

South Carolina Political Collections

University of South Carolina

Isadore E. Lourie

(1932-2003)

Papers, 1961-1994

- Volume:** 23.75 linear feet
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Biographical Note:

Isadore Lourie served in the South Carolina General Assembly from 1965 until his retirement in 1993 and gained a reputation as the champion of the common man and woman. During his service in the House and Senate Lourie gained statewide recognition as the author of major legislation including the Freedom of Information Act, and bills resulting in the creation of the Commissions on Aging and the Blind and the Legislative Audit Council, exemptions of sales taxes on prescription drugs and the homestead tax, and establishment of the public kindergarten program. On his retirement, his good friend Dick Riley said—“Much of the major legislative accomplishments of the past quarter century is due to the leadership and caring of Isadore Lourie. He’s been there, with his colleagues, when vision and strength were needed.”

Isadore Lourie was born in 1932 in St. George, S.C. His parents were Jewish immigrants who met and married in Charleston in 1921. The family founded a department store in St. George and later moved the business to Columbia. *Lourie’s* remains a major retail presence in downtown and suburban Columbia. Isadore Lourie entered the University of South Carolina in 1951, and became a prominent figure on campus, president of his fraternity, Phi Epsilon Pi, and president of the student body. In an oral history interview, responding to a question regarding what he learned from serving as student body president, Lourie said—“How important it is for a leader to be a leader, even at that young age. You must try to listen to other people’s opinions, consider them, but have to be a catalyst to get things done to be a leader.” He recalled his campaign for student body president—“I remember a week before the elections for president of the student body, I went door to door, campus dormitory to campus dormitory. If you understand, being Jewish at that time, I was not involved in the real social life of the university student body. I didn’t get invited to the big formals of the Tri-Delts and KDs. I had a lot of friends there, but fraternities were along religious lines considerably, so I didn’t have exposure to a great deal of social life in that sense of the word. I had a lot of social life with my fraternity and I had some social life at large on the campus, but not having that I had to go at it doubly hard to make the contacts and meet the people. I had to really go at it pretty hard to win.”

He entered the U.S.C. School of Law and, while in law school, worked as a page in the General Assembly. He received his law degree in 1956 and soon thereafter entered into practice in Columbia. In that same interview, Lourie noted, “...sometimes I think maybe I made a mistake not joining a bigger firm where I would have had more flexibility....in my first early years in law, there were very few Jewish lawyers in the big firms. They were WASP firms, and I don’t say that [in] any derogatory [way]. But, you see, it didn’t bother me because my philosophical feelings, being the staunch Democrat that I was, identified with the working people. I really never identified with the insurance companies, although they play a legitimate role. And law firms that represent them play a legitimate role. But, I always felt comfortable representing people, and that was consistent with my political philosophy.”

His appointment in 1958 as Administrative Assistant to the House Ways and Means Committee inaugurated a lifetime of public service. Lourie was first elected to the South Carolina House in 1964 with the slogan—“The Man Who Will Stand Up For You.” In 1972, he won election to the state Senate. Commenting in the interview on the motivation behind his commitment to public service, often to the detriment of his law career, Lourie concluded—“I really cherished being in public service, cherished the public trust, and cherished the opportunity to do some things that were meaningful in trying to improve the quality of life of people. Now, certainly in the later years, I’ve had some disenchantments, but I still strongly feel that public

service is a great trust and great opportunity.”

In addition to his work in government and as an attorney, Lourie has long played a prominent role in civic, religious, and Democratic Party affairs. In 1959 he became President of the Richland County Cancer Society. In 1960, he became President of the South Carolina Jaycees and headed Young Democrats for Kennedy. In 1994, Lourie founded the South Carolina Jewish Historical Society. He has also served on the University South Caroliniana Society Council. In 1995, Governor David Beasley appointed Lourie to the twenty-two member South Carolina Commission on Racial Relations.

Scope and Contents Note:

The Lourie Papers consist of 23.75 linear feet of material, chiefly 1978 to 1992, documenting his career in government and personal life. The Collection is arranged in four series: Public Papers, Personal Papers, Audio-Visual Materials, and Clippings.

Public Papers chiefly reflect Lourie’s tenure in the South Carolina General Assembly. General Papers include correspondence and other material of general interest. Other subseries include legislative highlights, newsletters, press releases, speeches, and topical files.

Of particular interest among the General Papers is a handwritten ten page draft letter, c. 1990, addressed to national Democratic Party chairman Ron Brown, providing a frank and open presentation of his views on the decline of the Democratic Party and steps which could be taken to remedy this decline. In a particularly poignant passage, Lourie noted he had “for the first time become deeply disillusioned and pessimistic about the future of our party, nationally, and in the South.”

Legislative Highlights files contain reference materials on a variety of issues before the General Assembly. Speeches and speech materials demonstrate Lourie’s career-long advocacy of the interests of the common people and his attempt to improve the quality of life for all South Carolinians. Speeches on education, taxes, civil rights, consumer affairs, government reform, the elderly, and Jewish issues dominate this sub-series.

Topical files relate to bills and issues before the Senate, committee service and bills pending and proposed, state agencies, local projects, and other matters of import. Records include texts and drafts of legislation, correspondence with other members of the Assembly and constituents, memoranda, and reports. Files gathered under the heading “Aging,” reflect Lourie’s leadership in a variety of areas affecting the state’s senior citizens, and membership on the Joint Legislative Committee on Aging, and South Carolina Commission on Aging. The Bingo and Marriage License Tax file is placed under aging because revenues went toward the provision of alternative care for the elderly. “Configuration” documents refer to the debate over the proper location and number of agencies on aging to achieve the widest possible benefit.

Appointments files regard appointments requiring Senate confirmation, received from both the Richland County Legislative Delegation and the governor. Project Train pertains to a legislative study group intent on streamlining the budget process. Elections files relate to votes by the General Assembly on judgeships and other offices. Of interest is a 1971 letter from Speaker Sol Blatt to Columbia attorney Stanley Kohn regarding Rex Carter’s plans to challenge Blatt for the Speakership. Blatt, upset that Carter’s bid was receiving support from Lourie and other members from Richland County, wrote—“I mention Isadore because I have been kinder to him than I have the others, and he shocked me at the position he has taken.... How a delegation from Columbia can support a man from Greenville is beyond me.... I am hoping that you and as

many friends as you can find to help you will let the present Delegation know at this time that they will not be supported financially or otherwise unless they change their position to support me...immediately.”

Files relating to the environment concern regulation in South Carolina. Lourie was active in this area and a co-sponsor of a 1990 bill to ban phosphate detergents. Records relating to a Federal Constitutional Convention include information on the push for a balanced budget amendment. The idea of a second Constitutional Convention swept the nation in the 1970s and South Carolina adopted a resolution calling for such a convention in 1978. In 1989, Lourie co-sponsored a resolution to withdraw South Carolina’s call for the convention.

Gambling material well illustrates Lourie’s thoughtful assessment of issues and his ideas on the role of government. Writing on 13 November 1990, Lourie remarked that he had, “always opposed a lottery because of its adverse effect on those of the lower income levels” but recognized the “strong sentiment in South Carolina for a lottery referendum.... After a great deal of consideration, I have decided that I will support a lottery, provided that as part of the referendum it is stipulated that when a lottery becomes law, there will be a reduction of ½ of 1 cent sales tax on food.” This would offset, at least partially, the damaging effects of the lottery of the low income population. Government’s responsibility to strike a careful balance between the will of the majority and the protection of the underprivileged seems to have been the sine qua non of Lourie’s political agenda.

It is convenient that documents on Homelessness and Housing are placed together by the alphabetical listing of topics, since they overlap significantly. In 1988, Lourie sponsored a bill to create a Task Force on Homelessness to study the problems of the homeless and recommend policies to the General Assembly. The bill became law in 1990 and Lourie was one of two senators appointed to serve on the task force. The South Carolina Institute on Poverty and Deprivation was a Columbia-based non-profit research organization that augmented the efforts of the Task Force. The Trust Fund Bill under Housing is intimately related to the efforts of both the Institute and the Task Force and regards affordable housing. Files under Legislation contain texts and summaries of bills.

Under Richland County, Consolidation refers to a 1989 bill dealing with the consolidation of municipalities. Local Government pertains to issues such as special purpose districts, local finance, and home rule. Legislative Delegation files, chiefly 1980 to 1992, include meeting minutes. Lourie chaired the Richland County delegation from 1985 to 1992.

Personal Papers include general, campaign, and topical files. Of particular interest among the Personal, General papers is a handwritten 1990 note from Donald Fowler, former Chairman of the South Carolina Democratic Party, responding to criticism from Lourie. At the same time forceful and apologetic, Fowler wrote—“Your suggestions that I have not done my part by the Democratic Party were surprising to me...,” and called upon Lourie to work with Fowler to “contribute to a solution.” Another example of such frustration within the party is evidenced by a letter from a Lourie supporter, 9 May 1990. Regarding the party, the writer noted solemnly that “It seems that you are all we have left.”

In 1984, Lourie announced that he would retire from the Senate due to health problems. A host of letters is present from this period from friends and associates including Robert McNair, Travis Medlock, Bruce Littlejohn, and I. DeQuincey Newman, encouraging him to reconsider. Lourie decided to remain in the Senate and won reelection that November.

Campaign Files relate to Lourie’s and other campaigns. The 1976 file contains a complete breakdown of Lourie’s media expenditures during that year’s election cycle. The 1984

file includes a summary of the senator's accomplishments while in the General Assembly. The 1988 file holds an extensive research paper—"Profile of South Carolina Senate District 21."

Among the topical files, those relating to Jewish issues and Israel document Lourie's leadership in Beth Shalom Synagogue of Columbia and the Jewish community in South Carolina. Biographical and Family files and those of St. George provide excellent information on Lourie's heritage, family, and personal background.

Among the Persons files the most extensive are those relating to T. M. "Babe" Nelson, I. DeQuincey Newman, and Alex Sanders. Lourie served on the steering committee that created the Nelson Scholarship Fund for "needy and deserving students" at the University of South Carolina. Lourie maintained a close relationship with Newman and also served on the I. DeQuincey Newman Portrait Committee. The Sanders files includes a collection of homilies used by Sanders.

An extensive interview conducted by Modern Political Collections with Lourie, whose life and career span a remarkable period of change in South Carolina government forms a valuable addition to the Lourie papers.

SERIES:

Public Papers:

General

Legislative Highlights

Newsletters

Press Releases

Speeches and Speech Material

Topical Files

Personal Papers:

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Campaign Records

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Audio-Visual Materials

Clippings and Scrapbooks

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- Reel, General Election, State Senate

Video Recordings:

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- Lintheads and Hard Times, Olympia School, Apr. 1986

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- Carolina Journal*, Isadore Lourie and Fred Zeigler
- Hurricane Hugo Special, Storm of the Century Update
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