

# Women's Rights

National Historical Park  
National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

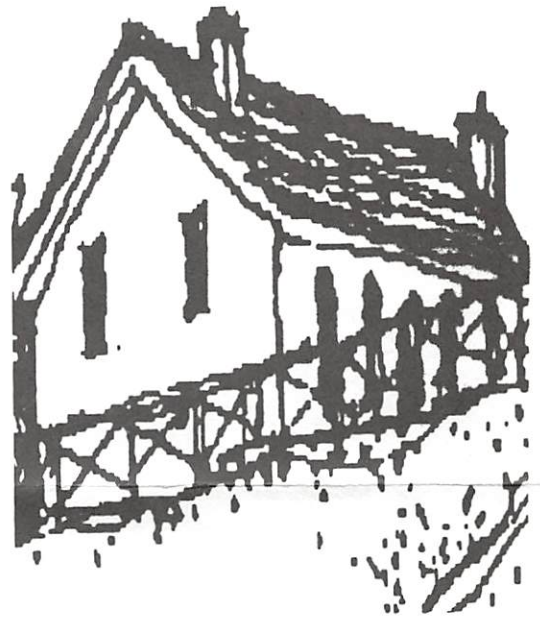
## WESLEYAN CHAPEL

### WESLEYAN METHODIST SOCIETY OF SENECA FALLS

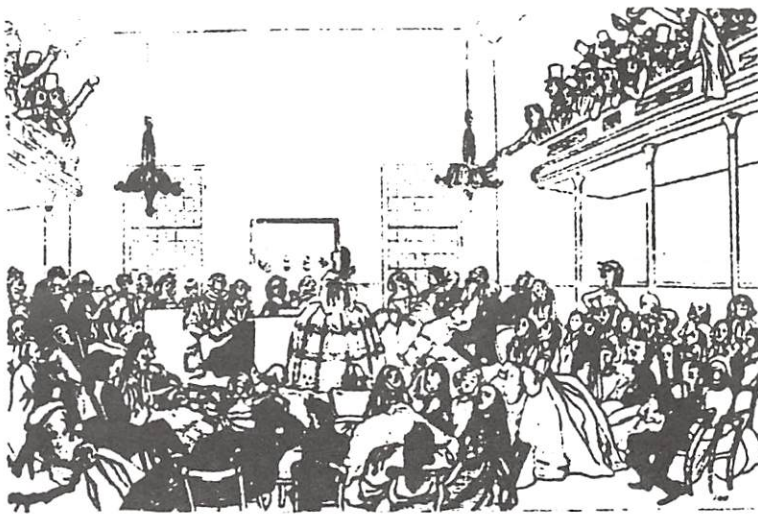
In March, 1843, approximately 60 people organized the first Wesleyan Methodist Society of Seneca Falls. Formed as a result of a dispute with the Methodist Episcopal church, Wesleyan Methodist societies were created throughout the northern states as a demonstration against slavery. These societies were not only concerned about slavery. They also spoke out on other reform issues such as temperance and women's rights.

A chapel was built at the corner of Fall and Mynderse Streets in Seneca Falls and dedicated in October,

1843. Not only was the Chapel to be used for religious services; it was opened to all reform speakers free of charge. Many prominent speakers, including Frederick Douglass and Matilda Joslyn Gage, used the platform offered by the Wesleyan Methodist Society. The fledgling Free Soil Party of Seneca Falls utilized the Wesleyan Chapel to hold its organizational meetings. This sympathetic congregation that welcomed a wide-range of reform and political speakers was the perfect setting for a Women's Rights Convention.



### FIRST WOMEN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION



On the morning of July 19, 1848, the streets of Seneca Falls were crowded with people making their way to the Wesleyan Chapel to attend the Women's Rights Convention. Many people arrived before the doors of the Chapel were unlocked, so Elizabeth Cady Stan-

ton's nephew was lifted through the window to unlock the doors and allow them access to the building.

Once everyone was seated, the Convention began. One of the first orders of business was the reading of the Declaration of Sentiments by

Stanton. The Declaration of Sentiments, based on the Declaration of Independence, listed many of the women's grievances against society and demanded basic rights of self-determination. Throughout both days of the Convention, much discussion was raised on the issue of women's suffrage as a part of the Declaration. During the final hours of the Convention, the Declaration of Sentiments was approved intact and signed. One hundred people signed the document - 68 women and 32 men. One third of the signers belonged to the Wesleyan Methodist Society.

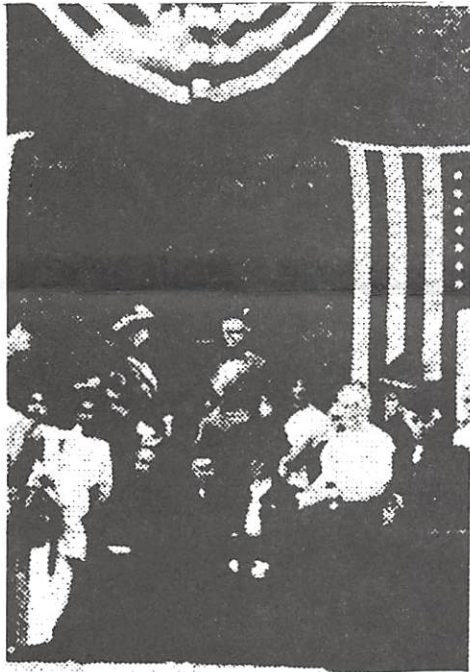
## CHANGES

The original brick structure of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel was 64 x 44 feet with a gallery around three sides of the interior. An altar and communion table faced the pews for the congregation. After the Civil War, many changes occurred within this simple church. The congregation split apart. One half became Congregationalists and built a new church on State Street. The remaining Wesleyan Methodists built a new church at Fall and Clinton Streets - the opposite end of the block from the first chapel.



In 1872, William Johnson bought the original Wesleyan Chapel and transformed it into Johnson Social Hall. He added two store fronts on Fall Street, raised the roof 8 feet and extended the rear of the building. Later his son, Charles Johnson, created the Johnson Opera House and added another extension to the rear of the building. Over the succeeding years the building became a movie theater, furniture store, roller rink, auto repair shop, car dealership, laundromat and apartment building. The site was added to the Women's Rights National Historical Park in 1985.

## CELEBRATIONS



Even while these many changes were occurring, people had not forgotten that the Women's Rights Movement started within the Chapel walls. In 1908, Harriot Stanton Blatch, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's daughter, led a group of women in placing a plaque on the southeast corner of the building to commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Women's Rights Convention. Many women returned to the site to celebrate the 100th birthday of Stanton on November 15, 1915. Alice Paul and the National Women's Party came to the Wesleyan Chapel in 1923 for

the seventy-fifth anniversary celebration of the Convention. They set up a display in the car dealership showroom that included Elizabeth Cady Stanton's desk and Susan B. Anthony's rocking chair. To mark the centennial of the Convention in 1948, a postal service stamp was issued depicting Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Carrie Chapman Catt. Currently, Convention Days are held yearly in the Village of Seneca Falls, in July, to commemorate the first Women's Rights Convention that was held in the Wesleyan Chapel.

## RESTORATION COMPLETED

Women's Rights National Historical Park has completed the restoration on the Wesleyan Chapel Block. The restoration involved exposing the original historic structure of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel. This included the east and west walls and the roof. The non-historic facade was taken down and a supporting structure was built to stabilize the original building. Adjoining the Chapel is Declaration Park, highlighted by

a water wall on the western edge. The wall, symbolizing the original Seneca Falls, is inscribed with the Declaration of Sentiments. Opened to the public in July 1993, this area, known as Declaration Park, along with the Chapel has become a place of contemplation, inspiration, and free speech just as the Wesleyan Methodist Society had intended in 1843.

