

The Birth of the Women's Rights Movement in Seneca County

Perhaps the single most famous historical event associated with Seneca County is its being the birthplace of the women's rights movement. Most people know something about the Seneca Falls convention of July 19-20, 1848, but do not have a comprehensive understanding of this event in its historical context. A brief survey of the events leading up to the Seneca Falls convention of July 1848, the people involved in the convention, and a general understanding of the nature of the economic growth and reforming spirit that characterized the Seneca Falls-Waterloo area of Seneca County in the first half of the 19th century is necessary for a good understanding of Seneca County's role as the birthplace of the women's rights movement.

A. Events Leading Up to the Seneca Falls Convention

1. Background

Elizabeth Cady was born in Johnstown, New York, on November 22, 1815, the daughter of Daniel Cady, a lawyer, judge and land speculator, and Margaret Livingston Cady. In many respects her upbringing was not typical of young ladies at this time. She was educated at a local boys' school and graduated from the Troy Female Seminary in Troy, NY in 1832. She met Henry Brewster Stanton in Peterboro, NY, at the home of her cousin Gerrit Smith. Henry and Gerrit were both abolitionists. Elizabeth married Henry, against her family's wishes, on May 1, 1840, in a ceremony that omitted the vow to "obey." Their honeymoon was a trip to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where Henry was a delegate representing the American Anti-Slavery Society. At that convention, elected women delegates were refused admission because of their sex. After a prolonged debate, it was decided that women could sit at the rear of the hall, but not participate.

Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia, a famous Quaker reformer, was among the female delegates sent from the floor. In the women's section, she met Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who shared her indignation at the treatment of women. (Both the Motts—Lucretia and her husband James—and the Stantons were staying at the Mark Moore's at No. 6 Queen Street Place. Lucretia and Elizabeth used the parlors and dining rooms of the boardinghouse as a way for ladies to lead antislavery discussions¹.) Elizabeth and Mott became friends, and vowed to hold a convention, immediately on returning to the United States, to discuss injustices against women.

After the 1840 convention, the Stantons returned to Johnstown and Henry studied law with Judge Cady. Then Henry and Elizabeth set up housekeeping in Boston, where Henry began a practice. Both Henry and Elizabeth became active in reform circles in Boston. In 1847, they moved with their three children to Seneca Falls. Henry was in poor health and felt a change in location would help. Elizabeth's father had given her a house he owned at 32 Washington Street in Seneca Falls.

In Seneca Falls, Elizabeth Cady Stanton first experienced the difficulties facing a wife and mother in an isolated, 19th-century household. She lacked the intellectual and cultural stimulation she had enjoyed in Boston. She now found herself overwhelmed by child care and housework. Later, in her autobiography, she wrote:

The general discontent I felt with women's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic conditions into which everything fell without my constant supervision, the wearied anxious look of

the majority of women, impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs...of women....²

Although Elizabeth may have despaired of her lack of intellectual and social stimulation in Seneca Falls, the Seneca Falls-Waterloo area was undergoing great economic growth at this time. This will be discussed fully in a separate section.

2. The Waterloo Tea Party of July 9, 1848

On July 9, 1848, Jane Hunt, a Hicksite Quaker (also known as Progressive Friends) invited four ladies to tea at her home (the address today is 401 East Main Street, Waterloo). The tea was prompted by the fact that Lucretia Mott, her friend from Philadelphia, was in the area. Lucretia Mott and her husband James had attended the Genesee Yearly Meeting (of a group of Quakers), and then were making an extended visit with her sister Martha Coffin Wright of Auburn, and taking time to visit with prisoners at the Auburn prison and with African Americans and Native Americans living in Canada, and Seneca Indians living in western New York.³ Mrs. Mott had become a prominent Quaker minister and lecturer and the tea would provide a splendid opportunity for her to renew her acquaintances with the other invited guests. These were Mary Ann M'Clintock, a Waterloo Quaker abolitionist and husband of Thomas M'Clintock; Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had recently moved with her husband Henry and children to a home in Seneca Falls; and Martha Coffin Wright of Auburn, who was the sister of Lucretia Mott.⁴

One can easily imagine that these ladies heard Elizabeth Cady Stanton share her frustrations about her newfound understanding of women's "proper sphere" and her vehement complaints about its injustice. One can be fairly sure that Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth remembered their vow in 1840 in London to hold a convention about the injustices of women. The ladies decided to hold a women's rights convention to call their grievances to the attention of the public. That same day they wrote a notice that appeared in the local *Seneca County Courier* newspaper on July 11 and 14, 1848. It read as follows:

A convention to discuss the social, civil, and religious rights of women will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel at Seneca Falls, New York, on Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July, current; commencing at 10 o'clock a.m. During the first day, the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when Lucretia Mott, of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention.⁵

Deliberately the women left the notice unsigned. The minutes of the convention reported that "the Women of Seneca County, N.Y." called the convention, and that is how these women wanted to be recognized—not for themselves as individuals but as representatives of local citizens. The *Ovid Bee* carried the notice starting on Friday, July 14, as did Frederick Douglass's *North Star*.⁶

3. Further planning prior to the Seneca Falls Convention

There were only eight days between the publication of the meeting notice in the *Seneca County Courier* and the first day of the convention. None of the five ladies had organized a whole convention before, but as individuals they had prior experiences upon which they could draw. Lucretia Mott was a well-known public lecturer. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had given at least two public speeches. Mary M'Clintock and her husband had organized Quaker meetings, and antislavery conventions and fairs.

Stanton drew up a draft declaration for the convention. She took it with her to the M'Clintock's house on Sunday, July 16, so that the M'Clintocks, especially Elizabeth (the twenty-seven years old daughter of Thomas and Mary) could review it. At that same gathering, the group would also write appropriate resolutions and consider topics for speeches.⁷ They decided to call their main manifesto a "Declaration of Sentiments" after the founding document of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833. The declaration was based on the Declaration of Independence. They prepared several resolutions.

Interestingly, the word "political" had not appeared in the notice for the convention. Stanton, however, came to the conclusion that women must have a right to vote. Stanton got the M'Clintocks to agree that the draft Declaration of Sentiments would include the wording that man had never permitted woman "to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise." Resolution number nine included the wording "resolved, that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise." Henry Stanton was so opposed to this proposed resolution that he would not attend the convention. He left town to lecture again for free soil. So, Elizabeth Stanton got her sister Harriet Eaton and son Daniel Cady Eaton to stay with her and attend the convention.⁸

B. The Events of the Seneca Falls Convention of July 19-20, 1848

1. Wednesday, July 19, 1848

No men would take part in the first day's proceedings. They would be listeners only, not speakers. Some children accompanied their mothers to the proceedings. The first order of business was appointing Mary Ann M'Clintock as secretary. She would take clear notes for both days of the convention.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton made clear that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss the "social, civil, and religious condition and rights of woman."

Stanton then introduced the draft Declaration of Sentiments which was read. Many, including Lucretia Mott, were surprised to learn that it advocated voting rights for women. The draft Declaration was reread and discussed. Some changes were made and the Declaration wording was adopted for formal presentation to the second day of the convention.

The wording of eleven resolutions was also agreed to. These also would be presented on the second day of the convention for formal approval.

There was debate as to whether or not to seek the signatures of men to the Declaration. The ladies present simply decided to defer this issue until the second day.

Although technically not a part of the convention proceedings, that evening Lucretia Mott spoke by candlelight on the progress of various reforms—temperance, antislavery, peace, etc.—in an attempt to put woman's rights into the larger context of reform in general. She concluded her remarks with an invitation to the gentlemen "to let their voices be heard on the great subject" of women's rights. Only Frederick Douglass made a response.⁹

2. Thursday, July 20, 1848

Apparently more people were in attendance the second day of the convention compared to the first day. Part of this is explained by the fact that, unlike the first day, men were expected to take part in the discussions on the second day. There was also the fact that the "word had gotten out" that some important developments had taken place the first day. Also, some key individuals were there for the second day. Two of these were Lucretia Mott and her sister Martha Coffin Wright who had come in by train from Auburn on Wednesday and were probably staying

with Stanton. James Mott, husband of Lucretia, had been sick but was feeling enough better to attend the second day. Amelia Jenks Bloomer had been out-of town and arrived late the second day. Many had come from Seneca Falls—Free Soilers and abolitionists for the most part. Others were Quakers from Waterloo and Rochester. Frederick Douglass was also there.¹⁰

The organizing ladies invited James Mott, who was experienced in running meetings, to serve as chair. Stanton then began reading the draft Declaration of Sentiments. The preamble contained only one major change from the Declaration of Independence—instead of saying that “all men are created equal” it said that “all men and women are created equal.” Then the draft Declaration of Sentiments dealt with a listing of grievances of woman because of what man has done. It began by asserting four charges dealing with civil and political rights such as “he [man] has never permitted her [woman] to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.” The second major category dealt with legal discrimination, especially for married women. Then it dealt with the rights of women in work, education, and the church. The last set of charges highlighted the values that supported the whole system of oppression. As a final comment about the effect of these grievances, the draft Declaration of Sentiments emphasized that the pattern of discrimination had the ultimate effect of destroying the self-confidence and self-respect of individual women. The document concluded by insisting that women have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.¹¹

Following Stanton’s reading of the declaration presented at the first day of the convention, the floor was opened for discussion. There wasn’t much doubt that it would be adopted by those in attendance this second day. Later in her life, Stanton wrote that what could be more “timely, rational, and sacred,” than to extend to women “all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of these United States,” and to do so by peaceful means? The Declaration of Sentiments was adopted unanimously on late Thursday morning.¹²

The adopted Declaration of Sentiments was then offered up for people to sign. One hundred signed the document. Sixty-eight women signed on the document itself while thirty-two men signed a separate list “in favor of the document.” This separate signing was a compromise between those (including Stanton) who wanted women to make their own demands and those who believed men also should have a voice. Some significant non-signers included Mary Bascom; her father, Ansel Bascom; Amelia Bloomer; Rhoda Palmer’s father Asa Palmer; the three youngest M’Clintocks—Charles, Sarah and Julia. So, if we use the commonly-held figure of three hundred attending the convention at any one time, then only one-third of those in attendance actually signed the Declaration.¹³

At the afternoon session, all draft resolutions from the first day were presented and adopted. These adopted resolutions are as follows:

1. Resolved, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and of no validity; for this is superior in obligation to any other.
2. Resolved, That all laws which shall prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.
3. Resolved, That woman is man’s equal—was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.
4. Resolved, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation, by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.
5. Resolved, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak, teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies.

6. Resolved, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior, that is required of women in the social state, should also be required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.
7. Resolved, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in concert, or in the feats of the circus.
8. Resolved, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverse application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.
9. Resolved, That it is the duty of women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.
10. Resolved, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.
11. Resolved, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every rightful cause, by every righteous means' and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth, growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as self-evident falsehood, and at war with the interests of mankind.¹⁴

Apparently all passed unanimously except for the ninth resolution, drafted by Stanton herself, “urging the women of the country to secure to themselves the elective franchise.” As was mentioned earlier, this resolution was opposed by Henry Stanton and Lucretia Mott. Stanton had gotten Frederick Douglass to help lead the support for this resolution when debated.¹⁵

Thomas M’Clintock presided over the evening session. Like at previous sessions, the minutes were read. Again the organizing ladies asked for people to express any objections they had to this new movement. No one expressed any objection. Stanton then spoke, followed by Thomas M’Clintock. Lucretia Mott offered one final resolution: “that the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions and commerce.” The younger Mary Ann M’Clintock (daughter of Thomas and Mary Ann) spoke next, followed by Frederick Douglass and Lucretia Mott.¹⁶

As the last act of the convention, five women—Mary Ann M’Clintock, Eunice Norton Foote, Amy Post, Elizabeth M’Clintock, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton—were appointed “to prepare the proceedings of the Convention for publication.” A collection box was passed around and they made arrangements with Frederick Douglass to have the *North Star* print the minutes.¹⁷

3. Key Individuals at the Seneca Falls Convention

Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902)

She spearheaded the call for the Convention and wrote the first draft of the Declaration of Sentiments out of a strong sense of injustice and righteous indignation at the plight of women. She later became one of the most important and persistent leaders of human rights in U.S. history.

Elizabeth Cady was born to Judge Daniel and Margaret Livingston Cady in Johnstown, NY, on November 12, 1815. On May 1, 1840, she married Henry Brewster Stanton. Henry and Elizabeth traveled to London for the World Anti-Slavery convention in June 1840 and then went on an extended honeymoon throughout western Europe.

In 1847, Elizabeth moved her family to a home of her father’s at 32 Washington Street in Seneca Falls. The Stanton family would live there until moving to New York City in 1862.

In 1851, she was introduced to Susan B. Anthony. The two became close working partners and friends in the efforts to secure woman suffrage.

Lucretia Mott (1798-1880) and James Mott (1788-1868)

They were influential Quaker abolitionists and merchants from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. They refused to sell slave-made products, including cotton and sugar, in their store. Lucretia was a respected Quaker minister and was a major speaker on the evening of the first day of the Convention and the second days of the convention. James chaired one of the sessions of the Convention.

Lucretia was a Coffin, born on Nantucket Island. As her father was a whaling ship captain, she grew up in a household in which her mother “ran affairs” and was virtually “independent.” The Coffin family later moved to Boston.

Mary Ann and Thomas M’Clintock

They were leaders in Quaker reform and abolition. They moved from Philadelphia to Waterloo in 1836. While in Philadelphia, Mary Ann and Lucretia Mott had worked closely together on anti-slavery efforts, including the formation of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.

In Waterloo, the M’Clintocks operated a store (rented from Richard Hunt, his brother-in-law) in which they sold goods advertised as ‘free from the labor of slaves.’ They even sold sugar-free fortune cookies that contained such messages as “If slavery comes by color which God gave, fortune may change and you become the slave.” They also used their store to secure signatures on numerous anti-slavery petitions. They became active in the changes taking place in the Quaker church. There were leaders in the Hicksite-Orthodox split in 1827, and later the Hicksite-Progressive split in 1848. Both times, they took strong stands on the equality of every person and on the need to work actively against injustice. Thomas wrote “The Basis of Religious Authority” shortly after the 1848 split. This document explained the Progressive Friends’ beliefs that divine was in every person, and that everyone was therefore equal.¹⁸

They hosted many reform meetings and individuals in their home.

On Sunday, July 16, 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton came to the M’Clintock home to have all present work on revisions to her draft Declaration of Sentiments and to prepare draft resolutions to be presented at the July 19-20 Convention.

Martha Coffin Wright (1806-1875)

She participated in the Convention activities while pregnant with her seventh child. She later embarked on a distinguished career in human rights, presiding over several conventions and holding office in women’s rights associations.

Martha was the younger sister (13 years younger) of Lucretia Coffin Mott. Martha was living in Auburn, NY, at the time of the Convention. Lucretia and James Mott had come to stay with Martha for an extended visit at the time of the Convention.

Richard and Jane Hunt

Richard and Jane Hunt were Waterloo philanthropists who supported human rights causes. They hosted the tea party on July 9, 1848, that led to the call for the first Women’s Rights Convention in the United States.

Richard was the wealthiest resident of Waterloo and perhaps the entire county. It is widely believed that he used his home as a station on the Underground Railroad.

Frederick Douglass (1817-1895)

A former slave, Douglass became a prominent abolitionist lecturer. He moved from Boston to Rochester, NY, and began publishing the *North Star*, one of the few African-American anti-slavery newspapers in the United States. At the Seneca Falls Convention, he publicly supported Elizabeth Cady Stanton's highly controversial resolution calling for the right of women to vote.

C. Information about those who signed the Declaration of Sentiments

1. Names of individuals who signed in support of the *Declaration of Sentiments*

(Note: Females were allowed to sign on the adopted Declaration itself. Males were allowed to sign on a separate sheet to indicate their support for the Declaration.)

Females:

Barker, Caroline
 Barker, Eunice
 Bonnel, Rachel D.
 Conklin, Elizabeth
 Conklin, Mary
 Culvert, P.A.
 Davis, Cynthia
 Doty, Susan R.
 Drake, Julia Ann
 Eaton, Harriet Cady
 Foote, Eunice Newton
 Frink, Mary Ann
 Fuller, Cynthia
 Gibbs, Experience
 Gilbert, Mary
 Gild, Lydia
 Hallowell, Mary H.
 Hallowell, Sarah
 Hoffman, Sarah
 Hunt, Jane C.
 Jenkins, Margaret
 Jones, Lucy
 King, Phebe
 Latham, Hannah J.
 Latham, Lavinia
 Leslie, Elizabeth
 Martin, Eliza
 Martin, Mary
 Mathews, Delia
 Mathews, Dorothy
 M'Clintock, Elizabeth W.
 M'Clintock, Mary
 M'Clintock, Mary Ann

Mirror, Mary S.
 Mosher, Phebe
 Mosher, Sarah A.
 Mott, Lucretia
 Mount, Lydia
 Paine, Catharine C.
 Palmer, Rhoda
 Pitcher, Sally
 Plant, Hannah
 Porter, Ann
 Post, Amy
 Pryor, Margaret
 Quinn, Susan
 Race, Rebecca
 Ridley, Martha
 Schooley, Margaret
 Scott, Deborah
 Segur, Anoinette E.
 Seymour, Malvina
 Shaw, Catharine
 Sisson, Sarah
 Smith, Elizabeth D.
 Smith, Sarah
 Spalding, Lucy
 Stanton, Elizabeth Cady
 Stebbins, Catharine F.
 Taylor, Sophrone
 Tewksbury, Betsey
 Underhill, Martha
 Vail, Mary E.
 Whitney, Sarah
 Wilbur, Maria E.
 Woodard, Charlotte
 Woods, Sarah R.
 Wright, Martha C.

Males:

Barker, William G.
 Bunker, Joel
 Burroughs, William
 Capron, E.W.
 Chamberlain, Jacob
 Dell, Thomas
 Dell, William S.
 Doty, Elias J.
 Douglass, Frederick
 Foote, Elisha
 Hatley, Henry
 Hoskins, Charles L.
 Hunt, Richard P.
 Jones, John
 Matthews, Jacob
 M'Clintock, Thomas M.
 Metcalf, Jonathan
 Milliken, Nathan J.
 Mott, James
 Phillips, Saron
 Pryor, George W.
 Salding, David
 Schooley, Azaliah
 Seymour, Henry
 Seymour, Henry W.
 Shear, Stephen
 Smallldridge, Robert
 Tillman, Samuel D.
 Underhill, Edward F.
 Van Tassel, Isaac
 Williams, Justin
 Woodworth, S.E.

2. Some general comments about the signers

Most had come either from Seneca Falls or Waterloo.

Most were mature adults in their thirties or forties.

Only one signer—Susan Quinn--was definitely linked to an Irish background. She was also the youngest signer—at the age of 14.

The oldest signer was probably Catherine Shaw, at age 81.

Except for Frederick Douglass, no identifiable African American signed the Declaration.

Judith Wellman reported that “Family patterns reflected a difference between signers and nonsigners. Signers settled in close proximity to parents and siblings, and they often incorporated unrelated persons into their households....Many women who signed the Declaration of Sentiments had strong identities as sisters as well as wives....Reflecting the importance of

extended family networks, almost 70 percent of known signers came to the convention with one or more family members....”¹⁹

There was a strong Seneca Falls-Waterloo area connection for many of the signers. These families had come to make a living from the growing economic activity of these villages on the Seneca River. Judith Wellman observed that “In terms of work and wealth, most signers came from families that bridged the old land-based economy and the new industrializing, market-oriented world. Their main income came from the law, milling, manufacturing, commercial farming, or retail sales. In property ownership, they ranged from Richard P. and Jane Hunt, the richest family in Seneca County, to George and Margaret Pryor, who were downright poor. Statistical analysis of property assessments (based on census and assessment records) suggests no relationship between property ownership and signing the Declaration of Sentiments.”²⁰

Signers were influenced by the newly-passed New York State Married Woman’s Property Act which guaranteed a woman the right to continue to own property she owned prior to marrying. Signers of the Seneca Falls Declaration were more likely than were nonsigners to have daughters in the household or to be female heads of households.

Religious affiliation also played an important role. Quakers formed the largest single religious group. At least one-fourth of the total signers were Quakers. Those who came from Seneca Falls and the immediate area were almost all Methodist, Wesleyan Methodist, or Episcopalian. At least four were Methodists. At least seven were members of the Wesleyan congregation. Seneca Falls Catholics, Presbyterians, and Baptists showed little enthusiasm for woman’s rights. Catholics avoided the convention entirely. Only one Presbyterian and one Baptist were signers.²¹

Judith Wellman also reports that the majority of the signers can be linked directly to one of two egalitarian networks: either the Free Soil Party in Seneca Falls or the Congregational Friends of Waterloo and Rochester. In June 1848 both groups had broken their traditional ties with former organizations and “came to the woman’s rights convention to explore the meaning of their newly articulated commitment to equality, not only in terms of race or religion but also in terms of gender.” Congregational Friends, centered in the Junius Monthly Meeting, were all abolitionists and woman’s rights advocates.²² Of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments from Seneca Falls, 69.2% of them lived in a household affiliated with the Free Soil movement. Only 21.2% of nonsigners’ households included someone involved with the Free Soil party.²³

D. Postlude—Reaction to the Seneca Falls Convention, and What Happened After the Convention

1. Public Reaction to the Seneca Falls Convention

Judith Wellman reports that in the *Seneca County Courier*, Nathan Milliken, editor and himself one of the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments, summed up local response to the woman’s rights convention. Milliken reported that the meeting was “novel in its character and the doctrines broached in it are startling to those who are wedded to the present usages and laws of society. The resolutions are of the kind called radical.” Despite some of the radicalism, “some of the speeches were very able—all the exercises were marked by great order and decorum.” Milliken predicted that the Declaration of Sentiments and the adopted resolutions “will provoke much remark,” ranging from curiosity to respect to “disapprobation and contempt.”²⁴

Newspapers around the country made fun of what had taken place. Cartoonists leaped at the “Fe’he Males” as the women were nicknamed, with all the tenacity of pit bulls, according to Norma Johnston.²⁵ The *Rochester Advertiser* simply dismissed the convention as “extremely dull

and uninteresting.”²⁶ *The Liberator* quoted an unknown person as characterizing those who attending the Seneca Falls convention as “erratic, addle-pated comeouters” and the convention itself was “a most insane and ludicrous farce.”²⁷ The New York *Herald*, published by Gordon Bennett, was sarcastic and hostile. Intending to offer concrete proof of the folly of the Seneca Falls women, Bennett published the Declaration of Sentiments and Resolutions in full. What he did, however, was give the women’s rights movement publicity that no amount of money or influence could have bought.²⁸

On the Sunday after the Seneca Falls convention, the Reverend Horace P. Bogue, pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Seneca Falls, preached a sermon opposing woman’s rights. Stanton and Mary Ann M’Clintock sat in the pews and took notes of what he said.²⁹

All this negative press prompted Elizabeth Cady Stanton to remark, “No words could express our astonishment on finding, a few days afterward, that what seemed to us so timely, so rational, and so sacred, should be a subject for sarcasm and ridicule.”³⁰

Many newspaper editors feared that equal rights for women would have a negative effect on men’s roles. The Albany, NY *Mechanic’s Advocate* recognized that woman’s rights advocates wanted to “divide with the male sex the labors and responsibilities of active life in every branch of art, science, trades, and professions.” Going on to say “this is all wrong” and if men performed “an equal share of the domestic duties,” this would “set the world by its ears...and prove a monstrous injury to all mankind.”³¹ The *Lowell* (Massachusetts) *Courier* complained that the ideas expressed at Seneca Falls would lead to a reversal in gender roles. The Philadelphia *Public Ledger and Daily Transcript* argued that “a woman is nobody. A wife is everything. A pretty girl is equal to ten thousand men, and a mother is, next to God, all powerful...The ladies of Philadelphia, therefore, ...are resolved to maintain their rights as Wives, Belles, Virgins, and Mothers, and not as Women.”³²

Not all newspaper editors were negative in their comments about the Seneca Falls convention. The *Herkimer Freeman* editorialized the following support for the convention: “Success to the cause in which they have enlisted! A railroad speed to the end they would accomplish!...I look forward to woman’s emancipation with the most intense anxiety; I hail it as a great jubilee of the nation.”³³ The St. Louis *Daily Reveille* said, “The flag of independence has been hoisted for the second time on this side of the Atlantic, and a solemn league and covenant has just been entered into by a convention of women at Seneca Falls, New York.”³⁴

Some newspaper editors kept at least an open mind on the issue of woman’s rights. Judith Wellman reports that Horace Greeley, editor of the New York *Tribune*, “gave a full and fair report of the convention and then added his reluctant support, reminiscent of his stance toward African American suffrage. If Americans really believed in the idea that ‘all men are created equal,’ he argued, they must endorse even the right of women to vote: ‘When a sincere republican is asked to say in sober earnest what adequate reason he can give, for refusing the demand of women to an equal participation with men in political rights, he must answer, None at all...However unwise and mistaken the demand, it is but the assertion of a natural right, and such must be conceded.’”³⁵

Judith Wellman in her book *The Road to Seneca Falls* goes on to challenge Stanton’s recollections about the huge negative press on the Seneca Falls convention. Wellman asserts that a majority of the newspapers throughout the country provided either positive support or relatively neutral reactions to the Seneca Falls convention. She further reports that the historian Timothy Terpstra, surveyed editorials in seventy-one newspapers across the country, finding that

58 had newspaper articles dealing with the Seneca Falls convention, with 28% giving a neutral report and 29% responding favorably.³⁶

The negative reactions to the Seneca Falls convention clearly intimidated many signers, especially women, of the Declaration. In her autobiography, Stanton stated that “So pronounced was the popular voice against us, in the parlor, press, and pulpit that most of the ladies who had attended the convention and signed the declaration, one by one, withdrew their names and influence and joined our persecutors. Our friends gave us the cold shoulder and felt themselves disgraced by the whole proceeding.”³⁷ Judith Wellman speculates that it was probably Seneca Falls ladies who were not experienced in prior reform movements other than temperance work who withdrew their signatures. Wellman clearly doubts any Quaker would have been intimidated by such public pressure.³⁸

Interestingly, Stanton’s father “took the night train and rushed up to Seneca Falls to see if [his daughter Elizabeth Cady Stanton] was insane.”³⁹

2. What Happened as a Follow-Up to the Seneca Falls Convention

Judith Wellman asserts that the Seneca Falls convention energized Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton felt invigorated. The Seneca Falls convention brought her out of her feelings of depression and unease and gave her a renewed sense of purpose. In the following decade, Stanton immersed herself in woman’s rights, temperance, and dress reform while maintaining an ever-growing household of children. At the same time, she remained, at least to observers, calm, cheerful, energetic, and witty. From 1848 to the end of her life, she never wavered from her commitment to woman’s rights and liberal religion.⁴⁰

On August 2, a sequel to the Seneca Falls convention was held in Rochester. Organized by Amy Post and her abolitionist Quaker friends, it was attended by several of those who had attended the Seneca Falls convention: Stanton, Amy Post, Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth and Mary Ann M’Clintock, Sarah and Mary Hallowell, Catharine Stebbins, and Frederick Douglass. The Rochester convention adopted the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments in its entirety, with 107 signatures.⁴¹

Stanton and M’Clintock undertook a writing crusade. They wrote a letter to the editor of the *Seneca County Courier* to respond to the anti-woman’s rights sermon of the Reverend Bogue. They wrote a letter to George Cooper, editor of the *National Reformer* in Rochester, in which they stated:

If God has assigned a sphere to man and one to woman, we claim the right to judge ourselves of his design in reference to us....We think a man has quite enough in this life to find out his own individual calling, without being taxed to decide where every woman belongs....There is no such thing as a sphere for a sex.⁴²

Stanton spoke at various Quaker gatherings (September in Waterloo and to the Congregational Friends in Farmington in October). She and the other ladies organized petitions to be sent to the New York state legislature.⁴³

Others joined in efforts to secure woman’s rights. By October, Emily Collins of South Bristol organized the Woman’s Equal Rights Union.⁴⁴

Stanton kept having children, desiring to have a daughter. Despite the growing household, Stanton continued to use her home and family to entertain reformers from out of

town. On May 12, 1851 she was introduced to Susan B. Anthony by Amelia Jenks Bloomer. Anthony had come to Seneca Falls to hear the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison speak. When they happened to come upon one another on a street corner after that evening program, they were formally introduced. Thus began what would become a famous working collaboration of Stanton and Anthony in the effort to secure woman's rights.⁴⁵

E. Seneca Falls and Waterloo Were “Hotbeds” for the Various Reform Movements of the Antebellum Period

There are several reasons that help to explain why the first woman's rights convention took place in the Seneca Falls-Waterloo area of Seneca County. One major factor is that this area was undergoing tremendous economic growth at this time. The rapids of the Seneca River at both Seneca Falls and Waterloo were a major source of water power to run the machinery of the many industries that were springing up in these two communities. The Seneca-Cayuga Canal, which was connected to the Erie Canal in 1828, provided a vital good transportation connection with eastern cities and ports like New York City. All trains running west from Albany to Buffalo went through Seneca Falls and Waterloo between 1841 and 1853. Given both the excellent water transportation and railroad facilities, farm produce of the central and western Finger Lakes region and the coal of Pennsylvania could be easily transported to these eastern markets. People were flocking to both Seneca Falls and Waterloo to work in the mills and factories or to open up their own businesses in the hopes of making it rich. More specifically, the Stantons, as indicated earlier in this article, had relocated to Seneca Falls in 1847 at least partially for economic gain. These “relocated” people would maintain their ties with their friends elsewhere, and in many cases these friends would come to visit in Seneca Falls and Waterloo. Remember that James and Lucretia Mott had come to the Finger Lakes area for an extended visit in summer 1848 and that had prompted Mrs. Hunt to invite the ladies to her home, providing Stanton with an opportunity to meet Lucretia Mott face-to-face for the first time since in London in 1840.

A second major factor was that Seneca Falls and Waterloo were the eastern part of the so-called Burned-Over District of the Second Great Awakening. In the years approximately 1820 to 1840, there was a major religious revival on the part of various Protestant churches, especially Methodist and Baptist. Encouraged by the preaching of the famous Reverend Charles Grandison Finney, many new converts were made. Finney had stressed that a person could choose to do good. This logically led to a belief that truly religious people could improve societal conditions. In western New York there was also a growing new group of Quakers—initially Hicksites and later the Progressive Friends—that believed firmly in the equality of everyone, including enslaved African Americans. Members of these growing religious groups became activists in many reform movements, especially anti-slavery activism, temperance, and woman's rights.

The involvement of many women in the anti-slavery movement contributed greatly to the woman's rights movement. The women would learn important leadership skills through their involvement in the anti-slavery movement—skills that they could use in the woman's rights movement. Clearly, Lucretia Mott had become an important public speaker through her involvement in anti-slavery activism. The involvement of women in the anti-slavery movement helped to raise their consciousness about their inferiority as women. As has been shown earlier in this article, for example, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott had experienced first-hand in London in 1842 the realities of discrimination against women.

As has been shown earlier in this article, many of the people at the Seneca Falls Convention were Quakers. Four of the five ladies who decided to hold the Convention in the first place were Quakers. Several of the people attending had been involved in other reform activities.

There is a tremendous intertwining of people involved in and/or supporting the evolving woman's rights movement and other reform activism at this time.

Endnotes

¹ Johnston, *Remember the Ladies: The First Women's Rights Convention*, New York; Scholastic, 1995, pp 37-45.

² Basically quoted from *Women's Rights Trail*, a 2000 Women's Rights National Historical Park publication, pp. 14-15.

³ Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004, p. 182.

⁴ *Women's Rights Trail*, p. 25.

⁵ *Women's Rights Trail*, p. 25.

⁶ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 189.

⁷ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 190-91.

⁸ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p 193.

⁹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 193-97.

¹⁰ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 197.

¹¹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 199-200.

¹² *Road to Seneca Falls*, p 201.

¹³ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 201-02.

¹⁴ *Remember the Ladies*, pp 103-11.

¹⁵ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 202-03.

¹⁶ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p 203.

¹⁷ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 203-04.

¹⁸ *Women's Rights Trail*, p. 27

¹⁹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 204-05.

²⁰ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p 205.

²¹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp 206-07.

²² *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 207.

²³ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 208.

²⁴ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 208.

²⁵ *Remember the Ladies*, p. 127

²⁶ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 209.

²⁷ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 209.

²⁸ *Remember the Ladies*, p. 127

²⁹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 213.

³⁰ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 209.

³¹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 209.

³² *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 210.

³³ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 210.

³⁴ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 210.

³⁵ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 210.

³⁶ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 210.

³⁷ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp. 21-11.

³⁸ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 211.

³⁹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 211.

⁴⁰ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 211.

⁴¹ *Road to Seneca Falls*, pp. 211-12.

⁴² *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 213.

⁴³ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 215.

⁴⁴ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 216.

⁴⁵ *Road to Seneca Falls*, p. 221.
