

SENECA FALLS DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS

(1848)

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The “Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments” was adopted at a convention in Seneca Falls, New York, on July 19-20, 1848. Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were the organizers and leaders of the convention.

The “Declaration” was drafted several days before the meeting by Mott, Stanton and a few others. It and eleven “Resolutions” were approved.

Posted here are the “Seneca Falls Declaration” and the “Resolutions” followed by a chapter from Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s *Reminiscences*, published in 1898, describing the convention.

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Declaration of Sentiments

When, in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one portion of the family of man to assume among the people of the earth a position different from that which they have hitherto occupied, but one to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to such a course.

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; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights governments are instituted, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of those who suffer from it to refuse allegiance to it, and to insist upon the institution of a new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness. Prudence, indeed, will dictate that governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shown that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they were accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute despotism, it is their duty to throw off such government, and to provide new guards for their future security. Such has been the patient sufferance of the women under this government, and such is now the necessity which constrains them to demand the equal station to which they are entitled.

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men — both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislation, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civility dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns.

He has made her, morally, an irresponsible being, as she can commit many crimes with impunity, provided they be done in the presence of her husband. In the covenant of marriage, she is compelled to promise obedience to her husband, he becoming, to all intents and purposes, her master — the law giving him power to deprive her of her liberty, and to administer chastisement.

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women — the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

He allows her in Church, as well as the State, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and, with some exceptions, from any public participation in the affairs of the Church.

He has created a false public sentiment by giving to the world of a different code of morals for men and women, by which moral delinquencies which exclude women from society, are not only tolerated, but deemed of little account in man.

He has usurped the prerogative of Jehovah himself, claiming it as his right to assign for her a sphere of action, when that belongs to her conscience and to her God.

He has endeavored, in every way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self-respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life.

Now, in view of this entire disfranchisement of one-half the people of this country, their social and religious degradation — in view of the unjust laws above mentioned, and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, we insist that they have immediate admission to all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States.

In entering upon the great work before us, we anticipate no small amount of misconception, misrepresentation, and ridicule; but we shall use every instrumentality within our power to effect our object. We shall employ agents, circulate tracts, petition the State and National legislatures, and endeavor to enlist the pulpit and the press in our behalf. We hope this Convention will be followed by a series of Conventions embracing every part of the country.

Resolutions

WHEREAS, The great precept of nature is conceded to be, that "man shall pursue his own true and substantial happiness." Blackstone in his Commentaries remarks, that this law of Nature being coeval with mankind, and dictated by God himself, is of course superior in obligation to any other. It is binding over all the globe, in all countries and at all times; no human laws are of any validity if contrary to this, and such of them as are valid, derive all their force, and all their validity, and all their authority, immediately and immediately, from this original; therefore,

RESOLVED, That such laws as conflict, in any way, with the true and substantial happiness of woman, are contrary to the great precept of nature and of no validity, for this is "superior in obligation to any other."

RESOLVED, That all laws which prevent woman from occupying such a station in society as her conscience shall dictate, or which place her in a position inferior to that of man, are contrary to the great precept of nature, and therefore of no force or authority.

RESOLVED, That woman is man's equal — was intended to be so by the Creator, and the highest good of the race demands that she should be recognized as such.

RESOLVED, That the women of this country ought to be enlightened in regard to the laws under which they live, that they may no longer publish their degradation by declaring themselves satisfied with their present position, nor their ignorance, by asserting that they have all the rights they want.

RESOLVED, That inasmuch as man, while claiming for himself intellectual superiority, does accord to woman moral superiority, it is pre-eminently his duty to encourage her to speak and teach, as she has an opportunity, in all religious assemblies.

RESOLVED, That the same amount of virtue, delicacy, and refinement of behavior that is required of woman in the social state, should also be

required of man, and the same transgressions should be visited with equal severity on both man and woman.

RESOLVED, That the objection of indelicacy and impropriety, which is so often brought against woman when she addresses a public audience, comes with a very ill-grace from those who encourage, by their attendance, her appearance on the stage, in the concert, or in feats of the circus.

RESOLVED, That woman has too long rested satisfied in the circumscribed limits which corrupt customs and a perverted application of the Scriptures have marked out for her, and that it is time she should move in the enlarged sphere which her great Creator has assigned her.

RESOLVED, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise.

RESOLVED, That the equality of human rights results necessarily from the fact of the identity of the race in capabilities and responsibilities.

RESOLVED, therefore, That, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities, and the same consciousness of responsibility of their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means; and especially in regard to the great subjects of morals and religion, it is self-evidently her right to participate with her brother in teaching them, both in private and in public, by writing and by speaking, by any instrumentalities proper to be used, and in any assemblies proper to be held; and this being a self-evident truth growing out of the divinely implanted principles of human nature, any custom or authority adverse to it, whether modern or wearing the hoary sanction of antiquity, is to be regarded as a self-evident falsehood, and at war with mankind. •

At the last session Lucretia Mott offered and spoke to the following resolution:

RESOLVED, That the speedy success of our cause depends upon the zealous and untiring efforts of both men and women, for the overthrow of

the monopoly of the pulpit, and for the securing to woman an equal participation with men in the various trades, professions, and commerce.

APPENDIX

In Chapter 9 of her memoirs, *Eighty Years and More (1815-1897)*, published in 1898, Elizabeth Cady Stanton described the convention and its aftermath. She dedicated her book to Susan B. Anthony “my steadfast friend for half a century.” The Call for the Convention published in the *Seneca County Courier* newspaper is added by the MLHP.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton

CHAPTER IX.

THE FIRST WOMAN'S RIGHTS CONVENTION.

IN the spring of 1847 we moved to Seneca Falls. Here we spent sixteen years of our married life, and here our other children—two sons and two daughters—were born.

Just as we were ready to leave Boston, Mr. and Mrs. Eaton and their two children arrived from Europe, and we decided to go together to Johnstown, Mr. Eaton being obliged to hurry to New York on business, and Mr. Stanton to remain still in Boston a few months. At the last moment my nurse decided she could not leave her friends and go so far away. Accordingly my sister and I started, by rail, with five children and seventeen trunks, for Albany, where we rested over night and part of the next day. We had a very fatiguing journey, looking after so many trunks and children, for my sister's children persisted in standing on the platform at every opportunity, and the younger ones would follow their example. This kept us constantly on the watch. We were thankful when safely landed once more in the old homestead in Johnstown, where we arrived at midnight. As our beloved parents had received no warning of our coming, the whole household was aroused to dispose of us. But now in safe harbor, 'mid familiar scenes and pleasant memories, our slumbers were indeed refreshing. How rapidly one throws off all care and anxiety under the parental roof, and how at sea one feels, no matter what the age may be, when the loved ones are gone forever and the home of childhood is but a dream of the past.

After a few days of rest I started, alone, for my new home, quite happy with the responsibility of repairing a house and putting all things in order. I was already acquainted with many of the people and the surroundings in Seneca Falls, as my sister, Mrs. Bayard, had lived there several years, and I had frequently made her long visits. We had quite a magnetic circle of reformers, too, in central New York. At Rochester were William Henry Channing, Frederick Douglass, the Anthonys, Posts, Hallowells, Stebbins,—some grand old Quaker families at Farmington,—the Sedgwicks, Mays, Mills, and Matilda Joslyn Gage at Syracuse; Gerrit Smith at Peterboro, and Beriah Green at Whitesboro.

The house we were to occupy had been closed for some years and needed many repairs, and the grounds, comprising five acres, were overgrown with weeds. My father gave me a check and said, with a smile, "You believe in woman's capacity to do and dare; now go ahead and put your place in order." After a minute survey of the premises and due consultation with one or two sons of Adam, I set the carpenters, painters, paperhangers, and gardeners at work, built a new kitchen and woodhouse, and in one month took possession. Having left my children with my mother, there were no

impediments to a full display of my executive ability. In the purchase of brick, timber, paint, etc., and in making bargains with workmen, I was in frequent consultation with Judge Sackett and Mr. Bascom. The latter was a member of the Constitutional Convention, then in session in Albany, and as he used to walk down whenever he was at home, to see how my work progressed, we had long talks, sitting on boxes in the midst of tools and shavings, on the status of women. I urged him to propose an amendment to Article II, Section 3, of the State Constitution, striking out the word "male," which limits the suffrage to men. But, while he fully agreed with all I had to say on the political equality of women, he had not the courage to make himself the laughing-stock of the convention. Whenever I cornered him on this point, manlike he turned the conversation to the painters and carpenters. However, these conversations had the effect of bringing him into the first woman's convention, where he did us good service.

In Seneca Falls my life was comparatively solitary, and the change from Boston was somewhat depressing. There, all my immediate friends were reformers, I had near neighbors, a new home with all the modern conveniences, and well-trained servants. Here our residence was on the outskirts of the town, roads very often muddy and no sidewalks most of the way, Mr. Stanton was frequently from home, I had poor servants, and an increasing number of children. To keep a house and grounds in good order, purchase every article for daily use, keep the wardrobes of half a dozen human beings in proper trim, take the children to dentists, shoemakers, and different schools, or find teachers at home, altogether made sufficient work to keep one brain busy, as well as all the hands I could impress into the service. Then, too, the novelty of housekeeping had passed away, and much that was once attractive in domestic life was now irksome. I had so many cares that the company I needed for intellectual stimulus was a trial rather than a pleasure.

There was quite an Irish settlement at a short distance, and continual complaints were coming to me that my boys threw stones at their pigs, cows, and the roofs of their houses. This involved constant diplomatic relations in the settlement of various difficulties, in which I was so successful that, at length, they constituted me a kind of umpire in all their own quarrels. If a drunken husband was pounding his wife, the children would run for me. Hastening to the scene of action, I would take Patrick by the collar, and, much to his surprise and shame, make him sit down and promise to behave himself. I never had one of them offer the least resistance, and in time they all came to regard me as one having authority. I strengthened my influence by cultivating good feeling. I lent the men papers to read, and invited their children into our grounds; giving them fruit, of which we had abundance, and my children's old clothes, books, and toys. I was their physician, also—with my box of homeopathic medicines I took charge of the men, women, and children in sickness. Thus

the most amicable relations were established, and, in any emergency, these poor neighbors were good friends and always ready to serve me.

But I found police duty rather irksome, especially when called out dark nights to prevent drunken fathers from disturbing their sleeping children, or to minister to poor mothers in the pangs of maternity. Alas! alas! who can measure the mountains of sorrow and suffering endured in unwelcome motherhood in the abodes of ignorance, poverty, and vice, where terror-stricken women and children are the victims of strong men frenzied with passion and intoxicating drink?

Up to this time life had glided by with comparative ease, but now the real struggle was upon me. My duties were too numerous and varied, and none sufficiently exhilarating or intellectual to bring into play my higher faculties. I suffered with mental hunger, which, like an empty stomach, is very depressing. I had books, but no stimulating companionship. To add to my general dissatisfaction at the change from Boston, I found that Seneca Falls was a malarial region, and in due time all the children were attacked with chills and fever which, under homeopathic treatment in those days, lasted three months. The servants were afflicted in the same way. Cleanliness, order, the love of the beautiful and artistic, all faded away in the struggle to accomplish what was absolutely necessary from hour to hour. Now I understood, as I never had before, how women could sit down and rest in the midst of general disorder. Housekeeping, under such conditions, was impossible, so I packed our clothes, locked up the house, and went to that harbor of safety, home, as I did ever after in stress of weather.

I now fully understood the practical difficulties most women had to contend with in the isolated household, and the impossibility of woman's best development if in contact, the chief part of her life, with servants and children. Fourier's phalansterie community life and co-operative households had a new significance for me. Emerson says, "A healthy discontent is the first step to progress." The general discontent I felt with woman's portion as wife, mother, housekeeper, physician, and spiritual guide, the chaotic conditions into which everything fell without her constant supervision, and the wearied, anxious look of the majority of women impressed me with a strong feeling that some active measures should be taken to remedy the wrongs of society in general, and of women in particular. My experience at the World's Anti-slavery Convention, all I had read of the legal status of women, and the oppression I saw everywhere, together swept across my soul, intensified now by many personal experiences. It seemed as if all the elements had conspired to impel me to some onward step. I could not see what to do or where to begin—my only thought was a public meeting for protest and discussion.

In this tempest-tossed condition of mind I received an invitation to spend the day with Lucretia Mott, at Richard Hunt's, in Waterloo. There I met several members of different families of Friends, earnest, thoughtful women. I poured out, that day, the torrent of my long-accumulating discontent, with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party, to do and dare anything. My discontent, according to Emerson, must have been healthy, for it moved us all to prompt action, and we decided, then and there, to call a "Woman's Rights Convention." We wrote the call that evening and published it in the *Seneca County Courier* the next day, the 14th of July, 1848, giving only five days' notice, as the convention was to be held on the 19th and 20th. The call was inserted without signatures,—in fact it was a mere announcement of a meeting,—but the chief movers and managers were Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann McClintock, Jane Hunt, Martha C. Wright, and myself.

Women's Rights Convention.

A Convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of Woman, will be held in the Wesleyan Chapel, at Seneca Falls, N. Y., on Wednesday and Thursday the 19th and 20th of July current, commencing at 10 o'clock A. M.

During the first day, the meeting will be exclusively for Women, which all are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited to be present on the second day, when LUCRETIA MOTT, of Philadelphia, and others both ladies and gentlemen, will address the Convention.

The convention, which was held two days in the Methodist Church, was in every way a grand success. The house was crowded at every session, the speaking good, and a religious earnestness dignified all the proceedings.

These were the hasty initiative steps of "the most momentous reform that had yet been launched on the world—the first organized protest against the injustice which had brooded for ages over the character and destiny of one-half the race." No words could express our astonishment on finding, a few days afterward, that what seemed to us so timely, so rational, and so sacred, should be a subject for sarcasm and ridicule to the entire press of

the nation. With our Declaration of Rights and Resolutions for a text, it seemed as if every man who could wield a pen prepared a homily on "woman's sphere." All the journals from Maine to Texas seemed to strive with each other to see which could make our movement appear the most ridiculous. The anti-slavery papers stood by us manfully and so did Frederick Douglass, both in the convention and in his paper, *The North Star*, but so pronounced was the popular voice against us, in the parlor, press, and pulpit, that most of the ladies who had attended the convention and signed the declaration, one by one, withdrew their names and influence and joined our persecutors. Our friends gave us the cold shoulder and felt themselves disgraced by the whole proceeding.

If I had had the slightest premonition of all that was to follow that convention, I fear I should not have had the courage to risk it, and I must confess that it was with fear and trembling that I consented to attend another, one month afterward, in Rochester. Fortunately, the first one seemed to have drawn all the fire, and of the second but little was said. But we had set the ball in motion, and now, in quick succession, conventions were held in Ohio, Indiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and in the City of New York, and have been kept up nearly every year since.

The most noteworthy of the early conventions were those held in Massachusetts, in which such men as Garrison, Phillips, Channing, Parker, and Emerson took part. It was one of these that first attracted the attention of Mrs. John Stuart Mill, and drew from her pen that able article on "The Enfranchisement of Woman," in the *Westminster Review* of October, 1852.

The same year of the convention, the Married Woman's Property Bill, which had given rise to some discussion on woman's rights in New York, had passed the legislature. This encouraged action on the part of women, as the reflection naturally arose that, if the men who make the laws were ready for some onward step, surely the women themselves should express some interest in the legislation. Ernestine L. Rose, Paulina Wright (Davis), and I had spoken before committees of the legislature years before, demanding equal property rights for women. We had circulated petitions for the Married Woman's Property Bill for many years, and so also had the leaders of the Dutch aristocracy, who desired to see their life-long accumulations descend to their daughters and grandchildren rather than pass into the hands of dissipated, thriftless sons-in-law. Judge Hertell, Judge Fine, and Mr. Geddes of Syracuse prepared and championed the several bills, at different times, before the legislature. Hence the demands made in the convention were not entirely new to the reading and thinking public of New York—the first State to take any action on the question. As New York was the first State to put the word "male" in her constitution in 1778, it was fitting that she should be first in more liberal legislation. The effect of the convention on my own mind was most salutary. The discussions had

cleared my ideas as to the primal steps to be taken for women's enfranchisement, and the opportunity of expressing myself fully and freely on a subject I felt so deeply about was a great relief. I think all women who attended the convention felt better for the statement of their wrongs, believing that the first step had been taken to right them.

Soon after this I was invited to speak at several points in the neighborhood. One night, in the Quaker Meeting House at Farmington, I invited, as usual, discussion and questions when I had finished. We all waited in silence for a long time; at length a middle-aged man, with a broad-brimmed hat, arose and responded in a sing-song tone: "All I have to say is, if a hen can crow, let her crow," emphasizing "crow" with an upward inflection on several notes of the gamut. The meeting adjourned with mingled feelings of surprise and merriment. I confess that I felt somewhat chagrined in having what I considered my unanswerable arguments so summarily disposed of, and the serious impression I had made on the audience so speedily dissipated. The good man intended no disrespect, as he told me afterward. He simply put the whole argument in a nutshell: "Let a woman do whatever she can."

With these new duties and interests, and a broader outlook on human life, my petty domestic annoyances gradually took a subordinate place. Now I began to write articles for the press, letters to conventions held in other States, and private letters to friends, to arouse them to thought on this question.

The pastor of the Presbyterian Church, Mr. Bogue, preached several sermons on Woman's Sphere, criticising the action of the conventions in Seneca Falls and Rochester. Elizabeth McClintock and I took notes and answered him in the county papers. Gradually we extended our labors and attacked our opponents in the *New York Tribune*, whose columns were open to us in the early days, Mr. Greeley being, at that time, one of our most faithful champions.

In answering all the attacks, we were compelled to study canon and civil law, constitutions, Bibles, science, philosophy, and history, sacred and profane. Now my mind, as well as my hands, was fully occupied, and instead of mourning, as I had done, over what I had lost in leaving Boston, I tried in every way to make the most of life in Seneca Falls. Seeing that elaborate refreshments prevented many social gatherings, I often gave an evening entertainment without any. I told the young people, whenever they wanted a little dance or a merry time, to make our house their rallying point, and I would light up and give them a glass of water and some cake. In that way we had many pleasant informal gatherings. Then, in imitation of Margaret Fuller's Conversationals, we started one which lasted several

years. We selected a subject each week on which we all read and thought; each, in turn, preparing an essay ten minutes in length.

These were held, at different homes, Saturday of each week. On coming together we chose a presiding officer for the evening, who called the meeting to order, and introduced the essayist. That finished, he asked each member, in turn, what he or she had read or thought on the subject, and if any had criticisms to make on the essay. Everyone was expected to contribute something. Much information was thus gained, and many spicy discussions followed. All the ladies, as well as the gentlemen, presided in turn, and so became familiar with parliamentary rules. The evening ended with music, dancing, and a general chat. In this way we read and thought over a wide range of subjects and brought together the best minds in the community. Many young men and women who did not belong to what was considered the first circle,—for in every little country village there is always a small clique that constitutes the aristocracy,—had the advantages of a social life otherwise denied them. I think that all who took part in this Conversation Club would testify to its many good influences.

I had three quite intimate young friends in the village who spent much of their spare time with me, and who added much to my happiness: Frances Hoskins, who was principal of the girls' department in the academy, with whom I discussed politics and religion; Mary Bascom, a good talker on the topics of the day, and Mary Crowninshield, who played well on the piano. As I was very fond of music, Mary's coming was always hailed with delight. Her mother, too, was a dear friend of mine, a woman of rare intelligence, refinement, and conversational talent. She was a Schuyler, and belonged to the Dutch aristocracy in Albany. She died suddenly, after a short illness. I was with her in the last hours and held her hand until the gradually fading spark of life went out. Her son is Captain A. S. Crowninshield of our Navy.

My nearest neighbors were a very agreeable, intelligent family of sons and daughters. But I always felt that the men of that household were given to domineering. As the mother was very amiable and self-sacrificing, the daughters found it difficult to rebel. One summer, after general house-cleaning, when fresh paint and paper had made even the kitchen look too dainty for the summer invasion of flies, the queens of the household decided to move the sombre cookstove into a spacious woodhouse, where it maintained its dignity one week, in the absence of the head of the home. The mother and daughters were delighted with the change, and wondered why they had not made it before during the summer months. But their pleasure was shortlived. Father and sons rose early the first morning after his return and moved the stove back to its old place. When the wife and daughters came down to get their breakfast (for they did all their own work) they were filled with grief and disappointment. The breakfast was eaten in silence, the women humbled with a sense of their helplessness, and the

men gratified with a sense of their power. These men would probably all have said "home is woman's sphere," though they took the liberty of regulating everything in her sphere.●

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