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George Bell Timmerman, Jr.

(1912-1994)

Papers, c.1904-1997

Volume: 2.5 linear feet

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Biographical Note:

George Bell Timmerman, Jr. served as governor of South Carolina from 1955 to 1959, leading the state during a period of growing racial strife. He served as lieutenant governor under both Strom Thurmond and Jimmy Byrnes, 1947-1955.

Timmerman was born August 11, 1912 in Anderson, S.C. to George Bell (1881-1966) and Mary Vandiver (Sullivan) Timmerman. His father was a solicitor, member of the General Assembly, Highway Commissioner, and federal district judge. Reared in Batesburg, Timmerman attended The Citadel from 1930 to 1934 and received his LL.B. degree in 1937 from the University of South Carolina. He was admitted to the Bar that same year and began the practice of law in Lexington, S.C.

He married Helen Miller DuPre (d.1980) of Columbia on Feb. 16, 1935. They had no children.

Timmerman served in the U.S. Naval Reserve, Naval Armed Guard, from 1942 to 1946. While on convoy duty as a Naval Gunnery Officer, his ship was torpedoed and he spent three days on a life boat before being rescued. Later, he commanded a rocket launcher ship during the invasion of Okinawa.



In 1946, after his return from service, he won election as Lieutenant Governor. He served from 1947 to 1951 under Governor Strom Thurmond and worked to promote the fledgling body that would become the State Development Board.



In 1948, Timmerman was president of the state Democratic Convention and a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. He was reelected Lieutenant Governor and served under Governor Jimmy Byrnes from 1951 to 1955. In 1954, Timmerman was elected governor, defeating Lester Bates in an exciting campaign. Timmerman's term, 1955 to 1959, witnessed major capital improvements in the State and Palmetto State hospitals, the building of new schools across South Carolina, the expansion of the State Law Enforcement Division, and an extensive highway

construction program. The conservative Timmerman was an ardent opponent of what he viewed as federal encroachment on the powers of the state and localities, particularly as applied to maintaining a segregated society. His energetic Lieutenant Governor, Ernest F. "Fritz" Hollings, became South Carolina's leading proponent of economic development.

On leaving office in 1959, Timmerman returned to his Lexington law practice. In 1966, 11th Circuit Court Judge T. B. Greneker announced his decision to retire. J. Fred Buzhardt was elected to succeed Greneker, but died unexpectedly. Timmerman sought the position and was elected in January, 1967 without opposition. He held that office until Aug. 11, 1984 when he reached the mandatory age of retirement. He then served as a special judge, filling in on the Circuit, until his death on Nov. 29, 1994.

In 1975, Timmerman made headline news when he declared the state's 1974 law regulating capital punishment to be unconstitutional. Timmerman called the law "a mishmash of contradictory terms." The U.S. Supreme Court agreed with Timmerman when, early in July, 1976, it upheld the death penalty but declared unconstitutional state laws, such as those in South Carolina, making death mandatory for certain crimes.

Scope and Content Note:

The collection is arranged as follows: Biographical Information, Genealogical Information, General Papers, Speeches, Audiovisual Materials, and Newspaper Clippings.



Biographical information includes information on Timmerman and his immediate family. Genealogical information on the Timmerman Family includes a paper given by J. Strom Thurmond at a 1937 Timmerman Family Reunion. Also included is the earliest item from the collection, a campaign card, c.1904, of the senior Timmerman seeking election as Solicitor of the 5th Circuit, which he attained at the young age of 23.

Among the General papers, the 1913-1917 folder contains a Solicitor's Docket Book for the Eleventh Circuit, Edgefield, Lexington and Saluda counties, noting the names of defendants, offense, and disposition of the case.

A number of petitions, c.1941, urge the appointment of George Bell Timmerman, Sr. to the federal bench. Among the wartime papers is a rare and delightful letter from Helen, postmarked March 24, 1944, in which she recounts her hunt in their storage room, "I made quite a haul – some elastic (now as valuable as gold), an enormous package of needles (as hard to buy as Nylon here or a pint of bourbon) and a Schick Injector Razor!"

General papers from 1946 document Timmerman's efforts to win election as Lieutenant Governor. In writing Democratic Party leaders across the state during July, Timmerman introduced himself as "the youngest candidate in the race – in my thirty-fourth year. I volunteered my services in World War II, and served in the navy for the duration of the war, in both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, encountering German submarines in one and Jap suicide

planes in the other. I feel sure that I stand for those things in public life which you and your friends would approve. I have not been in politics before. I owe no political debts. Hence, I am in position to serve the best interests of the people fairly and impartially. I have no political boss, except the people.” His father worked behind the scenes supporting his son and name recognition certainly helped him carry the race. Newberry College president James C. Kinard summed up the situation nicely, on Sept. 4, 1946 writing Judge Timmerman, “While we voted for your son in his own right many of us in doing so naturally thought of his distinguished father.” Letters marked “sample” provide examples of form letters sent out by the campaign.

A copy of a seven-page letter, Oct. 11, 1948, from state senator Edgar Brown to Joe Blythe, Treasurer of the National Democratic Committee, presents Brown’s thoughts on “why I think the Democratic Party is disintegrating, or, stated another way, why Southern Democrats are in open revolt against the present leadership of the Party.”

Material from 1953 includes copies of correspondence of state senator Milo Smith with fellow senators drawing them out regarding Timmerman’s possible candidacy for governor. George Grantham wrote, “his prospects will be materially affected by whether Thurmond enters the race. . . . Bates has lined up some of the professional politicians in the county. . . . I am sure that you are aware of . . . the apparent ambition of our mutual friend, Marion Gressette, to occupy the Governor’s seat.” James Hugh McFaddin noted, “We are in the midst of the race (white-colored) question here and vote will be entirely upon that issue.” W. Lewis Wallace expressed concern, “I would be unfair to you if I did not point out that Georges’ aloofness and his failure to fraternize with all the members of the Legislature is not going to be helpful to his candidacy.”



Early in 1954, Timmerman announced his intention to run for Governor. Typical of the many letters he received offering their support was one from prominent Columbia attorney R. Beverly Herbert, “Your statement on the segregation matter is, I believe, the best I have seen. . . . I think the difficulty in working out any kind of orderly school system without segregation would be almost insurmountable. . . . When you set up your organization I will try to help you in this county.” Former state senator Calhoun Mays wrote, Jan. 28, 1954, “[Y]ou are to my opinion the best bet for some one to defeat a certain other candidate whose selection would be most unfortunate to the State.”

The campaign was a brutal one. Bates ran on his record as a successful businessman, but was accused of mismanaging the Capital Life and Health Insurance Company, which he founded in 1936. The charges were damaging. Governor Jimmy Byrnes, who supported Timmerman, ordered the State Insurance Commissioner to examine the company. The report, issued after the election, showed the company was sound. A file on Bates includes two versions of a Bates campaign speech and his statement, May 26, responding to the “reports which have been used against it [Capital Life] for political reasons and calculated, in our judgment, to destroy the confidence of its policyholders.”

Columbia's African American newspaper, the *Lighthouse and Informer*, published by Modjeska Simkins, opposed Timmerman's election. In May, a sheet was circulated that charged that Timmerman favored desegregated schools. In a letter to Bennettsville attorney J.E. Dudley, May 20, 1954, Timmerman called the sheet "the big lie of this campaign," and noted that he had challenged Bates "to answer whether or not he denies having NAACP support." A typescript excerpt of "Charles Wickenberg Reporting," May 3, 1954, quotes Wickenberg's interview of Mrs. Simkins. Asked for a response to Timmerman's charge that the NAACP had degenerated into a subversive organization, Mrs. Simkins stated, "I consider that it would be beneath my contempt to even answer that. He knows it is not true."

The advertising file contains flyers, drafts of speeches and a television program, and "Recommendations for Advertising" from the firm of Bradley, Graham & Hamby.

"Segregation" files are chiefly as kept by Timmerman. Civic leader Eunice Ford Stackhouse took Timmerman to task in a letter of June 10, 1954, noting his "contemptuous tone" in referring to African Americans James Hinton and Modjeska Simkins and encouraging him to appoint a bi-racial committee to consider segregation.

Following his Democratic primary victory, Timmerman, in June and July of 1954, began planning for his gubernatorial term and handling patronage requests. Edgar Brown wrote, in a "Personal and Confidential" letter of Nov. 12, 1954, asking Timmerman to "clear out" the Constabulary, noting specific constables who had worked against Brown.

Voluminous files of Congratulatory Letters demonstrate the importance many voters and leaders in South Carolina government placed on Timmerman's election. Typical was the letter written by Judge Bruce Littlejohn, June 25, 1954: "Problems confronting the governor's office during the next four years will be perhaps some of the most difficult facing any governor since reconstruction days." Industrialist Roger Milliken wrote, July 7, 1954, "A great many people have told me of the important part that you have played in bringing to South Carolina the kind of government that has made it possible for the industries of the State to grow and has also made it attractive for additional industries to come into the State. It is very encouraging for those of us who have made such decisions and investments to know that the same kind of thinking that has prevailed will continue." Mrs. George Kerr of Bennettsville provides insights into the campaign and shows the emotional connection some voters found to Timmerman, writing on June 4, 1954, "the towns of Bennettsville and McColl have been well covered with the printed handbill, 'The Big Lie Expose.' By a stroke of luck, our printer miscounted and made up nearly double the order; he made us a present of all the extra ones. So everyone for miles around received it, inserted in the daily newspaper. . . . Please know that there are literally thousands like us who, however amateurishly, want to help you. . . . People like ourselves with a lot of little children



have been strengthened by your stand.”

The March 1957 annual meeting of the South Carolina Council on Human Relations, a bi-racial organization, generated a letter from Marion Gressette, Mar. 22, 1957, “I don’t suppose there is anything we can do about the meeting. . . .” A transcript of the meeting’s afternoon panel session is also present. It was moderated by Gren Seibels and featured panelists Traugott Kern of the Chamber of Commerce, USC faculty member Robert H. Patterson, and Walker E. Solomon of the Palmetto Teachers Association, 34 pages.



Ernest F. “Fritz” Hollings served as Timmerman’s Lt. Governor and succeeded him as governor. A letter, July 11, 1958, from Hollings thanks Timmerman for his offer of help “to familiarize myself with the details of the office,” and notes, “The election enthusiasm runs away with some people and many things come my way that are really matters for attention by your office. For this reason I want you to know that I fully realize we ain’t even elected yet much less taken the oath of office, and I don’t want to do anything to give a contrary appearance.”

Papers from 1964 include speaking points for the presidential campaign supporting incumbent Lyndon Johnson over Republican Barry Goldwater. The source of the points is unclear, but they originated in South Carolina and address civil rights and the rise of the Republican Party: at “issue is whether we are to abandon our traditional system of free and independent elections for a so-called two-party system....”

General papers of 1966 chiefly relate to Timmerman’s campaign to succeed retiring judge T. B. Grenaker of Edgefield as Judge of South Carolina’s 11th Judicial Circuit. The Circuit included Edgefield, McCormick, Lexington and Saluda counties. Timmerman and his friends and supporters worked diligently seeking pledges of support from the members of the General Assembly, who would elect Grenaker’s replacement. Speaker Sol Blatt reached out to members of the General Assembly promoting Timmerman’s selection, and noted, July 14, 1966, that Timmerman “is being endorsed by the Bars all over the State and I feel certain will get by without opposition but a pledge from you will be helpful.” In fact, he was elected without opposition and early 1967 papers consist chiefly of congratulatory letters received from people of all walks of life.

Audiovisual Materials include a wide range of photographs and well drawn sketches or cartoons probably penned by Timmerman in his youth. Four audio files date from the 1954 gubernatorial primary and consist of two identical recordings of a 1954 press conference in which Timmerman

discusses state's public school system and Lester Bates' support by Modjeska Simkins and other "communist agitators" affiliated with the NAACP, 10:45; another campaign address regards the schools and Bates' support by the NAACP, 4:45; and victory remarks, 8 June 1954, in which Timmerman pledges to preserve separate schools in South Carolina, broadcast on WIS Radio and Television, 0:58.

Clippings includes a particularly fine study of Timmerman written for *South Carolina Magazine*, Jan. 1955, by Charles Wickenberg.

Timmerman's official gubernatorial papers are held by the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Approximately seventy feet of material is described in the Archives' Summary Guide. Included are General Subject File, 21 ft.; Misc. Subject File, 18.82 ft.; Public Addresses and Prepared Statements, 1 ft.; Scrapbooks, 12 ft., Meet the Press File, 1958, 0.33 ft.; and Press Releases and Press Conference Transcripts, 0.33 ft.



National Governors' Conference, Atlantic City, NJ, June 24-27, 1956

COLLECTION INVENTORY

Biographical Information

Box 1

Genealogical Information [on the Timmerman Family]

General:

1913-1917 [Solicitor's Docket Book, Eleventh Circuit]

1937-1945

1946, 1948

1951-1952

1953

1954

General:

Jan.

Feb.

Mar.

Apr.

May-June

July

Aug.

Sept.-Oct.

Nov.-Dec.

c.1954

Campaign:

Advertising

Bates, Lester:

General

Capital Life Financial Info

Democratic National Committee

Education

NAACP

"Segregation" (2 f)

Congratulatory Letters (f. 1-2)

Congratulatory Letters (f. 3-6)

Winthrop College

Box 2

1955

1956

1957-1958

1960, 1962-1963

1964-1965

1966 (4 f.)

1967

1970-1979

1980-1997 & n.d.

Speeches:

1949, to Fountain Inn Rotary & Spartanburg Lions clubs

c.1950:

campaign speech

campaign speech

1952:

Oct. 16, at the Piedmont Interstate Fair, Spartanburg

Oct. 30, radio address re public school system

1954:

Jan. 27, announcing candidacy for governor

Oct. 19, to Junior Homemakers and Future Farmers

c.1954, campaign speech

c.1954, address reprinted as "You Be The Judge!" re the NAACP

c.1954, re NAACP involvement in campaign

c.1954, campaign speech

1955:

Jan. 18, Inaugural Address

Jan. 26, First Annual Message to the General Assembly

Mar. 3, re business climate in SC, NYC

Mar. 17, to SC Education Association, Columbia

Mar. 19, to the Corps of Cadets, The Citadel, Charleston

Apr. 1, to the Southern Regional Conference of Attorneys General, Charleston

June 5, to Newberry College Graduating Class, Newberry

June 6, to Lions International State Convention, Charleston

Aug. 18, for Farm and Home Week, Clemson

Oct. 19, Southern Governors' Conference, Point Clear, AL

Nov. 3, to Joint Meeting of the Assoc. of School Boards...statewide on radio & tv

1956:

Jan. 11, Second Annual Message to the General Assembly

Mar. 21, at SC Democratic Convention

Apr. 26, at Southern Regional Conf. of the Council of State Gov.ts, Charleston

May 11, Rivers Bridge Confederate Memorial Association

May 12, dedication of St. Stephen Plant, Albany Felt Co.

June 4, re Bowater Corp., to Extra Session of the General Assembly

June 25, National Governors' Conference, re Education, Atlantic City, NJ

Aug. 10, to National Democratic Convention Platform and Resolutions Comm.

Aug. 27, to SC Democratic Convention, Columbia

Oct. 12, at dedication of the Sangamo Electric Com Plant, Pickens

Oct. 18, at homecoming of Miss America, Manning

Oct. 19, for tv film of Educational Finance Commission

Dec. 28, at dinner celebrating 100th anniversary of Woodrow Wilson's birth, Columbia

1957:

Jan. 9, Third Annual Message to the General Assembly

Feb. 26, to U.S. House Education and Labor Sub-committee
re aid for school construction

Mar. 12, at ceremony honoring Miss America Marian McKnight, Columbia

June 24, to National Governors' Conference discussion of Education

Sept. 23, at Southern Governors' Conf. on educational facilities, Sea Island, Ga.

1958:

Jan. 6, to Lions Club, Winnsboro
Jan. 15, Fourth Annual Message to the General Assembly
Jan. 21, at the unveiling of Robert E. Lee bust
Feb. 11, before General Assembly honoring Edgar A. Brown &
Richard M. Jefferies
Mar. 25, to SC Democratic Party Convention, Columbia
May 5, for Calhoun Co. Golden Jubilee, St. Matthews
Sept. 12, to SC Highway Safety Committee, Columbia
Oct. 22, opposing use of State House property for Billy Graham rally
n.d.: banquet talk chiefly re General Assembly

Audiovisual Materials:

Audio [1 disk]:

1954, Primary Campaign Press Conference #1
1954, as above, poorer audio quality
1954, Primary Campaign Press Conference #2
1954, 8 June: Primary Campaign Victory Remarks

Photographs:

General:

c.1920s-1954
1955-1959
c.1961-1989 & n.d.

Timmerman, Helen D.

Negatives

Sketches

Clippings:

General:

1936, 1950s
1960s
1970s
1980s-1994 & n.d.

Timmerman, George Bell, Sr.

Misc.

Oversize Folder

1942, Jan. 23, App.t of G.B. Timmerman, Sr. Judge of the Eastern & Western Districts
1946, Lt. Governor Campaign Poster (2)
n.d., color portrait of G. B. Timmerman, Jr.