

Cherry, Mildred Stafford ^[1]

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by Marie Sharpe Ham, Debra A. Blake, and C. Edward Morris. Excerpted from *North Carolina's First Ladies, 1891-2001*, copyright 2001. Reprinted with permission from [North Carolina Historical Publications](#) ^[2], North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

8 Aug 1894 - 10 Apr 1971



Mildred Stafford Cherry, 1945-1949. H.1971.90.5. Photo from the North Carolina Museum of History. Used courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

^[3]See Also: [Robert Cherry](#) ^[4] (DNCB), [Governor Robert Cherry](#) ^[5] (Research Branch); [First Ladies and Gentlemen of North Carolina NCpedia collection](#) ^[6].

Gregarious and gracious, Mildred Cherry met the challenges of being a governor's wife with her customary good nature. She found the first lady's duties challenging, but she easily adapted her schedule to that of her busy husband and to the accelerated pace of social and political activities in Raleigh. The *Gastonia Gazette* of April 12, 1971, quoted her as saying that she had "enjoyed most the many interesting people whom she and the Governor entertained there. Among these

personalities were Eleanor Roosevelt, General Dwight Eisenhower, President and Mrs. Harry Truman and their daughter, Margaret, and Josephus Daniels, ambassador to Mexico."

During the Cherry administration the mansion staff underwent changes. Laura M. Reilley, the official housekeeper, hostess, and staff supervisor of the Executive Mansion, helped Mildred Cherry schedule events and manage the large household. David Haywood, affectionately known as Uncle Dave, longtime butler at the mansion, died on November 21, 1947. He had served fourteen governors and their families for fifty-four years.

Mildred Stafford was born August 8, 1894, in Statesville but moved to Greensboro when only a year old. She was one of Emory J. and Lula Roberta Lowry Stafford's seven children. Her father served two terms (1909 and 1917) as mayor of Greensboro. She attended public schools in that city and graduated from Greensboro High School, where she greatly enjoyed playing basketball. Later she attended [Greensboro College](#) ^[7] for two years and Randolph Macon Women's College in Lynchburg, Virginia. Mildred Stafford taught second grade in the Greensboro City Schools until she met and married [Robert Gregg Cherry](#) ^[4], lawyer and then mayor of Gastonia. They met in Gastonia while she was attending a summer session of the Institute for Teachers. They were married in Greensboro on June 28, 1921. The Cherrys had no children.

After her marriage Mildred Cherry was active in the civic and social affairs of Gastonia. She was a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Red Cross, and other organizations. She had a keen interest in gardening and reading. One of her hobbies was collecting china demitasse coffee cups and dessert plates, as well as other antique china. Her collection was vast.



Governor R. Gregg Cherry and his wife, Mildred Stafford Cherry, 1950-1957. H.1957.50.87. Image from the North Carolina Museum of History. Used courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources.

^[8]Mildred Cherry shared a strong interest in North Carolina with her husband and supported his service to the state - he was a member of the state legislature for several years. During World War II she led many activities in support of the war effort. She encouraged the sale of war bonds and helped in the appeal that gained the state its quota of 105 women for training as hospital technicians in the Women's Army Corps. Although peace was declared during the Cherrys' first year in the Executive Mansion, wartime shortages still prevailed. Mildred Cherry's frugality kept entertaining costs within the \$2,500 annual budget. Mildred Cherry preferred the simpler events for local groups and legislators to the lavish, expensive affairs necessary for national and international dignitaries.

While living in the Executive Mansion, she added her touch to the building's decor. She redecorated the Rose Room, the official guest room, as well as another guest room. She also chose new rugs and carpets for the second floor, but because of shortages of materials, she was unable to do the same for the first floor.

On June 14, 1944, the Gastonia Gazette said of her: "Governors may, and often do, fight their way to the high seat by means of natural endowments and hard apprenticeship in Governmental affairs, but First Ladies are born, not made. Such a lady was Mildred Cherry." After their tenure in the Executive Mansion, the Cherrys returned to their many friends and activities in Gastonia. Upon her husband's death in 1957, Mildred Cherry bought a new house and indulged two of her favorite hobbies - interior design and reading. In later years, her health limited her role in the various organizations that had meant so much to her.

After suffering for some time with heart trouble, Mildred Cherry died in Gastonia on April 10, 1971, at age seventy-six. She was buried beside her husband in Gaston Memorial Park in Gastonia.

References:

Ham, Marie Sharpe, Debra A. Blake, and C. Edward Morris. 2001. *North Carolina's First Ladies, 1891-2001*. Raleigh, N.C.: Executive Mansion Fine Arts Committee and Executive Mansion Fund.

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