

[A century later, Newcomb alumna lives on](#)

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As a crusader for economic justice for teachers, Newcomb College alumna Sarah Towles Reed was a guardian angel to her colleagues and a thorn in the side of her critics on the Orleans Parish School Board.



Sarah Towles Reed looks at a newspaper article detailing her victorious hearing before the Orleans Parish School Board in 1948 on an accusation of un-Americanism. (Photo from the Earl K. Long Library, University of New Orleans)

But to former student Everett Lucas Drewes she was also a life-changing force. Reed, who graduated in 1904, is one of five women memorialized in the late [Dr. Drewes'](#) \$2.5 million bequest to Tulane University.

The gift will be used to support academic scholarships in the spirit of the scholarship that Reed helped Drewes win to Tulane during the Great Depression, says Darla Kemp, great-niece and caretaker.

Drewes went on to complete his medical degree at Louisiana State University.

Reed and her sister Roberta Towles, a 1924 Newcomb graduate, were legendary educators who taught Drewes at Alcee Fortier High School. They are part of a circle of women credited in the scholarship gift.

“He had great respect for the women in his life,” says Kemp.

When Reed was a Newcomb College student, female professors outnumbered male professors three to one.

Those influences shaped Reed's idea of what women are capable of achieving, says biographer Leslie Gale Parr, who received graduate degrees from Tulane University in 1988 and 1994. “Newcomb made a deep impression on her,” says Parr.

After graduation, Reed embarked on a storied career teaching New Orleans public school students. She headlined efforts to fight for equal pay for women and African Americans, overturned a rule that automatically fired women teachers who married and founded the first teachers' union in New Orleans.

Reed retired from teaching in 1951 and died in 1978. She was 96 years old, but her legacy lives on. An elementary school and a high school in eastern New Orleans are named after her and she was instrumental, Parr says, in fighting for the job protections that some teachers still enjoy today.

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