

A Canterbury Tale: A Document Package for Connecticut's Prudence Crandall Affair

Henry B. Benson, "Letter to William Lloyd Garrison (March 12th, 1833)," published in *Fruits of Colonization*, 1833.

[*Fruits of Colonization* Editorial Note (1833)]

Who that believes in the truth of the foregoing declarations, will lift a finger to elevate the colored people in this country? The promulgation of such doctrines has a direct tendency to depress their condition. Is it strange, that in Connecticut, the very hot-bed of Colonization, scenes like those disclosed below, should be enacted? They are genuine flowers of the Colonization garden. Let the real friends of the people of color, who have been deluded by the professions of the Colonization Society, read and ponder.

CANTERBURY PERSECUTION — alias — COLONIZATIONISM.

PROVIDENCE, (R.I.) March 12th, 1833.

Wm. Lloyd Garrison.

DEAR FRIEND—You have, ere this, heard of the excitement that prevailed at Canterbury, when the intention of Miss Crandall to open a school for the education of colored females was made known the inhabitants; and you doubtless wish to hear the results of the Town Meeting that was warned to take place on Saturday last.

I arrived at C. from Providence, just at the hour the *freemen* were assembling; and when I entered the meeting-house, found that a Moderator had been chosen, and the warrant for the meeting read. On rapidly glancing my eye over the assembled multitude, I was rejoiced to recognise the faces of our friends Messrs. Buffum and May, and one or two others, who I knew were the decided friends of our cause. But my attention was soon called to a protest against the establishment of the school, signed by many of the citizens, which showed precisely the sentiments with which they regarded it. A preamble, with two resolutions annexed, was then handed to the Town Clerk by Rufus Adams, Esq. and read to the people. The preamble stated the intention of Miss Crandall to establish a school in Canterbury, for the education of young colored females, and the resolution amounted to this, viz.—That the unqualified disapprobation of this meeting be expressed against the establishment of the above mentioned school—that we will do all in our power to prevent it—and that a committee be appointed to visit Miss Crandall to inform her of the proceedings or result of the meeting, to endeavor to convince her of the injurious consequences that would inevitably result from the introduction of colored children into the town, and to persuade her to relinquish her plans.

Many remarks were offered upon these resolutions by Andrew T. Judson, Esq., Mr. Rufus Adams, and others, wholly unworthy of a civilized, much less of an enlightened, Christian community. The injury that would accrue to the town from the introduction of colored children, was represented in an awful light by Mr. Judson. He said that the state of things would be, should such a school go into operation, precisely

as they now are in New-Orleans, where there is scarcely, said he, a *happy person*—that their sons and daughters would be forever ruined, and property be no longer safe. For his part, he was not willing, for the *honor* and welfare of the town, that even one corner of it should be appropriated to such a purpose. After the example which New-Haven has set, he continued, shall it be said that we cannot, that we dare not, resist? We tell those gentleman, said he, turning towards Messrs. Buffum and May, that the laws *shall* be put in force. I, for one, am happy to see the Rev. gentleman here, who has attempted to impose upon me, and seek my property, and rouse my feelings—I am happy he is here to hear me.

The feeling expressed by the citizens of New-Haven, in regard to the establishment of a College in that place for colored youth, was represented by him to be a feeling common in through-out the State; that it had been said that there was one town in Connecticut that was willing that a school of this kind should be established, and that was Union. He said there were about 75 voters in Union, and a freeman of that town told him a few days since that should Miss C. attempt to cross their line for the purpose of establishing a negro school, that every one of these voters would arrange themselves upon it, and if she gained admittance, it would not be until they were no longer able to defend themselves.

Mr. Judson farther stated that they had a law which would prevent that school from going into operation, the law that related to the introduction of foreigners—that it had been threatened that if they made use of that law, the constitutionality of it should be tried in the Supreme Court of the United States. Fellow citizens, let it be done. Are we to be frightened because Arthur Tappan of New-York and some others are worth a few millions of dollars, and are going to use it in oppressing us? No, I know you will answer, No.

Much more was said. Yes, much more was said. Shame, shame, shame to those gentlemen who had no more honor. The character, the motives of Miss Crandall, were basely misrepresented. And you will ask, was there no one to defend her? Yes, there was one, one, who though he did not seem altogether to approve of the school, had moral courage enough to defend her character against the base insinuations of those who had so much to say about foreign influence and oppression. That than was Mr. G. S. White, a tanner. He said the gentlemen were excited; and did not rightly consider what they were about to do—that the resolutions in themselves might be well enough, but he thought it going too far to bring up an old blue law to support them—that that law never was intended, and never could be brought to bear upon the school in question. He did not believe that such a state of things would exist as Mr. Judson had represented, if colored children were admitted into the town; for, said he, Miss Crandall is a Christian, and the evening and morning prayer will daily ascend to the Father of mercies in their behalf, and he will vouchsafe his blessing.

Mr. White was continually interrupted by one Solomon Paine, who, whenever he attempted to defend the character of Miss C. desired the Moderator, Mr. Asahael Bacon, to call him to order: and this was promptly done. Indeed, sir, during the whole time that Mr. White was speaking, the house was in the utmost confusion:—and notwithstanding every liberty was allowed Mr. Judson and Mr. Adams, none at all was allowed him.

Miss Crandall sent in two slips of paper, requesting that Messrs. Buffum and May might be permitted to speak in her behalf. This seemed at once to arouse the feelings of the whole meeting, and Mr. Judson indignantly replied that he would not see the laws thus degraded and insulted; and if the Rev. gentleman and his associate attempted to say any thing, the law should be immediately put in force. Whether any vote was taken upon this subject, I cannot say; certain it is, that the gentlemen were not

permitted to speak; and defend the cause of her who could not plead for herself. One thing was allowed—one thing was admitted—that the lady had borne an irreproachable character up to the time she first contemplated a school for colored females. Her unpardonable sin lay altogether in her wish to elevate the moral and intellectual condition of the blacks, and attempting to carry her plan into operation, without consulting them.

The votes upon the resolutions were unanimous.

Immediately after the meeting was dissolved, Mr. Judson told Mr. May to go home—that he had no right to interfere—and he did not want him there. Mr. May immediately requested to be heard—the meeting was over, and he was violating no law. A great uproar hereupon occurred; some were for hearing him—others declared they would not. In the midst of this confusion, the voice of Andrew T. Judson, Esq. was heard at the door, ordering the people to leave the house. But he found his power was not absolute, Capt. Richard Fenner's assistance and aid notwithstanding. Mr. May was at last enabled to proceed, and spoke with great energy; and, I doubt not, with some effect, to about one third of the number first assembled. He soon gave way to Mr. Buffum, who commenced with defending Miss Crandall; but the door soon flew open, and about six men walked up the aisle, (the Committee, I conclude, of the house,) headed by Doctor Harris, *a life member of the Colonization Society*, who requested Messrs. Buffum and May to leave the house. The request was instantly complied with.

In short, such disgraceful proceedings I never witnessed before, and little expected to witness in the middle of the nineteenth century. The present generation may hail them as just, but the very next will execrate them. The names of those who have been most active in attempting the suppression of this school, may be honored now, but future ages will, consign them to ignominy and shame.

I had hoped that, among the enlightened inhabitants of Connecticut, such a school would be hailed with joy. But I was deceived. Let not the voice of remonstrance against Southern tyranny be raised by the people of that State, for it will 'be a Gloucester at his devotions'—'it will be the devil chiding sin.'

You will doubtless ask—How does Miss Crandall bear up under such a mighty opposition? I reply—UNMOVED. Not a purpose of her heart is shaken—not a fear awakened within her bosom. Confident that she is pursuing the path of duty, she is determined to press on to the end. No persecution that can assail her, will alter the steadfast purpose of her soul. She has received that consolation from above, which the world can neither give nor take away.

In view of the great principles for which we are contending, I think every abolitionist will feel pledged to adopt immediate measure, if necessary, for bringing this case before the proper tribunal.

Your friend,

HENRY B. BENSON.