

Weil, Gertrude ^[1]

Gertrude Weil

1879 - 1971

by Jaime Huaman
[Government & Heritage Library](#) ^[2], 2010

See also: [Weil, Gertrude](#) ^[3] (UNC Press)



Gertrude Weil, circa 1896. Image courtesy of North Carolina Office of Archives and History.

^[4]Gertrude Weil was a humanitarian and reformer who played a prominent role in many social, civic, political, and religious organizations at the local, state, and national levels. Her main interest in social welfare was based upon her belief in social equality in all areas and for all people. "It is so obvious that to treat people equally is the right thing to do," she once told a reporter. (*Goldsboro News-Argus*, December 6, 1964)

Gertrude Weil was born into a wealthy and prominent Goldsboro family on December 11, 1879. Her father [Henry Weil](#) ^[5], was a Jewish German immigrant and successful businessman. Her mother, Mina Rosenthal, also of Jewish German ancestry, was a North Carolina native. Henry and his brothers operated a general store, H. Weil & Bros. that opened just after the end of the Civil War. The Weils soon expanded their investments into a variety of other successful businesses. The Weil family played a significant role in the development of Goldsboro through their business enterprises and civic involvement.

After graduating from Goldsboro public schools, Gertrude was sent to New York to study at the [Horace Mann School](#) ^[6], a preparatory school affiliated with Columbia University. Her physical education teacher, Margaret Stanton Lawrence, was the daughter of [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) ^[7], one of the founders of the woman's suffrage movement. Upon graduation from Horace Mann, Gertrude attended [Smith College](#) ^[8] in Northampton, Massachusetts where she studied sociology. She graduated in 1901, becoming the first North Carolinian to graduate from Smith.

After completing her college studies, Gertrude returned home to Goldsboro where she followed the example of her mother who was active in local charitable organizations. Gertrude also became involved in the woman's suffrage movement. She was president of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League in 1920, when the North Carolina General Assembly failed to ratify the [19th Amendment](#) ^[9] to the United States Constitution. The amendment, needing only one more state's approval to become effective, was ratified by the Tennessee legislature in August 1920. Gertrude then became president of the North Carolina [League of Women Voters](#) ^[10], which educated women on their newly acquired voting rights. She was so committed to women's voting rights, political fairness and equality that in 1922, during the first election in which women were allowed to vote, she ripped up hundreds of suspect ballots after she was given a pre-marked ballot.

Gertrude was active in other civic organizations such as the Legislative Council of North Carolina Women, the Goldsboro Woman's Club, the North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching, the Women's State Council for National Defense, the [North Carolina Conference for Social Service](#) ^[11]s, and the North Carolina Council on Human Relations. During World War

II, she also provided money to help Jews escape from the Holocaust.

Gertrude also was concerned with working conditions for women and children. In a speech in 1916, she called for a survey of the working conditions of women and children. It was not until 1931, however, that North Carolina passed laws to shorten women's workdays [12] and to reform child labor [13].

Just as she believed in women's rights, Gertrude also thought that equality should be extended to African Americans. On one occasion, for instance, when a public pool was closed to African Americans, Gertrude and a cousin donated land and money for a pool to be built for their use. She opposed segregation and described the system in an interview with the *News & Observer* on March 14, 1965 as being "separate but by no means equal." Even in her eighties she could be found hosting bi-racial committee meetings in her home.

During her lifetime, Gertrude received several awards, including the Howard Odum award presented by the North Carolina Council on Human Relations [14], an honorary doctorate in 1957 from UNC Greensboro [15], and the Smith Medal [16] from Smith College for a lifetime of service to others.

On May 6, 1971, the North Carolina General Assembly finally ratified the woman's suffrage amendment to the United States Constitution. Just a few days later, on May 30th, Gertrude Weil died at the age of 91 in the house in which she was born and lived almost all of her life. She was buried in the Jewish section of Willow Dale Cemetery in Goldsboro.

Educator Resources:

Tar Heel Travelers Lesson Plan [17], State Archives of North Carolina

References and additional resources:

Items related to Gertrude Weil [18] from the **North Carolina** Digital Collections (Government & Heritage Library & the North Carolina State Archives).

Resources related to Gertrude Weil [19] in libraries [via WorldCat].

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