

Good Results Have Followed: Women's Suffrage 1848—2017

Seneca Falls is nationally-known for hosting the first women's rights convention in 1848. While not reported in the Geneva newspapers, the Declaration of Sentiments established demands for equality that included the right to vote. The long journey to universal suffrage traveled through towns across the United States but Geneva was more than an average town. Well-connected social reformers made the city a center of suffrage activity for Ontario County and the region.

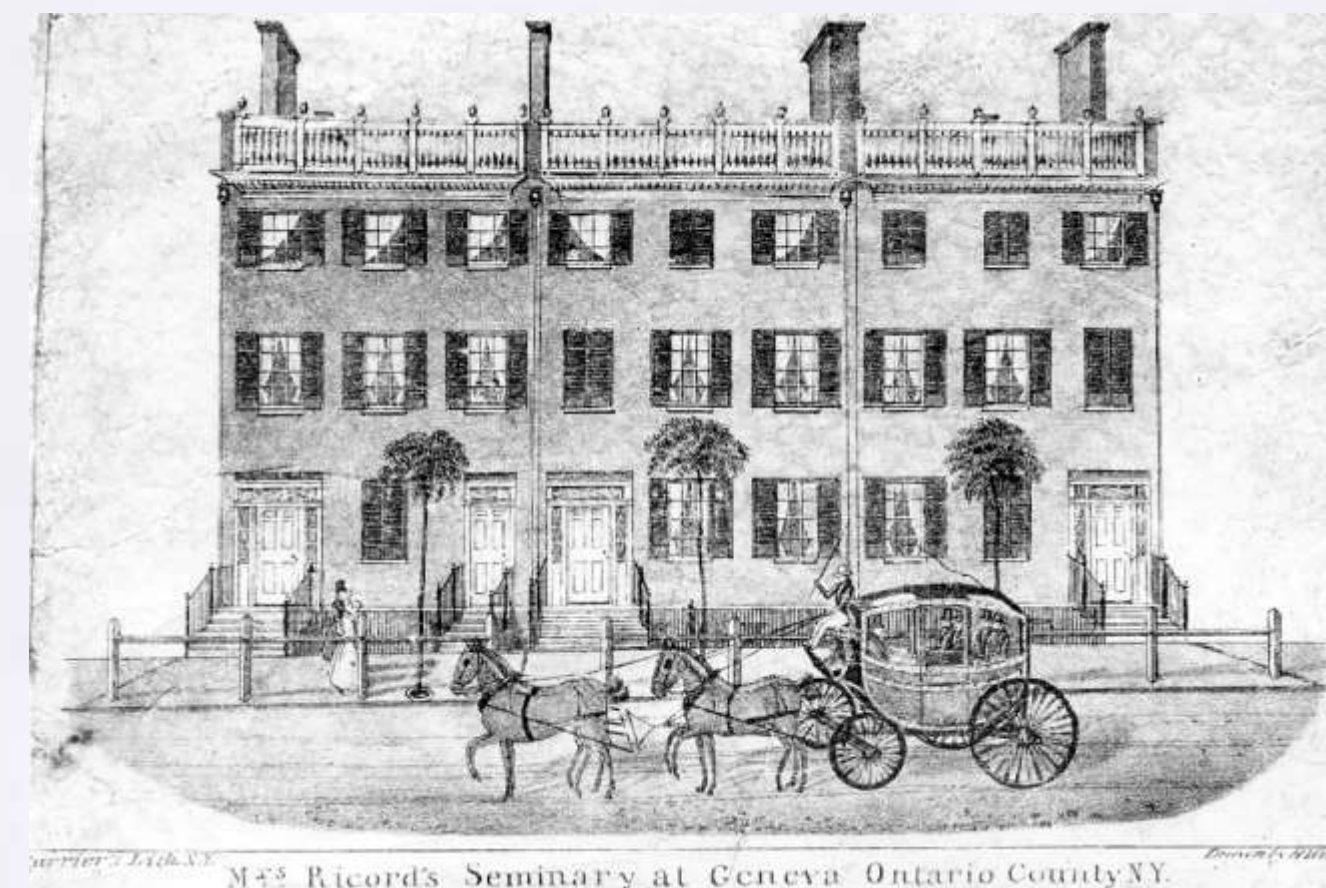
"There was quite a large assemblage of intelligent and noted people present that seemed deeply interested in the movement. Many suitable resolutions were resolved and voted. Many interesting addresses and short speeches were made... Good results have followed that first equal suffragist gathering. The seed fell on good ground. But the end is not yet."

- Rhoda Palmer, written memory of attending the 1848 convention, 1908.

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.



By 1848 some elements of women's rights had come to Geneva. From 1829-1842 Elizabeth Ricord ran the Geneva Female Seminary on South Main Street and taught math, science, and self-governance. In October 1847 Elizabeth Blackwell began her education at Geneva Medical College to become the first woman in the United States with a medical degree. The Quaker Monthly Meeting in Junius, 12 miles away, espoused women's equality and was the home meeting for organizers of the Seneca Falls convention.

Qualifications of voters.

§ 2. No person shall be qualified or permitted to vote upon any tax for street expenses, or upon any other tax or appropriation, who shall not appear, upon the last annual assessment roll, to have been assessed and taxed for real or personal property ;

The Seneca Falls convention was organized in ten days, with notices appearing in the Seneca Courier and Frederick Douglass' North Star in Rochester. Attended by about 300 women and men, only 100 signed the Declaration of Sentiments. It denounced discrimination in both church and state and called for reform.

Women's suffrage was granted gradually in New York State. In 1871, women property owners in Geneva could vote on tax issues. By 1880 New York state women could not only elect school board members but run for school board as well. In 1906 women property owners across the state were granted suffrage for village and town issues.

Laws and Amendments: Universal Suffrage in NY and US

Beginning in the 1890s western states such as Utah and Idaho granted women full suffrage. Referendums were voted down in the eastern states of Rhode Island and New Hampshire. By the 1910s New York became a battleground state for full suffrage. After a losing battle in 1915, the state constitutional amendment passed in 1917. New York became the first eastern state to grant universal suffrage. The state was the fifth to ratify the 19th Amendment which granted full national suffrage to women on August 18, 1920.

—At a meeting held at the home of Mrs. Waldo Hutchins on South Main street, Tuesday morning, arrangements were made for an address in this city, at Coxe Hall, on Wednesday evening, September 2nd, by Mrs. Grace Duffield Goodwin, formerly president of the Association opposed to Woman Suffrage, of the District of Columbia and who is now one of the regular speakers of the National "Anti" Association. Mrs. John Wood of Buffalo was chairman of the meeting.

**How New York State
Is Organized for the
Suffrage Campaign**

Assembly District as the Unit on
Which the Work Builds.

Five of the most important suffrage organizations in the state are banded together in the Empire State Campaign Committee. They are the Woman Suffrage Party, the New York State Woman Suffrage Association, the Men's League for Woman Suffrage, the Equal Franchise Society, and the College Equal Suffrage League.

The Committee is guided by the same genius of organization that was responsible for the formation of the Woman Suffrage Party.

**Vote for
Woman
Suffrage!**

THE ANTI-SUFFRAGE ASSOCIATION
Calls Upon the Voters of
the State to
VOTE NO
on Woman Suffrage

"I believe that women have the intelligence to be voters and that if given the franchise that the home need not and generally would not be neglected."

— Dr. John Parmenter, Geneva Supervisor on the County Board of Supervisors, March 13, 1915

GENEVA DAILY TIMES
WOMAN SUFFRAGE IS RATIFIED

Organized in 1914, the Geneva Anti-Suffrage Society received less publicity than the Political Equality Club but claimed over a hundred members. Based upon newspaper articles they focused on bringing speakers to Geneva for public lectures. Born and raised at Rose Hill Mansion, Agnes Swan Hutchins was the president of the Geneva Anti-Suffrage Society from 1914-1917.

Like any campaign, the national suffrage groups poured money into the 1915 New York State campaign. An Empire State Campaign Committee was formed and the state was divided into districts. Workers lined up allies and endorsements from elected officials from both parties and groups like the Grange.

Thirty-six states were required to ratify the 19th Amendment. On August 18, 1920 Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state when state representative Harry Burn did as his mother requested and voted in favor of the Amendment. The other states ratified later, Mississippi being the last in 1984.

The Movement Comes to Geneva: Famous Women

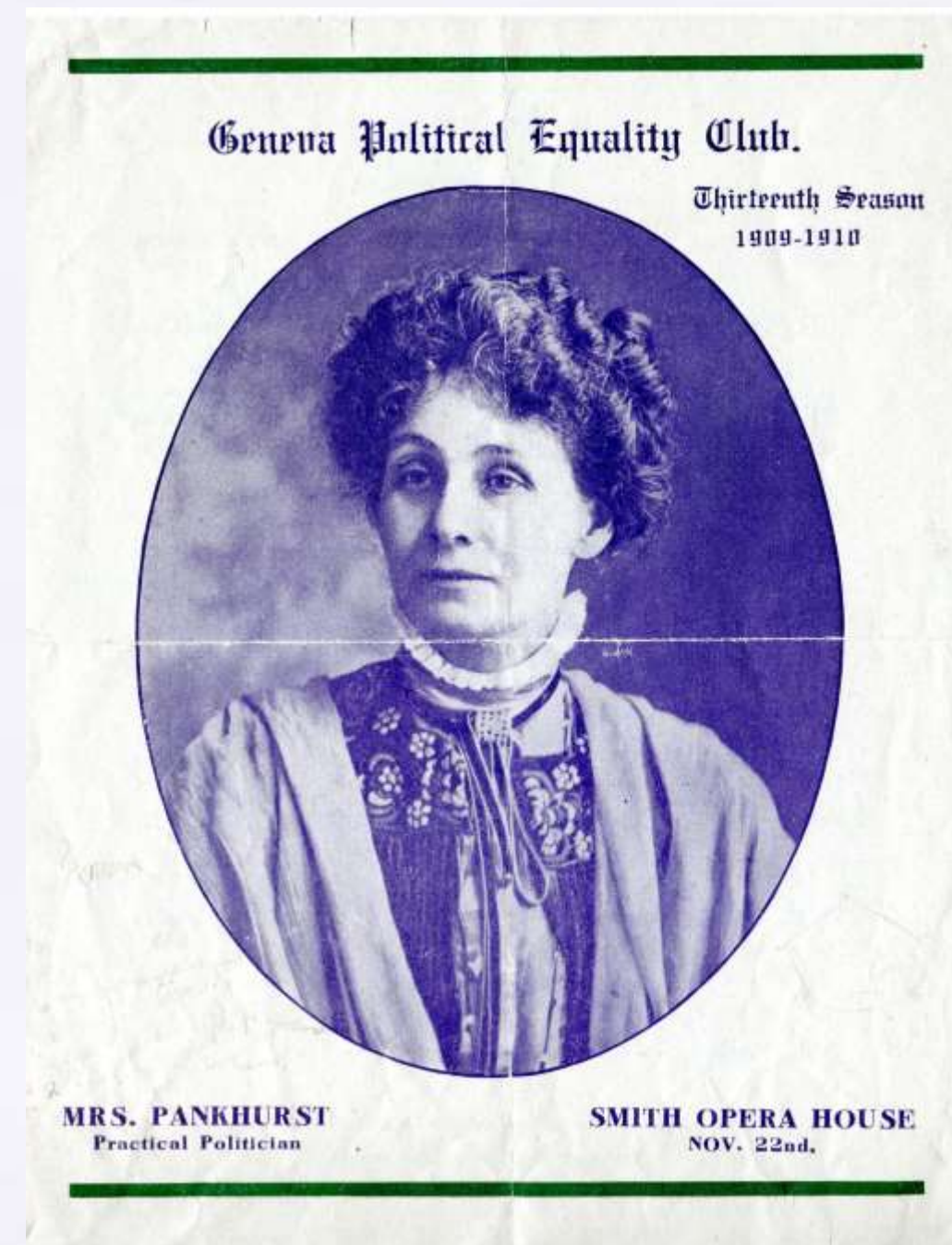


Elizabeth and Anne Miller's connections to the state and national suffrage movement brought important events and speakers to Geneva. Two conventions of the New York State Woman Suffrage Association were held here featuring national speakers. While other upstate cities (like Ithaca, Auburn, and Rochester) hosted conventions as well, the Millers also secured prominent figures for the Geneva Political Equality Club. Speakers included Emmeline Pankhurst and Carrie Chapman Catt.

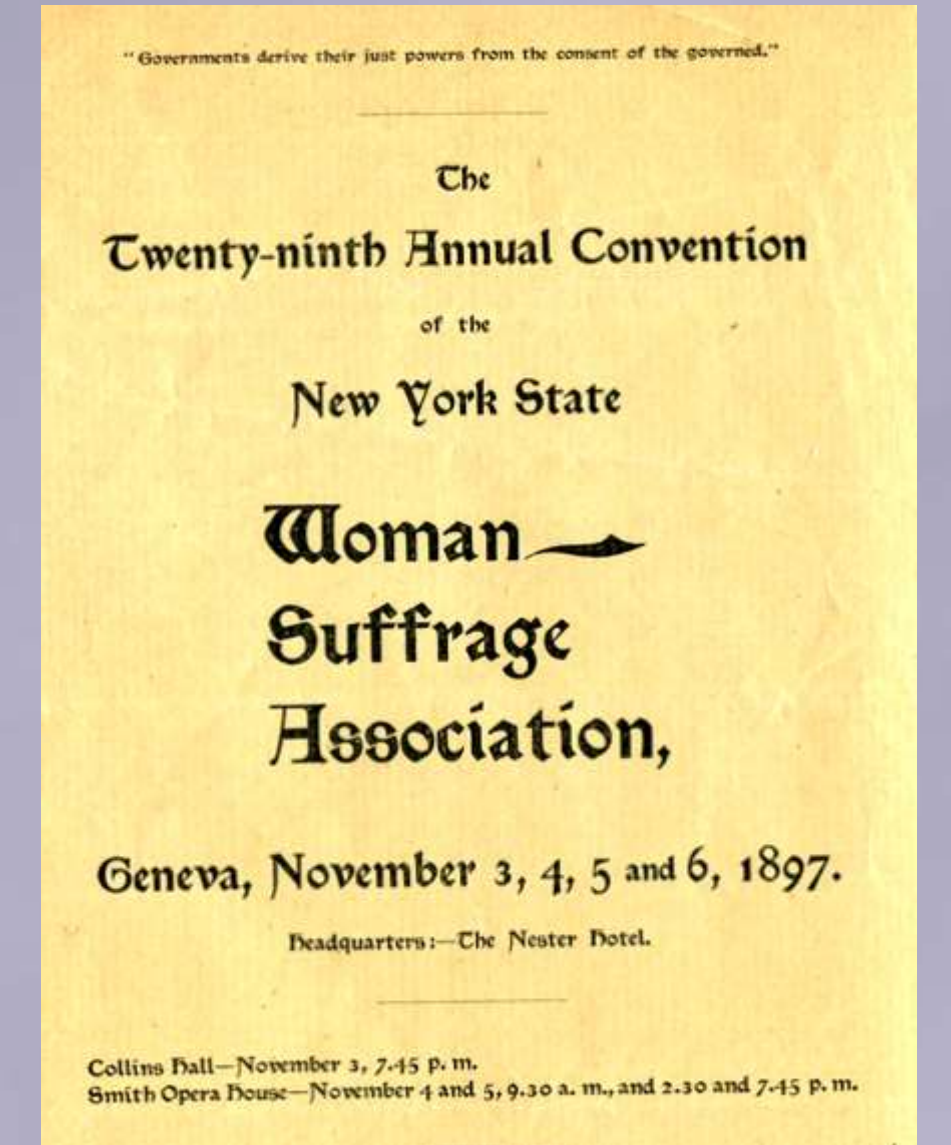
A frequent guest of the Millers, Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) spoke in Geneva in 1897 at the New York State Woman Suffrage Association's annual conference and at Collins Music Hall in 1899. When she died in 1906, only four states allowed women to vote.



Carrie Chapman Catt (1859-1947) was the president (1900-1904 and 1915-1920) of the National American Women's Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Under her leadership, women's suffrage gained the support of President Woodrow Wilson and both houses of Congress, which led to the passage of the 19th Amendment. The Millers tried for several years to get Catt to speak in Geneva. They succeeded in 1903 when she spoke at the Smith Opera House on "Woman and the State."



Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) was the founder of the British Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), a group that resorted to vandalism in the name of suffrage. In 1909 Pankhurst spoke at the Smith Opera House on "The Meaning of the Women's Movement in England." She defended her militant tactics by comparing the women's suffrage movement in England to the American Revolution.



The New York State Woman Suffrage Association (1869-1917) held its annual convention twice in Geneva. The 1897 meeting, held at the Smith Opera House and Collins Music Hall, featured Susan B. Anthony and Anna Howard Shaw. Held at the First Baptist Church, the 1907 convention featured Anna Howard Shaw, Harriot Stanton Blatch, and Rose Schneiderman, a leader of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union.



Anna Howard Shaw (1847-1919) was a speaker for the Women's Christian Temperance Movement when Susan B. Anthony convinced her to join the National Women's Suffrage Association (NWSA). She spoke in Geneva three times.

But the End is Not Yet: The Legacy of Suffrage

Local women did not rest quietly after they won suffrage in New York State. In 1918 the Geneva Political Equality Club disbanded but new groups took its place. Geneva Woman's Club presented music, arts, and civic issues for the education of the community. County and city League of Women Voters became a non-partisan voice for women's issues and electoral and judicial fairness.



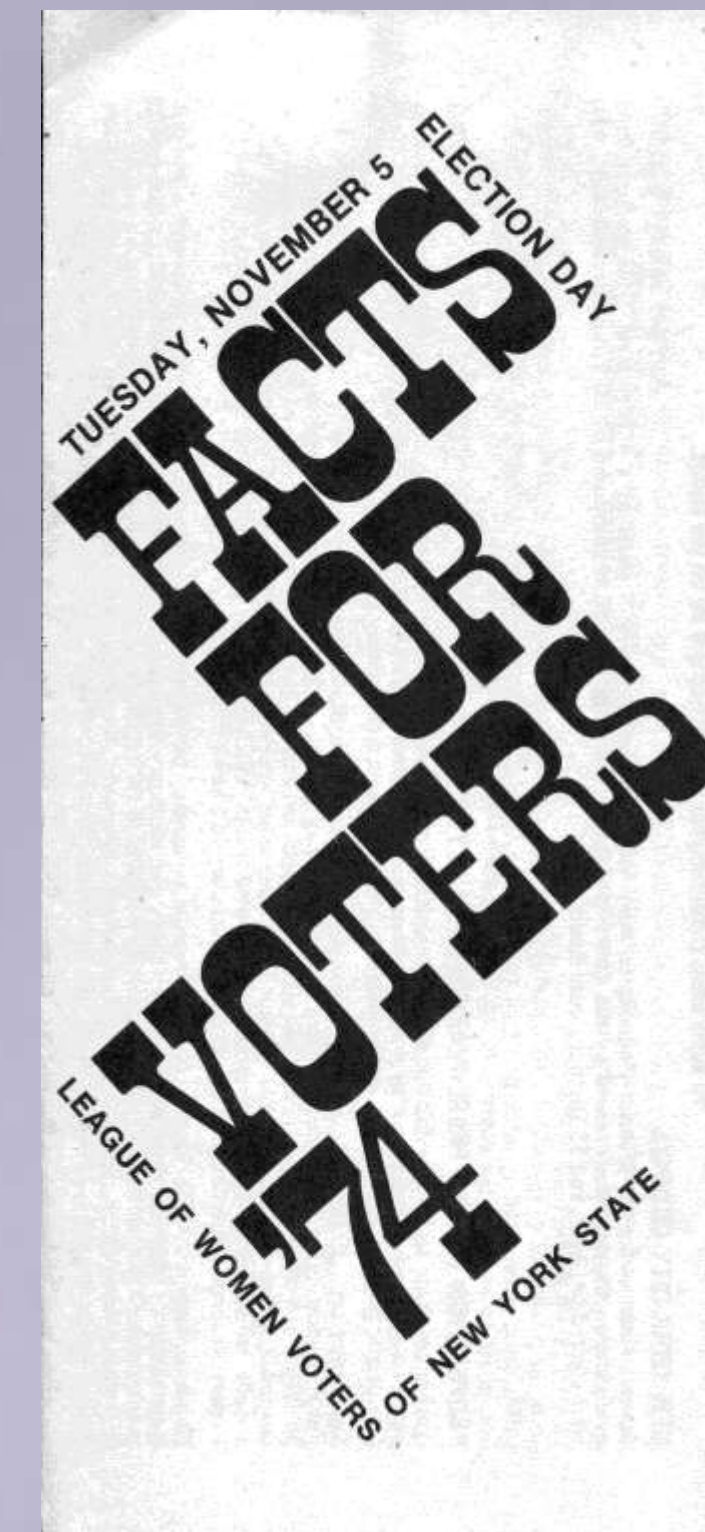
Agnes Slosson Lewis (1878-1960) symbolized both the pre- and post-suffrage eras. A childhood neighbor of the Millers, she was an officer in the Geneva and Ontario County Political Equality Clubs and in the state suffrage association. After 1917 she was an organizer and president of the Geneva Woman's Club and was active in the League of Women Voters at the local, state, and national levels.



In January 1918 the Political Equality Club invited 61 women and 40 women's organizations to a meeting to discuss forming a woman's club. The Geneva Woman's Club was incorporated in 1921 "to advance the interests and efficiency of women and to work for the education and welfare of the community."

"The League of Women Voters is thinking. Consequently it has a message. It is probable that the organization will go farther in its proposals than most citizens will care to follow, but in presenting their platform free of partisan prejudices, women are certain of receiving for it respectful and unbiased consideration."

– Geneva Daily Times, February 24, 1920



In June 1919 the Ontario County Woman Suffrage Party became the Ontario County League of Women Voters. The Geneva League of Women Voters was formed in June 1926. Today the League sponsors candidate forums, oversees the Court Watch program for a fair justice system, and advocates for non-partisan election reform.