

MARY FRANCES McCOLLUM COOK

Frances Cook was appointed Sheriff of Colbert County on September 27, 1963 becoming the only woman sheriff in Alabama at that time. Her appointment was made by Governor George Wallace after much consideration following the death of her husband Sheriff Hermon "Red" Cook on August 18, 1963.

Mrs. Cook was a teacher and when contacted at Deshler Main Street School she commented, "I will serve to the best of my ability...that's all I can say." She was 47 years of age at the time of the appointment and had been teaching school for 21 years. Mrs. Cook would serve out the remaining time of her husband's term through January of 1967.

THE LADY SHERIFF CAN DO THE JOB

Colbert County today has the only woman sheriff in the State of Alabama, but we don't believe an apology needs to be made.

Mrs. Frances Cook won't be a drag on law enforcement in her home county.

An energetic and capable school teacher for 21 years, she has had some experience in law enforcement, too. Being married for as long as she was to a career lawman, Mrs. Cook probably has had more than her share of sleepless nights already.

She won't be the first lady sheriff in Alabama, but she is the only one today.

It seems good and appropriate to us that Red Cook's office force and deputies will be retained through his term. It was his term....by popular acclaim...and he was doing the job up until the fatal incident that removed him from office.

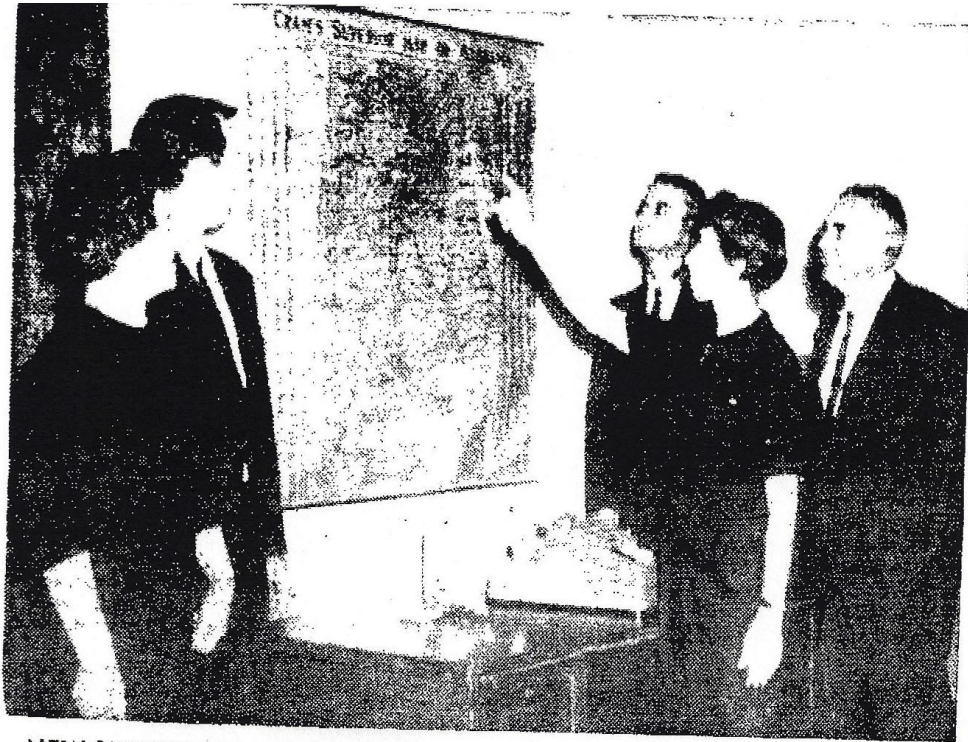
The Sheriff's Office in Colbert is still handicapped due to a manpower shortage with Deputy Donald Files on the ailing list from the same incident in which Cook was killed.

It is our hope that the Colbert Board of Revenue will work with the new sheriff to provide the men she will need to properly carry on law enforcement activities. Another deputy should be provided until Files is able to return to duty.

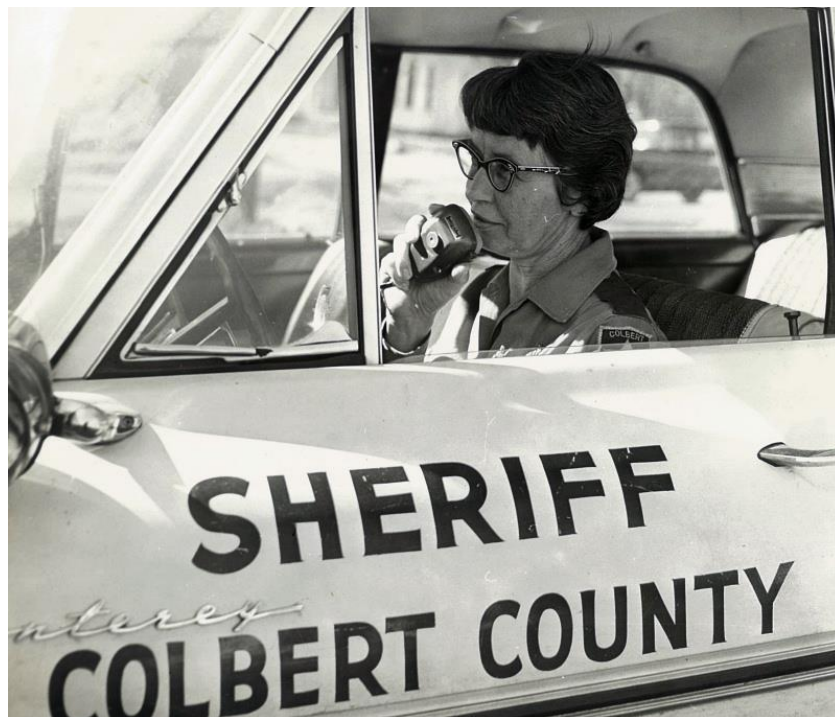
Mrs. Cook will need cooperation from the public just as any sheriff would in doing the job.

We would caution, however, that she won't need the political pressures which might be brought to bear from the two opposing force in Colbert County.

Her guidebook should be the Alabama Code...and common sense...We believe she will utilize those tools and they should suffice.



NEW SHERIFF GETS ACQUAINTED—Mrs. Francis Cook, Colbert's new sheriff, meets her office force, above, and tries out the Sheriff's car, left. Left to right above: Mrs. Gladys Whitlock, office secretary, Deputy Bobby Eckles, Deputy Ray Murray, Mrs. Cook, pointing to Colbert County on the map, and Chief Deputy Jerry Sockwell. (Staff Photos).



ALABAMA'S LADY SHERIFF OFFICIALLY IN OFFICE

Alabama's only lady sheriff officially assumed her duties as the chief law enforcement officer in Colbert County Saturday.

Mrs. Frances Cook, a 47-year old Deshler Junior High School teacher, received an official letter from the governor's office Saturday naming her sheriff. She will be sworn in later, but her appointment is effective immediately. Probate Judge Gresham Hale was also notified of her appointment.

"I intend to carry out the work Red started," the sheriff said, as she stopped between conferences and congratulations at the Colbert Courthouse Saturday. Mrs. Cook said this included strict law enforcement in the area of illegal whisky as well as other matters.

Mrs. Cook intends to feel her way gradually into the man-size job. "I'll have to learn day by day," she says.

Her job with the Tuscumbia City school system has not yet been terminated. She taught seventh grade English. Mrs. Cook expects the school board to give her a release in the near future.

One of her deputies was asked the question, "How do you like being bossed by a woman?" His reply was: "I'm married, you know."

Article in *Tri-Cities Daily* by Bob Martin, Staff Writer, on September 30, 1963

Sheriff Cook served Colbert County diligently continuing her husband's work in trying to stop illegal alcohol sales by bootleggers. She ran for re-election in 1966 but was defeated. She returned to the classroom as a teacher and later a principal with Tuscumbia schools and retired in 1981.

Mrs. Cook was born on June 5, 1916 and died on November 6, 2002. She is buried in Tuscumbia Oakwood Cemetery next to her husband, Hermon "Red" Cook.