



Black Life, History,  
and Culture

---

Sarah Parker Remond, Abolitionist and Physician

Author(s): Dorothy B. Porter

Source: *The Journal of Negro History*, Vol. 20, No. 3 (Jul., 1935), pp. 287-293

Published by: [Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2714720>

Accessed: 17/02/2015 12:11

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



Association for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc. is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The Journal of Negro History*.

<http://www.jstor.org>

## SARAH PARKER REMOND, ABOLITIONIST AND PHYSICIAN

Seventy years ago, the name of Sarah Parker Remond was well known on at least two continents to many thousands of persons who were interested in the movement for the abolition of slavery. A free Negro woman of remarkable ability and intellect, she was one of the few lecturers of her sex and race who, during the Garrisonian era, could command the attention of lords and mayors, as well as that of thousands of laymen, in behalf of the oppressed Negro slave.

Sarah Remond was born about 1815 in Salem, Massachusetts, of John and Nancy Remond. Her father, a native of the Island of Curaçoa, came to America at an early age. He later became a well-known hairdresser in Salem, and on May 2, 1811, he was admitted to citizenship in the Essex County Court.<sup>1</sup> Sarah Remond was well educated and probably received her early instruction in the schools of Salem, as did her brother Charles Lennox Remond. Negro children were able to attend the public schools in Salem much earlier than they were permitted to do so in some of the other cities.

Charles Lennox Remond, the first Negro to address American audiences on the abolition of slavery and the best known Negro before the time of Frederick Douglass, probably influenced his sister to become a public lecturer. In 1856, they were assigned to speak during an anti-slavery campaign in the state of New York by the Executive Committee of the American Anti-Slavery Society. A series of lectures was arranged which included many prominent speakers of the day. In many instances during these lecture tours Sarah and her brother were the

<sup>1</sup> Nell, William C., *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. Boston, Robert F. Wallcut, 1855, p. 319.

recipients of many insults primarily because of their color. The hotels and boarding houses which admitted Susan B. Anthony refused to accommodate Sarah and Charles, in spite of their education and refinement. On one occasion when Charles Remond was in the home of an anti-slavery friend in Washington County, New York, a neighbor called and stated that a family in the vicinity was being neglected because it was suffering from small-pox. No one would go near them to help them. Mr. Remond expressed his sympathy and remarked, "To the colored people it is the same as having the smallpox all the time."<sup>2</sup>

During the early part of her lecture career, Sarah Remond spoke, for the most part, in the West with her brother. They were able to remove much of the prejudice which existed in this section against persons of color. Wherever and whenever possible she fought to overcome race discrimination and ill-feeling towards the Negro. In the year 1853 she was expelled from the Howard Athenaeum in New York after she had purchased tickets of admission and had been admitted with two friends. An agent and officer forced her to leave the building and in so doing pushed her down the stairs. Miss Remond presented her case before the police court and an opinion sustaining the equal rights of colored persons was given by Justice Russell. The defendants were fined a small sum, and the agent was forced to pay the costs of the proceedings. From that time on Miss Remond was permitted to occupy any seat at the Athenaeum she might choose to pay for.<sup>3</sup>

In September 1858, the editor of the *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, published in London, printed a letter written by

<sup>2</sup> Powell, Aaron M., *Personal Reminiscences of the Anti-Slavery and other Reforms and Reformers*. New York, 1899, p. 171.

<sup>3</sup> American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society. *Thirteenth Annual Report*. New York, The Society, 1853, p. 154.

Sarah Remond to a friend of the editor. The letter was published primarily to prepare for the visit of Miss Remond in England the English people who were interested in the abolition of slavery. It is as follows:

Salem, Mass., Sept. 18, 1858.

Dear Friend,

Your letter dated August 18th, was received. It reached my home while I was absent attending an anti-slavery convention at Cape Cod, in the town of Harwich, in company with Parker Pillsbury, Mr. Foss and my brother. Our meetings, eight in number, were well attended. On Sunday, although we had a large hall, many were obliged to go away unable to obtain entrance. I never looked upon a more closely packed audience. We endeavored to speak the words of truth to them, and I am sure the meeting was a very successful one. I received last week a short but pleasant call from Mr. Garrison and an English gentleman, Mr. Robson, who has been traveling in America. Mr. Robson seems to understand the character of our nation and the spirit of slavery. He is bearing a very faithful testimony against the great crime of our age. There is a very strong effort being made on the part of the slave-holders and their allies to legalize the slave trade. Only think of it, in the nineteenth century, a nation which years ago declared the slave trade piracy, and at this time is making greater professions in favor of liberty and Christianity than any other nation in the world, endeavoring to legalize traffic in bodies and souls of men and women who are "made for little lower than angels." Is it not enough to make one's heart sick?

Oh God! my every heart string cries,  
Doest thou these scenes behold  
In this our boasted Christian land,  
And must the truth be told?

It is true the traffic in slaves has always been carried on under the flag, but now there will be an attempt made to throw around this infamous crime the sanction of law. "And why not?" I may ask, "When the Supreme Court of the United States has declared that men and women with a dark complexion 'have no rights which white men are bound to respect.' " When I began to write to you I did not intend to write so much about the cause I feel so much interest in, but you know "out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." It gave me great satisfaction to hear of your safe arrival at Liverpool. To ride upon the waves of the ocean three thousand miles is really an event. I was exceedingly anxious to join you in your voyage; more so than I expressed in my letters to you. Feeling that you had no prejudice against color, I knew I should be sure of one

person to speak a word now and then. I still hope to reach London before winter, but I dread starting for many reasons. I do not fear the wind nor the waves, but I know that no matter how I go, the spirit of prejudice will meet me. I shall take passage from Boston in an English steamer. You mentioned my brother's friend. It is a long time since he visited England, so I shall gather up all my courage, and endeavor to depend upon myself. Parker Pillsbury will write to a friend of his to meet me at Liverpool and I shall hope to get along very well. He wished me to remember him very kindly to you. He has visited me twice at my own home since I wrote to you last.

I am very truly yours,

SARAH PARKER REMOND.<sup>4</sup>

Sarah Remond made her voyage across the ocean late that year. She lectured in many of the large cities in Scotland, Ireland and England on the abolition of slavery, during the years 1859 and 1860.<sup>5</sup> Everywhere she was received with great enthusiasm by large, interested and sympathetic audiences. In Warrington, England, where she spoke in March 1859, her address was signed by the Mayor, the Rector of the Parish, a member of Parliament for the Borough and by three thousand five hundred twenty-two inhabitants of all ranks and classes. A donation of one hundred dollars was raised at this meeting and sent to William Lloyd Garrison for the aid of the American Anti-Slavery Society.<sup>6</sup>

That her presence in England was appreciated is shown by the fact that many prominent persons visited her; even Lord Henry Brougham who was eighty years of age at this time called on her while she was in London. For the most part she was presented to audiences in the different cities by the anti-slavery societies, male and female, which were organized in these various places.<sup>7</sup> The

<sup>4</sup> *Anti-Slavery Advocate*. London, 1858, vol. ii, no. xxiii, November 1858, p. 179-180.

<sup>5</sup> See *Anti-Slavery Advocate* for 1859-1860 for accounts of these lectures.

<sup>6</sup> *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, 1859, vol. ii, no. xxviii, April 1859, p. 221.

<sup>7</sup> See the reports of the various English anti-slavery societies, Leeds Young Men's Anti-Slavery society, Edinburgh Ladies Emancipation society, etc.

newspapers of the day described her style of lecturing as being "well adapted to English audiences." It was "broad, comprehensive and impressive." Her presentation of the great questions of slavery were made intelligently—"Clear elucidation of just principles, no clap trap." According to these reports she did not play on the sympathies of her audiences by a long recital of the horrors of slavery. She applied her "rules of judgment to all persons, sects and classes."<sup>8</sup>

Her gentleness, refinement of manners, her fluent and clear-toned speech made her a popular lecturer. While on these speaking tours she had in mind certain aims which she hoped to fulfill. She desired preeminently to "extend the active sympathy of the whole British nation towards the cause of abolitionism in America." This she felt could be accomplished by money subscriptions which were to aid the work of the American Anti-Slavery societies, "public addresses from the English to the American people, especially from the English to the American churches, enunciating true Christian anti-slavery principles and feelings of sympathy with the abolitionists there in their patriotic and philanthropic labors." She further hoped to awaken the English people to a sense of the dangers that then threatened the "great principles of freedom hitherto maintained in one national policy through the so-called immigration scheme now in cooperation in the West Indies."<sup>9</sup> It is needless to say that with these purposes in mind much was accomplished to aid the cause which she so well represented.

Early in December in the year 1859 Sarah Remond desired to visit France. Accordingly, she went to the American Embassy to obtain the necessary visé on her passport. This was refused her by a Mr. Dallam, an official, upon the ground that colored persons are not citizens of

<sup>8</sup> *Anti-Slavery Advocate*, 1859, vol. ii, no. xxvii, March 1859, p. 211.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

the United States. Miss Remond's immediate remonstrance was answered with a threat of forcible removal from the office. A few days later she applied in writing to the minister respectfully insisting upon her right to have her passport viséd by the minister of her country. He replied by affirming a "manifest impossibility by law" that in her case "the indispensable qualification for an American passport was that of United States citizenship." He could not comply, therefore, with her desire. She later, however, obtained a passport from the British foreign secretary.<sup>10</sup> This was not the first time a colored person had been refused a passport on the ground of his color.

After the American Negro had been given his freedom, Sarah Remond continued working in his behalf. Again in 1867, she is found lecturing in England. This time before literary institutions and general audiences on such subjects as—"The Freeman or the Emancipated Negro of the Southern States of the United States."<sup>11</sup> Since some of her lectures were published many persons were able to read her plea for these needy people.<sup>12</sup> In 1864, she wrote a pamphlet of thirty pages entitled "The Negroes as Freedmen and Soldiers," which was published by the *Ladies London Emancipation Society*, stating the condition of the freedmen and telling of the services rendered by the Negro soldier in the war of the rebellion.

Still popular in London in 1867, she attended a large public breakfast given in honor of William Lloyd Garrison at St. James' Hall. The Duke of Argyll headed the list of a committee of fifty. There were many members of Parliament, philosophers, scientists, and literateurs present including Thomas F. Buxton, John Stuart Mill,

<sup>10</sup> American Anti-Slavery Society. *Annual Report by the Executive Committee for the Year Ending May the First, 1860*, New York, American Anti-Slavery Society, 1861, p. 222.

<sup>11</sup> *The Freedman*. London, A. Partridge, December 1, 1867, p. 121.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 162.

Herbert Spencer, T. H. Huxley and William Howitt. The entire number present included about three hundred men and women. Other American Negroes present were Daniel A. Payne, J. Sella Martin, and William and Ellen Craft who were living at that time in London.<sup>13</sup>

An undated clipping states that Sarah Remond received the degree of Doctor of Medicine in 1871 from a leading medical school in Florence, Italy. Probably weariness with her fight against the race problem and the indifference displayed in regard to the rights of Negroes were some of the reasons which made her seek a new field of endeavor, in a new country where opportunity for self-expression and service would not be denied to her.

Mrs. Elizabeth Buffum Chace, a Quaker and friend of abolition, visited Florence, Italy, in 1873, and tells in her memoirs of her travels there. She mentions a visit and a tea with a Mrs. Putnam at which Sarah Remond was present. Mrs. Chace described Miss Remond as a "remarkable woman" and said that by her "indomitable energy and perseverance she had won a fine position in Florence as a physician and also socially." She quoted Miss Remond as saying that Americans had attempted to use their influence to prevent her success, "by bringing their hateful prejudices" to Italy.<sup>14</sup>

The name of Sarah Remond, then, should have a prominent place in the history of the Negro. The story of her life is an illustration of the untiring efforts of one who desired to help her race in every way and who suffered much mentally and physically in the long fight for the abolition of slavery and the betterment of race relations.

DOROTHY B. PORTER

<sup>13</sup> *William Lloyd Garrison, 1805-1879*. The story of his life as told by his children. New York Century Comany, 1889, vol. iv, p. 196-7.

<sup>14</sup> Lyman, Lillie B., and Arthur C. Wyman, *Elizabeth Buffum Chace, 1806-1899, Her Life and Environment*, (Boston, 1914) Volume II, p. 42.