

Elizabeth Cady Stanton



Women's Rights Leader

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an early and important leader of the nineteenth century Women's Rights movement. Her background and her experiences as a middle-class American housewife prepared her well for intellectual and ideological leadership of one of the most powerful and far-reaching movements for social change in American history.



Early Life

Born in Johnstown, New York in 1815, Elizabeth was the seventh of the eleven children of Daniel and Margaret Livingston Cady. Her family was wealthy, socially prominent, and politically active. Both parents indulged her childhood interests in traditionally male activities such as debating, Greek, and horseback riding, and she excelled at all of them. As a result, she became comfortable with both male and female roles and activities.

Though Elizabeth excelled in school, she could not follow her male classmates to college, since no colleges were open to women. Instead

she attended the Troy Female Seminary, and received the most advanced education available to a woman of her time.

Elizabeth Cady spent many summers at the home of her cousin Gerrit Smith, a wealthy radical reformer. She learned about and became committed to anti-slavery, temperance, and other reforms. There, she also met the fiery abolitionist lecturer Henry Brewster Stanton, and married him in 1840. After Henry Stanton completed his law studies, the family settled in Boston, where they became active in reform work and in the city's intellectual and cultural life.



Life in Seneca Falls

In 1846, the Stantons moved to Seneca Falls, New York with their three sons. For the first time, Cady Stanton experienced the life of an average middle-class white housewife. Henry was often away, and Cady Stanton felt isolated and overwhelmed by childcare and housework. She also missed the intellectual stimulation and household help that she had had in Boston.



Her discontent surfaced at a tea party at the Waterloo, New York home of Jane Hunt in early July 1848. Cady Stanton vividly described her unhappiness to four women friends: Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann McClintock, and Jane Hunt. The group decided then and there to call a convention to discuss the

status of women. A week later they met again, and drafted a "Declaration of Sentiments" which described women's inferior status and demanded change.

On July 19-20, 1848, the first women's rights convention was held in the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls. This meeting was the formal beginning of

the women's rights movement, of which Cady Stanton quickly became a leader. After the convention, Cady Stanton wrote extensively about women's rights, but family responsibilities prevented her from traveling and speaking outside the local area.



Susan B. Anthony

In 1851, Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony began a friendship which lasted over fifty years. As a single woman, Anthony was free of the domestic duties that tied Cady Stanton to her home, and so could travel and make speeches promoting women's rights. To give

Cady Stanton time to write those speeches, Anthony would visit Seneca Falls and care for the Stanton family. She then took the speeches and writings produced by Cady Stanton and traveled the country campaigning for women's rights.

After Seneca Falls

In 1862, the Stanton family moved to New York City, where Cady Stanton continued her work for women's rights. She believed that the movement should work for a broad platform of change for women, including: woman suffrage, dress reform, girls' sports, equal employment, property rights, equal wages, divorce and custody law reform, collective households, coeducation, birth control, and religious reform.

Cady Stanton wrote and lectured on all aspects of women's rights, and on many other current topics as well. When her children were grown, she began to travel the country, and her talks on women's issues were popular and well-received. She also helped write the three volume History of Woman Suffrage, before publishing her autobiography and the controversial Woman's Bible. Though ill health prevented her from

traveling much in later life, she continued to write on women's rights until her death in 1902.

