



# Lucretia Mott: Quaker Luminaries

## Patapsco Friends Meeting 18 February 2018

*My convictions led me to adhere to the sufficiency of the light within us, resting on truth as authority, rather than 'taking authority for truth.'*

Lucretia Mott, Memoranda on Herself

*Any great change must expect opposition because it shakes the very foundation of privilege.* – World Temperance Convention, New York, 1853

### Timeline

#### Lucretia Mott's Life

- 1/3/1793** Born Lucretia Coffin on Nantucket Island.
- 1804** Family moves to Boston
  - Attends free school "*mingle(s) with all classes without distinction*"
- 1806** Attends, later teaches at Nine Partners school in New York
  - Hears Elias Hicks speak
  - Reads tracks on abolition/anti-slavery
  - Meets James Mott
  - Discovers that male teachers paid 2.5 times female teachers
- 4/10/1811** Marries James Mott in Philadelphia.
- 1817** Son Tommy dies
- @1818** Begins speaking in Meeting
- 1821** Became recorded minister in the Society of Friends.
- 1827** Hicksite/Orthodox split – after several months follows James to Hicksite Cherry Street Meeting
- 5/1830** Chosen as Clerk, Philadelphia Women's Yearly Meeting (Hicksite)
- 12/9/1833** First meeting of Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society
- 6/12/1840** Excluded from the World Antislavery Convention in London
- 9/23/1841** Sermon delivered at Marlboro Chapel in Boston on women, first of many
- 1/15/1843** Sermon in First Unitarian Church of Washington on anti-slavery
- 7/19/1848** Seneca Falls Convention. Declaration of the Rights of Women
- 2/11/1849** Sermon to medical students at Cherry Street Meeting.
- 9/1852** Women's Rights Convention, Syracuse, New York. Also spoke at the conventions of 1853, 1854, 1856 and 1866.

#### Historical Events

- 1780** Pennsylvania 1<sup>st</sup> state to abolish slavery
- 1787** Elias Hicks begins anti-slavery work
- 1790** Second Great Awakening begins
- 1792** Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*
- 1808** U.S makes importing slaves from outside the U.S. illegal
- 1821-1827** Weighty English Friends denounce Hicks in Phila, NY and publications
- 1826** Hicks asserts scripture beneficial if read "*under the regulating influence of the spirit of God*" but harmful if used as doctrine without personal interpretation of the inner light in talk at Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.
- 1827** Hicksite/Orthodox split
- 1830** Elias Hicks dies
- 1833** American Anti-slavery society formed
- 1838** Sarah Grimké published *The Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women* in Boston
- 1840** Fade out 2<sup>nd</sup> Great Awakening
- 1850** Compromise of 1850 on Slavery/Fugitive Slave Act Passed
- 1850** 1<sup>st</sup> National Women's Rights Convention, Worcester, MA

**1/1866** Organization of the Pennsylvania Peace Society. Becomes president 1868.

**5/10/1866** Organization of the American Equal Rights Association. Lucretia Mott president.

**5/30/1867** Organization of Free Religious Association.

**11/10/1869** Dedication of Swarthmore College.

**7/4/1876** Addresses National Women's Suffrage Association. Lucretia president.

**11/11/1880** Lucretia Mott dies

**1860** Lincoln Elected President

**1861** Civil War Starts

**1863** Emancipation Proclamation

**1865** Civil War Ends/ Thirteenth Amendment Abolishes Slavery

**1869** National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) founded in May

American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) founded in Nov.

**7/19/1878** Thirtieth anniversary of Seneca Falls.

**1878** Women's suffrage amendment 1<sup>st</sup> introduced

## Opening Queries

What is your vision of Lucretia Mott and her works?

How does Lucretia Mott relate to your life?

## Lucretia Mott in Context

### *Religious Movements*

- Second Great Awakening
- Romanticism and emotional approaches to religion over rationalism
- Return to "primitive" Christianity, mystical approaches, direct communion with Christ
- Evangelical
- Ties to social causes (anti-slavery, women's rights, etc.)
- Burnt over district (upstate New York)

### *Religious Society of Friends*

- Movement toward quietism
- Many rules for dress, housing/furniture, behavior and people read out (expelled) from Meeting for violating rules
- Insular – people expelled for marrying out, restrictions on reading materials, interacting with people from other religions
- Recorded minister – people recognized for their vocal ministry
- Travelling in the ministry – not just approval to travel but approval to share a particular leading within the society of Friends or elsewhere. Included spiritual and financial support to Friends with a travel minute and/or "released friends" and their families.

## **Elias Hicks as a Second Great Awakening Minister**

*In April 1827, a separation between Hicksite and Orthodox Friends (as they came to be called) took place in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, which later spread to other yearly meetings. The roots of this separation are complex. Questions of differing theology were intertwined with the issue of authority of the yearly meeting elders to enforce doctrine, and rested on sociological differences between the wealthier Friends, primarily city merchants and the poorer Friends, mainly rural... The Hicksites were concerned, and more active, in the anti-slavery struggle and the movement for women's rights which grew out of that struggle; the Orthodox were the more consistent pacifists. The Orthodox believed in central control; the Hicksites sought more autonomy for the local meetings. Margaret Bacon (In the Shadow of William Penn, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends, pp 6-7)*

- Emphasis on the inner light and spirit led ministry
- Social concerns (anti-slavery) comes directly from the inner light
- Actions (not using the products of slavery) from leadings as important as words
- Lengthy sermons without notes coming directly from the spirit
- Interpretations of scripture etc. through the lens of the inner light, not as doctrine, intellect, or as taught by others

## **Anti-slavery and Woman's Rights**

*Resolved: that as the poor slave's alleged contentment with his servile and cruel bondage only proves the depths of his enslavement, so the assertion of woman that she has all the rights she wants, only proves how far the restrictions and disabilities to which she has been subjected have rendered her insensible to the blessings of true liberty. Lucretia Mott, Woman's Rights Convention, New York, 1856*

- Both movements started at about the same time, first in England, then the U.S.
- Both linked to second awakening
- Most key female leaders were active in both movements



## **Lucretia's Approach, Personality and Interactions with Friends and Others**

### ***A Bright, Educated, Spirit Led Activist, But Not a Quiet Personality***

*I always loved the good, in childhood desired to do right, and prayed for strength to overcome a naturally quick temper. Lucretia Mott (From Lucretia Mott, Dorothy Sterling, p 27)*

*I can remember how our mothers were employed while our fathers were at sea. At that time it required some money and some courage to get to Boston. They were obliged to go to that city, make their trades, exchange their oils and candles for dry goods, set their own price, keep their own accounts. Lucretia Mott (From Lucretia Mott, Dorothy Sterling, p 32)*

- Raised from an early age that women should be "useful" and active participants in business as well as running households and raising children.
- Bright, well educated, and willing from an early age to speak out against injustice.
- Often in trouble at school and later sanctioned by the Meeting for both minor infractions and her activism.
- Not afraid to speak her conscience even when it went against the expectations of the Meeting or others in activist movements. When in the position where she needed to sign a letter as clerk of Women's Yearly Meeting that she did not agree with, stepped out of her role as clerk, spoke against the letter, then edited it to soften the meaning before signing it.

- Actively involved in both Friends and a variety of social causes (anti-slavery, women's rights, peace movement, anti-poverty, Native Americans)
- Raised her children and several nieces. Hosted a wide array of activists and other visitors on a regular basis, so many that James decided that they should move out of Philadelphia in 1857 to cut down on visitors. It didn't work.

### **Speaking from the Spirit in the Hicksite Mode**

*Less well known, but perhaps in the long run more important, was her role as a nineteenth century Quaker minister, blessed with a deep spiritual insight, and a keen analytic mind... True to Quaker tradition, Lucretia Mott spoke only as the spirit moved. She never wrote a speech or sermon, and she disliked formal writing of any sort.* Margaret Hope Bacon (Lucretia Mott Speaking, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 234, pp 2-3).

- While recognized as a recorded minister at the age of 28 and always active in Friends, she did not begin her social activism until after she was 40 and most of her children grown.
- Like Elias Hicks and other Quaker social gospel ministers of the day, Lucretia gave long sermons from the spirit, without notes. Her speeches drew from a wide array of topical literature, the bible and other sources. With the exception of one brief biography and her letters, all records of her sermons and thoughts were recorded by others during or after the events.

### **Lived Her Beliefs**

*We are little aware how the prejudice against color vanishes as soon as we are disposed to face it. How little anyone seemed to be thinking whether she was sitting by black, brown, or white.* Lucretia Mott (From *Lucretia Mott*, Dorothy Sterling, p 87)

- Refused to use any products created with slave labor
- Had many long term African American friends that she invited to her home, visited theirs, and shared celebrations as well as activism
- Hired African Americans for key professional roles (for example teacher for the African American school) and hosted slaves escaping to freedom in her home
- After the civil war, visited the poor and sick of all colors and provided aid

### **Revered Among Activists, but Often Sanctioned by her Meeting/Yearling Meeting**

*After the separation, and in the wake of the backlash occasioned by the rejection of London the elders began to discipline those members who preached against slavery in meeting for worship, both in Philadelphia and elsewhere. ... In New York City Monthly Meeting, a charismatic minister named George White began to oppose the anti-slavery movement openly. Lucretia Mott was George White's particular target.... In 1842, George White came to Philadelphia to try to persuade Cherry Street meeting to disown Lucretia Mott for speaking in meeting in New York without a minute to travel in the ministry. He did not succeed in his mission, but Cherry Street disciplined Mott by denying her a minute to travel in the ministry after 1843, a period in which she did a great deal of traveling and speaking against slavery and for the rights of women.... In 1858 the meeting finally again gave Mott a traveling minute.* Margaret Hope Bacon (In the Shadow of William Penn, Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of Friends, pp 29-30)

- Sanctioned often for things as petty as a new bonnet given to her by London Friends as well as her speaking activities
- Denied a travel minute for 15 years and encouraged to cut back on her activism by Meeting elders both before and after the split

### **Active Until her Death, But Often Ill**

*You will have some idea of the fatigue my wife has endured when I tell you that we were absent 69 days, traveled about 2800 miles, attended 71 meetings in most of which Lucretia took part and in very many she was the only speaker.* James Mott (From *Lucretia Mott*, Dorothy Sterling, p 146)

- Known for keeping a grueling schedule regardless of her health from the time she became active in social causes until her death

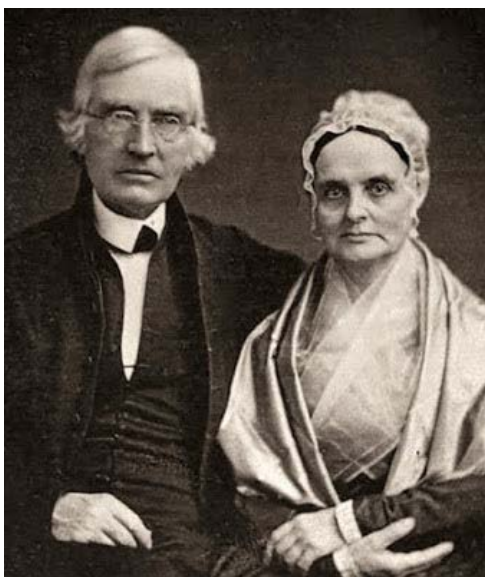
- Often suffered from “dyspepsia” and other stomach ailments from stress and efforts to appear outwardly calm
- Bouts of serious illness from the 1840s on due to exhaustion and digestive ailments.

### **Queries on Lucretia Mott and Her Times**

How does Lucretia’s style of spirit led ministry and her challenges resonate with what it means to you to be a Friend and activist?

How do the religious and social action movements of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resonate with our current situation?

### **Lucretia Mott’s Thinking on Various Topics**



James and Lucretia Mott, 1842

*Too long have wrongs and oppression existed without an acknowledged wrongdoer and oppressor. It was not until the slave holder was told “Thou art the man,” that a healthy agitation was brought about. Woman is told the fault is in herself, in too willingly submitting to her inferior condition, but like the slave, she is pressed down by laws in the making of which she has no voice, and crushed by customs that have grown out of such laws. She cannot rise therefore, while thus trampled in the dust. The oppressor does not see himself in that light until the oppressed cry for deliverance.* Lucretia Mott, *Woman’s Rights Meeting*, West Chester, Pa., 1852

- Lucretia did not go from cause to cause but saw all of the social issues she supported as related.

#### **Women and Marriage**

*In the true marriage relationship the independence of husband and wife is equal; their dependence mutual, and their obligations reciprocal.*

Lucretia Mott, *Discourse on Women*, Philadelphia, 1849

*The question is often asked, what does woman want more than she enjoys? What is she seeking to obtain? Of what rights is she deprived? What privileges are withheld from her? I answer, she asks nothing as a favor, but as a right, she wants to be acknowledged as a moral responsible human being.* Lucretia Mott, *Discourse on Women*, Philadelphia, 1849

#### **Anti-slavery**

*I know there are many who will not allow anything to be said in behalf of the slave. But I believe it to be my duty to plead the cause of the poor and of the oppressed whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. I have long believed that an obedience to Christian duty required more mouths should be opened upon this subject. Yet I do not regard this as an evil resting upon a particular part of the country, but “we are all verily guilty concerning our brother,” the manufacturers of the north, the consumers of various commodities of southern productions, are implicated in this matter, while the sweets of this system are found upon our tables, we are partakers of other men’s sins. What would this nation be... if she were free of this enormous system of injustice!* Lucretia Mott, Unitarian Church, Washington, D.C., 1843

#### **Poverty**

*5th day [July] 30th. Left Dublin on top of coach for Belfast... Passed miserable huts-poor villages- wretched looking people-women & children all barefoot- great quantities of peat or turf cut for burning- Drogheda, sad specimen of town in Ireland- beggars in abundance-place altogether beggars description. - very few comfortable dwellings-absentee proprietors- large domains-poor oppressed with rents-women working & carrying as heavy burdens as men.* Lucretia Mott, *Slavery and the Women’s Question: Lucretia Mott’s Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention*, p 65.

*We meet with a few individuals who hold the opinion that if less assistance were given to the poor, their energies would rally and they would make greater efforts to help themselves. The object of our institution is to aid those whose circumstances prevent their earning a subsistence in any other way, such as the aged, the sick and the infirm, and widows with families of small children, who have no other dependence for support than the needle, which too frequently furnishes but a scant pittance for the day's toil.* Lucretia Mott, *Friends Weekly Intelligencer*, Vol. VI, No. 37, (12-8-1849), p 293.

## **Peace**

*I want there should be a fullness of faith in the possibility of removing mountains on the side of right. If we believe that war is wrong, and everyone must, then we ought to believe that by proper efforts on our part it may be done away with.* Lucretia Mott, Mother's Peace Festival. 6-21-1876.

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