

Founding Mother

The Seneca Falls Convention began a six decade career of women's rights activism by Elizabeth Cady Stanton.



Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her daughter Harriet, from a daguerreotype 1856.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton and daughter Harriot, 1856. Harriot would also become a leading advocate of women's rights.

*"It has been said that I forged the thunderbolts and she fired them."
Elizabeth Cady Stanton on her partnership with Susan B. Anthony*



Elizabeth Cady Stanton grew up in a home with twelve servants. Early in her marriage Cady Stanton had a more modest lifestyle in Seneca Falls, New York. KENNETH C. ZIRKEL

Young Susan B. Anthony sometimes helped in the Stanton household. "Susan stirs the pudding, Elizabeth stirs up Susan, and Susan stirs up the world," explained Elizabeth's husband Henry Stanton.

PROJECT GUTENBERG

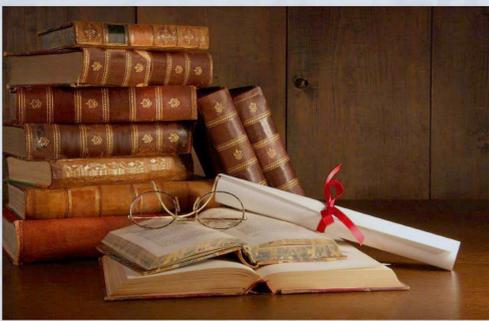


A Unique Partnership

She has been called the "outstanding philosopher" of the women's movement. Even in childhood Elizabeth Cady Stanton had a passion for equality. In order to compete with boys she studied the "books they read and the games they played," beginning a lifelong habit of intellectual curiosity. Later, as the mother of seven children, she sometimes felt like a "caged lioness." Elizabeth wrote speeches and prepared arguments for her friend Susan B. Anthony to deliver on the lecture circuit.



When her children were older Cady Stanton toured eight months each year as a paid lecturer. One winter she traveled forty to fifty miles a day by sleigh, often in sub-zero temperatures, when western railroads were not running.



"I wish you were a boy"—Daniel Cady to his precocious daughter Elizabeth

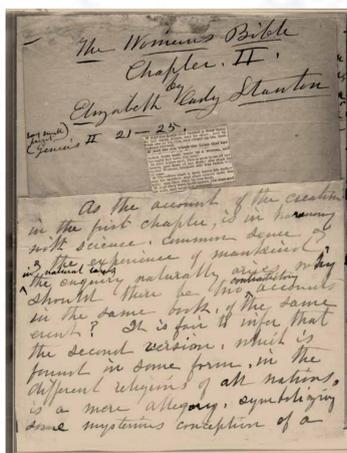
Young Elizabeth Cady Stanton listened as her father, a prominent attorney, counseled a local woman whose husband had lost the family farm, inherited from her family. Cady explained that there was no legal remedy. A woman's husband controlled property. One of Stanton's law students teased Elizabeth that he would own her prized necklace and could trade it for cigars if they married. Elizabeth wanted to take a scissors to her father's law books and cut out every statute damaging to women.

On the Road

Cady Stanton took to the lecture circuit in middle age promoting suffrage and other women's issues including divorce reform (particularly in the case of drunken or abusive husbands), the right to own property independently, and child custody (left exclusively to the husband after marital breakup). Often involved in controversy, her personal demeanor could be disarming.

Boston

As a young couple Elizabeth Cady Stanton and husband Henry lived for a time in Massachusetts, a center of nineteenth century reform. "I consider myself in a kind of moral museum and I find that Boston affords as many curiosities in its way as does the British museum in its," she wrote.



"My pail full of arguments against is getting emptied and the pail of arguments for is filling up," wrote one audience member.

Notes for Elizabeth Cady Stanton's "Woman's Bible." Challenging scriptural passages that seemed to subordinate women was one of her most controversial projects, making her appear too radical for some reformers. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



Late in life, Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote her most celebrated essay, "The Solitude of Self" advocating self-reliance for women. It is available from the Commonwealth Museum website. (www.commonwealthmuseum.org) NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY

Low Point

The women's suffrage movement split over the 15th Amendment, guaranteeing voting rights to black men but not women. Elizabeth Cady Stanton broke with former abolitionist colleagues arguing in a disparaging tone that educated women should vote first if there must be a choice. A painful rift persisted for decades.