

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE NATIONAL FIRST LADIES' LIBRARY
AND THE WOMEN'S RIGHTS NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK**

by

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National Historical Park”

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ABSTRACT

The National First Ladies' Library and the Women's Rights National Historical Park are two very important museums that interpret different aspects of women's history. The National First Ladies' Library, located in Canton, Ohio, interprets the lives of the United States' First Ladies and the roles associated with the position. The Women's Rights National Historical Park, located in Seneca Falls, New York, interprets the first Women's Rights Convention, which took place in 1848, as well as the Declaration of Sentiments, which Elizabeth Cady Stanton presented at the Convention. Both sites offer histories of women from the upper class; however, they tell two different stories and use different approaches for interpretation.

One of the main reasons why both museums use different methods of interpretation is rooted in their creation. One woman, Mary Regula, envisioned the National First Ladies' Library. Regula isolated her work from the community and as a result, lost touch with what the public wanted out of the site. On the other hand, the Women's Rights National Historical Park involved the community in its creation. Park historians and staff cooperatively worked together with the community to shape what the park is today. The sites differed drastically in both their creation and intentions, which influenced the interpretive plans used.

Introduction

The Interpretation of Women in Museums

Museums play a significant role in communities. They provide educational services and host programs and events that cater to the public. Museums that focus solely on women's history are relatively new and emerged because of the social history movement that began in the mid-1960s. The first major exhibit that focused solely on women was the *First Ladies' Hall*, which opened in 1964 in the National Museum of American History.¹ Since then, many museums and historic houses emerged with the mission of integrating women into American history. Some of these sites include: the Women's Rights National Historical Park, The Women's Museum, the National Museum of Women in the Arts and the National First Ladies' Library.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park (WRNHP), located in Seneca Falls, New York, and the National First Ladies' Library (NFL), located in Canton, Ohio, focus solely on women; however, from their inception, both sites set the interpretive model, which they use today. "A Comparative Study of the National First Ladies' Library and the Women's Rights National Historical Park," will focus on the creation of these museums and the different aspects of women's history each site interprets. These sites represent only a fragment of women's history. The WRNHP interprets the beginning of the women's rights movement, which took place in 1848 with the first Women's Rights Convention. The purpose of the WRNHP is to demonstrate that the women's rights movement began in Seneca Falls, to identify why it happened and its

¹ Barbara Melosh and Christina Simmons, "Exhibiting Women's History," in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*, ed. Susan Porter Benson, Stephen Brier and Roy Rosenzweig (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 204.

outcome. The NFLL interprets the lives of the nation's First Ladies and their roles associated with their positions.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library are National Park Service sites. Both sites interpret the lives of women who are from society's upper class; however, they tell two different stories. The WRNHP interprets the first Women's Rights Convention held at the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, which took place in 1848 in Seneca Falls, New York. The WRNHP also interprets the Declaration of Sentiments, which was presented at the Convention by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The WRNHP's theme appeals to a broader audience because women can relate personally to several topics offered by the park (women's rights, fashion, work, politics and education), whether they agree or disagree with the women's rights movement at all. On the other hand, The NFLL offers a conservative approach to women's history and focuses solely on the small, elite group of the nation's First Ladies. These women are not radical reformers as was Elizabeth Cady Stanton. They are women put into very traditional roles by the American public and are associated with being the wives of the Presidents.

One of the main reasons why the WRNHP and the NFLL offer different interpretations of women is rooted in their creation. The WRNHP opened to the public in 1982, with the cooperation of local organizations, private citizens and the federal government. From the beginning, the National Park Service encouraged community-wide participation in the park's creation. The community's opinions and ideas helped to shape what the park is today. The WRNHP is also a product of the social history

movement, which focuses on the histories of peoples marginalized in the past.² The park's Visitor Center makes this evident through its exhibits. On the other hand, one woman, Mary Regula, wife of former Congressman Ralph Regula (member of the U.S. House of Representatives from 1973-2009), envisioned the NFLL. The NFLL opened in 1998 with the help of former First Lady, Hillary Clinton and Regula's board comprised of thirteen women, whom she chose. The local community was not involved as heavily with the formation of the NFLL as it was at the WRNHP. Regula and the thirteen women isolated their work, until the site opened in 1998. In many ways, the NFLL lost touch with the public. The sites differed in their origins and goals from the beginning, which influenced their interpretive plans. It is important to study the differences in sites such as the WRNHP and the NFLL because it helps museum professionals identify problems associated with their sites and it allows them to make goals to strive for.

Women's roles began to change in the nineteenth century.³ Women wanted legal rights under the system. The beginning of this change is highlighted at the Women's Rights National Historical Park. Often conservative in its interpretation of historic sites, the National Park Service (NPS) offers a radical approach to women's history at the WRNHP. According to the National Park Service's WRNHP website, "...women have achieved greater equality with the vote, property rights, and education, the revolution continues today."⁴

The WRNHP's mission is:

² Barbara Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," in *History Museums in the United States: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Warren Leon and Roy Rosenzweig (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 183.

³ Joan Hoff, "Women and Politics," in *Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women's History*, ed. Page Putnam Miller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 141.

⁴ "Women's Rights National Historical Park," National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/index.htm> (accessed 16 December 2009).

To preserve and interpret for the education, inspiration and benefit of present and future generations, the nationally significant historical and cultural sites, structures, and events associated with the struggle for equal rights for women, and to cooperate with national, state, and local entities to preserve the character and historic setting of such sites, structures and events.⁵

The WRNHP consists of five sites: the Visitor Center, Wesleyan Chapel, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, the former home of Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock and the former home of Richard and Jane Hunt. The Hunt House is currently not open to the public. These sites help the visitor to understand the events leading up to the first Women's Rights Convention as well as the political fervor of the time. Most of the women's rights reformers were also staunch abolitionists, which is clearly interpreted by the WRNHP. The first Women's Rights Convention had a tremendous impact on social and political reform in the United States. It threatened America's societal norms, and many people feared the change. The sites also help the visitor to get a feeling of what life was like in mid-nineteenth century upstate New York, because most of Seneca Falls is classified as a Historic District.

The National First Ladies' Library opened in June 1998 in Canton, Ohio. Mary Regula, wife of former Congressman Ralph Regula, and former First Lady, Hillary Clinton, made the NFLL possible. It was Mary Regula's vision to obtain an extensive bibliography relating to First Ladies that started the NFLL. While conducting research on Mary Lincoln, Regula noticed the void of scholarship dedicated to First Ladies. Because of this, she proposed the idea of establishing a bibliography that focused solely on First Ladies. This bibliography evolved to include two historic sites: the William McKinley Historic Home and the 1895 City National Bank Building, which is currently used for exhibit space as well as a research center and library. The NFLL is currently

⁵ "Women's Rights National Historical Park."

operating under a partnership between a private organization, the National First Ladies' Library and the NPS. Regula's plan is to make the site operational solely as an NPS site in the near future, in order to ensure its future existence. The NFLL's mission is:

As the first and only facility of its kind, the National First Ladies' Library serves as a unique national resource for patrons from school children to serious scholars. As a national archive devoted to educating people about the contributions of First Ladies and other notable women in history, the Library's holdings fill an informational void that has long frustrated academicians and armchair history buffs alike. The Library fulfills this mission by serving as a physical educational facility and an electronic virtual library, in an effort to educate people in the United States and around the world.⁶

This paper identifies two National Park Service sites that include house museums as well as conventional museums. These sites are different from many other museums because their mission is to interpret the lives of women. The WRNHP interprets the lives of women's rights reformers, women's equality, the first Women's Rights Convention and the Declaration of Sentiments. The NFLL interprets the lives of the United States' First Ladies. They do not represent the "great white male" as the early house museums did.⁷ It could be argued, however, that both sites represent the "great white female" since both museums represent middle to upper class women.

Because social historians and museum professionals raised awareness that museums and other public institutions tend to focus on wealthy, usually white, American men, museums are currently undergoing a rebirth. Museums are now including minorities and women into their interpretive plans. Many scholars have written about such a phenomenon. The information available about public history and how women should be interpreted in museums began to appear in the 1980s. Barbara Melosh and

⁶ "About the National First Ladies' Library," National First Ladies' Library, <http://www.firstladies.org> (accessed 16 December 2009).

⁷ Patricia West, *Domesticating History: The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), 161.

Christina Simmons published in 1986, “Exhibiting Women’s History,” in *Presenting the Past: Essays on History and the Public*.⁸ This essay highlights the beginning of social changes within museums. Women are interpreted rather differently in every exhibit. These differences are highlighted in this essay.

Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women’s History, edited by Page Putnam Miller, is a collection of essays placing women into American history through landmarks.⁹ This book focuses on multiple themes: architecture, arts, community, education, politics, religion and work. All of the themes presented incorporate women into American history. The Women’s Rights National Historical Park and the first Women’s Rights Convention are discussed in the chapter related to politics.

Polly Welts Kaufman and Katharine T. Corbett’s book, *Her Past Around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women’s History*, published in 2003, is one of the best resources available that discusses women in museums.¹⁰ There are several essays that relate to this thesis. “Women’s Voices: Reinterpreting Historic House Museums” by Bonnie Hurd Smith, discusses the need to interpret civil rights and women’s movements in historic houses. Simple changes, such as changing the name of the site to imply a familial living space rather than the patriarchal name, implies a new awareness of the historic site.¹¹ “Reinterpreting Public Events: The Impact of Women’s History on Public Celebrations,” written by Barbara J. Howe is another important essay which discusses the 150th

⁸ Melosh and Simmons, “Exhibiting Women’s History.”

⁹ Page Putnam Miller, *Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women’s History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992).

¹⁰ Polly Welts Kaufman and Katharine T. Corbett, *Her Past Around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women’s History* (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003).

¹¹ Bonnie Hurd Smith, “Women’s Voices: Reinterpreting Historic House Museums,” in *Her Past Around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women’s History*, ed. Polly Welts Kaufman and Katharine T. Corbett (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003), 93-94.

anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls and how it attracted thousands of visitors to the WRNHP.¹²

There are three themes that emphasize the differences between the WRNHP and the NFLL. The first theme highlights the different approaches used by the WRNHP and the NFLL to interpret their topics. The sites have two very different subjects; however, the WRNHP uses a radical approach and the NFLL uses a conservative approach for their interpretive plans. The WRNHP addresses controversial topics and interprets several controversial themes. The NFLL uses a conservative approach to interpret First Ladies to avoid controversy over their traditional roles. The second theme recognizes the differences in interpretation based on who created the exhibits: professionals or amateurs. The third theme analyzes how effective or ineffective the sites are at getting their message across to the public.

The first chapter focuses primarily on the women interpreted in the two NPS sites. The history of the women's movement as well as historical information relating to Elizabeth Cady Stanton is also examined. Because Elizabeth Cady Stanton is credited with being the organizer of the first Women's Rights Convention, there is a wealth of information written about her. On the other hand, there is little information written about Ida Saxton McKinley, wife of former President William McKinley. Often viewed as an "invalid," Ida Saxton McKinley suffered from epilepsy and her illness was kept from the public. What little primary evidence that is left in regards to Ida Saxton McKinley was donated by her great-nephew, Marsh Belden Sr., including her former home.

¹² Barbara J. Howe, "Reinterpreting Public Events: The Impact of Women's History on Public Celebrations," in *Her Past Around Us: Interpreting Sites for Women's History*, ed. Polly Welts Kaufman and Katharine T. Corbett (Malabar, FL: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003), 238.

The second chapter analyzes how the sites were created, and funded, as well as their preservation. A brief history of the NPS is also included in this chapter. The NPS performed substantial research on each WRNHP site before they opened them to the public to ensure proper interpretation. On the other hand, volunteers preserved each site at the NFLL and left practically no records detailing the processes used to preserve the William McKinley Historic Home and the City National Bank Building. The WRNHP and the NFLL have two different histories and they will be analyzed in this chapter.

The third chapter focuses on the approaches used by the WRNHP to interpret the sites offered by the park as well as the women's rights movement. Several aspects of the women's rights movement are interpreted at the Visitor Center, including: women's rights, fashion, work, politics and education. The exhibits tell a story and introduce visitors to the theme. The visitor experience is crucial aspect for museum professionals. The tours offered by the park and the exhibits in the Visitor Center are analyzed for their effectiveness.

The fourth chapter focuses on the approaches used by the NFLL to interpret the William McKinley Historic Home and the exhibits housed in the Education and Research Center. This chapter also analyzes the tours provided by the NFLL exhibits. Positive visitor experience is a must in a successful museum. Visitor data kept by the National Park Service shows the trends in visitation.

The last section of this paper compares the differences in the two sites. This chapter also discusses the changes that these sites will undergo in the near future. The NPS established the Centennial Initiative 2016 to commemorate its 100th anniversary. The purpose of the Centennial Initiative 2016 is to prepare NPS sites for a new century

of, "...conservation, preservation and enjoyment."¹³ This chapter will also focus on other up and coming sites, such as the proposed National Women's Museum, which will be located on the National Mall in Washington D.C.

¹³ "Centennial Initiative 2016," National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/archive/2016> (accessed 16 December 2009).

Chapter One

A Brief Biography of the Women Interpreted by Each Site

Of the 32 men and 68 women who signed the Declaration of Sentiments in Seneca Falls, New York in July 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the leader and reformer who made the first Women's Rights Convention possible. The Women's Rights National Historical Park honors Stanton's home as well as the Wesleyan Chapel, where Stanton took the podium introducing the Declaration of Sentiments. Also included in the WRNHP interpretation are Jane Hunt, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright and Mary Ann M'Clintock because these women had a part in establishing the first Women's Rights Convention. Lucretia Mott did not live in Seneca Falls; however, she greatly influenced Stanton and helped with the planning of the Convention. Also discussed in this chapter is the life of Ida Saxton McKinley, since her former house is interpreted by the National First Ladies' Library. The NFLL briefly interprets the lives of all of the First Ladies; however, Saxton McKinley is the most relevant since her home is on display.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton left a legacy as one of the first radical feminists. She organized the first Women's Rights Convention demanding equal rights with the Declaration of Sentiments, which she, Mott, Wright, Hunt and M'Clintock wrote. Stanton lived a life committed to social and political reform. She was also an abolitionist and a supporter of temperance. Stanton was born on November 12, 1815 and died on October 26, 1902. She was born in Johnstown, New York to a prominent family; her father was a renowned attorney, congressman and judge who owned a great deal of land. Her mother was the daughter of Colonel James Livingston, who captured British spy

John Andre at West Point.¹⁴ Stanton may have idolized her grandfather who disobeyed orders to capture Andre, when he knew it was the right thing to do.

Stanton's book, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences, 1815-1897*, is her autobiography, which discusses her work as a woman's rights advocate. Stanton's family were conservatives, and when she became an abolitionist and suffragist, she, "...outraged family traditions."¹⁵ Her father did not approve of her work as a women's rights reformer. A defining moment in Stanton's life, which opened her eyes to the inequalities women faced, was the death of her brother, the family's only son, Eleazer. Stanton was 11 years old when her brother died. She went into the parlor to see her brother and found her father sitting next to him. Stanton sat with her father for a while and then he stated, "Oh, my daughter, I wish you were a boy!"¹⁶ This was a pivotal moment in Stanton's life. She did everything to try to please her father, and wanted desperately to do everything equal to a boy. In doing so, she discovered the inequalities society forced on women. Stanton made it her life's work to change them, even though her father disapproved.

Stanton's personal life can be characterized by conflict. Stanton's father did not allow her to attend Union College, which she desired; however, no college in the United States at that time, 1830, admitted women.¹⁷ Nor did the United States' government and society permit women to vote and to own land if married. According to Eleanor Flexner, "A working woman could be compelled to hand over every penny of her wages to a

¹⁴ Denise M. Marshall, introduction to *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences, 1815-1897*, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), ix.

¹⁵ Judith Wellman, *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 18.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *Eighty Years and More: Reminiscences* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2002), 20.

¹⁷ Elisabeth Griffith, *In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 17.

drunkard husband, even if she was left with nothing for her own subsistence or the maintenance of her children...”¹⁸ These are only few of the inequalities which women faced. Stanton’s father did allow her to enroll at a female seminary school established by Emma Willard in Troy, New York, which she strongly disliked.¹⁹ The school taught domesticity while broadening the horizons for young women to become educated. The school did the opposite of what it preached. It educated women, allowing them to look past domestic work in homes, which caused personal conflict for many of the women who attended the school.

Throughout her early life, Stanton received mixed messages. On the one hand, Judge Cady allowed Stanton to study law and to participate in dinner table debates, while he forbade her to go to college.²⁰ Stanton’s mother preached domesticity, while Stanton was learning Greek, mathematics and chess, subjects that were typically studied by males.²¹ Stanton grew up Presbyterian, which preached traditional family roles. Stanton later grew to dislike the Presbyterian faith and deemed it depressing. She refers to this period in her life as “suffering.”²² Because of her radical views on religion, Stanton published, *The Woman’s Bible* in 1895, which brought to the forefront how, “...religious ideologies and institutions tended to legitimate the oppression of women.”²³ Despite

¹⁸ Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Woman’s Rights Movement in the United States* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 63.

¹⁹ Griffith, 17.

²⁰ Griffith, 9.

²¹ Griffith, 8.

²² Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 26.

²³ Maureen Fitzgerald, introduction to *The Woman’s Bible*, by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), vii.

Stanton's radical religious views, she was a member of the Protestant church, which "...underpinned the majority of postbellum women's activist commitments."²⁴

Soon after leaving the seminary school in Troy, Stanton became engaged to Henry Brewster Stanton, even though her family disapproved. Stanton's father did not approve of Henry's finances. He was not wealthy enough.²⁵ Elizabeth and Henry Stanton met while in Peterboro, New York. Elizabeth Cady Stanton became involved with the anti-slavery and temperance movements while staying in Peterboro with her cousin, Gerrit Smith. Smith was deeply involved in the abolitionist movement and was a great influence on Stanton.²⁶ Elizabeth and Henry Stanton were married, without a lavish wedding, on Friday, May 10, 1840. Stanton made sure to leave the word "obey" out of their vows. During this period, being married on a Friday was considered bad luck; however, in Stanton's, *Eighty Years and More*, she proudly summarized her family life by stating,

But as we lived together, without more than usual matrimonial friction, for nearly a half a century, had seven children, all but one of whom are still living, and have been well sheltered, clothed, and fed, enjoying sound minds in sound bodies, no one need be afraid of through the marriage ceremony on Friday for fear of bad luck.²⁷

Another pivotal life changing event took place early in Stanton's marriage. The World Anti-Slavery Convention took place in London at the Freemasons' Hall on June 12, 1840. Henry Stanton, a staunch abolitionist, already planned to participate in the Convention. When the Stantons were married, Elizabeth went with Henry for their honeymoon. Two major events took place while the Stanton's were in London. First,

²⁴ Allison Sneider, "Religion and Biography: Re-visioning Feminism in the Gilded Age," *Journal of Women's History* Vol. 15 No. 1 (Spring 2003), 221-226.

²⁵ Wellman, 43.

²⁶ Wellman, 36.

²⁷ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 71-72.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton met Lucretia Mott, founder of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. The organization's members included abolitionists as well as feminists.²⁸ Mott, who had strong views on women's rights, became Stanton's role model and good friend.²⁹ Second, the seven American women delegates, Elizabeth Cady Stanton included, could not be seated on the floor of the convention by the majority of male delegates. The seven women delegates were seated in, "...low, curtained seats behind a bar."³⁰ Stanton characterized many of the participants as bigots for damming their own mothers to degradation.³¹ This event helped to transform Elizabeth Cady Stanton into one of the greatest women's rights activists of all time.

The Stantons moved around New England, mainly for their abolition work and also for Henry's political career. In 1847, the Stantons moved to Seneca Falls, New York, a bustling city thanks to the Seneca and Cayuga Canal and the Great Genesee Road. Seneca Falls was also home to several textile mills and flour mills.³² The canal brought business as well as raw materials. The canal and later the railroad, were central to Seneca Fall's economy. Seneca Falls and Waterloo also became the home of many of Stanton's fellow abolitionists and feminists. The evangelical movement that spread over the "Burned-over District" of Western New York preached equality among all people because everyone will be judged equally on Judgment Day. It sparked several reform movements: temperance, abolition, public education and prison reform, which influenced the people living in the region. According to Whitney Cross, the first

²⁸ Wellman, 48.

²⁹ Wellman, 61.

³⁰ Wellman, 59.

³¹ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 81.

³² Wellman, 71.

Women's Rights Convention, "owed a great deal to the Burned-over District's 'moral reformation'."³³

Despite being the mother of seven children and domestically attached to the home, which she despised, Stanton and her fellow reformers found the time to plan and organize the first Women's Rights Convention. Stanton's personal experiences, such as the World Anti-Slavery Convention, the legal status of women, oppression of women in the United States and the servitude to the home gave her the will to protest the social system.³⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M'Clintock, Jane Hunt and Martha C. Wright met at the Hunt House declaring that they would host the convention on July 19 and 20, 1848. They then convened at the M'Clintock House to write the announcement that they published in the *Seneca County Courier* on July 14, 1848 and to also write the Declaration of Sentiments. Stanton and the four other women who wrote the Declaration of Sentiments modeled it after the Declaration of Independence. The organizers declared grievances against the United States government for the degradation of women written into law. Such grievances included: women were denied the right to a "thorough" education because most colleges did not allow women to attend, women had no voice under the law even though they had to abide by it and married women were "civilly dead," to name a few.³⁵

The women decided to give a notice of only five days before the Convention; however, reformers, such as Frederick Douglass, and others close by took the train into town for the event. It was at this Convention where Stanton first spoke publicly and it

³³ Whitney R. Cross, *The Burned-over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1950), 237.

³⁴ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 147-148.

³⁵ Elizabeth Cady Stanton, "The Declaration of Sentiments," (presented at the Women's Rights Convention, Seneca Falls, New York, 19-20 July 1848).

was a full crowd, consisting of approximately 300 people. The *Seneca County Courier* reported that the participants of the convention were an “intelligent and respectful audience.”³⁶ The Convention lasted for two days. The first day was for women only; however, the organizers decided to allow men into the Convention because they did not want to be bigots. The Convention caused much controversy in the United States and many individuals made a mockery of the reform movement. Despite the controversy the 1848 Convention caused, it was this first convention that started the women’s rights movement in the United States. Soon after the first Women’s Rights Convention, others were held in Ohio, Indiana, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and New York City.³⁷ The first Women’s Rights Convention had a tremendous impact on social and political reform in the United States. It threatened America’s societal norms, and many people feared the change.

After the first Women’s Rights Convention, Stanton devoted her work toward women’s suffrage. The Fourteenth Amendment appalled Stanton. It was added to the Constitution in 1868. The Fourteenth Amendment gave formerly enslaved African-American males the right to vote. It was the first time in the Constitution that the word “male” was used, purposely excluding women from the vote.³⁸ Stanton felt as if her fellow abolitionists deserted the cause because they did nothing to promote the inclusion of women’s suffrage into the amendment. She worked closely with Susan B. Anthony and together, they traveled the country promoting the cause.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was from an elite family, even though she lived a middle class life with her husband and children. The people she surrounded herself with were

³⁶ “Woman’s Rights Convention,” *Seneca County Courier*, 21 July 1848.

³⁷ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 150.

³⁸ Flexner, 146.

also middle to upper class members of society. Gerda Lerner's argument provides truth about the early women's rights movement. According to Lerner, "It is true all over the world that woman's rights movements are dependent on a class of educated women with leisure."³⁹ Educated women were frustrated because during the Jacksonian age, women saw rights gained by immigrants and later African-Americans. Women became formally educated and saw the possibilities for upward mobility; however, women could not participate.⁴⁰ Early reform activities tended to focus on legal and constitutional amendments, rather than on radical change, such as religion.⁴¹ Reformers also tended to exclude working class women, who had to endure harsh conditions while working mainly in textile mills. Working women simply did not have the time to protest for equal rights. Fair working and living conditions had to begin at work for them. Even though Stanton's focus was aimed towards middle to upper class women, which could be considered one of Stanton's greatest weaknesses, she looked beyond women's suffrage. She wanted women to reject all social barriers that kept them inferior; including, the, "...legal, religious or political barriers of development."⁴² Stanton focused primarily on reforming religion in her later years because according to Stanton, religion dictated women's consciousness.⁴³

Ida Saxton McKinley was also from an elite family; however, she did not blossom into a feminist as did Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She was the wife of President William McKinley and her position on women's rights is unknown. Saxton McKinley was born

³⁹ Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1979), 39.

⁴⁰ Lerner, 19.

⁴¹ Lerner, 39.

⁴² Fitzgerald, x.

⁴³ Fitzgerald, x.

on June 8, 1847 in Canton, Ohio and lived there until she was 59 years old. She died on May 26, 1907. Her father, James Asbury Saxton was a successful banker and owner of the Stark County Bank. Saxton McKinley's grandfather, James Saxton was the founder of the newspaper, *Ohio Repository* in 1815, now known as *The Repository*. Saxton McKinley's mother, Katherine Dewalt Saxton was also from an influential and wealthy family. George Dewalt, Ida Saxton McKinley's grandfather, grew prosperous by investing in property.

Like Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Saxton McKinley was raised in the Presbyterian Church. Ida Saxton McKinley converted to Methodism once she married her husband, President William McKinley.⁴⁴ The Saxton family was wealthy and similar to the Cady family, could afford to send their children away for further education. Ida Saxton McKinley and her sister Mary "Pina" Saxton attended Brooke Hall Seminary School in Media, Pennsylvania. The Saxton parents also funded a European trip for the two girls. By this time, it was proper for children of elite families to discover the Old World. Saxton McKinley was one generation younger than Stanton. The sisters arrived in Ireland in June 1869. One of the few pieces of evidence left behind by Ida Saxton McKinley are her letters home to her parents from Europe. A descendant of the Saxton family, Henry S. Belden III, compiled these letters in the book, *Grand Tour: Letters from Abroad, 1869*.⁴⁵ When Saxton McKinley returned to Canton in November 1869 from Europe, Saxton's father employed her at his bank where she was a clerk. While working at the bank, she was promoted to cashier, a position typically reserved for men.

⁴⁴ "First Lady Biography: Ida McKinley," National First Ladies' Library, <http://www.firstladies.org/biographies/firstladies.aspx?biography=25> (30 December 2009).

⁴⁵ Henry S. Belden III, introduction to *Grand Tour: Letters from Abroad, 1869, Ida Saxton McKinley and Mary Saxton Barber*, by Ida Saxton McKinley and Mary Saxton Barber (Canton, OH: The Reserve Print Co., 1985), 2.

Her father would trust the bank in Ida Saxton McKinley's hands when he had to leave for business.⁴⁶ Saxton McKinley was a truly independent woman in her youth. She enjoyed working in business, especially with finances.

Besides working at her father's bank, Ida Saxton McKinley was also a Sunday school teacher at First Presbyterian Church, located in Canton, Ohio, which her family helped to build.⁴⁷ This is the same church where she and her husband, William McKinley wed on January 25, 1870. William McKinley settled in Canton, Ohio to practice law in 1867. By this time, Canton was a bustling railroad hub. Even though William McKinley was an educated man and a Civil War hero, he was not among Canton's elite. Ida Saxton McKinley married him for love, not money.⁴⁸ According to Nancy Herron, the couple met at a church picnic; however, the story how they met is often disputed.⁴⁹ They soon married and had their reception in Ida Saxton McKinley's home, which is on exhibit as the National First Ladies' Library. Saxton McKinley lived in Canton for nearly all of her life, only leaving while her husband served as U.S. Congressman, Governor of the State of Ohio and President of the United States.

Nancy Herron best describes Ida Saxton McKinley and her life as, "An intelligent, vivacious, and well-educated young woman, her bright mind was shattered by deaths she could not understand, including the loss of her two young daughters."⁵⁰ Saxton McKinley had to overcome the deaths of her grandfather, mother, her brother and her two children in a span of only five years. During this five-year span, she developed phlebitis,

⁴⁶ "First Lady Biography: Ida McKinley."

⁴⁷ "First Lady Biography: Ida McKinley."

⁴⁸ Nancy L. Herron, "Ida Saxton McKinley: Indomitable Spirit or Autocrat of the Sick Bed," in *Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies of the Twentieth Century*, ed. Molly Meijer Wertheimer, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 31.

⁴⁹ Herron, 33.

⁵⁰ Herron, 33.

an inflammation caused by blood clots and she also suffered brain damage, which caused her to have epileptic seizures. Despite the tragic losses and his wife's illnesses, William McKinley pursued his political career and in 1896 won the Presidential race. His devotion to his wife helped win the vote of many. The McKinleys portrayed everything required of a virtuous American family.

The Presidential race between William McKinley and William Jennings Bryan was highly publicized, which put Ida Saxton McKinley at the forefront of the spectacle.⁵¹ As a matter of fact, she was considered an "invalid" during that period of time. Despite her illnesses, the general public viewed Saxton McKinley as a dedicated, traditional woman. *The Sketch of the Life of Mrs. William McKinley* was first published in 1896, which was during the campaign. This article analyzes Saxton McKinley as representing the ideals of American character.⁵² The article also attempts to explain Saxton McKinley's illnesses by emphasizing the deaths in her family. When she felt well, she would often campaign with her husband, even sitting on the front porch during his famous front porch campaign. Ida Saxton McKinley was the "...revelation of the glory of the woman at home."⁵³ Saxton McKinley was considered to be feminine and traditional, despite her being an "invalid."

On the other hand, Mary E. Bryan, wife of the presidential opponent, William Jennings Bryan, was a lawyer by trade. "(Bryan) is interested in reforms in which her sex takes today initiative; she is a club woman; she is a student, whose mind is a storehouse

⁵¹ Herron, 34.

⁵² Josiah Hartzell, *Sketch of the Life of Mrs. William McKinley* (Washington DC: Home Magazine Press, 1897).

⁵³ Herron, 34.

of information on all subjects that pertain to her husband's duties and ambitions."⁵⁴ Mary E. Bryan served as her husband's aid, his mentor and his political partner. She contrasted with everything feminine of that time because she was perceived as her husband's political partner. It is rather fascinating to note that the ideology of the time juxtaposed traditional versus reformist values for the potential First Ladies. The traditional values won both in 1896 and 1900. Of course, women were not allowed to vote at that time. This shows the fear of social change by the majority of males who voted.

Ida Saxton McKinley suffered from multiple illnesses throughout the rest of her life. William McKinley, a loyal husband, remained devotedly dedicated to his wife. Nancy Herron, as well as the interpreter at the National First Ladies' Library mentioned the following story. Saxton McKinley remained the hostess at the White House during the remainder of President William McKinley's terms. At one particular dinner, Saxton McKinley suffered a seizure and President McKinley used a handkerchief to cover her face during her episode. The dinner went on as if nothing ever happened. Many people who surrounded President McKinley learned to ignore Ida Saxton McKinley's illnesses.⁵⁵ Despite her illnesses, Saxton McKinley's goal was to remain well enough to participate in the roles associated with being a First Lady.

Saxton McKinley was never spared from harsh realities. She had to overcome yet another untimely loss, when Leon Czolgosz, an anarchist, shot William McKinley on September 6, 1901, early in his second term as President. According to Nancy Herron, his killer was a "...paranoid whose fantasies had been excited by revolutionist

⁵⁴ Herron, 34.

⁵⁵ Herron, 37.

propaganda and the recent assassination of the king of Italy.”⁵⁶ President McKinley died of an infection to the entry site, a few days later on September 14, 1901. Ida Saxton McKinley returned to Canton, Ohio to live the remainder of her short life in the house she had shared with her husband. It was the famous home of the front porch campaign on North Market Street. The house is no longer there. It was demolished and the site is now occupied by the Stark County Library. Ida Saxton McKinley died in 1907.

First Ladies, such as Ida Saxton McKinley are constantly scrutinized. Their appearances, actions and communications both private and public are constantly in the world media. The First Lady has no manual; no “constitutional or legal guidelines to follow,” and for this reason, Molly Meijer Wertheimer argues that the role of First Lady is a more difficult task to perform than being president.⁵⁷ The First Lady symbolizes the image of proper American womanhood of the time. She behaves virtuously in America’s norms and values. She loves and supports her husband, always.⁵⁸ This is the type of relationship that is interpreted by the NFLL.

First Ladies’ who do not conform to the norm, for example, Edith Wilson, Florence Harding, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Rodham Clinton, are negatively stereotyped in the media.⁵⁹ The First Lady has several roles to fulfill, even though they are traditionally perceived as truly feminine and womanly. Wertheimer discusses these roles that include,

...wife and mother, public figure and celebrity, nation’s social hostess, symbol of American womanhood, White House manager and preservationist, campaigner, social advocate and champion of social causes, presidential spokesperson,

⁵⁶ Herron, 35.

⁵⁷ Molly Meijer Wertheimer, *Inventing a Voice: The Rhetoric of American First Ladies of the Twentieth Century*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004), 2-3.

⁵⁸ Wertheimer, 3.

⁵⁹ Wertheimer, 4.

presidential and political party booster, diplomat and political/presidential partner.⁶⁰

Many people do not see the influence of the last role, diplomat and political/presidential partner, even if the First Lady is perceived to be feminine. Public attention is on the role of President, not the role of the First Lady, unless she is deemed unfeminine. Not much information has been written about First Ladies, even though they carry such a heavy burden. They are often overshadowed by their husband's role as President, as is the case with Ida Saxton McKinley. Because of the lack of extant information about First Ladies, Mary Regula formed the National First Ladies' Library. She was aware of the lack of scholarship regarding these influential women in American history.

Ida Saxton McKinley was not a radical reformer such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton. She did not pursue the path of being a women's rights activist. Her thoughts about women's rights are unknown. Saxton McKinley and Stanton came from prominent families and represented women of the middle to upper class. Even though Stanton came from a prominent New York family, she did not represent true American womanhood, as did Ida Saxton McKinley. She wanted to go against the grain by rebelling against societal norms. Stanton even wore bloomers, a type of pants that was worn under a shorter, less restrictive dress. She was highly criticized for this action and as a result she stopped wearing them. According to Stanton, the bloomers were distracting her from reform activities. Stanton did not wear a corset either, which disfigured women's bodies. She deemed them unhealthy, which was later proven true.

Even though Ida Saxton McKinley was the model for true femininity, and the opposite of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, she had her own accomplishments. Ida and William

⁶⁰ Wertheimer, 5.

McKinley were the first Presidential couple to be immortalized on film.⁶¹ According to Nancy Herron, Ida Saxton McKinley also forced public acceptance of people living with disabilities, since she had several physical and mental impairments.⁶² Politically, Ida Saxton McKinley helped persuade her husband to keep the Philippines after winning the Spanish-American War in 1898. She wanted Presbyterian Church members to go to the Philippines and convert the indigenous population to their faith.⁶³ She took advantage of the opportunities afforded by her social status. Saxton McKinley was smart, educated and independent. She used these qualities to her advantage.

Because of their important roles in American history, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Ida Saxton McKinley are honored by having national landmarks dedicated to their work. Both women had very opposite effects on American history; however, their work was exceptional and unique. How many women can say that they were one of the organizers of a Women's Rights Convention or a First Lady of the United States? The WRNHP was one of the first museums dedicated to women. The NFLL is the only museum dedicated solely to First Ladies. Both sites are important and their creation and interpretation of peoples and events will be discussed in the following chapters.

⁶¹ Herron, 38.

⁶² Herron, 40.

⁶³ Herron, 39.

Chapter Two

The Creation of the Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library

The Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library were established by the National Park Service to identify specific themes of women's history. They were created with different intentions by professionals (WRNHP) and by amateurs (NFLL). This chapter highlights the creation of each site at both parks as well as the different techniques used to restore each structure.

According to Edith P. Mayo, six of the 392 National Park Service sites commemorate women.⁶⁴ These include the Eleanor Roosevelt's "Val Kil," Clara Barton National Historic Site, the Mary McLeod Bethune House, the Sewall-Belmont House, the Maggie Walker site and the Women's Rights National Historical Park. Since *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums* was published in 1994, there have been several more museums to add to the list. The National First Ladies' Library which opened in 1998 is one, even though the NPS website does little to recognize the NFLL as their site because it is managed by the National First Ladies' Library organization.

The main goal of the National Park Service is to care for places relating to American heritage so that all people can experience them in the future. The NPS was established in 1916 with the Organic Act. In that year, the NPS owned 15 national parks and 21 national monuments. Most of the parks were west of the Mississippi river and

⁶⁴ Edith P. Mayo, "New Angles of Vision," in *Gender Perspectives: Essays on Women in Museums*, ed. Jane R. Glasser and Artemis A. Zenetou (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1994), 58.

only four encompassed themes of American history.⁶⁵ The NPS has evolved since 1916 and thousands of their sites incorporate several different themes of America's heritage, including women. The National Park Service currently owns 27,000 historic structures, 2,461 national historic landmarks and 68,561 archeological sites with 121,603,193 museum objects in their collection as of 2008.⁶⁶

The NPS is based on a decentralized system. It has its home office in Washington D.C. and then branches out to include: ten regional offices, two service centers, "satellite" offices and 392 individual parks.⁶⁷ Horace M. Albright, who was the assistant director of the NPS from 1929 to 1933, had a love and devotion for history. It was he who began to hire professional historians within the NPS to help preserve American history.⁶⁸ The primary mission of historians is to complete research on NPS sites.⁶⁹ There are several reports completed by research historians, such as Historic Resource Studies and Historic Structure Reports.

Another major role that historians play within the NPS is interpretation. Interpretation is essential when describing events in the past because it may be the only perception taken into consideration by the visitor. Interpretation typically begins at the site's visitor center. These often include exhibits, movies, books and brochures.⁷⁰ The NFLL and the WRNHP have visitor centers that include exhibits, movies and brochures

⁶⁵ Ralph H. Lewis, *Museum Curatorship in the National Park Service, 1904-1982*, http://www.nps.gov/history/history/online_books/curatorship/toc.htm (accessed 7 January 2010).

⁶⁶ "2008 Director's Report," National Park Service, <http://www.nps.gov/2008DirectorsReport/2008NPSDirectorsReport.pdf> (accessed 7 January 2010).

⁶⁷ Ronald W. Johnson, "History in the National Park Service: The Denver Service Center as a Case Study," in *Public History: An Introduction*, ed. Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp, (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1988), 376.

⁶⁸ Heather Huyck and Dwight Pitcaithley, "National Park Service: Historians in Interpretation Management, and Cultural Resources Management," in *Public History: An Introduction*, ed. Barbara J. Howe and Emory L. Kemp (Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing Company, 1988), 359.

⁶⁹ Johnson, 381.

⁷⁰ Huyck and Pitcaithley, 361.

that are about the sites and exhibits offered. Visitor centers are helpful tools to introduce the visitor to the themes of the museum.

During the 1960s, a new school of history emerged, social history. Social history often focused on the interpretation of the lives of peoples marginalized in the past, which included women. Gerda Lerner is often credited with being the founder of women's history. Other historians that specialize in women's history include: Edith P. Mayo, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, Barbara Melosh and Ellen C. DuBois.⁷¹

In 1976, the United States' bicentennial sparked the nation's interest in American history. The combination of the social history movement and the bicentennial caused people to question where historical sites dedicated to women were. There were none. As a result of the social history movement and the rise of feminism, the WRNHP was created in 1980, which was long overdue. According to Barbara Melosh, the National Park Service undertook a new venture when establishing the WRNHP. She argues that social history had a strong influence, even on governmental organizations such as the NPS. Melosh attributes this to the Carter years. She argues that the Reagan era demonstrated, "hostility toward feminism" because of the influence he and his administration had on conservative politics.⁷²

⁷¹ Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds its Past: Placing Women in History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), *The Grimke Sisters from South Carolina: Pioneers for Women's Rights and Abolition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), Edith P. Mayo, "Eleanor Roosevelt's Clothing," *The Eleanor Roosevelt Encyclopedia* (Greenwood Press, 2001), "Introduction to Woman Suffrage," *Jailed for Freedom: American Women Win the Vote* (New Sage Press, 1995), Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Well-Behaved Women Seldom Make History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), *Good wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), Barbara Melosh, *Engendering Culture: Manhood and Womanhood in New Deal Public Art and Theater* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991), "Women and the Arts," in *Reclaiming the Past: Landmarks of Women's History*, ed. Page Putnam Miller (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992) and Ellen C. DuBois, *Feminism and Suffrage: the Emergence of an Independent Women's Movement in America, 1848-1869* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), *Women's Suffrage and Women's Rights* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁷² Barbara Melosh, "Speaking of Women: Museums' Representations of Women's History," 194.

Several individuals are recognized as making the WRNHP reality when it opened to the public in 1982. Without the help from Judy Hart, the sites would have never become reality. Judy Hart worked in land acquisition for the National Park Service and discovered that social history was a void within the organization. As a result, she recommended two sites for acquisition: a historic black church in Boston and Seneca Falls, New York, where the first Women's Rights Convention was held.⁷³ Judy Hart later became the WRNHP's supervisor.

Other individuals who made the WRNHP possible include Ralph Peters, Lucille Povero and Corrine Guntzel. Peters, who was a visitor to Seneca Falls, New York, discovered that the Stanton House was for sale by a private owner. He and his wife, Marjorie Smith, were outraged that the house was not recognized. They decided to purchase it in 1978 with the intention of selling the house to a non-profit organization once the organization could acquire the funds to purchase it. Without Ralph and Marjorie Peters' contributions, the Stanton House may have been lost. Lucille Povero, an active member of the National Organization of Women and a feminist, knew that there were no existing organizations in Seneca Falls that could come up with the funds to purchase the home from Peters. In 1978, Povero and a group of local citizens met and formed the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation. The organization's goal was to ensure the preservation of the Stanton House, even if Congress did not approve the potential NPS site. They feared the worst; the former home of Elizabeth Cady Stanton would continue to deteriorate. Peters' intention was to keep the house off of the market until the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation could raise the funds to purchase it. In the meantime, a live-in housekeeper maintained the property. The live-in housekeeper was Lucille

⁷³ Melosh, 196.

Povero.⁷⁴ Corrine Guntzel, a feminist and professor of economics at Eisenhower College, became involved with the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation and was the organization's trustee and treasurer. She succeeded Povero as president in 1980.⁷⁵ In February 1980, Congress approved the creation of the WRNHP. On January 6, 1982 Peters transferred the Stanton House to The Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation. On June 29, 1982 the Foundation transferred the Stanton House to the NPS.⁷⁶ The next month, July 1982, the park officially opened.

The NPS originally drafted four potential plans to include several sites into the WRNHP in 1976. The first alternative was to have just one site: the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel, where the first Women's Rights Convention was held in 1848. The Wesleyan Chapel would be the primary resource used to tell the story of the struggle for women's rights, originating in Seneca Falls. The intent of this plan was to use the chapel as an interpretive center and use much of the building's original fabric. The chapel would also have exhibits of the other sites related to the first Women's Rights Convention. The second option would be to have the Wesleyan Chapel and the Stanton House open to the public. This alternative would use the Wesleyan Chapel as proposed in the first plan and would restore the Stanton House to its condition when Stanton moved to Seneca Falls in 1847, where she lived for sixteen years. The third alternative would be to incorporate five sites. This proposal would use the Wesleyan Chapel and the Stanton House as in alternative two. It would also include the Hunt House, M'Clintock House and the Bloomer House, which would interpret the events leading up to the first

⁷⁴ "Dedication," *The Reveille*, 14 July 1982.

⁷⁵ "Who is This Multi-Faceted Spirit-Professor-Activist," *The Reveille*, 14 July 1982, 8.

⁷⁶ Barbara A. Pearson-Yocum, *The Stanton House*, Historic Structure Report, Women's Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1998), 30.

Women's Rights Convention as well as the interpretation of women's dress reform contributed by Amelia Bloomer.⁷⁷ The last plan was to create a women's rights historic district and to make downtown Seneca Falls a historic district. This plan would involve the efforts of local businesses. It would also include all of the sites mentioned in the third plan. The last plan was chosen and the local community embraced the idea. After the first NPS visit to Seneca Falls in December 1978, the NPS agreed to incorporate the broader theme into their interpretation plan.⁷⁸

According to the Women's Rights National Historical Park Act, S. 2263, passed by Congress on February 5, 1980, the NPS would incorporate six sites, including the Stanton House and the Wesleyan Chapel by donation or purchase. The Bloomer House, the M'Clintock House and the Hunt House could be purchased with less-than fee policy, which meant that the NPS could not buy the properties. The NPS was to work with private owners of these properties to ensure their preservation and to make them open to the public. The Women's Rights National Historical Park Act was amended so that the NPS could purchase the M'Clintock House in 1984 and the Hunt House in 2000.⁷⁹ The Women's Rights National Historical Park Act also encouraged the NPS to use state and local agencies to develop a preservation commission to restore the sites to their mid-nineteenth century appearance. It also created an advisory commission that lasted ten years after the establishment of the park. The advisory commission consisted of members from various local agencies: representatives from the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation; the Women's Hall of Fame which is also located in Seneca Falls; Seneca

⁷⁷ "Women's Rights Historic Sites, New York," Preliminary Study (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1976), 5-6.

⁷⁸ *Women's Rights Historic Site, New York*, 7.

⁷⁹ House Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, P.L. 98-402, 28 August 1984 and House Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, P.L. 106-258, 8 August 2000.

Falls Historical Society; two members appointed by the Governor of New York; a representative from the United States Department of Transportation; a representative from the Army Corps of Engineers; a representative from the Village of Seneca Falls; the town of Seneca Falls; Eisenhower College, Wells College, Cornell University; a representative from an agency dedicated to Seneca Falls revitalization; two women in nontraditional occupations; and finally, three women or authors from national women's groups or lecturers on women's rights.⁸⁰ The Women's Rights National Historical Park Act stated that members of the commission were to represent the community and to provide agency for women's struggle for equal rights. Their mission was to research the events leading up to the first Women's Rights Convention, and to incorporate them into the community. The members met without compensation, except for travel expenses. Their participation in such a commission was pivotal for the creation and interpretation of the sites.

On December 28, 1980, the NPS established the WRNHP. It took two years for the Visitor Center and Stanton House to open to the public on July 17, 1982. Architect John Harvey, who lived in nearby Geneva, donated his time and designed the 8,000 square foot park.⁸¹ When the park opened in 1982, public access to the Stanton House was very limited, since the restoration process took several years. The Stanton House completed its first phase of restoration in 1984. The Wesleyan Chapel was sold to the NPS in 1985 and the preserved Wesleyan Chapel opened in 1993. The M'Clintock House was purchased by the NPS in 1985. The NPS acquired the Hunt House in 2000. The Hunt House is not yet open to the public yet. The NPS is still debating about how to

⁸⁰ Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, *Women's Rights National Historical Park Act*, 96th Cong., 2nd sess., 1980, S. 2263, 1-6.

⁸¹ "Work Begins This Week on Park; Dedication Set," *The Reveille*, 30 April 1980.

preserve the house, since major remodeling was done. The WRNHP also originally intended to include the Amelia Bloomer House. The NPS conducted several different studies in regards to the site. After much research, the NPS could not link the Bloomer House to Amelia Bloomer. They could not find enough evidence to conclude that Amelia Bloomer actually lived in the house.⁸²

When the WRNHP was established, the NPS leased out multiple buildings for its headquarters. It was not until 1985 that the NPS considered using the former Seneca Falls Village Hall located on 136 Fall Street as its Visitor Center and for administrative office space. On October 16, 1985, the Seneca Falls Board of Trustees authorized the donation of the Village Hall to the National Park Service. The only occupant of the Municipal Building or Village Hall was the Seneca Falls Police Department, which relocated to another nearby facility.⁸³ The Village Hall was turned over to the NPS in April 1987 after offices were relocated and the lease ran out at the NPS's rented Visitor Center. The current Visitor Center opened to the public in 1993.

The former Village Hall was constructed in 1915 as a garage and automobile dealership. Even though the NPS is unsure of the architect, the building is attributed to M. L. Van Kirk and Son. The building is of steel frame construction, with a brick facade and a concrete foundation. The steel used for the framing was made by the Bethlehem Steel Company.⁸⁴ The building is three stories. The brick appears to be in fair condition. It is quite obvious where work has been done to the exterior of the building. According to the NPS, the brick used in the front of the building is a textured brick, while the sides

⁸² Huyck and Pitcaithley, 370.

⁸³ Stacey A. Matson, Barbara A. Yocum, Maureen K. Phillips, *Village Hall*, Historic Structure Report, Women's Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1988), 15-16.

⁸⁴ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 23.

and rear are standard. The NPS also reported that the brick used was of poor quality, probably because it was not load bearing.⁸⁵ The front elevation features the modern glass curtain, with large single pane windows running from the third to the first floor, covering the façade of the building.⁸⁶ There are also brick pillasters between the glass windows. Its modern design makes the building easy to locate, in comparison to other downtown structures.

Eventually the Boyce Garage moved to another nearby location and the mortgage on the building went into foreclosure. The Village of Seneca Falls foresaw the potential opportunities for having administrative office space in the building and purchased the building in 1927. The purchase price of the garage was \$28,000 with an interest rate of three and a quarter percent.⁸⁷ The town council proposed the following plan for rehabilitation; storage space on the third floor, police department and jail on the second and office space on the first.⁸⁸ The first floor also housed the fire department. Around 1953, two buildings directly north of the Village Hall were demolished in order to provide parking space for the building. Also installed inside the building were paneling and drop ceilings in the 1960s.

The NPS conducted an extensive report of the structure. Structure reports are done for almost every NPS acquisition and they are very detailed. They contain material such as a crack monitor progress sheet that monitors structural movement, molding analysis, mortar analysis, paint chromochronology which identifies original paint colors in each layer of paint used in the building as well as the condition of every aspect to the

⁸⁵ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 23.

⁸⁶ Joanne M. Hanley, *All Men and Women are Created Equal: Visitor Center Exhibits at Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York* (Eastern National, 1997), 4-5.

⁸⁷ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 14.

⁸⁸ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 14.

building and what could be done to make repairs. When the WRNHP took over the building in 1987, they used the first floor of the Village Hall, the former fire station, as their maintenance shop.⁸⁹ As of the date of the “Village Hall Structure Report, 1988,” the Visitor Center was not remodeled for its present use. In 1993, the Visitor Center opened to the public for its intended use.

The NPS wanted to maintain the building’s integrity as the Boyce Garage and the Village Hall. Three key original pieces to the building are the structural system, the concrete floors and floor drains and the Murphy freight elevator.⁹⁰ The NPS’ intended use for the former Village Hall was to have the first floor provide visitor information, orientation and interpretation. The NPS proposed that the second floor would be used as public and private areas and the third floor was to house offices.⁹¹

The proposed use of the Visitor Center was successful. The first floor has an information center, which greets people as well a space for temporary exhibits and an exhibit orienting the visitor with the four other sites that are part of the WRNHP. The first floor also houses statues of the participants of the first Women’s Rights Convention as well as a theatre, restrooms and a museum shop. The second floor consists of exhibits and the third floor houses office space for park staff.

The Wesleyan Chapel was sold to the NPS in 1985.⁹² It is considered by the NPS to be the primary site and main interpretation tool used by the WRNHP, since it is where the first Women’s Rights Convention took place. Even before the Wesleyan Chapel was

⁸⁹ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 21.

⁹⁰ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 112.

⁹¹ Matson, Yocum and Phillips, 113.

⁹² “Laundromat Officially Part of Women’s Park,” *The Reveille*, 17 April 1985, 1.

sold to the NPS, management considered what they could do with the building. The initial study was projected to cost \$40,000.⁹³

The Wesleyan Chapel, where the first Women's Rights Convention was held in 1848, first opened its doors in October 1843 and cost \$1,770 to build.⁹⁴ The Chapel remained open for its congregation until February 1872. When the Chapel was sold in 1872, it was converted into a grocery store and Boyd Furniture. There was also a hall constructed in the church. In 1890, the Wesleyan Chapel became an opera house. The Chapel then successively became a bowling center, a repair shop owned by a plumber, a theatre, a telephone company, a garage and finally, the Seneca Falls Laundromat, which opened in 1961.⁹⁵ In 1971, the second floor was converted to apartments. According to Sharon Brown, the NPS historian who conducted the structure report for the Wesleyan Chapel, many historians concluded that the Laundromat symbolized the current (published in 1987) status of the women's rights movement, unchanging under the Reagan administration.⁹⁶

The Chapel underwent major remodeling since the 1848 Convention, which destroyed the building's integrity. Another problem faced by the NPS is that there are barely any photographs or records of what the 1848 Chapel looked like. One of the best pieces of evidence left behind is a statement of a young girl who attended the Women's Rights Convention. She stated, "...the old chapel with its dusty windows, the gallery on three sides, the wooden benches or pews, and the platform with the desk and communion-

⁹³ "Nat'l Park Service Buys Former Wesleyan Chapel," *The Reveille*, 10 April 1985.

⁹⁴ Brown, 5.

⁹⁵ Brown, xv.

⁹⁶ Brown, ix.

table....”⁹⁷ Village records indicate that Fall Street was unpaved and one of the only exterior descriptions of the Chapel was that of a sidewalk built in front of the building.⁹⁸ According to maps of Seneca Falls circa 1848, the Wesleyan Chapel was rectangular. As for the interior of the structure, there is even less evidence. Throughout church records, individuals referred to rooms in the church; however, no descriptions were left. Also found in church records were indications that the congregation used stoves for heat. The congregation also bought carpets, pews and a podium. Frequent repairs to the windows were made and the church would sometimes pay for the walls to be whitewashed.⁹⁹ Several individuals in the newspaper *American Wesleyan*, made some inferences of what the interior of the chapel may have looked like, but, not enough detail was provided to determine the exact locations of rooms and stairs.¹⁰⁰ The Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation offered cash for information relating to the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel when the first Women’s Rights Convention took place. They wanted to preserve accurately the structure to its 1848 appearance. The Foundation offered \$500 for blueprints, \$300 for a photograph of the Chapel prior to 1870, \$200 for a postcard or drawing of the chapel and \$100 for descriptions.¹⁰¹ The Foundation did not have much luck. As a result of the lack of evidence available, the NPS determined to not duplicate missing interior or exterior parts of the building, since they are not sure what the Wesleyan Chapel looked like in 1848. Using best historic preservation practices, the National Park Service did not intend to fabricate missing features.

⁹⁷ Carol Petravage, *McClintock House, First Wesleyan Methodist Church and Stanton House*, Historic Furnishings Report, Women’s Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1989), 7.

⁹⁸ Sharon A. Brown, *Wesleyan Chapel*, Historic Structure Report, Women’s Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1987), 32-33.

⁹⁹ Brown, 36.

¹⁰⁰ Brown, 39.

¹⁰¹ “Foundation Offers Cash Prizes for Wesleyan Chapel Information,” *The Reveille*, 1985.

With little evidence left for the NPS to determine what the Chapel looked like, the NPS decided to have a design competition. There was little original fabric left of the building and the potential designers would have to work from that. The NPS had stipulations: the building must retain all original features; the designers were allowed to use non-original building material in order to retain the east and west walls; and the Chapel had to maintain its original size in order for the first Women's Rights Convention to be best interpreted. The Wesleyan Chapel was packed with 300 men and women who attended the Convention. Seating for 50 people had to be present as well as a parking lot for 18 cars and 2 buses. The Declaration of Sentiments had to be visible and accessible at all times and the space had to reflect on the progress of the women's rights movement.¹⁰² The NPS originally wanted to have an audio program located inside the Wesleyan Chapel. This never became reality. The original plan was to remove the surrounding buildings, the theatre to the west and the small house in the rear, and to use the adjacent Village Hall as a visitor center; this later became reality.¹⁰³

In 1987, two Harvard architectural and design graduate students, Ann Marshall and Ray Kinoshita, won the design competition and \$15,000. The seven member panel chose their design over 217 other entries.¹⁰⁴ The estimated budget for the project was five million dollars.¹⁰⁵ Both the east and west walls have been restored in their original appearances. There are only two original brick walls that remain. The Wesleyan Chapel

¹⁰² *Women's Rights National Historical Park Design Competition*, (National Park Service and the National Endowment for the Arts, 1987), 1-7, Seneca Falls, New York: Seneca Falls Historical Society (Collection 36A, Box 1, Folder 1).

¹⁰³ General Management Plan/Environmental Assessment, Women's Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1985), 45-46.

¹⁰⁴ "Two Students Win Nat'l Design Contest," *The Cornell Daily Sun*, 22 October 1987, 2, Seneca Falls, New York: Seneca Falls Historical Society (Collection 36A, Box 1, Folder 3).

¹⁰⁵ Martin Toombs, "Two Harvard Women Win Design Contest," *Finger Lakes Times*, 21 October 1987, 1, Seneca Falls, New York: Seneca Falls Historical Society (Collection 36A, Box 1, Folder 3).

is currently open in the front and rear and has a non-original roof which is holding the structure in place. The original beams are still present.

Adjacent to the structure is a stepped seating area, where the required seating for 50 is placed. The block also contains an open space of grass and concrete, and a beautiful water wall monument with the Declaration of Sentiments and the names of the signers engraved into the stone. The water represents the man-made falls once used as a power source in Seneca Falls. The Wesleyan Chapel and its grounds inhabit a park like area. It is a place where visitors and members of the community can congregate. The Chapel is also an important monument that is lit during the night. Across the street, and in the rear of the downtown area, is the canal, the former lifeline of the village. Also located across the canal is the former Seneca Woolen Company, which is currently being preserved. Both the Visitor Center and the Wesleyan Chapel are positioned well in the heart of Seneca Falls. These sites leave the visitor wanting to experience the others.

The Wesleyan Chapel block opened to the public on July 31, 1993. More than 2,000 people came for the event.¹⁰⁶ The project was completed nearly five years after the initial announcement of the design competition. The block consists of the Visitor Center and the Wesleyan Chapel. Even though the idea of having what is left of the original Chapel is great for interpretation, the NPS staff realized that it was detrimental to the historic fabric. Upstate New York has treacherous winters and leaving the original 1843 brick structure exposed has caused the structure to rapidly deteriorate. The NPS is also concerned with the noise of the street, since the Wesleyan Chapel is located on the main street, Fall Street, which runs through downtown Seneca Falls. It is hard to hear the interpreter and the noise provides a distraction when programs are held at the site. As a

¹⁰⁶ “On the Count of 3, Crowd Cuts Ribbon to Open New Park,” *The Reveille*, 5 August 1993, 1.

result, the NPS in collaboration with local organizations, decided to renovate the Wesleyan Chapel once again. The new rehabilitation project, which is currently underway, involves adding a north and south wall to enclose the Chapel. The plan also includes adding energy efficient windows, roof shingles and heating and cooling. The NPS will clearly make evident the original fabric of the building by making the supporting walls a different style of brick. The NPS will use the interior space in the Wesleyan Chapel for exhibits and seating.¹⁰⁷ The reconstruction is scheduled to be done by late 2010.

Renovations and remodeling of important historic structures are common. Buildings do not stay the same over time and they are sold and readapted for use. It is the job of preservationists and historians to find out the building's significance, function and originality. Preservation is difficult many times, as was the case of the Wesleyan Chapel, especially when there are no pictorial or descriptive records of what the building might have looked like at the time of the event. Extensive research was also conducted on the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House. The NPS had many of the same issues with the Stanton House as they did with the Wesleyan Chapel. There was not enough information to restore certain aspects of the house.

Elizabeth Cady Stanton moved to Seneca Falls, New York in 1847 from Chelsea, Massachusetts, located outside of Boston. According to Stanton, the family moved to Seneca Falls because of her husband, Henry's, "delicate" health.¹⁰⁸ According to the interpreter at the park, Henry Stanton had political ambitions he could not fulfill in a big

¹⁰⁷ *Wesleyan Chapel*, Women's Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 142.

city such as Boston.¹⁰⁹ Stanton found the move difficult. She enjoyed the bustle of Boston, as well as the fervent abolitionist movement and constantly being surrounded by reformers. Stanton loved her former house right outside of Boston in Chelsea, Massachusetts. In her autobiography, she often referred to the big windows overlooking the bay. Despite her love for Boston, she moved to Seneca Falls and lived there until 1862, spending 16 years of her life in the small village. Fortunately for Stanton, her sister, Harriet Cady Eaton, also lived in Seneca Falls and Stanton was familiar with the area. According to Stanton, her new home was on the outskirts of town with muddy roads and no sidewalks. She also stated that she suffered from a mental hunger while in Seneca Falls.¹¹⁰ She no longer had the time to read and write because she did not have good servants to help her take care of her home and children.

The National Park Service's plans for the Stanton House, which began with research in July 1982, were to restore the house to its original character when Stanton lived there from 1847 to 1862. The house is located at 1 Washington Street. The NPS found evidence of the home's appearance in local records and Stanton's autobiography, although not many pictures existed of the home at the time when Stanton lived there. The NPS is not sure when the house was actually built. Records in Seneca Falls' mortgage books prove that the house existed in 1838.¹¹¹ The individuals who owned the Bayard Company previously owned the house and the surrounding property before Daniel Cady, Elizabeth Cady Stanton's father, purchased the home in 1844. Her father then gave the house to Stanton and her family in 1847. This was a very generous gift,

¹⁰⁹ Interpreter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House Tour, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

¹¹⁰ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 145.

¹¹¹ Pearson-Yocum, 8.

since Henry Stanton did not make much money in Seneca Falls. Because of the newly passed Married Women's Property Act of 1848, Stanton was able to keep the home in her name, since it was a gift.¹¹²

Even though a wealthy man, Daniel Cady did not leave the Stanton's an elegant, ready to move in home. It was in need of much repair. According to Stanton,

The House we were to occupy had been closed for some years and needed many repairs, and the grounds, comprising of five acres, were overgrown with weeds. My father gave me a check and said, with a smile, "You believe in woman's capacity to do and dare; now go ahead and put your place in order."¹¹³

Stanton sent her children to her parent's home in Johnstown and then hired carpenters, painters, paperhangers and gardeners to do repairs to the house and the surrounding land. She added a new kitchen and woodhouse to the building. Stanton's husband did not move at the same time as the rest of the family to Seneca Falls because of business so Stanton was left to repair the house alone. Stanton enjoyed the independence, making the decisions needed for her home alone. Not only did she have to contract the work, she also bargained for fair prices for brick, timber and paint.¹¹⁴ The Stanton House was large for that period. By the years 1860 through 1862, the Stanton House and the surrounding land was valued at \$1,500.¹¹⁵ Stanton's property was in the top seven percent of the surrounding houses and land properties in Seneca Falls.¹¹⁶

The Stanton House had more than six rooms. The NPS is not sure how large the house was when Stanton lived there because additions have been removed. The bedrooms were upstairs while the main living area was on the first floor. According to

¹¹² *Stanton's Grassmere*, Women's Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 16 October 2009.

¹¹³ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 144.

¹¹⁴ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 144.

¹¹⁵ Pearson-Yocum, 18.

¹¹⁶ Pearson-Yocum, 18.

Stanton's daughter, the home had several porches. The NPS preserved only the front porch.¹¹⁷ The first floor contained the family parlor, where Stanton held her infamous conversational and debates. Stanton imitated Margaret Fuller's conversational. Fuller was a journalist and women's rights activist who published *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* in 1845. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* became, "a classic in feminist thought."¹¹⁸ The subject was selected the prior week and each individual would prepare a ten minute essay. The group would then discuss the essay one person at a time; men and women were included.¹¹⁹ According to Stanton, she and her friends started conversational that lasted several years.

In 1862, after living in the home for sixteen years, the Stanton family sold the house to John S. Edwards for \$1,650.¹²⁰ The home passed through the ownership of several people and remodeling was done in the early twentieth century. It remained in private ownership until 1982, when the Elizabeth Cady Stanton Foundation donated the house to the NPS. The main structure of the Stanton House is Greek Revival in style. Luckily for the NPS, remnants of the wallpaper used by Stanton remained. The NPS had the wallpaper reproduced. Some of the original plaster also remained, as well as the post-and-beam structure. The original roof was also present under layers of shingles. The north wing of the house was removed circa 1864 when the lot was subdivided. Apparently the North Wing of the house fell on boundary lines.¹²¹ The south wing was added to the home circa 1837 and remains intact. The east wing was added to the house

¹¹⁷ Pearson-Yocum, 17.

¹¹⁸ "(Sarah) Margaret Fuller, 1810-1850," *American Transcendentalism Web*, <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/transcendentalism/authors/fuller> (accessed 24 April 2010).

¹¹⁹ Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 152-153.

¹²⁰ Pearson-Yocum, 24.

¹²¹ Pearson-Yocum, 116.

circa 1902 and another addition to the east wing was added in the 1970s. The NPS removed the east wing because it did not exist when Stanton lived in the house. The NPS painted the north and east wings grey on the exterior of the house to show where existing wings once were when Stanton lived there. This is important for interpretation because it indicates to visitors that the house was much larger. Also missing are several porches and of course the land. Only one quarter of the two acres remain of the Stanton's original property.¹²²

The Stanton House sits on a hill overlooking the canal. The surrounding neighborhood consists of new and old homes. The building directly south of the Stanton House is a modern and relatively simple ranch style home owned by the NPS. Aesthetically, it does not compliment the Stanton House. The NPS uses the building for office space and a parking lot. It does not fit with the historical context of the Stanton House. The former adjacent neighborhood that existed when Stanton lived in Seneca Falls, which housed mainly Irish and Italian immigrants who worked in the mills, has also been removed to construct Van Cleef Lake which is part of the Cayuga-Seneca Canal.

Below the hill where the Stanton House is located, stands the Jacob P. Chamberlain House. The Chamberlain House is located on the canal. The NPS acquired this property in 1996. The NPS was going to use the house as a guest services site for Stanton House visitors; however, after research was conducted, the NPS found significance in the structure. The Chamberlain House was built in 1815 and is the oldest

¹²² Pearson-Yocum, 189.

remaining remnant of the local flour milling enterprise.¹²³ The house is in very poor condition. The wood siding on the exterior of the house is exposed and rotted in many places. Most of the windows are broken and mold is growing on several places on the exterior of the building. When asked what the plans were for this building, the NPS interpreter stated that there were currently none.

Other important sites used by the WRNHP to interpret the events leading up to the first Women's Rights Convention are the M'Clintock House and the Hunt House. It is obvious that the NPS attributes most of the WRNHP interpretation to the Wesleyan Chapel and the Stanton House. The original plan for the M'Clintock House was that it would be open year round. This house is currently open on a very limited basis during the late spring and summer months because it lacks utilities. The Hunt House is not open to the public, and has been in the possession of the NPS only since 2000.

The M'Clintock House is a short drive from the Visitor Center and is located in Waterloo, New York at 14 East Williams Street. It was at the M'Clintock House where Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others (the NPS is still not sure if all the women who met at the Hunt House to determine that they were going to hold the Convention actually met at the M'Clintock House) met on July 16, 1848 to plan the announcement of the Convention that took place only three days later on July 19 and 20, 1848. It was also at the M'Clintock House where these individuals wrote the Declaration of Sentiments, modeled after the United States Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Sentiments was written on the M'Clintock's mahogany table which is on display at the Smithsonian

¹²³ *Rescuing the Past: The Chamberlain House*, Women's Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 16 October 2009.

Institution in Washington D.C.¹²⁴ Mary Ann M'Clintock proved to be very involved with the first Women's Rights Convention and was appointed secretary of the Convention.¹²⁵

Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock moved to Waterloo from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1836 with their five children.¹²⁶ Richard Hunt owned the house and leased it to the M'Clintocks. It is believed that the house was built circa 1836, since the structure first appeared on a Waterloo map in that year.¹²⁷ Similar to the Stanton House, it is Greek Revival in style. Because of the structure's importance in the events leading up to the Convention, the NPS purchased the M'Clintock House from the Waterloo Baptist Church on October 15, 1985 for \$53,000.¹²⁸ The NPS decided to remove any additions to the property after 1848, including the Waterloo Baptist Church, which used the M'Clintock House for their parsonage for over 100 years.¹²⁹ The Waterloo Baptist Church made many alterations to the site such as adding partitions, window replacements and removing chimneys.¹³⁰

The NPS determined to restore certain aspects of the house, since preserving only original features was nearly impossible. Unlike the Stanton House, the M'Clintock House had no existing wallpaper. The NPS decided to use wallpaper from that period and make it evident that it was not the original pattern by relaying this information in the tour. Other restored aspects to the M'Clintock House would also be made evident by the NPS. This is the same technique that the National First Ladies' Library used when

¹²⁴ Barbara A. Yocum, *The M'Clintock House*, Historic Structure Report, Women's Rights National Historical Park (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 1993), 3.

¹²⁵ Yocum, 46.

¹²⁶ Yocum, 31.

¹²⁷ Yocum, 12.

¹²⁸ Yocum, 3 and 95.

¹²⁹ Yocum, 54.

¹³⁰ Yocum, 4.

preserving the William McKinley Historic Home. Because original features and furniture were not present, they used items appropriate for that period.

The NPS acquired the Hunt House in 2000. Richard P. Hunt built the house on several acres of farmland in Waterloo, New York.¹³¹ The Hunt House is significant because it is where Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, Martha Wright, Mary Ann M'Clintock and Jane Hunt met to decide that they were going to host the first Women's Rights Convention on July 19, 1848. While Stanton was in London attending the World Anti-Slavery Convention, she and Mott vowed to hold a convention for the rights of women because of the discriminations they faced at the event.¹³² Because they were women, they could not participate in the convention. This promise became reality eight years later.

The NPS is currently researching the Hunt House to publish a Historic Structure Report. According to the staff at the WRNHP, the NPS is debating whether to keep the four decorative columns added to the house at a later date. The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties state, "Changes to a property that have acquired historic significance in their own right will be retained and preserved."¹³³ The NPS determined that the Wesleyan Chapel, the Stanton House and the M'Clintock House that the homes would be preserved to their character at the time of the first Women's Rights Convention. The NPS demolished significant additions to each property, such as the Waterloo Baptist Church, which had a longstanding history in the community of

¹³¹ "Hunt House," Women's Rights National Historical Park, <http://www.nps.gov/wori/historyculture/hunt-house.htm> (accessed 19 January 2010).

¹³² Stanton, *Eighty Years and More*, 82-83.

¹³³ "Standards for Preservation," *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties*, http://www.nps.gov/history/hps/tps/standguide/preserve/preserve_standards.htm (accessed 19 January 2010).

Waterloo. To keep with the theme, even though it may be against the Standards, the NPS will probably demolish the columns. The demolition of important structures can be questioned, although the additional features would not fit in the interpretation of the first Women's Rights Convention.

The WRNHP was established in 1980 with the help of several people who wanted to preserve the birthplace of the women's rights movement. The NPS conducted a considerable amount of research on each of the sites open to the public at the WRNHP. Professional historians and archeologists conducted several reports in order for the NPS to best interpret and preserve the sites. One of the most important goals of the NPS was to ensure each site's integrity, while interpreting the events leading up to the first Women's Rights Convention and the 1848 Convention itself.

The National First Ladies' Library evolved from an idea that Mary Regula, wife of former Ohio Congressman, Ralph Regula, had about filling the historical void surrounding the nation's First Ladies. Mary Regula, who is originally from Girard, Ohio moved to Canton, Ohio with her husband not long after they were married. The Lion's Club invited Regula to give a speech in place of her husband who was busy with Senate business.¹³⁴ The topic was to be Abraham Lincoln. Instead of discussing Abraham Lincoln, she focused on former First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln. While researching Mary Lincoln, Regula realized that nothing written about her, or any other First Lady, even though their roles are multidimensional. The only thing known about Mary Lincoln was the belief that she went crazy after her husband's assassination. According to Regula, nobody knew about her staunch abolitionist views and the influential power she had on

¹³⁴ Mary Regula, "How it Came to Be," in *This Elevated Position...: A Catalogue and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History*, ed. Carl Sferrazza Anthony (Washington D.C.: Library of Congress, 2003), 21-22.

her husband.¹³⁵ There were several biographies written about Mary Todd Lincoln prior to the establishment of the NFLL.¹³⁶

Unlike the WRNHP, the NFLL was established through the vision of one person, Mary Regula. Regula, having political connections, had a much easier time finding political support and funding for the site. She had met and became friends with many First Ladies such as Betty Ford, Rosalynn Carter, Barbara Bush, Nancy Reagan and Hillary Clinton. She had connections with the most powerful women in the country. Regula then established a council of thirteen influential women who lived in Canton to discuss and develop her idea. Unlike the WRNHP, Regula chose her council. She approached Hillary Clinton in 1995 with the idea of establishing a library and bibliography dedicated to First Ladies. Clinton responded, “I know exactly what you mean. There is a void.”¹³⁷ Regula’s daughter thought that the bibliography would best be accessible online, and as a result, the online bibliography and the NFLL website were created and went live on February 23, 1998. A ceremony took place in the East Room at the White House. Hillary Clinton made the first “hit.” One of the individuals who made the website possible was Patricia Krider, a former teacher at Stark State School of Technology. Krider is currently the director of the NFLL.

The bibliography evolved to include two sites as part of the NFLL: the William McKinley Historic Home and the City National Bank Building. Marsh Belden Sr., a grandson of Ida Saxton McKinley’s sister saved his family’s childhood home (the

¹³⁵ Regula, 22.

¹³⁶ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Norton, 1987), Ishbel Ross, *The President’s Wife: Mary Todd Lincoln, a Biography* (New York: Putnam, 1973) and Mary Todd Lincoln, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, ed. Justin G. Turner, Linda Levitt Turner (New York: Fromm International Pub. Corp, 1972).

¹³⁷ Regula, 24.

William McKinley Historic Home) from the brink of destruction. The Beldens were an elite family. Belden purchased the William McKinley Historic Home in 1978 when he learned that the City of Canton was planning to destroy it. It was the former home of Ida Saxton McKinley, located on the corner of Market Avenue and Fourth Street in Canton, Ohio. It is also the former home of the McKinleys who lived there temporarily with Ida's sister and her family for fourteen years together while William served in Congress and as Governor of Ohio. It is the only structure remaining where former President McKinley actually lived. Despite the significance of the Saxton family, and their importance in establishing Canton as a city, the home is recognized primarily as the home of William McKinley and not as the home of the Saxton family. The McKinleys used the home as temporary living quarters when they returned to Canton from Washington D.C. or from Columbus, Ohio where he served as governor. The home where the McKinleys resided was a house that was given to them by Ida's father located on North Market Street shortly after they were married in 1870. Ida Saxton McKinley returned to this home after William was assassinated. It no longer stands.

As is the case with the Wesleyan Chapel, the William McKinley Historic Home was readapted for multiple uses. The Saxton family sold the house in the 1920s and it was transformed into a boarding house and tavern. Belden restored the exterior of the house after he purchased it in 1978 and it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places shortly after that.¹³⁸ Ralph Regula, who at the time was the chairman of the Interior Subcommittee of Appropriations, formed an agreement with the NPS and the Stark County Community Foundation to restore the interior.¹³⁹ The National Park

¹³⁸ Regula, 25.

¹³⁹ Regula, 25.

Service owns the William McKinley Historic Home. These two entities provided the funding and Sheila Fisher, Ph.D., is credited with restoring the interior to its Victorian splendor.

On June 8, 1998, the William McKinley Historic Home officially opened with help from former First Lady, Rosalynn Carter. The Education and Research Center was non-existent when the William McKinley Historic Home opened. The library was located in the William McKinley Historic Home, and the space was leased to the NFLL by the NPS. Space inside the house grew very limited and could no longer hold all of the library's collections. A few weeks after the opening of the William McKinley Historic Home, Marsh Belden Sr. offered to donate the 1895 City National Bank Building, which is located a block north of the William McKinley Historic home at 205 Market Avenue South. In May 1999, the former Bank Building became incorporated with the NFLL. Hillary Clinton announced that it would become the National First Ladies' Library Education and Research Center. The Education and Research Center opened to the public on September 4, 2003.

The 1895 City National Bank Building became an official project of Save America's Treasures. Save America's Treasures was the White House Millennium Council's initiative to save historic buildings from devastation, was established in 1998. As honorary chair of the council, Hillary Clinton decided that instead of building new monuments to mark the passage into the twenty-first century, it would be in the best interest of the nation to preserve existing historic structures that needed the funding and

expertise to move forward.¹⁴⁰ In many cases, using the existing built environment is a better way to interpret people and events of the past, rather than constructing monuments to commemorate history. Individuals learn first hand from their built environment and visiting a historic site can have a much greater impact on the visitor. It provides the visitor with an opportunity to see cultural evolution within their own and other's societies. Save America's Treasures designated more than 600 official projects and raised more than \$50 million dollars for their cause. Save America's Treasures matched grants and donations.¹⁴¹ The M'Clintock House in Waterloo, New York was also a project under Save America's Treasures.

The William McKinley Historic Home opened in an important year for women's history, 1998; the 150th anniversary of the women's rights movement, which began in Seneca Falls. In this way, the WRNHP and the NFLL became linked, as a result of the work of the National Women's History Project. The National Women's History Project led national campaigns in 1998 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the women's rights movement.¹⁴² Because of this organization's work, the "...spirit of celebration and recognition was seen in countless communities throughout the country...."¹⁴³ It is no coincidence that Hillary Clinton gave the keynote address at both the NFLL and the WRNHP in the summer of 1998. Hillary Clinton was very much involved with the creation of the NFLL as well as promoting sites that recognized women's history.

Without help from her, funding for the NFLL would have been almost non-existent, even

¹⁴⁰ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Preserving America's Legacy," in *Saving America's Treasures: National Trust for Historic Preservation*, ed. David Young (Washington DC: National Geographic Society, 2001), 8.

¹⁴¹ Clinton, "Preserving America's Legacy," 9.

¹⁴² "Our History," National Women's History Project, <http://www.nwhp.org/aboutnwhp/history.php> (accessed 24 April 2010).

¹⁴³ Molly Murphy MacGregor, "Living the Legacy of the Women's Rights Movement," *The Public Historian*, Vol. 21 No. 2 (Spring 1999), 27.

though Regula stated that the committee of thirteen women raised five million dollars for the initial project.¹⁴⁴ The NFLL received a major boost from Save America's Treasures because it matched the money raised by Regula.

In Clinton's 1999 speech, which took place in Canton, Ohio at the City National Bank Building, she discussed the importance of creating a site dedicated to First Ladies. She stated that it is important to preserve the legacies left behind by the First Ladies because it records the evolving roles of women in America's history.¹⁴⁵ She referenced Ida Saxton McKinley's silver inkwell located on a writing desk in the formal parlor. This inkwell represented to Clinton the changes in technology.

The William McKinley Historic Home and the Research and Education Center have been preserved to their original appearances. The William McKinley Historic Home is preserved as a house museum, representing the lives of both William and Ida McKinley when they lived there from 1878 to 1891. The seven story, City National Bank Building is preserved using most of the building's original fabric. It has been readapted to house exhibits, the library and research center, offices, a theatre and a conference center. Unlike the WRNHP, the NFLL was not researched by the NPS and no records exist of the preservation process. The NFLL staff and volunteers conducted research because they manage the site. According to Patricia Krider, director of the NFLL, they did not have the time to keep records.¹⁴⁶ The individuals involved in the preservation process at the NFLL were not trained historians and preservationists, as was the case for the WRNHP and its sites. Dr. Sheila Fisher, a former clinical psychologist,

¹⁴⁴ Regula, 25.

¹⁴⁵ Hillary Rodham Clinton, "Remarks by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton, Canton, Ohio" (23 July 1999), National First Ladies' Library Archives, Canton, Ohio.

¹⁴⁶ Patricia Krider, "Your Thesis," e-mail correspondence, 19 January 2010.

was the primary preservationist involved in the transformation of the William McKinley Historic Home. Sheila Fisher, Patricia Krider, now director of the NFLL, and an architectural firm restored the Bank Building. Regula asked Fisher not long after she retired, to be a member of the committee of thirteen women; Fisher agreed. Fisher loved everything Victorian and because of her devotion to the era (she wore clothes representing the period and designed her own home in a Victorian fashion), some members of the committee suggested that she should be the leader for preserving the William McKinley Historic Home.¹⁴⁷ She agreed and became a full-time volunteer.

The original section of the Saxton House was built circa 1840, by Ida Saxton McKinley's grandfather, George DeWalt. The Saxton's acquired the house from DeWalt in 1869. The house was also a gift, as was the Elizabeth Cady Stanton's home.¹⁴⁸ A later addition, the front of the house, was added circa 1870. The exterior style of the addition is Second Empire with Italianate features. The interior of the home is preserved in the Victorian style. The Saxton family was very wealthy and Fisher knew that her task of finding items for the house would not be easy. She would have to focus on multiple period rooms located within the house, including, a formal parlor, the family parlor, kitchen, dining room, the McKinley's bedroom, a sitting room, a ballroom and William McKinley's study. Fisher contacted the Victorian Society of America and the National Trust for Historic Preservation for more information.¹⁴⁹ Luckily for Fisher, some photographs existed of the interior rooms of the house, although some rooms scheduled for replication, lacked original evidence, such as the formal parlor. According to Fisher,

¹⁴⁷ Sheila A. Fisher, "The Saxton House and its Restoration," in *This Elevated Position...: A Catalogue and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History*, ed. Carl Sferrazza Anthony (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 2003), 32.

¹⁴⁸ Fisher, 29.

¹⁴⁹ Fisher, 33.

she used renovation and restoration to restore the home.¹⁵⁰ She and the committee decided what items and décor would best match the period from 1870 to 1880. This method of restoration is completely opposite of the NPS's decision to preserve the Stanton House. The NPS decided to preserve the Stanton House to its original appearances when the Stanton family lived there beginning in 1847. Because there was little information left for the NPS to restore additions, they decided against interior reconstruction. The NPS marked the exterior spaces where the additions once were in grey to show that the extant house was not inclusive.

Despite the lack of some physical evidence in specific rooms, Fisher had interior photographs that she worked from to duplicate what a room would have looked like when the McKinleys lived at the Saxton House. Photographs that Fisher had of interior rooms include McKinley's study and the bedroom. The photograph of the study appeared to be too dark to replicate the wallpaper exactly; however, the style was Japanesque, a Victorian style with Japanese influences.¹⁵¹ Fisher reproduced the wallpaper in the study as best as possible. She also hired a local Amish woodworking company, Shrock's of Walnut Creek, to build bookcases for the study. Another picture that Fisher worked from was the McKinleys' bedroom and sitting area. The photograph was taken of the McKinleys in their home on North Market Street. Fisher decided to duplicate the McKinleys' bedroom and sitting area in the William McKinley Historic Home. A postcard was left behind of Ida Saxton McKinley seated in a rocking chair. Fisher obtained a sense of what the carpet and fireplace appeared to look like. She also saw what other objects were and where they were placed in the room. For the bedroom and

¹⁵⁰ Fisher, 33.

¹⁵¹ Fisher, 35.

sitting area, Fisher contracted the replication of wallpaper to Scalamandre, a famous fabric and wallpaper company who specialized in the reproduction of historic wallpaper.¹⁵²

Fisher did not know what the original wall coverings were in the dining room; however, she received a phone call from the Cooper-Hewitt Museum stating that they received a letter from Spain that they had wallpaper made for Ida Saxton McKinley. The McKinleys purchased this wallpaper for use in the White House; however, Fisher decided to use the pattern for the dining room.¹⁵³ Fisher used a photo of the family parlor to replicate some of the objects in the room. Despite the lack of evidence of what the interior of the home looked like, Fisher, who did most of the work alone, conducted extensive research for the William McKinley Historic Home. Her research and love for interior decorating makes the William McKinley Historic Home a beautiful period piece.

Fisher had donations of items used by the McKinleys and the Saxtons by their relatives that she used throughout the house. The William McKinley Presidential Library and Museum located in Canton, Ohio and the Ohio Historical Society also donated original artifacts. Donations from all parties include: a portrait of Ida Saxton McKinley, a piano, a desk from that period and also Ida Saxton McKinley's silver inkwell, which Hillary Clinton referenced in her speech.¹⁵⁴ Apparently there are more items still owned by the Saxton, McKinley and Barber families that Fisher hopes to acquire for the site. Other objects in the house, excluding clothing, were purchased to fit the time period in which they were working. Unlike the WRNHP, where furniture is not a major part of

¹⁵² Fisher, 35-36.

¹⁵³ Fisher, 38.

¹⁵⁴ Fisher, 34.

interpretation, the William McKinley Historic Home relies on furniture and period pieces to help tell the story because they lack information relating to Ida Saxton McKinley.

The City National Bank Building began renovation almost immediately after former First Lady Hillary Clinton announced that it would be an official project under Save America's Treasures in 1999. The building is seven stories and 20,000 square feet. Each floor is named after one of the seven Ohio First Ladies. The NFLL uses all floors for its operations, which include exhibits, a theatre, a library/archives and administrative offices. On September 4, 2003, then First Lady Laura Bush traveled to Canton, Ohio for the opening ceremony of the Research and Education Center. The Research and Education Center brags that it is the only library of its kind, having materials dedicated solely to First Ladies.

There are many original features to the building that have been preserved. The building is designed in a U shape, which allows a skylight to shine from the second floor to the lower level. The NFLL covered the glass block floors on the first floor gallery with carpet. The Tennessee pink marble floors and wainscoting on the first floor and the lobbies of the upper floors are original to the building as well. Original crown molding has also been preserved. Replicas of the chandeliers used in the Chicago Public Library are used in the main exhibit area. The lower level, which was previously a barbershop and public baths was transformed into a 91 seat, Victorian style theatre.¹⁵⁵ Original windows were left in place in the interior. Most of the original windows are in place on

¹⁵⁵ Patricia Krider, "The Education and Research Center," in *This Elevated Position...: A Catalogue and Guide to the National First Ladies' Library and the Importance of First Lady History*, ed. Carl Sferrazza Anthony (Washington DC: Library of Congress, 2003), 44.

the exterior of the building. According to Patricia Krider, the director of the museum, the total cost of rehabilitation and renovation was around six million dollars.¹⁵⁶

The NFLL, a semi-private (managed by the National First Ladies' Library) and semi-public (owned by the National Park Service) institution has a small and limited staff. The research and work done to create the NFLL was done mainly by Dr. Sheila Fisher, a full-time volunteer. This is a stark difference compared to the WRNHP. The NPS conducted documented research and studies dedicated to the sites. NPS employees who were professionally trained historians conducted these studies. The employees were also compensated financially for their work. The sites at the WRNHP took several years to open to the public because of extensive research and rehabilitation done to each of the structures. On the other hand, the NFLL opened shortly after Marsh Belden Sr. donated the buildings. The NFLL worked quickly to get the sites operational.

There are many steps when conducting research for historical sites. The NPS conducts several studies: Historic Structure Reports, General Management Plans and Furnishing Reports. These studies make it easier when new staff transition into the sites. Bradley Brooks makes the best argument for the importance of keeping documentation while conducting research and preserving a historic home.

Without the touchstone of the plan, incremental changes can creep in more easily, leaving no documentation to assist those who come later in their efforts to sift through the exhibit's history. Years may pass while institutional memory slips away and succession of staff members, still unable to commit time to completing the furnishing plan, remains confused and frustrated without the documentation necessary to answer fundamental questions about the exhibits they must manage.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ Krider, 46.

¹⁵⁷ Bradley C. Brooks, "The Historic House Furnishings Plan: Process and Product," in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 130.

This is the case with the NFLL. The employees and volunteers who managed the preservation of the William McKinley Historic Home and the City National Bank Building worked quickly to preserve the structure and left no records behind to document the process. The information remains with the staff and volunteers and they currently do not have the time to document this information, either on paper or orally, for future use.

The William McKinley Historic Home opened in 1998. The site was envisioned by one woman, Mary Regula. Her efforts and connections allowed her dream to become reality. Sheila Fisher also played a crucial role in restoring the William McKinley Historic Home. Her love for the Victorian era enabled her to restore the house. The Research and Education Center opened in 2003 and houses the library's collections. It provides adequate space for exhibits and the library. Unlike the WRNHP, the NFLL was restored by volunteers and records were not kept that relate to the preservation of the William McKinley Historic Home and the Research and Education Center. Information will be lost once the current staff leaves the NFLL.

All of the sites at the NFLL and WRNHP have undergone transformations to become operational museums. Although the WRNHP was created in 1980, the leased Visitor Center did not open until July 1982. The Stanton House was under the NPS's ownership and visitors could only access the exterior of the house. The Stanton House did not open until 1985. It was not until 1993 when the WRNHP opened its current Visitor Center in the former Village Hall and the first rehabilitation project of the Wesleyan Chapel was completed. The M'Clintock House also opened in 1993 and the Hunt House is not open to the public. Research is currently being conducted on the Hunt House. The WRNHP is still a work in progress; however, the work being done brings

change to the site, which brings visitors back. The work being done is also by professional museum staff, which is thorough and accurately interpreted.

The NFLL originated from the idea of one woman, Mary Regula. Her persistence and connections led her to open the NFLL in 1998. The library was located in the William McKinley Historic Home; however, space grew tight. Luckily for the organization, Marsh Belden Sr., a descendant of Ida Saxton McKinley donated first, the William McKinley Historic Home and then the City National Bank Building to the NFLL. Hillary Clinton, who was an active participant in the creation of the NFLL, declared the City National Bank Building a project for Save America's Treasures in 1999. The Bank Building was an important acquisition for the NFLL. The library moved their collections to the building and Dr. Sheila Fisher further preserved the William McKinley Historic Home as a house museum. It would be beneficial for the NFLL to document how the site became operational. This information is important for visitors and future staff members.

It is evident when studying the WRNHP and the NFLL the differences in professional and amateur work completed when restoring the historic properties associated with each site. The following chapters will examine the different ways the WRNHP and the NFLL interprets women's history. They will also analyze how effective or ineffective their exhibits and sites are at accomplishing their missions.

Chapter Three

The Interpretive Models used by the Women's Rights National Historical Park

According to Candace T. Matelic, museums should use a communication model when designing its interpretation plan.¹⁵⁸ The first step in the communication model is the sender, which is the historical museum. The second step is the message, or the sample of history being interpreted. For the Women's Rights National Historical Park the message is the first Women's Rights Convention and the events leading up to it. The third step is the channel, or the interpretative measures taken by the museum to get their message across. Museums utilize a variety of methods including: the staff, objects and artifacts, buildings, environments, exhibits, audio/visual, publications, websites and demonstrations and programs. Successful museums use multiple channels to relay their message to ensure positive visitor experiences. Both sites, the WRNHP and the NFLL, use multiple channels to interpret their missions. The various channels of interpretation used by the WRNHP and the visitor experience will be analyzed in this chapter.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park, from its creation in 1980, has adopted heritage tourism. Because of Seneca Fall's declining industrial base, the community rallied behind the creation of the WRNHP. Lowell National Historical Park, which opened in 1978, was the National Park Service's first "heritage area."¹⁵⁹ The goal of sites like Lowell and the WRNHP is to offer multiple sites for visitors to enjoy, while boosting tourism and economic development. The Village of Seneca Falls supported the

¹⁵⁸ Candace T. Matelic, *Successful Interpretive Planning* (Nashville, TN: American Association for State and Local History, 1984).

¹⁵⁹ Cathy Stanton, *The Lowell Experiment: Public History in a Postindustrial City* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2006), 3.

WRNHP from its beginning. According to Howard Van Kirk, a journalist for *The Reveille* who attended several Seneca Falls Downtown Revitalization meetings, citizens and businesses in Seneca Falls who were serious about wanting a state Urban Cultural Park and Federal Park must, “show local support and enthusiasm for the projects and convince state and federal legislative bodies of this support...”¹⁶⁰ When the park opened on July 17, 1982, the community established Convention Days, which celebrated the first Women’s Rights Convention and the opening of the park. Convention Days are held annually. Several programs and events are sponsored by both the National Park Service and local organizations to attract visitors and the local community to the downtown area. There are several historical sites located on the Seneca Falls’ museum trails. These include: the Women’s Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls Heritage Area Visitor Center, Seneca Museum of Waterways and Industry, National Women’s Hall of Fame and Seneca Falls Historical Society and Museum.

The WRNHP consists of five sites. Three of the five sites are open to the public almost year round. These sites include: the Visitor Center, the Wesleyan Chapel and the Stanton House. When the visitor arrives at the park, they start at the Visitor Center. The Visitor Center offers an introduction to the beginning of the women’s rights movement. As soon as the visitor enters the building, the NPS makes it clear with photographs that this is a museum dedicated to every woman’s cause. Photographs leading to the second story exhibits show women protesting for the rights of black lesbians and women demanding equal wages and employment opportunities. Photographs include people of different ethnicities and all photographs are of women representing different causes. The

¹⁶⁰ Howard Van Kirk, “Financial Support, Planning Keys to Park Development,” *The Reveille*, 23 January 1980.

WRNHP is a strong contrast to the NFLL where proper “museum manners” are expected from the visitor. At the WRNHP, visitors are encouraged to participate in tours and the stationary exhibits.

Admission to the Visitor Center is free. When visitors enter the building, there are several resources available to them. There are brochures publicizing NPS sites and exhibits. Each brochure gives a brief history of the site. Also included in the Visitor Center is the Corrine Guntzel Theatre which shows a 25 minute film, *Dreams of Equality*. Media Projects Inc. produced this film exclusively for the WRNHP. *Dreams of Equality* uses actors and actresses to depict the first Women’s Rights Convention. The first floor also has a gift shop where visitors are able to purchase the film or books and souvenirs related to the park. *The First Wave Statue Exhibit*, created by Lloyd Lillie, a professor from Boston University, is also located on the first floor and provides yet another introduction to the sites. The statues include: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Frederick Douglass, Lucretia Mott, Mary Ann M’Clintock, Martha Wright and Jane Hunt, all of whom were involved in planning the first Women’s Rights Convention. Other men and women who supported the Convention are also included in the exhibit. The statues are made of bronze. The NPS has a video that shows how the statues were made and is played upon request.¹⁶¹ The first floor houses another exhibit which depicts the current changes taking place with the Wesleyan Chapel.

The exhibits in the Visitor Center are self-guided, which allows visitors to learn about topics that are most interesting to them and to explore on their own. National Park Service interpreters are located at the information center to answer questions. The second floor is dedicated to exhibits and they cover a broader theme. According to Vivien Rose,

¹⁶¹ *The First Wave Statue Exhibit*, Women’s Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

the current park superintendent, the exhibits in the Visitor Center are, “designed to make people think about how they got their civil rights and how to keep and defend them.”¹⁶²

The sections of the exhibit on the second floor include, “Inauguration of a Rebellion,” “True Womanhood,” “Declaration of Sentiments,” “Campaigning Women,” “Women at Work,” “Fashioning an Image” and “School Matters.” The exhibit covers a wide range in time, from 1848 to the early 1990s, and focuses on the struggle for women’s equality in the United States. It took four weeks and 16,000 work hours to install the second floor exhibit in the Visitor Center.¹⁶³

The first section, “Inauguration of a Rebellion,” is a starting point for visitors when they enter the second floor. This section orients the visitor with the text panel, “America in 1848,” which identifies the political fervor of the time when the Women’s Rights Convention took place. The Jacksonian Age established voting rights for the “common man” and women were participating in the evangelical movement, which preached moral reform. Women actively questioned their status. “Inauguration of a Rebellion” uses graphics and text to describe how and why the first Women’s Rights Convention took place. The text panel, “The Birth of an Idea” discusses the important meeting of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention, which took place in London and how the treatment of women that took place there led to the first Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls. The Declaration of Sentiments is also presented in the exhibit; however, the next section, “True Womanhood,” better identifies why the Declaration of Sentiments and the Women’s Rights Convention was such a rebellious act.

¹⁶² “Exhibits Tell a Story, Says Historian Rose,” *The Reveille*, 1993.

¹⁶³ “Exhibits Tell a Story, Says Historian Rose.”

“True Womanhood” focuses on the major roles of women in the mid-nineteenth century. These roles include childrearing, being a wife, teacher, housekeeper and nurse. This section also lists some of the rights, or lack of, women had especially when they married. The NPS accounted for the fact that women’s rights varied across the United States and that not one woman had the same experience. The text panel, “What Rights Did Married Women Have?” highlights the fact that slave women had no legal rights at all. The text panel also states that many Native American cultures allowed women to control their children and property, which contrasts with Anglo-American culture at that time.

“True Womanhood” uses text, graphics and artifacts to interpret women’s lives in the mid-nineteenth century. On display is a copy of a marriage certificate that lists the different requirements men and women were expected to abide by once they were married. The marriage certificate is a perfect representation of women’s roles. Visitors can relate their own lives to the expected roles of both men and women. The National Park Service has on display a page from the *Bible*. According to the NPS, “Religious tradition and advice literature provided guidelines for keeping house, caring for husbands and raising children.”¹⁶⁴ Elizabeth Cady Stanton argued that religion was interpreted by society to keep women inferior. Other artifacts on display include: a highchair, pin cushion and the book, *Practical Home Doctor for Women* by David Wark, M.D. These artifacts represent the several roles women had during the mid-nineteenth century. Women’s roles are given a reality in this section. Visitors can use telephones to listen to different stories discussed by diverse women. “True Womanhood” reveals that the ideal of being a “true woman,” the perfect wife under the protection of her husband, was often

¹⁶⁴ “True Womanhood,” Women’s Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

shadowed by reality. The ideal ignored, “infant mortality, poverty, slavery, widowhood and differing cultural customs.”¹⁶⁵

At the end of “True Womanhood,” a statue of Sojourner Truth overlooks the text panel which leads the visitor into the next section of the exhibit. The text panel provides the visitor with a brief biography of Truth and how she pointed out at a women’s rights convention in Akron, Ohio that the true womanhood ideal applies only to a select few. True womanhood was only possible for white, Anglo-Americans; however, even then, the ideal was hard to accomplish because of harsh realities. The transition to the next section, which is a video of the Declaration of Sentiments, could be clearer. The second floor exhibit does not follow a clear path and the floor plan is a bit jumbled which could cause the visitor some confusion. The exhibit does not flow to the right; they flow haphazardly.

On display is a video of the Declaration of Sentiments. The visitor is given the opportunity to select certain grievances and learn more about them. The video is all text, which can really distract the visitor from staying and reading more about the grievances. Also in the center of the second floor exhibit space is a timeline, which discusses major events in United States history and how they relate to civil rights from 1776 to 1993. Not only is there a lot of text, but it is not clearly organized as well. Obviously, the second floor exhibit has not been updated since 1993, which is a bit disappointing. Visitors want to see where major issues for women’s rights stand at the present day.

“Campaigning Women” begins by stating that Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony focused their goals on one thing: woman suffrage.¹⁶⁶ Women’s suffrage

¹⁶⁵ “True Womanhood.”

¹⁶⁶ “Campaigning Women,” Women’s Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

became a reality in 1920; however, women occupied only six percent of people in public office in 1990.¹⁶⁷ The NPS relates statistical facts to present day, even though the present day was nearly twenty years ago when the exhibit opened. The NPS also discusses the split in the women's rights movement over the question of African-American male suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton was involved with the split and criticized for her actions. Stanton did not agree with African-American male suffrage because she wanted women to vote as well. "Campaigning Women" uses graphics, text and artifacts. Many of the graphics are replicas of posters either supporting or not supporting women's suffrage. On exhibit are buttons, cards, a book, pamphlets and a teacup that represent both supporting and opposing sides. This section fails to identify why men and women were opposed to women's suffrage.

"Fashioning an Image" highlights the gendered differences by focusing on appearances. Orienting the visitor to the section, the text explains how clothing represented social status and race. White middle to upper class women wore corsets and other apparatuses that constrained movement. The text then references appearances today, by stating that women who choose to wear comfortable clothing obtain mixed messages from the media.

"Fashioning an Image" uses multiple artifacts and graphics to interpret the constraints fashion puts on women. This section uses more artifacts than any other. Toys, corsets, photographs, make-up and a dress are used in this section. One poster that more than likely has a lasting impact on the visitor shows the differences in a woman's body who wore the corset her whole life and one who did not. The difference is appalling.

¹⁶⁷ "Campaigning Women."

“Women at Work” is an intriguing part of the exhibit that focuses on women’s work both at home and in the workplace. “Women at Work” is the largest section in the second floor exhibit. It contains several elements to best interpret the material including: tools used by women, graphics, text, graphs, a crystal ball and electronic media. The section begins by stating that much of women’s work is unpaid; however, women who did leave the home to work often worked in factories or offices and also as teachers and nurses. Despite women entering the workforce, women had to do housework, doubling their workload. Also cited, was the fact that American white women had the best opportunities for employment.¹⁶⁸ Tools used by women were also on display, although there were no descriptions of how they were used.

The NPS made quite clear the disparities between women’s and men’s work. Not only do men have more options for employment, they get paid more as well. This is made evident through several objects, including a crystal ball, electronic media and a rod graph. The rod graph highlights the fact that many jobs are still dominated by one particular sex. The graph runs from 1890 to 1990. It would be interesting to know what changes, if any, took place in the last twenty years.

The last section on the second floor is “School Matters.” This section includes graphics, text, exercise equipment and books to interpret the integration of women into higher education. Women were denied the right to higher education for the most part prior to the Civil War. The only exceptions were Oberlin College and George Female College which offered Bachelorette Degrees to women.¹⁶⁹ This rule haunted Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the only option available for her was to attend the Troy Female

¹⁶⁸ “Women at Work,” Women’s Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

¹⁶⁹ “School Matters,” Women’s Rights National Historical Park exhibit, 7 March 2010.

Seminary School. "School Matters" also interprets women in sports and physical education. Women were trained in golf, baseball and tennis to satisfy society's belief that higher education damaged women's physical health.¹⁷⁰

Throughout the second floor exhibit, there are several interactive tools used by the WRNHP to involve the visitor. Videos are used throughout the gallery to obtain visitor opinions on different issues. Issues include sexual harassment in the workplace, job qualifications, grounds for divorce, employment advertising, forced sterilization, abortion and anti-pornography to name a few. The visitor reads the situation and then answers with their response if they either agree or disagree. Another important interactive tool is the "What will it be like when men and women are truly equal?" bulletin board. Paper and pencils are left for visitors to respond and to post their comments. According to Jo Blatti, "The wall at Seneca Falls is truly interactive, allowing viewers to respond to the material presented and to other visitors. May the NPS continue to supply paper and pencil and to nurture engagement and dialogue on this subject."¹⁷¹

Besides having a lot of text with relatively few artifacts, the National Park Service accomplished their mission in the Visitor Center. Elizabeth Cady Stanton enjoyed sparking debate and discussing controversial politics of her time. The second floor exhibit definitely poses controversial questions. It brings to the forefront major issues, such as women's fashion, work inequalities, abortion and divorce. The exhibits allow the visitor to learn about where the issues of women's rights began and the evolution of civil rights.

¹⁷⁰ "School Matters."

¹⁷¹ Jo Blatti (Exhibit Review), "Interpretive Exhibits, Visitor Center, Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, New York," *The Public Historian* Vol. 17 No. 3 (Summer 1995), 142.

The WRNHP is rather accessible to the public. It is open seven days a week, offering tours of the sites throughout the day. The Visitor Center and Wesleyan Chapel are open year round. The Stanton House is closed from late fall to late winter. The M'Clintock House is open from Memorial Day to Labor Day. The first tour is of the Wesleyan Chapel. In cold weather, the tour is given inside the Visitor Center. Throughout the east wall of the Visitor Center, windows were created to frame the Wesleyan Chapel, since this site is the main tool used for interpreting the first Women's Rights Convention.

The Wesleyan Chapel is currently under construction, which makes it hard for the visitor to imagine the first Women's Rights Convention being held at the location. Despite the problems that go along with the site, the interpreter made clear the importance of the event. It was the first of its kind in the world and the Declaration of Sentiments was such an important document that it spread quickly throughout the world.¹⁷² The interpreter also discusses the history of Methodism and the split that arose over the question of slavery. Because of the influences of the evangelical religion, the Wesleyan Methodists offered free speech for abolitionists, women and temperance activists.¹⁷³

The interpreter also spends time discussing the building. The building was larger than it is now; however, the congregation grew and needed a new building to hold its services and events. As a result, the Wesleyan Chapel only stayed at its original location for 30 years.¹⁷⁴ The interpreter also discusses the several transformations of the building to the present, then mentions the problems with the existing building. The walls were not

¹⁷² Interpreter, Wesleyan Chapel, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

¹⁷³ Cross, 226-237.

¹⁷⁴ Interpreter, Wesleyan Chapel, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

meant to be exposed to the elements. According to the interpreter, if the National Park Service did not do anything to preserve the building now, it would soon collapse.¹⁷⁵

Despite the community knowing that the first Women's Rights Convention took place at the location, they did nothing to commemorate the event until 1980, except placing a marker near the building in the early twentieth century. According to the interpreter, it was because women's studies were not created yet.¹⁷⁶ The Wesleyan Chapel block has green space leading to the water wall monument with the Declaration of Sentiments and the signees engraved in stone. This was one stipulation made by the NPS when establishing its design competition for the Wesleyan Chapel. The water wall monument will be kept within the Wesleyan Chapel block renovation project.

The new Wesleyan Chapel will work better for interpretation. Not only will it be heated and other utilities installed, it will be available for use year round, and it will offer additional space for exhibits and for visitors to learn more about the major event that took place there. The Wesleyan Chapel will provide an atmosphere to better imagine the first Women's Rights Convention and the National Park Service could do a lot with it. Currently, visitors receive the tour standing on the outside of the building. The enclosed chapel will allow for a longer tour and provide for a more in-depth interpretation. New technology could also be added to provide the visitor with a better experience and many more programs could be offered to the public.

Currently, there is an amphitheater behind the Chapel where programs are held outdoors. This will be removed. According to the interpreter, the WRNHP does not receive the crowds like it used to and it is no longer needed. The opening of each site

¹⁷⁵ Interpreter, Wesleyan Chapel, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

¹⁷⁶ Interpreter, Wesleyan Chapel, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

always brought in crowds. Awareness of the women's rights movement was brought to the forefront by Hillary Clinton and the National Women's History Project, which attracted more visitors to the site in the late 1990s. The new Wesleyan Chapel will be able to host more events in a comfortable environment. The Wesleyan Chapel block is anticipated to be completed by late summer 2010.

The next tour offered by the WRNHP is of the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, which requires transportation for the visitor to get to the site. Unlike the William McKinley Historic Home, the Stanton House is not handicap accessible, which is a major disappointment for someone who would like to tour the house. The tour is less formal than the one at the William McKinley Historic Home and visitors are not warned against touching things or taking photographs. Photographs are encouraged. The WRNHP obtained most of the information related to the Stanton House from her autobiography, *Eighty Years and More*; however, many historians have noted that dates used by Stanton are unreliable.¹⁷⁷ The tour begins in the front parlor of the home, which could be classified as the formal parlor, even though Stanton allowed her children to mingle amongst her guests. The interpreter begins the tour by stating that Elizabeth Cady Stanton was very active in women's rights; however, she was also a wife and mother of seven children.¹⁷⁸ The Stanton House tour discusses how she balanced her multiple roles at home with her reform work and how she integrated the two. Also included in the tour is the history of the house.

The Stanton House displays only a few pieces of furniture and objects relating to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. The house is practically empty. The items on display were

¹⁷⁷ Petravage, 9.

¹⁷⁸ Interpreter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

owned by Stanton and are loaned to the park mostly by family and the Seneca Falls Historical Society. Items on display in the formal parlor include: a fainting couch, desk and chair. A photograph of Stanton in the chair is on exhibit for visitors to view. The interpreter discusses Stanton's conversationals that took place in the formal parlor. Many issues were discussed and debated in the room, such as women's rights, abolition, dress reform, temperance and politics. The interpreter states that women were generally not encouraged to participate in such discussions; however, Stanton made it her rule that everyone must be included. This statement provides evidence for Stanton's image as a rebellious women's rights activist.

The tour then moves to the back parlor, the "family room" of the nineteenth century.¹⁷⁹ On exhibit in this room is a piano on loan from the Seneca Falls Historical Society. According to the interpreter, the piano was bought at an auction and passed through family until it reached the historical society.¹⁸⁰ The NPS is not 100 percent sure it belonged to Stanton. Also on display is one of Stanton's song books. Stanton was a great musician, which was common for middle to upper class women of that time.

In this room, the interpreter discusses yet another radical action Stanton followed. Stanton followed the Graham Diet which stated that cereals, breads, crackers, fruits, vegetables, exercise and fresh air were good for people. This was radical thinking in the mid-nineteenth century because people thought that fresh air could kill you. Since Stanton was a follower of the Graham Diet, she opened windows and doors and encouraged her children to play outside. This room is interpreted to represent the fact that Stanton was very radical.

¹⁷⁹ Interpreter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

¹⁸⁰ Interpreter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

The tour then moves upstairs where three bedrooms are located. One bedroom is roped off because it is structurally unsafe. Stanton's father gave her the house, which allowed her to keep it in her name. According to the interpreter, Stanton's father may not have trusted Henry Stanton or that her father knew that law did not protect the rights of women. In one of the second floor bedrooms, it is evident that the staircase has been moved by the different pattern of floor boards. More information about Stanton's children is given on the second floor bedrooms. Stanton prided in the fact that she had two girls and she hung pink flags on her lawn, which was scandalous at the time. According to the interpreter, Stanton wanted the women's rights movement to pass on through them.¹⁸¹

From the second floor, Stanton could look out her window and gaze out upon the industrial and working class neighborhoods of Seneca Falls. According to the interpreter, Stanton befriended many working women of Seneca Falls. The interpreter refers to the Declaration of Sentiments by stating that one of the grievances, the right for women to keep their wages, was influenced by these women. Despite this statement, it could be argued that Stanton's reform efforts were geared towards middle to upper class white women because she focused on suffrage, rather than labor reform. In the early twentieth century, the State of New York flooded the area to create what is now known as Van Cleef Lake, which is part of the Cayuga and Seneca Canal.

The tour then moves downstairs to the dining room. The NPS could not restore the kitchen because they did not have enough documentation to restore its original appearance when Elizabeth Cady Stanton lived in the house. Despite the lack of the kitchen, the tour stays on theme by integrating Stanton's family life with her reform

¹⁸¹ Interpreter, Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, Women's Rights National Historical Park, 7 March 2010.

work. The interpreter discusses how Stanton punished her children. She did so with reason. Often, the family hosted trials for their children and their behaviors were the cases. Stanton expected her children to be knowledgeable and intelligent. She required them to hold conversations with adults and the adults who visited the Stanton House were extraordinary people, such as Frederick Douglass, Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. Unlike the NFLL, the Stanton House tour discusses social altercations that arose in the house.

Several small artifacts are on exhibit in the dining room. These include Stanton's china and other pieces found while the NPS did an archeological survey of the grounds. Visitors are given a moment to look at the artifacts. The dining room also provides a conclusion for the tour. According to the interpreter, the Stanton House is where Elizabeth Cady Stanton grew to be the reformer she is known as today. The interpreter, until asked, made no mention of servants. Servants provided Stanton the time to integrate reform and family. They allowed her the freedom to work on other things besides necessary housework. Credit should be given to her servants and standardized in the tour.

The interpretive plan at the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House is rather clear. The plan is to interpret the ways in which Elizabeth Cady Stanton integrated her reform work with her family life. The NPS mentions several stories to identify how radical she was for her time. The interpreter also connected the mid-nineteenth century with present day by relating stories to the visitor's everyday life. One such example is by comparing the size of the home to our present day standards. The Stanton House, as it exists today is relatively small; however, the house Stanton lived in was much larger because of its

additions. Despite having seven children, the age range was eighteen years, so not all children were living in the house at once. The tour focused not on objects, but on Stanton's life as a radical reformer, wife and mother. The tour also focused on ideas. This type of tour is completely opposite of the tour at the William McKinley Historic Home, which has no centralized theme.

The next chapter analyzes the tours and exhibits provided by the National First Ladies' Library. The WRNHP focuses on a broader theme, which attracts more visitors. Visitors can relate to several themes offered by the WRNHP because they offer diversity in their exhibits and in their interpretive tours. The WRNHP is very effective at getting their mission across to the visitor. The tours and exhibits provide ample information relating to the first Women's Rights Convention and the women's rights movement. The following chapter will analyze the effectiveness of the NFLL at interpreting the lives of the First Ladies.

Chapter Four

The Interpretive Models used by the National First Ladies' Library

The National First Ladies' Library has two different sites that they use for interpreting First Ladies. The Research and Education Center houses temporary exhibits that rotate two to four times per year. They typically focus on one First Lady or an event First Ladies participate in. The Research and Education Center also houses the library and archive as well as a theatre, where programs are held. The William McKinley Historic Home provides another experience for the visitor. It allows the visitor to see where Ida Saxton McKinley, a First Lady, lived for most of her life. This chapter analyzes the effectiveness of the sites and the interpretive plans used by the NFLL as well as the visitor experience.

One woman and her followers envisioned the National First Ladies' Library. The local community did not get as heavily involved with the establishment of the NFLL as did the community of Seneca Falls; however, the citizens of Canton were not informed of the latest developments. The thirteen women on Mary Regula's board were the only individuals kept in the loop. The city of Canton is larger than Seneca Falls and at the time of its establishment did not need heritage tourism; however, at dedicating events where First Ladies were present, thousands of people attended the ceremonies. The city of Canton is located near major metropolitan regions, such as Cleveland, Akron and Youngstown; however, when visitors come to Canton, Ohio, the National First Ladies' Library is often overlooked. In Hillary Clinton's speech dedicating the City National Bank Building as a project under Save America's Treasures, she announced that one of

the goals of the National First Ladies' Library was to become as famous as the Professional Football Hall of Fame, which is also located in Canton; however, the NFLL is not a primary destination spot for tourists.¹⁸² One of the main reasons for the lack of attendance is because the NFLL currently does not appeal to a broad audience.

The NFLL uses multiple methods of interpretation to educate visitors about First Ladies. At the information desk, the visitor pays admission, and is then given a packet of information relating to the latest exhibit at the Education and Research Center. The visitor is also encouraged to sign a guest book, which allows the NFLL staff to track where visitors are from. The guest book also allows the staff to track how many locals visit the site, which is important because community support is essential for survival.

The exhibits are located on the first floor and lower level of the Education and Research Center, even though the first floor is not sit on the ground level. It is slightly raised, which allows access to the lower level from the street as well. Most of the exhibit space and the information center are located in the City National Bank's former lobby and center of business. If the visitor arrives early enough, they can sit and read the brochures given to them which they received upon arrival or watch an introductory video. Visitors can also watch the video after the tour is completed.

The NFLL changes its exhibits on the first floor in the Education and Research Center two to four times per year. The current exhibit is titled, *America's Goodwill Ambassadors: First Ladies Travel the World*. It will be exhibited from February 11, 2010 to November 5, 2010. The brochure which the visitor receives highlights the current exhibit. *America's Goodwill Ambassadors* focuses on the travels of Elizabeth Monroe, Harriet Lane, Helen Taft, Lou Hoover, Jacqueline Kennedy, Patricia Nixon,

¹⁸² Jennifer Mastroianni, "Mrs. Clinton praises city for treasure," *The Repository*, 24 July 1999, 1.

Rosalynn Carter and Hillary Clinton.¹⁸³ The brochure gives a brief biography of the selected First Ladies' roles as goodwill ambassadors. According to the brochure, the role of being a goodwill ambassador is one of the most important of her position, despite the grueling conditions which include,

...the sleep lost when traveling in different time zones, the threat of sickness from eating unfamiliar foods, experiencing different altitudes, improper sanitary conditions, exposure to extremes in heat or humidity, insect infiltrations, angry mobs, grueling schedules, language barriers, intense media coverage, and the physical and mental strain of representing her husband and her country in foreign lands while being critiqued about her clothing and hairdo.¹⁸⁴

Many of the conditions stated in the brochure are true; however, some are also exaggerated. It is true that First Ladies undergo intense media coverage, critique, exposure to different altitudes, angry mobs and grueling schedules; however, many of the statements are false. Because of the First Ladies' position of power and wealth, these women reside in a life of luxury. This is especially evident when traveling abroad. The brochure accounts for the fact that First Ladies are often left out of history books and their multiple roles are often overlooked. It also states that First Ladies have the power to sway diplomatic outcomes; however, the exhibit only focuses on non-political roles of the First Lady abroad. How did these women sway the outcomes and what were their personal experiences? Are these questions answered in the exhibit? These questions will be further analyzed in this chapter.

The next brochure is published by the National Park Service. It highlights Congress's mission for the park, "...to preserve and interpret the role and history of First

¹⁸³ *America's Goodwill Ambassadors: First Ladies Travel the World*, National First Ladies' Library online exhibit, http://www.firstladies.org/goodwill_ambassadors.aspx, accessed 2 March 2010 (accessed 2 March 2010).

¹⁸⁴ *America's Goodwill Ambassadors: First Ladies Travel the World*, Education and Research Center brochure, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

Ladies for the benefit of the people of the United States.”¹⁸⁵ The brochure identifies that First Ladies reflect the changing roles of American women and it gives a brief introduction about the history of First Ladies. It also identifies perceptions Americans have while different First Ladies are in the White House. It discusses the multidimensional roles First Ladies must adhere to as well as biographies of First Ladies who exemplify certain roles.

Other published materials include *This Elevated Position: A Catalogue and Guide to the National First Ladies’ Library and the Importance of First Lady History* edited by Carl Sferrazza Anthony and *The President at Home: The Life of William McKinley in the Saxton-McKinley House* by Carl Sferrazza Anthony. Carl Sferrazza Anthony is the National First Ladies’ Library Historian. *This Elevated Position* is for sale in the museum’s gift shop. It includes letters from some of the First Ladies and information about how the NFLL was created, written by Mary Regula, Sheila A. Fisher and Patricia Krider. Some of the information in this book is the only information recorded about the creation of the NFLL. The last section of the book discusses First Lady History and the roles associated with the position.

The President at Home discusses the history of the William McKinley Historic Home. Anthony highlights the time period when William McKinley lived in the house. *The President at Home* was published in conjunction with the renaming of the William McKinley Historic Home. On September 2, 2009, the Saxton-McKinley House was renamed the William McKinley Historic Home, which absolutely disregards the importance of the Saxton family who originally resided there. The NFLL decided to

¹⁸⁵*First Ladies National Historic Site*, National First Ladies’ Library brochure (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service), 2008.

change the name because McKinley frequently stayed at the house for long periods of time.¹⁸⁶ According to Bonnie Hurd Smith, “Something as simple as changing the name of a house raises awareness and implies new thinking about interpretation.”¹⁸⁷ The name also disregards Ida Saxton McKinley, a First Lady, who the museum is supposed to represent and interpret.

The video shown to visitors who arrive early enough provides background information about the current exhibit. This information is needed, since the exhibit itself does not include introductory text. The current video related to *America’s Goodwill Ambassadors*, highlights the travels of Jacqueline Kennedy and Patricia Nixon. It provides original footage of their travels and depicts the grueling schedules the First Ladies had when they traveled abroad. The video also allows the visitor to see the stark social and economic differences between the First Lady and the indigenous population of developing nations. Jacqueline Kennedy is shown in original footage traveling in New Delhi, India and meeting the indigenous population. She is also filmed at formal lunches and dinners among the political elite of India. Despite the grueling schedules, the video makes it apparent that these women are truly privileged to experience the world in the ways that they do.

Because the exhibits change a few times a year at the Education and Research Center, the tours in this facility stay fresh. Changing exhibits allow for return visitors. Past exhibits include: *Encore! The Artistry of America’s First Ladies, First Ladies’ Campaigns, Ohio’s First Ladies, Broadening the Horizons: The Transition of the Role of the First Lady in 19th Century America* and *Edith Kermit Carow Roosevelt*. There has

¹⁸⁶ “Saxton House to be designated as McKinley Home,” *The Repository*, 1 September 2009.

¹⁸⁷ Smith, 93.

only been one exhibit that focused solely on how First Ladies' roles have changed in the White House. Identifying the differences of First Ladies and their roles in the public will benefit the visitor if it is incorporated in the permanent interpretive plan.

The tours at the NFLL are always guided and formal. Formal tours are those that require the visitor to listen and observe with relatively little visitor participation. Unlike the WRNHP, photographs are not allowed. The tour begins on the first floor of the Education and Research Center located within the City National Bank Building. The visitor encounters two different interpreters; one located at the Education and Research Center and another at the William McKinley Historic Home. The interpreter begins the tour by discussing the building. The City National Bank Building remained vacant after the bank moved out of the building. The building was in fairly good condition when it was donated to the NFLL in 1999. Most of the money spent was on preserving original assets as well as updating utilities and making the building handicap accessible.

The interpreter then introduces Helen Taft because the first floor is named after her. Her photograph hangs above a fireplace near the front of the building. In a display case next to the photograph, White House china is on display. The collection is on permanent display, typically shown elsewhere in the exhibit; however, it was moved to this particular area in order to make room for a quilt. The china is not from one particular collection. It is a variety of pieces. Not much information is given about the pieces. The china is also showcased with artifacts from the current exhibit. The transition does not flow well.

Items on loan from the William J. Clinton Presidential Library located in Little Rock, Arkansas that relate to Hillary Clinton's role as a goodwill ambassador are also

exhibited. One particular item is an award made of stone and crystal presented to Hillary Clinton by the Icelandic Association of Women Entrepreneurs. This artifact represents the changing occupational roles of First Ladies, even though this information was not interpreted to the visitor. Many First Ladies are now becoming educated and employed in traditional male occupations. Hillary Clinton and Michelle Obama were both lawyers who practiced law for several years before they were First Ladies. Photographs of First Ladies during their travels are also included in this display; however, the interpreter did not discuss the significance of the photographs. The photographs must merely speak for themselves, since barely any text is present throughout the museum. The interpreter gives background information on who the First Ladies were that were photographed, such as Helen Taft and Lou Hoover, although no examples of their travels were given. Jewelry worn by Patricia Nixon is on display in the same case. The artifacts do not tell a story; they are thrown together leaving the visitor to wonder more about them.

Because this is a relatively new exhibit, the interpreter apologized for the lack of knowledge she has relating to the material.¹⁸⁸ Despite her apology, it is essential for museum staff and volunteers to be trained on new and upcoming exhibits in order for visitors to get the most out of their experience. It is especially important to train volunteers accurately to ensure that they provide factual information. One of the main problems, from the creation of the NFL, was the lack of paid staff to perform historical research.

In another section, dresses worn by First Ladies' during their travels are displayed. A black dress worn by Harriet Lane, the niece of James Buchanan is kept

¹⁸⁸ Interpreter, *America's Goodwill Ambassadors*, Education and Research Center, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

under dark lighting and is laid flat. According to the interpreter, it is very fragile. Exposure to light may also cause the dress to fade. Lane acted as First Lady since President Buchanan was a bachelor. The interpreter did not explain why this dress was on display. It did not appear to look like any other dress in the case. Also showcased are clothing worn by Hillary Clinton and Patricia Nixon. Women from Pakistan and India presented the dresses as gifts to Hillary Clinton. Relatively little text explaining the dresses and their travels are present. The interpreter even commented that it would be nice to include the years of their travels on text panels.¹⁸⁹ The interpreter also points out the needle work done on the dresses as well as the length. She stated that the dresses appear to be long until Betty Ford and Rosalyn Carter. These dresses could be interpreted to represent the evolution of women's dress reform; however, this information is not present.

The next section includes artwork done by Jacqueline Duheme, who toured with First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy when she went abroad. The collection is titled, "Mrs. Kennedy Goes Abroad." The samples of nineteen watercolors that are on display were published into a book. The watercolors are of Jacqueline Kennedy while on her travels in Paris, Rome, New Delhi, Karachi and London. According to the interpreter, it was a real honor for the NFLL to be loaned the collection from the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum because these watercolors are the first artifacts that the library loaned out to any institution. Information on Jacqueline Kennedy's travels is depicted in the video relating to the exhibit. Some of the scenes from the video are scenes painted by Duheme. Watching the video really helps the visitor when viewing the watercolors. It

¹⁸⁹ Interpreter, *America's Goodwill Ambassadors*, Education and Research Center, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

would benefit the visitor if there were clips from the video on display near the watercolors or more factual information.

Unrelated to *America's Goodwill Ambassadors* are two dresses worn by Helen Taft and Rosalyn Carter. They are in a separate section and relatively little information is given about them. The interpreter moves on to another exhibit where a silk quilt is showcased. It was a gift to Patricia Nixon from the President of Liberia in 1972. The quilt is finely stitched by hand and appears to be in excellent condition. The interpreter discusses the difficulty in creating such a quilt. More information about women's roles as clothing makers and unpaid laborers would be beneficial, since most of the items were made by women for women. Also displayed is more jewelry acquired while the First Ladies were traveling abroad. The interpreter discussed the difficulty in interpreting the exhibit because the First Ladies items are mixed together. A problem like this should quickly be addressed.

The tour on the first floor lasts around 20 minutes. The visitor is given some time to look at the artifacts. Besides having dresses and jewelry on display in most of the exhibits, it would be more attractive if the NFLL acquired more objects from the country visited as well as provide more information on culture. The tour does not provide much information about the importance of the artifacts on display and what they reveal about the First Lady.

All of the artifacts on display represent wealth, status, femininity and culture. Gold jewelry with local gems is generally expensive. Because of the First Lady's status, politically, socially and economically, she is gifted with rare and expensive jewelry representing the best of what the nation visited has to offer. Cultural dresses that are on

display that are gifted to First Ladies could represent multiple things. Color and design could represent status and they also tell a cultural story of women's roles; however, these stories are not told by the National First Ladies' Library. The First Ladies are merely placed in a new society, embellishing their privileged position, and the visitor is given no information in regards to why and when they traveled to different locations.

The tour and artifacts alone do not complete *America's Goodwill Ambassadors*. The brochure and video provide much more detail than the actual exhibit. The exhibit does not interpret its mission. How are First Ladies influential during their travels and how do they sway politics? These questions are not answered. It would benefit the visitor to have items separated by First Lady and the tour to tell a story. The information could also be interpreted chronologically in order for the visitor to get a sense of the political fervor during their travels. Many different themes (United States diplomatic policy, women's rights in foreign countries, culture, First Ladies' roles while abroad and personal accounts of their travels) could be addressed while discussing First Ladies abroad; however, these themes are not addressed because objects and status are the primary focus.

The next part of the tour at the Education and Research Center begins on the lower level, the Florence Harding floor. Because the stair case is original to the building, the steps are very steep and narrow. The stairs lead the visitor to a smaller, less grand space. There are several displays located on the lower level. Most of the displays are of programs that the NFLL hosts. Some of these programs include: Pets of the White House, Amelia Earhart and Eleanor Roosevelt and White House Weddings. According to the interpreter, many of the programs attract sell-out crowds. Also on display in the

lower level are dresses in miniature. According to the interpreter, the NFLL owns nearly all miniature dresses up to Lady Bird Johnson. The interpreter fails to acknowledge the significance of these miniature dresses.

The tour then moves into the theatre which seats 91 people. It is not original to the building. The ceiling is made of tin to best represent theatres in the 1800s. The light fixtures are the head of the Statue of Liberty. The back of the chairs contain plates of the names of several donors. The NFLL typically shows films associated with the programs they host. The former bank vault is behind the theatre. The interpreter did not take visitors back through the vault; however, it would be beneficial to visitor experience. When First Ladies make appearances to the NFLL they often use the bank vault for security purposes. First Lady Michelle Obama has not yet visited the NFLL. It will be interesting to see if she makes an appearance or not.

From this point, the visitor exits the building through the lower level. The William McKinley Historic Home is located a block south of the Education and Research Center. The visitor enters the William McKinley Historic Home from the rear and proceeds to the foyer. Interpreters at the William McKinley Historic Home dress in period costume to represent individual First Ladies. The tour is presented in third person and relates directly to the Saxton family and William McKinley. Because of the Victorian interior, the women interpreters descended the stairs one at a time to represent Victorian customs. This is the only living history done by the interpreters. On this particular occasion, the primary interpreter had a "hostess." This individual could have been an interpreter in training or a volunteer assisting the primary docent. The hostess

merely hid in the background and opened doors for visitors. She also explained the rules of the house: no pictures and no touching the wallpaper.

The interpreter begins the tour by discussing the history of the house while visitors are in the foyer. The house was built in the 1840s and then remodeled by Ida Saxton McKinley's parents in the 1870s. The house was sold in the 1920s by descendants of Ida Saxton McKinley and it was readapted for several purposes. Photographs of the transformation are present in the foyer. The structure was covered with a brick façade and the first floor was transformed into office space. The first floor of the house had to be completely restored when the NFLL acquired the property. Even the first floor stair case was dismantled and had to be rebuilt.

It is quite obvious that the Saxton family had a lot of wealth by just viewing the foyer. It is hard for many visitors to relate to the life of the Victorian wealthy. Historic houses that exist today tend to be of the rich. The William McKinley Historic Home is no exception. It is the role of interpretation to bring nineteenth century life to a twenty-first century audience. The interpreter at the William McKinley Historic Homes does this by telling stories of the family, primarily of the children. For example, she discusses how one grandchild recalled sliding down the banister from the third floor to the first. At the bottom, his grandmother was waiting for him to punish him. The interpreter also mentioned the windows which encompassed the first floor. According to the interpreter, the children would run in and out of the windows.¹⁹⁰ Stories like these put real life into historic house museums and are necessary to let the visitor know that real people lived in the house; however, the tour does not include experiences of the adults who lived in the

¹⁹⁰ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

home. The functions associated with running a house were not included. The roles of women were not clearly identified and daily life was not discussed.

The formal parlor is discussed next. According to the interpreter, the room was used for entertaining guests and dignitaries. The visitor cannot walk into the parlor because it is roped off, which leaves the visitor to look at the room from afar. The visitor cannot help but feel as if they are not invited, or they do not belong because they cannot enter the room in which important individuals resided. According to Kenneth Ames, in Victorian America only social peers could enter the formal spaces of the home while social inferiors remained in the hall.¹⁹¹ The NFLL is exhibiting the same behavior with its guests.

The house matches the Victorian style of décor very well. The wallpaper color in the parlor is bold and pink, which was necessary because of the lack of lighting. Pink was also Ida Saxton McKinley's favorite color. Because Sheila Fisher did not have original photographs of this room, she had the room designed to match the period. The pieces in the parlor represent different activities that were held within the room; however, these activities were not discussed.

Most of the furniture in the formal parlor is not original to the house, except for two pieces: the piano and Ida Saxton McKinley's silver inkwell. Hillary Clinton, in her speech dedicating the City National Bank Building as a project under Save America's Treasures, interpreted the inkwell as if it represented a change in technology; however, the interpreter did nothing to state the significance of the inkwell and merely focused on the objects of the room. It is obvious so early in the tour that the NFLL focuses on

¹⁹¹ Kenneth L. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 9 No. 1 (Summer, 1978), 28.

“...antique furnishings, or fantasies of ancient life as either elegantly aristocratic or cosily cute, or on commemorating a Great Person, than on the interpretation of contemporary life.”¹⁹² What did women do in this room besides play the piano? Why did women engage in the arts? The formal parlor is merely just a collection of furniture and is not properly interpreted. It is at this point where the tour could discuss why Victorian women chose to practice the arts, which were to entertain guests and to remain superior from the inferior lower classes.¹⁹³

In the hall, several Victorian items are present. A beautiful winding staircase made of walnut leads from the first floor to the third. This staircase was used by the household as well as by their peers. Another key piece present in the foyer is a hallstand, which was strictly designed and used in the late nineteenth century. Because the house was restored to its appearance in the 1870s, Sheila Fisher made a wise choice by including a hallstand, which was most popular during that period.¹⁹⁴ The interpreter pointed the piece out, stating that it was used for umbrellas and hanging hats. More information could be given to visitors about the piece: mirrors as a Victorian invention; the social implementation of marble tops versus wooden tops; and the fact that hall stands rarely appeared in lower-class homes.¹⁹⁵ Also present in the hall was a map table, a writing desk and a footbath. The writing desk and footbath did not typically appear in a Victorian hall and were placed there for display.

While in the hall, the interpreter provides the visitor with a brief biography of Ida Saxton McKinley. The visitor is already aware that the Saxton family was wealthy. The

¹⁹² Linda Young, “A woman’s place is in the house...museum: Interpreting women’s histories in house museums,” *Open Museum Journal* Vol. 5 (July 2002), 4.

¹⁹³ Young, 16.

¹⁹⁴ Ames, 30.

¹⁹⁵ Ames, 36.

interpreter makes the point clear one more time by stating that the Saxton family was the second richest in Canton.¹⁹⁶ Also mentioned was the Victorian custom of sending children to Europe if the family was wealthy enough. This information just adds to the fact that the family lived a life of privilege. The interpreter also discusses Saxton McKinley's job working at her father's bank as a cashier and sometimes manager when her father was away. This is the only time that the tour references women outside the home. Besides discussing the Saxton family's wealth, the interpreter discusses Saxton McKinley's loss of her two children due to illness. This would be a good time to discuss infant mortality in the nineteenth century and the hardships women had to overcome when childrearing.¹⁹⁷

The next rooms that the interpreter discussed were used by the family for daily living. This included the informal parlor, library, dining room, kitchen and breakfast nook. The family parlor appears smaller because the elevator shaft is present in this room. In this room, there are portraits of the Saxton family. The interpreter attempts to explain the familial lineage from Saxton McKinley's parents to her sister's grandchildren. It is easy to get confused by this information; however, according to the interpreter, at one point 14 people lived in the house. This information gives the visitor somewhat of a sense of how busy the people who lived here probably were. For the most part, the family parlor and the library focus on objects rather than on life.

What is even more disappointing is that the visitors are cut off in the library. They cannot go into the dining room, kitchen and breakfast nook. Visitors can only peer into these very important rooms where furniture and china are properly placed.

¹⁹⁶ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

¹⁹⁷ Young, 12.

According to the interpreter, the kitchen has a wood icebox and a wood baker's cabinet.¹⁹⁸ It would be nice to see these items since they are present. It is quite embarrassing that the NFLL claims to represent women; however, they do not show them where women traditionally worked, the kitchen. More than likely, Ida Saxton McKinley did not do drudge work in the kitchen. Her family's wealth could afford servants. There is no mention of servants or no mention of the work involved in cooking. There is no mention of social gatherings, meals, special occasions or guests. In many cases, the visitor knows only what the interpreter tells them; where the wallpaper came from, where the china came from and the chandelier. According to Linda Young, "One might think that it would be impossible to ignore housework in house museums-yet it still happens..."¹⁹⁹ Allowing the visitor to see the kitchen, and to explain the workload involved in cooking would allow the visitor to associate the knowledge with their everyday life. In many aspects, the tour lacks connection with the visitor.

The visitors are then taken by the elevator to the third floor where the ballroom and William McKinley's study are located. The interpreter takes the visitor to McKinley's study first. According to the interpreter William McKinley wrote the Fair Tariff Act of 1896 in the room.²⁰⁰ Again, the interpreter focuses on wallpaper, carpet and furniture. There are also more photographs of the family and the interpreter explains the familial lineage, which is very confusing for the visitor. Instead of discussing the family tree, it would benefit the visitor to provide personal stories about individuals. Personal stories stick with people and they remember them. It is in this room where the interpreter discusses William and Ida McKinley's North Market Street house where William's

¹⁹⁸ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

¹⁹⁹ Young, 14.

²⁰⁰ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

campaigns took place. The interpreter discusses the birth and deaths of their two children. Childrearing is yet one more topic that could have been discussed further.

The tour makes reference to the fact that Ida Saxton McKinley was the first First Lady to be put into mass media and to be used in the Presidential campaign. Saxton McKinley's image appeared on campaign buttons, paperweights, nut bowls and dishes, which are on exhibit in the study.²⁰¹ According to the interpreter, Ida Saxton McKinley was a very beautiful woman and the campaign took advantage of her looks. Saxton McKinley was used to promote the campaign because she represented the American standards of beauty at the time. Ida Saxton McKinley was frail, dainty and petite with auburn hair and blue eyes. She appealed to the male voter because she represented everything feminine and the McKinleys traditional family life appealed to the masses.

The visitor then enters the ballroom which is also located on the third floor. This room displays brief biographies of all of the First Ladies beginning with Michelle Obama and then works its way backwards. Artifacts on display include Ida Saxton McKinley's White House china, a silver spoon, pieces of fabric owned by Saxton McKinley and a dress. The visitor is then given the opportunity to look around the room and read biographies and look at artifacts. This room consists of a lot of text because there are biographies about every First Lady.

Also on display in the ballroom is one of Ida Saxton McKinley's dresses. Because of the petite dress, the interpreter discusses Saxton McKinley's body. She explains the average size of a wealthy woman living in that time period, which was 5'2" to 5'3" and that girls, starting around the age of three, were put into corsets, which helped

²⁰¹ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

to explain why Saxton McKinley was so petite.²⁰² The interpreter also compared the use of corsets to Chinese foot binding. The damage done to women's bodies for the ideals of beauty is clearly depicted by viewing the tiny waist on the dress. This is the only time throughout the tour that the interpreter discusses women's dress reform. The interpreter clearly links the evolution of the corset to a twenty-first audience.

A dinner table and chairs with a large chandelier are located in the center of the ballroom. The furniture would not be present in this room circa 1870; however, the furniture was donated to the NFLL and they decided to use it. In a Victorian ballroom, seating would be available for ladies.²⁰³ This room could have been utilized to interpret a ballroom, although the NFLL decided that this room best suited its needs to list biographies of First Ladies'. The NFLL readapted the space to suit their needs. If the NFLL interpreted the room as it was, the visitor might have gotten more out of the space, especially since the same information already present is listed on their website. A lot of different themes could have been used when discussing a ballroom including: food, fashion, music, servants, guests and children.

The visitor is then taken by elevator to the second floor where the bedrooms were located. On display in the hallway leading to the sitting room are several artifacts, such as photographs, the McKinley's wedding invitation, a fan, Saxton McKinley's bonnet and slippers knitted by Ida. According to the interpreter, Saxton McKinley knitted more than 3,000 pairs of slippers, which she donated to charities or gave them as gifts. The interpreter discusses the Saxton family's wealth and how most of her clothing came from

²⁰² Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

²⁰³ Interpreter, William McKinley Historic Home, National First Ladies' Library, 2 March 2010.

France. It would have been fascinating to know the differences in material and style in clothing owned by the wealthy and if Saxton McKinley was a trend setter.

The sitting room and the bedroom located in the William McKinley Historic Home represent what these spaces appeared to have looked like at the McKinley's former home located on North Market Street. Artifacts in this room include a folding chair, an organ, a dress, and a photograph of Katie, the McKinley's first child who died at the age of four. In this room, the interpreter discusses the tragedies that Ida Saxton McKinley had to endure and the illnesses that consumed her young life. The interpreter also explains how Saxton McKinley dealt with her illnesses in the White House. Saxton McKinley held flowers so she would not have to shake people's hands, she was propped in chairs with pillows and when she appeared in public, she would stay close to her husband so that he could hide her face with a handkerchief when she had seizures.

After the assassination of her husband, Ida Saxton McKinley moved back to Canton, Ohio and lived the remainder of her life in the Campaign House located on North Market Street, which William McKinley purchased back into the family. The interpreter concludes the tour in the bedroom, which represents Saxton McKinley's bedroom during her widowhood. The William McKinley Presidential Museum and Library has the original beds used by the McKinleys as well as several other original artifacts.

According to Linda Young, social history dominates the interpretive style at professionally run museums, such as the Women's Rights National Historical Park; however, house museums are slow to follow.²⁰⁴ The NFLL offers a conservative approach to women's history by discussing the traditional role of First Lady. The NFLL incorporates into their interpretive plan the lives of the wealthy. They do not tell the

²⁰⁴ Young, 4.

story of the evolution of the First Lady nor the people directly involved with the position. Simply put, the NFLL entertains the visitor with a variety of artifacts and biographies.

Conclusion

In many respects, visitor experience at both the Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library is very different. The visitor obtains two different messages when visiting each site. The WRNHP, which was strongly influenced by the social history movement, offers a social perspective while interpreting the women's rights movement. The WRNHP has stronger links to academic scholarship, which differentiates its interpretive programming from the NFLL. The NFLL offers a conservative approach to interpret the nation's First Ladies. Where are the roles of these parks in the future? The National Park Service established the Centennial Initiative 2016 to make its parks ready for the new millennium.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library are completely different in their interpretation of women and events. Not only do they focus on different historical themes, they also have different styles of interpretation, which is linked to the different ways in which the two sites were created. The NFLL focuses on objects rather than the broader picture and the women they interpret are of a small group. The primary focus of the NFLL is on First Ladies and their positions. The focus of the William McKinley Historic Home is on the Victorian era, since Ida Saxton McKinley's parents purchased the house in 1870. The NFLL focuses primarily on the lives of the privileged. The NFLL offers a conservative approach to women's history. On the other hand, the WRNHP focuses on a broader theme, the women's rights movement, which began at the site. The goal is to raise awareness of women's struggles and the first challenges to traditional nineteenth century societal norms. The

interpretation plan is not so much focused on objects. The WRNHP uses a social history model and the focus is on ideas.

The WRNHP and the NFLL are unique because they are solely dedicated to women. Because the NPS was heavily involved with the creation of the WRNHP in 1980, a social approach to understanding the first Women's Rights National Park was taken. A social approach would almost have to be taken, if the interpretation plan wanted to acknowledge Elizabeth Cady Stanton as a radical reformer. The NFLL was created by a conservative woman, Mary Regula. Regula has very strong ties with many First Ladies and because of this, controversy is avoided and a conservative interpretation plan is implemented.

The issues raised by the Women's Rights National Historical Park are rather radical in comparison to the National First Ladies' Library. The WRNHP offers a social approach to civil rights and political, economic and social change. The NFLL discusses First Ladies and the privileged lives they get to live. Typically, United States presidents are not perceived as radical. There are several differences within both site's visitor centers. The WRNHP tackles a much broader theme, and interprets very difficult subjects. The tours are self-guided and are selective. Visitors only learn as much as they want to. The exhibits on the second floor of the Visitor Center at the WRNHP also appeal to an adult audience. It could be relatively hard for a child to grasp some of the ideas presented by the WRNHP. The exhibits at the WRNHP's Visitor Center are also outdated. On the other hand, the NFLL is much simpler. The NFLL relies on artifacts and the interpreter to tell the story rather than text. Tours at the NFLL are guided and the

visitor only learns what the interpreter tells them. Themes change at the NFLL and are much smaller in scale.

Both sites use different channels of interpretation to get the message across. Guided tours are provided by both sites; however, the NFLL is toured strictly by a guide. The WRNHP Visitor Center is self-guided and the current Wesleyan Chapel could be viewed independently as well. Both the WRNHP and the NFLL offer introductory videos and brochures to make the information complete. The NFLL's exhibit, *America's Goodwill Ambassadors*, relies heavily on the video. Without the video and brochure, the exhibit is not complete. *Dreams of Equality*, shown at the WRNHP, depicts the first Women's Rights Convention in Seneca Falls and uses actors/actresses to best interpret the movement. It is a good introduction to the park; however, it is not required to understand the sites. The exhibits and tours discuss everything that is discussed in the video.

There are thousands of historic sites listed on the National Register of Historic Places and nearly 100 million people visit the sites open to the public annually; however, many visitors attend historic sites with relatively little knowledge relating to the theme.²⁰⁵ According to a study conducted by Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, the most popular places to visit are colonial sites and the least favorite are heavy industrial sites. "Homes of famous people" are in the middle.²⁰⁶ Both the WRNHP and the NFLL consist of the "homes of famous people;" however, the mission of these sites is to focus solely on women, which is a relatively new phenomenon. It can be argued that the William McKinley Historic Home focuses on William McKinley first and Ida Saxton

²⁰⁵ Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, "Excursions into the Un-Remembered Past: What People Want from Visits to Historical Sites," *Ethnology* Vol. 22 No. 3 (2000), 108.

²⁰⁶ Cameron and Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," 59.

McKinley second. It is possible that the home of Ida Saxton McKinley would not be on display if she were not married to President McKinley.

Since 1983, the WRNHP has attracted 622,048 visitors. In 1998, the park attracted 74,263 visitors, which was the most in its history. That year was the 150th anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention. According to Barbara J. Howe, the 150th anniversary of the first Women's Rights Convention was the most important celebration of women's history at the end of the twentieth century.²⁰⁷ Between July 10th and July 20th, 35,000 people visited the park.²⁰⁸ In 2009, the park attracted 20,620 visitors.²⁰⁹ Since visitor attendance has been tracked at the NFLL in 2006, there have been 42,336 visitors. In 2009, 10,466 people visited the site, half the attendance than the WRNHP.²¹⁰ There are several reasons why people visit the Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library. According to Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, people visit museums to, "transcend the present and engage with the past in a highly personal way."²¹¹ Many visitors want to connect with their ancestral past and to feel united by a common history. Visitors want to learn yet be entertained.

The pleasure-seeking factor associated with visiting museums is a major reason why people attend. The NFLL and the WRNHP have one great advantage in common; they offer more than one site for visitors to tour. Each site offered by the NFLL and the WRNHP have many different aspects associated with them. Both sites offer a Visitor

²⁰⁷ Howe, 238.

²⁰⁸ Howe, 238.

²⁰⁹ "Women's Rights NHP," NPS Stats: National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office, <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/viewReport.cfm> (accessed 23 March 2010).

²¹⁰ "First Ladies NHS," NPS Stats: National Park Service Public Use Statistics Office, <http://www.nature.nps.gov/stats/viewReport.cfm> (accessed 23 March 2010).

²¹¹ Catherine M. Cameron and John B. Gatewood, "Seeking Numinous Experiences in the Unremembered Past," *Ethnology* Vol. 42 No. 1 (Winter 2003), 57.

Center with exhibits and they also offer historic homes and structures (Wesleyan Chapel) that incorporate significant events and home life with the broader theme. Both sites also have limited visitor interaction. The exhibits and technology used at the Visitor Center are outdated and the NFLL offers no interactive tools, except for the tour itself. Even though funding is currently sparse, it is important to offer technology or other means for visitors to interact with the information provided.

Tours are a positive way for visitors to interact with the information presented to them by interpreters. Tours are also beneficial for the museum staff to get a feel of what most visitors are interested in (who attends and how knowledgeable they are on the subject). One downfall of the tours offered at the NFLL is that visitors are only allowed to see the sites through the interpreter and are constantly being watched. According to Nancy E. Villa Bryk, “The longer visitors spend looking and discussing, visitor studies show, the more likely they will take at least part of the interpretive message away with them.”²¹² Despite the fact that visitors cannot explore on their own, they gain much more information because the interpreter is able to discuss personal stories and life experiences at each site.

The WRNHP and NFLL offer a friendly atmosphere. One benefit of both sites is that, for the most part, tour groups are relatively small and allow the visitor to engage one on one with the interpreter. Both sites offer the visitor several good experiences, which in turn, allow the visitor to create positive memories. According to John H. Falk, visitor

²¹² Nancy E. Villa Bryk, “I Wish you Could Take a Peek at us at the Present Moment: Infusing the Historic House with Characters and Activity,” in *Interpreting Historic House Museums*, ed. Jessica Foy Donnelly (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), 147.

experiences are strongly influenced by memory.²¹³ Visitors take their memories of museum visits along with them to other sites. It allows them to compare and contrast material presented and to experience multiple aspects of museums that they enjoy.

Every visitor has different experiences when they visit historic sites. Many visitors at historic sites tend to visit those that provide an aspect of history that they enjoy. Because museums offer leisure, many visitors have positive experiences at the museums they visit.²¹⁴ Both the NFLL and the WRNHP offer different approaches and historic themes when discussing women's history. The NFLL offers a conservative approach to studying First Ladies. The tour is formal and guided at both the Visitor Center and the William McKinley Historic Home. The visitor is not given the option to explore on their own; however, the interpreter led tour provides adequate interaction. The women interpreted are also from an elite and small group, narrowing the type of visitor who visits the site. The WRNHP is informal, despite the ranger uniforms that are required by the National Park Service for employees. The visitor is given the opportunity to explore, take some pictures and ask questions. The WRNHP attracts a larger audience because it offers a social approach, including more women of different ethnicities, social and political classes.

One of the most important roles of the interpreter is to relate information of the past to the present in order to evoke personal experience. The National First Ladies' Library does this in the William McKinley Historic Home by telling stories of the children who lived in the home. It is common for children to act mischievous; however, personal stories allow visitors to relate their own lives to those who lived in the past. The

²¹³ John H. Falk, *Identity and the Museum Visitor Experience* (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2009), 133.

²¹⁴ Falk, 117.

Women's Rights National Historical Park evokes personal experience in both the Visitor Center and the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House. The Visitor Center exhibits bring to the forefront issues women face everyday, such as fashion and equality within the workplace. The interpreter at the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House discussed personal stories of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her family by relating several things (childbirth, punishment, diet and family life) to the present. Despite the fact that individuals represented in the homes may have lived more than a century ago, their lives relate to the lives of visitors today.

The information provided at both the Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library appeal to an adult audience; however, tours can be catered to school children. The ideas presented by the WRNHP at the Visitor Center could be hard to grasp for some people. For many children, it could be hard to understand through the text provided that the media pushes the ideals of "womanhood" on the consumer or that the "true womanhood" ideal is masked by harsh realities. Both sites' visitor centers also leave men out of the equation. A gendered approach would be the most realistic ideal for museums in the twenty-first century.

According to John H. Falk, "Every museum must be clear about why it exists and whom it is trying to serve."²¹⁵ He argues that even though many museums state that they serve the community, they actually are still focusing on "traditional and self-serving" ways of doing so.²¹⁶ The WRNHP serves its community. In many ways, present day Seneca Falls was built around the park. Seneca Falls rallied behind the idea and is built to sustain tourism. The WRNHP in return serves its community. When the park first

²¹⁵ Falk, 240.

²¹⁶ Falk, 240-241.

opened, Convention Days hosted several events that the community was encouraged to participate in. The WRNHP has attracted lectures, speeches, and other programs held at its amphitheatre. The park appeals to all women because all women have gained something from the first Women's Rights Convention. There are many exhibits within the Visitor Center that people may agree or disagree with; however, these exhibit spark debate, which is exactly what Elizabeth Cady Stanton enjoyed doing. On the other hand, the NFLL assumes Falk's argument. Besides offering programs, the NFLL does not give back to the community. The community was not involved with the creation of the site. The NFLL hosted a reception celebrating the grand opening of the site; however, the cost was \$1,500 per couple, which excluded most of the community. The 400 person "philanthropic group" that attended the reception mingled with politicians and business leaders.²¹⁷ The NFLL also states in its mission that the primary purpose of the site is to provide an archive and research facility relating to First Ladies; however, the library is open by appointment only. The beautifully rehabilitated research room appears to be rarely used.

The role of museums in communities is significant and museums that focus on multiculturalism are becoming necessary to incorporate the histories of everybody. For that reason, the National Park Service has established Centennial Initiative 2016 to prepare National Park Service sites for the twenty-first century. The NPS is aware of the problems associated with the NFLL and because of this, the NPS established a detailed plan for the site. On the other hand, the NPS did not list several changes for the WRNHP, even though exhibits need to be updated. Because the NPS was directly in

²¹⁷ Lisa Reicosky, "Making history fascinates philanthropists at library reception," *The Repository*, 9 June 1998.

charge of the creation and interpretation plans used by the WRNHP, the NPS has little to change at the WRNHP.

Museums dedicated solely to women are appearing more frequently throughout the United States. The WRNHP is certainly one of the first, if not the first, dedicated solely to women. On October 29, 2009, the U.S. House of Representatives passed legislation to establish a museum dedicated solely to women in Washington D.C. The National Women's History Museum Act of 2009, provides property on the National Mall in Washington D.C. for the establishment of a National Women's History Museum. This is very exciting for the nation; however, the U.S. Senate must also pass the bill in order for the museum to become reality. Despite the potential of having a national museum dedicated to women, it is still very important to have small, localized sites related to women's history.

What lies ahead for the WRNHP and the NFLL? The National Park Service established the Centennial Initiative 2016 to commemorate its 100th anniversary. The goals of Centennial Initiative 2016 are to expand programs and complete projects at its parks throughout the country to prepare them for the twenty-first century. Some of the issues being addressed by Centennial Initiative 2016 are changing demographics, a changing planet, population migration, re-connecting children with the outdoors and changes in technology.²¹⁸ Centennial 2016 created individual plans for each of its sites.

The NPS's vision for the NFLL is professionalizing the collection and clearly interpreting the roles of First Ladies. The NPS wants to strengthen its partnership with

²¹⁸ "National Park Service: Centennial 2016," Brochure (US Department of the Interior, National Park Service).

the NFLL, assist in operating both the Education and Research Center and the William McKinley Historic Home, establish the site within the local community, increase the educational aspect of the museum and implement the NPS standards of cultural preservation for the NFLL's collection of objects.²¹⁹ Other goals of the NPS are providing professional expertise, incorporating the stories of First Ladies into the interpretation plan, increase visitation by 100 percent and to market towards diverse audiences and young people.²²⁰ If many of these goals are accomplished, it will make the NFLL a better place to visit because the assessment wants to address the obvious problems associated with the site.

Because the NPS was the main creator of the WRNHP, and because they were the major participants in preservation and interpretation, the Centennial Initiative 2016 does not require major changes. The only proposed idea is to incorporate education in school classrooms. This would be through a "traveling trunk" that includes material about the first Women's Rights Convention. The traveling trunk would serve as a pre-visit tool for class visits to the park and would also serve classes who are unable to attend the park due to budget constraints.²²¹ The estimated cost of the project is \$9,300. This proposal is an excellent idea; however, the NPS needs to update the second floor exhibits in the Visitor Center.

The Women's Rights National Historical Park and the National First Ladies' Library are two National Park Service sites; however, they are very different. Their differences are rooted in their creation and the sites have taken different paths because of

²¹⁹ "First Annual Centennial Strategy for First Ladies' National Historical Site," *The Future of America's National Parks* (U.S. Department of Interior: National Park Service, 2007).

²²⁰ "First Annual Centennial Strategy for First Ladies' National Historical Site."

²²¹ "Develop Educational Traveling Trunk" (U.S. Department of the Interior: National Park Service, 2008).

it. It is quite evident where the NPS wants to go with the NFLL. They want to adopt a policy similar to the WRNHP. This would work well for the NFLL and it would attract a broader audience by making programs and exhibits geared towards a diverse public. The WRNHP incorporated the social history movement and sponsored diversity from its beginning, which has helped the park in terms of visitors. It is apparent that these sites have a very important place in American history and that they will be present for the future.

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