

C McClendon, Sarah Newcomb (1910-2003), Papers, 1931-1992
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INTRODUCTION

The personal and professional papers of Sarah Newcomb McClendon, White House journalist and women's rights advocate, contain biographical information, correspondence, newspaper columns, speeches, and other miscellaneous writings, photographs, negatives, newspaper clippings and magazine articles, awards, certificates, press badges, press cards, programs, posters, federal agency reports and publications, research, and family materials.

DONOR INFORMATION

The Sarah Newcomb McClendon Papers were donated to the University of Missouri by Sarah McClendon on February 1, 1988 (Accession No. 4827). Additions to the papers were made by McClendon on August 21, 1990 (Accession No. 4982), June 18, 1991 (Accession No. 5048), and June 16, 1992 (Accession No. 5185). The papers are part of the National Women and Media Collection.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

The youngest of nine children, Sarah Newcomb McClendon was born in Tyler, Texas on July 8, 1910 to Sidney and Anna Rebecca Bonner McClendon. Growing up in a home where charity and community service were encouraged, Sarah McClendon was exposed early to suffrage and women's rights issues. Her mother took five year-old Sarah to suffragette rallies and Sarah delivered suffragette speeches standing on the dining room table. She attended Tyler public schools and with financial aid from her siblings, graduated from Tyler Junior College and from the University of Missouri Journalism School in 1931. McClendon was hired as a special assignment reporter with the Tyler *Courier Times* and covered everything from local politics to the federal courts for the next eight years. Her aggressive investigative journalism style infuriated the powerful gas and oil interests in Tyler and McClendon was fired from the newspaper.

A series of reporting jobs followed until 1942, when McClendon enrolled in the Women's Army Corps. She worked in the public relations office at Fort Des Moines, Iowa, the Pentagon, and the surgeon general's office in Washington, D.C. During the summer of 1943, McClendon married John Thomas O'Brien but the marriage broke up within months. McClendon concealed her pregnancy from her Army superiors and continued to work until honorably discharged. Upon the birth of her daughter, McClendon was hired for a Washington news service run by Bascom Timmons of Amarillo and covered Pennsylvania's congressional delegation for the *Philadelphia Daily News*. In less than a year, she earned a press pass to the White House and began chronicling the final months of Franklin D. Roosevelt's life. Male employees returned to the news service after the end of the war and once again McClendon was unemployed. McClendon started the McClendon News Service in 1946, and would represent more than a dozen small Texas newspapers during the remainder of her journalism career.

One of only five women correspondents in Washington, D.C. in 1946, McClendon quickly built her reputation for tenacious reporting. Harkening back to her suffragette

upbringing, she organized a press briefing group for women reporters in Washington, D.C. in 1963, and also used her position to argue for women's membership in the National Press Club. On January 1, 1971, McClendon finally received her membership. She served at different times on the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, the Veteran's Administration Advisory Committee on Women Veterans, and in various positions in the National Woman's Party.

McClendon believed that citizens have a right to know what their government is doing. She knew and questioned ten presidents, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to Bill Clinton, and had good working relationships with all but Lyndon Johnson. She first tangled with Johnson during his 1948 U.S. Senatorial campaign and later wrote unflattering stories concerning influence peddling by Bobby Baker, a Johnson protégé. Johnson used his influence to have her news service fired from several Texas newspapers. At President Eisenhower's first news conference, as the lone woman in attendance, McClendon was sent to the balcony and told that questions were not encouraged. From her position, McClendon hollered at a startled Eisenhower to ask if this was the way things were to be conducted. Eisenhower eventually changed the format and from then on, McClendon arrived early, staked out a seat on the front row, and made a point to ask a question at every news conference.

Late in her career, McClendon authored a weekly syndicated newspaper column, a biweekly newsletter, and presided over a weekly radio commentary airing on 1,200 stations across the country. She was working on a newsletter article shortly before her death in Washington, D.C. on January 9, 2003 at the age of 92. For more detailed information pertaining to Sarah McClendon's life and career, please see her two autobiographies: *My Eight Presidents*, published in 1978 and *Mr. President, Mr. President: My 50 Years of Covering the White House*, published in 1996.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The papers focus primarily on women's rights issues and contain correspondence, newspaper columns, speeches, and other miscellaneous writings, photographs and negatives, newspaper clippings and magazine articles, awards and certificates, press badges and cards, programs, posters, federal agency reports and publications, and research materials. The papers are arranged into five series: **Personal**, **Executive Order**, **Journalism**, **Women's Issues**, and **Women in the Military**.

The **Personal** series contains correspondence, photographs, negatives, awards, certificates, press badges, press cards, programs, posters, publications, newspaper clippings, speeches, miscellaneous other writings, biographical information and family materials. Correspondence from organizations is filed under the name of that organization, e.g. Women in Communication, Inc., Women Involved in Farm Economics, University of Missouri Alumni Association. The series is arranged in alphabetical order by subject. Correspondence is arranged alphabetically.

The **Executive Order** series includes correspondence and agency reports pertaining to Executive Order 12336 which created the *Task Force on Legal Equity for Women* in 1981, and the resulting legislation. The task force was designed to provide for the elimination of gender based regulatory and procedural barriers in the federal government.

The Attorney General was ordered to review the language of federal laws, regulations, policies, and practices searching for differentiation or discrimination based on gender. Folders 18 through 24 contain the in-depth reports prepared for the President by the AG, responses and

criticisms. Original report titles were retained and as such, there is no 2nd Quarterly Report but there is a 5th Quarterly report. The remainder of the folders contain reports to the White House on the progress of these changes. Correspondence within the series is arranged alphabetically and the reports chronologically.

Materials pertaining to McClendon's journalism career comprise the **Journalism** series including newspaper columns and clippings, White House press briefings, statements, McClendon Press Briefing Group records, newsletters, and miscellaneous papers. In addition to general columns and stories, McClendon wrote a column for her news syndicate entitled "Washington Report." Folders 73 through 75 contain transcripts of White House briefings in which McClendon asked questions of either the Press Secretary or the President. Most of this material is neither titled nor dated and original order has been retained.

McClendon involved herself with women's issues at an early age and remained committed throughout her life. The **Women's Issues** series includes published articles, correspondence, women's political organizations of particular interest to McClendon, newspaper clippings, research and writings by McClendon, congressional correspondence, statements, U.S. Supreme Court rulings and briefs, commission reports, newsletters, guides and other publications. The series is arranged alphabetically by subject matter.

Comprising the bulk of the **Women in the Military** series are the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) materials. The Committee was established in 1951 with the primary goal to assist and advise the Secretary of Defense on policies and matters relating to women in the U. S. Armed Forces. McClendon served on the committee from 1971 to 1973.

As a veteran, McClendon was deeply concerned with women veterans' issues, primarily health care. During the 1970s, she compiled a scrapbook containing transcripts of news conferences pertaining to veterans' affairs and would often include newspaper columns she wrote on the same topic. Veterans wrote McClendon requesting her assistance and a sampling of these letters and the resulting official responses from the Veterans Administration are included in the scrapbook. Due to preservation concerns, the scrapbook was photocopied in original order.

The series, which also includes surveys, newspaper clippings, correspondence, brochures, publications and Department of Defense reports, is arranged alphabetically by subject matter.

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