

Reilley, Laura Holmes ^[1]

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by Eva Murphy, 1994

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Laura Holmes Reilley, was best known for her work in women's clubs on the local, state, and national levels. So varied and extensive were her activities that she was the first North Carolina woman to be included in *Who's Who in America* ^[2]. Born in St. Louis, Mo., to Charles Francis and Mary Linn Parry Holmes, she attended the "Mary Institute," the Women's Department of Washington University, and was graduated in 1882. Later that year, on 15 November, she married James Eugene Reilley (d. 1939), also of St. Louis. They lived in several places—St. Louis, New Mexico, Chicago, Baltimore, and Atlanta—before finally settling in [Charlotte](#) ^[3] in the 1890s and had six children: Lucile R. (MacDonald), Eugene Holmes, Ruth R. (Mrs. Preston B. Wilkes, Jr.), Laura Holmes (1891–1973), who served as a hostess at the [governor's mansion](#) ^[4] in [Raleigh](#) ^[5] from 1944 to 1961, Alfred Shapleigh, and Maurice Eliot.

Mrs. Reilley's contributions to women's organizations, especially those concerned with politics, history, and culture, were many. Most prominent was her long association with the [Charlotte Woman's Club](#) ^[6], of which she was president from 1903 to 1908 and from 1920 to 1922 and parliamentarian from 1934 to 1938. Under her leadership a clubhouse was built and the membership raised from 200 to 600. She was elected president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs for a two-year term beginning in 1909 and was chairman of Club Institutes for the state from 1926 to 1932. In 1910 in Cincinnati, she was elected to the board of the General Federation; from 1912 to 1916 she was corresponding secretary (elected in San Francisco), and from 1916 to 1918, vice-president (elected in New York). In 1924 the General Federation made her an honorary vice-president.

In September 1920 Mrs. Reilley was one of ten delegates from the United States attending the International Council of Women in Christiana, Norway. In May 1925 she was elected chairman of hospitality for the council at its meeting in Washington, D.C. In 1939 the governor of New York invited her to be a member of the Advisory Committee for the Participation of Women at the New York World's Fair.

Her political activities were mostly in the realm of voting rights. She was a member of the advisory board of the North Carolina [League of Women Voters](#) ^[7] and a delegate to the 1924 [Democratic](#) ^[8] state convention in [Raleigh](#) ^[5]. In addition, she was an organizer of the [North Carolina Suffrage Association](#) ^[9], a charter member and first vice-president of the Equal Suffrage League, and a representative, appointed by Governor [Locke Craig](#) ^[10], to the Southern Suffrage Conference in New Orleans in 1914. There she was elected vice-president.

While working for [woman suffrage](#) ^[11] she served on Governor [Thomas W. Bickett](#) ^[12]'s War Savings Committee, a part of the State Council of Defense during [World War I](#) ^[13], and also was chairman of the Committee on Women's Defense Work, a committee under the Council of National Defense set up by Congress. For the [YWCA](#) ^[14] she was requested to carry out an educational and financial campaign in the state districts after World War I.

Her affiliations with historical organizations were numerous. She was a regent of the Liberty Hall Chapter of the [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) ^[15] for two terms (1910–12, 1926–28), corresponding secretary (1912–16), and a parliamentarian. From 1936 to 1938 she was chairman of the Mecklenburg County Committee of Colonial Dames and in 1925 had been one of a Committee of 12 to plan the 150th anniversary celebration of the Declaration of Independence. She was a charter member and for a term governor (1937–38) of the Society of Mayflower Descendants.

Her work for cultural organizations was also notable. In the fall of 1922 she helped organize a Better Films Committee of Charlotte and was its first president. She was president of the state committee and vice-president of the Southeastern Council of Better Films. She was twice president of the Charlotte Sorosis, organizer of the Charlotte branch of the Needlework Guild of America (vice-president, 1930), and a trustee of the Mint Art Museum.

Active in church affairs, Mrs. Reilley was twice president of the Ladies' Aid Society, a charter member of the Westminster Presbyterian Church, and later a charter member of the Myers Park Presbyterian Church. She was buried from Myers Park Presbyterian Church in Elmwood Cemetery.

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