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John L. Myers

State University of New York at Plattsburgh

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JOHN L. MYERS

THE ANTISLAVERY AGENCY SYSTEM
IN MAINE, 1836-1838

Maine by the spring of 1836 had 24 antislavery societies and a nucleus of abolitionists. A few people in Maine had been among the earliest to respond to the new, militant abolitionism, best personified by William Lloyd Garrison. By January of 1834, 7 new antislavery societies had been founded, placing Maine second only to Massachusetts among the states. The Maine Anti-Slavery Society was established as early as October of 1834, the third state organization in the nation. By May of 1835 the number of antislavery auxiliaries had increased to more than 20. The organized and directed moral attack on slavery was beginning to produce results. This crusade continued between 1836 and 1838 both in the nation and in Maine. A special effort was undertaken by the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1836-1837, with its band of agents, known as "the Seventy," who were personally recruited by Theodore Weld. During that year the number of antislavery auxiliaries doubled from 527 to 1,006; during the following year another 340 societies were founded. In addition, church bodies were increasingly declaring their opposition to slavery or were taking a position which the abolitionists had been advocating and which they would not have affirmed before the militant antislavery movement began. Political bodies also were beginning to respond to a new climate respecting slavery. Maine had 48 abolition organizations by May of 1838.¹

The American Anti-Slavery Society was founded in December of 1833. It recognized that each state had the right to legislate for itself whether it would have slavery or not. Most abolitionist leaders, however, understood how other humanitarian and reform movements of their era operated

to engender change in individuals or society. When they established their national society they announced their intention to convince their fellow citizens by arguments “addressed to their understandings and conscience” that slaveholding was a “crime before God,” and that it was a personal duty and in the best interests of the nation, its people, and the slave to “require immediate abolition.”² One of their leaders, James G. Birney, declared that “for the permanent safety of the Union, it is indispensable that the whole moral power of the free states should be concentrated, and brought into action for the extermination of slavery.”³ The convention that created the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society declared (1) that slavery was a sin; (2) that the society deplored the effects of slavery upon the slaveholder, upon the nation, and upon the American church; (3) and that “slavery being *sin* we maintain that it is the duty of all who perpetuate it immediately to cease; in other words that immediate emancipation is the sacred right of the slaves and the imperative duty of the masters.”⁴

From the beginning the leaders of the antislavery movement of the 1830s perceived that their aims would be achieved through the publication and distribution of antislavery newspapers, pamphlets, and other written materials and through the use of commissioned agents. The latter would be either “permanent,” commissioned for three months to a year and paid between \$500 and \$1,200 a year, or “local,” men whose traveling expenses would be reimbursed, but who remained at their occupations and served as lecturers and organizers whenever and wherever they could. The constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society specified that the society would “send forth agents to lift up the voice of remonstrance, of warning, of entreaty, of rebuke.”⁵ Within several weeks after the creation of the society, its Agency Committee was seeking agents. “We must have men who will electrify the mass wherever they move,” Elizur Wright, Jr., wrote Theodore Weld, “and they must move on no small scale.”⁶

The agency system developed slowly. Funds to pay men or reimburse them for their expenses were limited. Most of those who were commissioned were unable to leave their occupational responsibilities or their families, or were unwilling to accept the financial sacrifices and receive the personal abuse that agents often encountered. As the decade progressed, able agents were secured and their achievements were often remarkable. The first agent in Maine was William Lloyd Garrison, engaged by the New England Anti-Slavery Society in 1832. During the succeeding years a number of men lectured for short periods of time under an agency status, although the primary, organized effort was that undertaken by Amos Phelps and George Thompson in the fall and winter of 1834-1835. The development of the abolition movement in the state was almost unrelated to agency activity in 1832-1834, then was kindled by Phelps and Thompson, only to fall behind the growth in other states in the remainder of 1835 and early 1836. In many other states, on the other hand, there were greater resources devoted to agency activity, with a predictable advance in the opposition to slavery, the number of antislavery societies and abolitionists, and the influence of antislavery principles upon important institutions of the state.

While progress was limited in Maine in 1835-1836, because resources employed in the state had been limited, the number of antislavery societies in the nation as a whole were doubled. Nine thousand abolitionists were estimated to reside in Massachusetts alone. The leadership of the American Anti-Slavery Society was convinced that the utilization of agents was its most effective means to arouse opposition to slavery. The society's executive committee therefore decided to reduce its number of publications from 90,000 to 28,000 copies per month and to strengthen its agency program. It assigned its two most successful lecturers, Theodore Weld and Henry B. Stanton, to search the nation for new agents and to obtain additional funds to sustain the enlarging program. In July of 1836 Elizur Wright, Jr., its corresponding

secretary, wrote that the officers hoped to put 50 men into "the field as soon as the busy season of the farmers is over."⁷ A few months later the society had decided to follow the biblical example of "the Seventy." After most of the agents had been secured, in November those east of the Appalachian Mountains were brought to New York City for more than two weeks of training. Unfortunately, the new program had hardly begun when the Panic of 1837 intervened. One cannot speculate how much would have been accomplished had the financial support continued to be available. Nevertheless, those agents performed an aggregate amount of labor estimated at thirty-two years, almost doubling the number of antislavery auxiliaries from 527 to 1,006 and increasing auxiliary membership to an estimated 100,000 people. Approximately one new antislavery society was established every day.⁸

Not all states benefited equally from the activities of the Seventy. New York and Pennsylvania received special attention. In contrast, in Maine, New Hampshire and New Jersey no systematic effort was made. On June 5, 1836, the Agency Committee recommended the three-month appointment of Swan L. Pomeroy, David Thurston and his brother, and George Adams at five hundred dollars per annum and travel expenses. It also asked Daniel Robinson to lecture in the state. None of the men acceded with the exception of David Thurston, who agreed to serve a total of three months whenever he could between July and the following May. The committee on September 20 also assigned Henry C. Wright to Maine, but in October it reversed that decision and dispatched him to Rhode Island.⁹

Maine had characteristics that both facilitated and rendered difficult the abolitionists' task. Its snowy and cold climate, during a period of the year frequently utilized by lecturers, hampered activities of traveling agents, inhibiting their arrival in communities in time for their scheduled lectures or preventing many of their expected audience from attending if they had far to travel. The holding of its elec-

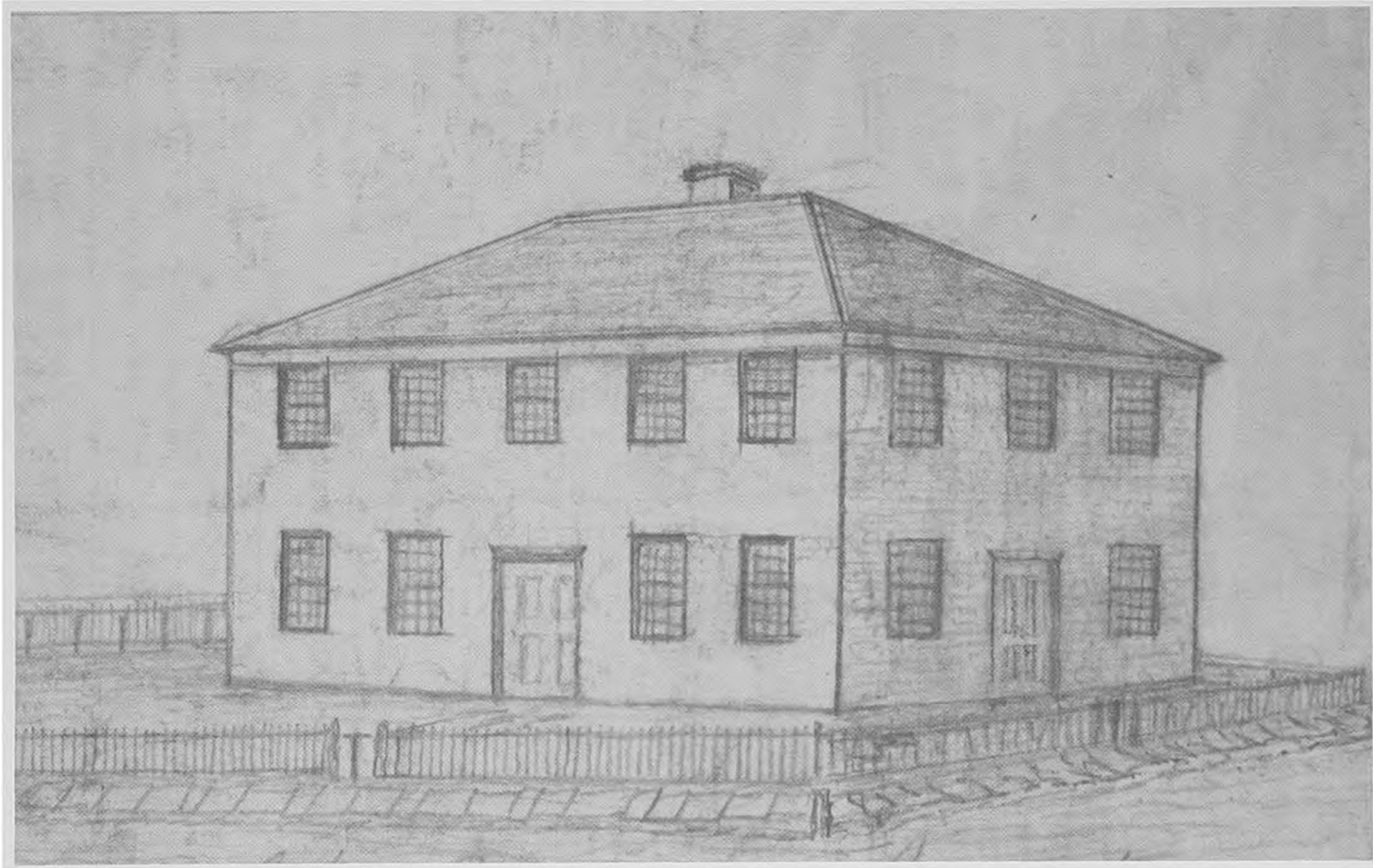
tions in early September, a good time in many states for antislavery speakers to get around, interested people in political affairs when those in other states could be appealed to on reform issues. The strength of the Democratic party in the state and its exceptional alliance with southern Democrats tended to prevent abolitionists from getting a hearing from a large component of the populace. Most newspapers were Democratic; they either ignored or attacked abolition and abolitionists. Whig editors, unwilling to have their minority party associated with an unpopular cause, were usually silent until provoked to defend their Americanism by an occasional attack on individual abolitionists.¹⁰

The nature and location of the people also had its effect. With less than 1,200 blacks in the state in 1830, whatever prejudices existed against them would not be deepened by competition between the races for jobs, antagonisms over housing, or many of the other reasons sometimes assigned to explain racial animosities. On the one hand, the population of the state appeared to be widely dispersed and hard to reach. According to the 1830 census, no county had more than 61,000 people; Washington County had only 21,000. Portland was the only community with more than 10,000 people and only one other had more than 4,000. Abolitionists would find difficulty as a result in speaking with more than a few people at a time. On the other hand, abolition leaders themselves had come by 1836 to believe that "converting" the cities to their doctrines would be far more difficult than small towns, so typical of Maine in that period. In addition, while Maine had approximately 400,000 people, only 225,000 of them were above fifteen years of age.

Henry B. Stanton, serving as financial agent to procure funds to support the enlarged agency program, was a visitor to New England in the fall of 1836. Born in 1805 in Griswold, Connecticut, Stanton was a student at Rochester Manual Labor Institute and at Lane Seminary. He was a founder of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Society and a delegate to the 1835 national antislavery meeting. He was appointed to an agency

and was primarily responsible for abolition advances in Rhode Island during the ensuing year. Soon after the creation of the Rhode Island Anti-Slavery Society, Stanton went to New York to join Theodore Weld's lecturing. He also became well known for his appearances before legislative committees in Rhode Island and Massachusetts that were investigating charges against abolitionists. He later was secretary of the American Anti-Slavery Society, a Free-Soil and Democratic politician, and editor of the *New York Sun*.¹¹ The *Lynn Record* described him in 1836 as a "young man of very youthful and prepossessing appearance, . . . surpassing eloquence." The same newspaper a year later said Stanton was "second to none but Weld, in this country, for eloquence and power, as a lecturer." It described his appearance before the legislative committee of Massachusetts as "masterly."¹² About the same time the *Liberator*, characterizing his speech before the New England Anti-Slavery Convention, reported he "electrified the Convention by the power and eloquence of his appeals, and went far to supply the place of Mr. Thompson."¹³

Stanton's first appearance in Maine was brief. He reached Portland on Tuesday, September 13, 1836. Although the community appeared to be quiet enough when he began his lecture in the Friends' meetinghouse, a horn suddenly blared, a mob surrounded the building, and stones and mud were thrown through the windows. The missiles and shouting continued until the address was concluded. A Wednesday afternoon meeting occurred without opposition, but another crowd collected outside the building that evening. Even the presence of the mayor could not quiet the crowd. Constables prevented the disturbance from getting out of hand. Although the mob followed the unprotected Stanton when he left, it did not molest him. He delivered five addresses and collected three hundred dollars in Portland. After a Thursday evening, September 15, lecture in North Yarmouth, on the following day, he boarded the stage for Massachusetts.¹⁴



Sketch of the Friends Meetinghouse, Portland, Me., by Charles Quincy Goodhue.
(MHS Collections.)

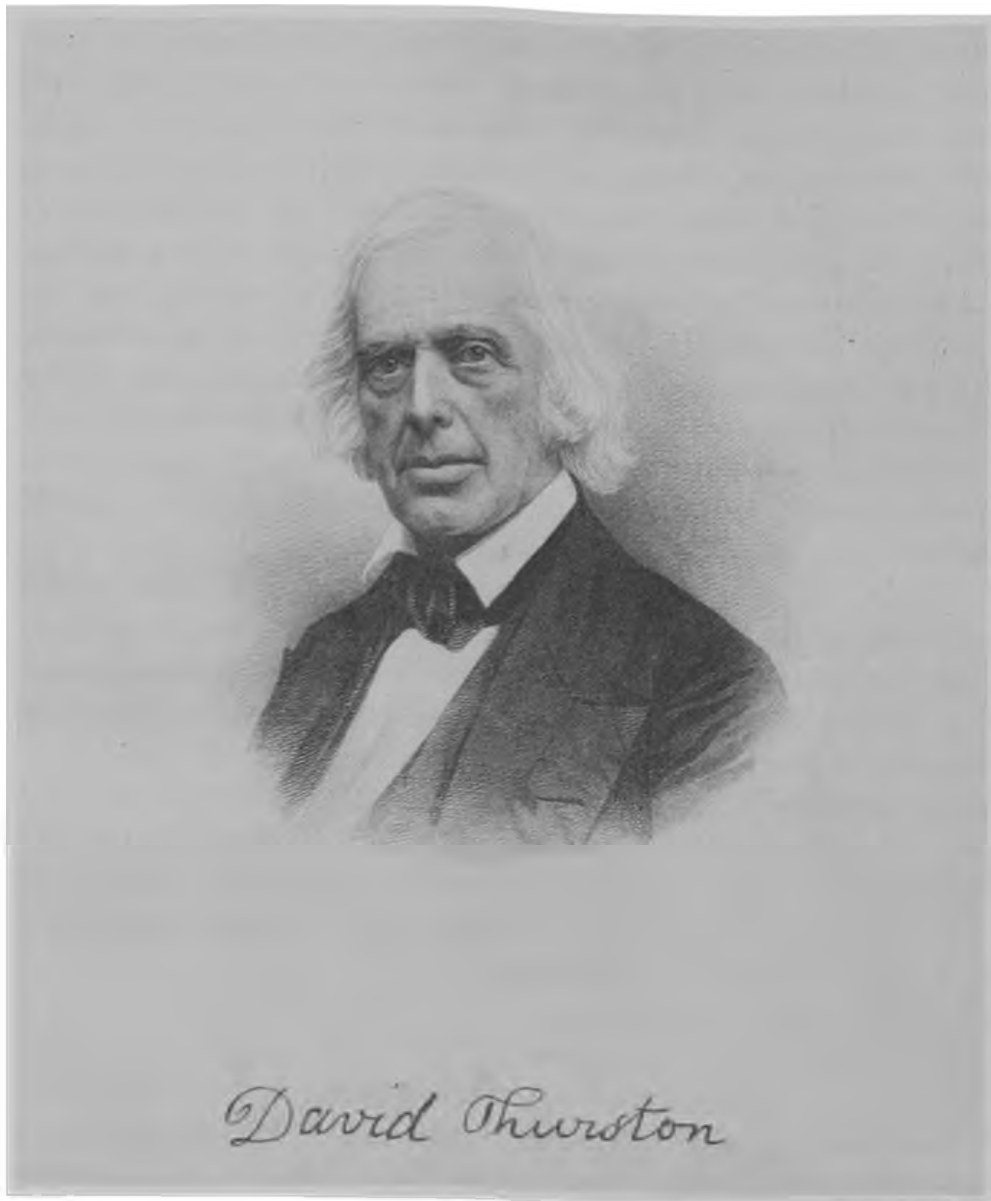
Stanton returned to Portland to attend the Maine Anti-Slavery Society anniversary, October 26. The meeting was stormy. The abolitionists had obtained permission from the mayor to use the City Hall, but their opponents assembled to discuss the matter and pass a resolution demanding the withdrawal of the authorization. One hour before the anti-slavery conclave was to begin, the mayor yielded. Forced to assemble in a private home, the abolitionists deferred their public sessions until the next afternoon at the Friends' meetinghouse. In the evening there was a riot, as anticipated. The mayor refused to guarantee protection as requested. Events of the day and the determination of the elite of the city to restore order prompted him to change his mind. He sent so many of his associates that the meeting was "a perfect jam." David Thurston and Samuel Fessenden joined Stanton as featured speakers. On his return trip to Massachusetts, Stanton lectured at South Berwick, October 30.¹⁵

When the Maine Anti-Slavery Society had been formed, it was presided over by the Rev. David Thurston of Winthrop, who later became one of the most important agents in the state. Thurston was born in Massachusetts in 1779, but the family moved to Sedgwick, Maine, when David was seventeen. Graduated from Dartmouth in 1804, he attended seminary at Harvard. He returned to Maine as an agent of the Massachusetts Missionary Society. He was voted a call in 1807 to the Congregational Church in Winthrop where he continued to serve until 1851. One of the state's leaders in the humanitarian and reform movement, he organized one of the earliest Sunday schools in New England in 1808, took an interest in the public schools, and was active in the temperance movement. In 1859 he would be president of the American Missionary Society. On November 21, 1833, Thurston began a series of three sermons about slavery. The first told the congregation what slavery was, the second demonstrated its sinfulness, and the third advocated immediate emancipation. When the community's antislavery society was founded six months later, Thurston was elected its presi-

dent. Winthrop became a stronghold of abolition. An antislavery library was established, Thurston's church observed the monthly concert of prayer for the slave, and the community eventually had male, female, and juvenile antislavery societies. Thurston was also a founder of the American Anti-Slavery Society. One writer characterized him as "orderly, systematic and punctilious in habit and work," an expert on horseback.¹⁶ Another antislavery agent remembered Thurston had presided over the deliberations of the famous agents' convention in November 1836, with "a candor, a courtesy, and a firmness of manner which endeared him to every member."¹⁷ Thurston was in many ways the leader of antislavery in Maine.¹⁸

David Thurston accepted his agency commission in the summer of 1836, but his only reported lectures for the remainder of that year were delivered before the annual meeting of the Middlesex County (Massachusetts) Anti-Slavery Society in Lowell, October 5, and at the Maine state anniversary, October 27. In addition, he attended the agents' convention in New York City, November 15 to December 2. He opened his official lecturing in Cumberland County in January of 1837 with three addresses in Pownal, two in Walnut Hills Parish of North Yarmouth, and two in Cumberland. His audiences were small and he encountered deep apathy. Attendance noticeably improved as Thurston progressed through his speaking engagements at two villages in Vassalborough and subsequent lectures at Winslow, Waterville, Litchfield, Winthrop, Monmouth, Sidney, West Waterville, Bloomfield, and Norridgewock. He lectured to his own church in Winthrop on February 19, 1837, and rode to Readfield Corner on February 20. A five-man committee interrupted him in the latter community and asked that he stop; after a lengthy discussion, the congregation voted to alter the meeting to a prayer session. He also spoke with the principal of the Wesleyan assembly who opened it to a course of lectures from Thurston. He worked on March 7 in Augusta to prepare for his appearance before a committee of

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the Maine House of Representatives. That evening he lectured in Monmouth. On the eighth he rode to Augusta and spoke more than an hour concerning the constitutional power of Congress to abolish slavery and the slave trade in the District of Columbia. On Friday, March 10, he rode to Waterville. He spent Saturday making arrangements

for his Sidney lecture. He then rode to Norridgewock where on Sunday he preached once and lectured once about slavery. On Tuesday, March 14, he spoke in the Baptist meetinghouse in Sidney.¹⁹

On March 17, 1837, Thurston rode to Waterville village and attended protracted religious meetings; he remained there on Sunday. Returning to Waterville on Monday, he lectured again. On Wednesday, March 22, and Friday, March 24, he spoke in two areas of Bloomfield. From there he went to Norridgewock to deliver three lectures in the village and three more in other neighborhoods. He reported happily that great change had taken place there in sentiments about slavery. On Monday evening he attended the concert of prayer, after which he assisted in the establishment of an antislavery society.²⁰

Thurston must have been dividing his time, lecturing some of the time and returning to his pastorate other weeks. This was possible since so many of his appearances were within fifty miles of Winthrop. On Sunday, April 2, he went to far-distant Solon for two lectures, then returned via Dudley's Corner, Skowhegan, on April 4. He was at New Sharon on Sunday, April 9. On Sunday the sixteenth he conducted two services in Readfield and on the following Sunday he delivered four lectures at the Wesleyan Seminary at Kent's Hill. The succeeding two weeks he spent attending meetings of the Kennebec and Somerset associations. The Conference of Congregational Ministers of Somerset County authorized Thurston to serve among their churches to promote antislavery. During this period he also lectured in Hallowell.²¹

Resuming his lectures at the Wesleyan Seminary in Kent's Hill on Monday, May 8, Thurston continued them for five successive evenings, totaling nine lectures in all. He then went to Farmington for addresses on May 14, 15 and 16, speaking twice in the Baptist meetinghouse. He reported he had revitalized the two-year-old antislavery society. He spent Sunday, May 21, at Phillips, lecturing on the three succeed-

ing days in the Free-Will, Congregational and Methodist churches and in the schoolhouse. On the final evening the church which he had used earlier was closed to him, but at the schoolhouse assembly on May 29, thirty-eight members established the community's antislavery auxiliary.²²

Thurston's lecturing throughout the summer of 1837 was less frequent. He spoke at Greene in Kennebec County on June 13; he boasted he had eight ministers in his audience. On Monday, July 10, he rode to the northern part of Parsonfield to visit the Free-Will Baptist Seminary and for lectures in York County. When he spoke the next night, some people attempted to disrupt the lecture by firing guns, beating drums, blowing trumpets, ringing sleigh bells, and the like. The audience simply gathered closer together and he spoke for two hours. Following lectures in Limerick on July 13, 14, and 16, he organized a new auxiliary of thirty-four members. He spoke in Waterboro on the eighteenth. By the end of July he had also lectured at Shapleigh, Emery Mills, Sanford, and Springvale.²³

Thurston then must have had more time for his agency. On August 6 he spoke at Lisbon Corner, then attended two dedications and an ordination at Topsham. He stayed the remainder of the week primarily with the colored people of Portland. He then turned northeastward on what he called "an exploring trip" through neglected Lincoln County, lecturing only at Newcastle on August 20. In Waldo County he presented three addresses in Belfast and three in West Prospect. At Bangor on August 31, the day following the anniversary of the theological seminary, he delivered a lecture to the largest audience he had ever drawn; he established an antislavery society the next evening. Among his other late-summer lectures were two in Bath, two in Winthrop, and one each in Bowdoin and Bowdoinham. The Agency Committee authorized payment of \$5.94 for his expenses.²⁴

Two of the most influential of the antislavery agents in the East were the Methodist ministers, Orange Scott and George Storrs. Scott was a native of Vermont who had received little

formal schooling or religious training. He had been converted at a Methodist camp meeting and had risen in reputation in the denomination. As early as 1834 he had begun efforts to persuade the Methodist Annual Conference and district conferences to take positions condemning slavery. Storrs held appointments in a number of New Hampshire pastorates. A founder of both the Concord and New Hampshire Anti-Slavery societies, primary supporter of *Zion's Watchman*, the Methodist abolition newspaper, Storrs had been more responsible than any other man for the progress of the cause in New Hampshire. Methodist abolitionists were defeated in their efforts to persuade the national conference in 1836 to condemn slavery, but a majority of the pastors in both the New England and the New Hampshire conferences were antislavery in 1837. The two agents came to Maine in June of 1837 to persuade its Methodist conference to take a stand on the subject.²⁵

Storrs arrived first. When he reached Portland he found, as usual, that no structure was available for his use except the Friends' meetinghouse. He lectured four times there to small audiences and preached on Sunday, June 18, in the blacks' church. He met with little opposition. He then continued to Augusta where he preached twice and lectured once in the Baptist meetinghouse on Sunday, June 25, 1837. He spoke again to a large audience on June 26 and 27. Scott did not leave Massachusetts until June 27, reaching Hallowell, the site of the Maine conference, on June 29. Storrs lectured on June 29, Scott on June 30, and Storrs twice again. They also met the ministers in smaller discussions. Storrs estimated that three-quarters of the Methodist ministers there were antislavery. The *Maine Wesleyan Journal* was now opened to abolitionists. A conference antislavery society of seventy-five to eighty members was formed. No official action dealing with slavery was taken by the conference, however, for members did not want to come into conflict with Bishop Beverly Waugh. Scott remained in the area until July 5 when he departed for the New Hampshire conference. Storrs

stopped en route for a lecture at the anniversary of the Winthrop Anti-Slavery Society.²⁶

Another Methodist minister, David I. Robinson of New Hampshire, had been commissioned in June of 1836 and assigned to Maine. Received into pastoral service in 1830, Robinson was secretary of the New Hampshire Methodist Conference Anti-Slavery Society. He had been unwilling to accept the commission in June, but he was persuaded in the late summer to accept the appointment on the proviso that he could lecture whenever he had the time during the winter and could become more active in the spring. Ill health prevented his full time service. The Agency Committee on July 15, 1837, directed Robinson to transfer to Maine. He broke up housekeeping in late August and reached Portland on September 1.

Robinson was not long in Maine. Opening his speaking with lectures at Minot on September 2 and 3, he delivered on Monday, September 4, the first abolition lecture for Minot Center. On Tuesday and Wednesday he was in Brunswick for the college commencement activities and to confer with abolitionists of the state. He found neither the hostile opposition to abolition he had been used to in New Hampshire, nor the endorsement of emancipation among an important minority. On Thursday, September 7, he returned to Minot for the antislavery society's anniversary. He lectured at Minot Center again on the tenth and the seventeenth. On September 12 he arrived in Monmouth to attend a camp meeting and confer with ministers. He preached there on September 13. On Thursday and Friday he attended the Poland camp meeting. He lectured in the Lewiston Baptist meetinghouse, as well as at Minot on the seventeenth. After spending a day with Samuel Fessenden to obtain his wisdom on how to approach the agent's task, Robinson proceeded to Fryeburg on Tuesday, September 19, for three lectures. He then returned home to New Hampshire and was soon assigned to that state as financial agent.²⁷

It is not clear when Thurston began lecturing again. He was paid quarterly, June to September 19, 1837, September 20 to December 2, and for the quarter ending May 20, 1838. He got favorable resolutions passed by the Kennebec conference (Congregational) on September 19. He forwarded money to the American Anti-Slavery Society collected between September 20 and October 5 from individuals in Hallowell, Yarmouth, Parsonfield, Limerick, Buxton and Bath. Beginning Sunday, October 8, he delivered two lectures in Fayette and four in Chesterville. He expected antislavery auxiliaries soon to be established in each community. At Temple he spoke twice, to a sparse audience the first evening, but a crowded house the second. Twenty-one people signed an antislavery constitution. At Dixfield he encountered so much illness that his attendance for two lectures was small. He formed a society of fourteen members and promised to return for more work. He then gave two lectures at Weld, which had a two-year-old antislavery society; he hoped he had revived it. He lectured three afternoons and evenings in Wilton, four times in Peru, four times in East Rumford and Rumford Center. It was so dark and muddy at Peru that few came to listen.²⁸

Thurston was using the tactics of Theodore Weld, the primary voice of the agents' convention. Weld believed in staying in a community and lecturing day after day until a core of abolitionists could be created and induced to establish an antislavery society. Thurston was the first agent in Maine to go to so many small communities and lay the foundation for abolition, and the first agent since Amos Phelps and George Thompson to organize a systematic campaign.

Turning next to Norway, Thurston spoke seven times, five in the village and twice in other parts of the town. He also lectured three times in nearby South Paris. He pronounced the locality abolitionized; fifty names were affixed to an antislavery society constitution. He was less successful at Otisfield; his first lecture encountered bad weather, the second had poorer attendance than he had expected. Yet even there

he saw interest. In Turner, Oxford County, he lectured twice. He then returned to Winthrop to attend to family matters and prepare for his winter campaign. While there he lectured once at Monmouth, twice at Wayne, and once in Winthrop. He was still there December 7. The American Anti-Slavery Society was asked to pay expenses of only ten dollars from September 20 to December 2.²⁹

On March 24, 1838, Thurston's activities since October were listed in the *Advocate of Freedom*. In addition to the lectures already recorded in this study the following communities also received his attention: one address in Vassalboro, one in Winslow, three in New Sharon, five in Mount Vernon, one in Readfield, three in the Baptist meetinghouse in Sidney, two in Augusta's North Parish, all in Kennebec County. He also spoke twice in Freeport, once in Westbrook, once in Portland, once in Falmouth, and once in Brunswick in Cumberland County. He had two addresses in Norridgewock at the end of February and one in Mercer, Somerset County, and three in Topsham and two in Woolwich in Lincoln County. Except that these occurred between early December and late March, the dates have usually not otherwise been ascertained. Besides the lectures, Thurston also attended two ministerial association meetings, one session of the trustees of a missionary society, one county conference of churches, one meeting of a county and one of a state temperance society, the state antislavery society anniversary, and two antislavery conventions.³⁰

For the anniversary meeting of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society, held in Augusta for three days beginning January 31, 1838, the American Anti-Slavery Society sent its corresponding secretary, James G. Birney. A southerner by birth, former slaveholder, former agent of the American Colonization Society, later candidate of the Liberty party for the presidency in 1840 and 1844, Birney was an effective and attractive speaker. For three evenings he delivered addresses to large audiences in Augusta and Hallowell. Many members of the state legislature and the governor attended. Then Birney

went to Portland where for almost a week he spoke every evening but one. The use of the City Hall was granted by the mayor for one of the evenings, a demonstration of a change of public opinion in contrast to previous years. Portland offered little opposition. Scott, Robinson and agent Ichabod Coddington and local agent Philemon Russell of Massachusetts also were anniversary speakers. More than one hundred delegates attended.³¹

During the summer of 1837, when the effect of the panic had forced the American Anti-Slavery Society to cut back in its agency operations, the national leadership allowed many of the permanent commissions to lapse and, out of necessity, began to emphasize a program of local agents. In some states during the next year more than fifty local agents were designated. Maine received proportionally fewer appointments. On July 15, 1837, three ministers, Daniel B. Randall of Mercer, Charles C. Cone of East Machias, and Asbury Caldwell of Wiscasset were commissioned. On December 7, the Agency Committee again designated Joseph Lovejoy as agent, to be paid six hundred dollars, while S. L. Pomeroy and George E. Adams were appointed agents "to correspond." Several of these men may have delivered lectures, but searches in the *Emancipator* reports of funds collected, in Agency Committee minutes of commissions accepted and rejected, and of travel expenses paid, and in antislavery newspapers of lectures delivered have not provided much information. Randall did write that he had lectured in Mercer in late August-early September 1837, and had formed an antislavery society. He was again commissioned in January of 1838 and on June 7 was paid five dollars for his expenses up to March 14, 1838. Cone delivered a course of lectures and helped form the first antislavery society in Washington County in February of 1838. On March 9 the county antislavery society was established.³²

In January of 1838 Stanton characterized Maine as "twice dead, and their resurrection is desirable." He believed they would need "a *strong* shake, but a *judicious* one."³³ Appar-

ently, in his view, Maine had moved ahead in 1833, fallen behind, moved ahead again in 1834-1835, and declined again. The *Liberator*, on the other hand, regarded Birney's lectures as an "entering wedge" towards impressive progress in Maine in the several months which followed. The emphasis was upon creation of county antislavery societies. Somerset and Lincoln county organizations were established in February and March; York County followed in June, Franklin County in July, and Kennebec and Piscataquis counties in the fall. Thurston continued his agency into July. In addition, Ichabod Coddington and Charles L. Redmond were assigned to the state by the Agency Committee.³⁴

Ichabod Coddington, one of the most effective and constant of the antislavery agents, was assigned to Vermont, New York, Massachusetts, and Maine in the 1830s, and he later led the movement in Illinois and Wisconsin. Coddington was born in 1810 in Ontario County, New York. At age seventeen he began lecturing for the temperance cause and by the time he was twenty-one, he had given more than one hundred temperance speeches. He attended Canandaigua Academy (New York) at the same time as Stephen A. Douglas, then he enrolled at Middlebury College. While at the latter institution he obtained faculty permission for a few weeks leave to lecture in behalf of abolition. Theodore Weld, in his travels to recruit agents for "the Seventy," persuaded Coddington to accept a commission in August of 1836. Coddington opened his service in Vermont, attended the agents' convention in New York City in November 1836, spent a few weeks in Westchester County, then returned to Vermont until the early summer of 1837. From July 1837 until January of 1838 he served in Massachusetts. During these experiences he had encountered mobs. Described as rather rough, of medium height, with dark hair and a large mouth, Coddington was labeled by one contemporary as the model reformer. He seldom engaged in denunciations of slaveholders, scarcely ever made enemies. He was an eloquent orator and a talented conversationalist.³⁵ Willey called him "intelligent,

earnest, with logical powers and earnest address.”³⁶ Henry B. Stanton characterized him as “eloquent, argumentative, strong, prudent, judicious. He will be just the man for Maine.” Stanton believed Coddington especially a good man to obtain money.³⁷

Charles L. Redmond was assigned to assist Coddington. He was an unusual choice for he was black, the first black agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Coddington himself suggested the appointment. The Agency Committee voted the status of “itinerant” agent to Redmond with a salary of twenty-five dollars per month and traveling expenses. How that title came about or what it meant has not been determined. From Massachusetts, Redmond was later one of Garrison’s most loyal black supporters. Carter G. Woodson, renowned editor of the *Journal of Negro History*, later characterized Redmond as the “ablest representative of the Negro race” prior to Frederick Douglass. William Lloyd Garrison characterized him as “amiable and talented.”³⁸

Coddington arrived in Maine just in time to participate in the state antislavery convention at the end of January 1838. He took Joseph Tillson along with him, according to Stanton, to seek money in six or eight communities. Tillson turned over \$137.50 to the national society from the Winthrop and Hallowell antislavery societies and from collections in Augusta. Coddington’s movements in February are difficult to follow. He spoke in Augusta, Hallowell, and Gardiner. At Hallowell, in five lectures, he reported good-sized audiences, sometimes a full house. He spoke only once in Gardiner.³⁹

On February 28 Coddington joined Thurston in the formation of the Somerset County Anti-Slavery Society at Norridgewock. The two also spoke in the community on March 2. Coddington next addressed the people of Skowhegan in the Methodist meetinghouse. On Sunday, March 4, he spoke to a joint meeting of the Baptists and Congregationalists, and in the evening he returned to the Methodists. Public opinion had changed over two years previously when few people had turned out to listen to Thurston and the speaker was insulted

in the streets. Coddington forwarded two hundred dollars collected at the county convention and from individuals elsewhere. Most important of all, however, were two appearances for three hours before a joint committee of the Maine legislature that was examining the question of annexation of Texas. Stanton had hoped when Coddington was first assigned to Maine that he could undertake this assignment. If the legislature could only be persuaded to protest against annexation, Stanton wrote, "it would be a great deal."⁴⁰ Coddington must have spent considerable time preparing for those appearances. One of his biographers and his wife both reported this was one of his greatest speeches and he supposedly converted more than forty of the legislators to abolition.⁴¹

Coddington and Thurston were also both present at the establishment of the Lincoln County Anti-Slavery Society at Wiscasset, March 13 and 14. Coddington lectured on both evenings to crowded audiences. The Augusta Anti-Slavery Society, organized three years before, had not been very active. Its few members and the strength of the opposition to it were the reasons given for its lack of effectiveness. The state society's annual meeting and Coddington lectures now prompted the organization of a new society on April 12, which by April 27 consisted of 150 to 200 members. Between March 21 and April 10 almost \$225 was forwarded by Coddington from his collections in Windham, Wardsboro, Jamaica, Dover, Wilmington, Grafton, Townsend, Halifax, and Guilford. On April 26 the *Advocate of Freedom* announced that the state antislavery society would employ Coddington for a year as its general agent, to begin in early June. Before he was done, he would serve two years, help edit the newspaper, and carry the message of abolition throughout the state.⁴²

After March 24, 1838, Thurston temporarily "suspended" his services "because of a local difficulty" he had.⁴³ Nevertheless, he continued to serve whenever he could. He addressed his local Winthrop Juvenile Anti-Slavery Society on March 29, delivered three lectures in the Union Chapel at North

Leeds, and spoke once in the Baptist meetinghouse in East Winthrop. The North Leeds appearance was the first lecture by an abolitionist in that community. An antislavery constitution was drawn up and twenty-four signatures affixed; by June the society numbered forty-five members. In mid-April Thurston was among the speakers at a meeting of the Topsham Anti-Slavery Society.⁴⁴

His activities increased in May and June. He next spoke at Bowdoin, then in Lincoln County, and then embarked for New York City for the anniversary meetings. His expenses for the quarter up to May 20 were \$30.70. Between January 25 and May 7 he collected over \$250. When he returned to Maine, he commenced full-time lecturing again. He spoke in Phillipsburg twice, in Georgetown once, and in Pittston on June 2. These addresses were followed by two lectures in Belgrade and at least two at Monmouth. An antislavery auxiliary of twenty-six members was organized in the latter community on June 15. In Litchfield he delivered two addresses in the Baptist meetinghouse and procured twenty-two more antislavery names. He proceeded to Lewiston where he expected a large antislavery society would soon be organized. After attending the York County Anti-Slavery Convention at Alfred, June 20 and 21, he spoke once at Limerick Corner. Rain cancelled two scheduled lectures at Cornish. He completed the month with attendance at the general conference at Saco.⁴⁵

Thurston continued his agency another month. Accompanied by Redmond, he left Saco on Friday afternoon, June 29, for Bowdoin where he preached twice on Sunday and where Redmond lectured. The two then went to Farmington to assist the formation of the Franklin County Anti-Slavery Society. The opening address was delivered by Redmond, the evening speech by Thurston. The minister next lectured in Union and Camden, then addressed the people in three different localities in Bristol. By happenstance, Thurston met Redmond again at Bethel and Gilead and lectured in both communities. They encountered a few sneers and in-

nuendoes. People had come from long distances to Gilead to hear the address. Thurston reported that Redmond was accomplishing much, for many people in the area had never seen a black before. Thurston then returned southward via Livermore and Wayne and on July 27 resigned his agency to resume his pastoral duties at Winthrop. His expenses for the last two months of his agency were less than eighteen dollars. He forwarded another forty-nine dollars to the national society's treasury. Thurston had sacrificed heavily in time and money for the antislavery cause.⁴⁶

By the spring of 1838 Maine was reported to have forty-eight antislavery societies, a 45 percent increase in a year and a testimony to the development of antislavery sentiment in the state in about five years. The state society had just started an antislavery newspaper of its own. While less than three years before, abolitionists were almost universally denounced and attacked, often unsafe in many northern communities, no legislature in 1837 and 1838 had dared respond to southern demands to restrict the abolitionists. The Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society noted in 1837 that men who had openly abused abolitionists were now seeking their votes. In the short session of Congress — December 1836 to March 1837 — petitions praying for abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia and for other actions which Congress had constitutional authority to undertake had included over 110,000 signatures, including 1,800 from distant Maine. While the Maine House of Representatives in January of 1838 had refused use of its hall for the antislavery society's annual meeting, it had nevertheless passed a resolution to the effect that Congress had a right to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia and that exercise of that right would not be inconsistent with national honor.⁴⁷

Reactions of religious groups to the slavery issue also demonstrate the progress of the abolitionist campaign. As noted earlier, a majority of the Maine Methodist Conference was antislavery. The Hancock and Washington associations of the Baptist church, the Kennebec Free-Will Baptist Yearly

Meeting, and the Congregational General Conference of Maine in 1837 also declared against slavery. Getting Congregational associations to protest against the institution had been a particularly difficult task in other states. The Maine conference declared "that slaveholding, . . . is a great sin against God and man, for which the nation ought to humble itself, and for the speedy and entire removal of which, every Christian ought to pray and use all suitable means within his reach."⁴⁸ The Baptist meetings declared they would have no fellowship with those who continued to hold slaves.⁴⁹

Like many of its sister states, Maine, by 1838, had a core of antislavery supporters. They were not a majority of the people; the continued strength of the Democratic party in the state and that group's close alliance with its southern brethren is proof of that. Nevertheless, the state was different. Local abolitionists had contributed their share to this change. Antislavery publications had helped. But commissioned agents had been even more effective in creating abolitionists and spreading the word. Agents, especially Amos Phelps and George Thompson, between 1833 and 1836, had laid the groundwork. Even the Panic of 1837, which had hampered the plans for "the Seventy," had not destroyed the movement. Between May of 1836 and May of 1838 Thurston, Redmond, Stanton, and Coddington, assisted by the more limited services of Storrs, Scott, Robinson, and Birney, had been systematic and effective in their endeavors. The work, of course, was far from complete. Coddington, for example, only began his two years of service as agent of the state society in May of 1838. But every county and a large number of localities of Maine by mid-1838 had been exposed to the antislavery word. Robinson said they had "aroused up the attention of the nation from the sleep of years."⁵⁰ The agents in Maine had furthered the national antislavery society's objectives of "showing the public its [slavery's] true character and legitimate fruits, its contrariety to the first principles of religion, morals, and humanity, and its special inconsistency with or pretensions, as a free, human, and enlightened people."⁵¹

NOTES

¹New England Anti-Slavery Society, *Second Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the New England Anti-Slavery Society* (Boston, 1834), p. 11; American Anti-Slavery Society, *Second Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1835), Appendix B, pp. 83-87 (hereafter cited as AAS, *Second Annual Report*); *Idem*, *Third Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1836), pp. 89, 99 (hereafter cited as AAS, *Third Annual Report*); *Idem*, *Fifth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1838), pp. 45, 129, 152; *Correspondence between the Hon. F.H. Elmore, One of the South Carolina Delegation in Congress, and James G. Birney* (New York, 1838, p. 7 (hereafter cited as *Elmore-Birney Correspondence*); John L. Myers, "Organization of 'The Seventy': To Arouse the North against Slavery," *Mid-America* 48 (January 1966): 29-46 (hereafter cited as Myers, "'The Seventy'.")

²American Anti-Slavery Society, *The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society, with the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention at Philadelphia, December, 1833* (New York, 1838), p. 3 (hereafter cited as AAS, *Constitution*).

³AAS, *Second Annual Report*, p. 5.

⁴Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention, *Proceedings of the Ohio Anti-Slavery Convention* (Cincinnati, 1835), pp. 5-10 (hereafter cited as OAC, *Proceedings*).

⁵AAS, *Constitution*, p. 8.

⁶Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844*, 2 vols. (New York, 1934), 1: 121 (hereafter cited as the *Weld-Grimké Letters*).

⁷Elizur Wright, Jr., to his parents, July 31, 1836, Elizur Wright, Jr., Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸AAS, *Third Annual Report*, pp. 33-42, 99; [New York] *Emancipator*, August 18, 1836; [Concord, N.H.] *Herald of Freedom*, July 23, 1836; [Boston] *Liberator*, August 4, 1837; [Utica, N.Y.] *Friend of Man*, April 26, 1837; Myers, "Organization of 'The Seventy'," pp. 29-46.

⁹American Anti-Slavery Society, Agency Committee Minutes, meeting of June 5, August 17, September 20, and October 5, 1836, Boston Public Library (hereafter cited as AAS, Agency Committee Minutes); *Elmore-Birney Correspondence*, p. 11.

¹⁰Austin Willey, *The History of the Anti-Slavery Cause in State and Nation* (Portland, Me., 1886), pp. 73-74 (hereafter cited as Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*); [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, October 22, 1834; [Portland, Me.] *Eastern Argus*, November 7, 1834.

¹¹Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké*, 1: 51-52; American Anti-Slavery Society, Executive Committee Minutes, meeting of June 5, 1835, Boston

Public Library; Chicago, Presbyterian Theological Seminary, *General Catalog of Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Chicago, Lane Seminary Affiliated* (Chicago, 1939), p. 37; Henry B. Stanton, *Random Reflections*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1887), p. 49; *Appleton's Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, s.v. "Stanton, Henry B."; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 36-37, 65; John L. Myers, "Antislavery Agents in Rhode Island, 1835-1837," *Rhode Island History* 30 (February 1971): 21-26.

¹²Lynn [Mass.] *Record*, May 26, 1836; April 12, 1837.

¹³[Boston] *Liberator*, May 28, 1836.

¹⁴[Concord, N.H.] *Herald of Freedom*, September 24, 1836 (quoting from the [Portland, Me.] *Journal of Reform*), November 12, 1836; [Boston] *Liberator*, October 1, 1836; [New York] *Emancipator*, October 6, December 8, 1836; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, September 22, 1836; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 71-72; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké Letters*, 1: 348.

¹⁵Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 67-70; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké Letters*, 1: 348; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, November 3, 1836; [New York] *Emancipator*, November 10, 1836; [Utica, N.Y.] *Friend of Man*, November 17, 1836.

¹⁶Everett S. Stackpole, *History of Winthrop, Maine, with Genealogical Notes* (Auburn, Me., n.d.), p. 623 (hereafter cited as Stackpole, *History of Winthrop*).

¹⁷[Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, October 11, 1838, quoting from the *Christian Witness*.

¹⁸David B. Thurston, *A Brief History of Winthrop, from 1764 to October 1855* (Portland, Me., 1855), p. 123, 153-54; Stackpole, *History of Winthrop*, pp. 88-91, 632-33; *The Principia*, February 2, 1861; [New York] *Independent*, May 18, 1865; [Augusta, Me.] *Kennebec Journal*, February 6, 1833, October 22, 1834; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, October 11, 1838, quoting from the *Christian Witness*; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 72.

¹⁹[New York] *Emancipator*, April 25, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, November 3, 1836, April 27, 1837; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 52.

²⁰[New York] *Emancipator*, April 25, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, April 27, May 11, 25, 1837.

²¹[New York] *Emancipator*, August 24, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, May 25, 1837.

²²[New York] *Emancipator*, August 24, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, May 25, June 15, 1837; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 72.

²³[New York] *Emancipator*, August 24, 1837.

²⁴[New York] *Emancipator*, September 28, October 12, 1837; *Bangor [Me.] Daily Whig and Courier*, August 31, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian*

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Mirror, August 31, 1837; AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, meeting of September 21, 1837; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 52.

²⁵N.F. Carter, *The Native Ministry of New Hampshire* (Concord, N.H., 1906), pp. 428-29; Lucius C. Matlack, *The History of American Slavery and Methodism, from 1780-1849* (New York, 1849), pp. 102, 104, 155; *Idem*, *The Life of Rev. Orange Scott* (New York, 1847), pp. 5-34, 71; (hereafter cited as Matlack, *Orange Scott*); Donald G. Mathews, *Slavery and Methodism* (Princeton, 1965), p. 121; John L. Myers, "The Major Effort of Antislavery Agents in New Hampshire, 1835-1837," *Historical New Hampshire* 26 (Fall 1971): 3-12 (hereafter cited as Myers, "Antislavery Agents in New Hampshire"); [Washington, D.C.] *National Era*, August 19, 1837; Lynn [Mass.] *Record*, April 12, 1837.

²⁶Matlack, *Orange Scott*, p. 124; [New York] *Emancipator*, July 13, 1837, one article quoting from the *Portland [Me.] Courier*; [New York] *Zion's Watchman*, June 24, July 1, 15, 22, 1837; [Utica, N.Y.] *Friend of Man*, July 12, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, August 3, 1837.

²⁷AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of April 18, June 5, July 15, and December 6, 1836, and January 18, April 5, May 8, and July 5, 1838; Ezra S. Stearns, *History of Plymouth, New Hampshire*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1906), 1: 263; Myers, "Antislavery Agents in New Hampshire," pp. 21-22; [Concord, N.H.] *Herald of Freedom*, October 7, 1837; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, September 28, 1837; [New York] *Emancipator*, September 28, November 23, 1837.

²⁸[Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, April 12, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, October 26, November 2, 23, 1837; AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, October 5, 1837 and January 18, June 7, 1838.

²⁹[New York] *Emancipator*, December 21, 1837; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, April 12, 1838; AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, meeting of January 18, 1838.

³⁰[Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, March 28, April 12, 1838; American Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society* (New York, 1837), p. 4.

³¹[Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, March 8, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, March 1, 1838; *New York Evangelist*, February 10, 1838; [Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, February 5, 1838; [Boston] *Liberator*, February 16, 1838; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 80; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimke' Letters*, 1: 449; Betty Fladeland, *James Gillespie Birney, Slaveholder to Abolitionist* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1955), *passim*.

³²AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, *passim* July 1837 to June 1838, especially July 15 and December 7, 1837, and January 16 and June 7, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, *passim* August 1837 to June 1838, especially October 17 and February 22, 1838; [New York] *Zion's Watchman*, September 30, 1837; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, May 24, 1838, quoting

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³³Dwight L. Dumond, ed., *Letters of James Gillespie Birney, 1831-1857*, 2 vols. (New York, 1938), 1: 448 (hereafter cited as Dumond, *Birney Letters*).

³⁴[Boston] *Liberator*, March 9, 1838.

³⁵Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 82; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké Letters*, 1: 331, 333; Dumond, *Birney Letters*, 1: 448; David W. Bartlett, *Modern Agitators, or Pen Portraits of Living American Reformers* (New York, 1855), pp. 56-72 (hereafter cited as Bartlett, *Modern Agitators*); Hannah M. Coddington, "Ichabod Coddington," *Proceedings of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Its Forty-fifth Annual Meeting* (Madison, 1898), pp. 175, 182; *Appleton's*

Cyclopaedia of American Biography, s.v. "Coddington, Ichabod."

³⁶Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 82.

³⁷Dumond, *Birney Letters*, 1: 448.

³⁸AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, meeting of January 18, 1838; Walter M. Merrill and Louis Ruchames, *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison*, 4 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1971-1975), 2: 461, 464.

³⁹[Boston] *Liberator*, March 9, 1838; AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, December 21, 1837; [New York] *Emancipator*, March 1, 15, April 19, 1838; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 82-84; Dumond, *Birney Letters*, 1: 448; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, March 8, 1838, quoting from the [Brunswick, Me.] *Eastern Baptist*.

⁴⁰Dumond, *Birney Letters*, 1: 448.

⁴¹Bartlett, *Modern Agitators*, p. 61; Coddington, "Ichabod Coddington," p. 176; [Boston] *Liberator*, March 9, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, March 15, 1838; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 82-84; Dumond, *Birney Letters*, 1: 448; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, March 8, 1838 (quoting from the [Brunswick, Me.] *Eastern Baptist*), March 29, 1838.

⁴²[Portland, Me.] *Christian Mirror*, March 22, 1838; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, March 8, 1838 (quoting from the [Brunswick, Me.] *Eastern Baptist*), March 29, April 26, June 7, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, April 14, 1838; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 83-84.

⁴³[Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, April 26, 1838.

⁴⁴Maine Anti-Slavery Society, *Fourth Annual Report of the Maine Anti-Slavery Society* (Brunswick, Me., 1839), p. 4 (hereafter cited as MAS, *Fourth Annual Report*); [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, April 26, June 7, 21, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, May 17, 1838.

⁴⁵MAS, *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 4; [Brunswick, Me.] *Advocate of Freedom*, July 19, 1838; [New York] *Emancipator*, May 10, 1838; AAS, Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 7 and August 16, 1838.

⁴⁶[New York] *Emancipator*, August 16, September 13, 1838; Willey,

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⁴⁷MAS, *Fourth Annual Report*, pp. 43, 123; AAS, *Fifth Annual Report*, p. 129; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 71, 82; [New York] *Emancipator*, April 20, 1837, November 1, 1838.

⁴⁸AAS, *Fourth Annual Report*, p. 40.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, p. 43; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, p. 85.

⁵⁰[Concord] *New Hampshire Observer*, June 16, 1837.

⁵¹Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké Letters*, 1: 125; Willey, *Anti-Slavery Cause*, pp. 83-85.

John L. Myers is a professor of history at the State University of New York at Plattsburg. Dr. Myers has written extensively on the antislavery movement.