

Quakers, Women, and Reform



Lucretia Mott, ca. 1860–1880. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., 9750024.

the start, they played a much greater role than women in mainstream Protestant sects. They wrote and spoke, served on committees, and were involved in decision-making. In New York State and Pennsylvania in the 1830s, there were slightly *more* women Quaker ministers than men. **Lydia Maria**

Child, who lived among Quakers for a period of time, noted that Quaker women were independent because they shared “equally with men in the management of all the business of the society.”

Independent Quaker women were indispensable to the abolition movement, but not without opposition. Lucretia Mott spoke at the 1833 convention that founded the American Anti-Slavery Society. But when women were not permitted to join—a position that would evolve and splinter the group by the late 1830s—she and others formed the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. Angelina Grimke Weld, a convert to Quakerism and one of

the leading antislavery orators of her day, was attacked by a mob at Pennsylvania Hall (see **Resource 13**).

In 1848, the first women’s rights convention was organized in Seneca Falls by five women: **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright (Lucretia’s sister), Jane Hunt, and Mary Ann M’Clintock. With the exception of Stanton, all were Quakers or, in Wright’s case, a former Quaker who had been expelled for marrying outside the faith. Susan B. Anthony did not attend the meeting in Seneca Falls, but she was a Quaker who became Stanton’s great partner in the long fight for women’s suffrage.

Discussion Questions

- ★ Why did the Quakers allow women more rights than general American society?
- ★ Why do the actions of a small religious sect matter to the larger story of women’s rights?

Sources: Christopher Densmore, “Radical Quaker Women and the Early Women’s Rights Movement,” *Quakers & Slavery*, http://trilogy.brynmawr.edu/speccoll/quakersandslavery/commentary/themes/radical_quaker_women.php (accessed by M. Waters, 11-28-2016); Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Women’s Rights Convention* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2004).

Women in Quaker Doctrine

As we dare not encourage any ministry but that which we believe to spring from the influence of the Holy Spirit, so neither dare we attempt to restrain this influence to persons of any condition in life, or to the male sex alone; but, as male and female are one in Christ, we allow such of the female sex as we believe to be endued with a right qualification for the ministry, to exercise their gifts for the general edification of the church.

[Joseph Gurney Bevan?], *Summary of the History, Doctrine, and Discipline of Friends: Written at the Desire of the Meeting for Sufferings*, London: 1790.