

A Spinster, a Protestant, and a Democrat: Florence Allen, Cleveland's First Female Judge

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In 1934 Chicago lawyer Alice Greenacre wrote to President Franklin D. Roosevelt supporting Judge Florence E. Allen's nomination to the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals. Greenacre, Allen's longtime friend, noted that Allen qualified not only because she was an outstanding lawyer and judge but also because she was "a spinster, a Protestant, and a Democrat." Almost twenty years earlier, Allen, while campaigning for Woodrow Wilson in Montana, had phoned Greenacre to ask her and lawyer Greta Coleman to do some quick legal research for her, and then to meet her at the Chicago train station with the results when she changed trains on her way to present a suffrage case before the Ohio Supreme Court. Now Greenacre, in practice with another woman, came to Allen's defense once again. While women lawyers from across the country were writing in support of Allen's appointment, Allen's own law partner, former campaign manager, and present housemate, Cleveland lawyer Susan Rebhan traveled to Washington D.C. to discuss Allen's appointment with Molly Dewson, Chair of the Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee. These are just two examples of the ways in which a network of "never-married" women lawyers advanced Allen's professional career as jurist. In exploring the interconnectedness of Allen's personal life to her professional career this presentation considers the importance of homosexual networks of women policymakers in early twentieth-century politics.