

The Woman of Many Firsts – Nina Otero-Warren

By Ashton Sergent

A notable leader in the women's suffrage movement, Nina Otero-Warren was a native resident of New Mexico where she utilized her cultural heritage in educating and conveying her message to an ethnically diverse audience. Nina was born in 1881 at her family home in Los Lunas, New Mexico. She came from an affluent and politically influential family, with both of her parents being descendants of local Spanish colonists. She was well educated, and even as a young woman, established herself as a progressive, intelligent role model amongst her family and peers.

She married in 1908, and got divorced 2 years later. Nina elected to call herself a "widow" to avoid cultural disapproval at the time. When her mother passed away in 1914, she returned to her childhood home and became the matriarch as the oldest female of 12 children. Nina cultivated friendships with artists, authors and politicians that would ultimately impact her professional career and activism.

Nina's suffrage work drew the attention of Dr. Alice Paul, who was responsible for founding the National Woman's Party, and in 1917, she asked Nina to lead the party's New Mexico chapter. Nina insisted on publishing literature in both English and Spanish to relay her efforts to multiple communities. These efforts challenged the federal government's active policy of assimilation of non-white people, as well as its institution of a national English-only mandate. In 1918, Nina took a job as the Superintendent of Santa Fe County Public Schools and worked to maintain both Spanish and Native American languages and customs in education.

Nina leveraged her political connections to contribute to New Mexico successfully ratifying the 19th Amendment in 1920. Nina was the first Hispanic woman to run for Congress and, in 1922, won the Republican Party's nomination. She did not win the election, but she continued her advocacy work in education and government in New Mexico.

Nina Otero-Warren holds the title for many "firsts," including being the first Hispanic American to be minted on US Currency as of 2022. She eventually homesteaded 1,257 acres near Santa Fe with her partner, Mamie Meadors, where they established a realty business and remained until her death in 1965.