

Cone, Laura Weill ^[1]

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By Kathelen McCarty Smith, 2017

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Portrait of Laura Weill Cone, State Normal and Industrial College (now University of North Carolina at Greensboro), Class of 1910. Used courtesy of University of North Carolina at Greensboro Special Collections and University Archives.

Laura Weill, Class of 1910, was one of the most illustrious alumna to graduate from the State Normal and Industrial College (now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro). Weill was born on September 19, 1888 in Wilmington, North Carolina, to prominent lawyer Solomon Weill and his wife, Elinora. In 1906, she entered Dana Hall School, a preparatory institution for Wellesley College, and transferred to State Normal the following year. She distinguished herself at State Normal as the president of her graduating class of 1910; Editor-in-Chief of the *State Normal Magazine* and *The Carolinian*; and the Vice-President of the Athletic Association. She was even the author of *The College Song*, which focused on loyalty and the school's devotion to service. Service had been an important part of State Normal's mission, but it was the motto of the Class of 1910, and they "willed it" to the college during graduation.

Weill also showed an interest in women's rights while she was at State Normal, penning "Self-Government in Women's College," for a school essay. Upon graduation, Laura Weill taught high school in Wilmington, North Carolina, but then returned to Greensboro where in 1917, she became the first woman on the Greensboro School Board. Weill married lawyer David Stern (1882-1915) and they had one child, Frances (1913-1993). After Stern's death, she married Julius W. Cone, a member of a prominent Greensboro textile family and president of Cone Export Commission Company, a division of Cone Mills. They had two sons, Edward Toner (1917-2004) and Julius Washington (1920-1925).

Cone continued her interest in educational causes, and also became a strong advocate for women's rights, serving as Treasurer and Vice-President of the Greensboro Equal Suffrage League. She also worked with other North Carolina suffragists, such as Gertrude Weil and Louise Alexander, to push for the ratification of the Susan B. Anthony Amendment. She joined in their disappointment when the North Carolina legislature postponed the vote on suffrage, thus allowing Tennessee to become the thirty-sixth state to ratify the Amendment, the number required for women to gain the right to vote. The Amendment was not ratified in North Carolina until 1971.

Cone remained active in the community, promoting women's rights, labor, and racial equality. When Woman's College (now the University of North Carolina at Greensboro) librarian Charles Adams was criticized for allowing black students from Bennett College and North Carolina A & T to use the school library, Cone strongly defended him. She also continued to support local education initiatives, serving on the Board of Trustees for Bennett College, a local historically black liberal arts college for women, for almost three decades. She also served for twenty-two years on the Board of Trustees of her alma mater, The University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG), and as a member of its executive committee from 1934 until 1953. When discussion began regarding the possible co-education of Woman's College, Cone opposed it, as did many of the administration faculty, feeling that there would always be a place for a public women's college. Her influence on campus also included architectural choices. Cone's taste in architecture was traditional and she preferred a

more cohesive campus plan, continuing the Georgian design prevalent in many of the buildings on College Avenue. Ironically, she would have a residence hall named in her honor in 1967, reflecting the typically modern architecture of the time.

Her interests also included community health, and she was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Moses Cone Memorial Hospital, where she died in 1970 after a brief illness.

References:

Smith, Kathelene McCarty. "Laura Weill Cone: Alumna and Suffragist," *Spartan Stories, Tales from the University Archives at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro* (blog), December 18, 2017, <https://uncghistory.blogspot.com/2017/12/laura-weill-cone-alumna-and-suf...> [2]

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[Laura Weill, Class of 1910.] Photograph. No date. University of North Carolina at Greensboro Special Collections and University Archives. (used with permission.)

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