

Suffragettes

Read the excerpt and then answer the questions using specific details from the text.

In 1893, it was illegal for women to vote. Many women from a variety of different backgrounds banded together to try to change that. They were called suffragettes. Two of those women were named Lucretia Mott and Matilda Joslyn Gage.

Lucretia Mott was raised a Quaker, which is a religion that believes that all people are equal. She worked hard to end slavery and later, she also worked to get women the right to vote.

Matilda Joslyn Gage was a suffragette who never asked for the right to vote. She accused the federal government of not protecting women in their right as citizens from the states where it was illegal for women to vote. She risked arrest by attempting to vote. She also kept diaries and journals which documented all that she experienced. Below are some excerpts of her journals that describe her experience at the national women's right convention in Syracuse, New York.

Wearing her best dress, twenty-six-year-old Matilda took her older daughter Helen, who was almost seven. "I prepared my speech," she wrote later, "and going to the convention, sat near the front." Two thousand people, from eight states and Canada, packed the Syracuse City Hall.

Matilda watched as ... thirty-nine-year-old Lucy Stone, in short dress and bobbed hair, read the convention's "call," or statement of purpose. Stone said she hoped that everyone present, even if opposed to new demands by women, would take part in the debates and help to find truth. Lucretia Mott was elected president of the convention. From the back of the room she rose, a slight woman, age fifty-nine, in plain Quaker clothing.

"Mrs. Mott ... walked forward to the platform," Matilda wrote later, "her sweet face and placid manners at once winning the confidence of her audience."

Like the rest of the crowd, Matilda knew that in the Society of Friends, or Quakers, women were equals with men, with the right to speak in public. "[Mrs. Mott] was well fitted," Matilda said, "to guide the proceedings and encourage the expression of opinions from those to whom public speaking was an untried experiment."

Susan B. Anthony, a Quaker and former school teacher from Rochester, New York, needed no particular encouragement. Like Matilda, she was attending her first women's rights convention. Formerly active in the temperance movement, she had switched causes after learning that women were not allowed to speak at temperance meetings. Age thirty-two, she was tall and thin, with sharp features and a contralto voice. Susan B. Anthony read a letter to the convention from her friend Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who could not travel to Syracuse because she was pregnant with her fifth child.

Matilda agreed with the proposals in Stanton's letter: that women who owned property should refuse to pay taxes until they could vote, that men and women should be educated together, and that the abuse of women in the name of religion should be investigated.

She listened to more speeches, waiting “with a palpitating heart,” she said, “until I obtained courage to go upon the platform, probably to the interference of arrangements, for I knew nothing about the proper course for me to take.” Trembling in every limb and holding her daughter’s hand, she made her way toward the stage, where Lucretia Mott welcomed her and invited her to speak and she gave a speech.

Matilda’s research, and her passion for her subject, amazed the audience. On several occasions they interrupted her with applause, surprising her in turn.

“... ONWARD!” she cried, at the end of her speech, “Let the Truth prevail!” As the crowd applauded, Lucretia Mott again took the podium, obviously delighted with Matilda.

“The paper is so fine,” she said, “I fear the young lady was not heard distinctly by the audience, and I move that it be published.”

The audience cheered approval.

“I was so sweetly welcomed by the sainted Lucretia Mott,” Matilda wrote later, “who gave me a place, and when I had finished speaking, referred so pleasantly to what I had said, to her my heart turned always with truest affection.”

- Based on the article by Angelia Carpenter (newyorkhistoryblog.org)

1. What did Matilda Joslyn Gage think of Lucretia Mott? _____

2. What role did Lucretia Mott have and why did Gage think she was a good fit? _____

3. How did Lucretia Mott help Matilda Joslyn Gage? _____

4. Do you think Gage and Mott worked well together? Why or why not? _____
