

Abby Kelley Foster

(1811–1887)



One of the first women to lecture in public, Worcester's Abby Kelley Foster was a fiery advocate of abolition and women's rights.



Abby Kelley Foster by Charlotte Wharton, Mechanics Hall Worcester

“Harmony! I don't want Harmony, I want Truth.”
Abby Kelley Foster

Taking the Stage

Born into a Quaker family, Abby Kelley became a teacher. Impressed by William Lloyd Garrison's abolitionist speeches, she joined his organization as a lecturer. Her appearances in Seneca Falls New York – years before the famous women's rights convention – split the local religious community. Some thought it inappropriate for women to speak or appear on stage with men. A supportive Wesleyan congregation

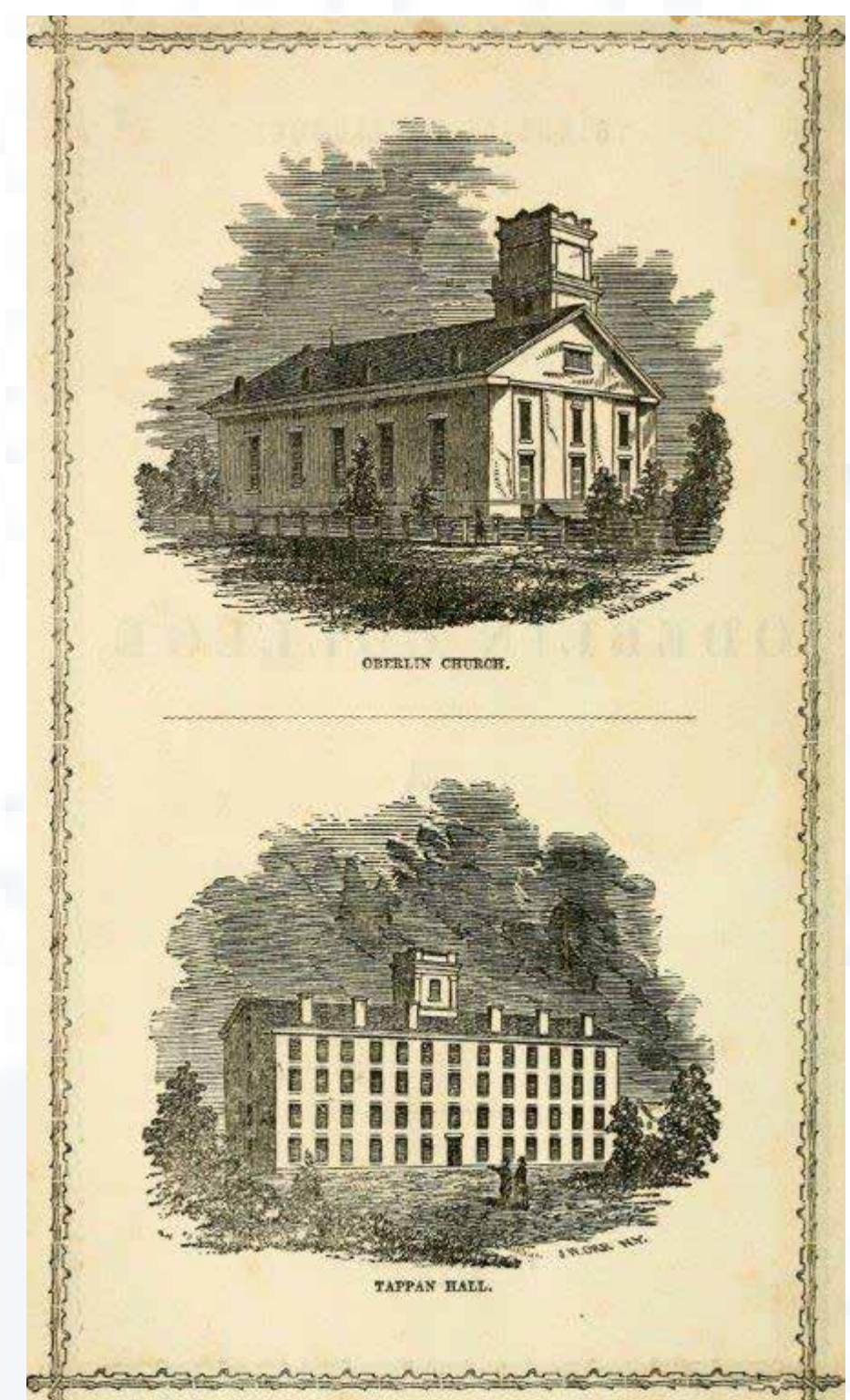
broke away over the issue. Their chapel became the site of the first women's rights convention.

Not as Easy as it Looks

Abby Kelley Foster advised, “Go where least wanted, for there you are most needed.” She was undeterred by hecklers or threats of physical violence. During one appearance protesters set the stage on fire under her. Some men resigned rather than sharing committee work with her in Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society. She became its most successful fundraiser.

Recently married, Abby Kelley Foster made a joint appearance at Oberlin village in Ohio with her husband, abolitionist lecturer Stephen Symonds Foster. Some local residents were shocked to see a woman on the platform. An Oberlin College student, Lucy Stone, was delighted and successfully pushed for a second appearance.

OBERLIN COLLEGE
CATALOGUE, 1850



Abby Kelley Foster and Lucy Stone

A provocative speaker and talented organizer, Abby Kelley went to Ohio to spread the anti-slavery message. Appearing at Oberlin village in 1846, she inspired a Massachusetts student at the local college – Lucy Stone – who would later take to the lecture circuit for abolitionism and women's rights. After the Civil War she urged Stone to support voting rights for black men if women's suffrage was out of reach, believing opposition would be an act of “monstrous selfishness.”



Abby Kelley Foster



Lucy Stone



Worcester honors the legacy of Abby Kelley Foster with charter schools as well as a shelter and supportive housing program for women that bear her name.

Taxation without Representation

The home of Abby Kelley Foster and Stephen Symonds Foster became a stop on the Underground Railroad. Later the couple refused to pay property taxes because this amounted to “taxation without representation” for women. The home was seized and bought back at a financial loss.



“Liberty Farm,” the home of Abby Kelley Foster