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The Spring Street Church in the Age of Abolition

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B.F.A. Emerson College, 1976

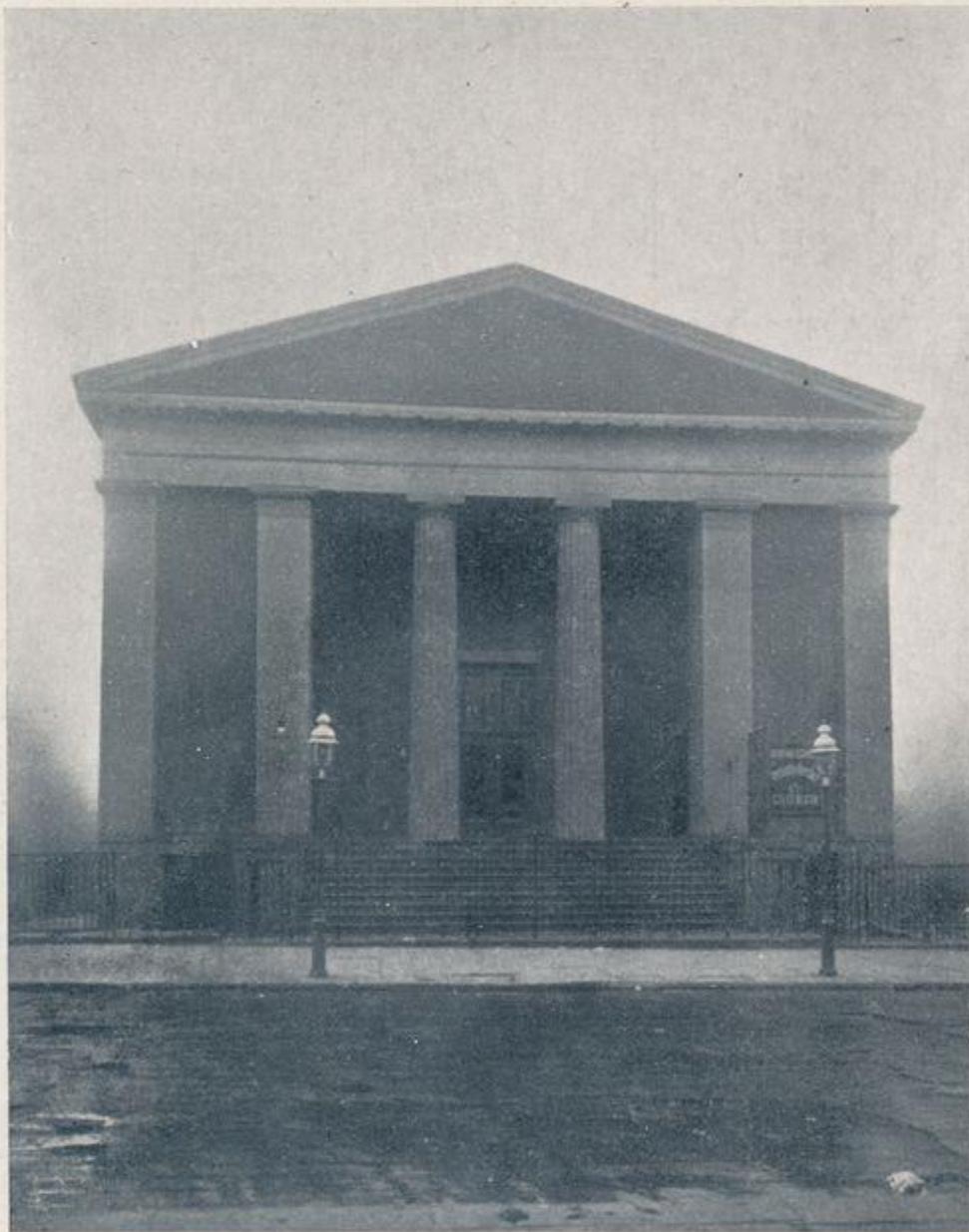
Thesis Advisor – John Blanton, PhD

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**Spring Street Presbyterian Church,
New York City.**

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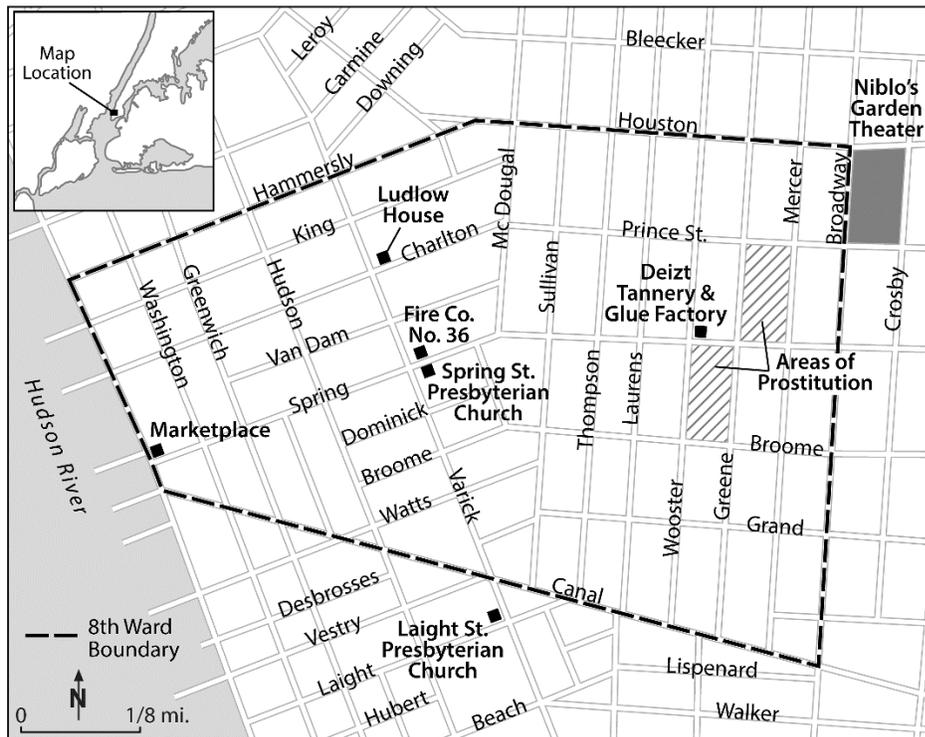
On a sweltering, hot early July day in 1834 a massive and destructive riot broke out in lower Manhattan. It lasted for three days before the forceful presence of the New York State Militia brought it to an end. While its root causes are still debated by historians, the broad outlines are clear: The anti-abolition riot of 1834 was in violent reaction to the well-funded activities of a small group of black and white antislavery activists calling for the immediate end to slavery in the United States. During the riot several buildings associated with the abolitionist cause were attacked and either badly damaged or destroyed. Included were homes, businesses, a theater, and churches. One of the severely damaged buildings was the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, a mixed race and avowedly abolitionist congregation that existed near the corner of Spring and Varick Streets in the current SoHo district of lower Manhattan. The church was targeted for both its integrated membership and well-known antislavery activism.¹

Nowhere within the northeast was the social reformist idea of immediate abolition and citizenship rights for blacks more contentious than in antebellum New York City. The formation of an organized interracial group of antislavery activists in 1833 generated formidable antagonism from white New Yorkers across the spectrum of class. It came from both a hostile press and popular animosity in a city known for its economic ties to Southern cotton resulting at times in violence. A group of Protestant reform-minded churches emerged during this period, taking the lead in declaring slavery sin and advocating for its complete and immediate eradication. They stood in stark contrast to the era's prevailing norms of racism and bigotry. The Spring Street Church was an integral part of this cohort, developing over the years in prominence

¹Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy: Popular Disorder in New York City, 1763 – 1834*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 162-170; Leonard L. Richards, *Gentlemen of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 114-121. Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 556-560; Rev. Alfred H. Moment, *Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City: Sixty-Fifth Anniversary*, (SSPC, 1877); Linda K. Kerber, "Abolitionists and Amalgamators: the New York City Race Riots of 1834." *N.Y. History* #48, Jan. 1967.

and reputation by becoming a symbol of principled opposition to slavery that did not go unnoticed to the anti-abolition rioters in the Summer of 1834.

Opening in 1811, the Spring Street Church was an early congregation situated in what was then largely rural farmland. A history written by a former pastor described, “meadows [that] stretched down to the river, flocks and herds [that] grazed in the open fields, and the fragrance of new-mown hay [which] scented the air.”² Within the area of the eighth ward, Spring Street extended west from the church about four blocks to the Hudson River. It was further bounded a few short blocks to the north by Houston and Hammersley Streets, to the east by Broadway, and



New York’s Eighth Ward in the mid-1830’s. (Joseph Stoll)

to the south by Canal Street. The area was sparsely populated at this time but included among its residents a small community of African Americans. Late nineteenth century histories of the

²Rev. A.W. Halsey, *1811 – 1886 The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City*, (New York: The Spring Street Presbyterian Church, 1886)

church indicate that from the beginning it was composed of an integrated membership largely reflecting the makeup of the immediate neighborhood. The congregation's racial composition continued as a distinguishing feature well into the years preceding the Civil War.³

Although substantial secondary literature exists about the early abolitionist period in New York City,⁴ very little has been written about the role of the Spring Street Church and its pastors within the antislavery community. The few sources mentioning Spring Street refer to its abolitionist pastor Henry G. Ludlow in relation to the 1834 riots and the destruction to both his private residence and the church building. Histories of the riots also generally note destruction to the Laight Street Presbyterian Church, a nearby sister congregation that was headed by Rev. Samuel H. Cox, predecessor to Ludlow at Spring Street.⁵ It was not until 2007 that more formal research into the history of the Spring Street congregation was conducted.

In December 2006 during the beginning of a construction project at Spring and Varick Streets, human remains were uncovered in four early nineteenth-century burial vaults belonging to the church.⁶ The vaults had apparently been long-forgotten by 1963 when the congregation

³ Rev. Alfred H. Moment, *Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City: The Sixty-Fifth Anniversary*; Rev. A. W. Halsey, *1811-1886: The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City*.

⁴See: Leslie M. Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Political Activism in New York City, 1784-1861*, (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Ira Berlin and Leslie M. Harris, editors, *Slavery in New York*, (New York: The New Press, 2005); Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Eric Foner, *Gateway to Freedom: The Hidden History of the Underground Railroad*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015); David N. Gelman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777-1827*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2006) Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City*, (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003); Graham R. Hodges, *Root and Branch: African Americans in New York and East Jersey, 1613-1863*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2016); Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1969).

⁵Leonard L. Richards, *Gentleman of Property and Standing*, 119; Paul A. Gilje, *The Road to Mobocracy*, 163; Linda K. Kerber, "Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834," *New York History*, Vol. 48, No.1 (Jan. 1967), 32; Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan*, 119; Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 197; Edwin G. Burrows & Mike Wallace, *Gotham*, 558.

⁶Substantial research on the human remains were subsequently published in "Journal of Northeast Historical Archaeology," V. 39, 2010.

dissolved and the building subsequently demolished. Construction was immediately halted, and an archaeological team was hired to study and catalogue the remains for eventual removal. A report by AKRF, a company hired by the developer Bayrock/Sapir Organization to oversee removal of the remains, included a summary history of the church.⁷ The report begins by describing the area of the eighth ward using maps of the early nineteenth century. The research is further supported by property, tax, and census records, newspaper articles, and congregational Session, Trustee, and Treasurer's minutes.

Little, if any, of this research revealed new information about the congregation's antislavery activism. Its strength, however, is its description of original land acquisition and history of the construction and use of the vaults. But the history of the congregation, including the succession of pastors, antislavery activism, and the vagaries of its financial and debt situation over many decades, relies on later nineteenth century sketches by pastors Rev. Alfred H. Moment (1876 – 1884) and Rev. A. Woodruff Halsey (1884 – 1899).⁸ Written as sermons commemorating the sixty-fifth and seventy-fifth anniversaries of the congregation, these histories are relatively brief, running thirteen and twenty-six pages respectively.

Moment's "Historical Discourse" describes the early days of the congregation, started as a series of prayer meetings in a missionary effort by two young men, John Morris and John Mills of the Wall Street Presbyterian Church.⁹ It chronicles to 1877 a succession of nine pastors along with various organizations and activities such as revival meetings, the establishment of tract distribution and bible classes, a Sabbath school, education society, and a youth prayer meeting.

⁷"Topic Intensive Documentary Study," *Report*, Ch. II, 1-9. Elizabeth D. Meade, M.A., 2007. Prepared by AKRF, inc. for Bayrock/Sapir Organization, LLC.

⁸Moment, *Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City: The Sixty-Fifth Anniversary*; Halsey, *1811-1886: The Seventy-Fifth Anniversary of Old Spring Street Presbyterian Church, New York City*.

⁹The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, commonly referred to as the "Wall Street Church," stood at what is now 14 Wall Street.

Another general history was produced in 1886 by Rev. A.W. Halsey. Although it is largely based on Moment's address and copies it at points, the Halsey sermon is more detailed and appears more accurate. It tells, for instance, of the original 1807 purchase of the property from Trinity Church by Samuel Osgood, Henry Rutgers, J.R.B. Rodgers, and John Mills, which is supported by city conveyances of the period.¹⁰ And according to Halsey, the prayer meetings organized by Morris and Mills took place sometime prior in a small grocery store on the property which was owned by a woman known only as "Jane."¹¹ Throughout their addresses both pastors appear to draw on general and collective knowledge passed down by members and colleagues, church records, and perhaps then-current literature that included books, newspapers, and periodicals.

Both histories are pastoral addresses intended to commemorate anniversaries through a narrative portrait of the church's historic character and identity. Both celebrate a congregation that had not only survived a mob attack, leadership challenges, and financial and membership ups and downs, but thrived and flourished by retaining an energy deeply influenced from its early days by the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening. A later pastor at the church commented that, "the tradition of facing and overcoming difficulties has become an integral part of the Spring Street spirit."¹² The addresses of Moment and Halsey have important value because they sketch out the earliest narratives of the congregation. Without them much of this history would be unknown. As base narratives they provide a foundation from which further research and investigation can be conducted. The task of this study will be to collate and compare primary documentation against these narratives for two main purposes. The first is to determine their

¹⁰Office of the City Register, *1807 Deed of Sale*; Meade, II-1.

¹¹Halsey, 8; According to Elizabeth D. Meade, there were two women named Jane listed in the 1810 census, "as having lived in the 8th Ward at this time," a woman named Jane Smith identified as a widow and an African American woman named Jane Stephens; Meade, II,1-2.

¹²Rev. Howard W. Hintz, *An Historical Sketch of Old Spring Street*; Church published program for the 140th Anniversary, 1951.

relative accuracy to the events they describe. The second is to add detail whenever possible to the most germane portions of the narrative. Both elements will be utilized as complimentary tools in determining the context of when and for whom the narratives were written. This assessment will in turn be integral to the application of methodology in defining the parameters of investigative research.

Two more recent works provide important background histories of religious antislavery. The first is *The War against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830 – 1865*, by John R. McKivigan.¹³ The book focuses on northern religious denominational approaches to antislavery, in particular the reluctance of most to commit fully to immediatism. McKivigan provides a close chronology of the deep ambivalence among Protestant church leaders regarding the most divisive issue of the era and the internal friction and discord that resulted. The book is most effective in describing the animosities between mainline church leaders and William Lloyd Garrison, who was unsparingly critical of their antislavery conservatism.

The second volume is *Evangelical Gotham: Religion and the Making of New York City, 1783 – 1860*, Kyle B. Roberts.¹⁴ It presents a detailed portrait of the role of Protestant evangelism in shaping urban New York City culture from the late eighteenth century through the antebellum period. It is particularly useful in focusing on reform movements coming out of the Second Great Awakening as a response to tremendous population growth and consequent social and economic upheavals. Of interest to this study is chapter five, “Free Churches and the Limits of Reform.” It gives a close-up look at Lewis Tappan and his Free Church movement. Roberts

¹³John R. McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830 – 1865*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1984).

¹⁴*Evangelical Gotham: Religion and the Making of New York City, 1783 – 1860*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

views it as a successful church building venture but ultimately a failed instrument for advancing social reform due to the negative impact of its close association with antislavery.

By focusing on the history of the Spring Street Church within New York's Free Church movement, this study will add important dimension and context to both volumes. The grouping of evangelical antislavery within New York's Third Presbytery is largely unexamined in McKivigan. His focus is on the sectional schisms and breakaway "comeouter" sects of mainline denominations that resulted from internal dissention over the slavery issue. *The War Against Proslavery Religion* makes barely any mention of Lewis Tappan's efforts toward utilizing the Free Church movement for antislavery activism. In counterpoint to the denominational divisions portrayed in McKivigan, this study will add an important complexity in the example of churches created with a mission toward social reform.

It will likewise provide a valuable compliment to *Evangelical Gotham*. The chapter devoted to Tappan and the Free Church movement contends that religious-oriented antislavery ultimately met with limitations. While this argument has merit, it does not consider the pastors and congregants at Spring Street and the church's relatively long adherence to antislavery principles. The congregation was an exception within the movement, and Roberts would have benefited from a closer and more nuanced examination of its history. The on-the-ground focus of religious antislavery in this paper, as provided by Spring Street's example, adds an important element missing in Roberts.

This study seeks to create a profile of the Spring Street Church as an integrated congregation active in the abolitionist movement, framed against the rapid economic and social changes taking place within New York City and the immediate neighborhood of the Eighth Ward. Research focuses on the abolitionist community in New York City and the place occupied

by the Spring Street congregation as led by three of its antislavery pastors: Samuel H. Cox (1820-1825), Henry G. Ludlow, (1828-1837), and William Patton, (1837-1847). Most importantly, this project seeks to understand the internal racial dynamics of the congregation in terms of its antislavery activism and in relation to organizations and individuals, both black and white, who comprised New York's abolitionist community. The timeframe will begin with the founding of the Spring Street Church in late 1810 and will end through the pastorate of William Patton in 1847.

Among the earliest integrated antislavery groups were those of women. Organizations such as the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society and the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society gave women a nascent public political platform upon which to build their own social reform efforts. Their formation in the early 1830's was at first seen in a supportive role to the male dominated American Anti-Slavery Society. But as the movement grew, women's role in opposing slavery within the public sphere became increasingly prominent, albeit controversial within the larger national effort. Within this context the project will seek to understand the organizational antislavery efforts of women, both black and white, at the Spring Street Church as an essential part of the congregation's activist profile.

In researching women's antislavery efforts at Spring Street against the larger historic canvas of the abolitionist movement in New York City, this study will ask: What was the extent of women's antislavery activities during the pastorates of abolitionist ministers Samuel H. Cox, Henry G. Ludlow, and William Patton? What was the social and racial dynamic among antislavery women in the congregation, and what was their relationship to the larger community of women activists in New York?

Several important overarching questions will be addressed in this research study. As an integrated congregation, what was the role of the congregants and pastors in the emergence of the small interracial community of abolitionists in New York City? What was the social and racial dynamic within the Spring Street congregation in relation to the abolitionist community? What was the relationship of Spring Street to other churches that espoused antislavery views? And how did the church respond to the rapid social and economic changes taking place in New York and the neighborhood of the Eighth Ward?

Methodology

Research will rely on the theoretical model of Jürgen Habermas concerning the emergence of the social and political public sphere in the modern period.¹⁵ It will additionally rely on the theoretical historical methodology of gender as articulated by Joan W. Scott.¹⁶ Both of these methodologies provide a similar framework that focuses on challenges to contemporary social and political structures through written and oral critiques. Within this context, the project will investigate and analyze the methods of antislavery communication regarding the political activities of congregants at Spring Street in group and organizational settings both within and outside the church. These frameworks of interaction will be used to guide the focus on, and ultimately demonstrate, the social and political participation of the congregants of both races and genders in an emergent early nineteenth century reform movement.

Research for this study utilizes primary documents relating to the Spring Street Presbyterian Church kept at the Presbyterian Historical Society, spanning the years 1810 through the 1850's. It includes minutes of Session, Trustees, and Treasurer's reports. Records of the

¹⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989)

¹⁶ Joan W. Scott, "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 91, Issue 5 (Dec. 1986), 1053 – 1075.

associated Laight Street Presbyterian Church are also presented along with those of pastors Samuel H. Cox, Henry G. Ludlow, and William Patton. Records of other existing groups in New York at the time are utilized, including the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS), New York City Anti-Slavery Society (NYCASS), the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham Street Chapel (FASS), and the Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society (LNYCASS). Most of these groups were formed in the mid-1830's.

Published studies of the human remains found in 2006 at the church's former site are found in the issue of *Northeast Historical Archeology* and are utilized in this paper along with unpublished articles and raw data provided by bioarchaeologists Dr. Meredith A. B. Ellis and Dr. Shannon S. Novak.¹⁷ As new primary sources, these studies provide details concerning the mix of race and class, family relations, and background origins of the Spring Street congregation. In addition, they provide evidentiary support of the known history of the rapid social and economic changes occurring in New York in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

This project will argue that activist participation within the context of the Spring Street congregation was influenced by pastoral leadership and involvement within the public sphere of the local New York antislavery movement. Because historic study and placement of the Spring Street church within the larger context of incipient antislavery of early nineteenth century New York City has not been given any serious treatment to date, this research will serve as a fresh area of inquiry. It will illuminate the Spring Street congregation as an important religious institutional component of the early New York abolitionist community. By accessing records from the Spring Street Church and other primary sources, this paper will show that the

¹⁷Susan E. Maguire, ed., *Northeast Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 29, 2010.

congregation and its pastors were active supporters and participants of antislavery organizations over an extended period.

A City in Transition

Beginning in the late eighteenth century and continuing through the early decades of the nineteenth, New York City experienced a period of rapid and expansive growth. The British industrial revolution that began about the 1780's later spread to continental Europe and, in the United States, to cities like New York. This change saw the increased development from small artisanal workshops typically employing two or three apprentices to the factory workplace in the early 1800's. Industrialization of the textile, metalworking, printing, and furniture trades coincided with infrastructure advances in transportation, communication, and legal and financial networks.¹⁸ In cities and their immediate surrounding areas, the transition from an agrarian-based economy began to convert to a wage-based factory model in what historian Charles Sellers has called the market revolution.¹⁹ A major aid to this economic transformation was the 1825 completion of the Erie Canal, allowing New York to become a major port city. A main consequence was the rapid expansion of a merchant class trading in lucrative commodities like southern cotton that was exported to European markets.²⁰

This economic transition was matched with a dramatic rise in population over the same period. Estimates show that between 1790 and 1830 the population of New York City doubled roughly every ten years, and by mid-century had twice tripled in size. Much of the growth was

¹⁸Richard B. Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity, and Youth in Antebellum New York City*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 34-48; James Brewer Stewart, *Holy Warriors: The Abolitionists and American Slavery*, revised edition, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1997), 36.

¹⁹Charles Sellers, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815 – 1846*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 5.

²⁰*Ibid.*, 40-43.

due to European immigration and migration from outlying rural areas to the city.²¹ And because of dramatically increased demand for housing, New York expanded northward, aided by the Commissioners' street grid plan of 1811. The immediate area around the Spring Street Church was no exception, as economic change and population growth drove rapid urbanization, transforming the Eighth Ward. With the development of the Hudson River docks extending between Canal and Spring Streets, the area was for a time a central hub of growth and commercial activity.²²

The sheer velocity of change brought with it dislocations in the economy, living conditions, and the physical environment of the city. Attempts to counter the negative effects of these changes consequently gave birth to multiple reform movements, including an organized interracial abolitionism²³ (from which women's suffrage emerged), temperance, Sabbatarianism, and body reform.²⁴ These movements sprung out of religious revivalism during the Second Great Awakening which embraced a Calvinistic New School Protestantism. "Across the country, and particularly in New York State" writes Meredith Ellis, "religious leaders challenged what they saw as a declining moral ethic," due to rapid economic and social changes. Early pastors at the Spring Street Church were among the prominent leaders within this reformist movement.²⁵

²¹Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall, *Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001),188.

²²Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 429-450; See also: Meredith A.B. Ellis, "The Children of Spring Street: The Remains of Childhood in a Nineteenth Century Abolitionist Congregation," (ProQuest, 2014), 34-36.

²³Stewart, 37-38; Abolitionism as a movement followed black activists, who had always advocated for an immediate end to slavery.

²⁴A movement meant to "purify" the body through a strict dietary regimen. Sylvester Graham, inventor of the Graham cracker, was a leading advocate.

²⁵Ellis, 46;

Early History of the Spring Street Church

The Spring Street congregation owes much of its genesis to Old First Presbyterian Church on Wall Street. Founded in 1716, it had given birth to several congregations, earning the moniker of “mother church” to New York Presbyterianism.²⁶ From the beginning, Old First members were directly involved in the organization of the Spring Street congregation. Prayer meetings held at Jane’s small grocery store on Spring Street, next to a fruit orchard, seem to have started just prior to the purchase of property from Trinity Church. All men involved in these efforts were either members or had deep ties to the Wall Street Church. The corner stone for the first Spring Street building was laid on July 5, 1810.²⁷ Present for the event was eighty-two-year-old Rev. John Rodgers, longtime pastor at Old First.²⁸ During construction of the Spring Street Church, Old First had concurrently begun a complete replacement of its own building, and “some of the timbers, the window sashes, the pews and the pulpit were given to the new church in Spring Street.”²⁹ By May of 1811 the new church opened for services.

Rev. Samuel Miller, co-pastor at Old First with Rodgers, led services for the first few months until a permanent minister could be found. It is worth noting that both Rodgers and Miller held antislavery views and were active members of the New York Manumission Society (NYMS).³⁰ Miller was particularly outspoken. His speech before the Society in 1797 attacked slavery as a moral violation of both biblical and philosophical ideas of personal liberty and

²⁶Dorothy G. Fowler and Donna W. Hurley, *A City Church; The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York*, second edition, (New York: First Presbyterian Church, 2016), 15.

²⁷Meade, II-2.

²⁸Samuel Miller, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Rodgers, D.D., Late Pastor of the Wall-Street and Brick Churches in the City of New York*, (New York: Whiting and Watson, 1813), 276, 281.

²⁹Halsey, 9.

³⁰Samuel Miller, *The Life of Samuel Miller, D.D., LL.D.* (New York: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelfinger, 1869). 91; David N. Gellman, *Emancipating New York: The Politics of Slavery and Freedom, 1777 – 1827*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 156-57.

equality. “The right which every man has to his personal liberty is paramount,” he declared, “to all the laws of property.” Miller also strongly refuted arguments that slaves and former slaves of African descent were intellectually inferior. In a footnote he recounts monthly visits to the African Free School over a two-year period, asserting “to me, the negro children of that institution appeared...quite as orderly, and quite as ready to learn, as white children.”³¹ Although Miller offered the standard NYMS position of support for gradual emancipation, he hinted at immediatism when exhorting his audience to work toward the, “speedy and everlasting abolition” of slavery, while at the same time throwing serious doubt on the efficacy of ideas of African repatriation.³² Due to his brief service, Miller’s views are unlikely to have made a lasting impact leading to Spring Street’s later embrace of antislavery. His strong position on the issue nevertheless serves as an indicator of developing immediatist views even in this early period, and a harbinger of the future character of the congregation.

On October 31 that year Rev. Matthew La Rue Perrine was installed and led the Spring Street Church for the first nine years of its existence. Perrine has been described as, “reserved in manner yet very genial.” His preaching was, “not at all popular, being closely confined to his notes, and fond of discussing metaphysical subjects.” And because the church was heavily in debt at this time it, “required a man of push, tact, energy and popular gifts. Dr. Perrine was not such a man.”³³ Perrine’s successor described him as, “an excellent man,” and a “clear-sighted theologian,” who later became a professor of religion. More critically, he is further described as,

³¹Samuel Miller, *Discourse, Delivered April 12, 1797 at the Request of and Before the New-York Society for Promoting the Manumission of Slaves*, (T. and J. Swords, 1797), 14; The African Free School had been started by the N.Y. Manumission Society in 1787.

³²*Ibid.*, 29-31. Gelman, 159.

³³Halsey, 10; Two published volumes from the period show Perrine’s focus on theological issues rather than social concerns: *Letters concerning the Plan of Salvation as Deduced from the Scriptures: Addressed to the Members of the Church, Spring Street, New York*, (New York: Dodge & Sayre, 1816), and *The Nature and End of Gospel Dispensation, A Sermon, Preached Before the Presbytery of New York*, (New York: J. Seymour, 1816.)

“characteristically mild and non-aggressive, his way of reading every word of his sermons, the sparse population of that locality at the time...eventuated in the non-success of his pure and pious ministry.”³⁴

Perrine’s views on slavery during his pastorate at Spring Street are unknown. The attitude among most reform-minded whites in this period, as reflected in the slow process of New York State’s 1799 emancipation legislation, was decidedly gradualist. The state would not see complete emancipation until 1827. Church Session records show, however, that Spring Street under Perrine was accepting African Americans at least as early as 1813, a development that points toward advancing ideas of interracial immediatism.

In that year two married couples - Francis and Hannah Schuyler, and Francis and Hannah Freeland - were accepted into membership. Because of suspected inconsistencies and omissions in these early handwritten records, others may have joined within the previous two years. The recorded names of those joining by either transfer or confession sometimes have an abbreviated notation for “colored.” The notations are not always consistent when compared with a separate listing of thirty-five names of, “Colored people who are or have been members of this church.”³⁵ But in 1816 Helen Willis joined the congregation; the following year it was Simon and Phillis La Rue and Sarah Craig; and in September 1820, Phebe Brown.³⁶ Halsey later expresses a distinct nostalgia for the church’s black membership in declaring, “These colored saints have played an important part in the history of this church,” and further comments that the congregation, “has

³⁴Samuel H. Cox as quoted in, Henry Fowler, *The American Pulpit: Sketches, Biographical and Descriptive, of Living American Preachers*, (New York: J.M. Fairchild & Co., 1856), 358;

³⁵*Records of the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, 1811 – 1835*, Presbyterian Historical Society (PHS). The Spring Street Congregation moved in 1825 to the corner of Laight and Varick streets and was renamed The Laight Street Presbyterian Church.

³⁶*SSPC Session Minutes*, V.1, 1811 – 1835; Session Minutes note that on 27 Sept. 1820, “Phebe, a free woman of colour was admitted to full communion as a member of this church upon certificate from the consistory of the church at Paramus.”

always had a number of them among its members.”³⁷ Acceptance of African Americans into majority-white congregations continued despite the establishment of all-black churches. That small numbers of blacks sought membership at Spring Street suggests a more complex picture of race relations than previous scholarship has acknowledged.

Rev. Samuel H. Cox and “Disinterested Benevolence”

Samuel Hansen Cox was born in 1793 in Rahway, New Jersey and grew up in a Quaker family with antislavery leanings. He credited his father as a primary influence by describing him as, “tenderly humane...and distinguished as the friend of the black man in all his degradations.” He relates that, as a young man, he experienced a profound crisis of the spirit, eventually finding solace in a conversion to Calvinist theology. Initially destined to a career in law, he instead turned to theological studies under the private tutoring of pastors James Richards of Second Presbyterian Church, Newark, and James P. Wilson of Philadelphia. Cox’s first pastorate began in 1816 at the Presbyterian Church of Mendham, New Jersey.³⁸ Shortly thereafter he married Abiah Hyde Cleveland of Connecticut. In 1820 he accepted a call from the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, becoming its second pastor.³⁹ It was a decisive turning point for the congregation.

Cox’s religious orientation stemmed from a Calvinist evangelical revivalism as reflected in the era of the Second Great Awakening. His early training and embrace of Hopkinsian “disinterested benevolence” under Richards and Wilson embodied the Presbyterian New School movement. It combined ideas of both personal salvation and humanitarian social reform, an

³⁷Halsey, 20.

³⁸Henry Fowler, 351.

³⁹Dwyn Micklin Mounger, “Bondage and Benevolence: An Evangelical Calvinist Approaches Slavery – Samuel Hanson Cox,” 58; unpublished dissertation, *Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York*, 1976; Session Minutes, *Laight St. Presbyterian Church, 1811 – 1841*.

activism prevalent among New England Congregational and New School clergy. The doctrine originated with Jonathan Edwards (1703 – 1758), minister and theologian in the First Great Awakening of the mid-eighteenth century. Its subsequent development was further refined by Samuel Hopkins (1721 – 1803), a student of Edwards and early opponent of slavery.⁴⁰

Spring Street under Cox became more socially activist by aiding and improving the lives of blacks within an emerging African American community. It was an antislavery path toward emancipation seen through social advancement, an approach generally followed by other reform-minded institutions such as the NYMS. Recent historians view the period as part of a transition in which immediatist antislavery activism was beginning to be deployed more widely, eventually leading to a more robust abolitionist movement beginning in the late 1820's and early 1830's.⁴¹ Consequently, Cox's antislavery views, along with other white reformers, evolved into a radical immediatism. By the late 1820's he briefly supported the movement to colonize free blacks to Liberia under the American Colonization Society (ACS), then rejected it to fully embrace the cause of abolition.⁴²

Under Cox's leadership the church grew in membership and continued, controversially, to accept African Americans into full communion.⁴³ By 1822, five years before the process of emancipation was completed, the church hosted an integrated Sunday school started by Thomas Lippincott, a member of First Presbyterian. According to Halsey, he “gathered some children

⁴⁰Charles C. Cole, *The Social Ideas of the Northern Evangelists*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1954), 195; McKivigan, *The War Against Proslavery Religion: Abolitionism and the Northern Churches, 1830 – 1865*, 37; Roberts, *Evangelical Gotham: Religion and the Making of New York City, 1783 – 1860*, 145-46.

⁴¹Sinha, 160-61; Gelman, 191. Sarah Gronningsater, “The Making of an Antislavery Generation: The Children of Gradual Emancipation, Antislavery Legal Culture, and the ‘General Abolition’ of 1827,” 109-10, unpublished paper, 2014.

⁴²Mounger, 62-8, 70; Samuel Cox, *Letter of the Rev. Samuel H. Cox Against the American Colonization Society*, (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1834), 11-16.

⁴³Elizabeth D. Meade, “A Free Church for the People: The History of the Spring Street Church and its Burial Vaults,” *Northeast Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 39, 2010, (Journal of the Council of Northeast Historical Archaeology, Buffalo State University), 11-16; Session Minutes, 1811- 1841.

(both white and colored) from the street and for a time held a Sunday-school in this church.”

This school was apparently for the poor children of the neighborhood and was in addition to one started four years earlier by the interdenominational New York Female Sunday School Union.⁴⁴ Cox served for a period as board member of the African School, an institution begun in 1816 by the Synod of New York and New Jersey for the purpose of, “educating young men of colour, to be employed as teachers and preachers among the people of colour in these states and elsewhere.”⁴⁵ He also served in 1823 on a committee of the New York Presbytery to raise funds for construction of a new building at Elm and Canal streets to house First Colored Presbyterian Church, a congregation initially led by Rev. Samuel Cornish.⁴⁶ Spring Street under Cox did not simply position itself as antislavery. It increasingly practiced an active policy of outreach and support for the growing African American community.

Rev. Henry G. Ludlow and the Antislavery Church

In 1822 Cox proposed that the growing congregation move to a new and larger building six blocks to the south at Laight and Varick Streets. The proposal split the membership, but in 1825 Cox led the majority to the new location, opposite fashionable St. John’s Park in an upscale area of the Fifth Ward. Officially the same congregation, it was renamed the Laight Street Presbyterian Church. A small group of some forty-three members chose to stay at the old location. Shortly afterward the original church became independent when its property was purchased from the Presbytery by George P. Shipman, a parishioner from the Brick Presbyterian

⁴⁴Halsey, 13. Edward W. Rice, *The Sunday-School and the American Sunday-School Union*, (Philadelphia: American Sunday-School Union, 1917), 57. According to Rice the NY Female Sunday School Union first organized in New York in 1816 using the lecture room at First Presbyterian on Wall St. The Union was also supposed to have included a multiracial body of students (68).

⁴⁵Edward D. Griffin, D.D., *A Plea for Africa: A Sermon Preached October 26, 1817 in the First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York*, (New York: Gould, printer, Chatham St., 1817), 65-66; Not to be confused with the African Free School; Mounger, 69.

⁴⁶David E. Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1989),22; *Ibid.*, Mounger.

Church. The new church retained its old name, and at the insistence of Shipman, it was to be a “Free Church for the People,” which meant seating was available without charge. Temporary pastors led the congregation for a few years. Newly ordained Rev. Ithamar Pillsbury supplied the pulpit until 1826, with Henry G. Ludlow then serving for two succeeding years.⁴⁷ The congregation apparently took an immediate liking to him as membership increased, though he initially declined a call to become Spring Street’s permanent pastor. In a letter to the Board of Trustees he states, “I do not feel I possess the qualifications for a pastor.” Ludlow’s reluctance may have been related to two failed attempts at ordination, one of which occurred while at Spring Street. He also reports in letters to his sister Caroline Ludlow Frey during this period that he suffered from an illness related to the lungs and stomach. On his third attempt in late September 1826, however, Ludlow was finally ordained.⁴⁸ By 1828 he accepted the call and was installed December 25th. Earlier that year Ludlow had written to his sister that the congregation consisted of three hundred and thirty members, “most of whom belong to that class of person who cannot afford to purchase or hire a pew in our city churches.”⁴⁹

Under Ludlow’s pastorate the Spring Street congregation thrived. Membership continued to increase, the church housed two separate Sunday schools, and the congregation was part of an evangelistic network of tract distribution. It also sponsored active local missionary efforts staffed by young men and women who traveled to various parts of the city establishing sabbath schools and cottage prayer meetings.⁵⁰ The years 1829 through 1833 were a peak time for religious revivalism in the city. According to Moment, “eight powerful revivals took place,” at the church

⁴⁷Moment, 13; Halsey, 11-12.

⁴⁸Henry G. Ludlow, *Frey Family Papers*, Manuscript Collections of the New York Historical Society, Boxes 1 & 2; Unpublished report by Meredith A.B. Ellis, 22 July 2011.

⁴⁹Henry G. Ludlow, November 1828 letter to Caroline Ludlow Frey, *Frey Family Papers*, Manuscript Collections of the New-York Historical Society.

⁵⁰Halsey, 13-14; Samuel B. Halliday and Rev. D. S. Gregory, *The Church in America and its Baptisms of Fire*, (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1896), 202-3.

over the course of Ludlow's ten-year pastorate.⁵¹ The period also saw the formation in 1830 of the Free Church movement underwritten by wealthy silk merchant Lewis Tappan. The elimination of pew rentals, as the Spring Street Church had previously done, was an attempt to attract new converts by making it affordable for the poor and emerging middleclass of the city. As an evangelistic New School adherent, Tappan saw an opportunity for social reform through inclusivity by attracting all classes, both black and white, in a way that the Old School Presbyterian churches had failed.⁵²

Henry Ludlow's popularity and success as pastor appears largely due to the energy and focus he devoted to the immediate concerns of the congregation. The best available firsthand account comes from Rev. Samuel B. Halliday, who joined about the time Ludlow was installed and remained a member throughout his pastorate. Writing at length, he states, "He had a perfect acquaintance with his whole congregation;" "Very much of his time was devoted particularly to pastoral work," and, "His efforts among the poor, the sick, and the troubled were unceasing." Halliday goes on to describes Ludlow's personal qualities: "He was very genial, able to make himself perfectly at home; nothing ever seemed to embarrass him; he had the rare power of making everyone feel at home in his presence." And regarding his preaching Halliday writes, "His voice was exceedingly pleasant, and he had intense sensibility; in nearly all his prayers and sermons, his voice would be tremulous with emotion...It was not possible for him to be stiff or formal."⁵³

⁵¹Moment, 14.

⁵²Lewis Tappan, "History of the Free Churches in the City of New York," in Andrew Reed and James Matheson, *A Narrative of the Visit to the American Churches*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835),350, 352.

⁵³Samuel B. Halliday, *Winning Souls: Sketches and Incidents During Forty Years of Pastoral Work*, (New York: J.B. Ford, 1873), 22-4.

Like Cox, Ludlow was a fervent abolitionist. He brought to the Spring Street congregation an enhanced antislavery profile just prior to the time when integrated abolitionist organizations were forming in the northern cities of New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. And like Cox, Ludlow spoke against segregated pews.⁵⁴ His evolution to radical immediatism parallels that of Cox, Lewis Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and other white antislavery activists by first supporting and then rejecting colonization.⁵⁵ “Both Pastor and people were bitter Abolitionists,” writes Moment.⁵⁶ Halsey adds, “The attitude of Spring Street Church on the slavery question was well known;” “Dr. Cox, the former pastor of the church, and Dr. Ludlow were both bitter abolitionists, and they feared not to express their views from the pulpit.”⁵⁷ A later history described him as, “a bold, outspoken opposer of the system of slavery.”⁵⁸

The church under Ludlow started down a path that would define its character and social standing in the years to come. In embracing abolition, it joined a distinctive subset of the Presbyterian faith.⁵⁹ “During the first half of the 19th century,” writes Ellis, “the church pushed the boundaries of racial politics by engaging with the major concerns of abolitionists, advocating for an end to segregated seating...and calling for racial equality.”⁶⁰

An important national organizational development was the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). Created in late 1833 by Boston abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison and Lewis Tappan, it was based in New York City. Its first anniversary report lists Tappan’s older brother

⁵⁴Burrows and Wallace, 556; Ellis, 46.

⁵⁵ *First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 6 May 1834, (New York: Dorr & Butterfield, 1834), 35; Moulner, 69-73.

⁵⁶Moment, 15.

⁵⁷Halsey, 15.

⁵⁸Benson J. Lossing, *History of New York City, Embracing an Outline Sketch of Events from 1609 to 1830, and a Full Account of its Development from 1830 to 1884*, (New York: The Perine Engraving and Publishing Co., Vol. 1, 1884), 335.

⁵⁹Meade, 11.

⁶⁰Ellis, 46.

Arthur serving as president with Ludlow as a manager, Cox as Secretary of Foreign Correspondence, and his brother Abraham L. Cox as Secretary. It was the first organization of its kind to encompass both an interracial and nationwide membership that lent support to the creation of women's antislavery societies.⁶¹

At its beginning, the AASS included a trio of influential black ministers - Samuel Cornish, Theodore S. Wright, and Peter Williams, Jr.⁶² Cornish had been born free and trained for the ministry in Philadelphia. In 1822 he moved to New York and founded, in a missionary endeavor, the First Colored Presbyterian Church. In 1827 he co-founded the first black newspaper, *Freedom's Journal* with Williams and John Russwurm among others in the African American community. By 1829 Cornish handed over leadership of First Colored to Rev. Theodore S. Wright, a recent graduate of Princeton Theological Seminary who had become the first African American of any denomination to attend seminary.⁶³ He served at First Colored until his death in 1847. Son of a Revolutionary War veteran, in 1808 Peter Williams, Jr. founded St. Philip's African Church, an Episcopal congregation in lower Manhattan's Five Points area. He became a member of the executive board of the AASS at its beginning in 1833.⁶⁴

Ludlow's involvement as a founding member of the AASS brought the Spring Street congregation more directly into the wider abolitionist community and a growing movement of activists throughout the northeast. He and the congregation were now part of an interracial effort that supported women's organizations, working in conjunction with this wider network to create and distribute antislavery literature, field speakers, and expand organizing efforts. The Spring

⁶¹Sinha, 274; Burrows & Wallace, 556; *Constitution and Address of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham Street Chapel*, (New York: William S. Dorr, 1834).

⁶²*First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, 6 May 1834, (New York: Dorr & Butterfield, 1834), 35.

⁶³Cornish later became a parishioner at the Spring Street Church. (Burrows and Wallace)

⁶⁴Burrows and Wallace, 546-551.

Street Church moved significantly from involvement in local efforts to interconnect into the much wider sphere of public activism.

Profile of a Congregation

For at least the first two decades, the congregants of the Spring Street Church largely reflected the changing demographics and rising population of the surrounding eighth ward. The area consisted of a mix of low-income whites and free blacks within what was essentially in the early years a farming community. With a population increase due to European immigration and domestic migration, northward urban development transformed the neighborhood into a mix of skilled and unskilled workers that included dockworkers, day laborers, stonecutters, seamstresses, bricklayers, printers, cartmen, and cabinetmakers.⁶⁵ By the 1820's the area saw an incipient middling class that included merchants, clerks, shopkeepers, and craftsmen, some of whom attended Spring Street.⁶⁶

Analysis of the artifacts and subsequent research into city burial records and church financial records indicate that the Spring Street vaults were in use between 1820 and 1846.⁶⁷ There were initially two vaults and it is not clear if they were part of the original 1811 building. In May 1831, however, trustee minutes note that two more newly constructed vaults were added.⁶⁸ Research into the names of parishioners from various sources, including city burial records, indicate most interments were members or their spouses who lived in the area. One notable exception was a coffin plate found for Georgia Senator Nicholas Ware, who died in September 1824 during the time of Lafayette's visit to the U.S.

⁶⁵Tomas A. Crist, "That Person Who Cannot Afford a Pew: Analysis of the Human Remains from the Spring Street Presbyterian Church Burial Vaults," *Journal of Northeast Historical Archaeology*, Vol. 39, 2010, 66; Ellis, 28-30; Stott, 68-72. Shannon A. Novak, PhD, 2012, *unpublished interview*, 6.

⁶⁶Ellis, 36; Stott, 64-5; *Ibid.*, Novak.

⁶⁷Meade, II-8-9.

⁶⁸SSPC *Trustee Minutes*, v.2, 1826-1841.

During the excavation of the Spring Street vaults in 2007 thirty-five of these coffin plates with discernable names and dates were found. Subsequent research turned up information on some of the individuals and their backgrounds. Among them were Rudolphus Bogert, a cotton merchant who lived at 20 Charlton Street and died in 1842; Juliana Radcliff, wife of New York City mayor Jacob Radcliff, who lived at 13 Howard Street and died in 1823; sixteen-year old Louisa Hunter, daughter of John Hunter, assistant superintendent of the New York Institution (Alms House), who died in 1825; Lewis Evans, a lime cartman who lived at 5 Dominick Street and died in 1822; and Garrett Morgan, a jeweler who lived at 38 North Moore Street and died in 1829. Occupations of other parishioners include accountant, painter, and teacher.⁶⁹ The findings closely correspond with city records of the period, placing the Spring Street congregation, “squarely in the new middling class and the new working class.”⁷⁰

A 2012 DNA sample study of the remains at Syracuse University’s Physical Anthropology Lab show that vault burials, like the congregation, were of mixed race. While most revealed western European ancestry, one sampling showed an individual male of West African descent. Two others, a male and a female, had ancestry from the East Indian subcontinent and another male from the South-East Asian nomadic tribal Huns. It is unlikely these last individuals were members of the church and the circumstances of their appearance in New York and subsequent interment are unknown. Analysis did not find any indication of attempted segregation by race of burials within the vaults.

A membership listing for the Spring Street Church from 1811 through the move to Laight Street in 1825 shows the mix of class, race and gender joining by either certificate of transfer or

⁶⁹Rebecca L. White and Douglass B. Mooney, “Stories from the Rubble: Analysis of the Mortuary Artifacts from the Spring Street Presbyterian Church Vaults,” *Journal of Northeast Historical Archaeology*, V.39, 2010, 40-52.

⁷⁰Ellis, 41.

confession. The number of unmarried white women joining was 159. That was more than twice the number of unmarried white men, which totaled 61. The number of white married women joining without their husbands was 90, and the number of married couples was 51. These ratios generally correspond with figures of those joining First Free Presbyterian, another evangelically oriented congregation that was begun about two decades later in 1830.⁷¹ The number of single black women joining in this period totaled 14; the number of single men, 1; the number of married women, 1; and the number of married women joining without their husbands was 3.

Records also indicate middle- and upper-income families joined Spring Street, many after 1820 when the more popular Samuel Cox was pastor. The prominent banker and later railroad executive Eleazar Lord joined in 1821, with his wife Elizabeth Pierson Lord becoming a member the year of their marriage in 1824. In 1822 Eliza Shaw joined, and two years later married the celebrated botanist John Torrey.⁷² In 1824 Ann Bogert, wife of Rudolphus, joined the congregation; and in 1818, just prior to Cox's pastorate, Hannah Hunter, wife of John Hunter and mother of Louisa, joined.⁷³ The mix of members indicate Cox's appeal across class and income lines. Church Elders, Deacons, and Trustees listed in 1825 largely came from the upper strata and moved with most of the congregation to the Laight Street location, an area closer to where many of them resided.⁷⁴

The proportionately large number of single women in membership, including African Americans, reflected a desire for social connection amid increasing urbanization. Added to this

⁷¹*Manual of the First Free Presbyterian Church, No. III*, (New York: Wm. T. Coolidge, 1834); Roberts, 155-6.

⁷²John Torrey subsequently joined membership in 1826. He and Eliza were married by Cox at the Spring Street Church 20 April 1824, (Christine Chapman Robinson, "John Torrey (1796-1873) His Life and Times," *Bulletin of the John Torrey Botanical Club*, Vol. 95, No. 6, Nov.-Dec. 1968, 515-645).

⁷³*Records of the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, 1811 – 1835*.

⁷⁴*Laight Street Presbyterian Church Manual, 1825*, (New York: Child & Wells, 1826); *Laight Street Presbyterian Church Manual No. 4, 1828*.

figure are single white men that, while significant, is less than half the number of single women, substantially less than the number of married women joining without their husbands but slightly larger than the number of married couples joining together. Most of the single membership appear to be either lower income or part of the emerging middleclass. The move to Laight Street in 1825 kept intact the cross section of classes that existed during Cox's ministry at Spring Street, including a small number of black members.⁷⁵ However, it left behind a small group of poor and working-class parishioners, black and white, who tended to be older and presumably wished to remain at a church that was closer to where they resided.⁷⁶

The Free Church Movement and Social Reform

Two years after his installation at Spring Street, Henry Ludlow joined with the pastors of six other churches to form the breakaway Third Presbytery of New York. A petition signed by the seven pastors was presented at a meeting of the New York Synod in October 1830. Included were Ludlow, his predecessor Samuel Cox of the Laight Street Church, and William Patton of Central Presbyterian, his future successor at Spring Street.

The Third Presbytery formed in large part out of significant theological differences between the Old School churches of the Presbytery of New York and New School churches. New School adherents rejected the classic tenets of Calvinist predestination theology. The idea that original sin was a determinant of one's acceptance to heaven, as the elect, or relegation to hell by divine predetermination was unacceptable. "The New Divinity theologians," writes James H. Moorhead, "felt considerable unease at the notion that Adam's sin was imputed to subsequent generations or that people were condemned antecedent to any acts they committed. Human beings did not live under a double guilt, Adam's and their own. They were guilty only

⁷⁵Roberts, 155; Mounger, 66.

⁷⁶Moment, 13; Halsey, 11.

for sin they themselves had done.”⁷⁷ As followers of Samuel Hopkins, the New School viewed human redemption through the lens of both divine grace and “disinterested benevolence.” In Hopkins’ reinterpretation of the theology of his mentor Edwards, Mounger writes he, “transformed the doctrine of ‘disinterested benevolence’...into a zeal for self-abnegating, active service to God, and especially for the salvation and welfare of one’s fellow human beings.”⁷⁸

The first meeting of the Third Presbytery was held at the Central Presbyterian Church in early January 1831. Samuel Cox preached an opening sermon and officiated until the election of Patton as moderator and Ludlow as stated clerk.⁷⁹ Various other pastors and Elders from the founding churches participated in the meeting, including Arthur Tappan who is recorded as representing the Bowery Presbyterian Church. Cox, Ludlow, and Patton appear to be among the most active participants.⁸⁰ The three were close to both Lewis and Arthur Tappan in both religious outlook and social reform. This was particularly true regarding their view of slavery as sin and the necessity of social equality for blacks. For a time, Arthur Tappan and his family lived on the south side of St. John’s Park near the Laight Street Church where they attended. The family had a particular fondness and regard for Cox, where he and Ludlow were frequent guests in their home.⁸¹

In May 1830, just a few months prior to the formation of the Third Presbytery, Tappan initiated discussions with pastors and laypeople in the New School evangelical community to start a free church. To attract members, it would do away with the standard economic model of pew rentals and offer free seating. The plan would be missionary, converting particularly the

⁷⁷James H. Moorhead, “The Restless Spirit of Radicalism: Old School Fears and the Schism of 1837,” *Journal of Presbyterian History*, Vol. 78, No.1, 1978, 22.

⁷⁸Mounger, 6-7.

⁷⁹*Minutes of the Third Presbytery of New York*, 1831-1838, Vol. 1, 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 5; Alexander lists Laight St., Spring St., and Central Church the first three congregations in the original formation of the Third Presbytery. This choice appears to be in order of importance rather than chronology.

⁸¹Lewis Tappan, *The Life of Arthur Tappan*, (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1870), 257.

poor and working class who had been effectively shut out of the existing Old School churches. And instead of relying on a single pastor to establish and coordinate the effort, it would involve laity and, “make the conversion of others the primary responsibility of every member and embrace revivalism as the way to bring it about.”⁸² In late June that year the First Free Presbyterian Church began under the pastorate of Rev. Joel Parker, a protégé of the most famous evangelist of the period, Charles G. Finney. It initially met at the Hall, the upper room of a building at Nos. 1 and 3 Thames street for a modest rent, another Tappan low-cost business innovation. The original sixteen members, nine women and seven men, were organized by a commission from the (first) Presbytery of New York that included Cox and two other pastors.⁸³

In addition to differences with Old School theology, the Third Presbytery was organized in response to Lewis Tappan’s initiative, which First Free Church soon joined. The congregation quickly grew, moving a few months later to a commercial building at the corner of Dey and Washington Streets. Other existing churches also joined the new Presbytery. The most notable were the Spring Street and Laight Street congregations. In February 1832 a group of First Free members organized Second Free Presbyterian Church, which held services in a spacious old theater on Chatham Street, renamed the Chatham Street Chapel. A call was made to the popular Charles Finney and by September he was installed as part of a rapidly growing movement which saw in quick succession the creation of Third and Fourth Free churches.⁸⁴

With the creation of a successful church-building movement based on revivalist conversions and proselytizing, Lewis Tappan and others pushed to link reform and social activism as a major element. At first the reforms focused on personal behavior such as abstaining

⁸²Roberts, 147-8.

⁸³*Manual of the First Free Presbyterian Church*, 1834, 3; Lewis Tappan, “History of the Free Churches in the City of New York,” 343

⁸⁴*Ibid*, 345-46; Alexander, 106-09; Wyatt-Brown, 114.

from alcohol and use of tobacco along with, “temperance in eating, and plainness in dress and furniture.”⁸⁵ The Free Churches soon took up antislavery and became part of the wider abolitionist efforts that were just emerging. Like Cox and Ludlow, the Tappan Brothers at first supported colonization then rejected it in favor of immediatism. They were, like so many other white antislavery activists, including William Lloyd Garrison, persuaded by African American abolitionists against supporting the ACS and their scheme. Lewis Tappan and pastors such as Cox and Ludlow were convinced by black abolitionists Cornish, Wright, Williams, and others that the African American community roundly rejected colonization. They saw it as a veiled attempt to support slavery by ridding the country of freedmen. Persuasion also came, in Cox’s case, from his meetings with antislavery figures during an 1833 trip to Britain.⁸⁶ As Lewis Tappan himself writes, “Meetings of people of color were held in most of the cities and towns in the United States...and it was their united and strenuous opposition to the expatriation scheme that first induced William Lloyd Garrison and others to oppose it.”⁸⁷

Lewis and Arthur Tappan had a vision of social equality. The free churches would not forget people of color. They were to be treated with respect in the true Christian sense and afforded equal rights. In writing about the thoughts of his brother, Lewis Tappan invariably reflected his own: “We are bound to remove obstacles, give the colored man a chance, offer him the right hand of fellowship, do away with oppressive enactments and usages, treat him as a fellow citizen, and fellow Christian...Christ died for the colored man as well as for the white man. He is no respecter of persons.”⁸⁸ And in his history of the free churches, he writes, “The people of color have not been overlooked, nor have they been thrust away into the few seats in

⁸⁵Tappan, “History of the Free Churches,” 350.

⁸⁶Mounger, 70-3; Sinha, 243.

⁸⁷Lewis Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 128-9; 135-6

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, 133.

the galleries, but especial efforts have been made to instruct them, and provide good seats for them, so that they might feel that Christians imitate their heavenly Father, in some degree at least, in not being respecters of persons.”⁸⁹

African Americans attending white church services and becoming communicant members was not new in the early nineteenth century. A small number of slaves and free blacks appear in church records as early as 1769.⁹⁰ Without exception, however, separate seating was consigned, often to the back of the upper gallery. Samuel Cox and Henry Ludlow were in full support of Lewis Tappan’s efforts at eliminating segregated seating, with Cox derisively condemning them as “nigger pews.”⁹¹ Tappan’s vision was unsuccessful in practice, however. Even in a church like Spring Street that prominently espoused abolition, overcoming ingrained social prejudices proved impossible. At their March 1831 meeting, church trustees passed a resolution to provide gallery seating for, “the Coloured People,” and to have, “the Sexton direct them to the places provided for them.”⁹² It is unclear if this directive was a new policy or an official confirmation of a practice that had informally been in place. Halsey writes somewhat apologetically that, “Despite the strong antislavery feeling in the church there was at this time a resolution passed by the Board of Trustees,” to provide gallery seating for the “colored people.” He adds, “but this was in the former days. No more godly set of men and women ever attended this church than some of these same colored people who were thrust off to the South-east corner of the gallery, even in the good old days of Dr. Ludlow.”⁹³

⁸⁹Tappan, “History of the Free Churches in the City of New York,” 348.

⁹⁰The First Presbyterian Church in the City of New York, *Session Records*, Series I, 1765-1808, 11 Nov. 1769, 33.

⁹¹Burrows and Wallace, 556.

⁹²Spring Street Presbyterian Church, *Trustees Minutes*, Vol. 2, 1826-1841.

⁹³Halsey, 15.

When the Tappans ended their support for colonization, they devoted their time, organizational skills, and wealth to supporting local and national organizations advocating an immediate end to slavery. Black antislavery activists had long pushed abolitionism, but now many white evangelicals, including Cox, Ludlow, Patton, and Finney, joined them. In espousing the New School doctrines of Hopkinsian Calvinism, immediatism perfectly aligned with their view of sin and repentance. “The new theological trends on the immediatism of the 1830’s was paramount,” asserts John R. McKivigan, and that for the New School evangelist, “Once slaveholding was recognized as sin, the only acceptable atonement was immediate emancipation.”⁹⁴

American Anti-Slavery Society

The years following creation of the Third Presbytery and the Free Church movement saw a dramatic upswing in antislavery organizing both at the local and national level. In 1831 William Lloyd Garrison started the influential weekly newspaper *The Liberator* out of Boston in part with financial support from Arthur Tappan. It followed his brief co-editorship with Benjamin Lundy of *The Genius of Universal Emancipation*, a newspaper published from Baltimore. The paper reflected Lundy’s antislavery position of gradual emancipation and support for colonization. Garrison was initially in agreement with Lundy’s views, but soon became convinced of the necessity of an immediate end to slavery. By 1829 black antislavery activists in Baltimore also convinced him to discard support for colonization.⁹⁵ In April 1830 Garrison was jailed for libel. He had reported that a shipper from his hometown of Newburyport, Massachusetts had transported slaves from Baltimore to New Orleans. Garrison was tried in a Maryland court. He refused to pay a fine of \$50, serving seven weeks until Arthur Tappan, who

⁹⁴McKivigan, 20-1.

⁹⁵Sinha, 215-16.

did not know Garrison, paid for his release. Garrison left for Boston shortly afterward, stopping in New York along the way to personally thank Tappan.⁹⁶

On New Year's Day, 1832 Garrison convened the first meeting of the newly created New-England Anti-Slavery Society (NEASS) in Boston's black Baptist church on Belknap Street. It is thought to be the first integrated antislavery organization in the nation advocating the complete abolition of slavery. It worked alongside the black-led General Colored Association (GCA) in a petition campaign to Congress to end slavery in the District of Columbia. It also fielded antislavery speakers throughout towns and cities in New England, preaching "moral suasion" to convince the public of the sins of slavery and racism. The organization became a template for other local antislavery societies in the northeast and parts of the Midwest. In March 1833 the Tappans started their own antislavery newspaper, the *Emancipator*, for the purpose of attacking both the slave trade and colonization. It was largely influenced by Garrison's paper but also *Freedom's Journal*, which in 1829 had ceased publication after two years.⁹⁷

By early October the New York City Anti-Slavery Society (NYCASS) was begun by the Tappans with support from William Green, Jr., John Rankin, Joshua Leavitt, William Goodell, Samuel Cornish, Theodore S. Wright, and others. The initial officers all appear to be white activists, but Article IV of the published constitution states, "Any person who agrees with the principles of this Constitution...may be a member of the Society."⁹⁸ Most importantly, these men represented significant organizational support from the evangelical wing of abolition.⁹⁹

The initial meeting, which was to be held at Clinton Hall on the second, was previously announced in newspapers and handbills. "Counter-notices" then began to appear inviting

⁹⁶Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 163.

⁹⁷Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 165.

⁹⁸*Address of the New-York City Anti-Slavery Society*, (New York: West and Trow, 1833).

⁹⁹*Ibid.*, 224; Burrows and Wallace, 551.

“Southerners,” those opposed to the abolitionists, to attend a meeting at the same place and time. James Watson Webb, editor of the pro-colonizationist *Courier and Enquirer*, denounced the abolitionist meeting in a morning edition and urged the anticipated mob to “crush” the fledgling antislavery movement. Expecting a possible violent confrontation, Clinton Hall closed its doors. The Abolitionists then relocated their meeting, by word of mouth, to the Chatham Street Chapel. An anti-abolitionist mob of about fifteen hundred appeared at Clinton Hall on the evening of the meeting, but finding it closed, organized a raucous meeting of their own at Tammany Hall. Speeches were made denouncing the abolitionists and toward the end, they learned about the Chatham Street meeting. Moving to the Chapel, the mob tried to storm the locked gate but gained entry only after the inaugural meeting of the NYCASS ended with the participants leaving by a back exit. The anti-abolitionists then staged a mock meeting, forcing a black man, whom they derisively called Arthur Tappan, to make a speech. The Tappans and their supporters were now fully aware of the incendiary opposition to abolitionism in the city. They had nevertheless taken the first steps and were organized.¹⁰⁰

At the urging of Garrison, the Tappans and many members of NYCASS met two months later in Philadelphia to form the first nationwide integrated organization, the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS). This first meeting drew some sixty antislavery activists, black and white, from ten states in the Northeast and Ohio. The new organization was headquartered in New York with Arthur Tappan as chairman.¹⁰¹

The AASS met again on May 6, 1834 at the Chatham Street Chapel. Samuel Cox was one of the more prominent members at the meeting. Following an opening prayer by Rev. Cyrus P.

¹⁰⁰Lewis Tappan, *The Life of Arthur Tappan*, 168-172; Burrows and Wallace, 552.

¹⁰¹*Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention, December 4, 5, and 6, 1833*, (New York: Dorr & Butterfield, 1833);

Grosvenor of Salem, he read from the fifty-eighth chapter of Isaiah, “Is not this the fast I have chosen?...to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and let the oppressed go free?”¹⁰² He also delivered two speeches before the society and helped prepare for a public “examination” later that week of Thomas C. Brown, a free African American from South Carolina who had recently returned from Liberia. The executive board members comprised an interracial group that included Cornish, Williams, and Wright along with Cox and his brother Dr. Abraham L. Cox, merchant John Rankin, Lewis Tappan, William Goodell, Elizur Wright, Jr., William Green, Jr., and Joshua Leavitt.¹⁰³ At the same time, the Tappans launched the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel, an auxiliary to the AASS.¹⁰⁴ The new organization published and distributed antislavery literature, fielded lecturing agents, and supported startup auxiliary organizations across the northeast. New York City had now become the center for antislavery leadership.

A highlight of the meeting was a speech by James A. Thome, a young student at Lane Seminary in Cincinnati. Son of a Kentucky slaveowner, Thome had participated in the school’s month-long debates on abolition and colonization in February that year. The famous “Lane Debates” were organized by another student, the charismatic Theodore D. Weld, at the behest of Arthur Tappan, a major contributor to the school. In eighteen daily sessions lasting two or more hours, they debated immediatism and colonization. Thome and another southern student, William Allen of Alabama, became convinced of the depravity of slavery and the necessity of immediatism, as did the majority. The result was the formation of the Lane Anti-Slavery Society,

¹⁰²KJV, (Boston: Whittemore Associates, n.d.), 688.

¹⁰³*First Annual Report of the American Anti-Slavery Society*, (New York: Dorr & Butterfield, 1834). Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Lewis Tappan and the Evangelical War Against Slavery*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1969), 115-16.

¹⁰⁴Burrows and Wallace, 556; *Constitution and Address of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham-Street Chapel*, (New York: William S. Dorr, 1834), 4.

a student-led organization advocating abolition. Many students then began educational reform efforts in the local African American community. The conservative trustees of Lane, worried about threats coming from the local white population, demanded that the society disband. Rev. Lyman Beecher, president of the college who had been away during the debates, tried and failed to affect a compromise. Forty students, the “Lane Rebels,” then left *en masse* and joined Oberlin, a progressive college founded the year before in northern Ohio.¹⁰⁵

The Society later printed the speech in a pamphlet that included an extended letter Cox had written to the *New York Evangelist* denouncing colonization.¹⁰⁶ The early efforts of the AASS consisted of a two-pronged attack on slavery, one calling for immediate emancipation and the other a condemnation of colonization and the ACS. Their efforts mirrored those Cornish had previously written in *Freedom’s Journal*.¹⁰⁷ More than a *mea culpa*, Cox’s letter attempted to persuade supporters of colonization away from it by tracing his own reasoned change of mind. He sums up his argument by asserting that efforts to expatriate all African Americans were not only morally reprehensible but, in the end, a futile effort. In a ringing conclusion he writes, “I assume it as practically certain that the blacks and the whites, or the African and the European races of men, are to exist on this continent – till the morning of the resurrection; and also that slavery cannot co-exist with the descendants of these two races, cannot exist at all, much longer. It must certainly be destroyed – and we all *know* that.”¹⁰⁸

At the same time NYCASS was forming in October 1833, James Watson Webb met with a group of ACS leaders at the offices of the *Courier and Inquirer*. They were deeply concerned

¹⁰⁵Stewart, 59-60; Sinha, 241-42.

¹⁰⁶AASS, *Speech of James A. Thome, of Kentucky, Delivered at the Annual Meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society, May 6, 1834; Letter of Rev. Samuel H. Cox Against the American Colonization Society*, (Boston: Garrison & Knapp, 1834).

¹⁰⁷Burrows and Wallace, 549.

¹⁰⁸Cox, *Letter*, 16.

about the Society, which was not doing well. The organization was suffering financially from the overwhelming costs associated with its colonization operation and because its venture in Liberia was failing.¹⁰⁹ Webb was an avowed racist and traditionalist defender of the “pure” lineage of New York’s patriarchal upper class. The Tappans and their evangelistic allies in the AASS, as Webb saw it, were a formidable threat that needed to be vigorously countered and destroyed. His failed attempt at quashing the abolitionists only resulted in a counter-attack by the AASS and an escalating war of words in speeches and print.¹¹⁰

Anti-Abolitionist Riots of 1834

Following the AASS meeting in May 1834, attacks against abolitionists reached a new level of intensity with a manifestly racist component. On his way to morning service at Laight Street on Sunday, June eighth Arthur Tappan saw Samuel Cornish standing on the church steps. Tappan and Cornish knew each other from AASS meetings and as former managers at the American Bible Society. Cornish was not a member of the congregation, so Tappan invited him to sit in his pew. After the service several members of the congregation directed anger and disapproval at Tappan and Cornish for their violation of societal norms. Some parishioners threatened to resign while members of the Session warned Tappan not to repeat the incident. The following Thursday at a weekly lecture Cox criticized his congregation for their intolerance. He argued that Christ was probably of, “a dark Syrian hue,” and that if he had been at service that day, he too might have been turned out. The comments immediately vaulted Cox into the national spotlight, however negatively. The *Courier and Enquirer* and the *Spectator*, among

¹⁰⁹Linda K. Kerber, “Abolitionists and Amalgamators: The New York City Race Riots of 1834,” *New York History*, Vol. 48, No.1, 1967, 29.

¹¹⁰Burrows and Wallace, 551-2; Stewart, 66-7.

other newspapers, immediately denounced him for claiming, “the Savior of mankind was a negro.”¹¹¹

That same month sensationalist rumors involving interracial sex, or in the terminology of the period, “amalgamation,” were being spread and repeated in the reactionary press. The *Courier and Inquirer* and William Leete Stone’s *Commercial Advertiser* reported unsubstantiated rumors that abolitionists had encouraged their daughters to marry black men, that Arthur Tappan had divorced his wife for a black woman, that Henry Ludlow was conducting interracial marriages at Spring Street; and most absurdly, that abolitionists were promoting amalgamation by having black dandies parade up and down Broadway on horseback picking up white women as wives.¹¹² “What these newspapers were doing was fear mongering,” states Paul A. Gilje; “The idea that whites and blacks would sit down in the same meeting triggered a sense of animosity... They were saying, look, if white abolitionists and black abolitionists sit down together in the same room, one right next to the other, then you’re going to have a situation where... black men and white women, especially, were going to be sleeping with one another.” “Part of this was to sell newspapers, part of this was political, and part of it was to suppress this abolitionist movement,” adds Gilje.¹¹³

By early July racial tensions and animosity against the Tappans and other abolitionists were near a breaking point. An integrated group met on the fourth at Chatham Street Chapel to celebrate the seventh anniversary of the completion of New York State’s gradual emancipation law. A white mob observing the event proceeded to break up the celebrations with shouts of

¹¹¹*New York Spectator*, Monday, 16 June 1834; Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 194-5; Burrows and Wallace, 556; Leonard L. Richards, *Gentleman of Property and Standing: Anti-Abolition Mobs in Jacksonian America*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 121; Fowler, *The American Pulpit*, 374.

¹¹²Burrows and Wallace, 556.

¹¹³Paul A. Gilje, *Unpublished Interview with the author*, 6 May 2016; Richards, 114-5.

“Treason!” just as a featured speaker moved to address the assembled mixed-race audience. The celebration was then rescheduled for the evening of Monday the seventh. The space was leased twice a week by the New York Sacred Music Society, including Mondays. The Society’s director had agreed with the church sexton to use a smaller room, leaving the main hall for use by the now mostly black celebrants. Not everyone was apprised of the situation, however. When musicians arrived, they were incensed to see black choir members sitting in the space normally occupied by members of the Society. The musicians angrily ordered the blacks out and attempted to drag a speaker off the stage. A brawl ensued, but the whites were outnumbered and were ejected. Soon the police arrived along with a sizeable crowd. Six African Americans were arrested as the remaining fled the mob.¹¹⁴

Tensions continued to be stoked by Webb as the *Courier and Enquirer* falsely reported the incident as “strictly a Negro riot,” blaming white abolitionists and Arthur Tappan and his “mad impudence” as instigators and “incendiaries” that encouraged the riot and needed to be put down by “the strong arm of the law.” The *Commercial Advertiser* joined in the fear mongering and reported that blacks had congregated at street corners, threatening to burn down the city.¹¹⁵ On the eighth two more “incidents” ensued. One was a fire of unknown origin that broke out in the building from which John Rankin operated his business. The other was an apparently fabricated report by the *Courier and Enquirer* of the break-up of another integrated antislavery meeting at Clinton Hall.¹¹⁶

On the evening of July 9, three full-scale interrelated riots broke out. Chatham Street Chapel was again attacked for an antislavery meeting that never materialized. The mob

¹¹⁴Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 203-4; Richards, 116-17; Burrows and Wallace, 557.

¹¹⁵*New York Courier and Enquirer*, 8 July 1834; *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 8 July 1834; Burrows and Wallace, 557; Richards, 117-8.

¹¹⁶*Courier and Enquirer*, 9 July 1834; Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 207;

nevertheless broke into the building and formed an ad hoc meeting calling for the deportation of blacks, with several individuals acting out Jim Crow personas in the popular style of Bowery theater performances. Part of the crowd then moved to the Bowery Theater to confront a benefit performance for George Farren, an English stage manager who had reportedly cursed out Americans as “jackasses.” The mob also connected Farren to British antislavery. A performance of *Metamora* by the popular actor Edwin Forrest was in progress when a mob of some four thousand entered the theatre. The performance halted, and stage manager Thomas Hamblin appeared on stage, apologized, and presented the crowd with performers singing popular songs. Hamblin had managed to avert impending violence.¹¹⁷

Another mob descended on Lewis Tappan’s home at 40 Rose Street. Tappan and his family were fortunately staying in Harlem at the time. The rioters, “broke open the door, smashed the blinds and windows, the looking-glasses, crockeryware, and threw the furniture into the street.”¹¹⁸ Bedding was likewise dragged into the street and thrown onto a bonfire. Over the following two days the rioters became more organized as violence and destruction escalated. On Thursday the tenth they chose among their targets the Laight Street Church, smashing its windows; Samuel Cox’s home on Charlton Street, repeating the pattern of destruction to the Tappan home; and they threw rocks into the windows of Arthur Tappan’s store on Pearl Street before fleeing at the sight of armed employees. Later they attacked the homes of John Rankin and William Green, Jr.¹¹⁹

On Friday Mayor Cornelius Van Wyck Lawrence called for assistance from the twenty-seventh regiment of the State Militia. That evening the rioters again pelted the Laight Street

¹¹⁷Philip Hone, *Diary of Philip Hone, 1828 – 1851*, Vol. 1, entry for 10 July 1834, (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1889), 109.

¹¹⁸Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 209.

¹¹⁹*Ibid.*, 211.

Church with rocks, then proceeded to the Spring Street Church where they set up a barricade near Varick Street with carts, wagons, barrels, and ladders chained together. The mob smashed the church windows and broke down the doors. Once inside, they tore out furniture, pews, galleries, and the organ and threw the debris into a pile on the street. A bonfire was lit, and the bell was rung incessantly as the rioters attempted complete destruction of the church. The state militia arrived and hacked through the debris. The rioters then fled, stopping on Laurens Street to sack the home of Henry Ludlow.¹²⁰

The worst violence on Friday evening, however, was happening at about the same time a few blocks south in the Five Points, a mixed-race neighborhood in the sixth ward. It consisted primarily of African Americans and Irish. A mob of two to three thousand methodically targeted the homes, businesses, schools, and churches of its black residents. Many were assaulted on the street. St. Phillips Episcopal Church on Centre Street was attacked when the mob broke in and smashed furniture and its organ. The adjoining rectory, home of pastor Peter Williams, Jr. was attacked. First Colored Presbyterian was likewise damaged and, “In a weird parody of the Book of Exodus,” white residents were told the rioters would spare their houses if they put lit candles in their windows. Only houses with darkened windows would be targeted for destruction.¹²¹ Black homes were sacked and burned. On Anthony Street a black Baptist church was attacked with a hail of rocks, and a school on Orange Street saw almost complete destruction. The seventh regiment was never deployed into the Five Points, leaving the rioters completely unimpeded.¹²²

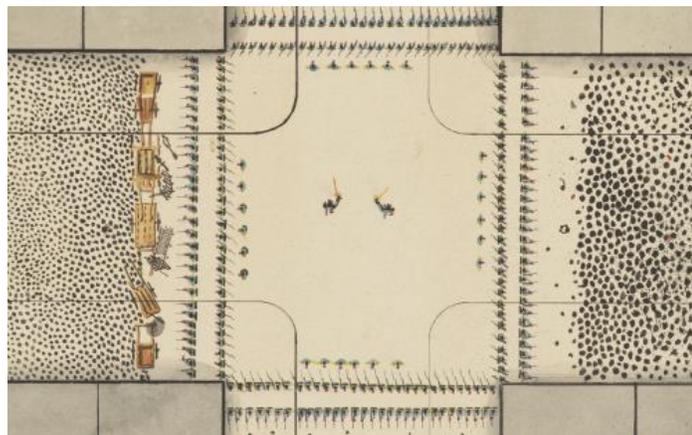
¹²⁰Ibid., 213-14; Burrows and Wallace, 558; Halsey, 15; Moment, 15; Richards, 119; Kerber, 32; Wyatt-Brown, 119.

¹²¹Kerber, 33.

¹²²Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 214-15; Burrows and Wallace, 558.



A depiction of the July 1834 confrontation between rioters and the state militia at Spring and Varick Streets.
(Museum of the City of New York)



By Saturday the rioting was over as troops patrolled through the city. A handbill appeared around town signed by Arthur Tappan and John Rankin disclaiming the actions and intentions of the AASS. It denied, “any desire to promote or encourage intermarriage between white and colored persons.” It also refuted charges that abolitionists had any intent to violate laws or advocate national disunion.¹²³ On the fourteenth Peter Williams was forced to resign from the AASS on orders of conservative Episcopal Bishop Benjamin Onderdonk. In a subsequent statement he denied active involvement in the AASS, even though he had been elected to both its Board of Managers and Executive Committee. What Williams was unwilling to do, however, was renounce his stand against slavery and social injustice.¹²⁴

The immediate aftereffects of the riots on the abolitionist community, especially in New York City, has been a point of discussion and analysis among some historians. Even more, however, has been the question of who the rioters were, and what motivated them to commit such destruction. Lewis Tappan squarely blames the violence on most of the New York press, which he labels anti-abolitionist. The *Courier and Enquirer* is cited as among the worst offenders for using provocative language and, “employing utmost skill to inflame the public mind” against the abolitionist cause.¹²⁵ Amalgamation, the fear of racial intermixing, seems the primary reason for the rioting since it was the propagandistic weapon of choice by Webb and his colonizationist allies.

Leonard L. Richards largely agrees. He focuses his argument on how New Yorkers at the time perceived the cause. He dismisses economic factors, specifically, “increasing competition between white and black labor.” He contends that, “If there was such a problem in 1834, few

¹²³Ibid., Tappan, 215-16.

¹²⁴Harris, 199-200; Burrows and Wallace, 559.

¹²⁵Tappan, *Life of Lewis Tappan*, 217.

New Yorkers were aware of it.”¹²⁶ Linda K. Kerber, however, gives some credence to economics and labor competition, citing 1834 as a recession year. She posits that, “what New Yorkers may have sensed hidden behind abolitionist egalitarianism was an economic challenge quite as much as a social one; though they claimed the riot was caused by outraged sensibilities, the outrage may well have been to pocketbooks.” She concludes, “The cause of the riot was unclear, and remains so to this day, but the contemporary consensus was that anti-slavery agitators had invited it.”¹²⁷

Paul A. Gilje, on the other hand, asserts the anti-abolitionist riots of 1834 should properly be called race riots. He allows that labor competition and possibly amalgamationist fears played a role in instigating the rioting. And he sees anger directed toward integrated AASS meetings and specifically the property loss experienced by Cox, Ludlow and the Tappan brothers as a potential link to these fears. Gilje maintains, however, that “the connection of the mob’s behavior to fears of amalgamation is inconclusive,” and that, “overshadowing and subsuming both issues...was the concern over the development of a black subcommunity within New York.”¹²⁸ By looking at what the rioters targeted for destruction in the Five Points - the homes, businesses, churches, schools, and benevolent organizations of African Americans - the thesis becomes clear. Gilje makes a convincing argument that what motivated the rioters was an overarching and intensified racism that, “revealed not just a willingness to demonstrate discontent with blacks and their abolitionist defenders but also a desire to purge the city of them.”¹²⁹ What the rioters had consequently understood in their planned targeting of the Spring

¹²⁶Richards, 114-15.

¹²⁷Kerber, 34-5.

¹²⁸Gilje, 163.

¹²⁹Ibid., 167.

Street Church was not only its history of opposition to slavery, but active support of the black community.

Women in the Antislavery Public Sphere

There were two antislavery women's organizations in New York City in the mid-1830's, and both are viewed as more conservative than their counterparts in Philadelphia and Boston.¹³⁰ The first to organize was the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham Street Chapel (FASS) in 1834. Article I of its constitution declared it to be an, "auxiliary to the American Anti-Slavery Society." The organization was based at Chatham Street Chapel, or Second Free Church, where Charles Finney was pastor. Officers in FASS were predominantly Presbyterian. They were also, "wives and daughters of merchants, clergymen, and doctors." The first director was Harriet Green, wife of William Green, Jr., a founding member and officer of the AASS.¹³¹ A wealthy merchant, Green joined the Spring Street Church in 1823 and is listed as a Deacon at Laight Street in its 1825 manual.¹³² By 1831 he and Harriet had joined the First Free Church on Dey Street, where he served as an ordained Elder.¹³³

A second organization, the Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Society (LNYCASS), was begun a year later in 1835. Like FASS, it was staffed largely by the wives and daughters of prominent Presbyterians. Its director was Mrs. Rev. J. H. Martyn, wife of a Presbyterian minister. Also listed were Mrs. Abraham L. Cox as Corresponding Secretary, Mrs. Rev. H. G. Ludlow, Mrs. John (Eliza) Rankin, and Juliana Tappan, oldest daughter of Lewis Tappan. This second organization was intended to be broader and more inclusive of women in other

¹³⁰Amy Swerdlow, "Abolition's Conservative Sisters: The Ladies' New York City Anti-Slavery Societies, 1834-1840," in Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. van Horne, editors, *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America*, (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1994), 31.

¹³¹*Ibid.*, 34.

¹³²*1825 Catalogue of the Laight Street Presbyterian Church*, 4.

¹³³*1834 Manual of the First Free Presbyterian Church*, 55.

denominations across the city. This organizational goal was generally unmet, even though it drew a larger membership than FASS.¹³⁴

Another aspect of LNYCASS was its unwillingness to allow membership to women of color. Shirley Yee writes that these women were focused on opposing the institution of slavery but did not take up the cause of social equality. Their narrowly defined antislavery mission reflects an obligation as evangelistic reformers to good works. “They opposed the idea of enslavement and supported benevolent aid to blacks,” writes Yee, “but their reformist vision did not include disturbing the structure of social relations, and they did not embrace equality between either the sexes or the races.”¹³⁵ The smaller Chatham Street Chapel group did, however, admit black women. In their published Constitution and Address they position themselves against colonization by disdainfully rejecting patronization, stating, “We would not join hypocrisy to persecution, by *dictating* to them (free blacks) how they are to improve their character and prospects. *We cannot urge them, then, to seek on a foreign shore the blessings they are entitled to in their native country.*”¹³⁶ Yee speculates this statement, “may have reflected the presence of black members, such as Elizabeth Ann Day, who participated in the Chatham Street organization.”¹³⁷

Apart from Mrs. Ludlow, the names of women who participated in these two female antislavery organizations fail to appear in Spring Street Church records after 1825 when most of the wealthier congregants left for Laight Street. Though some black women may have participated in the Chatham Street FASS, membership dues and perceived class barriers may

¹³⁴Swerdlow, 33.

¹³⁵Shirley J. Yee, *Black Women Abolitionists: A Study in Activism, 1828 – 1860*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1992), 91.

¹³⁶*Constitution and Address of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Chatham Street Chapel*, (New York: William S. Dorr, 1834), 12. Emphasis in original.

¹³⁷Yee, 93; In contrast to Yee, Sinha contends that FASS at Chatham Street did not have black membership.

have effectively excluded both white and black women at Spring Street from participation. Black women formed their own societies, however. They participated alongside LNYCASS and the Chatham Street group in the first Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, which took place in New York in May of 1837.¹³⁸

New York City was represented at the convention by eighteen delegates and eighty corresponding members. The most notable names that appear are Juliana Tappan and Mrs. Abraham L. Cox.¹³⁹ It is unclear if any women with membership at Spring Street attended the convention,¹⁴⁰ though the church did play an important role as host to a series of antislavery lectures by sisters Angelina and Sarah Grimké. Talks were proposed immediately following the convention as parlor meetings in private homes. The venue proved impractical, however, due to the overwhelming popularity of the Grimkés. At the invitation of Rev. Duncan Dunbar, the talks began in the session room of Beriah Baptist Church on McDougal Street. When that space became too small Henry Ludlow invited the Grimkés to lecture in the sanctuary of the Spring Street Church. Ludlow had attended the initial meetings at Beriah, offering opening prayers before the exclusively female audience. His specific connection to the sisters within the abolitionist community is not entirely known, but they were notably guests in the Ludlow home during their time in New York.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸Sinha, 274.

¹³⁹*Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women*, May 8-12, 1837, (New York: William S. Dorr, 1837).

¹⁴⁰Two women are identified as members of the Laight Street Church and two others with membership at the First Free Church.

¹⁴¹Catherine H. Birney, *Sarah and Angelina Grimké*, (Boston: Lee and Shepherd, 1885), 163-65; Oliver Johnson, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*, (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1885), 259; Dorothy Sterling, *Ahead of Her Time: Abby Kelley and the Politics of Antislavery*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 40-41.

Rev. William Patton, 1837 – 1847

The Spring Street Church was rebuilt in 1835 following the riots of the previous summer. The old wood frame building was replaced with a larger edifice made of stone with front columns in Greek revival style. In February that year Samuel Cox ended his pastorate at Laight Street and accepted a call in 1837 to First Presbyterian in Brooklyn. The same year also saw an acrimonious split at the Presbyterian General Assembly between the Old School and New School factions. The long running theological differences formed the root of the split, but the contentious issue of slavery was the breaking point. The denomination had assailed slavery in 1818 as a “gross violation” of human rights and divine law, but ultimately took a conservative position in proscribing any kind of social activism toward its demise. With most abolitionists in the New School advocating a stronger stance against the institution, a reactionary Old School backlash occurred with support from the Southern Presbyteries. First, the interdenominational Plan of Union forged between Congregationalists and Presbyterians in 1801 was invalidated. Then four synods formed since the plan, seen as theologically heretical and too outspoken on the issue of slavery, were expelled. The denomination was now riven into separate organizations.¹⁴²

In early April 1837, about a month after the Women’s antislavery convention, Henry Ludlow ended his pastorate at Spring Street and accepted a call to Church Street Congregational in New Haven.¹⁴³ While in Connecticut Ludlow continued to preach against slavery in addition to serving as an agent in the underground railroad. Anti-abolitionist mob violence also followed him. While delivering an antislavery lecture at the Congregational Church in Meriden, “an infuriated crowd stoned the building, battered down the locked door, and pelted the congregation

¹⁴²Moorhead, 28-9.

¹⁴³Halliday, 204; Alexander, 103. *Patten’s New Haven Directory*, (New Haven: James M. Patten, 1840), 93.

with rotten eggs and trash.”¹⁴⁴ Although he was no longer actively involved with the AASS in New York, Ludlow later served on the Amistad Committee at the invitation of Lewis Tappan.¹⁴⁵

Following Ludlow’s resignation, Rev. William Patton was installed in October as the fourth pastor of the Spring Street congregation. He was also the church’s third successive preacher to espouse abolitionist views from its pulpit. Patton had previously founded the Central Presbyterian Church in 1821 on Broome Street, serving until 1834 when he became Secretary of the Presbyterian Education Association.¹⁴⁶ His return to pastoral service was marked by increased growth in membership, with over two hundred joining within the first year. Many of the new members in the following years had migrated from the Laight Street Church, which saw its membership decline along with the neighborhood surrounding St. John’s Park. The years under Patton marked a high point, with membership reaching a peak of over seven hundred. Despite growth, the congregation continued to live under a burden of mortgage debt for the new building. Ludlow’s resignation was ostensibly because of poor health, but the “embarrassments” of increasing financial difficulties were suspected by some at the time as the real cause.¹⁴⁷

Patton is described as a competent and learned preacher. For Halsey, “the most scholarly man who has ever occupied this pulpit.” In addition to his prominent social stands on slavery and temperance, he was respected for his pastoral work at Central. At age forty he brought to Spring Street a maturity and able leadership the congregation needed in the wake of the riots. His pastoral skills, however, were viewed as less vigorous than those applied by Ludlow. Services were nevertheless well attended. A Youth Missionary Society was organized in 1838 for home

¹⁴⁴Horatio T. Strother, *The Underground Railroad in Connecticut*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1962), 35, 111.

¹⁴⁵Lewis Tappan, *History of the American Missionary Association*, (1855), 4; Wyatt-Brown, 210.

¹⁴⁶*Session Records of Central Presbyterian Church*, New York City, Vol. 1, 1821 – 1853. PHS.

¹⁴⁷Halsey, 16-17.

mission work, and by 1846 the Sunday School was said to have reached a peak of one-thousand children. “The congregations were large,” writes Halsey, “and the church the center of Christian activity.”¹⁴⁸

Records show Spring Street continued to accept African Americans into membership throughout the ten-year period of Patton’s service.¹⁴⁹ The congregation also maintained an antislavery activism at a time when many other congregations and clergy within the Third Presbytery began to move away from speaking out on the issue.¹⁵⁰ “In Dr. Patton’s day there was a strong anti-slavery Society connected with the church,” writes Halsey.¹⁵¹ While he does not specify an organization, the Evangelical Union Anti-Slavery Society (EUASS), an auxiliary of the AASS, in 1839 lists Anthony Lane of the Spring Street Church a member of its Board of Managers.¹⁵²

Patton preached antislavery from the pulpit, though his sermons seem not to have survived. His active stand on the issue was consistent throughout his life but appears solely contained within the religious sphere.¹⁵³ According to his son, he did not join the AASS, “lest he should seem to identify himself with the objectionable sentiments and measures of some of its leading advocates.”¹⁵⁴ However, a forty-page pamphlet written by Patton for a British audience and published in July 1861 during a visit to London reveals much about his understanding and

¹⁴⁸Ibid, 17-18; Jonathan Greenleaf, *A History of the Churches of All Denominations in the City of New York*, second edition (New York: E. French, 1850), 168.

¹⁴⁹*Session Records of the Spring Street Presbyterian Church, 1837 – 1875*, Vol. 3.

¹⁵⁰Roberts, 158.

¹⁵¹Halsey, 18.

¹⁵²Evangelical Union Anti-Slavery Society of the City of New York, *Address to the Churches of Jesus Christ by the Evangelical Union Anti-Slavery Society of the City of New York*, (New York: AASS, 1839), 53.

¹⁵³George Lewis Prentiss, *The Union Theological Seminary in the City of New York: Historical and Biographical Sketches of Its First Fifty Years*, (New York: Anson D. F. Randolph and Co., 1889), 125.

¹⁵⁴William Weston Patton, *A Filial Tribute to the Memory of Rev. William Patton, D. D.*, (Washington, D. C.: Howard University, 1880), 21.

thinking on the issue. *The American Crisis; or The True Issue, Slavery or Liberty?* is a vigorous and cogent argument against the purchase of Southern cotton.¹⁵⁵

Patton begins by explaining that the founding of the United States, in discarding the old Articles of Confederation, adopted a plan of union for a single nation under one constitution. From that basis he argues that Southern secession had no constitutional validity. He goes on to list seven points why the South's provisional government was set up, "without in any shape setting forth any bill of grievances." In rhetorical fashion, all except one point begins with, "They do not plead....," declaring that no efforts were made to ask for a redress of grievances because none were enumerated.¹⁵⁶ Patton asserts the Southern states had not made claim to unconstitutional, oppressive, or unfair laws, or have not had fair electoral representation. The only issue regarding secession, Patton maintains, is slavery: "Instead of a bill of grievances...they only make prominent their fear that the principles of the republican party, on which they have elected President Lincoln, are such that in their legitimate workings they must inevitably abolish slavery."¹⁵⁷

Taking a wider perspective, the pamphlet notes antislavery trends around the world. "The irrepressible tendencies of the age are towards liberty," writes Patton, and in contrast sees the United States as "almost alone" among nations in holding onto the largest number of slaves.¹⁵⁸ Southern recalcitrance on slavery, according to Patton, is purely due to a desire to retain monetary profit through continued market dominance in cotton exports. And the exercise of "slave power" in the American political sphere, he argues, has only been met with resistance

¹⁵⁵Rev. William Patton, D.D., *The American Crisis; or, The True Issue, Slavery of Liberty?* (London: Sampson Low, Son, & Co., 1861)

¹⁵⁶*Ibid.*, 15 – 18.

¹⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵⁸*Ibid.*, 28.

and determined opposition. Among the political actions of the Southern states are the curtailing of the “right of petition” to Congress in the form of the gag rule; the fugitive slave law against the North; and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise in the Kansas-Nebraska Act that entirely left open the introduction of slavery in the West.¹⁵⁹

By eliminating any Southern claim of legitimacy to secession, Patton attempts to persuade his British audience that the purchase of cotton only supports the institution of slavery. He appeals to past British abolitionism through critical argument in stating, “England, with all her strong Anti-slavery feeling, became the great supporter of slavery, by being the largest purchaser of cotton raised by slave labor,” and that the country thereby ignores, “all her past brilliant career in the abolition of slavery,” in handing any support to the Southern cause.¹⁶⁰

Patton also effectively argues that the constitution of the Confederacy, “makes slavery national and perpetual,” and, “that slavery is the all-pervading and animating cause, cannot be doubted.”¹⁶¹ In *The American Crisis*, Patton concludes in a final, rhetorical argument that, “The grand issue which the providence of God is forcing upon the United States is this, – Which shall rule, Slavery or Liberty?”¹⁶²

In attempting to enlist British support for the Union, Patton brilliantly constructs his argument around a constitutional and political chronology that sees Southern secession as based in economic greed, perpetuating the denial of emancipation to four million slaves. The appeal to freedom, rooted in Enlightenment era ideas of equality and combined with reference to Britain’s recent abolitionist past becomes a moral suasion argument against slavery. Patton’s appeal to the British public in 1861 demonstrates a firm grasp of the political, constitutional, and moral

¹⁵⁹Ibid.,29-32.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., 26, 29.

¹⁶¹Ibid., 25.

¹⁶²Ibid., 27.

dimensions of the issue of slavery. It reveals an understanding that was undoubtedly a powerful influence on the congregation at Spring Street during his ten-year pastorate.

Conclusion

The years immediately following the 1834 riots saw the issue of slavery become increasingly contentious within the New York evangelical community. The disclaimer posted around the city by Tappan and Rankin along with the forced withdrawal of Peter Williams, Jr. from the AASS in the immediate aftermath appeared to portend a retreat. Many white evangelicals, including Finney, began to see serious liability in linking activist reform with the Free Church movement. They saw identification with abolition a threat to revivalism. The riots had driven home the extent to which a strong racist element had associated evangelicals with not only abolition but support for the black community through what they considered amalgamationist practices.¹⁶³ In 1835 Charles Finney wrote a series of articles at the suggestion of Joshua Leavitt that were published as a best-selling book. *Lectures on Revivals of Religion* declared slavery as sin, and Finney strongly admonished individuals and churches against seeing it otherwise. He stopped short, however, of advocating organized antislavery within evangelical churches.¹⁶⁴

Black clergy such as Rev. Theodore Wright of First Colored Presbyterian were also wary of associating too closely to Lewis Tappan. They feared the negative implications of pushing the boundaries of racial integration too quickly both within the AASS and evangelical churches.¹⁶⁵ It was not all retreat, however. On the national level the AASS continued to expand its regional

¹⁶³Roberts, 160-62; Burrows and Wallace, 559.

¹⁶⁴Charles G. Finney, *Memoirs of Charles G. Finney*, (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1876), 330; Charles G. Finney, *Lectures on Revivals of Religion*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1868), 272-3. Leavitt was editor of *The New York Evangelist* newspaper at the time.

¹⁶⁵Roberts, 162-3.

influence, and by the late 1830's would count a million members in well over one thousand local auxiliaries. A vastly expanded postal campaign in 1835 also stirred animosities in the South when more than a million antislavery tracts were distributed. In Charleston, mobs burned effigies of Cox, Garrison, and Arthur Tappan. There was demand in some quarters of the Southern states for the extradition of the Tappans, which New York Governor William L. Marcy refused to consider.¹⁶⁶

A significant peak in the Free Church movement was represented by the Broadway Tabernacle at Thirty-Fourth Street. Completed in 1836, it was built at the initiative of Charles Finney for his own use. It departed from the Tappan model by its high expense and grand scale. As a congregation it sought to avoid attaching itself to social issues like temperance and antislavery. A circular, arena-like interior provided a stage from which Finney could preach in ever more dramatic revivalist style.¹⁶⁷ The Free Church movement started by Lewis Tappan had changed out from under his influence. It discarded religious institutional support for abolition at a time when secular and political activism surrounding the issue was increasing. The economic model of the movement had also changed. The panic of 1837, which severely diminished the Tappan fortune, had forced the cash-strapped First Free Church to merge with Broadway Tabernacle. Except for the Chatham Street Chapel, the Free Churches were no longer free. They were now forced to charge pew rents.¹⁶⁸

By the late 1830's a split had occurred within the AASS between the New York and Boston factions. Garrison and most of his followers uncompromisingly rejected any antislavery politics, including voting, and deemed the U.S. Constitution a pro-slavery document. Tappanites

¹⁶⁶Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 245-6; Burrows and Wallace, 560.

¹⁶⁷Finney, *Memoirs*, 339.

¹⁶⁸Roberts, 164-65.

in New York, conversely, supported politics, particularly in the new antislavery Liberty Party. It saw the Constitution as an expressly antislavery document. Another divisive issue was the role of women in antislavery organizations. Garrisonians accepted and encouraged women in speaking and leadership roles, in contrast to the evangelical wing that relegated women to auxiliary and supportive functions. As a result, the New York faction broke from the AASS and formed in 1840 the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society (AFASS).¹⁶⁹

The character of the Spring Street Church grew organically and in stages as the Eighth Ward transformed from a rural to urban landscape. The sparse population of the area in the early years meant that to attract parishioners the church needed to be inclusive and integrated out of necessity. By 1820 Samuel Cox replaced the undynamic Matthew La Rue Perrine, firmly establishing the congregation within the New School, evangelical wing of Presbyterianism. Cox brought to the church a social activism that included a prominent antislavery orientation. His energetic preaching and popularity attracted and increased membership from an emerging middling and upper class. When the congregation moved to Laight Street in 1825 most of the membership, including the wealthier families followed. The new location and the old location were now separate but sister congregations. The few that remained at the old church formed the nucleus of the “new” Spring Street Church.

The arrival of Henry G. Ludlow in 1826 shifted the congregation toward an even greater socially activist, antislavery orientation as membership once again grew. Ludlow’s subsequent involvement in the AASS connected the church to the wider abolitionist movement and to prominent leaders like the Tappan brothers and William Lloyd Garrison. While Cox also became a leading member of the AASS, most at Laight Street did not support his antislavery position

¹⁶⁹Tappan, *Life of Arthur Tappan*, 301-07; Sinha, 263.

even though he remained popular.¹⁷⁰ That was not the case with Ludlow at Spring Street. The move downtown in 1825 ironically insured a continuity begun under Cox at the original location. The church during the time of Ludlow and later Patton would continue to be closely associated with antislavery, even as other pastors within the Third Presbytery began to disassociate from abolition in the wake of the riots.

Cox, Ludlow, and Patton appear to have enjoyed general if not universal support for abolition and racial equality throughout the twenty-seven years of their combined pastorates. The creation of segregated seating by church Trustees illustrates the congregation was not immune to the pervasive racial prejudice of the period. Nevertheless, all three pastors were among the most actively prominent in the formation of the Third Presbytery. That Spring Street continued to be identified with antislavery even after the 1834 riots and the installation of Patton three years later indicates that most of those who joined the congregation did so knowing full well its history with the issue.

Antislavery activism among Spring Street's congregants is more difficult to gauge simply because there is less documentation in comparison to its pastoral leadership. There are any number of reasons people join churches, like an affinity for a pastor, the preaching, Sunday school opportunities, and proximity to one's neighborhood. At Spring Street, antislavery activism appears to have been a feature drawing in a cohort of congregants. An entry in the trustee's minutes from April 1839 references that activism, stating, "a certain communication...from the 'members of the Anti-Slavery Society of Spring Street Church' was received...for use of the lecture room monthly."¹⁷¹ Unfortunately there are no other records of

¹⁷⁰Lossing, 335; Three prominent members of the AASS were, however, officers at the Laight Street Church: William Green, Jr., John Rankin, and Arthur Tappan. Former slave James W. C. Pennington was admitted into membership at Laight Street 11 April 1829 and later served on the Executive Committee of the AFASS.

¹⁷¹SSPC *Trustee's Minutes*, Vol. 2, 29 April 1839.

the Anti-Slavery Society, and it remains unknown the degree to which women and African Americans were active.

The Spring Street Church stands out as a unique congregation that, despite a changing social and physical landscape, steadily identified with principled abolition and social equality through the early and middle years of immediatist antislavery. Three confluent factors formed and supported the church's character. The first was its early beginnings as an integrated congregation, closely associated with the local populace. The second was strong pastoral leadership in Cox, Ludlow, and Patton. The third was a core membership that was increasingly attracted to the social stance for which the church was identified. Like its burial vaults, the history of the Spring Street Church and its place within New York City's antislavery community had long been forgotten. In a final irony, the accidental discovery of human remains at the church's former site has made possible the purposeful rediscovery of its storied history.

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