This exhibit was designed to be an entirely self-guided experience at the end of a fully guided historic house tour. The visitors enter the first of two rooms and are immediately drawn to the first text panel on the left. This is an introductory text panel explaining how sisters Frances Miller Seward and Lazette Miller Worden came to be involved in the Women's Rights Movement and their general thoughts on women's rights. Visitors can then follow around the rest of the first room and learn about local women’s rights leaders and the sisters’ discussion about suffrage. The information on the panels is interspersed with smaller panels and supporting Seward House Museum collections items and borrowed collections items from other local historical sites.

**THE VOTE: CHANGING MINDS, CHANGING TIMES**

**Two Sisters From Auburn**

The world was changing. Frances Seward (1805-1865), along with her sister and best friend, Lazette Worden (1803-1875), watched as new ideas challenged their understanding of America. Who had a voice and who should vote? Was universal suffrage necessary, or even desirable, for a democracy? These were questions neither of them could answer.

And while the sisters lacked immediate answers to these questions, in their adult lives they surrounded themselves with local leaders, friends of similar beliefs, and books to sort out and develop their views in a world that was very different from the one of their childhood.

**THE VOTE: CHANGING MINDS, CHANGING TIMES**

**Power of the Page**

Starting in girlhood, Frances and Lazette were avid readers of all types of books such as social thought, history, and philosophy. Upon entering adulthood, their reading habits influenced their understanding of universal suffrage. Women’s suffrage had become an international conversation, and it was through books that Frances and Lazette gained access to these ideas.

**Suffrage** suf·frage | \`so-fraj , sometimes -fo-rij\ | Noun
1: a short intercessory prayer usually in a series
2: a vote given in deciding a controverted question or electing a person for an office or trust
3: the right of voting : FRANCHISE
My dearest sister[,] I really began to think I never should find time to write to you again. I have been too sick two or three days of the last week and the remainder of the time hurried. I was sick Monday when you left Tuesday[,] I kept my bed the greater part of the day[,] I think it was the effect of a severe cold from which I have not yet recovered. Wednesday I was some better but not able to keep up all day. Thursday I went with Mr and Mrs Seward to Mrs Hortons[,] We dined there and came home to tea[,] It was very very warm and uncomfortable riding. When we came home I found a letter from Henry whom we were expecting every hour, saying he must return to New York and possibly to Philadelphia[,] Yesterday I received another letter[,] He was then in New York the 1st of June[,] He hoped to arrange his business the next day[,] We look for him Tuesday though he said he should write again. Friday Clara went with Mr and Mrs Seward to the Owasco lake and yesterday I had Boyce come and whitewash my room[,] it having become so smokey that I could endure it no longer. Mrs Fosgate[,] Mrs Horner and Mrs Smith had called so that upon the whole you will perceive I have had very little leisure[,] Add to this the vexation of spoiling a little silk frock coat for Fred, and having the tailor do the same kind office for a pair of pantaloons for Augustus and you have about the sum of my weekly experiences. Mr. Seward has become very impatient for Henry’s return[,] He has a great many ill turns but is upon the whole much better than I expected to see him[,] His plan of travelling varies with his feelings[,] Sometimes he is going to travel the remainder of the summer through Ohio[,] Indiana and Illinois then an uncomfortable night convinces him it is best to return immediately to Florida which he sometimes purposes to do before Henry comes home. My impression is that they will remain here until Henry comes and then will wish us all to go on to Chautauqua together. I need not tell you that this plan is by no means consonant to my feelings or if I come along some time next week you may take it for granted it is because women do not rule here. I am just as much unprepared as when you went away. Anna Benedict has made that pair of pantaloons and partly made the said silk coat[,] I have neither dress or hat and the boys are minus at least two suits each. I hope you will be ready to accompany as in the Telegraph - there is nothing like brisk motion. Clara has been to Mrs Jenngings and Miss Riggs to look for hats. Mrs Jenning insisted upon her taking one of the hats she had made for you which Clara does not seem to relish exactly. I am anxious to hear from you again[,] I am afraid the ride was too long for you. Nicholas came home between 4 & 5 the next day long before I excepted him. Mrs Fosgate regretted very much that you did not stay two or three days with Serene. I am sorry that you did not stay all night[,] The little boys missed Frances very much. How does the warm weather agree with you[?] Mr Seward did not learn until Monday afternoon that you had been here [and] he expressed much surprise that he did not see you. I could not help laughing when I thought of your encounter in the kitchen. We all went to Church this morning and this afternoon all have gone to Methodist meeting. Pa has been unwell a day or two but not confined to the house. John Williams never made his appearance [and] the basket is in safe keeping. Mrs Post and her son called on to see you Monday[,] They did not come in when they found you were gone. I think I will go to the store tomorrow and if I can I will call on the Posts[,] that is if I go alone. My head aches violently do write I will write again when Henry comes[.]

~Your own sister
Frances
Friday Jan 10th–
My dear Sister,

Your letter came last night after I had gone to bed[,] Fred held the candle while I read him sundry passages[,] I have just finished reading it to Clara and Henry read it for himself while I was eating my breakfast[,] I am sorry to hear your journey made you sick[,] are your room comfortable the first winter I was in Albany I thought I came near freezing but then the weather was intensely cold[,] We are all getting along tolerably[,] Henry improves very slowly[,] He went with his crutches yesterday as far as the printing office and has to day gone to his own office[,] His arm and leg are both still sore and painful I fear he uses both, too much[,] The confinement and inactivity are both very irksome to him[,] Mrs Johnson left me Tuesday whereupon I had a good crying spell[,] Clara sat up and kept Sister Fan until one o'clock and Caroline slept on the couch to keep fires the remainder of the night[,] Wednesday I succeeded in getting Mrs Hickson who is a well disposed person a little deaf, and deficient in judgement[,] I shall keep her for the present[,] I am sorry Abbey cannot come[,] When you see her again will you try to ascertain whether I may depend upon her coming in the Spring and at what time as I may have an opportunity of employing some one else, and Caroline wishes to know how long I want her[,] I wish you would tell Abbey that Barton is married[,] It may influence her in her decision and it is fair that she should be apprised of it[,] He married a farmers daughter who resides near his uncle[,] It appears to have been a very hurried affair as I am quite sure he had no such intention six weeks ago[,] He has gone with his wife to Michigan intimates that there is something strange in this marriage but does not specify[,] I think I shall keep Elizabeth as I cannot well do without her[,] When I get able to take charge of baby at night I shall get along very well[,] I prefer to attend to her myself during the day[,] chiefly[,] Clara left us yesterday morning [and] he looked uncomfortable all day Wednesday but assigned no reason[,] Mrs Lucas was here yesterday[,] She and Debby are the only persons I have seen[,] Now for an answer to your interrogatory[,] Six or eight years ago I should have said without hesitation I would not be engaged in nominating any person but a good Whig for U.S. so I should have thought any other course of conduct a dereliction of principle[,] With more experience and some observation of similar cases were I a Whig member (^and a man)^ I should I suppose vote for any man selected by Weed and accepted by other members of the party[,] I say Weed because his political sagacity is unquestionable I cannot say the same of H. Greeley so that a proposition of the same kind from him would raise some doubt of its expediency[,] M. Sibley is an example of a man too impracticable to conform in any way to the judgement of others. You asked me for my own opinion so have given it and not Henry’s which would presume be me to the purpose[,] I leave remainder of the page for a postscript to Worden Henry and Willie have come home[,] Henry having written a letter to Worden I am at liberty to fill out my letter[,] I received a letter from Augustus Monday last it had been written ten days and eight days upon the road he was well[,] [He] had heard nothing of Henry’s accident[,] of course had not received my letter[,] I sent for Mrs Smith the day after you were here but she had made another engagement[,] Mrs Richard Smith is said to be very ill[,] There was a large party at Burgot Rathbones Wednesday evening and another at Swains last night[,] Our father attended both[,] I can learn nothing except that both were large the houses all open and lighted and music and dancing the prevailing amusement[,] Clara would have gone to the latter place but for her cold which is very bad[,] Mrs Livingston was a Miss Bradford who married a son of Harry Livingston’s[,] they all live with Mrs Bradford in Clinton square near Mr Dwight [and] are fashionable and were always very polite to me[,] The Misses Skinner are nieces of Rufus H King[,] There was but one “out” when I was in Albany and she no way remarkable for without[,] [Frances]
My dear Henry,

Willie has at length fallen asleep after a day of much suffering. The pain in his face is at times very intense. I do not think he slept 15 minutes at a time last night. Today I have been so fortunate as to find some medicine which afforded temporary relief. My own experience with neuralgic pain has proved to me how hard it is to bear. He is very weak after these paroxysms subside but may be all about again tomorrow. I receive all your letters and hear of you frequently by the papers. I have directed one letter to Washington which you will receive after this. The frost has so maimed the garden that it is a sad sight. I washed then all the time the weeping skies would allow last week–John is getting better I think will be able to work next week. Harris has not yet commenced the outside of the house. We have had but one day without rain since you left. The Wooden part of the building is nearly completed. The girls have taken possession of their rooms. Augustus Miller came for his sister Clara last Sunday. They left Tuesday Monday evening I invited a few young people to see Clara here. They seemed quite happy. I should have been more so had they returned a little before 12 o’clock. I have been reading Mrs Ellet’s “Women of the Revolution.” It makes one feel that the race has degenerated. Though similar scenes might perhaps convert the many idle, overrefined & useless that we have now into persons more respectable and self reliant, I sometimes fear the time has entirely gone by when it will be reckoned among a woman’s virtues that “She looketh well to the ways of her household and toileth diligently with her hands.” I received the other day a very nice letter from Caroline Canfield written remarkably well. If her health does not suffer I presume her severe discipline will benefit her. I shall write to her as soon as I can find time. You do not yet talk about coming home. You have been gone more just half of the time you proposed. I attended a party last evening at Mrs Watrous’. All Presbyterians but myself. I did not leave Willie until nearly 9 o’clock. It was social and pleasant without dancing or Whist. You have numerous letters requiring you to speak at different places and requesting you to appoint the time. I suppose they will ascertain that you are not at home by and by from the papers.

~Willie and Fanny send love

Ever your own

Frances
Letter 4
Frances Miller Seward to William Henry Seward
October 29, 1848

My dear Henry,
I have this moment received your first letter and it now occurs to me that I ought to have written to you before. But I have been so occupied that I have had little time for thought and merely determined in my own mind to write as soon as I heard from you. I thought of you many times the day you left and was much afraid you would go upon the lake the same night when the wind blew so hard. Mr McGregor remained here until after dinner I found him very agreeable and did little but talk until he left. He is to send some one to build the furnace within two weeks from the time he was here. We heard nothing from the Maury cause that day until a short time before Mr McGregor left, a telegraph message from Mr Blatchford said that Judge Nelson was ill and would not charge the Jury until the next day. We heard nothing more until Thursday when the Knickerbocker told us that the jury did not agree. I send you a slip from the same paper which came this morning which is all that I have learned further on the subject. Mr Blatchford has neither returned or written Mr Dennis says he has gone to New York and perhaps to Boston Willie came home last evening much pleased with his visit and bringing a half bushel of hickory nuts. Clarence seems to have fallen very readily into the political spirit of the times. He attends meetings every night of the Rough & Ready Club. He has spoken two or three times. Last night he went to Sennett [and] did not return until late at night. I shall be glad when the election is over and all men can return to their wanted occupations. When the women commence voting I suppose there will be yet more confusion. I have spent every pleasant day almost entirely in the garden indeed many that were not pleasant. We have planted a large amount of new shrubbery which will not be very conspicuous for some time to come I have kept both John and Dennis very constantly employed, fearing each day that snow might come the next. Our house progresses at a snails pace. The doors are being hung which will occupy yet another week. The painters have had but two days for the outside. I am grateful to hear so good an account of our dear boy. Since I have learned that he will be entitled to a furlough at the end of two years I have had little expectation that he would come this Winter. Fanny is well [and] busily engaged singing Grandpa to sleep. She and Willie were mutually rejoiced to meet again.

~Ever your own
Frances
Monday Jan 15th
My dear Sister,
Not wishing to write again under the influence of a sick head ache I did not write yesterday as I would have done otherwise[.]. Then I supposed that about this time you would see Henry and Clarence and would not be so likely to miss a letter from me[.]. I have just finished a letter of condolence to Aunty Cary[.]. Lucinda died last week with congestive fever so the Newspaper says[.]. They will feel her loss greatly[.]. Her kind attentions to them made her appear very amiable last Summer[.]. I wish Walter would go home and live with his wife but I suppose he will not particularly if he has any practice in Buffalo[.]. I was much entertained with your letter and intend to read it to Mrs Hills suppressing names so that she cannot make any mischief[.]. She really enjoys hearing your letters which in my humble opinion are infinitely more entertaining that the court gossip of Madame Sévigné. Her letters are sprightly and interesting because they evince so devoted an attachment to her daughter but I cannot say that they meet my expectations[.]. What do you think? Our family is reduced to eight which seems quite small[.]. Henry and Clarence left Friday morning [and] I have heard nothing from them since[.]. Clara came and spent the afternoon with me Friday[.]. She has now an attack of influenza[.]. Jane Perry is at John Dills again with Alice[.]. I am not sure that they will not go to Aunt Clara’s again but she thinks not[.]. Some one told me that Perry talked of going to California[.]. I think he had better go[.]. I called the other day upon Mrs Clary[.]. She is pleasant and unpretending Henry went with me to call upon the wives of the Professors[.]. Dr Hicox looks very thin though he is better than he has been. Mrs Hicox is amiable and agreeable[.]. Mrs Smith was a Livingston of New York[,] not particularly attractive though exceedingly well bred[.]. Mrs Hopkins I did not see and did not wish to[.]. We also called to see Miss Powers at Nelson Beardsleys — she was out — The Blatchfords were engaged — A rapid thaw has succeeded our very cold weather of last week [and] the snow is melting away[.]. I feel sometimes as if we were melting with it[.]. Our new house leaks in so many places that we are literally deluged[.]. Mr Blatchford is felicitating himself upon the prospect of a more comfortable home next Winter[.]. He says they almost freeze where they are[.]. I have only seen Mary in Church[.]. She looks better than she did last Summer[.]. I have been reading a book entitled the Influence and Education of Women by Mrs D Reid an English woman[,] with a preface by Mrs Kirkland[,] The book is written with much ability and did it not assert a claim to more rights than the lords of creation are generally willing to allow, I think it would have elicited some complementary notices from the press[.]. Although I cannot yet say that I think women ought to vote and be eligible for become office holders yet[,] I will say that if there is no other way of elevating them I would rather see them more masculine than to see them what they are now[.]. Mrs Reid makes many sensible observations on the subject of education[,] Her book gives evidence of a strong mind combined with much modesty and delicacy[,] She never attempts to convince by sarcasm[,] but reasons logically and with entire freedom from passion[,] I should like to see an answer to her book written with equal good temper[,] I anticipate much pleasure in reviewing it with you[,] Grandpa is so lonely now Fred has gone that I have written to Catherine Huson to come and make us a visit while we are alone[.]. Clara has not come yet[,] Willie took me in the sleigh with John's pony all about the village last week very much to his gratification[,] Fanny went along[,] Fanny reminds me of Fred in her determination to learn to read[,] She will say her lessons when Willie does[,] I do not want her to learn yet[,] If she lives I want her to play for three years to come[,] Eliza is getting impatient for you to come home[,] She cannot agree with the girls and they do many wrong things by her[,] Her mother is quite engrossed with her new husband and housekeeping[,] I think it very probable that you will be detained until Spring and then you will not stay long with me[,] I wish Mrs Catlin would take her daughter there[,] She remains in about the same state though less violent[,] I hear nothing from Augustus[,] The Clol Cholera has swept off many of the 8th his old Regiment stationed in Texas[,] Gen Dix I see has lost a brother[,] 

-Love to Frances [Frances Alvah Wordon Chesebro-Daughter to Lazette] tell her six weeks will not last[,] always your own Sister —
My dear Sister, I have looked for a letter from you since Monday but none comes. I hope neither you or Frances are ill. Henry has not yet gone to Orange County. I do not think he will before next week. Mrs. Wright was here Tuesday. I believe she came to lecture me for want of boldness of which she certainly presents a striking example. She was disappointed not to have seen you and I thought [she] received my apology with rather an incredulous air. [She] regretted that she had not courage to adopt the Bloomers Costume, especially when I expressed my dislike of it. Said she had spent one evening with the Mullens in an argument on the absurdity of keeping the Sabbath. I told her plainly that I could not disseminate opinions which I did not believe, or such as I thought would not benefit others. She replied to this after the manner of Lucy Stone that she thought the truth should be told at all times and in all places. I asked her what was her standard for truth if she disbelieved the Bible. She said any man's own conscientious convictions. I told her the Mormons and the Spirit Rappers held the same, but like Lucy she only added the more warmly that she thought the truth should be propagated. Not having any fancy for this circular argument I did not prolong the conversation. I am very sorry to have lost an article in the Times of Tuesday by Mrs Oaks Smith in reply to a “Southerner” in Woman’s Rights. I hope if you can you will see it. Clara and I went to make some visits yesterday. We have another bright morning. Dennis has been away sick all this week. Henry and the children send love.

-Your own Sister

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Dear Henry[,] Fanny is better today than she has been in a week. She will write for herself tomorrow. We had your letters written [for] Christmas yesterday morning. We were all with you that day in spirit if not in substance. Fred left us yesterday morning after a very (to us) pleasant visit of two days. I see by to day’s paper that your Uncle Weed has defined his position in regard to Women’s rights. Which is against them & himself also according to my theory. I send with this a letter which came a day or two since from Uncle Cary. I have also addressed as you requested a Webster Eulogy to Mr. C.B. Wheeler. I found one franked. It is winter here in good earnest. The thermometer this morning standing at 5 above zero.

-Your own sister
Washington  
Sunday, Jan 15th  
My dear Sister  

The letter which I confidently expected this morning did not come– I hope it is only delayed by the snow storm of which a rumour reaches us–I am very anxious to see you to day indeed every day, but to day especially[.] You of course read the address of the Women of England to their American Sisters and I think with me admired its tone & spirit. Has it ever occurred to you what it would be proper for us all to do when it comes?– The Abolitionist & womens rights women will act for us but are we sure that we can join them or is it right for us to be silent?I wish you would consider this matter and send me your thoughts[.] I thought of it when I first read the address– my attention was more particularly called to it last evening by Charles Sumner reading to me a letter from the Rev. Lorenzo Bacon of N. Haven who made some suggestions which Mr Sumner wished me to consider–I did not think those suggestions altogether practicable but at the time could make none better– I wished you were here to think for me in which wish Mr Sumner heartily concurred– If you are not coming immediately will you write– One proposition made by Mr Bacon was, that the women favoring a movement meet in every large town & consult together– Speaking of Washington as one of the most important– Now you know there are no women here to meet with except the extreme abolitionists which would not meet Henry's approbation were I ever so much disposed– I told Henry last night that I should feel bound to sign my name to the address written in reply if asked– He seemed to think that the duty would depend upon circumstances– & that I, or you and I alone, joining the abolitionists would do the cause more harm than good– Herer we differ–What do you think?– I know if you were living here as I am, hearing every day accounts of unhumanity which often keep me awake all night, that you would think there was little danger of doing too much. Still I should deprecate any action extravagant or unwomanly because I think such action detrimental to any course. I was able to give Charles Sumner so little encouragement about enlisting the feelings of the women in high place that he went home rather desponding– yet I know feel on reflection that I may have been wrong– It is possible Anti slavery may become fashionable now the noble woman of England are advocating it– we shall see –In the mean time let this letter be entre nous for the present –

I have written to day to Mrs. E Nott and Mrs Hicok – tomorrow I will talk with Mrs. McLean but you are worth any 40 –I hope your letter will come tomorrow saying you are all ready to come I think Augustus can come whenever you are ready but wishes to avoid as much of the party going season as possible – when I hear from you I will write to him– Henry & Caroline attended a party at Miss Corwin's last week– I made none but morning visits– I have 2 evening engagements for next week but doubt my strength to fulfil them –You saw the Scott dinner noticed –Mr Upham is said to have died with[just ends....]?
Cayuga County, and Central New York in general, was a center for progressive thinking during Frances’ and Lazette’s lives. Political leaders, social reformers, and abolitionists were frequent visitors and, in some cases, residents of the area. The first Women’s Rights Convention in the United States was held in their neighboring town of Seneca Falls. Frances and Lazette spent a lot of time keeping company there, active in what their mutual friend Elizabeth Cady Stanton called “the center of the rebellion.”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

“Come, come, my conservative friend, wipe the dew off your spectacles, and see that the world is moving.”

Martha Coffin Wright

“In union [of women] there is strength.”
(to Lucy Stone, Aug. 22, 1869, in Bolt, The Women’s Movements)

Lucretia Mott

“The world has never yet seen a truly great and virtuous nation because in the degradation of women the very fountains of life are poisoned at their source.”

These figures met frequently at dinner parties and around parlor tables, often challenging each other’s opinions, which created a network of like-minded, forward-thinking individuals. For Frances and Lazette, who often hosted such gatherings, this circle of influence challenged them to view the world in a different light.

Frances and Lazette did more than talk when joining with Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Martha Coffin Wright, and Lucretia Mott. As they realized the need to obtain the vote, the sisters lent themselves to direct action and saw the world change around them. As the Civil War approached, restrictions against women’s property rights fell, and that movement aligned itself with abolition. After the war, only the fight for suffrage remained.

While Frances and Lazette never had the chance to vote, an excerpt from Stanton’s Eighty Years and More describes a time when Lazette ran a farm in Auburn and hired men who would vote her way:

“... I have neither husband, father, nor son; I am responsible for my own taxes; am amenable to all the laws of the State; must pay the penalty of my own crimes if I commit any; hence I have the right, according to the principles of our government, to representation, and so long as I am not permitted to vote in person, I have a right to do so by proxy; hence I hire men to vote my principles.”
Before 1848, when women married in New York they surrendered almost all of their rights upon their wedding day. Women lost the right to own property, control income earned through wages or assets, file lawsuits, and sign contracts. The Married Women's Property Rights Act, a key building block for the suffrage movement, ended these discriminatory practices by giving women power over their lives and choices.

From a young age, Frances Seward was against the many legal inequalities placed upon wives. Serving as First Lady of New York during the early 1840s, she played a leading role in advocating for a property rights act that would protect the rights of all women. During this time, as Stanton later recalled:

“In her autobiography, “80 Years and More,” Elizabeth Cady Stanton describes a dinner party with the Swards:

“The Senator [William H. Seward] was very merry on that occasion and made Judge Hurlbert and myself the target for all his ridicule on the woman's rights question, in which the most of the company joined, so that we stood quite alone. Sure that we had the right on our side and the arguments clearly defined in our minds, and both being cool and self-possessed, and in wit and sarcasm quite equal to any of them, we fought the Senator, inch by inch, until he had a very narrow platform to stand on.”

After fending off Seward's questions, Stanton joined the women of the party in splitting off into the parlor. Seeing as it was her first time meeting Frances, Stanton assumed that she shared her husband's questions:

“...Mrs. Seward, approaching me most affectionately, said: 'Let me thank you for the brave words you uttered at the dinner table, and for your speech before the legislature, that thrilled my soul as I read it over and over.' ... Mrs. Seward's spontaneity and earnestness had moved them all deeply, and when the Senator appeared the first words he said were: 'Before we part I must confess that I was fairly vanquished by you and the Judge, on my own principles... You have the argument, but custom and prejudice are against you, and they are stronger than truth and logic.”
“Martha C. Wright of Auburn was a frequent visitor at the center of the rebellion, as my sequestered cottage on Locust Hill was facetiously called. She brought to these councils of war not only her own wisdom, but that of the wife and sister of William H. Seward, and sometimes encouraging suggestions from the great statesman himself, from whose writings we often gleaned grand and radical sentiments.”

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences” (1898)

Martha Coffin Wright was a local activist, feminist, and abolitionist. After moving to Auburn, NY in 1839, Martha, Frances, and Lazette quickly became friends, with Wright pushing the two sister towards greater activism. Martha would join her sister, Lucretia Mott, in signing the Declaration of Sentiments at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848.

Access to printed literature in the 19th century would have been difficult and expensive. Frances and Lazette’s engagement with text from a young age was important for their later involvement in national movements. Beginning in 1815, the year of Auburn’s incorporation as a village, small presses started emerging in the growing community. The flourishing publishing industry developed in 1848, when Derby, Miller & Co. was founded. In fact, many of the books in the family library—including those that Frances was reading—were published right here in Auburn!
After reading letters with Frances and Lazettes’ thoughts and learning about the local movement, visitors are encouraged to enter a second and final room. This room was designed to open up the discussion to a national scale. Almost all of the text panels are timelines and the exhibit includes some borrowed women’s rights collections objects.

Timeline Key for Events
Pro Suffrage
Anti Suffrage

In the case of Minor v. Happersett, the Supreme Court rules that the 14th Amendment does not guarantee women the right to vote.

When the Statue of Liberty is unveiled in the New York harbor, the New York City Woman Suffrage Association rent a steamer and join the water parade with protest banners during the dedication ceremonies.

Introduced in 1882, a women’s suffrage amendment loses in the senate with a vote of 16-34 against.

Frances Seward passes away in Washington D.C.
June 21, 1865

Lazette Worden passes away in Auburn, NY.
March 29, 1875

October 3, 1875

October 28, 1886

July 21, 1896

November 5, 1872

In protest, Susan B. Anthony makes her way to the polls to cast a ballot for Ulysses Grant. Two weeks after voting, she is arrested and eventually fined.

On July 4th, 1876, which marks another important centennial, leaders of the National Woman’s Suffrage Association (NWSA) present the “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States” in Philadelphia. The declaration compares the oppression of women in the United States to those suffered by the colonies prior to the American Revolution.

The National Association of Colored Women (NACW) is founded by activists such as Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, and Mary Church Terrell in an effort to advocate for universal suffrage and improving the lives of African Americans.

Although African American men were legally allowed to vote, literacy tests, poll taxes, and grandfather clauses made it all but impossible. The NACW looked to remove these barriers as well.
Timeline Key for Events

Pro Suffrage

Anti Suffrage

January 1, 1911

The National Association Opposed to Women’s Suffrage (NAOWS) is formed.

October 1907

Support for suffrage grows in New York, as the Woman Suffrage Association Convention attracts 100 delegates.

January 1917 - June 1918

Starting in January 1917, a group of women known as the “Silent Sentinels” began holding a vigil in front of the White House. They remained for the next 2.5 years, picketing and demanding the vote from President Wilson.

November 6, 1917

New York grants women the right to vote, though Native Americans are excluded in every state until the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924.

November 2, 1920

Over 8 million women cast a ballot.

June 4, 1919

Spurred by the words of his mother Febb Burn who wrote him, “don’t forget to be a good boy” and to vote for suffrage, Harry Burn, a representative from Tennessee, cast the deciding ballot that ratified the 19th Amendment and gave women the right to vote. Though Harry cast the vote, Febb changed history.

The movement suffers a pair of setbacks, including losing a 1914 Suffrage Amendment vote in the US Senate and similar defeats on referendums in states like New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Massachusetts.

In Washington DC, African American leaders gather for a symposium, “Votes for Women.” Threatened by Jim Crow segregation in the south and often excluded from the suffrage movement, black women were determined to have their voices heard. The symposium was published in The Crisis.

The brewing and liquor industries funded a robust anti-suffrage campaign and helped finance the opposition. This 1915 political cartoon shows drinking men celebrating referendum defeats.

"Dear son, ...Hurray and vote for Suffrage and don't keep them in doubt. I noticed Chanders' speech, it was very bitter. I've been waiting to see how you stood but have not seen anything... Don't forget to be a good boy and help Mrs. Catt with her "Rats." Is she the one that put rat in ratification, Ha! No more from mama this time. With lots of love, Mama."
The Centennial That Followed: 1920-2020

While the ratification of the 19th Amendment marked the end of the long fight to secure women’s suffrage, the political struggle to gain full equality was far from over. And not just for women—throughout the remainder of the 20th century, and into the 21st, America’s democracy has proven imperfect. Just as Jim Crow segregation restricted black voters through the civil rights era, new obstacles have arisen to challenge voting participation among immigrants and the very poor. The vote remains both a necessary and a fragile thing that should never be taken for granted.

Even after the battle for the ballot was won, generations of strong women reformers worked together to advocate for true gender equality. In 1923, former “Silent Sentinel” and suffrage leader Alice Paul travelled to Seneca Falls to introduce the first Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) to the Constitution. The following decades of debate saw women’s rights advocates gain a number of victories: many entered the workplace during the Second World War and attained economic independence, a new wave of 1960s feminism came into the forefront and rallied around the National Organization of Women (founded in 1966), birth control pills and Roe v. Wade gave women greater control over their bodies than ever before, and the enactment of Title IX protections provided important protections from gender-based discrimination. The ERA passed the House and the Senate in 1972 and moved for ratification to the states where its prospects appeared bright.

But there were setbacks as well. The wage gap that opened between women entering the workplace and their male counterparts continues into the present. A strong counter-feminist backlash emerged, aligning itself with a very politically successful conservative movement. Discrimination and harassment persisted in the workplace, as made evident in the massive outpouring of the modern Me Too protest movement. And the ERA went down in defeat, stalling over a decade (1972-1982) while falling just shy of being ratified by three-quarters, or 38, of the states.

The fact that Virginia very recently became the 38th state to ratify—though well past the original deadline—shows that the debates around inclusion in democracy are nowhere close to over.

We might do well to remember the words spoken by Alice Paul at Seneca Falls when she first introduced the ERA: “If we keep on this way they will be celebrating the 150th anniversary of the 1848 Convention without being much further advanced in equal rights than we are… We shall not be safe until the principle of equal rights is written into the framework of our government.”

Suffrage Posters

Posters are on loan from the Howland Stone Store Museum in Sherwood, NY. They have perhaps the nation’s best collection of suffrage posters.

This original poster image was created by Evelyn Rumsey Cary, a Buffalo painter and patron of the arts. Cary created the Women’s Suffrage poster c. 1905 to depict a beautiful, feminine figure rising from the earth.
BOOKS WITH TITLES: “THE HISTORY OF THE WOMEN’S CLUB MOVEMENT IN AMERICA” AND “THE CONGRESS OF WOMEN.”

THIS ROSE MEDALLION CHINA SET IS FROM 1870 AND WAS PURCHASED IN CHINA.

THE PLATE AND BOWL ON DISPLAY IS MEANT TO BE REPRESENTATIVE OF WHAT THE TABLE WAS SET WITH THE NIGHT ELIZABETH CADY STANTON DINED AT THE SEWARD HOME. SEE PAGE 10 TEXT PANEL FOR THE DETAILS OF THE DINNER PARTY.

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY ELIZABETH CADY STANTON DESCRIBES HER LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS AS A LEADER OF THE WOMEN’S RIGHTS MOVEMENT ALONGSIDE SUSAN B. ANTHONY.

IT IS SIGNED BY STANTON ON THE INSIDE COVER OF THE BOOK.
Abraham Lincoln quote sign. This quote came from a letter Lincoln wrote in 1836 while running for re-election in the Illinois general assembly.

The sign, though seeming to show Lincoln’s support of women’s rights, it actually provides an example of the clever marketing of the movement. By only including part of Lincoln’s quote for their collectibles, organizers obscured the fact that he was never an outspoken advocate of women’s rights.

These lapel flowers, buttons, drinking cups, crepe paper napkins, pledge envelopes, yellow cardboard coasters, and suffrage bank were all examples of ways women could show support for the movement and also how the movement was advertised. One of the more popular forms of suffrage artifacts was the button or badge. While most of the button sayings were generic, they were often manufactured for a special campaign. Lapel flowers would have been worn to outwardly show support for the cause.

Workers of the suffrage groups gave away or sold many collectible items showing support of suffrage and domesticity. The suffragists took advantage of common consumer items such as napkins and drinking cups to market their cause. However, all of these promotional materials would have cost a lot of money and suffragists welcomed donations on the streets.
This dress (above right) was worn by Frances Miller Seward in the early 1860’s for a photograph taken in a Washington DC garden. The photograph was used as a model for a statue (above left) of Frances created by John Rogers. The dress is black organdy with diamond print and tiny yellow and pink flowers in the center of the diamond. It also has fine white pleating around the neck and down to the waist. A delicate black net is on the cuff of the sleeves. The statue sat at the head of the caskets of all Seward family that passed after Frances.

Suffrage buttons on loan from the Rochester Public Library

Anti-Suffrage postcards used in the early 1910s

Enrollment form for the city of Albany. These forms from the 1890s would have been petitions in support of suffrage. Groups such as county Political Equality Clubs and other versions of the NYS Suffrage Association worked to get petitions signed in support of suffrage.

The first ballot box used in the town of Cato, NY in on March 3, 1803. It was used in the home of Israel Wolverton, when Archibald Green was elected assessor.
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