Dolly Witter Stetson
1807 – 1883
“What was life in the Community like?”

**Dolly Stetson**

**Introduction**

We stand before the site of the Association’s factory/boardinghouse. Unfortunately, this historic building was torn down. The Community bought the four-story brick factory from the Northampton Silk Company. They continued to manufacture silk there, but also used it for other purposes. Dolly and James Stetson left Brooklyn, Connecticut (the same small town where the Benson Family lived) to join the Community in 1843. They were accompanied by their six children aged 1-14 years old. The family moved into the fourth floor of the factory.

“What was Dolly Stetson?”

— Dolly Witter was born in 1808 and married James Stetson in 1827. Starting in the early 1830s, the young couple became social activists. Can you describe the work they did? Dolly helped create a role for herself as a female activist. What was that? Female abolitionists living in the North paid particular attention to one aspect of Southern slavery. What was that? (Doc. B,C)

— What did Prudence Crandall, from the neighboring town of Canterbury, Connecticut, do to get arrested and put in jail? What was Dolly’s involvement? A majority of people living in the area responded violently to what Crandall did. How do you think this made Dolly feel about her hometown? Do you think this might be a reason why she agreed to leave home and move to Florence? (Doc. B) Tell us more about Prudence Crandall.

— Dolly, like most women of her generation, had very little formal education. Did this stop her from matching wits with a college-bound student living at the Association? Describe the scene. Dolly may have been self-taught, but would you consider her un-educated? (Doc. D)

“What was life like in the factory/boardinghouse?”

— Dolly moved her six children, including a baby, into the fourth floor of the silk factory. This was a factory, not designed as a living space. Why did the Community have to house families this way? (Doc. E)

— Describe the layout. How did the Association make use of all four floors of the factory building? (Doc. F)

— How would you describe living conditions there? What do you think living at “common table” meant? What services could they expect living there? What rules did they have to follow? (Docs. G,H)

— How do you think living in the factory/boardinghouse compared to living in her own farmhouse in Connecticut? What does this tell us about Dolly’s commitment to the Community and all it stood for? (Docs. E,G)
“What were some pros and cons of living in the Community?”

—When the Stetsons joined the Community, James agreed to take the job of selling the silk they produced as a travelling “agent”. This meant he was on the road, away from home, most of the time. This was an unusual circumstance at the Community. It must have been hard on the family, but it’s great for historians. Can you guess why?

—In reading Dolly’s letters to James, how do you think she felt about living there? What about her workload and working hours? Was it easier or harder than living on the farm? Or was it just different? What were some distinct advantages of living in the Association? Give us a picture. (Docs. E,I,J,K) What did it mean to “keep boarders” (Doc J)?

—In this letter, Dolly wrote to James to persuade him why the family should stay in the Association. What were her reasons? (Doc. L) “Our race” refers to the human race.

—Dolly worked in the Household Department and was paid the same rate men were paid working at other jobs. She could speak and vote at Community meetings. Equality of the sexes was unheard of outside the Association. Do you think Dolly liked this aspect of living there?

“What was all the fuss over ‘amusements’?”

—Community members successfully put their religious differences aside and lived in relative harmony. A lot of religious denominations were represented there. The Stetsons remained practicing Unitarians and occasionally went to services in Northampton. Talk to your partners in the “George Benson Group” about this. What they could not agree on was the issue of “amusements”, or what people did in their spare time, particularly young people. What amusements were they referring to? What was Dolly’s position on this as the mother of two teenaged daughters in a communal living arrangement? Do you agree with Dolly? Give us your reasons. What were some consequences to the association? (Docs K,M)

NOTES ON SOURCES

A. List of Northampton Association members. Note that families are listed under the name of the father. Published by the Association.
B. (Top) From a family history written by Dolly’s granddaughter in 1907.
C. Notice in a local newspaper from the time (1830s).
D. From a memoir written by a boarding student living at the Association, published 1894.
E. From “Reminiscences” written by former Community member Frances Judd in 1894.
F. From History of Florence (1894).
G. From an account written by former Community member Frances Judd in 1870.
H. Northampton Association By-Laws.
I. Letter written by Dolly to her husband James, April 22, 1844.
J. Letter from Dolly to James, May 25, 1844.
K. Letter from Dolly to James, October 6, 1844.
L. Letter from Dolly to James, April 13, 1845.
M. Frances Judd account (1870).
Silk mill of the Northampton Association that stood opposite the David Ruggles Center on Nonotuck Street in Florence. Dolly Stetson and her family lived here along with approximately eighty other members of the Community. (Courtesy Historic Northampton)
A

NAMES.
William Adam, wife, 4 children,
James D. Atkins, 
George Ashley, 
George Benson, wife, 4 children, *Frances P. Birge, 
Samuel Brooks, wife, 7 children, 
Samuel A. Bottom, wife, 
*Roxey A. Brown, 
James Boyle, wife, 
Wm. J. Butstead, wife, 3 children, 
Luther Brigham, 4 children, 
Susan Byrne, 
William Bassett, wife, 4 children, 
Cyrus Bradbury, 
Elizabeth Ely Bradbury, 
Sarah Elizabeth Bradbury, 
Bailey Birge, wife, 3 children, 
Joseph Comant, wife, 
Orwell S. Chaffee, wife, 1 child, 
George Cooper, 
†Octavia M. Damon, 
Sophia Foorde, 
Emily Farrell, 
Gustavus Gifford, 
Roswell K. Goodwin, 
Caroline M. Gove, 
Erasmus G. Hudson, wife, 2 children, 
Rhoda Hudson, 
Romulus Fowler Hudson, 
Samuel L. Hill, wife, 3 children, 
Sally Hill, 4 children, 
Josiah Hayward, wife, 3 children, 
William Haven, wife, 7 children, 
Matilda Hill, 4 children, 
Lucy Charlotte Hayward, 
* Harriet W. Hayden, 
Eliosa L. Hammond, wife, 
Hall Judd, 
William Larned, 
David Mack, wife, 2 children, 
Charles May, 
Aber S. Meade, 
Littleton T. Morgan, 
Moses K. Meader, 
George W. Miller, 
A. Menkin, M. D., 
Joseph C. Martin, wife, 4 children, 
Lorenzo D. Nickerson, 
Enos L. Preston, wife, 1 child, 
William F. Parker, wife, 2 children, 
Susan F. Parker, 
Oliver D. Pain, 
George Prindle, 
Fortune R. Potter, 
Lydia B. Pierce, 
Nancy Richardson, 4 children, 
David Ruggles, 
Stephen C. Rush, 
Lucius F. Reed, 
Annis Ross, wife, 
Ezra Rosbrooks, 
Polly Rosbrooks, 
Louisa C. Rosbrooks, 
Francis O. Rosbrooks, 
Three Rosbrooks children, 
Theodore Scarborough, wife, 1 child, 
Jason Solloway, wife, 
Penélia Small, 1 child, 
Earle Dwight Swift, wife, 
Herbert Scarborough, 
Mary Ann Smith, 
Calvin Stebbins, wife, 2 children, 
William Stearns, wife, 1 child, 
James A. Stetson, wife, 6 children, 
Laura Stetson, 
George Washington Sullivan, 
Sidney Southworth, 
George Thurber, wife, 1 child, 
Hiram Wells, wife, 1 child, 
Joseph S. Wall, wife, 
Wm. G. Wilson, 
James Willey, 
Lyman F. Wight, 
Thomas Whitmarsh, 

FROM.
Cambridge, 
Old Cambridge, 
Chaplin, Ct., 
Brooklyn, Ct., 
Coblebrook, Ct., 
Hadley, 
Mansfield, Ct. 
Bloomfield, Ct., 
Boston, 
Bloomfield, Ct., 
Worcester, 
Willimantic, Ct., 
Lynn, 
Boston, 
Celebros, Ct., 
Mansfield, Ct., 
Chesterfield, 
Dedham, 
Cambridge, 
Nantucket, 

ENTERED.
April 8, 1842. 
Sept. 28, 1842. 
Jan. 13, 1843, 
April 8, 1842. 
April 9, 1842. 
March 10, 1843. 
April 9, 1842. 
Nov. 12, 1842. 
June 5, 1842. 
Nov. 16, 1842. 
Nov. 20, 1843. 
Nov. 4, 1843. 
Feb. 24, 1844. 
April 1, 1844. 
April 4, 1844. 
April 1, 1844. 
April 4, 1844. 
Jan. 31, 1846. 
April 8, 1842. 
April 15, 1843. 
April 24, 1842. 
April 15, 1843. 
April 15, 1843. 
April 15, 1843. 
New Ipswch, N.H., 
Northampton, 
Boston, 
Cambridge, 
Benton, Ala., 
Beverely, 
Cambridge, 
Nantucket, 
Boston, 
Chaplin, Ct., 
Boston, 
Brooklyn, Ct., 
Nantucket, 
Chesterfield, 
New Haven, Ct., 
New York, 
Waltham, 
New York, 
Cummington, 
Chaplin, Ct., 
Cicero, N. Y., 
Brookyn, Ct., 
Coxon, 
Norwich, Ct., 
Mansfield, Ct., 
Brooklyn, Ct., 
Bloomfield, Ct., 
Willibrand, 
Waltham, 
Brooklyn, Ct., 
Springfield, 
Baltimore, Md., 
Boston, 
Mansfield, Ct., 
Worcester, 
Vergennes, Vt., 
Hartford, Ct., 
Easthampton, 
Northampton, 

WITHDRAWN.
Jan. 2, 1844. 
March 6, 1847. 
Dec. 28, 1845. 
Oct. 1, 1845. 
March, 1843. 
Oct. 13, 1843. 
July, 1844. 
Nov. 18, 1844. 
Dec. 2, 1844. 
Oct. 8, 1842. 
Oct. 22, 1842. 
Sept. 12, 1843. 
March 6, 1847. 
June 12, 1843. 

Nov. 24, 1844. 
Aug. 5, 1844. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
July 31, 1844. 
July 2, 1843. 
Sept. 23, 1842. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Sept. 16, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Nov. 1, 1846. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 7, 1843. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
April 3, 1844. 
March, 1844. 
Aug. 4, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 4, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
August 7, 1843. 

Oct. 13, 1843. 
Nov. 24, 1844. 
Aug. 5, 1844. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
July 31, 1844. 
Sept. 23, 1842. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 7, 1843. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
April 3, 1844. 
March, 1844. 
Aug. 4, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
August 7, 1843. 

Oct. 13, 1843. 
Nov. 24, 1844. 
Aug. 5, 1844. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
July 31, 1844. 
Sept. 23, 1842. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 7, 1843. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
April 3, 1844. 
March, 1844. 
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April 3, 1844. 
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Oct. 13, 1843. 
Nov. 24, 1844. 
Aug. 5, 1844. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
July 31, 1844. 
Sept. 23, 1842. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 7, 1843. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
April 3, 1844. 
March, 1844. 
Aug. 4, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
August 7, 1843. 

Oct. 13, 1843. 
Nov. 24, 1844. 
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July 31, 1844. 
Sept. 23, 1842. 
May 13, 1843. 
May 13, 1843. 
Aug. 7, 1843. 
Sept. 5, 1845. 
April 3, 1844. 
March, 1844. 
Aug. 4, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
April 3, 1844. 
August 7, 1843. 

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The Anti-slavery Reform excited much bitter opposition, but my grandparents were among the first anti-slavery people in the country. Grandfather helped runaway slaves to escape by carrying them to Woodstock, the next station on the underground railroad. A female Anti-slavery Society was formed in 1832. Grandmother was one of the first Board of Managers, and was President of the Society for four years. It was given up in 1840 because many members had gone away and they had all become so firm in their belief it was not considered necessary to continue the meetings.

In May, 1833, at the time of the excitement occasioned by Miss Prudence Crandall who admitted colored girls to her school in Canterbury, and in consequence was imprisoned in the jail, in a cell just occupied by a murderer, grandfather and grandmother spent the evening with her, and Miss Benson remained during the night. In the morning she was bailed out by Mr. May and Mr. Benson. Grandmother said: “We were never afraid or ashamed to show our colors in all these controversies. It is a happiness that we were in them and shared the society of such earnest, disinterested people.”

Constitution of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Brooklyn and vicinity.

Preamble.—Whereas the system of slavery which exists in a portion of this land is contrary to every principle of humanity, honor, and religion, is derogatory to the character of our country abroad, and injurious to its peace and prosperity at home, and renders us obnoxious to the righteous condemnation of the Most High.

And whereas more than a million of our own sex are now groaning under the yoke of an insupportable and most degrading bondage, unprotected by law, or by any sense of manly shame, from merciless stripes and cruel outrage, are subjected by a traffic in the bodies of human beings, more dreadful than death, to the sudden and cruel sundering of the most sacred relations of domestic life, are deprived of knowledge, and as far as the power of their oppressors extends, of the hopes of the blessed gospel.
A YOUNG MAN IN THE COMMUNITY.

BY GILES D. STEBBINS, DETROIT, MICHIGAN.

It is sometimes well for a young man to find out how little he knows. It takes away self-conceit and leads to deeper thinking. I was at the age when self-esteem is active. A Massachusetts youth, who was a Whig, a Unitarian, and a prospective clergyman, might naturally have a fair share of complacent self-satisfaction. I had a room in a house partly occupied by James Stetson and family from Brooklyn, Conn. Mrs. Stetson was a superior woman, a personal friend of S. J. May, and other early antislavery leaders. One evening, in their room, the talk was of anti-slavery, and she quoted some Bible texts favoring freedom for all. Gravely and with oracular air, I spoke of Paul and Onesimus, and of the Apostle sending back the slave to his master. I can see still the shade of amused pity that spread over her fine face as she heard me through. Then she took up the matter and expounded the Scriptures in the light of liberty. As she expounded I was confounded,—that I, one of the lords of creation, who hoped, like Walter Scott’s Dominie Sampson, to “wag my pow in the pulpit “in due time, should be so utterly humiliated by a person unlearned, as I supposed, in clerical lore, and that person a woman ! She was kind, but that made it worse. There really seemed nothing left of me, I did not sleep for half the night, for thinking of my mental and moral confusion. But at last it dawned on me that the lesson was needed as well as right, and I went to her in the morning and heartily thanked her. We became cordial friends, and, having come into a teachable mood, I learned much from her.
Houses were scarce, and to accommodate all who wished to join us, part of the brick factory was fitted up as a boarding house. The quarters were rude and plain, and the fact that the members were willing to submit to the many inconveniences, and to forego all luxuries and many of the comforts to which they had been accustomed, showed how dear to their hearts was the cause they had espoused.

The “labor question” was, even then, stirring earnest and philanthropic souls, and the fact that the employees in the silk factory were confined twelve hours a day led some of our zealous members to express themselves earnestly against it, and to advocate a reduction of the hours of labor. That the immediate consequences of this proceeding were injurious to the financial interests of the association, there is no doubt, but the final result was satisfactory, especially to those who gained an hour a day for rest and recreation by the change from twelve to eleven hours.

During this month the brick building (later known as the Greenville Cotton Factory) was fitted up and the “factory boarding house” established. In the basement was the laundry; on the floor above or second story, besides two rooms given to silk manufacturing, was a room fitted up with “bunks” in which several men slept. On the third floor at one end was the kitchen and long dining room, and at the other end were several sleeping rooms. The “finishing room,” where the silk was skeined and packed, and the “Community store” were on this floor also. The fourth story was divided into sitting and sleeping rooms for families and single persons. All the partitions were of plain boards. Mr. and Mrs. Hiram Wells were appointed to take charge of the new department, and they were instructed to entertain only such boarders as the stock directors might sanction. All supplies were ob-
“The accommodations for families were extremely limited and many times serious inconvenience was experienced, in consequence of small and few apartments. For the most part it was cheerfully sustained; at least, so long as there was any hope of success—that is, of paying the debts and obtaining a livelihood. Most of the members had been accustomed to good, spacious houses, and every facility for comfortable living.

“To obviate the difficulty of procuring suitable tenements for separate families, a community family was instituted, occupying a part of the silk-factory. Two stories of this building were appropriated to the use of such as chose to live at a common table and participate in the labor of the family. This also formed the home of young persons who were unconnected with families.

“There was always plenty of food, and no one suffered for the necessaries or comforts of life. All were satisfied with simplicity, both in diet and dress.”

1st. All boarders are required to retire to their sleeping apartments for the night at one half past nine o’clock, and to extinguish their lights at ten o’clock.

2nd. It is left exclusively to the discretion and judgment of the superintendents of the Boarding House to make provision for the table and generally for the comfort and convenience of the boarders, and in the event of any dissatisfaction of the boarders they are requested to first make known their wishes to the superintendents, and finally, if necessary, to the Board of Industrial Directors.

3rd. Washing is included in “Board and Lodgings” to be furnished by the Association, but should any boarder appear at the end of the year to have occasioned disproportionate expense on this account he will be debited with the excess.

4th. Mending is not included in “Board and Lodging,” and the boarders are left to provide for their own wants in this respect, either through the Department of Domestic Economy, in which the charges will be as moderate as will compensate for the labour, or in any other way that may be preferred.
Monday Evening

I have now tried another day in my new home and am sure that for the present I am sure I shall like very much—after allmost seventeen years of more or less care of housekeeping concerns it is a great change to have no responsibility about what we shall eat and what we shall drink—It seems as if I was visiting only that I cannot make out whose guest I am—Almira is nearly well to day—Aunt Mary has got quite rested and has gone to stay to day with Aunt Ruth—the rest of us are as well as usual. All desire very much to have you get home and see how you will like it I am very much disappointed about the noise here I think I can truly say I have not spent so quiet a sunday since I have been in the Association a[s] I did yesterday—I hope you will be able to effect] some arrangement by which you can stay at home and that by our past experiances disappointments and trials we may grow to be a better and a happier family here and be prepared for a reunion with those of us who have gone in their innocence and purity to the world “where there shall be no more sorrow or crying and where all tears shall be wiped from every eye.”

I have been very busy to day in fixing clothes for Thomas to go to Boston on Wednesday I will leave the rest of the sheet to be filled tomorrow evening—

I have not even been able to make you any shirts or collars but if you need them very much I will make them my first business—but I have constant applications to make this blouse and mend that and cut this dress and sew on this button so that unless you need them I shall be likely to neglect them for the wants that are constantly pressing me—I am glad that I am in the family here for I do not see how I could ever get along with my own family if I was expected to keep boarders and take care of my baby too—I want you to write where you board—how you succeed in business how your business agrees with your health and every thing that you think will interest me—the letters that you send to George or Mr Bassett I never see—they are too much engaged in their own business to think that a woman can ever want to hear from her husband.
My Dear Husband

I am happy to seat myself to talk to you thro my pen for a few moments—

... I think the tendencies are to improvement Our Sunday meetings are more interesting and they have commenced the formation of Voluntary classes for every evening in the week—Sunday Evening Bible Class, Monday Evening Singing, Tuesday Evening Grammar, Wednesday Lyceum, Thursday Mathamatics, Friday Readings, Saturday I have forgotten I wish you were here to help to sustain them and keep alive a spirit of improvement among us I think that Instruction and Amusements in their proper places would save our young people from the follies that have been so much complained of—I cannot oppose innocent amusements for the young for I do not believe that utility in a sense confined to the making of money ought ever to be the governing principle or even the acquireing of knowledge without relaxation

I think I can look back to my past life and see where I may have been saved from what might have been far worse by a game of whist—and I had much rather my daughters should be dancing or playing cards (as wicked as that sounds, in a mixed company of boys and girls than in the language of Sojourner to be lolling on each other squeezing each others hands or sitting in each others laps—Now mind I do not say that Dancing and cards are the best way that young people can spend their time but I say that where they are often together they will be apt to spend it much worse—

Mr Bassett has come home quite in love with the Roxbury community the principle advantage of that over this that I have heard him speak of is that they have a change of plates & knives at the dinner table some times three changes—this is a great matter truely—he says while our women are so much occupied in manufactoring we can never have proper domestic arangements for ease and comfort—this is somewhat true-

My Dear Husband

While most of the family have gone into town to listen to the “eloquent fugitive” I sit down between the cradle and the secretary to talk with you—And in the first place your letter made me quite sad—I fear you are acting rashly in making up your mind to lieve the Association I have always noticed when you came home the longer you stayed the better you liked, and you certainly was very happy the summer that you lived at home all the time—now it seems to me that you had better come home and stay a few months before you decide to lieve and perhaps you may feel differently—I think I know that if we were to go to the farm our situation would be far less desirable than here—We should look in vain for society for ourselves and children such as we enjoy here—we could never place our children under the care of such accomplished teachers as they are now under—I say accomplished because I think Mrs Mack one of the most accomplished women I ever met and one whose influence over girls as far as education and manners is concerned is most salutary—But we ought not to be looking for our own good alone Can we do as much good to our race to return to our isolated condition where whatever of moral power we may possess will be rendered powerless because we have not the wealth and station to render us worthy of notice.
“The carrying out of different religious views was, perhaps, the occasion of more disagreement than any other subject: the more liberal party advocating the propriety and utility of amusements, such as card-playing, dancing, and the like; while others, owing perhaps to early education, which had taught them to look upon such things as sinful, now thought them detrimental and wholly improper, especially in the impoverished state of the Community. This disagreement operated to general disadvantage; as in consequence of it several worthy people and valuable members withdrew.”

“Labor was remunerated equally; both sexes and all occupations receiving the same compensation.”

“The whole number of persons ever resident there, as nearly as can be ascertained, was two hundred and twenty; while probably the number of actual members at any one time did not exceed one hundred and thirty.”