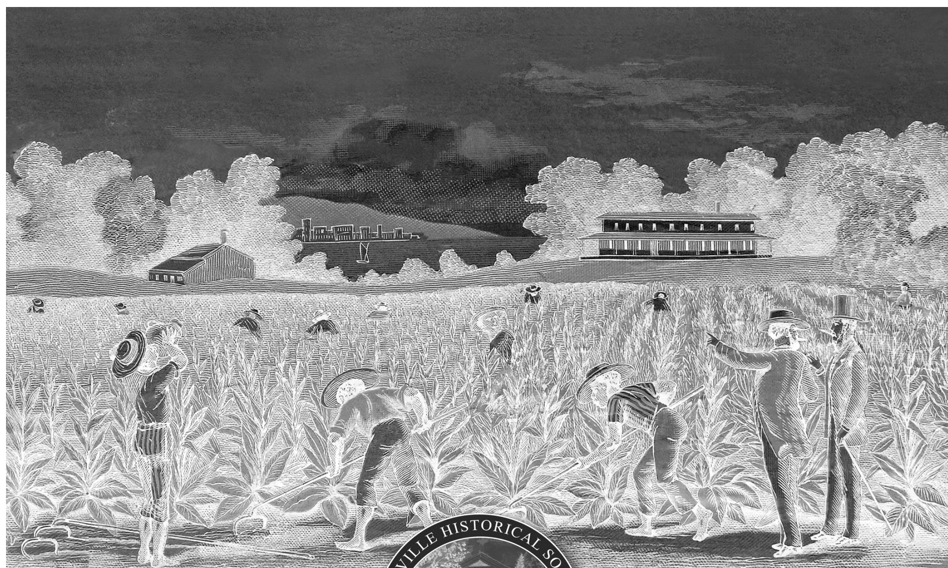
# FREEDOM

## *The Antislavery Movement In Granville*

MITCHELL SNAY



GRANVILLE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
POCKET HISTORY
6

**Other publications of the Granville Historical Society**

*Granville, Ohio: A Study in Continuity and Change* (Three volumes)

*Jacob Little's History of Granville*

**GHS Pocket Histories:**

*The Founding of Granville* (2011)

*Granville's Industrial Past* (2011)

*The Civil War and Granville: An Ohio Community's Outsized Contribution* (2012)

*By Means of Ink and Paper: The Civil War Correspondence of Edwin & Sarah Sinnett* (2013)

*Beneath This Sod: A Walk Through Granville's Old Colony Burying Ground* (2014)

Please see www.granvillehistory.org for more of our publications.

**Freedom: The Antislavery Movement In Granville**

*Granville Historical Society Pocket History No. 6*

By Mitchell Snay

*Photo Credits*
All photos and images provided by the
Granville Historical Society unless otherwise noted.

The publication of this volume was made possible by a generous gift from the Gilbert Reese Family Foundation of Newark, Ohio. The GHS Pocket History series is also supported through a generous grant from the Granville Foundation.

Design and layout of the GHS Pocket History series by
Fishergate, Inc., Chester, Maryland

Printing of the GHS Pocket History series by
Old Trail Printing, Inc., Columbus, Ohio

To contact the Granville Historical Society to purchase the above books, make a donation, join the society, or request more information, please contact us at::
Granville Historical Society
P.O. Box 129, Granville, OH 43023
740-587-3951
granvillehistorical@gmail.com • www.granvillehistory.org

# CONTENTS

Introduction
1

Social and Cultural Background
3

The Rise of Immediate Abolitionism
9

*In Focus: Samuel White, Jr.*
13

Women in the Abolitionist Movement
15

Anti-Abolitionism in Granville
16

*In Focus: The Great Granville "Riot" of 1836*
17

The Underground Railroad
21

*In Focus: Granville and the Underground Railroad*
23

Political Abolitionism
27

About the Granville Historical Society
30

## Introduction

The growth of abolitionism occurred throughout the small towns of the North from 1831 to 1865. Granville, Ohio, was one of many small, religious, market-oriented, and middle-class villages where abolitionism took root and grew into a potent political force. William T. Utter, prominent twentieth-century historian of Granville, argued that the village was "dominated by abolitionist sentiment." A narrative of the rise of abolitionism in Granville is an important and interesting part of the village's history, one that typifies the experience of countless towns in the northern United States before the Civil War.

Abolitionism was responsible for the infamous Granville "riot," notorious in the village's history. From the beginning of the abolitionist crusade in the early 1830s, reformers faced opposition in Granville. Theodore Dwight Weld, who had organized an Ohio Anti-slavery Society in Putnam, was invited to speak on abolition in April 1835 at the Academy Building but was pelted with eggs before he finished. Weld was forced to give subsequent addresses at the Bushnell home on Broadway and the Bancroft homestead just north of the village. When word came out that the first annual convention of the state antislavery society was to be held in Granville, resistance to the abolitionists increased. In October 1835, some leading citizens of Granville passed resolutions that deplored "the immoderate language of the immediate Abolitionists." Thus an official proclamation was

placed in the *Newark Advocate* by Major Elias Fassett, Judge Samuel Bancroft, and other citizens:

> We the citizens of Granville in the county of Licking & State of Ohio Participating in veneration to the Union in attachment to the constitution & laws of our country, & in regard to our brethren of the sister States, common to all good citizens; And desirous to promote their safety & tranquility, to strengthen the social & political ties of our great Republic & to preserve unimpaired in purity & vigor the constitutional guarantees of person & property which appear to be endangered by the proceedings of the Abolition & Anti-Slavery socities [sic] …

Five resolutions served to explain their position. First, to introduce the controversial issue of slavery would be "at variance with all rules of moral duty & every suggestion of humanity." Second, these men felt bound by the Constitution to recognize the right of slavery in the slaveholding states. Third, they argued that abolitionist tactics were "calculated to strengthen and rivet the chains of the slaves and perpetuate their bondage," and called their efforts at racial equality "utterly vain and delusive." Fourth, they reasoned that since slavery was forced upon the South by Great Britain, only "the most exalted influence of religion & humanity can ever induce them voluntarily to change their habits." Fifth, these citizens of Granville insisted that the "language of reproach & vituperation" was not calculated to constructively address the problem of slavery. It would be better approached "in the spirit of Christian kindness and brotherly love." Finally, they endorsed forced colonization of the slaves to Africa. These resolutions attest to a popular state of mind at the time, explaining the context for the anti-abolitionist riot and suggesting the difficulties under which the early abolitionists labored.

Undeterred by these threats, Ohio abolitionists descended upon Granville on April 27, 1836. They were forced to meet in a large barn owned by Ashley Azariah Bancroft that was immediately renamed the "Hall of Freedom." The meeting at the village attracted nationally known figures such as John Rankin and James G. Birney. Eight



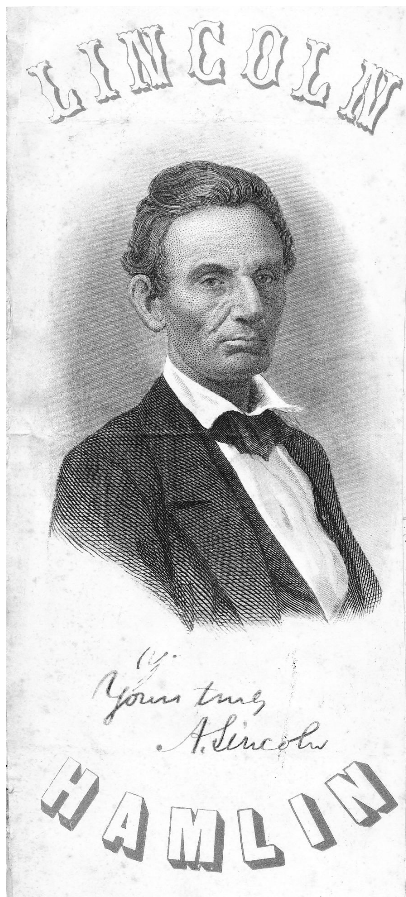
Granville delegates as well as two students from Granville College attended the meeting in the Bancroft barn. The next few days witnessed small skirmishes between conventioneers and local anti-abolitionist agitators. On April 28, some convention delegates left the meeting in order to escort some women from the local Female Academy. As the delegates marched down Pearl Street and on to Broadway, a small riot broke out in the village (see "In Focus: The Great Granville 'Riot' of 1836" on page 17). Birney, a popular figure among the state abolitionists, was a target of the attack but later minimized the violence.

## Social and Cultural Background

William Lloyd Garrison personified American abolitionism, the movement during the three decades before the Civil War that would culminate in the destruction of slavery in the United States. Born in Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1805, Garrison had picked up antislavery ideas by working for Quaker editor Benjamin Lundy during the 1820s. Yet Garrison grew impatient with Lundy's moderate antislavery tone. By 1831, he went off on his own in Boston and established his more radical abolitionist newspaper, the *Liberator*. Garrison's shift from antislavery to abolitionism was crucial. Rejecting gradual approaches to end slavery like colonization (the movement to free black slaves and send them "back" to Africa), he called for immediate, unconditional, and universal abolition coupled with the extension of equal rights to African Americans. Garrison's lack of moderation troubled even his allies in the nascent abolitionist movement. "Oh, my friend," remarked the young minister Samuel J. May, "do try to moderate your indignation, and keep more cool! Why, you are all on fire!" "I have need to be all on fire," Garrison replied calmly but forcefully, "for I have mountains of ice about me to melt."

The road from antislavery to abolition, traversed so quickly and dramatically by Garrison, took a far longer and more tortuous route in the United States. In the 1830s, Garrison probably created as

many enemies as he did converts. He was almost killed by an anti-abolitionist mob in Boston in 1835. His radical stances on questions of pacifism and women's rights split the abolitionist movement he helped to found. By the 1840s, many opponents of slavery believed that the road to abolition lay in bringing the slavery issue to the attention of American politicians. By the mid-1850s, antislavery politicians had created a new political party, the Republicans, based on opposition to the spread of slavery. By 1860, the Republicans had succeeded in electing their antislavery candidate, Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, to the presidency. And in the cauldron of the Civil War, slavery was forever abolished in the United States.




*In 1860 Abraham Lincoln became the first successful Republican candidate for president.*

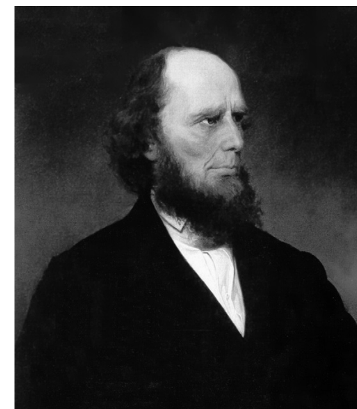
In the long course of human history, abolitionism was a relatively late development. Slavery had existed since Biblical times. The practice of slaveholding and the buying and selling of human beings could be found in ancient Near Eastern societies and in Classical Greece and Rome. Through the Middle Ages and the early modern era, slavery was accepted as a natural form of subordination necessary for social order. The first stirrings of antislavery can be seen in changes in sensibility that appeared during the eighteenth century. Radical Protestant sects such as the Quakers began to claim that slaveholding was a sin. (One story has a



Quaker abolitionist who held one of his legs in deep snow outside Quaker meetings. When his brethren inquired into the condition of his cold leg, he replied that they should be more concerned about the condition of slaves.) Why then, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, had slavery become a moral problem?

The answers to this question are complex and can only be suggested here. First, during the American Revolution, the institution of slavery came under closer scrutiny as some Americans saw the contrast between republican liberty and slavery. The natural-rights emphasis on individual freedom, so crucial to Revolutionary ideology, also served as a basis for antislavery. Second, the rise of capitalism and the accompanying laissez-faire economic theory, pioneered by Adam Smith, valued the freedom of labor and contrasted slavery with the efficiencies of free labor. Third and perhaps most important was the rise of evangelical religion.

The "Second Great Awakening" was a series of religious revivals that swept across the American landscape between roughly 1790 and 1840. There were religious revivals in Granville in 1808, 1818, and 1851 that involved the Baptist, Methodist, and Congregational churches in the village. It is estimated that by 1835 three out of every four people living in the United States maintained at least some nominal relationship to a church. Evangelical religion in the early American Republic is perhaps best personified in Charles Grandison Finney, the leading revivalist of the Second Great Awakening. A commanding figure—tall, athletic, and a spellbinding speaker—Finney himself had had a dramatic conversion experience in 1823. The gospel according to Finney was a powerfully liberating evangelical message in which all human beings were



*The "Father of Modern Revivalism," Charles Finney (1792–1875) was one of the most important figures in the Second Great Awakening.*

viewed as free moral agents who could choose their own salvation. No longer was sin part of human nature—sin now consisted in the act of sinning itself. No longer was there any intermediary between man and God—salvation was open to all classes. Yet there was still a place for evangelical preachers to convincingly present strongly emotional appeals to assault sin and offer comforting salvation upon conviction of sin. The resulting conversion experience was defined as the "New Birth" after which the convert lived a life of Christian holiness based on religious devotion and moral discipline. Part of the evangelical religion preached by Finney and his clerical brethren was the belief in human perfectibility. In other words, it was considered possible for the Christian to become totally free of sin and achieve a perfection akin to that of God. For those who would be perfect, slaveholding was a sin that needed to be renounced.

The influence of evangelical Christianity on the rise of abolitionism is well illustrated by Theodore Dwight Weld. The son of a Connecticut minister, Weld was converted by Finney in 1826. Weld was first introduced to antislavery ideas by an English friend. When he entered Lane Seminary in Cincinnati in 1833, Weld helped trigger mass conversions to abolition. Those students radicalized by Weld were forced out of Lane by more conservative trustees and later helped found Oberlin College, truly the hotbed of abolitionism in Ohio.

Along with abolitionism, the Second Great Awakening spawned the temperance movement. The crusade to stop the use of alcohol was one of the largest and most influential of antebellum reforms. The period from the 1790s to the 1830s witnessed some the heaviest drinking in American history. In 1790, the national average was 5.8 gallons of absolute alcohol per capita. In 1830, this figure rose to 7.1 gallons—today's rough equivalent of thirty-nine beers a week, or 4.8 per day! By the 1820s, reformers such as the Rev. Lyman Beecher of Litchfield, Connecticut, were beginning to point to intemperance as the major problem facing American society. Beecher, along with other evangelical clergymen, founded the American Temperance Society in 1826. By 1835, there were close to 5,000 temperance societies in the United States with a total membership of about one million.



*From the Boston Daily News*

THE DRUNKARD'S WIFE

I knew her at life's cloudless morn,
And I remember now
How fresh the green leav'd wreath o
Bloomed on her girlish brow.
Mem'ry reflects her sunny smiles,
And 'minds me still how bright
And sparkling beamed her full dark e
With joy's own dazzling light.

I saw her at love's altar stand,
A breathing form of grace;
A look of deep, confiding love,
Illumed her youthful face;
Blushing, she pave her willing hand
To one of Manly pride,
And with him left her childhood's ho
A happy, trusting bride.

Time swiftly sped—again we met;
Fondly she now caress'd
A cherub boy, that smiled upon
Her young, maternal breast;
She smiled—but, ah! her lip wore nc
The rainbow's gorgeous light;
That smile, so like the moon's cold ra
Betrayed the spirit's blight.

I marked how altered were her looks,
But yet I asked not why
Her gentle bosom heaved so oft
With sorrow's rending sigh;

I knew that he to whom so late
Her guileless heart she gave,
Had bowed to Bacchus' loathsome shrine,
An abject, willing slave.

Yes, he to whom she freely gave
Her pure affections up,
Had cast her's by, and drown'd his own
Within the mad'ning cup;
The lips once moist with love's sweet dew,
The nectar of the soul,
Now turn from her warm kiss away,
To quaff the poisonous bowl.

She lives; but grief hath drank joy's spring,
And left its fountain dry;
Each tone is sad—pleasure no more
Lights her one brilliant eye:
The wreath that bound her sunlit brow,
With tendrils fresh and green,
Now droops upon her sunken cheek,
Its blighted, withered sheen.

Her heart, like the neglected harp,
Responds to joy no more,
All crushed and broken are the cords
That thrilled to bliss of yore;
Like the storm-torn, frost-blighted flower,
She bows to meet her doom,
One ray alone—that ray, the hope
That lights the dark, damp tomb.

LIZETTE.

*The newspapers of the 1840s frequently published works aimed at helping the temperance cause.*

Drinking was also a social problem in Granville. The Rev. Jacob Little, pastor of the local Congregational Church, estimated in 1826 that the township consumed 10,000 gallons of whiskey. This figure suggests that nearly every adult male was drinking close to a gallon of hard liquor per week! Little also noted five distilleries in the township and fourteen places from which one could purchase whiskey. The Congregational minister, with a Whiggish and evangelical background from New England (he attended Dartmouth College