

Nomination for SSAWW Lifetime Achievement Award: Phyllis Cole

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We write to nominate Phyllis Cole for SSAWW's Lifetime Achievement Award. As the attached curriculum vitae demonstrates, over the course of a decades-long and still-vibrant career of teaching, publishing, and activism Professor Cole (emerita at Penn State Brandywine) has been a motive force in the study of nineteenth-century American women writers and the building of contemporary female community.

Challenging as it is to single out accomplishments from such a robust professional life, we would like to highlight three with exceptional reach and impact: the renovation of the Margaret Fuller Society (which celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2017); the ground-breaking publication of *Mary Moody Emerson and the Origins of Transcendentalism* (Oxford Univ. Press, 1998); and the coediting of *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism* (Univ. of Georgia Press, 2014).

In her years as president of the [Fuller Society](#), Cole spearheaded a collective revitalization bent on bringing this pioneering feminist writer and activist, among related female circles, to a larger audience both within and beyond academia. Under her directorship, the society saved its threatened status as an allied MLA organization, preserving the only conference session that annually keeps a female prose writer of the pre-1850 United States before the eyes of the entire profession. Its 2017 session was among those selected for the presidential theme "Boundary Conditions." Further, Cole led a drive that greatly expanded the membership, drawing in scholars focused mainly on other writers as well as people from communities outside the academy, and at the same time broadening the society's diversity in age, professional status, and nationality. She also extended the group's outreach into social action by forging a connection with the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House (Cambridge, MA), a community-based nonprofit whose century-old mission to empower underprivileged families and individuals is based on Fuller's legacy. This effort further included the underwriting of a new Margaret Fuller [Women's Leadership Award](#). And again crossing national boundaries, Cole played a substantial role in society plans for a major conference in Heidelberg, Germany (2018), in partnership with the Emerson Society and the University of Heidelberg Center for American Studies.

Professor Cole's work for the Fuller Society is interconnected with her rich record of individual and collaborative scholarship on female writers more broadly in the consequential strain of American literary history known as Transcendentalism. Signal among numerous publications, her book on Mary Moody Emerson, a finalist for the MLA's James Russell Lowell Award that exemplifies, [according to Mary Kelley](#) (Dartmouth), "feminist archaeology at its most impressive," and the [coedited essay collection](#) *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism* bring forward underappreciated and forgotten women of "the Newness": those who anticipated and shaped the major male figures; those who showed the movement's many involvements in social action, including antislavery and feminism; those with transatlantic relations previously unexplored; and those making their voices heard in experimental forms of writing. Recognizing Cole's far-ranging work on Transcendental thought, notably on Mary Moody Emerson and her more famous nephew, the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society elected her one of its earliest female presidents (2004-2005) and honored her with its [2011 Distinguished Achievement Award](#). More than any other scholar, in our view, Cole has widened our understanding of the movement long represented primarily by Emerson and his male cohorts to encompass the women who also gave it life.

Collegiality and collaboration inspire Professor Cole's remarkable story—in keeping with a core argument of *Toward a Female Genealogy of Transcendentalism* that female contributions to this movement arose from conversation among women—but it is important to shine a bright light, as the Emerson Society and SSAWW awards do, on those individuals whose particular dedication has moved our community forward. Phyllis Cole is just such a deserving luminary.