

BIOGRAPHICAL SUPPLEMENT

Abby Hills Price

Abby was one of the few people whose words were recorded in the Proceedings of the 1850 National Woman's Rights Convention.

Abigail Hills Price was born July 18, 1814 in Franklin, CT. She died May 4, 1873 of apoplexy at Red Bank, NJ. She married Edmund Price (born on March 1, 1808), an unsuccessful hatter with poor investments.

- Children:
1. Arthur W. Price was born January 23, 1840 in Willimantic, CT.
He became an engineer in the U.S. Navy.
 2. Helen C. Price was born May 18, 1841 in Willimantic, CT.
 3. Emily W. Price was born in Hopedale.
 4. Henry Edmund Price was born April 2, 1850 in Hopedale and died May 2, 1852.

"Mr. Price was by trade a hatter. He was a very honest, industrious, hard-working man in whatever business engaged, often consuming 15-18 hours of the 24. Had he been as successful in preserving the fruits of his toil as in earning them, he must have become wealthy. But, with no vicious or spend-thrift habits, through misjudgment or ill-luck in the investment of his funds, he frequently lost in large sums what he had acquired by laborious diligence. He and his wife came to Hopedale in 1842, and were among our early members of the community. Mrs. Price was an intelligent woman, with a literary and poetic genius. She occupied an influential official position in the community for several years. In 1853, she and her husband removed to Englewood, NJ, thence to New York City, and last to near Red Bank, Monmouth Co., NJ. There she died suddenly of apoplexy, May 4, 1878. An interesting memorial obituary testifying to her life-work and worth, soon after appeared in the "New York Tribune."

(Biographical and Genealogical Register of Milford, page 979)

"Abby H. Price was the leading spokeswoman for equal rights at Hopedale. ...A member of the New England Non-Resistance Society and the author of at least ten hymns and various pieces of verse for the community, she was a talented woman whose abilities earned her election in 1843, at age twenty-eight, as the community's secretary, the one exception to the male dominance of major offices in the 1840s. Some unspecified "family cares" led her to withdraw temporarily from Hopedale, but by 1848 she had returned and was elected secretary-treasurer of the newly formed Beneficent Society. ...The convention, well attended by women from Hopedale, approved a set of resolutions along..." the lines of her speech.

"In an address given at Hopedale in 1852, she said that 'here woman has no restrictions imposed because she is a woman, but has a fair chance of being all she is capable of doing.' But she also noted that equal rights had increased the burdens of women with homes and families; she herself had four children. To liberate woman from the tyranny of washing and ironing, therefore, the community should provide a 'combined household. Where she might be occasionally relieved from the care of the family—and be free to exert her nobler powers unfettered.'"

"The male leadership at Hopedale postponed indefinitely the plan for a combined household, but in theory at least, it supported greater opportunities for women. Lucy Stone, the 'gifted advocate of Universal humanity.' Was well received when she gave two lectures on woman's rights at Hopedale in late 1851. Two years later William Henry Fish applauded both the ordination of a female minister and the publication of a feminist newspaper. Although [Adin] Ballou's nonresistance principles left him with little enthusiasm for the woman's suffrage movement, he did open the pages of *The Practical Christian* to its advocates, publishing Abby Price's demand in 1853 that the state of Massachusetts eliminate the word *male* from its voting requirements."

Edward K. Spann, Hopedale: From Commune to Company Town, 1840-1920. (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1992), pages 69-71.

“Nearly all that we know about the Hopedale Community (1841-1856) is written through the eyes of Adin Ballou, its founder, planner, theologian, President, and historian. ...Ballou referred to [Abby Price]- as ‘a sort of poet-laureate’ to the Community. I found more than sixty poems, several articles, and the story related in the following pages. I also found evidence that there are many other stories waiting to be discovered and told.” (preface)

“ Abby’s writings give us an intriguing picture of a highly intelligent, educated woman, absolutely committed to Practical Christian Socialism. The writings that we have contain a strong but warm and loving religious flavor. Her writing is replete with Biblical allusion and metaphor which she applies to the reform movements with enormous skill. They show us a woman whose thoughts were developing over the years, and whose personal commitment to reform began to focus on woman’ rights by the early 1950s. And they show us a woman with the courage to speak before a national convention, criticizing the large society in which she found herself; a woman whose courage failed when it came to wearing the newfangled Bloomer costume in public’ and a woman who finally turned a critical eye on the community which she loved, advocating for changes in women’s sphere with that community. I would suggest that it may have been this criticism of Hopedale itself that led to a lack of support during a time of interpersonal crisis, leaving her vulnerable and ultimately leading to her decision to leave.” (9)

“Abby Price along with her fellows at Hopedale was strongly anti-war [Mexican War], giving many of her anti-slavery writing a rich, sweet-sour mixture of hope that slavery would end without war, that God and love would somehow put an end to the evil of slavery.” (12)

“There was a particular chain of events that led to the departure of Abby and her family from Hopedale. Adin Ballou refers to these events a ‘A Free Love Episode’ [in his History of Hopedale]. He mentions no names. But upon hearing a rumor, Sam’l W. Wheeler of Providence wrote to Abby Price as follows: ‘ It is reported that you, with two or three others, (Henry Fish is named as one,) are about being or are excluded from Hopedale Community. I hear nothing as a reason but that you have adopted what is call by some the ‘Free Love’ principle What is it? what does it mean? ...You cannot imagine my feelings. Seldom, if ever, has my spirit been troubled as it is now. Do write immediately.’ To his credit, Adin Ballou published this letter and Abby’s reply in *The Practical Christian*. [July 2, 1853]” (22)

Susan G. LaMar, “The Poetry, Politics, and Prophecy of Abby Hills Price.”
(unpublished paper for Andover Newton Theological School, 1998).

Closing words in Address to the First National Woman' Rights Convention, October 24 & 25, 1950
as published in *The Practical Christian*, March 15, 1851. (Compilation-57)

What *highest* prize hath woman won
In science or in art?
What *mightiest* work by woman done,
Boasts city, field, or mart?
She hath no Raphael! Painting saith –
No Newton! Learning cries;
Show us her steamships! Her Macbeth!
Her thought-won victories.

Wait, boastful man! Though worthy are
Thy deeds, when thou art true, -
Things worthier still, and holier far,
Our sisters yet will do.
For this, the worth of woman shows
On every peopled shore,
That still as man in wisdom grows
He honors her the more.

O, not for wealth, fame, or power,
Hath man's meek angel striven;
But, silent as the growing flower,
To make of earth a heaven!
Soon in her garden of the sun
Heaven's brightest rose shall bloom;
For woman's best is unbegun!
Her advent yet to come!

Susan G. LaMar, "The Poetry, Politics, and Prophecy of Abby Hills Price."
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