



Aunt Susan's PLACE

BY KATE CULKIN

A suffrage foremother is honored in a now faded architectural gem in the Bronx.

In 1950, Susan B. Anthony became the eighth woman elected into the Hall of Fame for Great Americans, the first hall of fame in the United States. Born in 1820, Anthony famously fought for women's suffrage from the 1850s until her death in 1906. As one of American history's most celebrated women, her selection might seem a forgone conclusion. Anthony was elected, however, only after a 30-year campaign driven by women who connected their accomplish-

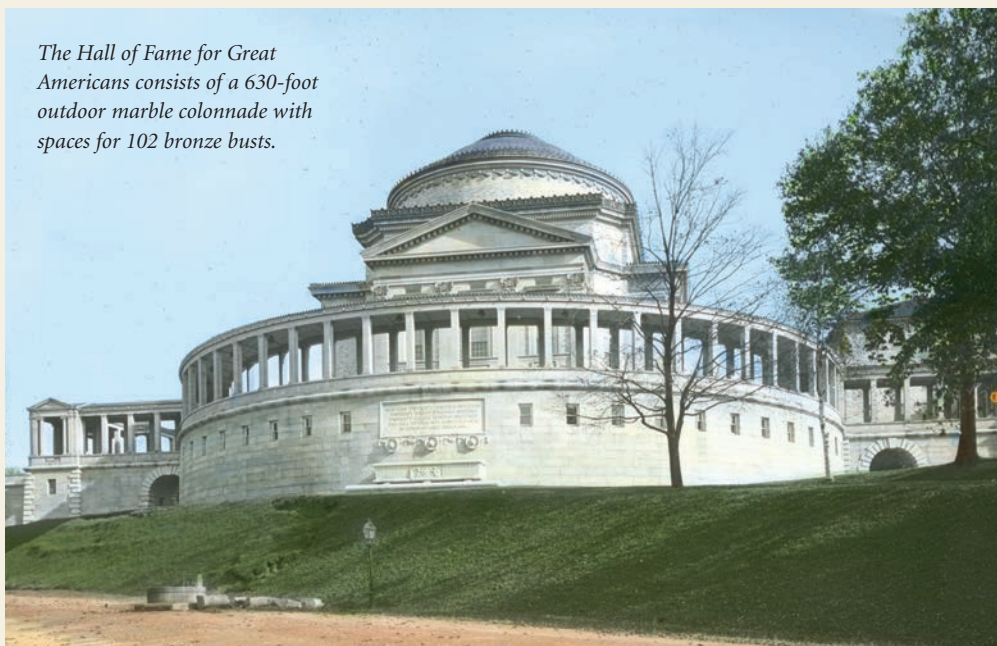
ments and opportunities to Anthony's legacy.

The Hall of Fame held a prominent place in American culture throughout much of the twentieth century. Located on the Bronx Community College campus, the former uptown home of New York University, the 630-foot outdoor marble colonnade with spaces for bronze busts of 102 honorees was dedicated in 1900. NYU Chancellor Henry McCracken hoped the hall, designed by Stanford White, would help the school develop a national reputation.

Honorees had to be American citizens who had been dead for at least ten years and "distinguished themselves by their accomplishments in the arts, sciences and other pursuits directed toward the betterment of mankind." Politicians, military leaders, authors, musicians, artists, educators, scientists, and inventors make up the honorees, including George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Orville and Wilbur Wright.

The Hall of Fame for Great Americans consists of a 630-foot outdoor marble colonnade with spaces for 102 bronze busts.

NEW YORK STATE ARCHIVES



The Hall of Fame is on the Bronx Community College Campus at University Avenue and 182nd Street in the Bronx. It is open for self-guided tours, Monday-Saturday; visitors must have a photo ID to enter the campus. Guided tours can be arranged by contacting Remo Cosentino at remo.cosentino@bcc.cuny.edu.

Last Election

The last election was held in 1976, three years after NYU sold the campus to New York City to house Bronx Community College, part of the City University of New York. The plan for NYU and the city to co-finance the hall fell apart by 1977. Neither NYU nor New York City could generate enthusiasm for the funding as they each faced financial crises. The civil rights and women's rights movements and the rise of social and cultural history, in addition, made a monument defining "Great Americans" as primarily white men seem old-fashioned and, thus, hard to promote. The hall's location in the Bronx also dissuaded visitors. A 1978 *Los Angeles Times* article notes the hall "is partly out of place, out of time and surely out of money." Periodically, groups on and off campus have proposed reviving the

elections, and the 2012 designation of the campus as a National Historical Landmark generated positive publicity. A durable natural patina means the busts remain bright with occasional buffing, but it is difficult to prioritize money for structural repairs, much less elections, over the needs of students.

Before the hall's glory faded, elections, held every five years, attracted national attention. (After 1970, they were every three years.) From 1900 through the 1970s, the American public mounted elaborate campaigns nominating those they found worthy. Approximately 100 "distinguished citizens," including university presidents, historians, scientists, authors, editors, and judges, served as electors, selecting from the names nominated by the public. In 1900, none of the nine nominated women were elected. In 1905, the electors

selected educators Mary Lyon and Emma Willard and astronomer Maria Mitchell; temperance advocate Frances Willard and Stowe followed in 1910. In 1914, the hall's administrators proposed a distinct "Hall of Fame for Women," with a separate ballot. It lasted until 1922, when, "in order to remove any semblance of discrimination, this plan was abandoned, and all questions of sex in future elections were abolished."

Long Campaign

In 1920, her first year of eligibility, Susan B. Anthony fell one vote short of being elected to the hall. In 1925, the eligibility requirement was extended from ten to twenty-five years after death, placing the Anthony campaign on hold.

Beginning in 1935, the National Federation of Business and Professional Woman's Clubs (BPW) led the charge for Anthony's nomination.

Susan Anthony

NOMINATION TO HALL OF FAME
745 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

We, the undersigned, present the name of SUSAN B. ANTHONY for nomination to the Hall of Fame. In our opinion she is one of the most outstanding women citizens of the United States.

| NAME | STREET AND NUMBER | CITY | STATE |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------|--------|
| Laura J. Somell | 5202 Funderman | S.A. | Calif. |
| Lila Loya | 2366 Fairfield | S.A. | Calif. |
| Ruth Holst | 5060 Elwood | S.A. | Calif. |
| Geneva M. Roadley | 324 W. Fairfield | Blundell | Calif. |
| Mildred M. Carlin | 1039 So. Vermont Ave. | S.A. | Calif. |
| Bernice Fiedler | 4721 Vincent Ave | S.A. | Calif. |
| Wendy D. McOrtle | 1127 N. Kensington | S.A. | Calif. |
| Ella W. Cropp | 5108 Highland | Van Nuys | Calif. |
| Luthele Austin | 5217 Hollywood Blvd | Van Nuys | Calif. |
| Harriett May Mitchell | 826 Fedra | Van Nuys | Calif. |
| Rose Carmel | 1630 Bank St. | Van Nuys | Calif. |
| Mary S. Nagle | 5103 1/2 Altura St | Van Nuys | Calif. |

Please mail to HALL OF FAME, 745 Fifth Avenue, New York City, when petition is filled or when you have all the names you can obtain.



California members of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women promoted efforts to elect Anthony in its publication, *Independent Woman*, and submitted over 50 petitions to Hall of Fame electors in 1935.

In 1935, the California clubs submitted over fifty petitions stating, "We the undersigned present the name of Susan B. Anthony for nomination to the Hall of Fame."

BPW, founded in 1919 to lobby for the interests of professional women, grew in numbers and influence over the course of its fifteen-year Anthony campaign. In 1935, the California clubs submitted over fifty petitions stating, "We the undersigned present the name of Susan B. Anthony for nomination to the Hall of Fame. In our opinion she is one of the outstanding women citizens of the United States." In 1945, Lillian Call, the second vice-president of the New York BPW, suggested Anthony's election would honor both the suffragist and modern American women for their contribution to the war effort.

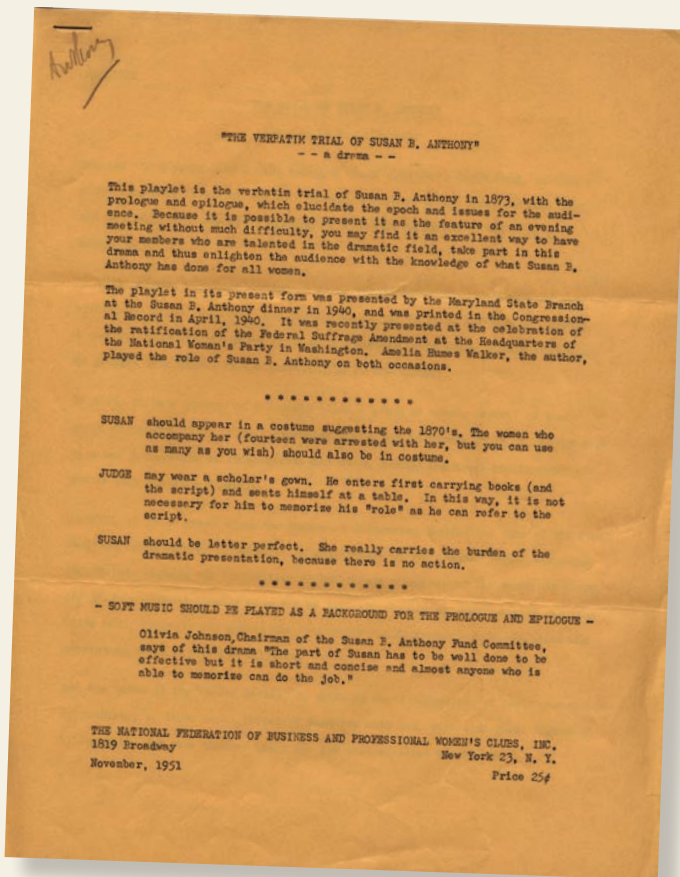
Others worked for Anthony's election as part of larger efforts to enshrine the suffragist in public memory.

The National Woman's Party, fighting for the Equal Rights Amendment, wanted to paint its members as Anthony's true heirs. Having already formed the Susan B. Anthony Memorial Committee, the party added lobbying for Anthony's election to efforts such as renaming public schools and parks and funding a sculpture for the US Capitol of Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Lucretia Mott. Working with the National Woman's Party was Rose Arnold Powell, founder of the Susan B. Anthony Forum, who was on a mission to promote and preserve Anthony's legacy. She focused on the Hall of Fame after her campaign to include Anthony on Mount Rushmore failed. The Woman's Christian

Temperance Union, having already secured a spot in the hall for its founder Frances Willard, and the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) also threw their weight behind the nomination. The DAR sent electors a profile of Anthony from its magazine, which urged women to honor Anthony by voting and lamented younger women's lack of interest in her; a handwritten note annotating the clipping explained: "She was a life member. She made out her lineage papers herself in 1898."

Honoring Women

Not all advocates for Anthony's nomination were aligned with women's organizations. In 1945, fifteen former presidents of the National Education Association argued that elect-



The National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs raised money to fund the bust of Anthony by selling copies of the play The Verbatim Trial of Susan B. Anthony for a quarter.

ing Anthony would honor women's work during World War II, as well the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Nineteenth Amendment. Their support indicates the success of efforts to promote Anthony's importance to American history; educators sent electors publications designed to help teachers integrate Anthony into their curriculum. Civic groups from Anthony's city of Rochester, New York, also chimed in, spurred after 1945 by the establishment of the Susan B. Anthony Memorial, now known as the Susan B. Anthony Museum & House.

Aunt Susan

Anthony was elected with seventy-two votes in 1950, and BPW began raising the

\$10,000 needed for the bust and unveiling ceremony. Copies of a play consisting of a "verbatim" transcript of Anthony's trial after her 1872 arrest for voting were sold for 25 cents to raise money.

BPW encouraged club members to view fundraising and personal contributions as a way to thank Anthony. A 1952 fundraising plea in the BPW publication *Independent Woman* notes:

"Let us all remind ourselves—let us remind our fellow club members—that whatever contributions we make should be regarded as merely the small payment on that debt of gratitude we owe 'Aunt Susan.' For the fact that we women of today can have the kind of education we desire, secure the

kind of work we want to do, have control of our earnings and other property, exercise control with our husbands over our own children, participate in all the rights and responsibilities of full citizenship, is due to a very great extent to the struggle which this great woman in company with others like her carried on for most of her adult life."

Modern Treatment

The money was raised within two years, allowing Anthony to be installed in 1952, along with Thomas Paine, elected in 1945.

A committee consisting of former presidents of the National Sculpture Society selected Brenda Putnam for the bust's commission. Putnam had sculpted the hall's Harriet Beecher Stowe bust in 1925; her father Herbert Putnam was the former Librarian of Congress and an elector. The *Independent Woman* says of the Anthony bust, "Although highly modern in treatment and feeling, it faithfully reproduces her features and characteristic facial expression as revealed in photographs taken at about this period in her young womanhood." The stress on the modern treatment emphasizes the link between the nineteenth-century reformer and twentieth-century womanhood that was central to the strategies for Anthony's election.

The May 18, 1952, ceremony to present the bust celebrated the suffragist, the groups championing her

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Judge Sarah T. Hughes, president of the National Federation of Business and Professional Women, and Ann Anthony Bacon, Susan B. Anthony's niece, were present for the unveiling of the bust by Brenda Putnam.

election, and the accomplishments and patriotism of modern American women. Ann Anthony Bacon, Anthony's niece, unveiled the bust. Sarah T. Hughes, president of the BPW, presented it to the hall's administrators in Gould Memorial Library, another White building that stands in front of the hall. The bust

was installed later in the week. In her remarks, Hughes paraphrased the Anthony quote selected for the bronze tablet beneath the bust, referring to Anthony's vision of a "perfect comradeship with men, not only at the fireside but in the council of nations." Hughes connected Anthony's sentiment to BPW's fight to

ensure full rights and equal professional opportunities for women, which, she argued in a reference to Cold War concerns, was critical to helping the country solve "the problems that face the world today."

Florence Ellinwood Allen, judge of the US Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit, gave the address, stressing, "All women everywhere owe their liberty first of all to Susan B. Anthony." Allen proclaimed the reformer's talent was "the supreme power of great leadership in a situation utterly without hope ... she infused these weak and scattered forces with her own magnificent courage." Allen did not mention the other leaders of the suffrage movement, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Lucy Stone. The speech thus contributes to, and is evidence of, the ascension of Anthony as the preeminent symbol of the suffrage movement in public memory. Stanton and Anthony's work on the first three volumes of *The History of Woman Suffrage* was a critical part of this elevation; issued between 1881 and 1887, the volumes centered on their contributions to the movement and minimized the work of other reformers. Stanton's publication of the two-volume *Women's Bible* in the 1890s, written with a committee to reinterpret *The Bible's* message regarding women, also alienated the mainstream suffrage movement. Anthony thus emerged

THE ARCHIVES CONNECTION

The Hall of Fame Collection at Bronx Community College consists of 110 linear feet of material. Correspondence, guidebooks, programs, pamphlets, photographs, audio recordings, and financial records document the nomination process, unveiling ceremonies, maintenance of the monument, and public outreach. While this material has been on the campus since 1973, it was only processed and made available to the public in 2016. A small portion of the collection has been digitized on the Digital Culture of Metropolitan New York website (<http://dcmny.org/content/bronx-community-college-hall-fame-collection>).

At the New York University Archives, the Records of the Hall of Fame for Great Americans includes general correspondence, administrative files, newspaper clippings, programs, and guidebooks to the hall. Hall of Fame material is also found in the records of the presidents, chancellors, treasurers, and architects of the university from 1900 through the 1970s. The Historic Photographs and Drawings and the University Publication collections contain relevant material as well.



The Daughters of the American Revolution, the City of Rochester, the National Education Association, the National Woman's Party, and the World Woman's Party were among the groups that sponsored wreaths for the unveiling ceremony.

in the twentieth century as the symbolic foremother of the suffrage movement. Her election to the Hall of Fame helped solidify the position.

While BPW funded the bust, the ceremony offered other ways for groups to honor Anthony and their role in her election. The General Federation of Women's Clubs, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the City of Rochester, the National Education Association, the National Woman's Party, the World Woman's Party, and several Unitarian groups sponsored wreaths, with a member of each laying the flowers on the stage. Brenda

Lyons, the hall's curator, organized the ceremony, soliciting long invitation lists from those associated with Anthony.

The printed program includes a biography of Anthony, pictures of her and her home, and a reproduction of a letter concerning her 1872 arrest. Lyons coordinated with Martha Taylor Howard, founder of the Susan B. Anthony Memorial, in collecting material for the program. While Anthony was going into the hall alone, her long-partnership with Stanton was acknowledged through a photograph of the two women. It would be as close as Stanton would get to the

Hall, despite nine nominations between 1920 and 1973.

Only three more women made it into the hall before elections stopped in 1976. With the possible exception of Stowe, Anthony is the hall's most famous woman, and her name often appears as evidence that there is at least some diversity in its overwhelmingly white, male demographics. Even in the hall's present-day diminished state, Anthony still looks noble in her gleaming bronze form. The bust stands as a tribute not just to Anthony, but to the women who labored to ensure she was honored as a great American. ■