

The Road to Seneca Falls



The first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls, New York on July 19 and 20, 1848.

Tea, No Sugar

The idea of a women's rights convention had been brewing for some time.

Abolitionists Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott first met in London at a world anti-slavery convention and were shocked that women were denied recognition as delegates. Eight years later, at an afternoon tea party in Jane Hunt's New York parlor, they met with a small group to plan a "woman's rights convention." After placing a notice in the *Seneca County Courier*, they reserved the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls as a venue.

Declaration of Sentiments

At first there was little hint of the convention's historic significance. No one arrived to unlock the door and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's nephew was dispatched to climb through a window. Participants debated a "Declaration of Sentiments" and eleven resolutions written mainly by Cady Stanton. Most controversial was the ninth resolution advocating women's right to vote. Even organizer Lucretia Mott thought the proposal would make the convention "too ridiculous." Speaking forcefully, Frederick Douglass joined Elizabeth Cady Stanton in arguing successfully for its passage.

"Resolved that it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."

Seneca Falls Convention, 1848

History imagined: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott and Frederick Douglass at the convention site. ALAMY



The original Wesleyan Chapel has not survived. This building, on the site, houses a museum dedicated to the Seneca Falls convention and women's history. KENNETH C. ZIRKEL

Setting the Stage: London 1840

British abolitionists issued an invitation to "friends of the slave in every nation" for a World Anti-Slavery Convention. An American delegation included Elizabeth Cady Stanton—on her honeymoon—and Quaker activist Lucretia Mott. Women were seated separately and William Lloyd Garrison sat with them in protest. Shocked at the "narrow minded bigotry" of celebrated reformers, Cady Stanton made women's rights a life-long priority.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton around the time of the Seneca Falls Convention. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Lucretia Mott became a mentor and inspiration to the younger Cady Stanton. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the Declaration of Sentiments in the McClintock house parlor in Waterloo, NY. Modeled on the Declaration of Independence it declared that "All men and women are created equal." The original table is now at the Smithsonian Institution. NEW YORK HISTORIC



Sidelined: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony later wrote, "The movement for women's suffrage, both in England and America, may be dated from the World Anti-Slavery Convention." BENJAMIN ROBERT HAYDON



The McClintock house was used to draft convention materials. The tea party, that set the plan in motion, was held at the home of another activist, Jane Hunt. COURTESY OF KATHLEEN EILERS