

Henderson, Mary Ferrand ^[1]

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By Carolyn Howard Carter, 1988

13 Oct. 1887–4 July 1965

Mary Ferrand Henderson, [Democratic party](#) ^[2] official and promoter of women's political rights, was born in Salisbury, the daughter of [John Steele Henderson](#) ^[3], a North Carolina legislator and congressman, and Elizabeth Cain Henderson. One of seven children, she was the sister of [Archibald Henderson](#) ^[4], mathematician and professor, and Elizabeth Henderson Cotten, Democratic party activist and woman suffragist.

Mary Henderson spent her childhood in Salisbury where she received her early education. She was graduated from [St. Mary's School, Raleigh](#) ^[5], in 1903, attended the Stuart School in Washington, D.C., and studied law at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] in 1915–16 and 1933–34.

Working ardently for [woman suffrage](#) ^[7], she became the first legislative chairman of the [Equal Suffrage League of North Carolina](#) ^[8]. In 1920 she served as vice-chairman of the Democratic party in [Rowan County](#) ^[9]. Appointed first vice-chairman of the [North Carolina Democratic party](#) ^[10] executive committee in 1922, Miss Henderson was the first woman to serve in that position. In 1924 she was elected to the office and served until her voluntary resignation in 1930.

When the number of North Carolina delegates-at-large was increased in 1924 from four to eight, she figured prominently in the successful drive to establish a four-man-four-woman delegation, and she was elected as one of the four women. Between 1928 and 1930, Miss Henderson led the voter registration drive for Democratic women. During the 1930s she continued to be an active campaigner for her party. In 1934, she was an unsuccessful candidate for the position of national committeewoman from North Carolina to the Democratic party.

Miss Henderson was the first woman to serve on the Alumni Council of [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6]. Throughout her life she advocated the adoption of the Australian ballot, longer school terms for rural communities, and more widely based welfare legislation. She also held offices in the [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) ^[11], [United Daughters of the Confederacy](#) ^[12], [YWCA](#) ^[13], and the Woman's Club. She died in Chapel Hill where she had resided since 1933.

References:

Lyman Cotten Papers, Archibald Henderson Papers (Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library, Chapel Hill)

North Carolina Biography, vol. 5 (1941)

Raleigh News and Observer, 22 July 1934, 5 July 1965

Additional Resources:

Mary F. Henderson Papers, UNC: http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/h/Henderson.Mary_F.html ^[14]

Subjects:

[Biographies](#) ^[15]

[Politics and government](#) ^[16]

[Women](#) ^[17]

Authors:

[Carter, Carolyn Howard](#) ^[18]

Origin - location:

[Orange County](#) ^[19]

[Rowan County](#) ^[20]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[21]

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