



# Remembering Rebecca Clark

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# Project Background and Goals

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Rebecca Clark was nothing short of a legend in Chapel Hill. A leader in the town's African-American community, Rebecca Clark committed herself to registering every resident that moved into the Northside community, one of Chapel Hill's historically black neighborhoods. She also used the connections she gained through work as a domestic, a laundress, and a nurse, to advocate policies to improve the lives of Chapel Hill's African-American citizens.

This summer, I used Rebecca Clark's Southern Oral history Interview, as well as information from The University Archives, The Southern History Collection, the North Carolina Collection, The Chapel Hill Town Council Archives, and other interviews and documents relating to Mrs. Clark's life to create a biography of her life, to be completed as a Senior Honors Thesis in the History Department.

My goal was to answer three questions regarding her activism: 1) What was the scope of Rebecca Clark's political and community activism, 2) How are the effects of her activism visible in Chapel Hill today, and 3) Why did she choose to pursue certain causes and abstain from others?



# Project Results

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The results of my project were thus:

- ▶ The scope of Rebecca Clark's activism extended far beyond Chapel Hill and even the state of North Carolina through the persons with whom she was able to influence and interact. Rebecca Clark's influence was so far reaching because of her position as a domestic worker to University Presidents, professors, and the like, as well as her work as a laundress and a nurse.
  - ▶ Rebecca Clark's chosen form of activism was voter registration, which she pursued from the time she registered to vote at the age of twenty-one until her passing at the age of ninety-three. She participated in many campaigns, not only those of black candidates, but also those of liberal leaders, women, or any other group that needed a more significant role in politics. She abstained from the protest marches and civil disobedience of the tumultuous '60s both because she did not have the temperament to take the kind of abuse that activists faced in Chapel Hill, and because she felt that making sure that everyone who could made it to the polls to make their voice heard was the best method of ensuring social justice.
  - ▶ Her influence is visible in Chapel Hill not only on the building that bears her name, but also on the roads in Chapel Hill's black community that she worked so hard to get paved, the bus system that she got people to the polls to vote for, and most of all, in the hearts and minds of all Chapel Hill citizens who knew her.
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