

# Life in the Mansion

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Exhibit originally created by Katharine Klein with text by Herb Hartsook and Katharine Klein, 2011

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## Life in the Mansion

Columbia's historic Governor's Mansion is not only a home to South Carolina's first family but a symbol representing the elegance and grace that is the South.

South Carolina Political Collections is honored to hold the papers of eleven men who have led South Carolina as governor: Olin D. Johnston, George Bell Timmerman, Ernest F. Hollings, Donald S. Russell, Robert E. McNair, John C. West, James B. Edwards, Richard W. Riley, Carroll A. Campbell, Jr., James H. Hodges, and Marshall C. Sanford.



SCPC also holds a collection of interviews conducted by former USC Dean of Libraries Dr. George Terry. Dr. Terry interviewed many of the First Families about their experiences as residents in the Mansion and garnered rich insights into the lives of the families and the value of the Mansion as an engine for economic development.

Drawing on the papers of the governors and the interviews, this exhibit offers a glimpse at *Life In The Mansion*.

*The Big Picture*, a televised program that focuses on issues and interests of South Carolinians, sat down with Mrs. West, Mrs. Edwards, Mrs. Campbell, Mrs. Beasley, and Mrs. Hodges in March 2009 to discuss life as a first lady and living in the Mansion. For a look at the interview, please visit [SCETV](#).

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## History of the Mansion

Originally built in 1855 to accommodate officers of Arsenal Military Academy, the historic structure (which had survived the burning of Columbia in the Civil War) was recommended in 1868 by Governor James L. Orr to be the official residence for the state's governors. The Governor's Mansion Complex, which includes the Mansion, Lace House, Caldwell-Boylston house and gardens, has been home to many First Families who were instrumental in its restoration and protection.



For the past 132 years, the Governor's Mansion has had numerous renovations to help accommodate the First Families. It was evident that more space was needed when Governor Ernest F. Hollings moved in with his family in 1959. Two upstairs bedrooms were transformed into a nursery and a playroom while a Family Dining Room and guest wing were added downstairs. The most extensive renovations done to the home were completed in 2001. Under the Governor's



Mansion Commission, which was created in 1966 "to promote and cultivate the embellishment and ornamentation of the Governor's Mansion through the acquisition by loan or gift of articles of historical significance," the executive mansion is now filled with southern elegance.

Paintings and antique furniture, made possible with a program initiated by Mrs. Robert E. McNair, provide a glimpse into the past for thousands of school children and tourists who visit the Mansion. A 66-piece Silver Service from the battleship "South Carolina" and the gold-bordered state china are among the items of special interest in the Mansion.

The Lace House, acquired in 1968 through the efforts of Mrs. McNair and restored under the direction of Mrs. West, is the official guest house of the Governor's Mansion. Another component of the Governor's Mansion Complex is the Caldwell-Boylston House and gardens which was acquired in 1979. Mrs. Riley had a special interest in the gardens and creating the grounds we see today.



For more information on the mansion, visit the [South Carolina Governor's Mansion](#) webpage.

## Governor George B. Timmerman (1955-1959)

In 1954, George Bell Timmerman was elected governor after defeating Lester Bates in a dramatic campaign. Timmerman's term witnessed major capital improvements in the State hospitals, the building of new schools, the expansion of the State Law Enforcement Division, and an extensive highway construction program.

As reported in the *Christian Science Monitor*, Helen Timmerman oversaw a major redecorating project with the Mansion, "choosing colors and fabrics for the reupholstering of the furniture, for floor and wall coverings, also rearrangement of furniture, selection of pictures, and decorative pieces." [3 Sept. 1958]

In July, 1955, *The Charlotte Observer* had a feature on Mrs. Timmerman and life in the mansion. It noted "Mrs. Timmerman has plenty of servants - - all prisoners. . . In the house, Mrs. Timmerman has a staff of four servants - - butler, cook and two maids. On the grounds, two gardeners work under the guidance of the state gardener."



Visit SCPC to learn more about [Governor Timmerman](#) and his collection

## Governor Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings (1959-1963)

As governor of South Carolina, "Fritz" Hollings was a progressive leader who altered both the face of South Carolina and the fabric of the office itself. During his term, he made constant efforts to improve the state's educational system at all levels, to develop industry, and to create jobs.

When Hollings brought his wife and three, soon to be four, children to the Mansion, the home was very different than what we see today. He noted when he arrived, *"You looked out on the big expanse that's the lawn now. It was a corn field. They had the help sleeping up above the garage. . . . I got Clemson to dirt-scrape the whole red clay clean of the corn and weeds and trash,"* and had the yard landscaped and even added a "little golf hole," where he'd often strike balls in the early morning. To accommodate his young family, Hollings also had a small family dining room added to the Mansion in addition to a guest wing.



The prison trustees long employed at the Mansion are a feature in one of Hollings' most dramatic recollections. He received an urgent call one day that he was needed at the Mansion, where a Civil Rights demonstration was taking place. By the time he arrived, all was quiet; the demonstrators had fled after being threatened by trustees working on the grounds, *"they had these machetes to cut grass. So, they just walked on the inside of the fence, the demonstrators were on the outside and they were told in very certain terms, 'You so-and-so.' I don't want to use the terms they called them. But these black prisoner trustees, said, 'You come back around here, I'm already in here for killing one. . . .' My prisoners had cleaned them out. I had a loyal bunch of prisoners working there."*



Visit SCPC to learn more about [Governor Hollings](#) and his collection.

## Governor Robert E. McNair (1965-1971)

Lt. Governor Robert E. McNair became governor when Donald Russell stepped down to become U.S. Senator after the death of Senator Olin D. Johnson in 1965. Robert and Josephine McNair did not have near the time to prepare for the move to the Mansion as their predecessors had, in fact, McNair recalled only having about twelve hours' notice of the transition.



Mrs. McNair recalled that Mrs. Russell had a rigorous schedule of tours which she had to take over. *"Mrs. Russell had scheduled any group of children, school children or adults, garden clubs, and all that wanted to come through, on a tour. I didn't know that I could not do that, so, I mean everyday, we averaged 3,000 [people touring the Mansion] a week, coming through the Mansion just to see it. And I had nobody helping me at that time, so I would have to do the tours and point out things that I thought would be of interest to them."*



Although Mrs. McNair was provided a secretary to assist with all her duties, she always made a point to greet everyone who came through the Mansion.

Mrs. McNair, showing both charm and political acumen, also convinced Senate powers Edgar Brown and "Spot" Mozingo to provide an appropriation to buy china and other necessities for Mansion entertaining.

Visit SCPC to learn more about [Governor McNair](#) and his collection.



## Governor John C. West (1971-1975)

John West became governor in 1971 during a time of great change and racial conflict. His election was seen by many, including West himself, as a repudiation of divisive, racial politics. Among West's major accomplishments as governor were the passage of mandatory automobile insurance for all drivers and the creation of the Housing Authority and Human Affairs Commission. West was also the first governor in over a century to appoint an African-American to an official state position when he named James E. Clyburn assistant to the governor for Human Resource Development.

One of West's most striking memories of the Mansion was of the trustees and his first moments within the home. *"Of course, we knew that all of the help were convicts, they were from the penitentiary. I walked through the house introducing myself, and [walked] into the kitchen, there was a black man, a cook with a large hat on. He turned to me and he said, 'Lord, Mr. West, you knows me. Your firm defended me. Us lost.' So, that was my introduction to the help at the Governor's Mansion. And of course, over the years there, we developed a real relationship with them and a real respect for the rehabilitation that comes from the penitentiary system, particularly those working there."*



When asked how he and wife Lois handled concurrent events, West noted, *"Well, frequently I would show up at one and she [at] the other one and maybe we would mingle during the social hour at one and go and have dinner at the other. It was a constant challenge but a real reward because the people appreciated the hospitality, the 'southern hospitality.'"*

Among Mrs. West's activities as First Lady was the establishment of a horticulture program for the mentally disabled which provided flower arrangements to decorate the State House and Governor's Mansion. She also oversaw the completion of the renovation of the Lace House on the Mansion grounds.

Asked for her favorite memory, Mrs. West said, *“One of the things that John did is he would invite members of the legislature to come and spend the weekend. And we invited them to come and bring somebody they wanted to bring with them. And so, they would come and we’d plan the weekend around what they wanted to do, and they enjoyed it and it was fun for us, we got to really know them. And we made some very close friends that we still have to this day.”*



Visit SCPC to learn more about [Governor West](#) and his collection.



## Governor James B. Edwards (1975-1979)

Dr. James B. Edwards became the first Republican Governor of South Carolina since Reconstruction when he won the 1974 gubernatorial election. Among his many accomplishments as governor, Edwards made significant contributions to improving energy management in the state with the establishment of the South Carolina Energy Research Institute.

When James and Ann Edwards moved into the Mansion, their son Jim, Jr. was a student at the University of South Carolina. The First Family truly felt at home at the Mansion, their daughter Kathy even had her debut while living in the Mansion. Dr. Edwards noted, "In the summertime, we'd swim in the pool. Other times of year, we'd just linger around the Mansion. It was secure and quiet and we enjoyed the Mansion as a place to retreat and get away from it all on those Sundays, particularly."

The Edwards told a wonderful story about their cat Victoria that reflects the duality of the Mansion as a site to entertain and its function as a true home to the Governor and his family. A dinner was being held for the Palmetto Visitors Forum and as Mrs. Edwards recalled, *"there was a man that worked at the Mansion at that time named Hennigan. He came running upstairs and he said, 'We're in terrible trouble downstairs, Mrs. Edwards. Terrible trouble.' And I said, 'Hennigan, what is the matter?' Because, Jim wanted everything to go just perfectly. He said, 'Well, you see, the trouble is this. We're getting ready to serve the fish course, and Victoria is underneath the table.' Victoria was a black cat. Now he said, 'You know, she has put her paw up on the table. I go down to one end, thinking I can grab her, then she'd go down the middle of the table, down to the other end.' Under the table. And [he] said, 'I've got a butler down on this end and a butler down on that end. . . . We can't get that cat out from under the table, and the Governor wants to know why we don't serve."*



## Governor Richard W. Riley (1979-1987)

Richard W. Riley is the state's first governor to serve two consecutive terms, and lived in the Mansion for eight years. As governor, Riley successfully improved education in South Carolina and was nationally recognized for his efforts when President Bill Clinton appointed him as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education in 1993.



Recalling the pitfalls of living in what is in many respects a museum, Riley tells a wonderful and humorous story about his first days in the Mansion. The morning after he was inaugurated, *"they told us my shower was being fixed, and we had to come out of my room and go down the hall and use [son] Ted's shower. So I was naked and had a towel around my waist, the first morning, I had just gotten up, it was seven o'clock in the morning or whatever, and I walked out in the hall, and there were these two elderly*

*ladies. I said, 'How are you?' They said, 'Ah, Governor, we're from Pomaria. We strongly supported you in the election.' I said, 'Well, I hope you don't see anything today that'll turn you against me.'"*

Regarding the trustees, who formed a good bit of the Mansion staff, Riley said his sons, *"Ted and Hubert would play basketball [with the butlers]. Of course, the butlers were inmates, and we really got to know a number of them very well. Of course, we tried to do what we could to influence them to study and learn and try to improve themselves."* Mrs. Riley noted, *"We had some literacy training at one point. I'd forgotten about that."* And Governor Riley added, *"But we really became very close with them and they were very, very loyal to us."* And Ted concluded, *"Became very street-smart, also."*

Mrs. Riley was especially active in promoting the restoration of the Governor's Mansion Complex and noted the gardens were, *"really my love the whole time I was here, and still is."*



## Governor Carroll A. Campbell, Jr. (1987-1995)

After a glowing career in the state House of Representatives and state Senate, Carroll A. Campbell became the second Republican since Reconstruction to serve as governor of South Carolina. As governor, he is credited with helping South Carolina through the destruction of Hurricane Hugo, pushing through a plan to restructure state government, and bringing \$22 billion in capital investments to the state. Campbell is credited with luring BMW to the Upstate and building its first North American plant and recruiting companies such as Hoffmann-La Roche and Fuji Photo Film Co. to the state.



First Lady Iris Campbell and son Mike spoke of the excitement of living in the Mansion but also the loss of privacy associated with it. Mike recalled his early days at the Mansion, *"I'd just gotten up. I kept hearing all these voices downstairs, and still not getting used to the situation I was in, I just kind of wandered to the top of the stairs in my boxer shorts to see what's going on. I look down and there's a tour of some people from a retirement home standing there looking back up at me."*

Mrs. Campbell also commented on Governor Campbell's triumph in recruiting BMW to South Carolina, *"We had worked on that for several days, and finally I said, 'Carroll, get them out of the house. Take them out by the pool. We'll put a little classical music on, we'll give them a nice lunch, they could smoke their cigars.' They loved their cigars. 'We'll give them a nice little glass of wine.' And they took out a cocktail napkin and they wrote the agreement on a cocktail napkin. And that's how they sealed the deal with BMW."* Mike concluded, *"It was funny, because there were a couple of issues that the intermediaries couldn't get past, that the lawyers were holding up, basically. You got the two decision makers, the governor and the chairman of the board of BMW, in a relaxed atmosphere, away from everybody else, and they got it done within just a few minutes."*



Visit SCPC to learn more about [Governor Campbell](#) and the collection.

## Governor David M. Beasley (1995-1999)

Governor David M. Beasley focused on economic development, welfare reform, crime, prison reform, and education, but is particularly proud of his pro-business initiatives, including the Enterprise Zone Act of 1995, which resulted in more than \$11 billion in capital investments and the addition of 50,000 jobs in South Carolina. *"We used the Governor's Mansion probably as effectively as it could be used. When I list out the projects that we landed, right here in the Governor's Mansion... Michelin, a billion-dollar deal, we negotiated that in the Governor's Mansion... BMW, Nucor Steel, Bridgestone, Firestone... Billions and billions of dollars of economic development projects were landed in South Carolina because we were more effectively able to use the Governor's Mansion."*

When David and Mary Wood Beasley moved into the Mansion, they brought with them three young children, two still in diapers. Beasley emphasized the Mansion as a home, noting, *"We played more hide and go seek back here. Oh, my goodness. I had so much fun in these gardens. With little kids, these gardens are wonderful. We probably had hundreds of kids over here every month, playing with our kids. This was just Columbia's playground."*



Beasley also spoke of playing hooky from a formal state occasion, *"I was worn out. I snuck out, snuck upstairs, got with the kids, took my black tie and everything off, put my blue jeans on, watched an hour and a half of TV with the kids, ate some popcorn, put my black tie back on, went back downstairs, nobody ever knew. [laughter] They thought I was in that room, or that room, or this room."*

## Governor James H. Hodges



Governor James H. Hodges adopted education as a top priority. During his first year as governor, Hodges won approval for a referendum on a state lottery, provided \$1 billion for school construction without raising taxes, and launched the First Steps to School Readiness early children education initiative. Mrs. Hodges also stressed the importance of education and launched the Reading With Rachel program, an immensely popular initiative, which was occasionally held at the Mansion and featured authors or celebrities like Hootie and the Blowfish.

Interestingly, Hodges and his wife had one of their first dates at the Mansion during the Riley administration when they attended an event honoring Mike Daniel. Unfortunately for the bulk of his term as governor, the Hodges family had lived in a rented home while the Mansion underwent a massive renovation. When the Hodges did move into the Mansion's family quarters, renovation work was ongoing and not completed for some months. Mrs. Hodges' noted, *"It's nice with this renovation to have space upstairs to be able to have private, family time together. Because this is a hard-working building and there are things constantly going on downstairs and outside for lots of different reasons. It's good to have a place that our children can be children, and play games and enjoy time together if Jim and I are busy downstairs working. It's been a positive change in that regard for first families now and in the future, to have that private space."*



Governor Hodges said one of his highlights of being governor was *"coming in here [the Mansion], and when you walk in the doors, and knowing the historical significance of the place, and realizing you're walking in the same shoes that people like Jimmy Byrnes, and Wade Hampton, and Dick Riley, and a whole host of others have walked in. It sends chills down your spine."*