

Elizabeth Cady Stanton in Tenaflly, New Jersey

written and researched by Kevin W. Wright

We are seldom called to speak in defense of a historic landmark in our midst deserving of international attention and respect. We do so now on behalf of the old Valley Hotel on County Road in Tenaflly, where suffragist **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**, a resident of Highwood Park in Tenaflly, defiantly attempted to cast her ballot on November 2, 1880.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton built her home near the Tenaflly railroad station in 1868, paying its upkeep and taxes with income from her lectures and writings. Here, with Susan B. Anthony and Matilda J. Gage, she accomplished some of her most important work, including the compilation of the first volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage*.

On November 2, 1880, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony rode the Republican carriage to the Valley Hotel, where Republican committeeman Charles Everett introduced them to the judges of elections, saying, “Mrs. Stanton is here, gentlemen, for the

have not voted in my day, and I cannot accept your ballot.”

In 1882, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the only woman featured among 185 biographical sketches in Clayton’s *History of Bergen and Passaic Counties*. A clear and tireless voice for women’s rights, devoted mother to seven children, she died in New York City on October 26, 1902, at 86 years of age. Ahead of her time, Stanton fought ignorance and braved ridicule to secure “justice to Woman,” being an early advocate of an amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1920, giving women the right to vote.



Stanton, about 1880, the year she attempted to vote at the Valley Hotel.



The former Valley Hotel. This landmark is still standing August, 2015.

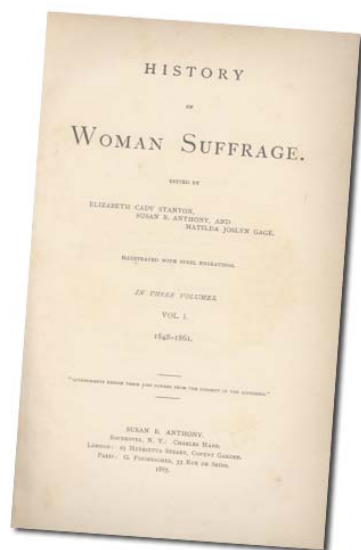
purpose of voting. As she is a taxpayer, of sound mind, and of legal age, I see no reason why she should not exercise this right of citizenship.” “Oh, no, madam!” exclaimed the judge, protecting the ballot box, “Men only are allowed to vote.” “You are mistaken,” said Mrs. Stanton, who patiently explained that the 1776 Constitution of New Jersey allowed women to vote, which they did until 1807, when an arbitrary act of the legislature disenfranchised them. She also cited the Fourteenth Amendment, which offered equal protection of the laws to all American citizens. In response, one of the poll inspectors confessed, “I know nothing about the Constitutions, State or National. I never read either; but I do know that in New Jersey, women



Page from Clayton’s *History of Bergen and Passaic Counties*

Elizabeth Smith Cady was born to Daniel and Margaret (Livingston) Cady of Johnstown, New York, on November 12, 1815. Growing up in a family of ten girls and one boy, she loved to read her father’s law books, which enlarged her otherwise ordinary education. Marrying abolitionist Henry Stanton in 1840, she omitted the

promise “to obey” from her vows. They honeymooned at the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention in London, where she met feminist Lucretia Mott. Together, they summoned the Woman’s Rights Convention at Seneca Falls, New York, in 1848. She then successfully lobbied for a law giving women the right to control inherited property, becoming the first woman to address the New York legislature.



History of Woman Suffrage
University of South Carolina Libraries

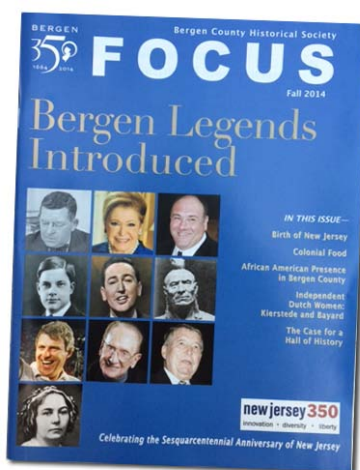
Elizabeth Cady Stanton built a house near the Tenaflly railroad station in 1868 and paid for its upkeep and taxes with income from her lectures and writings. Her home became a gathering place for many leading reformers, attracted to the cause of social and economic equality for women. She and Miss Anthony launched their newspaper, *Revolution*, in New York City in 1868.

The following year, she founded the National Woman Suffrage Association. Mrs. Stanton proudly helped compose the *Woman’s Declaration of Rights*, which Susan B. Anthony read at the 1876 Centennial Fair in Philadelphia. With Susan B. Anthony and Matilda J. Gage, she accomplished some of her most important work at her home in Tenaflly, including the first volumes of the *History of Woman Suffrage*.

On November 2, 1880, Elizabeth Cady Stanton boarded a carriage here with Susan B. Anthony and unsuccessfully attempted to cast her ballot at a nearby hotel. In 1882, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the only woman featured among 185 biographical sketches in Clayton’s *History of Bergen and Passaic Counties*. She departed Tenaflly in 1882, but returned to “the comforts of home, on the blue hills of Jersey” in 1885. She



Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s house in Highwood Park, Tenaflly that she built with her own money in 1868. Privately owned.



Magazine with stories of the ten Bergen County Legends.

sold her Tenaflly home in May 1887.

A clear and tireless voice for feminism, devoted mother to seven children, she died in New York City on October 26, 1902 at 86 years of age. Ahead of her time, Stanton fought ignorance and braved ridicule to secure “justice to Woman,” being an early advocate of an amendment to the United States Constitution, ratified in 1920, giving women the right to vote.

In 2014, the Bergen County Historical Society recognized Stanton as one of ten Bergen County Legends in the Bergen 350 Gala.



Stanton and Anthony, they didn’t live to see women get the vote.



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E. C. Stanton, the Valley Hotel and the Question of Significance

by Kevin W. Wright

What follows is my own opinion and observations. I suppose I have to start with the tired-but-true aphorism that “history” is largely “his story” and not “her story.”

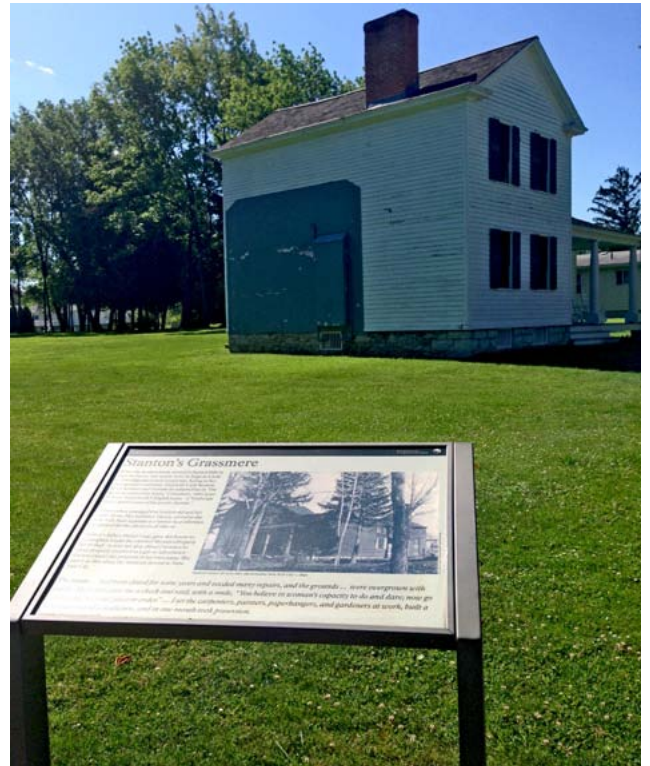
The Valley Hotel in Tenaflly, where Elizabeth Cady Stanton paid her property taxes and where she attempted to cast a ballot in the national elections of November 1880, is not listed as a municipal historic landmark, supposedly based on a determination that the building lacks architectural integrity and therefore is not eligible for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

If this be true, then I and others strongly disagree. The significance of this building is not based upon its survival as an outstanding example of the Second Empire style of architecture, but rather for its association with a figure of national prominence, namely, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and for its association with a significant event, namely, her courageous attempt to vote here in 1880. I would add that she tried to cast her ballot based upon her study of historical precedents in the state constitution, state law and common practice in township elections. Satisfying these criteria for inclusion, I strongly feel the Valley Hotel qualifies for independent listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

In support of this argument, I point to the Wesleyan Chapel in Women’s Rights National Historical Park at Seneca Falls, New York, where the First Women’s Rights Convention convened in July 1848. This historic site clearly reveals extensive re-building, where remnants of the original brick walls can be easily distinguished from reconstructed portions. As an interpretive wayside exhibit, standing outside the extensively restored building, explains,

“Though never destroyed entirely, it was altered to serve as a theater, store, garage, and laundry. Still, Americans returned to the site to commemorate the anniversary of the First Women’s Rights Convention. Today, the National Park Service preserves the remnants of the original chapel. Visitors from around the world come here to explore ideas of freedom, equality, and social reform.”

During her residence in Tenaflly, Bergen County, New Jersey, Elizabeth Cady Stanton nobly advanced the great work she and other reformers set in motion at Seneca Falls. The question now is: doesn’t this chapter of the story deserve to be told and honored?



Stanton's Seneca Falls house with missing original wings.



Wesleyan Chapel in Women's Rights National Historical Park at Seneca Falls, New York,



Detail showing original and extensive replacement brick on Chapel.