



Women Make History:

Stories we should have learned in school

*I think, with never-ending gratitude,
that the young women of today
do not and can never know at what
price their right to free speech and to
speak at all in public has been earned.*

[Lucy Stone](#)



Lucy Stone, Library of Congress

Abolitionist & Suffragist: Lucy Stone

[Lucy Stone](#) was a pioneering abolitionist and suffragist in the mid-nineteenth century. The first woman in Massachusetts to earn a college degree, she fought for racial and gender equality by generating support for amending the Constitution to give Black men the vote, and by laying the foundation for passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

Born in 1818 in Massachusetts to a farming family, Stone was one of nine children. Her family traced its roots to British colonists who had arrived in New England seeking religious freedom. From her family, she inherited a passion for education, equal opportunity, and the abolition of slavery.

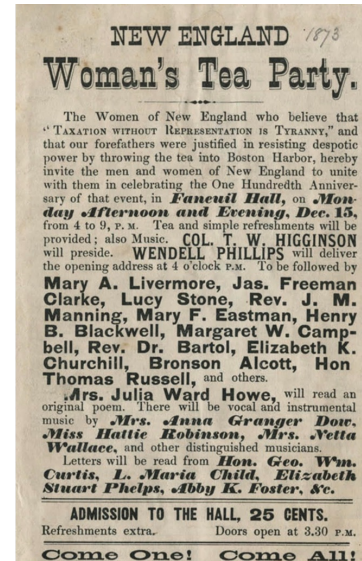
Always one to walk the talk, at age sixteen, Stone [became](#) a teacher to earn money to attend college. She completed one semester at Mount Holyoke before an illness in her family forced her to return home. Four years later, she returned to school, this time at Oberlin College in Ohio. She graduated with honors in 1847 at the age of twenty-nine.

At college, Stone wanted to study public speaking, but it was an era when it violated social

norms for women to speak to groups of men and women in public. Although Oberlin was progressive—few colleges admitted women—she was not allowed to pursue her interest. When she was asked to write a commencement speech for graduation, she declined when she learned it would have to be read by a man.

Beyond teaching, few professions were available to women. Abolitionist leader [William Lloyd Garrison](#), however, hired Stone to write—and give speeches—on behalf of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Her oratory skills proved so powerful that she often out-earned male speakers. Like other abolitionists, especially women, Stone was often jeered and on one occasion, was attacked by a mob.

Stone did not attend the [1848 Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention](#), considered the birthplace of the suffrage movement, but two years later, she [co-founded](#) the National Woman's Rights Convention. Attended by more than 1,000 women and men from eleven states, Stone gave a speech that was so popular, it was reprinted in newspapers in the U.S. and abroad. In 1852 she delivered another speech that some scholars credit with winning Susan B. Anthony to the cause.



Boston Antheneum Collections

In 1855 Stone [married](#) Henry Blackwell, brother of Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, the first American woman to earn a medical degree. He promised Stone a marriage of equality and partnership. At her wedding, she famously omitted traditional vows of obedience and [refused](#) to take her husband's name. When other women followed her example, they were known as "Lucy Stoners."

Stone's campaign for women's rights extended beyond the vote. As part of an event she helped to organize, Stone [refused](#) to pay property taxes under the principle of "no taxation without representation." The family's household items were impounded and sold.

During the Civil War (1861–1865), suffragists set aside their efforts but returned to campaigning at the war's end. In 1869, Stone co-founded the [New England Woman Suffrage Association](#) and served on the committee of the American Equal Rights Association.

Until the Civil War, the suffrage movement was mostly united in its dual aims to abolish slavery and win universal suffrage. That changed with the passage of the [Fifteenth Amendment](#) in 1869 which split the movement into two factions: one led by Stone and the other by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. The amendment granted voting rights only to African American men and excluded women.

Stone was willing to put the voting rights of African American men ahead of women's suffrage. Stanton and Anthony felt betrayed and warned that it would take another sixty years to win the vote. The rift tore apart many close friendships and alliances.

Also in 1869, Stone co-founded the [American Woman Suffrage Association](#) (AWSA) in Boston. Stanton and Anthony had already formed the National Woman Suffrage

Association in New York. Both groups focused on winning the vote, but Stanton and Anthony set their sights exclusively on women's rights, including divorce laws and equal pay. Their aim was to pass a Constitutional Amendment. By contrast, AWSA included male officers, continued the fight for racial equality, and supported a grassroots approach at the state level.



Selling copies of the *Woman's Journal*. Library of Congress.

At AWSA, Stone [launched](#) the *Woman's Journal*, which remained in print until 1931, eleven years after passage of the Nineteenth Amendment. Always challenging the norm, in 1879, Stone tried to register to vote since Massachusetts granted women voting rights suffrage in certain elections. She was removed from the rolls because she did not use her husband's last name.

By 1890, it was clear that the two suffrage organizations would be more effective if they worked together. The daughters of both Stone and Stanton succeeded in healing the divisions and [merged](#) the two groups into the National American Woman Suffrage Association.

Stone's last speech was in 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition. She [died](#) the same year at age seventy-five, thirty years before women won the vote.

Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Ask yourself: When is it worth breaking from allies who are fighting for the same result?

Ask a friend: Have you ever healed a public rift, and if so, how?



[Sharon Spaulding](#) specializes in the life and times of reproductive rights activist, Mary Ware Dennett (1872-1947). In 2020, Time magazine included Dennett as one of the most important women in American history. Curator of Dennett's family archives, Spaulding is at work on a book about Dennett. In 2024, her manuscript was named runner-up in Book Pipeline's General Fiction category.

Spaulding received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her work. Her journalism has appeared in [Ms. Magazine](#), [Smithsonian](#), [New Hampshire Magazine](#), [BOLD](#), and others. She lives near Salt Lake City with her husband and a lab named Hank.

Sharon is available to delight audiences with the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. Contact her at: Sharon@SharonSpaulding.com.

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