

The Women's Suffrage Movement

SUSAN B. ANTHONY (1820-1906) for over fifty years Susan B. Anthony was the leader of the American woman suffrage movement. Born in Adams, Massachusetts on February 15, 1820, Anthony lived for many years in Rochester. When she died in 1906, only four states allowed women to vote, but Anthony's single-minded dedication to the cause of suffrage was largely responsible for the passage of the nineteenth amendment to the United States Constitution in 1920 giving women the vote. In 1872, Anthony was arrested for voting.

CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT (1859-1947) after graduating from Iowa State College in 1880, Carrie Chapman Catt pursued a brief career as educator, journalist, and lecturer. After attending her first national suffrage convention in 1890 as a delegate from Iowa, Catt quickly rose to the top ranks of the suffrage movement. When Susan B. Anthony retired from the presidency of the National American Woman Suffrage Association in 1900 she chose Catt as her successor. Forced to resign in 1904 because of her husband's failing health, Catt again became president of the NAWSA in 1915 and led the suffrage cause to victory in 1919. She was also the leader of the international suffrage organization and the peace movement.

LUCRETIA COFFIN MOTT (1793-1880) Lucretia Mott was a Quaker minister, abolitionist, and pioneer in the women's rights movement. In 1840, she traveled to London with her husband James Mott as a delegate to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention. At the convention, the women delegates were refused recognition and not allowed to participate in the proceedings. Grieved by this treatment, Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who was also attending the anti-slavery convention, determined to hold a meeting to discuss the rights of women. Mott, Stanton, and Mott's sister, Martha Coffin Wright, organized and called together the first women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York in July of 1848. Throughout her long life, Mott continued to work for the rights of women and of freed blacks after the Civil War.

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (1815-1902) In 1840 Elizabeth Cady Stanton accompanied her husband Henry to the World's Anti-Slavery Convention in London, England. When the British excluded the American women delegates, including Lucretia Mott, from the convention, Stanton and Mott resolved to hold a women's rights convention when they returned to the United States. In 1848 the first such convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York, where Stanton was then living. The Declaration of Sentiments that Stanton drafted for the convention enumerated eighteen legal grievances suffered by women, including lack of the franchise and the right to their wages, their person, and their children. It also called attention to women's limited educational and economic opportunities. In 1851 Stanton met Susan B. Anthony and for the next fifty years they worked in close collaboration, Stanton articulating the arguments for improving the legal and traditional rights of women, and Anthony organizing and campaigning to achieve these goals.

Women's Rights Convention Seneca Falls, NY

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 the 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 40s. Among these reformers were abolitionists who joined relatives and started businesses in Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Here and elsewhere, Quaker women such as Philadelphia 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 (called the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions), denouncing inequities in property rights, education, employment, 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 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, and Mothers" for equal rights. Many signers of the declaration removed their names. However, 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.

Text Quest: Use the information in this packet or your textbook to answer the following questions.

1. What was the main result of Susan B. Anthony's dedication to the women's movement?

2. What did Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton decide to do when they were in London in 1840?

3. What document did Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted for the Seneca Falls Convention?

4. By law or by custom in 1840, what restrictions were place on married and unmarried women?

5. Explain how the abolitionist movement related to the women's suffrage movement?

6. "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal," This quote from the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions is related to what other famous historical document?

7. List 5 demands of the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions that at the time of the resolution seemed radical yet today we take them for granted.
