



# **A Very Dangerous Woman: Martha Wright and Women's Rights**

*Sharon Penney*

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"A very dangerous woman" is what Martha Coffin Wright's conservative neighbors considered her, because of her work in the women's rights and abolition movements. In 1848, Wright and her older sister Lucretia Mott were among the five brave women who organized the historic Seneca Falls Women's Rights Convention. Wright remained a prominent figure in the women's movement until her death in 1875 at age sixty-eight, when she was president of the National Woman Suffrage Association. At age twenty-six, she attended the 1833 founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society and later presided over numerous antislavery meetings, including two in 1861 that were disrupted by angry antiabolitionist mobs. Active in the Underground Railroad, she sheltered fugitive slaves and was a close friend and supporter of Harriet Tubman.

In telling Wright's story, the authors make good use of her lively letters to her family, friends, and colleagues, including Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. These letters reveal Wright's engaging wit and offer an insider's view of nineteenth-century reform and family life. Her correspondence with slaveholding relatives in the South grew increasingly contentious with the approach of the Civil War. One nephew became a hero of the Confederacy with his exploits at the Battle of Fredericksburg, and her son in the Union artillery was seriously wounded at Gettysburg while repelling Pickett's Charge.

Wright's life never lacked for drama. She survived a shipwreck, spent time at a frontier fort, experienced the trauma of the deaths of a fiancé, her first husband, and three of her seven children, and navigated intense conflicts within the women's rights and abolition movements. Throughout her tumultuous career, she drew on a reservoir of humor to promote her ideas and overcome the many challenges she faced. This accessible biography, written with the general reader in mind, does justice to her remarkable life.

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