

Professor seeks info on GWU namesake

Friday, Dec 16 2011, 12:13 pm

[Rebecca Clark](#)

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About Fay Webb Gardner

She was born in 1885 and died in 1969

She was the wife of O. Max Gardner, governor of North Carolina from 1929 to 1933.

After her husband's death, Fay Gardner continued to shuttle back and forth between Shelby and Washington, where she remained active in national Democratic politics.

Fay Gardner was close friends with both Bess Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt.

She continued to provide financial support for Gardner-Webb University after her husband's death, allowing it to become the highly respected institution it is today.

About Dr. Joseph Webb

Started teaching at GWU in 2006 after retiring as the founding dean of the school of communication and media at Palm Beach Atlantic University in Florida

Author of nine textbooks on journalism, communication and practical theology

His most recent book, on the history of his ancestral roots, titled "An American Religious Odyssey," will be published this spring.

Has spent 44 years in higher education

Holds doctorate degrees from both the University of Illinois and the Claremont School of Theology

His wife, Andrea Worley, is an adjunct professor of art at GWU and teaches drawing and painting.

BOILING SPRINGS — Fay Webb Gardner was the wife of a North Carolina governor, close friends to the wives of two United States presidents and active in politics during a time when women were typically part of the background in a male-dominated world.

Now, Dr. Joseph Webb wants to tell Gardner's untold story.

She is the subject of one biography, published in 1978, but Dr. Joseph Webb said the 100-page book does not fully capture her character and legacy.

Her husband, O. Max Gardner, generally takes the spotlight, although even after his death, Fay Gardner was active in national Democratic politics.

"If Fay had been the typical wife and gone back to being a widow, we wouldn't be sitting here (at GWU)," Dr. Joseph Webb said.

He called Fay Gardner a "national woman."

The "Webb" in Gardner-Webb University is attributed to her, said Dr. Joseph Webb.

She left her mark on the town of Boiling Springs, the university and even on a broader, more national scope.

Dr. Joseph Webb said the GWU library is full of Fay Gardner's extensive records, diaries, notes and letters, which he is using in his research.

During the process, Dr. Joseph Webb will take trips to Raleigh, Missouri and other locations to discover the people and places that influenced and shaped Fay Gardner.

"I'm looking forward to doing this," he said. "It's well under way."

During the information-gathering process, GWU has supported Dr. Joseph Webb by lessening his teaching load in a mini-sabbatical.

"It does have the university's blessing," he said.

Dr. Webb is also seeking help from the community.

If there are people in the county who knew Fay Gardner or her family or have any information or documents on her life, he said he would be interested in talking to them.

Call Dr. Joseph Webb at 704-466-1654 or email him at jwebb1@gardner-webb.edu.

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