

South Carolina Political Collections
The University of South Carolina

Thomas S. & Clara G. McMillan
(1888-1939) & (1894-1976)
Papers, c. 1870 - 1980

Volume: 0.75 linear feet

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Provenance: Donated by William G. and Elizabeth A. McMillan

Citation Form: Thomas S. and Clara G. McMillan Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina

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Biographical Note:

“Their selfless service to our state and nation has left a lasting mark on all of us, and their untiring work on our behalf helped pull our nation through some of its darkest days.” Strom Thurmond’s speech at the 1980 dedication of the McMillan Memorial Highway paid tribute to Thomas and Clara McMillan, a couple who dedicated their lives to public service. Between them, they served for more than forty years in South Carolina’s General Assembly, in the United States Congress, and in various federal offices.

Thomas Sanders McMillan was born near Ulmer, South Carolina on November 27, 1888, to James C. and Mary K. McMillan. After graduating from the Orangeburg Collegiate Institute, he taught school at Perry in Aiken County. In 1908, McMillan won a scholarship to the University of South Carolina, where he distinguished himself as a scholar and an athlete. He graduated in 1912 with a Bachelor of Arts degree and in 1913 with a Bachelor of Laws. McMillan played baseball for the University and, during the summer months and after graduation, for the Charlotte Hornets and the Charleston Sea Gulls. McMillan was admitted to the South Carolina Bar and entered the practice of law in 1913, forming with James Heyward the Charleston firm of McMillan & Heyward. On December 14, 1916, he married Clara Eloise Gooding, a teacher from Hampton County.

McMillan ran for the South Carolina House of Representatives in 1916 and was elected to represent Charleston County. He served as Speaker Pro Tem from 1921 to 1923 and Speaker from 1923 to 1924. In 1924, McMillan was elected to represent South Carolina’s 1st Congressional District in the United States Congress. There, he served on the House Appropriations Committee as well as the Committee on Rules and the Committee on Post Office and Post Roads. He gained note for his support of defense spending and his interest in international affairs. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Interparliamentary Union, an international forum intended to promote multilateral negotiations, from 1937 to 1939, and was a delegate to its 1939 convention in Oslo, Norway. McMillan died in Charleston on September 29, 1939. In a special election held on November 7 of that year, Clara McMillan was elected to complete her husband’s unexpired term.

Clara Eloise Gooding was born on August 17, 1894, near Brunson in Hampton County to William James and Mary Webb Gooding. Her childhood was spent largely in Savannah, Georgia, and she graduated from Savannah High School. She continued her studies at Flora MacDonald College in Red Springs, North Carolina. Gooding completed a teacher training course at the Confederate Home College in Charleston in 1915. She taught school in Crockettville in Hampton County for one year before marrying McMillan. The couple had five sons, the youngest of whom was nine when Mrs. McMillan began her service in Congress.

Clara McMillan was the second woman from South Carolina to be elected to Congress. In reporting on her impressive 5,089 to 1,042 victory, Charleston’s *News and Courier* of November 8, 1939, noted that she would be “the first South Carolinian of her sex to participate in a Congressional session.”*

She was on the Select Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, as well as subcommittees for patents and elections, and sponsored a bill to reimburse the Beaufort County Public Library for books that were stolen and destroyed by Union occupiers during the Civil War. McMillan was known for her support of military appropriations and the Selective Service. Clara McMillan did not run for re-election in 1940, but stayed in Washington and served in the National Youth Administration and, later, the Office of Government Reports and Office of War Information. In 1946, she was appointed to be a Congressional Liaison Officer for the Department of State. She served in that capacity until 1957 or 1958. (*Charleston Evening Post*, February 17, 1956) McMillan retired to Ulmer and Barnwell, South Carolina, and was selected as South Carolina's Mother of the Year in 1960. Clara McMillan remained active, traveling and corresponding with her family, until her death on November 8, 1976.

**Mrs. Elizabeth Gasque was elected to fill the remaining months of her late husband's Congressional term and served from September 13, 1938, to January 3, 1939. Congress was not in session at the time.*

Scope and Content Note:

The McMillan Papers consist of 0.5 linear feet of material, c. 1870 to 1980, arranged in five series: General Papers, Speeches, Photographs, Clippings, and Ephemera.

General Papers consist largely of correspondence from Clara G. McMillan to her son Edward after her retirement. Correspondence from other family members is included in this series, as is a folder of material pertaining to the dedication of the McMillan Memorial Highway.

Speeches made by Thomas S. McMillan address topics such as Masonry and the armed services.

Photographs chiefly document Clara McMillan's Mother of the Year ceremonies, 1960, and the highway dedication, 1980. There are also several pictures of Thomas McMillan, a c.1931-1932 McMillan family portrait, and photos of more distant ancestors.

Clippings document the family's activities from 1916 to 1980, and contain a large number of 1960 articles profiling Clara G. McMillan.

Ephemera consists of a 1936 Interparliamentary Union pin, a Clariosophic Society Declaimer's Medal awarded to Thomas McMillan in 1910, McMillan's Mason's pin, and a Sunday School attendance pin.

Box List:

General Papers, 1916 - 1980

Correspondence:

 General, 1939 – 1963, 1980, n.d.

 Clara G. McMillan:

 1927 - 1958

 1959 - 1960

 1961

 1962 and n.d.

McMillan Memorial Highway, 1980

Speeches, 1928 - 1938

Photographs:

 General, c. 1870 - 1939 and n.d.

 McMillan Memorial Highway, 1980

 South Carolina Mother of the Year, 1960

Clippings, 1916 - 1980

Ephemera