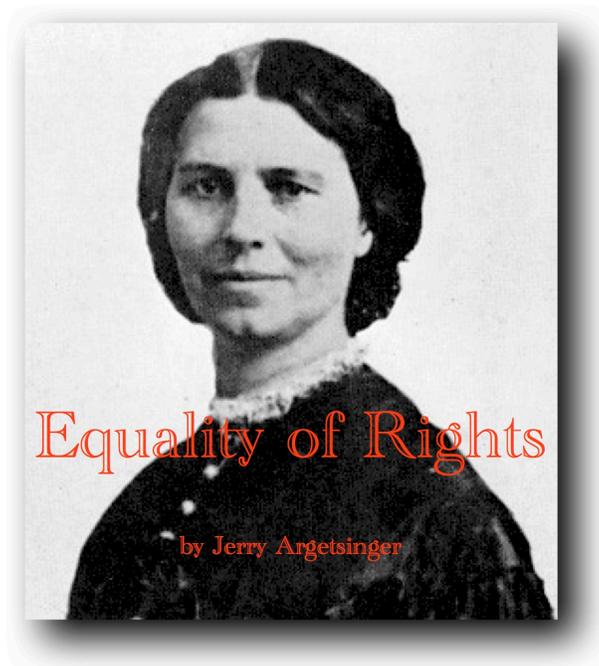


PERUSAL SCRIPT



an historic drama by

Jerry Argetsinger



Newport, Maine

Adapted from "Equality of Rights: The First Woman's Rights Convention" © 1998 Gerald S. Argetsinger

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PHOTO in the artwork for the cover page is that of Elizabeth Cady Stanton. (Not Susan B. Anthony)

"Equality of Rights" is an historic dramatization in celebration of the Sesquicentennial of the 1848 Woman's Rights Convention. "Equality of Rights" premiered at the Sesquicentennial Celebration of the First Woman's Rights convention in the Wesleyan Chapel at the National Woman's Rights Park, Seneca Falls, New York, July 14-19, 1998. It was produced by Walter and Doris Wolf, directed by Gerald Argetsinger, costume design by Gail Argetsinger, production design by P. Gibson Ralph and had the following cast:

Charlotte Woodward	Joan VanNess
Reporter	Stephen Beals
Jane Hunt	Karen Beals
Lucretia Mott	Eleanor Stearns
Martha Coffin Wright	Sue Ramer
Mary Ann M'Clintock	Cynthia Cuddeback
Elizabeth Cady Stanton	Joni L. Pontius
James Mott	Brenton Stearns
Frederick Douglass	Sean McLeod
Daniel, an 11 year old boy	Michael McDonald
Woman 1	Joan B. Mitchell
Woman 2	Sharon Walker
Man 1	Frederick Harvey Rapp
Man 2	Paul Wenderlich
Original Music	Joseph Downing
Video Production	Peter McDonald

Setting - The re-enactment is performed in an open stage setting on a variety of levels. Central to the action is an area representing the sanctuary of the Wesleyan Chapel from which the Convention was conducted. Other areas represent various times and places. The performance is highly presentational, including the audience as confidants and as the actual participants at the Convention.

Cast of Characters

Jane Hunt
Lucretia Mott - early 50's
Martha Coffin Wright
Mary Ann M'Clintock
Elizabeth Cady Stanton - early 30's
James Mott - mid 50's
Frederick Douglass - mid 30's
Henry Stanton (played by Man 1)
British Gentleman (played by Man 2)
Daniel, an 11 year old boy
Woman 1
Woman 2
Man 1
Man 2

EQUALITY OF RIGHTS A Play by **Jerry Argetsinger** 8W 5M 1Boy(aged 11). Open Stage Setting with levels. About an hour. (*For production by Educational, Amateur and Professional groups.*) This play was commissioned by Celebrate '98 and premiered at the Sesquicentennial of the first Women's Rights Convention (1998) in the Wesleyan Chapel, Women's Rights National Historical Park, Seneca Falls, NY, where it is regularly performed. "Equality of Rights" is a dramatic representation of the events leading up to and a reenactment of highlights of the First Women's Rights Convention at the Wesleyan Chapel, Seneca Falls, NY in 1848. It begins at the 1840 World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, England where the American delegation was made up primarily of Quakers. Upon their arrival, the World Convention leaders caused an uproar by refusing to seat the American women delegates. As they observed and discussed the convention Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott became fast friends and vowed to convene a Women's Rights Convention on their return to the States. They reunited eight years later in Seneca Falls, NY and remembered their resolve. In less than one weeks time, they organized the convention, wrote their "Sentiments and Resolutions" and publicized the event as best they could. Remarkably, the convention had standing room only and established a political outcry, due to the efforts of Frederick Douglass editor of the North Star newspaper. The women became nationally recognized leaders at the forefront of the movement that eventually resulted in the 19th Amendment to Constitution granting women the right to vote. **ORDER # 3114.**

Gerald Argetsinger, Ph.D. (Bowling Green State University), is an Associate Professor, Department of Cultural and Creative Studies, National Technical Institute for the Deaf, a college of the Rochester Institute of Technology in Rochester, NY. [cut sentence] Argetsinger has had a distinguished career in theater and film as a scholar, playwright, director and producer. He has published extensively on Ludvig Holberg, "The Father of Danish Literature and Theatre" and has translated several of his comedies. Over a dozen of his scripts have been produced and published, including *Trail of the Lonesome Pine*, the Virginia State Outdoor Drama. He is a nationally recognized director of outdoor drama, including *The Hill Cumorah Pageant* (Palmyra, NY), *Trail of the Lonesome Pine* (Big Stone Gap, VA), *Utah!* (Tuacahn, St. George, UT), *Equality of Rights: the First Women's Rights Convention* (Seneca Falls, NY) and two historic dramas, *Sword of Peace* and *Pathway to Freedom* (Snow Camp, NC). Off Broadway and regional directing credits include Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (Quintero Theatre, Theatre Row, NYC), Shaffer's *Equus*, van Zandt's *Silent Laughter*, Wright's *Mistakes Were Made*, and Carol Lynn Pearson's *Facing East* with an African American cast. He is married to award winning costume designer Gail (Bishop) Argetsinger and they have raised two sons.

Equality of Rights

by

Jerry Argetsinger

(As the performance begins British patriotic music fills the air. We are in London, England, 1840, for the World Anti-Slavery Convention. A British Gentleman stands ready to examine the credentials of convention delegates. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and her husband, Henry Stanton enter from stage right as Lucretia Mott enters from stage left. The three arrive in good spirits at the post of the British Gentleman and hand him their credentials.)

HENRY: Here you are, Henry Stanton and Elizabeth Cady Stanton delegates from Boston, Massachusetts.

LUCRETIA: Lucretia Mott from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

GENTLEMAN: You are welcome, Mr. Stanton. However, I must inform the women that it is against Convention policy to allow female participation.

LUCRETIA: Excuse me, but I am a Quaker Minister and have been elected to represent the American Anti-Slavery Society.

HENRY: This is an outrage. We are honeymooning in London because we have been elected delegates to this Convention.

GENTLEMAN: It is against the law for women to speak publically in any official meetings. The ladies may be seated as observers-only to this Convention. Mr. Stanton, you may enter. Mrs. Stanton . . .

ELIZABETH: Mrs. Cady Stanton.

GENTLEMAN: Mrs. Cady Stanton and Mrs. Mott, you may go around to the roped-off area.

(HENRY enters as ELIZABETH and LUCRETIA move in the opposite direction.)

LUCRETIA: Excluding duly elected delegates is untenable.

ELIZABETH: It's the same back home. Women are not allowed to speak in public. One would think such ridiculous policies would be waved at a conference for human rights.

LUCRETIA: As a Quaker minister I am allowed to speak in public, not only in our Society of Friends but when working for abolition.

ELIZABETH: Lucretia Mott! That's why I've heard your name before. You are a major proponent for abolition of slavery. It is wonderful to meet you.

LUCRETIA: And thee, as well, Mrs. Cady Stanton.

(The two women laugh.)

When we get back to our homeland we should organize a conference for the rights of women.

ELIZABETH: Yes, Mrs. Mott. That's exactly what we'll do.

(Arm-in-arm, the women move toward the exit.)

Even my husband fears that any discussion of women's rights might undermine the abolitionist cause.

(Both exit.)

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(The music changes to an 1840's brass band. We are now in the home of JANE HUNT who is serving tea and cakes to LUCRETIA MOTT, her sister MARTH COFFIN MOTT, and MARY ANN M'CLINTOCK.)

JANE: Here's tea for thee, Mrs. Mott.

LUCRETIA: I thank thee, Jane.

MARTHA: I wonder where Elizabeth can be?

LUCRETIA: It has been eight years since we became friends in London at the World Anti-Slavery Convention. I've have been looking forward to this meeting.

MARY ANN: With her three boys it's a wonder she is able to go anywhere.

MARTHA: Oh, Mary Ann! Thee doesn't think they've tried to float another baby down the river!

LUCRETIA: What's that? Float a baby?

MARTHA: I think her oldest son was pretending his brother was Baby Moses.

JANE: He tied cork around the baby to see if he would float.

LUCRETIA: Oh dear!

(There is some commotion as ELIZABETH CADY STANTON enters.)

ELIZABETH: My dear Lucretia!

LUCRETIA: Elizabeth, how wonderful to see thee again after so many years.

ELIZABETH: It doesn't seem so long. I've had your letters and there are always reports of your abolitionist work.

(She sits, makes herself comfortable and laughs.)

It's such a relief to get away for an afternoon.

LUCRETIA: Jane was just telling me about thy children.

ELIZABETH: Oh! My Boys! I do love them, but I also miss the regular company of ladies.

JANE: *(Handing her a cup of tea.)* Here's tea for thee, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Thank you, Jane. Sometimes it's so painfully difficult to get away from the house. Where is your new baby? He must be . . .

JANE: Six weeks old and sleeping peacefully. Here's lemon and honey for thy tea, as well as honey cakes to satisfy thy hunger.

ELIZABETH: *(Helping herself.)* Thank you, but what I have been really hungering for is good conversation.

LUCRETIA: *(To JANE.)* It gladdens my heart that thee are not supporting the slave production of sugar.

MARY ANN: Lucretia, thee must remember that our own Waterloo Woolen Mills produce slave-free cloth.

Refusing to profit from the work of slaves is something we all support.

JANE: After a week of disputation, it's wonderful to find an issue on which we can all agree.

(Quiet laughter.)

ELIZABETH: Disputations? I thought your annual meeting with the Hicksite Quakers was for spiritual development.

LUCRETIA: how can one's spirit be developed when others are oppressed? How can one demonstrate one's true religion without opposing that oppression?

MARTHA: We oppose profiting from the work of slaves as vigorously as we oppose slavery itself.

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ELIZABETH: I thought that was agreed to by all Quakers.

LUCRETIA: Not all Quakers agree on every point of doctrine. Martha, as well as my husband, James and I, believe that salvation results from good works such as working for the freedom of all mankind.

ELIZABETH: Right now I could use some freedom for womankind.

MARY ANN: What was that, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH: You know that I am an abolitionist. How could I be married to the great Henry Stanton and be anything else? Only last week he informed me that the abolitionist Free Soil Party has enrolled over two hundred members locally. But after just one year in Seneca Falls, I could use some freedom myself.

MARTHA: I'm not certain that I understand thee, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: Eighteen months ago I lived in the social center of Boston. My husband and I enjoyed several well-trained servants who cared for the house, the cooking and the boys, allowing me time for friends such as yourselves. Henry was active in local and state politics, so hardly a week went by when we did not host a renowned politician or artist. But here, in this outpost!

JANE: I thought thee loved Seneca Falls.

MARY ANN: Thee has done such wonderful work with thy house and gardens.

ELIZABETH: Please don't misunderstand me. Perhaps I became too accustomed to the opportunities of city life. That is what my father, Judge Cady, says. When it became clear that Mr. Stanton could not earn enough to maintain our house and servants in Boston, my father gave us the house and farm in Seneca Falls. He told me that I should be responsible. "You believe in woman's capacity to do and dare," he admonished me, "now go ahead and put your house in order."

MARTHA: So the house and land are thine?

ELIZABETH: They have always been in my name, but until the Married Women's Property Act was finally passed this year, they were legally the property of my husband, who was supposed to help me move to Seneca Falls. When he was forced to stay behind in Boston, I left the boys at my father's house in Johnstown and came alone to put my house in order. At first it was a great adventure. The house had been vacant for over five years. I made the plans and supervised the workers, making repairs and adding a kitchen and a woodhouse. I laid out the landscaping and supervised the gardeners. But when the work was completed and I retrieved my family, my life all but stopped.

JANE: But thee is welcome in any house in the community.

ELIZABETH: It's one thing to be welcome, it's entirely different to be able to get there. We are isolated across the flats, away from anyone with education or position. The roads are usually muddy. It's impossible to find adequate help, let alone trained servants. And they no sooner arrived than my boys contracted malaria. I spend my life taking care of the house and nursing the children.

MARY ANN: At least thee has not gone hungry.

ELIZABETH: I am suffering from a mental hunger that is every bit as debilitating and depressing as an empty stomach!

LUCRETIA: Can thee join thy husband in his work?

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ELIZABETH: I have worked hard to support Henry's political campaigns, but when it comes to woman's right he says, "Freedom first for the slaves." Have you forgotten being barred from the Anti-Slavery Conference in London? Do you remember what we vowed?

LUCRETIA: We vowed that we would convene a convention to discuss the political and social conditions of women.

(The others are excited to hear this.)

ELIZABETH: But what has happened to our resolve? You returned home to the important work of abolition, while I concerned myself with intellectual stimulation, learning as much, and doing as much as I could to help Henry and women. Well I have been one year in Seneca Falls, alone most of the time, taking care of house and family--not to mention the poverty stricken immigrants!

MARTHA: Every time a bedraggled wife is beaten by a drunken husband, she finds solace at the door of Elizabeth Cady Stanton.

ELIZABETH: Someone must reach out to them. Under the law they are nothing! Reading my father's and husband's law books has done nothing if it has not taught me to render compassion to the downtrodden. I have seen women robbed of their birthrights by unfair laws. I have seen women evicted from their homes because they were liable for the debts of their husbands who drank away the very money their daughters earned to pay their bills.

MARY ANN: What can we do about it?

ELIZABETH: *(She stops. She turns to Lucretia.)* Let's do it, Lucretia! Let's have our convention now.

LUCRETIA: Yes. Why not?

MARTHA: But Lucretia . . . Where? How? There shall be here only a few short days. Who can we find to organize a meeting?

ELIZABETH: Lucretia, you and your husband have organized scores of meetings and conventions, as have you, Mary Ann.

MARY ANN: My husband, Thomas, will help us, as well as my daughter Elizabeth, who has organized many anti-slavery fairs to raise money for Frederick Douglass.

LUCRETIA: We can hold our convention next week. James will help us.

JANE: But where?

MARTHA: The minister of the Wesleyan Methodist Chapel in Seneca Falls has often said his church should be used for social causes.

MARY ANN: We can publish an announcement in Friday's *Seneca Country Courier* informing women of our convention.

MARTHA: We must send it to Frederick Douglass as well. He can publish it in *The North Star*.

JANE: *(Bringing paper, pen and ink.)* If we expect our announcement to be published in this Friday's *Courier*, we must deliver it to the editor tomorrow!

MARY ANN: *(Sitting down to write. There is an anxious, awkward pause.)* Oh dear. How shall we begin?

LUCRETIA: "A convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition of women . . . "

ELIZABETH: "Condition and rights of women."

LUCRETIA: "To be held at Seneca Falls . . . "

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JANE: But when? Saturday next week?

LUCRETIA: (*Thinks and makes her decision.*) It will have to be on Wednesday and Thursday of next week.

JANE: In the middle of the week? Who will come? Harvest time is just beginning and the poor women will be at work in the factories.

LUCRETIA: Even if only a handful of women can attend, we will have done something.

MARY ANN: "To be held at Seneca Falls, Wednesday and Thursday, the 19th and 20th of July, current."

LUCRETIA: "Commencing at 10:00 A.M."

MARTHA: Everyone is encouraged to attend.

ELIZABETH: No. Only women should be invited. Our purpose is to discuss the rights of women.

LUCRETIA: Perhaps we could follow the Hicksite model and have a separate meeting for women. Then we could open the meeting to men on the second day.

ELIZABETH: If we agree on our purposes, it will be beneficial to hear how men respond to us.

MARTHA: I agree. First with women and then men.

LUCRETIA: How does this sound? "During the first day the meeting will be exclusively for women, who are earnestly invited to attend. The public generally are invited on the second day."

MARY ANN: (*Reading it over.*) It's perfect. Now all we have to do is arrange for the chapel.

LUCRETIA: There's much more to do! If we do not have a plan, something to begin our discussions, we will only waste our time.

MARTHA: Blackstone's commentaries on the *Law of Nature* should have something we can use to get us started.

LUCRETIA: As well as Garrison's covenant of the American Anti-Slavery Association.

ELIZABETH: I'll review my husband's law books. Even as a girl in my father's chambers, I would mark all of the laws that deprived women of their rights.

JANE: My head is spinning! Who will we find to speak for us?

ELIZABETH: Lucretia Mott will speak for us!

(*Lucretia looks at her questioningly.*)

You are well known for your eloquent speeches and many of the men and women in our region have never heard a woman speak in public.

LUCRETIA: "Lucretia Mott of Philadelphia, and other ladies and gentlemen will address the convention."

MARY ANN: Who?

LUCRETIA: There is Martha, my husband, James, Elizabeth . . .

ELIZABETH: But I was raised to be a lady. I've never spoken in public. It was never allowed.

LUCRETIA: It was thee who ignited the fire here today, Elizabeth, surely thee can do it again next week at our convention. And I'll invite my good friend Frederick Douglass of Rochester.

MARY ANN: We can meet at my house on Sunday to draft our document.

ELIZABETH: It's settled. I'll deliver this announcement to the *Courier* office on my way home. Each of us will write down the injustices we have observed. Search your hearts for issues that have troubled you.

LUCRETIA: And bring any documents that might be of help.

(*There is much excitement as **the scene ends.***)

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(A lighting change as the women gather at the M'Clintock home the following Sunday. The large round table at which they sit is where the Sentiments and Resolutions will be written and is on display in the Women's Rights Historic National Park in Seneca Falls. MARY ANN again serves as scribe.)

MARY ANN: It was so exciting to see our announcement in the *Courier* on Friday. And then I realized that the convention is in only three days and we have nothing prepared.

MARTHA: I've been thinking and thinking and can't think of a place to begin.

JANE: I feel as though we are trying to build a steam engine without any idea of how one works.

ELIZABETH: We should begin where working men have begun: where America began, with a Declaration of Independence.

MARTHA: It can be our declaration of rights.

LUCRETIA: Garrison coined a phrase that we can borrow. Let us call it our Declaration of Rights and Sentiments.

ELIZABETH: That sets a fine tone.

(General agreement.)

I counted fifteen major points in the Declaration of Independence. I think we should come up with fifteen points for our declaration as well.

MARTHA: Women have been deprived of profitable employment opportunities and wages . . .

JANE: Deprived of opportunities in education and the professions . . .

MARY ANN: Men have deprived women of any legal rights . . .

LUCRETIA: Women have been denied equal moral obligation . . .

ELIZABETH: Denied the right to divorce . . .

MARY ANN: Elizabeth!

JANE: And to the custody of their children.

ELIZABETH: All of these things undermine women's self confidence. And there is one political solution to all of these social problems. When women are enfranchised with the right to vote, all of the other problems can be solved.

MARY ANN: *(She is shocked.)* The right to vote!

LUCRETIA: Elizabeth! We could be a laughing stock if we demand suffrage for women.

ELIZABETH: When Henry and I honeymooned in Ireland, the great freedom fighter Daniel O'Connell gave us some very sound advice. Always demand more than you expect to get, eventually the outrageous will seem reasonable.

LUCRETIA: That demand could cost us the support of every other issue, no matter how slight.

ELIZABETH: Think about it for now. Women are individuals endowed with the same natural rights possessed by men. Ultimately we must demand the right to vote. Only then can we achieve equality under the law.

MARY ANN: We have a good working list. How shall we begin?

ELIZABETH: The Declaration of Independence is our foundation, let us begin with it.

(She reads from her copy, adapting as needed as she reads.)

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"When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolved the political bands which have connected them with another . . . "

MARTHA: But we are not dissolving any political bands.

LUCRETIA: But we are assuming a new position.

ELIZABETH: What if we revised it this way. " . . . it becomes necessary for one group of people to assume a different position than that they have assumed . . . "

LUCRETIA: It's a start.

ELIZABETH: "A descent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes that impel them to the separation." To the separation . . . We could change that to " . . . declare the causes that impel them to such a course of action."

LUCRETIA: That is good, so long as the individual parts are in agreement with our final sentiments.

ELIZABETH: I can take it home and work on a final draft so long as we are in agreement as to principle.

(Reading again.) "We hold these truths to be self evident; that all men are created equal . . . "

LUCRETIA: That all men and women . . .

JANE: *(Questioning.)* All men and women?

MARY ANN: *(Trying to see how it feels.)* All men and women . . .

ELIZABETH: *(Excited.)* All men and women!

EVERYONE: *(Form and resolved.)* That all men and all women . . . are created equal!

End of Scene

6 more pages of script to the end.