

THE CONTEXT

Industrial Revolution: During the 1830's Seneca Falls was transformed into a bustling milling and manufacturing community along the five natural falls of Seneca River. Revolution also occurred in the home: the shared responsibilities of farm life, and a barter economy, changed rapidly to a cash economy with men working away from home in the mills. Women in Seneca Falls generally took piece work into their homes, earning far lower wages than men doing comparable work. When women did earn wages, they discovered their husbands were entitled to them, and that they couldn't own property even if they had cash.

These facts pointed to other discriminations. Women could not inherit their husbands' estates. They could not be guardians of their own children. They could not attend college or enter any profession except teaching. And they could not effect change: it was considered improper for them to speak in public, and they could not vote.

Reform Spirit: The first Women's Rights Convention was successful partly because of the reform spirit already in the Seneca Falls area. Anti-slavery and temperance societies flourished. Many of these local reformers were motivated by the revival-inspired religious belief that people could effect salvation for themselves as well as society. Revivalism was so intense the region was called "the burned-over district." These people, dedicated to improving their society, responded to the call to discuss rights for women.

Going West: In 1794 the trail of the American Indian moving west became the Great Western Turnpike, which bordered the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and became the main street of Seneca Falls. Seneca Falls was linked to the Erie Canal system by 1828. The railroad crossed Seneca Falls in 1841. Radicals, reformers, dreamers, pioneers and speculators from the east coast all passed through Seneca Falls, their influence lingering.

THE PARK

The history of the women's rights movement and the history of its founders is the focus of the Women's Rights National Historical Park. Legislation establishing the Park was signed on December 28, 1980. The Park is in the early stages of development in Seneca Falls and Waterloo. The Elizabeth Cady Stanton home at 32 Washington Street is restored and open to the public. The Wesleyan Chapel at Fall and Mynderse Streets was purchased by the National Park Service in April 1985. In Waterloo the Hunt house is at 401 East Main Street, and the McClintock house is at 16 East Williams Street. The Hunt and McClintock homes are not open to the public.

YOUR VISIT

Your visit to the Women's Rights National Historical Park should begin with the interpretive exhibits at the Visitor Center at 116 Fall Street: open year round 9 to 5 Monday through Friday; also 9 to 5 Saturday and Sunday April through November. Interpretive talks and walking tours are scheduled June through August. In addition, guided tours of the restored Elizabeth Cady Stanton house are available June through September, and additionally by appointment. The Park is located 15 minutes off New York State Thruway Exit 41 via Rt. 414 and Rt. 5/20. Airports within one hour's drive include Rochester, Syracuse and Ithaca. Admission is free.

ADMINISTRATION

The Park is administered by the National Park Service, the U.S. Department of the Interior. A Superintendent, whose address is P.O. Box 70, Seneca Falls, New York 13148, is in immediate charge. Write or call 315-568-2991 for further information.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS
NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
SENECA FALLS, NEW YORK 13148



WOMEN'S RIGHTS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

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THE STORY

Women's Rights Convention: On July 19 and 20, 1848, over 300 women and men assembled at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls for the first Women's Rights Convention. This first "Convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of woman" was the formal beginning of the women's rights movement still in progress in America today. The Convention was called because five courageous women including Elizabeth Cady Stanton felt the need to publicly address the grievances of women. Many factors contributed to the success of the Convention including the industrial revolution, the prevalent spirit of reform, and the movement west.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved to Seneca Falls from Boston in 1847 with her three young children; her husband Henry followed later. Accustomed in Boston to an active and stimulating city life supported by household help, Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved to a house she found inconvenient and isolated on the outskirts of the community. Unable to hire adequate assistance to manage the home and with her husband often traveling she found her life frustrating and limiting.

Tea Party: Elizabeth Cady Stanton poured out her discontent with women's lot on July 9, 1848, at the home of Jane Hunt in Waterloo. She resented her husband's freedom while she was confined to "the woman's sphere" to care for the children and manage the home. Elizabeth Cady Stanton saw this confinement in all aspects of women's lives — social, legal and religious. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Jane Hunt, Mary Ann McClintock and Martha Wright resolved to take action, and called a convention to discuss women's rights.

Declaration of Sentiments: A few days later, the women met again at the home of Mary Ann McClintock to draft their grievances into a Declaration of Sentiments modeled after the Declaration of Independence. It called, outrageously, for the right of women to vote and for seventeen additional rights. It declared that "all men and women are created equal" and was signed by 68 women and 32 men at the Convention. Many of the participants, however, refused to approve a document so extreme as to ask for the right of women to vote.

WOMEN'S RIGHTS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

