

Temperance and Women's Dress Reform in Seneca County

In previous article, you have read about Seneca County anti-slavery reforming activity in the years before the Civil War. It is also well-known that the birth of the American woman's rights movement can be traced directly to the Seneca Falls Convention of July 1848. It was at that convention that a Declaration of Sentiments and twelve Resolutions were adopted. These documents provided for the focus for the efforts to secure for women the right to vote. These documents are still the focus for other contemporary women's rights efforts.

Seneca County also played a very important role in the temperance and women's dress reform movements. Temperance activists wanted to stop the human consumption of alcohol. It was believed that in too many cases, the male household head wasted away his hard-earned wages on alcohol and/or the imbibed husband would beat us his wife or children. The Seneca House at the northwest corner of Bayard and Ovid Streets in Seneca Falls was operated by J.C. Fuller in the 1840s as a boarding house and meeting place for temperance reformers and abolitionists. Also, Amelia Jenks Bloomer began publishing *The Lily* in 1849, containing her views on temperance and various social issues.

Amelia Bloomer was the first woman to own, operate and edit a news vehicle for women. It was her newspaper that helped to popularize what became known as "Bloomers," although it had actually been invented by temperance advocate Elizabeth Smith Miller. For many years, the Bloomer outfit became a popular alternative to the hooped skirts that were so heavy, awkward for walking or sitting. *The Lily* became a recognized forum for women's rights issues.