

*Eric, can you talk a little bit about the role of women in the Dorr Rebellion?*

Women played a significant role in Thomas Wilson Dorr's attempt at constitutional reform in Rhode Island between 1841 and 1845. Women also played a significant role in opposing Dorr's efforts to alter and abolish Rhode Island's form of government. The recent update to the Dorr Rebellion Project website focuses in on women who were deeply connected to the Rhode Island Suffrage Association and personally to Thomas Wilson Dorr.

We have uploaded a series of letters from the Dorr Correspondence at the John Hay Library at Brown University, that highlight the activism of women who worked tirelessly on behalf of Dorr in terms of promoting his agenda in regards to Suffrage extension and Constitutional Reform. Women also worked tirelessly in the wake of Dorr's failed attempt to alter Rhode Island's form of government in June of 1842. Women worked for the release of Dorrite prisoners. They were very much connected to aiding them in prison and securing their release from prison. They formed associations. There was the Ladies Free Suffrage Association, the Ladies Benevolent Suffrage Association, as well. There's a multitude of organizations that women became connected to. They were very active in terms of fundraising, in terms of keeping Dorr's agenda alive while many of his followers were in prison. Women worked tirelessly throughout 1842 and 1843 to keep the cause alive. They were in communication with Dorr while he was in exile in New Hampshire. Indeed, when Dorr returned to Providence in the Fall of 1843, women were there to greet him.

He went, of course, he went on to trial in Newport. He was tried and convicted for treason against the State of Rhode Island and then subsequently imprisoned in this new state prison in Providence, on the cove in Providence. And women, again, tried to keep his cause alive. Catherine Williams, in particular, worked behind the scenes to ensure that Dorr's mother Lydia would receive correspondence from her son, as her son sat in prison. Catherine Williams, Abby Lord, Anne Parlin, Frances Whipple Greene, worked throughout 1844 and into 1845 to secure Dorr's release from prison.

These letters are all represented on this new update to the Dorr Rebellion Project website. They really show an often-neglected period of Antebellum history, that is, women who were very much connected to the Democratic Party. These were not abolitionist women. All too often our focus in on women in the Antebellum period — we look at women who were working tirelessly in the side of abolition and temperance and were connected somewhat to the Whig party. This is indeed a different group of women in Rhode Island. And of course, their efforts, they were very vocal, they were very political. All this predates the convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls by four or five years.

So, it's a significant period for students and teachers to dive into, through these letters, through the head notes, through the textual essay that accompanies this. And they also can look at the very close relationship Dorr had with his mother Lydia while in prison, on another part of the website.