

'It's a Wonderful Life' in Seneca Falls, New York

By [Olivia Twine and Marguerite Kearns](#) on [December 9, 2013](#)



George Bailey: What is it you want, Mary? What do you want? You want the moon? Just say the word and I'll throw a lasso around it and pull it down. Hey. That's a pretty good idea. I'll give you the moon, Mary.

Mary: I'll take it. Then what?

George Bailey: Well, then you can swallow it, and it'll all dissolve, see... and the moonbeams would shoot out of your fingers and your toes and the ends of your hair... am I talking too much?

What's Christmas without putting your feet up and watching "It's a Wonderful Life"? This much-loved holiday classic is an industry for Seneca Falls, New York at this time of the year.

If you haven't seen the 1946 film with Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed, or you'd like to watch it for free on YouTube, then take a break from baking holiday cookies and go online. [The film's trailer](#) gives the highlights. And a YouTube search will result in numerous video variations.

If you're looking for a day trip (or longer) that's guaranteed to capture the holiday spirit, check out this year's 67th anniversary festivities of the "It's a Wonderful Life" celebration from Friday, December 13 through Sunday, December 15 in Seneca Falls, NY.

The fascinating schedule of events will make your head spin, including an analysis of the film that has convinced many fans that Bedford Falls of the film is actually Seneca Falls. This includes certain lines in the script that sets the film's location in New York State, plus numerous "coincidences" that appear to justify the bragging rights of many Seneca Falls residents. [See commentary](#) and event schedule on the web site.

The December 2013 weekend celebration in Seneca Falls includes film showings of "It's a Wonderful Life," related dramatic performances, raffles, book signings, a tree lighting, contests, entertainment, museum exhibits, a parade, food tastings, a dance, wagon rides, a bell ringing and much more. The web site called "The Real Bed-

ford Falls” even suggests places to stay in Seneca Falls, where to park, and photo galleries of past celebrations.

There’s no mention of the Seneca Falls convention of 1848 in the promotion materials associated with the “It’s a Wonderful Life” annual celebration. It isn’t much of a stretch though to find parallels to a spirit that, in our opinion, links the 1848 convention with the 1946 film.

Of course back in 1946, women and men were doomed to stereotypical gender roles in the cinema. The film itself is enough to create some speculation that director Frank Capra not only may have been aware of the 1848 women’s convention in Seneca Falls, but he could have even been inspired by it, if only in a small way. Capra left no evidence behind that Seneca Falls, NY was the inspiration for “It’s a Wonderful Life” at all.



So we’re in good company in imagining that “It’s a Wonderful Life” has parallels to the stories of those who organized and participated in the Seneca Falls women’s rights convention that sparked a major 20th century national social revolution. Decades of work culminated in the 19th amendment to the U.S. Constitution in 1920 that guaranteed all American women the right to vote.

George Bailey’s story in “It’s a Wonderful life” raises questions that resonate with us today. How many of us feel as if our lives are of little or no consequence? How often have we wished for divine intervention and yet we plod on, consumed by the details of daily life? How often are we motivated by the best of intentions but end up feeling as if no one has noticed us and the world has passed us by? How often do we go the extra mile and take dramatic risks that should positively impact our lives and the lives of others and then we admit that we’ve made a colossal mistake?



The character George Bailey (Jimmy Stewart) steps up to the plate for a transformative adventure in “It’s a Wonderful Life” with his wife Mary (Donna Reed) at his side. Mary is the optimist who stands by her man. It takes an angel during the holiday season, however, to convince George that he significantly changed the world because of his actions and life decisions.

Sound familiar? The women organizers of the Seneca Falls convention in 1848 took many risks. They faced harsh criticism, name calling, and numerous judgments about how their lives and decisions had no redeeming value. They needed the strength of angels to sign the Declaration of Sentiments. “It’s a Wonderful Life” ends happily, as does real life, where today a national park in Seneca Falls, NY commemorates the courage and persistence of the early women’s rights pioneers of Seneca Falls and the surrounding area.

And Seneca Falls has a treasure trove of historic sites, events and places of special interest including the Elizabeth Cady Stanton House, the National Women's Hall of Fame, the Women's Rights National Historical Park Visitors Center, the Wesleyan Chapel and waterfall, the Anthony-Stanton-Bloomer statue, the Seneca Falls Heritage Area Visitor Center, the Seneca Falls Historical Society Museum, and the annual Convention Days held each July to commemorate the 1848 women's convention.

The word is getting out. A growing number of people visit the Seneca Falls national park each year. One notable group of visitors included [a group of United Nations staff and their friends](#) in July of 2013 who rode on motorcycles from New York City to the Seneca Falls national park. The Seneca Falls ride followed in the trail of other U.N. events including "Climb Up," "Speak Out," and a motorcycle ride around South Africa to bring attention to issues of gender equality and an end to violence against women. This isn't an isolated example of people from around the world being interested in Seneca Falls and its history.

But we're wondering the best way to get the world out, which is why the question of funding a state and federal women's trail is high on our personal wish list. Trails and auto tours constitute an important way to strengthen awareness of the Finger Lakes region. It was a hotbed of 19th century social reformers and their issues, including abolition, women's rights, temperance, and free thought.

There's plenty to see and do in the "Cradle" of the U.S. women's rights movement. And Seneca Falls, as one of 18 Heritage Areas throughout New York State, could stand some more rocking within the "Cradle." The special attention of a team of angels is needed to brand Seneca Falls permanently in the hearts and travel destinations of more travelers, now, through the coming year, and well into the future.



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This entry was posted in Economic Development, Events, Exhibits and tagged Film History, Gender History, Seneca Falls, Suffrage Movement on December 9, 2013 [<http://newyorkhistoryblog.org/2013/12/09/its-a-wonderful-life-in-seneca-falls-new-york/>] by Olivia Twine and Marguerite Kearns.

About Olivia Twine and Marguerite Kearns

Olivia Twine is a freelance writer specializing in cultural issues whose work appears in regional and local publications in the Hudson Valley. She also edits the website [WomensSuffrage.org](#). Marguerite Kearns writes on the subject of women's history. Her website, [SuffrageWagon.org](#) is a multi-media educational platform featuring news and stories about the suffrage movement. Marguerite Kearns is traveling with Olivia Twine on a 2013 blogging tour of the "Cradle" of the US women's rights movement in upstate New York and blogging at [LetsRockTheCradle.com](#).

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