

Bertha Kirkley

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Read by Cheryl Spencer, Library Associate in Special Collections.

“Bertha Kirkley, long-time professor at Sam Houston State Teachers College.” Read by Cheryl Patton, Library Associate at Newton Gresham Library at Sam Houston State University.

Bertha Kirkley was born in San Augustine, Texas, to Dr. James E. Kirkley and Elizabeth Hollis Kirkley, January 10, 1868. Her father was a physician. The family lived in Beckville, Panola County, Texas, where Bertha graduated from high school. She attended Sam Houston Normal Institute on a scholarship. She received the Peabody bronze medal during her junior year and the Peabody silver medal as valedictorian of her class.

She became an assistant in History, Latin, and Mathematics in 1891. She was advanced to Associate Professor of History. She travelled and studied during the summers at Universities of Chicago, Harvard, Tennessee, and Colorado. She travelled in Europe and studied art, literature, and history. She received a Master's degree from Alabama Polytechnic Institute in 1924. She taught History at SHNI until she retired in 1937. After her retirement from teaching, she began a part-time career as supervisor of indexing periodicals in the Sam Houston Library, and served as curator of Sam Houston Museum until 1941.

In 1905, with the assistance of her history classes, Miss Kirkley began a fund to purchase the home and grounds of a former home of General Sam Houston. She felt this shrine should be returned to the citizens of Texas and opened to the public. From this beginning, the park was purchased and donated to the State, and later a museum was built.

Miss Kirkley was a member of the Presbyterian Church, the Outlook Club, Sigma Tau Delta, and many professional organizations. In June 1941, she was honored with a dinner party commemorating her fifty years of service with Sam Houston State Teachers College. She died August 14, 1949, and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery, Huntsville, Texas. Kirkley Hall on Sam Houston campus was named in her memory.