

HELEN HAMILTON GARDINER AND CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT

UPTON ASSOCIATION SPRING LUNCHEON SATURDAY, MAY 4, 2024 11:30 AM SEX, SUFFRAGE, AND THE EXTRODINARY LIFE OF HELEN HAMILTON GARDINER

Exposed in Ohio newspapers for an affair with a married man, Alice Chenoweth refused to cower in shame, instead she changed her name to Helen Hamilton Gardener, moved to New York, pretended to be married to her lover, and became a wildly popular lecturer and author, brazenly opposed to sexist piety and propriety.

The "Harriet Beecher Stowe of Fallen Women," she campaigned to raise the age of sexual consent for girls (from twelve or younger), decried double standards of sexual morality, and debunked scientists' claims that women's brains were inferior. In 1910, she moved to Washington, D.C., right next-door to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, and became the suffragists' lead negotiator in the nation's capital. With liberal doses of feminine charm, Gardener persuaded Woodrow Wilson and other male politicians to support the Nineteenth Amendment, often drawing on her Southern heritage and marriage to a Civil War hero. Her effort, according to suffrage leader Maud Wood Park, was "the most potent factor" in its passage. In 1920, President Wilson appointed Gardener to the U.S. Civil Service Commission, making her the highest-ranking woman in federal government and a national symbol of what it meant, finally, for (white) women to be full citizens.



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