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### Women, the Church and Equality: The Religious Paradox

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## ABSTRACT OF THESIS

*Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.<sup>1</sup>*

Traditional religion and biblical interpretation helped to cement the passive role of women in the United States for hundreds of years. The emergence of spiritualism and communal societies, however, challenged the traditional role of women, and the very fabric of American society, throughout the 1800s to the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920. Women also used temperance and abolitionism--venues that had oppressed women--to champion women's equality and social justice reform. In particular, leaders in the women's rights movement came from Quaker backgrounds', that religion challenged traditional clergy in respect to what defined a woman's role in society. Throughout the 1800s, women were oppressed by tradition in religion, but they paradoxically turned to the more liberal spiritualist movement to speak publicly on the right to equality, and to hone skills needed to be effective leaders in the United States through increasingly tumultuous times.

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<sup>1</sup> King James Bible, Corinthians 14:34-35

State University of New York  
College at Buffalo  
Department of History

Women, the Church and Equality: The Religious Paradox

A Thesis in  
History

by

Donna M. Nowak

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements  
for the Degree of

Master of Arts  
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## *Chapter 1*

### **Introduction**

The emergence of the spiritualist movement and women's rights in America during the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were in part led by spiritualists and followers of the teachings of non-traditional pioneers such as Emanuel Swedenborg, Ann Lee, John Noyes and Robert Owen--all leaders in spiritual thought and communal philosophy. Traditional religious groups including the Roman Catholic Church, Jewish Orthodox, Latter Day Saints and Protestant Church limited women's basic human rights within the churches to attending services. Women were forbidden to speak in church or offer insight to religious prophecy; therefore, the paradox faced women using what historically was a limiting institution, the church, for quite the opposite goal—to seek equality. Non-traditional denominations that surfaced in the mid 1800s, Christian Science and Theosophy, emerged and were closely tied to spiritualism and women holding leadership roles. Two women in particular who introduced non-traditional denominations to the northeastern states were Mary Eddy, one of the founders of Christian Science and Helena Blavatsky, a revolutionary who laid the path for Theosophist thought.<sup>2</sup>

During the mid-1800s, spiritualism in the United States was characterized by infinite knowledge, equality, mysticism, and faith in natural law. Many spiritualist communities practiced gender equality, freedom of thought and speech. Spiritualism and

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries; The Rebels Who Reshaped American Religion*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 188.

what some called the “new religion” surfaced in the U.S. during a period of global revolutions, socialist ideology, and gender and race specific civil liberties. Founders of spiritualist movements were both men and women who were often dedicated to the same societal reforms.

Spiritualist camps founded or led by women were created to celebrate and advocate the core spiritualist philosophy of peace and harmony and ultimately served as venues to champion social issues such as abolition, woman’s suffrage, temperance, and equality of the sexes.<sup>3</sup> For over one hundred years, the movement away from traditional religion flourished. It embodied a spiritualist path that allowed for a greater degree of equality between the sexes flourished.

Religious and spiritual founders included Mary Eddy, Ann Lee, Anne Hutchinson, Frances Wright and many prominent members in the Quaker communities.<sup>4</sup> While spiritualist communities have to a great extent, laid the groundwork for the women’s rights movements, it is important to note that some historians have argued spiritualism movements and the link to women’s rights was negligible. Priscilla Brewer’s essay in Wendy Chmielewski’s *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*, suggests at times the phenomenon was a fluke, rather than what could be argued as a religious revolution. Brewer argues that Shaker women disagreed on the

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989), 56.

<sup>4</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 67.

issue of equality stating that “most Believers appear to have felt that men and women should exercise unequal authority because of their distinctive characteristics.”<sup>5</sup>

Brewer’s stance provides a stark contrast to the views of historians Robert C. Fuller, Marilyn French, Ann Braude, Michael Lawrence, and Miriam Gurko, all of whom see strong support of women’s success within the Shaker and spiritualist communities and recognize, to some degree, the achievement of gender equality since the inception of non-traditional religious denominations.

Ann Braude’s *Radical Spirits* supports the argument that spiritualist communities, because of their liberalism and progressive nature, served as a catalyst for the women’s rights movement and gender equality;

*Women needed to be freed from limited education and the restricted elements of their intellects, from unjust laws that denied them access to their property and to the custody of their children...spiritualists’ commitment to the emancipation of women formed one plank of a broad reform platform designed to overthrow the conventions imposed by the church*<sup>6</sup>.

New religious and spiritualist movements were both a manifestation of traditional religious denominations, and a catalyst for social enlightenment fueled by unrest and socio-economic challenges in the global community. Braude’s words in particular call attention to the stigma attached to women throughout the Northeast; traditional religious teachings via sermon by clergy members during the early to middle 1800s emphasized

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<sup>5</sup> Priscilla J. Brewer, “Tho’ of the Weaker Sex” in Wendy Chmielewski, Louis Kern, Marlyn Klee, eds, *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 143-145.

<sup>6</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 56.

the role of women as submissive and dutiful to men. Too often, women were stereotypically defined as being mentally and emotionally fragile.

Braude argues that spiritualist communities were in direct opposition to established traditional denominations. While Braude writes extensively about mediumship (speaking to the deceased), she emphasizes the need women and spiritualists had for individuality and to achieve radical change for women in regard to equality.<sup>7</sup> Braude argues that social norms aimed at women were dictated by an immoral society in conjunction with theology and immorality due to the structure of human interaction and relationships during the 1800s.

In his *Radicals in Their Own Time, Four Hundred Years of Struggle for Liberty and Equal Justice in America*, Michael Lawrence argues that both the Church and State conspired to limit the freedom of women.<sup>8</sup> It was the decisive move towards spiritualism that “ignited a flame, and women increasingly began to find their voices.” And many women found the experience of moving away from traditional religion gratifying and empowering. Lawrence ties women’s desire for equality to the migration to spiritualist communities that did not focus on eternal damnation or adhere to the submissive role outlined by clergy and society, therefore raised questions about equality that women had previously dared not to ask. The rise of spiritual communities gave women a glimpse of holding leadership roles and ultimately gaining equality. In a society where traditional

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>8</sup> Michael Lawrence, *Radicals in Their Own Time, Four Hundred Years of Struggle for Liberty and Equal Justice in America*, (London: Cambridge University Press), 2011, 152.



churches scoffed at the notion of women speaking publicly on religious issues, much less, societal woes, the newly emerging communes provided women the means to achieve gender equality.<sup>9</sup>

Lawrence brings the reader's attention to the Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls on July 18, 1848. Prior to the Convention, Elizabeth Stanton and Lucretia Mott met for tea on July 13, 1848. During their meeting, Stanton and Mott vocalized their disdain for the oppression that both felt resulted from the teachings of the church. According to Lawrence's *Radicals in Their Own Time*, Stanton found an attentive audience to vent her concerns; "The torrent of my long-accumulating discontent with such vehemence and indignation that I stirred myself, as well as the rest of the party to do and dare anything-to address the pervasive insults against women in the laws, religion and literature of the world".<sup>10</sup> Lawrence's views on the rationale for women to branch off from traditional religious denominations, which were considered by women activists to be oppressive, to spiritualist communities runs parallel with Robert C. Fuller's *Religious Revolutionaries*, Ann Braude's *Radical Spirits* and Miriam Gurko's *The Ladies of Seneca Falls; The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement*.<sup>11</sup>

Historian Robert C. Fuller's, *Religious Revolutionaries*, provides an account of many men and women changed the religious landscape during the 1800s by challenging traditional religious practices or establishing spiritualist communities. Fuller begins with

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence, *Radicals in Their Own Time*, 143.

<sup>11</sup> Miriam Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls, The Birth of the Woman's Rights Movement*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing 1974).

Anne Hutchinson, a Puritan in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the early 1600s.

Hutchinson challenged the established Puritan role aimed at women by holding meetings and questioning the standards of conduct that early Puritan colonists must conform to.<sup>12</sup>

Fuller argues that the spiritualist movement fulfilled a need for women to secure equal opportunities, but at the same time was also popular during the 1800s because

spiritualism induced excitement about the unknown.<sup>13</sup> In *Religious Revolutionaries*,

Fuller states that the intellectual changing religious climate during the 1800s led to divisions within society in respect to religious unity.<sup>14</sup> Fuller expands beyond the

women's rights movement in the 1800s to the 1960s with Mary Daly, a feminist who challenged traditional male dominated religion and unequal treatment of women.<sup>15</sup>

Fuller, throughout, *Religious Revolutionaries*, writes about women activists such as

Elizabeth Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Susan B. Anthony and Mary Daly, who challenged the oppressive traditional role dictated by religious clergy in an effort to achieve gender

equality. Historian Fiona MacDonald's *Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, shares many of

Fuller's views and states during The Second Great Awakening of 1790-1840, the

movement appealed to women in particular who wanted to have a leadership role in

reform movements, such as abolition and temperance. MacDonald makes a connection

between The Second Great Awakening and the non-traditional Quaker movement, and

further to the pursuit of women's rights throughout the 1800s.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 20.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>16</sup> Fiona MacDonald, *Women in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*, (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1999), 15.

In her *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, Miriam Gurko states that women became involved in reform movements, especially temperance, because they provided an opportunity for women to do something outside of the home. Gurko argues that temperance and abolition were stepping stones for women to achieve gender equality, and by partaking in reform movements, they were able to learn the skills needed to champion effectively the women's rights suffrage movement.<sup>17</sup> Gurko, in ideological tandem with both Fuller and Braude, contends that women were oppressed by the church and clergy, and activists united to achieve the common goal of suffrage and gender equality.<sup>18</sup>

Marilyn French, feminist and author, wrote extensively about the role of women in society until her death in May, 2009. French's *From Eve to Dawn; A History of Women in the World*, asserts that the use of feminism in the 1860s challenged social hierarchies at all levels. The demise of social communities such as the Oneida Community, and Robert Owens' New Harmony, and the increasingly popular transition from traditional denominations to spiritualist communities, allowed women's rights activists to pursue suffrage without being seen as socialist or subversive.<sup>19</sup> Throughout *From Eve to Dawn*, French has similar views to Miriam Gurko and Robert C. Fuller, but writes about the relationships women have with men and the church much more sharply than the other authors studied for this thesis. French states that "sex determines what is a

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<sup>17</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 40.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn, A History of Women in the World*, (New York: The Feminist Press, 2008), 109.

crime”, and the degree of punishment administered is undeniably related to gender.<sup>20</sup>

French’s views on the women’s rights movement closely mirrors the views of Ann Braude’s *Radical Spirits*, supports how Spiritualism was indeed a catalyst for women to secure suffrage rights.

The apostasy during the 1800s is reflected in the works of many historians mentioned in this thesis, but for many different reasons. Whether the departure from traditional religious groups was to seek communal life, explore the unknown or assume a secular or non-secular leadership role, an undeniable convergent is the pursuit for women’s rights. Women and girls were denied basic freedoms within the churches which were, to some degree, paralleled in the home. Spiritualist communities, though viewed as unconventional or radical, provided women and girls the freedom of expression and thought. Spiritualist communities encouraged free-thinking and speech, which allowed women to hone necessary skills to intellectually converse and persuade in regard to societal issues.

Historians who have written on the subject of the women’s rights movement demonstrate a pattern in their works of how suffrage and degrees of equality were achieved and are in agreement that the rise of communes and spiritualist communities served as the precursor to obtaining gender equality. The pursuit of women’s rights is truly remarkable when we, as a society, consider the challenges, disappointments and decades of disappointment that pioneers for gender equality endured for most of their

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<sup>20</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn*, 229.

lives. Historical writers over the next twenty to thirty years will surely embark where the women's suffrage rights left off, as the story of true gender equality in the areas of economic and opportunity remains unfinished and incomplete.

## *Chapter 2*

### **Emergence of Spiritualism in the Northeast**

The religious landscape in the United States began to change dramatically in the 1800s during the Second Great Awakening, a religious resurgence that focused more on non-traditional religion and more on utopian based communities. Spiritualist communities emphasized gender equality and offered women leadership roles not afforded to them within traditional religions, such as Catholic, Protestant and Puritan denominations. Although traditional religions restricted the woman's role within the church and society overall, prior to the Spiritualist movement in the 1800s, traditional religious denominations began to see a modest exodus in favor of more liberal and progressive religious communities as early as the 1600s.

Puritans helped to shape the religious community in the 1600s and 1700s in the Northeast and enveloped the traditional role of women in church sermons, as well as societal norms. Ministers such as Jonathan Edwards and John Winthrop amplified the notion of submission to God, and in essence maintained social control over the entire colonial population.<sup>21</sup> Interpretation of biblical scripture was used by ministers to adhere

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<sup>21</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 33.

to clearly defined social roles during the early colonial years until the women's suffrage movement in the early 1900s.<sup>22</sup> Despite the oppressive views that male clergy members held in respect to women, many women proved to be intrepid in their pursuit of equal rights.

Anne Hutchinson, a Puritan in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, was excommunicated by Puritan magistrates for speaking publicly on the matter of religion after being charged for heresy by Governor John Winthrop in 1637. Hutchinson's banishment from Massachusetts Bay Colony led her to New York in 1642 after being informally charged with holding and demonstrating through speaking, non-conformist views of biblical interpretation in regard to salvation.<sup>23</sup> Puritans had long held the belief that women were inferior to men and did not hold a place in the church other than quiet attendance, so the punishment for her "crime" was not entirely unexpected. Given Puritanical beliefs, it was no surprise that Hutchinson's views on salvation were interpreted by the Puritan Church as being aligned with the Anti-Christ and not fit for Puritan society. While Hutchinson was never formally charged with a crime, her banishment for speaking publically on religious issues was just the beginning for the ostracism of women.<sup>24</sup> Over the next two hundred years, women in the United States were oppressed by male dominated clergy and their arguably conscious misinterpretation of Biblical Scripture.

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<sup>22</sup> Sally McMillen, *Seneca Falls and the Origins of the Women's Rights Movement*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 112-113.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>24</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 30-31.

Quakers, by contrast, held a more liberal view in terms of gender equality. Early in the 19th century, tensions increased within the movement over doctrinal matters. The Quaker movement included instrumental members who shaped the women's rights movement decades later in New York. Elias Hicks from Long Island began preaching the primacy of the "Christ within" and the relative unimportance of the virgin birth, the crucifixion, resurrection and other fundamental Biblical beliefs. "Hicksites", coined for Elias Hicks, focused on social reform, whereas the "Gurneyites", named after John Gurney, were a stark contrast from the Puritans and boasted a more progressive viewpoint on religion and its teachings.<sup>25</sup>

Communes emerged in part from the Shaker community that had established itself in Albany, New York in the late 1700s. Viewed as more radical, the Shakers, led by a woman named Ann Lee, emigrated from Manchester, England to the United States in 1774. Lee and Shaker members built their first community dwelling in 1779. Lee, through vigorous missionary work, grew the Shaker community to impressive numbers in the late 1700s. Lee and the Shaker movement advocated for a strong code of conduct amongst its members in regard to personal behavior and equality of women.<sup>26</sup> The Shaker community thrived through the mid 1800', but due to post Civil War economic problems, Shaker membership dwindled.<sup>27</sup> The Shakers had a decisively different code of conduct in respect to traditional religious denominations.

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<sup>25</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn*, 165.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>27</sup> *Shaker Heritage Society*. <[www.shakerheritage.org](http://www.shakerheritage.org)> (accessed on March 3, 2016).

Celibacy was at the forefront, as well as the dispossession of all worldly holdings and the provision for the community as brother and sister. Shakers shared the belief that Christ had already returned to earth and manifested himself first in Mother Ann Lee. The importance of the Shakers to the advocacy and pursuit of women's rights is clear. The Shakers gathered into order as a practicing religion in 1787, just as the new United States found its form with the drafting of the Constitution. The same year Shaker women were officially given equal rights.<sup>28</sup> In 1817 the Shakers' southern societies freed the slaves belonging to members and began buying black believers out of slavery. The Shakers gained sudden appreciation as successful communitarians and as successful utopians.<sup>29</sup>

Contrary to the seemingly idyllic Shaker communities that were established in the Northeast, John Noyes, leader of the Oneida Community interpreted the vision of Mother Ann Lee quite differently when he established his community in Oneida, New York. In 1848, Noyes maintained the community-minded aspect of the Shakers, but in regard to the vow of celibacy and "brother-sister" relationships Shakers had followed for decades, Noyes advocated "Christian love", in which each adult in his commune was spouse to one another.<sup>30</sup> To substantiate his beliefs in the face of criticism, Noyes stated that he believed Jesus, a perfect creation by God, through His death and sacrifice for sinners, had lifted the burden of sin from all who truly believed in Him; therefore such a believing Christian had become "perfect" in the eyes of God. But this "perfection" was mildly

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., (March 28, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., (March 3, 2016).

<sup>30</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 71.



afforded to women within the Oneida Community. The role of women, aside from performing community chores, was narrowed to dominating the sexual regulations within the community. John Noyes, his wife Harriet, and his sister Charlotte tasked female members within the community to regulate the sexual relations of all Community members.<sup>31</sup> Any arrangement for sexual liaisons had to be regulated through an older woman in the Community, who would serve as a go-between for those involved. The founding members of the Oneida Community issued a “Statement of Principles” in 1846;

*1. All individual proprietorship of either persons or things is surrendered and absolute community of interests takes the place of the laws and fashions which preside over property and family relations in the world. 2. God as the ultimate and absolute owner of our persons and possessions is installed as the director of our combinations and the distributor of property. His spirit is our supreme regulator. 3. John H. Noyes is the father and overseer whom the Holy Ghost has set over the family thus constituted. To John H. Noyes as such we submit ourselves in all things spiritual and temporal, appealing from his decisions only to the spirit of God, and that without disputing. 4. We pledge ourselves to these*



Plate 1. John H. Noyes.



Plate 2. View of the Oneida Community.

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<sup>31</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 71.

*principles without reserve; and if we fall away from them, let God and our signatures be witness against us.*<sup>32</sup>

Noyes gave evening talks on proper sexual attitudes, activities, and birth control.

Male and female members shared community chores, which included farming, rearing of children and even accounting duties that outside of the commune were reserved solely for men.<sup>33</sup> Noyes placed a few women into more of a leadership role, and they were charged with securing obedience from the other women within the community.<sup>34</sup> Considering that traditional religious denominations severely limited the woman's role in the church and household, the task of securing obedience was intoxicating to members of the Oneida Community. *Figure 1. Oneida Community, www.library.syr.edu/digital/guides/o/OneidaCommunityCollection/1834-1972* opportunity for women. The John Humphrey Noyes communal doctrine was the inevitable outgrowth of the religious revivals that swept over western New England and then the "Burned-over District" of Western New York during the mid-1800s. By 1878, education and reading began to undermine the religious underpinnings of the Community. The outside and inside worlds seemed rather attractive to members and the religious element provided by Noyes became secondary.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jack T. Ericson, "*Oneida Community Books Pamphlets and Serials 1834-1972*". <[www.library.syr.edu/digital/guides/o/OneidaCommunityCollection/1834-1972](http://www.library.syr.edu/digital/guides/o/OneidaCommunityCollection/1834-1972)> (accessed on April 4, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Ryan, Mary P., *Cradle of the Middle Class, The Family in Oneida County, New York 1790-1865*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1981), 237-238.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>35</sup> Jack T. Ericson, "*Oneida Community Books Pamphlets and Serials 1834-1972*" (accessed on April 4, 2016).

<sup>36</sup> Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 241.

In New Harmony, Indiana, another community emerged touting socialist views and the promise of opportunity for women. New Harmony, created by Robert Owen in 1825, was a religious commune that emphasized economic independence for women. Women in the community were required to be fully employed and self-sufficient and women's responsibilities within the commune differentiated from men in several degrees. Owen and New Harmony emphasized educational opportunities for girls and women which led to the stirring of ideas that contributed toward a new role for women. Frances Wright, founder of the Nashoba Community in Tennessee, frequented New Harmony to further her own reform efforts. It is difficult to prove to what extent New Harmony women actually sought to modify the traditional role of women within the Community itself. But the creation of a Female Social Society in 1825 at New Harmony clearly reflects the probability that there was more than a conscious effort to change the traditional role of women into a meaningful and contributing role within the Community, and possibly the country.<sup>37</sup>

New Harmony was not without some degree of dissent. Sarah Pears, a member of New Harmony, wrote;

*Indeed the day [Sunday] here is only used as a day of recreation, visiting and amusement, military operations and with some few of work. Those ladies who are in regular employment, having no time allowed them, have some excuse for washing, ironing and doing their own sewing on the Sabbath. Every Sunday evening there is a meeting at which Mr. Owens reads over the particulars of the expenditures of the Society, and the*

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<sup>37</sup> William E. Wilson, *The Angel and the Serpent: The Story of New Harmony*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1964) 198.

*amount of work performed by each occupation, and also the names of the working men and women, with characters attached to each.*<sup>38</sup>

Sarah Pears, in *New Harmony, an Adventure in Happiness, Papers of Thomas and Sarah Pears*, questioned the intent of the commune in respect to equality between the two sexes in a series of letters to her uncle, Benjamin Bakewell;

*I am confident I shall never be able to perform what [Owen] appears to expect from the women. My strength, which never was great, is much diminished since I came here, is unequal when taking my turn in the kitchen, which I find it is required that all should do by turns for six weeks together. No one is to be favored above the rest, as all of us are to be in a state of perfect equality.*<sup>39</sup>

Carol Kolmerten sharply criticizes the New Harmony community, stating that while Owens touted equality within the commune, women such as Sarah Pears and Eliza M’Knight began to realize “equality for all” was actually a tiered and disproportionate concept. Eliza M’Knight, member of the Franklin Community in Upstate New York, felt she worked much harder than her husband, who seemed to conveniently fall ill when field work was required from him. Women in the New Harmony and Franklin Communities spent what should have been free time, completing additional chores for the “betterment of the community”. Kolmerten argues that Pears and M’Knight both share the disillusionment with Owenite Communities in regard to child rearing. Children were removed from member homes and placed in a form of boarding school which left

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<sup>38</sup> Carol A. Kolmerten, “Women’s Experiences in the American Owenite Communities” in Wendy Chmielewski, Louis Kern, Marlyn Klee. *Women in Spiritual and Communitarian Societies in the United States*. (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 40-41.

<sup>39</sup> Thomas C. Pears, ed., Papers of Thomas and Sarah Pears: *New Harmony, an Adventure in Happiness*, <<https://archive.org/details/newharmonyadvent111pear>> (accessed on February 19, 2016).

mothers feeling powerless because they had to relinquish their rights to their children.<sup>40</sup> Although Pears and Kolmerten clearly disagree with the achievement of equality within New Harmony, it can be argued that to some degree women did indeed achieve more opportunity to secure a leadership role than as if they had remained in a traditional religious denomination that abstained from acknowledging women could lead at all.

Frances Wright, creator of the Nashoba Community in southwestern Tennessee in 1825, fused the socialist aspects of New Harmony with a reformer agenda that included abolition and women's rights. Kolmerten states that, "on paper", Wright created a community that provided more rights to women than any other community in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The constitution for Nashoba was clear on its stance on equality as Wright declared, "No woman can forfeit her individual rights or independent existence, and no man [can] assert over her any rights or power whatsoever".<sup>41</sup> Kolmerten states that Wright made "constitutional promises for rights" for women, which can be argued suggests they did not exist, but Kolmerten fails to prove that rights for women were non-existent.

Wright built her community with men and women, white and black. Wright's intent was to create an alternative to the slave-based plantation system in the southern states. Several of the members were former slaves, Wright had purchased the freedom of fifteen former slaves, but required a five year stay at Nashoba to "pay off their debt" incurred by the cost of freedom, sickness and potential child rearing expenses. In turn,

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<sup>40</sup> Kolmerten, "Women's Experiences in the American Owenite Communities", 44-45.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

former slaves would learn the skills of cooperative labor and after the five year period would be free and moved to another region such as Haiti or Mexico to live freer lives.<sup>42</sup> In addition to abolition, Kolmerten states “she [Wright] advocated racial and sexual equality on its most primal level, blacks and whites should have sexual intercourse to produce mulatto children in order to ease racial differences and women should enjoy sexual intercourse as easily and as often as men”.<sup>43</sup> Kolmerten argues that Wright’s views were similar to Robert Owen, but she was condemned for her stance on race relations because she was a women.<sup>44</sup>

Economic instability threatened the Nashoba Community, and Wright traveled to Europe in 1827 in an attempt to raise money for the commune. But when she returned shortly after, her vision was shattered. What was left was a motley group of individuals who replaced her vision of communal life that offered equality and a means to achieve reform for societal woes. Within months, all but a few blacks had left the community. Wright followed suit shortly after, taking the remaining blacks to Haiti where they could live freer lives. It is important to note that achieving women’s suffrage in Haiti proved to be more difficult than in the United States. In 1934 women of Haiti formed the Feminine League for Social Action, [Ligue Féministe d’Action Sociale] but this organization was banned for several years by the government shortly after. The League remained organized and ultimately women, through the League, were able to secure women’s

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<sup>42</sup> Francis Wright, “A Plan for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in the United States Without Danger of Loss to the Citizens of the South”, *New Harmony Gazette*, October 1, 1825.

<sup>43</sup> Carol Kolmerten, *Women in Utopia; The Ideology of Gender in the American Owenite Communities*, (New York, Syracuse University Press, 1998), 129.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 130.

suffrage in 1950.<sup>45</sup> Wright's departure to Haiti marked the end of the Nashoba community, but clearly demonstrated a changing tide within the country to pursue human and civil rights for blacks, as well as women.<sup>46</sup> While Kolmerten is critical of Wright's achievements at Nashoba Community, evidence supporting that Wright was a revolutionary and leader for abolition and furthering women's equality is clear. Wright established her own community on a foundation of women's rights and abolition and drafted a constitution that declared equality and independence for women. Although Nashoba declined because of financial hardship, Wright brought the remaining slaves to Haiti to ensure a freer life.

Christian spiritualist communities that vigorously emphasized individualism and broke away from the societal customs that dictated the role of women thrived in the mid-1800s. And in 1836, the "Transcendental Club" was created in Boston, Massachusetts and was comprised of a few famous and prominent members in 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The organization included Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and Elizabeth Peabody. The philosophy of transcendentalists embraced nature and an "unchurched spirituality" that strongly encouraged freedom of thought. Transcendentalists believed in spiritual truth based on inner experience, complete rejection of external authority, and non-traditional religion. Belief in the "Universal Soul" meant that Transcendentalists practiced justice, love, and freedom.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> "Feminism in Haiti" <<http://www.aidvolunteers.org/feminism-in-haiti/>> (accessed on March 23, 2016).

<sup>46</sup> O. B. Emerson, "Frances Wright and Her Nashoba Experiment", *Tennessee Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (1947): 291-314.

<sup>47</sup> John Ankerberg and John Weldon, *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, (Eugene, Oregon, Harvest House Publishers 1984), 323-324.

Transcendentalists in America in the mid to late 1800s were joined by another spiritual group that believed in animal magnetism. Already practiced in Vienna by Franz Mesmer, animal magnetism focused on linking the present spirit to the past, and non-traditional science as a conduit for healing the body and mind. “Mesmerists”, coined in response to Franz Mesmer’s teaching, were by today’s definition, hypnotized, and through this process achieved cures to previous ailments. Practicing members of mesmerism believed they were morally and spiritually transformed, and achieved mental powers during the mesmerizing process.<sup>48</sup> Transcendentalism morphed into Christian Science and Theosophy, which also branched off from the practice of spiritualism in the 1800s. Christian Science and Theosophy embraced the notion that evil and sickness did not exist, and instead posited the ideology of “mind over body”. Christian Science also focused on the act of self-healing through trance and mesmerism. Similar to spiritualism, Christian Science and even Robert Owen who believed God was both male and female, Christian Scientists believed God was not gender specific. The Divine Mind was the focus of Christian Science which stressed the ideology of self-help that appealed to women in particular who were seeking independence from the male dominated fields of clergy and medicine.

Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of Christian Science in 1879, turned away from traditional religion when the church did not take her views seriously.<sup>49</sup> Believing that the healings of Jesus were natural to human beings, Eddy taught her findings to men and

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<sup>48</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 187.

<sup>49</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 103.



women. Eddy made her discovery of Christian Science mid-way through her long life, at a time when women could not vote and were generally barred from pulpits, seminaries, and the medical profession. Fuller suggests that Mary Baker Eddy's work, while discredited by the church, was embraced by a growing population of women and men who had become increasingly restless with traditional religion and roles within American society.<sup>50</sup>

Theosophy was yet another religious movement that maintained that mankind should not acknowledge sex, color, or social classes, thus solidifying the liberal ideology of women activists who argued against the oppressive nature of traditional religion. The Theosophist Society was founded in New York in 1875 by Helena Blavatsky and Henry Olcott.<sup>51</sup> The goal of Theosophists was to create a "Universal Brotherhood of Humanity". Similar to the spiritualists and Christian Science, Theosophists rejected "The Fall" or "Curse of Eve", which demonized women and instead promoted the dismissal of traditional marriage roles and the male dominated clergy. What set Theosophists apart from the other spiritualist movements was their belief in karma and reincarnation. Theosophists believed that karma and reincarnation provided women the opportunity to move away from traditional Christian beliefs that emphasize sin and redemption. Thus individuals could ultimately be reborn into a more prestigious role in politics and social reform.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>51</sup> "*History of the Theosophical Society*" <<https://www.theosophical.org/the-society/history-of-the-society>> (accessed on 3 January 2016).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., (April 3, 2016).

Across the Atlantic in England, the Theosophist movement was led by new president elect Annie Besant, who worked diligently for free speech, universal human rights, women's suffrage rights and birth control in the 1800s. Besant, a free thinker and atheist, contrasted with the women in the northeastern United States on religious views, but held the same stance in regard to women's rights and equality. Similar to women activists in America, Besant was harshly scrutinized for her views in the *National Reformer*, a newspaper printed in Sheffield, England dedicated to pursuing societal reforms. As her views on religion and women's rights became well known, when Besant was part of a custody battle with her husband, the Glasgow *Times* printed, "If Besant were a man, and the child a boy, the social consequences would not be as damaging as in the case of a girl raised by a disreputable mother".<sup>53</sup> The *Times* also printed that it was not attacking a woman's right to free speech, but rather was to prevent her from destroying the prospects of a child.<sup>54</sup> The views of the Glasgow *Times* were clearly in agreement with proponents of maintaining the traditional role of women and were not dissimilar with those of the New York *Times* and New York *Herald* that often criticized American women during the women's rights movement during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>55</sup>

Spiritualism, Christian Science and Theosophy incorporated science and nature into their religious practices and emphasized individualism and free thought. In contrast to the traditional religious groups, members of the new religious movement did not

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<sup>53</sup> Ann Holmes, *Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Great Britain*, (New York, St. Martin's Press, 1997), 25-26.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>55</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 19.

adhere to what they called “blind faith” and a male dominated clergy. Intellectual thought from the East introduced ideas and perspectives to religious groups and stirred a desire for higher intellectual and spiritual thought. As the religious landscape continued to change in the United States, women not only became members of newly formed religious institutions, but also founded them.

### *Chapter III*

#### **Cassadaga Lake Free Association and the Seneca Falls Convention 1848**

New York State served as a pulpit for spiritualism during the 1800's within the Oneida Community, New Harmony, Christian Science, Transcendentalist and Mesmerist Movements. Particularly in Western New York, spirituality provided an outlet to fill a need for equal opportunity for women, but at the same time it is important to note that migration from traditional religious denominations offered Americans a distraction for some men and women from mainstream society.<sup>56</sup> As spiritualist communes rose in popularity, they coincided with the changing intellectual climate throughout the Northeast in particular. Many men and women in the 1800s advocated for Temperance and equal rights for women. Activists organized at the Cassadaga Lake Free Association and Seneca Falls to pursue reform movements and ultimately the ratification of constitutional amendments that would, in time, guarantee the right to universal enfranchisement.

As science and technological advancements flourished, many early Americans moved away from traditional religion as more and more economic opportunity provided

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 19.

more control over their lives.<sup>57</sup> Utopian communities such as Oneida, New Harmony and Nashoba gave women autonomy in respect to economic independence and self-sufficiency not typically given in to women in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Marriage, to a great extent, denied women the right to property, keep wages or sign contracts in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spiritualist and utopian communities, by and large allowed women to be independent of men and obtain educational and leadership skills that would help them lead productive and meaningful lives. The increased popularity of spiritualist movements and the increased freedom of thought and speech, as well as the gender equality they offered, was truly showcased in the Burned-Over District during the 1830's through the 1870's, namely in the Cassadaga Lake Free Association in 1878. While the members of the community in Oneida did not practice the typical teachings of spiritualism, the Cassadaga Lake Free Association complied fully.<sup>58</sup>

Social movements such as the Temperance Movement, abolition, and woman's suffrage were often celebrated at the Cassadaga Lake Free Association, approximately sixty miles southwest of Buffalo, New York in Chautauqua County, New York. The Association featured prominent speakers that spoke passionately to crowds of men and women who shared the same social philosophies. Susan B. Anthony was among the many speakers at Cassadaga Lake Free Association and spoke on the issue of women's suffrage in 1891 and 1894.<sup>59</sup> Free thought, free speech and free investigation served as

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<sup>57</sup> Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class*, 60.

<sup>58</sup> Merle Williams Hersey, *75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lily Dale Assembly*, 1879-1954, 1968.

<sup>59</sup> "Beautiful Lily Dale, Program July 1<sup>st</sup>-August 31<sup>st</sup> 1925" Lily Dale Assembly (1925).

their ideology beginning in 1879 through the present day at Lily Dale. Cassadaga Lake Free Association members comprised of both men and women, focused on moral and world issues, as well as spiritualism.<sup>60</sup> Cassadaga Lake Free Association, today referred to as “Lily Dale”, provided an outlet for men and women to speak freely both on social reform issues. Susan B. Anthony often visited Cassadaga Lake Free Association as a women’s rights activist, but was not a true spiritualist herself. While Anthony was never a formal member of the Spiritualist movement at Cassadaga Free Lake Association, she recognized it as one of the rare religious organizations that did not subjugate women. Anthony gave many lectures at Cassadaga Lake Free Association and during one of her visits stated “the only religious sect in the world...that has recognized the equality of women is the Spiritualists.”<sup>61</sup>

It can be argued that early communities such as Oneida and New Harmony abused and oppressed women, the Cassadaga Lake Free Association was based on the belief in true equality for all of mankind. Tolerance and a celebration of the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, a 17<sup>th</sup> century philosopher and mystic appealed to the members of Cassadaga Lake Free Association. According to Swedenborg, men and women were seen as equal entities, which contrasted with the traditional roles of women already established in New York and throughout the country. Swedenborg’s teachings also mandated tolerance of race and different religious denominations practiced in New

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<sup>60</sup> John Phillips Downs and Fenwick Y. Hedley, *History of Chautauqua County, New York and Its People Volume II*, (Boston, New York, American Historical Society 1921), 109.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

York.<sup>62</sup> Particularly influenced by the teachings of Swedenborg was Ralph Waldo Emerson. Emerson, a transcendentalist, studied the writings of Swedenborg, and while he was not an advocate of the “spiritualist Swedenborg”, Emerson was enthralled with his scientific and moral knowledge. Emerson wrote; “the moral insight of Swedenborg, the correction of popular errors, and the announcement of ethical laws take him out of comparison with any other modern writer and entitle him to a place, vacant for some ages, among the lawgivers of mankind.<sup>63</sup>” Swedenborg’s popularity was most dominant in the New England region of the United States and he greatly appealed to women activists and spiritualists alike.

In 1848, the ideological foundation was laid for mediums and, in part, the women’s rights movement, in New York. It was in Hydesville, New York, near present-day Arcadia, just north of the Finger Lakes region, in the Burned Over District, between Rochester and Syracuse, which the famous medium sisters, Maggie and Kate Fox, would first learn of their ability to speak with the dead. The young girls were able to communicate by “rapping”, clapping and snapping their fingers, with a peddler that was murdered and buried in the cellar of their home. Although later proved a hoax, it was this incident that prompted William Alden to help create Cassadaga Lake Free Association in Western New York. And in 1879, when members of the Spiritualist church in Laona, New York, purchased 18 acres of land and founded a religious corporation it was called

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<sup>62</sup> Tiffany Wayne, *Encyclopedia of Transcendentalism*, (New York: InfoBase Publishing, 2006), 270-271.

<sup>63</sup> Joan Richardson, *Pragmatism and American Experience*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2014), 73.

the Cassadaga Lakes Free Association. The name was changed to the City of Light Assembly in 1903 and to the Lily Dale Assembly in 1906.<sup>64</sup> Despite several name changes, the goals of the spiritual community remained the same--freedom from religious denomination, equality and free-thought.<sup>65</sup>

By 1859 there were 71 mediums in New York alone, and the number of men and women during the 1850's and 1860's in New York that proclaimed affiliation with a spiritual group was over 350,000. A survey conducted in 1859 reported that over 1.5 million men and women nationally were affiliated with spiritualism, with New York as the leader in spiritualist affiliation.<sup>66</sup> Mediums were sought out by men and women during the 19th century to speak with deceased relatives or friends. The Civil War had encouraged this trend by creating an enormous death toll to the United States.

Between the years 1861-1865, both men and women looked to mediums to find the smallest amount of solace after losing members of their families or close friends. Abraham Lincoln and Harriet Beecher Stowe were both advocates of spiritualism during this time in history.<sup>67</sup> Interestingly, death was romanticized during the 19th century, especially in literature. Writers such as Alfred Tennyson and Arthur Hugh Clough wrote about individual grief, struggles with morality and the decay of Christianity. Death during the 19th Century was rampant due to many causes, and through art and literature, as well as

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<sup>64</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 55.

<sup>65</sup> Reverend Sandra Pfortmiller, "A Dale by Any Other Name" <[www.nsac.org/LilyDale.php](http://www.nsac.org/LilyDale.php)> (accessed on April 3, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Pfortmiller, <[www.nsac.org/LilyDale.php](http://www.nsac.org/LilyDale.php)> (accessed on April 3, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, (April 8, 2016).



through the work of spiritualist mediums, death was viewed by many as a means of achieving a path to a “higher plane” and free thought.<sup>68</sup>

Three months after the Hydesville rappings in 1848, several women influenced by the teachings of Quakerism met twenty miles away at the Wesleyan Chapel located in Central New York for the Seneca Falls Convention, with the distinct purpose of joining forces to promote social, civil, and religious reform for women. This event, the start of modern Women’s Rights Movement. Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott met in 1848 for the first of many Women’s Rights Conventions.<sup>69</sup> Ann Braude argues that spiritualists signed on to all of the social reform movements of the late nineteenth century that promoted freedom of choice and the elimination of repression including the abolition of slavery, marriage reform, labor, dress, and health reform, temperance and the elimination of poverty. Spiritualism’s widespread acceptance of social reform paired with its nature to reveal truth “to individuals without recourse to external authority,” made the religion a “magnet for social and political radicals throughout the nineteenth century.”<sup>70</sup>

To the Spiritualists, the Women’s Rights Movement was the most consistent and important social cause in light of the role women played within the religion. Spiritualists received their spirit knowledge through mediums independent of any authority other than the spirit who spoke through them.<sup>71</sup> Braude argues that followers were able to speak

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., (April 5, 2016).

<sup>69</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 57.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 59.

directly with spirits one-on-one with no interference from an organized religious institution or restrictive doctrines, awakening an appreciation for the value of the individual, which in turn, was transferred to the role of women and an individual woman's rights in all matters in her life. Braude writes about the dynamic that made this reasoning plausible in the following passage, when she describes the social construct in which women were so readily accepted as the leaders of Spiritualism:

*Spiritualism embraced the notion that women were pious by nature. But, instead of concluding that the qualities that suited women to religion unsuited them to public roles, Spiritualism made the delicate constitution and nervous excitability commonly attributed to femininity a virtue and lauded it as a qualification for religious leadership. If women had special spiritual sensitivities, then it followed that they could sense spirits, which is precisely what mediums did. Nineteenth-century stereotypes of femininity were used to bolster the case for female mediumship . . . The very qualities that rendered women incompetent when judged against norms for masculine behavior rendered them capable of mediumship.<sup>72</sup>*

The individual characteristics that defined a “proper” woman’s demeanor in the nineteenth century—pure, weak, passive, impressionable, susceptible, uneducated, and therefore incapable of performing any role outside a domestic one—were conveniently the most attractive to spirit. Spiritualism gave mediums unprecedented roles in leadership and public life without the medium having to make the bold decision to rebel against the social norms they were constrained to live within. The young women who became trance mediums may have done so as a way to become a part of the world that would ordinarily be closed to them if they followed the expected path set forth for them by the

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<sup>72</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 60.

male dominated society.<sup>73</sup> By becoming trance mediums they were able to travel and perform for large attentive audiences that hung on each word they uttered in trance in the name of a more learned spirit than themselves. It provided a certain freedom not available through any other means. Spiritualists could “mix and match” what aspects of religion they chose to follow and those they wanted to disregard.<sup>74</sup>

Women used Spiritualism to break from religious institutions dominated by male clergy. Braude, Fuller and Gurko support an intricate relationship between Spiritualism and the Women’s Rights Movement, crediting the spiritualist religion as the predominant agent for the dispersion of women’s rights advocacy across America.<sup>75</sup> Although it is important to avoid the suggested generalization that “all Spiritualists” supported women’s rights. The partnership between Spiritualism and women’s rights had both positive and negative results for both groups. As already mentioned, the successful outcome of the Women’s Rights Movement and subsequent Women’s Suffrage Movement, were nurtured by the positive, welcoming response of the Spiritualists, who saw value in the efforts to free women from the societal bondage of a male dominated society, giving a space for the women’s movement to grow and prosper.<sup>76</sup>

The ultimate outcome of the initial goals of both the women’s movement and the early Spiritualists were changed because of the mutual responses to and acceptance of each other. Women’s rights speakers were seen and heard as a result of Spiritualists’

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>74</sup> Todd Jay Leonard, *Talking to the Other Side, A History of Modern Spiritualism and Mediumship*, Lincoln, Nebraska, iUniverse, 2005, 93.

<sup>75</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 161.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 161.

acceptance, eventually succeeding in getting the vote for women, something that very well might have taken years longer to accomplish without the use of religious and spiritualist venues. In the spring of June 1869, spiritualists and free-thinkers gathered to discuss social reform issues and to share ideologies. The New York *Herald*, sternly against the women's suffrage movement, wrote;

*As it is at the gatherings of the Spiritualists, the talk was mere rhapsody, stringing together big sounding words without thought or meaning. The only practical common sense address was that of Fred Douglass, in which he sarcastically and humorously touches up the spiritualism of a Mr. Mills. But it was evident that the hifalutin trash of this Mills and his Spiritualistic notions were favorably received by the assembly. It is utterly impossible to bring such a set of people down to the level of common sense, or to any clear ideas, even upon the theories they pretend to advocate.<sup>77</sup>*

Frederick Douglass, an early supporter of women's suffrage, was in attendance at the spring meeting but he later in the same year cut ties with the women's suffrage movement claiming securing the Negro vote took precedence over women's suffrage. Gurko quotes Douglass who stated; "I must say that I do not see how anyone can pretend that there is the same urgency in giving the ballot to women as to the Negro".<sup>78</sup>

In one such move to support the women's rights movement, Marion Skidmore, a founding member of Lily Dale (previously Cassadaga Lake Free Association), invited Suffragists to meet in 1887 on the campgrounds, initiating what is now the annual Women's Day event.<sup>79</sup> Susan B. Anthony, Rev. Anna Howard Shaw, and many other

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<sup>77</sup> New York *Herald*, June 16, 1869.

<sup>78</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 231.

<sup>79</sup> Michel P. Richard and Albert Adato, "The Medium and Her Message: A Study of Spiritualism at Lily Dale, New York" *Review of Religious Research*, Vol 22, No 2 (1980) 186-197.

reformers went to Lily Dale on January 25, 1887 to speak on the stages in Lily Dale and other Spiritualist auditoriums in response to a growing women's rights movement. Cassadaga Lake Free Association and its speakers took advantage of the widespread opportunities to reach accepting and like-minded audiences they would otherwise not be able to address, and thus provide a "major vehicle for the spread of women's rights ideas in mid-century America".<sup>80</sup> Anthony had previously been informally tied to Lily Dale from a religious aspect as well. She was involved in the early days of the North Collins Progressive Friends, a radical Quaker group that in later days had more Spiritualist members than Quakers, and eventually merged into the Spiritualist community in Lily Dale. By the time Anthony arrived in Lily Dale in the 1893 she was greeted by former members of her circle from her Progressive Friends days. Other Suffrage speakers in Lily Dale included Anna Howard Shaw, Harriet Stanton Blatch, Charlotte Perkins Gillman, and Ida Husted Harper.<sup>81</sup> Braude suggests that the widespread investigations of spirit manifestations benefited the women's movement, inferring the national notoriety caused by the attempts to prove fraudulent spirit claims (Fox Sisters), inadvertently put a spotlight on the women's movement issues.<sup>82</sup>

The Spiritualists, who rejected dominance of one group or sector over another, particularly male dominance over the female fate, found an ally in the women's movement, which provided credence to the overarching position of freedom imbedded in

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<sup>80</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 58.

<sup>81</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 142.

<sup>82</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 54.

the foundation of Spiritualist belief, allowing women ever more power and control within their lives outside the family unit. The dynamics of the groups' interactions resulted in altered outcomes for both. With the benefit of hindsight, however, Braude makes retrospective note that the two factions were not in perfect harmony when recording their own histories. Spiritualism provided an intricate and widespread web of public access for "a relentless group of [non-Spiritualist] women's rights advocates who operated outside the mainstream of the women's movement" and who for decades edited newspapers, wrote books, chaired conventions, and lectured "almost exclusively" on "women's emancipation."<sup>83</sup> Spiritualist mediums, both trance and normal, regularly included women's rights topics in their public speaking lectures alongside their Spiritualist teachings.

At the same time, however, women's rights leaders distanced themselves from the Spiritualists. Braude suggests that this may be due to the "canonization" of the three-volume history of the women's movement, *History of Woman Suffrage*, edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, which does not include the significant contributions of the Spiritualist women's rights reformers. One explanation Braude provides is that the editors were unaware of the work of the Spiritualist women's rights advocates. This is very unlikely in light of the intimate connection the groups shared, working side by side on lecture platforms and in publishing organizations. Another explanation Braude provides is more likely: the non-Spiritualists

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<sup>83</sup> Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 60.

distanced themselves from the religion due to the extreme views of the Spiritualists in all matters of freedom (including marriage, sexual, and any number of other individual freedoms) coupled with the global fervor to discredit the religion.<sup>84</sup>

In contrast, Spiritualists have been and are to this day extremely proud of their religion's early involvement with the reformers; Lily Dale residents often speak of it in conversation, and a dedicated space to artifacts and photographs of official Suffragist meetings held on the grounds in the Lily Dale museum gives evidence to their continued view of the relevance of the association of the two groups.<sup>85</sup>

The resulting history of the women's movement is, in part, an altered and incomplete record of the relationship between spiritualist communities and women's rights activists.



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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>85</sup> Richard and Adato, "The Medium" 186-197.

Figure 2. *New York Herald* June 16, 1869 "Friends of Progress Convention" Cassadaga Lake Free Association, New York

## *Chapter IV*

### **Changes in Perception and Practice of Traditional Religion Through the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

Traditional religious groups, such as Catholics and Protestants in New York and throughout America began to lose some popularity in the late 1700s as immigrants entered the country, brought their practices with them, and began to establish their own Presbyterian, Baptist and Methodist churches. But over the next century, men and women, especially in New York, were continuously searching for less stringent religious faiths and a denomination that encouraged more free thought.<sup>86</sup> Pentecostals surfaced in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and stressed the belief in faith healing and often spoke in “tongues”. One of the goals of the Pentecostals was to rid the idea of the church of its formality and to welcome men and women alike, regardless of race. Religion in America had in some respect grown less tolerant of traditional religious groups and for many men and women,

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<sup>86</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below, Early Pentecostals and American Culture*. (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1945), 29-30.



the days of blind obedience to traditional religious denomination seemed to be ending as more and more diverse religions surfaced in Western New York through the 19<sup>th</sup> century and became more popular.<sup>87</sup>

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century spiritualist communities rejected the Biblical ideology of “The Fall,” which focused on the sin of Eve and condemned women in the eyes of God and traditional religion.<sup>88</sup> Ideologies planted in spiritualism also supported the view that God was neither man nor woman, but rather an abstract entity which further appealed to women seeking a voice in religious roles, as well as politics. The “Supreme Being” for spiritualists was closely tied to nature and the spirit world--both living and deceased--and continued to challenge traditional religion.

Social Darwinism and social engineering in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ideologies, as well as the beliefs of men such as William G. Sumner, William T. Harris, and Thomas Jones--traditionalists who favored the idea that white men were the “fittest” of society--led American society to remain relatively stagnant for decades in the progression of civil liberties for women, blacks, Native Americans, the poor, and uneducated. The Panic of 1837, a six year depression that affected much of the Northeast, created additional divisions between existing social classes and destabilized family relationships. Thus in the wake of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century economic crisis, utopian communities used the challenges to forge ahead with membership and their religious agenda. Utopian

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>88</sup> Mary Farrell Bednarowski, “Outside the Mainstream: Women’s Religion and Women Religious Leaders in Nineteenth-Century America”. *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Vol. 48, No.2. (June 1980), 207-231.

communities and Evangelical Protestants placed their aspirations on economic and social betterment in the wake of financial crisis. Between the years of 1894 and 1900, thirty-six new utopian communities were created to help deal with societal problems. In addition to economic crisis, disease also proved to be a factor leading to a decrease in traditional church attendance and a migration to spiritual communities.<sup>89</sup> The reasoning behind the departure from traditional religious denominations during a time of crisis was that many spiritualist communities embraced women as equals and encouraged a female dominant voice in respect to societal problem resolution, overall spirituality and equal rights. The transition of men and women from traditional religious churches to spiritualist and utopian communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was in part due to the appreciation for the intellect and leadership skills of women.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Barkun, *Crucible of the Millennium; The Burned Over District of New York in the 1840s*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986) 82.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

## *Chapter V*

### **Women's Christian Temperance Union**

Prior to the formation of the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1874, women frequently organized to speak on the issue of Temperance. Abby Kelley Foster, a proponent of Temperance and the anti-slavery movement was denied her right to speak at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, just as Lucretia Mott was. Prior to Foster's attendance at the Convention, she had spoken openly on the issue of abolition. The clergy responded to her publicly speaking by expelling members of their Churches merely for listening to her. Foster began to pursue women's rights after her experiences during the abolition movement.<sup>91</sup>

The Daughters of Temperance formed in 1846 in Salem, New Jersey to support abstention from the use of alcohol. Members pledged not to use, buy, or sell alcoholic beverages and advocated for limiting the sale of alcohol. Temperance societies were

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<sup>91</sup> National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior. "Abby Kelley Foster: Anti-Slavery, Women's Rights, and Seneca Falls" <[www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/upload/Abby-Kelley-Foster-siteb\\_bl.pdf](http://www.nps.gov/wori/learn/historyculture/upload/Abby-Kelley-Foster-siteb_bl.pdf)> (accessed on February 11, 2016).

formed during the 1800s in response to increased alcohol use and abuse by men, which temperance activists argued led to the deterioration of the family unit. Susan B. Anthony was elected as president of the Rochester Branch of the Daughters of Temperance in 1849. After Susan B. Anthony was denied the right to speak at a Sons of Temperance convention in 1853, she and Elizabeth Stanton formed their own organization. While the Sons of Temperance allowed females as members, some ministers who belonged to the organization felt the cause was too political for women to take part. Ministers claimed that women should devote themselves to matters of religion.

The Women's State Temperance Society was formed in 1853 by Susan B. Anthony, and Elizabeth Stanton served as president. Once the society was organized, members emphasized the need for women's rights, and included the need to reform divorce laws, before the pursuit of Temperance. Membership included some men, and they immediately pushed for the women's rights agenda to be abandoned. In response, Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony resigned. Reverend Antoinette Brown Blackwell spoke on the issue of women speaking publicly at a Temperance Convention in 1853 which led to the argument for women's rights being dismissed.<sup>92</sup>

Amelia Bloomer, perhaps most famous for initiating a fashion statement for women, was an intrepid force in the Temperance movement. Bloomer edited a New York newspaper, *The Lily*, which was dedicated to Temperance and women's rights in the 1850's. *The Lily* was considered the first newspaper to be read solely by women. While

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<sup>92</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 186.

it began as a temperance newspaper, Bloomer believed that as women speakers and lecturers were considered by many unseemly, writing was a way for women to work towards reform. *The Lily* was intended to be distributed to members of the Seneca Falls Ladies Temperance Society, but grew in popularity and distribution. Unfortunately due to many obstacles early in its publication years the Society's enthusiasm for the publication eventually died out.<sup>93</sup>

Although women's exclusion from membership in many early temperance societies was the main force that moved Bloomer and the Ladies Temperance Society to publish *The Lily*, it was not initially an advocate for women's rights. In its first year, *The Lily* maintained its focus on temperance, but it gradually began to include articles about other subjects of interest to women. Many articles were penned by Elizabeth Stanton, writing under the name "Sunflower." The earliest Stanton's articles dealt with temperance, child-rearing and education, but she turned to the issue of women's rights. Stanton wrote about laws unfair to women and demanded change. Bloomer and *The Lily* were both greatly influenced by Stanton, and gradually the newspaper became a convert to the cause of women's rights.<sup>94</sup>

Temperance meetings often included the idea that women, in abusive relationships due to alcohol, should be able to secure a divorce. Antoinette Blackwell, in particular, was a staunch critic on the divorce issue and could not render her support. In 1860 at the 10<sup>th</sup> National Women's Rights Convention, divorce was deemed a priority

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>94</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 188.

issue, but speakers were quickly attacked and criticized by Wendell Phillips, an abolitionist, who stated that the use of convention time for issues other than those that affected only women should be dismissed immediately. Horace Greeley responded to the proposed issue of divorce by attacking Elizabeth Stanton. Greeley suggested that Stanton could not offer an opinion on marital issues as she was not married.<sup>95</sup> Newspaper press covered the convention with disdain, printing that the women in attendance were “spinsters” who were trying to create dissent.<sup>96</sup>

Prior to the formation of National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the conflict between the church and women’s rights would surface again in regard to the Women’s Christian Temperance Union founded in 1874. Annie Wittenmyer and Frances Willard were at the forefront of the organization and proclaimed themselves advocates for women’s suffrage. Stanton was not entirely convinced by the WTCU. At the center of the WTCU was the ideology that a woman’s religious convictions should be used to form social conscience.<sup>97</sup> Ellen DuBois argues that Christian feminism helped form laws that promoted a religious and traditional agenda for women, making the WTCU not only morally influential, but also politically influential.<sup>98</sup>

The Women’s Christian Temperance Union was formed in 1874 by Annie Wittenmyer and Francis Willard. The WTCU was a proponent for women’s suffrage. As for the prohibition of alcohol, liquor lobbyists wasted no time in opposing the WTCU,

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 188-189.

<sup>96</sup> Lawrence, *Radicals in Their Own Time*, 154.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>98</sup> Ellen DuBois, *Elizabeth Stanton and Susan b Anthony; Correspondence, Writings and Speeches*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), 173.

claiming that if women did indeed receive the right to vote, then prohibition could come to fruition. It can be argued that the women's crusade against alcohol was actually a protest by women rooted in their lack of civil rights, namely voting. In addition, in most states, women did not have control of their property or custody of their children in case of divorce.<sup>99</sup> Legal protection was not afforded to women, and even prosecutions for rape were extremely rare. During the mid to late 1800s, local political meetings were actually held in saloons from which women were excluded.

Francis Willard's personal motto was "do everything." The WCTU soon adopted this motto as a policy which came to mean all reform was inter-connected and that social problems could not be separated.<sup>100</sup> By 1894, the WCTU endorsed women's suffrage. And by 1896, most departments within the WCTU dealt with non-temperance issues. But the relationship between the WCTU and Elizabeth Stanton became strained after the publication of *The Woman's Bible* in 1895. Although the matter of inequality in the Church and society was certainly warranted to Stanton and other activists, many refused to partake in her endeavor. Followers of Stanton, such as Frances Willard of the WCTU, feared that women would entirely lose the support of the clergy and the ability to use churches as meeting places for suffragists across the country.

Willard had previously shown interest in Stanton's *The Woman's Bible*, but the women involved in the WCTU retained traditional views on religion and scripture,

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<sup>99</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 203.

<sup>100</sup> "Women's Temperance Convention", *Library of Congress*.

<[www.loc.gov/womenschristiantemperanceunion](http://www.loc.gov/womenschristiantemperanceunion)> (accessed on January 10, 2016) .

therefore Willard recognized that she needed to put distance between herself and *The Woman's Bible*. Willard denounced the article publicly to ensure that men and women knew there was no involvement by the WCTU. In a New York *Times* article printed on May 19, 1895, Willard publically claimed that she “had not seen Mrs. Stanton’s exegesis,” before its publication and took no part in the commentary presented within *The Woman's Bible*.<sup>101</sup>

Divisions between Stanton and her supporters, as well as women and men involved with the women’s movement and the WCTU, widened. Stanton’s intrepid mission of re-examining the Bible took an unseemly turn, and to some extent divided the women’s movement much like ratification of the 15th Amendment did in respect to the split in the women’s movement that formed the National Woman Suffrage Association and the American Woman Suffrage Association.

Religious ideological differences amongst women’s rights activists aside, the importance of the WCTU in respect to temperance and women’s rights is clearly undeniable, as for 125 years the organization has helped to train women in reform movements to respond to adversaries and think on their feet, speak in public, and effectively run an organization--all of which helped lead to the ratification of the 19th amendment giving women the right to vote.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> New York *Times*, “Had Not Seen Mrs. Stanton’s Exegesis,” May 19, 1895.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*



## *Chapter VI*

### **Elizabeth Stanton**

*To women still believing in the plenary inspiration of the Scriptures, we say give us by all means your exegesis in the light of the higher criticism learned men are now making, and illumine the Woman's Bible, with your inspiration. Bible historians claim special inspiration for the Old and New Testaments containing most contradictory records of the same events, of miracles opposed to all known laws, of customs that degrade the female sex of all human and animal life, stated in most questionable language that could not be read in a promiscuous assembly, and call all this-The Word of God.<sup>103</sup>*

Spiritualism in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was attractive to men and women for many reasons. Among those were progressive reform, non-sectarian faith, and preserving the good in society and mankind.

The desire to adhere to a faith that did not embrace the traditional religious values was quite popular for the time in history during the 1800s. Elizabeth Stanton helped to pave the way on controversial issues such as poverty, abolition and women's rights. Coupled with the pursuit of women's suffrage and overall equality, women of the

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<sup>103</sup> Elizabeth Stanton, "The Woman's Bible". < <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/9880/pg9880.html>> (accessed on February 19, 2016 and March 7, 2016).

spiritualist movement questioned religious groups and the interpretation of the Christian Bible. Elizabeth Stanton was among the women who challenged traditional religious groups and the roles pre-selected for women in traditional denominations. Early in her life she wanted to experience a spiritual conversion from the traditional philosophy.<sup>104</sup> Although Stanton was skeptical at best in regard to religion and conformity to traditional roles dictated by the churches, she acknowledged the need to use churches as venues to pursue reform issues in the 1800s. Stanton organized and led women's rights conventions and campaigns using the very organization that repressed women's views and speech—the church. As Stanton became increasingly vocal in her views on biblical interpretation by church clergy (*The Woman's Bible*), it led to rifts between the WCTU and fellow women's rights activists who retained a degree of conservatism in relation to religious doctrine.

Born in Johnstown New York in 1815, Stanton was trained to investigate and question by her prominent family. Stanton received an education at Troy Female Seminary and learned the importance of the law in regulating women through her father's law books and interactions with him. Stanton was a member of the American Anti-Slavery Society and a skilled and eloquent speaker for the abolition of slavery.<sup>105</sup> Historians such as Sally McMillen and Miriam Gurko argue that Stanton's early religious experiences paved the way to Stanton's rejection of the strong Calvinist and Protestant views that were present in America during the early 1800s. Stanton's views on religion

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<sup>104</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 160-161.

<sup>105</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 84.

were laced with fear; fear of disobeying God and fear of eternal damnation.<sup>106</sup> Revivals led by evangelist minister Charles Finney had a distinct impression on Stanton, who described him as, “a terrifier of human souls.” Although Finney’s theology slightly differed from the reformed Calvinist theology taking place in the second great awakening, what really affected Stanton was his emotionally debilitating and threatening methods of winning souls back from an unrighteous path by literally scaring them into salvation.<sup>107</sup> These experiences with religion led Stanton to resist religion, not wholly due to its negative connotations. By contrast, Stanton felt women were underrepresented, misrepresented and treated poorly through religion and religious doctrine.<sup>108</sup>

In 1840, Stanton was among the women in attendance at the World Anti-Slavery convention in London, but was denied a seat due to her gender. Lucretia Mott, also in attendance at the World Convention, influenced Stanton in the woman's rights movement and religious reforms. At the 1860 Woman's Rights Convention Stanton made several resolutions in favor of divorce under certain circumstances, which was met with considerable dissent from clergy members and fellow women’s rights activist Antoinette Brown Blackwell who was firmly against divorce.<sup>109</sup> Throughout her life Stanton encountered considerable criticism to her views on women’s rights and equality.

Later in 1866, the American Equal Rights Association was formed as a coalition between woman's rights activists and abolitionists. The organization promoted the

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<sup>106</sup> Stanton, Elizabeth, “*Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences 1815-1897*”, (Boston, MA, Northeastern University Press,) 1898.

<sup>107</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 63.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 172.

suffrage movement for former slaves and women. Many abolitionists felt that the demand for woman's suffrage would harm the chances for black suffrage, and they considered this the "Negro's hour," not woman's.<sup>110</sup> In 1869, Stanton and Anthony founded the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA) to work solely for the enfranchisement of women. It was the same year that Frederick Douglass parted ways with NAWSA because he believed the Negro vote took precedence over women's suffrage.

The women's rights movement continued through the 1870s and 1880s with Stanton's help. Throughout these years and she was widely and enthusiastically received. But the relationship between Stanton and other women's rights activists became strained over the very issue that helped to oppress women for hundreds of years-- religion. Stanton helped write *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1895, that questioned the woman's role in organized religious groups. Stanton sharply criticized the interpretation of the Bible by men and clergy;

*As the account of the creation in the first chapter is in harmony with science, common sense, and the experience of mankind in natural laws, the inquiry naturally arises, why should there be two contradictory accounts in the same book, of the same event? It is fair to infer that the second version, which is found in some form in the different religions of all nations, is a mere allegory, symbolizing some mysterious conception of a highly imaginative editor. The first account dignifies woman as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man. The second makes her a mere afterthought. The world in good running order without her. The only reason for her advent being the solitude of man.<sup>111</sup>*

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 173.

<sup>111</sup> Fitzgerald, Maureen, *The Woman's Bible*; Elizabeth Stanton, (Boston: Northeastern Press), 1993, 20.

Stanton continues in *The Woman's Bible*, citing Old and New Testament scripture, stating that men and women were equal in the eyes of God in both books. Stanton argued that blind faith in God and biblical text prevented women from realizing their role in both government and religion. According to Stanton and other women's activists, men abused power and privilege since male clergy taught the subjugation of women, therefore men could remain at the top of social and religious hierarchies. Stanton believed that women had the same right to power and privilege as men did, and through challenging interpreted scripture, women could begin to change the social and religious hierarchies determined by men and clergy. Ultimately this particular work thrust Stanton into an alienated position within the feminist group, as she was viewed as too radical.<sup>112</sup> Stanton's views on religion surfaced in her work, *The Woman's Bible*, published in 1895. Stanton wrote about the Christian Bible; "I know no other books that so fully teach the subjection and degradation of woman. When our bishops, archbishops and ordained clergymen stand up in their pulpits and read selections from the Pentateuch with reverential voice, they make the women of their congregation believe that there really is some divine authority for their subjection".<sup>113</sup> Stanton was convinced that the Christian Bible needed to be revised to achieve future progress on women's rights reforms. Activists for women's rights decades earlier had voiced the same concerns regarding interpretation of the Bible. Anne Hutchinson was banished for her views on the

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<sup>112</sup> Kathi Kern, *Mrs. Stanton's Bible*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 215-217.

<sup>113</sup> PBS, "God In America; People and Ideas, Elizabeth Stanton" 2010  
 <<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/people/>> (accessed on January 13, 2016).

interpretation of scripture, and the Grimke sisters suffered a backlash from the Catholic Church for similar views. Stanton assembled a committee to reinterpret the Bible's message. *The Woman's Bible* was met with mixed reaction from members of the women's rights movement, including Susan B. Anthony and the Women's Christian Temperance Union. It can be argued that the publication of *The Woman's Bible* did more to fracture relationships within the women's rights movement, than achieve actual reform. Susan B. Anthony did not agree with Stanton's views in *The Woman's Bible* and made the following statement; "I have worked 40 years to make the [women's suffrage] platform broad enough for atheists and agnostics to stand upon, and now if need be I will fight the next 40 years to keep it Catholic enough to permit the straightest Orthodox religionist to speak or pray and count her beads upon.". In addition to Anthony's lack of support for Stanton's book, the Woman's Christian Temperance Movement also disavowed Stanton's religious radicalism in *The Woman's Bible*.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid., (March 29, 2016).

## *Chapter VII*

### **Quaker Influence on Women's Rights**

The Seneca Falls Convention in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York served as the catalyst for the women's rights movement that ultimately led to the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1920. Mary M'Clintock, Lucretia Mott and Martha Wright helped organize the conference, in part due to their experiences as Quakers. The Quaker's beliefs and practices were contrasted starkly with traditional religious denominations. Where Protestant religious groups used biblical scripture in an effort to maintain the traditional role of women, Quakers encouraged freedom of thought and speech by men and women, with a resulting change in their concepts of women's roles.<sup>115</sup>

In the 1840s, Hicksite Quakers, a more radical sect of the Quaker movement, began to explore the idea of furthering a woman's influence in religion and religious activities. The notion of women assuming more of a leadership role in religion happened

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<sup>115</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 71.

at the same time women in America were reaching out for greater control of their lives. During the early 1800's, women could not inherit property, sign contracts, serve on a jury and vote in elections. Many colleges refused to admit women, much less offer degrees in theosophical areas.<sup>116</sup> Economic opportunities for women in regard to property or employment were limited. Much of the world's doors were closed to women, and husbands and fathers directed their lives. But as women were beginning to challenge their traditional role, it marked the beginning for women to clamor for equal rights and to break free of society's shackles binding them to kitchen and cradle.<sup>117</sup>

In the summer of 1848, a type of schism transpired when roughly 200 Hicksites created a more radical Quaker group, known as "Progressive Friends". In addition to opposing slavery, Progressive Friends sought ways to increase the influence of women in affairs of the faith. Progressive Friends introduced joint meetings of men and women, giving women an equal voice, which foreshadowed the movement that would bring many aspects of equality to women and men in American society.<sup>118</sup>

Quaker women and men are often affiliated with the abolitionist movement. Perhaps most influential were Lucretia Mott, William Lloyd Garrison and converts Sarah and Angelina Grimke. The "Grimke Sisters" ultimately converted to Quakerism after speaking publicly on abolition within their own Presbyterian Church and were ultimately excommunicated for their outspoken views on slavery and drawing parallels between the

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.74.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>118</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 113.



treatment of women and slaves.<sup>119</sup> Sarah and Angelina read *The Friend*, a Quaker weekly that passed along Quaker views on issues such as women's rights. As speakers for the abolitionist cause, they routinely spoke in front of men and women, and the practice sometimes led to chaos due to societal views on women speaking publicly. Several religious leaders rejected the idea that women should speak from pulpits and public stages. In 1837, the Congregational Churches issued a "Pastoral Letter" warning their congregations of "the dangers which at present seem to threaten the female character with widespread and permanent injury" and called women to remember their "appropriate duties and influence . . . as clearly stated in the New Testament".<sup>120</sup>

Sarah Grimke responded to the Pastoral Letter in 1837;

*No one can desire more earnestly than I do, that woman may move exactly in the sphere which her Creator has assigned her; and I believe her having been displaced from that sphere has introduced confusion into the world.*

*It is, therefore, of vast importance to herself and to all the rational creation, that she ascertain what are her duties and her privileges as a responsible and immortal being.*

*The New Testament has been referred to, and I am willing to abide by its decisions, but must enter my protest against the false translation of some passages by the MEN who did that work, and against the perverted interpretation by the MEN who undertook to write commentaries thereon.*

*I am inclined to think, when we are admitted to the honor of studying Greek and Hebrew, we shall produce some various readings of the Bible a little different from those we now have.*

*The Lord Jesus defines the duties of his followers in his Sermon on the Mount.*

*He lays down grand principles by which they should be governed, without any reference to sex or condition:--Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it*

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<sup>119</sup> Carol Berkin, *Civil War Wives; The Lives and Times of Angelina Grimke Weld, Varina Howell Davis & Julia Dent Grant*, (New York, Vintage Books, 2009), 52-53.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-49.

*under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in Heaven.*<sup>121</sup>

Religious leaders were not alone in their reaction against the Grimke Sisters' work. Catherine Beecher in 1838 published a strong critique of the sisters' approach to abolition-- the letter was specifically addressed to Angelina Grimke. Beecher advocated using gradualism instead of immediate emancipation, and also called women to remember their subordinate role in society. Angelina Grimke responded in the same year, publishing *Letters to Catherine Beecher*, defending her position on immediate emancipation of slaves, as well as the right and responsibility of women to participate as citizens in their society.<sup>122</sup> The World Anti-Slavery Convention in 1840, held in London, England, allowed for the invitation of women, but women were not afforded the right to speak publicly on the issue of abolition. Lucretia Mott attended the Convention and was subsequently denied the right to speak. The argument used to deny women attendees the right to speak on societal issues such as slavery was that women were "constitutionally unfit" and their presence, much less the public view, would hurt the abolition cause.<sup>123</sup>

During the Second Great Awakening, women such as the Grimke sisters were able to set up Sunday schools and discussion groups despite a high degree of opposition.

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<sup>121</sup> Sarah Grimke, "Letter in Response to the Pastoral Letter". 1837  
<[www.wfu.edu/zulick/340/grimkeletter.html](http://www.wfu.edu/zulick/340/grimkeletter.html)> (accessed on February 19, 2016).

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., (February 22, 2016).

<sup>123</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 50.

Challenges to the traditional role of women grew out of the Second Great Awakening and resulted in the founding of many moral reform societies and communities.<sup>124</sup>

In 1848, at the Seneca Falls Convention, aside from Elizabeth Stanton, a Calvinist, most speakers were Quakers. In the Declaration of Sentiments, a list of grievances against women, were the following; "...women could not vote...women had no representatives to put forth their views in government...women were not allowed to be ministers of Religion".<sup>125</sup> Women's rights activists at the convention were, in part, influenced by the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft. The convention both called attention to the slights against women in American society and further challenged the education system. Wollstonecraft was vocal in her criticism of Jean Jacques Rousseau who had stated that a woman's role was to please a man, not to gain an education for self-

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<sup>124</sup> Fordham University. "The Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls Conference, 1848" <[www.legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/senecafalls](http://www.legacy.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/senecafalls)>. (accessed on January 19, 2016).

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., (March 2, 2016).

betterment.<sup>126</sup>



*Figure 3. Wesleyan Chapel, site of first Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, N.Y. 1848, [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)*

The Quakers greatly influenced the 1848 convention in that Quaker women, prior to the convention, had been afforded the opportunity to speak publicly and had the right to become ministers within the Church. Not only were women welcomed as members of the Quaker community, but in essence they were celebrated. Lucretia Mott, Stanton and several other attendees had met prior to the convention to discuss an agenda and used the Declaration of Independence as a basis for their Declaration of Sentiments. Considering the role Quaker women held in the Hicksite denomination, the charges in the Declaration

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<sup>126</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 174.

of Sentiments were more than valid. Quaker women, in their preparation of the Declaration of Sentiments, listed charges against an oppressive male dominated society. Among the charges were: “men destroyed confidence of women, made her willing to be a dependent....made women suffer through religious degradation”.<sup>127</sup> The document denounced discrimination, laws against women and demanded equality to men in regard to freedom of speech and taking part in religious issues. Despite the growing support for the women’s rights movement, the resolution to the charges listed in the Declaration of Sentiments barely passed. Women supported the document until the topic of suffrage was broached, as it was viewed as too radical. The northeast press agreed. Women were demonized in newspapers and their efforts were called “shocking and unnatural”. Reporters claimed women’s suffrage would degrade women. In response to some of the scathing press coverage of the convention, many of the original signers of the Declaration of Sentiments withdrew their names out of sheer embarrassment.

But, the fight for women’s rights had just started, and it cannot go unnoticed that the Quakers’ attendance and construction of the Declaration of Sentiments provided a wealth of experience in public speaking and organizing meetings. The skills acquired through the Quaker community were invaluable in the ongoing struggle for equality. The success and influence of the Quakers was unmistakable at the Rochester Women’s Rights Convention, held two weeks after the Seneca Falls Convention, when Elizabeth Cady

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<sup>127</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 103.

Stanton chaired the proceedings. This critical step in leadership would be continued at all future Women's Rights conventions.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 103.

## *Chapter VIII*

### **From the Pews to the Ballot**

Between the 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, a woman's participation in the church and reform movements was limited to mere attendance. Women could attend church services, and that was the beginning and end of her contribution. Over several decades in the 1800s, women met and organized in many of the same churches that denied them equality to men. This activity indirectly helped women to secure, through the women's rights movement, the 19<sup>th</sup> amendment. Women challenged the traditional teachings of the Bible and became increasingly drawn to spiritualist communities that rewarded forward thinking and that gave them a pulpit from which they could speak to both men and women publicly. Women activists pursued suffrage and gender equality for over one hundred years. They worked through countless church meetings, women's rights conventions and campaigns that helped clear the way to the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1920. During the 1800s, women pursued suffrage relentlessly and held hundreds of conventions and campaigns and volunteered thousands of hours to secure legislation that would give women the right to vote.<sup>129</sup>

In in the early 1600s, the earliest woman religious activist in the colonies was Anne Hutchinson. Hutchinson was banished from the church in Massachusetts for speaking openly and criticizing man's interpretation of the Bible. By the late 1700s

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<sup>129</sup> Carrie Chapman Catt and Nettie Rogers Shuler, *Women Suffrage and Politics; The Inner Story of the Suffrage Movement*, (New York, Charles Scribner' Sons, 1926), 107.

women during the Second Great Awakening opened Sunday Schools, set up discussion groups and took part in reform movements such as those for temperance and abolitionism.<sup>130</sup> But to take part in any of the reform movements, much less assume a leadership role, women needed to find a forum in which they would be welcomed and where they could speak openly about social reform issues.

During the early 1800s women used the churches to advocate for themselves and for other human and civil rights issues. Women's rights was not an accepted social reform movement during the 1800s. Therefore venues to pursue equality were extremely limited. The first Women's Rights Convention was held on July 19<sup>th</sup> and July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1848 at the Wesleyan Church in Seneca Falls, New York. Because finding a venue to speak on women's rights was so difficult during this time, women often would combine the abolitionist agenda with women's rights advocacy.<sup>131</sup> The press covered the Convention stating that it was "shocking and unnatural" for women to behave in such a fashion and that "equal rights would degrade women." In the Declaration of Sentiments presented at the Women's Rights Convention, writer Elizabeth Stanton argued that men and women were created equal and that women had been victims of oppression, scorn and degradation for years.<sup>132</sup> Fuller argued that the Grimke Sisters, prior to the Convention, found it increasingly difficult to speak publicly on any kind of reform issue as soon as their message changed to primarily women's rights.<sup>133</sup> At the World Anti-Slavery

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<sup>130</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 15.

<sup>131</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn*, 188-189.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 192.

<sup>133</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 90.



Convention held in London, England in 1840, women who had been invited to the convention were denied the right to speak at all. The clergy who led the event quoted the bible in an effort to support omitting the women as speakers, and several men in attendance were quoted as stating the women were “constitutionally unfit” to speak publicly.<sup>134</sup>

The Second Baptist Church in Salem, Ohio held a Women’s Right’s Convention on April 19th and 20th in 1850 that created a stir when presider, Betsey M. Cowles refused men in attendance the right to speak, cote or sit on the platform.<sup>135</sup> The Women’s Rights Convention held in Philadelphia at the Bethel AME Church in 1854, attending ministers criticized women speaking openly on any societal issue. Lucretia Mott accused the ministers in attendance of being selective in their use of the Bible to support submissive roles of women that clearly restricted freedom of speech.<sup>136</sup> Women’s Rights Conventions continued to be held at mainly Baptist churches through the mid 1800s offering women a place to speak to both genders on abolition and women’s suffrage. The continuation of women’s rights conventions demonstrated that women were capable of leadership roles, but while women proved their place within reform movements, the journey to suffrage was marred with resentment and strong criticism and ridicule. The women’s rights movement sometimes ebbed because of harsh criticism and a loss of supporters. At the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca

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<sup>134</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 50.

<sup>135</sup> Elizabeth Frost-Knappman, Kathryn Cullen-DuPont, *Women’s Suffrage in America*, (New York, Facts on File Inc., 2005) 85.

<sup>136</sup> Fuller, *Religious Revolutionaries*, 112.

Falls, New York, Frederick Douglass had been a staunch supporter of women's suffrage, but he withdrew his support in 1869 and promoted instead the then pending 14<sup>th</sup> amendment and the vote for the black male.<sup>137</sup>

Coinciding with the Women's Rights Movement was the Temperance Movement. It is important to note that not all women supported the women's rights agenda, at the Temperance Convention at Foster Hall in Cincinnati, Ohio in March 1853, a dividing issue for the group was whether or not to pursue women's rights. Elizabeth Stanton, present at the meeting, pushed for women's rights to be at the forefront, but she encountered strong resistance from men and women. It could be argued that that convention was doomed from the beginning as men were allowed to attend and pushed for the women's rights issue to be abandoned. But while resistance was more or less expected from men, Antoinette Brown Blackwell was at times also critical of the women's rights issue. Blackwell was vigilant on the issue of temperance, but had tepid support at times for women's rights.<sup>138</sup> Her position on the anti-slavery movement was powerful, and she was equally formidable on the issue of temperance. Blackwell was an eloquent and powerful speaker, but in 1853, she was banned from speaking at the International Meeting on Temperance, because she was a woman.

The use of churches by activists to organize and pursue women's rights continued for years. Philadelphia, PA hosted a Women's Rights Convention in 1854 at the First Baptist Church, often referred to as Samson Hall. Henry Grew, a minister, attended the

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<sup>137</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 232.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 233.

convention and publicly opposed women being seated at the upcoming London Convention. Grew cited the bible and claimed it supported a submissive role of women. Lucretia Mott countered Grew's stance by also citing biblical scripture to demonstrate how Grew and other ministers were interpreting the Bible incorrectly and conveniently.<sup>139</sup> The 7<sup>th</sup> National Woman's Rights Convention took place at the Broadway Tabernacle in New York, New York in 1856, followed by the 8<sup>th</sup> National Woman's Rights Convention in 1858 at the Church of the Puritans (Mozart Hall).<sup>140</sup> Women, through their relentless efforts, were instrumental in the passing of the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1863 after securing over four hundred thousand signatures demanding the end of slavery. In 1864 and 1866 additional women's rights conventions were held at the Church of the Puritans in New York, New York.

The use of churches to further civil rights was paralleled by African Americans beginning as early as the late 1800s through the 1960s. In 1787 Richard Allen, a former slave, migrated to Pennsylvania and founded the Free African Society of Philadelphia which evolved into the Bethel Church and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) in 1794.<sup>141</sup> Churches played a pivotal role in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Under the leadership of civil rights activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr., marches and boycotts took on the characteristics of religious services, with prayers, short sermons and songs. But not all churches joined the civil rights movement, many pastors

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<sup>139</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 112.

<sup>140</sup> Gurko, *The Ladies of Seneca Falls*, 213-214.

<sup>141</sup> Marilyn Mellowes, "The Black Church", <<http://www.pbs.org/godinamerica/black-church/>> (accessed April 29, 2016).

and congregations were reluctant to defy societal norms that could bring additional violence to their communities. Thurgood Marshall and the leadership of the NAACP, criticized the use of civil disobedience and argued that it put African Americans in conflict with the powers of government and would compromise their efforts toward equality via the courts.

From the end of the Civil War in 1863 to 1869, Elizabeth Stanton and Susan B. Anthony created several organizations to support women's rights. Organizations often faced stagnation in reaching their goals, therefore they recognized the need to merge in an effort to consolidate ideas and push for women's suffrage and rights. Differing ideologies clearly was a factor between the two dominating organizations; American Woman Suffrage Association, a more conservative group that maintained ties with abolition activists in the pursuit and suffrage and the National Woman Suffrage Association, considered radical and isolated themselves from abolitionists because of lack of support on the issue of adding women to the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The first organization formed was the National Woman's Loyal League to continue the women's rights movement. A petition sent to Washington D.C. included 100,000 signatures supporting women being added to the 14<sup>th</sup> amendment, but it failed because of the nation's lack of support for women's rights. In response to the lack of support, Anthony and Stanton created a second body, the American Equal Rights Association that was solely dedicated to women's suffrage.<sup>142</sup> Prior abolitionists who

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<sup>142</sup> McMillen, *Seneca Falls*, 113.

had once been committed to women's rights had backed off, claiming the black vote took precedence over women's suffrage. Resistance to the women's rights movement did not stop women from continuing their fight for suffrage, however, the Equal Rights Association met once again at the Church of the Puritans in New York City to reorganize and structure future meetings. Sojourner Truth spoke passionately at a women's rights meeting in 1867 and urged for suffrage for both men and women, while the Negro vote was critical, she argued, so was gender equality.<sup>143</sup> In 1869 Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed a new organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA). The organization condemned the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments as blatant injustices to women and aimed to secure women's right to vote on a federal level. The NWSA also advocated for easier divorce and to end discrimination in regard to employment and pay.

Another group, the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) was formed in the same year, led by Caroline Severance, Lucy Stone and Julia Howe. The AWSA embraced more conservative views and did not support the radical actions of the NWSA. In short, the AWSA was mainly concerned with obtaining the vote state by state and did not campaign on other issues.<sup>144</sup> Two years prior to the formation of the AWSA, Caroline Severance formed the Free Religious Association in 1867. It is not surprising that the ideology of the AWSA and the Free Religious Association differed greatly from the NWSA. Both the AWSA and the Free Religious Association believed suffrage and

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 245-247.

women's rights were important, but not an "all consuming passion that it was to others like Susan and Elizabeth."<sup>145</sup> The role and message of many women's rights and temperance organizations in the 1870's changed. A resurgence of the traditional role of women emerged and adopted conservative views that contrasted with the more radical groups focused on suffrage and equal pay. In *Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony Correspondence; Writings and Speeches* Ellen Dubois states;

*Leadership of Stanton and Anthony...particularly objected to what they considered excessively radical attacks on feminism...yet some organizations believed it was important to create societies where conservative, non-suffrage women could develop and grow...as a result, support for the vote was rarely voiced in postwar (Civil War) women's organizations.*<sup>146</sup>

Because of the conflicts between women's groups in regard to suffrage, by the late 1880s it was clear it was not a good idea to have two rival groups campaigning for votes for women. In 1890 AWSA and the NWSA merged and formed the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). Leaders included Elizabeth Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, Carrie Chapman Catt and Anna Howard Shaw.<sup>147</sup>

During the latter part of the 1800s and early 1900s, women were no longer limited to holding conventions in places of worship and began using town halls and secular venues to achieve the right to vote as the momentum and popularity of the women's rights movement had grown considerably. By 1913 the women's suffrage movement

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<sup>145</sup> Virginia Elwood-Akers, *Caroline Severance*, (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, Inc., 2010), 82-83.

<sup>146</sup> Ellen DuBois, *Elizabeth Stanton and Susan b Anthony*, 173.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

appeared to be well-oiled in regard to momentum, organization and structure. In 1903 Jane Addams formed the Women's Trade Union League (WTUL) of New York. Originally the WTUL fought exclusively for higher wages and better working conditions for working class women. But by 1910, the WTUL shifted some of its focus and dedicated its efforts to suffrage and women's rights in the workplace. Women's rights activists suffered a slight setback in 1911 with the formation of the National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage in New York City. This organization was funded mainly by brewers of alcohol who worked with southern lobbyists to thwart the women's suffrage movement to ensure that women did not receive the right to vote, citing irrational arguments that the nation would fall under the rule of women in petticoats. Several members of the National Association Opposed to Women's Suffrage also included clergymen, liquor lobbyists, congressmen and influential men and women from the southern states. But in 1912, Theodore Roosevelt's Bull Moose Party announced its support for women's right to vote, adding momentum to the movement.<sup>148</sup> Until this point in history, women's rights organizations had never been supported by a national political party. Although the tide had clearly turned in respect to support for women's suffrage, many hurdles to achieving the vote seemed to be cemented into place.

In the political sphere, on December 1915, Alice Paul, Lucy Burns, and the Congressional Union, a radical organization formed in 1913 that mirrored the ideology of the Women's Social and Political Union in Great Britain, held a national convention in

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<sup>148</sup> French, *From Eve to Dawn*, 242-243.

Washington, D.C. and collected 500,000 signatures supporting a suffrage petition. Paul, Burns and the Congressional Union testified before Congress on the issue of women's suffrage but failed to secure support for women's suffrage. Activists continued their efforts and in 1916 formed the National Woman's Party.<sup>149</sup> In June 1916 the Congressional Union formed the National Woman's Party (NWP). A majority of the leaders of the NWP came from Quaker backgrounds that emphasized a greater degree of gender equality in the household and openly discussed progressive issues, a stark contrast from a traditional religious home in the 1800s.<sup>150</sup> The primary purpose for the Congressional Union was to continue working for suffrage in the states where women did not have the vote; the newly created NWP organized and worked in western states that had already passed women's suffrage. The two organizations merged in March 1917 solely under the NWP. After President Wilson's re-election in 1916, Alice Paul called for members of the National Woman's Party to picket the White House to convince the president to put pressure on Democratic senators to vote in favor of a constitutional suffrage amendment. But World War I brought intolerance to the actions of women activists. In 1917, police arrested protestors outside the White House. Not faltering in their efforts, women marched to the White House on Independence Day, carrying banners reading "Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed," and they were immediately arrested.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 242-243.

<sup>150</sup> Lynn Wenzel and Carol J. Binkowski, *More than Petticoats; Remarkable New Jersey Women*, (Guilford, CT, 2003) 119-121.

<sup>151</sup> Library of Congress, "*Women of Protest*". <<https://www.loc.gov/collection/women-of-protest/>> (accessed on March 3, 2016).



In October 1917, police announced that if women continued to picket the White House, they could expect sentences of up to six months in prison. Alice Paul marched to the White House carrying a banner with one of Wilson's slogans, "The time has come to conquer or submit for there is but one choice - we have made it." Paul was arrested and began a hunger strike to protest her arrest. Paul was transferred to a psychiatric hospital and placed in a mental ward. During what could be argued as politically charged retaliation, Paul wrote a letter to the National Woman's Party;

*Miss Winslow and I are at opposite ends of the building, each locked in her room, with an iron barred door. I saw her as they brought me on a stretcher from the psychopathic ward, but I have not seen her since. We are each in a ward with three windows. Today they nailed two of my windows shut so that they cannot be opened. The third window has been nailed shut at the bottom, so that the only air I have now is from the top of one window. This was done by the order of Dr. Gannon. He seems determined to deprive me of air because air was one of the things we demanded in our letter asking for recognition as political offenders. We have, of course, been deprived of everything else that was included in our original demand – letters, books, visitors, decent food, except as they force it upon us through tubes. Two weeks ago they did give us letters like this one, on the back of which I am writing.<sup>152</sup>*

Paul had many supporters from all over the United States, and they wrote to her while she was incarcerated. Among the letters of support she received were also others from anonymous Americans who sharply criticized her actions; "Why not let this miserable creature starve? The country would be much better off without her and the balance of her gang of pickets. They are a rotten lot, and are crazy, and should be locked

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<sup>152</sup> "Miss Paul on Hunger Strike," *New York Times*, 7 November 1917.

up for life. If they would starve it would save the expense of keeping them. Let them starve”.<sup>153</sup>

Police arrests and brutality did not stop the women of the National Women’s Party from picketing. Many women in 1917 were arrested for protesting and picketing for their right to vote. Sentences typically varied anywhere from a few days to six months; Lucy Burns received a six-month sentence; Mary Nolan, 73, was sentenced to six days because of her age. A poignant stain on the women’s rights movement occurred on November 14, 1917 when numerous women, despite age or degree of frailty, were arrested and sent to Occoquan Workhouse in Virginia for picketing the White House. Upon arrival at the jailhouse, women refused to put on the prison uniforms or perform the required work which led to prison guards becoming violent, kicking and beating the women prisoners in what became known in the suffrage movement as “The Night of Terror.” Women again resorted to a hunger strike and the guards and staff in the psychiatric ward resorted to inserting tubes into the throats of the jailed activists and pouring raw eggs down their throats. Within three weeks, most of the women were released from Occoquan Workhouse after their charges were dismissed upon the grounds they were illegally arrested and detained.<sup>154</sup> Many of the women that were arrested for protesting were so weak and emaciated that they were unable to walk on their own when they were released from the Workhouse.

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<sup>153</sup> Library of Congress, “*Women of Protest*” (accessed on March 5, 2016).

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, (March 9, 2016).

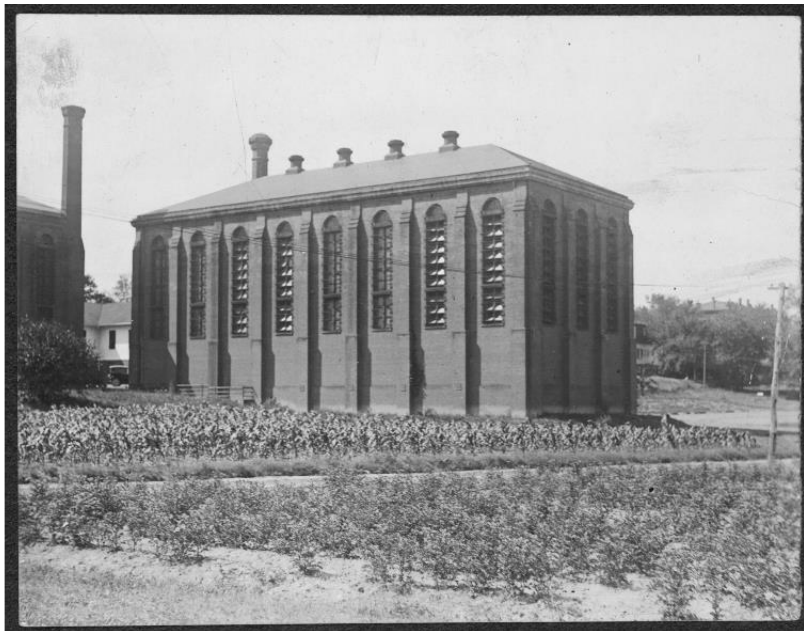


Figure 4. Occoquan Workhouse, Occoquan, VA. [www.loc.gov/womenofprotest](http://www.loc.gov/womenofprotest)



Figure 5. Released women's activists leaving Occoquan Workhouse, 1917.  
[www.loc.gov/womenofprotest](http://www.loc.gov/womenofprotest)

The New York *Times* story on November 7, 1917 quoted the National Women's Party referring to the protestors as militants *The Times* wrote;

*Women's Party Officials say she [Pau] and the other militants have been getting a course diet principally of salt pork and cabbage at the rate of eighteen times in thirty days...Dr. Cora Smith, Miss Paul's physician...issued a bulletin saying Miss Paul was refusing food until she and her companions received the same treatment as seventeen murderers who have the privilege of special food, air, exercise and the newspapers.*<sup>155</sup>

Toward the end of this article, the *Times* itself that referred to the women as "militants." "Although the militants announced they will not resume picketing the White House until Congress reconvenes in December, they considered that a hunger strike is a sufficient climax for the present at least, to their efforts to force President Wilson to indorse woman's suffrage by Constitutional amendment".<sup>156</sup>

There was still resistance and negative connotation in respect to women securing the vote, but World War I brought positive changes for the women's rights movement. By 1918, millions of men were overseas fighting and women assumed roles as laborers in factories across the country, solidifying their argument that the female role was, in many ways, vital to society. NAWSA and NWP in their efforts to secure the vote, left out black women in their struggle. Over 6,000 black women tried to join NAWSA and were denied by the exclusively white members. French states that the NAWSA leaders refused black membership, claiming that black women should forgo their goals and rally behind "white franchise".<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> New York *Times*, Miss Paul on Hunger Strike, November 7, 1917.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid.

<sup>157</sup> Marilyn, *From Eve to Dawn*, 243-244.

Despite previous conflict between the two women's rights organizations, the NAWSA and NWP joined together to back the Susan B. Anthony Amendment to grant women's suffrage. And in 1919, the amendment finally passed by the Senate and was ratified in 1920, granting all women the right to vote. But Alice Paul was not entirely satisfied. Paul wanted women to have equal economic and legal rights to men. The Equal Rights Amendment was presented to Congress in 1923 and subsequently failed.<sup>158</sup> The ratification of the 20<sup>th</sup> Amendment marked the end of a century long battle to secure women's right to vote, but started the fight for equal pay for equal work, as well as equal opportunity in the workplace.

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<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 243.

## *Chapter IX*

### *Conclusion*

Spiritualism and new religious denominations served several distinct purposes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for Americans. Through the 1800s women and men leaned towards secular institutions, less traditional religious denominations and progressive communities to promote social reform movements and pursue equal rights. Spiritualist groups provided an answer for those men and women who wanted to address problematic social issues and civil injustice openly and freely. Through the 1700s and early 1800s, teachings of traditional clergy were embedded in social norms that limited the freedoms of women in the church, workplace and home. Although traditional churches during the 1800s oppressed women through citing the Bible, as well as misinterpreting the Bible, the church was one of the few places, in part to help the poor and hold discussion about select societal woes.

While women were constricted within the churches in regard to participation and freedom of speech, they were able to use them for decades to structure and organize the women's rights movement. As the political climate warmed in regard to suffrage for women, the women with progressive Quaker backgrounds were intrepid in the pursuit for women's rights and suffrage. Between the 1840s and 1870s, women used churches to meet and discuss both societal problems such as poverty, temperance and slavery—and women's rights. Emerging spiritualist communities in the 1800s offered women an

opportunity to experience individualism and celebrate freedoms not experienced before in traditional religious churches. Spiritualism embodied democratic ideals and was often characterized by equality, freedom, tolerance and justice. It is easy to understand why women would be drawn to spiritualist communities during the 1800's considering how sharply they contrasted with traditional religious groups. In addition, spiritualist communities distinguished themselves as progressive entities, where women could practice speaking, conversing and debating issues. Skills that women learned in the spiritualist communities aided their pursuit in the suffrage and women's rights movement.

As the 1860s and 1870s came to pass, women were not restricted to the use of churches with the frequency they experienced twenty years earlier. As the women's movement gained momentum and popularity, women were able to secure town halls and other secular venues to organize and hold public women's rights conventions. Eventually, women created suffrage organizations and petitioned, as well as picketed in Washington, D.C. for passage of a women's suffrage amendment. But even with the passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, victory was bittersweet. Women secured the right to vote only to embark on the passage of the elusive Equal Rights Amendment that would guarantee full economic equality in the workplace.

### Afterward

The fight began with Alice Paul in 1923 and through the year 1970, portions of the Equal Rights Amendment had been presented to Congress every year, but a vote on the ERA was never cast. During the 1970's, opposition to the ERA emerged with fundamentalist Christians and influential women such as Phyllis Schlafly. Opponents claimed that the ERA stated that the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment would prove to be detrimental to women and lead to moral corruption of society. Schlafly stated when asked about the ERA; "ERA means abortion funding, means homosexual privileges, means...whatever else. What I am defending is the real rights of women. A woman should have the right to be in the home as a wife and mother".<sup>159</sup>

Opponents like Schlafly argued that passing the ERA would end protective laws like sexual assault and alimony, eliminate the tendency for mothers to receive child custody in a divorce case, and immediately make the all-male military draft unconstitutional. By 1979, the amendment had not yet been ratified and a three year extension was given to secure the 38 states votes in favor of the ERA. In 1982, the ERA was defeated again falling three votes short and the amendment has expired.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> "Martha Griffiths and the Equal Rights Amendment."

<<https://www.archives.gov/legislative/features/griffiths>> (accessed on March 23, 2016).



In a 2014 legislative proposal to revive the ERA, the following argument was given<sup>161</sup>;

*The “fresh start” approach provides an alternative means to revive the Equal Rights Amendment. It consists of starting over by introducing a new amendment, identical to, but distinct from, the original. A fresh start would avoid potential controversies associated with the “three-state” approach, but would face the stringent constitutional requirements of two-thirds support in both chambers of Congress and ratification by three-fourths of the states. These proposals would restart the ratification process for the proposed Equal Rights Amendment at 35 states and extend it indefinitely by effectively repealing both the original seven-year ratification time limit, and its later extension.<sup>162</sup>*

In 1963, President Johnson’s New Frontier led to the passage of the Equal Pay Act of 1963. The Act required that men and women be given equal pay when they work in the same work place; i.e. equal pay for equal work. But decades later, white women earn 78 cents for every dollar a man earns and minority women fare far worse as African-American women earn about 64 cents and Latina women earn about 56 cents for every dollar earned by a white man. In April 2014 President Obama signed an executive order that allows workers to negotiate their pay, as well as, fight workplace discrimination. On April 1, 2014 when the Paycheck Fairness Act was presented for a vote in the Senate, the Act was defeated by a 52-40 vote that required 60 votes to pass. In 2016 there is yet to be a federal Act or amendment passed that would guarantee equal pay for equal work.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> Neale, Thomas, “The Proposed Equal Rights Amendment: Contemporary Ratification Issues” 2014. <<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42979.pdf>> (accessed on April 2, 2016).

<sup>162</sup> Ibid, accessed 5 April 2016.

<sup>163</sup> “Your Right to Equal Pay.” <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/issues/equal-pay>>. (accessed on March 23, 2016).

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