

## George Thompson and Anti-Abolitionism in Lowell, Massachusetts

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A wave of violence swept American society in the 1830s; abolitionists, Catholics, Mormons, and other outcasts were attacked by mobs, and some were murdered. Among the best-known cases was the murder of Elijah Lovejoy at Alton, Illinois in 1837. As for anti-abolition mobs, Leonard L. Richards and others analyzed the cases of New York and Boston. These studies on anti-abolition mobs indicate that among these leaders were often “Gentlemen of Property and Standing.” David R. Roediger suggested the complexities of working class racism.<sup>1</sup> In this paper, we will shed light on one of the less known mobs, which occurred in Lowell, Massachusetts.

In the fall of 1834, George Thompson, English abolitionist was invited to the United States for the first time, and he gave a series of lectures throughout the country. While many Americans were impressed by his lectures, he became a target of anti-abolition mobbing. Lowell, Massachusetts was no exception. A local weekly newspaper *the Lowell Patriot* published a letter from “an Abolitionist”:

Delivered lectures on Slavery at the Town Hall in Lowell on Sabbath and Monday evenings last, to large and delighted auditories. On the second evening, he was interrupted by stamping vociferation and hisses, from persons just without the door; and a brick-bat, thrown through the window behind him, passed over within a foot or two of his head. A lecture was announced for Tuesday evening; but such were the appearances of tumult in the course of the day, that the Selectmen doubted their ability to protect the assembly from the assaults of a mob without, by the aid of the civil officers; though they declared their

readiness to do their utmost to secure the peace, having granted us the use of the Hall.<sup>2</sup>

While Thompson gave lectures in the town with impunity for the first time earlier in October, his lectures during his second visit to Lowell caused more turbulence.<sup>3</sup> On his second visit he gave three lectures in total, and his first lecture on the 30th of November was given almost without interruption, “except the throwing of a large stone at a window, which was arrested by the sash and fell harmless on the outside.”<sup>4</sup> It was during his second lecture that the mob stormed the Town Hall. His lecture then was:

of nearly two hours’ length, on the history of St. Domingo [sic]—that history which on so many minds is a spectre to warn them against the liberation of slaves; but which, when truly narrated, is so triumphant an example of the perfect safety of immediate emancipation, even in circumstances as unpromising as can possibly be conceived. Very few left the hall till the lecture was ended, notwithstanding its length and some untoward events now to be mentioned....<sup>5</sup>

“[S]ome untoward events” refers to the disturbance and brickbat-throwing, as several newspapers reported. Rev. Asa Rand, who was congregational minister, the president of the Lowell Antislavery Society then, and the probable host of Thompson in Lowell, reported this incident to *the Liberator* as follows:

In the early part of the lecture, a small company of low fellows disturbed the assembly just without the door, in the entry at the head of the stairs, by loud stamping, vociferation and hisses. This was continued at intervals for near half an hour, when peace-officers, who had been sent for, arrived, and immediately the disturbers were quiet as lambs, and continued so till the close. Same time after, three missiles were thrown at the building behind the speaker. The third or last, a large brickbat, came through the window, passed near the speaker’s head and

fell harmless before the audience in front of the rostrum. This missile must have been thrown with great force, to pass into the second story of a high-posted building, and fly so far from the wall. A slight change of its direction could have silenced the eloquence of our friend forever, except that the barbarity of the deed would have given what he had already said in behalf of the oppressed more glorious immortality.<sup>6</sup>

While Thompson continued talking without hesitation, another lecture to be held on Tuesday evening was to be cancelled and postponed till Wednesday afternoon, December 3rd. Although the Selectmen promised them “protection to the extent of their authority,” the board of managers [of the antislavery society] decided to postpone the event under the circumstance where the Town Hall was “approachable on all the sides” and its windows had no blind nor shutter.<sup>7</sup>

Rev. Rand also reported in *the Liberator* that the anti-abolition meeting was held on Tuesday, December 2nd.

The mal-contents were not satisfied to retire home after our adjournment last evening. They re-opened the Hall, and held a sort of mobocratic caucus, though remarkably still and orderly for one of that kind. They passed and have to-day published, resolutions, ‘deeply deploring the existence of slavery’—most sincerely, no doubt—and saying that the agitation of the subject here is very bad—that the Town Hall ought not to be used for the purpose—and communicating this wise opinion to the Selectmen.<sup>8</sup>

For this incident, there is no contemporary record except newspaper articles, and as for the antislavery societies in Lowell, the research materials are so scarce that the author could locate only one small pamphlet of the Lowell Anti-Slavery Society, published earlier in 1834, in a collection of the Rare Books and Manuscript Department in the Boston Public Library. Therefore, the research here is mainly based on contemporary newspaper articles.

*The Liberator* reported the same incident more in detail and rather

emotionally in the editorial entitled “Cowardice and Ruffianism,” saying that the “*very patriotic* placard” appeared in the morning of December 2nd, and that an anti-abolition meeting was held on the same day in the Town Hall. These “verbatim” handbills were reprinted in the article.

Arise! Look well to your interests! Will you suffer a question to be agitated in Lowell, which will endanger the safety of the Union? A question which we have not, by our constitution, any right to middle with. Fellow Citizens—Shall Lowell be the first place to suffer an Englishman to disturb the peace and harmony of our country? Do you wish instruction from an Englishman? If you are the freeborn sons of America, meet, one and all, at the Town Hall, THIS EVENING, at half past 7 o’clock, and convince your Southern brethren that we will not interfere with their rights.

In addition to the above, the following *kind* and *intelligent* epistle was addressed to Mr. Thompson, by an anonymous hand:

Lowell, 2d December, 1834.

Rev. Dr. Thompson,  
DEAR SIR,

I as a friend beg leave to inform you that there is a plot in agitation to immerce [sic] you in a vat of Indelable [sic] Ink\* and I recommend to you to take your departure from this part of the country, as soon as possible or it will be shurely [sic] carrid [sic] into operation [sic], and that to before you see the light of an other son.

Very respectfully yours,

A citizen of theas [sic]

United States of Ammerica [sic]

\*nitrate of Silver<sup>9</sup>

According to these handbills, the question was that an Englishman tried to disturb “the peace and harmony of our country” while people in Lowell had no right to interfere with the rights of their “Southern brethren”—in other

words, their state rights were secured by the Constitution. A British subject, Thompson had no business to interfere in the question in the American South. In this anti-abolition meeting the executive members were selected and adopted the resolutions. Samuel A. Coburn, Esq., inn-holder of Merrimac House and the town clerk was selected as Chairman, and John N. Sumner, surgeon dentist was appointed as Secretary.<sup>10</sup>

On motion of P. H. Willard,

*Voted*, That a committee of three be appointed to draft resolutions to be submitted to the meeting.

Thos. Hopkinson, Esq. P. H. Willard, and John P. Robinson were appointed said committee.

The committee reported the following resolutions:

*Resolved*, That we deeply deplore the existence of Slavery in the United States, and regard it as a blot on the fair reputation of our otherwise free country.

*Resolved*, That the agitation of the question of immediate emancipation, in this part of the country, is calculated to create suspicions and disaffection between the north and south, and with no reasonable prospect of effecting any good results, greatly to endanger the permanent union of these States.

*Resolved*, That in the opinion of this meeting, the Town Hall of Lowell ought not to be used for the purpose of prosecuting a discussion obviously tending to produce effects so much to be deprecated by every well disposed citizen.

After a short discussion by Messrs. Robinson and Hopkinson, the resolutions were unanimously adopted.

*Voted*, That the proceedings of this meeting be signed by the Chairman and Secretary, and published in the several newspapers in Lowell.

*Voted*, That the Secretary be instructed to deliver a copy of the resolutions to the Selectmen of the town of Lowell.<sup>11</sup>

*The Liberator* concluded that the “*kind and intelligent epistle*” was not written

by “American citizens” but by “foreigners of the lowest grade,” and labeled people who attended the anti-abolition meeting as cowards for they did not accept Thompson’s invitation to meet him in public debate.<sup>12</sup> In reality, the executive members of the meeting were all respectable in the town; both Thomas Hopkinson and John P. Robinson were listed as “Counsellors and Attornies [sic]” in the Lowell Directory of 1834, and Peter H. Willard was a wine and grocery storekeeper dealing with West India goods.<sup>13</sup>

A local newspaper, *the Lowell Patriot*, while sometimes featured the anti-slavery articles rather sympathetically, including the one cited in the introduction of this article, got the point and criticized the editorial of *the Liberator*:

... they must be informed that one of the gentlemen, whom their organ, the *Liberator*, has classed as one of the *ruffians*, and one of the *leaders* of the mob is THE TOWN CLERK, —another, SENATOR ELECT for this county, —another EDITOR of THE LOWELL MERCURY, the organ of the whigs of Middlesex county, —and the other two members, par excellence, of the good society portion of the Lowell whigs, having been *voted* in, at a regular meeting of the members, one of the other *three more distinguished* names, presiding! We think that these *clouds* portend trouble and divisions among “the friends, of the *Constitution* and the *laws*.”

... the *Liberator* says, “Citizens of New England! The question is *no longer*; *whether* the slaves at the South ought to be emancipated? but *whether you* are freely to exercise the liberty of speech, *or* be yourselves the *tools* and *slaves* of TYRANTS and RUFFIANS?”<sup>14</sup>

*The Lowell Mercury* certainly vindicated anti-abolitionism while it was not necessarily in favor of the mob at Thompson’s lecture:

The good natured Yankees are perhaps the only people on earth who would suffer a foreigner, the subject of a foreign government, to go about teaching them their duty, and laboring to raise an excitement on

the most delicate subjects and most difficult relations, subjects which agitate the community and more imminently threaten the very life of the government than any other....

But yet we are of opinion that this good nature is nevertheless, the best policy. A riot is no argument, and generally tends to produce the precisely contrary results from those designed to be effected....

If a public expression of disapprobation of the Anti-Slavery Society be called for, a riot is certainly not the most efficient organ of that sentiment. There is no doubt that the current of public opinion in this town sets strongly against that cause. If a meeting of citizens should be called, there is no doubt they would pass resolutions of decided disapproval, and the only question on that subject is, whether the Anti-Slavery party here is so large as to require such an expression. We think it does not....

Some slight disturbances took place Monday evening. But it being confined to some boys in the entry, and one missile sent by some despicable outlaw from without, we did not think it worth while to raise the matter into importance by making mention of it. Tuesday we understand that the meeting adjourned from apprehension was well founded or not, we cannot say—we hope not....

We went to the Town Hall Tuesday evening, without having any intimation of any adjournment, and expecting of course to hear Mr[.] Thompson's lecture. On arriving there, the Hall was then being lighted up for a meeting which we were informed had been called by individuals opposed to the movement of the Anti-Slavery society. We know of no connexion which that meeting had with those who intended any violent proceedings, if indeed any such were intended. We believe no such connexion did exist. It was a meeting of quiet, orderly and respectable citizens. They had many of them, come to hear the lecture, and others had come after this last evening had been called. They were men who have a stake in the peace of this town and general welfare of the country as deep, and an interest as strong as any party whatever.

Such averments may indeed seem superfluous. But the fact is, that

certain individuals have intimated that the meeting was calculated and even intended to countenance a disturbance. We believe the contrary effect most likely to follow. An expression of the sentiments of a majority of the citizens, in such a way would more naturally allay than cherish the excitement.<sup>15</sup>

At this point there is no evidence suggesting that these leaders, either Coburn, Sumner, Hopkinson, Willard, or Robinson, had actually participated in the mob at Thompson's lecture on December 1st. If the editor of *the Lowell Mercury* was among the members of the anti-abolition meeting, as *the Lowell Patriot* suggested, it would be rational for this newspaper to be in favor of anti-abolitionism, and it is understandable why Peter H. Willard proposed a motion to vote that a committee of three should be appointed to draft resolutions as his business was connected to sugar plantations in the West Indies.

In the process of research at the Center for Lowell History at the University of Massachusetts, Lowell, the author found small hand-written notes with pencil as well as a handbill and a broadside of anti-abolition meetings in a folder classified as "abolitionists."<sup>16</sup> Neither the title, the date, nor the note-keeper's name was recorded in this document, but they referred to the anti-abolition meeting held in Lowell on Saturday, August 22nd.

Soon after a call for a public meeting was issued, signed by Kirk Boott and more than fifty [sic] other citizens, of which the following in a copy:—

The undersigned inhabitants of Lowell are impressed with a brief that the rash doings of those who advocate the immediate abolition of slavery result in much mischief to our common country....<sup>17</sup>

Kirk Boott was the agent of the Merrimac Manufacturing Company, the cotton textile factory established first in Lowell, as well as of Locks and Canal Company, Representative of Lowell in the Massachusetts legislature, and one of the most eminent inhabitants of this town. In the meeting they selected William Austin, agent of the Lawrence Manufacturing Company, as



Chairman, and John Aikin, agent of the Tremont Manufacturing Company, as Clerk. Other executive members were Charles H. Locke; John P. Robinson, counsellor and attorney; Samuel H. Mann, attorney; Elisha Bartlett, physician; John Avery, superintendent of the Hamilton Manufacturing Company; Thomas Hopkinson, attorney at law; and John L. Sheafe, counsellor. Considering the business connections between the Northern cotton textile industrialists and the Southern planters, we can understand easily why anti-abolitionism was led by the textile industrialists in this town.<sup>18</sup>

Considering the fact that August 22nd fell on Saturday, this might be written in 1835, and an article on a "Public Meeting" was found in *the Lowell Journal and Mercury* of 4 September 1835. They repeated the state-rights issues as we discussed above.

Whereas, the regulation and control of slavery are of paramount and vital importance to the states in which that condition exists; and, whereas, no power has been granted to the Federal government over that subject, but by express understanding, well known at the period of the adoption of the constitution, and forming the basis of the policy of that time, it was left with the respective states.

And, whereas, certain individuals and societies of the North insist upon immediate abolition, regardless of consequences and at all hazards and labor to the end, by means tending to endanger the harmony of the Union, to excite sectional jealousy and ill will, to [disturb?] the domestic relations of society, and leading to insurrection and civil war.... Therefore, we, the inhabitants of Lowell, without distinction of party, in public meeting assembled, do make known our opinions and determinations to our fellow citizens by the following resolutions.

*Resolved*, That we sympathize with our Southern Brethren in the present period of alarm and danger, that we are firmly and resolutely determined to cherish the Union and maintain inviolate the compact under which it was formed, and that we regard with deep sorrow and disapprobation the course pursued by the Anti-Slavery societies of the North, and with especial abhorrence [sic] and disgust the introduction

of foreigners, sent by foreign policy and paid by foreign funds, to agitate and distract our people on a point vitally affecting our national existence.<sup>19</sup>

While they opposed the immediate abolition of slavery and criticized the introduction of George Thompson by Garrisonian abolitionists, the document seems not to mean that they were all affirmatively pro-slavery. One of their resolutions says:

*Resolved*, That we deplore the existence of slavery in any part of our common country; our feelings, habits, principles and laws, equally forbid it among ourselves; yet we deem it our bounden duty, on principles of moral right, national law, and sacred compact, to leave the evil with its remedies, where the constitution leaves it, in the hands of the several states.<sup>20</sup>

Apathy to the slavery question would be more common among the Northerners. Since most of the proprietors of Lowell mills, known as “Boston Associates,” lived in Boston, their names did not appear in the discussion above. In Boston an anti-abolition meeting was held on August 21st, 1835, one day before the Lowell public meeting held on August 22nd. Among the participants was Abbott Lawrence, one of the proprietors of Suffolk, Tremont, and Lawrence Mills. Their political attitude was later labeled as “Cotton Whigs.”<sup>21</sup>

In spite of such violence against the abolitionists, however, in Lowell as well as in other towns in Massachusetts, women organized the anti-slavery societies after attending Thompson’s lectures.<sup>22</sup> In a few years, more than 1400 Lowell women started petitioning to Congress. They wrote to the House of Representatives in favor of the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia, and to the Senate opposing the Annexation of Texas.<sup>23</sup> Lowell women petitioners consisted of about 10 % of the total women’s population in Lowell.<sup>24</sup> These were among the anti-slavery petitions that John Quincy Adams and others presented to Congress in the 1830s. How the antislavery

movement progressed in Lowell is another story to be explored.

### Notes

- 1 *The Boston Mob of "Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Meeting Held in Stacy Hall, Boston on the Twentieth Anniversary of the Mob of October 21, 1835* (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1855); Leonard L. Richards, *"Gentlemen of Property and Standing": Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970); David Grimsted, *American Mobbing, 1828–1861* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Yoshio Higomoto, "Anti-Abolition Riots and the 'Communications Revolution' in Jacksonian America," *American History/Amerikashi-Kenkyu* 36 (2013): 24–42 (in Japanese); David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class, New Edition* ([1991]; London: Verso, 2007).
- 2 An Abolitionist, "Mr. Thompson," *Lowell Patriot*, 5 December 1834.
- 3 George Thompson to George W. Benson, 7 October 1834 (Manuscript), the Rare Books and Manuscript Dept., Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts (BPL); "George Thompson," *The Liberator*, 18 October 1834; A. Rand, "Mr. Thompson at Lowell," *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834 [letter to Mr. Garrison, 3 December 1834].
- 4 A. Rand, "Mr. Thompson at Lowell," *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Ibid. The name "Rev. Asa Rand" appeared as the president of the Lowell Anti-Slavery Society in a small pamphlet, *the Lowell Anti-Slavery Society* (Lowell, Mass.: The Observer Press, 1834), the Rare Books and Manuscript Dept., BPL.
- 7 Rand, "Mr. Thompson at Lowell," *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 "Cowardice and Ruffianism," *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834.
- 10 Ibid.; Benjamin Floyd, *The Lowell Directory Containing Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupation, Places of Business and Dwelling Houses* (Lowell: The Observer Press, 1834), 33, 112, 133.
- 11 "Cowardice and Ruffianism," *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Ibid.; Benjamin Floyd, *The Lowell Directory*, 65, 125, 141–42; *The Lowell Annual Advertiser Prefixed to the Lowell Directory*.
- 14 "The Liberator," *Lowell Patriot*, 12 December 1834.
- 15 "Anti-Slavery," *Lowell Mercury*, 12 December 1834.  
The author is at the present not able to identify who was the editor of *the Lowell*

- Mercury* in the year of 1834.
- 16 The handbill and broadside of anti-abolition meetings (Anti-Thompson Handbill Circulated in Lowell, December 2, 1834; “Public [Anti-Abolition] Meeting” Broadside, August 21, 1835) were reprinted as Documents 7 and 8 in *Cotton, Cloth and Conflict: the Meaning of Slavery in a Northern Textile City* (Lowell, Mass.: Tsongas Industrial History Center, n.d.).
  - 17 Hand-written notes, n.d., Folder: Abolitionists, Collection of the Center for Lowell History, the University of Massachusetts Lowell.
  - 18 Ibid.; Benjamin Floyd, *The Lowell Directory: Containing Names of the Inhabitants, Their Occupation, Places of Business and Dwelling Houses* (Lowell: The Patriot Press, 1835), 14, 16–17, 24, 74, 89, 115, 119.
  - 19 “Public Meeting,” *Lowell Journal and Mercury*, 4 September 1835.
  - 20 Ibid.
  - 21 Thomas H. O’Connor, *Lords of the Loom: The Cotton Whigs and the Coming of the Civil War* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1968), 52; Kinley J. Brauer, *Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southern Expansion, 1843–1848* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 8–29.
  - 22 “Cowardice and Ruffianism,” *The Liberator*, 6 December 1834.
  - 23 Petition of Harriet S. Gridley and 1400 Others, Women of Lowell, Mass. for the Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia, January 3rd, 1838, Records of the U.S. House of Representatives, HR25A. H.1.8, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (NARA); Remonstrance of H. Huntington and 1400 Others, Women of Lowell, Mass. against the Annexation of Texas to the United States as a Slave-Holding Territory, October 12th, 1837 Laid on the Table, Records of the Senate, SEN25A.H1, Box123, NARA.
  - 24 While there is no available population data in the years of 1837–1838, that of 1840 is available. The Lowell female population was 13,511, and the male and female population in total were 20,796. *Sixth Census of Enumeration on the Inhabitants of the United States* (Washington, D.C., 1841), 44–45.

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## ジョージ・トムソンとマサチューセッツ州ローウエル における反アボリショニズム

久田 由佳子

1830年代、アメリカ合衆国北部各地では暴動が頻発し、奴隷制即時無条件廃止論者やカトリック教徒、モルモン教徒などがその標的となった。本稿では、奴隷即時無条件廃止論者を標的とする反アボリショニスト暴動のうち、マサチューセッツ州ローウエルで起こった1834年の暴動について扱う。奴隷制即時無条件廃止論者ウィリアム・ロイド・ギャリソンらの招待によって北部各地で講演をおこなったイギリス人のジョージ・トムソンは、特に外国人による内政干渉として反発を受けることが多く、各地で暴動が起こったが、当時、綿工業都市として急速に発展していたマサチューセッツ州ローウエルにおいても例外ではなかった。

この暴動については、『愛知県立大学外国語学部紀要（地域研究・国際学編）』44号（2012）所収の「マサチューセッツ州ローウエルにおける反アボリショニスト暴動をめぐって」で扱ったことがあるが、平成24年度に「南北戦争前夜における階級・政党政治・ジェンダー・人種に関する研究」として、愛知県立大学学長特別教員研究費の交付を受けてハーヴァード大学歴史学部客員研究員として調査研究をおこなう機会が与えられ、現地で手稿史料を含む新たな史料を入手することができたため、大幅な加筆修正をおこなった。前稿ではマイクロフィルムの状態が悪く判読不能で利用できなかった新聞記事があったが、今回はローウエル地方史研究センター（マサチューセッツ大学ローウエル校）所蔵の別の版が利用可能になったことにより、明らかとなった事実がある点、および同研究センター所蔵の反アボリショニスト集会のビラやポスターを閲覧中に同時代のものと思われる手稿メモを発見し、それも利用できた点が、前稿との大きな違いである。またローウエル奴隷制反対協会に関するパンフレットがボストン公共図書館の貴重書・手稿史料室に所蔵されていることがわかり、トムソンの招聘に関わったと考えられる牧師を特定することもできた。

しかし町の有力者の大半が反アボリショニストであった事実と、その数年後に同町で起こる奴隷制反対運動の高まりをどのように説明するのか、まだ不明な点も多く、さらなる研究が必要である。

なお、本稿は平成23-25年度科学研究費基盤研究(A)「19世紀前半のアメリカ合衆国における市民編成原理の研究」(研究代表者 遠藤泰生)の共同研究の成果の一部でもある。