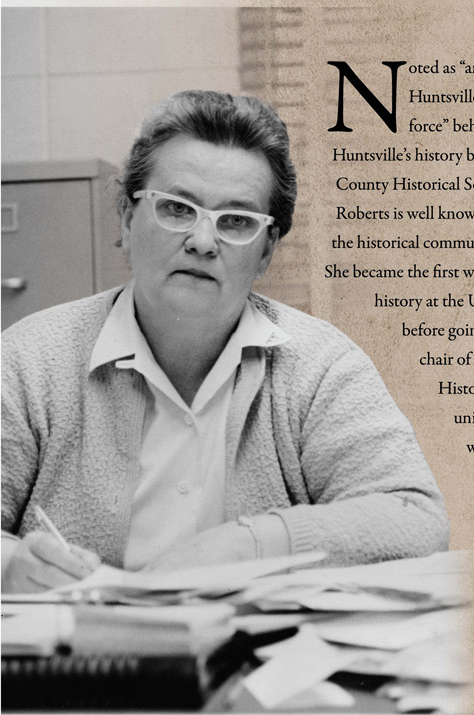


Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

1916-2000



Frances Roberts at her desk, UAH, c. 1960s.

Noted as “an institution” by the Huntsville Times and as a “founding force” behind the preservation of Huntsville’s history by the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society, Dr. Frances Cabaniss Roberts is well known and revered amongst the historical community of northern Alabama. She became the first woman to earn a Ph.D. in history at the University of Alabama before going on to become the first chair of UAH’s Department of History and the namesake of the university’s Roberts Hall. She was later inducted into the Alabama Women’s Hall of Fame, thanks in part to her efforts to help establish Huntsville’s Old Town and Twickenham historical districts, Huntsville’s Constitution Hall Village, the Huntsville Historical Society, and the Huntsville Preservation Society.



“Miss Frances Roberts, Univ. of Ala. Ext. Center,” c. 1952.

Frances Roberts at the time of her graduation from Alabama State Teachers College in Livingston, Alabama, in 1937.



Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

BIOGRAPHY



Frances Roberts, c. 1940s.

Frances Roberts was born in Gainesville, Alabama on December 19, 1916 to Richard and Mary Roberts. She attended Livingston High School, and at age 20 she graduated from Alabama State Teachers College (now the University of West Alabama) with a Bachelor of Science. She earned her Master's degree and Ph.D. from the University of Alabama, in 1940 and 1956 respectively. Roberts taught in high schools in Sumter County and Huntsville until 1952. In 1950, she began teaching history in the evenings at the University of Alabama Huntsville Center.

Roberts was diagnosed with Guillain-Barre syndrome in 1975, which contributed to her retirement from UAH in 1980. Despite her objections to public recognition, UAH's Humanities Building was renamed Roberts Hall in her honor on May 14, 1988. UAH awarded Roberts an honorary doctorate in December 1993, and she delivered a commencement speech on the value of the family, a topic she deeply valued. She died on November 5, 2000, a few weeks before her 84th birthday. In 2013, Roberts was posthumously inducted into the Alabama Women's Hall of Fame.



Roberts delivering the keynote speech at UAH fall commencement, 1993.



The Cabanis House at 603 Randolph Avenue in Huntsville, where Roberts lived most of her life, 1988.



View of Roberts Hall, c. 1970s.



SCAN to learn more about Frances C. Roberts
at the UAH Archives and Special Collections



Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

EDUCATOR AND SCHOLAR

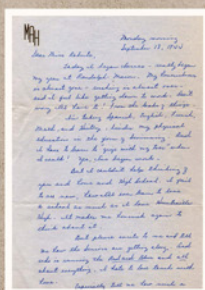
As a young woman growing up in Alabama, Frances Roberts set her sights on becoming an educator. Roberts first taught history at the high school level; then in 1950, she was hired to teach history at the University of Alabama Huntsville Center, where she became the first chair of the history department in 1966. Roberts was instrumental in restructuring the Huntsville Center into the independent University of Alabama in Huntsville in 1969. She retired from UAH in 1980. By the end of her career, she had impacted thousands of students through her classes.



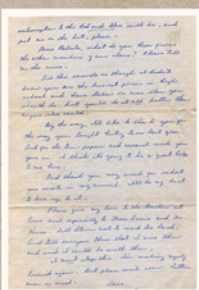
Roberts teaching in Morton Hall, 1960s.

As a scholar, Roberts studied the history of the Tennessee Valley. Her master's thesis, titled "An Experiment in Emancipation of Slaves by an Alabama Planter," focused on

Samuel Townsend's efforts to free his slaves during the 1850s. Her 1956 dissertation, "Background and Formative Period in the Great Bend and Madison County," was a seminal work on the Tennessee Valley that established her as an authority on Alabama history.



Letter from Martha Holliman (1928-2011), a high school student of Roberts, 1944. Holliman went on to become the first female member of the University of Alabama System Board of Trustees.



Frances Roberts and UAH president John Wright at Roberts Hall dedication, 1988.



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Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

A LIFE OF SERVICE

In the mid-twentieth century, rapid growth and urban renewal threatened many of Huntsville's historic structures. Frances Roberts was instrumental in saving many historic buildings as an active member of Huntsville's historic preservation groups. Among her notable projects were securing funding to establish the Weeden House Museum and working with Constitution Hall Park and Burritt on the Mountain. Roberts and architect Harvie P. Jones also compiled "A Preliminary Historical-Architectural Survey of Sites and Structures in Dekalb, Jackson, Limestone, Madison, and Marshall Counties" for the Top of Alabama Regional Council of Governments (TARCOG).



The Weeden House at 300 Gates Avenue, downtown Huntsville.

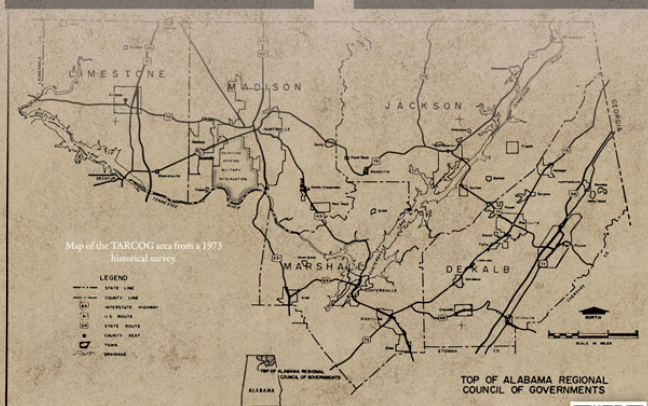
Roberts was a co-founder of the American Association of University Women (AAUW) Huntsville chapter. Her work with the AAUW included the first tours of historic downtown Huntsville and the publication of "Glimpses into Antebellum Homes of Huntsville." Roberts was also a proud supporter of the Girl Scouts of America.



Frances Roberts at the Madison County Women's Scroll of Honor award ceremony, a project sponsored by the Girl Scouts of North-Central Alabama, 1976.



Dorothy Adair, Lynn Jones, Frances Roberts, and Harvie Jones in front of the Cabaniss House, 1988.



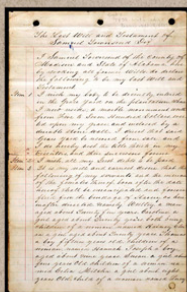
Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

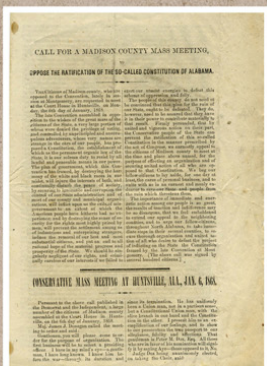
ARCHIVAL LEGACY

Frances Roberts amassed thousands of documents related to her family and the history of Alabama over her lifetime. These materials live on as the Septimus D. Cabaniss Papers at the University of Alabama (UA), the Frances C. Roberts Collections at the University of West Alabama (UWA) and The University of Alabama in Huntsville (UAH).

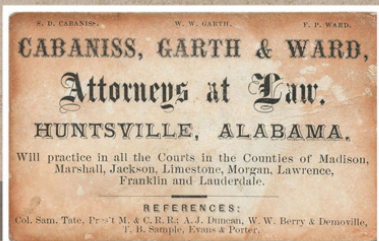
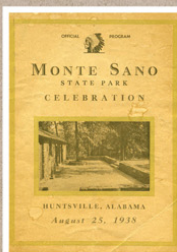
The Septimus D. Cabaniss Papers contain materials related to Cabaniss' Huntsville law practice. The National Historical Publications and Records Commission funded the arrangement and description of the Cabaniss Papers as part of a collaborative grant between the University of Alabama and Tuskegee University in 2009. The Frances Roberts Collection at UWA contains ephemera, photographs, and family records from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It includes a large postcard collection and antique books. The Frances Roberts Collection at UAH contains the heart of Roberts's research and family records. The collection documents Huntsville and Madison County history from the late 1700s to the early 2000s, making it a trove of genealogical and local history research.



First page of Samuel Townsend's last will and testament, from The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections.



"Call for a Madison County Mass Meeting, to Oppose the Ratification of the So-Called Constitution of Alabama," 1868.



S.D. Cabaniss business card, from The University of Alabama Libraries Special Collections.



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Frances C. Roberts

HER LIFE AND LEGACY

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STATE OF ALABAMA

PROCLAMATION

BY THE GOVERNOR

WHEREAS, Frances Cabanis Roberts is a native Alabamian, born and raised in the little Black Belt town of Gainesville; and

WHEREAS, after receiving her B.S. from Livingston College, she came to Huntsville in 1937, beginning a teaching career that spanned forty years; and

WHEREAS, she completed her M.A. at the University of Alabama; she received her Ph.D. there in 1956; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Roberts joined the Huntsville Extension Center when it opened in 1950; consequently, she climbed through the ranks, attaining full professorship in 1961 and becoming a professor emerita in 1980; and

WHEREAS, throughout her years with the Center, which is now UAH (University of Alabama in Huntsville), she worked tirelessly to raise money for buildings, build the university's curriculum, and promote positive relations between the UAH and the community; and

WHEREAS, Dr. Roberts has continually taken her professional knowledge into the community, serving in leadership positions on several boards and speaking before civic groups; and

WHEREAS, because she is so greatly loved and admired by her former students, many of them have come forward to donate substantial amounts of money to UAH in her name; and

WHEREAS, throughout her career, Dr. Roberts combined her job of teaching, research and service with a much broader sense of responsibility which led her to do above and beyond what she was asked; and

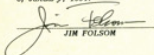
WHEREAS, on December 12, 1993, Dr. Roberts received her Doctor of Humane Letters Honorary Degree;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Jim Folsom, Governor of the State of Alabama, do hereby proclaim December 12, 1993, as

Dr. Frances Roberts Day

in Alabama and do commend her for her outstanding achievements.

GIVEN UNDER MY HAND, and the Great Seal of the Governor's Office at the State Capitol in the City of Montgomery on this the 13th day of January, 1994.


JIM FOLSOM



"Dr. Frances Roberts Day" Proclamation from Gov. Jim Folsom, 1993.

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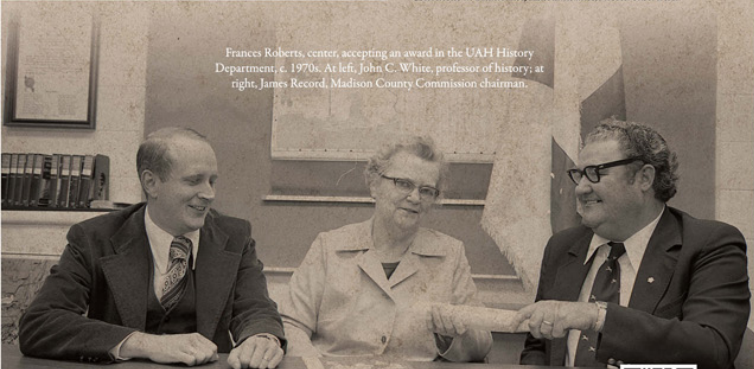
Caroline Gibbons

William Morris

Sara Kaparos

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Frances Roberts, center, accepting an award in the UAH History Department, c. 1970s. At left, John C. White, professor of history; at right, James Record, Madison County Commission chairman.



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