The South Caroliniana Library’s Modern Political Collections Division is engaged in a project to develop its holdings which document the rise of the South Carolina Republican Party. This effort is receiving important assistance from former Party chairmen, Dan Ross and Greg Shorey. Recently, while cleaning out materials stored in the Party headquarters attic, staffer Wes Church discovered two cartons containing Party records dating chiefly from 1936-1948. He recognized the value of this material and brought it to the Library.

This important addition to the papers of the South Carolina Republican Party consists of 1.25 feet of material and is comprised of three components: correspondence and other papers from 1932 to 1938 of Party activist and Sumter attorney, Marion W. Seabrook, who died in 1947; Party papers from 1939 to 1950; and news clippings, chiefly from 1940 to 1950.

Seabrook’s correspondents include Party leaders such as state chairman, Dallas Gardner, of Orangeburg; national committeeman, J. C. Hambright, of Rock Hill; Greenville banker, George Norwood; J. Bates Gerald, of Summerton; and national committee chairman, John Hamilton.

The disputed seating of delegates to the 1936 National Republican Convention held in Cleveland and the aftermath of the convention are documented in great detail. At that convention, the forces of Joseph “Tieless Joe” Tolbert were seated in preference to the “regular” Party delegates, which included Seabrook. State Vice-Chairman, Gisbourne J. Cherry (1869-1939) of Charleston wrote Hambright on June 20, “...you and Gardner ran the Republican Party in South Carolina as a two men [sic] Party. You didn’t take the rest of us in your confidence as you should have and when you needed some help you didn’t have it. …With kindest regards and best wishes and remember you wasn’t the only one that got it in the neck at Cleveland.”

On July 8, Seabrook wrote, “We think that the biggest opportunity in many a year is now presented to do something in this State for the Republican Party, if we had an organization that we could conscientiously expound to the people...but this Tolbert situation is a sword thrust in our side.”

The bitter nature of this division is captured in a letter from National Committeewoman Clara Harrigal of Aiken, who wrote Seabrook on July 11, “We had a respectable organization in this State but the Party at Cleveland saw fit to unseat us & put in that thieving unprincipled Tolbert who wanted the job for the patronage. He had it for years and all that he did was to sell the Federal jobs. And why he appointed negro chairman was to do his dirty work. …To be frank, I am thru. Lemke, the Third Party man will be the next President of the U.S.A.” North Dakota congressman, William Lemke (1878-1950), was the Union Party nominee for President in 1936. He finished third with more than 880,000 votes.
Also documented in these new materials is the battle for control of the Party in South Carolina through the year 1938. Seabrook wrote, on August 16, 1937, “We have consistently carried on the fight to re-recognition, and never intend to give up…. If the good people of this State could only be brought to realize what it would mean to them to have two competitive parties, they would lend us a hand.”

Later correspondence, 1940 to 1950, documents the Party under the leadership of J. Bates Gerald. Correspondents include Isaac Samuel Leevy (1877-1968) and Modjeska Simkins (1899-1992). Also found in this new addition are a number of photographs including shots of an Eisenhower rally (c.1952) and a visit to South Carolina by California Governor Ronald Reagan in 1967.

The Library also recently received the papers of Joseph Rogers, 1966 Republican candidate for governor. Rogers lost to incumbent Robert McNair 184,088 to 255,854 votes. A number of oral history interviews are planned with former Republican Party chairs and other party leaders. At this time, interviews have been completed with Charlie Boineau, Greg Shorey, Martha Edens, and Floyd Spence.

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