

## **Northeast Ohio: The Birthplace for Women's Suffrage?**

For the March 29, 1976 edition of "The New Yorker" magazine, artist Saul Steinberg depicts the World as viewed from Manhattan. This magazine cover, turned into a popular poster, is dominated by the skyline of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, and an overly expansive Hudson River, especially when compared to "Jersey," the Rocky Mountains, and the Pacific Ocean. One of the few mentions of the Midwest is a small dot for Chicago, a vast improvement over the eastern seaboard and the City of Boston that, perhaps unsurprisingly, gets no mention at all. The rest of the World gets it; from the New York perspective nearly everything began and ended in the borders of New York State.

Five years ago, my wife was elected to judicial office, the first woman in our rural Ohio County so elected to this particular seat. To pay homage to those who won women the Vote, and paved the trail for my wife's election, we made a pilgrimage to New York State and the location of the First Women's Suffrage Convention at Seneca Falls. We enjoyed the Museum and the surrounding area thoroughly, as a tour of Seneca Falls has several impressive historical locations. Within a tour that is easily experienced in a single day, one can visit the home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the main organizer of the 1848 Convention. A short distance away from the Stanton home is the M'Clintock House where the Convention was planned, and the Declaration of Sentiments were drafted, a document largely credited to Lucretia Mott. The highlight of the tour was the Wesleyan Chapel. In need of repairs at the time of our visit, this Chapel was the location of the 1848 Convention at Seneca Falls where the Declaration of Sentiments was signed by over one hundred people. A reading of this document, conveniently written on a large wall in a park between the Wesleyan Chapel and an adjacent Visitor's Center, provides a poignant end to your visit with a chance to reflect upon why our Nation's ideals upon our founding were limited only to white males of privilege.

The Visitor's center, a perfect location to both begin and end your Suffrage Tour, offers several displays and films related to the Suffrage Movement and Park Rangers helpful with additional information about the Suffrage Sites and the surrounding area. The Visitor's Center also contains the obligatory Museum shop from which to purchase mementos and share your experience with a very helpful staff eager to know your thoughts of how the events of 1848 had a direct impact on visitors who enjoy the right to participate and serve in our democracy. When my wife explained the purpose of our Journey, to honor those who made her legal career possible, one of the Park Rangers for the Women's Rights National Historic Park took her picture, displaying evidence of our visit on the Park's Facebook Page. The experience was educational and thought provoking. However, events immediately after this pilgrimage caused both my wife and I to question Steinberg's belief in the over-importance of New York State to our Nation and its ideals of equal justice under law, particularly with respect to voting rights for women.

Within a few days of our Visit to Seneca Falls, my Judicial spouse looked at the Facebook page of the Women's Suffrage National Historic Park. To her surprise, she noted that there were several comments associated with this post and the picture taken of our journey to Seneca Falls. A chance photograph has turned into a debate! A gentleman from Boston replied to this picture by indicating that the National

Park Service has it all wrong. We had wasted a trip to New York State, and needed to travel to the true origins of Women's Suffrage in the Great State of Massachusetts. According to this Bostonian, the Seneca Falls meeting was more regional in nature, with the New York women unable to conduct business without the help of their husbands. The first "National" Women's Suffrage Convention, it was alleged, occurred in October of 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts. From this New England perspective, credit for the early expansion of Women's rights belonged more to such luminaries like Lucy Stone and Abby Kelley Foster, and not Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott and the events that occurred at Seneca Falls.

Before discussing a trip to Massachusetts and touring the alleged "real" place where the first Suffrage Convention occurred, our story became more complicated, with claims that the roots of Women's Suffrage were near our hometown in Ohio. Contributing to our confusion was a letter that my wife received upon her election to the bench from the Family of Judge Florence E. Allen. Along with a letter that congratulated my wife upon her election as the first female Judge in our small Northeast Ohio Community was a photograph of Florence E. Allen taking the oath of office as the first woman to serve in our third branch of government as a Judge in the nearby Court of Common Pleas of Cuyahoga County in Cleveland, Ohio. As soon as Women secured the right to vote with the ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment in August of 1920, Ms. Allen secured her name on the ballot for Judge that same November and won. Two years later, Judge Allen was elected to the Supreme Court of Ohio. In 1934, she was appointed to an Article III Federal Court, on the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals, all firsts for Women. Amazingly, while born in the State of Utah, Judge Allen received some of her early education in my wife's home County of Ashtabula, about 60 miles east of the City of Cleveland. Judge Allen, when receiving her early education in Ashtabula County, Ohio, was led to believe that it was Northeast Ohio that could rightfully claim the birthplace or training of early Women's Suffrage Pioneers, and, quite possibly, held the Nation's first Women's Suffrage Convention before either Massachusetts or New York State. Is this possible? Just as Ohio is the Birthplace of Aviation, the Electric Light Bulb, and Football, could the Buckeye State be the Birthplace for Women's Suffrage?

The year is 1945, twenty-five years after Votes for Women were secured with the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment. Then in her 60's, Judge Allen sought to recognize pioneering Women who played such a prominent role in her own life and others; leaders within the Ohio Women's Suffrage Association and National American Women's Suffrage Association, such as Harriet Taylor Upton and Elizabeth J. Hauser. The timing of Judge Allen's project was important as these Ohio leaders were in failing health. Moreover, more recognized leaders within the Suffrage Movement, such as Carrie Chapman Catt of New York State and Maud Wood Park of Massachusetts, were not getting any younger. Curious about Ohio's role in the Suffrage Fight, and wanting to honor those who made her path as the first woman elected to our Judicial Branch of Government, Judge Allen helped to create the "Committee for the Preservation of Ohio Women Suffrage Records." Her first order of business was to contact those women who played leading roles both in the National Suffrage Movement, as well as her own career and path in life: Carrie Chapman Catt; Maud Wood Park; and Harriet Taylor Upton. Each one of these women would stake out the claim for their home state to claim the Birthplace of Women's Suffrage: New York; Massachusetts; and Ohio.

While born in Wisconsin, writing from her home in New Rochelle, New York, Carrie Chapman Catt was clear within her letter dated January 26, 1945 to Judge Allen as to which City and State deserved credit as the birthplace of Women's Suffrage. From the woman who led the National American Women's Suffrage Association after Susan B. Anthony and again in the critical period before the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment's passage, the correct answer was Seneca Falls, New York. Admittedly, Catt acknowledged that the Convention at Seneca Falls "was not properly organized," a statement seemingly in agreement with our friends in Massachusetts. However, regardless of what anyone felt for the leaders, Ms. Catt noted that it was at the Seneca Falls Convention, two years before the one in Massachusetts, that she set "down the principles and platform" that eventually led to the "enfranchisement of the women of the nation."

It is apparent, within this January 26<sup>th</sup> letter, that Judge Allen informed Ms. Catt that she was seeking alternate opinions on the subject and had also contacted Maud Wood Park. Ms. Catt expressed her belief that Judge Allen had made a mistake, and admitted to having a "little quarrel" with Mrs. Park who did "not agree with me [Ms. Catt] at all." Ms. Catt believed that Mrs. Park was attempting to obtain large contributions for a Library envisioned on the campus of Radcliffe College in Massachusetts. Carrie Chapman Catt acknowledged that the Suffrage Convention held in the autumn of 1850 in Worcester, Massachusetts was important, especially as it occurred at "the beginning of the [suffrage] organization in Great Britain." Again, however, Ms. Catt noted that the events at Seneca Falls, including the Declaration of Sentiments, occurred a full two years before the events in Massachusetts.

In a line that is reminiscent of Steinberg's iconic view of New York, Ms. Catt stated as follows to Maud Wood Park's claim that Massachusetts was the Birthplace of Suffrage:

New England never got over the feeling that it was the beginning, the middle and the end of history of the United States and that the rest of us, from the border of Massachusetts to the Pacific, are just a few scattered people who wandered off from the Motherland, never did anything very important. So, what they did in Massachusetts was to emphasize all the Massachusetts people and to "little-ize" the big movement that grew out of the first beginnings. I think that, to show forth the movement to coming generations, a museum exhibit should begin with the beginning and make some kind of display of the Seneca Falls Convention, which really was the beginning, putting Lucy Stone on an equality with them, although she was not, or rather, did not actually represent the beginning.

In making her argument, Carrie Catt Chapman heard loud and clear what certain Bostonians were saying with respect to our Nation's history; everything began and ended within the borders of the Massachusetts. Ms. Catt was willing to recognize that others made significant contributions to the cause, including such luminaries like Lucy Stone. It would even include persons from Ohio who also "has a very useful and interesting story." Ms. Catt noted that there was a "Great Convention at Salem, Ohio, and the best thing about that convention was that it converted a young boy who became the

Governor of Wyoming at the time the first legislature concluded to enfranchise women and he signed the bill and, if he had not been there, we would not have had suffrage in Wyoming yet, perhaps.”

In the middle of the crossfire between who was “first,” Massachusetts or New York, a new contender appears based on the written statement of Ms. Catt – Ohio. Indeed, John Allen Campbell snuck into a Women’s Convention in his hometown of Salem, Ohio, that occurred in the spring of 1850 and made an impression on this young man. Years later, in 1869, when Wyoming would earn the nickname of the “Equality State,” Campbell was the territorial governor who signed the Bill granting women the right to vote in that state. Could the Buckeye State claim a first in the Suffrage Movement, beyond having the first woman elected to the third branch of government in Judge Florence E. Allen? Despite these events occurring in Ohio and Massachusetts, Ms. Catt stood steadfast that the Convention at Seneca Falls, New York was first. Her argument was compelling. While Ohio has, indeed, held an early Suffrage Convention in the Spring of 1850, that Convention was held in-between the Conventions held in Seneca Falls and Worcester, Massachusetts.

As a Judge, Florence Allen wanted to give all sides a chance to make their case. Before turning to the argument of this new possible contender, Ohio, arguing its place in early suffrage history, Judge Allen turned her attention to the arguments made by the State of Massachusetts. To obtain this perspective, Judge Allen reached out to one of her mentors from Massachusetts, Maud Wood Park, author of the book, “Front Door Lobby,” where Mrs. Park expertly describes the final lobbying effort to convince our elected officials in Washington D.C. to seek final passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

Judge Allen’s ties with Maud Wood Park ran deep. While Judge Allen received her higher education largely in Northeast Ohio, both at the New Lyme Institute and the Women’s College of Western Reserve (now Case Western Reserve University), she was denied admission into Western Reserve’s law school due to her gender. What could have been a tragedy, turned into a triumph as Allen would obtain her law degree at New York University. Attending law school in New York City, Florence Allen was hired as Assistant Secretary of the National College Equal Suffrage League, an Auxiliary of the National American Women’s Suffrage Association (“NAWSA”) working with none other than Maud Wood Park. Within a short time of her hiring, the future jurist would work for the NAWSA and the Ohio Women’s Suffrage Association on a ballot initiative to grant Ohio’s women suffrage rights in 1912. Thirty-three (33) years later, Judge Allen, would write her former mentor for advice as to which state could claim the first true Women’s Suffrage Convention.

In a letter dated May 11, 1945, and addressed to Judge Allen, Maud Wood Park confirmed the work that was being performed in creating a Women’s History Museum on the Campus of Radcliffe College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Ms. Park indicated that she would provide Judge Allen with a guide to this particular collection when it was fully completed, but indicated that she agreed with Judge Allen that a portion of the museum should have pictures to make the “collection more appealing to visitors and students.” Ms. Park also mentioned the use of large glass cases that would hold a variety of memorabilia such as suffrage flags, badges, and buttons. It was this Museum, located near Boston that created fear toward Ms. Catt in how the history of Suffrage would be told. Indeed, Carrie Catt Chapmen lamented that no one gave consideration at the time of the Seneca Fall Convention to

preserve history and noted the dearth of photographs that existed of these early leaders at a time when photography was in its infancy. In many respects, Ms. Catt's fear is the same fear that the one Bostonian warned both my wife and I when visiting Seneca Falls. Would we get the whole story, or a version created within a National Park located in New York given the blessings and dollars from the Federal Government?

Like her counterpart in New York, Maud Wood Park complemented the tremendous story that Ohio has to tell of the Suffrage Movement. Ms. Park was pleased to learn that Judge Allen was working with long-term treasurer of the NAWSA Harriet Taylor Upton and Elizabeth J. Hauser "who was a great help in the last years of the struggle for woman suffrage" leading the NAWSA's press corp. Mrs. Park also noted Ohioan, Belle Sherman who, along with Carrie Chapman Catt, helped to transform the NAWSA into the League of Women Voters where they both held leadership positions within this national organization.

However, despite being complementary of the efforts taken by Women of New York and Ohio, Maud Wood Park made it clear that the story of Women's Suffrage belonged in the State of Massachusetts. Yes, the collection would display thirty or so pictures of women across the Country who were involved in the suffrage fight, but the story would be told from near Boston. It was the assembling of this collection in the State of Massachusetts that upset Carrie Chapman Catt. Radcliffe College, within the educational confines of Cambridge already familiar with preserving our Revolutionary split from Britain, knew of the importance of saving our Nation's early history and had experience with sharing that history well beyond what existed in Seneca Falls let alone Ohio. As noted by Carrie Chapman Catt, with the limited use of photography in the "West," Boston Society was in a much better position twenty-five years after woman obtained the vote to tell the story of the struggle for suffrage. Mrs. Catt feared that the efforts of other persons in the cause of Suffrage would be lost outside the borders of Massachusetts. Would persons like Lucy Stone and Abby Kelley Foster, with their better organizational skills and living in an area of the Country with a better appreciation for history, obtain credit for the early roots of the Suffrage Cause?

Judge Florence E. Allen soon found herself in the middle of this debate. For the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of final ratification of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, which State deserved credit for its passage? New York? Massachusetts? Could Judge Allen dare ask; what role Ohioans played in the early suffrage movement? In addition to contacting her mentors such as Carrie Chapman Catt and Maud Wood Park, Judge Allen also reached out to Harriet Taylor Upton to seek the Ohio perspective on this issue. Harriet Taylor Upton was a major influence on Judge Allen, not only as a leader voice within the Ohio Women's Association, but also as a longtime Treasurer of the National American Women's Suffrage Association, the "NAWSA." Indeed, at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, when the NAWSA's treasury was in a critical situation, Ms. Upton agreed with Susan B. Anthony and Carrie Chapman Catt to temporarily move the NAWSA's headquarters to Upton's hometown of Warren, Ohio. Ms. Upton agreed to this arrangement so long as Elizabeth J. Hauser remained in Warren to assist with the day-to-day operations of the organization. Under the leadership of Upton and Hauser, between 1903 to 1910, the NAWSA's finances improved with an increase in membership and the organization publishing more materials each year in support of votes for women. When the NAWSA returned to New York in 1910, as alluded to by Maud Wood Park, Ms. Hauser moved to New York to continue helping with the organization's press corp.

These Ohio connections undoubtedly helped Florence E. Allen to obtain a job with the College League in New York, as well as creating additional opportunities for work in her chosen field.

By the autumn of 1945, Harriet Taylor Upton, one of the last living legends of the Suffrage fight at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, responded to Judge Allen's request for information. The years had not been kind to Upton. Following the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression that followed, Ms. Upton lost her home to foreclosure. While the Upton Association in Warren, Ohio saved Mrs. Upton's home a few years back from the wrecking ball, and lovingly restored this home to its former glory, the Association was unable to save her personal belongings. Unlike Boston Society, who more readily recognized the importance of saving its history at the time it was being made, Upton's belongings were sold on the front porch during the foreclosure sale, leaving precious few original artifacts that actually belonged to this pioneering woman from the Suffrage Movement. Harriet Taylor Upton died in November of 1945, and was buried in a pauper's grave in California. Just before her death, Ms. Upton did her best to respond to Judge Allen's request for information. Naturally, she highlighted Ohio's role in the Suffrage Movement.

Within the Archives of Ohio History Connection ("OHC") in Columbus, Ohio, the work of the "Committee for the Preservation of Ohio Women Suffrage Records" is on display for all to view. The collection was highly sought after with the Library of Congress reportedly seeking to obtain the collection as an important piece of Women's History. Cleveland Plain Dealer Pictorial Magazine (Feb 29, 1948). However, pleas were made for the collection to remain in Ohio, with Judge Allen originally planning to display the items at the Ohio State University where her sister, Esther Allen Gaw, was a longtime Dean of Women. However, the collection was donated to the Ohioana Library Association, whose first book within its collection was the "History of the Western Reserve" written by Harriet Taylor Upton. See "Women's Suffrage and the Ohio Women's Convention" (August 30, 2019), Ohioana Library. This collection, now called the Francis Jennings Casement Papers when transferred to OHC, has photographs of Harriet Taylor Upton with early suffrage leaders such as Frances Jennings Casement, and women of the earlier Women's Suffrage and Political Club who met at the Union Chapel in South Newbury, Ohio, and who attempted to cast ballots in local elections as early as 1871, a full year before Susan B. Anthony was more famously arrested for attempting to vote. An early catalogue of this Collection was made by Judge Allen, who contributed to a story entitled: "The Ohio Woman Suffrage Movement: 'A Certain Unalienable Right' – What Ohio Women Did to Help Secure It." This story has the following Dedication:

To

The brave and forward-looking women of Ohio

Who in 1850 held in Salem the second

Woman's Suffrage Convention

In history

And

To

Harriet Taylor Upton

Who caught and carried the torch

As a jurist, Judge Florence E. Allen read the briefs, honored her mentor Harriet Taylor Upton, and agreed with Carrie Chapman Catt that Seneca Falls, New York was the clear winner in holding the first Women's Suffrage Convention in the United States. However, Judge Allen questioned Massachusetts' claim that it was "second" to hold a Women's Suffrage Convention, let alone "first," given the role of the women in New York in 1848 and the Women of Ohio at the Women's Suffrage Convention held at Salem, Ohio in the Spring of 1850. A clear look at any calendar reveals that the 1850 Convention in Worcester, held in October of 1850, third to Judge Allen's proof that Ohio held the second Women's Suffrage Convention in April of 1850. What about the State of Massachusetts' claim that its convention was more "National" in scope, and, hence, more important to the cause than the regional meeting at Seneca Falls? Should Ohio's convention similarly be discounted and removed from our teaching of history?

A review of the actual proceedings at Seneca Falls, including the signors of the Declaration of Sentiments, establishes New York's prominence. As to Ohio's Convention, that remains largely lost to history, a review of the proceedings at Salem, Ohio establishes its own importance, as well as helping to jump-start the women of Massachusetts to action. As part of our Nation's Bicentennial in 1976, the Salem (Ohio) Public Library commissioned a project to detail all the speeches given at the Women's Suffrage Convention held at Salem, Ohio in April of 1850. A woman by the name of Betsey Mix Cowles from Austinburg, Ohio was called upon to lead this Convention. Various motions were presented and speeches made including letters in support from the leaders at the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. There is also a letter in support from none other than Lucy Stone dated April 10, 1850, p. 35, which states in relevant part as follows:

Dear Friends: The friends of human freedom in Massachusetts rejoice that a Woman's Rights Convention is to be held in Ohio. We hail it as a sign of progress, and deem it especially fitting that such a Convention is to be formed. It is easier, when the Old is destroyed, to build the New right, than to right it after it is built. \*\*\* [Stone notes how Ohio has recently called a Convention for a new Ohio Constitution.]

Massachusetts ought to have taken the lead in the work you are now doing, but if she chooses to linger, let her younger sister of the West set her a worthy example; and if "the Pilgrim spirit is not dead," we'll pledge Massachusetts to follow her.

Yours for Justice and Equal Rights,

Lucy Stone

This letter is of interest for many reasons, but in the debate of determining which State was “first” in the suffrage movement there are two important points. First, there is an acknowledgement from Lucy Stone that based on the actions of the women from the Buckeye State, the women of the Bay State were encouraged to “follow.” Second, Lucy Stone’s letter from Massachusetts, not to mention the letters of support for the Salem Convention from more recognized names at Seneca Falls, establishes that the Convention in Ohio, 1850, had a National reach; one of Massachusetts’ criticisms for New York taking the crown of holding the “first” Women’s Suffrage Convention. By this same argument, would not the State of Ohio deserve the title of being “first?”

Despite these facts, Judge Allen heard the evidence and concluded that Seneca Falls was indeed “first,” with Ohio’s Convention coming in “second.” While it might be tempting to call this case closed, Ohio is not about to concede to New York State the title of holding, or at least proving the brain power behind, the first Women's Suffrage Convention.

Looking at the proceedings of the events in Salem, Ohio one reads the name of Betsey Mix Cowles as Presiding over the 1850 Convention. Who is this new name, and does she deserve to be known in the same circle as persons like Susan B. Anthony, Lucy Stone, Carrie Chapman Catt, and Maud Wood Park? After all, as acknowledged by Ms. Catt, the proceedings in Salem, 1850, led by Betsey Mix Cowles, provided the groundwork for women to obtain the actual right to vote in Wyoming when it became a State in 1869 earning that State the moniker of The Equality State. Who is Betsey Mix Cowles, and what qualified her to lead the 1850 proceedings in Salem if not an earlier Convention?

Within the annuals of the American Anti-Slavery Society, published in New York City (1838) by William S. Dorr, Betsey Mix Cowles’ name appears at p. 147 as the Recording Secretary of the Ashtabula County, Ohio, Anti-Slavery Society (female), first formed in September of 1835, with a standing Membership of 224. With a large number of Betsey’s original letters deposited at the Main Campus of Kent State University, one can learn that Betsey Mix Cowles was denied the opportunity to speak at the Ashtabula Anti-Slavery Society, the men preferring the women to remain quiet and work on tasks associated with raising money for the male dominated organization such as knitting, quilting, and the production of baked goods. Not wanting to take a secondary role in the single largest issue of that time, the abolition of slavery, Betsey stood up and created her own Anti-Slavery Society. The amount of courage for anyone, let alone a woman in 1835, to stand up to authority was remarkable. However, this was par for the course for Betsey who would be one of the first women to attend and earn a degree from Oberlin College, and serve as an early female principal and school superintendent sought out and paid on an equal pay scale as her male counterparts. She would then lead the Women’s Suffrage Convention in Salem, Ohio in 1850. Is there any chance that Betsey Mix Cowles did anything further to advance the cause of women between 1835 to 1850?

It turns out that Betsey Mix Cowles did quite a lot, even earning the attention of Abby Kelley Foster who visited Betsey in Austinburg, Ohio in February of 1846. In a letter located in the Boston Public Library and written from Cleveland, Ohio to Maria W. Chapman of Boston, Massachusetts on February 18,



1846, Foster states her belief that “Ohio is to the west what Mass. is to N[ew] E[ngland] in point of influence, and we trust our labors here have given her a Mass. character or at least have laid the foundation for such a character.” In her letter, Foster notes Betsey’s education at Oberlin and high ranking duties at a local school of higher education. Abby Kelley Foster then describes Betsey as speaking to “excellent effect in public meetings and is now forming societies all over the eastern section of the Reserve, using all her spare moments for this purpose.” Foster concludes her letter by noting that “No woman in the Reserve has half her influence.”

The Anti-Slavery Bugle would frequently report on Betsey’s gatherings, one from September 4, 1846 gives some insights into the wit and humor of Betsey Mix Cowles, and hints at calling Men and Women alike to meet and see all that Women can accomplish.

All friends of the slave “from every persuasion” are respectfully invited to attend [a meeting in Jefferson, Ohio]. Come one, come all, friend and foe –come outer and come –iner.

Those who think every movement of the professed friend of the slave, only rivets his chains, come, that you may be confirmed. – Those who blush for women, that she is thus out of her sphere, come and see how she looks, that you may blush the more; for the deeper the tinge – the more youthful the appearance – hence the greater verdure.

Those who think nothing is done, come see the nothing – those who think a little, come and see how little – those who think much is accomplished come and see – “great is the work.” Those whose superior wisdom looks upon us with contempt, come and see our folly – the contrast will enable you to appreciate even more highly your own superiority. Those who sympathize with us, come that you may test for yourselves whether or not, we are worthy of sympathy – those who condemn, come and see that you may do it intelligently.

Those who call us Anny Kellyites do just come and see what a company of such “ites” will do; only think of it; if only one creates such a stir in community – what will a whole company do? Don’t lose the sight, come and see.

Those who call us Garrsonians take your shield in hand; carefully peep over or under it; see how such “ons” look; those who call us Liberty Party – buckle on the whole political armor; come and stand your ground manfully.

Use your own eyes and ears –don’t borrow your neighbor’s. Exercise your own judgment – don’t borrow this essential to maturity of character from your neighbor. Whatever your predictions, you will probably find what you expect and wish to find; therefore we promise you shall be gratified. \*\*\* Better times are coming.

B.M. Cowles, Sec’ry

While Betsey acknowledged that many would view her actions as out of the typical “sphere” of women activities, there is no doubt that she is calling women to action and encouraging all to see what they are accomplishing. Could this notice for a meeting in 1846, two years before Seneca Falls, be considered a call for a Women’s Suffrage Convention? That would depend on how one defines a “Convention.” Merriam-Webster defines a Convention as; “a large meeting of people who come to a place for usually several days to talk about their shared work or other interests or to make decisions as a group.”

The length of stay is not critical to the definition of a “Convention,” but it is worth remembering that travel in the mid 1850’s was certainly not as convenient as today; with persons having a tendency to stay for a day or two before proceeding home from a journey. Is it fair to presume that Betsey Mix Cowles’ outreach to the rest of the Western Reserve, noted by Foster’s letter of 1846, and the sheer volume of Members of the Ashtabula County Female Anti-Slavery Society, 224 in 1835, was enough to establish a sufficient gathering to form a “Convention?”

The Following year, in the fall of 1847, William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass started their Western Tour by visiting Ohio, first at New Lyme within Ashtabula County, spending time with Betsey Mix Cowles at her home in Austinburg. The fact that Garrison and Douglass started their Western tour with Betsey, visiting if not staying at her home, gives some semblance of her importance to the Anti-Slavery cause if not the Women’s Suffrage Cause. Moreover, in Garrison’s autobiography, when describing this Western Tour and a visit to Salem, Ohio, he notes meeting with James and Lucretia Mott. It was Lucretia Mott who was credited with drafting the Declaration of Sentiments presented at the 1848 Convention at Seneca Falls; a document most worthy of praise and evidence as to the importance to New York State in the Suffrage Cause. Later, during his stay in Oberlin, Garrison met “a very superior young woman” who, in her “firm and independent course at Oberlin,” plans to lecture on the rights of women. That young woman was Lucy Stone, who no doubt is worthy of credit for the work she performed nationally and internationally for the cause of Freedom. William Lloyd Garrison: The Story of his Life told by His Children. (1889) Vol iii, p. 199, 204-05.

However, the question remains, what effect, if any, did Betsey Mix Cowles have on the Women Suffrage Convention to be held at Seneca Falls in 1848? Much as they did with the Women of Massachusetts before their own Convention in Worcester, October of 1850, did the women of Ohio including Betsey Mix Cowles influence the women of New York and the Seneca Falls Convention? As feared by Carrie Chapman Catt, those who preserve their history are in a much better position to document their case, and Judge Florence E. Allen clearly viewed the evidence as favoring New York as being “first.” However, facts, as they are uncovered, can change minds and the telling of history. Recently, a newspaper article in the archives of the American Antiquarian Society, located, in all places, at Worcester, Massachusetts, might change how history is told. Within the collection of the AAS is a publication dated February 2, 1847, and produced by the Female Anti-Slavery Society, Ashtabula County, Ohio. Within this publication, entitled a “Plea for the Enslaved and the Oppressed,” the articles largely concern information regarding the rights and accomplishment of African Americans. However, one of the articles also calls for “Universal Suffrage,” bringing to question whether the “Oppressed” in the name of

the publication had a broader meaning. The American Antiquarian Society attributes this publication to both Betsey Mix Cowles and Abby Kelley Foster. It is worth noting the publication was listed as "Volume 3" acknowledging the prospect that other documents remain to be found.

Garrison's papers are also of interest with respect to the young woman he met at Oberlin, Lucy Stone, ready to promote the rights of women. Within the Frances Jennings Casement papers at Ohio History Connection is a letter written by Lucy Stone's husband, Henry B. Blackwell, and dated June 6, 1887, after a lull in the Suffrage Movement in the years following the Civil War. In the letter, Mr. Blackwell notes that he was "an Ohio Woman Suffragist, who attending the meeting held for organization in Cleveland in 1853 as a delegate from Cincinnati & for 18 years a citizen of your State, I am very glad to note the increased activity which has sprung up since my wife and myself visited Northern Ohio." (Letter written to Olpha D. Baldwin, M.D., but forwarded to Frances Jennings Casement, as there was an expense incurred with a printing within the Women's Journal for the Ohio Woman Suffrage Association during the time of Mrs. Casement's leadership in that organization.) The above notes the very significant ties that Lucy Stone had with the Western Reserve of Ohio, receiving her education within one of the few schools in the Nation at that time to permit the education of women.

Who was the first state to hold a Women's Suffrage Convention? New York, Massachusetts, or Ohio? Is the strongest case, perhaps, one that shares credit with an amazing group of Women throughout the Country?

As Carrie Chapman Catt noted, the women of Seneca Falls, while admittedly disorganized, were the first to lay down a formal platform and principles. However, how much "formality" is needed within a group of individuals who are meeting for a common cause from which to constitute a "Convention." Were Betsey Mix Cowles calls in the Anti-Slavery Bugle in 1846, a full two years before Seneca Falls to gather persons to advance the cause of Freedom, sufficient to constitute a Convention?

The best case that New England has for starting the Women's Suffrage Movement is in the actions and deeds of such luminaries as Lucy Stone and Abby Kelley Foster. For her part, Foster saw the potential in the West, and the need to expand the Suffrage Movement outside of the confines of Boston Society. The fact that, by 1846, people are referring to groups of women assembling together in Ohio as "Kelleyites" is proof that Foster's influence was most profound in the Western States. Lucy Stone's contributions to the movement are extensive, but can we overlook the fact that so many women, including African Americans, were first afforded the opportunity at an education, enough to establish that a significant portion of the brain power for this movement was concentrated in Ohio?

Although Judge Allen, when sifting through the evidence to support Carrie Chapman Catt's view that New York was the first, Catt's letter to Judge Allen makes an important admission. While discussing her concern that Radcliffe College was attempting to accept credit for the Suffrage Movement by creating the first permanent exhibit on the subject, Ms. Catt noted as follows: "Being a real westerner, I think that if there is any college anywhere that should do anything of that sort, it ought to be Oberlin, which I think never did understand how important it had been in the world, in the long ago."

Does this debate boil down to, in many respects, to a similar discussion about aviation and the creation of the first airplane? Does the credit go to the State of North Carolina where the “First Flight” occurred, or to the technical expertise and knowledge that the Wright Brothers gained in creating the first airplane in Ohio? Depending on your perspective, each State has an argument of holding the crown of being first. However, the arguments raised by those advocating for New York or Massachusetts holding the first Women’s Suffrage Convention, not unlike the Steinberg poster, tries to paint the world from a particular location with little consideration of the efforts of others. By comparison, Ohio’s argument is much more inclusive, and more willing to credit others who inspired them to seek Universal Suffrage. Why are Betsey Mix Cowles’ accomplishments not better known, or that of the Women of Ohio who conducted their own Convention at Salem no later than the Spring of 1850? Were their efforts in support of the Suffrage cause not worthy of the history books? Is our lack of knowledge about Betsey Mix Cowles merely about marketing, with Betsey not doing enough to tout her own accomplishments or those of Ohio’s women? Should Betsey have created a cartoonish figure of herself for the Anti-Slavery Bugle in the 1840’s, not unlike Steinberg’s famous depiction in the New Yorker, demanding all credit for the Suffrage Movement within the confines of Ohio and its Western Reserve? Alternatively, is it her willingness to share credit with others that somehow diminishes her accomplishments or, because of her humbleness, makes her more worthy of respect?

In 1959, Judge Allen would retire from active service on the 6<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals. While the occasion was certainly a time for celebration, it was also filled with sadness. At the time of her retirement, she remained the first and only Woman to serve on a Federal Appeals Court. For the remaining seven years of her life she would struggle through a number of illnesses while attempting to finish her own autobiography entitled, “To Do Justly.” The title of her book comes from the New Testament, Micah 6:8, that lists the requirements to lead a good life; “To Do Justly, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with Your Lord.” There is some comfort in the State of Ohio conveying its humbleness when discussing its work in the area of expanding human freedom and social justice. At the same time, the names of persons like Betsey Mix Cowles, Frances Jennings Casement, Harriet Taylor Upton, Elizabeth J. Hauser, and Florence Allen belong in the Pantheon of names that should be remembered for their brave, forward-looking, and humble way that they carried the Torch of Freedom.

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