Article by the late historian Kevin Wright, first published in The Bergen County Historical Society’s In Bergen’s Attic newsletter in November 2015. Permission for reprint (edited) by Deborah Powell, widow, and BCHS Past president, Museum Collection Chair and BCHS Commissioner on the Historic New Bridge Landing Park Commission. Recently, Powell was able to finish and edit Wright’s fourth book that he was writing at the time of his death in October 2016, “The Bridge That Saved a Nation, Bergen County, New Bridge and the Hackensack Valley,” publisher, Fonthill Media.
The late historian Kevin W. Wright wrote that the Valley Hotel in Tenafly stands close in rank to New Jersey’s Revolutionary War sites in deserving national (if not international) recognition and honor as cultural landmarks in humanity’s march towards equal rights and dignity for all. It was in this building where suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, accompanied by Susan B. Anthony, attempted to cast her ballot in the same room where she paid her property taxes in the national election of November 2, 1880.

Stanton moved her family from Seneca Falls, NY, to New York City in 1862 when her husband, Henry B. Stanton, accepted the job of deputy collector of the customs house for the port of New York. He resumed lawyering and also wrote for the *New York Tribune* and later *The New York Sun*.

At the conclusion of the Civil War, Elizabeth decided to test whether a woman could hold political office, running for Congress in 1866, but, being far ahead of her times, she received only 24 votes. She and close friend Susan B. Anthony launched their newspaper, *Revolution*, in New York City on January 8, 1868, continuing its publication until 1872. When the first American Woman Suffrage Convention met in Washington in 1869, Stanton lobbied for a constitutional amendment to enfranchise women. Rejected as too radical, she and Anthony formed the National Woman Suffrage Association.

Wanting to own property in her own name, Stanton used her own income to purchase lots and build a house in a part of Tenafly, New Jersey, known as Highwood Park. Many 19th century New York merchants were attracted enough by its pleasant, inexpensive properties to make the daily commute rather than endure living in New York City.

On April 20, 1868, Stanton purchased Lots 89 and 90, situated at the northeast corner of Highwood Avenue and Park Street, for $2,500 from Andrew Clerk, a Brooklyn fishhook manufacturer living in Jersey City, and his wife, Louisa. The transaction was subject to a mortgage, dated April 17, 1868, by Clerk to Mary H. Mahan for $885.1 The Clerks had owned the property for a mere three days, having bought it on April 17, 1868 from Ashbel Green and his wife Frances, for $2,000.2

The previous owners were Mary (Jay) O’Kill and her daughters Jane L. Swift and Mary Helena Mahan. The elder Mary was the daughter of Sir James Jay (1732–1815), oldest brother of John Jay, the first Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Though a physician, Sir James is remembered primarily as the inventor of an invisible ink used by George Washington and his spies during the American Revolution. Mary Jay married John Okill, a merchant, on August 13, 1807. When her father wrote his will, he stipulated her inheritance—which included nearly 1,000 acres of land in what is now Closter, New Jersey—be put in trust “free of

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1. “Bergen County Deed Book,” Volume 6, page 438
2. “Bergen County Deed Book,” Volume 6, page 435
any control of her present husband.” So, Mary divorced John in order to claim that inheritance and opened a school for young ladies. Given her strong feminist upbringing and that of her daughters, one wonders if they had any influence in bringing Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Tenafly?

According to the “Map of the City of New York And Its Vicinity,” published in 1863, Highwood Avenue did not then-exist, and there no houses were depicted east of Engle Street, in the vicinity of the present intersection of Park Street and Highwood Avenue. Therefore, it is safe to say Elizabeth Cady Stanton built her home in Tenafly in 1868—a fact confirmed by its architectural style—naming it “Cedar Hill.”

After visiting in October 1869, the New York correspondent for the Cincinnati Inquirer described the Stanton Tenafly home as “a pretty little brown cottage nestling charmingly among the firs and cedars on a hill overlooking the town. It is an unpretentious house, with a Mansard roof, a small veranda and a bow window at one side. There are flowers dotted about, a hammock slung to a couple of magnificent oaks on the lawn, and vines carelessly clambering over picturesque stumps.” The famed suffragist greeted her guest in “a pleasant parlor, small and quiet in tone, to be sure, but full of refinement. Music books and pictures, stereotyped but expressive. On the wall on one corner is a queer mixture of little portraits—Wendell, Phillips, Horatio Seymour, Gerritt Smith, Calhoun and Clay.” The charming hostess next ushered the correspondent into “a charming little library opening upon the veranda and seats us by a window, from whence we can see the distant palisades, the
Orange Mountains and the roofs of Newark glowing in the sunlight. Dedicated entirely to her life’s cause, the motherly suffragist employed a model housekeeper, who reputedly made “the most delicious bread and butter imaginable.”

Stanton attracted not only journalists to her suburban abode, but also newspaper editors and many leading social reformers. She composed many lectures and letters here, undertaking some of her most important work, including writing the “Declaration of Rights of the Women of the United States,” which Susan B. Anthony read at the Centennial Fair in Philadelphia on July 4, 1876. Stanton was instrumental in placing woman suffrage on the ballot in Kansas in 1867 and Michigan in 1874. She also annually addressed a congressional committee in support of a constitutional amendment on women’s suffrage.

Attempt to Vote at the Valley Hotel

As autumn leaves fluttered down on Highwood Park in 1880, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was hard at work upon her “History of Woman Suffrage.” On October 27, 1880, the Times-Picayune of New Orleans reported, “Miss Susan B. Anthony has come from her home in the city of Rochester, N. Y., to aid her friend and collaborator, Mrs. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in preparing for the press the first volume of their history of the agitation for woman suffrage. The two are working in Mrs. Stanton’s royally shaded nook of three acres on a gentle declivity midway between the railroad station in Tenafly, New Jersey, and the brow of the Palisades.”

In response to an invitation received at Boston from Elizabeth Cady Stanton, suffragist Elizabeth Boynton Harbert traveled “to the home of one of America’s greatest women” to celebrate Foremothers’ Day on October 18, 1880. Upon arriving, she passed a silver nameplate on the gate and followed a winding path to the front door. Mrs. Harbert noted, “The house, spacious and convenient, planned by Mrs. Stanton, stands in the midst of an enclosure of three acres, and from garret to cellar, from kitchen to drawing-room, is a model of neatness, the grass plot and honey-suckle about the back door being as perfectly cared for as that at the front.” She also reported, “In Mrs. Stanton’s library, one soon becomes interested in her collection of pictures of representative people, a collection at one time amounting to hundreds, and classified in groups (for benefit of her children), composed of authors, poets, inventors, educators, reformers, statesmen, and others.” She also informed her readership, “Miss Anthony is making her home with Mrs. Stanton at present, in order that they may complete before the holidays the first volume of their history of the woman suffrage movement.”
In the midst of contemplating women’s history, Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony decided to make a memorable show of defiance against the time-honored male order of things. In an account written within days of the event, Stanton explained:

Sitting in my library in the early morning of our great national election day [November 2, 1880], that had dawned so bright and beautiful, my thoughts naturally turned to our grand experiment of government, the deep significance of a national election, and the blessed freedom of thought and speech our people here enjoy. My heart swelling with gratitude and hope that our right to be a nation might to-day be fully vindicated at the ballot-box, I seized my pen to give an outpouring of my patriotic soul to a woman’s journal; when lo! ‘The Republican carriage and horses,’ all decked with flags and evergreens, drove gayly to my door. One of our leading citizens announced himself in search of voters. As my six legal representatives were scattered far and near, in the old world and the new, I offered to do the voting for them and represent myself, a most fitting thing for me to do, being the owner of the homestead, and having paid my own taxes in person, and having resided in the Democratic state of New Jersey twelve years; being also of sound mind, sufficient education to read the constitution, and the ticket I offered, and of the legal age three times over. My staunch Republican friend accepted the proposition, and accordingly Susan B. Anthony (always ready to make an escapade on the ballot-box) and I donned our Sunday attire, stepped into the carriage and were borne in triumph to the polling-booth mid the crowd of American sovereigns, their crown and scepter, the ballot, in their own right hand.

This greatest of all duties of an American citizen we found was to be performed in a wayside inn, where the aristocracy of Bergen County are wont to seek the elixir that keeps them warm in winter and cool in summer, though suppressed on election day until the clock strikes 7, when the polls close and the sun is supposed to set on this 2nd day of November.

Ushered into the august presence of the inspectors of election and of the imposing ballot-box, with the Holy Bible pressed to its inanimate lips, my champion announced:

"Mr. Stanton has come to vote a clean Republican ticket."

As this occurred precisely in the same spot where I usually paid my taxes, I felt quite at home, and at the prospect of enjoying the highest privilege of citizenship, much lighter hearted than on any former occasion when compelled to pay its penalties; and when my heart did not respond to the tender Scriptural sentiment, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.”

At the first proposition for a woman to vote, one of the inspectors, whom I knew well, dropped into his chair, looking as meek as Moses; another stood back with bowed head, as if...
searching for grains of mustard seed in the cracks of the floor, while the chosen champion for the combat took his position with dogged determination that “none but male citizens could vote; that there was no precedent for females voting.” I told him that in the opinion of many learned judges, lawyers, and statesmen, women were enfranchised by the fourteenth amendment to the National Constitution, which declares “the citizen’s right to vote.” I am here as a United States citizen to vote for United States officers. It is not the duty of a town inspector to decide on my liberties. As to a precedent, there are many precedents for women’s voting. Women are voting on school questions in eight States of the Union to-day, and on the sacred soil of New Jersey, were we now stand, women voted thirty-one years, from 1776 to 1807.

But this stolid Democrat (for the two Republican judges had cunningly thrust him forward), was impervious to argument or appeal, and in his stress for something to say, he innocently admitted what his assailants and the bystanders had already perceived, that he knew nothing about the matter—never having read our constitutions, State or national. Shades of Jefferson and Jackson forgive, ‘that of such material we now make town inspectors of election.’ At this point Mr. [Cornelius] Cooper, a Democratic State Senator, seeing his brother Democrat pushed the wall, impertinently called from the corner:

“Pray proceed with the voting: we have wasted time enough over this trifling matter.”

“Gentlemen,” said I, “this is the most momentous question the citizens of our town have ever been called upon to consider.”

The acting inspector then asked his Republican coadjutors if they agreed with him to refuse my vote, and each solemnly lowed his assent. I then tendered my ballot, but, as no outstretched hand was ready to receive it, I laid it on the box, the inspector meantime keeping one hand heavy on the Bible, evidently fearing that, with the heroic Miss Anthony at my elbow, who ever and anon, in a low tone, had made suggestions, the two might with some dextrous maneuver slip the proscribed ballot into the sacred enclosure.

In retiring I said: “I leave my ballot here. With you rests the responsibility of refusing to count it.”

We returned in the “Republican carriage” in waiting to our home, leaving the voters of Palisade Township to discuss the merits of the question. Several called on us during the day for papers, pamphlets, and constitutional arguments, and we have thrown down the glove for a series of public discussions.

What a spectacle this gorgeous autumnal sun shines down upon this 2nd of November. A free people with millions of voters enthusiastically assembling round the tens of thousands of polling booths to express their will in regard to the principles of government. And what a grand education to our people are
these political campaigns, in which the ablest minds of the
nation teach the men in every school district their duties as
citizens, and the value of free institutions.

It is an inestimable loss to the nation that the large class of
intelligent, educated women, ever loyal to the best interests of
society, should stand silent witnesses of this sublime spectacle;
denied the right to express their will. But the good time is
coming when we, too, will share in the great national uprising,
and march in the grand procession of freedom.

Meantime let us American citizens rise above the personal
injustice we suffer, above the dust and smoke, the frauds and
corruptions of politics, and remember the great experiment of
government we are now making, based on human equality.

Though failing at so many points to maintain our declared
principles, yet we are steadily moving, step by step, toward the
consummation of what philosophers have predicted, poets
sung, and artists painted, the golden age, when among the sons
and daughters of earth there shall be no class nor caste.

The Ottawa Daily Republic of Ottawa, Kansas, noted on
November 9, 1880, “Mrs. Elizabeth Thompson, of New York, has
made a liberal contribution for the publication of the ‘History of
Woman Suffrage in the United States,’ which Miss Susan B,
Anthony, Mrs. Stanton, and Mrs. Gage are now completing. Miss
Anthony and Mrs. Stanton have cancelled all lyceum lectures for
the season, and will spend the winter together at Mrs. Stanton’s
rural home in New Jersey.”

In 1882, Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the only woman featured
among 185 biographical sketches in W. Woodford Clayton’s History of
Bergen and Passaic Counties, New Jersey. Therein, she not only
advertised her History of Woman Suffrage (including the name of the
publisher), but she revealed, regarding her attempt to vote, “it is Mrs.
Stanton’s intention to do for the women of New Jersey what she has
already done for those of New York, and to give the rulers of this State
no rest until all of its citizens stand equal before the law.”

Stanton departed Tenafly in 1882, but returned to “the comforts
of home, on the blue hills of Jersey” three years later. She sold her
Tenafly home in May 1887 and died in New York City on October
26, 1902, at 86 years of age. Ahead of her time, Stanton fought
ignorance and braved ridicule to secure “justice to Woman,” being
an early advocate of an amendment to the United States
Constitution, ratified in 1920, giving women the right to vote.

The Valley Hotel

The place where this historic event took place was the Valley
Hotel on County Road in Tenafly—a landmark that was relegated to
the rubbish heap in the summer of 2016 despite the international
significance of its great moment in time.

A German immigrant named Hermann Heinrich Eicks built the
Valley Hotel at the intersection of County Road and Highwood Avenue, a short walk from the passenger train station, in 1868. He was born in Hanover, Germany, about 1816, and arrived in New York City sometime before 1855, when he was first listed as a baker, residing at 276 W. 19th Street. He appears in the IRS Tax Assessment List for 1864 as a liquor dealer and hotel owner in the “English Neighborhood.” The federal census for 1870 also lists him as a hotel owner, residing with his wife, Anna, who was of French origin, and their children: William, 14-years-old; Maria, four-years-old; and Annie, two-years-old. George Hoffman, who was 30-years-old and born in New York, was the hotel clerk. Hoffman’s wife Eliza was 20-years-old and “without occupation.” Lizzie Clark, 25-years-old, was a domestic servant.

Andrew Boyd’s “New Jersey State Directory” for 1872 lists “Eicks H. H. saloon” in Tenafly. A notebook preserved in the collections of the Bergen County Historical Society records the expenses of the Palisade Township Committee for 1876, showing $25 paid to “H. H. Eicks . . . use of Room for Spring Election,” and on April 10 and November 7, 1876, $25 paid to “H. H. Eicks use of room for fall election.” According to the 1880 census, Hermann and Anna Eicks resided at the Valley Hotel with their four children: Herman H., 19-years-old; Maria T., 15-years-old; Anna M., 12-years-old; and Augustus W., 9-years-old. Eliza Hoffman, 30-years-old, was a servant, who resided in the hotel with her six-year-old daughter Georgiana.

The last will and testament of Hermann H. Eicks, Sr., of Tenafly, probated March 10, 1889, bequeathed the use and income of his real and personal property to his widow for and during the time of her widowhood. Upon her death, he ordered his property be divided equally among his five children. In a codicil dated March 27, 1888, he gave his executors full power and authority to sell “my homestead known as the Valley Hotel and from the amount received therefrom set aside three thousand dollars to build purchase a home for my wife Anna Maria for her use during her natural life if she so long remains my widow.” Anna M. Eicks made “her X mark” on a list of articles selected and set apart for the use of the family in “An Inventory of the Goods, &c., of Hermann H. Eicks, proven on 31 May 1889.”

In an effort to save the Valley Hotel, author Kevin W. Wright researched the property and wrote an application to try and obtain a Certificate of Eligibility on the National Register of Historic Places. In the summer of 2016, however, despite such efforts, the town decided to allow the building to be torn down for a childcare facility and chose to recognize the site with a small town marker.