

South Carolina Political Collections
University of South Carolina

Harriet Keyserling

(1922-2010)

Papers, 1965-2005

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Biographical Sketch:

Harriet Keyserling, a Democrat and self-proclaimed “New York Jewish liberal,” represented District 124, Beaufort County, in the South Carolina House of Representatives from 1977 until her retirement in 1993. Mrs. Keyserling was a tireless advocate of the arts, of education, and of the protection of the environment from nuclear waste and other energy hazards. Highly respected by other legislators, she was once described by former Governor Richard W. Riley as “more given to quiet research, serious conversation, and careful organization - and less to the smoke-filled-room politics of much big talk and little listening.”

Born in New York City in 1922 to Isador and Pauline Hirschfield, both immigrants from Eastern Europe, Harriet Keyserling attended public schools and graduated with honors with a degree in economics from Barnard College in 1943. In 1944 she married Dr. Herbert Keyserling, a native of Beaufort, and relocated to his hometown. There Mrs. Keyserling became involved in local affairs and served on numerous civic and cultural boards while her four children were growing up. In 1974 she became the first woman elected to the Beaufort County Council. Mrs. Keyserling ran for Council because she “saw that the County Council was not doing enough for education. Our schools were on shaky ground after integration, and public support was fading fast.” Among her achievements in two years on County Council was the creation of a library consortium consisting of the Technical College of the Low Country, the Beaufort campus of the University of South Carolina, and the Beaufort Public Library, thereby eliminating duplication of services and greatly enhancing the availability of resources for Beaufort County citizens.

In 1976, Mrs. Keyserling was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives. She became associated with a group of progressive legislators, chiefly members of her 1976 class but also including Bob McFadden and Jean Toal, nicknamed the “Crazy Caucus.” This group of like-minded legislators was dedicated to causes such as rules reform, education, the environment, the arts, ethics, and campaign reform, many of which remained near to her heart throughout her legislative career.

In 1980 Mrs. Keyserling approached Governor Riley about creating a Task Force on the Arts. This ultimately “laid the foundation for building an infrastructure for the arts in South Carolina.” In 1985 the Joint Legislative Committee on Cultural Affairs (JLCCA) was born out of this effort, and she chaired the committee from its creation until 1991. While the Task Force had been dependent upon the governor, the JLCCA was an entity created by legislation and was dedicated to enhancing cultural endeavors and activities across the state. In addition to her legislative duties, Mrs. Keyserling also served on the Spoleto Board of Directors, the South Carolina Humanities Council, and the Beaufort County Arts Council. This service continued after her retirement from the House of Representatives.

Education was a fundamental issue for Harriet Keyserling. Dick Riley described her as, “one of those responsible leaders willing to risk personal political security by fighting openly for public investment in improving schools and the lives of our children. She was a key member of the small group of legislators, called the Smurfs by the press, who felt that talk about education was not enough.” Keyserling was instrumental in the passage of the comprehensive Education Improvement Act (EIA), which addressed issues such as academic standards, teacher evaluation and salaries, student testing and comparisons between schools and districts, special programs for gifted and talented students, and advanced placement programs.

In addition to the JLCCA and the Education Committee, Keyserling served on the Ways and Means Committee, the Public Works Committee, the Rules Committee, the Judiciary Committee, on which she became only the second non-lawyer to serve, and the Joint Legislative Committee on Energy. In 1991, Mrs. Keyserling was named Chairman of the Energy Committee and worked to pass both the Solid Waste Bill and the Energy Conservation and Policy Management Act. She is also associated with other pieces of major energy legislation, including the South Carolina Energy Conservation and Efficiency Act of 1992, Southeastern Interstate Low-Level Waste Compact, Energy Tax Credit Bill, and the Prohibition of Nuclear Waste from Foreign Countries. From 1979 to 1982, she was a member of Congress' Advisory Panel on Nuclear Waste Disposal. Following her retirement from the legislature, Mrs. Keyserling maintained her interest in energy policy and served on the Advisory Committee to the State Energy Office.

Mrs. Keyserling announced her decision to retire from the House of Representatives in 1992. Her son, William Keyserling, was elected to succeed her. Since leaving office, she has remained active on the Spoleto Festival Board of Directors, the South Carolina Coastal Conservation League, the Beaufort Arts Council, and the Palmetto Project, an organization "whose goal is to bring some sanity to the volcanic, highly politicized racial divisions in our state." Of her sixteen years of service in the South Carolina House of Representatives, Mrs. Keyserling wrote in her autobiography, *Against the Tide: One Woman's Political Struggle*, "what was most important to me as a legislator were the issues, the friendships, the victorious battles, the feeling that I had contributed towards the improvement of some people's day-to-day lives."

Scope and Content Note:

The Harriet Keyserling Papers are comprised of 56.25 linear feet of material dating from 1965 to 2005. The collection chiefly documents Keyserling's tenure in the South Carolina House of Representatives, 1977 to 1993, and the subject areas in which she has developed expertise and in which she continues to have an impact. These subject areas include the arts, Beaufort County, education, and energy. The collection is arranged in six series: Public Papers, Personal Papers, Speeches, Columns, Photographs, and Clippings. The arrangement of the collection reflects, as much as possible, the original order established by Keyserling.

The arrangement of this collection is necessarily complex. Many of the subject areas in which Keyserling was active are interrelated, and there is significant overlap among a number of topics within Public Papers. Since retiring from public office, Keyserling continues to be an active advocate on issues ranging from the arts to nuclear waste, and thus there is also overlap between the Public and Personal papers. This requires researchers to be thorough in searching out series, sub-series, and topical headings which might contain information pertinent to their study. An example of this overlap can be seen among files concerning education. Papers relating to Keyserling's work in passing the Education Improvement Act are filed under Education; materials relating to education at the local level are filed under Beaufort County, Education.

Public Papers comprise the largest portion of the collection. This series is arranged topically and contains files relating to Keyserling's work as a legislator in the South Carolina House of Representatives. The largest sub-series within Public Papers relate to those areas in which Keyserling had the greatest impact -- the arts, Beaufort County, education, energy, health, and women.

Keyserling was active both in promoting and in securing public funding for the arts. Arts files include papers relating to Keyserling's activities on the state level, including her service as chairman of the Joint Legislative Committee on Cultural Affairs. The committee was created in 1985 to increase cooperation between agencies involved in cultural development for the arts in South Carolina and to recommend legislation aimed at the promotion and enjoyment of the arts. Issues Keyserling faced as chairman included the sale of artwork, art education, creation of art awards, estate tax deductions for contributions of cultural property to state agencies, and the status of non-profit agencies relating to the arts. Many of the issues that this committee examined overlap with other topics in the arts files, such as the National Endowment for the Arts.

Additional arts materials relating to her local efforts in Beaufort County are filed under Beaufort County. Arts in Education materials are filed under Education and include the Governor's School for the Arts and the North Carolina School for the Arts. Papers relating to Keyserling's service on the Spoleto Festival Board, the South Carolina Humanities Council, and the Southern Arts Federation, in which she participated as a private citizen, are included with her Personal Papers.

The Beaufort County files contain materials related to the arts, education, energy, health, and transportation, though each of these files is limited to Keyserling's interests and efforts within Beaufort County. Many of the subject headings in this sub-series are identical to topical headings for other sub-series within the Public Papers. Education files include materials relating to the Beaufort County Board of Education, including the Board's struggle to gain fiscal independence from the Beaufort County Council, as well as papers relating to the Board's 1983 indictment for spending funds not allocated to it. Health relates to specific health care institutions within Beaufort County, such as Beaufort Memorial Hospital and the Coastal Empire Mental Health Center. Waste relates specifically to the Beaufort-Jasper Water Authority and the management of hazardous and solid waste within the county. Other Beaufort County files relate to activities and events in specific parts of the county: Bluffton, Fripp Island, Hilton Head, and Port Royal. Files on Hilton Head include information about recycling and highway transportation on the island, as well as the cultural center for the arts and the Victoria Bluff Yacht Manufacturing Facility.

Education files illustrate Keyserling's belief that it is the state's duty to provide every student with a balanced and complete education. Keyserling was instrumental in passing both the Education Improvement Act (EIA) in 1984 and Target 2000 - School Reform for the Next Decade Act, the 1989 addendum to the EIA. Target 2000 addressed issues such as drop-out prevention, early childhood education, accountability, and raising the standards for basic skills. A substantial provision of both acts was the inclusion of arts education in the public schools, exemplified in the Arts in the Basic Curriculum (ABC) program. Higher education files relate chiefly to the proposed consolidation of the Technical College of the Lowcountry, located in Beaufort Country, and the University of South Carolina, Beaufort. Other education topics include arts education, State Education Policy Seminars, and teachers.

Energy files reflect Keyserling's concern for the production and use of energy in South Carolina, particularly nuclear power production and its by-products. Nuclear waste files consists of material exclusively concerning nuclear waste such as away-from-reactor storage, monitored retrievable storage, overseas waste, and the Southeast Compact Commission for Low-Level Radioactive Waste Management. Nuclear waste is also addressed in several of the other "Energy, Nuclear" files such as those on the Savannah River Plant, Barnwell Nuclear Fuel Plant, U.S.

Office of Technical Assessment, and Energy Research Foundation. Nuclear energy material concerning the National Conference on State Legislatures is filed under Public Papers, National Conference on State Legislatures. Other significant topics in the Energy sub-series include Keyserling's work on the Joint Legislative Committee on Energy (JLCE) and solid waste. The JLCE papers concern oil overcharge and the Energy Policy Panel, which Keyserling created to recommend a long-range policy for energy planning and specific legislative actions needed to implement that policy. Oil overcharge files concern the disbursement of money received by the state from a settlement with oil companies that had overcharged during a period of federal petroleum price controls. These oil overcharge funds were then used to fund energy conservation programs throughout the state. Solid waste includes materials relating to incineration and recycling. In addition to these major energy topics, Keyserling kept files on cogeneration, carpooling, hydroelectric energy, and solar energy.

Health files chiefly document Keyserling's fourteen years of work on the Death with Dignity Act, establishing the right of a patient to sign a living will authorizing the physician to take no actions towards life saving measures. Other health issues include AIDS, breast cancer legislation, the Medically Indigent Assistance Act, and funding for mental health programs.

The National Conference of State Legislatures is a partnership of state and federal governments to improve domestic policy through funding, implementation and delivery of services. This sub-series reflects Keyserling's work as a representative for South Carolina, especially her involvement on the Committee on Energy and the Legislative Working Group on High-Level Waste. Also included are materials on education, health care, and the Arts, Tourism, and Cultural Resources Committee.

Natural Resources consists of materials on conservation, chiefly the Beachfront Management Act, H. 3731, which created erosion zones and new guidelines for the construction and repair of homes built on beachfront property. Also included are the Underwater Antiquities Act, the Conservation Easement Act, the South Carolina Conservation Finance Project, and the South Carolina Wildlife Federation.

Tax files chiefly concern the 1983 Accommodations Tax which created a 2% tax on hotel, motel, and campground accommodations. Included are files of the Ad Hoc Committee which was responsible for determining that each county complied with the Act in spending the revenue the tax generated.

Ways and Means Committee papers chiefly concern the allocation of state funds for elementary and secondary education, arts, children's services, mental retardation, Medicaid, and state agencies.

The Women sub-series reflects Keyserling's interest in the role of women legislators, both state and national, and social issues affecting women, such as abortion, employment, and the Equal Rights Amendment. Abortion papers document Keyserling's strong support of a woman's right to choose. The Human Life Protection Bill file relates to Keyserling's vigorous opposition to this proposed legislation to outlaw abortion.

Personal Papers documents Keyserling's personal interests and activities before, during, and after her service in the General Assembly. Major sub-series include Arts, Campaign, Energy, and

the Penn Center. Arts include the South Carolina Humanities Council, the Spoleto Festival, and the Southern Arts Federation. Spoleto Festival papers, 1982-1996, contain materials documenting Keyserling's involvement with the Festival, including her service on the Board of Directors, and reveal her role in 1994 in securing financial assistance through the General Assembly to keep the festival out of bankruptcy.

Penn Center papers describe Keyserling's involvement with the St. Helena Island organization as member of the boards of directors (1992-1995) and trustees (1992-1998). Materials dating from 1965 to 1970 concern her husband Dr. Herbert Keyserling's membership on the Board of Trustees. Also included are materials relating to a partnership between the Penn Center and the University of South Carolina that emphasized the development of an early childhood education program at the Center. The Center was established in 1862 to aid freedmen. Its mission has evolved over time. Always focused upon improving the lives of the local African-American population, the Center decided in the 1990s to work for the preservation of the Sea Island history, culture and environment.

Campaign materials consist primarily of correspondence, contribution lists, and memoranda from four of Keyserling's campaigns: her 1974 election to the Beaufort County Council and the 1976, 1988, and 1990 election and reelections to the General Assembly.

Speeches are filed chronologically and include both drafts and final copies of speeches Keyserling gave as a private citizen, as a member of the Beaufort County Council, and as a legislator in the South Carolina General Assembly.

Columns, 1977 to 1995, are arranged chronologically and include a table of contents at the beginning of the 1977-1979 folder. These are chiefly articles written by Keyserling on a semi-regular basis, mainly for the *Beaufort Gazette*. These articles document Keyserling's opinion on legislation, social issues, and the legislative process.

Clippings are arranged topically to correspond with topics found elsewhere in the collection. These materials include newspaper articles of Keyserling's activities and reference materials relating to the arts, Beaufort County, education, and energy.

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BellSouth Leadership Institute, Leaders of Humanity Seminar, 1992

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 - Lawsuit, *Harriet Keyserling, Sierra Club, et al. v. David M. Beasley, as Governor; David H. Wilkins, as Speaker of the House; Robert L. Peeler, as Lt. Governor; et al.*:
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3. Waste Management, 8-3-1990 [SCETV *Capitol View*]
4. Herbert Keyserling's 75th Birthday Celebration, 1990 (?) [WJWJ TV News Segment]
5. Solid Waste Legislation for South Carolina, 20-3-1991 [SCETV Teleconference]
6. The State of the Arts, 2-10-1991 [SCETV *Capitol View*]
7. Women's Issues Caucus, 5-2-1992 [SCETV *Capitol View*]
8. Barnwell Low-level Storage Debate, 25-3-1992 [SCETV *Capitol View*]
9. Harriet Keyserling Profile, 12-1992 [WJWJ TV]
10. Harriet Keyserling Interview, 12-1993 [WJWJ TV Special Edition]
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13. Marital Rape Law in South Carolina (Dale Crawford Case), n.d. [*Dateline NBC*]
14. Health and AIDS Education, n.d. [SCETV *Journal*]
15. Death with Dignity Act, n.d. [WIS TV Interview]

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