

Donald Russell: A Life of Public Service

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This exhibit is drawn from the following collections in the South Caroliniana Library:

- Donald S. Russell Papers, 1929-1998 (Modern Political Collections)
- Records of the President, Donald S. Russell, 1952-1957 (University Archives)
- University Archives Photograph Collection

Exhibit content by Dorothy Hazelrigg, Curator, Modern Political Collections and Elizabeth West, University Archivist.

Special thanks are due to South Caroliniana Library staff members Nicholas Meriwether, for banner design, and Brian Cuthrell, for technical assistance.

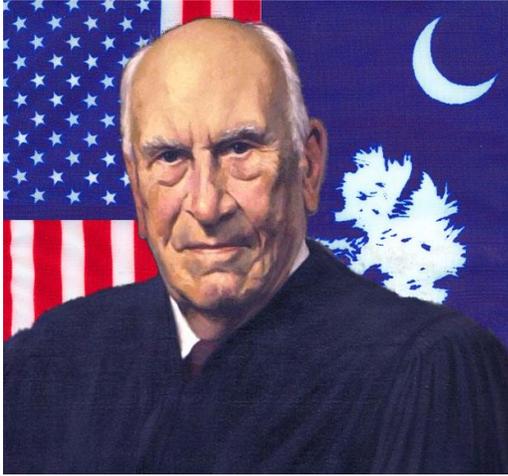
Created April 2005

Archived September 18, 2014

Table of Contents

Donald Russell: A Life of Public Service	1
Donald Russell.....	2
Early Life.....	3
War Years.....	5
University of South Carolina President.....	7
Political Life.....	9
Judicial Life.....	12

Donald Russell



Few individuals achieve the success that Donald S. Russell (1906-1998) enjoyed in life, fewer still achieve success in such a wide range of arenas, and even fewer have active careers of the duration of Russell's.

Russell held important positions in the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration during World War II, then returned to South Carolina to practice law. Russell served as President of the University of South Carolina from 1952 until 1957, when he resigned to run for governor. He was unsuccessful in his first attempt, but won in 1962.

Upon the death of U.S. Senator Olin D. Johnston, Russell stepped down as governor and was appointed to serve as senator until a special election could be held. Russell was praised for his acumen and activities as senator, but was defeated by Fritz Hollings in the 1966 special election. President Lyndon Johnson appointed Russell a U.S. District Court judge in 1967 and, in 1971, he was appointed to the U.S. 4th Circuit Court of Appeals. He served as an appellate court judge until the time of his death, in 1998, on his 92nd birthday.

Early Life



Donald Russell's senior photograph from the 1925 *Garnet and Black* yearbook.

Donald Stuart Russell was born in Lafayette Springs, Mississippi, in 1906. His father passed away when Russell was four, and, unable to keep the family farm viable, Lula Russell moved with her children to Chester, South Carolina, to be nearer her own parents. Russell attended the public schools of Chester and took jobs as a newspaper boy and at a drug store to help support his family. Graduating from high school early, Russell entered the University of South Carolina at the age of fifteen and put himself through school by pumping gas at a filling station.

Asked in a 1992 oral history if he had always wanted a career in public service, Russell recalled, "I was very ambitious. I don't know that I knew exactly which way I wanted to go. I knew I wanted to be a lawyer. That attracted me from early years. But...I don't know that I thought of much beyond that. I didn't grow up in a very metropolitan situation, so I don't know that you had any high aspirations of things. You...did have the idea that you'd try to take advantage if you did get an opportunity. That's about the best you could do."



Virginia Utsey's senior photograph from the 1927 *Garnet and Black* yearbook.

After his admission to the bar, Russell began practicing in Union, South Carolina. A year later he married his college sweetheart, Virginia Utsey of St. George. In 1930, Russell joined the prestigious law practice of Nichols, Wyche and Byrnes of Spartanburg. He had impressed the firm by winning a case in which he was opposed by partner Charles Cecil Wyche. Russell was running the practice alone by 1937, following the death of George Nichols and the appointments of James F. Byrnes to the United States Supreme Court and Wyche to the Federal District Court.

War Years



Russell in Army uniform 1944.

Russell's relationship with Byrnes became very important over the following years as Byrnes took on increasingly prominent positions in the Roosevelt administration. Russell went to Washington to work for the War Department in January 1942. Byrnes was appointed director of the Office of Economic Stabilization in October 1942 and took Russell as his assistant. In May 1943, Russell followed Byrnes to the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, which Byrnes had been appointed to direct. In October 1944 Russell went on active duty serving at the Army's Supreme Allied Headquarters in Europe. He was discharged later that year.



Donald and Virginia Russell returning from Europe, 1946.

In early 1945, Russell served as Deputy Director of the Office of War Mobilization and Reconversion, then as Assistant Secretary of State for Administration, under Byrnes, from August 1945 to January 1947. He implemented plans for the reorganization of the Foreign Service and developed the first series of continual regional foreign policy statements, which was later to become standard practice. His interest in the foreign service later led to his involvement on several federal committees. As the assistant to Byrnes, Russell attended the Potsdam Conference with President Harry Truman and Byrnes and took part in the decision to drop the first atomic bomb on the city of Hiroshima, Japan. Byrnes and Russell

left the administration shortly after the war ended and joined Hogan & Hartson, a Washington, D.C., law firm.



James F. Byrnes (left) and Donald Russell, 1950.

Byrnes and Russell enjoyed a close relationship for many years following their service together in Washington. In 1956, a set of bridges connecting Hilton Head Island to mainland South Carolina were officially named the "James F. Byrnes Crossing." Russell was chosen to deliver the dedicatory address at a ceremony attended by numerous dignitaries. Russell remarked on Byrnes' long career of public service, calling him "Mr. South Carolina." Responding to Russell's speech, Byrnes wrote him, "That you could, after long association with me say so many kind things about my career makes me very happy and very grateful. No other man could make the speech you made Saturday. Truth is, the same speech by any other man would not make me so happy." [21 May 1956]

University of South Carolina President



The President's House at
the University of South Carolina.

After the war, Russell returned to Spartanburg to practice law. He renewed his association with the University of South Carolina in 1947 when he was elected to the institution's board of trustees. His service on the board demonstrated the vision, political acumen, and clear thinking that the University needed in its president, and Russell was tapped for that office in 1951. Historian Dan Hollis calls Russell "the right president at the right time....The Russell era...gave Carolina confidence, momentum, and style."



Unveiling ceremony for the
Donald and Virginia Russell
portraits at the Russell House.

Russell was a popular and generous president, serving from 1952 to 1957. He refused to accept a salary, personally funded several scholarships, and paid for the renovation that transformed a former faculty duplex on the Horseshoe into today's President's House. A modern student union, named the Russell House in honor of both President Russell and his equally popular wife Virginia, was completed in 1955. He was also instrumental in obtaining legislation permitting state universities to issue tuition and dormitory-revenue bonds to finance permanent improvements.

Russell set about strengthening the University's academic side by revising the curriculum of the School of Engineering, reorganizing the School of Education, creating a strong physics department, and establishing doctoral programs in biology, chemistry, and other fields. The University also adopted an entrance examination, apparently the first Southern state university to do so. In his final year at Carolina, Russell oversaw the establishment of the first USC regional campus in Florence (now Francis Marion University).

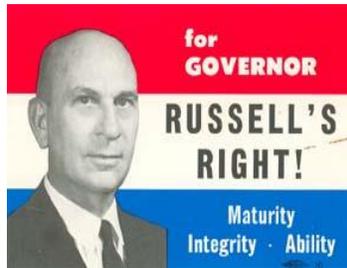


Donald Russell with
John F. Kennedy
before the 1957
USC commencement.

His experience in the U.S. State Department and the growing tensions of the Cold War convinced him to emphasize the study of international problems and foreign policy. He instigated the creation of the international studies program at the University, bringing in Yale professor Richard L. Walker, a specialist on communist China, to establish the program. Russell continued to emphasize international exposure for Carolina's students by introducing an unprecedented program of visiting scholars and lecturers from around the world. Russell also brought in top figures from the U.S. political, military, and foreign policy establishment, including a young rising star in the Democratic Party who gave the 1957 commencement address – Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts.

Russell resigned from the University in 1957 to run for governor, but was defeated in the Democratic primary by Ernest F. Hollings.

Political Life



Russell's gubernatorial campaign card, 1962

Russell returned to Spartanburg to practice law and renewed his involvement in a number of community organizations. He served as Chairman of the Spartanburg General Hospital Board of Trustees, State Easter Seals Chairman for the Crippled Children's Society, Advanced Gifts Chairman for the United Way Community Campaign, and as a member of the boards of the Spartanburg County Foundation and Converse College. In 1959, the Russells established an endowment for a James F. Byrnes Chair of International Relations at the University of South Carolina, which was the beginning of USC's Richard L. Walker Institute of International and Area Studies.



Governor Russell with Sol Blatt (left) and Olin D. Johnston (center).

In 1962, Russell ran for governor against Lieutenant Governor Burnet Maybank Jr. Russell won the primary and was unopposed in the general election. To celebrate his election, Russell held a barbecue which included both white and black guests. This was the first integrated political event held in South Carolina since Reconstruction. In 1992, Russell recalled the circumstances, "We had a pretty good gauge of things in South Carolina at the very date of inauguration. During the campaign, I had made the statement that we were going to have a barbecue at the Governor's Mansion, on that big lawn, and everybody in the state was to be invited. And the question arose immediately, was there to be any bar on account of color? The answer was, there would be none. Anybody could come that wished...[L]ots of people thought there would be a very difficult time.... But we had blacks and whites there, and had no trouble whatsoever. Everything was fine. It sort of set the stage for the feeling that we were going to be a law-abiding people, and that all we had to do was to show our faith and our confidence in what they would do. We didn't have to have any big show of force of any kind around, or anything. It was just like we knew people would act decently. They did, and that, I think, was a good omen for what was going to happen at Clemson [when it was integrated later that month]."



Governor and Mrs. Russell
greeting President and
Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson
at the Governors' Reception,
1965 Presidential Inauguration.

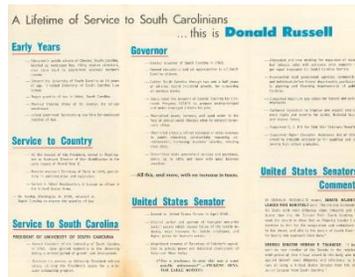
As governor, Russell stressed the importance of improving the state's educational programs. He also established an open-door policy at the Governor's Mansion, inviting all citizens to come and see him at any time. These innovations led both *Time* and *Life* magazines to feature Russell as an exemplary leader of the New South.

One of the first challenges Russell faced as governor was the court-ordered integration of Clemson College. Russell received high praise when he refused the offer of federal troops from U.S. Attorney General Robert Kennedy. As reported in *The State* newspaper, he assured Kennedy "South Carolina was 'perfectly capable' itself of maintaining law and order' and we are not going to have any violence'" (25 Jan. 1963). South Carolina was distinguished among the southern states for the peaceful integration of its schools. Russell also helped expand the technical education system and worked to continue the dramatic expansion of industry in the state.



Front page from the
Columbia Record, 21 April 1965.

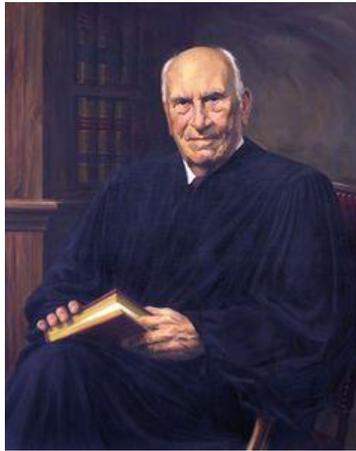
U.S. Senator Olin Johnston died unexpectedly in April 1965. The governor was to appoint a successor to serve until such time as a special election could be held. Russell said that he felt South Carolina needed a strong and able leader in Washington to deal with the important issues and he believed that he was best qualified to step in and serve. He stepped down as governor and was appointed Senator by his former Lieutenant Governor, Robert E. McNair, who became governor upon Russell's resignation. By all accounts, Russell was an effective senator who quickly won the respect of his fellow senators. "I have seen no new member of the Senate...who has applied himself more diligently and effectively to the task of being a United States Senator than the able Junior Senator from South Carolina." -- U.S. Senator Herman E. Talmadge, c. 1966



Flyer from Russell's Senate reelection campaign.

The special election again pitted Russell against "Fritz" Hollings and again, Hollings came out the winner. Voters appeared critical of the manner of Russell's appointment. During his gubernatorial campaign, Russell had promised to serve his full term as governor and not to use the position for further political advancement. Russell served in the Senate from April 22, 1965 to November 8, 1966.

Judicial Life



Portrait of Russell in judicial robes.

Russell was appointed U.S. District Judge for the Western District of South Carolina by President Lyndon Johnson in 1967, to fill the vacancy created by the death of Russell's former law partner, Charles Cecil Wyche. Russell had campaigned for Johnson during the 1964 election and attended Johnson's inauguration, though their opinions on the Voting Rights Bill differed significantly. He possessed a brilliant mind and had a temperament well suited to the bench and quickly gained the respect of all who appeared before him.



Russell is greeted by
President Jimmy Carter.

In 1971, President Richard Nixon assigned Russell to the Appellate Court bench. Russell and his wife Virginia continued to reside in Spartanburg, though in his capacity as Appellate Judge, Russell traveled to Richmond, Virginia one week a month for nine months of the year. Known for his thorough knowledge of the law, Russell served until his death in February 1998. He never took senior status or lightened his case load.

In a tribute, Senator Hollings, his onetime political rival and successor in the U.S. Senate, remarked: "His dedication to improving the lives of everyday citizens has been an inspiration to me and one that I will never forget." [*The State*, 2/24/98] South Caroliniana Library director Herb Hartsook interviewed Judge Russell in 1992 and recalls, "I was fascinated that at that time in his life I bored him when I asked him to recall his active and successful past. He lived in the present, and for the future. He grew animated only when we began to talk about the issues he was currently facing, and even more excited in commenting on issues he thought might come before him."



Russell was inducted into the
South Carolina Hall of Fame in 1987.

Donald S. Russell, Jr. described his father in this way, "Donald Russell was a statesman who loved South Carolina with his heart and soul and loved his family with a like devotion.... In all things he was a man of compassion who maintained, until his death, his independence of mind and his vigor of body and spirit."