ABSTRACT

SARAH CHRISTIAN HAYNES
A Pioneer in Georgia Politics: Janet S. Merritt and her Legislative Career in the 1960s and 1970s
(Under the direction of DR. JOHN INSCOE)

The focus of this thesis will be to show the exceptionality of Janet B. Scarborough Merritt as a woman involved in elected politics in the 1960's and 1970's. This paper will involve an in depth discussion of women in politics in the South and in Georgia specifically. It will also identify key components of the women's movement and the time period of the 1960's and 1970's. Merritt's campaign experience, legislative experience, and connection to the women's movement will be explained in order to show her similarities and differences with other women who served in elected office before and during her time.

Janet Merritt was a Democratic member of the Georgia General Assembly from 1964-1972. She was not the first woman to ever serve in the Georgia General Assembly, but she was the first to serve from Sumter County and the only woman in the House of Representatives. While many in the legislature expected her to be like a fraternity sweetheart, Merritt made it clear from day one that her top priority was to be a good legislator who happened to be a woman. This project will involve original research based on her personal collection of papers, as well as, interviews with people who knew her personally and as a legislator.

INDEX WORDS: Southern Political History, Women's Movement, Women in Politics, Janet Merritt, Georgia General Assembly, Sumter County, Georgia Politics, Georgia Flag,

A PIONEER IN GEORGIA POLITICS:
JANET S. MERRITT AND HER LEGISLATIVE CAREER IN THE 1960s AND 1970s

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandmother, Sarah Ann Lazar. She was a Southern woman who taught me how to have strength and grace even when conquering life's toughest tasks.

This thesis is also dedicated to all the women who are brave enough to be "firsts" in politics. These women have made it possible for women like me to get involved in the political process.

I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my fellow Daughters of the American Revolution. They provide an excellent model for how to be a successful female politician, all while wearing the perfect hat, pearls, and gloves.

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First and foremost, I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Inscoe for supporting me and guiding me through this process. His passion for teaching and for gaining knowledge about Southern history has been a source of continual inspiration for me. His constant encouragement of me and my want to explore the realm of original research truly made this thesis possible.

I would like to thank Dr. Bullock for showing me that the South is still exceptional in the arena of politics. His support and teachings encouraged me to want to write this thesis.

I greatly appreciate Governor Carl Sanders, Mrs. Jane Merritt Myers, and Mrs. Lanette Reid for providing me personal insights about Representative Merritt. I can only hope that this thesis reflects their memories well.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge the Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies. It would have been impossible for me to complete this thesis without their staff that works so diligently to preserve Georgia's political history. They were so supportive of my thesis from helping me find the perfect collection to research to getting me in contact with people to interview.

I would also like to thank my parents for encouraging my love of history and supporting me through all my years of education.

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

There will never be a statue erected on the grounds of the Georgia State Capitol in honor of Janet Merritt. Any student in Georgia can make it from kindergarten through senior year of high school without hearing her name. When her name is mentioned, there is no instant image of statesmanship, leadership, or legacy that appears in one's mind. Looking at the details of her service, Janet Merritt is similar to the countless others who have served the state of Georgia in public office. While she was a strong leader in life, on paper she does not appear extraordinary. Placed in the context of her time, a period in which women were much more likely to be seen behind a secretary's desk than a senator's desk, Janet Merritt is an exceptional example of a woman serving in political office in the South during the 1960's and 1970's. She served in the Georgia General Assembly as a representative for Americus from 1964-1972.

With the emphasis that is often placed on the role of women in the modern political arena and the continuation of the feminist movement, it would be expected that the topic of women in local and state politics would receive detailed attention from many historians. Unfortunately, this is not the case. While issues such as the gender gap, gender voting, and the emergence of the women's movement have been heavily researched and written about, there is no foundation of scholarly work that reviews the involvement of women on the local and state level in the realm of politics.

While many historians and sociologists make the argument that regionalism in the United States has become less and less prominent, a simple study of the number of women elected in

different regions shows that it is still an important factor in the twenty first century study of women in politics. While this paper addresses the topic of women in politics in the United States, its primary focus is on women in politics in the South.[1]

One goal of this thesis is to provide information on the level of female political involvement in elected politics in the South, especially in Georgia. This paper will also review the history of the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's and of the women in elected politics in that era. A background of female politicians in Georgia and in the South is provided, as well as, the key movements that opened the door for women in elected politics are identified. This background will be combined with the background and analysis of the service of Representative Janet Merritt in order to show her as an exception to the common paths that women followed in elected politics in the South during the 1960's and 1970's.

[1] For the purposes of this paper, the term "Southern states" will be defined as any state that seceded from the Union during the Civil War. This term includes: South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina, and Tennessee. This is the definition most commonly used by historians and political scientists.

CHAPTER 2
WOMEN SERVING IN OFFICE

Georgia:

When specifically studying the state of Georgia, it is important to recognize that the state does not have a history of electing mant women to major positions in government. Since 1788, when the state was admitted to the Union, Georgia has elected few women to the legislature and even fewer women to its highest offices. While the involvement of women in Georgia on the local level is slightly greater than that on the statewide and federal levels, the political climate in Georgia both in the past and in the present does not make it easy for females to be elected to office.

Georgia has thirteen state-wide elected officers: governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state, attorney general, commissioner of agriculture, insurance and safety fire commissioner, state school superintendent, commissioner of labor, and five public service commissioners.[2] Georgia's Public Service Commission plays a unique role because it is a partly legislative and partly judicial body that is elected statewide.[3]

Of these nine offices (considering public service commissioner as one office), women have only served in three; secretary of state, state school superintendent, and public service commissioner. There have been two female secretaries of state. Cathy Cox was elected the first female secretary of state in Georgia in 1998. Karen Handel was elected in 2006 as Georgia's

[2] Secretary of State, "Official Directory of Statewide Officers"; available from http://sos.georgia.gov/cgi-bin/OfficialDirectoryStateWideOfficers.asp; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.
[3] Public Service Commission, "History and Mission of the Commission"; available from http://www.psc.state.ga.us/pscinfo/annual_reports/1997-1998annualreport/hismis.ht; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.

first Republican secretary of state since Reconstruction. There have also been two female state school superintendents. Linda Schrenko was elected to the position in 1994. She was the first woman to be elected to state wide office in Georgia.[4] Kathy Cox was elected in 2002 as Georgia's second female state school superintendent. There has only been one female public service commissioner since it's beginning as the Railroad Commission of Georgia in 1879. Angela Speir was elected to the Public Service Commission in 2003 and did not seek reelection when her term ended in 2009.[5]

Although the members of the state legislature are elected locally, there is still a lack of female participation and leadership. The most powerful positions in the legislature are the lieutenant governor who serves as the president of the Senate, the president pro tempore of the Senate, the speaker of the House, and the speaker pro tempore of the House. Although women had served in the state legislature since 1923, Georgia has not had a woman fill any of the most powerful positions until this year. [6] The highest-ranking position a woman has ever filled in the Georgia General Assembly is the position of speaker pro tempore. In January 2010, Representative Jan Jones was the first woman in Georgia history to be elected to this position. Although women have served in the Georgia legislature for over sixty years, there has not been a female lieutenant governor/president of the Senate, president pro tempore of the Senate, or speaker of the House.

In addition to these powerful offices, the positions of majority and minority leaders in the House and Senate also play a vital role in the legislature. A female has never acted as majority

[4] "Schrenko takes on GOP Gender Gap," *Augusta Chronicle*, 4 August 2002; available from http://chronicle.augusta.com/stories/2002/08/04/met_350811.shtml; Internet; accessed 4 March 2010.
[5] Public Service Commission, "History and Mission of the Commission."
[6] Georgia General Assembly, "House of Representatives"; available from http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2009_10/house/alpha.html; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.

or minority leader in either the House or Senate in Georgia. Before Jan Jones became speaker pro tempore in 2010, she served as the majority whip in the House, which is the closest any woman has come to serving as party leader.

When looking at the number of women who have served in the state House and state Senate overall, the number of women in politics is greater than expected. But once the numbers are put in perspective, it is obvious that there is a lack of female participation in the Georgia legislature. From 1927- 2000, only twenty-eight women have served in the Georgia State Senate. Only eight of those senators served before 1970. Of those eight, over half served for one term or less. If they served less than one term, it was due to being elected by special election to a vacant seat, often left open by a deceased husband.[7] In the 2010 Georgia State Senate, eight senators, less than 15 percent, are women.[8]

Many more women have served in the Georgia House of Representatives than the Georgia State Senate. From 1923-2000, ninety-three women have served in the House. Twelve of those served before 1970 and many of those only served for one term or less. Viola Ross Napier and Bessie Kempton became the first two woman elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1923.[9] Out of the 180 representatives currently serving in the 2010 Georgia House of Representatives, only thirty-two or less than 18 percent are women.[10]

In addition to state politics, it is important to look at the involvement of women on a federal level to understand the overall achievement of women in Georgia politics. Georgia has

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[7] Georgia Secretary of State, "Women in the State Senate"; available from http://sos.georgia.gov/archives/what_do_we_have/wgs.htm; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.
[8] Georgia General Assembly, "Georgia State Senate"; available from http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2009_10/senate/senatelist.php; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.
[9] *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, "Violet Ross Napier", available from http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-3142&sug=y; Internet; accessed 12 January 2010.
[10] Georgia General Assembly, "House of Representatives"; available from http://www.legis.state.ga.us/legis/2009_10/house/alpha.html; Internet; accessed 18 March 2010.

only sent one female to the United States Senate. Although this is a dismal statistic, the one female was significant because she was the first female to ever serve in the Senate. Rebecca Latimer Felton was appointed to the United States Senate in 1922 by Governor Thomas Hardwick to fill the vacancy left by the passing of Senator Thomas E. Watson. She served for only one day because there was a special election to fill the seat.[11]

There have been a few more women who have served in the United States House of Representatives than in the U.S. Senate. The first woman to represent Georgia in the U.S. House was Florence Reville Gibbs. She was elected in 1940 to fill the seat of her husband who had passed away.[12] Unlike Congresswoman Gibbs, Helen Douglas Mankin was the first woman from Georgia to be elected to U.S. Congress on her own, not to fill the position of her husband. It should be noted that she was elected through a special election to fill a vacant seat after a congressman resigned. She served from 1946-1947 and was not renominated, although she did seek reelection.[13] Iris Faircloth Blitch was the first woman elected from a general election, not a special election, as well as, the first woman from Georgia to win reelection to the U.S. Congress. She served from 1955-1963.[14]

For the next thirty years and the majority of the women's movement, there was no female representation in Congress from Georgia until 1993. Cynthia McKinney served in the U.S. Congress from 1993-2003 and from 2005-2007, and was the first African American woman from

[11]New Georgia Encyclopedia, "Rebecca Latimer Felton"; available from http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-904&sug=y; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.
[12] Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Florence Reville Gibbs"; available from http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=G000155; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.
[13]New Georgia Encyclopedia, "Helen Douglas Mankin"; available from http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-744&sug=y; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.
[14] Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Iris Faircloth Blitch"; available from http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000561; Internet; accessed 28 February 2010.

Georgia to do so.[15] Denise Majette, also an African American woman, served in Congress for one term from 2003-2005. After serving her term, she chose to run for the United States Senate seat vacated by former governor, Zell Miller. She lost the election to a Republican, Johnny Isakson.[16] A total of six women have represented Georgia in the United States Congress, five representatives and one senator who only served for one day. This is an embarrassing statistic for Georgia considering that in any given year, there are states that have five women currently serving in Congress.

Comparing Southern State Legislatures:

Although all southern states slightly differ in the structure of their state government, most leadership positions are comparable. For example, in Georgia, there is a lieutenant governor and a president pro tempore that lead the Senate. In Tennessee, the title for the Senate is speaker tempore, not president tempore, but their responsibilities are almost the same.

While Georgia has a poor history of electing women specifically to leadership positions within its General Assembly, this appears to be the case throughout the South even today. The four top leadership positions in a state legislature are the speaker of the House, speaker pro tempore of the House, lieutenant governor/president of the Senate, and president pro tempore of the Senate or comparable positions. Of the forty-three potential leadership positions that women

[15] Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Cynthia Ann McKinney"; available form http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=M000523; Internet; accessed 28 January 2010.
[16] Women in Congress, "Denise Majette"; available from http://womenincongress.house.gov/member-profiles/profile.html?intID=150; Internet; accessed 4 May 2010.

could hold throughout the South, as of February 2010, women only hold five of these positions and only in three states.[17]

The three states that have a woman in a high leadership role are Louisiana, Tennessee, and Georgia. Louisiana has Sharon Weston Broome in the president pro tempore position in the Senate[18] and Karen Carter Peterson as the speaker pro tempore in their House of Representatives.[19] Tennessee also has a female speaker pro tempore of the Senate, Jamie Woodson[20] and a female speaker pro tempore of the House, Lois DeBerry.[21] As previously mentioned, Georgia also has a woman in a top position with Jan Jones serving as speaker pro tempore of the House.

It is important to note that of these five women to serve in leadership positions, three of them are also African-American. Only two white women have been elected to one of the four major positions of leadership within Southern state legislatures. There are currently eight states that cannot claim a single female in their top legislative leadership.

While it would be informative to compare the historic firsts for women in each state, these records are not easily available. It appears that knowing who was the first female president pro tempore of the Senate or who the first speaker of the House in a state legislature is knowledge gained only through experience and involvement in politics not through reading or researching. While these females may be making great progress for women in politics, none of

[17] There are four possible positions for each state except Virginia because they do not have a speaker pro tempore or a comparable position.
[18] Louisiana State Senate, "Senator Sharon Weston Broome"; available from http://senate.legis.state.la.us/Broome/; Internet; accessed 26 February 2010.
[19] Karen for Senate, "About Karen"; available from http://www.karenforsenate.com/; Internet; accessed 27 February 2010.
[20] Tennessee General Assembly, "Senator Jamie Woodson"; available from http://www.capitol.tn.gov/senate/members/s6.html; Internet; accessed 1 March 2010.
[21] Tennessee General Assembly, "Rep. Lois DeBerry"; available from http://www.capitol.tn.gov/house/members/h91.html; Internet; 1 March 2010.

their legislative biographies and few of their campaign biographies mention that they are the first woman or one of the first women to hold the position that they do. Also, in many of these states, like Georgia, women have never held these positions. While there is often celebration of an individual when they set historical precedent such as first African American, first Cuban American, first Asian American, etc. there seems to be less celebration or even notice when women fill these positions for the first time.

Comparing Female Governors:

The ultimate executive office for a state is the office of the governor. This position is the most visible political role in any particular state. The first female to ever serve in this role was Nellie Tayloe Ross who served as governor of Wyoming from 1925-1927. She was elected in a special election to fill the position left vacant by her deceased husband.[22] She falls into the pattern of many women who have been the historic first to serve in a position in that the opportunity for her to serve was preceded by the death of her husband. There have only been five Southern women governors: Miriam A. Ferguson of Texas (1925-1927, 1933-1935), Lurleen Wallace of Alabama (1967-1968), Ann Richards of Texas (1991-1995), Kathleen Blanco of Louisiana (2004-2008), and Beverly Perdue of North Carolina (2009 to present). [23] It is particularly noteworthy that Lurleen Wallace served as governor because Alabama did not allow for governors to serve consecutive terms. The Wallaces were very open about the fact that George Wallace would continue to make executive decisions while Lurleen served as

[22] Made in Wyoming, "Nellie Tayloe Ross biography"; available from http://www.madeinwyoming.net/profiles/extras/NellieTayloeRossbiography.pdf; Internet; accessed 24 January 2010.
[23] Women's History, "Women Governors"; available from http://womenshistory.about.com/od/governors/a/governors.htm; Internet; accessed 24 February 2010.

governor.[24] In this respect, they followed the precedent of Miriam and James Ferguson. Governor James Ferguson was denied a place on the Texas ballot, so Miriam Ferguson campaigned for governor with the slogan "two governors for the price of one."[25] Of the five Southern women who have served as governor, two were preceded by their husbands.

Comparing Women in Congress:

By 2010, 260 women have served in the United States House of Representative but only thirty-eight women have served in the United States Senate.[26] Of those thirty-eight, twelve have been from the South, as defined by this paper. Georgia holds the honor of sending the first woman to the Senate, but the only significance of her serving was the symbolism considering the fact that she only served for one day. Of those twelve, six were appointed to fill a vacancy from the death of their husband, appointed by their husband who was serving as governor, or appointed to fill an otherwise vacated seat. Paula Fickes Hawkins was the first woman elected to a full-term as senator without a family connection or appointment. She represented Florida in the Senate from 1981-1987.[27] While four southern states are currently represented by women, (Texas, Louisiana, Arkansas, and North Carolina), Georgia has not had a female senator since 1922 or for more than one day. There are currently sixteen female senators serving in the Senate.

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[24] Alabama Governors, "Lurleen Burns Wallace"; available from http://www.archives.state.al.us/govs_list/g_walllu.html; Internet; accessed 24 February 2010.
[25] Texas Governors, "Miriam A. Ferguson"; available from http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/governors/personality/index.html; Internet' accessed 24 February 2010.
[26] United States Senate, "Women in the U.S. Senate"; available from http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/common/briefing/women_senators.htm; Internet; accessed 22 February 2010.
[27] Biographical Directory of the U.S. Congress, "Paula Hawkins"; available from http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/governors/personality/index.html; Internet; accessed 18 February 2010.

Of the 260 women who have served in the United States House of Representatives, information is not readily available as to how many of that number have come from the South. It is important to note that 435 members make up the entire United States House of Representatives. To put female congressional participation into perspective, if all the women who have ever served in the House were currently serving, they would not even make up 60 percent of the voting body. In the current session, there are ten Southern Congresswomen, representing four states: North Carolina, Tennessee, Florida, and Texas.[28] There are a total of seventy-two female representatives that make up slightly more than 16 percent of Congress. Only about 14 percent of those women are from the South.

These statistics are important to note because it shows that there is a trend across the United States of not electing women to high representative office but it is even more pronounced in the South.

Overall:

While much of the information presented in this paper is readily available, a comprehensive study or comparison of women in politics in the South has not been written. When researching different states, it is shocking that more information about women who have served in their state government is not openly documented. The first African-American person to serve in a political position is often not only documented but also praised. In the realm of politics, it appears that women are not viewed by historians or the general public as a minority although they were barred from voting until 1920. In many places, they were barred from playing an active role and being elected to office for many years after they gained the right to

[28] Office of the Clerk, "Member Information"; available from http://www.house.gov/house/MemberWWW_by_State.shtml; Internet; accessed 6 March 2010.

vote. To this day, women are becoming the first to hold a certain position and yet this fact is rarely noted, and in some cases seems to be hidden as shown by the lack of public knowledge about these achievements.

When evaluating the involvement of women in Georgia politics specifically, the information available is insufficient. Much of the knowledge of which women served in a political position for the first time in Georgia is informal. Due to the lack of coverage of female political involvement in Georgia, historians and academics have overlooked many significant, or at least symbolic, contributions to the state by women.

CHAPTER 3
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

In order to have an in depth understanding of the significance of Janet Merritt serving as the only woman in the Georgia state legislature in the 1964 session and one of only two women from 1965-1972, it is imperative to study the time in which she was elected. Many people in the 2000s readily accept a woman serving in high political office or holding a top position in a business, but this was not the case forty or fifty years ago. The study of women in politics is in many ways a new topic. Unlike the study of men in politics, which reaches back to the foundations of America, the study of women in American politics is less than a century old. While there have been studies of women in politics and the impact of their involvement, much of the literature on the topic focuses on the feminist movement, not necessarily the individuals that actually run for office.

It is important to understand the context in which the women's movement thrived. The 1960s was not just an important time period for women, but a transformative period for the nation. Along with the rise of the women's movement, it was a period of changing social values, the black freedom struggle, welfare rights activism, student protests against the Vietnam War and much more.[29] It was a period in which grassroots movements and protests were common and defined an era that would change the path of the rest of the century and the beginnings of the

[29]Susan Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*: *American Women and Politics Since 1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 24.

twenty first century. The 1960s proved to be a decade that would forever change the position of women in American society. Greater numbers of women were attending college and joining the workforce. Many of these women were consciously choosing to have fewer children causing the birthrate to decline. In addition, there was greater marital instability, which led to a sharp increase in the divorce rate. Overall, it was a time period in which women found increasing liberty, freedom, and self-awareness. In the words of Susan M. Hartmann, "the 1960s spawned a host of grass-roots movements that engaged large numbers of women, developed their political skills and self- confidence, and led them to reflect on their own exclusion from formal political power."[30]

As women moved more and more into the realm of feminine activism, they began to become core parts of other activist movements. One movement in particular that attracted female attention is that of the struggle for black freedom. As stated by Hartmann, the black freedom struggle "afforded a broad scope for female participation and leadership, and it engaged women at the grass-roots level at rates nearly equal to those of men."[31] Women played an integral part of these movements and even became key leaders in the Civil Rights Movement. For example, a woman, Rosa Parks, began the famous bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama, that was pivotal to the success of the Civil Rights Movement.[32] It is important to note that she was denied any formal leadership or power beyond her boycott. Women also played a vital role in the Chicana movement that protested economic exploitation and discrimination against

[30] Ibid., 23.
[31] Ibid., 24.
[32] Academy of Achievement, "Rosa Parks"; available from http://www.achievement.org/autodoc/page/par0bio-1;Internet; accessed 18 February 2010.

Mexican-Americas.[33] These opportunities for activism on behalf of other minorities helped galvanize women on a grass-roots level and made them more aware of their own position in society.

In addition to movements involving race, women played a vital role in the welfare rights movement. As women became more politically active, they took on issues that directly affected themselves or other women. In the 1960s, the movement to end poverty gained particular attention with President Johnson's Great Society programs. Poverty was no longer an issue of local concern but transitioned to a national issue. Women began organizations to combat the disastrous affects of poverty. One example of a female led group was the ANC- Aid to Needy Children, established by Johnnie Tillmon, a woman whose own personal struggle with welfare led her to band together with other welfare mothers in her neighborhood.[34] Women also found new leadership positions in peace movements, student movements, and movements against the Vietnam War. All of these movements gave women opportunities to show their political strength and abilities and helped to bring them together in the name of a particular cause.

While many women did become active in the various movements for peace and freedom, not all women were unified and supportive of their newfound opportunities. In response to the rising divorce rate, greater number of women working outside the home, and the increase in female activism, a conservative reaction arose. A woman named Phyllis Schlaffly embodied the conservative reaction. Although she was very active in politics, managed campaigns, authored a book about grass-roots Republicans, worked as a speech writer, and found great success working

[33] Ibid., 34.
[34] Ibid., 36.

outside the home, she focused the majority of her career on antifeminism.[35] In addition to Schlaffly, many conservatives opposed the Equal Rights Amendment, as well as, the new set of social mores that were ushered in with the 1960s. Women were vital parts of these movements. It is important to understand that although the 1960s reshaped women's relationship with the political process, not all women had the same belief that all of the political change was for the better.[36]

Feminism was not a movement that just appeared out of nowhere; it developed out of slow changes that began to consolidate by the 1960s. Women were already becoming a large part of the work force in the decade leading up to the sixties so that "by 1960, 35 percent of all women were employed and constituted one-third of the labor force."[37] Unfortunately, most of these women found themselves working in low-wage, low-prestige jobs. This factor coupled with the social norm that a woman's place was raising her children in the home helped to bar women from political office. These factors led to "just 351 women serving in state legislatures in 1963, constituting a scant 5 percent of the total and only 13 held congressional seats."[38] As the feminist movement took on new issues and began to solidify, it was apparent that women still had an inferior role in society.

Although the feminist movement had roots reaching back before women were even granted the right to vote, it is important to understand some of the groups that helped to develop the feminist movement in the era of the 1960s. In 1963, President Kennedy created the

[35] Ibid., 46.
[36] Ibid., 47.
[37] Ibid., 49.
[38] Ibid.

Presidential Commission on the Status of Women.[39] Most states had similar commissions that were appointed by their governors. The mission of these groups was "to take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream of American society now, exercising all privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men."[40] Many people understood that there was a great need for such commissions at the time. As explained by Martin Gruberg, "there is a selective perception according to sex. Most men are oblivious to any problem involving the status of women. Men's groups invite few women speakers, although women's organizations frequently have male lecturers."[41] These commissions gave a voice to women, which they had previously lacked and publicly recognized that a change in women's status in society needed to be made.

While many groups participated in the feminist movement that gained popularity in the 1960s, the organization that spearheaded the movement was the National Organization for Women (NOW). The founding of this organization in October of 1966 was significant because it played a vital role in encouraging women to get involved in politics; "NOW called for equal participation and treatment of women in employment, education, and government, for establishing new institutions to facilitate public roles for women, for true equality in marriage and for destroying false images of women."[42] The creation of NOW's statement of purpose has been called "the most comprehensive call for women's rights since the 1848 Seneca Falls

[39] Carol Hurd Green and Blanche Linden-Ward, *American Women in the 1960s: Changing the Future* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1993), 409.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Martin Gruberg, *Women in American Politics*: *An Assessment and Sourcebook* (Oshkosh: Academia Press, 1968), 30.
[42] Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 59.

Declaration of Sentiments."[43] The presence of NOW throughout the United States helped to encourage women to get involved and advocate for themselves. By the 1970s, one of NOW's objectives became increasing women's presence in politics.[44] Women's organizations and commissions such as NOW not only promoted involvement on the part of women but also created a basis for understanding about the minority status of women.

Moving from the 1960s to the 1970s, women gradually took on more political roles and became more likely to join the work force. As women became more active, the gender gap in various forms of political participation began to decline; "by the 1970s the differences between men and women in such activities as voting, belonging to a political organization, and working in a campaign were rarely large enough to be statistically significant."[45] This decline in gender difference shows the vast impact of the women's movement of the 1960s. It is very telling that the term "gender gap" was not even coined until 1981 by the then president of NOW.[46] For many decades, the concept of a gender gap or a difference in participation in politics by the sexes was not viewed as a negative characteristic that needed to be changed but instead just as the way life was supposed to be. As the term was not created until the 1980s, there was no call to fix the gender gap until the 1980s when the term was sensationalized by the national media. As a result of the popularity of the term, the gender gap began to be used to characterize the peculiarities of presidential elections and the ways in which issues were prioritized.[47]

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[43] Green and Linden-Ward, *American Women in the 1960s*, 410.
[44] Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 74.
[45] Ibid., 72-73.
[46] Susan Carroll, *Women and American Politics: New Questions, New Directions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 147.
[47] Ibid., 154.

In addition to the narrowing of the gender gap in political activities throughout the 1960s, within the decade from 1970-1980, the number of women in state legislatures more than doubled and black women almost doubled the seats that they held.[48] It is important to take note that the number of overall women increased at almost the same rate as the number of black women. From an observational perspective, it appears that race was not a major factor in determining whether a woman got elected or not. There was such a great increase in the number of women state legislators that in 1972, the first conference for women legislators was held at Rutgers University. What is most notable about this first conference is that "most attendees were reluctant to identify themselves as women or attach themselves to women's issues, and more than half expressed opposition to the women's liberation movement."[49] Although these women were achieving historic milestones for their gender, many wanted to distance themselves from gender as their defining characteristic.

An important question to ask when considering the great increase in women running for office after the 1960s is why were women so reluctant to run for elected office before the 1960s? While social values and society played a big role in discouraging women from getting involved in politics, there were other factors. One factor that prevented them from running was that they were not recruited to run. Another factor was that many scholars and men believed that women were simply not suitable to hold political office; as stated by Susan Carroll, "even as late as 1959, a noted political scientist counseled against women's active political participation on the

[48] Hartmann, *From Margin to Mainstream*, 85.
[49] Ibid., 89.

grounds that it would contribute to juvenile delinquency and homosexuality."[50] As exemplified by this quote, there was a fear that the lack of a motherly/female's presence at home could be detrimental to society. It also may be the case that in some states, women were not allowed to run for political office. Even after women were granted the right to vote, Georgia had a law on the books that prevented women from running for certain political offices, as did other states.[51] Another argument that is made is that although women were not holding political office, they still wielded influence on the political system through involvement in various political movements. Marianne Githens points out that women have been active in politics since the early 20th century. She cites the examples of the female led Women's Peace Party in 1914, the suffrage movement, the settlement house movement, and the temperance movement as movements in which women wielded political influence in order to promote social change.[52] While it is true that women have been politically active before they even had the right to vote, the movements of the 1960s acted as a catalyst to encourage more women to seek political office.

When looking specifically at the South in the 1960s and 1970s, Martin Gruberg stated, "the numbers of women in public life, in proportion to the population, are probably no more today than in 1925."[53] Whether this was completely true or not does not matter, the perception of women in politics in the South in the 1960s was that little change had occurred. In his 1968 study of women in politics, Gruberg compares Georgia and Massachusetts as "two states with

[50] Carroll, *Women and American Politics*, 34.
[51] Gruberg, *Women in American Politics*, 169.
[52] Carroll, *Women in American Politics*, 37.
[53] Gruberg, *Women in American Politics*, 38.

legislative houses of over 200 having fewer than five women each."[54] Gruberg also points out that by 1968, Georgia had elected no women to important state executive offices while Alabama had elected fifteen women, Arkansas had elected one woman, Louisiana had elected five, Mississippi had elected one woman, Tennessee had elected two women, Texas had elected three women, and Virginia had elected two women. South Carolina, North Carolina, Florida, and Georgia stood out as the only southern states that had not elected a single woman to an important state executive office.[55] This overall lack of women serving in public office in these states speaks to a regional discrepancy in electoral politics.

Further proof that the 1960s and 1970s brought an unprecedented change in women's role in the political sphere occurred in the early 1980s. For the first time in American history, proportionately more women than men voted in the 1980 election.[56] Even with all of these advancements, women are even now less likely to engage in campaign activities or run for office than men.[57] When women do decide to engage in the political arena, they are often more efficient leaders than men; as stated by Beth Reingold, "they are more likely than their male colleagues to initiate, prioritize, and support policymaking that addresses a broad range of women's issues and interests, from feminist's rights measures to more "traditional" social welfare legislation."[58] The most recent available data for the number of women in statewide elective executive offices, which includes governor, lieutenant governor, and secretary of state, is

[54] Ibid., 170.
[55] Ibid.,, 192-201.
[56] Carroll, *Women in American Politics,* 148.
[57] Ibid., 149.
[58] Reingold, Beth, *Legislative Women: Getting Elected, Getting Ahead* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 2008), 3.

from 2000. In that year, women held 28.5 percent of statewide elective executive offices.[59] In a nation in which women make up a slightly larger portion of the population than men, a statistic such as 28.5 percent shows that women still have many strides to make in terms of gaining equality in the political arena of elected politics.

Although the 1960s and especially the 1970s did see a sharp increase in women's involvement in society, it is important to not overstate the strides that women made. Coming out of the 1960s, women were still at a great disadvantage in the political arena. In Martin Gruberg's *Women in American Politics* published in 1968, he specifically asked the question: "have women achieved political equality?"[60] He explained that women had not achieved equality but they had made political progress that could lend itself to political equality in the future. If one looks to the present from the 1960s, this same question could be asked. Although consistently more women vote in elections than men, women are still considerably underrepresented in national and state elected offices throughout the United States.

Overall, the context of the 1960s and 1970s was one in which great changes came to America. There were many forms of social upheaval during this period. One of the most important changes that came out of that era was the increase in opportunities for women to get involved in the political arena. While women still represent a minority in elected politics today, they have made great strides to close the difference in political participation between women and men. The topic of women in politics from the 1960s until the present is one that has been analyzed from many perspectives but there has been little focus on the individuals who helped to

[59] Ibid., 4.
[60] Gruberg, *Women in American Politics*, 26.

bring women into the political mainstream. While the focus on women in politics is often on a national level, many women have made historical impacts on the role of female public servants on their local and state levels which have helped pave the way for women to serve in national office. The research done for this thesis reveals that there is a great opportunity for historians to do research on these women who helped to revolutionize the role of women in state governments.

CHAPTER 4
THE CASE OF JANET MERRITT

While the information previously presented in this paper is important, it is imperative that the generalizations made by historians and political commentators are tested and applied to actual situations and individuals. Janet Merritt provides an excellent case to study in the context of the women's movement and the involvement of women in electoral politics in the South.

Janet Merritt, born on January 4th 1909 to Robert and Janet Scarborough, grew up in Americus, Georgia. She held a Bachelor of Arts degree from Valdosta State College with credits at several colleges in the University of Georgia System.[61] She taught music in public schools until she had a family and then taught piano as a homemaker. She married Sam Merritt with whom she raised three children, Thomas, Ella, and Jane.[62] After she married, she worked with Sam in his insurance business and became a real estate broker.[63] She was known for her intense civic involvement, especially her dedication to Daughters of the American Revolution and the Girl Scouts. In many ways, DAR gave her a political start because she came to know many prominent Georgia politicians through their wives who were also in the organization. The positions she served in DAR also led her to spend time in Washington, D.C., where she met

[61] Janet S. Merritt, 1966, pg. 1, Speeches 1964-1973, Speeches/Press Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[62] *Americus Times-Recorder*, pg.1, Committee Files, Legislative Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[63] Memorial Tribute to Janet Merritt, pg. 1, Press/Clippings, Speeches/Press Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

many influential people.[64] She served as State Regent of Georgia's DAR in 1960 and later served as Vice President General of the National Society from 1963-1966.[65] Her intense dedication to serving her community and preserving history was evident through her work as a state representative.

While she did have distant family members who were involved in Georgia politics, neither her parents nor her husband were involved in electoral politics. She tells a story of first cutting her political teeth when she was a young child. When she visited her grandmother, they would go riding in the country making visits with Congressman Charles Crisp, son of the legendary Speaker of the House Charles Crisp; she later came to realize that these visits were political stops.[66] She was also the great- granddaughter of Thomas W. Cobb who served multiple roles in state government and was a leader in the Confederate army.[67] She also had brothers-in-law that had served as city councilman and a county commissioner.[68] While she was loosely surrounded by politics in terms of her family, she had no direct connection to politics like many women who came to serve in government in this era.

Merritt was the only woman to serve in the General Assembly when she was elected in 1964. After serving one session, she was joined by Grace T. Hamilton who was the first black woman to serve in the House.[69] They were the only women in the House until Merritt lost

[64] Jane Merritt Myers, Personal Phone Interview, 24 April 2010.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Wesleyan College Speech, 14 September 1965, pg.3, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[67] Ibid., 2-3.
[68] She's set to help make laws, 13 Sunday 1964, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[69] 2 Women in Legislature Urge More to Get Active, 12 February 1968, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

reelection in 1972. Merritt is an exceptional example for the time period because she was a woman who got involved in elective politics in the South completely on her own volition with no original support from women's groups or political groups. While she did work on some women's issues as scholars at the time would predict, she also talked controversial issues that made her not only exceptional as a woman but also as a legislator.

CHAPTER 5
CAMPAIGN EXPERIENCE

At the time Janet Merritt first ran for political office, the majority of the women who gained political office were either appointed to their positions or ran to fill the position left vacant by a deceased husband. These women had the advantage of name recognition and public nostalgia for their husbands. When Mrs. Merritt decided to run, she had neither name recognition nor any political knowledge of her husband or father on her side.

In her "Reminiscences of My Experience in the Georgia State Legislature", Merritt describes her first entrance into campaign politics. It was an interesting political period in Georgia. Reapportionment had happened in the Senate but not in the House. The man who had previously held the seat for which Merritt would run had decided not to run for re-election. She tells the story of her first decision to run after reading the news of the vacant seat in the newspaper:

> I idly told my husband that I would be interested in running for that seat. I really was not serious because I had no idea he'd be favorable to it because he was a dear sweet man who would never in a thousand years be interested in being a candidate. He said: "Go ahead. I'll pay your entrance fee. I think you would do a better job than any man I know." I nearly fainted, but I took him up and the next morning I went to the office of the local Democratic chairman and paid my fee.[70]

As the story of her beginning in politics shows, Merritt was not an intentional politician. In a speech in 1965, she explained that many people asked her why she decided to run when she first

[70] "Reminiscences of My Experience in the Georgia State Legislature 1965-1973", Fall 1997, pg. 5, Correspondence 1942- 2000 file, Personal 1957-2000 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

began campaigning and she responded: "I have always been interested in politics and I believe that politics is everybody's business but my race for state office was not especially pre-meditated."[71] She had not planned a career in politics or been groomed to take over the family business of politics. Upon paying her fee to be on the ballot for the Democratic primary, Merritt had entered an unfamiliar world that would feel her impact for decades to come.

The first race that she entered began in 1962. While the district changed over the years, it always included Sumter County. Her opponent in the Democratic primary was J.W. Sewell. She lost her first race by a margin of 77 votes but said, "It was a better education than a college degree." [72] This race was her first taste of the long entrenched power of the political machines that ran the majority of Georgia politics and politics throughout the South. She had great opposition from many Democratic leaders in the area because she had not sought their permission before running and she campaigned in areas that the leaders did not condone.

For Merritt, the beginnings of the 1960's were a time of political upheaval. Throughout her papers she makes notes and discusses the changes that were occurring during the time, especially the racial changes. In her first race, there were four boxes on the ballot when people went to vote: white male, white female, black male, black female.[73] She knew exactly where her support came from. She admits that from this first race, she was the only candidate to reach out to the black community. She did not believe in paying for black votes, which was a commonplace practice in her time. She states that she was the "first to openly go to black

[71] Wesleyan College Speech, pg. 5.
[72] *Daily Tribune News* article, 29 December 1964, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[73] Ibid.

churches and meetings."[74] From her writings, one can gather the sense of frustration she had over fighting a system in which votes were bought, not sincerely gained from the black community.

It is important to note Merritt's emphasis on campaigning to all people of all races in her district. She saw every individual regardless of race as one vote so she reached out to every person that she could. She was a woman who was already looked at skeptically by men and women alike for getting into "a man's field."[75] Yet instead of attempting to campaign the way that the white political men from her area had always campaigned in order to lessen their skepticism which would involve reaching out to white business leaders and buying black votes, Merritt challenged traditional campaign norms by actually reaching out to black voters and by going door to door in communities. She was not worried about the wealth or influence of an individual; she just wanted their vote.

Although she had not planned her original campaign for the Georgia House of Representatives, after her first narrow loss, she was determined to try again. In 1964, she challenged the incumbent J.W. Sewell and won. There had been a reapportionment of districts and now there were single member districts instead of the old system in which multiple people could represent the same district. Merritt notes that with this reapportionment, "Atlanta got many (new seats) and blacks came to Atlanta."[76]

There was some controversy surrounding her election and her friendship with Governor Carl Sanders. Representative Sewell, who had beaten Merritt in 1962 and then lost to her in 1964, charged that the governor had used "state employees to oust him in his bid for

[74] Ibid., 5.
[75] Ibid., 4.
[76] Ibid., 1.

reelection."[77] Sewell presented an argument for why Governor Sanders would oppose him, including his disagreement with Sewell over inviting Alabama governor George Wallace to come and speak to the Georgia General Assembly. Although it appears that a sort of political machine was behind Merritt, she really benefited from some of the progressive members of the Democratic Party's dislike for Representative Sewell. She did have a friendship with Carl Sanders who was one of the first Democratic leaders to support her. When he was questioned about the controversy in 2010, he stated, "I don't recall it being a controversy. I think it was just a writer in need of a story."[78]

In 1966, Representative Merritt ran for reelection. She beat Randy Jones. This was an election cycle of political turmoil for Georgia due to the controversy surrounding the gubernatorial election. Lester Maddox had won a hard fought victory over former Governor Ellis Arnall in the Democratic primary. Maddox went on to face the first realistic Republican candidate for governor since Reconstruction, Bo Callaway. Although Callaway won the most popular votes, he did not have a majority because there had been a strong enough write-in campaign for Governor Arnall to leave Callaway with only a plurality. The election was then thrown to the legislature which was controlled by Democrats and therefore, Maddox was elected.[79]

Merritt played an interesting role in this political drama. Although she was a Democrat, during her bid for reelection, she had promised to vote the way Sumter County and her district

[77] *The Columbus Enquirer* article, 16 September 1064, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[78]Governor Carl Sanders, Personal Phone Interview, 20 April 2010.
[79] *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, "Lester Maddox", available from http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-1387&hl=y; Internet; accessed 2 April 2010.

went regardless of party in the event that the election was thrown to the legislature.[80] Before the vote, Merritt was asked by Democratic leaders to vote for Maddox but she voted for Bo Callaway because he had carried her district. Once again, she went against the party norms.

Not only was she separate from any political machine but she also seemed proud to be outside of the old system. During the 1966 election, she made a campaign speech claiming, "I have no organized backing except that of all of the people of Sumter County. I represent no group except all of you who want good, honest government."[81] These words echoed her sentiments from one of her first campaign speeches made in the election that she first lost in 1962; " I have no use for a stooge, and I have no organized backing which would seek to control me."[82] A 1970 campaign piece even mentions that Merritt "cannot be bought. No one has dared try because they know she would expose them."[83] This theme of independence and not being 'owned' by anyone continued throughout her campaigns and time in the legislature.

In 1968, there was another reapportionment. Representative Merritt did not have significant opposition and she was once again seated in the House. Her race for reelection in 1970 was not quite as easy as the 1968 election. She was challenged by Marvin Horne in the Democratic primary. He had support from a local political machine but she still beat him and went on to be sworn in again in January of 1971.

As she attempted to win reelection for her fourth term in the Georgia General Assembly, she faced tough opposition. The districts had once again been reapportioned and now only one

[80] Merritt, *Reminiscences of My Experience in the Georgia State Legislature 1965-1973*, 18.
[81] Campaign Speech, Fall 1966, pg. 1, Speech/Press, 1950-2000 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[82] Campaign Speech, 1962 election, Campaign Files 1960-1974, Political/Campaign 1960-1979 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[83] Brief Survey of Rep. Janet Merritt's Long Record of Serving the State and District, 1970, pg. 1, Committee Files 196-1976, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

district covered all of Sumter County. This meant that Merritt was in a primary with a colleague, Oliver Oxford. She admitted in her reminiscences that she "did not politic as hard as before."[84] She was not taking her seat for granted but faced increased criticism due to her husband being ill. Some people said that she was not fulfilling her duty as a wife because she was spending too much time campaigning. She lost the election in 1972 but carried her home city of Americus.

Although she lost in 1972, she was still determined to serve the people of her district and in 1974 decided to run for the seat she previously held. There were four people in the Democratic primary, Merritt, Oxford, Parker, and Sewell, all of whom had represented Sumter County at one point. Merritt won the most votes but was pushed into a runoff with Oliver Oxford, who she had lost to in the previous election. As her husband became progressively sicker, she campaigned less and lost the runoff election.[85]

Throughout her papers, it is evident that Merritt struggled during some campaigns due to the fact that she was a woman. From speeches and articles, it appears that she often had to prove and explain that a woman could do just as good a job and maybe even better than a man in the legislature even after she was the incumbent. Her daughter tells the story about campaigning on behalf of her mother with her friends; they called themselves "Merritt's Merry Maids" as seen in the picture below.

[84] Ibid., 1.
[85] Ibid.

 [86]

They went from house to house throughout the district handing out matches or nail files and at one house a woman refused their campaign material saying, "a woman's place is in the home."[87] Merritt's daughter explained that her mother said that men often had no problems supporting her but she consistently faced opposition from women.[88] Representative Merritt also explained that she found support from older men but had difficulty with young men;

> Elderly men or men who have made it on their own and do not fear women as competition do not fall into this category [of those that oppose her] and can be strong supporters…but beware of younger men with political ambitions of their own. Young businessmen, lawyers on the climb, and especially Junior Chamber of Commerce types keep quiet, but they can be bitter opponents.[89]

There are a few consistent themes on which she campaigned that resonate throughout her speeches. One was that she had the time to devote to being a full-time legislator. In her eight years in the legislature, she did not miss a single day of session. In her campaign speeches, she would also explain that this job was not part-time for her like it was for many other legislators; "my children are grown and will be away from home. I am free to continue to give the county my training, experience, and time… I have no other job."[90] In campaign material that was given

[86] Courtesy of the Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia
[87] Jane Merritt Myers, Personal Phone Interview, 24 April 2010.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Merritt, *Reminiscences of My Experience in the Georgia State Legislature 1965-1973*, 4.
[90] Janet Merritt, Campaign Speech 1966, 3.

out in 1970, the first point about Merritt's service is that she is "a full time legislator for all the people in her district and can assume all individual requests and legislative assignments without any business conflict. Being a legislator is her full time job."[91] In her 1974campaign, an *Americus Times-Recorder* article quotes her saying "my eight years of experience without conflict of interest and without regular professional duties are what this county needs."[92]

Another continual theme of her campaigns was her high level of ability and devotion to good government. In one speech, she mentioned, "My first and only concern is good government. I am not afraid to crusade for the things in which I believe."[93] The best way to sum up her view of campaigning and serving the people of her district is to share her "Recipe for Good Government." In her political notes for speeches, Merritt writes:

> Use a batter of honesty. Add an overflowing cup of concern for all people. Sprinkle thoroughly with Christian morality. Mix in hard work and dedication. Bake in an over of compassion and happiness. Top with principle of the Golden Rule. Serve equal portions of justice to all.[94]

While much of the news coverage surrounding Janet Merritt's first campaign and later election focused on her being the only woman to serve in the Georgia General Assembly, she did not campaign on this issue. She did defend women as being just as capable as men but she never campaigned on people needing to send her to Atlanta because of the historic nature of her election or because a woman deserved to serve. Unlike groups such as NOW that emphasized electing women because of their gender and the need to have more women involved in politics, Merritt's focus was on achieving the best representation possible for the people of her district.

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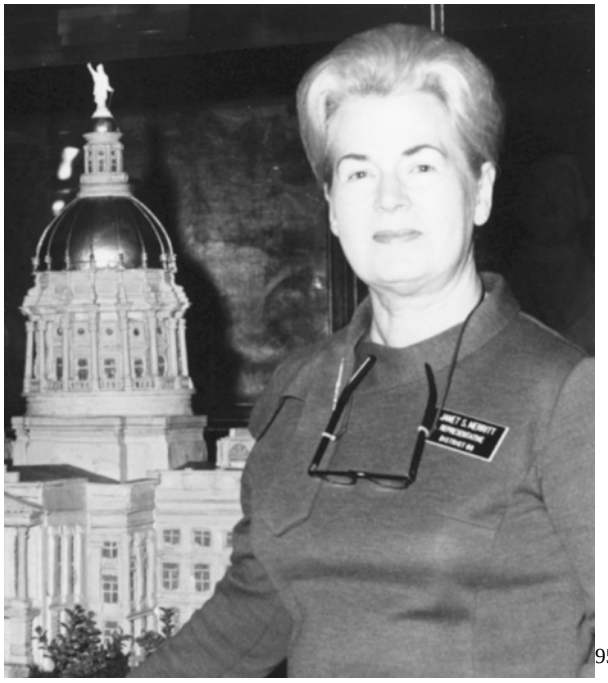
[91] *Brief Survey of Rep. Janet Merritt's Long Record of Serving the State and District*, 1.
[92] *Americus Times-Recorder* article, 11 June 1974, pg. 1, Committee Files 1965-1076, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[92] Ibid., 1.
[93] Janet Merritt, Campaign Speech 1966, 4.
[94] Campaign notes, pg.1, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

CHAPTER 6
LEGISLATIVE EXPERIENCE

 [95]

While most legislators viewed their duties to their districts as part-time because they had other jobs, Janet Merritt was exceptional in that she saw being a legislator as a full-time commitment. When assessing the book of legislators from the 1967-1968 session, there are many occupations listed for the representatives and senators including attorney, insurance, farmer, etc. but listed next to Rep. Merritt's name was simply "legislator."[96] Like most legislators who have multiple goals during their time of service, Merritt was involved in many different issues and pieces of legislation during her eight years in the Georgia House of

[95] Courtesy of the Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Papers, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia

[96] Georgia House of Representatives, 1967-1968, Publications 1945-1983, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

Representatives. That being said, it is not difficult to pick out the issues about which she cared the most. During her time in office, she greatly focused on making progress in the area of race relations and changing the Georgia state flag.

It may be expected that in the context of the women's movement, Merritt would want to focus on issues specific to women that may have been overlooked by the previously all male legislature. It would be an injustice not to mention that Merritt was interested and involved in improving Georgia's school systems and systems of higher education. She also advocated for women on issues such as divorce regulations but this was not the focus of her time in the legislature. As reiterated by her daughter, Merritt's focus in the legislature was on representing her district, not necessarily being a leader for the women's movement; "She was for the woman's movement but wasn't that involved. She didn't have the goal of leading the movement. She wanted to do her best and serve her district because she knew she was the best for the job."[97]

As evidenced by her time spent campaigning in the black community in her district, making progress in the arena of racial issues was greatly important to Merritt. She worked to improve relations through grandiose and subtle ways. She believed that the black community needed better representation. When a woman wrote her asking her to support the appointment of a black licensed practical nurse to the Examining Board for Practical Nursing in Georgia, Merritt responded writing; "I certainly am in sympathy with your desires and believe that if the blacks are a part of Licensed Practical Nurses of Georgia, they should certainly have representation on the board."[98] She then sent a letter asking the governor to appoint a black licensed practical nurse. Besides responding to the concerns of the black community, Merritt found other ways to

[97] Jane Merritt Myers, Personal Phone Interview, 24 April 2010.
[98] Letter to Mrs. Hattie R. Griffin, 16 February 1971, Correspondence 1964-1977, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

reach out to and incorporate them in her legislative career. In 1972, she worked to subtly incorporate the black community by requesting that a prominent black man in her district recommend a young black man to act as a page in the upcoming session.[99]

While some of the ways that she reached out to this community are not documented through legislation, committee reports, or letters, Merritt was known for continually working to improve race relations for the state but specifically for her community. Her choice to work with the black community follows the idea presented by Susan Hartmann that was previously presented that active women often worked to help other minorities. Although Merritt does fit into this mold of an active woman, she is also an exception because she was never part of the Civil Rights Movement. She publicly identified problems and atrocities within both the white supremacist movements and the Civil Rights Movements.[100] For example, there were ongoing race problems in Americus during the time that she served. Although many in the white community blamed all the problems on the black community, Merritt publicly pointed out the evils of the KKK. She asked Governor Sanders to send troops to Americus to protect both the black community and the white community.[101] In that way, she goes against the mold that Hartmann explains because she separates herself from officially being involved in the movement.

While she was in the legislature, Representative Merritt served on several committees including Appropriations, University of Georgia, Welfare, and State Planning and Community

[99] Letter from B.L. Fuse, Jr., 19 January 1972, Correspondence 1964-1977, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

[100] Merritt asks Gov. Sanders to send troops to Americus, pg.1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

[101] Ibid.

Affairs.[102] Some of these committees dealt with "women's issues" such as education but much of the committee work done on committees such as Appropriations and University of Georgia, put her in the same category as many prominent male leaders.

All this being said, one "women's issue" that she did champion while she was in the legislature was adding kindergarten to all public schools. She saw this issue as vital to creating an educated population. Her approach to pushing for kindergartens was practical. She explained that kindergartens "decrease the number of students who have to repeat grades, and also decrease the number of dropouts."[103] Merritt understood that these were two issues that not only plagued Georgia's schools but cost state and local governments a great amount of money. She compared Georgia to other Southern states and pointed out the state was truly behind in terms of adding kindergartens. She believed it was an investment in gaining an educated workforce that Georgia had to make. Her push for the addition of kindergarten was an example of her progressive ideas that constantly sought to improve Georgia.

Rep. Merritt was involved with other "women's issues" such as birth control legislation and day care legislation. During the 1966 session, She worked with Representative George Busbee, future governor of Georgia, on legislation making birth control more widely available. While it was a controversial issue, it was addressed in a way that focused on personal choice with no mandates that helped it to be passed.[104] She also led a committee during the 1966 session that was dedicated to studying the state's newly created day nursery licensing

[102] Vitae, 1970, pg.1, Correspondence 1942-2000, Personal 1957-2000 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[103] Kindergartens-Georgia's Urgent Need!, pg.1, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[104] Rep. Busbee Promises Birth Control Bill Soon, 26 January 1966, pg.1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

program.[105] Just like in her fight for kindergartens, Rep. Merritt firmly believed that proper day care programs would become a vital part of educating Georgia's children. She believed that "next to the home, the day care center can have the greatest influence in forming the type of citizen a child will become in later years."[106] Even when dealing with "women's issues," she took a practical approach. She chose what to support based on whether it was helping Georgia to progress into the future, not just simply because it affected women. These examples of her work in the legislature further show Merritt's focus on progressive issues and her ability to work with others to achieve what she believed needed to be accomplished. At the same time, it was obvious that being a woman led her to sympathize more with these issues.

It would be possible to write an entire essay, thesis, or book on Representative Merritt's devotion and struggle to change the state flag. Since that is not the purpose of this thesis, it should be noted that the greatest amount of literature that exists mentioning Janet Merritt is associated with that battle to change Georgia's flag. Although the topic of changing Georgia's flag is no longer relevant in today's politics, this issue has been solved within the last decade and was surrounded by great controversy.

While some people may assume or even advise that a woman in elected politics in the 1960s and 1970s should stick to less divisive issues or even just "women's issues," Merritt took on one of the most controversial issues to come about in state politics in the past century beginning in 1968. In 1955, Democratic Party leaders began a campaign to change the state flag to include the Confederate battle flag. The argument for the flag was to celebrate the centennial

[105] Rep. Janet Merritt Lauds Day Nursery Program, 27 January, 1966 pg.1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

[106] The Mainstream Toward the Dwelling Place of Light, 7 October 1965, pg. 28, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

of the Civil War and Georgia's history. It also became a show of resistance to the Supreme Court decision enforcing desegregation in *Brown* v. *Board of Education*.[107] Governor Carl Sanders who was serving in the state house at the time recently explained that he "voted not to change the flag. Many legislators argued that it was not supposed to have racial overtones but the truth of the matter was that it did have racial overtones."[108] Merritt claimed that the flag "was adopted in a spirit of defiance, a spirit of hate and of wild passions." [109] This issue is so important to understanding Merritt's service because she was the first legislator to propose a bill to change Georgia's flag back to the flag that flew over the State Capitol from 1914-1956.[110] Merritt first sparked concern over the Confederate symbol remaining on the state flag when women from other states made snide comments about Georgia trying to fight the Civil War again at a national DAR conference.[111]

Her battle and fierce push to change the flag was not a way to gain political friends in a time that was rife with forced desegregation and racial tensions. Even former Governor Marvin Griffin publicly came out against Janet Merritt and her bill, which changed the flag from the 1956 flag to the flag that flew previously to 1956, and personally urged legislators to keep the Confederate cross on the Georgia flag.[112] Not only did she receive negative reactions from fellow legislators but also she received negative letters and comments from citizens across Georgia. One supporter of keeping the 1956 Georgia flag wrote a letter to Representative Merritt

[107] *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, "State Flags of Georgia", available from http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/nge/Article.jsp?id=h-2671&sug=y; Internet; accessed 6 April 2010.
[108] Governor Carl Sanders, Personal Phone Interview, 20 April 2010.
[109] Flag article, 4 May 1969, pg. 4, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[110] Flag article, pg. 1.
[111] Jane Merritt Myers, Personal Phone Interview, 24 April 2010.
[112] Griffin defends state flag, 25 January 1972, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

saying, "You are wrong, wrong, wrong. You say the current flag is an 'embarrassment to the state.' Well, dear, you are an embarrassment to Sumter County."[113] She did receive some commendation for her efforts to change the flag. She was praised by many civil rights groups and even by some Georgia citizens who shared in Merritt's embarrassment. As her arguments for changing the flag developed, Merritt began to speak about her concern that keeping such a flag would prevent Georgia from moving forward.[114] She was fearful that the rest of the nation would look down on Georgia for beings tuck in the past during a progressive era which could prevent development in education and commerce. Due to her commitment to changing the state flag, she authored bills to do just that in 1970 and 1972. Both bills failed but Merritt would be committed to this issue for the rest of her life. She kept aware of all changes and political discussions of changing the flag. The flag was officially changed in 2001, thirty-one years after Merritt first proposed the change.[115] Her commitment to this politically volatile issue showed that she did not fit the mold of a woman in politics or truly a legislator who was chiefly concerned with staying in office. She pursued an issue that she believed in because she thought it would help Georgia progress and move past many tensions and issues that still existed in the 1970's.

When Merritt was first elected, there was opposition that would say that even if she was elected, true gentlemen would never let her serve because it was not a woman's place. Through her speeches and writings, Representative Merritt made it clear that this was far from the truth. She explained in one speech that she "was put on important working committees" and "received

[113] Steve C. Short to Janet Merritt, 15 June 1992, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

[114] Statement on Flag, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

[115] *New Georgia Encyclopedia,* "State Flags of Georgia".

well and as an equal by all the men, but especially so by the more respected and experienced ones."[116] While some people may have viewed Merritt's sex as a disadvantage, in some ways, she seemed to see it as an advantage. She is quoted in one 1966 *Atlanta Constitution* article saying, "Recently I was the only woman at a gathering of legislators. I was seated at the head table, a spot where I wouldn't have been if I hadn't been a woman. So I really think that my sex is to my advantage."[117] As evidenced by her sitting on influential committees and pursuing controversial legislation, Merritt showed that her sex was not a negative deterrent to legislative success.

Although she often spoke and wrote of being treated just like any other lawmaker in Atlanta, there were certain positions or opportunities she took part in due to being a woman, such as attending the Order of Women Legislators convention. At this convention, the women were asked what their future goals were and Merritt answered "Good government with women."[118] While this seems like a simple statement, it is very telling of the way she viewed her role as a female legislator. She chiefly wanted to be as good a representative as possible but it was also important to her that more women become involved in the process.

Representative Merritt was involved with countless pieces of legislation and issues during her time in the state legislature. These issues ranged from historic preservation such as bringing "The General" back to Georgia after it had spent many years in Chattanooga and the creation of Andersonville as a historic place to much more serious issues like working to

[116] Wesleyan College Speech, 14 September 1965, pg.1, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[117] Lawmaker Finds It's an Advantage to be a Woman, 23 February 1966, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[118] OWLS Convention, 18 November 1970, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

alleviate the tensions that existed between different racial communities. It is fair to say that Merritt did not play a politically safe game which may have cost her the 1972 and 1974 elections but she pursued what she believed would be best for Georgia and her district.

CHAPTER 7
WOMEN'S MOVEMENT CONNECTION

Janet Merritt never claimed to be a leader of the women's movement of the 1960's and 1970's. In fact, she often tried to avoid publicity; " I don't intend to become the center of attraction but rather someone who can add some constructive thinking to our legislature."[119] From her papers and the reminiscences from people who knew her, it can be gathered that being a leader of such a movement was not a role that she wanted to take on. Although this was the case, it would be a disservice to her if her roles of leadership in the women's community were overlooked.

As previously presented in this paper, the women's movement of this era could often be extreme. Groups like the National Organization of Women called for social and sexual revolutions that had not come to the South yet. While Merritt may have been involved in some women's issues such as opening access to birth control and reforming day care services, she never gave speeches on the more extreme women's movement ideals of lesbianism, complete equality with men, and female superiority.

Instead of attempting to head the movement by being in the spotlight and making headlines like many activist women did, Merritt had a way of bringing light to women's issues and the abilities of women in the new era without sounding trite or stirring up controversy. In 1965, she gave a speech at the Southeastern Fair about a book auction. As she described the books up for auction, she added vignettes that pertained to the women's movement. She

[119] Loner in State Politics, 29 December 1964, pg. 1, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

recounted Chancellor Craig Barrow's original opposition to women's suffrage and she explained how he began to change his opinion as he saw women bloom, as they became a part of the University of Georgia.[120] These subtle actions were Merritt's way of helping the movement and working to open citizen's minds to more active political roles for women without appearing controversial or forceful.

Governor Jimmy Carter appointed Representative Merritt to the Commission on the Status of Women in 1972.[121] Before she was officially appointed, she had paid attention to the committee for the preceding years. Unlike many leaders of women's movements throughout the United States, Merritt agreed that the ideal place for women with small children was at home but she also believed that this was not necessarily the reality. As she explains in one speech, she appreciated that Governor Carl Sanders originally created the commission, which came into being after President Kennedy established a national commission, on which she would later serve because he recognized that there are millions of women with young children who work for pay throughout the United States and that these women have problems that must be addressed.[122] Merritt noted that times were changing and that the social norms for a woman's place were going to be different in the years to come; "the role of women in the economic world is progressively changing. Scientific and technological advances have chipped away at the traditional pedestal in the home, and much of the protection formerly surrounding her has disappeared. Women are caught between the sheltered security of the old and the challenge and possibility of the new."[123]

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[120] The Mainstream Toward the Dwelling Place of Light, pgs. 18-19.
[121] Secretary of State Ben Fortson to Janet S. Merritt, pg. 1, 19 October 1972, Correspondence 1964-1977, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[122] The Mainstream Toward the Dwelling Place of Light, pgs. 19-20.
[123] The Mainstream Toward the Dwelling Place of Light, pg. 21.

Merritt understood the predicament that many women found themselves facing and worked to bring light to this issue.

In addition to serving on the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, Merritt was often asked to give speeches on her experience as a female legislator. From these speeches great insight can be gained as to what were Merritt's views of the status and role of women in society and more specifically government. In one speech to college women, she explains that "we do not have stag voting; we should not have stag government."[124] As exemplified by her statement, she was a huge proponent of more women getting involved in elected politics but she was also careful to explain what type of women should get involved; "don't let any prejudiced person lead you to believe that a woman of some maturity, wide experience, and training in parliamentary law, cannot be a good legislator."[125] For Representative Merritt, simply being a woman did not qualify someone to become involved in elected politics. In the same speech, she tells the story of a young woman who asked her advice when she wanted to enter a race for the legislature. Merritt told the woman, "honey, you just live and gain experience about 20 more years and then, if you are still interested, go to it and more power to you."[126] Her focus on gaining more involvement of citizens in government seemed to apply to multiple categories of people, not just women; "there is no monopoly on the term good citizen by any group or sex or race or creed. Income and social status have nothing to do with it either."[127] She responded to one eighth grader who asked, "how do you think women can be a great help to Georgia?" by saying that "citizenship toward the interest of good government should not be divided into categories…Government, to function properly, should look after the interests with impartiality of

[124] Wesleyan College Speech, pg. 1.
[125] Wesleyan College Speech, pg. 1.
[126] Wesleyan College Speech, pg. 7-8.
[127] Wesleyan College Speech, pg. 6.

all people who occupy the territory covered by that government."[128] In many of her speeches, she focused more on the qualities that make someone a good legislator or citizen, not necessarily a good *female* legislator or citizen. For Merritt, a politician was simply "a citizen in action."[129]

Janet Merritt was keenly aware that women did not understand their position in the world. She thought it was tragic that women "have recognized their potential, but do not use their power."[130] She did not in any way argue for intense feminism or riotous lobbying for women's rights. She believed that a "female's best weapon is finesse, not force!"[131] It appears that Merritt's goal in being a quiet leader of the women's movement was to prove to both men and women but especially women, that females were capable of being good citizens and legislators.

As she spent more time in the legislature, subtle hints show that she became progressively more comfortable with her role as a female legislator and began to show more colors of the women's movement. When she first campaigned for the state House, her name was listed on the ballot as "Mrs. Sam Merritt" but the second time around, she listed her name as "Janet Merritt" and won.[132] After she was elected in 1964, she listed her occupation in the members of the General Assembly book as "home-maker and piano teacher", by her second term

[128] Janet S. Merritt to Bonnie D. Hilton, 9 March 1971, pgs. 1-2, Correspondence 1964-1977, Legislative 1945-1986 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[129] Speech notes, pg. 2, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[130] Speech notes, pg. 2.
[131] Personal notes, pg. 1, Speeches 1964-1973, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens
[132] She's set to help make laws, pg. 1, 13 Sunday 1964, Press Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

in the House; she was listed as "legislator."[133] These small but important anecdotes show that Merritt was an unintentional part of the women's movement. She led many discussions about the role of women in ways that took into consideration the time in which she lived. By the 1970's, many of the women's movement groups had become radicalized but Merritt remained as rational as possible in seeking solutions to the problems that plagued the women of Georgia. She saw that change would come from working with men, not from shouting at them.

[133] Members of General Assembly, pg. 59, 1965-1966, Publications 1945-1983 File, Legislative 1956-1983 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSION

The1960's and 1970's were two decades that transformed the political climate in Georgia, the South, and the nation for the decades to come. The women's movement and integration were two of the greatest impetuses for this transformation but there were many other subtle changes that accompanied them.

Although Janet Merritt served in a time of political upheaval and transformation, she is an exception to the example set by other women activists and politicians. She was elected on her own merit without the aid of a political father or husband. She campaigned in non-traditional ways, even reaching out to the black community, which had previously not been done. She conquered controversial issues that pit her against members of her own party. Although a default leader of the women's movement, she never claimed to represent the movement as a whole or to take on its values.

It is difficult to gain a true perspective on Janet Merritt because so many she worked with are no longer living or are not willing to point out any of her flaws. By the words of her colleagues both during her time of service and those who look back on their relationships with her, Janet Merritt was a stateswoman known for speaking her mind and for always putting what she thought was best for Georgia first.

A familiar anecdote of Janet Merritt goes like this: "On her first day as a member of the Georgia House of Representatives, Rep. Janet Merritt was introduced by Speaker George T. Smith as the 'sweetheart of the House.' She didn't like it and wasted no time in letting Smith

know about it."[134] This small vignette shows Merritt's true colors. She was a woman whose chief concern was to be a good citizen and a good legislator and to do all she could to help Georgia progress. She showed exceptionality in her role as a female legislator when compared to the roles taken on by most Southern women and to the national example of activist women of her era. She will be remembered for being before her time in many ways.

[134] Past Year Recalled By Lady Legislator, 1964, Press/Clippings 1950-2006, Speech/Press 1950-2001 Series, Janet B. Scarborough Merritt Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, University of Georgia Libraries, Athens

APPENDICES

Appendix A

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH JANE MERRITT MYERS
April 24, 2010

CH: What was your mother's general attitude towards politics?

JM: Growing up, she was gone with DAR a lot- that's what started her off. She went to Washington and met a lot of influential people which got her going in the realm of politics. Most of Democrat's wives were in the DAR so she got to meet many of the political leaders through their wives. She was always involved in something. Politics started once DAR slowed down a little. Once she was no longer serving as Regent and she became more of an honorary member, she had time for politics.

CH: What do you think was her main motivation for running for office?

JM: She thought she could do a better job and thought she could take care of the community better than the men. She never got permission from the Democratic men to run- she just decided on her own. She knew she could do a better job.

CH: Did she have a desire to be a leader of the women's movement?

JM: She said the men in the legislature treated her just like another man but did show respect. She was for the woman's movement but wasn't that involved. She didn't have the goal of leading the movement. She wanted to do her best and serve her district because she knew she was the best for the job.

CH: What was her greatest political passion?

JM: She was hoping they would change the flag in her lifetime. The flag was changed after she passed away. Her idea to change the flag first came from the DAR. At some national DAR meetings, you always had your state flag and some ladies would make side comments about the Georgia flag being confederate and she wanted that changed.

The racial equality movement was also very important to her. She would go to the black churches and many who ran the county didn't think she should do that. She did it anyways.

She said the men supported her well but had problems with women supporting her.

CH: What was your father's role in campaign/political life?

JM: He was in insurance and had his own business. She worked with daddy. She was his real estate agent. He also had a farm. When she first got her start, he would go with her out in the county and go politicking with her. He was quiet but very supportive of mother.

CH: Did you or your family ever receive negative attention due to your mother being a woman in politics?

JM: We never really had any confrontation about it. When she first ran, she had matches and nail files that she would hand out. My friends and I were the Merritt's Merry Maids and we would hand out things from house to house. One house we went to, a woman said "a woman's place is in the home" and rejected what we were passing out. There were a few incidents lie that but not many.

CH: What was her relationship with Jimmy Carter?

JM: Homer Moore was running from Montezuma. She told Homer she would support him. Then Jimmy Carter decided to run. He jumped in and Mrs. Carter called and tried to get her to switch but she had already committed to Moore. This was the only really negative incident. Interms of governors, she was much closer to Carl Sanders than Jimmy Carter.

CH: Additional comments:

JM: She was adamant about her feelings and sometimes that rubbed people the wrong way. She was related to some political leaders. She told a story about when she was five years old, she remembers riding in a horse drawn carriage politicking for Speaker Henry Crist.

Appendix B

PHONE INTERVIEW WITH GOVERNOR CARL SANDERS
April 20, 2010

CH: How did you come to know Mrs. Merritt?

CS: Briefly first met when I ran for governor in 1963.

CH: Please explain why you chose to support Mrs. Merritt over Mr. Sewell in the 1964 election? Were you hesitant at all in supporting her because she was a woman, considering that she would be the only woman in the House if elected?

CS: Janet was the first woman elected to the legislature in a long time. She served the state well and really looked after her constituents. She was always enlightened and interested in what was going on. I only have positive things to say about her.

CH: How did you handle the controversy of Sewell's loss to Mrs. Merritt? Did the controversy receive much attention?

CS: I don't recall it being a controversy. I think it was just a writer in need of a story.

CH: When you were in office, did you and Rep. Merritt ever discuss the state flag issued for which she became so known? I so, what were your opinions about changing the flag?

CS: In 1955, the legislature tried to change the flag to the controversial one in celebration for the centennial. I voted not to change the flag. Many legislators argued that it was not supposed to have racial overtones but the truth of the matter was that it did have racial overtones. My recollection is that Janet supported keeping the original flag. She was progressive and understood the racial undertones of the 1956 flag.

CH: Do you feel that Rep. Merritt was ever marginalized due to the fact she was a woman? How was your personal working relationship with Mrs. Merritt?

CS: She never presented herself as a leader of woman. Her representation was about her district, not about being a woman. She was very able and very progressive.

CH: In the climate of the 1960's, do you feel that it was difficult for women who wanted to be involved in politics to get elected due to their gender?

CS: She was ahead of the times as far as women serving in higher office. She had a good record and was very helpful and supportive of me.

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