

Woody, Mary Chawner ^[1]

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by Mary Edith Woody Hinshaw, 1996

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Mary Chawner Woody, Friends minister, teacher, and spiritual leader, was born in Bartholomew County, Ind., of [Quaker](#) ^[2] English and colonial ancestry, the daughter of Chalkley Albertson and Sarah Cox Chawner. Her father was the son of John Squires Chawner, an attorney at the King's Bench, London, who migrated to North Carolina and married the daughter of a Friends minister in [Perquimans County](#) ^[3]. Her mother was of a [Wayne County](#) ^[4] Quaker family. Among her ancestors were Francis Toms, a member of the colonial Council of Carolina, in whose home the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends was organized in 1698, and Richard Cox, in whose home Contentnea Quarterly Meeting of Friends was organized in Wayne County.

Mary Chawner was educated in Sand Creek and Sugar Plain Friends Monthly Meeting Schools and at Bloomingdale Academy (Friends) and Earlham College, all in Indiana. In 1868 in Thorntown, Ind., where both were teaching, she married John Warren Woody, of North Carolina, who during the [Civil War](#) ^[5] had walked to the Indiana farm of his uncle, who lived next to the Chawners. Mary C. Woody read law with her husband at the [University of Michigan Law School](#) ^[6] at Ann Arbor; she also studied public speaking there.

A teacher by disposition, she assisted her husband in the establishment of Whittier College in Salem, Iowa, and, later, of William Penn College at Oskaloosa, Iowa. Her oil portrait hangs with his in the foyer of Spencer Chapel at Penn College. She also taught at [Guilford College](#) ^[7] and for a shorter time at [Whittier College](#) ^[8] in California and [Friends University](#) ^[9], Wichita, Kans. Her favorite subjects were English composition, rhetoric, literature, and the Bible. She gave lessons in elocution at Guilford College and, during her retirement, at home.

Mrs. Woody was recorded a minister in the Society of Friends in 1884 and became a strong leader in the North Carolina Yearly Meeting of Friends. As secretary of the evangelism and outreach committee she helped organize a number of Friends meetings across the state. She traveled in North Carolina for two years as acting superintendent of the Yearly Meeting at the time Friends meetings were beginning to accept the pastoral system. For a period she served as resident pastor of New Garden Meeting, which was attended by Guilford College students and faculty.

Taking the lead in 1884 in forming the state Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Mrs. Woody was elected first president at the organizational meeting held at Benbow Hall on South Elm Street, Greensboro. She served as president for ten years, traveling, preaching, and lecturing; at different times she spoke to the state legislature urging the passage of temperance laws. Mary Woody was vice-president of the national [temperance](#) ^[10] union when Frances Willard was president.

In 1892 she traveled to England with "a minute to visit Friends Meetings and missions in London Yearly Meeting." Her companion, Lorena Reynolds, wrote: "from the time we left Greensboro until our return she was sowing seeds of truth which, I doubt not, yielded a rich harvest." Mrs. Woody was a delegate to the three national organizational conferences of American Friends and instrumental in helping to establish the Five Years Meeting of Friends in America (now Friends United Meeting), where she held important positions for several years.

Among her concerns for people, she demonstrated a lively interest in equal rights for women. She was one of a committee of three women Friends in 1895 who planned and raised money for a gymnasium for women at Guilford College. (Guilford was probably the first college in America to have a physical education department for women, eight years before it hired a coach for men.) Wishing to see a woman's college in [Greensboro](#) ^[11], she worked with other Quaker women for the establishment of the State Normal and Industrial College (now the [University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#) ^[12]). While her husband was associated with the Slater Industrial and State Normal School for blacks in Winston, she sought money from Quakers in Philadelphia with which to begin a school of nursing at Slater School. She promoted passage of the Nineteenth Amendment and continued to encourage women to vote.

Small in stature, Mary Woody was quick in movement, in perception, and in speech. She was a clear thinker, a good organizer, and a convincing speaker. The Woodys had three children: Hermon, John Waldo, and Alice. Mary Woody died at the home of her son Waldo in High Point and was buried in the New Garden Cemetery at [Guilford College](#) ^[7].

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Arthur S. Watson, *William Penn College: A Product and a Producer* (1971).

Additional Resources:

Woody Training Home, Winston Salem State University: <http://www.wssu.edu/cg-okelly-library/archives/buildings/woody-training-home-m.aspx> ^[13]

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