

**Manuscripts Collections
South Caroliniana Library
University of South Carolina**

Rhett Jackson Papers

Contact Information:
South Caroliniana Library
University of South Carolina
Columbia SC 29208
803-777-3132
Email: scoref@mailbox.sc.edu

© 2018 University of South Carolina Libraries

Rhett Jackson papers, 1930-2003

Creator: Rhett Jackson (b.1925)

Extent: 5 linear ft. (4 cartons)

Location: Annex

Biographical Sketch

Born in Florence in 1925, Rhett Jackson is perhaps best known as Columbia's "Happy Bookseller," a business that he and his wife, Betty, established in Richland Mall in 1975.

After completing high school in Florence, Jackson enrolled in Clemson College but left when he enlisted in the Navy in 1942. He spent two years in the Navy's V-12 training program at the University of South Carolina which was followed by midshipman's school in New York City. In 1946 he was aboard a ship bound for Bikini where an atom bomb more powerful than the bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was to be dropped on salvaged World War II ships loaded with livestock. Jackson took advantage of an offer to be sent home and was three hundred miles from Bikini when the bomb exploded. A shipmate on the U.S.S. Sylvania advised him on 4 July 1946-"If I ever felt as though my remaining out here was being compensated for by seeing this atomic bomb blow up then I been gyped. Boy what a disappointment that thing was."

Prior to entering the retail book business in 1976, Rhett Jackson completed a degree in electrical engineering and spent almost thirty years in the furniture and carpet business, initially at a store owned by his father-in-law in North (Orangeburg County, S.C.). Originally, Jackson had hoped to open a store with his identical twin brother, Larry. When his brother took an appointment as president of Lander College in Greenwood, S.C., Jackson opened The Happy Bookseller on his own. After more than two decades, Jackson sold the store in 2001, and but remained active in the community in his retirement.

Scope and Content Notes

The Rhett Jackson papers, 1930, 1932, 1946, 1962-2003, document the activism and interests of this Columbia, S.C., businessman.

The six and one-half linear feet of papers in this collection document a life of active commitment and service to the United Methodist Church, the South Carolina Parole and Community Corrections Board, the Alston Wilkes Society, Claflin College's Board of Trustees, the Greater Columbia Community Relations Council, and United 2000, a citizens group opposed to the display of the Confederate flag on public property. Given Rhett Jackson's lifelong commitment to the United Methodist Church, it is appropriate that one of the earliest documents in the collection is a 1932 certificate certifying that he "attended every session of the Vacation Bible School of the Methodist Episcopal Church and has completed the course 'How Nations Share.'"

Rhett Jackson's lay ministry in the United Methodist Church, his service on the Parole and Community Corrections Board, and his leadership role in the American Booksellers Association constitute sixty percent of the collection, with approximately a linear foot devoted to each. In his first address before the South Carolina Methodist Conference, delivered at Wofford College in 1963, lay delegate Rhett Jackson challenged the church to stop saying "NO" to God:

We conjure up some enthusiasm in programs to aid the widows, the aged, and the orphans....But we are taking reluctant steps indeed in the areas of race relations, prisoner rehabilitation, alcoholic problems, economic injustices, dope addiction, and others. In these areas the church is being overtaken from the rear....These are the cutting edges of the world that Christ calls us to. But, we aren't there! We aren't there! I think God doesn't give much of a hoot about many things

we give great priority to in our churches, as important as we think they are....But he cares a great deal that along with rejecting alcohol, we reject the alcoholic. He cares mightily that while we reject disobedience to law, we reject the prisoner. That while we reject prostitution, we reject the prostitute....That while we reject economic injustices, we reject the poor. That while we reject racial prejudices, we reject the Negro.

Many of the organizations and boards of the United Methodist Church on which Rhett Jackson has served are represented in the collection by minutes, reports, and correspondence. Included here are minutes of the Board of Christian Social Concerns, 1965-1972; minutes and correspondence of the Joint Committee on Merger; and minutes and correspondence of the Commission on Religion and Race. The collection includes the "Plan of Merger of the South Carolina Conference (1785) South Carolina Conference (1866) of the Southeastern Jurisdiction The U.M.C." An annotation by Rhett Jackson identifies this as "the first working copy of the Black & white conferences to merge into one."

Jackson chaired the committee that was appointed to develop the plan to merge the African-American and white conferences of the Methodist church in South Carolina and served on the national committee to study race relations and mergers of conferences across the United States. Minutes, reports, and correspondence document the committee's work. There is a substantial file regarding the case of the Rev. Karl Mertz who was "fired" by his local congregation and subsequently dismissed by the Mississippi conference. Four years after the committee completed its work, Jackson wrote the other members and recalled - "No experience has, for me, been more meaningful and joyful than serving on this particular committee....I feel a deep and lasting love for each of you."

As an independent bookseller, he began an active association with the American Booksellers Association. He was elected to the Board of Directors in 1982 and to the presidency in 1986. After ten years in the book business, Rhett Jackson reflected on the state of the business in a paper entitled "My View" which he apparently prepared upon assuming the presidency of the ABA. Among the encouraging developments he cited - "Publisher discounts have climbed significantly, order fulfillment is much better, bookseller-publisher relationships are now one of a spirit of cooperation, advertising allowances are improving, [and] freight pass through has added thousands of dollars to the bottom line of bookstore statements." Some of the challenges that the ABA confronted during Jackson's two terms as president were a significant increase in the number of titles published annually, the timing of publishers' shipments to book stores, the deep discounts offered by chain stores, and the issue of censorship and other challenges to rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. Minutes of ABA board meetings and correspondence with Executive Director Bernie Rath, legal counsel Maxwell Lillienstein, ABA board members, and others provide an overview of economic and legal issues that concerned American booksellers in the 1980s and 1990s.

Prior to being appointed to the South Carolina Parole and Community Corrections Board in 1976, Jackson was involved with the Alston Wilkes Society, a prisoner aid organization, which he served as president from 1965 to 1970. Correspondence with public officials, policy statements, audit reports, and minutes of administrative meetings provide information about policies under which the board operated. In addition to attending weekly hearings, Rhett Jackson spoke to various civic and church groups over the state about the value of parole. Jackson was elected president of the Parole and Community Corrections Board in 1988.

The Jackson papers also contain files on Claflin College which awarded Jackson an honorary degree and distinguished trustee award in 1997. The Claflin files include correspondence concerning fund raising and other business before the board on which Jackson served from 1976

to 1998. Other series include the Governor's Task Force on Critical Human Needs, 1982-1983; the University of South Carolina Bicentennial Commission; and United 2000. Jackson's public opposition to the display of the Confederate flag on public property did not begin with his support of United 2000. As early as 1983, in a letter commending an editorial in *The Columbia Record*, Jackson remarked - "Surely, those among us who believe that all men, regardless of race or color, are equal in worth, have been offended long enough by the colors of the confederacy flying over our state capitol....Whatever the flag meant at the time of the war (and history has never really taught me what that was), the time to display it anywhere except in a relic room is long past."

For all of his adult life Rhett Jackson has read widely and thought deeply about his denomination and broader theological questions. Extensive letter files include correspondence with John Shelby Spong, Carlyle Marney, Will Willimon, James Armstrong, and Methodist bishops Woodie White, Joseph Bethea, Jack Meadors, Roy Clark, Edward Tullis, and Lawrence McCleskey.

His correspondence with church leaders discusses the state of the church, theological questions, and social issues. In the 26 July 2002 issue of the *United Methodist Reporter*, Jackson argued the United Methodist Church's General Conference in 2004 might become a battleground with representatives of the Confessing movement, the Good News movement, and The Institute of Religion and Democracy seeking to control the General Conference and ultimately controlling the theology and mission of the United Methodist Church. The collection includes several hundred letters and emails that Jackson received in response to his article. Responses also appeared in United Methodist Church publications and included clergy and laypeople. The preponderance of responses from clergy concurred with the concerns that were expressed in his article. A letter in the 16 August 2002 issue of the *United Methodist Reporter* declared - "This is not about theology; it is about faith and belief that the Bible is the 'Word' of God. The virgin birth and the resurrection are the very things that give true Christians hope. If you do not believe in these things, why are you here?" A minister in the South Carolina conference commended Jackson - "Yours was a courageous and timely article, deeply felt and caring for the church we both love and want to continue to serve....You have done the church a distinct service in articulating your concerns about the radical right within United Methodism. Hopefully, you have brought attention to the insidious way these groups operate. Unfortunately, your clear statements will inflame more enthusiasm for labeling your kind as radical and not Christian. But then, that kind of label strikes me as a telling commentary on the extent to which genuine dialogue has disintegrated in our time."

Citation form: Rhett Jackson Papers, South Caroliniana Library, The University of South Carolina

Copyright: Information concerning copyright must be secured in writing from the Director of the South Caroliniana Library.

Provenance: The Rhett Jackson papers were transferred to the South Caroliniana Library.

Summary

Consisting chiefly of correspondence and other materials documenting Rhett Jackson's activism and involvement with the United Methodist Church, South Carolina Parole and Community Corrections Board, Alston Wilkes Society, Claflin College's Board of Trustees, Greater Columbia Community Relations Council, and organization called "United 2000," a citizens group opposed to the display of the Confederate flag on public property.

Accession number: 14029

Container List:

Box 1

Alston Wilkes Society
American Booksellers Association:
 Bylaws
 Correspondence
 Legal
 Meetings
 Miscellaneous
 News
 Officers & Committees
 Publisher Planning Committee
 Ronald Reagan
American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression
Articles [legal sized]
Awards
Books and Bookstores
 Articles
Church Burnings
Claflin College
 1976-1998
 2001
 2002
 Undated
Confederate Flag Debate
 Articles
 King Day at the Dome
 United 2000
 Legislature information
 [Misc.]

Box 2

Correspondence
 1930, 1946, 1962-1969
 1970-1979
 1980-1984
 1985-1987
 1988-1989
 1990-1991
 1992-1994
 1995-1999
 2000-2003
 Undated
Death Penalty Information
Education First
Feelings, Tom: The Middle Passage publicity
Governor's Task Force on Critical Human Needs

Greater Columbia Community Relations Council
Happy Bookseller Publicity
International Booksellers Federation: General Assembly, 1987
Jackson Family
Kosmos Club
Mendenhall Lawsuit
Miscellaneous

Box 3

Parole Board [letter size]
Parole Board [legal size]
 1976, 1977, 1979
 1981
 1982
 1983
 1984-1986
 1987-1988
 1989
 1990, 1991, 1993
 Articles
Photographs
Publications: Johnson, Sandra E. – Standing on Holy Ground
Speeches [letter size]
Speeches [legal size]
United Methodist Church
 “Advocate” newsletter, 1962-2002
 Articles
 Board of Christian Social Concerns
 Convocation of Racism, Sept. 1992
 Correspondence
 Developing and Strengthening the Ethnic Minority
 General Commission on Religion and Race
 1970-1972
 1973
 1974

Box 4

United Methodist Church (con't)
 General Commission on Religion and Race
 1975
 1976
 1977
 1978
 1979
 1985
 Jurisdictional and General Conference, 2000
 Marney, Carlyle
 Merger
 Miscellaneous

Mississippi Conference
Task Force
Miscellaneous [letter size]
Miscellaneous [legal sized]
Miscellaneous Publications
Racism
Racism, miscellaneous
South Carolina Conference
White, Woodie
United Methodist Reporter
Article, 26 July 2002
Responses 2002
July
August
September
October
November
Undated
University of South Carolina
[General]
Bicentennial Commission
World Council of Churches
1990
1991