The meetings that started the women's rights movement

Waterloo

The fight for women's rights began in New York State. In Waterloo, on July 13, 1848, a gathering at the home of activist Jane Hunt became the catalyst for the women's rights movement. Jane Hunt's guests were Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann McClintock and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The women discussed the misfortunes imposed upon females – not having voting rights, not being able to own property, few social and intellectual outlets – and decided that they wanted change. By the end of the gathering, the five women organized the first women's rights convention set for Seneca Falls, NY, and wrote a notice for the *Seneca County Courier* that invited all women to attend the influential event.

Susan B. Anthony

Seneca Falls

Six days later, on July 19, 1848, people crowded into the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, NY. These participants partook in the two-day historic event that catapulted the women's rights movement into a national battle for equality.

Although the convention was supposed to only have women, men were not turned away. As a result, 42 men were part of the 300-member assembly. James Mott, an advocate for women's rights and the husband of one of the day's speakers, Lucretia Mott, even chaired the event.

On that first day, in addition to Lucretia Mott's speech, Elizabeth Cady Stanton read her Declaration of Sentiments, symbolically modeled after the Declaration of Independence:

"We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men and women are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights…"

Declaration of Sentiments
Seneca Falls, NY Convention
1848

On the second day, July 20, abolitionist Frederick Douglass made a powerful speech that unified the two causes of abolishing slavery and improving women's rights. It was also the day that the convention voted on the Declaration of Sentiments. After 68 women and 32 men signed the document making it legitimate, the women's rights movement officially began.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

"Suffrage"

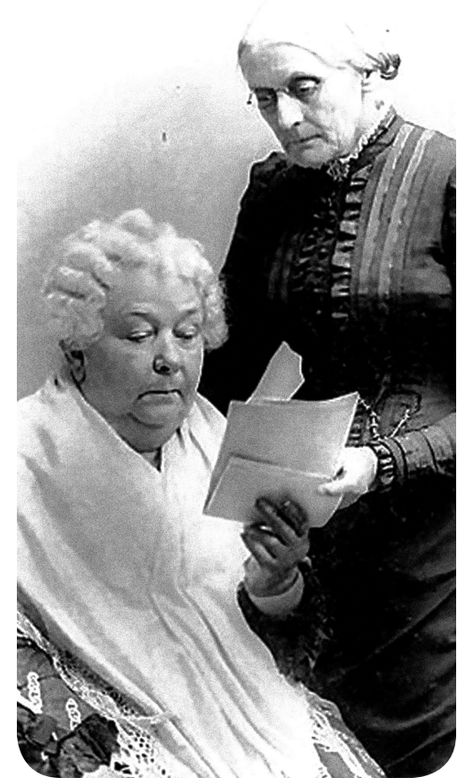
The word "suffrage" means "voting as a right rather than a privilege." Suffrage has been in the English language since the Middle Ages. Suffrages originally were prayers. Then the meaning was extended to requests for assistance, then the assistance provided by a supporting vote and finally, the vote itself. Therefore, in 1787 the Constitution used suffrage to mean "an inalienable right to vote."

And the right to vote was what advocates of women's equality sought. They used suffrage in the phrase "female suffrage" or simply by itself, with the understanding that suffrage referred to voting rights for the half of the adult population that had been excluded.

Even beyond its legal meaning, suffrage has connotations that helped the cause. Its sound evokes a sense of suffering and its spelling, with it ending in "rage," evokes anger.

The goal of the suffrage movement was accomplished in 1920 with the 19th Amendment to the Constitution: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged ... on account of sex." With that, the word suffrage was also retired. Since then, campaigns to extend the vote have simply called for "voting rights."

Women's Suffrage in New York State



How New York's Pioneer Feminists Fought for Women's Rights, Starting with the Right to Vote

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Mother, wife, activist – 1815-1902

New Yorker Elizabeth Cady Stanton was instrumental in calling for the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls in July of 1848, setting in motion a series of events that gave all women the right to vote.

Among her initial efforts, in 1854 Stanton lobbied the New York State Legislature to amend the existing Married Women's Property Law, which would grant women the right to conduct business, manage their own finances, sue and be sued and be joint guardians of their children. After six failed attempts she finally prevailed in 1860, bringing New York's women a giant leap closer in equal rights to men.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was born in Johnstown, NY, on Nov. 12, 1815. She graduated from the Troy Female Seminary (now the Emma Willard School) in 1833. As an adult, Stanton was the epitome of a working mom. She balanced fighting for women's suffrage and raising her seven children with her husband, Henry Brewster Stanton, who was also a women's rights advocate. Stanton died in New York City on Oct. 26, 1902.

Susan Brownell Anthony

Teacher, abolitionist, suffragist – 1820-1906

Many women were part of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's efforts, including transplanted New Yorker Susan B. Anthony, who while not at the seminal Seneca Falls meeting, worked her entire life for women's suffrage.

Susan B. Anthony was born in Adams, Mass. in 1820. However, she lived most of her life in New York; her family moved to Battenville, NY, in 1826 and later to Rochester, NY, in 1849.

Anthony devoted her life to achieving equality for women. Before she died in Rochester, NY, on March 13, 1906, Anthony made many significant strides for women, such as leading the battle for women's suffrage, promoting equal pay for equal work and passing more liberal divorce laws. Together, Anthony and her friend Stanton established and worked with many groups that aided in gaining voting rights for all American citizens.

Updated 1/13

19th Amendment Ratified

On Aug. 18, 1920, the 19th Amendment granting women the right to vote was ratified, 72 years after the struggle for women's suffrage began. Of the estimated 260 women that attended the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, only one – Charlotte Woodward – was still alive to cast her first official vote.

Moments in History

1837

First National Female Anti-Slavery Society Convention meets in New York City. Eighty-one delegates from 12 states attend.

1844

Lowell Female Labor Reform in Massachusetts demands a 10-hour work day, a decrease from the usual 12-hour day. In 1853, the Lowell Female Labor Reform won a small battle when the Massachusetts corporations reduced the workday to 11 hours.

1848

First Women's Rights Convention is held in Seneca Falls, NY.

1866

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony form the American Equal Rights Association, which people of all races and both genders join to support universal suffrage.

1870

The 15th Amendment is ratified, granting voting rights to all men without regard to race and color, including former slaves.

1872

Susan B. Anthony is arrested and brought to trial in Rochester, NY, for attempting to vote for Ulysses S. Grant in the presidential election. Anthony's penalty was to pay a $100 fine – which she never paid and never served jail time.

1878

Women's Suffrage Amendment is introduced in the United States Congress.

1889

Jane Addams and Ellen Gates Starr found Hull House, the first of many settlement houses that encourage all college-educated women to have careers in social work.

1890

The National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association are reunited as the **National American Woman Suffrage Association** under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

1896

Mary Church Terrell, Ida B. Wells-Barnett and former slave Harriet Tubman form the **National Association of Colored Women.**

1903

Margaret Dreier (Robins), Rheta Childe Dorr, Leonora O'Reilly, and others form the Women's Trade Union League of New York, an organization of middle- and working-class women dedicated to unionizing women and giving women the right to vote.

1912

Theodore Roosevelt's Progressive (Bull Moose/ Republican) Party becomes the first national political party to adopt a women's suffrage plank.

1913

Alice Paul and Lucy Burns organize the Congressional Union (of the National American Woman Suffrage Association) and later known as the National Woman's Party. These members use hunger strikes and picket the White House, among other forms of civil disobedience, to publicize the suffrage cause.

1916

Jeanette Rankin of Montana becomes the first American woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

1917

New York State grants women the right to vote, one of the first to do so.

1920

The 19th Amendment is ratified. Its victory accomplished, the National American Woman Suffrage Association ceases to exist, but its organization becomes the nucleus of the League of Women Voters.

ASSEMBLYMAN PETER J. ABBATE, JR.
6605 Fort Hamilton Parkway • Brooklyn, NY 11219 • 718-232-9565
6604 17th Avenue • Brooklyn, NY 11204 • 718-236-1764 • abbatep@assembly.state.ny.us