



Women's Rights National Historical Park
136 Fall Street
Seneca Falls, New York 13148

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National Park Service The Wesleyan Chapel



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The Wesleyan Chapel

The Superintendent's Message

The National Park Service (NPS) preserves and protects our nation's natural and cultural treasures. The Wesleyan Chapel at Women's Rights National Historical Park, in Seneca Falls, NY is the site of the first Women's Rights Convention in the United States and one of those treasures. Since my arrival here in the fall of 2004, I have met visitors from around the country and the world for whom the Wesleyan Chapel shines the light of hope and strength to women and men determined to live to their full potential.

As the steward of this resource, the NPS is committed to the long-term preservation of the chapel and to providing a quality experience to all who visit the site. As issues have emerged that threaten the preservation of the chapel, the park has taken steps to mitigate or further study them.

Today we have before us an opportunity to further define these issues and to look for solutions. I am seeking your thoughts on how best to preserve this important historic resource and invite you to participate in this effort. In this newsletter you will find information about how you can join us in this important endeavor. We look forward to hearing from you.

Tina Orcutt, Superintendent
Women's Rights National Historical Park
136 Fall Street
Seneca Falls, New York 13148

Significance of the Wesleyan Chapel

When the newly-formed Wesleyan Methodists built one of the first Wesleyan Chapels in the United States in Seneca Falls in 1843, they welcomed anti-slavery and other reform speakers. Frederick Douglass, freedom-seeker, newspaper publisher, and Underground Railroad activist, spoke here, and attended the most famous reform meeting at the Wesleyan Chapel--the First Women's Rights Convention on July 19 and 20, 1848.

Some 300 women and men participated in the convention that resulted in the adoption of the Declaration of Sentiments, which advocated for equal rights for women. Although the chapel underwent multiple renovations after it passed into private hands, portions dating to before the Civil War are preserved at Women's Rights National Historical Park.



How was the chapel used and modified throughout history?

The Wesleyan Chapel has hosted a variety of uses and has undergone many renovations since it was first established in 1843. Its initial use, the First Wesleyan Methodist Church, lasted until 1872 at which point the Wesleyans moved to a new facility.

The first remodeling of the chapel occurred later that year to accommodate stores on the first floor and a public hall on the second floor. A second addition on the north end of the building was added in 1890 to accommodate a new stage and dressing rooms for the Johnson Opera House. In 1917, the building was then converted into the Regent Theater.



Between 1919 and 1985, the building underwent additional conversions serving the following uses: automobile garage/dealership, hall, offices, laundromat, garage, and apartments. In 1985, NPS purchased the building for inclusion in Women's Right's National Historical Park and began architectural and structural studies.

These studies included historical investigations and archival research reviews that involved the dismantling of the building's newer additions in order to document and reveal the remaining sections of the Wesleyan Chapel dating from 1848.

The remaining sections of the Wesleyan Chapel that were discovered included the eastern and western brick walls and wooden roof trusses. In 1987, the NPS held a national design competition to collect proposals on how to preserve and celebrate the remaining sections of the chapel.

The winning design for the site, which exists today, proposed carefully placed structural support columns along the remaining structure while developing sandstone walls along its perimeter near the roadway intersection southeast of the chapel.

The design also incorporated a natural grass amphitheater area that is skirted by a commemorative "water-wall" west of the chapel. A line of beech trees were aligned north of the chapel and a perennial garden was planted to the south. Collectively, these features form a commemorative site that celebrates the Women's Rights Movement.

What issues are confronting the Wesleyan Chapel?

In recent years, the remaining structure of the Wesleyan Chapel dating from 1848 has entered into various stages of deterioration as a result of being exposed to varying environmental conditions. As a result, the long-term preservation of the chapel is threatened.

Other issues confronting the chapel range from difficulty conducting group tours because of traffic noise, to vandalism and inappropriate use of the chapel grounds during the day and evening, to concerns related to bird nesting. These and other issues, which we hope you will help us to identify during the "scoping process" described below, have prompted the NPS to take action to:

1. preserve the chapel for current and future generations, and
2. enhance the visitor's experience while at the chapel.

What does the scoping process mean?

Scoping is done in the initial phase of a project to seek input from a variety of sources. The input is used to identify issues, areas requiring additional study, and topics that will be analyzed in the Environmental Assessment and Assessment of Effect report (EA/AE), a document which will be discussed in greater detail in a subsequent paragraph.

This is an opportunity for you to provide us with your suggestions, comments, and concerns about the Wesleyan Chapel and your ideas on protecting and preserving the chapel.

Is scoping my only opportunity to comment on the project?

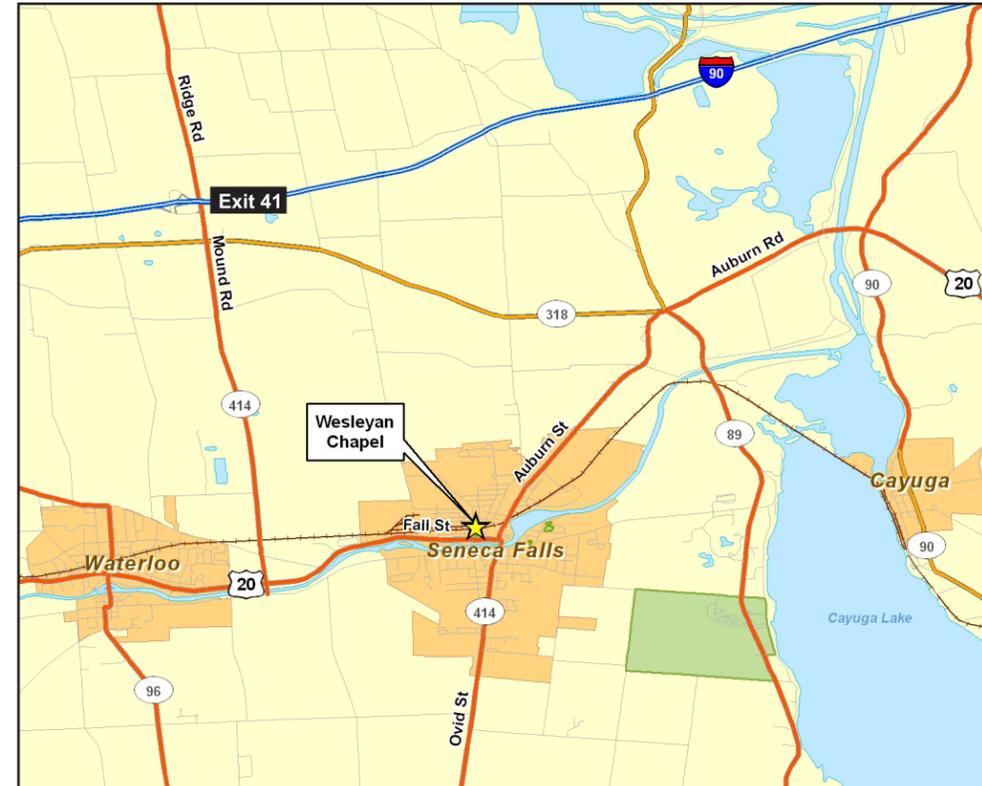
No, once the EA/AE is developed, the document will be made available for public review for a 30-day period.

How will your ideas be used to preserve and enhance the chapel?

To facilitate the process leading to the preservation and enhancement of the Wesleyan Chapel, the NPS is preparing an Environmental Assessment/Assessment of Effect (EA/AE). Utilizing the information collected during the scoping process, the EA/AE will identify different preservation and enhancement alternatives.

Each alternative must be assessed for its overall effectiveness in achieving NPS goals and objectives – to preserve the Wesleyan Chapel and to enhance the visitor's experience. Alternatives must also consider beneficial and/or adverse impacts on the chapel, its setting in the surrounding community, and its historical context.

Prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and Section 106 the National Historic Preservation Act, the EA/AE will provide the decision-making framework in which significant issues facing the chapel will be identified, a reasonable range of alternatives and their effects will be presented and analyzed, and a strategy for the long-term preservation and enhancement of the Wesleyan Chapel will be determined. Your feedback during this process will be used to help the NPS determine the most appropriate course of action for implementation.



The Wesleyan Chapel - Village of Seneca Falls, Seneca County, NY



Regent Theater c. 1918



Courtesy of Women's Rights National Historical Park



Huntington Ford c. 1920

Please let us know by March 24, 2006:

1. What issues/concerns do you have about the preservation of the Wesleyan Chapel?
2. Do you have any ideas about how we could improve a visitor's experience?
3. Do you have other comments and suggestions for us to consider in the environmental assessment/assessment of effect report?

If you wish to comment on any other issues associated with the preservation and enhancement of the Wesleyan Chapel, you may submit your comments in the following ways:

- Comments can be posted to the NPS Planning Environment and Public Comment system (PEPC). You can access PEPC and provide us with your comments at <http://parkplanning.nps.gov>. (The preferred contact method.)



- You may also submit written comments to:

Tina Orcutt, Superintendent
Women's Rights National Historical Park
136 Fall Street
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- Finally, you may hand deliver comments to the Women's Rights National Historical Park.

Please indicate in your response if you wish to be added to the park's mailing list for this and other announcements.

Public Scoping Meeting – Wesleyan Chapel

A public scoping meeting will be held at the NPS visitor center in Seneca Falls, New York on March 8, 2006 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. RSVP not required, but appreciated to Dorothy Fenton 315-568-2262 or dorothy_fenton@nps.gov. The NPS visitor center is located next to the Wesleyan Chapel. The address of the NPS visitor center is:



NPS Visitor Center
136 Fall Street
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