

South Carolina Political Collections
University Libraries
University of South Carolina

J. Drake Edens, Jr.
(1925-1982)
Papers, 1943-1982

Volume: 1.25 linear ft.

Processed: 1994, by Herbert J. Hartsook; 2006, additions by Kate Moore

Provenance: Donated by son Robert Edens and daughter Jenny Edens Padgett

Citation: J. Drake Edens, Jr. Papers, South Carolina Political Collections, The University of South Carolina

Copyright: Copyright of J. Drake Edens' papers has been transferred to the University of South Carolina.

Biographical Note:

J. Drake Edens, Jr. is recognized by many as the father of the modern Republican Party in South Carolina. Born on May 13, 1925, in Blythewood, Edens lived in the Columbia area his entire life. His father had developed the family farm into a supermarket chain and Edens moved naturally into a management position within the chain – Edens Food Stores. His career was interrupted by World War II. Edens enlisted in the Marine Corps and served from 1943 to 1946, seeing action in the Pacific Theater.



On his return to private life, Edens married Ferrell McCracken (1923-1982), a North Carolina native whom he had met while both were serving in the Marines. Edens enrolled at the University of South Carolina and in 1949 graduated with a degree in Business Administration. In 1955, Edens Food Stores merged with Winn-Dixie, and the following year Edens founded the Edens-Turbeville Agency, an insurance agency for which he served as President from 1956 to 1964, when he sold his interest in company to W.L. Turbeville.

Edens' political interest surfaced in 1960 when he organized a Republican club in his precinct during an exciting campaign year in which John F. Kennedy, to the great surprise of most political observers, carried South Carolina over Vice-President Richard M. Nixon, and was elected President. Stimulated by his entry into the world of politics, Edens helped elect Charles E. Boineau, Jr. to the General

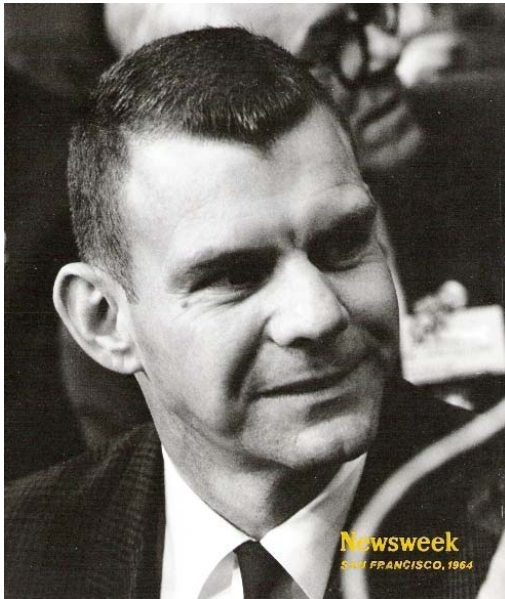
Assembly in 1961, serving as campaign co-chair. Boineau became the first Republican member of the Assembly in the twentieth century. Reflecting in 1976 on his entry into politics, Edens wrote Strom Thurmond, "The major concern that caused me to become active in the Republican Party years ago was the question of deficit spending by the Federal Government. I am still deeply concerned that deficit spending will be the cause of the eventual downfall of our country."

In 1962, Edens enlarged his political universe, working the entire state as campaign chair of William D. Workman, Jr.'s senate campaign, opposing incumbent Olin D. Johnston. Workman lost but polled a surprising 43% of the vote and his campaign proved the viability of the Republican Party in South Carolina. In February, 1963, Edens was elected Chair of the Republican Party of South Carolina. In 1964, at the Republican National Convention in San Francisco, Edens, as chair of South Carolina's sixteen man delegation, cast South Carolina's votes for Barry Goldwater, putting Goldwater over the top and ensuring he would oppose Lyndon B. Johnson in the presidential campaign. Edens then chaired the Goldwater effort in South Carolina where Goldwater proved wildly popular, receiving 59% of the vote.

1965 was a busy year for Edens. He sold his interest in Edens-Turbeville to work for himself in a variety of enterprises involving real estate, farming, timber management, and investments. He also chaired Albert Watson's campaign for Congress. Watson had been elected to the House in

1962 as a Democrat. He had been a vigorous Goldwater supporter in the Arizona senator's 1964 presidential campaign and as a result, was stripped of his seniority by the House Democratic leadership. Watson resigned from his seat in Congress and from the party and ran for election to succeed himself as a Republican. Watson won the election with approximately 70% of the vote.

Edens resigned as state party chair and was elected Republican National Committeeman for South Carolina that same year, gaining an important voice in Republican affairs at the national level. In 1966, Edens played an important role in Richard Nixon's presidential campaign. He became the first member of the Republican National Committee to publicly declare his support for Nixon's 1968 bid, and during the campaign Edens served on the national Nixon for President Committee, the national Nixon Finance Committee, and chaired South Carolina's Nixon Finance Committee.



drowned while swimming in the summer of 1982.

The public first became aware of the health problems that plagued Edens throughout the remainder of his adult life in 1968 when he was forced to curtail his energetic and effective activities on behalf of the future president, suffering from chronic ulcerative colitis and rheumatoid arthritis. In 1972, he stepped down as Vice-Chair of the Republican National Committee, writing his friend Leonard W. Hall – “...this was a hard decision for me to make, but I simply felt that the time had come for me to slow up a bit and let somebody else step into this position for the period immediately ahead.” [Jan. 5, 1972] In 1976, Governor Richard W. Riley, a Democrat, in a widely popular move, appointed Edens to the South Carolina Wildlife and Marine Resources Commission. Edens became Chairman of the Commission in 1979. He

Robert McNair summed up Edens' role in the state's political affairs as follows – “In my judgment, Drake Edens is responsible for the existence of the Republican Party as a strong and viable entity in South Carolina. Only because of his perseverance and credibility does the party exist.” [letter to Jenny Edens (Padgett), 6 Dec. 1979]

Scope and Content Note:

The J. Drake Edens Papers consist of one linear foot of material, chiefly correspondence. Also included is a copy of a 28 page paper, Dec. 1979, on Edens' role in the Republican Party, written by his daughter Jenny Edens Padgett, for her USC class on Contemporary South Carolina. A significant portion of the correspondence relates to Edens' efforts with Richard M. Nixon's 1968 presidential campaign.

COLLECTION INVENTORY

Biographical Information

Box 1 of 1

Political Papers:

General:

1961-1966

1967-1968

1971-1973

1974-1976

1977-1982

Campaigns, Nixon, Richard M.:

General, 1966-1968

Nixon Correspondence, 1966-1969

Resignation, Republican National Committee

Personal Papers:

General:

c.1943-1947

1967-82

Edens:

Food Stores

Jenny, Research Paper, 1979

White House Correspondence

Audiovisual:

Photographs

Walt Lardner Cartoon

Clippings:

General

Campaigns:

Goldwater, Barry, 1964

Nixon, Richard M., 1968

Edens:

Ferrell

Food Stores

J. Drake, Death of, 1982

Republican Party

S.C. Wildlife and Marine Resources Commission