

WISCONSIN WOMEN MAKING HISTORY

THEIR STORIES
OUR LEGACY

www.womeninwisconsin.org



HELEN C. WHITE

1896-1967

City: Madison

County: Dane

Helen C. White was the first woman to hold a full professorship in the College of Letters and Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.

White, born in Connecticut in 1896, was already reading by the time she started school in 1902. She graduated from Girls High School in Boston, Massachusetts, and went on to Radcliffe College, where she achieved membership in Phi Beta Kappa and graduated summa cum laude in just 3 years.

In 1919, White became an English instructor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, where she taught both advanced composition and Shakespeare. A year later she delivered her first major essay on the English poet Blake to the Modern Language Association. She completed her Ph.D. in 1924 (her dissertation was also about Blake's poetry), and by 1936 she had advanced from assistant professor to full professor in the UW-Madison's College of Letters and Science; she was the first woman to do so. In addition to teaching, White authored books—including novels—and mentored graduate students. In 1955 she became the first woman to chair the Department of English at the UW-Madison. She also served as president of the American Association of University Women for three terms and was the first woman president of the American Association of University Professors. The building that houses the undergraduate library on the UW-Madison campus is named after her.

To learn more, visit womeninwisconsin.org/profile/helen-c-white