

Wiley, Mary Callum ^[1]

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by Marjorie Siewers Stephenson, 1996

14 July 1875–10 Mar. 1965

Mary Callum Wiley, teacher, author, editor, and historian, was born in Salem, the daughter of [Calvin Henderson](#) ^[2] and Mittie Towles Wiley. Her father was consecutively a lawyer, editor, member of the [General Assembly](#) ^[3], author of the *North Carolina Reader* and other educational publications, and North Carolina's first superintendent of public instruction. As the motivating force in the establishment of Winston's own graded school system, he became the first chairman of the Winston School Board and provided the school's first graduate—his daughter, Mary Callum Wiley.

Miss Wiley entered Woman's College (then the State Normal School) in [Greensboro](#) ^[4] as a junior and was graduated in 1894. In those days, a graduate received a diploma but no degree. She returned to Woman's College in 1903 for a year to earn an A.B. degree. In 1946 she was awarded an honorary degree by her alma mater for her years of service as a "master teacher," author, editor, and historian.

Of the forty-nine years she spent in the classroom, forty-seven were in [Winston-Salem](#) ^[5], first at West End School, then at the Cherry Street High School, and, from 1923 to 1945 at Reynolds High School, where she was head of the Department of English. In the *Winston-Salem Journal* ^[6] of 10 Mar. 1953, a staff reporter wrote: "Miss Mary, as she was affectionately called by her thousands of students, was an institution. But when her former pupils are asked to say why this is so, you quickly discover they are not talking in gray, granite-like institutional terms. Instead they seem to be describing a state of mind—a rather gay, somewhat strange and unpredictably wonderful state of mind."

Her teaching methods combined strict discipline (with a silent tongue and a speaking eye), enthusiasm, chuckles, smiles, and wit, portraying her irrepressible sense of humor. In clear evidence were her well-planned lessons. Her students enjoyed the variety of content and tempo to prevent any dullness, her "inspirational approach," her own dramatic impersonations of literary characters, and her pranks to enliven the class hour. She had strict requirements in regard to specific procedures, academic effort, "good study habits," and manners. For instance, students knew that on entering her class they were expected to say, "Good morning, Miss Mary." They could also expect her cheerful reply, "Good morning," and their name. Students knew to stand to recite, to enter through the back door and leave through the front door. "Class," she would sometimes say, "arise. We will now sing our state song." As one display of her strong loyalty to her beloved state, in an ardent—if not melodic—voice she would begin:

"Carolina, Carolina, heaven's blessings attend her
While we live we will cherish, protect and defend her."

Inspired by her enthusiasm, the class knew to chime in as heartily as she.

At other times she would instruct her students to condense a three-hundred-word paragraph into thirty words "with the exact core meaning of the author but in your own words." Many graduates of Reynolds High School, later in college or in the business world, praised "Miss Mary" for her insistence on a "perfect précis" and for instilling in them the understanding and appreciation of good literature. They were also grateful for the lessons in grammar and the drills that relentlessly weeded out the errors that she called "insults to our beautiful and effective English language."

She contributed many articles to *The State* ^[7] magazine, and her essays on education were widely published in the state press. For many years following her retirement she wrote a daily column, "Mostly Local," for the Winston-Salem newspaper. An active member of the [North Carolina Literary and Historical Association](#) ^[8], she donated her writings and those of her father to the North Carolina Department of Archives and History; books and other family materials were given to [The University of North Carolina](#) ^[9] Library in Chapel Hill.

After a long illness, Mary Wiley died at the age of ninety and was buried in Salem Cemetery.

References:

William S. Powell, ed., *North Carolina Lives* (1952 [portrait]).

Some Pioneer Women Teachers of North Carolina (1955).

Winston-Salem Journal-Sentinel, 8 Mar. 1953, 10 Mar. 1965.

Winston-Salem Twin City Sentinel, 29 May 1945, 10 Mar. 1965.

Additional Resources:

Finding Aid for the Mary Callum Wiley Papers, 1847 - 1966, UNC-Greensboro:
<http://library.uncg.edu/info/depts/scua/collections/manuscripts/ead/Mss115.xml> [10]

Calvin Henderson Wiley Papers, UNC Libraries: <http://www2.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/w/Wiley,C.H.html> [11]

Wiley, Mary Callum. The English Journal. The. <https://archive.org/details/jstor-800890> [12] (accessed August 8, 2013).

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From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#). [19]

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