

Sisters *in Law*

Mary Boney Denison '81 & Emmett Boney Haywood '82


By: Kaela Inman

A trailblazing Carolina Law graduate inspired sisters **MARY '81 AND EMMETT '82 BONEY'S** mother's belief in women's potential through her resilience in the face of challenges. In 1943, **MARGARET MCLEAN FAW FONVIELLE HEYWARD** graduated from Carolina Law as the sole woman in her class. She later balanced family with an esteemed early career, becoming the first woman admitted to the Wilkes County Bar and clerking for Federal Judge I.M. Meekins.

After pausing to raise five children, Margaret boldly revived her practice in 1969 as a prosecutor, solo attorney and city council member in Wilmington, N.C. Margaret's journey, including overcoming divorce and rebuilding her career, underscored for Emmett and Mary's mother, Lillian Bellamy Boney, the importance of women cultivating careers to withstand life's hardships.

Seeing Margaret's struggles and ultimate triumphs, Lillian was inspired by her friend to instill those values of resilience and perseverance in her daughters – empowering them through education to support themselves amidst whatever twists and turns came their way. Attending all-girls high schools, Emmett and Mary were taught women could thrive in any career. An internship on Capitol Hill exposed Mary to a secretary who envisioned law as the perfect professional path for women. Though initially dreaming of adventures abroad after college, practical considerations helped steer Mary toward nearby UNC School of Law after graduating Duke University in 1978.

That same year, Emmett, who had graduated from Carolina undergrad in 1977, was gaining legal experience



Emmett '82 and
Mary '81 Boney
circa 1959.

as a paralegal at Arnold & Porter in Washington D.C. before beginning her own journey at Carolina Law.

In Margaret's era, her law school presence was an anomaly. But by the late-1970s, women had gained a small foothold, though barriers persisted with law remaining a male-dominated field. Securing their parents' progressive encouragement, Mary and Emmett were ready to pursue careers aligned with their strengths.

Equipped with this empowerment, the sisters embarked on two formative years together at Carolina Law. Though their paths would later diverge, Mary and Emmett would rely on each other and Carolina Law's foundation to support their success amidst all the challenges ahead. As Emmett reflected, "We saw each other every day, and were there to support each other." Although the sisters did not

have classes together, they jointly served on the *North Carolina Journal of International Law*.

After law school, Mary pursued opportunities first in New York and later in Washington, DC, while Emmett built her career in Raleigh. The legal education and training they received at Carolina Law equipped both sisters for legal success in different specialties.

Mary focused on building her expertise at firms concentrating first on commercial litigation and later on trademark law, an area of practice she thrived in, enjoying the blend of rigorous analytical thinking coupled with the creative problem-solving involved in protecting brands.

Meanwhile, Emmett began practicing family law and

general civil litigation at Manning Fulton & Skinner dealing with sensitive matters impacting North Carolinians navigating emotionally difficult life transitions. After having two children, she worked part-time before taking a job at the Attorney General's Office representing the Department of Transportation, gaining immeasurable condemnation case experience.

After nine years, Emmett took an enormous risk, borrowing money to open her own solo practice as her children grew more independent. In those lean early days, she took on whatever work she could – speeding tickets, collections, legal research – to keep her budding practice afloat, relying on the kindness of mentors and clients willing to take a chance on her until she could prove herself.

A pivotal opportunity arrived when a prominent developer asked Emmett to take on a complex condemnation case. Her hard-fought victory proved her talents, catapulting her practice defending landowners. Soon she was in high demand across North Carolina. A few years later, she merged her firm into Nicholls & Crampton where she still practices, expanding her team to provide their clients with fuller representation.

Progress in their budding careers flowed from the legal education and foundational training received during their years as Tar Heels. Mary and Emmett appreciated how they were mentored by their skilled professors and walked in the footsteps of pioneering alumni who came before them. Soon, they would honor that by reaching back to lift the next generation of Carolina Law graduates.

In 2011, Mary's deeply ingrained belief in public service led her to accept an appointment as Deputy Commissioner for Trademark Operations at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. She quickly rose through the ranks to the role of U.S. Commissioner for Trademarks, serving as the highest-ranking U.S. Government official devoted solely to brand protection.

In this elevated role, Mary managed an expansive staff of over 950 employees and drove major modernization efforts to increase the office's efficiency and improve the experience for applicants. Her most significant achievement was spearheading employee engagement coupled with IT systems upgrades to allow the organization to sustain consistent trademark application review timelines, despite exponential growth in application volume – upholding the values of integrity and public service.

For her impactful leadership and stewardship of the trademark field, Mary received Carolina Law's Distinguished Alumni Award in 2016. This award reflected her trailblazing contributions, though Mary recognized she did not reach such heights alone.

She credits her progress and leadership acumen to the legal education, mentoring, and foundational training she received during her years Carolina Law as well as the stalwart support of her sister. She was also named one of the "50 Most Influential People in IP" in the World in 2019 by Managing *Intellectual Property Law Magazine*.

After building a distinguished career and highly

accomplished solo practice, Emmett joined Nicholls & Crampton to continue advocating for North Carolina landowners throughout the state facing property takings and seizures. Her work ethic earned her respect and recognition through awards at the state and national level, including among others being selected four times as Lawyer of the Year Eminent Domain and Land Condemnation (Raleigh), reflecting her excellence in legal skills and profound impact on the North Carolina community.

Accolades and personal success were not the sisters' end goals. In addition to their investment of time through alumni board participation and launching student enrichment initiatives, Mary and Emmett contributed financially to Carolina Law. Emmett established a scholarship, both have included the law school in their wills, and both have consistently supported other key priorities to help reduce the student debt burden, which has skyrocketed since their own law school days.

Mary and Emmett attained remarkable individual

success over their careers but remained steadfastly dedicated to giving back to the Carolina Law community that helped lay the foundation for their achievements. Mary served five years on the Law Alumni Board and currently serves on the Institute for Innovation board. Emmett has served on the UNC Law Alumni Advancement Committee, as well as the Board of the UNC Arts and Sciences Foundation. Both have actively engaged fellow alumni, strengthening connections across generations of Carolina Law graduates. Mary also pointed the way for the law school to establish an intellectual property clinic in collaboration with the US Patent and Trademark Office, aiming to enhance practical skills training and experiential learning opportunities for current students.

The sisters advise graduates to get involved, promote new voices, and show gratitude by helping others still finding their footing. Mary and Emmett stand tall as pioneers much like Margaret McLean Faw Fonvielle Heyward did before them. ♦

Emmett '82
and Mary '81
Boney.

