

HIGHTOWER, Ruby U. June 17, 1880–May 5, 1959.

SHORTER FEMALE COLLEGE (BA 1896), UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA (MA 1919), UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI (PhD 1927).

Ruby Usher Hightower was born near Covington, Georgia, the youngest of four surviving daughters of Amaranth (Sims) (1844–1908) and James Richard Hightower (1846–1933), natives of Georgia. Her father was in the Confederate army during the Civil War; her parents married in 1869. Two children died as infants. The other daughters were Minnie (b. 1869), Alma (b. 1871), and Lillie Frances (b. 1874). In 1880 her father was a farmer, and in 1900 and 1910 he was described as a contractor.

Ruby Hightower attended high school in Jackson, Georgia, before completing work for her bachelor's degree in the academic year 1895–96 at Shorter Female College (Shorter College after 1923) in Rome, Georgia. In the twenty-three-year period between her graduation and the resumption of her teaching career at Shorter in 1919, she taught and studied at a number of places. She taught at: the grade school, at least in 1908–09, and high school in Dublin, Georgia; Central College (now closed) of Conway, Arkansas; Alabama Normal College (now the University of West Alabama); Cox College, a women's college in College Park, Georgia, (now closed) at least 1915–16; Anderson College (now University), then a women's college in South Carolina, 1916–17; and Southwest Baptist College and Hardin College in Missouri. She studied at the University of Chicago in 1899, at the University of London in 1913, and received her master's degree from the University of Georgia in 1919. She was the only one listed as receiving a Master of Arts degree at that June commencement at Georgia.

After receiving her master's degree, Hightower returned to Shorter and remained there, except for a leave of absence in 1924–25, until her retirement in 1947. The college annual of 1920 notes that she was elected fellow in mathematics at the University of Missouri for 1919–20. Apparently she delayed her entrance to the graduate school there until the summer of 1921. She was resident for five summer sessions and was granted a leave to study at Missouri 1924–25. She was an honorary fellow in mathematics for the year and then returned to Shorter as head of the department. She received her PhD with minors in physics and astronomy in 1927. While at Missouri she wrote her dissertation in ring theory under the direction of G. E. Wahlin. According to the Shorter College historian, Hightower was the first Shorter graduate to receive a PhD degree.

During Hightower's years at Shorter College she was generally the only permanent member of the mathematics department. Her interests included mathematical astronomy and economics. She wrote in 1940, "My chief interest is in teaching, and not in research, for which I have little available time" (Owens questionnaire). After her retirement in 1947, she spent time with relatives in Quitman and Atlanta, but maintained her apartment on the college campus. She taught part time at the college 1949–50, 1954–55, and 1956–57, and was emeritus after 1952.

Hightower was tall, slender, extremely soft-spoken, and, according to her obituary in the Shorter College alumni bulletin, "an excellent teacher, thoroughly grounded in her subject." She was a Baptist and a Democrat. She had been living at the college apartments in Rome until a few weeks before her death in Quitman, Georgia, in 1959. A niece in Quitman and a great-niece in Rome were among her survivors. The niece was a former dean of Shorter College.

Organizational affiliations: AMS, MAA (charter member), AAAS, Sigma Delta Epsilon, AAUW, AAUP, Sigma Xi, Pi Mu Epsilon.

Thesis and dissertation:

1919 A study in conics. MA thesis, University of Georgia. Manuscript.

1927 On the classification of the elements of a ring. PhD dissertation, University of Missouri, directed by Gustav Eric Wahlin. Typescript. Printed abstract, 1927, Lancaster, PA.

Abstract:

1928 On the classification of the elements of a ring. *Bull. Amer. Math. Soc.* 34:701 #29. Based on PhD dissertation. Presented by title to the AMS, Amherst, MA, 6 Sep 1928.

References to: AmMSc 4–8, 9P; AmWom 1935–40, BiDWSci.

“Some New Members of the Faculty.” *Shorter College [Alumnae] Bulletin*, July 1919.

“Dr. Ruby Hightower, Formerly of Rome, Dies in Quitman.” *Rome (GA) News-Tribune*, 6 May 1959.

“Dr. Ruby Usher Hightower.” (Obituary) *Shorter College Bulletin*, Oct 1959.

Other sources: PhD dissertation vita 1927; Owens questionnaires 1937, 1940; Center for Research Libraries College Catalog Collection; communications with Anderson University library director, Shorter College historian/archivist, and University of Georgia Archives; US Census 1880, 1900, 1910, 1920, 1930 GA.

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