

# Seneca Falls and Beyond

"What are we next to do?" asked Elizabeth Cady Stanton after the 1848 convention. The women of Seneca Falls had challenged America to social revolution with a list of demands that touched every aspect of life. Testing different approaches, the early women's rights leaders came to view the ballot as the best way to change the system, but they did not limit their efforts to one issue. Fifty years after the convention, women could claim progress in property rights, employment and educational opportunities, divorce and child custody laws, and increased social freedoms. By the early 20th century, a coalition of suffragists, temperance groups, reform-minded politicians, and women's social welfare organizations mustered a successful push for the vote.

Although the ballot was never the primary agent of social reform, as many had hoped, the fight for suffrage expanded the women's influence in the political arena. Again the question arose: What next? Immediately

after 1920 many women worked for reform through groups such as the League of Women Voters and national political parties. Some women asserted their rights on a personal level by attending college, taking jobs, adopting new clothing fashions, and practicing birth control. Then as now, each woman sought her own definition of freedom.

In 1848 the *Seneca County Courier* warned that the convention's resolutions were "of the kind called radical . . . Some will regard them with respect—others with disapprobation and contempt." The story of the women's movement is the story of ideas once controversial, now unremarkable. The chronology below outlines the major events that changed the status quo for women in America. Which of our present efforts will contribute toward a future of equality? What, indeed, are we next to do?

The organizers of the First Women's Rights Convention (left to right): Elizabeth Cady Stanton with daughter Harriot, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann M'Clintock, and Jane Hunt. After the convention, Hunt remained in Waterloo and continued to work with her husband at various reform efforts. No longer active in women's rights, the M'Clintocks moved to Philadelphia in 1856. Wright and two M'Clintock daughters became active suffragists. Mott and Stanton led the movement in its formative years. Library of Congress



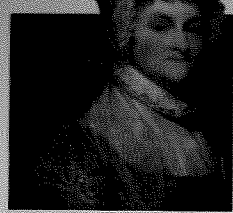
## "Remember the Ladies"

1776 American Revolution begins. Abigail Adams admonishes husband John and other Revolutionary leaders to "remember the ladies" in the formation of the new government.

1784 Judith Sargent Murray writes essays on women's rights, endorsing women's education. Murray's "On the Equality of the Sexes" appears in *Massachusetts Magazine* in 1790.

1788 U.S. Constitution is ratified. With decisions about voting qualifications left up to states, New Jersey women property owners have full franchise until 1807. Elsewhere women vote in local elections.

Early 1800s Popular literature defines a new middle-class ideal: women dominate the "sphere" of home and family, while men are acknowledged



Portrait by Gilbert Stuart

"If particular care and attention is not paid to the ladies," writes Abigail Adams in 1776, "we are determined to foment a rebellion, and will not hold ourselves bound by any laws in which we have no voice or representation."

leaders in politics and the workplace.

1830s American Anti-Slavery Society is founded in Philadelphia in 1833 by Quakers seeking immediate emancipation of slaves. AASS's 1600 auxiliaries gather more than 400,000 signatures on antislavery petitions by 1838. As abolition cause escalates, lecturers such

as Sarah and Angelina Grimké promote women's concerns simultaneously with abolition. Sarah draws criticism for her 1837 *Letters on the Equality of the Sexes*. AASS splits in 1839 over issue of women's rights.

1840 Newlyweds Henry and Elizabeth Cady Stanton attend World Anti-



Denied leadership positions in many other abolitionist

Slavery Convention in London, where organizers refuse to seat women delegates. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott resolve to hold a convention devoted to women's rights.

1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Quaker abolitionists Jane Hunt, Mary Ann M'Clintock, Lucretia



groups, women sit on the executive committee of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. Lucretia and James Mott are at far right. Sophia Smith Collection, Smith College

## A Call to Convention

Mott, and Martha Wright hold First Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. Participants discuss women's social condition and demand full and equal rights with men.

1850 Boston women abolitionists, including Lucy Stone, organize national women's rights convention in Worcester, Mass.; more than 1,000 people attend. Subsequent conventions are held throughout the 1850s.

1851 Stanton meets Quaker teacher Susan B. Anthony in Seneca Falls. They form an activist team and use temperance and abolition gatherings to address women's issues. Stanton writes speeches and devises strategy, while Anthony lectures and circulates petitions.

1860 Stanton and Anthony work successfully to amend Married Women's



Lucy Stone (top), champions reform both in her public life, by leading abolition and women's suffrage efforts, and in her private life by keeping her maiden name after marrying. "We hold women to be justly entitled to all we claim for man," writes Frederick Douglass (above) soon after the 1848 convention. Two decades later Douglass breaks with Stanton over suffrage strategy. Library of Congress

## War and Reconstruction

en's Property Act of New York, originally enacted in 1848. Revised law allows wives to hold property, keep earnings and inheritances, make contracts, sue in court, and share child custody.

1861-65 Northern and Southern women take over jobs on farms and in factories, businesses, and government offices during Civil War. Thousands of women work as nurses, opening profession to females.

1862 Morrill Act grants federal land to support coeducational colleges and universities in the West. Homestead Act grants free land to any "head of household," including women.

1863 After Emancipation Proclamation frees some slaves in Confederacy, Stanton and Anthony's National Women's Loyal League presents



400,000 signatures on petition to Congress for a complete end to slavery. Mott and contemporaries yield leadership to rising generation; new women's leaders anticipate that postwar expansion of civil rights will include female suffrage. Thirteenth Amendment outlaws slavery in 1865.

1867 First statewide women's suffrage campaigns in Kansas and New York are defeated.

## "Revolution"

Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) to support voting rights first for black males, then women. Wyoming becomes first U.S. territory to enact women's suffrage.

1872 Anthony and colleagues test 14th and 15th Amendments by casting votes in New York. Suffragists are arrested and fined. An 1875 U.S. Supreme Court ruling upholds states' right to deny women the vote. In 1876, Anthony and others crash U.S. Centennial celebration in Philadelphia's Independence Hall, demanding women's vote.

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## The Revolution.

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THE REVOLUTION.

NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 1868.

Vol. 1, No. 1.

Editorial: The Revolution is a weekly paper published for the purpose of promoting the cause of woman's rights. It is published by the National Woman Suffrage Association, No. 111 Broadway, New York.

Subscription: One dollar per annum in advance. Single copies five cents.

Advertisements: One dollar per square per month. Longer advertisements at special rates.

Published by the National Woman Suffrage Association, No. 111 Broadway, New York.

Nebraska State Historical Society

## Social Reform Movements



1877 Backed by the NWSA, a women's suffrage amendment is first introduced in Congress, but not voted on for ten more years. As Reconstruction era draws to a close, Southern blacks see erosion of their new civil rights.

1879 Frances Willard becomes president of Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), established in 1874 to fight social ills of alcohol. Willard strongly advocates women's suffrage as a means to impose a moral influence on society. More popular than

Temperance societies, first popular in the 1830s, were among the first American women's groups. The crusade made women all the more aware of their legal defenselessness against a drunken husband and the need for property and divorce rights. After the Civil War the movement reemerged. Its leaders

formal suffrage associations, WCTU becomes nation's largest women's organization by the 1880s.

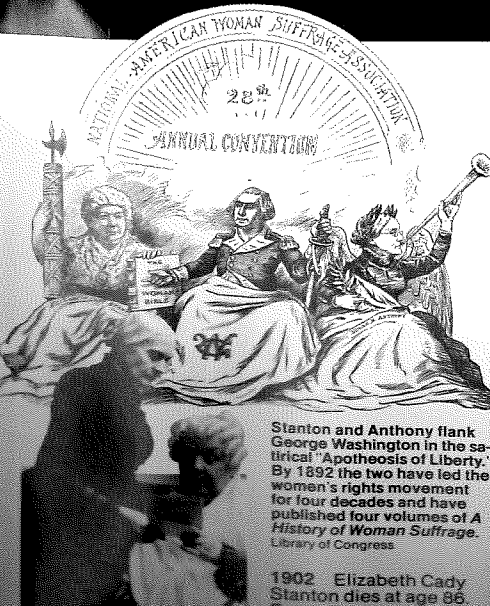
1881 Knights of Labor organizes housewives, domestics, factory workers, railroad workers; 65,000 women join. Knights disband by 1886 after losing national strike. Women's organized labor recovers by the early 20th century to become an active force in suffragism.

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wives, mothers, and grandmothers, investigate labor conditions, start settlement houses, promote education and public health, agitate for liberalized birth control laws, and march for suffrage. Increasingly, women activists see vote as a means to improve society.

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## The Suffrage Bandwagon

going for vote on basis of female moral superiority rather than equality. NAWSA is led by Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt.

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1913 Alice Paul and newest generation of suffragists revive demand for constitutional amendment. Paul, who worked in England with militant suffragist Emmeline Pankhurst, introduces mass demonstrations, hunger strikes, and constant pressure on political party in power. Paul and several thousand marchers protest Woodrow Wilson's inauguration in March 1913. Paul and others leave NAWSA and form National Women's Party in 1916.

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1917 U.S. enters World War I. Women take over jobs for men serving in armed forces. Women's Bureau is formed; for

HEADQUARTERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION

OPPOSED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE

Illustration of a group of men in suits, some holding signs, representing opposition to women's suffrage.

Antisuffragist arguments are based mainly on differences between the sexes, while suffrage groups claim that such differences make women better qualified voters. Some antisuffrage groups are exposed as fronts for liquor interests. In the years before the 19th Amendment, suffragists such as these New York women (right) make their



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Library of Congress

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Stanton and Anthony flank George Washington in the satirical "Apotheosis of Liberty." By 1892 the two have led the women's rights movement for four decades and have published four volumes of *A History of Woman Suffrage*.  
Library of Congress



**1902** Elizabeth Cady Stanton dies at age 86. Four years later Susan B. Anthony dies at 85. New generation of suffragists are solidly in power, ar-

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## HEADQUARTERS NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OPPOSED TO WOMAN SUFFRAGE



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Library of Congress



## A New Deal

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Seneca Falls, 1923: Costumed as Elizabeth Cady Stanton (center) and her colleagues,

**1923** At the 75th anniversary of the Seneca Falls convention, Alice Paul proposes an Equal Rights Amendment to remedy inequalities not addressed in the 19th Amendment.

**Late 1920s** Many states continue to bar women

pageant participants from National Women's Party celebrate the 1848 convention. Sewall-Beimont House

lic office. Widows succeed their husbands as governors of Texas and Wyoming. Middle-class women attend college and enter labor force. Anticipated "women's vote" fails to materialize by end of decade.

**1933** Frances Perkins

Franklin D. Roosevelt as first female Secretary of Labor. In the New Deal years, at urging of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt and Democratic women's leader Molly Dewson, many women gain positions in federal social service bureaus, including Mary McLeod Bethune, director of the Negro Affairs Division of the National Youth Administration.

**1936** Federal court rules birth control legal for its own sake, rather than solely for prevention of disease.

**1941** United States enters World War II. Millions of women are recruited for defense industry jobs in war years and become significant part of labor force. WAC and WAVE



Women such as this railroad brake operator take men's jobs for the duration of World War II, permanently changing the makeup of the workforce. Sewall-Beimont House

**1947** Percentage of women in the labor force declines as women leave jobs to get married and to make way for returning soldiers. By end of decade, numbers of working women are again on the increase.

## "The Feminine Mystique"

**1952** Democratic and Republican parties eliminate women's divisions.

**1955** Civil Rights movement escalates in the South; Septima Clark and others lead sit-ins and demonstrations, providing models for future protest strategies.

**1960** FDA approves birth control pills.

**1961** President's Commission on the Status of Women is established, headed by Eleanor Roosevelt. Commission successfully pushes for passage in 1963 of Equal Pay Act, first federal law to require equal compensation for men and women in federal jobs.

**1963** Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*

**1964** Civil Rights Act prohibits job discrimination on the basis of race or sex and establishes Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to address discrimination claims.

**1966** National Organization for Women, founded by Betty Friedan and associates, promotes child care for working mothers, abortion rights, the Equal Rights Amendment, and "full participation in the mainstream of American society now."

**1972** After nearly 50 years, Equal Rights Amendment passes both houses and is signed by President Richard Nixon. Civil Rights Act bans sex discrimination in employment and education. Shirley Chisholm is first



Colorful and concise, these buttons express some of women's concerns in the late 20th century.

## "All Rights and Privileges"

**1973** In *Roe v. Wade*, U.S. Supreme Court affirms women's right to first trimester abortions without state intervention.

**1974** Ella Grasso of Connecticut becomes the first woman Governor elected in her own right.

**1981** Sandra Day O'Connor is appointed first woman U.S. Supreme Court justice.

**1982** Deadline for ERA ratification expires; final count is three states short of adoption.

**1984** Geraldine Ferraro is first woman from a major political party nominated as Vice President.

**1992** More women run for and are elected to public office than in any

**Today** The fight for equality is waged on many fronts: women are seeking political influence, better education, health reform, job equity, and legal reform. The demands echo those of the movement throughout its history. In 1848 Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and others claimed on behalf of American women "all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens." What would the reformers from Seneca Falls do today to contribute toward a future of equality? What will you do?

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# Women's Rights

Women's Rights  
National Historical Park  
New York

National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior



# Created Equal

*"I was born and lived almost forty years in South Bristol, Ontario County—one of the most secluded spots in Western New York, but from the earliest dawn of reason I pined for that freedom of thought and action that was then denied to all womankind . . . But not until that meeting at Seneca Falls in 1848, of the pioneers in the cause, gave this feeling of unrest form and voice, did I take action."*

—Emily Collins

For Emily Collins, who went on to start a local equal rights organization, and for other women of 1840s America the news of a women's rights convention was a vivid reminder of their inferior status. By law or by custom, an unmarried woman generally did not vote, speak in public, hold office, attend college, or earn a living other than as a teacher, seamstress, domestic, or mill worker. A married woman lived under these restrictions and more: she could not make contracts, sue

in court, divorce an abusive husband, gain custody of her children, or own property, even the clothes she wore. Though middle-class wives reigned over the domestic sphere, legally their husbands controlled them. Individual women publicly expressed their desire for equality, but it was not until 1848 that a handful of reformers in Seneca Falls, New York, called "A Convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of Woman."

**Why Seneca Falls?** A significant reform community emerged in western New York in the 1830s and 1840s. Among these reformers were abolitionists who joined relatives and started businesses in Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Here and elsewhere, Quaker women such as Philadelphian Lucretia Mott took an active role in the effort to end slavery. For Mott, her sister Martha Wright, Jane Hunt, Mary Ann M'Clintock, and 32-year-old Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the next step was to demand rights for women. In July 1848 they planned the convention and hammered out a formal list of grievances based on the Declaration of Independence, denouncing inequities in property rights, education, employ-

ment, religion, marriage and family, and suffrage. The demand for the "elective franchise" was so radical that even Mott protested, but Stanton had her way. On July 19 the Declaration of Sentiments was presented before an audience of about 300. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal," announced Stanton at the First Women's Rights Convention.

The advocates expected controversy. True ladies, a Philadelphia newspaper wrote after the convention, would be foolish to sacrifice their status as "Wives, Belles, Virgins and Mothers" for equal rights. Many signers of the declaration removed their names. But 12 days later a second convention was held in Rochester. By the turn of the century armies of women marched for suffrage. Today many of the convention's most radical demands are taken for granted. The Declaration of Sentiments was the start; its words have a relevance that reaches far beyond that warm July day in Seneca Falls.

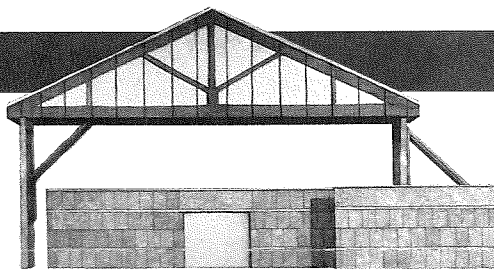
**Location** From I-90 (New York State Thruway) take Exit 41; go south on N.Y. Rt. 414; go east on U.S. 20, (it becomes Fall St.); follow signs to the visitor center. Airports within one hour's drive include Syracuse, Rochester, and Ithaca. A fee is charged.

**More Information** Contact: Women's Rights National Historical Park, 136 Fall Street, Seneca Falls, NY 13148; 315-568-2991; TDD 315-568-9039; FAX 315-568-2141; Internet [www.nps.gov/wori](http://www.nps.gov/wori).



## About Your Visit

The setting for the First Women's Rights Convention and the homes of some participants are preserved today as **Women's Rights National Historical Park**, established by Congress in 1980. Begin at the **visitor center**, 136 Fall Street, open daily except Thanksgiving, December 25, and January 1. Hours are 9 to 5, with extended hours in summer. The visitor center has exhibits, a film, and a list of activities. The center is accessible for visitors with disabilities; ask staff about access to the other sites.

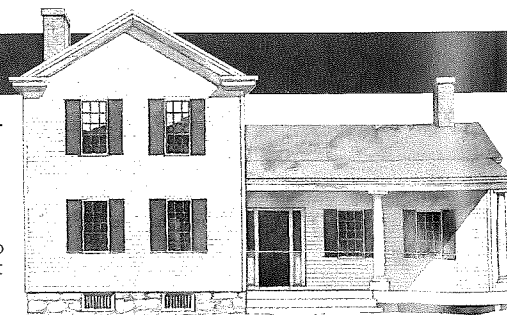


Wesleyan Chapel

**Declaration Park** features a granite water wall engraved with the words of the Declaration of Sentiments. The remains of the **Wesleyan Chapel** are preserved. The restored **Elizabeth Cady Stanton House** in Seneca Falls is open to the public. The **M'Clintock House** and

the **Hunt House** in Waterloo are being restored. Guided tours of the Stanton House are available in summer and on a limited basis at other times. Restoration tours of the M'Clintock and Hunt Houses are available periodically. On July 19 and 20, 1848, about 300 women and

men gathered in the **Wesleyan Chapel** to hear the first formal demands for women's rights. Curious local residents joined abolitionists, temperance workers, and reformers to fill the chapel. On the first day participants debated the wording of the Declaration of Sentiments. The *Seneca County Courier* reported that "an intelligent and respectful audience" attended the public session that evening to hear the "eminently beautiful and instructive" discourse of Lucretia Mott. At the next day's session

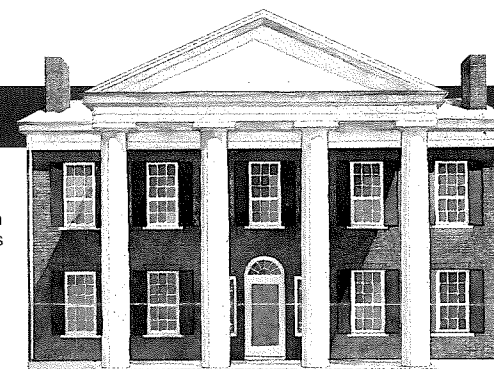


Elizabeth Cady Stanton House

the amended declaration was adopted; 100 women and men signed the document. Frederick Douglass reiterated his support at the final session. The **Elizabeth Cady Stanton House**

was the family's home for 15 years. Stanton's philosophy was based in large part on her experiences as a Seneca Falls housewife. She was 31 years old when she moved here in 1847 with her husband, a

lawyer and abolitionist lecturer, and three boys. Stanton found small-town life oppressive: "My duties were too numerous and varied and none sufficiently exhilarating or intellectual to bring into play my higher faculties. I suffered with mental hunger, which, like an empty stomach, is very depressing." Accustomed to the activity of Boston reform circles, Stanton drew inspiration from the company of Lucretia Mott and her associates. Stanton defied many of the day's housekeeping and

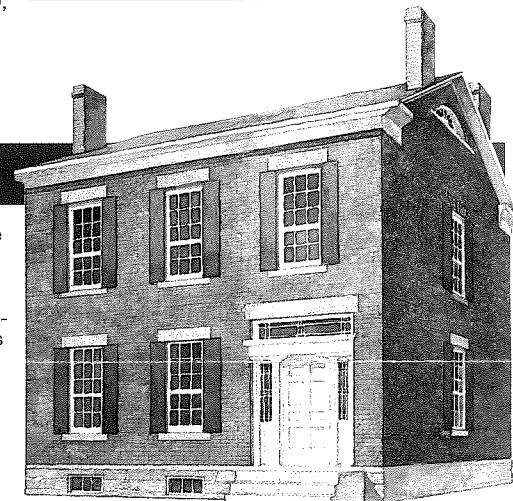


Hunt House

child-rearing customs. For many years she wore an outfit consisting of pants and a knee-length skirt, introduced by her cousin Libby Smith Miller and popularized by Amelia Bloomer, which allowed

freedom of movement prohibited by current fashion. She encouraged her seven children to join parlor discussions with visitors such as the Motts and Frederick Douglass. For several years Stanton hosted a

"conversation club" in the back parlor where young men and women discussed issues of the day and socialized. Her benevolent work with the town's poor residents made her all the more aware of the economic insecurity of women. The **Hunt House** was the home of Jane and Richard Hunt, Quakers active in the Waterloo reform community. Their mansion was the gathering place for Stanton, Mott, Wright, M'Clintock, and Jane Hunt as they planned the convention



M'Clintock House

Illustrations by Greg Harlin

on July 9, 1848. The **M'Clintock House** was owned by the Hunts, who rented it to relatives and fellow Quaker abolitionists,

Mary Ann and Thomas M'Clintock. The convention planners met here on July 16 to draft the Declaration of Sentiments.

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