

## Kenan, Sarah Graham <sup>[1]</sup>

### Kenan, Sarah Graham

by Ida Brooks Kellam, 1988

**17 Feb. 1876–16 Mar. 1968**



A Virtual Museum of University History.

Above, Kenan House circa 1968.

<sup>[2]</sup>Courtesy of UNCW Archives.

<sup>[3]</sup>Sarah Graham Kenan, philanthropist, was born in

Wilmington <sup>[4]</sup> of which she remained a lifelong resident. The daughter of Mary Hargrave and William Rand Kenan <sup>[5]</sup>, a native of Kenansville, she attended school in Wilmington and New York City; she was graduated from St. Mary's Junior College <sup>[6]</sup> in Raleigh <sup>[7]</sup>. On 19 Dec. 1912 she married her cousin Graham Kenan, a lawyer in Wilmington; he died on 5 Feb. 1920 in New York City, where he had recently opened a law office. The couple had no children. After the death of her husband, Mrs. Kenan purchased a house on Market Street in Wilmington in order to live near her sister Jessie; the brick colonial residence was altered and modernized by Tom Hastings <sup>[8]</sup>, architect of Carrere and Hastings <sup>[9]</sup> of New York City. Mrs. Kenan traveled extensively, spending time in Palm Beach and St. Augustine, Fla., as well as in Wilmington in winter and Lake Placid, N.Y., in summer. She also traveled abroad and was an avid art collector most of her life.

Mrs. Kenan was the sister-in-law of Henry Morrison Flagler <sup>[10]</sup>, who with John D. Rockefeller <sup>[11]</sup> founded the Standard Oil



Sisters Jessie Wise (center) and Sarah Kenan (right). Courtesy of

Company. The UNCW Archives.

<sup>[3]</sup>Flagler fortune was left to Mrs. Kenan's sister, Mary Lily Flagler

Bingham <sup>[12]</sup>. At her death in 1917 it was divided equally between Mrs. Kenan, her brother William Rand Kenan, Jr. <sup>[13]</sup>, of New York, and her sister Jessie Kenan Wise of Wilmington. Because Mrs. Kenan lived a quiet life and shunned publicity, most of her philanthropic activity went unnoticed. Nonetheless, during her lifetime gifts to charitable foundations and educational institutions exceeded \$12 million. The present report of philanthropic donations of the Sarah Graham Kenan Foundation <sup>[14]</sup> lists substantial gifts received by the Catherine Kennedy Home <sup>[15]</sup> in Wilmington, the Duplin County Board of Education, New Hanover County <sup>[16]</sup> private schools, the Diocese of East Carolina <sup>[17]</sup> and St. James Episcopal Church <sup>[18]</sup> in Wilmington, the Duke University Medical School <sup>[19]</sup>, the North Carolina Museum of Life and Science <sup>[20]</sup>, St. Mary's College <sup>[6]</sup>, the Thalian Hall Commission <sup>[21]</sup> in Wilmington, Durham Academy <sup>[22]</sup>, the Kenansville Board of Education, the University of North Carolina at Wilmington <sup>[23]</sup>, and others. On 18 Nov. 1968 James Graham Kenan gave a gift deed of Mrs. Kenan's home on Market Street to the state of North Carolina for the board of trustees of Wilmington College (now the University of North Carolina at Wilmington). This gift from her nephew included some of the fine furnishings and art

treasures collected by Mrs. Kenan. The home is now the residence of the chancellor of the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Mrs. Kenan's portrait hangs in the lobby of the [Sarah Graham Kenan Auditorium](#) <sup>[24]</sup> on the Wilmington campus.

On 20 Mar. 1968 the funeral service for Mrs. Kenan was held at St. James Episcopal Church, Wilmington. She was interred in Oakdale Cemetery, where her parents were also buried.

## References:

Daniel L. Grant, *Alumni History of the University of North Carolina, 1795–1924*(1924).

Information Service, University of North Carolina at Wilmington.

New Hanover County Deed Books (North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh).

Raleigh *News and Observer*, 17 Mar. 1968.

Wilmington *Morning Star*, 20 Mar. 1968.

Wilmington *Sunday Star-News*, 17 Mar. 1968.

## Additional Resources:

Kenan Family Papers, 1748-1996 (collection no. 04225). The Southern Historical Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kenan\\_Family.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kenan_Family.html) <sup>[25]</sup> (accessed February 14, 2013).

Buildings & Landmarks: Kenan Memorial Auditorium, UNCW: <http://library.uncw.edu/web/collections/archives/bnl/1.html> <sup>[26]</sup>

Register, Alvaretta Kenan. *The Kenan family and some allied families of the compiler and publisher*. Statesboro, Ga., J. S. Kenan II. 1967. <https://archive.org/details/kenanfamilysomea00regi> <sup>[27]</sup> (accessed February 14, 2013).

Sarah Graham Kenan (1876-1968), UNC Digital Collections:  
[http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir\\_museum/id/668](http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir_museum/id/668) <sup>[28]</sup>

Kenan, Sarah Graham 1876-1968 in WorldCat: <https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2009-189534> <sup>[29]</sup>

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Above, Kenan House circa 1968. Courtesy of UNCW Archives. Available from <http://library.uncw.edu/web/collections/archives/bnl/kenanh.html> <sup>[3]</sup> (accessed February 14, 2013)

Sisters Jessie Wise (center) and Sarah Kenan (right). Courtesy of UNCW Archives. Available from <http://library.uncw.edu/web/collections/archives/bnl/kenanh.html> <sup>[3]</sup> (accessed February 14, 2013).

Sarah Graham Kenan (1876-1968). From the Carolina Story: A Virtual Museum of University History. Available from [http://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/early\\_benefactors/sarah-graham-kenan-1876-1968/](http://museum.unc.edu/exhibits/early_benefactors/sarah-graham-kenan-1876-1968/) <sup>[2]</sup> (accessed February 14, 2013).

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## Authors:

[Kellam, Ida B.](#) <sup>[33]</sup>

## Origin - location:

[Wilmington](#) <sup>[34]</sup>

## From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[35]</sup>

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## Links

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[20] <https://www.ncpedia.org/north-carolina-museum-life-and-scie> [21] <http://www.thalianhall.org/thalian-hall/board-trustees> [22] <https://www.ncpedia.org/durham-academy> [23] <https://www.ncpedia.org/university-north-carolina-wilmington> [24] <http://www.uncw.edu/arts/kenan.html> [25] [http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kenan\\_Family.html](http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/k/Kenan_Family.html) [26] <http://library.uncw.edu/web/collections/archives/bnl/1.html> [27] <https://archive.org/details/kenanfamilysomea00regi> [28] [http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir\\_museum/id/668](http://dc.lib.unc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/vir_museum/id/668) [29] <https://www.worldcat.org/identities/lccn-no2009-189534> [30] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/biography-term> [31] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/philanthropy> [32] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/women> [33] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/kellam-ida-b> [34] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/origin-location/coastal-39> [35] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/dictionary-no>