

## Susan B. Anthony (Birthplace) House Opens

*February 11, 2010*

*By: Peter McLaughlin Special to the Eagle*

ADAMS -- At 52 years of age, Susan B. Anthony became a criminal -- arrested, put on trial and found guilty. Her crime? She was a woman, and she voted in a presidential election. The judge ruled her incompetent to testify on her own behalf because of her gender and fined her \$100.

If it please your honor," she said at her sentencing, "I will never pay a dollar of this unjust penalty." And she never did.

This polite intractability was the trademark of the feisty native of Adams, who battled the male-dominated culture of America for her entire adult life to win equal rights for women, especially the right to vote. But when that right was finally won with the passing of the 19th Amendment in 1920 -- bringing true democracy to half the population of the United States -- the cheering crowds were missing their most important voice. Even though it was called the "Susan B. Anthony Amendment"; Anthony wasn't there to enjoy the victory. She had died 14 years before it was ratified.

The turbulent life of Susan B. Anthony, from the time she was born to Quaker parents in a modest house on East Road in Adams to her days as a world renowned crusader for social justice, is compellingly told in a new museum opening next week in the East Road house in which Anthony was born.

The Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum will open on Monday for a one-week preview and then remain open by appointment until it begins full-time hours in May.

A self-guided tour through the house reveals that suffrage was just one of Anthony's passions. An exhibition room with wall displays and memorabilia shows that Anthony felt just as strongly and worked with equal passion to eliminate slavery in America and to ban the sale of alcohol. Getting women equal pay with men and giving women the right to own their own property were also high on her list of wrongs that needed to be righted.

"After the Civil War," said the Rochester, N.Y.-based Carol Crossed, owner of the museum and president of its board, "an amendment was added to the Constitution that gave black men the right to vote. Anthony and her fellow suffragists fully expected that subsequent amendments would give women the same rights. They didn't. Anthony and other suffragists felt betrayed." So for more than 50 years, black men voted alongside white men while women sat on the sidelines, disenfranchised. For Anthony, this was the most disappointing and disillusioning time of her life.

Eugene Michalenko, president of the Adams Historical Society, said that the new Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum is the first significant monument to Anthony that Adams has seen since Anthony left town as a 61 2-year-old.

"There are no statues of her in Adams,"; he said, ";no parks named after her, no schools with her name above the door. The hope in Adams now is that the new museum will make Anthony better known, her accomplishments more appreciated and her hometown an attraction for tourists."; James Leitch, of Westall Architects in Williamstown, who did the renovation drawings, said the small, buff-colored, eight-room house, built by Anthony's father in 1818, is in the Quaker-Federal architectural style.

"At first, it needed a new section of roof and the rotting sills had to be reinforced," said Leitch. "Then the interior walls were made to look just as they did when the Anthonys lived there." Craftsmen scraped off six layers of paint to reveal four different shades of green on the woodwork, everything from light celery to dark moss, from sea foam to olive, he said. They duplicated the colors and put them on the woodwork while all the walls were painted the original white and ceilings got a coat with a warm yellow tone.

With sun pouring in through generous sized windows, the overall effect is surprisingly cheerful, making a good stage for the period furniture, 19th-century kitchen tools, quilts, antique decorations and exhibits found throughout the house.

"As a child, Susan B. Anthony loved to spend time in the front room," said Crossed, "where her father, who owned a textile mill, operated a small store for employees and neighbors. Beside cheese and cider and other staples he also sold liquor -- a substance forbidden to members of the Quaker community."

When the Quakers learned about Mr. Anthony's side business, they reprimanded him. From that day on, he became a strict and active prohibitionist, just as his daughter would be.

As an adult, Susan Anthony was a rather stern looking but handsome woman with clear, hazel eyes and dark hair which she wore combed smoothly over her ears and bound in a coil in back. She never married, focusing all her efforts on her crusades.

Anthony was a warrior, at war with the culture that treated women as second-class citizens. Her enemies derided her mercilessly. She was vilified from both the pulpit and the press and encountered hostile mobs and threats on her life.

Crossed said that surprisingly, many women were against giving women the right to vote."They thought it would lead to the breakdown of the family," she said.

In the museum, large panels describe Anthony's involvement in the temperance movement, abolition, suffrage and women's rights in the workplace. Cabinets contain various items such as a small metal hammer used by prohibitionist women workers in a candy factory for smashing the

windows of drinking establishments, and anti-suffrage posters like one aimed at men that says: "Once Women Get The Vote, your life is doomed." On the pro side is a poster saying "Women bring all voters into the world. Let women vote."

Both Crossed and the museum's executive director, Sally Winn, also have long histories in activist women's organizations. Crossed is a member of Feminists Choosing Life of New York, a nonprofit, grassroots organization based in Rochester, N.Y. Winn was recently vice president of Feminists for Life of America, a Washington, D.C., also an anti-abortion group.

When asked if this meant the Museum would be a platform for an anti-abortion agenda, Crossed said, "The pro-life views expressed in Anthony's newspaper, 'The Revolution,' will not be excluded from the exhibition. This vision represented a very small part of Anthony's life, and while it will be presented, it will not be an overwhelming theme of the birthplace. Anthony's own anti-abortion stance is mentioned in just one of the museum's 10 exhibits."

No matter how viciously Anthony was attacked, her message was unwavering. Her battle cry, seen on literature and the masthead of her newspaper, was simple and direct. It read: "Men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less."

If you go ...

What: The Susan B. Anthony Birthplace Museum

Where: 67 East Road, Adams

When: Opening on Monday, Anthony's 190th birthday.

The museum will stay open through Sunday, Feb. 21, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and then will be open by appointment until full-time hours begin in May.

Admission: Free

Information: [susanbanthonybirthplace.org](http://susanbanthonybirthplace.org) or (413) 743-7121.