

A Canterbury Tale: A Document Package for Connecticut's Prudence Crandall Affair

Prudence Crandall, "Letter to the *Windham County Advertiser* (May 7, 1833)," published in *Fruits of Colonization*, 1833.

LETTER FROM PRUDENCE CRANDALL

Canterbury, May 7, 1833

Mr. Holbrook: Whatever reluctance I may feel to appear before the public, circumstance require that I should do so. After all that has been said in various newspapers, about me and my school and my friends it seems that I owe it to them and to myself to make a simple statement that you and others may know the object of my present school and also what first induced me to establish it; and to exonerate my friends and myself from several unreasonable censures and misrepresentations that are in circulation.

A colored girl of respectability — a professor of religion — and daughter of honorable parents called on me sometime during the month of September last and said in a very earnest manner "Miss Crandall, I want to get a little more learning, if possible enough to teach colored children and if you will admit me to your school, I shall forever be under greatest obligation to you. If you think it will be the means of injuring you, I will not insist on the favor."

I did not answer her immediately, as I thought if I gave her permission some of my scholars might be disturbed. In further conversation with her however I found she had great anxiety to improve in learning.

Her repeated solicitations were more than my feelings could resist and I told her if I was injured on her account I would bear it — she might enter as one of my pupils. The girl had not long been under my instruction before I was informed by several persons that she must be removed or my school would be greatly injured.

This was unpleasant news for me to hear but I continued her in my school. Previous to any excitement concerning her there fell in my way several publications that contained many facts relative to the people of color of which I was entirely ignorant. My feelings began to awaken. I saw that the prejudice of whites against color was deep and inveterate. In my humble opinion it was the strongest if not the only chain that bound those heavy burdens on the wretched slaves, which we ourselves are not willing to touch with one of our fingers. I felt in my heart to adopt the language of the Sacred Preacher when He said — "So I turned to consider all the oppressions that are done under the sun and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power but they had no comforter. Therefore I praised the dead that are already dead more than the living which are yet alive."

I said in my heart, here are my convictions. What shall I do? Shall I be inactive and permit prejudice, the mother of abominations, to remain undisturbed? Or shall I venture to enlist in the ranks of those who with the Sword of Truth dare hold combat with prevailing iniquity? I contemplated for a while the

manner in which I might best serve the people of color. As wealth was not mine, I saw no other means of benefitting them, than by imparting to those of my own sex that were anxious to learn, all the instruction I might be able to give, however small the amount. This I deem my duty, how to perform it, I knew not. With the friends of the people of color, called 'Abolitionists' I was entirely unacquainted save by reputation.

Having for some time wished to visit New York or some other places of schools and also to purchase for the benefit of my scholars, school apparatus, I come to the conclusion that I would perform my long contemplated journey and visit the schools in Boston while at the same time the most prominent object of my tour was to visit William L. Garrison — to obtain his opinion respecting the propriety of establishing a school for colored females — and the prospect of success should I attempt it. Being an entire stranger in Boston previous to my journey, I took the liberty to inquire of several of my neighbors, if they had any friends in Boston to whom they would be willing to give me a line of introduction. Rev. Mr. Kneeland and Rev. Mr. Platt were the only persons I found who had any acquaintance in the place. These gentlemen very kindly gave me letters to distinguished Clergymen in that city. Neither to these gentlemen, my scholars, nor my neighbors, did I make known all my business. And I felt perfectly justified in telling them I was going to visit schools, which I did; and to purchase the before-mentioned apparatus, which was at that time my determination; and the want of money was the only reason why I did not purchase.

Now because I did not see fit to expose my business before I knew whether I could obtain a sufficient number of colored pupils to sustain my school and also did not purchase the apparatus [which was too costly], I am charged that too in a public manner of falsehood or at least wilful prevarication. False and scandalous reports about me and my friends are in constant circulation, some of which are dispersed by the papers far and near. In the piece signed "A friend of the Colonization Cause" that first appeared in the Norwich Republican, which you have copied into your paper, the author upon his own authority has declared that there are a few men in Boston and Providence who have laid the foundation of this school which is entirely false as I was wholly self moved in the plan, though I gratefully acknowledge their kind approbation. Furthermore, he asks, 'and what do they intend to do with this institution?' After making several ungenerous and detestable replies the sentence is closed with this remark — 'In a word they hope to force the races (black and white) to amalgamate.' This is utterly false — the object, the sole object, at this school is to instruct the ignorant and fit and prepare teachers for the people of color that they may be elevated and their intellectual and moral wants supplied.

You are apprised that the Rev. S. J. May, is the warm friend and advocate of my school. He has plead my cause manfully, and I trust he will reap a just reward.

The truth of his remonstrance with A. T. Judson Esq., and others, I presume no one will attempt to deny in any material point. After what he has published, it is unnecessary to enlarge, but simply to give this, my public declaration, in favor of the correctness of all the statements he has made, respecting myself and my school, many of which he made upon my authority.

Respectfully yours, Prudence Crandall