



Photo by Lona on Unsplash

# Women Make History:

## Stories we should have learned in school

---

*With the recent celebration of [Earth Day](#), this issue is dedicated to two remarkable conservation activists for their tireless efforts to preserve and protect the natural world: Rosalie Barrow Edge and Minerva Hamilton Hoyt.*

---

**"The only honest, unselfish, indomitable hellcat in the history of conservation."**



Photo: Audubon Center for Birds of Prey

*A Friend, Referring to Rosalie Barrow Edge*

---

[Born](#) in 1877 to a wealthy family in New York City, Rosalie Barrow Edge used her privilege and her invincible will to set the course for environmental activism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Her visionary approach to wildlife conservation gave the world [Hawk Mountain](#), the first sanctuary for birds of prey in the U.S., [Kings Canyon National Park](#) in California, [Olympic National Park](#) in Washington, and the addition of an old-growth forest of [sugar pines](#) to Yosemite National Park.

As a child, Edge attended elite schools, and grew up in a world of social, cultural, and



political access to thought leaders of the day. She also traveled the world and met her husband on a trip to England in 1909.



Despite her husband's objection to women's suffrage, Edge jumped into the movement in 1915. Until the passage of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment five years later, she dedicated her considerable resources to winning the vote. The battle for women's rights gave Edge first-hand experience in grassroots organizing, running educational campaigns, managing protests, and the nuances of political persuasion.

In 1924, Edge's husband left her for another woman. She found comfort in taking long walks in Central Park where she befriended amateur bird watchers and biologists from the American Museum of Natural History. Birding became her favorite pastime and during her life, she logged more than 800 species in Central Park alone. She later [described](#) birding as "a solace in sorrow and loneliness."

That loneliness evaporated in 1929 when Edge was vacationing in Paris. She received a bundle of mail from home that included a pamphlet from a birding friend entitled [A Crisis in Conservation](#), by a renowned New York scientist. It accused the highly regarded [Audubon Society](#) of corruption including secretly placing bounties on bald eagles, endorsing legislation that would allow wildlife refuges to become public shooting grounds, and catering to wealthy donors/sportsmen by negotiating hunting arrangements with developers and ranchers resulting in the mass slaughter of wildlife.

A member of the Audubon Society, Edge decided to attend its annual meeting of directors. To his later peril, its President was dismissive of Edge. He [referred](#) to her as "the lady [who] had spoiled the meeting" because "her questions had taken up the time allotted to the showing of a new moving picture, and that lunch was getting cold." Edge doubled down.

She launched the [Emergency Conservation Committee](#) (ECC) to "protect all species while they were common so that they did not become rare." Determined that all Audubon members be made aware of its double-standards, she sued the Society for its mailing list and won. By 1934, the old guard of the Audubon Society was out.

That same year, Edge purchased 1400 acres in the Appalachian Mountains of Eastern Pennsylvania to stop an annual hunt of migrating birds of prey. She created the [Hawk Mountain Sanctuary](#) which today encompasses 2600 acres. Each year, an average of 20,000 eagles, hawks, and falcons migrate through Hawk Mountain.





The annual hunt of birds of prey that spurred Rosalie Barrow Edge to purchase the property. Photo: Hawk Mountain Sanctuary

Although Edge is most often associated with Hawk Mountain, she was also committed to enlarging national parks. Again, Edge met with fierce resistance. In a brief [biography](#) of his mother, Peter Edge writes that The National Parks and the U.S. Forest Service were allied with lumber interests and regarded conservation only for its economic value. In 1935, they drove 13,000-miles across country to visit most of the parks, and to meet with local officials regarding projects she championed. Through her vast connections, she also lobbied the Secretary of the Interior and indirectly then President Roosevelt. Her [efforts](#) contributed to the expansion of Yosemite to include a forest of old growth trees, and the creation of Kings Canyon National Park and Olympic National Park.

Edge remained a tireless activist until her [death](#) in 1962 at the age of 85. Shortly before she died, Edge showed up announced at an Audubon gala. When her presence was made known, she received a standing ovation. Today, she is credited with endowing conservation groups, including the Audubon Society, with a grassroots approach. As for the ECC, although it was mostly a one-person operation, Edge published some 100 titles and more than a million copies of educational materials, news releases, letters to the editor, and other papers. It continued to operate for 22 years after her death.

To learn more about her life, her son Peter wrote a short, but detailed biography. It can be purchased for \$4.00 at the [Hawk Mountain Sanctuary](#) website.

---

***Note: The following story about Minerva Hamilton Hoyt was originally published here in June 2021***

---

**"...lying in a snug  
sleeping bag, I  
soon learned the  
charm of a Joshua**



**Forest...  
Above, the bright  
desert  
constellations  
wheeled  
majestically toward  
the west, a  
timepiece for the  
wakeful."** Minerva  
Hamilton Hoyt



Minerva Hamilton Hoyt Mural



Minerva Hamilton Hoyt and child

## The Desert Visionary

[Minerva Hamilton Hoyt](#) (1866–1945) became the champion of desert ecosystems when she moved to Pasadena from New York in the late 1890s. When her husband and son died in close succession, she found comfort sleeping under the desert sky, listening to the winds blow through the Joshua trees. She later [remarked](#) that this landscape was one of "... strange and inexpressible beauty, of mystery and singular aloofness, which is yet so filled with peace."

Hoyt became concerned for the desert's fragile ecosystem when the population of Southern California exploded after 1910. Cacti and other plants were ripped up and carted to backyard gardens for the wealthy. Large swaths of the desert were destroyed to make room for homes and highways. Determined to educate others about the desert's unique beauty, Hoyt organized conservation exhibits in major U.S. cities and also in London.

In 1930, Hoyt founded the [International Deserts Conservation League](#). Soon after, she was asked to serve on a commission tasked with recommending new state parks. Hoyt hired and supervised teams of biologists and ecologists to gather scientific data for her report, and hired photographers to document the landscapes. Hoyt's recommendation was to create parks in Death Valley, the Anza-Borrego Desert, and the Joshua tree forests of the San Bernardino Mountains. When she realized these desert areas would be better protected as national parks, she pursued that goal but was rebuffed by the director of the National Park Service.

Undaunted, Hoyt lobbied President Franklin Roosevelt whose New Deal included the designation of national parks. Her persistence paid off. In 1933, Death Valley and the Anza-Borrego Desert became National Monuments. [Anza-Borrego](#) became a National Landmark in 1974 and [Death Valley](#) a National Park in 1994. In 1936, President Roosevelt created the [Joshua Tree National Monument](#) and it became a national park in 1994.

---

**Ask a Friend:** What does conservation mean to you, and why is it important?



**Ask Yourself:** Like Rosalie Barrow Edge and Minerva Hamilton Hoyt, when have you found solace in nature?

---

## Women Make History Swag / Remember the Moms!

Thanks for helping to launch WMH swag. We will be rolling out new products—let me know what you'd like to see! Your purchases during March contributed \$75 to women's health research, and remember, Mother's Day (May 12) is fast approaching.

Spread the love. If you [purchase](#) a mug or book bag, post a photo of yourself with the item on Instagram and or Facebook, and tag me (@SharonSpaulding) in your post.



[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 twelve 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 also book clubs. 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, Gus and Hank.

---

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

---



Sharon Spaulding | 40 Wanderwood Way, Sandy, UT 84092

[Unsubscribe sharon@sharonspaulding.com](mailto:sharon@sharonspaulding.com)

[Update Profile](#) | [Constant Contact Data Notice](#)

Sent bysharon@sharonspaulding.compowered by