

Appendix B: Framework Defining the Women's Rights Movement

Prepared by Christine Arato, Historian. National Park Service, Boston Support Office.

On July 19, 1848, the first Women's Rights Convention convened at Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, New York. The meeting was called by a small group of activists—including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Mary Ann M'Clintock—who had met earlier at the nearby home of Jane Hunt. Despite the short notice and the organizers' cautious expectations, 300 women and men attended the convention. At its close on the following day, 68 women and 32 men signed a Declaration of Sentiments that called for a broad array of rights for women, including suffrage.

The early women's rights movement built on the principles and experiences of converging currents of reform. Efforts to promote social justice and to improve the human condition inevitably led to a challenge to the subordinate status of women. The members of the Convention found an appropriate model in the philosophy and rhetoric of the Declaration of Independence, the most celebrated, and often contested, articulation of the American political experiment. The Convention's Declaration of Sentiments represented a call to expand this political vision, to extend the "inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" to women. Like the Declaration of Independence, the Declaration of Sentiments was a lofty appeal to fundamental principles of natural law that challenged Americans to reexamine their past and to re-envision their future. In this appeal for equal rights for women, the Declaration of Sentiments provided a point of departure in a struggle for equality that has continued to the present. Beginning by confronting of the legal system that circumscribed women's lives, the Declaration invoked a movement that laid claim to a broad range of powers and an enlarged sphere of influence and achievement for women. And while the nature and goals of the women's community—or, more appropriately, communities—have intersected and diverged in the subsequent 150 years, we may find in the Declaration of Sentiments the foundation of a multifaceted perspective that acknowledges the constellation of social, political, economic, and cultural forces that inform women's historical experiences. Women's struggles for liberation were—and are—conducted in national, state, local, and domestic arenas, and the story of women's rights unfolds along integrated, diverse and complex paths of human experience.

The lasting historical significance of the Seneca Falls Declaration of Sentiments lay in its frontal attack on the social, political, economic, and religious institutions that circumscribed the lives of 19th-century women and in the enduring relevance of its collective natural-rights vision of equality. While the delegates' claim to equal **political rights** through suffrage may have been the most controversial resolution passed at the Convention, their manifesto of **social, economic, educational, and religious rights** permeated and inspired contemporary and later movements for women's rights. These five themes bring into focus the dynamic relationships between public and private action that characterized the women's rights movements. Further, they allow us to organize the individuals, institutions, ideas, and events that have been critical to the expansion of democracy and the definition of active citizenship into a broad interpretive framework. Identifying these distinctive themes does not preclude addressing a broader range of subjects and issues in later stages of planning and development, but—like the document that inspired it—provides a point of departure for the identification, preservation, and interpretation of tangible resources associated with the struggle for women's rights.

Politics

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

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

Among the delegates at the Wesleyan Chapel, concern for gender equality derived, in part, from the refusal of the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London to seat women from the official American delegation earlier in the decade. The Seneca Falls Convention reflected several decades of women's involvement in social reform, and this activist community's thoughtful assessment of discrimination suffered by all women. Conscious of the significance of their collective contributions to the promotion of "every righteous cause," the women and men who signed the Declaration of Sentiments demanded immediate access to "every righteous means" to fulfill their social and moral duties as individuals and as citizens of the United States.

In its call for the enfranchisement of women, the Declaration of Sentiments earned its place as one of the first American feminist legal texts. While reform societies, local benevolent organizations, temperance campaigns, and abolitionist petition drives justified political action on the grounds of women's moral influence, the Declaration of Sentiments proposed a redefinition of the political landscape. Their demand for women's suffrage insisted upon equal rights for women and rejected legal discrimination. A number of the Seneca Falls delegates, including Susan B. Anthony and Frederick Douglass, added women's suffrage to the social reforms lauded in a growing antebellum lecture circuit. As the nation careened toward civil war, many leading abolitionists embraced the cause of women's rights as a natural corollary to their defense of human freedom.

By the end of the 19th century, women deployed oratorical and organizational skills gained through decades of grassroots activities in organized campaigns of overt political action. In the decades following the Civil War, two rival suffrage organizations emerged and later united to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association under the leadership of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. Their successors, Anna Howard Shaw and Carrie Chapman Catt, led NAWSA's early 20th-century campaign to win suffrage through a federal amendment to the Constitution. Following passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, NAWSA's successor, the League of Women Voters, worked to provide political education for newly-enfranchised women, while the National Woman's Party, under the leadership of Alice Paul, moved from the suffrage victory toward a second constitutional goal, the Equal Rights Amendment. From her home in Washington, DC Mary Church Terrell—the civil rights leader who achieved national prominence as the president of the National Association of Colored Women and as a charter member of the NAACP—assailed all forms of racial discrimination and endorsed the ERA as a path toward the emancipation of African-American women. These early 20th-century campaigns for women's rights informed a second wave of women's activism beginning in the 1960s.

Women's participation in politics, however, has taken many other forms. American political institutions were initially founded with the assumption that women were not "fitted" for participation in public life. Women's close association with domesticity, however, has meant only that they followed different paths into public life, not that women were excluded from the public domain. Indeed, by exploring the interactions of public and private spheres, the study of women's history has revealed new dimensions in political life. Beginning in the Revolutionary era, women pioneered the formation of voluntary associations, laying the basis for that layer of civil society that is critical to the maintenance of an active democratic citizenry. Nineteenth century politics proceeded along two different lines: electoral politics, exclusively male, and the politics of influence, primarily female and located in voluntary associations that became the seed bed for the social justice dimensions of progressive reform. By the middle of the 19th century, despite exclusion from the formal channels of electoral politics, many women had engaged in such social movements, including religious revivalism, abolitionism, and temperance, and claimed a certain degree of emancipation in the face of opposition to women's public activism. The movements for women's rights are part of the larger drama of American democracy in which numerous groups have broadened the definition of citizenry and redefined the terrain of politics.

Through voluntary associations women have reshaped civic life, creating benevolent associations, missionary societies, reform and social service institutions—hospitals, orphanages, social settlements. They have invented professions such as social work, and feminized others such as teaching. Both white and black women engaged in reform activities and, when

established organizations barred female membership, formed their own societies and auxiliaries. By the mid-19th century women were a majority of the members of northern abolition societies, from which emerged the powerful voices of Lucy Stone, Susan B. Anthony, and Sojourner Truth. Temperance activists employed direct action to extend women's moral authority from the home to the public sphere and worked through organizations such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union to express their views on social and political issues under the rubric of "Home Protection."

During the early 20th century women gained prominence as welfare and housing reformers, influencing federal policy. Social settlements served as a bridge to the male-dominated political culture and a point of departure for women who went on to occupy positions in the broader reform community, as well as in local, state, and federal political and governmental institutions. In facilities such as the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged in Aurora, New York, women activists sponsored services and activities for poor relief, childcare, and health education that eventually achieved permanence as public responsibilities. As Civil War nurses, as members of the American Expeditionary Forces, as defense workers, and as members of military auxiliaries women expanded the realm of female civic duty. In all of these reform activities the community infrastructures that resulted broadened the arenas of civic action and civic education considerably, and over time reform activities expanded accepted views of societal responsibility and the role of government.

Some examples of properties that interpret the sub-theme of women's political rights are Women's Rights National Historical Park, site of the Seneca Falls Convention, and Mary McLeod Bethune's Council House National Historic Site in Washington, D.C., home of the National Council of Negro Women. The Sewall-Belmont House in Washington, D.C. still serves as headquarters of Alice Paul's National Woman's Party, while the Susan B. Anthony House in Rochester, New York, remains as the simple brick structure that served as both home and political headquarters of one of the American women's rights movement's most prominent leaders. Many other properties offer opportunities to discuss women's public roles. Boston's Chauncy Hall Building, the former headquarters of the New England Woman's Club, the Mary Church Terrell residence in Washington, D.C. and many other local clubhouses that survive are evidence of the far-reaching club movements under the aegis of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs. Boston African American National Historic Site and Worcester's Liberty Farm, the home of Stephen and Abby Kelley Foster, preserve properties associated with women and men who were active in abolitionist and early women's rights movements.

Family and Society

- ♦ *He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.*
- ♦ *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 of divorce, 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 the false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.*

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

Cultural definitions of womanhood and of appropriate female roles have generally centered on familial relationships: wife, mother, and daughter. Nineteenth-century American women were defined largely by their roles and responsibilities within the family and by a legal system that denied married women control of their property, their children, and, ultimately, their own bodies. After fulfilling the legal requirement to submit her will to her husband for his approval, the dedicated abolitionist and suffragist Lydia Maria Child wrote to a friend that she was "indignant for womankind made chattels personal from the beginning of time...the very phrases used with regard to us are abominable. 'Dead in the law' ...How I detest such language." Similarly, the Declaration of Sentiments clearly found in the institution of marriage both an instrument for the "social and religious degradation" of women and an obstacle to their pursuit of "true and substantial

happiness.” In calling attention to the legal disabilities of most married women and in demanding emancipation within the private sphere of marriage, the Convention delegates acknowledged that patterns of daily life—birth, marriage, child-rearing—have a profound influence on both the public and private lives of women and that women’s search for autonomy affected both spheres.

The changing definitions and structure of the family, both nuclear and extended, have been central concerns for historians of women, who redefined the meaning of “family” itself to consider the issues of family versus household and examine household structure, family size, and the relationship of families to society. Historians have examined both the legal and ideological parameters of familial and marital relationships, noting a separation of women and men among the Victorian middle class into distinct spheres of activity. While “separate spheres” shaped 19th-century architecture, furnishings, fashions, and other forms of material culture and the built environment, society did not simply impose this ideology on women. Educated women of the middle class helped create this distinct space, and exercised a certain social power based on their “special female qualities” in the areas of domestic influence, morality, and child nurturing. By the late 19th century the values of “true womanhood” crossed the domestic threshold. “Social housekeeping” asserted women’s traditional gender roles and familial responsibilities into the public realm, justifying women’s participation in the transformation of urban conditions through sanitation policy and the creation of playgrounds and other open spaces, and in other fields of social work and reform. Further along the trajectory, 20th-century feminists, in declaring that “the personal is political,” acknowledged that understanding the development of family formation and structure, child-rearing practices, housing alternatives, concepts of gender and sexuality, and other issues of personal and communal identity is central to the appreciation of women’s lives and experiences and to the struggle for women’s rights.

The movement for women’s rights embraced the quest for women’s autonomy in both the realm of the traditional family and in the broader sphere of society. For example, local women’s clubs, usually affiliates of General Federation of Women’s Clubs or the National Association of Colored Women, worked to improve the communities in which members lived and worked and provided meeting places in central locations to alleviate domestic isolation in a period of middle-class suburbanization. Theorists of domestic architecture, such as Catherine Beecher and Charlotte Perkins Gilman, worked to improve the social, physical, and moral character of middle-class families by reorganizing domestic space and work and designing communal daycare, cooking, and dining facilities. Boarding houses, such as Lowell’s Boott Mill Boarding House, the Boston YWCA’s combined residential and training facilities, and other local low-cost housing alternatives for working women—including the Shawmut Street Home for Working Women and Harriet Tubman House, both in Boston’s South End—illustrate the nontraditional “family” residences developed for women “adrift,” a growing contingent of female workers for whom relocation and the sexual wage differential brought the threat of domestic isolation and sexual vulnerability. Social settlements—such as the Henry Street Settlement in New York City—created alternative communities, offering immigrant women a variety of health, cultural, and work-training programs while freeing reformers from the constraints of strictly interpreted traditional gender roles. Margaret Sanger, a pioneer in birth control, dispensed information about contraception and advocated sexual reforms that would win reproductive autonomy for women and give them a choice about parenthood. Dr. Marie Zakrzewska’s direction of an all-female staff of physicians at the New England Hospital for Women and Children asserted women’s place in the management of issues of health, nutrition, and disease affecting their lives and the lives of their families.

Many properties offer opportunities to interpret family and life cycle themes. The changing ideals of the 19th-century middle-class family can be studied at Orchard House in Concord, Massachusetts, where household furnishings reflect both contemporary domestic standards and gender roles and the more unconventional ideas and accomplishments of the Alcott family. The Boott Mills Boarding House at Lowell National Historical Park illustrates a nontraditional family living situation, while Hartford’s Harriet Beecher Stowe House preserves the domestic designs of her sister, Catherine Beecher. In New York the Margaret Sanger Clinic, a 19th-century brick row house in lower Manhattan, preserves the building from which Sanger’s clinic distributed information about contraception to its working-class constituents.

Economics

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

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

To the women who gathered at Seneca Falls—as the Declaration of Sentiments reveals—one of the foremost obstacles to the “true and substantial happiness” of women was found in their economic subordination. Three of the document’s tenets speak directly to the material circumscription of women’s freedom and to the circumstances under which women labored in the mid-19th-century American economy, including slavery, servitude, and non-wage as well as paid labor. In claiming for themselves “all the rights and privileges which belong to them as citizens of the United States,” the signers of the Declaration of Sentiments articulated a demand for woman’s access to profitable employment and control over the equitable wages of her labor—a program for the economic empowerment of women that continues to resonate through the American political economy today.

To understand women’s daily lives, historians have set aside narrow definitions of work as paid labor, generally outside the home, and have looked closely at the full range of women’s productive activities both inside and outside the home. Women have always exercised productive roles in our nation’s economy. In pre-industrial economies many women turned raw materials into the goods their families consumed and often sustained barter networks, the primary mode of distribution and exchange. While the household and agricultural labor of most women was gender-segregated and unremunerated, enslaved African-American women often toiled often at gender-integrated tasks and had little control over the distribution and exchange of the products of their labor. As the 19th century progressed and an increasing number of women entered into wage labor women began to advocate and act for control not only over the fruits of their labor, but also over the conditions in which they worked.

Although many women remained confined to the ranks of relatively poorly paid industrial, clerical, and retail wage labor, a number of women gained access to more lucrative and creative occupations through training and educational institutions established by and for women. Ellen Spencer Mussey, cofounder of the Washington College of Law in Washington, D.C., not only established a coeducational training school to facilitate women’s entry into the legal profession, but also wrote the District law that gave women control of their own property and financial interests. In both the health and social sciences women gained experience and expertise on the subject of women through clinical and social work, and thereby created new fields of scientific theory and professional practice. From such properties as the Henry Street settlement in New York and Denison House in Boston, women’s work in public sanitation, juvenile courts, and factory reform contributed to the transformation of “social housekeeping” into the professional field of social work. Clara Barton contributed to the professionalization and institutionalization of women’s traditional medical roles through nurses’ training programs and the creation of the American Red Cross, while the New England Hospital for Women and Children provided both services and professional training to women and pioneered diagnostic techniques and treatments in women’s health care. Ellen Swallow Richards, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s first female science graduate and an instructor in sanitary chemistry, was a pioneer in home economics and ecology whose work in sanitary engineering and experimental research in domestic science widened professional opportunities for women.

Women entrepreneurs created producer cooperatives, such as Val-Kill Industries on the grounds of Eleanor Roosevelt’s New York estate, where members attempted to resuscitate craft industries. Other entrepreneurs expanded capitalist channels of distribution and consumption, creating women’s markets and employment opportunities. Sarah Breedlove “Madame C.J.” Walker, the first self-made woman millionaire in the United States, developed a successful cosmetics

company that catered to African-American consumers and employed black women as sales agents. Women in the design professions, such as Louise Blanchard Bethune and Lois Lilley Howe, established firms and realized projects in both residential and public settings, while women authors took advantage of the expanding female literary marketplace. Still other women ingeniously modified work environments, designing technologies and policies that provided practical and innovative applications to work processes in both traditional and modern contexts. Through innovative health care and incentive programs, mill manager Elizabeth Boit built a successful career in the textile industry of eastern Massachusetts and, as a result of her accomplishments, was nominated and served as the nation's first woman bank director.

Women also altered wages and working conditions—and influenced the development of the American economy—through organization and reform activities. From the mid-19th-century “turn outs” of Lowell’s female factory operatives under the local Female Labor Reform Association to the 20th-century strikes of national craft unions, such as the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union, women joined and led protests to change their work environments. Reform organizations, such as the Women’s Trade Union League, forged cross-class alliances to influence governmental policies, including protective labor legislation. In particular, public outrage over the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire heightened awareness of the conditions under which many women labored. The outrage contributed to legislative reform, including factory inspection laws, fire safety measures, and restrictions on working hours and conditions for women and children. The National Consumers League, headquartered in New York’s United Charities Building and under the guidance of Florence Kelley, successfully lobbied for government regulation of labor contracts and for protective legislation for working women and children. While some women strove for industrial reform through consumer activity, others occupied key government posts. Frances Perkins, an authority on industrial hazards and hygiene, applied her experiences at both the New York Consumers’ League and the New York Committee on Safety to government service after her appointment as Secretary of Labor. As the nation’s first female cabinet member, she promoted adoption of the Social Security Act, advocated legislation to mitigate industrial strife, and helped standardize state industrial legislation.

Diverse opportunities exist for interpreting women’s work experiences and their struggles for economic rights, including the factories where women operatives worked, the offices, studies and laboratories where women professionals labored, and the homes in which wives, immigrant servants, or enslaved women performed daily household tasks. The extant buildings on the wooded campus of the New England Hospital for Women and Children (later reorganized as the Dimock Community Health Center) constitute the oldest remaining hospital managed by and for women, established in an effort to overcome obstacles for women who wanted to enter the male-dominated practice of medicine during the late 19th century. The Ellen Swallow Richards residence in Jamaica Plain served as both a home laboratory and the office of the Center for Right Living, where Richards conducted much of her work as an environmental scientist and employed MIT students in the first consumer home testing laboratory. The North Bennett Street Industrial School, founded by philanthropist Josephine Agassiz Shaw, provided training and economic opportunity for women of the largely immigrant population of Boston’s North End. Louisa May Alcott’s Orchard House provides evidence not only of literary accomplishment, but also of the possibility for financial independence in the expanding female literary marketplace.

Education

- ♦ *He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education—all colleges being closed against her.*

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

Until the late 20th century, society considered formal education less important for women than for men, and in many instances women have been denied access to institutions. Yet women have always been providers of education. In the colonial era literacy and vocational training were familial responsibilities often executed by women. In the revolutionary era the debate about “woman’s place” in the new republic and the need for an educated citizenry led to a new emphasis on formal education for women of the upper and middle classes: as “Republican mothers” capable of raising a virtuous

citizenry, women claimed the importance of education for themselves. Judith Sargent Murray, an 18th-century Boston author and activist, advocated access to education so that women could become financially independent. Others, arguing that women's education was important in its own right, established female seminaries for the education of European-American and African-American girls in the first half of the 19th century. Early school buildings housed in the homes of Emma Willard and Prudence Crandall (in Middlebury, Vermont, and Canterbury, Connecticut, respectively) stand as a reminder of women's commitment to education as a means of empowerment and of some of the dramatic dimensions taken on by the 19th-century women's struggle for education.

By the time of the Seneca Falls Convention the nation's proliferating common schools increasingly accepted girls, and the growing demand for teachers—together with the lower wages commanded by women—facilitated the transfer of women's traditional educational roles into the public forum of the classroom and, consequently, to the relatively rapid feminization of the teaching profession in New England and the West. In the years before the normal school, female academies and seminaries were the leading educators of teachers, as well as of writers and professional women. Willard's Troy Female Seminary numbered more than 200 women teachers among its graduates, and demonstrated the importance of educational opportunities for women. Such improvements in female education contributed to the movement of the first generation of American women's rights activists from the private world of family responsibility to more public political roles as reformers, enlarging women's sphere and opening opportunities for travel and independence outside of marriage.

Participants at the Seneca Falls Convention realized the inextricable links 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 greater roles for women as educators. This legacy extended through Pauline Agassiz Shaw's sponsorship of kindergarten programs in Boston and the academic and vocational programs for African-American women at Nannie Burroughs' School in Washington, D.C., to the first women's college at Mount Holyoke, and to later institutions at Vassar, Smith, and Bryn Mawr that rejected the intellectual limitations of traditional female education and established liberal arts curricula for women. Coeducational programs and women's annexes at established universities, including Boston University and the Harvard-affiliated Radcliffe College, illustrate the differing educational strategies employed to broaden women's sphere of achievement.

While both women's and coeducational institutions offered women a range of curricular choices, in many places women had access to liberal arts but were barred from the sciences and from professional training in engineering, law, medicine, or architecture. Women's rights advocates established several antebellum female medical schools, and women's hospitals provided both services and professional training to women in an era when most hospitals excluded women health practitioners. Elizabeth Blackwell—the nation's first woman to receive a medical degree and the founder of the nation's first hospital staffed by women to serve women—joined with her sister Emily to establish the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, educating female physicians until coeducational medical colleges opened professional training to women. Similarly, when prestigious schools barred women from legal training, institutions such as Mussey's Washington College of Law and Boston's Portia School of Law opened at the turn of the 20th century. At around the same time, when few schools admitted women to degree programs in architecture and the American Institute of Architects tightened accreditation requirements, the Cambridge School, supported by alumnae and other benefactors, provided training for aspiring architects from its Harvard Square facilities.

Access to educational and employment opportunities in the physical sciences—fields previously closed to women—was led by ambitious and persistent practitioners. Annie Jump Cannon, who applied the prismatic technique of telescopic photography to the classification of stars and radically expanded the catalog still in use by modern astronomers, channeled her own professional renown into advocacy for the promotion of women in science. Maria Mitchell—the nation's first woman astronomer and professor of astronomy, as well as the first woman elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences—was convinced that reverence for authority fettered women's minds. A staunch advocate of women's education;

her work lent credibility to the inclusion of women in scientific training and professional organizations. Ellen Swallow Richards and Marion Talbot developed the science of domestic economy, which applied biological, chemical, and physical principles to household technology. As cofounders of the precursor to the American Association of University Women, Richards and Talbot challenged the prevailing scientific theory that justified the subordination of women, demonstrated that higher education did not damage women's health, and thereby expanded both scientific education for women and the boundaries of scientific knowledge. Programs such as the Woman's Education Association's summer sessions at Annisquam, Massachusetts that were originally designed to provide women with scientific training later contributed to the production of scientific knowledge in their own right. The Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, a legacy of the WEA's summer institute, serves as a vindication of women's claims to inclusion within the scientific community.

Opportunities to interpret the movement to secure women's educational rights include the Prudence Crandall House in Canterbury, Connecticut, now a museum that preserves the history of Crandall's ill-fated effort to provide an education to free women of color in the early 19th century. The Maria Baldwin House in Cambridge, Massachusetts, recalls the distinguished career of the 19th-century educator and civic leader who, as principal and later master of the Agassiz School, overcame the common exclusion of women from leadership roles in educational institutions. An extant structure of the Smith College Graduate School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture in Cambridge, a later incarnation of the Cambridge School in Harvard Square, represents women's roles as students, educators, professionals, and benefactors. The Vassar College Observatory, on the grounds of Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York, stands as a reminder of Maria Mitchell's contributions to women's education at the nation's first real college for women. Similarly, the M. Carey Thomas Library at Bryn Mawr College honors the institution's first dean, a dedicated suffragist whose commitment to women's education produced the first graduate program at a women's school.

Religion

- ♦ *He allows her in church, as well as state, but a subordinate position, claiming Apostolic authority for her exclusion from the ministry, and with some exception, from any public participation in the affairs of the church.*
- ♦ *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 her God.*

DECLARATION OF SENTIMENTS, 1848

The history of American women and religion is one of both contradictions and ironies. In the British North American colonies worship communities were acceptable forums for public action and sites of social interaction outside of the home where women exercised informal influence, but lacked formal authority. Many denominations counted a majority of women among the faithful, but excluded them from positions of leadership. However, some religions, such as the Society of Friends, displayed a relative acceptance of gender equality. After the turn of the 19th century, European-American women in other major denominations claimed institutional roles for themselves through benevolent and religious organizations, gaining organizational skills and experience outside the boundaries of their congregations.

The Declaration of Sentiments recognized the power of religious belief and authority to define and sustain the values that shape women's lives. Following on the tails of the Second Great Awakening, the Seneca Falls Convention occurred in a profoundly religious climate that emphasized the salience of direct inspiration and elevated the religious status of women. The correlation between these religious tenets of gender equality and an emerging activist community can be seen in the relatively large proportion of Quakers among early advocates of women's rights, including Lucretia Mott and Abby Kelley Foster, and in the inclusion of religious autonomy in their demands for gender equality. As in their demands for political, family, and economic rights, the Convention participants called for the extension of women's moral authority to more tangible forms of autonomy in religious practice and leadership.

Eighteenth-century perfectionist colonies established by the Shakers (United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing), under the leadership of Ann Lee, and Jemimah Wilkinson's Society of Universal Friends rejected traditional forms of male leadership and gathered believers into communities separated from American society. During the first half of the 19th century Rebecca Cox Jackson left the confines of both Methodist "praying bands" and marriage and founded a celibate community of women who lived and worked among the broader Philadelphia society. Other women—including Ellen Harmon White and Mary Baker Eddy—founded and led gender-integrated spiritual communities in the century following the Seneca Falls Convention, attaining religious authority within the institutional framework of newly-created denominations.

While some women found greater freedom for expression, authority and personal growth in communities that they created and sustained, others worked for change within established churches. Jareena Lee used her powerful spiritual gifts to claim her right to preach in the African Methodist Church. Antoinette Brown Blackwell, the first ordained woman minister in the Congregational Church, overcame a lack of institutional support after several years on the abolitionist and women's rights circuit and obtained formal church authority at a pastorate in South Butler, New York, in 1853. Anna Howard Shaw, who is commemorated at Boston University's School of Theology, also overcame institutional opposition to her ministerial authority and, as a minister of the Methodist Protestant Church, continued to perform marriages—as long as the promise to obey was omitted from the wedding vows—as she served as president of the National American Woman Suffrage Association from 1904 to 1915. As these women laid claim to pulpits and decision-making, they preached a doctrine of religious and moral autonomy that continues to resonate in the struggle for women's rights.

Opportunities to interpret women's struggle for religious rights can be found in the buildings and sites associated with women reformers, ministers, and missionaries. New York's Watervliet Historic District and the Jemimah Wilkinson House preserve evidence of two perfectionist communities that valued women's spiritual autonomy and authority, while the Mary Baker Eddy House in Lynn, Massachusetts, commemorates the founding of the Church of Christ, Scientist, the only worldwide religion founded by an American woman. The former church of Antoinette Blackwell's first Congregational pastorate in South Butler, New York, serves as an example of the ministerial callings that directed the lives of many women toward leadership within their spiritual communities and in society at large. Similarly, Pennsylvania's Bryn Mawr College and the Arch Street Meeting House in Philadelphia represent the Quaker conviction of spiritual autonomy that informed Lucretia Mott's commitment to women's rights.