The following profiles of remarkable Hudson Valley women abolitionists and suffragists are part of a larger publication.

**Women in the Hudson Valley: A Teaching Resource** introduces more than 50 extraordinary women with ties to our region -- artists and athletes, lawyers and legislators, mapmakers and mathematicians. Whether you’re a teacher or a site educator, you’ll find a story to help students you work with see women.

Our aim is to stir interest, not to tell the women’s full stories or portray the complexity of their lives. We hope these mini-bios prompt you to dig more deeply. You can learn more about the other sections or [download them here](#).

**ABOLITION AND SUFFRAGE**

Lucretia Mott
Sojourner Truth

**Resources:** Sojourner Truth

Harriet Myers
Cynthia Hesdra
Elizabeth Cady Stanton
Carrie Chapman Catt
Inez Milholland

**Resources:** Abolition and Suffrage

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Lucretia Coffin Mott was born in Massachusetts. As a teenager she attended Nine Partners, a Quaker school in Dutchess County.

She taught there after graduating, and her interest in women's rights began when she discovered that male teachers were paid significantly more than women.

In the 1820s, Mott became a Quaker minister. She traveled extensively, with her husband's support, preaching sermons that emphasized the presence of the Divine within every individual.

Mott worked with Elizabeth Cady Stanton and other women to plan the first large gathering of U.S. women's rights activists. At their 1848 Seneca Falls Convention, they issued a call for suffrage and other rights, known as the "Declaration of Sentiments."

Define: Quaker

Quakers trace their roots to the Church of England and are known formally as the Religious Society of Friends. Although Nine Partners School closed in 1863, a cemetery and Friends Meeting House are still active there.
Sojourner Truth was born Isabella Baumfree, a Dutch-speaking slave in Ulster County. After escaping, she became known as a powerful orator and advocate, first preaching Christianity and later promoting abolition and women’s suffrage.

Like most slaves in the rural North, Isabella lived isolated from other African Americans. She was sold many times and suffered physical and sexual abuse. Inspired by her faith, she managed to flee with her infant daughter in the mid-1820s. She then became the first woman to successfully sue for child custody, regaining her young son who had been sold illegally.

Living as an acclaimed preacher in New York City in the 1830s, Truth met abolitionists and suffragists. She found their arguments compelling and began to speak on those topics as well. She traveled broadly as a lecturer at first basing her speeches on her Biblical understanding of justice.

When the Civil War began, Truth became more political. She argued for the inclusion of blacks in the Union Army, and once they joined brought them food and clothes. After the war, Truth continued the fight for universal suffrage and advocated that freed slaves be given land.

"At a time when most Americans thought of slaves as male and women as white, Truth embodied a fact that still bears repeating: Among blacks are women; among the women, there are blacks."

Nell Irvin Painter, emerita professor of history, Princeton University
For more abolition and suffrage resources, go to the end of this section.

LISTEN OR WATCH

Ain’t I a Woman? Three actors have recorded this speech by Sojourner Truth. Each is under five minutes: Alice Walker, Kerry Washington, and Alfre Woodard. Produced by Zinn Education Project, grades 6-12.

READ


VISIT

Sojourner Truth spent much of her life in Ulster County. What is sometimes called her escape route includes two plaques: (1) near her birthplace on Route 213 and (2) Ulster County Court House, Kingston, where she sued to reclaim her son.
Sojourner Truth Library, SUNY New Paltz, Ulster County, observes March 6 with special events in honor of Sojourner Truth. For details email the dean of the library. A 1995 mural featuring Truth hangs above in the staircase. Website features books, articles, documents from the U.S. Dept. of Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and a list of related materials in its collections.

Sojourner Truth Memorial, Port Ewen, Ulster County. Truth is seen as she might have looked as a young girl enslaved by a tavern owner and Revolutionary War veteran. Sculptor Trina Greene of New Paltz wanted to honor Sojourner Truth, the abolitionist cause, and the ongoing struggle for human rights. She also hoped to raise awareness that slavery existed in New York.

LESSON PLANS & OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES

Sojourner Truth: Abolitionist and Women’s Rights Activist, PBS Learning Media, 4 minute video with lesson plan.

Unsung Heroes: Encouraging students to appreciate those who fought for social justice. Activity by retired Portland (OR) Public School teacher Bill Bigelow, 17 pp. Reading levels: 6-12. The activity is based on an essay by Howard Zinn. Sojourner Truth is one of the "heroes."

BACKGROUND READING

Complicity: How the North Promoted, Prolonged, and Profited from Slavery, Anne Farrow, Joel Lang, and Jenifer Frank, 304 pp, Ballantine, 2005. This book provides valuable context and includes substantial information about New York slavery and Sojourner Truth, including her 1851 speech to the Women’s Rights Convention. A teachers' guide is available.


For 30 years Harriet Myers and her husband Stephen helped individuals escaping slavery and were among Albany’s most important abolitionists.

Their home (shown here) was a pivotal stop on the underground railroad and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the New York State Underground Railroad Heritage Trail, and the National Park Service’s National Network to Freedom.

Image: Paul Stewart, Capital District Underground Railroad History Project.
Cynthia Moore Hesdra was born in 1808 in Tappan, Rockland County. She spent part of her life enslaved. The circumstances are unclear though some accounts say her husband, Edward Hesdra, purchased her freedom.

Cynthia and her husband ran a successful laundry in New York City and owned property there, in Bergen County, NJ, and in Nyack where Cynthia's father was one of the town's wealthiest men.

One of the Hesdras' Nyack properties is said to have been a safe house on the underground railroad. A marker at Main Street and Route 9W marks the spot where the house stood.
Elizabeth Cady Stanton was not born in the Hudson Valley, but she studied at the Troy Female Seminary, now the Emma Willard School, in Rensselaer County. She was a suffragist, social activist, abolitionist, and a leading figure in the early women's rights movement.

Stanton wrote the "Declaration of Sentiments," presented at the Seneca Falls Convention in 1848. That gathering is often marked as the start of the organized women's rights and suffrage movement in the U.S. During her life, Stanton addressed many issues in addition to suffrage, e.g., custody, property and employment rights; divorce, and birth control.

After the Civil War, the women's rights movement split. One side, including Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, were committed to suffrage for women and African Americans. They did not support constitutional amendments that would have given voting rights to African American men only.

Eventually, Stanton and Anthony argued that the language of the 14th and 15th amendments actually did give women the right to vote, but they did not win that argument. Almost 50 years passed before U.S. women obtained the right to vote, Elizabeth Cady Stanton shaped the movements that made it possible.
Carrie Chapman Catt was crucial to the suffrage movement and was also a tireless activist for peace.

She spearheaded a campaign for women's voting rights in New York State, which was successful in 1917. Catt was also instrumental in passage of the 19th amendment, which in 1919 gave all U.S. women the right to vote.

Catt was involved in the global women's movement and helped found the International Woman Suffrage Alliance now known as the International Alliance of Women.

In the 1910s Catt moved to Westchester County. Her home in Briarcliff was called Juniper Ledge. She later lived in New Rochelle's Paine Heights neighborhood.

Did you know?

Between 1912 and 1914 there were two Suffrage Hikes. One traveled from the Bronx to Albany; the other from New York City to Washington, D.C.

The hikes were an expression of grassroots activism designed to bring attention to voting rights for women.

Grassroots Activism

Individuals working together starting at the most local level. A grassroots movement is made up of “ordinary” people, not the rich, not the powerful, not elected officials.

Synonyms include: popular, of-the-people, bottom-up, nonhierarchical, rank-and-file.
Mr. President,
how long
must women wait
for liberty?

Born and raised in Brooklyn, Milholland graduated from Vassar College in Dutchess County. She was denied admission to law school at Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale due to her gender, but was admitted to New York University and graduated in 1912. She joined a New York City firm where she handled criminal and divorce cases. During an investigation of conditions at Sing Sing Correctional Facility she insisted on interviewing prisoners and even had herself handcuffed to one so she could experience conditions firsthand.

In March 1913, Milholland led a national Woman's Suffrage Procession on horseback, wearing a crown and a long white cape. The images quickly became a suffragist symbol. Her obituary in the “New York Sun” said, “No suffrage parade was complete without Inez Milholland.” Her presence boosted morale and won support for the movement. She was active in the National American Woman Suffrage Association, which later became the National Woman’s Party.

Her wide ranging activism involved Milholland in prison reform, world peace, and equality for African Americans. She was a member of the NAACP, the Women’s Trade Union League, the Women’s Political Union, the National Child Labor Committee, and England’s Fabian Society. Milholland died from pernicious anemia while on a speaking tour in the western states. Her last public words were, “Mr. President, how long must women wait for liberty?”

Inez Milholland
Dutchess County

Image: 1913, photographic print, George Grantham Bain Collection, Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C.
LISTEN OR WATCH

Audio, Eileen McAdam, producer, Sound & Story Project of the Hudson Valley

Certificate of Freedom, 2008, under 2 minutes. Warren Boyd's grandfather was a freed slave. As a young boy in the 1920s, he loved listening to his grandfather's stories even though his mother disapproved.

Too Many Bones, narrator: Jim Metzner, 2009, under 7 minutes. Newburgh’s City Historian, a police officer, a school parking lot, a 19th century African cemetery, and the discovery of bones make for a suspenseful tale.

READ


Letters Home: Carrie Niles’ Correspondence with New York’s Volunteers, Gail Goldsmith, Hudson River Valley Review, Vol. 27, No. 2, Spring 2011, pp 105-116. Niles grew up in Columbia County and corresponded with Union soldiers during the Civil War. The letters can be seen at the Columbia County Historical Society.


VISIT

Bevier House Museum, Marbletown, Ulster County. An upstairs room houses the county’s largest collection of Civil War artifacts on public display.
Cynthia Hesdra is honored at Nyack, Rockland County, sites: (1) bench¹, Village Memorial Park, 4 Depew Ave., (2) plaque to the “Edward Hesdra Family,” Routes 59 and 9W, the site of the Hesdra family home thought to have been part of the Underground Railroad, (3) Cynthia Hesdra Way, Depew and Piermont.


**Foster Memorial African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion Church.** Tarrytown, Westchester County. Amanda Foster (b. 1807, Albany) joined the Underground Railroad while working for Arkansas’s governor. She moved to Tarrytown in 1837, started a candy shop, married, and helped found AME Zion, which fed and sheltered fugitive slaves. Open to the public. (Foster is not profiled in this guide.)

**Harriet and Stephen Myers’ Residence.** Albany. The Myers’ were leaders in Albany’s movement for abolition. Youth group/classroom tours are one hour.

**Jay Heritage Center.** Rye, Westchester County. Striving for Freedom: The Jay Family and Manumission is an interactive theater program designed for grades 4-8, social studies, and adaptable for high schoolers and adults. The site also is eager to work with students interested in primary source material.

**John Jay Homestead State Historic Site.** Katonah, Westchester County. Slaves, Slavery and the Jay Family, immersive, hands-on experience designed to help students (grades 6-12) answer difficult questions, e.g., “Why did many Founding Fathers continue to own slaves” while stating that “all men are created equal?”

Out of Washington’s Shadow: African-American History Tour of Newburgh. Tashae Smith developed this self-guided five-stop tour, including the Alsdorf home, one of the city’s links to the Underground Railroad. [Maps and more](https://www.walknewburgh.org), [Narration for each stop](https://www.walknewburgh.org), Sound & Story Project. Guided tours, [Walk Newburgh](https://www.walknewburgh.org).

**Rensselaer County Historical Society.** Troy. During Abolition & Escape (grades 4-8) students visit sites associated with the abolition movement and use primary resources and readers’ theater based on a real event.² Not a Railroad and Not Underground (grades 3-5) introduces students to African-Americans living in Troy before the Civil War. Also: walking tours and in-class programs.


² Incident in Troy, for more information about this see the teaching materials section below, [Africans in America](https://www.africansinamerica.org).
St. Paul’s Church National Historic Site, Mount Vernon, Westchester County. Interpretive programs include the history of enslaved and free black community members. Including some buried in the cemetery, e.g., Rebecca Turner (not profiled in this resource), who lived through the revolutionary and civil wars.

**LESSON PLANS & OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES**


**Freedom & Dignity Project**, Hudson River Valley Institute, Marist College, includes:

- Children and Slavery, grades 7-8, Kathy Hack, Miller MS, Kingston City Schools. Students learn to understand the conditions of slavery.
- Resistance to Slavery, grade 8, Michael Brown, Linden Avenue MS, Red Hook CSD. Students read, discuss, and write using primary sources.
- Slavery in New York, grades 7-11, Georgia Herring and Heather Simco, Millbrook Junior/Senior High School.


**Mount Zion & Montrepose Cemeteries**, grade 4, Donna Nageli, Kingston City School District. Students compare and contrast two very different cemeteries. One, given to the African-American community by the City of Kingston; the other created by and for leaders of the white community.

**BACKGROUND READING**


LISTEN OR WATCH

100 Years on Mount Ida, 2011, 12-minute video on the history of the Emma Willard School. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others in this guide attended the school formerly known as Troy Female Seminary.

Perseverance: The story of women's suffrage in New York State, Tamarac Video Productions, 2017, 15 minutes. Film features Hudson Valley students and scholars.

For more video, see Teaching Materials below and resource page for Sojourner Truth.

READ


Declaration of Sentiments (2 pp) signed by three women profiled in this resource: Eunice Newton Foote, Lucretia Mott, and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Grades 6-12.

Elizabeth Started All the Trouble, Doreen Rappaport, illustrated by Matt Faulkner, 40 pp, Disney-Hyperion, 2016. Grades 1-4.

One Hundred Years toward Suffrage: Timeline, E. Susan Barber, Women’s Rights National Historic Park.


VISIT

**New York State Museum** has a substantial collection of items related to women’s history. The woman’s suffrage collection contains flyers, banners, car cards, and more. Votes for Women, a centennial exhibit, closed May 2018, but resources remain online: [Educator’s Guide](#), 30 pp; [online exhibit](#), traveling exhibit: [email](#) for details.

**LESSON PLANS AND OTHER TEACHER RESOURCES**

**Seneca Falls, 1848: Women Organize for Equality**, class role play, grades 9-12, Bill Bigelow, Portland (OR) Public Schools, 17 pp, Zinn Education Project. Students study race and class while exploring the convention’s accomplishments and limitations.

**Woman Suffrage**, grade 6, uses essays from the Hudson River Valley Review, Hudson River Valley Institute, Marist College: (1) From Emancipation to Representation, Joan Hollister & Sally Schultz; (2) Woman Suffrage, Vassar College and Laura Johnson Wylie, Eva Boice, both from Vol. 20, No. 2, 2004; and (3) The 1895 New York State Woman Suffrage Association Convention, Shannon Risk, Vol. 23, No. 2, Spring 2007.

**From the Library of Congress**

**Women’s History Lessons**: 19th Century Women Struggle and Triumph (grades 6-12), Suffrage Strategies: Voices for Votes (grades 3-8), Suffragists and their Tactics (grades 6-12), and Women’s Suffrage: Their Rights and Nothing Less, (grades 6-12).

**Primary Source Sets, Women’s Suffrage**: collections of sheet music, photographs, letters, and maps; teacher’s guide with historical context and online resources; tools to help students analyze primary sources; Student Discovery Set (free e-book). Students can zoom in, highlight, and make notes on artifacts and documents.

**National American Woman Suffrage Association Collection**: 800 books and pamphlets collected between 1890 and 1938.

**From PBS Learning Media**

**Elizabeth Cady Stanton: Orator, Author, and Activist**: 4-min. video, lesson plan, 3-7.

**Primary Source Set: Women’s Suffrage: Campaign for the 19th Amendment**, 6-12.

**Upstate, Downstate: The Women’s Movement**, grade 4, explores the history of the 19th century women’s movement, its connection to abolition, and the continuing struggle for equality + discussion questions, teaching ideas, and student handouts.

**Women's Suffrage: Crash Course US History #31**, lesson and 13-minute video, 9-12.