

Engstrom, Mary Claire ^[1]

Engstrom, Mary Claire

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1 Oct 1906-20 May 1997

Mary Claire Engstrom was born in 1906 in Kansas City, Mo., and moved to Chapel Hill, N.C., to attend the University of North Carolina, earning her Ph.D. in English literature in 1939. She is best known for the active role she played in the preservation of historic Hillsborough, N.C.

Born in Kansas City, Mo., she was the daughter of Lester L. Randolph and Florence Alberta Toynbee Randolph. She moved to Chapel Hill to attend the University of North Carolina, earning a Ph.D. in English literature in 1939, and she did postdoctoral research at Harvard and Yale, specializing in 18th-century satire. In 1959, after she and her husband, Alfred G. Engstrom (1907-1990), professor of French at the university, purchased the historic Nash-Hooper house in Hillsborough, she began to focus on the historical documentation of Hillsborough and its environs.

In addition to writing numerous articles on local history, she was instrumental in founding the Hillsborough Historical Society in 1963. She also served as chair of the Historic Hillsborough Commission, 1964-1966 and 1976-1983. Engstrom undertook a major project to document 122 old structures and historic sites in the Hillsborough area for the Historic American Buildings Survey, 1963-1965. Her research helped many of these buildings qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, including the Nash-Hooper House as a National Historic Landmark. It also helped establish two historic districts in Hillsborough and resulted in the restoration of many buildings. Other major documentation projects included a survey of cemeteries and graves in Orange County and a survey of the whole of Orange County for an historical map.

The Mary Claire Engstrom Photographic Collection at the University of North Carolina contains over 2,000 images created or collected by Mary Claire Engstrom, 1930-1979, documenting the Hillsborough and Orange County, N.C., area. There are images of historic individuals and families, including Governor Abner Nash; Governor William A. Graham; William Hooper, signer of the Declaration of Independence; and Thomas Ruffin, chief justice of the North Carolina Supreme Court. There are also images of historically significant homes, churches, and other locations, including the Bingham School; the Alexander Dickson House, used as a headquarters during the Civil War; the Hillsboro' Military Academy; the Nash-Hooper-Graham House, home of William Hooper; and the Nash-Kollock School. Also included are images of cemeteries, among them the Chapel Hill Memorial Cemetery, the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery, the Hillsborough Cemetery, the Hillsborough Old Town Cemetery, the West Hillsborough Cemetery, and church and family cemeteries.

Engstrom lived in Hillsborough and continued her historical research until her death in 1997.

Update from Government & Heritage Library Staff:

Mary Claire Engstrom was a contributor to North Carolina history articles contained in the University of North Carolina Press volumes, edited by William Powell, that are also republished in NCpedia. Click [here for a list of articles by her](#) ^[2].

References:

Mary Claire Engstrom Photographic Collection (P0050), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/P0050/> ^[3]

Mary Claire Engstrom papers #4684, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/04684/> ^[4]

Additional Resources:

Engstrom, Mary Claire. 2007. *The book of Burwell students: lives of educated women in the antebellum South* Hillsborough, NC: Historic Hillsborough Commission.

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28 February 2017

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