

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was an American Suffragist, social activist, abolitionist and an early leader in the movement for women's rights. Many give her credit for beginning the women's right movement when she presented her *Declaration of Sentiments* at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. She served as president of the National Woman Suffrage Association for eight years, 1892-1890.



Elizabeth was number eight in what would have been a large family of eleven children except that five of the children died in infancy or early childhood. An older brother, Eleazar died at age 20, shortly before he was to graduate from college. Only Elizabeth and four sisters lived well into adulthood. Elizabeth would name her two daughters after Margaret and Harriot, two of her sisters.

She was born on November 12, 1815, in Johnstown, New York to Daniel and Margaret Livingston Cady. Her father was a prominent Federalist attorney who served one term in the U.S. Congress. Her mother fell into depression over the loss of so many of her children which left Elizabeth with a maternal void in her childhood. Many of the responsibilities of raising Elizabeth fell to her sister Tryphena, who was eleven years older.

It was not until July 4, 1827 that slavery would become illegal in the state of New York and her father was a slave owner like many New York men. Elizabeth mentioned Peter Teabout many times in her writing, but never referred to him as a slave. It was not owning at least one slave that turned her into a devout abolitionist, but a visit as a young woman with her cousin, Gerrit Smith, in Peterboro, New York.

Elizabeth received the very best female education that was available to her at that time. She attended Emma Willard's Academy, but regretted not having a full-fledged college education. After her school years, she spent most of her time in visiting and social activities, primarily with her cousin Gerrit, the die-hard abolitionist. It was there that she met and fell in love with Henry Brewster Stanton, another dedicated abolitionist and nine years her senior. Her father was opposed, but the couple married in 1840. They went to London for their honeymoon to attend the World's Anti-Slavery Convention. That is when Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott met and became close friends pursuing the same goals.

The Stantons moved to Seneca Falls, New York in 1847 and there the last three of their eight children were born. The Stantons were far luckier than most all the couples in that time frame, all their children lived to maturity. The first born was the one to die earliest and he lived to 49. The longest living offspring lived to the ripe old age of 86.

Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott would organize the world's first women's rights convention that was held in Seneca Fall, New York. Mott was not too keen on including women's suffrage as part of the Seneca convention resolutions, but Stanton was persistent and it was included in the platform. In 1851 Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony (Stanton sitting/Anthony standing) met and formed a lifelong friendship and partnership based on their mutual commitment to the emancipation of women. In 1854 Cady Stanton would address the New York legislature with her omnibus women's rights bill and in 1860 most of her reforms were passed, the notable exception was the right to vote.

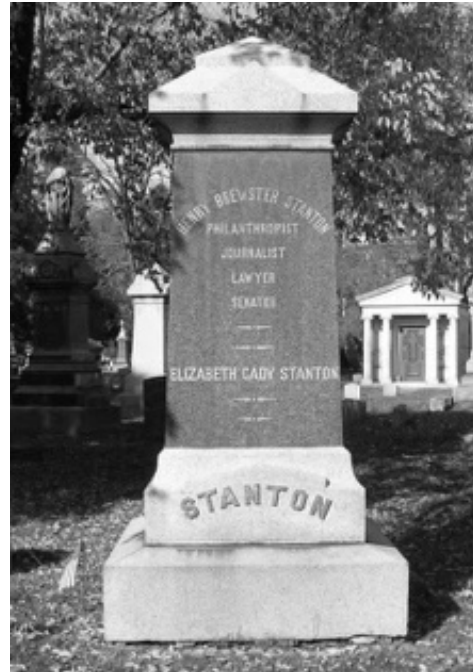
Cady Stanton jumped into the Civil War political drama and, with Anthony, Stanton formed the National Women's Loyal League seeking to abolish slavery by a Constitutional Amendment. When the war was over, Cady Stanton and her husband created a lot of dissension and conflict among the other reformers because of their attempts to tie woman suffrage to black suffrage and for then criticizing the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments for ignoring women suffrage when their efforts ended in failure.

Cady Stanton's voice became seriously watered down when she started to extend her interests far beyond voting rights. She had always been for more liberalized divorce laws and urged women to leave unhappy marriages. Then she went so far as to say women should take steps to prevent pregnancy. And in the early 1870s

she went too far when she began to associate with the notorious “free lover,” Victoria Woodhull, the first woman to run for the presidency.

Cady Stanton also diverged from the mainstream women’s movement over religion. Her deep dislike of organized religion grew out of a traumatic youthful conversion experience. In the 1880s, she visited England, where she was influenced by freethinkers and biblical critics. Back in the United States, she learned that Christian political activists were attempting to close public institutions on the Sabbath, undo divorce law liberalization, and even establish Christianity as the state religion. Determined to oppose them, she found herself on a collision course with the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, a new generation of suffrage leaders, and even Anthony. In 1898 she published *The Woman’s Bible*, a scholarly but irreverent feminist commentary, for which the National American Woman Suffrage Association censured her.

Although embittered, she continued her independent course on behalf of women’s emancipation until her death. On October 26, 1902, her heart failed her, and she died in New York City. Her death came eighteen years before women were granted the right to vote. She was survived by six of the eight children she gave birth and seven grandchildren. She followed Henry who died on January 14, 1887. They are buried together in the Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.



In 1948, the U.S. Post issued a three-cent stamp titled 100 Years of Progress of Women: 1848-1948 commemorating the Seneca Falls Convention. (Elizabeth Cady Stanton on the left, Carrie Chapman Catt in the middle and Lucretia Mott on the right.)