

Shaw, Ruth Faison ^[1]

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by Claude Hunter Moore, 1994; Revised December 2021

15 Oct. 1889(?)–3 Dec. 1969



A portrait of Ruth Faison Shaw. Image from the North Carolina Digital Collections.

^[2]Ruth Faison Shaw, teacher, artist, lecturer, and originator of finger painting, was born in Kenansville, the daughter of the Reverend William M., a Presbyterian minister, and Alberta Faison Shaw. She was related to the Hicks, Thomson, Moore, Ivey, and Bannerman families.

After attending elementary school in [Cabarrus County](#) ^[3] and the James Sprunt Institute in Kenansville, she entered the [Peabody Institute of Music](#) ^[4] in Baltimore. She taught elementary school in [Transylvania County](#) ^[5] and music in Kenansville and [Wilmington](#) ^[6]. During World War I she did [YMCA](#) ^[7] work in France. In Italy from 1922 to 1932, she directed the Shaw School in Rome for English-speaking boys and girls. While there, she discovered the art of finger painting and also devised a formula for making finger paint.

In 1932 Miss Shaw taught for a time at the University of Paris and then set up a finger painting studio in New York and later at Cape Cod, where she taught finger painting. During World War II she entertained servicemen with finger painting demonstrations, and for two years she worked with mental patients at the Menninger Psychiatric Clinic in Topeka, Kans. She was the author of *Finger Painting: A Perfect Medium for Self-Expression* ^[8] (1934).

In 1959 Miss Shaw moved to Chapel Hill and was employed as a consultant in the Department of Psychiatry, where she remained until her death. She lectured and gave finger painting demonstrations to groups in person as well as on television. She was buried in [Oakdale Cemetery](#) ^[9], Wilmington. Her large collection of finger paintings was given to the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) ^[10].



Ruth Faison Shaw. Post-1940 (no date). "Untitled." Image courtesy of the Chapel Hill Museum.

References:

American Magazine, no. 122 (1947 [portrait]).

Chapel Hill, *Living*, 29 Apr. 1979.

Chapel Hill Weekly, 24 Apr. 1977.

Crockette W. Hewlett, *Two Centuries of Art in New Hanover County* (1976).

Holland's The Magazine of the South 59 (February 1940).

Clinton, *The Sampsonian*, 12 Sept. 1968, 24 Sept. 1971.

Scholarship 27 (25 Jan. 1936).

Additional Resources:

Ruth Faison Shaw Papers, 1908-1969. Southern Historical Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. UNC Chapel Hill Libraries. http://www.lib.unc.edu/mss/inv/s/Shaw,Ruth_Faison.html ^[11]. (Some papers available online.)

"Ruth Faison Shaw: Lady of Destiny, User of all Life." Chapel Hill Museum, past exhibits. <http://www.chapelhillmuseum.org/About/Archives/PastExhibits/RuthFaisonShaw/> ^[12]

Shaw School and Studio. #

Image Credits:

North Carolina ECHO (Project). "Part of an exhibit on Ruth Faison Shaw, the creator of the art of finger painting. The Chapel Hill Museum has a large collection of her works." Photograph. May 30, 2002. North Carolina Digital Collections. <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/chapel-hill-museum/52392> ^[2] (accessed December 2, 2013).

Shaw, Ruth Faison. "Untitled, 3 1/2" x 4 3/4." Post-1940 (no date). Image courtesy of the Chapel Hill Museum. Online at http://www.worldandi.com/subscribers/feature_detail.asp?num=25220 ^[13]. (accessed June 12, 2013).

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Moore, Claude H. ^[17]

Origin - location:

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Transylvania County ^[19]

From:

Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press. ^[20]

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