



# Women Make History:

## Stories we should have learned in school

*"To ask for freedom for women*

*is not a crime.*

*Suffrage prisoners should  
not be treated as criminals."*

Nina Allender

Artist. Suffragist. Feminist.



### Wielding a Pencil, Nina Allender Shaped a Movement



With her sharp wit and artistic talent, the political cartoons of Nina Evans Allender not only captured the news of the week, but also the spirit of women's suffrage in the early 20th century. Her work helped to shape public opinion surrounding the cause of women's rights.

[Born](#) Nina Evans in Kansas in 1872, she moved to Washington D.C., with her family in 1881.

From her earliest years, Allender's dream was to

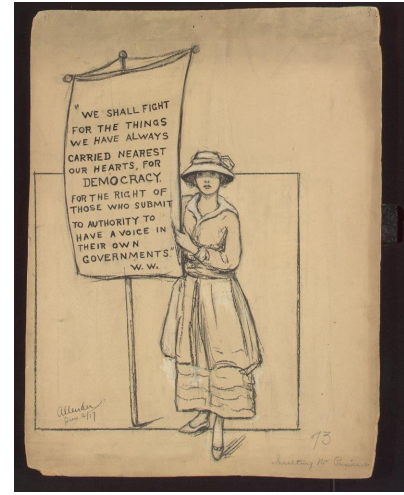
be an artist. She studied painting at the Corcoran School of Art and at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. From 1903–1907, Allender honed her skills under the mentorship of American impressionist painters [William Merritt Chase](#) and [Robert Henri](#).



Allender [married](#) in 1893 at the age of 19, but it wasn't long before her husband took off with another woman after embezzling money from his employer. At the time, it was rare for women to sue for divorce, but Allender did so in 1905. Her request was granted that same year. To support herself and continue her artistic studies, Allender worked at the Treasury Department and then at the Government Land Office.

It is unclear when Allender joined the suffrage movement, but in 1912 she volunteered to help [Alice Paul](#) and the [National American Woman Suffrage Association](#) plan its groundbreaking march in Washington, D.C., designed to upstage the inauguration of President Woodrow Wilson. Allender chaired two committees: one on "outdoor meetings" and another on "posters, post cards and colors."

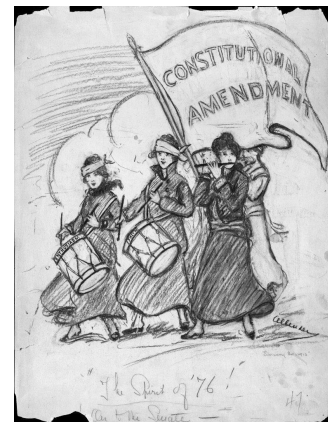
Soon after, she became president of the District of Columbia Woman Suffrage Association. One of the movement's best orators, Allender regularly spoke at prominent suffrage events. But it was Allender's political cartoons that most helped to sway public sentiment to the cause of women's rights.



Although Allender [considered](#) herself a painter, she decided to try her hand at political cartoons. From 1914 through 1927, her work appeared regularly in [The Suffragist](#), a weekly journal about the movement, and later its successor publication, [Equal Rights](#). In all, she contributed more than 150 drawings.

Allender's portrayal of women was radical for the era. Countering the negative images promoted by anti-suffragists that depicted women as man-eating monsters, Allender's suffragists were confident, proud, and stylish. Posed with their hands on their hips, they appeared to look to the future, unafraid of their emerging political power.

Later, when suffragists were accused of treason for picketing the White House during WWI, Allender drew the protestors as patriots, echoing the soldiers of the Revolutionary War in their fight for justice from tyranny. Beginning in 1917, many of the suffragists were jailed for protesting at the White House. In addition to joining the picket lines, Allender also created the ["Jailed for Freedom"](#) pin. The pin became a badge of honor and was bestowed on women who spent time behind bars.



After the passage of the [Nineteenth Amendment](#) in 1920, Allender remained an active member of the [National Woman's Party](#). She continued to fight for women's rights by working for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and also equal pay. Allender retired in 1946, suffering from poor



health.



In 1942, Allender moved to Chicago, then later to New Jersey. She died in 1957 at the age of eighty three.

Before her death, Allender gave most of her original cartoons to the National Woman's Party. However, they were inadvertently placed in an unlabeled box and stored in a closet at [The Sewall-Belmont House](#) the Party's headquarters. In 2001, they were rediscovered.

The museum, now the Belmont-Paul Women's Equality National Monument, hosted an extensive exhibit of Allender's work. In 2020, in conjunction with the 100th anniversary of women's suffrage, Allender's cartoons were included in a variety of events, igniting awareness of her contributions to the cause.

Renewed interest has also brought criticism. Her drawings did not include the contributions of women of color, thereby perpetuating the myth that suffrage was won through the exclusive efforts of women who were white and privileged.

To view more of Allender's work, click [here](#).

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## Bring it Home: Conversation Starters

Nina Allender used political satire to convey the plight of women.

**Ask Yourself:** When is humor a more effective strategy than debate?

**Ask a Friend:** How have you used humor to convey a different perspective?

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## Kudos to Assemblyperson Didi Barrett, D-New York

In celebration of **Women's History Month** last March, the office of **Assemblyperson Didi Barrett**, D-New York State Assembly, compiled a booklet, ***Women's History in the Hudson Valley: Ten Stories from Columbia and Dutchess Counties., 2023***. Mary Ware Dennett is included in the booklet as she spent the last few years of her life in Valatie, New York.

To download a free copy, visit Assemblyperson Barrett's website:

<https://nyassembly.gov/mem/Didi-Barrett>

**Thank you, Night Owls of the Salt Lake Chapter of the League of Women Voters** for inviting me to speak about Mary Ware Dennett and the recent resurrection of the Comstock Laws.



**Cheers to Girl Scout Troop 969** for inviting me to their celebration of Women in History. Each

girl selected a woman of their choice, then dressed as the person and shared the woman's story with the rest of us. The women on whose shoulders we stand, would be so proud of this generation!



[Sharon Spaulding](#) discovered the hidden story of Mary Ware Dennett, suffragist, sex education and reproductive rights activist, when she married one of Dennett's great-grandsons. Today, she curates the family's archives.

Sharon has spent ten years researching first-wave feminism, the battle for reproductive rights, and Mary's life in the context of politics and social mores from 1914–1947. She received a grant from Radcliffe College's Schlesinger Library to support her research and the creation of a manuscript. Her essays about Dennett have appeared in [Ms. Magazine](#), [Smithsonian](#), and [New Hampshire Magazine](#).

Sharon is a popular speaker at women's and civic groups, and book clubs, and was recently a moderator at the [San Francisco Writers Conference](#). She is available to speak on the forgotten stories of remarkable women and the history of the suffrage and reproductive rights movements of the early 20th century. [Schedule](#) a talk with your group!

Sharon lives near Salt Lake City with her husband and two dogs.

Help reclaim the lives of remarkable women. Share the newsletter and invite others to subscribe. Follow me on social media. [www.SharonSpaulding.com](http://www.SharonSpaulding.com)



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