

The Clerk's Black History Series



Debra DeBerry Clerk of Superior Court DeKalb County



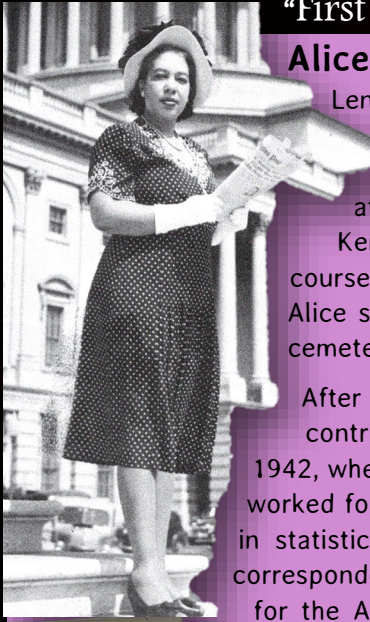
Alice Allison Dunnigan

(April 27, 1906 – May 6, 1983)

"First African-American Woman to Receive White House Press Credentials"

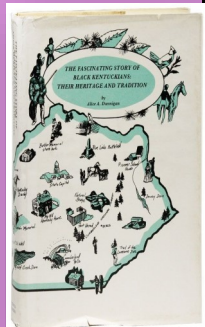
"First African-American Woman Member of Senate and House Press Galleries"

"First African-American Woman Member of Press to Travel with a President"



Alice Allison Dunnigan was born April 27, 1906, near Russellville, Kentucky to Willie and Lena Allison. In the segregated Russellville school system that Alice attended, black students were only allowed ten years of schooling. And although her parents saw no benefit in her advancing her education, a insistent Sunday school teacher did, and Alice was allowed to attend college. After completing a teaching course, Alice taught History in the deeply segregated Kentucky school system and incorporated omitted contributions by black Kentuckians to the course. Her collection of facts were later gathered into a manuscript in 1939 and published in 1982. Alice supplemented her meager teacher's salary by washing tombstones in the white cemetery, cleaning houses and doing laundry for other families.

After teaching, Alice pursued the dream she had since she was a 13-year-old contributor to the local Owensboro Enterprise Newspaper, to be a reporter. And in 1942, when a call went out for government workers, Alice moved to Washington, D.C., and worked for the federal government from 1942 - 1946. While there, she took night courses in statistics and economics at Howard University. In 1946, she became a Washington correspondent for the black-owned, weekly, "The Chicago Defender." As an official writer for the Associated Negro Press, Alice sought press credentials to cover Congress, the Senate and The Supreme Court. She was denied her request on the grounds that she wrote for a weekly newspaper, and reporters covering the U.S. Capitol were required to write for daily publications. But just six months later she was granted press clearance and became the first African-American woman to gain the accreditation. Although she was paid \$100 dollars a month, her male colleges made double. Not deterred, the next year Alice became the first African-American female White House correspondent, and was the first black woman elected to the Women's National Press Club. In 1948, Alice traveled across 18 states with President Truman during his presidency campaign, making her the first African-American woman member of the press, to do so.



During her years of covering the White House, she frequently asked questions regarding the civil rights movement and the plight of black America. Her reputation for being a hard hitting reporter caused President Eisenhower to request her questions, often about racial inequality, in writing before each press conference. She refused, because no one else was required to do so, and he refused to call upon her. That all changed when in 1961, President J. F. Kennedy named Alice the education consultant to the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. She was an associate editor with the President's Commission on Youth Opportunity from 1967 to 1970. In 1970, after 28 years in government service, Alice Dunnigan retired.

Alice's autobiography, "A Black Woman's Experience: From Schoolhouse to White House" was published in 1974. Alice Allison Dunnigan died, May 6, 1983, in Washington, D.C. She was 77 years old. She was inducted into the Black Journalist Hall of Fame in 1985.

On Sept. 21, 2018, a sculpture of Alice Allison Dunnigan, was put on display at the Newseum located in Washington, D.C. Later this year, the statue will be placed in a new park dedicated to civil rights, in Alice's hometown of Russellville, Kentucky.

