

## **Jerman, Cornelia Petty** <sup>[1]</sup>

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By Donald R. Lennon, 1988

**1 Dec. 1874—4 Feb. 1946**

Cornelia Petty Jerman, leader of the North Carolina woman suffrage <sup>[2]</sup> movement and Democratic <sup>[3]</sup> party official, was



born near Carthage, the daughter of William Cary and Emma Virginia Thagard Petty. She was Cornelia Petty Jerman <sup>[4]</sup> graduated from Oxford College in Oxford, N.C. <sup>[5]</sup>, in 1892 and studied at the New England Conservatory of Music in Boston, Mass. <sup>[6]</sup>. In 1898 she married Thomas Palmer Jerman of Raleigh <sup>[7]</sup>. Moving to Raleigh, she immediately became active in the city's social life. She was a charter member of the Woman's Club of Raleigh <sup>[8]</sup>, serving as president from 1909 to 1911 and as chairman of the building committee during the construction of the first and second club houses. She subsequently became president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs <sup>[9]</sup> and a trustee of the General Federation of Women's Clubs <sup>[10]</sup>.

Mrs. Jerman was in the forefront of the woman suffrage movement in North Carolina. She helped organize the Raleigh Equal Suffrage League and in 1919 was elected president of the North Carolina Equal Suffrage League. At a special 1920 session of the General Assembly <sup>[11]</sup>, which considered and rejected ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment <sup>[12]</sup>, Mrs. Jerman fought futilely for women's right to vote. In 1921, she led a movement to organize the State Legislative Council to sponsor constructive legislation in the fields of health, education, labor, and corrective institutions; from 1922 to 1933, she served as president of the council. She also led an effort to organize the Raleigh League of Women Voters <sup>[13]</sup> and served as its president. When the Democratic state convention met in 1922, she served as vice-president of the convention and became the first woman in North Carolina to address a Democratic state convention as a delegate.

In 1920, 1924, and 1928 Mrs. Jerman was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. As the gubernatorial campaign began in 1928, there was speculation that Mrs. Jerman planned to run for governor; however, she declined to enter the campaign. She was appointed to the Democratic National Committee in the same year, and she actively campaigned for Al Smith in 1928 and Franklin D. Roosevelt <sup>[14]</sup> in 1932.

In 1934, the Roosevelt administration selected Mrs. Jerman for the post of assistant collector of Internal Revenue for North Carolina. This appointment required her resignation from the Democratic National Committee and her relocation in Greensboro <sup>[15]</sup>. She remained in the federal post until 1939, when she resigned and returned to Raleigh <sup>[7]</sup>.

In June 1943 Mrs. Jerman was awarded an honorary doctor of laws degree by the Woman's College in Greensboro <sup>[16]</sup>. She also served as a director of the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad <sup>[17]</sup> and the Wake County Savings Bank, and was a member of the Fortnightly Review Club, the St. Cecilia Music Club, and the Women's National Democratic Club of Washington, D.C. <sup>[18]</sup>.

On her death in Raleigh <sup>[7]</sup>, the News and Observer <sup>[19]</sup> called her the "State's First Woman." She was survived by a son, Thomas Palmer, Jr., and a foster daughter, Cary (Mrs. John P. Cooper).

#### **References:**

Cornelia Petty Jerman Papers (Manuscript Collection, East Carolina University, Greenville)

*Who's Who in America* (1940–41)

#### **Image Credits:**

Raleigh City Museum. Available from <http://poe.ced.ncsu.edu/adventure/raleighcitymuseum/virtsuff.html> <sup>[4]</sup> (accessed April 23, 2012).

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**From:**

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press.[27]

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