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Fall 2015

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### Recommended Citation

Calazans, Sabrina, "Lucy Stone and Her Legacy as a Defiant Pioneer for Feminism" (2015). *Faculty Curated Undergraduate Works*. 27.

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Lucy Stone and Her Legacy as a Defiant Pioneer for Feminism

Sabrina Calazans

Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History, Dr. Jeanne Buckley

08 December 2015



### Abstract

According to society, Lucy Stone was a badly-behaved woman, but according to her impact on feminism today, Stone was just an intelligent, courageous and outspoken woman. Stone succeeded in becoming the first woman from her state of Massachusetts to earn a college degree and became the first woman to not take her husband's last name. By not letting societal norms and ideals hold her back from doing what she wanted, Stone worked through hardships and challenges in both her personal and professional life, but she soldiered on and continued voicing her thoughts and opinions to women nationwide. Though many women were limited in what they could or couldn't do, Stone defied that, which led to her being expelled from her church and, while protesting against the taxation without representation of women, had her household goods publicly impounded and sold. After a disagreement with other renown women, such as Susan B. Anthony, Stone helped organize the American Woman Suffrage Association and was able to impact millions of women during her time and in the generations that would follow.

Lucy Stone was a nineteenth-century woman whose lectures and outspokenness branded her as a badly-behaved woman, according to societal norms. Stone did what she thought was right and never apologized for anything, regardless of what others thought of her. She was able to overcome several challenges throughout her life, yet she was still strong and considered a pioneer for women's rights. By staying true to herself, she was able to help millions of women in the process. Stone played a major role in influencing and contributing to the Woman's Rights movement and feminism through her willingness to help others and through her defiance of social standards.

Lucy Stone was born on August 13, 1818 on a farm about three miles from West Brookside, Massachusetts to her parents, Hannah Matthews and Francis Stone. Her mother was a devout Christian woman who came from an educated and philanthropic family, while Lucy's father was a teacher and tanner by trade, who later became a farmer (Blackwell, Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist, 1930). Both of Lucy's parents believed in a husband's divine right to rule over his family. Lucy once said, "There was only one will in our home, and that was my father's" (Blackwell, Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist, 1930). She was raised in a traditional household with her father as the head of the family, her mother as the submissive wife and seven siblings; two other siblings passed away before her birth.

As a child, Stone was rebellious and high tempered as she had experienced rage from her drunken father. Although she endured this hardship at such a young age, Stone was very intelligent and learned at a faster rate than her brothers did (National Women's History Museum, n.d.). She helped her mother in the home and assisted her father in farming; some of her daily requirements were to sew nine pairs of pants and to handle the farm animals. While she had many things to do at home to assist her family, Stone's true desire was to learn. In order to

receive an education, she was faced with the task of attaining her father's permission for her to attend school:

When she told her father her intention of going to college, he turned to her mother: "Is this child crazy?" He then took Lucy aside and said to her, "Your mother learned to read and write and cipher. She can keep accord [sic] of her egg and butter money. What more does a girl need to learn?" (Kerr, 1940, p.21).

Lucy's father would later make her take a teaching position to assist her family financially, as they struggled with financing their sons' education and farm maintenance. As she was able to save money, Lucy enrolled in Mount Holyoke Seminary; Stone had only attended the seminar for three months when her sister, Rhoda, passed away and her mother would soon become sick (Blackwell, *Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist*, 1930). Stone fulfilled the household responsibilities, aided her mother during her failing health and managed to continue working through it all.

After saving up money for nine years, in 1843 at the age of twenty-five, Lucy Stone enrolled in the only college which accepted women, Oberlin College in Ohio; Stone alternated between studying and teaching. At Oberlin College, Stone studied Greek "in order to find out what the bible says about women" (Blackwell, *Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist*, 1930). Stone also made her first public speech while at Oberlin. At Oberlin, Stone was asked to write the Commencement speech, but because it was to be read by a man, Stone declined the honor. She said, "I hoped when I came to Oberlin that the course of study would permit such practice, but I was never in a place where women are so rigidly taught that they must not speak in public." In 1847, Lucy Stone became the first woman from Massachusetts to ever receive a college diploma. Later that year, Stone gave her first lecture on women's rights in her home state of

Massachusetts, a year before the Seneca Falls convention in New York (Blackwell, Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist, 1930). Stone would soon begin to frequently lecture for the Anti-Slavery Society and advocate for women's rights; she also began to lecture at women's rights conventions and organizations nationwide. Stone said in 1847, "I expect to plead not for the slave only, but for suffering humanity everywhere. Especially do I mean to labor for the elevation of my sex (Blackwell, Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist, 1930)." Stone made it clear that she was not only working to help those who were suffering, but that she was also working to help improve women's lives everywhere.

Although she was becoming more experienced with public speaking at conventions, Lucy Stone had no part in the First Woman's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. Stone did organize the 1850 Worcester First National Woman's Rights Convention, as well as participate in the convention and address the audience (U.S. National Parks Service , 2015). Her 1852 speech at the National Woman's Rights Convention in Syracuse, New York, is credited for converting, the well-known, Susan B. Anthony to the cause of women's rights (U.S. National Parks Service , 2015). Lucy Stone participated in several national woman's rights conventions, and was president of the 1856 National Woman's Rights Convention held in New York (U.S. National Parks Service , 2015).

In her adult years, Lucy met and corresponded, through the exchange of letters, with Henry Browne Blackwell, who she would marry two years later in 1855 (U.S. National Parks Service , 2015). One of the greatest acts of defiance taken by Lucy Stone was in regards to her marriage. In a traditional marriage during her time, the husband would be in control and "owned" his wife, as if she were an object or a possession, but Stone and Blackwell had their own opinions. They disagreed with the belief that a man should own a woman, so they had a

marriage contract written stating how Blackwell would not own Stone and that she would keep her own last name (Women's Suffrage 1855, 1955). This marriage contract was signed and read at their marriage ceremony as a symbolic act of defiance against the norms that accompanied a traditional marriage. Being the first woman to keep her own last name instead of taking her husband's, she inspired generations of women who have decided to keep their own last name instead of changing it to their spouse's last name; several of these women call themselves "Lucy Stoners" as they were inspired to take this defiant act by Lucy Stone. At the age of thirty-nine, Stone gave birth to her daughter, Alice Stone Blackwell, and at the age of forty-one, she lost her second child, making Alice her only child (National Women's History Museum, n.d.).

Aside from dealing with the hardship of losing a child and the unfair treatment that she received for being a woman, Stone faced various other challenges throughout her life. One challenge faced by Stone was her expulsion from her West Brookfield church. She was sent a letter saying that she was "engaged in a life inconsistent with the engagements at the church"; Stone responded by sending a letter back stating that she was withdrawing herself from the church (Blackwell, Lucy Stone Pioneer Woman Suffragist, 1930). Another challenge faced by Stone was during her protest against taxation without representation; Stone refused to pay her taxes because she did not have the right to vote. While her daughter, Alice, was still an infant, tax collectors gathered all of Stone's household goods, including her daughter's crib, and publicly impounded and sold them (Stewart, 1920). Not only did Stone disagree about the lack of women's representation in the National and state votes, but she also had some disagreements with certain people within the Women's Rights movement. While serving on the executive committee of the American Equal Rights Association, Stone "intended to support the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment, which Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton rejected because

they feared (correctly, as it turned out) that its gender-neutral language would assure the vote only for black men” (National Women's History Museum, n.d.). This resulted in Anthony and Stanton forming the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) in May 1869, leaving Stone, and others, with the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) (National Women's History Museum, n.d.). Stone’s major contribution to the AWSA was as editor of its publication, the *Woman’s Journal*; Stone later took up its editorship in 1872 with assistance from her husband, Henry (U.S. National Parks Service , 2015).

Through the efforts of Lucy Stone, there have been many changes regarding women in society. Women are now able to vote and through the bold decision to not take her husband’s last name, many women still continue that trend today. Also, being the first woman from Massachusetts to earn a degree, Stone paved the way for change. Now, there are more women earning degrees and graduating from colleges than men are. Though we may not notice it, Lucy Stone has certainly affected millions of women across the nation, and perhaps even in other parts of the world, in a positive way.

In regards to the course title, Well-behaved Women Seldom Make History, Lucy Stone is a perfect fit. As a woman who fought for an education, for the rights of others and was outspoken to the point of being expelled from the West Brookfield church, Stone was a badly-behaved woman. Her dedication to women’s education, the advocacy of rights and willingness to stay true to herself helped her to make history and influence generations of women who would learn to stand up for themselves and others regardless of whether they were considered well or badly-behaved. I chose to write about Lucy Stone because she is inspirational and exemplar as she defied societal norms and became the pioneer to prepare the path for women who would follow. I had also never heard mention of Stone, although she was the one who would influence Susan



B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton to join the Women's Rights movement. Through writing this paper on Lucy Stone and her life, I have had the chance to learn more about her and how her imprint on the Women's Rights movement still continues to impact women today.

Lucy Stone was truly a defiant pioneer for feminism. Her actions and words, though often unknown by many, have influenced myriad generations of women. She endured hardships in her life that have helped to make women's lives easier today. Her dedication and determination to advocating for others shows her kindness and willful spirit. Stone did not allow herself to be limited by what limited others. Though she is not often credited, Lucy Stone helped to guide and fuel the Women's Rights movement, helping to mold it into what it is today.

