

Robertson, Lucy Henderson Owen ^[1]

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by Anna Jeanette Bass, 1994

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A 1906 engraving of Lucy Henderson Owen Robertson. Image from Archive.org.

^[2]Lucy Henderson Owen Robertson, educator and first woman college president in the South, was born in Warrenton, the daughter of Henry Lyne and Catherine Rebecca Watkins Owen. Her father was a merchant, moving his family in 1852 to Chapel Hill and later to Hillsborough. There young Lucy attended the Misses Nash and Kollock School for Young Ladies for seven years before entering Chowan Baptist Institute (now [Chowan College](#) ^[3]) at Murfreesboro. After graduation in 1868, she returned to Hillsborough and on 1 Nov. 1869 married Dr. D. A. Robertson. The couple had two sons, Charles Henderson and David William, before Dr. Robertson's early death in 1883. In 1872 the family moved to [Greensboro](#) ^[4], and there Mrs. Robertson began her teaching career. She served first, in 1878, as an assistant in the literary department at Greensboro Female College and by 1890 was head of the English language and literature department. In 1893 she left that post to become head of the history department at the newly formed State Normal and Industrial College for Girls (now the [University of North Carolina at Greensboro](#) ^[5]). Seven years later she returned to Greensboro Female College to become lady principal and teach history. In 1902 the board of the college elected her—by unanimous vote—president of the college, thus making her the first woman college president in the southern states and the head of the second oldest state chartered college for women in the United States. She held that position until her retirement in 1913, when she was named president emerita. In 1925 a chair of religious education was established in her honor.

Beyond her achievements in education, Mrs. Robertson was active in the Women's Foreign Missionary Societies of Greensboro and the state, serving as president of the Western Conference for thirty-six years. She was also president of the United Society of Foreign and Home Missions, an ardent worker for the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, and involved in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, the United Daughters of the Confederacy, and the Woman's Club of Greensboro.

After a long illness, she died in the infirmary of Greensboro College. She was buried in Green Hill Cemetery, Greensboro.

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