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## Civil Rights Come Alive in the Finger Lakes

by Winnie McCroy

EDGE Editor

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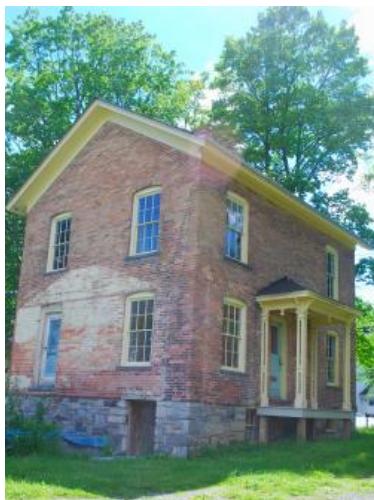
An exhibition at the National Women's Hall of Fame and Visitor Center (Source:Winnie McCroy)

As the LGBT community seeks an ever-wider net for welcoming places to visit in the face of potentially curtailed civil rights, it's nice to know that New York has a lot to offer, and not just in the city. [The Finger Lakes](#) is an ideal destination to experience the region's strong history of suffragists and abolitionists as the state celebrates the centennial of women's right to vote.

"There is a word sweeter than mother, home, or heaven -- that word is liberty," was the rallying cry of [Matilda Joslyn Gage](#), a suffragette and abolitionist who lived in Fayetteville, New York. Although she devoted her life to creating the foundation for the feminist movement, she was mostly written out of women's history, because of her strident views on the separation of church and state, and her advocacy for the Native Americans of

the nearby Onondaga Nation.

Gays may be more familiar with Gage's son-in-law, Frank L. Baum, who wrote "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz." The original "Friend of Dorothy," Baum was influenced by Gage's beliefs, including numerous strong female characters in his books, from Glinda to Dorothy. Baum's work and related ephemera are scattered throughout [The Gage Home](#), a hands-on museum where docents welcome guests to touch things, read the books, play the piano, and of course, to try on those ruby slippers. The home was also a stop on the Underground Railroad; a close eye reveals a hiding place behind a bookcase.



Harriet Tubman House (Source:Winnie McCroy)

### The Harriet Tubman House

A few towns over, in Auburn, you can learn a lot more about the Underground Railroad by its famed conductor at the [Harriet Tubman Home](#). Born in 1822 in Maryland, Tubman was one of nine children. A childhood injury led to temporal lobe epilepsy, which made Tubman prone to seizures and blackouts. She said that she felt the spirit of God giving her visions during these spells, and some believe that's why she never got caught during her 13 trips ferrying nearly 100 enslaved people to freedom.

Tubman was active in the Civil War as a scout, spy, nurse, and cook, and was the first and only woman to lead troops into battle, earning her the nickname "General Tubman," and the right to be buried in Fort Hill Cemetery, with full military honors.

After the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act, Tubman moved to upstate New York and married a much younger man. He and his brothers rebuilt her house in brick after the original wooden one burned, and she opened it to her family and borders before later establishing a home for the elderly, and the John Brown Infirmary. For one who started with so little, she achieved so much.

## Seneca Falls

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National Women's Hall of Fame and Visitor Center. (Source:Winnie McCroy)



The National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House

into their historical contributions.

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Twenty miles away in Seneca Falls, the "birthplace of women's rights," Elizabeth Cady Stanton and others were fighting against slavery, and for universal suffrage. It was in July 1848 at [Wesleyan Chapel](#) where they organized the first Women's Rights Convention, adopting the Declaration of Sentiments with 12 resolutions, including women's suffrage.

The Chapel and the neighboring National Women's Hall of Fame and Visitor Center are all part of the [Women's Rights National Historical Park](#), a great destination for kids and adults alike. From July 13-17, Seneca Falls Convention Days will promote a full week of events around women's civil rights, with speeches, tours, trivia, live music and more.

About an hour away in Rochester, [The National Susan B. Anthony Museum & House](#) does an excellent job of capturing the courageous work of the intrepid civil rights leader. Arrested in 1872 for voting, Anthony made sure that everyone knew of her civil disobedience by making 50 speeches about it, and refusing to pay the \$100 fine.

Bedecked in her trademark red shawl and alligator bag and her famed black lace dress, Anthony was extremely savvy about creating her personal brand, using her fame to solicit donations for the suffragette movement, and connecting other activists to network. You could call her the original social marketer!

Rochester was savvy enough to buy Anthony's house in 1945, and take steps to restore it into a museum. Although many of the furnishings are reproductions, her mother's original rocking chair resides in the front parlor where she was arrested, and her famed black silk dress stands next to the bed in which she died.

Anthony was friends with Frederick Douglass, who reportedly brought his family to picnics in her backyard, and believed in the value of each human being, despite some statements about women getting the right to vote over black men. Her nearby gravesite is still a popular destination; on Election Day 2016, 10,000 people flocked there to put their "I Voted" sticker on her grave.

Before The Women's March on Washington or the Human Rights Campaign, there were these courageous women who defied the status quo to ensure liberty and justice for all. A visit to [upstate New York](#) offers visitors the opportunity to dive deep



spirits, terrific restaurants, and plenty of history and culture to work up an appetite.

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Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

## Summer 2017

This story is part of our special report titled "Summer 2017." Want to read more? [Here's the full list.](#)



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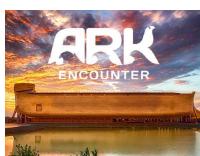
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