

Graham, Mary Owen ^[1]

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13 Oct. 1872–29 Mar. 1957

Mary Owen Graham, educator and civic leader, was born in [Wilmington](#) ^[2], the daughter of Archibald and Eliza Owen Barry Graham, and the great-granddaughter of [James Owen](#) ^[3], a legislator also from North Carolina. Her ancestry was a blending of Scottish, Welsh, English, and French. She was a sister of [Edward Kidder Graham](#) ^[4], niece of Alexander Graham, cousin of [Frank Porter Graham](#) ^[5], and aunt of Edward Kidder Graham, Jr. She received her education in private schools, the [Charlotte City Schools](#) ^[6], Charlotte Female Institute (now [Queens College](#) ^[7]) where she earned the A.B. degree in 1890, and at [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[8], [University of Tennessee](#) ^[9], and [Teachers College of Columbia University](#) ^[10].

From 1892 to 1907 Miss Graham taught in the graded school in Charlotte, often with ninety children in her primary classes; from 1908 to 1912 she was a member of the Department of Education of the North Carolina College for Women, where she trained primary teachers; and from 1912 to 1916 she was assistant superintendent of schools in [Mecklenburg County](#) ^[11], where she instituted Community Week. Because of its success the governor issued a proclamation making Community Week a statewide enterprise. From 1906 to 1914 she also taught in summer sessions in colleges and universities in North Carolina; in Fredericksburg, Va.; and in county institutes. She edited *Literature and Stories for Primary Grades* and with Ann M. Williams prepared a manual for teachers and students on teaching phonetics, which was widely used.

From 1916 to 1924 she served as president of [Peace Institute](#) ^[12] (renamed Peace, a Junior College for Women in 1930), Raleigh, the first woman president of the institution. She brought to Peace Institute "the efficiency of her experience, the forcefulness of her personality, the unselfishness of her service to womanhood, and the refining grace of her personal tastes." Her objective was "the full and rounded development of the girls mentally, physically, spiritually and socially." To assist in this task student government was begun at the school. In 1942, a portrait of her by Mabel Pugh of the Art Department of Peace was presented to the college, where it hangs in the Administration Building.

Because of her achievements, "Miss Mary Owen" was sought for numerous state offices and services. She was the first woman president of the [North Carolina Teachers Association](#) ^[13] (1914–15); first committeewoman from North Carolina on the National Democratic Committee (1918–27); trustee of the [North Carolina School for the Blind](#) ^[14] (1916–22); member of the State Board of Examiners, of the Committee of 100 for Public Welfare, and of the YWCA's South Atlantic Committee; vice-president of the [State Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[15]; speaker for the War Committee of World War I; and president of the Albemarle Presbyterial, an organization of the Presbyterian women of the church. She also was a member of the [National Education Association](#) ^[16], [Federation of Women's Clubs](#) ^[17], [League of Women Voters](#) ^[18], Bessie Dewey Book Club, [Daughters of the American Revolution](#) ^[19], [United Daughters of the Confederacy](#) ^[20], and [Business and Professional Women](#) ^[21], and an honorary member of the Altrusa Club. Miss Graham was an effective speaker before the senate and house committees of the North Carolina General Assembly. She died in the Presbyterian Home in High Point and was buried in Charlotte.

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