

Sarah Huff Fisk left 'legacy for Huntsville'

Madison County native known for preserving history

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Sarah Huff Fisk was a writer, artist, historian and musician. She wrote two novels when she was in her 80s, filed her own income tax returns until she was 90 and helped found Alabama Constitution Hall Village.

She was 91 when she died on Dec. 31. She lived her entire life in Madison County, first in Meridianville, then Huntsville.

She spent her childhood in a Victorian house at 701 Ward Ave. in northeast Huntsville. She and her husband, Burke, lived much of their lives on North Broad Place in a house built for Dr. Carl Grote, one of the best-known doctors in Madison County history.

For 35 years, she and Burke walked to work together, ate lunch together and walked home together. At times, they worked at adjoining desks. He was the office manager at Huntsville Manufacturing, and



she was a bookkeeper there.

Her mother and an aunt also lived at the Fisks' home in Huntsville Park in southwest Huntsville. In later years, she cared for her mother, her aunt, her husband and sister as they were dying.

"It's really a huge loss for Huntsville," said Kerry Pinkerton, her nephew. "She was such an encourager. In my entire relationship with her, I don't recall her being in a bad mood. She and my mother said they never had a cross word with each other."

Pinkerton's mother, Martha, was Fisk's younger sister. Around 1923, Sarah and Martha attended a Punch and Judy show in Huntsville.

Thus began their fascination with puppets. Soon, they began making marionettes that could

walk and dance.

Sarah and Martha wrote plays for the marionettes, some of them composed completely in rhyme. From 1937 to 1948, the Huff Marionettes played at churches and schools across Madison County.

In 1994, she and her sister held their final marionette show for their closest friends.

"It's a stage of human evolution that will never happen again in America," Kerry Pinkerton said. "They were just creative, and they had this outlet they had to express."

About 50 of the Huff Marionettes still remain and were donated to the Huntsville Museum of Art.

"She did leave a legacy for Huntsville," said Emily Pinkerton Saile, Fisk's niece. "All this work she did, she was never paid for it. She did it because she felt it needed to be done for Huntsville."

In later years, she spent a year drawing the Huntsville downtown square and Big Spring as it appeared in 1823. She sketched the drawing in pencil to commemorate the 150th anniversary of the Huntsville water system.

"She knew everything about the buildings" in the drawing, Pinkerton said. "She knew how many panes of glass were in the Bell Tavern, how many windows it had and how many lanterns it had out front. She told me the only thing she didn't know was how many out-houses there were."

In 1989, Fisk was chosen as one of 50 Huntsville High graduates from 1914 to 1958 who had contributed most to Huntsville. Among her chief contributions was her role in the creation of Alabama Constitution Hall Village.

"She chaired the committee to create (the village)," Pinkerton said. "She did all the work and research. If not for her, Constitution Hall Village would not exist."

Her love of history flourished in 1940, when she was in her mid-20s. Working in the Madison County Probate Judge's office, she began studying some of the county's oldest documents, triggering her imagination.

When she was in her 70s, she and her sister wrote their memories of their childhood. Being the artist and the writer

in the family, Fisk wrote and drew the illustrations for the five volumes.

"Book 1, October 7, 1919, to December 31, 1919," the first volume began, "in which we begin life in our new home in town."

Sarah was 4 and Martha was 21 months when their father, O.C., an accountant for a local oil company, moved his family from Meridianville to Huntsville.

"Sarah woke up because the clock was striking," she wrote of the family's early days in Huntsville. "She could see it on the mantel and knew at once by its wheezing sounds that it was Nannie's old clock that she and Grandpa Baker had brought from New York state when they moved to Huntsville after their marriage."

When Fisk was in her 80s, she wrote her first novel, "Found Among the Fragments," a story about Huntsville women dealing with the Civil War. Later, she wrote a sequel, "Built Among the Fragments," a story of Huntsville in the 1880s.

In 1962, Fisk and Frances Roberts, a University of Alaba-



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ma in Huntsville professor and historian, co-authored "Shadows on the Wall," the story of Huntsville poet Howard Weeden. In 1998, she published "Civilization Comes to Big Spring," the story of the beginning of Huntsville.

Fisk also illustrated "Long Ago in Madison County," a social studies book. Her final book was "The Lost Writings of Howard Weeden as Flake White," published in 2005.

"She didn't have any children," Pinkerton said. "We all go to ballgames to watch our kids play ball. She went to the archives."