

Aycock, Cora Lily Woodard ^[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.

11 Oct 1868 - 13 Mar 1952

See Also: [Governor Charles Aycock](#) ^[3] - Research Branch, NC Office of Archives and History; [First Ladies and Gentlemen of North Carolina NCpedia collection](#) ^[4].



Mrs. Charles B. Aycock (Cora L. Woodward) in inaugural gown. N_58_9_83. Photo courtesy of the State Archives of North Carolina.

Just as first ladies before her had discovered, Cora Aycock in 1901 found that the governor's annual salary of three thousand dollars was inadequate to cover frivolous or elaborate entertaining at the Executive Mansion; and just as former first ladies had managed, so too did Cora Aycock. (Indeed, the family, being of modest means, left office in debt, in part because of personal expenses associated with being governor.) Cora Aycock skillfully hosted the small dinners for friends and colleagues that her husband, Governor Charles Brantley Aycock, preferred. Both of them relished simple entertaining and did not undertake many large events at the mansion. Many children were entertained there, however, as the Aycocks' many children often invited their friends to visit. Cora Aycock also encouraged her husband's interest in education and in her later years saw the fruits of his labors ripen as he was accorded the title of North Carolina's education governor.

Cora Lily Woodard was the second wife of [Charles B. Aycock](#) ^[3]. They were married on January 7, 1891. Her older sister, Varina, Aycock's first wife, died July 9, 1889, following eight years of marriage. With his first wife, Aycock had three children. Ernest Aycock was born in 1882 and died as an infant. Charles Brantley Aycock Jr. was born December 28, 1883, and died of spinal meningitis on August 10, 1901, while his father was governor. Alice Varina Aycock was born in 1886 and later married Clarence Poe. Varina Aycock's children loved Cora Aycock and were reared with Cora's own children. William Benjamin Aycock was born March 23, 1892, and later married Lucile Best; Mary Lily Aycock was born October 1, 1893, and later married Lennox Polk McLendon; Connor Woodard Aycock was born November 14, 1895; and John Lee Aycock was born August 7, 1897. Louise Rountree Aycock was born September 4, 1899; Frank Daniels Aycock was born July 9, 1902, in the mansion; and Brantley (who subsequently changed his name to Charles Brantley) Aycock was born August 12, 1907, and later married Alice Brogden. While in the Executive Mansion, Cora Aycock gave most of her attention to rearing her children and her duties as first lady. She was also active in her church, maintaining her membership in the Primitive Baptist church in Wilson. This musical woman played the piano beautifully and instilled in her children an appreciation for music. Their home was often filled with the sound of it.

After the Aycocks left office, they moved back to Goldsboro, where they had resided before moving to Raleigh. In 1910 the family moved back to Raleigh. Charles B. Aycock died suddenly on April 4, 1912, while delivering an address before

the Alabama Education Association in Birmingham. Left with almost no estate and eight children, the spunky former first lady took matters in hand. At their Raleigh home, located on a one-acre tract, she raised a variety of vegetables and kept chickens and a cow. She taught her children to be thrifty and allowed them to sell any extra milk or vegetables. She inherited from her parents a farm in Wilson County adjacent to that of a brother-in-law, who oversaw its operation. From that farm her family received a modest income from the sale of tobacco and was provided ham and sausage. Cora Aycock helped to support her family by publishing and selling *The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock*, which was edited by historian R. D. W. Connor and her son-in-law Clarence Poe. Later in her life, Cora Aycock, never very interested in politics, was appointed president of the North Carolina Railroad Company by then governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus^[5].

Born October 11, 1868, to Elder William and Delpha Rountree Woodard of Wilson, Cora Woodard Aycock was the daughter of a Primitive Baptist lay preacher and farmer. She was educated at Wilson Collegiate Institute and attended Mary Baldwin College in Staunton, Virginia. Following a long illness, Cora Aycock died on March 13, 1952, and was buried beside her husband in Raleigh's Oakwood Cemetery.

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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[Mrs. Charles B. Aycock (Cora L. Woodward) in inaugural gown.] N_58_9_83. Photograph. State Archives of North Carolina.

Subjects:

Biographies^[6]

Governors^[7]

Women^[8]

Authors:

Blake, Debra A.^[9]

Ham, Marie Sharpe^[10]

Morris, C. Edward^[11]

Origin - location:

Wayne County^[12]

Goldsboro^[13]

Wilson County^[14]

Wilson^[15]

Wake County^[16]

Raleigh^[17]

From:

North Carolina's First Ladies: 1891-2001, North Carolina Historical Publications^[18]

Years:

1868 - 1952

27 July 2017 | Blake, Debra A.; Ham, Marie Sharpe; Morris, C. Edward

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