



**GENESEE VALLEY CHAPTER
MILITARY OFFICERS
ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
NEWS BULLETIN #5
SUBJECT: ONTARIO COUNTY COURTHOUSE
AND THE SUSAN B. ANTHONY TRIAL**

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Canandaigua is home to one of the historically significant courthouses in New York State, Ontario County Courthouse. It was built in 1858 and renovated in 1908. Henry Searl was the architect and he went on to be the supervising architect of the U.S. Treasury. The courthouse is a two-story Greek Revival building and is entered on the National Registry of Historic Places.

Apart from being an architectural gem, the courthouse is famous for having hosted the trial of Susan B. Anthony on June 17, 1873. She was on trial for “illegal voting.” In 1872 women did not have the right to vote. Anthony had been a politically active proponent for women’s right to vote and was well known to election officials in her county of residence. She was permitted to register in Rochester after reading sections of the 14th and 15th amendments of the Constitution to local election officials. On election day she reportedly voted a straight Republican ticket. According to Anthony, she voted for President Ulysses Grant because he said he would “promise to give the demands of women a respectful hearing” and the Republican Party platform stated it was “mindful of its obligations to the women of America.”

The pretrial publicity forced the United States attorney to petition for a change of venue from Rochester. The request was granted and Ontario County Courthouse was selected as the new trial site. The packed courtroom included former President Millard Fillmore. Anthony’s primary defense attorney was Henry R. Selden, a former New York State Court of Appeals judge. After she was charged with violating the election law, the presiding judge ordered bail at \$500. Selden paid the bail which displeased Anthony. When she queried him on why he paid the bail, he answered “I could not see a woman I respect put in jail.” The trial lasted two days. Anthony was found guilty and the judge asked her if she had anything to say before punishment was imposed. Her strategy was finally paying off. Now was her opportunity to tell the entire country women were getting a raw deal and it was time to do something about it.

“Yes, your Honor, I have many things to say; for in your ordered verdict of guilty, you have trampled underfoot every vital principle of our government. My natural rights, my civil rights, my political rights

are all alike ignored. Robbed of the fundamental privileges of citizenship, I am degraded from the status of a citizen to that of a subject; not only myself individually, but all of my sex are, by your Honor's verdict, doomed to political subjection under this so-called Republican government. Had your Honor submitted my case to the jury, as clearly your duty, even then I should have just cause to protest, for not one of those men was my peer, but each and every man of them was a political superior, hence in no way my peer."

Her sentence was a \$100 fine. The election inspectors who allowed her to vote were also tried, convicted, fined and imprisoned. Gifts of money poured in for Anthony. She used the funds to pay her attorney and the fines of the election inspectors who had been prosecuted. She never paid her \$100 fine.

It all happened in 1873 at the Ontario County Courthouse which is straight up the hill from the Inn on the Lake. Look for Lady Justice perched on the dome as you get near the top of the hill.



Ontario County Courthouse

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