

SUSAN BOGERT WARNER

Susan Warner was a prolific evangelical writer during the 19th century. She was born in New York City on July 11, 1819, to Henry and Anna Warner. Susan had one sibling, a younger sister named Anna, remaining close during their entire lives both professionally and personally. At a time when few women received an education, Susan's parents encouraged her studies. However, her mother died when Susan was young and their lawyer father lost most of his wealth as a result of poor investments and the 1837 financial crisis. Susan's paternal aunt came to live with the family. Aunt Fanny became an important figure in her life, encouraging Susan's writing ambitions. In 1837, the Warner family moved to an old farmhouse on Constitution Island near West Point, New York, where the sisters would spend the rest of their lives. Neither one of them married.

Christian Conversion

Although she read the Bible and regularly attended Mercer Street Presbyterian Church, it was not until the late 1830s that Susan had a conversion experience. The date of her conversion remains unknown, but Susan became a member of the church in March 1844.

Susan and Anna began to write to support the family due to ongoing financial problems. Susan often wrote under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell. In 1851, Susan published her first novel, *Wide, Wide, World*, considered the first bestselling novel in American history.

In 1860 the sisters co-wrote the book, *Say and Seal*. Susan encouraged her sister to write a poem for a character to use to comfort a dying child. Anna's poem, "Jesus Loves Me," was set to music by William Batchelder Bradbury in 1862, quickly becoming a beloved hymn for children and adults alike.

In 1857, several cadets at West Point Military Academy asked the sisters to lead a Bible study. The women went to the school each Sunday to teach in the chapel. In the summers the Bible studies were held at their home on Constitution Island, a short boat ride from the Academy. The sisters' commitment to teach the Bible to the soldiers lasted for more than 40 years.

Significant Contribution to Christianity in the United States

Writing religious fiction books that imparted her Christian beliefs, Susan's popular books were among the most widely read books of the time. In addition, she wrote religious nonfiction works, children's books and hymns that were widely sung in church congregations.

Susan wrote more than 30 novels, including *Wide, Wide, World* (1851), *Queechy* (1852), *The Hills of the Shatemuc* (1856), *Say and Seal* (1860) and *Melbourne House* (1864). Susan died on March 17, 1885, in Highland Falls, New York. With her sister, they are the only two female civilians buried in the historic West Point Cemetery.

Resources and References

Warner, Anna B. 1909. *Susan Warner ("Elizabeth Wetherell")*. New York: G.P.P. Putnam's Sons.

"Miss Warner's Boys." Constitution Island. www.constitutionisland.org/#!the-warner-family. Accessed March 29, 2015.

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