THE EARLY ANTISLAVERY AGENCY SYSTEM IN PENNSYLVANIA, 1833-1837

By John L. Myers*

IN THE years before 1830 a strikingly large number of the antislavery leaders of the United States, including Anthony Benezet, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, James Wilson, George Bourne, John Woolman, and Benjamin Lundy, lived in or near Philadelphia. Pennsylvania's influential Quakers were the first religious sect to repudiate the practice of purchasing and selling slaves, while the nation's first abolition society was organized in the state in 1775. The first national organization to espouse the cause of the Negro, the American Convention for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and Improving the Condition of the African Race, was founded and thereafter convened every one to three years until 1832 in Philadelphia, sustained in large measure by Pennsylvanians. The legislature in 1780 abolished slavery on a gradual plan and with later laws attempted to safeguard the movement of the Negro to a free status. Since all this was true, why was Pennsylvania one of the last of the free states to establish a militant antislavery auxiliary affiliated with the American Anti-Slavery Society, and why did it contribute so little to the organized antislavery movement of the early 1830's?

The contributions of Pennsylvanians to the abolition crusade of the nineteenth century were initially modest. Historians still disagree whether the national leadership of the militant antislavery movement of the 1830's emanated from the Garrisonians in Boston, the New York merchants, or Westerners, but few Pennsylvanians occupied vital positions. This secondary role is further demonstrated by the existence in the state of only six of the 221 auxiliaries of the national society in May, 1835. The financial support of the cause also was initially feeble. However,

*Dr. Myers is associate professor of history at Southeast Missouri State College, Cape Girardeau, Missouri.

as agency activities expanded in the state so did antislavery sentiment.

The primary contribution of the American Anti-Slavery Society to the struggle for the abolition of slavery was to marshal and concert the efforts of scattered individuals and groups and to proclaim the evils of slavery and demand an agreement to destroy the institution. Pamphlets published by a number of writers, abolition speeches delivered by private citizens, and the activities of the antislavery press all helped generate an increased awareness about slavery, but, as Dwight L. Dumond has emphasized, only an organized lecturing effort “could have carried the antislavery message convincingly enough to enough people.” Of the 300 new antislavery societies reported in the year following May, 1835, 100 were founded in Ohio and 61 in New York, but only 26 were in Pennsylvania, 4 in Connecticut, and 3 in New Jersey. One reason is that during that year the American Anti-Slavery Society assigned most of its best agents to Ohio and New York, while Pennsylvania received less attention, and New Jersey and Connecticut almost none at all. On the other hand, after the development of the agency system in Pennsylvania, the state in 1837 accounted for 93 of the 1,006 auxiliaries, exceeded only by New York, Ohio, and Massachusetts. The financial support of the cause in Pennsylvania outside Philadelphia increased between 1835 and 1837 from $193 to $3,073. A similar transition from a scanty or quiescent antislavery sentiment to well organized and more frequently supported activity can be ascertained in the actions of public officials and organizations. This article proposes to tell the story of the abolition agents who transformed by this system the sentiment of so many Pennsylvanians, to recount their experiences, and to assess the results of their work.2

The first authorized agent of the militant antislavery societies of the 1830’s to visit Pennsylvania was Arnold Buffum. A founder and first president of the New England Anti-Slavery Society, Buffum delivered the initial public address of the Boston organization in February of 1832. He thereafter spoke frequently for the society and in June agreed to become its lecturing agent to deliver lectures about slavery, obtain money to support the cause, and form auxiliaries to the parent society. Although he was commissioned to work in New England, he had to support himself after October, 1832, through his own collections, and he must have been free to appear wherever he desired. Since his location during most of April, 1833, is unknown and he had earlier expressed his intention to speak in Philadelphia, he may have arrived in Pennsylvania at that time. In any case, he did appear in the city later that year. He rented a hall for October 21 to speak in support of Negro education, but the American Colonization Society, which advocated dispatching free Negroes to Africa, sharply opposed him. In fact, so many citizens objected that the owner of the hall asked Buffum to postpone his lecture, and he reluctantly agreed. Most of his attention after his arrival on October 11 was devoted to working with the colored people of the city, although he did stray to Burlington, New Jersey and Bristol, Pennsylvania, for lectures. He returned northward on October 28. His meager efforts probably won few new antislavery supporters in Pennsylvania; they mark the only early entry of the New England society into the state.

Agency activities in Pennsylvania thereafter were under the direction of the American Anti-Slavery Society, which was established in Philadelphia on December 4, 1833, but whose headquarters were in New York City. The leaders of the new society quickly perceived that their success would depend upon efficient

---

64

6 New England Anti-Slavery Society, Records, 1832 (Boston Public Library), meetings of January 6, March 3, June 25, July 30, and October 29, 1832, and June 23, 1832, meeting of the Board of Managers; New England Anti-Slavery Society, Second Record Book (Boston Public Library), p. 264; Oliver Johnson, William Lloyd Garrison and His Times (Boston, 1880), p. 94; Wendell P. Garrison and Francis J. Garrison, eds., William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879, the Story of His Life Told by His Children (4 vols., New York, 1885-1889), I, 277, 282; Buffum to Garrison, March 4, 1833, William Lloyd Garrison Papers (Boston Public Library); Liberator, February 18, 1832; June 30, 1832; April 6, 1833; May 11, 1833; August 24, 1833; October 5, 1833; October 26, 1833; November 16, 1833.
agents. The plan of its Standing Committee on Agencies was to commission four lecturers for three months each; one of them, William Lloyd Garrison, was to be assigned to western New York, western Pennsylvania, and Ohio. Their business, and that of subsequently appointed agents, was "to arouse the public mind by addresses and lectures and to enlighten and convert individuals by private interviews—especially to operate on ministers of the Gospel." Since none of the four men would accept his assignment—Garrison would not leave the Liberator because of its "critical" state—the committee determined to appoint local agents who would speak whenever they could, receiving no compensation except reimbursement for travel expenses. Although it appointed eleven men and some of them did serve effectively, none of them were from Pennsylvania.¹

Not only did the national society fail to select any local agents, but it assigned its permanent agents elsewhere throughout 1834. The Agency Committee's determination to commission qualified and trusted men rather than an absence of agency candidates seems to have been the reason for this omission. Philadelphia abolitionists urged the national officers to appoint Evan Lewis. Although concluding that his speaking talents were insufficient for the assignment, the committees nevertheless yielded to pressure by agreeing to pay Lewis $600 plus traveling expenses for three months to organize an auxiliary and collect funds in Philadelphia. The terms of the appointment must have been unsatisfactory, for no other record indicates that he served.²

One of the effective methods of abolition operation was the scheduling of a number of annual and quarterly meetings during May and June each year to profit from the availability of delegates to the anniversaries of the various humanitarian and reform societies in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia. The new organization brought its first lectures to Pennsylvania under this program. On May 15, 1834, following the anniversary meeting, a


² Agency Committee Minutes, February 18, 1834, meeting; Elizur Wright, Jr., to Phelps, March 3, 1834, Amos A. Phelps Papers (Boston Public Library).
force of the American Anti-Slavery Society’s better speakers converged upon Philadelphia. William Goodell, a founder of the national society and a well-known editor, and Henry B. Stanton, then a representative of the students of Cincinnati’s Lane Seminary to the eastern antislavery convention, but subsequently the man who abolitionized Rhode Island and became financial secretary at the national headquarters, conferred with the Managers of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of the city on May 16 and decided to call a public meeting for the next evening. Between 100 and 200 people heard Stanton speak about improving the life of the colored people. Amos A. Phelps, a New England Congregational minister and then the national society’s only permanent lecturer, and James A. Thorne, the son of a Kentucky slaveholder and Stanton’s classmate at Lane Seminary, participated in the May 17 ladies’ program and lectured to a room “crowded to excess” on May 19. At a third session on May 21 the speakers included Phelps, Thorne, the Rev. S. L. Pomeroy of Bangor, Maine, and the Rev. D. C. Lansing of New York. Phelps also preached in a colored church on Sunday morning and evening and visited a Negro school on Tuesday, May 20. By the end of the week, the four had returned to New York City.6

Of the eight agents who assisted Phelps during the remainder of 1834, only one served in Pennsylvania. The Agency Committee on August 5, 1834, appointed James Loughhead of Pittsburgh, who was to obtain his salary and expenses out of the money which he collected. Loughhead, while commissioned earlier as agent of the Pittsburgh Anti-Slavery Society, had participated in a debate with colonizationist William J. McDonald and others on May 15 and from May 20 to 23, 1834. Although he served under national society auspices approximately the full year, little record exists in antislavery papers of his activities. In August of 1835 the antislavery newspaper Emancipator reported the formation of fourteen new antislavery auxiliaries in Ohio and three in western Pennsylvania—at Greenville, Butler, and West Middletown—most of which were the product of Loughhead’s efforts. The Agency Committee on May 5, 1835, considered his request for the society to continue his agency at a fixed com-

6 Emancipator, May 27, 1834; June 3, 1834; New York Evangelist, May 31, 1834; Phelps to his wife, May 19, 1834, and Wright to Phelps, May 16, 1834. Phelps Papers.
pensation and decided future employment under those terms was inexpedient. In July of 1835 the committee took cognizance of his letter summing up his labors and voted him an expense payment of $36.7

American Anti-Slavery Society agents continued almost to ignore the Philadelphia area. Between the lectures after the national anniversary of 1834 and a year later, only two appearances by George Thompson broke this record of inattention. Thompson first won fame as a lecturer for the British Agency Committee which had successfully carried the antislavery word throughout England and Wales and generated upon Parliament political pressure for abolition. On a trip abroad in 1833 William Lloyd Garrison persuaded Thompson to enlist in the American struggle. However, the Englishman had less appeal to an American audience. Commissioned by the Agency Committee in September of 1834, he was assigned to New England and did not speak in Philadelphia until March 3, 1835. Although the local abolitionists did not advertise his appearance in order to discourage any public attacks upon them, an estimated 1,000 people gathered in the Reformed Presbyterian Church to listen. Thompson departed immediately after the meeting for New York City. When he returned to Philadelphia accompanied by Garrison for two lectures during the week of March 18, only the Reformed Presbyterian Church was open for his use. Nevertheless, so many people turned out to hear his second address that the galleries of the building began to give way and the audience was barely evacuated in time. The abolitionist remained in the city for a week.8


8 Archibald H. Grimké, William Lloyd Garrison, the Abolitionist (New York, 1891), p. 205; George Thompson, Letters and Addresses during His Mission in the United States from Oct. 1st, 1834, to Nov. 27, 1835 (Boston 1837), pp. 45-47; Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grimké Letters, 1, 210; Samuel J. May, Some Recollections of Our Anti-Slavery Conflict (Boston, 1869), pp. 109-115; New England Anti-Slavery Society, Letter Book (Boston Public Library), Benjamin C. Bacon to Elizur Wright, Jr., July 25, 1834; Quarterly Anti-Slavery Magazine, I (January, 1836), 108; Liberator, September 27, 1834; March 28, 1835; April 4, 1835; Emancipator, March 3, 1835; March 10, 1835; March 24, 1835; March 31, 1835; Garrison to his wife, March 13 and 16, 1835, Garrison Papers.
Prior to the American Anti-Slavery Society anniversary in May, 1835, another agent, James G. Birney, delivered several Pennsylvania lectures en route to New York City. Born in Kentucky, educated at Princeton, a participant in various humanitarian and reform movements in his adopted state of Alabama, Birney became disturbed about the implications of slavery both for the slaveholder and for other Christians. He moved his family back to his native state where he became the bellwether behind plans for organization of a Kentucky antislavery society. In the autumn of 1834 the Agency Committee commissioned him for one year. Birney prepared the ground for Theodore Weld's subsequent success by an address in Pittsburgh and lectures in Harrisburg. Joined by Stanton, he addressed a large audience in Fund Hall on May 7; both men spoke at the Northern Exchange on the succeeding evening.  

Western Pennsylvania received an effective indoctrination into antislavery principles as a result of Theodore Weld's two visits in the spring of 1835 and that following winter. Described by the *Lynn Record* as "the most eloquent, persuasive and powerful lecturer ever known in this country," Weld is adjudged to have been not only the American Anti-Slavery Society's most forceful speaker, but the organizer of and the inspiration for its expanding agency program. Born in Hampton, Connecticut, in 1803, Weld was converted by Charles Grandison Finney and served in the evangelist's Holy Band. As a consequence of his tours in the South for humanitarian and reform societies and his Finney religious convictions, which included the affirmation that "faith without works is dead," Weld became a proponent of immediate emancipation of the slaves. He began his antislavery agency service in Ohio in the autumn of 1834 and remained in that state through the formation of a state abolition society. He then invaded western Pennsylvania, primarily to attend the Presbyterian General Assembly at Pittsburgh. The city's antislavery society called a public

---

meeting in the Protestant Methodist Church for June 2, 1835, with Weld and Dr. Nathan S. Beman, pastor of a Troy, New York, church, its featured speakers. On the following evening another Presbyterian pastor, John Rankin, an early leader of the antislavery movement and subsequently a permanent agent of the American Anti-Slavery Society, joined Beman on the platform. However, Weld's primary objective was not to hold public meetings nor to convert the city, but to ascertain the position of the assembled churchmen, to convert quietly as many as possible, and to get those converts publicly to advocate their stand. Only two delegates at the Assembly twelve months earlier were abolitionists; after a year of exposure to antislavery propaganda and two weeks of Weld's work, forty-eight of the commissioners, twenty-seven of whom were ministers, supported antislavery. That constituted a quarter of the assembly. While this does not necessarily prove the abolition conversion of many Pennsylvanians, it does indicate that the ministers of many state Presbyterian churches were now willing to admit antislavery lecturers to their pulpits and to insert antislavery principles in their sermons.16

Before leaving the state, Weld detoured to Washington. An antislavery society had been formed in this southwestern Pennsylvania town in August, 1834, after an address by Dr. F. Julius LeMoyne, who had been born and reared in the community and who was one of the national antislavery society leaders and a local agent. Weld left for Washington on June 8, intending to remain a few days, but he stayed nearer two weeks to deliver in the Methodist church at least nine addresses. His first lectures were devoted to "an investigation of the principles of slavery; of the progress made in the emancipation of slaves in different parts of the world; of the mental and moral condition of the slave

---

16 Weld to Wright, January 1, 1833 (typewritten copy), and Vashon to Wright [1835], Wright Papers; Claude M. Fuess, Men of Andover, Biographical Sketches and Commemoration of the One Hundred and Fiftieth Anniversary of Phillips Academy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1928), pp. 136-137; Benjamin P. Thomas, Theodore Weld, Crusader for Freedom (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1950), passim; Barnes and Dumond, Weld-Grinne Letters, I, 180, 224-225; Dumond, Letters of Birney, I, 194; Emancipator, January 13, 1835; June 16, 1835; New York Evangelist, June 13, 1835; Liberator, May 12, 1837, quoting from Lynn Record.
population in the south; and of the laws which relate to the
treatment of slaves in the southern states."

After repeating his success in the Western Reserve, Weld
yielded further antislavery cultivation in Ohio to others and re-
turned to western Pennsylvania. He took Augustus Wattles with
him. Wattles was a former associate of Weld at Lane Seminary
who had subsequently directed a Negro school in Cincinnati.
The two reached Pittsburgh on December 18, 1835, and stayed
until about January 20, 1836. Although his hoarse voice, con-
vention activity in the community, and the Christmas holidays at
first prevented any lectures, Weld remained to deliver sixteen
addresses in Pittsburgh and one on January 5 in Allegheny. The
Reverend Sereno W. Dwight, a former president of Hamilton
College and a colonizationist, had offered a full course of lectures
in Pittsburgh shortly before; all churches had been available for
his use. However, when Weld sought a hearing, only a few of
the small houses of worship were open. He began speaking in the
young men’s antislavery rooms and afterwards transferred his
efforts to whatever churches he could procure. The colonizationists
were soon routed, and Weld and Wattles left the area well or-
organized in its support of antislavery principles.

In spite of Weld’s success, much more extensive labor needed
to be expended. The Agency Committee continued to consider
suggestions that it commission and assign various men to the
state, but action seldom resulted from its aspirations. In July,
1835, the committee attempted to employ George Cheever of
Massachusetts. Later the same month the Philadelphia Young
Men’s Anti-Slavery Society offered to contribute $500 towards
the support of an agent who would be acceptable to them, but no
one could be obtained. Finally, when the young abolitionists in
October suggested a candidate of their own, Samuel L. Gould,

September 14, 1837; *New York Evangelist*, August 23, 1834; Allen John-
son and Dumas Malone, eds., *Dictionary of American Biography* (21 vols.,
New York: Scribner’s, 1937-1944), XI, 163-164.
12 Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grimké Letters*, I, 248; Domond, *Letters of
Birney*, I, 238-240, 251-254, 283-285, 292-293, 300; *Emancipator*, December,
1835; *New York Evangelist*, February 13, 1836; *Philanthropist*, January 22,
1836, quoting from *Pittsburgh Times*; February 12, 1836; February 19,
1836; American Anti-Slavery Society Executive Committee Minutes, De-
cember 15, 1836 meeting (Boston Public Library).
the Committee appointed him. Gould in the spring of 1835 had been employed as lecturing agent of the Providence (Rhode Island) Anti-Slavery Society.\textsuperscript{13}

Gould's labors in Pennsylvania continued for almost a year. At first, while he was lecturing in the Harrisburg-Gettysburg region, contemporary antislavery publications seldom recorded his activities. One report told that when he posted a notice for a meeting in the Gettysburg Courthcuse on December 11, he was informed that he would be answered. The abolitionist and a local lawyer debated for two evenings before crowded houses. The audience was unable to decide who had won. At another time the opposition to him in Harrisburg in early January petitioned the Town Council to ban his meeting. However, when the Council asked him to cancel his program, Gould refused to surrender his right of free discussion and continued.\textsuperscript{14}

Gould must have shifted quickly from Harrisburg to Westmoreland and Fayette Counties. He opened his operations in Greensburg during the last week of January, preaching twice on Sunday and lecturing once during each of the succeeding four evenings. On Saturday, February 6, he began at Adamsburg. When he was locked out of the community's schoolhouse, which also served as the main lecture hall, Gould forced open the door and spoke. The next day the building was again locked, so he addressed 200 people during both morning and evening in a private workshop. Beginning February 8, he delivered five lectures in the Mt. Pleasant Baptist and Methodist churches and preached twice on Sunday to the Presbyterians and Baptists. He declared that he had never realized that so little work could produce such remarkable results. An antislavery society was founded which he estimated would number over 100 members within a week. On February 16 he visited an influential Baptist of the area and lectured to another 100 people at his home. After addressing a large audience on February 18 at Jacob's Creek, about five miles from Mt. Pleasant,


he spoke on February 22 at the Robbstown schoolhouse. He returned to Greensburg the next day, lectured on the 24th, and established a county society. Although he conceded that his lectures were from two-and-a-half to three hours long, he reported that he had not seen an impatient audience west of the Alleghenies.15

After about a week when Gould's activities were unrecorded, he proceeded south to Fayette and Greene Counties on the Virginia border. On March 8 he talked with the Smithfield Baptist minister whom he had converted to antislavery doctrines a few weeks earlier at Mt. Pleasant. Three days later the clergyman announced at a temperance meeting that Gould would lecture. Told by some influential members of his church that the notice would have to be recalled, the minister refused to comply and was sustained by his congregation. Gould lectured on Saturday, March 12, and Monday, March 14, and preached twice on Sunday, all without interruption. On Tuesday, March 15, a mob successfully threw his meeting into so much disorder that it had to be adjourned. When his supporters met again the next day, they were outnumbered and out-voted, and for a time the mob controlled the community. On the evening of March 16 a committee of twelve ordered Gould either to leave the township within twenty-four hours or be forcibly expelled and have his possessions burned. Establishing himself as a symbol of free speech, Gould vowed to "wait it out." The mob continued its control until the people learned of a conspiracy to carry the abolitionist into Virginia. On March 26 the aroused villagers assembled in the Baptist church of Georges to ascertain what measures they had to take to restore law and order. Another meeting on the same day at Turkey Foot church opened that building to Gould's use. When the citizens regained control of their own community, they embraced immediate emancipation at the same time and formed an antislavery society. In the week of April 6 Gould delivered four addresses and two sermons in the area, including one discourse in Virginia and another in a church within a stone's throw of the border to an audience most of whom were from the Southern state.16

Using Smithfield as his base of operations during the latter part

---

15 *Emancipator*, March, 1836.
of April, Gould traveled more than 100 miles and delivered fourteen lectures within the eight-day period prior to April 26. He founded four societies in the county, at Smithfield, Washington Township, Perryopolis, and Connellsville. On April 25 he was in the latter town; the next day he set forth to begin a series at Brownsville and Bridgeport. He remained in the southwestern corner of the state during the next month. He participated in a Greene County debate which he declared added a considerable group to abolition ranks in spite of audience support for his opposition by a 4-3 majority. After a society of eighteen was organized, Gould delivered several additional lectures in the county.

In mid-May he was mobbed on two succeeding days in Uniontown. Denied permission to reply to a lecture of colonizationist Elliott Cresson, he was pelted with stones, sand, and filth on his return to his lodgings. The mob on the following day prevented an audience which had assembled in the courthouse from hearing him. During the latter part of the week he attended sessions of the Monongahela Baptist Association, composed of twenty-six churches, spoke to them, and secured adoption of antislavery resolutions. He lectured on May 21, attended the quarterly meeting of the Westmoreland County Anti-Slavery Society at Greensburg on May 25, and reached Pittsburgh on May 26. He called a meeting in that city for Monday, May 30, and endeavored to present his convictions to as many members of the General Assembly as possible. 17

Crossing into Washington County on June 11, Gould faced stiff mob opposition, yet he was able to organize eight antislavery societies within a few weeks. He delivered twenty-three addresses in eleven neighborhoods and formed auxiliaries for Morris Township, Peters, Mt. Pleasant, Cross Creek, Burgettstown, Florence, West Middletown, and Buffalo Township. While he was presenting his first lecture in the Cumberland Presbyterian Church on Tuesday, June 21, a mob assaulted the building. The audience, remaining quiet "amidst volleys of missiles, which were ruining clothes and endangering lives," was eventually ejected; Gould

---

received only a minor blow from the stones. A few days later the anti-abolitionists at a meeting of their own attempted to vindicate those who had participated in the mob action by declaring that it was "highly-expedient to intrude on the citizens with offensive anti-slavery doctrines." However, shortly thereafter on June 27, the citizens of West Middletown at a similar conclave also supported colonization, but denounced mob action. Five of the rioters were indicted. On the eve of the trial, the antagonists reached a compromise by which the mobocrats acknowledged the impropriety of their conduct, expressed sorrow and regret for their participation, and agreed to pay the costs of prosecution and repair of the meetinghouse. Gould reaped the benefit from the publicity which he received. A county antislavery meeting which convened on July 4 encountered no violence. He remained in the area until he began efforts in Beaver County, July 20.18

Later in July Gould informed the national headquarters that so many antislavery friends resided in the area in which he was operating that he could not list all their names. He delivered twenty-four lectures, probably in Beaver County, the last two or three weeks of July and the first week of August. During that time he had no difficulty obtaining a hearing. He scheduled appointments for several weeks in advance. The only additional society which he reported forming was at Mountville, Beaver County.19

In the latter part of August Gould penetrated into Ohio. Among his activities was attendance at the annual meeting of the Beaver Baptist Association at Salem. This association was composed of fourteen churches scattered over five counties of Ohio and western Pennsylvania. Although not formally considered, abolition was discussed more than any other subject.20 His efforts during most of early September, 1836, were generally unreported. He probably worked either in eastern Ohio or in Beaver and Crawford Counties of Pennsylvania. In any case, on September 21 he set out for the assembly of the eighteen-church French Creek Baptist Association

19 Emancipator, August 25, 1836.
20 Ibid., September 22, 1836.
at Cussawaga, Crawford County. He spoke on the first day about
the responsibilities of the church and on September 23 about
slavery. The Association adopted antislavery resolutions.\textsuperscript{21}

On September 20, 1836, the Agency Committee decided to
transfer five of its agents, including Gould, to Rhode Island until
that state society's anniversary meeting, November 9-11. Gould
then participated in a training convention for agents in New York
City. He was returned to his former field of labor with instruc-
tions to engender the greatest possible transformation of public
sentiment prior to the organization of a state society. At the con-
clusion of several meetings which he and other agents called in
Philadelphia, Gould, accompanied by agent Oliver Johnson, crossed
the Alleghenies again on December 13. Arriving in Pittsburgh on
the evening of December 15, he attended the sessions of the ex-
ecutive committees of both the city and county antislavery so-
cieties and assisted them to plan for future operations. He reported
that matters were going "swimmingly" in the city and that he
expected the area would supply a large delegation to the state
convention. On Christmas Day he alighted at Butler. Against
what he termed "angry opposition," he lectured on December 26
and 28; he was prevented from holding a meeting in the court-
house on the 27th. Returning to Westmoreland County, he lectured
in North Alexandria once on December 31 and twice on January
1 and formed a society of eighty members. He was in Greensburg
on January 2 and 3. Although he reported that he had appoint-
ments scheduled until his departure for the state convention, except
for money which he was credited with collecting in West Middle-
town, additional record of his January activities is unavailable in
antislavery sources. After participating in the state convention,
January 31 to February 2, he transferred to New York and
Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{22}

Edward Henry Fairchild was the only other national society
agent to operate in the western region of the state during this

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., October 13, 1836.
\textsuperscript{22} Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of September 20 and October 5,
1836, and sheet pasted near the end of the book, listing agency assignments; 
Liberator, November 19, 1836; Friend of Man, November 24, 1836, quoting 
from Providence Journal; Emancipator, January 5, 1837; February 9, 1837; 
February 16, 1837; National Enquirer, December 17, 1836; December 31, 
1836; February 11, 1837.
period. While a student at Oberlin College, this Massachusetts native was prepared for his agency in late October or early November of 1836. He was assigned by the Agency Committee to northwestern Pennsylvania. After plodding through Trumbull County, Ohio, during the early part of December, Fairchild crossed into Pennsylvania to lecture for the remainder of the month and all of January, generally in Erie County, but also in Crawford County. Since he easily obtained a hearing, he was able to help establish twelve new societies which averaged between thirty-five and forty members. Fairchild also attended two meetings of the Erie County Anti-Slavery Society and the sessions of the presbytery. From the funds which he forwarded to the national headquarters, one can assume that during the final month before he completed his service he visited Hickory and Clarksville in Mercer and Harristown in Crawford Counties.  

Until the national anniversary of 1836, Gould was the only agent serving in Pennsylvania. Recognizing the necessity to correct the situation, the Agency Committee redoubled its efforts to find qualified men. At its meeting of June 5, 1836, it recommended William L. Chaplin of Massachusetts, organizer of the Lowell (Massachusetts) Anti-Slavery Society in January, 1934, and subsequently General Agent of the New York State society. Although he promised to begin his work in eastern Pennsylvania about the middle of July, no evidence has been discovered to indicate that he served, at least before February, 1837; illness probably kept him from his duties. Unable hitherto to reach the large number of foreign-speaking Pennsylvanians, the committee in July, 1836, voted to employ a German-American agent. It was unable to obtain the right man until it selected the Reverend John Winebrenner on February 22, 1837. Although the committee received an acceptance of his three-months appointment of March 15, no report of his activities was printed nor payment for expenses authorized. During the same summer the committee commissioned Timothy Stowe, a minister of Montrose. While affirming his support of the cause and agreeing to lecture near his home, Stowe

Emancipator, March 2, 1837; April 27, 1837; Agency Committee Minutes, sheet pasted in near the end of the book; Oberlin College, Alumni Records, file on Fairchild (Oberlin College Alumni Office).
declined the appointment on the grounds of responsibilities to his family and congregation.24

The greatest difficulties in efforts to procure agents for the state finally ended in the autumn of 1836 with the appointments of Jonathan Blanchard and Janies Miller McKim. The accomplishments of agents during 1835-1836 in multiplying the number of antislavery societies in the nation to over 500 and in abolitionizing large areas of Ohio, New York, and New England had prompted the American Anti-Slavery Society to re-evaluate its methods of operation, virtually abandon its publications, and concentrate most of its resources upon agency activities. Weld canvassed the country for new men. The society launched a drive to augment its income to sustain its new effort. All of the agents east of the Appalachians were invited to attend a consultative gathering in New York City from November 15 until December 2, 1836, "for the purpose of kindling, warming, 'combustionizing' and in short getting the whole mass to a welding heat." Under the leadership of Weld the subject of slavery was thoroughly discussed and the participants drilled, disciplined, and aroused. The result was amazing. More than one new antislavery auxiliary was formed somewhere in the country every day for months. "The Seventy" is the term which had traditionally been applied to those who served at this time. Pennsylvania was given special attention by the group.25

Jonathan Blanchard, one of the most prominent of the agents because of his later activities and a man of "superb physique," was involved in numerous controversies in his life. A native of Vermont, he was attending Andover Theological Seminary in 1836 when Weld persuaded him to accept an agency. J. Miller McKim was born near Carlisle on November 14, 1810. This

24 Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of June 5 and July 6 and 13, 1836, and February 22 and March 15, 1837; Liberator, January 11, 1834, quoting from Lowell Observer; February 11, 1837; Emancipator, October 13, 1836.

Federal member of the American Anti-Slavery Society left a 
pastorate at Womelsdorf to accept an October Agency Committee 
commission for service in eastern Pennsylvania.26

Blanchard arrived in Philadelphia on Monday, October 17, and 
participated in a meeting of the governing committee of the city’s 
young men’s antislavery society on the following day. After a 
short excursion to Haddonfield, New Jersey, Blanchard reached 
Harrisburg on October 25. He spent most of the week visiting 
families. His single lecture in the Presbyterian church created 
considerable opposition, but evoked no mob. Since the community 
was in the midst of election campaigning, he invaded the sur-
rounding district, lecturing on November 2 in Dauphin and on 
November 3 in Halifax, and beginning a course of four addresses 
in Millersburg on November 4. Before departing for the agents’ 
convention, he returned to Harrisburg for more work.27

Following the training sessions at New York, Blanchard partic-
ipated with the other state agents in several antislavery meetings 
in Philadelphia and then returned to his former bailiwick in south-
central Pennsylvania. He was authorized $35.04 for his expenses 
from December 1 to January 1, indicating that he engaged in 
considerable travel. Abolitionist politician Henry Wilson many 
years later reported that twenty-five of Blanchard’s thirty meetings 
were broken up or interrupted. Blanchard near the end of De-
cember was operating in Carlisle, climaxing his efforts with the 
delivery of the main address before the convention which formed 
the Carlisle Anti-Slavery Society on January 3, 1837. By the 
middle of the month, probably around January 14-21, he was 
laboring in the area of York Springs, Adams County. He could

26 National Enquirer, November 5, 1836; Emancipator, November 10, 
1836; Princeton Theological Seminary Biographical Catalogue, 1909 (Trent-
on, New Jersey, 1909), p. 105; Agency Committee Minutes, September 20, 
1836 meeting; Johnson, Dictionary of American Biography, II, 350-351; 
James G. Wilson and John Fiske, eds., Appleton’s Cyclopædia of American 
Biography (6 vols.; New York, 1888-1889), IV, 136; Proceedings of the 
American Anti-Slavery Society at Its Third Decade, . . . (New York, 
1864), p. 32; Richard N. Current, Old Thad Stevens, a Story of Ambition 
(Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1942), pp. 34-35; Chicago 
Tribune, May 15, 1892, Ira V. Brown, “Miller McKim and Pennsylvania 
27 Emancipator, November 10, 1836; December 1, 1836; National Enquirer, 
November 5, 1836.
measure the fruits of his service when he attended the state convention at Harrisburg, January 31-February 2.28

After accepting his commission, McKim delivered three lectures at his home in Womelsdorf before setting out for Philadelphia and New York to spend between two and three weeks collecting information and preparing himself for his duties. On October 21 he left Philadelphia to join Buffum at several temperance meetings. McKim inaugurated his planned operations in Bucks County, with lectures at the New Prospect schoolhouse on October 23, near Pineville on October 24, at Buckingham on October 25, and at Pineville on October 27. Both the Buckingham ladies' and Pineville antislavery societies were established. He delivered five addresses in Buckingham while Buffum presented one.29

During the week between October 30 and his visit to New York for the agents convention, McKim lectured between two and four days in Newtown, Falsington, Sullyville, Lower Wakefield, and Penn's Manor. He founded three new societies and anticipated a fourth would soon be established. After the convention and participation in the antislavery meetings in Philadelphia, he returned to his former assigned area. By January 2 he had lectured at Norristown, Plymouth, and Gulph Mills in Montgomery County and at Frankford and Byberry in Philadelphia County. He reported that he was welcomed in each locality. He anticipated that a society would soon be founded in Frankford. No record has been discovered of McKim's subsequent January activities until his appearance at the Harrisburg convention on January 30.30

The absence of a state society in Pennsylvania and the need for a sustained drive before the convention must have been discussed at the agents' meeting. Probably as a result of this consideration, the Agency Committee increased its number of employees who were assigned to the state. The editor of the National Enquirer, Philadelphia's antislavery newspaper, proudly announced

---

28 Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of January 18 and May 15, 1837, and sheet pasted in near the end of the book; National Enquirer, December 17, 1836; January 21, 1837, one article quoting from Gettysburg Star; Emancipator, February 9, 1837; April 27, 1837; Henry Wilson, History of the Rise and Fall of Slave-Power in America (3 vols., 4th ed., Boston, 1875-1877), I, 293.
30 Emancipator, November 10, 1836; National Enquirer, November 5, 1836. Emancipator, November 10, 1836; January 19, 1837; February 9, 1837; National Enquirer, February 11, 1837.
on December 3 that the national society had dispatched ten men, some of whom were to work for the duration of their terms of service, others for definite periods. On a sheet attached near the end of the Agency Committee Minutebook now in the Boston Public Library is a register which lists those men who were to operate in certain counties, most of which were in Pennsylvania. It stated:


At the bottom of the page the names of Wilson Tillinghast, H. C. Wright, and Amos Dresser were also written.¹¹

These must have been the assignments for December, 1836. Stanton earlier had been directed to serve in the state, but the committee on November 29 transferred him to New England and shifted Tillinghast and E. C. Pritchett to Pennsylvania. No record implies that Wilson Tillinghast, appointed in July of 1836 and a lecturer for a short time on Long Island, served at all after the agents' convention. Since Nathaniel Colver's activities between the convention and January 18 are unreported, he may have been in the state, but his contemporaries did not mention his service. On January 3, 1837, the Agency Committee countermanded his instructions and returned him to New York. The others fulfilled their assignments.²²

E. C. Pritchett was one of only two foreign born among the band of Seventy. A student at Amherst College at the time of

¹¹ Agency Committee Minutes, sheet pasted near the end of the book; National Enquirer, December 3, 1836.
²² Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of July 6 and 19, November 29, and December 6, 1836, and January 3, 1837.
his appointment, he was commissioned in July, 1836, for one year at a salary of $8 per week; he accepted in August. Possibly because he roamed amidst the rugged terrain and isolated life of Indiana, Cambria, and Huntingdon Counties, he seemingly furnished almost no record of his two months' service in Pennsylvania. After participating in the antislavery sessions which the agents conducted in Philadelphia, he made his way toward his field of operations. Only two references to his activities have been discovered. In one, a gentleman in Harrisburg remarked that Pritchett had been "mobbed in Huntingdon—a man now here saw a brick-bat pass within an inch of his face. He is used to it." The only other testimony was a letter written by Pritchett from Blairsville on December 22, which simply forwarded tales of slavery which he had collected. He participated in the organization of the state society in Harrisburg.

Oliver Johnson was also assigned to the state for the two-month period between the agents convention and the state meeting. Johnson had served as an agent for the New England Anti-Slavery Society in the first half of 1833. Moving to Vermont in 1834, he was thereafter rather inactive in the antislavery movement, except for attendance at state conventions and an occasional speech. In the latter part of August, 1836, Johnson answered Weld's inquiry that he would accept an agency appointment. After assisting the other Pennsylvania lecturers with the series of antislavery meetings in Philadelphia, he set out westward with Gould. The two crossed the Alleghenies on December 13, parting at Bedford, where Johnson was to begin his labors. Gould later wrote that the people of the community gave Johnson "a candid hearing." He toiled during the next one-and-a-half months in Bedford and Somerset Counties, along the Maryland border. Johnson's only letter in antislavery publications was written from Somerset on January 20. He arrived in that community on January 6 and delivered seven lectures to audiences which he characterized as respectable in size. On January 18 and 19, interrupted by yelling and cursing and threatened by tar and feathers, he spoke in Berlin.

\[23\] *Emancipator*, October 20, 1836; January 5, 1837; February 9, 1837; *National Enquirer*, December 17, 1836; January 21, 1837; February 11, 1837; *Agency Committee Minutes*, meetings of July 6, August 2, and November 29, 1836, and sheet pasted in near the end of the book; *Friend of Man*, October 10, 1838.
He suspended his lectures soon thereafter to attend the state
convention. 34

John Cross, who had been working in New York, was directed
at the agents' convention to proceed into Pike, Wayne, Susque-
hanna, and Northampton Counties in northeastern Pennsylvania.
Cross was one of the most hard-working and durable of the agents.
A native of Massachusetts, he was prepared for the ministry at
Oneida Institute and subsequently preached in central New York.
The first report of his Pennsylvania activities told of an encounter
with a mob in Wilkes-Barre. Denied use of the public buildings,
he was lecturing in the home of a well-known citizen when a
ruffian band entered. Cross was protected by the ladies until his
friends could whisk him into another room and lock the door.
When the host rejected their demand that the abolitionist be turned
over to them, the mob damaged a picture, toppled the gate, and
destroyed fences and shrubbery. Late in January Cross delivered
four or five addresses at Milford, Pike County. He concluded his
pre-convention operations by speaking during the period of the
court session at Bethany and organizing the Wayne County Anti-
Slavery Society. After participating in the Harrisburg convention,
he attended the quarterly meeting of the Susquehanna County
Anti-Slavery Society, held a debate, and then returned to New
York. 35

Henry Beldon was at Andover Theological Seminary in the
summer of 1836 when, upon the suggestion of Weld and national
secretary Elizur Wright, Jr., he was commissioned a permanent
agent. The committee initially assigned this Connecticut native to
Rhode Island, but while he was attending the agents convention,
it transferred him to Lycoming, Clearfield, Centre, Jefferson,
Mifflin, and Juniata Counties in the interior of Pennsylvania. His
authorized expenses of $25.02 on January 3 and $21.98 more on

34 New England Anti-Slavery Society, Second Record Book, pp. 255, 266; Emancipator, February 9, 1837; February 23, 1837; March 23, 1837; Liberator, February 2, 1833; March 9, 1833; March 30, 1833; June 29, 1833; National Enquirer, December 17, 1837; December 31, 1836; February 11, 1837.
35 Emancipator, December 15, 1836; March 15, 1837; Agency Committee Minutes, January 3, 1837, meeting and sheet pasted in near the end of the book; Friend of Man, February 1, 1837; National Enquirer, February 11, 1837; Theophilus Packard, Jr., A History of the Churches and Ministers, and of Franklin Association, in Franklin County, Mass. (Boston, 1854), p. 21.
February 8 imply that he traveled considerably. His first reported visit was to Lewistown on December 20. Thereafter, for the remainder of December and January, he operated in Juniata County, particularly in the Lower Tuscarora area, in which he delivered at least four lectures. He also presented two addresses in Mifflin County. Of course, he attended the state convention, January 31-February 2.26

The only other national agent who served in Pennsylvania before the establishment of the state society was Charles C. Burleigh. Although a key figure in the events of his era and a pillar of the Garrison wing of the antislavery movement, Burleigh today is one of the lesser known abolitionists. Trained to become a lawyer, Burleigh's interest in slavery soon moved him into active participation in the antislavery movement as writer, editor, and lecturer. He was characterized as having power of speech, clearness of presentation, and logic of mind. After assisting his co-workers in conducting the antislavery meetings in Philadelphia, he remained in the city to deliver seven more lectures, all except the first two to "overflowing audiences."

Burleigh opened his lecturing tour of upstate Pennsylvania on December 9. He delivered without serious opposition almost thirty addresses before the end of the month. On December 9 he set out for West Chester and spoke that evening to a few people who assembled without advance notice. He walked to Kennett Square, above twelve miles, for meetings in the Friends' meetinghouse on December 10 and 11. The congregation stifled an attempt to create a disturbance. On Tuesday, December 13 he returned to Philadelphia for a scheduled debate, but he reappeared in West Chester for an address to a larger audience the next day. After lectures

26 *General Catalogue of the Theological Seminary Andover, 1808-1908* (Boston, 1908), p. 170; Agency Committee Minutes, meetings of August 17 and October 5, 1836, and January 3 and February 8, 1837; Barnes and Dumond, *Weld-Grinbk Letters*, I, 333; *Emancipator*, February 9, 1837; March 9, 1837.

at Old Kennett during both the afternoon and evening of December 15, he set out with a friend who volunteered to conduct him from town to town for nine meetings between December 16 and 20. At the conclusion of two more programs in Kimberton, he had delivered eleven lectures and traveled sixty miles since he had left Kennett. Although a stone was hurled at him through a window at West Chester, it damaged nothing except glass. He returned to Philadelphia to help with the preparations for the state convention.28

After an appearance in Lyonville on December 29 and another visit to Philadelphia, Burleigh left for Lancaster County on December 30. He lectured in the Willistown schoolhouse on the same evening and on the last day of the month, and the first day of January he spoke in Sadsbury. During the following week he visited Lower Octoraro and Sadsburyville in Chester County and Wasteland, Middle Octoraro, Salisbury, Williamstown, Paradise, and Strasburg in Lancaster County, conducting meetings in each community except the latter. The audience at Wasteland twice removed an agitator from the building. The Lower Octoraro Presbyterian minister challenged Burleigh to a verbal skirmish which Burleigh affirmed was helpful to abolition. He continued his efforts with lectures in the Friends' meetinghouse in East Fallowfield on January 9 and in Lampeter on the following day. By that date and after his exit from Philadelphia, he had delivered nineteen addresses in which he spoke a total of forty-two hours and which entailed travel of 180 miles.29

Thereafter, until the gathering of the state convention, Burleigh continued lecturing in the same region. On January 11 he spoke twice more at Lampeter and on January 12, at Strasburg. He addressed the Adams County meeting at York Springs on Friday, January 13. While he was speaking at Doe Run on January 15, he was assaulted by a mob which hurled stones through the windows and against the house. They tried to frighten the ladies in the audience by beating clubs on the roof and to halt the lecture by spraying water through the window upon the speaker.

28 Emancipator, January 5, 1837; National Enquirer, December 31, 1836; January 7, 1837.
29 Agency Committee Minutes, February 8, 1837 meeting; Emancipator, January 5, 1837; National Enquirer, January 21, 1837.
Although the meeting had to be adjourned, another was scheduled for January 22. Burleigh in the meantime moved on for two addresses in Leacock Township in Lancaster County, two in Colerain, two at Andras Bridge, and two in Coatesville. He returned to lecture twice at Sadsbury and Lampeter.\(^{10}\)

The state antislavery society organizational meeting for which so much effort had been expended during the preceding two months assembled in Harrisburg on January 21. The call for the convention was published as early as October 29, signed by a leading group of state abolitionists, including Lewis C. Gunn, James Mott, Benjamin Lundy, A. B. Shipley, Benjamin C. Bacon, James Forten, Thaddeus Stevens, F. J. LeMoyne, and Arnold Buffum. Eight agents were present: Blanchard, Burleigh, Cross, Beldon, Gould, Johnson, McKim, and Pritchett. Burleigh and Blanchard were among those who delivered addresses.\(^{11}\) The assembly did not mean that the battle against approval or forbearance of slavery had been won in Pennsylvania. Agents would accomplish much more in the future; other means of gathering antislavery support would also be beneficial. A large number of Pennsylvanians would oppose doing anything effective to combat slavery as late as 1861. Nevertheless, the agents in Pennsylvania had produced startling changes in public sentiment by February of 1837.

The addition of the Pennsylvania state society was far more the result of the activities of the paid lecturers who organized antislavery efforts and spread antislavery doctrine than of the presence of the Quakers who were mildly antislavery but who did not usually support the immediate emancipation movement. Almost ignored in the early American Anti-Slavery Society activity, Pennsylvania was given special attention which resulted not only in the formation of the new organization, but in new pockets of abolition sentiment all over the state. The doctrines of the abolitionists were revealed to and clarified for thousands of people, local societies were formed to sustain the enthusiasm already generated and to convert the remainder of the community through daily contacts within the family and among friends and business

\(^{11}\) *National Enquirer*, February 11, 1837; February 18, 1837.
associates, financial support was obtained for activities elsewhere, and pressure was brought to bear upon political and religious leaders to add their efforts to the cause. Through the dramatization of their beliefs and mobilization of their fellow-believers, the agents had helped alter the course of Pennsylvania and American history.