

# Prudence Crandall

(1803-1890)

A Woman of Courage

Prudence Crandall started a school for high school age girls located in Canterbury, Connecticut in 1831. It was a prominent school and was doing very well. Young ladies from distant towns were applying and were being admitted into the school as boarders (Strane 14).



In 1832 Prudence was approached by a young lady named Sarah Harris. Sarah was seventeen and was part white, Indian, and black. She had a light complexion and was a graceful young lady (Strane 25). Sarah wanted to get an education so she could begin to teach “colored children.” She asked Prudence if she would admit her into her school. After some thought Prudence accepted; knowing that it would cause problems from the citizens of the town (Strane 25).

In January, 1833, Sarah entered the Canterbury School. The white students of the school accepted her, but the parents complained profusely. After some complaining and threats, the parents withdrew their daughters thinking this would bring Prudence to her senses. Prudence Crandall would not give up (Strane 27).

Prudence decided to dismiss all the girls from her seminary and open a school for all black young women. After an advertisement for her new school was printed in an abolitionist newspaper, the citizens of Canterbury voiced their anger at the idea of this school. A town meeting was set to prevent the school from opening. The town’s people did everything they could to stop the school from continuing. The storekeepers refused to sell supplies or food to Prudence, the doctor would not attend to the sick students, and the pharmacist refused to give any medicine. The church wouldn’t allow the students in the doors, and crowds smashed windows and threw manure into the water well (Foner et al. 20). Prudence Crandall was continually being harassed, but somehow she kept her school running.

Andrew Judson, a legislator, brought about a bill forbidding anyone from setting up a school for the instruction of “colored persons.” On June 27, 1833, a sheriff entered Prudence’s house and arrested her. She was placed in a cell that was just vacated by a man executed for killing his wife (Foner et al. 25). After a long trial, on October 3, 1833, the jury returned a verdict of guilty. Prudence’s lawyers immediately filed an appeal. On July 22, 1844, the court reversed the decision of the superior court that had found Prudence Crandall guilty on the grounds of “insufficiency of the information” (Foner et al. 39).

With the excitement of a victory, Prudence Crandall continued her school, but the citizens of Canterbury were not going to let her. On Sept. 9, 1834, men carrying iron bars and heavy clubs smashed the windows in her school. The house was considered uninhabitable. That was it for Prudence. There was nothing she could do but abandon the school and put the house up for sale (Foner et al. 42).

In 1886, the state of Connecticut officially apologized to Prudence Crandall. She accepted the apology and died three years later.

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Prudence Crandall truly made a bold move for her time. It was almost unheard of for anyone, especially a woman, to stand up for the education of blacks. You can find more information about Prudence Crandall from these sources.

Distinguished Women. Prudence Crandall. 1995. Online. Internet. 3 March 2000. Available: [www.DistinguishedWomen.com/biographies/crandall.html](http://www.DistinguishedWomen.com/biographies/crandall.html).

Foner, Philip S. and Josephine F. Pacheco. Three Who Dared. Westport Connecticut: Greenwood, 1984.

Strane, Susan. A Whole-Souled Woman. New York: W.W.Norton & Company, 1990.