between variables are presented as cross-tabulations.

Of those who were members of the women's rights convention, their names were located in the Worcester, Massachusetts census of 1850. There were eighty-eight names on the membership list who listed their address as Worcester. However, all of these persons could not be located in the census. Of the eighty-eight, sixty-eight were located. Their data was transcribed directly from the manuscript census and grouped the same as the data for the general population. The tables all have different numbers of cases for the members of the women's rights group. This is because every person did not report to the census taker every variable coded for. Therefore, those who did not report certain items were not coded for those items.

APPENDIX D

Tables

Table 1.—Age of the General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention

Age	General Population	Members of Convention
16-29	329 (27.6%)	32 (47.8%)
30-39	461 (38.7%)	14 (20.9%)
40-49	215 (18.1%)	12 (17.9%)
50 and older	186 (15.6%)	9 (13.4%)
	$\bar{X}$= 37 n= 1191*	$\bar{X}$= 25 n= 67

*This number is larger than the sample of 625 because each households where the head was married, both the age of the male and female were coded.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 2.-- Number of Children Per Household by Age of Those Attending the Convention.

Number of Children	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
AGE										
16-29	22	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n=32
30-39	6	2	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	n=14
40-49	3	3	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	n=12
50 and older	2	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	n= 9

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 3.-- Number of Children Per Household by Age of The General Population.

Number of Children	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
AGE										
16-29	55	81	41	19	7	3	0	0	0	n=206
30-39	27	34	53	46	37	12	8	1	0	n=218
40-49	17	13	25	18	4	8	4	1	0	n= 90
50 and older	21	22	16	10	14	2	5	0	2	n= 92

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 4.—Number of Children per Household of the General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention.

Number of Children	General Population	Members of Convention
1	29 (4.7%)	34 (51.5%)
2	86 (13.8%)	17 (25.0%)
3	87 (14.0%)	8 (11.8%)
4	71 (11.4%)	2 (3.0%)
5	76 (12.2%)	4 (6.1%)
6	96 (15.4%)	0 (0.0%)
7	94 (15.1%)	1 (1.5%)
8	84 (13.5%)	0 (0.0%)
	$\bar{x}$= 2.0 n= 427	$\bar{x}$= 1.0 n= 67

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 5.—Marital Status of the General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention

Marital Status	General Population	Members of Convention
Single	21 (3.4%)	22 (32.4%)
Married	570 (91.5%)	43 (63.2%)
Unmarried with Children*	32 (5.1%)	3 (4.4%)
	n=623	n=68

*The 1850 census does not distinguish between divorced, widowed, and unmarried. All of those listed as unmarried and had children were placed in the unmarried with children category.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 6.—Property Value of the General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention

Property Value	General Population	Members of Convention
$0	403 (64.7%)	47 (69.1%)
$1- 2000	102 (16.4%)	7 (10.2%)
$2001-4000	59 (9.5%)	3 (4.4%)
$4001-9999	26 (4.2%)	4 (5.8%)
$10,000 and higher	33 (5.3%)	7 (10.2%)
	$\bar{x}$= $1963.10 n= 623	$\bar{x}$= $2312.00 n= 68

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 7.—Occupational Class of the General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention.

Occupation	General Population	Members of Convention
Professional/ Proprietor	71 (11.4%)	17 (25.0%)
Nonmanual	57 (9.1%)	13 (19.1%)
Skilled	229 (36.8%)	14 (20.5%)
Semi-skilled	81 (13.0%)	5 (7.3%)
Unskilled	131 (21.0%)	6 (8.8%)
Unknown	54 (8.7%)	12 (19.1%)
	n= 623	n= 68

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 8.—Ward of Residence of General Population Compared to the Members of the Convention

Ward	General Population	Members of Convention
1	29 (4.7%)	7 (11.3%)
2	86 (13.8%)	7 (11.3%)
3	87 (14.0%)	6 (9.7%)
4	71 (11.4%)	2 (3.2%)
5	76 (12.2%)	4 (6.5%)
6	96 (15.4%)	10 (16.1%)
7	94 (15.1%)	13 (21.0%)
8	84 (13.5%)	13 (21.0%)
	n= 623	n= 62

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 9.--The Marital Status of Those Attending the Convention as Compared to the General Population.

Marital Status	General Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members**	Women Who Attended The Convention**	Men Who Attended The Convention**
Single	21 (3.4%)	2 (10.0%)	10 (32.2%)	10 (58.8%)
Married	570 (91.5%)	17 (85.0%)	18 (58.0%)	7 (41.1%)
Unmarried with children*	32 (5.1%)	1 (5.0%)	3 (9.6%)	0 (0.0%)
	n=623	n=20	n=31	n=17

*The 1850 census does not distinguish between divorced, widowed, and unmarried. All of those listed as unmarried and had children were placed in the unmarried with children category.
**Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 10.—Occupational Class of Those Who Attended the Convention and the General Population.

Occupation	General Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members*	Women Who Attended The Convention*	Men Who Attended The Convention*
Professional/ Proprietor	71 (11.4%)	11 (55.0%)	2 (6.4%)	4 (23.5%)
Nonmanual	57 (9.1%)	7 (35.0%)	4 (12.9%)	2 (11.7%)
Skilled	229 (36.6%)	1 (5.0%)	7 (22.5%)	6 (35.2%)
Semi-skilled	81 (13.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (12.9%)	1 (5.8%)
Unskilled	131 (21.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (12.9%)	2 (11.7%)
Unknown	56 (9.0%)	1 (5.0%)	10 (32.2%)	2 (11.7%)
	n=625	n=20	n=31	n=17

*Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 11.-- The Property Value of the General Population Compared to Those Attending the Convention.

Property Value	General Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members*	Women Who Attended The Convention*	Men Who Attended The Convention*
$0	403 (64.7%)	9 (45.0%)	27 (87.1%)	11 (64.7%)
$1-2000	102 (16.4%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (3.2%)	3 (17.6%)
$2001-4000	59 (9.5%)	2 (10.0%)	1 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)
$4001-9999	26 (4.2%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)
$10,000 and higher	33 (5.3%)	3 (15.0%)	1 (3.2%)	3 (17.6%)
	$\bar{X}$=$1963.10 n=623	$\bar{X}$= $3568.42 n=20	$\bar{X}$= $791.67 n=31	$\bar{X}$= $1813.33 n=17

*Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 12.--Ward distribution of Those Attending the Convention Compared to the General Population.

Ward Number	General Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members*	Women Who Attended The Convention*	Men Who Attended The Convention*
1	29 (4.7%)	1 (5.0%)	2 (7.4%)	4 (28.6%)
2	86 (13.8%)	1 (5.0%)	5 (18.5%)	1 (7.1%)
3	87 (14.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (14.8%)	2 (14.3%)
4	71 (11.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (3.7%)	1 (7.1%)
5	76 (12.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (14.8%)	0 (0.0%)
6	96 (15.4%)	5 (25.0%)	3 (11.1%)	1 (7.1%)
7	94 (15.1%)	7 (35.0%)	4 (14.8%)	2 (14.3%)
8	84 (13.5%)	6 (30.0%)	4 (14.8%)	3 (21.4%)
	n=623	n=20	n=27	n=14

*Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 13.--Age Comparison of the Three Member Groups In Relation to the General Population of Worcester.

Age Group	General Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members*	Women Who Attended The Convention*	Men Who Attended The Convention*
16-29	329(27.6%)	13(65.0%)	13(41.9%)	7(41.1%)
30-39	461(38.7%)	1(5.0%)	8(25.8%)	7(41.1%)
40-49	215(18.0%)	4(20.0%)	6(19.3%)	3(17.6%)
50-59	186(15.6%)	2(10.0%)	4(12.9)%	0(0.0%)
	n=623	n=20	n=31	n=17

*Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 14.-- Number of Children Per Household of the Three Member Groups Compared to the Native General Population of Worcester.

Number of Children	Native Population	Anti-Slavery Organization Members*	Women Who Attended The Convention*	Men Attended The Convention*
0	82 (19.2%)	8 (40.0%)	13 (43.3%)	12 (75.0%)
1	107 (25.1%)	8 (40.0%)	8 (26.7%)	1 (6.3%)
2	91 (21.3%)	1 (5.0%)	4 (13.3%)	3 (18.8%)
3	72 (16.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)
4	46 (10.8%)	1 (5.0%)	2 (6.7%)	0 (0.0%)
5	16 (3.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
6	11 (2.6%)	1 (5.0%)	1 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)
7	0 (0.0%)	1 (5.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
8	2 (.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
	$\bar{X}$= 2.0 n=427	$\bar{X}$= 1.2 n=20	$\bar{X}$= 1.35 n=30	$\bar{X}$= .44 n=16

*Those that attended the women's rights convention from Worcester and had ties to antislavery organizations were grouped together. Those persons not a part of an antislavery organization were then split into male and female categories. The reason for the gender separation of those not a part of the antislavery group was to better understand the motives for attendance. The main objective of this study was to determine the socio-economic composition of the women who attended and their motives for attendance. Therefore separating the women from the men was necessary.
Source: See Appendix C.

Table 15.—The Age of the Members of the Convention By Marital Status

	Single	Married	Single with Children	
Age				
16-29	14	17	1	n=32
30-39	3	11	0	n=14
40-49	3	9	0	n=12
50-59	1	6	2	n= 9

Source: See Appendix C.

Table 16.—The Property Value of Members By Ward of Residence.

Ward	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Age									
$0	5	4	5	2	4	6	7	9	n=42
$1-2000	0	1	0	0	0	2	3	1	n= 7
$2001-4000	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2	n= 3
$4001-9999	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	n= 3
$10,000 and higher	1	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	n= 7

Source: See Appendix C.

VITA

Holly Brown

Candidate for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Thesis: AN ANALYIS OF THE RANK AND FILE MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORCESTER WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION OF 1850

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