

A Good Man - A Life In Service

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An Electronic Exhibit Drawn from the Papers of John C. West

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Introduction

Kershaw County native John Carl West has spent most of his life in service to his community, state, and country.

His distinguished record of achievement is highlighted in this exhibit, drawn from the John C. West Collection. This extensive body of personal papers is preserved at the University of South Carolina's South Carolina Political Collections Division of the South Caroliniana Library.



John C. West Timeline

- 1922** Born August 27, Camden, S.C.
- 1942** Awarded A.B. degree in political science from The Citadel , where he was captain of the debating team.
Entered Army as a Lieutenant, June 10; served until February 22, 1946.
August 29, married Lois Rhame of Camden, S.C.
- 1945** Member, U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey, Japan
Awarded Army Commendation Medal.
- 1946** Awarded LL.B. degree from University of South Carolina.
Formed law practice, Murchison & West, Camden, S.C.
- 1948-52** Member, S.C. Highway Commission.
- 1954** Coordinated U.S. Senate campaign of Edgar A. Brown.
- 1955-66** Member, S.C. Senate, representing Kershaw County.
- 1956** Member, Senate Committee studying public school curriculum.
- 1957-64** Member, Senate Committee Investigating Communist Activities.
- 1959** Member, special Senate Committee studying needs of the State Development Board.
- 1964** Member, Governor's Committee to Lend Support to the Nursing Profession.
- 1965** Member, Governor's Committee to Study the Feasibility of Establishing State Supported Junior Colleges.
- 1966** Member, Legislative Committee to Make a Study of the Constitution of South Carolina.
- 1967-71** Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina.
- 1968** Member, Governor's Advisory Committee on World Trade.
- 1969** Member, Governor's Advisory Committee on Housing.
- 1971-75** Governor of South Carolina.
- 1975** Announced formation of law firm West, Bendorf, Cooper, Bowen and Quinn with offices in Columbia, Camden, and Hilton Head, S.C.
- 1977-81** U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

The Early Years

Born August 27, 1922, John Carl West grew up on a farm near Camden, in the Kershaw County community known as Charlotte Thompson, S.C.



"The building in which the holocaust occurred, that destroyed nearly four score souls at Cleveland school house...was six miles southeast of Camden... Mrs. [Mattie] West escaped death by jumping from the second story window, or climbing down the flag pole, and her mother, who is over 70, also slid down the pole..."

-J. O. Moseley, *The Terrible Cleveland Fire*, Charleston, S.C.: Southern Printing and Publishing Co., 1923.

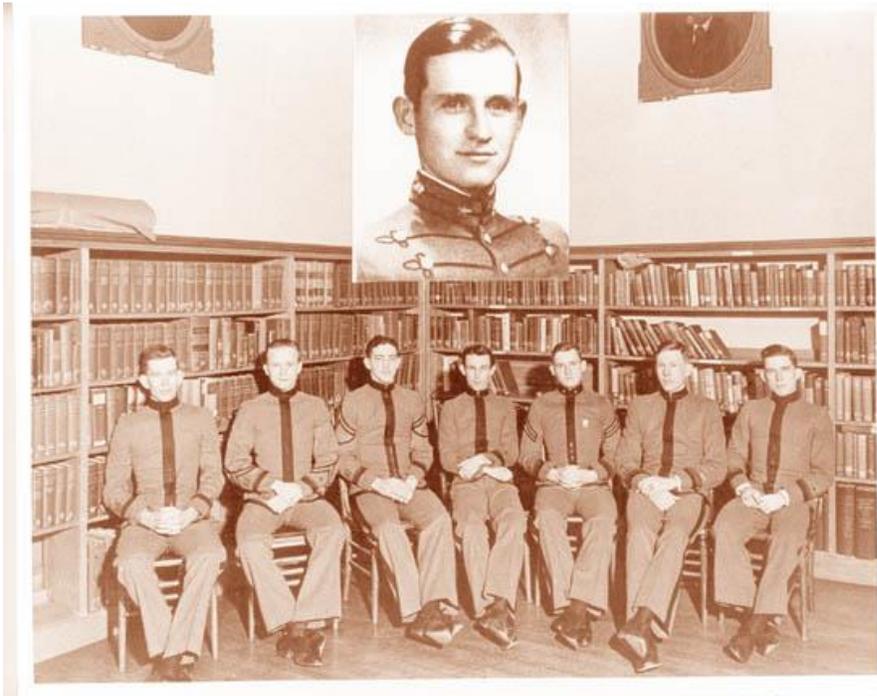
The Cleveland school fire of May 23, 1923, took the lives of seventy-seven people, including West's father. In an unpublished memoir, West noted, "The loss of 77 persons from this small community [of Charlotte Thompson, S.C.] was a disaster from which there was never a recovery... That event changed the course of the community and the West family." Mrs. West resigned from her job teaching school in order to manage the 220-acre family farm. Even during the hardest days of the Depression, the Wests persevered.

After high school, John West attended The Citadel, as had his brother Shelton. He graduated in May 1942, entered into military service, and was trained on antiaircraft guns. That same year he married long-time sweetheart, Lois Rhame.

In an oral history interview conducted by South Carolina Political Collections, West recalled the significance of the scholarship which allowed him to attend The Citadel:

"It was the only opportunity I knew I'd have to get what amounted to a free education, so it was never any question of me liking it or not liking it. I liked it from the day that I got there."

The U.S. Army selected West for intelligence work at the Pentagon where he deciphered Japanese signals. He went to Japan at the war's end as part of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey.



Upon his return to South Carolina, West enrolled at the University of South Carolina School of Law. He passed the bar exam while in law school, entered into a partnership with attorney Allen Murchison of Camden, S.C., and completed his coursework while teaching in the University's Department of Political Science. Mrs. West also worked at the University as an instructor of Physical Education for Women.

Service to South Carolina

1955: State Senate



John West entered public service in 1948 when he was elected to the State Highway Commission. He ran and won election to the South Carolina Senate in 1954 on a single issue - the need for improved health care. In an unpublished memoir, West wrote, "health care delivery was one of the most important aspects of public life and public responsibility....It was the only election I ever went into feeling confident I was going to win." His margin of victory turned out to be a mere three votes.

At that time, unlike today, state senators had tremendous power over local operations in their home counties due to their responsibility for the county budget. A great benefit of this was their ability to act quickly and decisively. In addition, the people knew to whom they could turn for help and whom to blame if they were dissatisfied with affairs in their county.

James F. Byrnes, Strom Thurmond, John West, and Edgar Brown, photographed ca. 1960s in Camden, S.C., probably at the Carolina Cup. West noted on the back of the photo, "It is the first time Strom Thurmond and Edgar Brown had a picture together since Thurmond defeated Brown in the 1954 Senatorial election as a write-in candidate."

1967: Lieutenant Governor's Office



West's successful 1966 bid for the office of Lieutenant Governor was a key step in achieving his ambition to become governor. He began steady behind-the-scenes politicking for the office almost immediately after the 1962 election of Donald Russell as Governor and Robert McNair as Lieutenant Governor. The tremendous support he received within the party and across the state was the product of his years in the General Assembly during which he exhibited great ability, energy, and a progressive vision for South Carolina.

His service as Lieutenant Governor was, in many ways, superb preparation for his race and service as governor. In reflecting on the strong and visible role John West played as his Lieutenant Governor, Robert McNair stated, "I found his experience and connections with the Senate of invaluable help to me as Governor and leaned heavily on his support. John was always willing to accept additional duties, and I increased his responsibilities well beyond those of any previous Lieutenant Governor. While sharing those responsibilities certainly made me more productive, I also believe it helped John assume the Governor's position with greater ease and confidence."

1971: Governor John Carl West

West's humane and progressive administration as governor assured a peaceful improvement in the lives of most South Carolinians. Among his major accomplishments were the passage of mandatory automobile insurance for all drivers; the creation of the Coastal Zone Planning and Management Council, Housing Authority, Health Policy and Planning Council, Social Development Council, and Commission on Human Relations; and the reorganization of the Governor's Office and departments of Labor and Wildlife and Marine Resources.



In a legislative state such as South Carolina in the 1970s, an effective governor had to rely chiefly on intellectual argument, moral persuasion, and the bully pulpit to push forward his agenda. West has described the key to his success as "Getting people to work with you. I deliberately never use the term 'working for you', because people don't work for you, they work with you. That was the key, if there was one. I tried to recognize that most of the legislative leaders had carved out a niche or an expertise in a particular area, some more than one. To get something accomplished you would first have to go to that legislative leader or leaders, and bat the ideas back and forth. Of course, the ideal way was to make them think it was their idea, and give them credit for it... I learned that from Bob McNair." Rembert Dennis, a key leader in the state Senate, said of West, "West didn't need much help. West was very smart... Only thing West needed

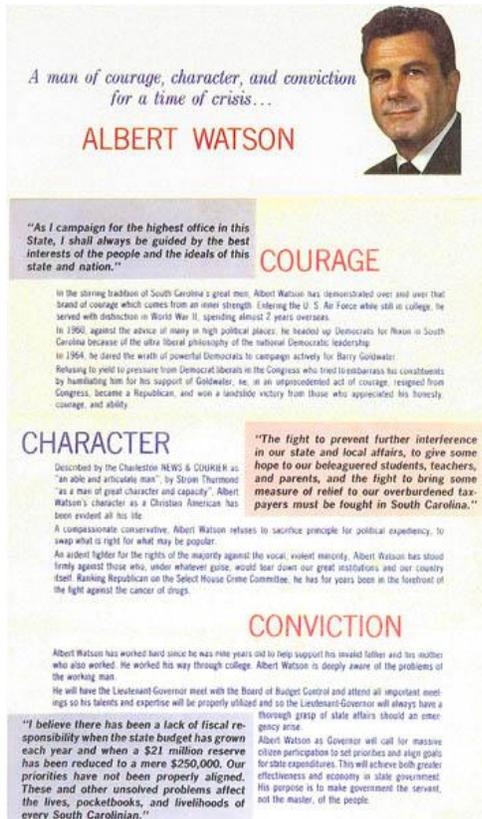
was help with the work, he had the ideas."

West speaking John West speaking from the porch of Barratt House, the Greenwood County home of former congressman and state Democratic Party chairman William Jennings Bryan Dorn, and the scene of innumerable political gatherings.

As governor, John West provided strong and compassionate leadership during a time of turmoil. Asked what gave him the greatest satisfaction as governor West cited improved race relations and noted, "in a fairly critical period we made a transition and changed a lot of attitudes."

"Elect a Good Man Governor" The 1970 Gubernatorial Campaign

The hotly contested 1970 gubernatorial general election featured candidates with clear and important differences in their visions of South Carolina and its future. West was opposed by Albert Watson, the first Republican elected to Congress from South Carolina since Reconstruction.



A man of courage, character, and conviction for a time of crisis...

ALBERT WATSON

"As I campaign for the highest office in this State, I shall always be guided by the best interests of the people and the ideals of this state and nation."

COURAGE

In the stirring tradition of South Carolina's great men, Albert Watson has demonstrated over and over that brand of courage which comes from an inner strength. Entering the U. S. Air Force while still in college, he served with distinction in World War II, spending almost 2 years overseas.

In 1960, against the advice of many in high political places, he headed up Democrats for Nixon in South Carolina because of the ultra liberal philosophy of the national Democratic leadership.

In 1964, he saved the wrath of powerful Democrats to campaign actively for Barry Goldwater.

Refusing to yield to pressure from Democratic liberals in the Congress who tried to embarrass his constituents by humiliating him for his support of Goldwater, he, in an unprecedented act of courage, resigned from Congress, became a Republican, and won a landslide victory from those who appreciated his honesty, courage, and ability.

CHARACTER

Described by the CHARLESTON NEWS & COURIER as "an able and articulate man," by Strom Thurmond as "a man of great character and capacity," Albert Watson's character as a Christian American has been evident all his life.

A compassionate conservative, Albert Watson refuses to sacrifice principle for political expediency, to swap what is right for what may be popular.

An ardent fighter for the rights of the majority against the vocal, violent minority, Albert Watson has stood firmly against those who, under whatever guise, would tear down our great institutions and our country fast.

Ranking Republicans on the Select House Crime Committee, he has for years been in the forefront of the fight against the cancer of drugs.

CONVICTION

Albert Watson has worked hard since he was nine years old to help support his invalid father and his mother who also worked. He worked his way through college. Albert Watson is deeply aware of the problems of the working man.

He will have the Lieutenant Governor meet with the Board of Budget Control and attend all important meetings so his talents and expertise will be properly utilized and so the Lieutenant Governor will always have a thorough grasp of state affairs should an emergency arise.

Albert Watson as Governor will call for massive citizen participation to cut priorities and sign goals for state expenditures. This will achieve both greater effectiveness and economy in state government. His purpose is to make government the servant, not the master, of the people.

"I believe there has been a lack of fiscal responsibility when the state budget has grown each year and when a \$21 million reserve has been reduced to a mere \$250,000. Our priorities have not been properly aligned. These and other unsolved problems affect the lives, pocketbooks, and livelihoods of every South Carolinian."

In 1960, Second District Congressman Albert Watson, a Democrat, endorsed Barry Goldwater for president and led the Democrats for Goldwater organization in South Carolina. The following year he was stripped of his seniority by the House Democratic caucus, resigned, and was reelected as a Republican in a special election. Republicans felt Watson had a real opportunity to win the governorship and party leaders such as Strom Thurmond campaigned energetically for his election.

While most of the issues debated during the campaign have faded from memory, many still remember what became known as the Lamar Riot. The courts had ruled that Darlington County schools be desegregated using busing to achieve some level of racial balance. In a speech in Lamar, S.C., Watson told his audience that he supported their opposition to busing. Shortly thereafter, whites attacked two school buses carrying black children and several children were injured. Twenty-eight men were charged with rioting, and many South Carolinians felt that Watson's speech had been incendiary and linked the Watson campaign with the incident.

Desegregation of the public schools was a topic of heated debate in the 1960s and remained a focus of the 1970 gubernatorial campaign.



In this cartoon drawn by Walt Lardner for The State newspaper, Watson, sporting the chip of desegregation on his shoulder, challenges West with the caption: "Go ahead, knock it off."

Shortly after he won the Democratic primary, West asked key supporters to list their impressions of his and Watson's strengths and weaknesses. Ike McLeese captured the situation particularly well, writing, "We have the most eminently qualified candidate ever to offer for Governor of this state, who brings with him unexcelled experience and a keen insight into the workings of the state bureaucracy. This is a semi-marketable commodity. We are weakened

by the fact that our candidate is not Hollywood pretty, nor is he an aggressive flesh pumper."

West won the election with 53.2% of the major party vote. Reflecting on the campaign, journalist Jack Bass wrote, "West drew support among Nixon voters, reacting to Watson's redneck appeal and the threat he posed to stability, and from Wallace voters, many of them traditional Democrats reacting against the Nixon administration's economic and school policies." West went on to become one of the most popular governors in South Carolina history.

A Winning Campaign Slogan

Every politician wants a simple, memorable, and moving slogan that speaks to the hearts of the people and that captures the essence of the candidate's cause. Many today still remember Barry Goldwater's slogan from his 1964 presidential campaign, In Your Heart, You Know He's Right. Of course, many also recall the opposition's spin on that one, In Your Guts, You Know He's Nuts.

Below are some of the fifty-three slogans considered by John West in his 1970 bid for the governor's office. The slogan which ultimately was selected, Elect A Good Man Governor, highlighted the clear and critical differences between his goals and vision for South Carolina and those of his Republican opponent Albert Watson.

Other Slogans Considered:

John West: The Public Servant of Responsible Leadership

John West: Responsive to All South Carolinians

John West: The Man of Action

John West: Good Government for a Good People

John West: I Promise and I Deliver

John West: He Helped Fashion South Carolina's Progress

John West: Don't Be Ashamed of Your Vote...Elect West For Governor

Turn West and Build South Carolina

John West: He's Passed Every Test

Service to the Nation

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In his remarks at his ambassadorial swearing in ceremony, John West proclaimed that, "Saudi Arabia is the key to energy, capital and to peace in the Middle East." Earlier, President Carter had welcomed Crown Prince Fahd by noting that the two nations "share a common purpose,...we share a heritage that is completely compatible... We know that this is an important period of a search for peace, and our visits today and tomorrow will be designed to accommodate that search in the face of tremendous challenge, but at the same time tremendous opportunities."



President Jimmy Carter placed extraordinary trust in his good friend, John West. Carter and West

The new ambassador's experience and political savvy served the nation well at a time when events in the Middle East gained global prominence.

After leaving office as governor, West returned to his private law practice with the goal of building it into a statewide firm with national and international interests. The election of his friend Jimmy Carter as president excited speculation that West

might return to public life. The media reported rumors of a seat in Carter's cabinet as a reward for West's strong and very early support of Carter's presidential bid.

West was appointed Ambassador in May 1977 and served at the U.S. Embassy in Riyadh until 1981. When asked why he accepted the Saudi post, West responded by putting both the job and the challenge in perspective, "To achieve peace in the Middle East might be one of the great accomplishments not just of the Carter Administration but of our generation and if I could be a part of it, a meaningful part, it would be of sufficient challenge to warrant me leaving the private sector that I was enjoying."



President Carter demonstrated great trust in John West, and their close personal relationship was well known by both those in the State Department and Saudi leadership. In his oral history interview with South Carolina Political Collections West noted, "I wrote the president at least once a month, just a handwritten letter, always sending [Secretary of State] Cyrus Vance a copy of it. He encouraged me to keep that up, and most of those are in the Carter Library now in Atlanta. It was just an

informal sort of a thing. The King, the Crown Prince, and the defense minister would frequently say, 'You

just call your friend President Carter and get him to do so and so.' The fact that they felt that I could do that was a big advantage even though I didn't do it except very rarely. But I did threaten the bureaucracy time and again."

Political Life and the West Family

Lois West has been an active partner in her husband's political career. Reflecting on her life in politics, Mrs. West said, "you can either go willingly or be dragged kicking and screaming. So I figured I'd go gracefully, and I tried to help every way I could. It's a hard life. It takes a lot of effort.

"You get some criticism that you really don't enjoy, and your children are subjected to some of that. I tried to tell our children that they had some privileges and opportunities that they wouldn't have otherwise, and at the same time they were going to get some criticism that they wouldn't have otherwise, and it would sort of balance out."



John and Lois West with their children, Douglas, Shelton, and John, Jr., circa 1970-1975 West family portrait

Political campaigning is a family affair. Lois West remarked, "I like people, but it's difficult to campaign. It's hard. There are parts of it that are nice because you make friends that you wouldn't meet any other way.

"There's a fellow who lived out at the mill, and I asked him why he worked so hard for John. He said, 'I don't have any education. I don't know what's best for me, but I think Mr. West is an honest man, and I think he's smart. If I help him go over there, he'll do what's best for me,' which gives you the essence of it all."



John West with his mother, Mrs. Mattie Ratterree West, at the opening of his campaign headquarters in 1966.

Lois West played an integral role in running the Embassy. She commented, "Saudi Arabia had been a Class 4 Embassy, and it was changed to a Class 1 Embassy because the Saudi affairs were becoming internationally recognized and the oil wealth was such that it was a very important place at that time. But the Embassy was an old house. All of a sudden you're Class 4 and now you're Class 1, overnight, and it wasn't equipped that way."

Under those circumstances, entertaining became a creative challenge. "We took [the] screen porch and glassed it in and made a big dining room. We could seat one hundred and twenty people at a time, and John felt that entertaining at a meal was one of the ways that he could be effective, and it was so."



John Jr. receives a smart salute from family members as he prepares to attend The Citadel.

In December 1999, the Kershaw County Historical Society honored John West by placing a historic marker at his boyhood home. The dedication ceremony featured remarks by Harvey Teal, former President of the South Caroliniana Society, an officer of the Kershaw County Historical Society, and a long-time friend of John West.



In his remarks directed to West, Teal noted: "You have honorably served your country, your state and your nation with diligence, distinction, and dedication. In recognition of that service and to honor you, all of your legion of friends and associates join with the Kershaw County Historical Society, the sponsoring organization, in erecting this historical marker on the land of your birth."

Contributions to South Carolina

Economic Development: The Perpetual Imperative

Throughout West's tenure in government, South Carolina's economic development has been a high priority. West and other leaders, including Governors Hollings and McNair, knew that a more highly developed and more diverse economy would address many of the state's needs. South Carolina had much to offer corporations seeking sites for industrial development, including rich natural resources and an underemployed labor force which had shown no interest in organized labor. And development meant fostering the growth of existing business and agriculture as well as seeking new industry.

West's first major success was in bringing the Elgin watch company to Blaney, now Elgin, S.C., in 1962. He attributes being elected to a then rare third and final term in the state Senate to that success. Continued success marked his terms as Lieutenant Governor and Governor.

"...As long as we can communicate, one with another, the changes will be understood and the progress will be achieved through the joint effort of men of good will working together for the ultimate benefit, not just for us, but for our posterity."

Societal Improvements

A constant in West's public service is his devotion to bettering the condition of all South Carolinians. This progressivism resulted in threats against his life and family while he was serving in the Senate. His efforts and successes in this regard while governor are one of the hallmarks of his administration.



Governor West embarked on fact-finding "Poverty Tours," which were designed to assess living conditions around the state. While Fritz Hollings' earlier tours had called attention to hunger in South Carolina, West's tours focused on housing as well as hunger. The State Housing Authority was created to address concerns publicized by these tours.

Another product of the tours was the "Privy Project." As West related, "A lot of the people did not have indoor plumbing. We designed an indoor facility that you could have even without running water, and we started a program to put those indoor facilities in the shacks that didn't have them. As I say, I got a lot of kidding, I called it the Governor's Privy Project."

A 1967 speech reflects West's optimistic determination to improve human relations - "The tensions will not disappear or solve themselves if ignored. They must be squarely faced and the solutions found bear directly

upon the whole fabric of our society. The progress we have made, are making, and hopefully will achieve in the future, will be in direct proportion to the success we enjoy in solving the problems of race relationships in our state.... As long as we can communicate, one with another, the changes will be understood and the progress will be achieved through the joint effort of men of good will working together for the ultimate benefit, not just for us, but for our posterity." [1 Dec. 1967]

Highlights of Gubernatorial Service

Passage of:

- Mandatory auto insurance for all drivers
 - Interstate Mining Compact
-

Creation of:

- Coastal Zone Planning and Management Council
 - Housing Authority
 - Health Policy and Planning Council
 - Social Development Council
 - Commission on Human Relations
-

Reorganization of:

- Governor's Office
- Department of Labor
- Department of Wildlife and Marine Resources

Research in the West Collection

The John C. West Collection is a remarkable historical resource documenting West's entire life. Extensive records generated during important periods of his life provide detailed and intimate source material on government and society. Over thirty feet of material includes correspondence, memoranda, reports, audio-visual, electronic and other records. Certain portions of the collection are closed to research until January 1, 2005.

West's diary is of particular interest. It was begun as a campaign tool shortly after he decided to run for lieutenant governor. On taking office as governor, he renewed his keeping of a diary. On an almost daily basis, West recorded commentaries, at times quite lengthy, concerning his activities and issues facing the state. A third and final diary segment documents his service as U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

In addition to the papers and diary, an oral history interview conducted by South Carolina Political Collections supplements the record of West's life and impact at the local, state, national and international levels.

The University is grateful for the support of the West Foundation in helping to fund our work preparing the West Collection for research.