



Unit 9: Reforming New Hampshire

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Section 1: Introduction

Changing the world takes a lot of work, but reformers in New Hampshire in the first half of the 19th century were committed to the idea that they could make life better for others.

As you learn about New Hampshire in this period, think about the following questions:

- How did education reform in the 19th century impact New Hampshire's people?
- What was life like for Black Americans in the years before the Civil War?
- How did people in New Hampshire and the nation fight against slavery?



Section 2: Changing the World

What types of problems did reformers try to solve in the early 19th century?

Most Americans believe that we can create a society where all people are treated equally and are free. But our ideas about what it means to be “equal” and what it means to be “free” have changed over time. Today, we expect people to be treated the same no matter what race or gender they are. We also expect that all Americans are free to live as they want as long as they follow the laws and do not harm other people.

But it was not always this way in America. During the colonial period and in the years after the American Revolution, many people were not considered to be equal or free.

Some Black people were enslaved and had to work for white slaveholders. Even free Black people did not always have the same rights as everyone else.

Women were another group of people who did not have the same rights as men. They could not vote or own property once they got married. The law said that their fathers, brothers, or husbands were responsible for them. Only widows, women whose husbands had died, were free to make their own decisions.

There were also lots of groups of people who needed care but did not always get it. People with disabilities, like being blind or deaf, did not have opportunities to go to school or live independently as they do today. Sometimes they did not even live in good conditions.

People who suffered from mental illness also tended to be treated badly, mainly because doctors did not know very much about mental illnesses then or how to help people manage their mental illness.



People who were poor also did not receive much help back then. Many poor people lived in terrible conditions in crowded neighborhoods without good water or enough food. In many of these neighborhoods, there was a lot of illness and disease.

Many children suffered in America during this period, too. Some were poor; others had a disability; still others had an illness of some kind.

In 1800, many children did not have an opportunity to go to school. Instead, they had to work on their family's farm. Since they did not go to school, they did not know how to read or write, which kept them from getting good jobs when they were older.

In what ways did reformers try to change the world in the early 19th century?

There were always Americans who tried to solve these problems, but at the beginning of the 19th century, more people than ever decided to devote their lives to making other people's lives better. They wanted to reform society by fixing the parts of it that did not work very well. These people were known as reformers.

Reformers were inspired by their religious beliefs to try to solve society's problems. Religion played a very important role in people's lives during this period. It became even more important for many people in the early 1800s when there were a series of Christian religious revivals that swept through the United States, particularly in New York and New England. Religious revivals are when people decide to make a bigger commitment to religion than they had before. They may begin to attend church more often or make big changes in their lives because their religious beliefs say they should live a different way.

So many people participated in Christian religious revivals in the first decades of the 19th century that new types, or denominations, of religion



developed. Other denominations that already existed got bigger as more people committed to their religion.

Many of the religious revivals of the early 19th century focused on solving the problems that affected society and caring for people who needed help. Religious leaders often said people had a moral responsibility to provide support to others who were struggling with problems. This responsibility was what it meant to be a Christian.

Reformers tried to solve all sorts of social problems by working together. During the early 19th century, people started to form volunteer groups focused on each social problem.

Most of the groups worked to educate other Americans about these social problems. They published articles in newspapers or books. They organized lectures where speakers would explain what the social problems were and how they thought the problems could be solved. They held lots of meetings, both to bring new members into their groups and to organize their activities. The groups also raised money to support their activities.

Sometimes, these groups tried to change laws, but often their main purpose was to change society, which means influencing the way people thought about social problems.

Some reformers worked on many social problems, while others focused on just one or two social problems.

All different types of people were reformers, but most of the reformers came from the middle class. They earned enough money that they had free time to devote to a cause that inspired them.

Both men and women were reformers. For women, though, trying to change the world was a new role for them. Instead of only staying at home to care for their families, reforming women began to volunteer outside the home.



For the first time, women became involved in politics, gave speeches, and published their writings on social issues.

Although there were reform movements all over America in the early 19th century, most of them were in the northern states, particularly in New York and New England.

Not everyone agreed with the reformers, though. Many people thought reformers were troublemakers who were trying to disrupt society rather than fix it. Political leaders often did not listen to the reformers or make the changes to the law that reformers wanted. Newspaper editors often wrote articles that criticized reformers and the things they were trying to do.

Many people were uncomfortable with the new role women reformers began playing in society. They believed women should not influence the government and that they should not be involved with social problems because it would be too upsetting for them. People's ideas about women were very different in the early 1800s from what they are today!

Like the rest of New England, New Hampshire had many religious revivals in the early 19th century, which inspired many reformers to try and fix society's problems.

The rest of this unit focuses on two of the most important reform movements in New Hampshire during this period: the movement to make sure all children received the education they needed, and the effort to end slavery throughout the United States.

Let's Review!

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. Social Problems: Many people did not have equal rights in 19th-century America, like Black people and women. Other people who needed help, like those who were ill or disabled, were not always treated well.



2. Religious Revivals: In the early 19th century, many people became more committed to their churches and believed they had a responsibility to help other people lead better lives.

3. Changing People's Minds: Reformers tried to convince other people to make changes to society by writing books and newspaper articles, making speeches, and holding meetings.

4. Some People Disagree: Many people thought reformers were troublemakers and did not think society should change. They fought against making changes to the way people were treated.



Section 3: Reforming Education

How did education change in the early 19th century?

Education has always been important to the people of New Hampshire. In fact, New Hampshire—and all of New England—has been the most educated part of America since the first English settlers arrived in the early years of the 17th century.

During the colonial period, New Hampshire adopted laws that said every child should learn to read. Children needed to be able to read the Bible, because religion was very important to the colonists. At that time, school was held in town meeting houses, which was also where people in the community came together to make decisions about town government. It was also where they held church services for the town. The town meeting house was used for all three purposes—government, church, and school.

The schoolmaster was usually the town's minister. He taught the children how to read and write while also teaching them about religion. Both boys and girls went to school but only for a few years, just until they could read and write. School was not held every day, either. The schoolmaster taught children for just a few hours a week or a month. How often school met was different in every town.

In the early 1800s, the state government of New Hampshire decided that children needed to go to school more regularly. They passed laws that said every town had to build separate school buildings and locate them throughout the town so children could walk to school.

Towns all over New Hampshire began building schoolhouses and placed them just a few miles apart so the children could walk to them easily. These buildings were called one-room schoolhouses because there was just one classroom for all the children who attended. All of them would learn together no matter what their age.



One-room schoolhouses were part of a larger reform effort called the common school movement. The idea was to create schools that would give all students the same experience.

Schools were very important to American democracy. If the people were going to govern themselves, then each new generation needed to learn about the country and what it meant to be an American. Schools were expected to teach children what they needed to know to become good citizens.

Even though both boys and girls attended school, girls did not have the same rights as boys at this time. For example, girls would not be allowed to vote when they grew older, but boys would. Reformers believed it was still important for girls to be educated, though, because most of them would be mothers someday and they would help raise future citizens.

But not everyone had a chance to attend school. Black children or indigenous children were not allowed to attend school with white children. Neither Black people nor indigenous people could become citizens at this time, so their children were not allowed in the common schools. Sometimes there were separate schools for Black children or indigenous children. It was a long time before all children attended school together.

Since most people in New Hampshire lived on farms in the early 19th century, the school year was organized around the farming calendar. Students spent about 20 weeks per year in school, which is much less than students spend in school today.

The school year was divided into two parts. Half the school year was held in winter, and the other half was held in summer. During the spring and fall, most children had to work on their families' farms. During the 19th century, the school year slowly got longer and longer until children were spending most of their time in school.

What did children learn in school in the early 1800s?



Part of the movement to reform education included adding new subjects for children to learn. During the colonial period, children mainly learned how to read and write and how to add and subtract numbers. In the early 1800s, though, children began to learn a lot of new subjects, like history, civics, and literature. All of these subjects were focused on helping children learn what they needed to know when they were grown up.

A lot of the material students learned was about patriotism. They learned about America's past as a British colony and how it won its independence from Great Britain. They learned about how the American government works and their responsibilities as citizens when they became adults. Their books were full of stories, songs, poems, speeches, and pictures about America's heritage.

Books written just for children began to be published during the early 1800s too. Before then, books were printed only for adults. But by the 1810s, children could read stories written just for them, like fairy tales.

For younger children, people began to write nursery rhymes, like "Mary Had a Little Lamb," which was written by a New Hampshire woman named Sarah Josepha Hale. She also published a magazine for children that had games, stories, and puzzles for them to solve. These kinds of publications helped children have fun while they learned basic skills.

Teachers were different in the early 1800s, too! Instead of the minister teaching children how to read and write, towns began to hire teachers whose entire job was to help children learn. Many of these teachers were young women. In fact, teaching was one of the first professions for women.



Let's Review!

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. Colonial Schooling: Education was important in colonial New Hampshire, but most children spent their time working on the family farm. They went to school mainly to learn how to read and write.
2. One-Room Schoolhouses: In the early 1800s, NH passed laws that required each town to build lots of schools, but each school was only one room. All the kids learned together in these schools, with older kids helping the younger kids.
3. New Subjects and New Books: In the 1800s, children began learning more subjects, like history, civics, and literature. Books were also published just for kids. Most of them had stories, poems, and pictures that celebrated America.
4. Women Teachers: Many women became teachers in the one-room schoolhouses. Teaching was one of the few jobs women could have in the 19th century.



Section 4: Ending Slavery

What is slavery, and did it exist in New Hampshire?

The other big reform movement in New Hampshire in the early 19th century was about slavery.

Video: Mason Explains: Slavery in the United States

The Lives of Enslaved People. Not everyone has always had the same rights in America. Some people did not even have their own freedom. In this video, Mason explains what slavery was and what life was like for enslaved Black people living here.

During the colonial period, there were almost 700 enslaved Black people living in New Hampshire. After the American Revolution, many slaveholders set their enslaved people free, both in New Hampshire and in other northern states. By 1800, there were just 8 enslaved people living in the state.

Slavery was not made illegal in New Hampshire until 1857, but there were no more enslaved people here by then. In the early 19th century, Black people lived in many towns in New Hampshire, especially in the seacoast region.

There were still millions of enslaved Black people living in the United States, though. Almost all of them were in the southern states, working on farms or plantations.

The textile mills in New Hampshire depended on enslaved people in the South to grow the cotton they needed to make cloth. Thousands of bushels of cotton were shipped to New Hampshire—and the other New England textile factories—every year.

Slavery had never been very popular in New Hampshire, though. Most people in the state thought it was wrong to enslave other people.



In 1796, an enslaved woman named Ona Judge arrived in Portsmouth on a ship that had come from Philadelphia. She had been enslaved to George Washington, who was the president of the United States. George Washington wanted her back and tried to get his friends in New Hampshire to send her back to slavery. Washington's friends refused, and Ona Judge lived the rest of her life in New Hampshire.

How did Granite Staters work to end slavery throughout the United States?

Although most people in New Hampshire did not like slavery, only some of them worked to end it. Most people hoped it would disappear from the South eventually, just like it did in New Hampshire and the rest of the North. They believed slavery would gradually come to end. But a small group of people thought slavery was so terrible that it had to end right away.

They were called abolitionists because they believed slavery should be abolished, or ended, immediately. Abolitionism was also called antislavery because the movement was against slavery. There were never many abolitionists in New Hampshire, but they were very active and drew a lot of attention to their cause, especially in the 1830s and 1840s.

In 1833, New Hampshire's first abolitionist society was formed in Plymouth. Other towns formed their own abolitionist societies soon after until there were more than 60 antislavery groups across the state. Some of these groups were just for men. Others were just for women. And in some groups men and women worked together.

Abolitionists believed that the best way to end slavery was to convince other people that slavery was wrong. When enough people agreed with them, the laws about slavery would be changed, and it would be made illegal throughout the country. This idea of trying to change people's minds was called moral suasion.



Speakers. Abolitionists organized many different activities to get people's attention and teach them about slavery. For example, they often arranged for speakers to travel around New Hampshire and give public lectures about slavery. Sometimes these speakers were from New Hampshire, but sometimes they were famous people from elsewhere in the United States or even Great Britain.

One of the most well-known abolitionist speakers was Frederick Douglass, who came to New Hampshire several times. Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery when he was a young man by hiding on board a ship. He wrote an autobiography about his experiences as an enslaved person. In fact, he wrote part of the book while he was staying with a friend in Weare. He was also a very good speaker, and hundreds of people came to hear him talk about slavery.

Not everyone welcomed abolitionist speakers, though, no matter how famous they were. Sometimes angry mobs drove abolitionist speakers out of town.

These attacks did not always work out as the mobs planned because newspapers published articles about what the mobs had done. A lot of people in New Hampshire thought that abolitionists should be free to talk about their beliefs, even if no one agreed with them. The mobs sometimes made the public more sympathetic to abolitionists.

The Petition Campaign. Abolitionists also gathered thousands of signatures on petitions asking the U.S. government to end slavery throughout the country. Men and women knocked on the doors of people's homes, asking them to sign a petition. Many people did. In some towns, as much as 30 percent of the population signed a petition against slavery.

Then the abolitionists tried to give the petitions to one of their representatives in the U.S. House of Representatives. One of New Hampshire's congressmen at that time was a political leader named Franklin



Pierce. He was the leader of the Democratic Party in the state, and one day he would be elected president of the United States.

When the abolitionists asked Franklin Pierce to present their petitions to the U.S. Congress, Pierce refused. He thought abolitionists were causing too much trouble between northerners and southerners. The New Hampshire abolitionists had to take their petitions to a congressman from Massachusetts instead. Other antislavery petitions from abolitionists in other states were presented at the same time. But the U.S. Congress refused to hear any of the antislavery petitions.

The Underground Railroad. Some abolitionists were so opposed to slavery that they helped enslaved people escape from the South. Escaping from slavery was very dangerous for enslaved people. If they were caught they were sent back to slaveholders in the South and were often punished with violence.

Before 1861, it was against the law to run away from slavery, and it was also against the law to help other people run away from slavery. But some abolitionists in the North helped enslaved people anyway. They set up a network of safe houses where enslaved people could stay as they escaped north. The safe houses provided enslaved people with food, clothing, medical attention, and a place to sleep and rest on their journey.

This network was called the Underground Railroad, even though it was not a railroad at all. It was really more of a trail that enslaved people could follow to freedom.

Many routes on the Underground Railroad passed through New Hampshire. No one knows for sure where all the safe houses were because the routes were secret. The routes also changed a lot so the safe houses would not be discovered.



The Herald of Freedom. Abolitionists in New Hampshire also published a newspaper to promote their activities, like speeches or fundraising drives. It was called the *Herald of Freedom*, and it was published in Concord by Nathaniel Peabody Rogers. Before becoming an abolitionist, Rogers had been a lawyer who was used to arguing in court. He used those same skills to write editorials that used moral suasion to convince people slavery must end.

Although abolitionist newspapers were published in many northern states, the *Herald of Freedom* was one of the more popular antislavery newspapers. It was read throughout New England and New York.

The Hutchinson Family Singers. New Hampshire was also the home of the Hutchinson Family Singers, the most popular singing group in the United States in the 1840s and 1850s.

The Hutchinson family was from Milford. There were 16 children in the family, but the original singing group included just four of them. Over the years, some siblings left the singing group and were replaced by others. Eventually, 13 of the brothers and sisters performed as part of the Hutchinson Family Singers, but not all at one time.

They began performing and traveling around New Hampshire in the 1830s, singing mostly patriotic songs that they wrote themselves. While on their travels, they met Frederick Douglass, who convinced them to start singing songs that protested slavery and called for enslaved people to be emancipated.

In the mid-1840s, the Hutchinson Family Singers went on a tour throughout the North. Audiences loved their music. They eventually got involved in several reform movements, but they were most committed to abolition.

They were also very proud of being from New Hampshire. They ended every show with a song about New Hampshire called "The Granite State."



New Hampshire had a reputation for being an abolitionist state, even though many people here did not support the abolitionists. Eventually, though, more and more people in New Hampshire started to agree with the abolitionists that slavery was bad for the country and had to end.

Let's Review!

What are the big ideas in this section?

1. Slavery in the United States: Slavery disappeared in northern states in the early 1800s but expanded in the southern states. Northern factories depended on the cotton grown by enslaved people in the South, though.
2. The Effort to End Slavery: Throughout the North, reformers tried to convince people that slavery needed to end right away. They held speeches, published newspapers and books, and organized petition campaigns to Congress.
3. Mobs Attack Abolitionists: Many people, even in the North, did not like abolitionism, though. They thought abolitionists were troublemakers and southerners had a right to own enslaved people. But other northerners thought the abolitionists had a right to argue for what they believed in.
4. New Hampshire's Contribution: NH abolitionists were very active in the cause. They helped enslaved people escape from the South and tried to change people's minds about slavery with newspapers like the Herald of Freedom and the singing group known as the Hutchinson Family Singers.