

Davis, Kathryn Rachel Sarah Rebecca Speight Darden ^[1]

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By [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 1986

24 Sept. 1905–10 Oct. 1979

Kathryn Rachel Sarah Rebecca Speight Darden Davis, physician and legislator, who was usually known as Rachel Darden Davis, was born at Seven Springs, [Wayne County](#) ^[3], the daughter of Herbert W. and Harriette Isler Davis. One of six children, she was reared on her father's farm and attended [James Sprunt Institute in Kenansville](#) ^[4] and Mount Olive High School. She was awarded the B.S. degree at [Salem College](#) ^[5] in 1926 and attended [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[6] in 1927–28. After receiving the M.S. degree at [Columbia University](#) ^[7] in 1928, she entered the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania and was awarded the M.D. degree in 1932. Following her internship and residency in Philadelphia, she served on the staff of Parrott Memorial Hospital in Kinston during 1934–57 and at the [Lenoir Memorial Hospital](#) ^[8], also in Kinston, from 1946 until shortly before her death. She also engaged in private practice specializing in obstetrics and gynecology, operated a farm, and engaged in extensive public service.

The first woman in eastern North Carolina to be elected to the state legislature, Dr. Davis represented [Lenoir County](#) ^[9] in the General Assembly for three terms (1959–63). In the Assembly she spearheaded a crusade to ease adoption requirements for single persons and, single herself, adopted a daughter, Harriette Elizabeth Davis (Mrs. Hugh L. Wilde). She also supported the promotion of fertility, population, food, and cancer research in the universities of the state. She helped found [Lenoir Community College](#) ^[10] and was especially active in the [American Cancer Society](#), ^[11] serving as a delegate to the International Cancer Congress in Moscow in 1972. She served on numerous state and local boards and commissions including the Water and Air Resources Board, the Commission of Correction and Detention, the Board of Dobbs Farms (chairman), Lenoir County Welfare Board, Kinston Recreation Board, and others. She was a member of and active in local, state, and national medical societies, the Business and Professional Women's Club, and a number of hereditary patriotic societies such as the [United Daughters of the Confederacy](#) ^[12], [Daughters of American Colonists](#) ^[13], [Magna Charta Dames](#) ^[14], and [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) ^[15]. Her artistic interests were expressed through service on the [North Carolina Arts Council](#) ^[16] and in support of ballet in the state.

Dr. Davis, originally a member of the Baptist church in which she was a deacon and a Sunday school teacher, later became an Episcopalian. She was a Democrat and the friend of many state and national political leaders; friends reported that she was the only Democrat invited to the inauguration of [Governor James E. Holshouser, Jr.](#) ^[17], a Republican.

References:

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