

II. Study Findings

Introduction:

The study team used two approaches to define and evaluate the American women's rights movement. First, National Park Service historians used the goals expressed in the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments to develop a framework to define the scope of the women's rights movement for the purpose of this project. The study team then contracted with Ellen C. DuBois of the University of California at Los Angeles to prepare an overview describing the significance of the Women's Rights movement within the context of United States history using the 5 categories of the framework as an organizational guide. The results of both efforts are summarized below. (The complete text of the "Framework Defining the Women's Rights Movement" and Dr. DuBois' historical overview appear in Appendix B and Appendix C respectively.)

Defining the Women's Rights Movement

The study team followed the guidance of the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments to construct a framework for understanding the entire women's rights movement. The Declaration of Sentiments addressed the entire spectrum of areas in which women were being deprived of their rights. While the call for suffrage gained the greatest notoriety and had the most immediate political repercussions, it was only one of a wide range of demands for equality. Indeed, the Declaration remains relevant today largely because it was so perceptive and comprehensive in identifying the multiple causes of women's subservient status and in demanding remedies. These areas, which bring into focus the dynamic relationships between public and private actions that characterized the women's rights movements are: politics, economics, education, religion, and, family and society.

Understanding the multiple facets of the women's rights movement and using them to define smaller and more discrete study units would allow us to organize the individuals, institutions, ideas and events that have been critical in the movement into a broad historical and interpretive framework. This would help ensure that the full diversity of the women's rights movement is adequately recognized and that the identification and evaluation of historic properties expresses this diversity.

Politics: *The right to vote, as well as advancing the position and influence of women in politics through voluntary associations outside the realm of electoral politics.*

As the Declaration of Sentiments pointed out, deprivation of the right to vote meant that women lacked direct political representation and therefore had to submit to laws they had no share in formulating. The effort to win the franchise was the most visible demand that emerged from the Seneca Falls convention and the one that translated most immediately into customary political action.

However, this element also embraces women's efforts to advance their position and influence politics through voluntary associations outside the realm of electoral politics.

Properties related to this topic include the homes of individuals who were prominent in the movement, headquarters of important organizations, meeting halls and clubhouses, courthouses and other government buildings.



Source: Library of Congress

Suffragists picketing the White House, February 1917

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...

-Declaration of Sentiments, 1848

Economics: *The increased access for women to profitable employment, equitable wages and greater control over conditions in the workplace.*

To the delegates who gathered at Seneca Falls, one of the foremost obstacles to the “true and substantial happiness” of women was their economic subordination. In addition to lacking property rights, women were effectively barred from many fields of employment, particularly the most respected and powerful. The signers of the Declaration of Sentiments articulated a demand for women’s access to profitable employment and equitable wages for their labor—a program for economic empowerment of women that continues to resonate. As the 19th century progressed and more women entered into wage labor, they began to advocate for and take control not only over the fruits of their labor, but over the conditions in which they worked. Women improved wages and working conditions through organization and reform activities, thereby influencing the development of the economy.

Properties that reflect this topic include businesses, training institutions, laboratories, hospitals and so forth that show women’s increasing participation in the economy; factories and meeting halls important in the labor movement as it affected women and was influenced by them; residential hotels, lodging houses, YWCA residence halls, and other housing for women workers, in addition to the residences of important individuals.

Education: *The expansion of women’s education to include elementary, academic, vocational and professional training, as well as larger roles for women as educators.*

Until the late 20th century, society considered formal education less important for women than for men, and in many instances women were denied access to educational institutions. Participants at the Seneca Falls convention perceived the close link between educational and economic opportunities. Throughout the 19th century the struggle for women’s rights embraced not only the expansion of women’s education to include elementary, academic, vocational and professional training, but also larger roles for women as educators.

In addition to homes associated with prominent women educators and advocates for women’s education, properties expressing this topic include a variety of education-related institutions such as schools, libraries, laboratories, etc., emphasizing those connected with the expansion of women’s educational opportunities and influence.

Religion: *The expansion of roles for women in religion both as participants and leaders in established, as well as new and emerging, religious institutions.*

Delegates at Seneca Falls were keenly aware of the paradox that worship communities were one of the few sites of social interaction outside the home in which women could exercise influence, albeit informally, but that even there they lacked formal authority. The convention occurred in a profoundly religious climate that placed high value on direct inspiration and religion. As in their demands for political, family and economic rights, the participants called for the extension of women’s moral authority to more tangible forms of autonomy in religious practice and leadership. While some women found greater freedom for expression, authority and personal growth in religious communities that they created and sustained, others worked for change within established churches.

Properties related to this aspect include the buildings and properties associated with women reformers, ministers and missionaries, as well as the churches, meetinghouses, religious communities and certain educational institutions associated with women’s advancement in this sphere.

Family and Society: *The reformation of laws and customs that limited women's control over their property, their children, and ultimately their bodies. Among these reform initiatives were dress reform, child custody, child care, and birth control.*

The legal system in force at the time of the Seneca Falls Convention denied married women control of their property, their children and, ultimately, their bodies. In calling attention to the legal disabilities of married women and in demanding emancipation within the private sphere of marriage, convention participants acknowledged that familial relationships and roles have a profound influence on both the private and public lives of women and that their search for autonomy affected both spheres. At the same time, although women were confined by 19th-century law and custom to a separate domestic sphere, many were able to expand the values of “true womanhood” across the domestic threshold to participate in a number of reform movements (e.g. public housekeeping, kindergarten, parks) and make improvements in the larger society.

In addition to the homes of prominent individuals, relevant site types include dwelling houses that illustrate non-traditional living situations, houses or house museums that discuss women’s influence on domestic design, and potentially a multitude of properties such as parks, museums, playgrounds, settlement houses, counseling centers, hospitals, clinics, etc., that display women’s influence in mitigating the harsher aspects of society.

Relationship to National Park Service Thematic Framework

In 1994 the National Park Service adopted a new thematic framework to ensure that the diversity of American history and prehistory is expressed in its identification and interpretation of historic properties. This conceptualization divides the human experience into eight broad overlapping and interrelated themes. Within this framework, the struggle for women’s rights is expressed most clearly and completely by Theme II: “Creating Social Institutions and Movements.” Indeed, the women’s rights movement is one of the defining examples of the theme. As intended by the structure of the Thematic Framework, the consequences of the women’s movement also fall under other themes.

Historical Summary

The following historical summary is adapted from the essays prepared by Professor Ellen C. DuBois of UCLA and Christine Arato, a historian with the National Park Service.

By any measure, the women’s rights movement is among the most fundamental and far-reaching reform traditions in U.S. history. In its many manifestations, the women’s rights movement has been characterized by its challenge to women’s subordination to men and its insistence on a standard of equal treatment, opportunity and rights. Since the relations between women and men form the basis of the most intimate institutions of any society—sexuality, marriage, family, childrearing—radical changes in the relative status of women and men have dramatic implications for the most personal aspects of life for all Americans.

Women’s rights has been a central issue during each of the three major periods of reform in American history. It is generally agreed that the formal women’s rights movement began in 1848, when the first Women’s Rights Convention met at Seneca Falls, NY. Despite the short notice and the organizers’ limited expectations, about 300 women and men attended. Veteran reformer Lucretia Mott gave the event the necessary gravity, but the driving force at Seneca Falls was Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who went on to become the chief 19th-century philosopher of female emancipation.

At the close of the convention, 68 women and 32 men signed a Declaration of Sentiments that called for a broad array of rights for women. The most conspicuous and immediately controversial of these was the demand for women’s suffrage. This proclamation was deliberately modeled on the Declaration of Independence and represented a call to expand the earlier political vision and extend the “inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” to women. In this appeal for equal rights, the 1848 Declaration of Sentiments provided a point of departure in a struggle that has continued to the present.

In the years after 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her collaborator Susan B. Anthony worked to expand women's legal and economic rights while continuing to advocate women's suffrage. Generally the women's and abolitionist movements worked in parallel, though there were occasional differences over which should receive priority and over the role of women in direct political action toward abolition.

The conclusion of the Civil War and subsequent passage of the 14th and 15th Amendments led woman suffragists to believe that a universal suffrage approach was the best way to win the franchise. Based on the 14th Amendment, they argued that as citizens they were guaranteed the right to vote. Susan B. Anthony and others actually voted under this interpretation, and Anthony was arrested for this act. In 1875 the Supreme Court decisively rejected this approach. After this setback, leaders of the women's rights movement changed tactics and campaigned for a constitutional amendment that would affirm their particular rights as women.

Through the last quarter of the 19th century, American women's prospects continued to expand in education and work. Women had an enormous role in the development of economic and social welfare policies that helped define the Progressive Era. Convinced by social reform advocates that women workers were more vulnerable than men were, the courts let stand a growing body of labor standards intended to protect women and children. Eventually these "protective labor laws" were extended to include men.

The women's suffrage movement grew with these developments. Its revitalization at the beginning of the 20th century, after decades of stalled progress, began with a series of successful state campaigns for voting rights. This state-by-state enfranchisement of women was important in the final victory of women's suffrage through passage of the 19th Amendment in 1920.

Foreshadowed by the Seneca Falls declaration, a new dimension of the women's rights struggle—the birth control movement—emerged out of the final stages of the suffrage campaign. Margaret Sanger was a leader in turning the inchoate longing of growing numbers of American women for greater control over their reproductive and sexual activity into a social and political movement. When the "feminist" movement she helped initiate revived in the 1960s, during a third period of reformist ferment, the battle for women's sexual and reproductive self-determination took the lead in the struggle for women's rights. This shift in emphasis showed that the women's rights movement had moved beyond merely seeking the same rights as men. In calling for the right to bodily integrity and personal physical autonomy, women's rights advocates altered and expanded the concept of individual rights.

By 1960 the idea of women's rights had largely disappeared from public discourse, as policymakers and public opinion alike assumed that women had already achieved their rights. The resurgence of the civil rights movement among African Americans dramatically changed this situation, inspiring organized groups of white women to rediscover their longing for greater rights and more substantial equality. Women who came of age before and during World War II, who had quietly advanced their program in trade unions, civil rights organizations and women's organizations, were able to secure a new level of legal protections for women. The most important of these was Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which banned discrimination in employment on the grounds of sex as well as race.

Thanks to these achievements, enormous changes occurred for women in the workplace during the final decades of the 20th century. The earlier assumption that the presence of women in the labor force was an unfortunate or temporary necessity was discarded. By century's end, nearly 50% of all paid workers were women. Women still earned less than men, but much (though by no means all) of this inequality was a function of the degree to which men and women worked in different jobs — the problem of sexual division within the labor force itself. A closely related dilemma facing increasing numbers of working women was the persistent conflict between family and workplace obligations.

A new feminist movement grew up in the 1960s and 70s, exemplified by the National Organization for Women (NOW). Initially, NOW's agenda was the completion of the early 20th-century campaign for legal equality for women, but this expanded under the force of a wider revolt among women. Many young feminists, lacking faith in lobbying and legal change, espoused "women's liberation," trying to effect deep cultural changes, both in society and among women

themselves. They challenged passive notions of femininity, the sexual double standard, repressive ideals of female beauty and socially conditioned female deference to men.

The greatest disappointment in the expansion of women's legal rights in the 1970s was the failure to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment, first proposed by Alice Paul in 1923 as a follow-up to the suffrage campaign. The division over this issue carried over into the debate about abortion rights, one of the most highly charged controversies of the present era. Surrounding the intensely politicized conflict over legalized abortion is a larger and more amorphous set of changes in the concepts of marriage, sexuality and parenthood. These changes, whose full impact cannot yet be discerned, constitute as dramatic a set of developments in the realm of private life as any in American history and demonstrate the continuing importance of women's rights issues in American life.

The long pursuit of equality between the sexes has had immense consequences in American history. It has altered the way the American labor force is structured and the way working people perceive their labor. It has changed the deeply private experiences of family life, parenthood, marriage, and sexual behavior. It has altered our understanding of the purpose and justification of government, what American citizenship means, and how extensively democratic principles apply in our modern society. Far from being confined to a corner of American history as a "special interest," the long struggle for women's rights lies at the center of this nation's public traditions.

Women's Rights Historic Property Sample

Introduction

The study team assembled and mapped a sample of women's rights history properties throughout the northeastern United States, encompassing an area from Maine to Virginia and including the District of Columbia. The women's rights property sample should not be considered comprehensive and is by no means definitive. It is merely a reconnaissance-level survey used by the study team to develop a better understanding of the number and types of properties that are known to exist. The sampling process and findings are described below.

Sampling Process

Step 1: Data Collection

To develop the property sample the study team relied on known and readily accessible secondary sources. These sources included a wide range of materials, among them National Park Service documents, travel guides and brochures published for general audiences, as well as scholarly papers and reports. Examples of resources consulted include: National Historic Landmark Theme Study on Women's History; *Susan B. Anthony Slept Here* by Lynn Sherr and Jurate Kazickas; the National Register's travel itinerary, "*Places Where Women Made History*;" and *Preserving Her Heritage: American Landmarks of Women's History*, a Ph.D. dissertation presented by Dr. Gail Dubrow. The study team also contacted the historic property inventory coordinators in each of the state historic preservation offices in the study area to identify additional sources of information. A complete list of resources specifically used to prepare the property sample has been included in the bibliography.

During the early phases of data collection, the study team focused their attention on identifying potentially relevant properties. The list of properties was very broad and included extant historic sites and landscapes; museums; archives; libraries; public art; monuments; markers; gravesites; and locations of significant sites where structures are no longer extant. A number of property types related to the history of women's rights appeared with great frequency in the property sample. The property types included home, institution (e.g. hospital, settlement house), workplace, lodging, clubhouse, school, birthplace/childhood home, religious building, product (e.g. architecture, landscape, sculpture), event, and collection. A description of these property types can be found in Appendix D. Using this broad approach the study team

identified approximately 600 women's history properties that may potentially be confirmed as women's rights history properties for the purposes of this study.

Step 2: Data Analysis

The team used the thematic framework developed for the project to analyze and refine the list of properties developed during the data collection phase. Each property was researched using National Register documentation (where available) biographical sources, women's history literature, and websites such as Distinguished Women.com (www.distinguishedwomen.com), a biographical database, to determine whether a property and the people and events associated with that property would fall within the thematic framework. The study team attempted to distinguish between those women who advocated for women's rights within each of the 5 themes and those women who had outstanding achievements but were not activists.

National Park Service senior cultural resource and planning managers in the Washington Office helped the study team further refine the database. During that consultation, it was suggested that the property sample content emphasize the National Park Service "niche"—authentic, real places—and that it should not include properties where there is no longer any original structure or landscape. Entries in the property sample should have the potential to meet the criteria for eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places. Memorials, tablets, roadside markers and sculptures were also culled from the property sample.

The database assembled for this project is best used as an indicator of the potential scale and scope of women's rights history properties located in the northeastern United States. The general condition and integrity of the properties identified in the property sample were not evaluated as part of this study.

Step 3: Mapping

Mapping services were provided by the Environmental Data Center at the University of Rhode Island. A geographic information system (GIS) was used to map most of the women's rights history properties identified through the property sample¹. The first map developed shows the distribution of properties across the entire study area. A second map provides a detail of the Rochester/Seneca Falls/Waterloo/Syracuse area in upstate New York.

Products

A GIS database has been developed in support of this project. GIS is a powerful tool that enables project managers to link mapped information to an associated database. It is a versatile management tool with potential applications ranging from analysis for management to public information and interpretation. The GIS database will be documented and maintained in the National Park Service's data archive at the University of Rhode Island and can be made available for use when necessary and appropriate.

The GIS database includes the following information for each property: Name of Site; Alternative Name; First and Last Names of associated women; Street Address; City; County; State; Date (of association with property); National Register Designation; Primary Theme; Secondary Theme; Information Source; Public v. Private; Site Type; Extant/ Non-Extant; Location Coordinates (for mapping purposes); and Description. Details relating to the limitations and specifications of this GIS database may be found in Appendix D.

Summary of Contents

The property sample is not a comprehensive inventory. In all likelihood, it represents the proverbial "tip of the iceberg." The availability of information on a state by state basis may be uneven. As a result, some states, like Massachusetts and New York, are much better represented than others. The project schedule also played a role in determining the end of this data collection and analysis phase. This summary description of the property sample database describes its contents as of May 2001.

The property sample contains information on women's rights history properties from 13 states and the District of Columbia. Nearly three hundred properties were identified as being associated with one or more themes defining the women's rights movement. Massachusetts had the most identified properties (96), many of which are located in the greater Boston area. Massachusetts was followed by New York with 63 identified properties. The most intense concentration of properties in New York was in the upstate region surrounding Rochester, Seneca Falls, and Syracuse. Pennsylvania and New Jersey each had more than 20 identified properties. The number of identified properties in New Jersey could increase due to the current statewide effort to inventory women's history properties.

Fewer than 10 properties were identified in a number of states including Delaware, Maryland, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and West Virginia. It should not be implied that these states do not have a more significant number of women's rights properties. Much of the success of this sampling effort relied on finding the right information at the right time. With better information, more properties could potentially be identified in these areas.

Of the 298 properties identified, 132, or 44%, are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Of these 57 are designated National Historic Landmarks. Though they may be documented at the state register level, the majority of properties have not been evaluated for National Register eligibility. It is also worth noting that many National Register properties are listed for other areas of significance and have not been evaluated for their association with women's history. National Register documentation should be updated to reflect the significance of the women's history associated with these properties.

Only 89 of the 298 properties (just under 30%) are open to the public. About 48 of these properties are open to the visiting public and offer some exhibits and interpretive or educational programming. Others are religious structures, libraries, courthouses, and other public buildings that are generally open to the public but are much less likely to offer any exhibits or interpretive or educational programming.

Based on the planning team's assignment of women's rights themes to identified properties, just over 40% are "politics" properties. About 20% are "family and society" properties; 17% are "economic" properties; and 13% are associated with the "education" theme. "Religion" properties represented approximately 5% of the overall property sample. About 3% of the sample properties represented all themes; these included several archival and museum collections as well as various cemeteries where the gravesites of many notable women's rights activists can be found.

More than one-third of the properties in the sample are family homes – the largest single category of property type. School and other educational buildings make up about 12% of the total property sample. Lodginghouses and clubhouses each make up about 9% of the sample. Locations of important women's rights events, gravesites, institutions (hospitals, settlement houses, etc.), religious buildings, and workplaces each make up about 5% of the property sample. Birthplaces and products (works of architecture, public art, landscape) are the least represented site types, making up less than 5% of the property sample. Another category of properties—collections—is 5% of the overall property sample. Collections include public libraries, archives, museums, and exhibits as well as research collections.

A list of women's rights history properties as compiled for this project appears in Appendix E.

Properties Not Included in the Property Sample

It is important to note that these roughly 300 women's rights history properties were drawn from a larger list that included many notable properties associated with significant women or events associated with general women's history. As noted earlier in the document, the study team attempted to distinguish between those women who advocated for women's rights within each of the 5 themes and those women who were very accomplished but were not activists. Many significant women of the period, such as Edith Wharton, Rachel Carson, and Beatrix Ferrand and the properties associated with them were excluded from the project property sample. As is the case with the properties associated with women's rights, many of these general women's history properties lack recognition, appropriate documentation, and proper stewardship.

Endnote:

¹Some properties did not have sufficient address information to allow them to be mapped using GIS.

Resolved, therefore, that, being invested by the Creator with the same capabilities and same consciousness of responsibility for their exercise, it is demonstrably the right and duty of woman, equally with man, to promote every righteous cause by every righteous means.

-Declaration of Sentiments, 1848