

## Guide to the Michael Donald Papers, 1981-2004

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### **Descriptive Summary:**

Creator: Scotty E. Kirkland

Title: Michael Donald Papers

Dates: 1981-2004

Quantity: .5 cubic feet

Abstract: Contains copies of research, articles, court transcripts and FBI Investigation files from Kirkland's research on the Donald murder.

Accession: 06-09-466

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### **Bibliographical Note:**

On March 21, 1981, Michael Donald was kidnapped and murdered by local Ku Klux Klan members James Knowles and Henry Francis Hays. In retribution for the mistrial of a black man accused of killing a white police officer in Birmingham, Hays and Knowles took Donald's body and hung it from a tree on Herndon Avenue near his home. The investigation into the murder stalled for over a year until, after prodding from Thomas Figures, the assistant U.S. attorney in Mobile, the local division of the Federal Bureau of Investigation launched a new inquiry. That inquiry resulted in the arrest and conviction of Henry Hays for Donald's murder in February 1983. Hays was sentenced to the death penalty. Knowles was also convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. In 1987, Morris Dees, founding partner of the Southern Poverty Law Center, sued the United Klans of America on behalf of Michael Donald's mother. *Beulah Mae Donald v. United Klans of America* resulted in a \$7 million verdict for the Donald family and bankrupted the UKA and its founder, Robert Shelton. Henry Hays was executed in June 1997, becoming the first white man to be put to death for the murder of a black man in Alabama in over sixty years.

In 2006, Herndon Avenue was renamed for Michael Donald. The next year, Mobile author Ravi Howard published *Like Trees Walking*, a fictional account of the Donald murder and its affect on Mobile's African-American community. Scotty E. Kirkland obtained the FBI Investigation files during thesis research at the University of South Alabama in April 2007 and donated copies of the material in May 2007.

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**Scope and Contents:**

The papers of Michael Donald contain selected Hays and Knowles court proceedings, the bulk of which is related to Hays. Also included are FBI investigation files, coroner's report, and several articles relating to the cases and the Ku Klux Klan.

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**Arrangement:**

The collection has been divided into four series: 1. Court proceedings (3 files); 2. FBI files and correspondence (1 file); 3. Ku Klux Klan (2 files); 4. Articles and Research Material (7 files).

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**Access Restrictions:**

This collection is open to researchers.

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**Preferred Citation:**

Michael Donald Papers, University of South Alabama Archives.

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**Series Description:****Series 1: Court Proceedings**

This series contains five court rulings from *State v Hays* from 1985-1992, as well as selections from the civil suit, *Beulah Mae Donald v. United Klans of America*. The series also contains the official coroner's report and his testimony in the Hays trial.

**Series 2: FBI Files and Correspondence**

Contains correspondence and material related to the acquisition of the Michael Donald murder investigation files from the Federal Bureau of Investigation in 2006. The FBI files comprise approximately 1500 pages and have been burned to a CD-ROM.

**Series 3: Ku Klux Klan**

Contains a copy of the Klan charter for the Mobile chapter, copied from the Southern Poverty Law Center, and a state investigation file of the UKA in Alabama commissioned by Attorney General Richmond Flowers in December 1965.

**Series 4: Articles and Research Material**

This series contains articles from *Mobile Register* about the Donald murder and Hays execution, as well as a collection from the Michigan State University Library's Radicalism Collection. There are several articles concerning the civil suit and two stories on the renaming of Herndon Avenue in 2006 from the *Mobile Press Register*. The final file contains a copy of an Auburn University master's thesis on the KKK in Alabama, 1969-1981, by Raymond Morton.

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**Content List:**

**Series 1**

1. Court Proceedings, Rulings, *State v. Hays*, 1985-1992
- 2-3. Court Proceedings, Transcript Selections, *Beulah Mae Donald v. UKA*, 1987
4. Coroner's Report, 1981

**Series 2**

5. FBI Correspondence and Related Materials

**Series 3**

6. Ku Klux Klan, Charter
7. Ku Klux Klan, Alabama Investigation File, 1965

**Series 4**

8. Newspaper Clippings, 1981
9. Newspaper Clippings, 1983
10. Newspaper Clippings, 1984-1985
11. Newspaper Clippings, 1987
12. Newspaper Clippings, 1988-1989

13. Newspaper Clippings, 1991-1993
14. Newspaper Clippings, 1995-1997, 2000
15. Newspaper Clippings, n.d.
16. Articles, *Guardian*, 1981-1984
17. Articles, Lexis Nexis, 1983-2002
18. Articles, Michigan State University, 1981-1987
19. Articles, Michael Wilson, *Mobile Press Register*, 1997
20. Articles, 2006
21. Articles, Robert Shelton Interview
22. Articles, "Slaying the Dragon"
23. Morton Thesis, 2004