

Lucy Stone, the daughter of Francis and Hannah, witnessed the difficult life of a woman first-hand on the farm where she was raised. This we know about Lucy's mother: "When she married Francis Stone, Hannah left the prosperous and cheerful farm of her parents and moved less than eleven miles away. She would never again find time or opportunity to travel the short distance to her childhood home. In linking herself to the tightfisted and cantankerous Francis Stone, she entered into a lifetime of what her own children would later remember as almost ceaseless toil."

When Lucy was born Hannah had a total of six children to care after, and in all she gave birth to nine children with two dying in infancy. In addition, Francis' pals came to drink and play cards with him at Coy Hill, and as they had to travel out of town for their carousing they lingered long, expecting Hannah and her growing daughters to cook and serve them. Francis was a rough man, given to drinking too much hard cider and to slapping his children to knock obedience into them. Once, when Lucy was about 10 or 12 she disobeyed one of his orders and he pulled her over his knee and spanked her so unmercifully not only she, but, her brothers and sisters remembered the incident well into adulthood.

Born in 1818, Lucy Stone's early years were spent in close proximity to the hardscrabble farm where she lived and the Congregational church where the family worshipped. Her mother was an observant Christian, and as was the wider custom in that day she was submissive and subservient to her husband. Lucy found a natural ire when she encountered Biblical injunctions for that submissiveness. "One day, as Lucy was reading the Bible to herself, she came across the words: 'Thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.'" The words enraged her, and she went to her mother and asked if this was true." Her mother replied in the affirmative and Lucy immediately asked if there was something available with which she might kill herself rather than face that fate.

Lucy vowed she would never marry and moreover she would go to college. Her sibling brothers were being given an education in Latin, Greek, mathematics and rhetoric. But, like Judith Sargent Murray, who met the same resistance sixty years earlier, the Stone family education budget did not extend to Lucy's needs. She picked up chestnuts in the woods, and gathered berries and nuts to buy the books she needed to join her brothers at their studies.

Lucy's studies bore fruit she might not have imagined when her father sent her out to a teaching job for one dollar a week. She seemed to excel in the work, and though she may have begrudged her father the larger portion of her earnings, she soon found herself accepting better teaching posts with better pay. However, she was always in those days paid a 'woman's wages', which no one ever seemed to be embarrassed to announce would always be less than a man's wages. Lucy Stone alternated teaching and studying as she worked toward her educational goals. Julia Ward Howe reports that she studied for a time at the Monson, Quabbong and Wilbraham Academies. She also enrolled at Mount Holyoke Seminary. It is said that she and her sister Sarah did not board, but, took a room in a friend's home bringing their own provisions from the farm. .

Two of Lucy's sisters died in the next few years. On the first occasion she left her studies to care for Elizabeth's children and then to console her mother. On the second occasion she took over Rhoda's teaching job, and when the semester was finished she went home again to bring consolation to her mother.

By the age of twenty-one Lucy had learned something of what the books she read had taught her, but also many lessons from her own life experience. She learned by her mother's example that a woman's life was hard. She learned from the Bible, that men ruled their wives. Through the death of her sisters she learned a woman's life could be short, with unfinished business left

behind. She learned from her father's actions that men could be harsh and even cruel with the people they should love the most. She learned, too, that family relationships built around a certain man's wishes might be reduced to a 'what can you do for me' mentality. For example, when she asked her father's permission to go to Mount Holyoke Seminary, he released her only on the condition that she sign a promissory note for the wages she would have earned by working during the same time period. From her brothers she learned that not all men were as difficult to live with as her own father, and of course, that their education and preparations for life still took precedence over her own. Note, for instance, that she picked her own berries and sold them, without obvious help or support from her brothers.

Laws denied women the right to own property, the right to vote, or speak as witnesses in court. Their husbands, or fathers, or brothers truly did rule over them. When, as a child Lucy witnessed, a woman whose husband died, lose her children to foster care and be turned out of her home, the stark reality of what it meant for women to be ruled by a husband became clear. She is said to have recalled asking her mother if the same would happen to a man whose wife died, and of course the response was, "No, his life would go on as before." This condition of dependence persisted despite protest and attempts at revising the law. Even when Lucy Stone was earning good money as a lecturer, the property she purchased, and her investments, were either held in her brother's name or in her husband's name.

Still the 1830s and 1840s were stirring times. The abolitionist movement was actively questioning the morality of slavery. Women like the Grimke sisters and Abby Kelley had joined the ranks of public speakers arguing against the institution of slavery. Their presence on the pulpits and podiums was not entirely welcome, and Lucy Stone was witness to an entire cycle of events that demonstrate how far the hand of suppression might reach. The clergy around Brookfield, Massachusetts issued a warning against the horror of abolitionists, and particularly women abolitionists, being invited to speak in area pulpits. Lucy was in church the Sunday the letter was read to all parishioners, and she was in the pews on the day when Abby Kelley accepted the invitation of Deacon Henshaw to speak at Brookfield. She called it 'exciting and riotous,' but soon she also made time to attend the trial held to suppress the disobedient Deacon Henshaw. In little more than a decade her own career as a lecturer for women's rights would be the impetus the Orthodox Congregational Church, where she was a member, to excommunicate her.

Lucy Stone did not adopt her mother's firm Christian beliefs. Often, when she wrote to her brother, Bowman, who was studying for the ministry, she would make reference to her lack of belief. Occasionally, she wondered wistfully about the fate that left warm religious feelings out of her makeup. She was not a fan of the organized church. When she made fast friends with Antoinette Brown (who was seeking to be the first woman ordained a Congregationalist minister) she lamented the sad fact that her dear friend was caught up in the ropes of religion. As a lecturer confronted with texts that spoke of the subjugation of women she was known to retort that those passages were only predictions but, just because the prediction described a true outcome, that didn't mean it was the truth. Lucy Stone had learned from her own reading of the Bible, her mother's sad submission to a husband, and the church's treatment of women, that religion was one with the laws that bound women in oppressions from which they might never escape. She was introduced to the 'Transcendentalists' – in the persons of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, joining their conversations from time to time. And yet, she revealed more traditional beliefs about personal immortality as her own end drew near. She told people she expected the next life to be as beautiful as this one.

While she was still in her twenties and thirties ‘exciting and riotous’ ran through her life. After saving for eight years, and studying off and on whenever she could, Lucy Stone matriculated at Oberlin College ready to pursue the first dream of her young life. Many miles distant from Massachusetts, Oberlin was the only college that accepted women.

Four years later, Lucy was more than ever an abolitionist and a supporter of women’s rights. Oberlin College did not choose to let women study elocution or rhetoric, as the prospect of a woman speaking in public addressing a mixed audience of women and men was considered unbecoming. Lucy spear-headed a debating club for women while a student, and at graduation determined she wanted to be an orator. Her decision met with opposition from her father, mother, sister Sarah, and most of her brothers, except Bowman who encouraged her to follow her own conscience. The year she graduated William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass and Stephen Foster came to Ohio to speak. Lucy Stone attended the meetings, and left this impression on Garrison: “She is a very superior young woman, and has a soul as free as the air, and is preparing to go forth as a lecturer, particularly in vindication of the rights of women.”

Once she arrived home her brother, Bowman, serving a church in Gardner, Massachusetts asked her to speak to his congregation there, and Lucy Stone’s public speaking career began. She had earlier secured an agreement to be a lecturer for the New England Slavery Society, under the direction of Samuel May. However, a full year passed before the Anti-Slavery Society called upon her. She was soon a popular and well-loved lecturer. In her sentiments, she was a full-fledged Garrisonian, who urged her audiences to consider severing the nation to rid itself of the scourge of slavery.

At first she spoke only on the slavery issue, but, began to inter-mingle lectures on women’s rights. This troubled the Anti-Slavery Society, but, she soon struck a bargain that allowed her to speak on women’s rights during the week, and against slavery on the weekends. By all accounts Lucy Stone was a gifted orator. At first she refused to charge admission to her lectures on women’s rights, but, after a while discovered that people would still attend when charged 12 and ½ cents admission. Though the admission fee kept out some of her rabble-rousing opponents, it seems that many of Stone’s appearances would have outstripped our recent racous town hall meetings on health care by a country mile. Pennies, dried apples, smoked herring, and tobacco cuds were sometimes used to counter her arguments. On one occasion the opposed threw a hymnal with great force hitting Lucy Stone on the back of the head leaving her with ringing in her ears.

Lucy Stone was instrumental in calling together the forming committee for the first national convention on women’s rights. The illness and death of her brother, Luther, and the needs of his pregnant wife, Phebe, kept her from fulfilling her duties as one of the committee however. And, when she herself contracted typhus, she was nearly prevented from attending the convention. At the last moment she was well enough to attend, and on the last day was pressed into speaking herself. She spoke warmly of the need for change, saying: “We want to be something more than the appendages of Society; we want that woman should be the coequal and help-meet of Man in all the interest and perils and enjoyments of human life. We want that she should attain to the development of her nature and womanhood; we want that when she dies, it may not be written on her gravestone that she was the ‘relict’ (widow) of somebody.”

For many years Lucy Stone was not in danger of being anybody’s widow, because she continued to turn aside any men who sought her attentions. But, one day a man seven years her junior came to Boston looking for a bride, and he heard Lucy Stone speak. He contrived to meet her through mutual friends, and within the hour proposed marriage. Lucy dealt with him as she had all

previous suitors, but, Henry Blackwell would not be turned aside. He implored her with letters, and hammered her with protests that he would be a husband like no other. He promised her she could keep her own name, determine the terms of their marital relationship, have or not have children according to her will, and most of all that he would support her career as a lecturer, and indeed help to make her even more successful. Eventually, she came to love him, and two years after his campaign began Henry Blackwell and Lucy Stone were married. At their marriage ceremony they read a protest of all the laws that deprived a woman of rights over her person and property.

Now, here's the rest of the story. Henry Blackwell had admitted to his sisters that he was seeking a wife with money. Lucy Stone was earning \$500 and sometimes \$1000 dollars a week as an independent lecturer. Even before their marriage Henry began to borrow money from Lucy Stone for a series of bad investments. It was a habit he never shook, and, once they were married, he sometimes appropriated money from Lucy's accounts without her permission. After exchanging vows Henry began a campaign to make Lucy over into a housewife and mother, discouraging her from taking lecture tours because she 'might be pregnant.' Unfortunately, Henry was never able to hold a job he felt worthy of his skills and needs, and so Lucy Stone had to return to the lecture circuit, while she was pregnant, while Alice was growing up, and whenever she could so their would be money to support the family and pay Henry's debts. Lucy Stone's letters seem to reveal a woman who was proud, in some regards, of being the breadwinner. She also judged herself harshly for her faults as a mother and wife; promising Henry she would do better when he criticized her. Henry found more reason to be away from his home with Lucy and Alice than in it, and eventually left Lucy with the care of his mother and other ailing relatives. One wonders how a woman who cared for herself, traveled around the country, spoke to angry crowds (and returned to speak again), managed her own money, developed enthralling two-hour long speeches, and held her own with the likes of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton could so easily (it seems) dissolve. In her relationship with Henry Blackwell she often became a self-doubting, self-negating woman who surrendered much of her independence to a rather raggedy-sort-of-fellow. Certainly his letters display both an unrelenting courtship and a rather manipulative post-marriage campaign to limit Lucy Stone's opportunities to experience her strengths. Did she fall in love with him because he needed her money? Did she think he would be an unwise investor, but, a sagacious husband? Or, did she know a seed of self-doubt sewn early in life, that blossomed in the kind of marriage she'd witnessed in her natal family? Whatever it was that let her be both people, she held to both sides of her personality, and her marriage for the rest of her life.

After the Civil War, the suffragists began to seek redress for a woman's right to vote. The right of black males to vote was also under debate. Differing opinions on which groups rights should be addressed first, if at all, led to serious divisions in the women's movement. Black male suffrage became national law in 1870. Lucy Stone was active, as was Henry Blackwell, in reforming the suffrage movement under a new banner. But, momentum for national suffrage for women did not gain Republican and Democratic support until 1916, with the law being adopted in 1920.

Lucy Stone, who died in 1893 at the age of seventy-five, never saw suffrage into law. Her last speech recounted many of the changes she did see. A woman's right to speak in public was won during her lifetime. The right of women to work outside the home and aside from rearing children was also won in her lifetime. And, she accounted these gains as good, and though not all she would have wished, acceptable for one lifetime considering the starting place. She said of her life's work defending and expanding women's rights: "it was so hard and so difficult that if I had been put at the foot of the loftiest peak of the Rocky Mountains with a jack-knife in hand, and had been told 'Hew your way up,' it would have been (a) pastime compared to my task."