

# STORIES FROM THE YEAR

*As told by Sally Roesch Wagner, Executive Director, 2009*

Dear Friends,

It has been a tremendous year of spreading the thought-provoking vision of Matilda Joslyn Gage to an ever-expanding circle of people across the country. Please join me as I take you on a journey of stories that demonstrate the mission and work of the Gage Foundation in 2009 ...

## **The Gage Foundation in Action – Programs and Outreach**

### ***Essay Contest for High School Students***



“Silence and fear of criticism are opponents of free thought and reform,” wrote Molly Linhorst, a junior at Fayetteville-Manlius High School and the winning writer in this year’s Matilda Joslyn Gage Essay Contest. “Matilda Joslyn Gage, in her speech at the National Woman’s Rights Convention of 1852, encouraged women to expect criticism for their involvement in the feminist movement and to bear it with unwavering confidence. Gage’s courage led to an admirable life devoted to change. Gage is certainly a role model to today’s generation of young women, including myself,” Molly concluded. You can read her full essay at: [http://blog.syracuse.com/east/2009/06/fayettevillemanlius\\_junior\\_win.html](http://blog.syracuse.com/east/2009/06/fayettevillemanlius_junior_win.html)

### ***Dialogue: Our Primary Tool for Education***

“How many people do you anticipate will attend the events?” Tammy Bormann asked. The dialogue consultant working with us through a Project Development Grant from The International Coalition of Historic Site Museums of Conscience to develop a “Tea and Talk Slavery in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Dialogue Program” wondered how interested our small (5000 people) village would be in engaging in a facilitated dialogue about slavery in our community, the United States and the world today during the cold month of March. We looked around the table exchanging hopeful glances. Maybe 25, we wished. We were totally unprepared for the 265 people who turned up for our three-part series, cosponsored with Vera House and the Fayetteville Free Library, to further our community’s awareness of the fastest-growing crime in the world today, with nearly 27 million slaves—most of whom are women and children. High school students, teachers, soccer moms, senior citizens, local police officers, a Catholic nun, and social service providers were among the diverse audience members from our village community, and the wider Native American, Asian, and African-American communities. They were astounded to learn that there are more slaves in the world today than at any other point in history and were anxious to do something about it.

Gage wrote about sex trafficking in women and girls with such clarity that when Gloria Steinem read Gage’s description at a conference this year, not telling participants who wrote it or when, they assumed it was from a newspaper today. They could hardly believe that Gage, the “woman ahead of the women who were ahead of their time,” as Gloria calls her, wrote it in her classic, *Woman Church and State*, in 1893 (available through our on-line bookstore at: [www.MatildaJoslynGage.org](http://www.MatildaJoslynGage.org)).

We also organized and facilitated a workshop/panel on “Human Trafficking Today and the Evolution of a Modern Abolitionist Movement” presented by Alina Diaz and Renan Salado of Farm Worker Legal Services of Rochester, N.Y., at an Underground Railroad conference in Schenectady, N.Y., on February 27, 2009.

More recently, the Education Committee brought Sam Eschenbrenner, who just returned from Ghana, where for six months he worked successfully on a human trafficking case, to the United Church of Fayetteville on December 1 for a talk about his experiences.

As we further developed our dialogue program, I suggested to Deborah Hughes, Executive Director of Susan B. Anthony Home, that we do a public dialogue about the 120-year-old argument between Anthony and Gage that changed the course of history. The goal was to bring together others to work with us to determine how the Anthony and Gage historic home museums can create a coherent interpretation of the political differences between these two leaders that respects both sides of the argument. This dialogue, entitled “From Friendship to Fighting to Friendship” was presented on April 19, 2009 at the Onondaga Historical Association in Syracuse, and may be viewed online at: <http://essentialdissent.blogspot.com/2009/04/matilda-joslyn-gage-and-susan-b-anthony.html>.

We dialogued on the same topic again on October 10, 2009, during the Wonderful Weekend of Gage at the Auburn Public Theater in Auburn, N.Y. The latter event was moderated by Peter Wisby, Executive Director of the Seward House in Auburn.

Exploring how best to approach a dialogue about Gage’s religious/spiritual journey, we decided that we needed first of all to educate ourselves about the different religions and spiritual practices she explored, along with her critique of organized religion. To that end, the Education Committee brought in Melinda Grube, an adjunct faculty member at Cayuga College, for a talk about Gage’s religious views and her disagreement with the religious right wing of the Suffrage movement. Melinda spoke at the United Church of Fayetteville on October 6. Further internal education was provided by volunteer Connie Caldwell, who offered to conduct a six-week “Mind-Body Meditation Series: Matilda & Theosophy” in November and December, leading a variety of mind-body discussions and meditations centered on a Theosophical theme.

### ***Ride the Rails and Learn***

Nearly 200 passengers enjoyed onboard presentations by costumed historical enactors, including Matilda Joslyn Gage as portrayed by Renee-Noelle Felice. Our sold-out August railway excursion from Camillus to Seneca Falls included a program at the Women’s Rights National Historical Park in Seneca Falls, a scavenger hunt with lots of prizes, and a complimentary wine tasting.



*Photo: Heidi Stephens, Denise Butler, Jody Luce, Renee-Noelle Felice, Julia Bliven, Diane Palmer, Vanessa Johnson, and Julie Fishman.*

### ***Spreading the Word of Matilda Joslyn Gage***

I wish you could have been there for my presentation of Matilda to the 23,000 people in the Marin County (Calif.) Convention Center and at satellite conferences across the country on October 13 for the annual Bioneers Conference. As I went into character and began sharing the inspiring vision of peace and social justice of

Matilda, I could not help but feel the electric resonance of her words in the audience, which hardly stirred. People caught me in the elevator later, bombarding me with questions: “Who WAS that woman?” “Why don’t I know about her?” “How can I find out more?” Their faces — young and old, men and women, multiracial — told an excited story of recognition, inspiration and empowerment which, with time, can transform into action. This is what the Gage Foundation stands for — this is our important work. The performance can be viewed at: <http://www.ustream.tv/recorded/2364801>.

Gage’s words began an August *New York Times* article about women’s funding, placing in perspective how women of means in numbers, for the first time in our history, are assisting other women. Matilda lamented, “We have yet to hear of a woman of wealth who has left anything for the enfranchisement of her sex. Almost every daily paper heralds the fact of some large bequest to colleges, churches and charities by rich women, but it is proverbial that they never remember the woman suffrage movement

that underlies in importance all others.” Times have changed, as you’ll see at: [http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/magazine/23fob-wwln-t.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/23/magazine/23fob-wwln-t.html?_r=1).

“What is your greatest need right now?” the Gifford Foundation challenged us to answer. We responded with a lengthy Lifecycle Capacity Evaluation, determining just where we are in our growth and what we need to develop. We found we were right where we should have been at ten years, evenly moving from start-up to growth. The result was a grant to create a new website — the dynamic integration of mission (educating the relevance of Gage’s ideas today) into her home (each room dedicated to one of her social justice issues) which you can view for regular updates right here at: [www.MatildaJoslynGage.org](http://www.MatildaJoslynGage.org). The Community Foundation of Central New York, The Sister Fund and Upstate History Alliance: Underground Railroad Heritage New York also gave us grants to build the infrastructure and programming of our organization. This strong support, along with yours, is propelling us into the next stage of development.



“Wow, this has never been here before!” an enthusiastic visitor to our booth at the New York State Fair exclaimed. “I’m so excited you’re doing something with that place,” another offered.

*Photo: Genevieve Frank staffs the Gage booth at the fair. The free plastic construction hats were a big hit with fair-goers, who snatched them up quickly. Donated by Jane Albright of the International Wizard of Oz Club to celebrate the restoration work at the Gage Home, the hats ended up perched happily atop the heads of children from across Central New York.*

### ***Who Is Using Gage as a Model? European Scholars, Among Others!***

**MATILDA** is the first Joint European Master Degree in Women’s and Gender History, named for our very own Matilda. Set up as part of the Erasmus program with funding from the European Commission, DG Education and Culture, **MATILDA** is designed for students wishing to develop expertise in women’s and gender history, as well as in European history, and who are interested in intercultural exchange. Why did they choose the name? Because of “The ‘Matilda Effect,’ named for the suffragist, feminist critic, and early sociologist of knowledge Matilda J. Gage, who, in the late 19th century, both experienced and articulated the following phenomenon: the under-recognition accorded to those who have little to start with (complementing the “Matthew Effect,” made famous by Robert K. Merton in 1968, describing the phenomenon that who have will be given).”

When we contacted Margaret W. Rossiter, the originator of the “Matilda Effect” about how she chose to honor Matilda Joslyn Gage in this way, she explained, “Well, I was reading about her when I was writing a paper about 15 years ago. She seemed to fit the bill.” You can read more about the Matilda Effect in Margaret Rossiter’s article, “The Matthew Matilda Effect in Science,” *Social Studies of Science* (1993, 23, 325-341). The **MATILDA** website is <http://matilda.ned.univie.ac.at/node/47>.

### ***Celebrating Matilda - Wonderful Weekend of Gage Events***

The Auburn Public Theater became Matilda’s bedroom at 210 East Genesee Street as Mimi Kennedy presented the premiere reading of her one-woman show, “Waking Matilda,” which we co-sponsored with Planned Parenthood of the Rochester/Syracuse Region. Working from my research, Mimi



(currently starring in the critically acclaimed BBC film “In the Loop”) wrote the show for the Gage Foundation, and the audience watched spellbound as this accomplished actor brought to life Matilda’s passion, principles and brilliance. Those who missed it will not be able to say “I was at the Woodstock of the Gage Foundation,” but we’re hoping to give you another chance in 2010 – perhaps at different locations around the country. Stay tuned.

Author and philanthropist Helen LaKelly Hunt catalyzed the worldwide Women Moving Millions campaign with her sister Swanee. They have raised \$180 million in just three years. “For the first time ever, women’s organizations are no longer getting the

leftovers,” says Helen. She kicked off our Wonderful Weekend with an inspiring call to support women and girls, and a special call-out to the Gage Foundation. We co-sponsored the event with the Women’s Fund of Central New York, and look forward to another continuing partnership.

In the current *Barron’s Markets*, Helen is quoted as saying her Role Model is none other than our own **Matilda Joslyn Gage**. See Barron’s Markets: <http://online.barrons.com/home-page>.

Our Wonderful Weekend also featured engaging talks and book signings by authors Jill Tietjen and Beth Wilson. Jill, author of *Her Story: Women Who Changed America*, shared with us “The Legacy of the Women on Whose Shoulders We Stand,” stories about activists who changed America.

Beth titled her talk “Beyond Destructive Relationships: Women as Agents of Change, Personally and Globally” and gave us a fresh voice for moving beyond destructive relationships as well as a powerful new lens through which to view our relationships with other countries, other women, other cultures and the global community. Her latest book, *He’s Just No Good For You*, has been optioned for a television reality show due to be released in spring of 2010.

*Mark your calendar now for the next Wonderful Weekend of Gage, October 8-10, 2010!*

## Restoring Matilda’s Home and Creating the Gage Center



Things are happening so quickly at the Gage Home that we hardly have time to catch our breath.

On Women’s Equality Day – August 26 – we broke ground for the final phase of restoration of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Home. The Ruth Putter Welcome Center now stands as an addition to the Gage Home where four months ago there was only grass in the backyard. Restoration is moving at breakneck speed, as the house comes into shape as it stood majestically when Gage’s son-in-law L. Frank Baum photographed it in 1887. By December 31, the restoration and rehabilitation of the Gage Home will be nearly complete. Special-order windows and doors will be delivered to Matilda as a Valentine’s Day present, and the painting will wait for the warm

weather. A rehabilitation tour of the Gage Home, done by Syracuse University student Katie Knudson, is available for viewing at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NilkyBssVfk>.

In the meantime, the workers on the job are turning into Gage historians, as they have checked out our entire lending library of Gage’s books. Knowing the historic importance of the house they are restoring, they are watching carefully for any piece of history the walls they are opening may contain.

Sean Gallagher (*in photo at right*) came rushing over, excited one afternoon. He had just exposed the original stairway to the attic, closed off for years until he tore off the old lathing and plaster and debris suddenly came raining down on him. He started grabbing at “the stuff” and saw a tin cup, and thought, “I’d better watch what I’m doing.” He did, and, in the process, a piece of an envelope, postmarked November 21, 1877, with a 3 cent stamp was discovered. Bill Whalen, who was working with Sean, said, “Let’s find some more.” Bill says, “I went up and started looking for more in the crevices there, and there was an envelope with newspaper clippings in it.” And then, pay-dirt: a letter from Matilda Joslyn Gage, describing, in detail, a dress she was having made. Denise Butler, our in-house expert on 19<sup>th</sup> century clothing, is now working with the letter, and, who knows, we may end up with a Matilda Joslyn Gage dress pattern for sale in our gift shop! Treasures just keep pouring out of the walls: a toilet water bottle, porcelain shards, canning jars, and a paper coffee package – all from different times in the house’s history.



Our intrepid Girl Scouts from Troop 151, Beth Bannar and Katherine Millet, and several of their family members worked this summer clearing the wooded area behind our office for a forthcoming “Forest of Forgotten Feminists,” which will feature walking paths and seating areas. This is their third project with us. You may remember that they got their Bronze award for identifying the flowers in Matilda’s garden from Frank Baum’s 1887 photo and scrapbooking contemporary photos of the flowers. They followed with helping secure a \$1,200 Eastwood Rotary Club grant to purchase a cast-iron urn resembling the one in Frank’s 1887 photo of the front yard. We’re meeting now with Pam Hyland, the new CEO of the consolidated Girl Scouts NYPENN Pathways, to plan a formal partnership between our organizations.



*Photo: Richard Silverman, past president of the Rotary Club of Eastwood with Katherine Millet, Beth Bannar and Sally Roesch with the new urn.*

In the meantime, the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry is following up on the Gage Foundation’s garden research, potting 10 bags of soil from layers in Matilda’s garden where seeds left can be found. “Next spring,” reports our board president, ESF professor Jack Manno, “flowering plants from Matilda’s own garden may once again sprout and bloom.” As the house restoration proceeds, we will be recreating Matilda’s garden, seed by heirloom seed.

## **Making It All Happen**

Enthusiastic snowbirds joined local longtime supporter Gloria Marvin in creating our first friend/fundraiser of the year in St. Petersburg, Fla., a gala and joyful event, complete with silent auction, film and a talk by yours truly. You, too, can host one of these fundraisers and join us in spreading Gage’s vision around the country. Just email Sally Roesch Wagner at [director@matildajoslyngage.org](mailto:director@matildajoslyngage.org) and we can begin planning.

Tom Thomas hosted his eighth annual gala fundraising auction for the Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation with 90 people in attendance at the Wellington House on Sunday, November 22. Tom’s generosity, along with excellent gifts from our local and national supporters, combined with the hard work of an energetic committee to create a delightful event. With guests bidding on over 100 items such as donations from feminist icons Gloria Steinem and Karen DeCrow, actresses Lily Tomlin and

Mimi Kennedy and astronaut Larry DeLucas; vacations to places from Cancun to Abiquiu to Myrtle Beach and an array of services and items from merchants, the event raised more than \$13,000 for the work of the Gage Foundation.

Clara Reed surprised the audience at the auction with the presentation of a gift to the capital campaign for the restoration and preservation of the Gage Home from the Fayetteville Owahgena Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Other highlights of the day were a spellbinding portrayal of Matilda Joslyn Gage by Denise Butler and the announcement of a \$50,000 challenge gift to the capital campaign for the Gage Home restoration.

Gloria Steinem, a member of our National Advisory Committee, hosted a fundraiser in her New York City apartment that brought in \$110,000 for our Gage Home restoration campaign – not bad for an afternoon’s work! She also agreed to be honorary co-chair of our Gage Center campaign committee, along with Oneida Iroquois Confederacy singer/actor and Grammy Award recipient Dr. Joanne Shenandoah and Dr. Delores M. Walters, Director of Diversity & Inclusion Initiatives, National Council for Research on Women. ***We are almost there*** – we need to raise just \$46,000 more to match the state grants we received and reach our \$1 million goal for the restoration phase of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Home. But this all needs to be done by December 31. We must move forward quickly in the face of the current economic situation to secure the additional \$46,000 in donations to match the grants and complete the restoration work by the end of 2009 or the available grant money may be lost.

If you would like to support the Gage Home Restoration project with a donation, we would greatly appreciate your help to make this important project a reality. Your donation will help us inspire even more people in our community and throughout the country with Matilda’s extraordinary courage and vision. And with your help, by October 8-10, 2010, we will hold the Grand Opening of the Matilda Joslyn Gage Center, a national heritage tourism destination in Fayetteville with state-of-the-art exhibits where education and an ongoing dialogue on the basic issues of peace and freedom take place.

What a grand year it has been of spreading the thought-provoking vision of Matilda Joslyn Gage to over 27,000 people across the country. Our innovative and cutting-edge work as we restore Gage to history has been recognized by the American Association of Museums, the National Council of Women’s Organizations and The International Coalition of Museums of Conscience. Gage has made it into the *New York Times*, the New York State Fair, and Gloria Steinem’s living room this year. She now has a one-woman show and a short film about her, with a longer one in the making. Boasting a dynamic new website, blogged and Twittered, hip-hopped and Facebooked, Gage is well on her way to becoming a household name.

And 2010 promises to be just as full of opportunity to restore Matilda to history and inspire a whole new group of people with her vision.

A heartfelt thank you to all of our donors and volunteers who make the work of the Gage Foundation possible. Without your support and interest, we would not have been able to accomplish all that we did.

I send each of you a warm greeting for a holiday season full of joy and renewal.

With shared vision,



Sally Roesch Wagner, Ph.D.  
Executive Director,  
The Matilda Joslyn Gage Foundation