

## **Barnwell, Lila Ripley** <sup>[1]</sup>

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By Arika Brown, North Carolina State University, 2013; Revised by SLNC Government and Heritage Library, June 2023

**18 Apr. 1863–6 Mar. 1961**



Photograph of Lila Ripley Barnwell, from the *Times-News* (Hendersonville, NC), March 7, 1961. Presented by Google News. Used by permission of the Times-News Online.

<sup>[2]</sup>Lila Ripley Barnwell, poet, suffragette, and community activist, was born April 18, 1863 in Hendersonville, North Carolina to Col. James M. Ripley (also referred to as Valentine Ripley), originally of Virginia, and Mary A. Ewart of South Carolina. Col. Ripley was the operator of Hendersonville's first hotel and stagecoach depot before rail arrived, while her mother was an author whose stories were published in magazines and periodicals.

Barnwell received her early education from her mother and an unnamed tutor and then attended Mary Baldwin Seminary in Staunton, Virginia at the age of 14. Later becoming an accomplished poet in western North Carolina from the publication of her volumes *Heart Songs* and *Rhymes from Laurel Land*, she began her writing career at age 11 when she wrote a letter to a State Representative asking for legislation to protect wildlife, particularly birds. Having developed knowledge of and interest in public affairs, particularly women's suffrage, at age 18 she became a delegate and an active member of the first North Carolina Woman's Suffrage Convention in Charlotte.

Her active participation in the community included becoming the first president of the local chapter of the United Daughters of Confederacy, a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, participation in the the Women's Club and Women's Auxillary, and membership on the Board of Public Charities. Barnwell described herself as a Presbyterian and Republican who was extremely active in politics; others referred to her as a mountain poetess, a matriarch, a suffragette, and an "authority on birds".

### Red Roses.

[From Washington Post of Sunday.]

Well, the gay, bright summer is over,  
And I have come to say,  
Goodby and to bring you this flower;  
For to morrow I go away.  
I give as a farewell token  
The loveliest flower that grows,  
I shall need no other reminder  
Than a glowing, red, red rose.  
Perhaps you would like to forget me,  
But that can never be,  
For as long as red roses are blooming,  
They will make you think of me.  
You will give to others flowers,  
At many a time and place,  
But whenever you see red roses,  
You will think of a woman's face.  
You will think of this happy summer.  
You will think of me, and yet  
The thought of me and red roses  
Will bring to you only regret.  
For I know that I and red roses  
Will be of your life a part.  
You'll remember their glowing beauty,  
As they lay on a woman's heart.

The roses and I will haunt you,  
And I shall remember, too,  
Alas! that sweet red roses  
Should leave the scent of rue.  
You never can forget me,  
Although you are a man,  
And roses—warm, red roses—  
Forget them if you can.

So this is the end of the summer,  
And the brief, sweet dream is o'er,  
Another summer is coming,  
Red roses will bloom as before.  
But they will only remind you  
Of the blue of this summer's skies;  
Of dancing, jests, and moonlight,  
And a woman's laughing eyes.

I have had a woman's triumph,  
Has it caused you any pain?  
Would you like to live this summer,  
Of roses and moonlight again?  
Goodby to you and the brightness  
That goes with this summer's close,  
I leave you with this token  
A beautiful, deep red rose.

LILA RIPLEY BARNWELL.

Hendersonville, N. C., September, 1894.

Lila Ripley Barnwell's poem "Red Roses," published in the *News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), October 3, 1894. From Gale Group 19th Century Newspapers Online.

In 1884, at the age of 21, Lila Ripley married Rafe Izard Barnwell of Charleston, South Carolina. Their marriage was cut short by Rafe's death while Lila was still in her twenties. Increasing her writing after this time, she contributed to different newspapers and magazines, and her poems were reportedly featured in *The Washington Post*, the *Charleston News and Courier*, and *The Charlotte Observer*. The Raleigh, North Carolina *News and Observer* published a number of her poems in several issues, and one of her more well-known poems, "Red Roses", was published in the October 3, 1894 issue.

Known regionally as a writer, she was invited in June 1927 to speak at the unveiling of a number of commemorative tablets in Fletcher, North Carolina that were dedicated to several poets and songwriters (although not themselves North Carolina natives) whose works had particular meaning for local memory, including Bascom Lunsford (credited with writing the song "Dixie"), the mid-western poet James Whitcomb Riley, and Stephen Collins Foster (composer of "Swanee River").

Barnwell focused her writing in particular on her connection to North Carolina and its mountains. In 1923 in an unpublished undergraduate thesis, Elon College student Mary Swanson<sup>[3]</sup> conveyed Barnwell's sentiments: "I am a mountaineer, a native of Hendersonville, exceedingly proud of my state and my own section of country. I have travelled abroad having spent some time in Europe, Asia, and Africa. My foreign experiences were interesting and delightful, but I returned to my own land more satisfied than ever with our country, our ideals, our history, our opportunities, and our people." Barnwell sought to preserve in her writing the 19th century ideals and traditions of North Carolina.

Lila Ripley Barnwell Barnwell was a lifelong member of the First Presbyterian Church of Hendersonville, which both parents helped found in 1852. She died on March 6, 1961, a number of weeks short of her 98th birthday, and appears to have been buried in a family plot in Oakwood Cemetery in Hendersonville, NC.

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<http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1665&dat=19610307&id=fMZAAAAIBAsjJ&id=UCMEAAAAIBAJ&pg=3796,3212906><sup>[2]</sup> (accessed March 5, 2014).

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### Additional Resources:

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Barnwell, Lila Ripley. "Red Roses." *The News and Observer* (Raleigh, NC), October 3, 1894. From Gale Group 19th Century U.S. Newspapers online (accessed March 6, 2014).

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