

The following "biography" of **Leila Hardie Moore Williams (1.11.3)** was excerpted from *John Hardie of Thornhill and His Family* by Lillian Galt Martin (1988)



1.11.3 Leila Hardie Moore was born on 18 February 1901 in New Orleans at her parents' home at 2525 St. Charles Avenue, corner of Third Street. She was educated by private tutors, at local schools, and at an eastern finishing school. The family moved in 1907 to Pass Christian, on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, but social affairs brought them back frequently to New Orleans.

Leila Hardie Moore Williams (Mrs. L. Kemper Williams) (1.1.3) (1901-1966) as queen of the Mystic ball in 1936.

Leila's father Robert Moore had been a sea captain and he loved boats and sailing. He kept his sloop anchored out in front, both here, and at their summer homes in (first Waterford, then New London) Connecticut. His children played tennis and golf, rode horseback, and sailed, at the Pass and in Connecticut.

Leila Moore made her debut in 1919-1920. She was a beautiful woman, but suffered from delicate health. On 2 October 1920 she was married at Pequot Chapel in New London, Connecticut (followed by a reception at her family's summer home) to Lewis Kemper Williams (Kemper), born 23 September 1887 in Patterson, Louisiana, son of Francis Bennett Williams and Emily Seyburn Williamson Williams. He had attended the University of the South at Sewanee, Tennessee, from 1906 to 1908, and then entered the family lumber business in Patterson, Louisiana. "His family had vast lumber interests [in Patterson] but he was well known in New Orleans, and each of his brothers had married a New Orleans girl."

After an extensive trip to California and Hawaii, the Williamses returned to Patterson in February 1921, and lived there until 1929 when they moved to New Orleans and bought a house with a large garden on Audubon Street.

Leila Williams was an active volunteer in the Junior League (she ran their coffee shop) and at St. Anna's Asylum. In Santa Barbara, California, where they had a three-story home, "with a beautiful back garden carefully tended by the Japanese gardener," she provided several scholarships to the Academy of the West, which was directed by Lotte Lehman. Both Kemper and Leila Williams were interested in education for the needy and also gave scholarships to the University of the South at Sewanee, the Piney Woods Negro School, and other schools. She was active in the Orleans Club, the Colonial Dames, the Garden Study Group, and the Altar Guild of Christ Church Cathedral. In 1936 she was queen of Mystic ball.

Kemper Williams was secretary-treasurer, then president, of the Frank B. Williams Cypress Co., Patterson, Louisiana; president and director, Williams, Inc., City Center Realty Co. He was a member of the board of directors of many other companies and many civic and social organizations, was honorary consul of Monaco, and was the recipient of the Times-Picayune Loving Cup for community service in 1937.

Kemper Williams served in World War I as lieutenant, then captain, retiring as colonel. He was national president of the Reserve Officers Association from 1931 to 1934. During World War II he was Commander of the Army Recreation Center, President of the War Department's Disability Review Board, and retired with the rank of Brigadier General.

In 1938 the Williamses had bought the "Merieult House" and adjoining property on Royal and Toulouse Streets. On returning to New Orleans after the war Leila Williams persuaded her husband to move into the "hidden house" on this property. This was joined to the Merieult house. Involved in the restoration, besides architect Richard Koch, were artists Boyd Cruise and Enrique Alferez, and Albert Lieutaud.

The Williamses' move to the Toulouse-Royal Street house brought association with artists and the arts. "Their group of friends had heretofore been completely social...They were serious churchgoers...They travelled extensively...With great wealth and no children...she began to reach for some purpose, not only for herself but for Kemper, a man gentle and sympathetic, but almost entirely occupied with practical and financial matters or social activity and family obligations...[The] idea of the Historic Collection took form..."

As Kemper neared eighty, and Leila no longer liked living in the now rowdy French Quarter, they moved to Coliseum Street, nearer to family and friends. Less than two years later Leila Williams died on 13 December 1966 in New Orleans.

They had been co-founders of the L. Kemper and Leila Williams Foundation and in 1970 came the announcement of The Historic New Orleans Collection, administered by the Foundation. It is a center for the study of Louisiana history, and is located partly in the complex of houses bought and lived in by the Williamses in the French Quarter. The Historic New Orleans Collection is of special interest to the Thornhill Foundation, as it serves as a repository for the Hardie Family Memorabilia (a collection of family letters, papers, photographs, etc., which have been donated to the Thornhill Foundation).

A year after the founding of The Historic New Orleans Collection, Kemper Williams died on 17 November 1971 in New Orleans. Leila and Kemper were both buried in Metairie Cemetery. There were no children.

[Quotations from *A Small Portrait of Leila Moore Williams*, The Historic New Orleans Collection, 1976.]