

# Two Hundred Years on the Erie Canal

## 1817-2017

See the online exhibit at [NYHeritage.org](http://NYHeritage.org)

### Moving Ideas

Not only did the Erie Canal open the American interior to increased trade, commerce, and settlement, it also became an "information superhighway" for new ideas. Social reforms like abolition, women's rights, utopianism, and various religious movements thrived along the Erie Canal and beyond.

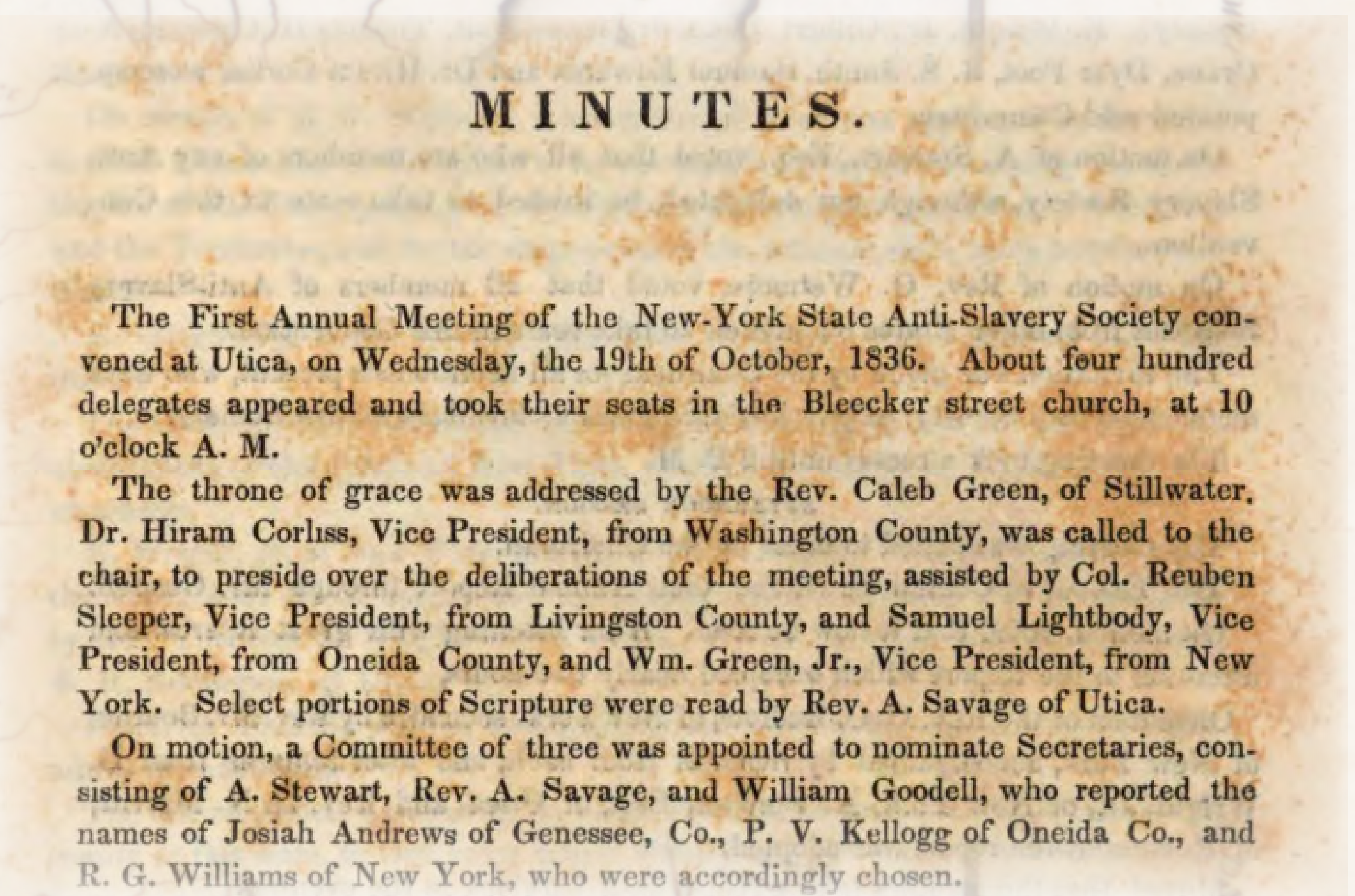


Just two years after the Erie Canal opened in 1825, slavery was abolished in New York State. The Canal acted as a route on the Underground Railroad, helping move freedom-seekers to Canada or cities along the Canal.

Map showing routes of the Underground Railway in Central and Western New York. Image from Cornell University

In October 1835, the first convention of the Anti-Slavery Society took place in Utica, NY.

Proceedings of the first annual meeting of the New-York State Anti-slavery Society. Image from the University of Minnesota



**MINUTES.**

The First Annual Meeting of the New-York State Anti-Slavery Society convened at Utica, on Wednesday, the 19th of October, 1835. About four hundred delegates appeared and took their seats in the Bleeker street church, at 10 o'clock A. M.

The throne of grace was addressed by the Rev. Caleb Green, of Stillwater, Dr. Hiram Corliss, Vice President, from Washington County, was called to the chair, to preside over the deliberations of the meeting, assisted by Col. Reuben Sleeper, Vice President, from Livingston County, and Samuel Lightbody, Vice President, from Oneida County, and Wm. Green, Jr., Vice President, from New York. Select portions of Scripture were read by Rev. A. Savage of Utica.

On motion, a Committee of three was appointed to nominate Secretaries, consisting of A. Stewart, Rev. A. Savage, and William Goodell, who reported the names of Josiah Andrews of Genessee, Co., P. V. Kellogg of Oneida Co., and R. G. Williams of New York, who were accordingly chosen.

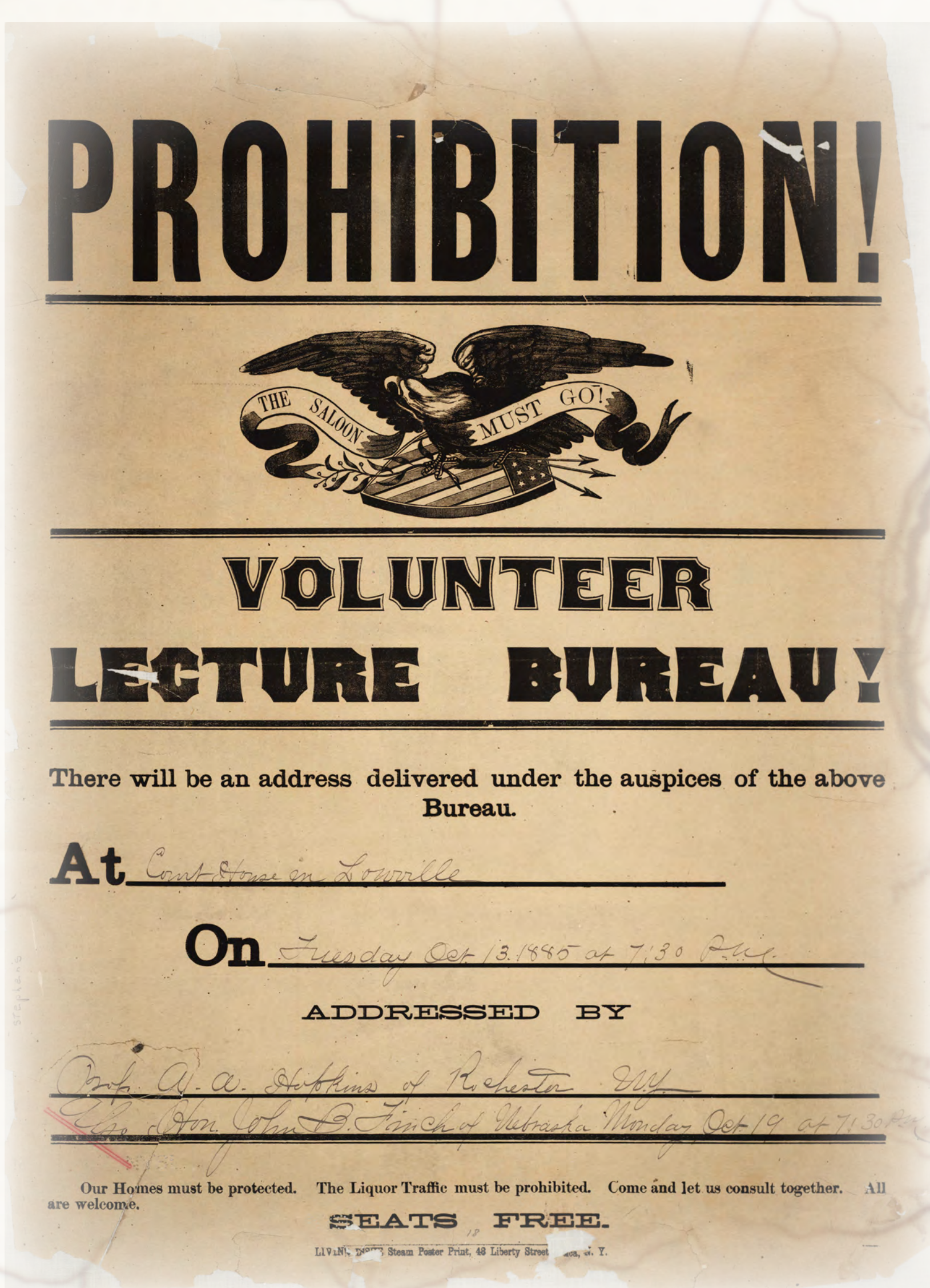


Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony were two of America's most important leaders in the 19th century's quest for women's rights. Both had been active in the anti-slavery and temperance movements before turning to build a mass movement for women's rights. The very first convention held to advocate for women's rights took place in Seneca Falls, NY, within 12 miles of the Erie Canal, with over 400 women in attendance.

Left to Right: Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony. Image from the National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution

Art and literature reflected a growing disillusionment with the commercialization and industrialization changing the landscape around them. The artists of the Hudson River School, including Bierstadt, Cole, Durand and Church, attempted to capture the lost sense of the sublime and untamed wilderness that had characterized the American West before the intrusion of "civilization."

Dover Plains, by Asher B. Durand. Image from the American Art Museum, Smithsonian Institution



The movement for the prohibition of alcohol was also widespread in the Erie Canal corridor and long before national prohibition, many canalside communities, such as Port Byron, NY, voted to go "dry" and ban alcohol.

Poster for announcing prohibition meetings, Utica, NY. Image from New York State Library

Watermark: Map of proposed Canal from Lake Erie to the Hudson River; 1817. State University of New York at Fredonia Archives & Special Collections; Municipal Archives of Amsterdam; Nederlandse Document Reproductie B.V.



Sponsored by a Humanities New York Action Grant

