

Dixon-Carroll, Elizabeth Delia ^[1]

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By Warner Wells, 1986

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"Nordell Hill, Raleigh, NC." This is a postcard of the log-cabin home of Dr. Dixon-Carroll. Photo courtesy of UNC Libraries.

^[2]Elizabeth Delia Dixon-Carroll, physician and director of medical services, professor of physiology and hygiene, and infirmery physician of [Meredith College](#) ^[3], Raleigh, was born in Shelby of English and Scottish ancestry. She was the daughter of Thomas Dixon, Sr., a Baptist minister in Shelby who was much respected in western North Carolina, and Amanda McAfee Dixon. One brother, Clarence, was a celebrated Baptist preacher in London, England; another, Thomas, Jr., author and lecturer, wrote *The Clansman* ^[4], the stirring Civil War story that was adapted for the motion picture *Birth of a Nation* ^[5]. A sister, Addie May, was married to a Presbyterian clergyman, J. E. Thacker of Norfolk, Va.

Elizabeth Delia attended public school in Shelby; she was awarded an academic degree from [Cornell University](#) ^[6], Ithaca, N.Y. and a medical degree in 1895 from Women's Medical College (later Columbia) in New York City. That year she rated first among two hundred medical licentiates. While enjoying an adventure of world travel following graduate training, she met and became engaged to Dr. Norwood G. Carroll, a young dentist of Magnolia. They were married in about 1900 after both had begun practice in Raleigh.

When [Meredith College](#) ^[3] opened on 27 Sept. 1899, Dr. Dixon-Carroll became its first physician, holding the position until her death thirty-five years later. Her course in physiology and hygiene was eagerly sought; confidante and counselor, she was dearly loved by students and faculty alike and respected by her professional colleagues. She insisted on strict preventive medical practices and took pride in the fact that during her entire tenure she never lost a patient, the deadly influenza epidemic of 1917–18 notwithstanding. From mid-fall to spring she insisted that all students wear high-topped shoes and warm underwear with sleeves to the wrists.

Public-spirited, she espoused the causes of [woman suffrage](#) ^[7] and youth welfare. She advocated reform in the care of delinquent youth before the North Carolina legislature, exciting an enthusiasm reminiscent of the General Assembly's response to Dorothea Dix in the 1840s when the latter pleaded for improved treatment of the mentally ill. In 1917 the legislature enacted a bill to "establish 'The State Home and Industrial School for Girls and Women' for the reclaiming and training of delinquents, \$25,000.00 having been appropriated for the purchase of grounds and the erection of buildings, and \$10,000.00 annually for operating expenses." Dr. Dixon-Carroll was on its board of directors, appointed by Governor [Thomas W. Bickett](#) ^[8]. Acting for the [North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs](#) ^[9], an organization that she helped establish, she was influential in the purchase of a defunct school for boys at [Samarcand](#) ^[10] in [Moore County](#) ^[11], comprising 224 acres and buildings in good repair. For favorable psychological impact, the school and farm were given the name [Samarcand Manor](#) ^[12]; it was one of the first establishments of its kind in the South. Each Christmas, Meredith College students enhanced its holiday sparkle by sending Christmas stockings.

Dr. Dixon-Carroll was the first woman medical practitioner in Raleigh. She maintained private offices for many years with Dr. Bessie Evans Lane, who assisted her at [Meredith College](#) ^[3] and on her death succeeded her at Meredith. In addition to her general medical practice, Dr. Dixon-Carroll practiced ophthalmology and counseled both young and older women. She was a member of the [American Medical Association](#) ^[13], the [North Carolina Medical Society](#) ^[14], and the [Raleigh Academy of Medicine](#) ^[15] of which she was one-time president. She was also an honorary member of the North Carolina Dental Society, founding member and first president of the Raleigh Women's Club and the North Carolina State Federation of Women's Clubs, vice-president (1917–30) and president (1930–34) of the board of directors of [Samarcand](#)

Manor ^[12], founding member and president of the Raleigh Garden Club ^[16], and a member of the Fortnightly Review Club.

She and her husband had no children. After their marriage a young nephew of Dr. Norwood Carroll, Herbert Norwood, became a frequent visitor to their hospitable and rustic log home, Nordell Hill, in the old Bloomsbury section of north Raleigh ^[17] and in time was like an adopted son. He enhanced the Carrolls' pleasure in a leisurely cruise around the world when his uncle retired from dentistry in 1914. Later he was graduated with honors from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis to become a career officer. Serving with distinction during World War II, he was reported missing in action when his ship was lost during the Battle of the Solomon Islands. A naval fighting ship bears his name.

Dr. Dixon-Carroll died in Rex Hospital ^[18], Raleigh ^[17], of injuries suffered in an automobile accident the previous day. The funeral service was conducted in the First Baptist Church by the Reverend Dr. J. Powell Tucker. The Reverend E. McNeill Poteat said in eulogy, "She was utterly impatient of things that cramped the human spirit." Burial was in Oakwood Cemetery. Her husband died on 5 Apr. 1942 while visiting friends in Cincinnati.

Additional information from NCPedia editors at the State Library of North Carolina:

Modern scholarly analysis of Dixon-Carroll places her achievements in their proper context, especially as it concerns her work to advance women's suffrage. In a state that would refuse to ratify the 19th Amendment, Dixon-Carroll was outspoken in her support for the suffrage movement, but her support of voting rights for women specifically and purposefully excluded Black women. In a June 1920 newspaper article, Dixon-Carroll argued that women's suffrage would both secure white supremacy and expand it: "Not only would women suffrage give white control in [Southern] states a more permanent footing than now, but white supremacy will continue to grow, since the increase of white population is more rapid than the increase of colored population."

Following the amendment's ratification and in advance of an upcoming election, Dixon-Carroll worked to whip the votes of white women in support of the Democrats and their white supremacist agenda. In a September 1920 speech to a crowd in her hometown of Shelby, Dixon-Carroll seized the opportunity to remind women that the future of white supremacy was at stake:

"I believe that every woman in North Carolina should align herself with the Democratic Party, for what the Democratic Party has stood for and has already accomplished, and for what it promises in the future. Women want clean government, institutions taken care of, the blind and the insane and the reformatories taken care of, and white supremacy."

Her stewardship of Samar CAND ^[19]—a public institution for "delinquent" girls that operated from 1918 to 2011—as president of its board of directors is likewise receiving renewed attention. Investigations of the institution in the 1930s revealed a culture of physical abuse and poor living conditions, sparking public outcry and demands for reform. At every turn, Dixon-Carroll defended the institution, dismissing the allegations and publicly insisting that Samar CAND was operating "beautifully and smoothly." Despite the public embarrassment, Dixon-Carroll retained leadership of the board as its president until her death in 1934.

---*Historical Research and Publications Office, NC Office of Archives and History, 2021*

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