

Doak, Frances Blount Renfrow ^[1]

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By Ralph Hardee Rives, 1986

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Frances Blount Renfrow Doak, leader in women's organizations and in the North Carolina Democratic party, first woman radio announcer in North Carolina, and civic, religious, and political leader, was an accomplished speaker and writer who was well-known and highly respected throughout the state. She was born in Spring Hope, the daughter of Perry Van Buren and Ellen Douglas Sorsby Renfrow. Her ancestors—the Renfrows, Pridgens, Blounts, and Sorsbys—had lived in eastern North Carolina since the eighteenth century. She attended [Littleton Female College](#) ^[2], a private Methodist-related college, on a scholarship established there by General [Julian S. Carr](#) ^[3]; afterward, she studied at [Meredith College](#) ^[4] and Draughton's Business College in Raleigh. When [Charles B. Aycock](#) ^[5] retired as governor and entered into private legal practice in Raleigh, she became his secretary and was assisting him in his campaign for the U.S. Senate at the time of his death in 1912. The following year she married Charles Glenn ("Chick") Doak, a longtime coach and professor at [North Carolina State College](#) ^[6].

Mrs. Doak became the first woman radio announcer in North Carolina in 1928 and pioneered in presenting the first hourly woman's program over radio station [WPTF](#) ^[7], where she was a staff member for three years. From 1934 to 1941 she was employed by the [U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) ^[8], serving as executive secretary in the Farm Debt Adjustment Section of the Farm Security Administration, then headed by future Governor [W. Kerr Scott](#) ^[9] of North Carolina.

For many years Mrs. Doak was active in the [Raleigh Woman's Club](#) ^[10] as vice-president and president; she also served on a number of committees. While chairman of the club's welfare department, she was instrumental in establishing the first day-care center for Black children in Raleigh. In 1933, she was chairman of the International Relations Committee of the Federation of Women's Clubs. Later, she spoke on behalf of the Dumbarton Oaks Proposals and in favor of the formation of the [United Nations](#) ^[11] organization. She was, in part, responsible for the founding of the Institute of International Relations in North Carolina, which functioned for seventeen years. In 1941 she began a ten-year stint as executive secretary to the [North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs](#) ^[12] and edited the *North Carolina Club-woman*.

Among her civic works, Mrs. Doak helped to organize the first statewide Black Parent-Teacher Association Congress. She took an active interest in prison reform and, for over forty years, presented an annual Christmas program at [Central Prison in Raleigh](#) ^[13], a project she started in 1910. This was the first such entertainment ever offered to the inmates of the prison. For thirty years, she was the secretary of the Wake County Cancer Society; she also served as president of the Raleigh Women's Christian Temperance Union, chairman of the [United Nations](#) ^[11] first State Children's Crusade, vice-president of the Health Publications Institute, Inc., for the U.S. Public Health Service, and board member of the Aycock Memorial Commission and of the [North Carolina School for the Blind](#) ^[14]. In addition, she wrote a history of the [North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs](#) ^[12] for the period 1942–62.

Early in her life, Mrs. Doak was affiliated with the Methodist church; however, in 1927 she joined the [Raleigh Monthly Meeting of Friends \(Quakers\)](#) ^[15] which her husband helped to organize, where she was active in peace and service work. Several times she served on the North Carolina Board of the [American Friends Service Committee](#) ^[16]. Faithful to her alma mater, she took a deep interest in the work of the [Littleton College Memorial Association](#) ^[17]—organized in the late 1920s following the burning of the school in 1919. She was secretary of the association for many years and assisted in establishing a Littleton College Scholarship Fund at Scarritt College in Nashville, Tenn., and a Littleton College Loan Fund at North Carolina [Wesleyan College](#) ^[18] in Rocky Mount. She also assisted in compiling memorabilia connected with [Littleton College](#) ^[19] which was placed in the libraries of several colleges and universities in the state.

An active member of the [North Carolina Democratic party](#) ^[20] for many years, Mrs. Doak was involved in the campaigns of Governor [Cameron Morrison](#) ^[21], Congressman Harold Cooley, Governor and Senator [W. Kerr Scott](#) ^[22], Senator Frank P. Graham, and Governor [Terry Sanford](#) ^[23]. She wrote the constitution for the first unit of the [North Carolina Democratic Women](#) ^[24]. She was one of the founders and president of the [Wake County League of Women Voters](#) ^[25], as well as chairman of the Child Welfare and Women in Industry Committee of the state league.

Mrs. Doak was the mother of two sons and one daughter. During the thirty-three years her husband was associated with [North Carolina State College](#) ^[6], the Doak home frequently served as an "Open House" for students. At [Littleton College](#) ^[17], where she studied elocution, and in her early years in the [Raleigh Woman's Club](#) ^[10] Mrs. Doak helped to present and appeared in various amateur theatrical productions including the dramas of Shakespeare. She died at the Confederate Home for Women, [Fayetteville](#) ^[26], where she had lived during her later years. Funeral services were held at the [Community United Church](#) ^[27], [Raleigh](#) ^[28], and at the New Garden Friends Meeting House, [Guilford College](#) ^[29]; burial was at [New Garden Friends Cemetery](#) ^[30].

References:

William S. Powell, ed., *North Carolina Lives* (1962)

Raleigh *News and Observer* , 6 July 1941, 22 May 1951, 16 Sept. 1974

Additional Resources:

Frances Renfrow Doak, DocSouth: <https://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/doak/bio.html> ^[31]

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Authors:

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Origin - location:

[Nash County](#) ^[37]

[Wake County](#) ^[38]

[Meredith College](#) ^[39]

From:

[Dictionary of North Carolina Biography, University of North Carolina Press](#).^[40]

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