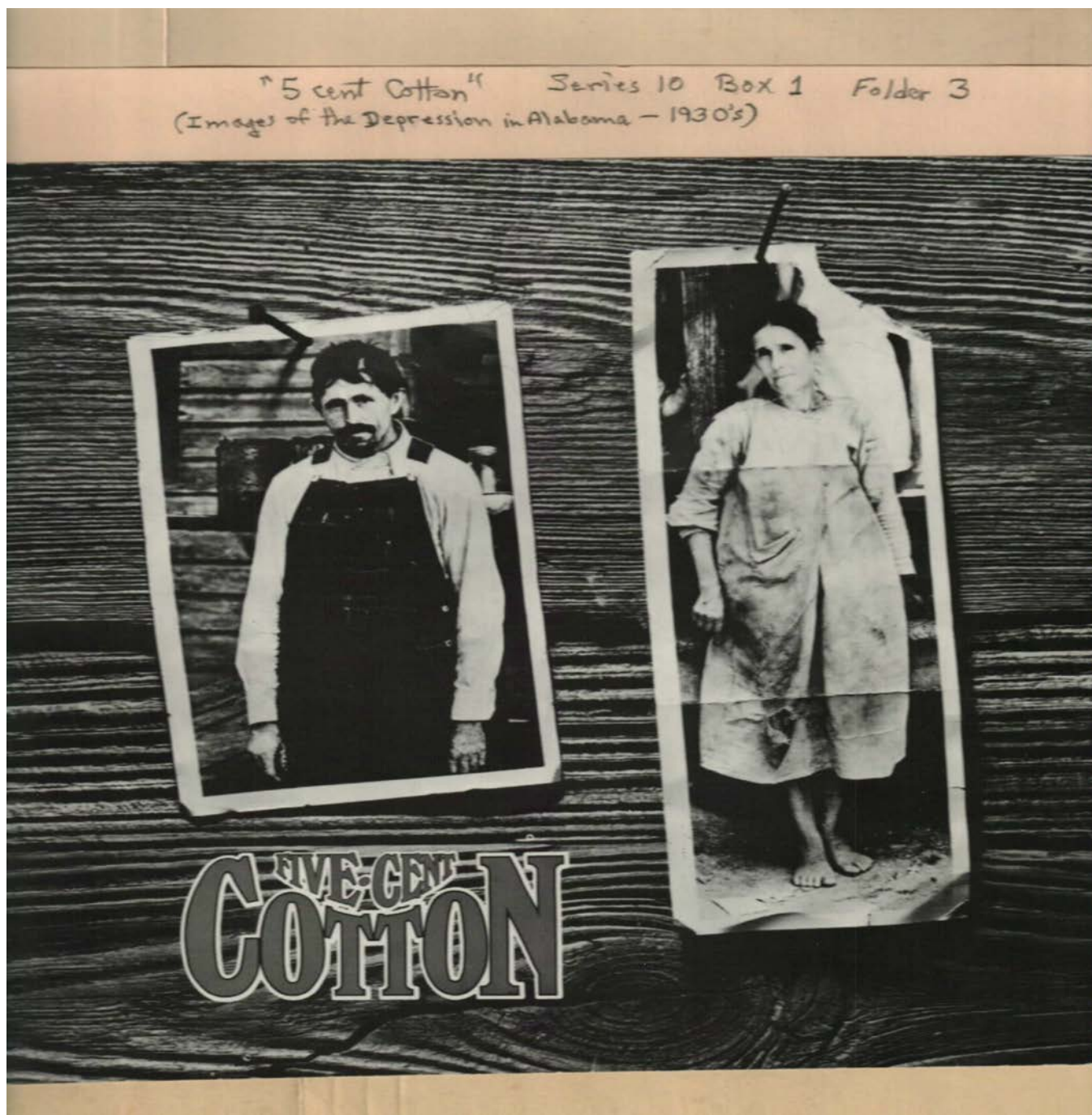


Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3
"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

Image 1 r10_01-03-000-0001 [Contents](#) [Index](#) [About](#)



Names:

Five Cent Cotton

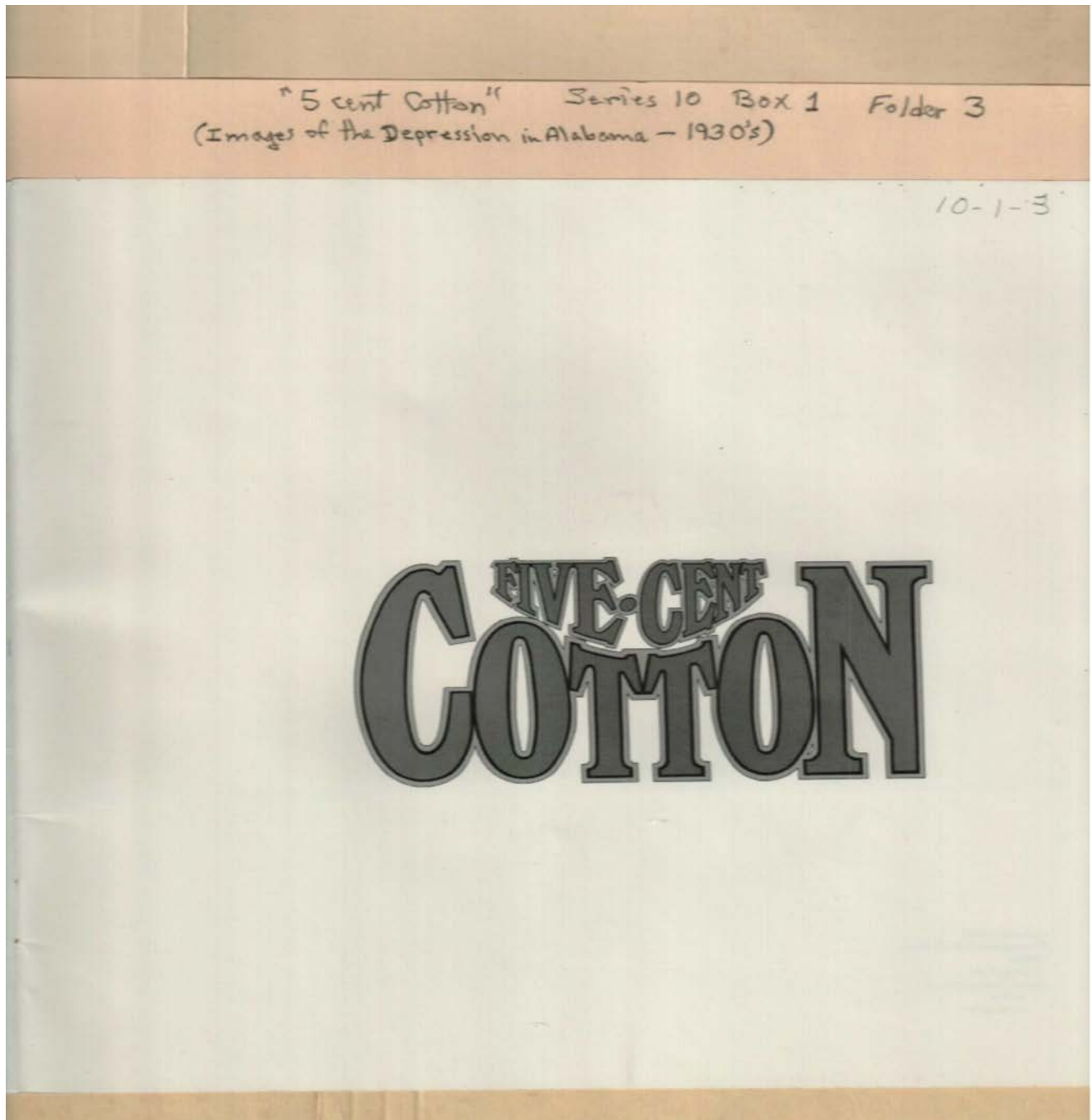
Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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Names:

Five Cent Cotton

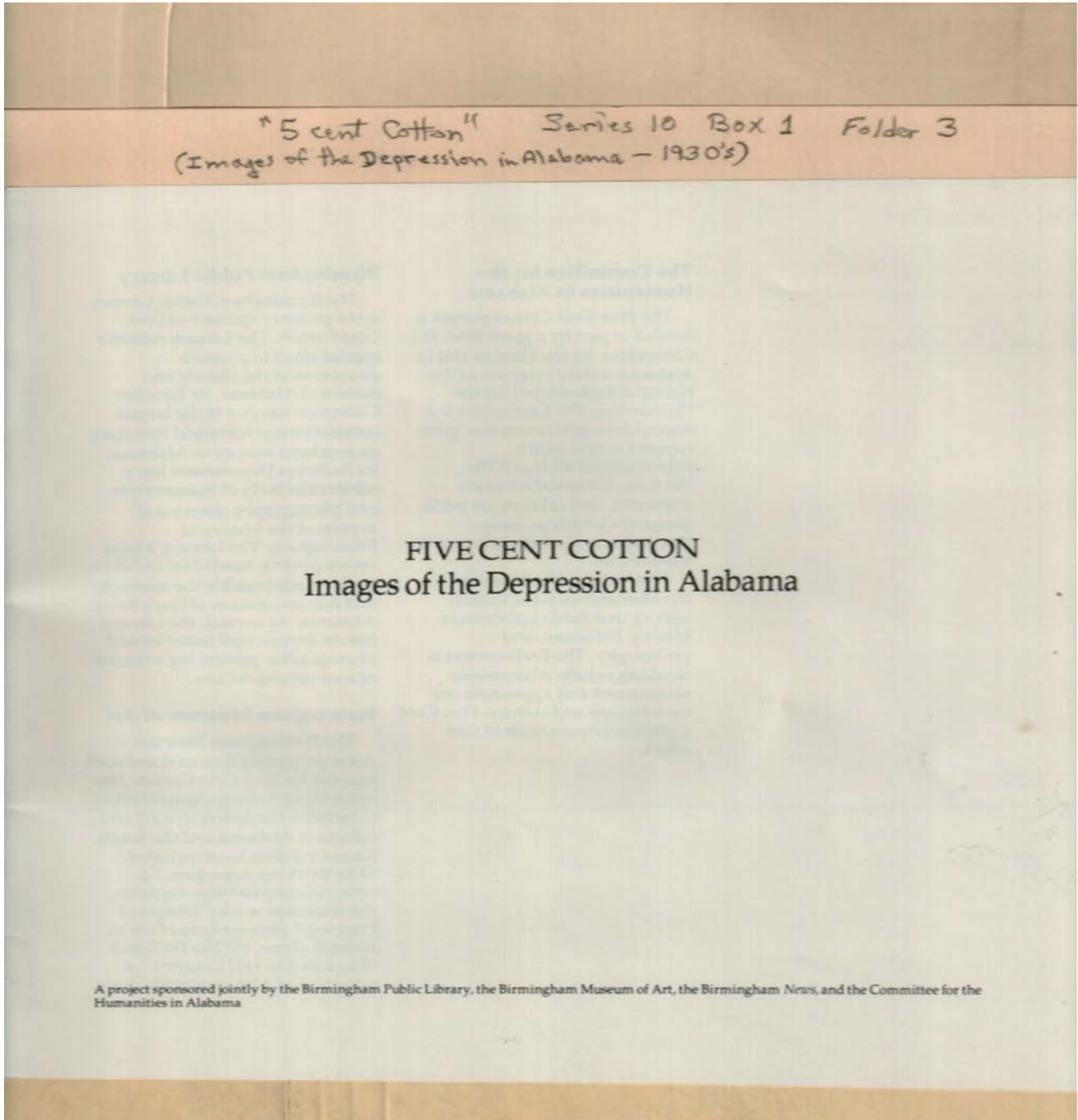
Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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Names:

Birmingham Museum
of Art
Birmingham News

Birmingham Public
Library

Committee for the
Humanities

Depression in
Alabama
Five Cent Cotton

Places:

Birmingham, AL

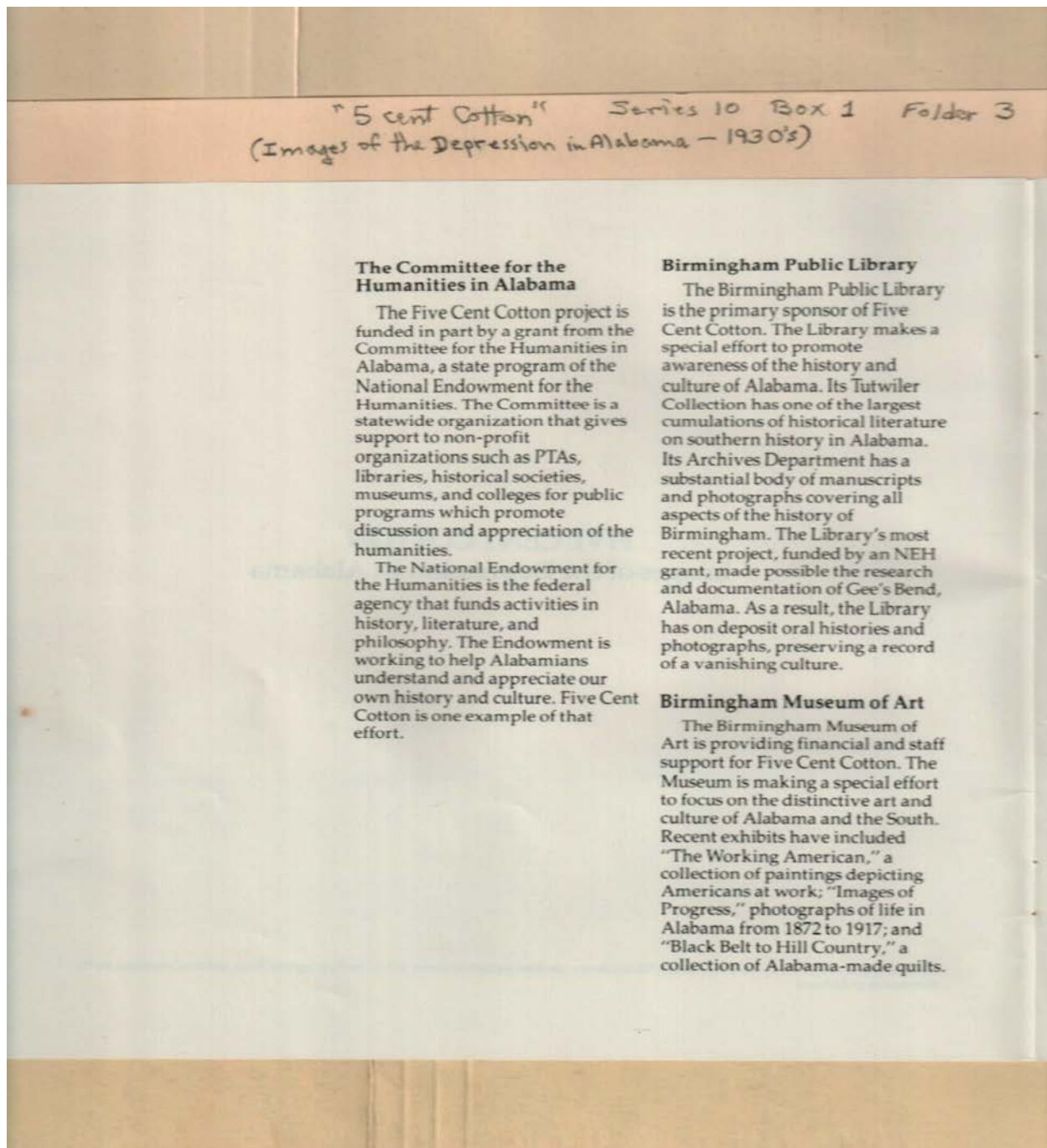
Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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Names:

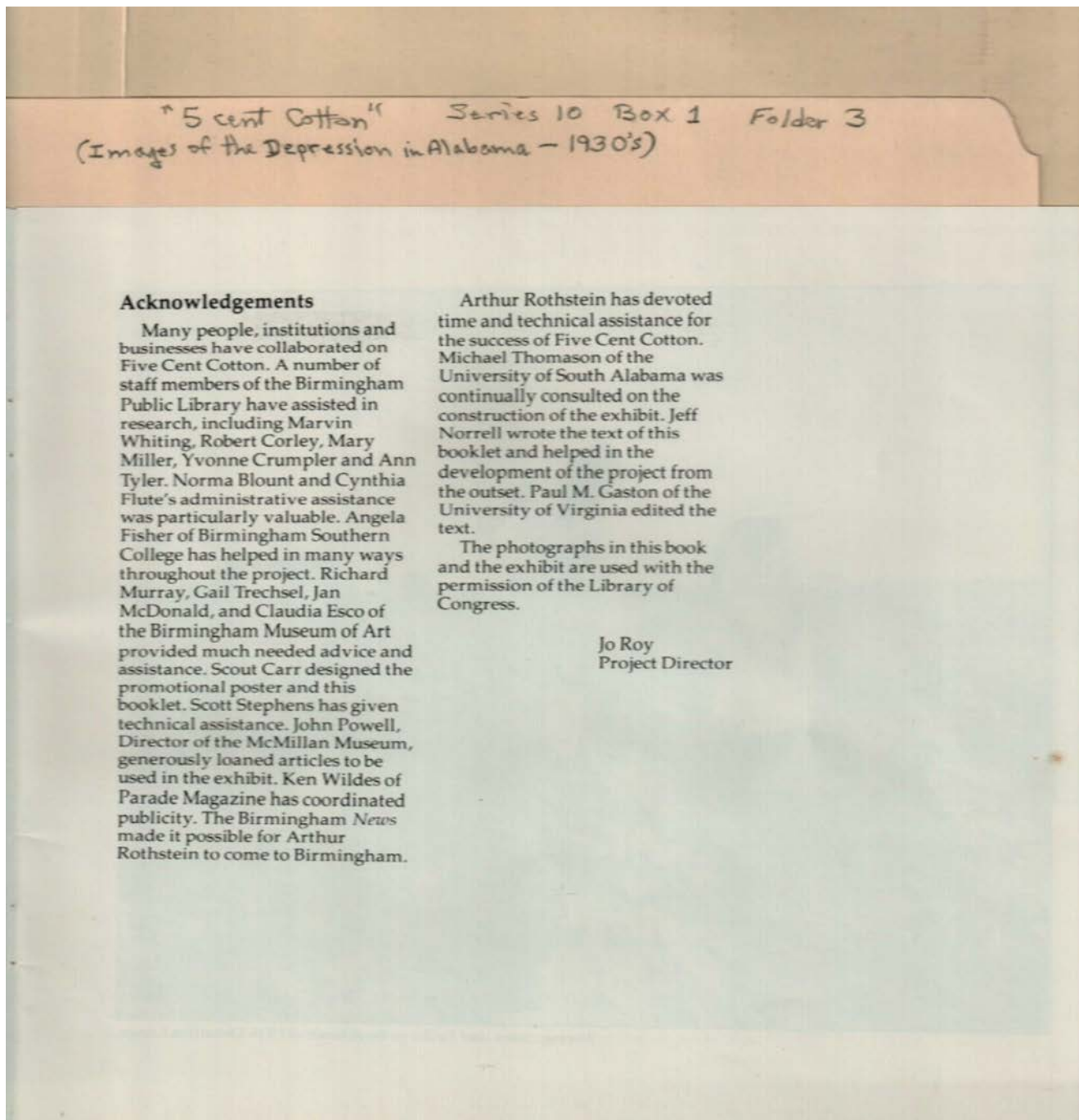
Depression in
Alabama

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

booklet



"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

Acknowledgements

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Arthur Rothstein has devoted time and technical assistance for the success of Five Cent Cotton. Michael Thomason of the University of South Alabama was continually consulted on the construction of the exhibit. Jeff Norrell wrote the text of this booklet and helped in the development of the project from the outset. Paul M. Gaston of the University of Virginia edited the text.

The photographs in this book and the exhibit are used with the permission of the Library of Congress.

Jo Roy
Project Director

Names:

- | | | | |
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| Blunt, Norma | Flute, Cynthia | Powell, John | Tyler, Ann |
| Carr, Scout | Gaston, Paul M. | Rothstein, Arthur | Whiting, Marvin |
| Corley, Robert | McDonald, Jan | Roy, Jo | Wildes, Ken |
| Crumpler, Yvonne | Miller, Mary | Stephens, Scott | |
| Esco, Claudia | Murray, Richard | Thomason, Michael | |
| Fisher, Angela | Norrell, Jeff | Trechsel, Gail | |

Types:

booklet

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Hoeing cotton near Eutaw in the summer of 1936. Dorothea Lange.

Names:

Hoeing cotton

Lange, Dorothea

Places:

Eutaw, AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

On a hot summer day in 1934 four-year-old Winnie McClain was playing in the front yard of her home in Bolling, Alabama, when a sudden rumbling of wheels and purr of an automobile engine startled her.

Few automobiles and only an occasional transfer truck rolling down Highway 31 to Florida disturbed the peace of Bolling, a hamlet in Butler County. On this particular day, the automobile that stopped in front of Winnie McClain's home brought her a startling awareness of the world outside.

"All of a sudden I looked at the car's tire and I could see my reflection in the hubcap," she recalled years later.

"I had never seen my reflection in our tires. It was then that I knew there was a better life somewhere."

That realization is Winnie McClain's earliest memory of the Great Depression. It is as vivid to her as the photographs in this book are to us now. Like Winnie's moment in front of the hubcap, these photographs reflect the reality of life in Alabama during the 1930s.

Those were hard times. The

Alabama-born poet John Beecher captured life's harshness in his "sharecropper's prayer":

Five cent cotton Lord
and no way Lord for a man to
come out.

Fifty cents a day Lord for
working in the field
Just four bits Lord for a good
strong hand
from dawn to dark Lord from
can till can't
ain't no way Lord a man can
come out.

They's got to be a way Lord
show us the way . . .

Cotton was Alabama's major product in the 1930s; its price was a barometer of the state's economy. It had sold for as much as forty cents a pound in 1918. By 1932 it had dropped to five cents—the lowest price ever. No one could live on five-cent cotton and five-cent cotton was a symbol for how bad things were in Alabama.

Hard times were nothing new for southern farmers. Their status had been getting worse for fifty years. In 1880 one-third of them were tenants. By 1930 more than half of all southern farmers worked land they did

Names:

Beecher, John

McClain, Winnie

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Floyd Burroughs was a tenant farmer in Hale County. Walker Evans.

Names:

Burroughs, Floyd

Evans, Walker

Places:

Hale Co., AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

not own. The figure was even higher for cotton farmers. Seventy-one percent of them were landless.

The landless farmer in Alabama was a sharecropper, working land that belonged to a landlord. A sharecropper and his family usually supplied all the labor to make a crop. The landlord provided the tenant a house and the necessary seed, fertilizer, mule, and plow. He arranged for a merchant to furnish the tenant with food while the crop was in the field. The proceeds of the harvest were halved, unless the tenant had provided some of the seed or equipment, in which case he got a larger share.

The sharecropping system invited the landlord to exploit the tenant. Landlords always kept the books, which allowed them many chances to cheat the tenant, many of whom could not read. The landlord and the furnishing merchant could demand high interest rates on the money the tenant borrowed to buy food. Merchants often charged excessive prices for the salt pork, corn meal, flour, and sugar that tenants bought on credit.

A popular story illustrated the exploitation of sharecroppers. A tenant brought five bales of cotton to the post-harvest meeting with his landlord and was told, after the landlord figured for a while, that the five bales exactly balanced out his account.

"Are you sure?" asked the tenant. "There ain't a little left over either way?"

The landlord assured him the figures were correct, whereupon the tenant happily exclaimed that he still had one bale at home.

"Shucks," the landlord uttered in disgust. "Why didn't you tell me that before? Now I'll have to figure your account all over again to make it come out even."

We have some vivid accounts of what life for a sharecropper was like in those days. The most moving story of a black sharecropper's life is told by Ned Cobb in his autobiography, *All God's Dangers*.

An ambitious and forthright farmer, Cobb was succeeding despite the obstacles the tenant system put in his way. Then his rise was halted by a hostile furnishing merchant who tried

Names:

Cobb, Ned

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A Montgomery County tenant plowing for the next crop. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Rothstein, Arthur

plowing

Places:

Montgomery Co., AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

to entrap him in credit contracts. Cobb was plain about the merchant's intentions: "He had it in for me. . . . He just aimed to use his power and break me down; he'd been doin to people that way before then."

Cobb believed that there was nothing to keep the white merchant from exploiting black tenants. "They was his niggers and he could do with em like he wanted to and nobody else wouldn't fool with em. I figured this, and I might have been a fool to think it, me being a colored fellow and knowin the rules of the state of Alabama, partly, if I didn't know em all."

Cobb decided to act when the merchant foreclosed on a neighbor in December, 1932. After pleading unsuccessfully for mercy from a sheriff's deputy - asking that the neighbor not be left unable to feed his family - Cobb defied the deputy to take the man's property. "If you take it, I'll be damned if you don't take it over my dead body."

The deputy left but returned soon with the sheriff and a group of armed men. Alone, Cobb watched them silently until one of the men seized him.

When Cobb pushed the man away, another fired three times with a shotgun, hitting Cobb in the hips and legs. Cobb then blasted away with a pistol and the men fled.

His injuries not serious, Cobb hid out in Macon County until his family, under threat of death, told authorities where he was. They captured him and in the process killed his brother-in-law. Cobb later served twelve years in state prison on an assault charge stemming from the shootout.

Most whites blamed the violence on "communist agitation" for the sharecroppers' union. Cobb said simply that the local whites would do anything to maintain control over black farmers. He later explained why he acted in 1932.

"Somebody got to stand up. If we don't we niggers in this country are easy prey. Niggers had anything a white man wanted, the white man took it; made no difference how the cut might have come, he took it."

Ned Cobb, eloquent spokesman though he was, was only one of thousands of deprived black sharecroppers

Names:

Cobb, Ned

Types:

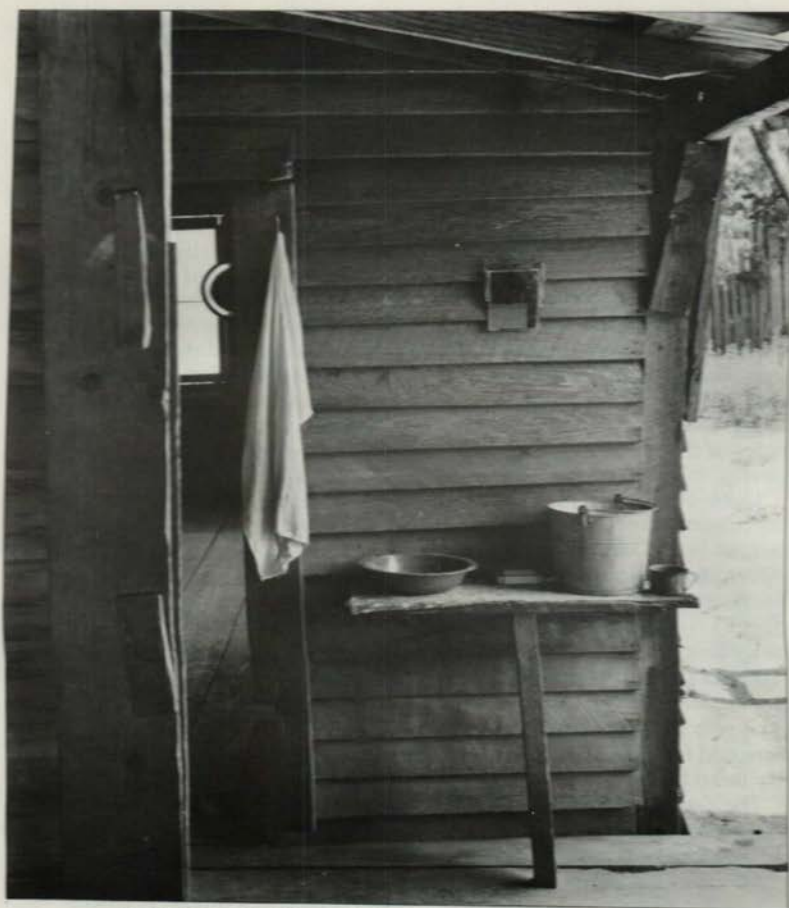
article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Wash stand on the "dogtrot" of a tenant house in Hale County. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

wash stand

Places:

Hale Co., AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

in Alabama. In his book *Shadow of the Plantation*, sociologist Charles S. Johnson wrote about the lives of more than six hundred black farm families in Macon County. He wrote that little had changed for the better for them since the end of slavery; many things had gotten worse.

For one thing, land ownership declined relentlessly. More and more black farmers became sharecroppers, deepening their dependence on white landlords. Ninety percent of those Johnson surveyed in the early 1930s were tenants. They all told him the same thing: sharecropping allows almost no room for Negroes to improve themselves. "They manage to live on advances," Johnson wrote, "or by borrowing for food and clothing and permitting their crop to be taken in satisfaction of the debt." Independence always remained an elusive goal, beyond their grasp. "When you working on a white man's place," one man told Johnson, "you have to do what he says, or treat, trade, or travel."

Not all sharecroppers were black. In fact, by 1935 there

were twice as many white sharecroppers in the South as there were black. This was another of the tragic dimensions of southern history — the steady fall of the white yeomanry into tenancy. Spared the insult of racial prejudice, they shared the other hardships of black sharecroppers.

The best portrait of white sharecroppers in Alabama is James Agee and Walker Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, a moving book about three Hale County families. Agee, a Tennessee-born writer, and Evans, a photographer, lived with the families during the summer of 1936.

Like Ned Cobb and Charles Johnson, Agee described how the tenant system controlled and exploited the sharecropper. Cotton was the tenant's "chief contracted obligation, for which he must neglect all else as need be; and is the central leverage and symbol of his privation and of his wasted life.

"It is the one crop and labor which is in no way useful as it stands to the tenant's living; it is . . . the one which must and can be turned into money; it is . . . the one in which the

Names:

Agee, James

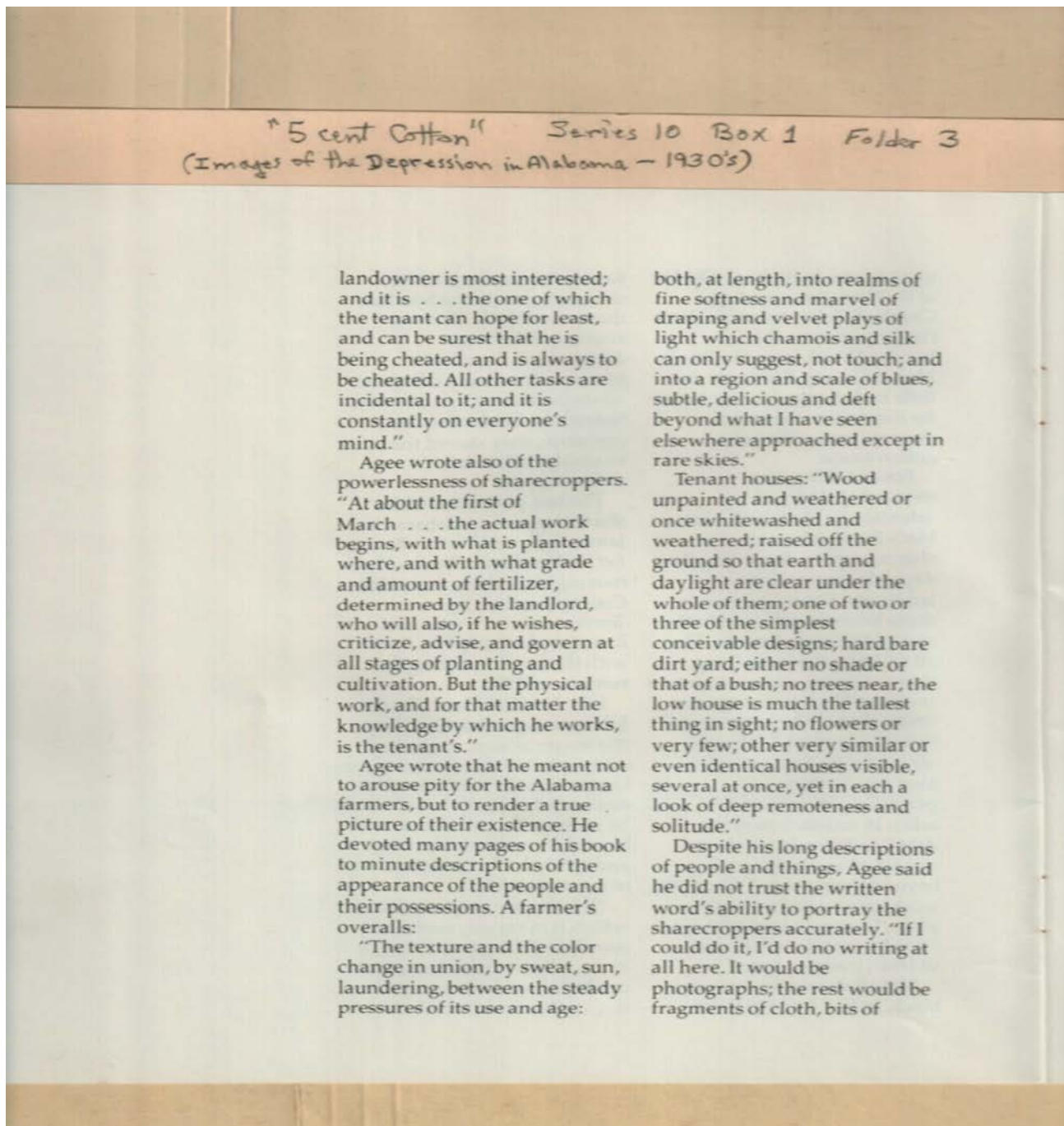
Cobb, Ned

Evans, Walker

Johnson, Charles S.

Types:

article



Names:

Agee,

Types:

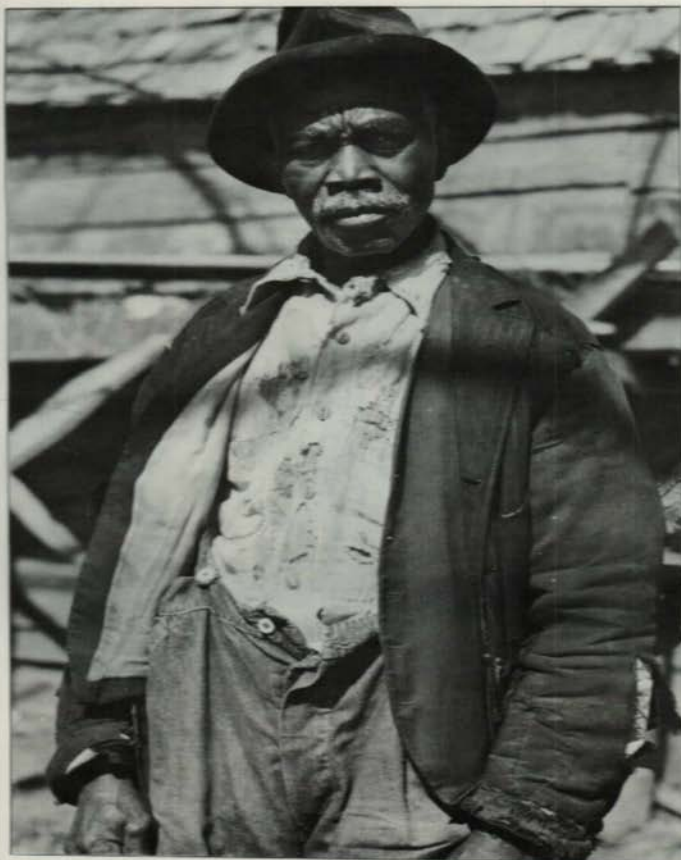
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Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A sharecropper in Gee's Bend, 1937. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Rothstein, Arthur

Sharecropper

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

photograph

Dates:

1937

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



The Tenge family of Hale County. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

Tenge family

Places:

Hale Co., AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A churchhouse. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

church house interior

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

cotton, lumps of earth, records of speech, pieces of wood and iron, phials of odors, plates of food and of excrement."

He had great faith in photographs. "The camera seems to me, next to unassisted and weaponless consciousness, the central instrument of our time," he wrote. He listed Walker Evans as co-author of the book and put Evans's stark photographs, some reprinted in this book, at the front of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*.

State governments had done much to worsen tenancy and nothing to help remove it. With the coming of the Depression and the election of a reform-minded administration in 1932, the question now became "can the national government help to solve the problem of poverty and deprivation?"

Five-cent cotton was one of the first problems that Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal addressed. FDR's new plan paid farmers to reduce the size of their crop. Shorter supply, he hoped, would raise the market price of farm products. In the summer of 1933 farmers across the South plowed up part of their cotton, some of which was well in bloom.

Some farmers objected to this. "You know, I ain't never pulled up no cotton befo', and somehow I don't like the idea," one tenant said when he was instructed by his landlord to plow up his crop. Conservative farmers disliked wasting their product, especially at a time when many people desperately needed clothing.

The farm program worked well for landowners, pushing the price of cotton to ten cents in 1933 and doubling the income of cotton farmers. But tenant farmers suffered. Many plowed up their crop but received none of the government payment for the sacrifice. Landlords who claimed to share the payment with the tenant often credited his account rather than hand over cash.

Conflict between landlords and tenants naturally followed. When a Macon County landlord ordered his tenants to sign over their checks to him, one tenant asked for \$10 of his \$275 check to buy himself a new pair of overalls. "No, you can't get a nickle. Bring it to me," the landlord replied. When the tenant cashed the check anyway and fled to

Names:

Evans, Walker

Roosevelt, Franklin

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



The Bud Fields family of Hale County. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

Fields, Bud, family

Places:

Hale Co., AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A migrant camp near Birmingham. Arthur Rothstein

Names:

Migrant camp

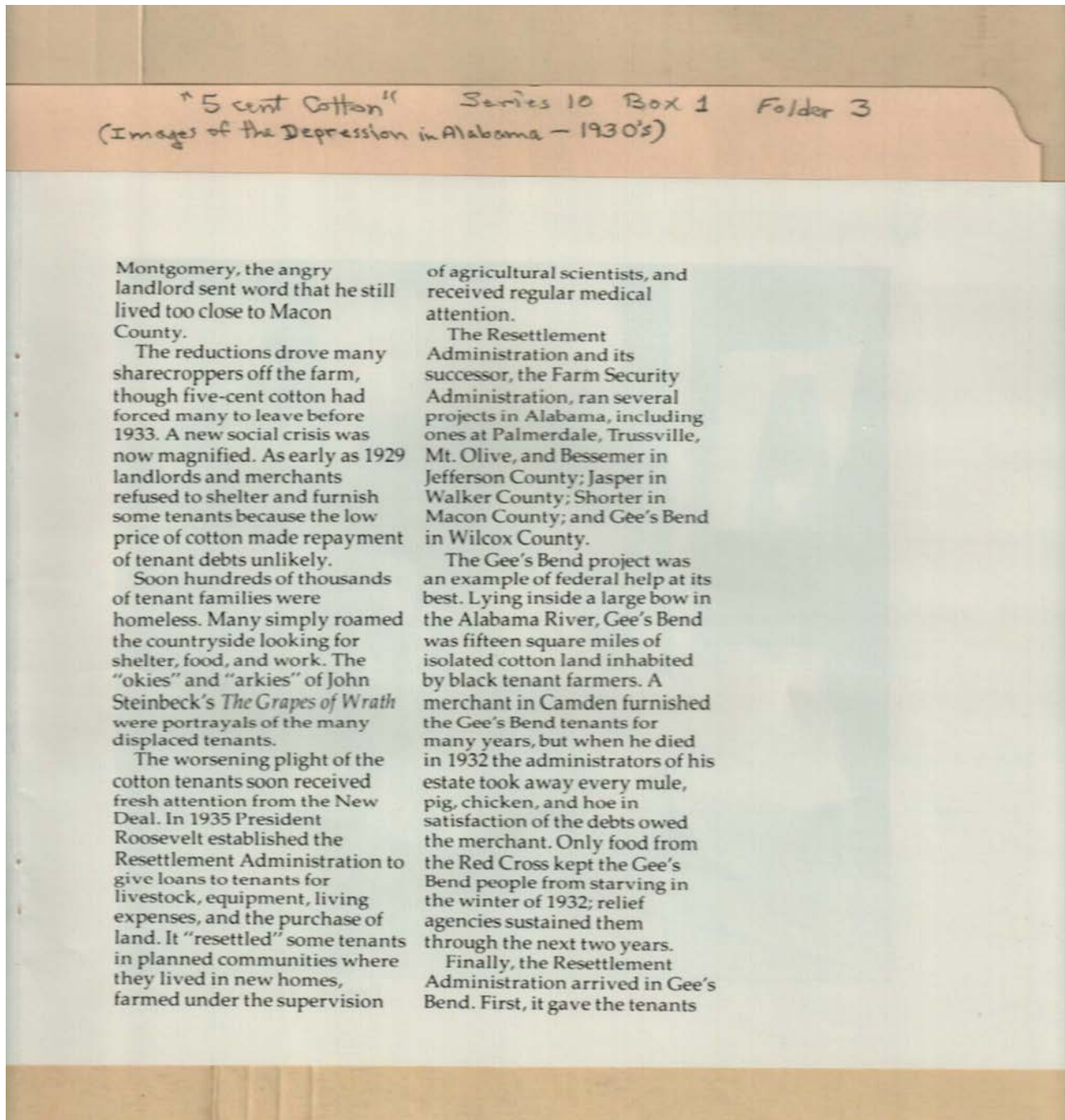
Rothstein, Arthur

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph



Names:

Roosevelt, President

Steinbeck, John

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Farm folks in town. Dorothea Lange.

Names:

Lange, Dorothea

farm ladies

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Downtown Greensboro in Hale County. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

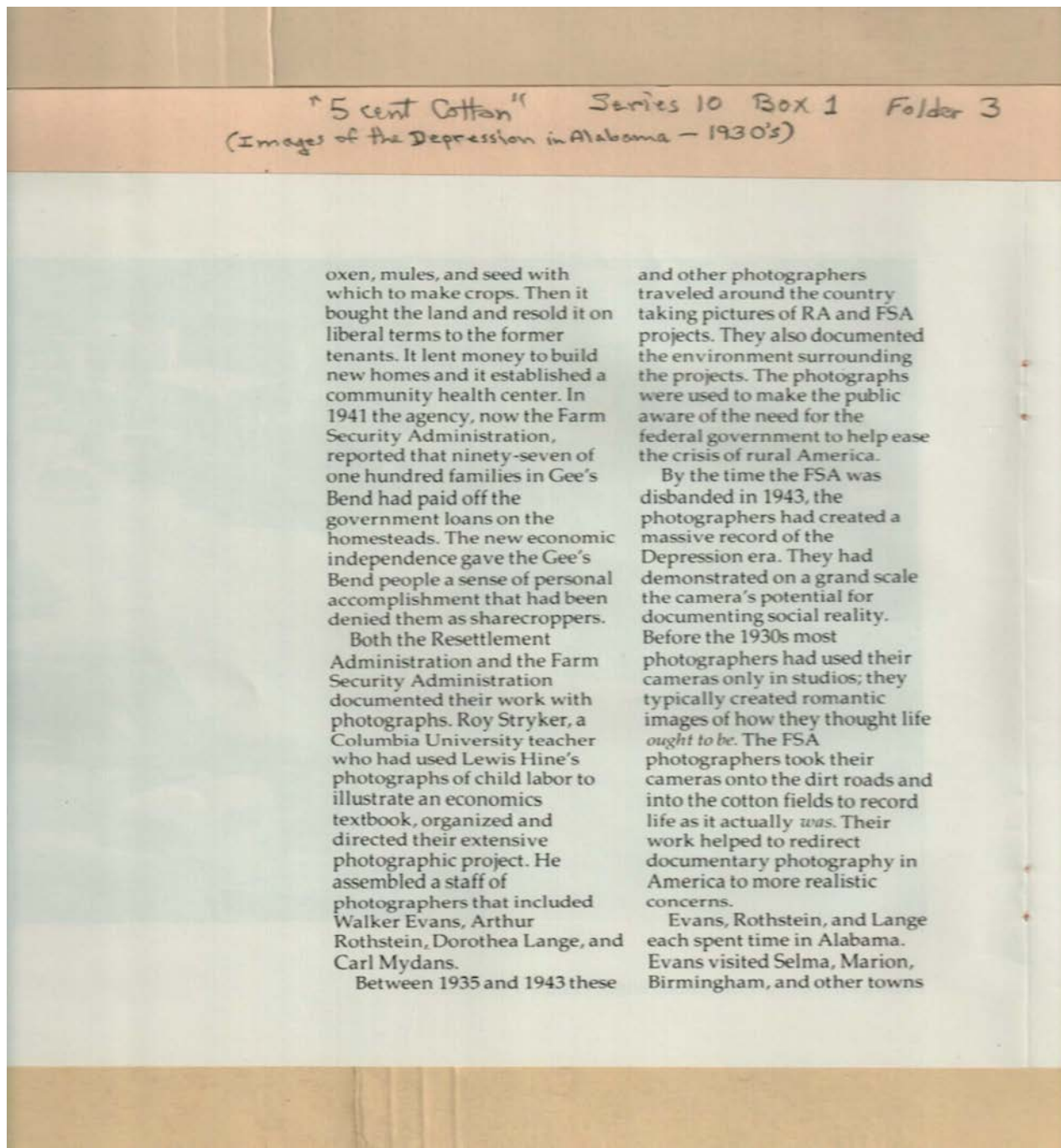
Greensboro

Places:

Hale Co., AL

Types:

photograph



Names:

Evans, Walker
Hine, Lewis

Lange, Dorothea
Mydans, Carl

Rothstein,
Stryker, Roy

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Names:

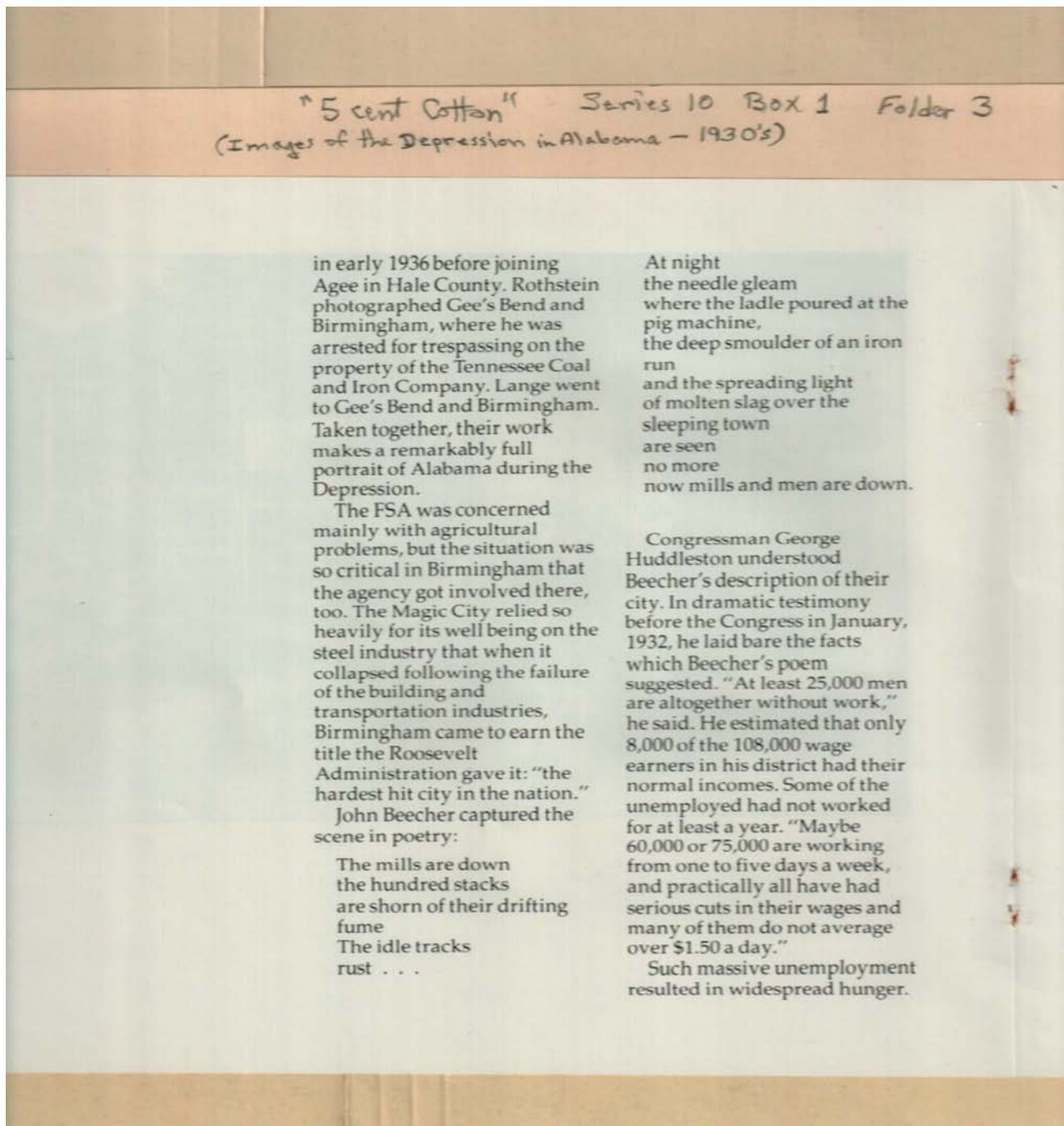
log cabin

Places:

Alabama

Types:

photograph



in early 1936 before joining Agee in Hale County. Rothstein photographed Gee's Bend and Birmingham, where he was arrested for trespassing on the property of the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company. Lange went to Gee's Bend and Birmingham. Taken together, their work makes a remarkably full portrait of Alabama during the Depression.

The FSA was concerned mainly with agricultural problems, but the situation was so critical in Birmingham that the agency got involved there, too. The Magic City relied so heavily for its well being on the steel industry that when it collapsed following the failure of the building and transportation industries, Birmingham came to earn the title the Roosevelt Administration gave it: "the hardest hit city in the nation."

John Beecher captured the scene in poetry:

The mills are down
the hundred stacks
are shorn of their drifting
fume
The idle tracks
rust . . .

At night
the needle gleam
where the ladle poured at the
pig machine,
the deep smoulder of an iron
run
and the spreading light
of molten slag over the
sleeping town
are seen
no more
now mills and men are down.

Congressman George Huddleston understood Beecher's description of their city. In dramatic testimony before the Congress in January, 1932, he laid bare the facts which Beecher's poem suggested. "At least 25,000 men are altogether without work," he said. He estimated that only 8,000 of the 108,000 wage earners in his district had their normal incomes. Some of the unemployed had not worked for at least a year. "Maybe 60,000 or 75,000 are working from one to five days a week, and practically all have had serious cuts in their wages and many of them do not average over \$1.50 a day."

Such massive unemployment resulted in widespread hunger.

Names:

Beecher, John

Huddleston, George,
Congressman

Lange,
Roosevelt,

Rothstein,

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" - Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



The Ensley steel plant in Birmingham. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Ensley Steel Plant

Rothstein, Arthur

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Brookside, a coal mining village in northern Jefferson County. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Brookside

Rothstein, Arthur

Places:

Jefferson Co., AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Coalminers lucky enough to be at work, near Birmingham. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Rothstein, Arthur

coal miners

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

The Red Cross had fed as many as 25,000 people in Birmingham in one month, Huddleston testified, but "any thought that there has been no starvation, that no man has starved, and no man will starve, is the rankest nonsense." Most people in Birmingham usually had something to eat, Huddleston explained, "but they are living such a scrambling, precarious existence, with suffering from lack of clothing, fuel, and nourishment, until they are subject to be swept away at any time, and many are now being swept away."

Housing was the only basic need readily met in Birmingham. "Rather than to have the house torn down [and] burned up for fuel," Huddleston reported, "the landlord prefers to have somebody living there free of charge . . . The choice is between leaving them vacant or allowing somebody to live in them free of charge. When they are vacant long they are subjected to vandalism."

Fuel for heating obviously presented a critical problem. "Birmingham is a cold place when it does get real cold," said Hosea Hudson, who was an unemployed black foundry

worker in the early 1930s, in his autobiography *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*. "It got cold in those days. It got to where you could not find a stick on the ground as large as a baby's wrist to make a fire out of in your house.

"We used to get coal off of the trains. Sometimes the Negro firemen would throw coal off the trains . . . When they'd be shoveling coal . . . they'd just take they shovel and throw they coal all over the ground, just like they was shoveling into the engine, for people to get coal.

"You would hear men say, 'I believe I'll go down and meet the train.' . . . Come along about 8 or 9 o'clock at night, the train would cross 1st Avenue . . . The freight train would stop because . . . the switchman had to get out to flag down the traffic . . . we'd go and get on the train on the cars . . . we just roll the lumps of coal off the train by where we live.

"We couldn't see it at night after we roll it off, but . . . in the morning, just as soon as we could see that coal, by light, we get out there with baskets and bags. . . And it was whosoever

Names:

Huddleston,

Hudson, Hosea

Types:

article

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



The Pettway family of Gee's Bend. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Pettway Family

Rothstein, Arthur

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

will, let him come. Nobody fighting over 'this coal is my coal' or nothing . . . It wasn't any jim crow line around that coal, and there wasn't any fights among the Negroes and whites."

The Depression devastated the poor, but in some ways it may have hit the middle class even harder. Journalist Lorena Hickok, investigating relief efforts in Alabama in 1934, found that unemployed professionals did not show anger over their plight. In fact, they had little to say. "They were very mild," she wrote. "Had few kicks to make. Generally I'd say they were dumb with misery."

Hickok wrote about the inadequacy of relief for white collar people. "We can provide overalls, but not tailored business suits," she lamented. "We can't keep those white shirts laundered." Unemployed professionals tried to hold on to their middle-class status. "To white collar people it's damned important to live in a decent house or apartment, in a decent neighborhood." Hickok argued that the particular problems of unemployed professionals had to be addressed: "I honestly

believe that, if we force them to give that up, we shall, in many, many instances, either break their morale completely or make Communist leaders out of them."

John Beecher observed the impact of the Depression on his father, an executive with the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company in Birmingham. "He lost most of his money in the stock market crash of '29. He had a hard time recovering from it, psychologically.

"I remember how, after dinner, he'd just lie on the couch in utter despair, night after night, for hours. A man who was interested in music, read all kinds of literature, novels, plays, history, economics and so on—there was this man so knocked out.

"We were afraid he was going to commit suicide. His close personal friend did take a header out of the fourteenth story window. He was still getting an excellent salary, but he felt . . . the measure of a man's success was the amount of money he accumulated.

"But he did recover. He became a kind of coolly critical intelligence. He was ready for

Names:

Beecher, John

Hickok, Lorena

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A roadside stand near Birmingham.

Names:

Pointer, F. M.

Roadside Stand

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Sisters in Gee's Bend. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Negro Sisters

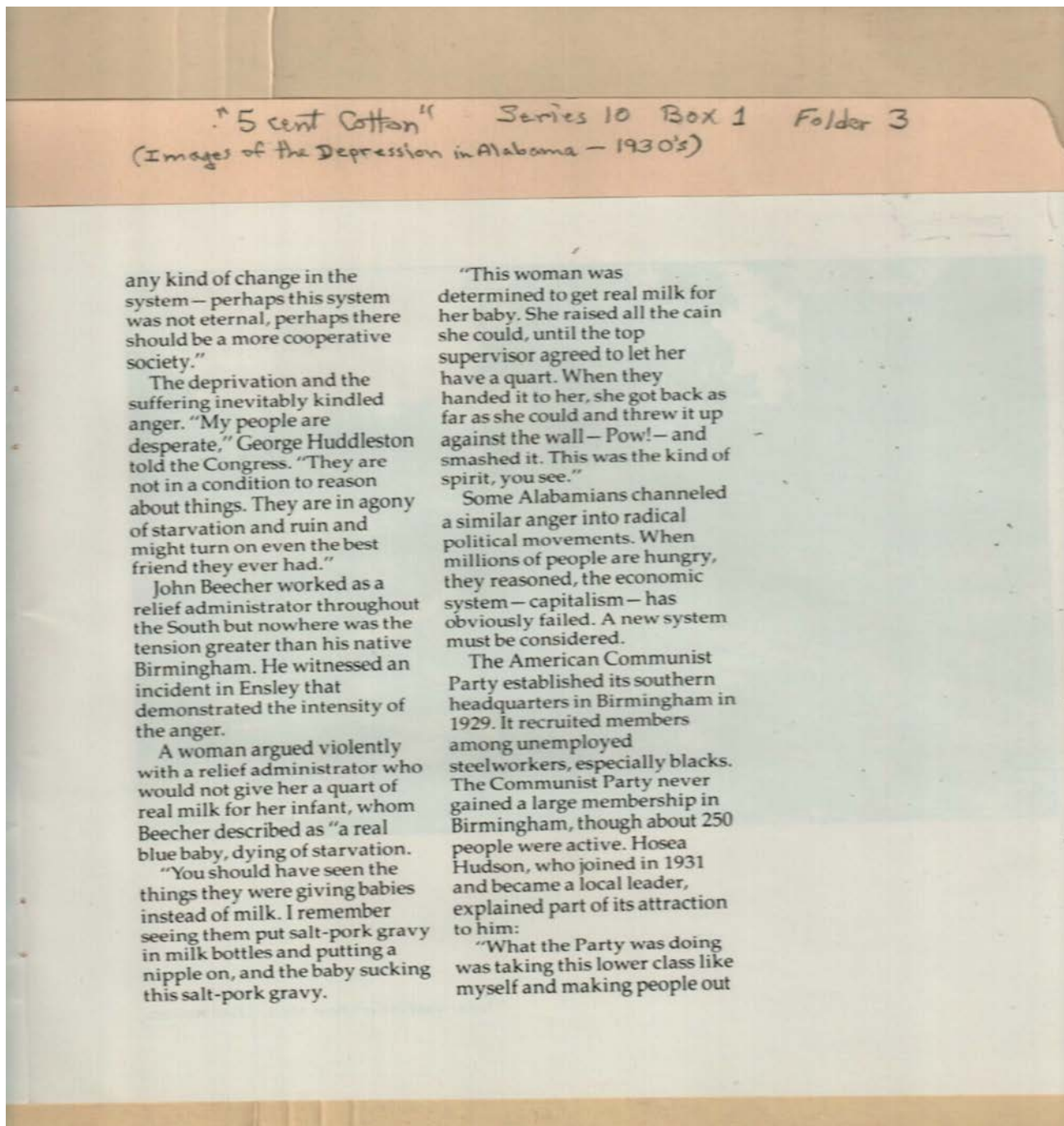
Rothstein, Arthur

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

photograph



Names:

Beecher, John

Huddleston, George

Hudson, Hosea

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Toting wood in Gee's Bend. Marion Post Wolcott.

Names:

Wolcott, Marion Post

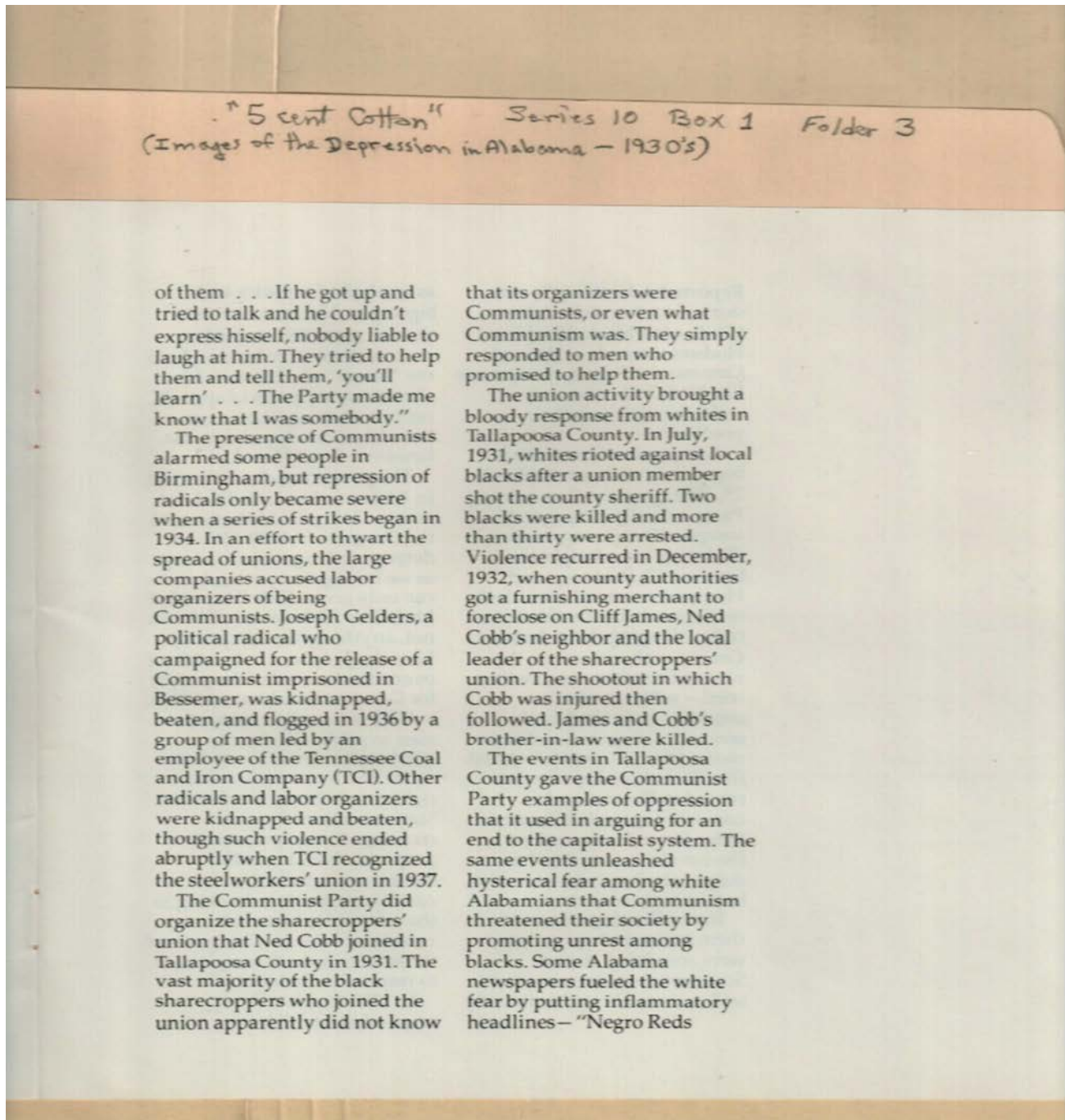
Toting Wood

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

photograph



Names:

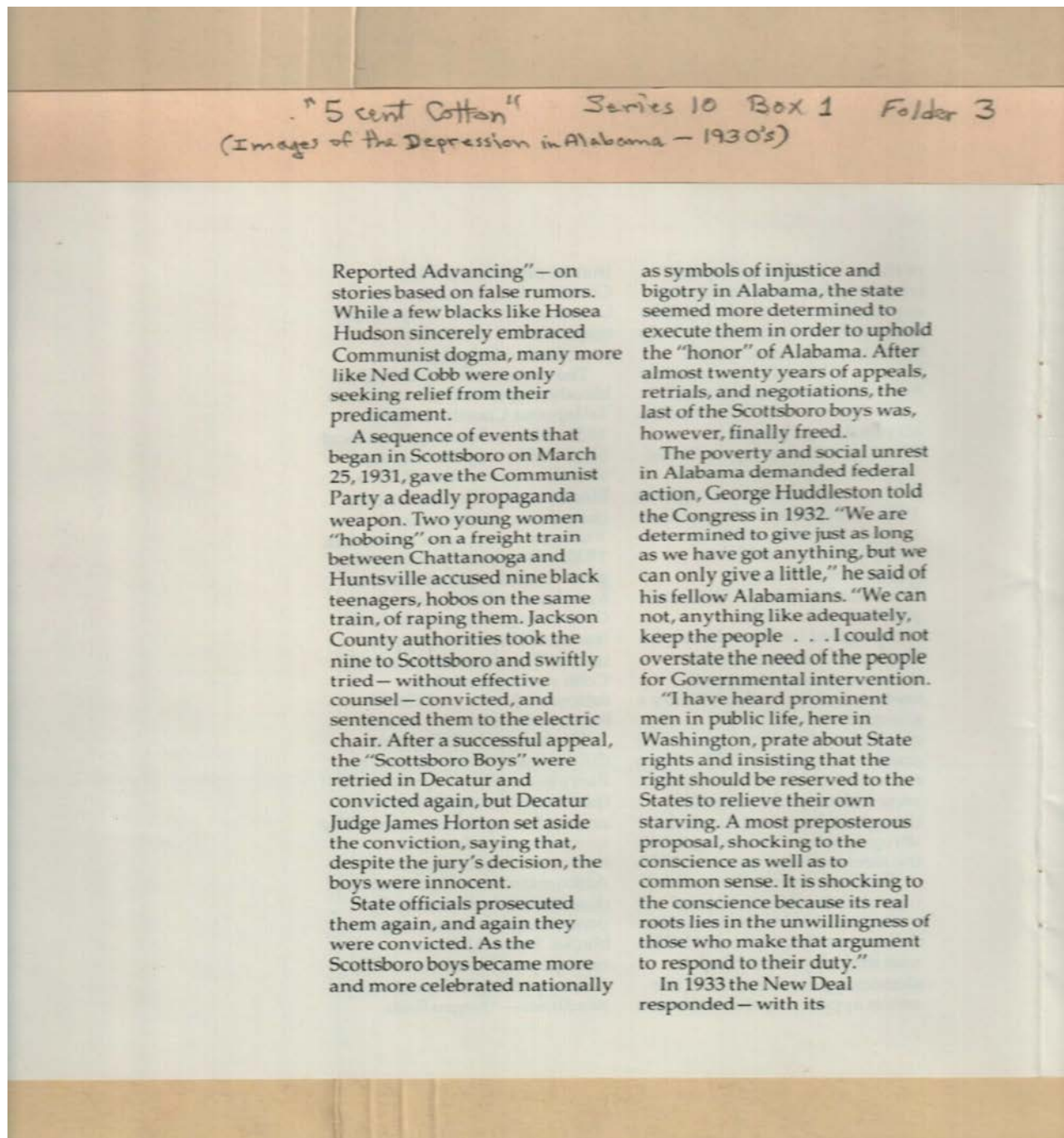
Cobb, Ned

Gelders, Joseph

James, Cliff

Types:

article



Names:

Cobb, Ned

Horton, James, Judge

Huddleston, George

Hudson, Hosea

Types:

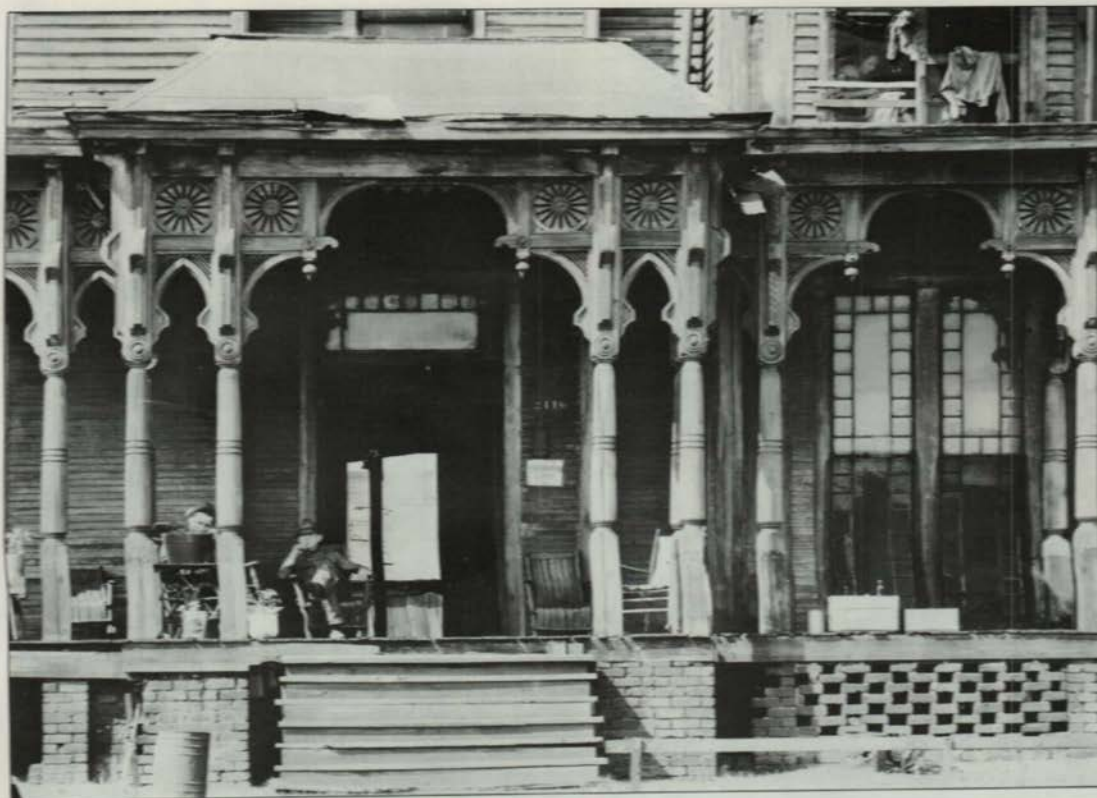
article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A boarding house near Birmingham. Walker Evans.

Names:

Boarding House

Evans, Walker

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

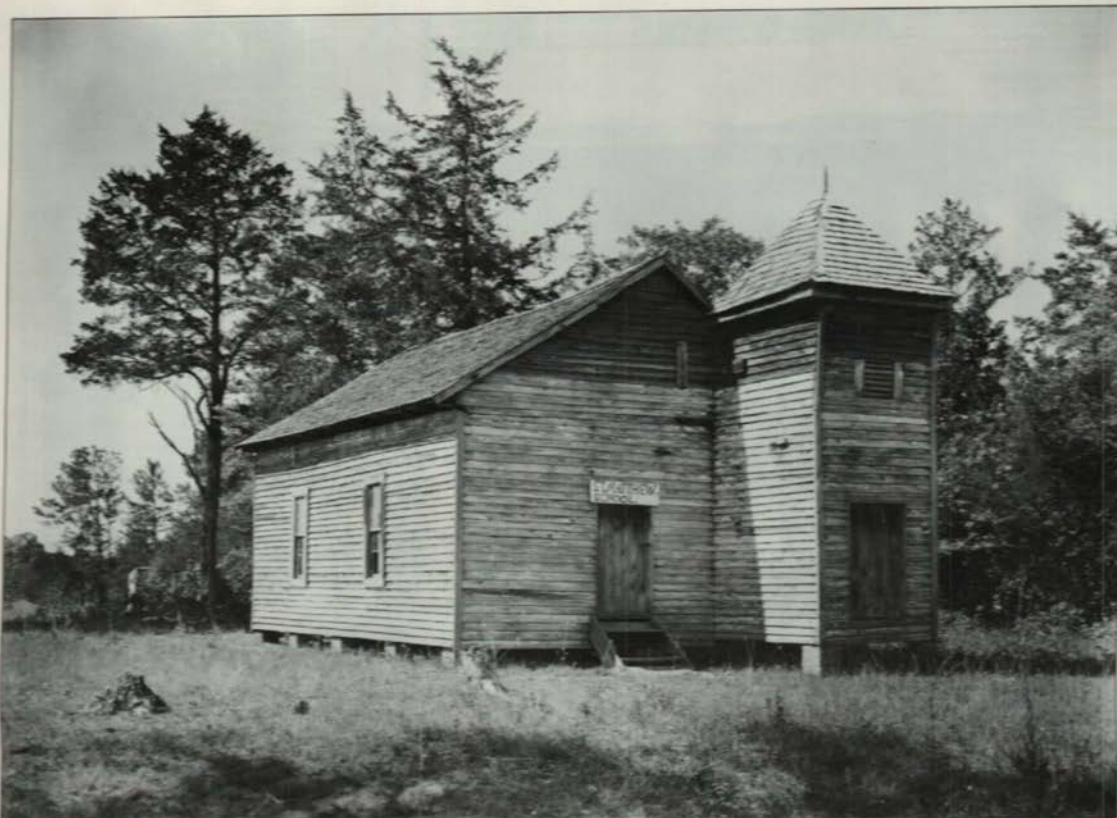
photograph

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"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A schoolhouse. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

School house

Types:

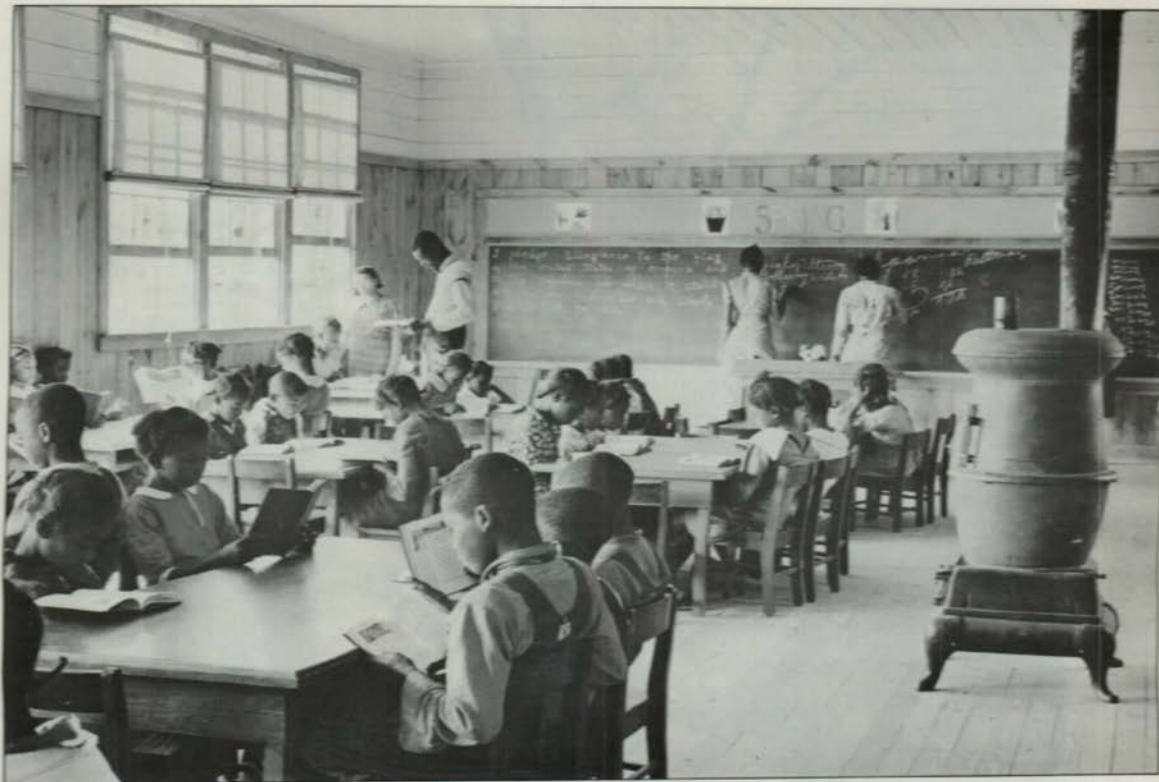
photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



The new school at Gee's Bend.

Names:

Gee's Bend School

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Migrants near Birmingham. Arthur Rothstein.

Names:

Migrants

Rothstein, Arthur

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Company housing near Birmingham. Walker Evans.

Names:

Company Housing

Evans, Walker

Places:

Birmingham, AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

agricultural programs and relief efforts. After the first year of the Administration, the New Deal used "work relief" rather than a simple dole. Thousands of young men worked on projects improving forests, parks, and recreational areas around the country for the Civilian Conservation Corps.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) employed about 70,000 Alabamians on road, water, and park projects in every county. In Birmingham WPA workers built a national guard armory, an industrial water system, and a public park for Vulcan—the monument to the steel industry—on Red Mountain.

The Tennessee Valley Authority, established in 1933, gave an economic lift to the northern third of Alabama. The building of the Wheeler and Guntersville dams created jobs, and the availability of cheap power brought new industry into the area. Along the way, the TVA transformed the appearance of much of northern Alabama.

Lakes now stood where farmers had formerly plowed. Power poles now paralleled

country roads and farm houses glowed with electric lights. But not everyone liked the changes: farmers forced to sell their land to make way for a lake and persons philosophically opposed to such a large federal presence in their community objected to the TVA.

The New Deal encouraged the growth of unionism with federal legislation that guaranteed workers' the right to bargain collectively. In the Birmingham area coal and iron ore miners rushed to take advantage of the new protection. The United Mine Workers (coal miners) and the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers (ore miners) both carried out long strikes in 1934. By the end of the year the UMW had ninety-two locals in Alabama with 23,000 members, which represented more than ninety percent of the coal miners in the state. The ore miners encountered more violent opposition; they won wage increases but union recognition did not come until 1937, when the Tennessee Coal and Iron Company agreed to collective bargaining for the first time.

Names:

New Deal

Types:

article

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"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A corner cafe near Tuscaloosa. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

River Hill Cafe

Places:

Tuscaloosa, AL

Types:

photograph

"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)

The New Deal programs were not the only efforts to relieve suffering. The kindness of friends and neighbors helped many Alabamians overcome the hardships of the Depression. In Hazel Green, a village north of Huntsville, Slaughter Graham opened a small general store just as the Depression set in. Behind his storecounter he witnessed the impact of hard times every day and, like many people, did what he could to help those in need. He bartered goods with customers who did not have cash. He sent hungry men to his own home with a message to his wife to give them a meal.

Graham was particularly bothered one cold day when a customer came in the store leading a shoeless little girl. "Where are that child's shoes?" he asked the man.

"She doesn't have any," the man replied, lowering his head.

"Mary Ann, give me your shoes," Graham said, turning to his own little girl who was playing nearby. Seeing the look of hurt on Mary Ann's face as she handed him what were her only shoes, he said, "I'll buy you

another pair when we go to Huntsville."

The day her father gave away her shoes is Mary Ann Graham's sharpest memory of the Depression. She recalls that her father's generosity was not an uncommon act of benevolence for the time. The Depression encouraged kindness in many people, just as it elicited fear, despair, anger, and radicalism from others.

The problem was that, no matter how kind people were, there were not enough shoes to go around. Thus, as these images of the Depression should remind us, the 1930s were a time when poverty abounded, despair was pervasive, and men and women lost confidence in their society. They only regained it when a concerted effort demonstrated that the nation did care. There were heavy penalties to pay along the way and the record of suppression and bigotry is not a proud one. Fifty years separate us from the season of five-cent cotton, but we can ill-afford to forget the meaning of what happened then.

— Jeff Norrell

Names:

, Mary Ann

Graham, Slaughter

Norrell, Jeff

Types:

article

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A general store near Moundville. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

General Store

Places:

Moundville, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A new home in the Resettlement Administration community of Palmerdale near Birmingham.

Names:

resettlement home

Places:

Palmerdale, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



"Putting up" peas in Gee's Bend.

Names:

Putting up peas

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

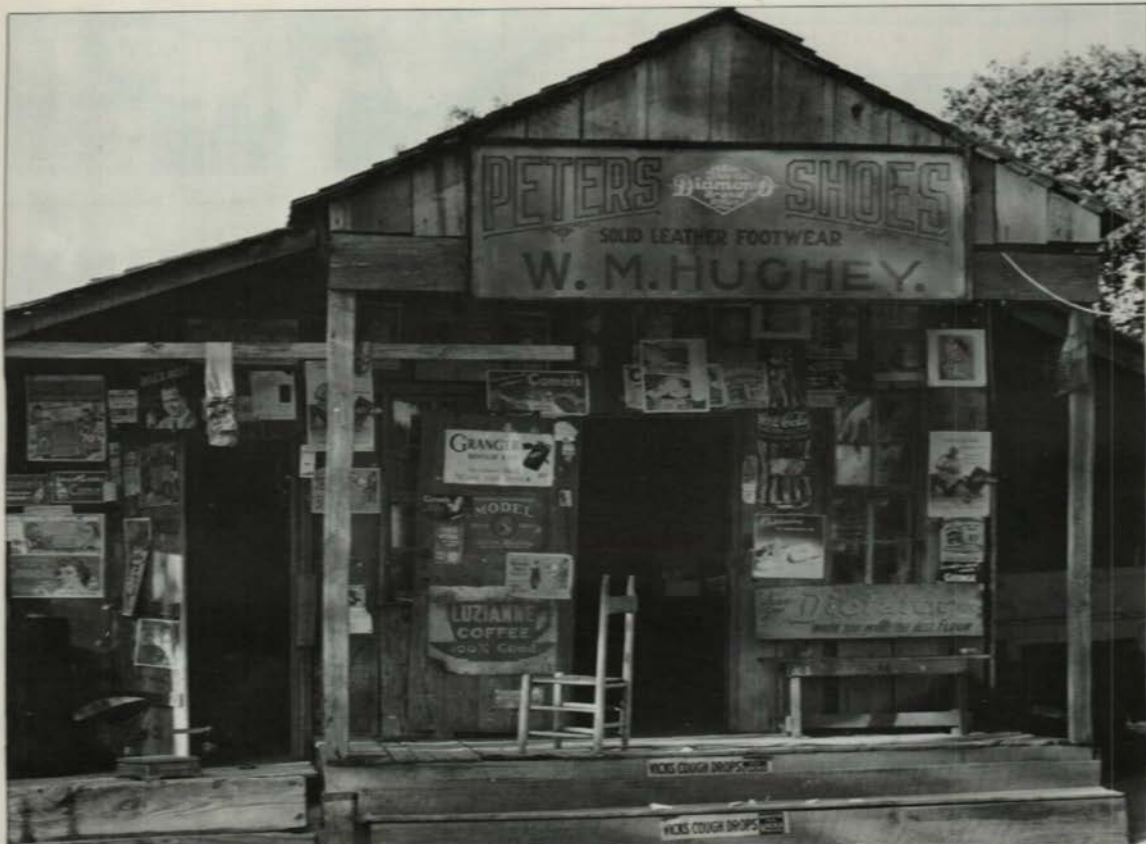
photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A store near Moundville. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

Hughey, W. M.

W. M. Hughey Store

Places:

Moundville, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



Organized fun at the Friendship Church in Gee's Bend. Marion Post Wolcott.

Names:

Friendship Church

Wolcott, Marion Post

Places:

Gee's Bend, AL

Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)

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"5 cent Cotton" Series 10 Box 1 Folder 3
(Images of the Depression in Alabama - 1930's)



A crossroads store and post office in Sprott, near Marion. Walker Evans.

Names:

Evans, Walker

Post Office

Places:

Sprott, AL

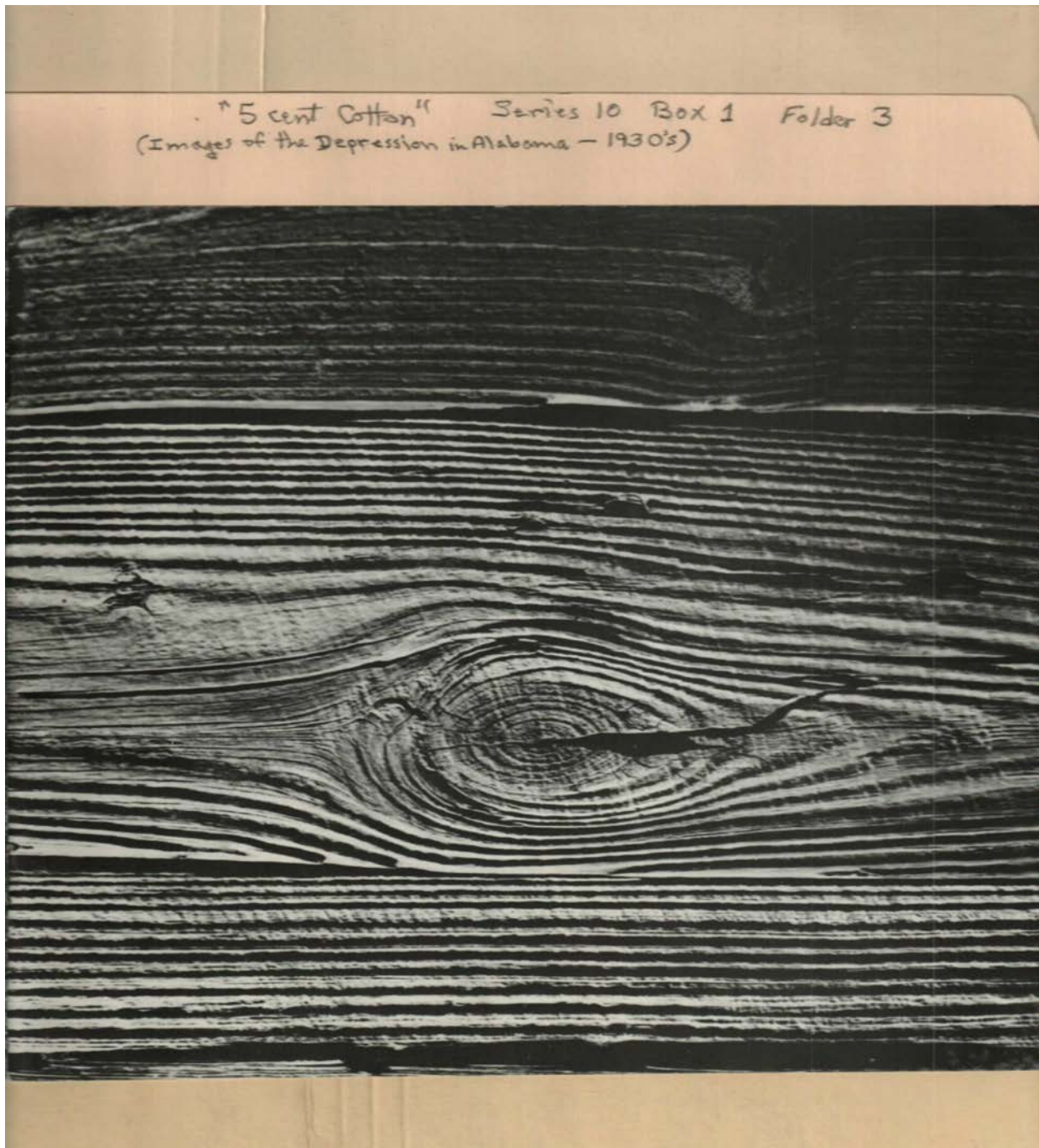
Types:

photograph

Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3

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Names:
plank

Types:
photograph

**Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection: Series 10, Box 1, Folder 3
"Five Cent Cotton" (Images of the Depression in Alabama, 1930s)**

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Preferred Citation: Frances Cabaniss Roberts Collection, Archives and Special Collections, M. Louis Salmon Library, University of Alabama in Huntsville, Huntsville, AL.

Collection Scope and Content: The Collection of 114 Linear ft. includes a total of 156 Archival Boxes. The Frances Cabaniss Roberts collection covers the historical records of the Cabaniss Roberts family. This collection contains extensive correspondence records of the Cabaniss Roberts family circa 1830 to 1930.

Archives/Special Collections Access Restrictions: None

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