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Ross, Vernell collection

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Havana History and Heritage Society

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Summary Information

Repository:	Havana History and Heritage Society
Title:	Vernell Ross collection
ID:	21.0007
Date:	1929-
Physical Description:	1 Files 1 file
Language of the Material:	English .
Mixed Materials [Box]:	Single Folder Collections - 2021 Box 1
[Folder]:	21.0007-Folder 1

Preferred Citation

Vernell Ross Collection, Havana History and Heritage Society, Havana, FL.

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Biographical / Historical

Vernell Ross was born May 12, 1929, in Warissa, Florida. He coached at Northside High School and served on Havana's city council and as mayor before his retirement. He has been retired from coaching for 34 years but was still involved until he was 90. He became involved in politics in 1983 when he was approached by the council chairman, Robert Miller, about running for office. He served as a councilman until 2020 and was mayor three times - the first African-American mayor of Havana.

Ross coached in Quincy, Florida, before moving to Havana when Northside High was opened in August 1962 to work as athletic director and coach for 24 years. Ross was working at Northside before integration, and thought, as a coach, that the process would be difficult but it went better than expected, with the newly integrated basketball team winning the state championship in 1971. He describes his years at Northside as the "greatest years of his career". When he started, the program was essentially nothing and most of the kids did not have any athletic foundation. The academics at the school were good, with students going on into a

wide range of professions after graduation. As time passed, Ross coached the teams to be great and the community helped build up the program. By the time Ross retired, the athletic budget was \$25,000. The interconnected community of Havana was brought together by the tobacco industry. Though it started to die with tobacco, the antique business revitalized the entire community.

Ross himself made a very lasting impact on the community, which he describes as one community - not a white community and an African-American community - but one family. He impacted many lives throughout Havana in his endeavors, but many of his athletes made an impact on him, including Congressman Al Lawson.

One person that Ross looked up to was Coach Alonzo Smith "Jake" Gaither, his football coach at Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University. Gaither was the head coach for 29 years, retiring in 1969. Ross has not missed a Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University home football game since his return from the military - having watched over 300 games. He has lived in Gadsden County since 1948, only leaving to serve in May 1953. He played football in the military as well and was eventually discharged in April 1956. Ross was married for 57 years and met his wife, who was also an educator, working at St. John's. He has one daughter with a college girlfriend as well. Ross is now 92 years old and lives in Havana.

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Scope and Contents

This collection relates to Vernell Ross, the former athletics director and coach of Northside High School in Havana, Florida. This collection contains an interview registration form and a digital video disc interview of Ross.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

Havana History and Heritage Society

Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open to all researchers.

Conditions Governing Use

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Controlled Access Headings

- Havana (Fla.)
- Gadsden County (Fla.)
- Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University