

The Quaker Influence on The Seneca Falls Convention

"We profess to be the only pure democracy in the world. Men and women being one - on an absolute equality in the Lord Jesus Christ, is one of our fundamental doctrines."

*-Elizabeth Comstock
"The Life and Letters of
Elizabeth Comstock" (1895)*

The women's rights movement was rooted in the fertile ground of central New York. This area was known for sweeping reform, which burned across the landscape through village, town, and city like a prairie on fire. Much of this reform was due to the numerous members of the Society of Friends, or Quakers, who made their homes here. A progressive branch of Quakers lived in and around Waterloo. At a time in America when women had virtually no rights, these Quakers provided model relationships where men and women worked and lived in equality. How did their influence help make the first Women's Rights Convention a success? How did their progressive way of living affect us? A look at two of these Quaker families provides the answer.

Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock came from a Quaker community in Philadelphia where Thomas had been acknowledged as a minister. The Quakers did not ordain ministers, but instead recognized certain individuals as gifted. Following a migration of Quakers to new settlements in western New York, the M'Clintock family (including Thomas' sister, Sarah) settled in Waterloo. They rented a home and store from Waterloo's wealthiest and most prominent citizen, their brother-in-law Richard Hunt.

ABOLITION

The M'Clintock and the Hunt families were bound together by more than family relations. Both families adamantly opposed slavery and believed their lives

should reflect their religious convictions. Richard Hunt's textile mill produced woolen cloth, purposely avoiding the use of cotton because it was cultivated by southern slaves. This mill once supplied cloth for a suit worn by abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London in 1840, a suit Garrison proudly proclaimed as having been manufactured free of slave labor.



Mary Ann M'Clintock
(From Jane C. Hunt's personal photo album,
courtesy of the Waterloo Historical Society)

PUBLIC ACTION

Though Quakers supported abolition, not all did so publicly or participated in discussions of slavery. Thomas and Mary Ann M'Clintock, however, were active supporters of the abolition movement. They had been founders of Philadelphia's Free Produce Society. Just as a person today might decide to purchase goods manufactured free of child labor, the Free Produce Society promoted a boycott of all goods produced through slave labor. The M'Clintocks continued their boycott of slave-made goods after they moved to Waterloo. Thomas took out ads in the *Seneca County Courier* which proudly announced that all merchandise carried in his store was made without the use of slave labor.



National Park Service
Women's Rights
National Historical Park
136 Fall Street
Seneca Falls, NY 13148
315-568-2991
(TDD 315-568-9039)
<http://www.nps.gov/wori>