

Tillett, Charles Walter, Jr. ^[1]

Tillett, Charles Walter, Jr.

by James B. Craighill, 1996

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Charles Walter Tillett, Jr., attorney and civic leader, was born in Mangum ^[2], Richmond County ^[3], the son of Carrie Patterson and Charles W. Tillett. He attended the Charlotte ^[4] public schools and Webb School at Bell Buckle, Tenn., from which he was graduated in 1905. At The University of North Carolina ^[5], where he received the A.B. degree in 1909, he was elected to membership in Phi Beta Kappa and the Order of the Golden Fleece; he was an intercollegiate debater and president of the Dialectic Society. He also studied law at the university, was admitted to the bar in 1911, and established a practice in Charlotte. In 1918 he entered the Officers' Training Corps; commissioned in the Fiftieth Infantry, he was

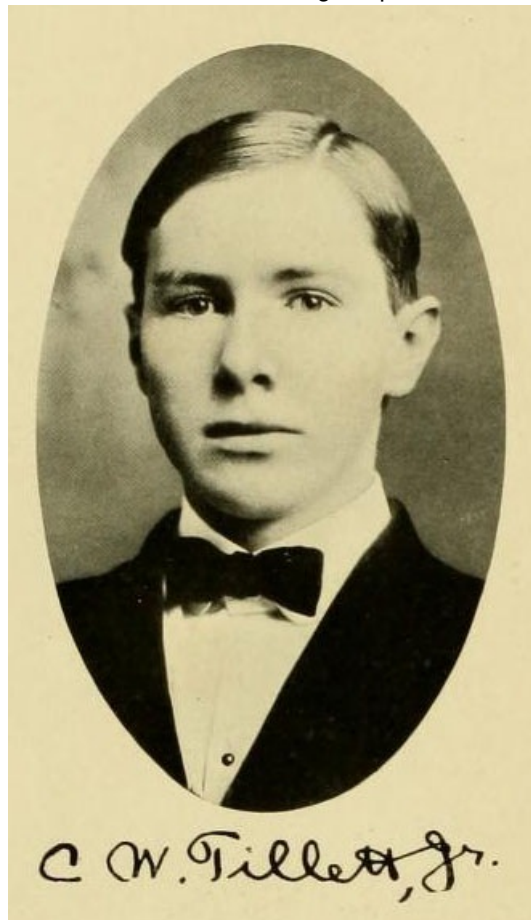


Image of Charles Walter Tillett, Jr., from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Yackety Yack Yearbook, [p. 63], published 1909 by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

discharged as a captain in 1919. Presented on Internet Archive.

^[6]

As a member of the school board in Charlotte, Tillett was noted for his championship of a fair distribution of public school funds for the benefit of black children. He was a leader in the Citizens Library Movement, which obtained state support for countywide library service, and in Charlotte he served on the board of directors of the Symphony Society and helped to establish the Mint Museum of Art ^[7]. Perhaps the one act that brought him most forcefully to public attention occurred in Charlotte in May 1926, when a Committee of One Hundred, a Fundamentalist group, met to plan steps to secure legislation that would prohibit the schools of North Carolina from teaching the theory of evolution. During a brief pause in the proceedings, while the Resolutions Committee was temporarily off the floor, Tillett and a group of his friends, all university alumni, received permission to speak. Tillett taunted the Fundamentalists by asking whether they intended to destroy free speech and free thought. Reportedly his remark "brought on a tumult" and in large measure contributed to the failure of this committee to achieve its objective. Tillett also spoke effectively before legislative committees on behalf of freedom of research and teaching. North Carolina was spared the infamy that befell several other states on this question.

After World War II ^[8] Tillet became a champion of "peace by world law." As an observer, he attended the 1945 conference in San Francisco at which the United Nations Charter was adopted and reported on the proceedings for the *Charlotte News*. He later spoke and wrote extensively in support of the United Nations, and his writings were reprinted and widely distributed. On his own initiative as well as through membership in the American Bar Association ^[9], Tillet succeeded in defeating a proposed amendment to the Constitution offered in 1952 by Senator John W. Bricker of Ohio and more than sixty others that would have imposed far-reaching restrictions on the treaty-making powers of the U.S. president and the Senate. (The amendment proposed that the House of Representatives and each of the state legislatures have the right to reject a treaty.) His testimony before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations undoubtedly contributed to the failure of this proposal.

He was a Presbyterian and an active Democrat ^[10], attending the Democratic National Convention of 1944. In 1917 he married Gladys Love Avery ^[11], and they had three children: Charles W. III, M.D., Gladys (Mrs. William I. Coddington), and Sara Avery (Mrs. William Wayt Thomas, Jr.).

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