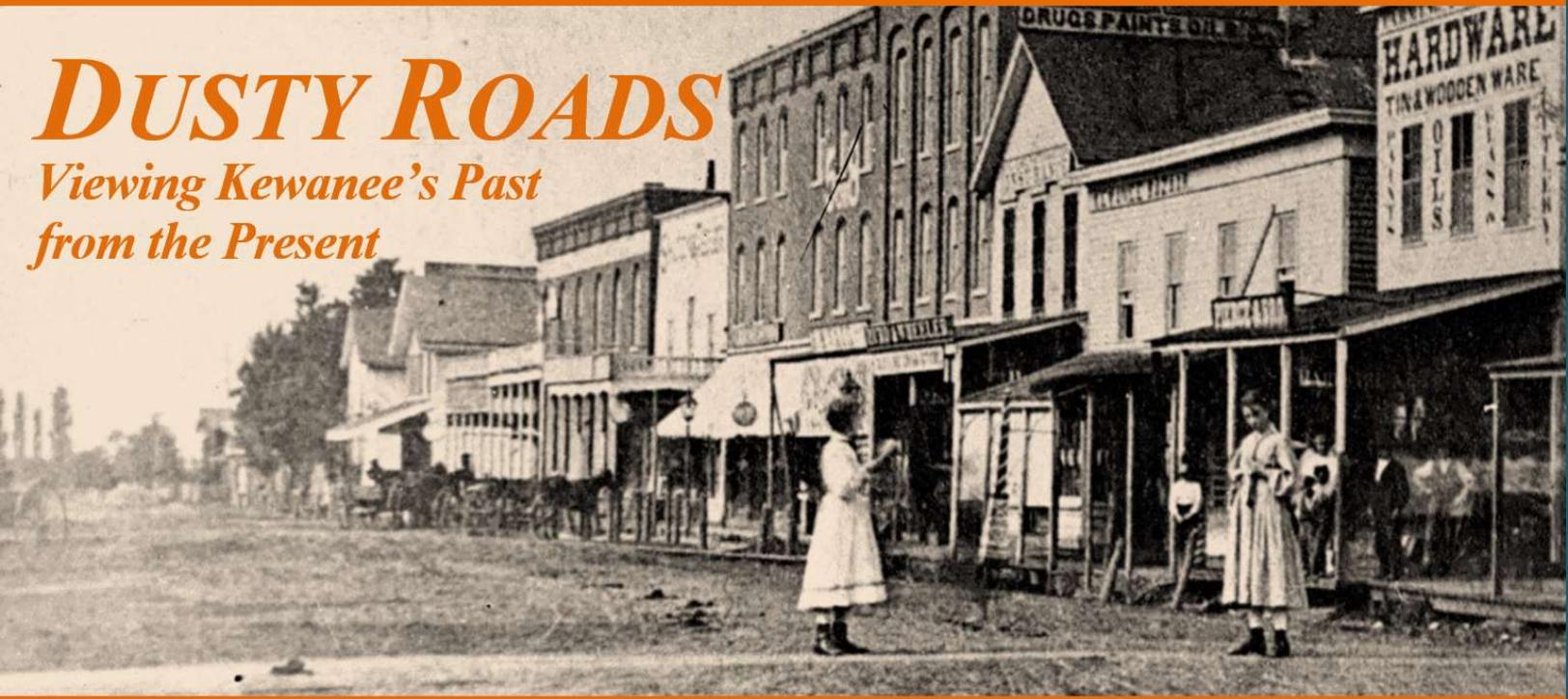


# DUSTY ROADS

*Viewing Kewanee's Past  
from the Present*



*by Dean Karau*

*March 2020*

## March is Women's History Month

**Lest We Forget, Women Are Responsible for at Least Half of Our History**

In 1848, Kewanee didn't exist, and it would be six years before it sprang to life practically overnight. The Wethersfield Colony, founded in 1836, had about seven hundred souls, evenly split between what became Wethersfield and Kewanee townships.

Most people in the two townships lived and worked on small subsistence farms, trying to eke out a living. The country had suffered from a major financial panic, from a year after the inception of the colony well into the 1840s, and the colony suffered along with everyone else.

The village of Wethersfield was just beginning to develop. There were a couple of blacksmith shops, a general store and warehouse, a scattering of homes. There still was no real church building, just a small log cabin which doubled as a school. The saw and grist mills had been disassembled and sold to interests elsewhere. The post office was still located at Sylvester Blish's home and inn, 200 yards south of today's

Division and West Streets, almost a mile from the center of the village.

The men worked the farms from dawn to dusk during the growing season and then took any crops not needed to far-flung markets in Peoria, Stephenson (Rock Island), and Hennepin. Some mined coal found south of the village. Others logged the timber of Big Barren Grove to the north. Still others provided specialized services to their neighbors – blacksmithing, wheelwrighting, merchandising.



*Pioneer Rhoda Cheney Blish,  
wife of Sylvester Blish*

In addition to helping the men in the fields, the women ran the households. They labored from morning till dusk and then by candlelight into the evening. They spun the wool raised on the farms into yarn, dyed it, and then knitted it into stockings or mittens or wove it into cloth from which they made blankets and clothing. They strained the milk and kept the crocks, pans and pails sweet and clean. They made butter and cheeses.

They cooked all the meals.

Yet for everything women did to make the colony prosper, in 1848, they had no say in governing it, or in governing the county, the state, and the country.

But little did they know about the happenings back East and the profound changes which would occur within their lifetimes and their children's lifetimes.

In 1848, Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton organized the Seneca Fall Convention, attended by hundreds of people including noted abolitionist Frederick Douglass. Stanton drafted a "Declaration of Sentiments" she presented at the meeting, demanding rights for women by inserting the word "woman" into the language of the Declaration of Independence and included a list of 18 woman-specific demands, including divorce, property and custody rights, as well as the right to vote.



*Lucretia Mott*

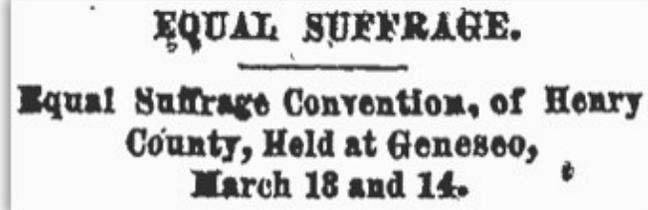


*Elizabeth Cady Stanton*

Demanding the vote launched the women's suffrage movement. Mott, born and raised a Quaker - a religion that stressed equality of all people under God - said that she grew up "so thoroughly imbued with women's rights that it was the most important question [of her life]." After the convention the two women, joined by many others, continued to crusade for women's equality.

Illinois' first suffrage association was formed in 1855 in Earlville in LaSalle County.

In 1869, Illinois suffrage conventions connected Illinois to the national movement, and led to the first statewide suffrage organization, the Illinois Woman Suffrage Association (IWSA).



*March 19, 1884 Kewanee Courier*

Undoubtedly, Kewanee women were involved in women's suffrage not long after the village was founded. However, the first reference found to Kewaneeans' participation was at the Henry County Equal Suffrage Convention held in Geneseo on March 13 and 14. Kewaneean Sallie M. Miles was elected treasurer and Kewaneean Emma Hall was elected one of the vice-presidents.

Then, in 1913, Illinois enacted the Presidential Suffrage Bill, which gave Illinois women the right to vote in federal and municipal elections not otherwise restricted to men under the Illinois constitution. With the enactment of that law, Illinois became the first state east of the Mississippi to give women such right to vote for President of the United States.



*Believed to be Emma Hall in her later years*

Finally, on May 21, 1919, U.S. Representative James R. Mann, a Republican from Illinois and chairman of the Suffrage Committee, moved the adoption of the Susan Anthony Amendment to give women the right to vote. The bill passed the House 304 to 89 - 42 votes above the required two-thirds majority.

On June 4, 1919, the U.S. Senate passed the 19th Amendment by two votes over its two-thirds required majority, 56-25. The amendment was then sent to the states for ratification.

Within six days of the beginning of the ratification process, Illinois was one of the first three states to

ratify the amendment. On August 18, 1920, Tennessee became the 36th state to ratify, and on August 26, 1920, the 19th Amendment was certified by U.S. Secretary of State, finally giving women the right to vote across the country.

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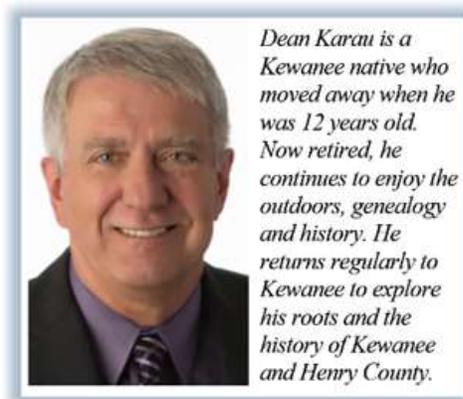
Women's History Month began as a national celebration in 1981 when Congress authorized the President to proclaim a week in March as "Women's History Week." Over the next five years, Congress continued to pass joint resolutions designating a week in March as "Women's History Week."

In response to a 1987 petition from the National Women's History Project, Congress passed a law designating all of March as "Women's History Month." Between 1988 and 1994, Congress passed

additional resolutions requesting and authorizing the president to proclaim March of each year as Women's History Month.

Since 1995, Presidents Clinton, Bush, Obama, and Trump have issued a series of annual proclamations designating the month of March as "Women's History Month."

To learn more about women's suffrage and Women's History Month, go to the website sponsored by The Library of Congress, National Archives and Records Administration, National Endowment for the Humanities, National Gallery of Art, National Park Service, Smithsonian Institution and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, located at <https://womenshistorymonth.gov>.



*Dean Karau is a Kewanee native who moved away when he was 12 years old. Now retired, he continues to enjoy the outdoors, genealogy and history. He returns regularly to Kewanee to explore his roots and the history of Kewanee and Henry County.*

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