

The Writer's Almanac

with GARRISON KEILLOR

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Today is the birthday of women's rights reformer **Lucretia (Coffin) Mott**, born in Nantucket, Massachusetts, in 1793. She went to public school in Boston for two years, and then, when she was 13, she enrolled in a Quaker boarding school near Poughkeepsie, New York. After two years there, she was hired on as an assistant, and then a teacher. She quit when she found out that she was being paid less than half of what the male teachers all made, simply because she was a woman; the experience sparked her first interest in women's rights. In 1811, she married fellow teacher James Mott, and the newlyweds moved to Philadelphia. Ten years later, she became a minister in the Society of Friends, as the Quaker church was called, and she was a popular public speaker on matters of religion and social reform.



She was active in the abolitionist movement when she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton on a ship to London; both were on their way to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840. They were attending as delegates, but found that the convention would not let them speak because they were women; they were even seated in a separate area, behind a curtain. The two women resolved then and there to organize a convention for women's rights as soon as they returned home. It took eight years, but eventually they did: the Seneca Falls (New York) Convention of 1848.

Mott wrote, "The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation, because in the degradation of women, the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source."