Roberta Clay Collection, 1925-1973:  
A Guide

Descriptive Summary

Creator: Roberta Louise Clay  
Title: Roberta Clay Collection, 1925-1973  
Inclusive Dates: 1925-1973  
Abstract: The collection documents the activities of Roberta Louise Clay, an educator, writer, and supporter of civil rights and social justice. In addition to education-related materials, notes for writing projects, and copies of manuscripts, it contains personal materials such as travel logs and scrapbooks.  
Identification: AR13  
Extent: 3.29 cubic feet  
Shelf location: 6:B:1, 5  
Language(s): Collection is predominantly in English; materials in Spanish are indicated at the series level.  
Repository: Tarleton State University, Dick Smith Library, Archives and Special Collections, Stephenville, Texas

Biographical Note

Roberta Louise Clay was born on December 30, 1900 in Dublin, Texas. She was the youngest child of William James Clay (1861-1918) and Lucy Ann Higginbotham (1863-1941). Even though they were financially prosperous, the Clays chose careers in education. They taught in Dublin and Stephenville, Texas.

Clay earned a high school diploma in 1917 at Dublin High School. She then attended Texas Woman’s University where she received a BA in English in 1921. By 1931 she had obtained a BA in Journalism from the University of Missouri. Her advanced degrees included an MS from Northwestern University (1937) in journalism and an MA from Columbia University of New York City (1947) in English.

Clay began her education career in the 1920s by teaching in several Texas high schools. During that time she became a reporter for the Wichita Falls Daily Times and later for the Stephenville Empire-Tribune. Clay’s career in higher education began in 1931 when she joined the faculty at John Tarleton Agricultural College (now Tarleton State University) as a professor of journalism and sociology. She was also the supervisor of publications and the faculty advisor to The J-TAC and the Grassburr staffs. After resigning from Tarleton in 1936, she became a professor of English and journalism as well as Dean of Women at College of the Ozarks (now University of the Ozarks) in Clarksville, Arkansas. Clay taught English Journalism (a hybrid course) at Arkansas State Teachers College from the late 1940s to the mid-1960s.


Clay’s 1937 thesis for Northwestern University was titled Labor, Liberty, and the Press: A Study of Newspaper Reports of the 1936 Senate Investigations of Violations of Free Speech and the Rights of Labor. Her interest in civil liberties and social causes resurfaced during her retirement. She supported the United Farm Workers by providing funds to help educate young Mexican-Americans, joined the Society
of Friends in their opposition of the Vietnam War, and wrote letters about academic freedom to the American Civil Liberties Union.

Clay became interested in the prisoners of the Texas penal system in 1966. After reading a newspaper article written by inmate Shirley Jean Jaquess, Clay communicated with authorities and convinced them to release Jaquess to her custody. Clay provided Jaquess with a home, some spending money, and access to an education. The project ended when Jaquess returned to her criminal ways and was again incarcerated.

Clay died on February 16, 1974 in Stephenville, Texas and was buried in New Dublin Live Oak Cemetery in Dublin, Texas. Scholarships were established in her memory at Tarleton State University and Texas Women’s University.

Sources:

The Dublin Citizen (Dublin, Tex.), Vol. 18, No. 39, Ed. 1 Thursday, May 29, 2008, newspaper, May 29, 2008; Dublin, Texas.  

The Dublin Progress (Dublin, Tex.), Vol. 76, No. 100, Ed. 1 Thursday, March 10, 1966, newspaper, March 10, 1966; Dublin, Texas.  

Hicks, Linda. The Dublin Progress (Dublin, Tex.), Vol. 85, No. 35, Ed. 1 Thursday, February 21, 1974, newspaper, February 21, 1974; Dublin, Texas.  

The J-TAC (Stephenville, Tex.), Vol. 17, No. 1, Ed. 1 Saturday, September 19, 1936, newspaper, September 19, 1936;  

Turney, Frances. The Dublin Progress (Dublin, Tex.), Vol. 76, No. 24, Ed. 1 Thursday, September 16, 1965, newspaper, September 16, 1965; Dublin, Texas.  
Scope and Contents

The collection documents the activities of Roberta Louise Clay, an educator, writer, and supporter of civil rights and social justice. In addition to education related materials, notes for writing projects, and copies of manuscripts, it also contains personal materials such as travel logs and scrapbooks. Some of the significant topics covered in these files are academic freedom, education of young Mexican-American men and women, and Clay’s work with and support of a young woman who was an inmate of the Texas penal system. Copies of manuscripts of her thesis for her Master’s of Science in Journalism are found in the collection. Materials are largely textual, comprising correspondence, writing notes, manuscripts for articles, programs for events attended, and speeches written and given by Clay.

Two letters signed by Cesar Chavez are included in the files. As a preservation measure, archival staff made photocopies of the original letters for researcher access.

Organization

The Roberta Clay Collection is organized in 12 series:

Series I. Biography
Series II. Correspondence
Series III. Writings
Series IV. Memorabilia
Series V. Notes
Series VI. Programs
Series VII. Speeches
Series VIII. Personal
Series IX. Travels

Some materials are in Spanish.

Series X. Manuscripts
Series XI. Thesis
Series XII. Scrapbooks

Rights and Access

Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Physical Access Restrictions

None.

Technical Access Restrictions

None.

Publication Rights

Copyright restrictions may apply.
Reproduction Note

Reproductions must be made from surrogates (microfilm, digital scan, photocopy, transcript of the original held by Archives/Special Collections, Dick Smith Library, Tarleton State University), when available. Only archives staff may photocopy collection documents.

Index Terms

Persons
- Bentsen, Lloyd Millard, 1921-2006
- Chavez, Cesar Estrada, 1927-1993
- Gore, Albert Arnold, Sr., 1907-1998
- Kennedy, Edward Moore, 1932-2009
- Tower, John Goodwin, 1925-1991

Organizations
- American Civil Liberties Union
- Amnesty International
- Columbia University in the City of New York
- Texas Civil Liberties Union
- The Arkansas State Teachers College
- United Farm Workers

Subjects
- Civil liberties
- Correctional institutions—Inmates
- Free speech
- Great Britain—Description and travel
- Incarcerated persons
- Labor and laboring classes—Texas
- Newspapers
- Prisoners
- Roberta Clay—Travel
- United States—Description and travel
- Voyages and travels—1960-1980
- Working class

Administrative Information

Provenance

Donated to the Dick Smith Library at Tarleton State University by Roberta Clay before 2008.
Preferred Citation

[Title of file or item], Roberta Clay Collection, AR13, Box [no.], Folder [no.], Tarleton State University, Dick Smith Library, Archives and Special Collections, Stephenville, Texas.

Processing Information

Finding aid prepared by Phyllis Kinnison and Alyce Crane, 2019.

Related Collections

Clay Family Papers, 1930, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.
Higginbotham family collection, 1886-1921, Southwest Collection/Special Collections Library, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas.
Lena Lewis Manuscripts, AR32, Tarleton State University, Dick Smith Library, Archives and Special Collections, Stephenville, Texas.

Note to the Researcher

The collection is processed, but advance notice is required with time allowed to retrieve the records from an offsite location before conducting research. There may be occasions when staffing or weather conditions delay or prevent retrieval of the records. For more information, contact Librarian/Archivist Phyllis Kinnison at pkinnison@tarleton.edu.

Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stack Location</th>
<th>Box</th>
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<th>Series Title and Folder Contents (with dates)</th>
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