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Woman's Rights in Rochester A Century of Progress

By BLAKE MCKELVEY

This year, the one hundredth anniversary of the first woman's rights conventions, held at Seneca Falls and Rochester in July and August, 1848, offers a fit occasion to review the local struggles and achievements in this field over the years. It was not entirely by accident that Rochester helped to cradle the woman's rights movement, nor was it by chance that this city failed to give its small coterie of embattled suffragists any early victories. The circumstances in both cases were related to fundamental aspects of the community's development. Equally important was the extent to which practical provisions for woman's rights were achieved in the movement's third period, long before the state and nation-wide triumphs of woman's suffrage brought the vote to women in Rochester as well.

Susan B. Anthony's towering importance in the suffrage movement was so overshadowing that the contributions of her local friends have been overlooked. No one person could create such a movement; in fact Miss Anthony was not even present at its inception, though she joined and assumed leadership a few years later. Like all important developments in human history, the woman's rights movement was an expression of broad social trends, yet leaders were essential, and it is interesting to discover that, in addition to Miss Anthony, Rochester has produced at least a score of women during the past century whose contributions were both outstanding and enduring. Only a half dozen of those active in the first period lived through the discouraging mid-years and survived to pass their

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inspiration on to the new and more numerous generation that arose in the nineties. None of the founders lived to see the triumph of 1920; yet their aspirations and their determination have borne fruit in the vigorous citizenship of recent generations of women.

Cradle of Woman's Rights

The Rochester that played host to the adjourned sessions of the pioneer Woman's Rights Convention of 1848 was a thriving community just over 30,000 in population. Known far and wide as the Flour City, it had outgrown its crude frontier ways a decade or so before, and its vigorous Yankee residents were earnestly promoting a host of improvements. Women as well as men yearned for a better society, and when their efforts were sometimes rebuffed, even by their brother reformers, the special task of asserting and winning the rights of women was undertaken a hundred years ago this summer.¹

Of course the woman's rights movement was far-flung, yet its inception in western New York indicates the presence here of potent factors. The women who assumed leadership were moved by earnest feelings which merit close study. The majority of those active at the beginning of the movement in Rochester were of Quaker background; they had been attracted by the vital doctrines of Elias Hicks and had developed forthright consciences and a restless zeal for new doctrines and new light. The voice of women had long been respected among Quakers, and vigorous ladies (such as the Kirby-Post-Hallowells, the Anthonys, and a few kindred spirits) served the movement in Rochester in much the same fashion as did the Grimke sisters, the Motts, the Blackwells, Lucy Stone and Mrs. Stanton in other localities.

Most of these reformers of Quaker background came to Rochester in the late thirties or early forties, bringing their Hicksite inspiration with them. Apparently the earlier Quaker settlers were repelled by the abolitionist sentiments of these newcomers, who turned instead to the Unitarians, drawn by two ebullient personalities, first Myron Holley and later the learned Reverend F. W. Holland. There was a definite quality of heterodoxy about the Unitarian Church in that day and its followers comprised only a small minority

in Rochester, but the strength of character they developed in this situation was to prove of great assistance in all later endeavors.²

Yet these Quaker-Unitarians had to find new allies if they were to exert much influence in the community, and fortunately the reform elements springing from the great Finney revival of 1829/30 contributed in an important way to the movement. That religious revival had been possibly the most dramatic and significant episode in Rochester's early history, strengthening the forces of order and restraint perhaps even more than those of the spirit. Among the converts had been young Henry B. Stanton, who with others had followed the Finney movement westward to Lane Seminary and Oberlin College, becoming as zealous for temperance and abolition as any reformer of the day. Stanton and the other "perfectionists" soon split with William Lloyd Garrison and the eastern abolitionists on a significant issue: the use of the ballot as a means of reform.³ Thus when Henry, who championed political action, won the heart and hand of Elizabeth Cady, daughter of Judge Cady of Johnstown, New York, it was not surprising that she should become the first to insist that the ballot was also essential to women, although Henry could not at first see it.

Meanwhile, Henry and Elizabeth Cady Stanton had journeyed to London on their honeymoon in 1840, drawn there by the World Anti-slavery Convention of that year. They found themselves in the midst of the unfortunate dispute over the participation of women in the convention and joined Mrs. Lucretia Mott and other Hicksite Quakers in the unsuccessful bid for full delegate privileges for women. After their return, Henry at least visited Rochester briefly, but made his home for several years in Boston and Albany. As the young couple enjoyed rich associations with the leading reformers in these cities, Mrs. Stanton could hardly content herself with domestic chores when in 1847 they located in quiet Seneca Falls. She eagerly seized the first opportunity to break the monotonous routine—an opportunity presented by the visit, in the summer of 1848, of Lucretia Mott and her husband, James Mott, at a Hicksite Quaker gathering in nearby Waterloo. Mrs. Stanton hastened over to discuss Mrs. Mott's earlier resolve to bring the question of woman's rights before the public. There, encouraged by a few kindred spirits, these

ladies issued a call for a convention to meet at the Wesleyan chapel in Seneca Falls on July 19 and 20, 1848.⁴

An announcement was inserted in area papers and invitations were dispatched to several Rochester friends of the Stantons and of Lucretia Mott, for both were well known here. Frederick Douglass, the Negro editor whose *North Star* had been established at Rochester the year before, Mrs. Amy Post, Mrs. Sarah and Mrs. Mary Hallowell, Mrs. Catherine Fish Stebbins and two or three others from Rochester joined the earnest folk who gathered at Seneca Falls "to discuss the social, civil, and religious condition and rights of women." The famous Declaration of Sentiments, drafted by Mrs. Stanton and her friends and based on the model of the Declaration of Independence, was enthusiastically adopted; a series of resolutions was debated and approved. The most startling issue was that injected by Mrs. Stanton as the ninth resolution. Against the advice of her husband and several friends consulted beforehand, she boldly stressed the value of the ballot for women: "Resolved, That it is the duty of the women of this country to secure to themselves their sacred right to the elective franchise."⁵

Of those consulted beforehand, only Frederick Douglass, who was battling for the same right himself, approved the assertion of a claim to the ballot at this time, and he joined Mrs. Stanton in urging it before a divided convention. All the other resolutions and the Declaration of Sentiments were adopted unanimously, but the suffrage resolution won only a small majority. It was this resolution which especially attracted ridicule from press and pulpit as news of the convention spread throughout the land. Indeed, among the many press notices in papers as far afield as Worcester and Philadelphia, the first word of encouragement was that issued by Frederick Douglass in the *North Star*, July 28, 1848.⁶

The need for a persistent campaign for woman's rights was repeatedly stressed at Seneca Falls. The Declaration itself closed with a plea for similar conventions in "every part of the country." Rochester was the first community to respond—in fact the only community to take action for almost two years. In a sense the convention planned for Rochester on August 2 and 3 was an adjourned session of the first convention. Most of the leaders at Seneca Falls

promised to attend, and the Rochester ladies hastened home to make preparations.

If the leaders at Seneca Falls expected a simple duplication in Rochester of their first convention they were soon disillusioned. A preliminary meeting at the Mechanics Protection Hall chose Mrs. Amy Post as temporary chairman and appointed a nominating committee which prepared a slate of women officers. At Seneca Falls the ladies had held back, choosing James Mott as their presiding officer; now both Mrs. Stanton and Mrs. Mott feared to intrust control of the meetings to a woman. The Rochester ladies were confident nevertheless, and when the convention opened in the Unitarian Church on August 2, their slate of officers was duly elected. Mrs. Abigail (Norton) Bush was chosen president and proceeded to conduct the meetings in such calm and assured fashion that another old prejudice was shattered. However, no one of the three secretaries elected at the start (Catherine Stebbins, Elizabeth McClintock and Sarah Hallowell) could make herself heard throughout the hall. After several embarrassing calls of "louder" from the floor, a former school teacher, Mrs. Sarah Anthony Burtis, assumed the post of acting secretary and the session continued without further mishap.⁷

Mrs. Stanton, representing the Seneca Falls convention, read the Declaration of Sentiments and concluded with a plea for a full discussion, urging those who disagreed to speak out then and there rather than from a pulpit or an editor's chair as soon as the convention adjourned, as had happened after Seneca Falls.

A lively discussion ensued. One visitor who spoke too flatteringly of women was criticized by Mrs. Mott for an overstatement of the case. Another young man who hoped women would not presume to interpret the Scriptures was chided by the same lady for revealing his Yale training; the Bible, she remarked, placed no such restraint on women. Frederick Douglass spoke feelingly for the emancipation of women, and William C. Bloss, also of Rochester, voiced similar opinions but indulged in a few humorous sallies at women as voters. Several male speakers felt that woman's place was in the home. The great majority, however, were ready to endorse the Declaration of Sentiments and called for the preparation of additional resolutions.⁸

The second deviation from the Seneca Falls pattern appeared in the list of resolutions. The earlier convention, assembled in a rural

setting, had conducted its deliberations in a middle-class milieu, complaining of woman's unequal right to own and inherit property, to secure a divorce and guard her children, or to find opportunities in church and professional work. But in Rochester many women were already members of the working class, and the local committee delegated Mrs. Roberts to investigate and report on the wages of women in the community.

Mrs. Roberts was apparently Mrs. Ruth Roberts, widow of the E. J. Roberts who had formerly edited *The Rochester Craftsman*, a paper which had displayed an interest in the workingmen's movement led in New York by Frances Wright and Robert Dale Owen. At any rate, Mrs. Roberts introduced some startling statistics on the wages of working girls. Good seamstresses, she reported, received from 31 to 39 cents a day, while board and lodging cost \$1.25 to \$1.50 a week, and thus kept them at a subsistence level. There was some fear on the part of the leaders of the convention, especially Mrs. Mott, that this issue would deflect attention from the central question.⁹ Already some of the papers had dubbed the movement with the name of Fanny Wright, then a very unpopular character. Yet equal pay for equal work was earnestly recommended, and as a further practical suggestion it was resolved that "Those who believe the laboring classes are oppressed, ought to do all in their power to raise their wages, beginning with their own household servants."¹⁰

Of the twelve resolutions approved, several were described by Mrs. Mott as much too tame. Yet the right to vote was now more forthrightly advocated than at Seneca Falls, appearing as Number One in the Rochester list. Included also was a special resolution extending congratulations to Miss Elizabeth Blackwell, who had recently completed a course at the Geneva Medical College, the first woman so trained in America. The session closed with determination to press the issue through petitions to the legislature "every year until our prayer be granted."¹¹

The repercussions of this convention were even wider than those evoked by the Seneca Falls gathering. Editors, for the most part, were greatly amused by the impending "reign of petticoats." Mrs. Stanton took up her pen to answer some of the charges contributed by George G. Cooper, editor of the *National Reformer* (Rochester),

September 14, 1848. Few editors were so candid in recognizing the essential justice of the cause as was Horace Greeley in an editorial on "The Female Reformers" in his *New York Tribune*.¹²

The only immediate result in Rochester was the formation of a Woman's Protection Union, of which Mrs. Roberts was chosen president, Mrs. Sarah C. Owen, secretary, and Mrs. Amy Post, treasurer. The object was to campaign for the voluntary increase of the wages paid working girls. Members paid weekly dues of one cent (two cents in the case of men, until women's wages should be raised to an equality with those of their brothers) and a series of bi-monthly meetings was scheduled at the Mechanics Protection Hall. Published notices of the union soon ceased, though it gained mention again in 1853 when wage increases at three firms were reported by Mrs. Roberts.¹³

Possibly the sudden excitement over the spirit rappings that broke out in Hydesville and Rochester in the fall of 1848 helped to divert attention from the woman's rights cause. Several of those most active in the Rochester convention were strongly drawn to this new movement. The Posts, Isaac as well as his wife Amy, became absorbed by the spirit phenomena; Amy's sister, Mrs. Sarah Hallowell (Willis), Mrs. Catherine Fish Stebbins and her sister, Sarah Fish, the De Garmos, close neighbors of the Anthonys, and Mrs. Sarah Anthony Burtis formed an inner circle of devoted followers of the Fox girls even before the public demonstrations at Corinthian Hall officially launched the movement a year later.¹⁴

Though their energies were for a time deflected, none of these folk lost interest in the woman's cause. A few of their fellow workers did, however, leave Rochester, notably Mrs. Bush, the accomplished chairman, who accompanied her husband to California in 1849. Fortunately a new and most valuable recruit was won to the cause with the return that year of Miss Susan B. Anthony to her father's farm on the outskirts of Rochester. She had been somewhat unsympathetic when news of the "Hen Conventions" had reached her as a teacher at the academy in Canajoharie, for a speech she gave at a Daughters of Temperance meeting convinced her that all a woman needed was the necessary spunk and she could match any man. Nevertheless the reports of her father, mother, and her younger sister Mary, all of whom had attended the suffrage convention, were

eagerly discussed on her return to Rochester. Susan was soon a close friend of the principal figures in the movement—her cousin and former teacher, Sarah Anthony Burtis, the Posts, the De Garmos, Frederick Douglass, and the new Unitarian minister, the brilliant William H. Channing. She became active in local temperance and anti-slavery work, but showed little interest in spiritualism.¹⁵

It was Susan B. Anthony who in 1851 took the lead in promoting a series of Temperance Suppers in Rochester, featuring songs, toasts, and short speeches. The proceeds, at one dollar a couple, supported the work of the Daughters of Temperance, of which Miss Anthony was now president.¹⁶ She probably had nothing to do with the arrangements for a series of three lectures by a woman lawyer, Mrs. Emma Coe, at Corinthian Hall in August, at which the educational, matrimonial and political affairs of women were discussed;¹⁷ but Miss Anthony's increased interest in the subject of woman's rights was demonstrated that year by the eagerness with which she seized an opportunity to visit Mrs. Amelia Bloomer and to meet Mrs. Stanton, both at Seneca Falls. When the Sons of Temperance arranged a state convention at Albany in the fall, Miss Anthony was sent as a Rochester delegate. There for the first time she encountered the rebuffs experienced by some of her sister reformers at earlier conventions, and leadership was immediately assumed in the calling of a Women's State Temperance Convention to be held at Rochester in April, 1852.¹⁸

Corinthian Hall, the best in the city, was engaged, and Miss Anthony enlisted the support of local and state friends in staging a convention which attracted crowds of nearly five hundred to several of the six sessions and resulted in the establishment of the first Woman's State Temperance Society. Mrs. Stanton, as president, startled many of her hearers by defending the right of married women to protect themselves and their children from drunken husbands through divorce. Mrs. Bloomer, whose monthly publication, *The Lily*, had recently made its appearance, unwittingly gave her name to a costume that afforded much humor to scornful observers. Miss Antoinette Brown, born in nearby Henrietta and a student at Oberlin at the time of the first conventions, had recently returned to fill a pulpit in South Bristol; her appearance before the convention as one of the first women preachers in America scandal-

ized many pious folk. Miss Anthony, in accepting the post of state agent for the society, found herself beset on all sides by controversy over the proper place and necessary proprieties of women in reform movements.¹⁹

The next twelve months saw a rapid splintering of the reform forces. Sarah Adamson, who graduated from the short-lived Rochester Medical College in 1851, the second woman in America to receive a medical degree, returned from internship in Philadelphia to marry Dr. Lester S. Dolley and to take up medical practice in Rochester, but she steadfastly declined at the time to join the agitation for woman's rights.²⁰ When local temperance forces sent Miss Anthony and several other active workers as delegates to a state temperance gathering at Syracuse, the women were again denied recognition, prompting the more adamant ladies to call a woman's rights convention in that town as protest. Several attended from Rochester and the local press displayed much interest, especially in the Bloomer costume which made its first platform appearance on this occasion. Only the Democratic *Union* saw merit in the new style and mildly defended the right of women to speak for themselves.²¹

Though denied full recognition by their temperance brethren, the women of New York State labored diligently under Miss Anthony's direction and collected 28,000 signatures on temperance petitions to the legislature. However, the society's thriving development enrolled many conservative ladies who refused at the end of the year to reelect Mrs. Stanton president. Miss Anthony loyally stood by her friend and resigned as state agent for the temperance forces. As a further symbol of her primary allegiance, Miss Anthony donned the Bloomer costume for a brief period shortly after the first Bloomer girl appeared on the Rochester streets in November, 1852.²² Henceforth her major efforts would be devoted to the woman's rights cause.

Long before the second woman's rights convention was held at Rochester early in December, 1853, the plan for a series of such conventions had materialized. The principal figures—Mrs. Stanton, Mrs. Mott, Miss Anthony and several others—visited one convention after another. The press belabored them scornfully as Hen Conventions, magnifying the defects, as Isaac Post observed after returning from one such meeting in Cleveland to read with astonish-

ment the colored reports in the Rochester press.²³ The original novelty was gone and most of the conventions in the mid-fifties were devoted to a reaffirmation of woman's rights by an increasing list of national speakers. Among the strong voices raised in these years was that of William Henry Channing, Unitarian minister at Rochester, while Samuel J. May, his fellow Unitarian located at Syracuse, frequently visited Rochester and other cities in support of woman's rights.²⁴ A third suffrage convention was held at Rochester in January, 1855, but the deepening crisis over the slave question deflected attention for the rest of the decade. Idealistic in temperament, the advocates of woman's rights were likewise abolitionists and eager to forward that cause. Miss Anthony, who now served as agent for an anti-slavery society, managed to find time to hold a woman's rights convention in some New York State city every year except 1857 when, as she remarked, too many of her colleagues were "having babies."²⁵

The Lean Years

The Civil War brought so many radical changes in American society that all the older reform movements were either abandoned or forced to make a fresh start. Several new approaches were tried in Rochester as elsewhere and a number of dramatic events occurred. Most exciting was the unsuccessful attempt by a number of Rochester ladies to vote in 1872, an episode which culminated in the widely publicized trial of Susan B. Anthony. But the results during the sixties and seventies were invariably discouraging, and only the unflagging zeal of a few indomitable ladies kept the issue alive.

A recently organized National Dress Reform Association held a convention at Rochester in 1863. Over five hundred were attracted to Corinthian Hall to see the one hundred lady delegates who came attired in the "American costume," consisting of a tunic, dress and trousers—a further evolution of the Bloomer costume. None of the Rochester champions of woman's rights figured in the press reports of this convention, which was dominated by Dr. James C. Jackson of Dansville. Considerations of style and health absorbed the attention on this occasion and at a second convention held under the same auspices at Rochester in 1865.²⁶ The press and some rowdy elements in the audience derived considerable amusement from

these sessions, but their real defeat came from the hoop skirt which was currently sweeping the country. Three manufacturers of steel frames for hoop skirts located in Rochester, and ingenious inventors designed a "Duplex Elliptic" spring frame that could be folded to enable a lady to pass through a narrow door.²⁷

The woman's rights advocates, who put aside their own cause and labored diligently throughout the war for abolition and Negro suffrage, were grievously offended when the word "male" was used in the Fourteenth Amendment. Susan B. Anthony launched a furious campaign in 1866 to build up sentiment for its revision or a new amendment. Conventions were scheduled all over the country and Miss Anthony, now resident in New York City, attended most of them. She reached Rochester on December 11 to preside over such a gathering in Corinthian Hall. Mrs. Stanton, whose hair was beginning to turn grey, was on hand with several of the local pioneers, such as Mrs. Post, Mrs. Mary Hallowell and Mrs. Burtis. When Dr. Jackson of Dansville attempted to discuss his health and dress reforms, an unsympathetic audience of some four hundred shouted him down, though Mrs. Stanton finally persuaded the delegates to hear him and thus save their reputation for free discussion. Their real concern now was for the right to vote; all other issues appeared extraneous.²⁸

After the miserable failure of the 1866 campaign, Miss Anthony and Mrs. Stanton determined to vary their approach. George Francis Train accompanied them the next year with a fresh store of humorous anecdotes which helped to maintain a series of lively meetings. One editor declared after the close of the Rochester convention that it had provided "the richest entertainment Rochester has had for years."²⁹ Unfortunately it was hard enough to keep the discussion on a serious level and some former friends, including Lucy Stone, repudiated the Train lectures. A Rochester editor rejoiced to see that the movement was splitting up and hoped the ladies would turn their attention to the care of their fallen sisters or other matters.³⁰

Miss Anthony tried another tack in 1868 when she secured a nomination as delegate at large to the Democratic National Convention. Since the Republicans remained indifferent, she was determined to present a resolution before the Democrats, but un-

fortunately the convention meeting in New York City hooted her down when she tried to gain the floor.³¹

All was quiet in Rochester that year and for several years thereafter. Miss Anthony was busy in New York editing *The Revolution*, or in Kansas where her brother Daniel R. Anthony was mayor of Leavenworth. Yet a small item clipped from *The Revolution* by a local editor indicated that the Flower City (as it was now known) had not been forgotten. The item noted that a Mrs. A. St. John of Rochester had made 3,500 vests with her sewing machine during the previous ten years and was therefore "entitled to her vest-ed rights!"

Rochester saw much of Miss Anthony during 1872 and 1873. Republicans, fearful at first of the joint strength of Democrats and Greeley Republicans, engaged several women reformers to campaign for Grant. Miss Anthony staged her first rally in Rochester with her personal friend, Mayor Carter Wilder, presiding. She was thus able to present arguments for woman's suffrage before larger crowds than ever before, but as the weakness of Greeley's candidacy became apparent, Miss Anthony found her Republican colleagues much less cordial.³³

Returning to Rochester for rest and recuperation, Miss Anthony resided for a time at the home of her sister Mary on Madison Street. It was there on November 1, 1872, that a notice in the *Democrat* urging all citizens to register galvanized her into action. Accompanied by two of her sisters, Susan B. Anthony marched over to the polling place at the corner of West Avenue (now West Main Street) and Prospect Street. The three young election inspectors were unable to answer her arguments, based on the Fourteenth Amendment, and soon the Anthony sisters and a number of other ladies were registered. Fourteen registered in that ward and a total of fifty throughout the city before the polls were closed.³⁴

While the election officials rallied their forces and prepared to stop the women from voting, the ladies took counsel with Henry R. Selden, former judge of the New York Court of Appeals and former Lieutenant-Governor. After some deliberation Selden advised that he believed the right to vote was given to women under the Fourteenth Amendment. Thus encouraged, Miss Anthony and thirteen other ladies in the Eighth Ward cast their votes on election day.

Among this little band were at least three who had attended the first woman's rights convention; one, the aged Quakeress, Rhoda De Garmo, would never see another election day.³⁵ None of the other wards accepted any women as voters, and Miss Anthony, who had assured the inspectors in her ward that all their fines would be paid, soon had a sizeable bill on her hands.³⁶

Miss Anthony was eager to fight out a test case and many ladies rallied to her assistance. When arrested she refused to give bail, though her counsel supplied the deficiency in order to keep her out of jail. The case was finally tried in Canandaigua and a fine of \$100 was imposed by the judge who, fearful of an acquittal, high-handedly took the case away from the jury entirely, thus adding a new grievance to the list of those afflicting the women of America.³⁷

The intense interest aroused locally by this trial spurred the formation of a Women Taxpayers' Association early in 1873. They gained permission to meet in the mayor's office, which signified the increased respect women had won. Mrs. Lovisa C. Smith, a new convert to the cause, was chosen president, and the experience she had received as secretary of the Ladies' Hospital Relief Association during the war proved excellent training. Another new worker won to the cause was Dr. Sarah Adamson Dolley.³⁸ A diligent search of the assessment books disclosed the fact that women taxpayers held \$1,500,000 in property or approximately a tenth of the city's total valuation. Reinforced with this statistical evidence of their importance, several of these ladies again attempted to register in the fall of 1873. Miss Mary Anthony, Mrs. Post, and Mrs. Sarah Owen each made claims to the right to vote, but now no registration clerk would admit a woman.³⁹

The Women Taxpayers' Association sounded like a practical approach. Taxpayers' associations were then highly respected bodies of businessmen whose chief concern was for lower taxes. The women merely followed a currently popular organization; nevertheless, little of lasting value was achieved and the association disappeared after a few months.⁴⁰

Temperance again became the chief issue in the mid-seventies, and the antics of some of its advocates, particularly those engaged in the so-called "Woman's War" of 1874, put most suffragists to shame. Miss Anthony had never lost interest in temperance and took

part in several tent meetings at Rochester in these years; moreover, some of the ladies most active in that cause, such as Mrs. Lysander Farrar, were later to be drawn into the suffrage movement. But the temperance gains of the mid-seventies could not be maintained in face of the surging tide of immigrants that now transformed Rochester and many other cities into cosmopolitan communities far removed from the old Yankee pattern.⁴¹

In July, 1878, the National Woman Suffrage Association came to Rochester to hold its annual meeting at the Unitarian Church. It was the thirtieth anniversary of the first woman's rights convention and several of the original pioneers were present. Frederick Douglass, who had long since left Rochester for Washington, came back for the occasion; Mrs. Mott and Mrs. Stanton were on hand again. At least a half-dozen local delegates, including Mrs. Amy Post, now 77 years of age, could recall the conventions three decades before at Seneca Falls and Rochester. Several mellow speeches were delivered and the press was somewhat more respectful, yet the goal seemed if anything much farther off than it had in the optimistic days of 1848.⁴²

Three Constructive Decades

The achievements of the first thirty years may have been few and insignificant, yet great changes were taking place in American society, and the triumph of woman's rights was much nearer than many supposed—nearer also than full realization of the reforms that had brought the movement into being: temperance and Negro rights. Women had already assumed responsible positions in many walks of life, in religious and educational fields, in charitable and health work, as well as in social and domestic life. In Rochester, now a city of 90,000, three times its earlier size, women were the mainstay in most of these fields and provided a fourth of all the workers in industry and trade.⁴³

The special interest taken by women in educational matters became the crucial issue of the eighties. A state law of 1880 granted the right to vote at "school meetings," and, while many believed the law inapplicable to city elections, a meeting was called at Rochester on February 24 to debate the question. Thirteen women had voted at Syracuse a few days before, reported Mrs. Lysander Farrar who was chosen to preside. Miss Mary Anthony, Mrs. Roberts and Mrs. L. C.

Smith were present and urged action, but the majority favored a mild resolution asking an amendment of the law. Two other meetings were held and Mrs. L. C. Smith was proposed as a worthy candidate for the board of education but nothing came of that proposal and none of the ladies succeeded in casting a vote. The next year Miss Mary Anthony led a group of eight women to the polls, thus again registering their demands if not their ballots.⁴⁴

Meanwhile, several women active in the professions—Dr. Sarah A. Dolley, Dr. Anna Searing, Mrs. Jane Marsh Parker and a few others—organized the first woman's club of Rochester, the Ignorance Club, in January, 1881. Though primarily literary in purpose, it afforded Rochester an example of feminine independence and self-reliance in social organization outside the fields of religion and charity. Women's clubs were already well established in several other cities, and by the end of the decade Rochester had a half-dozen such clubs. Although few of them espoused the suffrage cause, the influence of their members on community affairs was greatly enhanced.⁴⁵

The Rochester press began at this time to take a more respectful attitude toward the advocates of woman suffrage. Susan B. Anthony spent most of the year 1883 in Europe—her first pleasure trip, as she described it—visiting many of the leading women of England and on the continent and taking part in several conventions. Her views were eagerly sought on her return that December, and for the first time many in Rochester saw the movement as world-wide in scope and correspondingly dignified in character.⁴⁶

It was her sister Mary who took the initiative in forming the most forthright woman's club of this period. The leading spirit among those who gathered at the Anthony home in December, 1885, was Mrs. Ellen Sully Fray, who was promptly chosen president. Mrs. Fray had recently returned to Rochester from Toledo where she had been active in a woman's rights organization; as a girl she had attended the first convention in Rochester almost forty years before, and now, with such older veterans as Mrs. Post, Mrs. Mary Hallowell, Mrs. Sarah (Hallowell) Willis, Miss Mary Anthony and Mrs. L. C. Smith, she formed a small but effective organization.⁴⁷

Several new women of talent were attracted to the early meetings of the Women's Political Club, later renamed the Political Equality Club. The most important recruit was Mrs. Jean Brooks Greenleaf

(wife of the Rochester congressman, 1882-1884, 1890-1892) who became the club's second president in May, 1888.

The forty or so ladies who attended the monthly meetings of the Women's Political Club soon had several achievements to their credit. The mayor was persuaded to appoint Rochester's first police matron late in 1886. The need for women on the various institutional boards was stressed, and memorials to that effect were sent to the governor and other officials concerned. The agitation for a woman on the school board was revived in 1888, resulting in a house-to-house canvass when the Republicans of the Ninth Ward tentatively nominated Mrs. Elizabeth Green for that office. Nothing came of this move, but the demand for women physicians on the city's health staff and for women on state institutional boards produced action, though none of the members of the club was given recognition in these appointments.⁴⁸

A special meeting was generally called whenever Susan B. Anthony returned to Rochester. She was back in May, 1889, and addressed a gathering at the Unitarian Church, chiding her hearers for the limited gains of women in Rochester. Fifteen states had already granted women the vote in municipal or school elections while in Wyoming the full state franchise had been won. Rochester, cradle of the movement, was far behind, yet a coterie of earnest ladies was now at work, and the next year, after Susan B. Anthony's seventieth birthday had been widely celebrated elsewhere, the Women's Political Club took the lead in gathering all the women's clubs of Rochester at a grand reception for her on December 16, 1890. Over 600 guests flocked to the rooms of the Chamber of Commerce over the Rochester Savings Bank to honor Rochester's most distinguished citizen.⁴⁹

The Political Equality Club (as the Women's Political Club was now renamed) provided vigorous leadership throughout the nineties. Similar clubs were organized in the surrounding towns and Mrs. L. C. Smith was elected president of the county organization. Many controversial public issues were debated, the opening of a woman's gymnasium was commended, woman's day ceremonies were conducted at the annual agricultural society's fairs, and a campaign to open the University of Rochester to women was launched. A herculean task was undertaken in 1893—a canvass of the city for

suffrage petitions to the state constitutional convention then about to meet at Albany. The cooperation of other women's clubs was secured, but the major part of the work was done under the direction of Miss Mary Anthony, third president of the Political Equality Club, and it was largely due to her efforts that the number of petitioners (including both men and women) exceeded the number of voters by almost twenty five per cent, a record not matched elsewhere in the state.⁵⁰

Mrs. Jean Brooks Greenleaf had become president of the New York State Woman's Suffrage Association in 1891 and directed the state-wide campaign from Rochester. One of her star witnesses at the hearing on this issue before the constitutional convention in Albany was a new recruit to the cause, Mrs. Mary T. Gannett, wife of the new Unitarian minister in Rochester. The suffrage clause failed of adoption, but so much earnest feeling was developed in its behalf, especially in Rochester (described again as the "hotbed of woman suffrage") that victory now seemed only a matter of time.⁵¹

The trend of opinion was evident in the vitality of several new women's organizations in Rochester. The Ethical Club, founded by Mrs. Gannett in 1889, soon attracted crowds of several hundred ladies to frequent meetings at which the social and ethical questions of the day were discussed. Although that club was not an action group, it quickly engendered a forthright spirit and when the older Ignorance Club called a meeting to form an alliance of women's clubs, the more socially conscious leaders of the Ethical and Political Equality clubs directed developments so that all the women's clubs cooperated in establishing a Woman's Educational and Industrial Union modeled after similar unions in Boston, Buffalo and elsewhere, and dedicated to practical efforts to make the city more congenial to women. The election of Mrs. Helen Barrett Montgomery as president brought another able woman to the fore.⁵²

Indeed, a new generation of leaders was emerging. Susan B. Anthony had returned to make her home with Mary on Madison Street in 1891, and Mary Anthony served as president of the Political Equality Club from 1892 until 1903, years of great activity, but these two aging ladies relied increasingly on the fresh inspiration coming from representatives of the new generation: Mrs. Gannett, Mrs.

Montgomery, Mrs. Henry F. Danforth, Mrs. Max Landsberg, Miss Mabel Clark, Mrs. Emma Sweet, to mention only a few.⁵³

More important still was the fact that these new leaders were able to enlist a numerous band of active workers from all walks of life. Mrs. Don Alonzo Watson gave her mansion as a headquarters for the Educational and Industrial Union in 1894, and most of the other women's clubs met there as well. A "Noon Rest" for working girls was opened by the Union, and Mrs. Oscar Craig, one of its committee chairmen, launched a legal aid program; Mrs. Joseph Alling started a kindergarten playground in a slum area; Mrs. Fannie Bigelow led in the establishment of an "Opportunity Shop." These activities, all initiated by the Woman's Educational and Industrial Union, were among the more practical civic accomplishments of women around the turn of the century, but they were by no means the only ones.⁵⁴

The two big victories of the period were the opening of the University of Rochester to women and the election of a woman to the school board. These major goals, unsuccessfully sought in the past, were won at this time by a new organization, the Council of Women. A second grand reception in honor of Miss Anthony had been staged in Powers Hall by the women's clubs of Rochester on February 15, 1897, her 77th birthday.⁵⁵ It was highly gratifying to see representatives of 21 women's organizations gathering in her honor, but Miss Anthony was more concerned to get them to work together for woman's rights. It was at her invitation in December, 1898, that delegates to many of these clubs assembled in the Music Hall to hear about the practical values of local councils in other cities.⁵⁶

The campaign for a woman on the school board was taken up at the local Council of Women's first regular meeting in February, 1899. It was an old issue, but none of the earlier campaigns had proved successful. Mrs. Montgomery urged a moderate request to the legislature for a provision that at least one of the five members of the new board *might* be a woman, and this resolution finally prevailed, both in the women's council and in the legislature. Mrs. Montgomery was nominated by both parties and duly elected that November, the first real triumph won by the women of Rochester in a half-century of campaigning.⁵⁷

The Council of Women likewise took up the drive for funds to secure the admission of women at the University of Rochester. When the issue had first been raised over a decade before by the Political Equality Club, the university had asked that an endowment of \$200,000 be raised. This had later been cut in half and was now finally reduced to \$50,000. Various clubs had already approved the drive and all were now called upon for assistance. Subscriptions of \$33,000 were secured in the first year, but then the campaign lagged; \$8000 had still to be subscribed when Miss Anthony returned in September, 1900. Learning that but two days remained to collect the balance if women were to be admitted that fall, Miss Anthony leaped into a carriage and commenced a determined last-moment canvass which resulted in pledges totaling \$6000. Finally the fund was subscribed in full by a pledge of \$2000 on her own life insurance.⁵⁸ Miss Anthony lost her voice temporarily and was confined to her bed for several weeks as a result of that campaign, but girls were at last admitted to the university.

The Council of Women was made up of delegates from 34 of Rochester's 47 women's organizations in 1899. Unfortunately, a number of controversial issues soon arose and several of the clubs failed to pay their dues the second year. A few societies were, however, interested in the wider representation afforded by the Council. The Educational and Industrial Union pressed for the creation of a consumers' committee, headed by Mrs. Landsberg and Mrs. Gannett, out of which grew a local branch of the national Consumers' League. The W.C.T.U. urged the Council to indorse a proposed curfew law, and the third president, Mrs. W. W. Armstrong, made this the prime objective during her years of leadership. The Political Equality Club strove unsuccessfully to commit the Council to the suffrage campaign. The Council heard and debated many causes but it could not encompass all, and soon the more vigorous ladies dropped out.⁵⁹

The early 1900's brought a low ebb in woman's suffrage agitation at Rochester. Most of the earlier leaders had passed on and the deaths of Susan B. Anthony and Mary Anthony in close succession in 1906 and 1907 left a serious void in the local scene. The Ethical Club disbanded at this time and only nine societies maintained active affiliation with the Council of Women in 1903 and 1904. Fortunately, renewed vitality came to the Council with the election of a new

president in 1906, Mrs. William L. Howard, who shortly established her residence in the old Anthony home on Madison Street. A number of civic reforms stimulated interest, such as the campaigns against flies and the smoke nuisance, and for improved sanitary measures and the protection of women and children in court trials. The Council of Women changed its name to the Federation of Women's Clubs in 1908 and entered a new period of activity—one in which the suffrage issue was, however, carefully sidestepped.⁶⁰

Marching to Victory

It was a revived Political Equality Club which provided local leadership in the protracted campaign that finally put woman suffrage across. Mrs. Alice Clement, Mrs. Helen Probst Abbott, Mrs. Emma B. Sweet, supported by a growing band of followers, staged innumerable meetings, opened successive headquarters from which literature and petitions could be circulated, and injected the issue on every possible occasion, including the entry of a woman's float in the Genesee River pageant of 1913. Similar groups of women in other communities, notably that of Mrs. Carrie Chapman Catt in New York, were pressing the campaign with renewed zeal, and, shortly after Mrs. Catt transformed the Inter-Urban Women's Council of New York City into the Woman Suffrage Party, the Rochester Political Equality Club was likewise reorganized as the Monroe County Woman Suffrage Party. Mrs. Helen Probst Abbott was chosen president and Mrs. Clement assumed leadership throughout the 7th Judicial District, setting up separate organizations in each of its eight counties.⁶¹

The drive for state-wide suffrage gained momentum in 1915. A party of suffragists clad in white with blazing yellow sashes and carrying numerous suffrage banners gained permission to enter the Labor Day parade that year. As the first suffrage parade in Rochester—the first appearance of a woman's marching unit in any local parade—the detachment of suffragists, headed by Mrs. Clement, attracted generous applause as they marched down Main and State Streets.⁶² Their open-air meetings that summer and fall likewise attracted crowds, frequently at Main and Water Streets or Main and Front Streets. Speakers from seven states cooperated in a series of programs arranged for a special suffrage week in September, closing

with a continuous speaking marathon on the 27th with decorated automobiles carrying the speakers and other visitors to the halls and grandstands scattered about the city, now a community of 250,000 residents. The press provided space on editorial pages for communications under the head "Shall Women Vote?" Representatives of the Woman Suffrage Party first appeared as watchers at the registration places on October 8, and three days later a great mass meeting was held at Convention Hall.⁶³

The leaders were full of enthusiasm and confidence on election day, but the results were not wholly satisfactory. The state amendment was defeated locally by a city vote of 18,297 to 13,340 and lost in the state by a similar margin.⁶⁴

Undaunted by this reversal, the local suffragist forces, like those in New York City and elsewhere, reformed their ranks and prepared for a new test in 1917. By that date America had entered the war and the splendid work performed by women, individually and collectively, had convinced many voters of the importance of women citizens. Mrs. Clement was called to New York City to help direct the state campaign, but Mrs. Danforth, Mrs. Abbott and Mrs. Sweet carried on in Rochester with the aid of several vigorous younger women, such as Miss Helen Rochester Rogers. Again innumerable meetings were held, literature was distributed and petitions circulated, and again the local forces suffered defeat at the polls (the margin of defeat was, however, cut in half). This time the amendment carried in the state, and Rochester women finally enjoyed the vote in 1918.⁶⁵

The Federal Amendment (originally submitted in 1878 and re-introduced through the efforts of Miss Anthony and her associates at every subsequent session of Congress) was the next order of business. To press this cause and to train women in the problems of citizenship, Mrs. Catt reorganized her New York supporters into the League of Women Voters in March, 1919. Many local suffrage organizations followed suit, and Mrs. Sweet with a few others endeavored to bring the women of Rochester into line. However, the success of the Men's City Club of Rochester had already prompted the formation of a Women's City Club that February, and many feared a duplication of effort. National suffrage was but one of the new club's concerns, yet effective work was done in support of the

drive for state ratification of the 19th Amendment, which was accomplished at a special session in June, 1920.⁸⁸

The Women's City Club enjoyed a significant and useful career for almost a decade, tackling many civic issues with great vigor under the notable leadership of Mrs. Helen Probst Abbott and other women of ability. Nevertheless the continued desire of state officials of the League of Women Voters prompted several efforts to found a local branch of that organization in Rochester. The first attempts in the mid-twenties did not prove too successful, but by the end of the decade, after the leadership of Mrs. Stafford Warren and Mrs. Helen Jones had been enlisted, a vigorous League was ready to take up some of the functions which the Women's City Club, now in financial difficulties, was compelled to relinquish.

Space does not permit a detailed account here of the many useful services of women citizens or even the listing of the numerous leaders who have emerged from their ranks. Suffice it to say that, while no political millenium has resulted from the grant of suffrage to women, the new supply of able and conscientious leadership has greatly enriched the civic life of Rochester.

Finally, it is interesting to record that in December, 1945, the Susan B. Anthony Memorial, Incorporated, was created through the efforts of the Federation of Women's Clubs, under the leadership of Mrs. George Howard. With the aid of numerous gifts from friends in Rochester and throughout the land, the Anthony home on Madison Street has been purchased and restored and is being maintained as a center in which articles and materials associated with Miss Anthony are being preserved in order to help perpetuate the spirit and traditions of Susan B. Anthony, Rochester's sole representative in the Hall of Fame.

NOTES

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25. *Dem.*, Jan. 15, 17, 1855; *Union*, Jan. 16, 1855; *U.&A.*, July 12, 1859; *Susan B. Anthony* I:159.
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27. *Dem.*, May 2, 1864.
28. *Dem.*, Dec. 5, 12, 13, 1866; *U.&A.*, Dec. 12, 13, 1866; *Susan B. Anthony* I:264; Stanton, *Reminiscences*, p. 243.
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30. *U.&A.*, Nov. 14, Dec. 17, 1867.
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32. *Chronicle*, Jan. 3, 1869.
33. *Dem.*, Sept. 20, 21, 1872; *Susan B. Anthony*, pp. 422-423.
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