

*South Carolina Political Collections*  
*The University of South Carolina*

**P. Bradley Morrah, Jr.**  
*(1915-1992)*  
**Papers, 1931-1990**

- Volume:** 3.75 linear feet
- Processed:** 2000, by Jean B. Bischoff
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## **Biographical Note:**

“He gives the impression of being stranded in the wrong century, transparently honest, and kind, and dutiful.” Writing more than fifty years ago in *The New Yorker*, British author Rebecca West thus described Greenville native P. Bradley Morrah, Jr., noting that “he was very likable, obviously courageous, and there was nothing unlikable in his oratory.” By all accounts, Morrah brought these qualities to his many years of public service, first as a member of the armed forces in World War II, then as a member of the South Carolina House of Representatives, 1947 to 1948, and the state Senate, 1953 to 1966, on the State Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission, 1976 to 1983, and, in retirement, as chairman of the U.S. Constitutional Bicentennial Commission, 1971 to 1977.

Morrah was born in Lancaster, South Carolina, on June 13, 1915, the son of Patrick Bradley Morrah and Hessie Thomson Morrah. In 1922 the family moved to Greenville where Morrah attended public schools and graduated in 1932 from Greenville High School. After lettering in basketball and track at The Citadel, Morrah graduated in the class of 1936 and enrolled in Duke University Law School. He received his law degree in 1939, gained admission to the South Carolina Bar on August 31, 1939, and practiced in Greenville until 1941.

In 1940, Morrah was elected to the South Carolina House of Representatives where he was appointed to the powerful Ways and Means Committee. He resigned from the legislature two days after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor to enter active military duty and rose to the rank of major while serving in the Fourteenth Antiaircraft Artillery in Australia and the Pacific as an intelligence officer.

While stationed in Australia, he met and married Edna D. Burgess of Melbourne. The Morrachs' first child, Irene, was born in 1945 in Australia. In 1946, Morrah was discharged from the Army and returned to Greenville, and within several months he was able to arrange transportation to the United States for his wife and daughter. Voters immediately reelected Morrah to the South Carolina House of Representatives, where he represented Greenville from 1947 to 1948. Morrah's son Bradley was born in 1948.

His defense pleadings in the trial of one of 31 men accused of lynching Willie Earle in 1947 reveal his talents, both as an attorney and as an orator. According to Rebecca West, who witnessed the trial, Morrah warned the jurors that if they convicted his client, their verdict “would rankle in the hearts of men throughout the state, from the rock-ribbed brow of Caesar's Head to the marshes of Fort Sumter” and that “the ghosts of Hampton's men would rise to haunt you.”

In the 1952 Democratic primary, Morrah won a seat in the state Senate by defeating Greenville attorney William Chandler. He served in that body from 1953 to 1966. In the late 1950s, Morrah and several other more progressive senators banded together to pursue their legislative goals in an informal group they called “the left field boys.” The group challenged the old-line establishment represented by Edgar Brown and Marion Gressette. It included John West of Kershaw, Earle Morris of Pickens, and Marshall Parker of Oconee. “The only purpose for wanting to see the Club in existence is so that we Senators who have mutual interests and belong to more or less the middle aged and the middle of years of service might get together and benefit some by discussing our problems.” (letter from Sen. W. Bruce Williams, Dec. 15, 1958) As head of the Greenville delegation and a member of the committees on the Judiciary, 1953 to

1966, Commerce and Manufacturing, 1957 to 1966, and Highways, 1957 to 1966, Morrah struggled against the entrenched powers in the Senate. In 1957 he campaigned to limit the powers of the Free Conference Committee, which dictated state appropriations every year, boldly challenging the authority of Edgar Brown, the Senate's senior member. Morrah took the lead in instituting electoral reform in Greenville by directing a purge of the voter registration lists, backing reduced residency requirements for voters, and introducing IBM voting machines. He advocated legislative control of the Santee Cooper Dam and equitable educational opportunities for all of South Carolina's schoolchildren. Commenting in 1966 upon his role as a legislator, he declared: "I have never taken an extreme left or [an extreme] right position on any measure. I have been willing to fight when necessary and compromise when necessary in order to achieve good legislative results."

From 1961 to 1962, Morrah campaigned unsuccessfully for election by members of the South Carolina House of Representatives to a circuit judgeship. The race required three runoff votes, and after his disappointing defeat he wrote to many of his long time colleagues, "It is never pleasant to choose between friends, and I want you to know that I value your friendship now and will continue to do so." Columbia mayor Lester Bates responded to this letter by quoting Tennyson: "'Men may rise on stepping stones of their dead selves to higher things', and I am sure you will go on to greater successes in your profession and in public service." (February 3, 1962)

In 1966, Morrah ran simultaneously for his state Senate seat and the United States Senate seat held by Republican Strom Thurmond. He lost to Thurmond and his Senate seat went to Republican write-in candidate Thomas A. Wofford, a fellow defense attorney from the 1947 Willie Earle trial.

As a legislator in the 1950s and 1960s, P. Bradley Morrah possessed unusual foresight. He recognized the expanding role of the federal government and how it would increasingly affect the lives of South Carolinians well before many of his colleagues were ready to acknowledge the rapid changes occurring in post-War America. He best described his political philosophy as he campaigned for a United States Senate seat in 1966: "An expanding government is here to stay and will not go away. Extreme views have no place in the passage of legislation. My own seventeen years in the legislature have taught me that you cannot compromise, you cannot delay, you cannot take off the sharp edges of anything — unless you command the respect of your fellow legislators. [T]he solutions to the knotty problems confronting a nation which is bulging at the population seams require a calm, forceful, intelligent, and persuasive approach."

Unlike many of his colleagues who advocated States' Rights and social conservatism, Morrah adopted positions that were closer to the political center. He argued in 1966: "the complexities of government never lessen. These federal programs are established and they are not going to be abolished. It's up to us to make them work more efficiently and save tax money. We should screen each of these programs carefully, but a little state like South Carolina can't stop them. This is the time for action, not reaction."

He was a member of the Board of Visitors of The Citadel, 1949 to 1952, the State Parks, Recreation and Tourism Commission, 1973 to 1983, the State Archives Commission, 1977 to 1983, and other important civic organizations. He served as Chairman of S.C. American Revolution Bicentennial Committee, 1971 to 1977, and on the United States Constitution

Bicentennial Commission, 1971 to 1977. He was a man described by his fellow attorneys in the South Carolina Bar Association as “a lawyer of the highest ethical principles, always a gentleman; he epitomized the best of the profession.” *The State* newspaper eulogized Morrah in a February 20, 1992 editorial, “The reforms espoused by Bradley Morrah and other independent-minded lawmakers more than three decades ago may seem pretty tame stuff by today’s more expansive, radical standards. But their tenacity and drive can be the inspiration to advance the reforms that must occur if the government of this state is to be genuinely accountable and responsive to the needs of its citizens.” P. Bradley Morrah died February 17, 1992.

### **Scope and Content Note:**

The Morrah Papers are composed of 3.75 linear feet of material, c.1931 to 1990, arranged in four series: Public Papers, Personal Papers, Clippings, and Audiovisual materials. The majority of the collection consists of Public Papers from 1953 through 1966 when Morrah served in the South Carolina State Senate. Personal Papers chiefly document Morrah’s political campaigns, notably his pursuit of a circuit judgeship, 1961 to 1962, and his 1966 bid for the U. S. Senate. Clippings touch upon his WWII years and cover his 1966 Senate race in depth. Some files have been rearranged, retitled, or combined for clarity and ease of use.

Public Papers consist of General Papers and Topical Files. General Papers chiefly consists of correspondence with constituents, colleagues, and Greenville’s municipal managers relating to politics, pending legislation, and other matters. These are arranged in chronological order. Topical Files regard specific issues which concerned Morrah during his Senate career and illuminate South Carolina’s political processes at the county level and the wide-ranging powers of a typical county delegation leader.

Of particular interest are papers documenting one of Morrah’s earliest successes — the financing and development of the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport, one of the state’s first regional facilities serving commercial and corporate jet aircraft. Included are early planning documents and correspondence, 1957 to 1966, documenting the fight between the airport’s backers and foes. A Greenville newspaper editor wrote Morrah, “Those who have criticized what you and the other members of the Delegation did will be in the forefront of the distinguished guests at the dedication and they won’t be far behind when the development gravy bowl is taken off the back burner” (1961). The establishment of the Greenville Municipal Auditorium is similarly documented.

Morrah continued his pursuit of economic development for Greenville by spearheading the enormous task of purchasing Donaldson Air Force Base from the United States government and converting it into an industrial park occupied by private businesses and industrial plants. Correspondence and management committee reports from 1960 to 1966 illustrate the process of turning the base into a viable commercial center.

Other topical files document issues with which citizens and legislators struggled, ranging from Local Option (whether voters should determine the sale of alcohol on a county-by-county basis), to election law, education, and voting reform. Morrah’s letters articulate his positions on a broad range of topics and demonstrate his infinite patience, respect and empathy for citizens and colleagues alike.

Morrah's constituents express in their letters a poignant and literate concern for their world, which began to change so rapidly after World War II. Issues relating to the expanding role of the federal government in the social structure appear with increasing frequency in correspondence. In the final years of Morrah's Senate career, files reflect the growing influence of the civil rights movement and the fledgling activities of the federal Office of Economic Opportunity in Greenville County. Although these records are not comprehensive, they illustrate the beginnings of important social forces in the early 1960s.

The Correctional Facilities file provides insight into the links between Greenville County's system of prison camps and chain gangs and the local highway department. Letters in the file also document citizens' concerns with the conditions under which the prisoners lived.

Throughout General Papers and Topical Files, Morrah's letters display his superb communications skills, which, even when he was not able to agree with the writer or provide the requested assistance, certainly must have left the recipient with a sense of having his views heard and considered.

Personal Papers are chiefly composed of campaign records, from 1952, 1960, 1962, 1966, and 1968. The 1952 file contains campaign speeches in draft and finished forms, a large amount of opposition research, clippings, and visual materials. The elections of 1962 and 1966 are the most extensively documented campaigns. Files reflect Morrah's desire to be elected to two very different positions, the first, election by his fellow Senators to a Circuit judgeship in 1962, and the second, election by South Carolina's citizens to the United States Senate. Both efforts ultimately failed. The 1962 file contains running counts of the votes committed to him, evidence of how carefully he measured his chance of victory. Files contain dozens of requests to other legislators and citizens for support and many of their replies, some positive and others deliberately worded and noncommittal, "This race has posed an unusual problem for me since I know and like both candidates, you and Frank, very much. You and Marshall Williams of Orangeburg are my favorites of forty-six Senators [but] to make my decision tougher, Frank and I went to Carolina together and were fraternity brothers. I am now serving on the committee in the House of which he is Chairman. I hope that my decision in the end will merit your confidence." (1961)

The 1966 campaign file contains documentation of campaign strategy, fund-raising tactics, and stump schedules. Of particular interest is extensive opposition research on Strom Thurmond's Senate voting record and lively speculation as to how brief Thurmond's Senate career was likely to be. Clippings from newspapers across the state also document this race.

Personal papers also contain notes relating to a trip to Antarctica made by Morrah and other public figures in 1960, and a limited quantity of family and Citadel correspondence.

Clippings reflect Morrah's career, campaigns and family life, 1931 to 1983 and are arranged in chronological order. Morrah's views on contemporary issues and his political philosophy are articulated in quotations from addresses excerpted in clippings.

Audiovisual material consists of an audiotape of John Culbertson, Morrah's opponent in the 1966 primary election, a speech by Bob Jones, Sr., and small collection of photos.

## **Timeline**

- 1915 Born 13 June, Lancaster.
- 1922 Family moved to Greenville.
- 1932 Graduated Greenville High School.
- 1936 B.A., The Citadel. Lettered in basketball and track.
- 1939 Graduated Duke University School of Law, admitted to the South Carolina Bar on 31 August and began practice in Greenville.
- 1940 Elected to S.C. House from Greenville County
- 1941 Enlisted in U.S. Army on October 22. Resigned from House on December 9, 1941 to enter active service.
- 1942-45 Served in Fourteenth anti-aircraft artillery as an intelligence officer, stationed in the Pacific.
- 1944 Married Edna D. Burgess of Melbourne, Australia.
- 1946 Discharged on 2 February with rank of Major.
- 1946 Elected to S.C. House of Representatives from Greenville County.
- 1947-48 Served S.C. House. Defended Greenville man among those charged with lynching Willie Earle.
- 1949-52 Board of Visitors, The Citadel.
- 1952 Elected to S.C. Senate from Greenville County, served 1953-1966.
- 1966 Unsuccessfully challenged U.S. Senator Strom Thurmond and lost state Senate seat to Republican write-in candidate Thomas A. Wofford.
- 1971 Named Chair of the S.C. American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, served 1971-1983.
- 1976-83 Served on State Parks, Tourism, and Recreation Commission.
- 1977-83 Served on State Commission on Archives and History.
- 1977-84 Chairman, U.S. Constitution Bicentennial Commission of South Carolina.
- 1992 Died February 17.

**COLLECTION INVENTORY**

Public Papers:

**Box 1**

General:

1952-1954  
1955-1957  
1958-1959  
1960-1962  
1963-1967, 1990  
n.d.

Topical Files:

Airport:

1957-1958  
1959  
1960  
1961  
1962  
1963-1966

Banking, 1954-1964  
Blue Laws, 1953-1966  
Carolina High School, Student Letters, 1961  
Children's Issues, 1953-1961  
Civic Auditorium, Greenville, 1954-1963  
Civil Rights, 1952-1966  
County Attorney, Greenville, 1955-1957  
Department of Corrections, 1952-1956  
Department of Highways:  
1947-1958  
1959-1961  
1962-1966  
Department of Motor Vehicles, 1954-1966  
Department of Parks, Recreation & Tourism, 1982  
Development Board, Greenville, 1959-1964  
Donaldson Air Force Base, Redevelopment of:  
1960-1962  
1963  
1964:  
Jan.-April  
May-June  
July-Dec.  
1965:  
Jan.-June  
July-Dec.  
1966  
Earle, Willie, Lynching of

Education:

**Box 2**

General:

1952-1953  
1954-1955  
1956-1957  
1958-1959  
1960-1962  
1963-1966

Greenville Industrial Training School, establishment of, 1961-1962  
Educational Television (ETV), 1958-1963

Election Law, 1948-1966  
Farmer's Market, 1952-1962  
Fireworks, 1957-1966  
Gambling, 1954-1966  
Gun Control, 1957-1965  
Health Care:  
    1953-1956  
    1957-1959  
    1960-1966  
Insurance, 1953-1966  
Labor, 1954-1966  
Libraries, 1958-1965  
Liquor Ordinances, Bob Jones University, 1959  
Local Option:  
    1953-1954  
    1955-1966  
Magistrates:  
    1952-1960  
    1961-1966  
Natural Resources, 1953-1966  
Office of Economic Opportunity, Anti-poverty programs, 1964-1965  
Retirement Systems:  
    1953-1958  
    1959-1966  
South Carolina American Revolution Bicentennial Commission, 1976-1983  
Taxes:  
    1947-1956  
    1957-1960  
    1961-1966  
Utilities, 1953-1966  
Voting:  
    1952-1964  
    1965  
Welfare:  
    General, 1953-1966  
    County Home, 1952-1961

Personal Papers:

    Campaigns:

        1952 (2 folders)  
        1960  
        1962

    1966:

        General:

            1965, April -April 1966

            1966 continued:

                May

                June:

                    1-15

                    16-30

                July:

                    1-15

                    16-31

                August:

                    1-15

                    16-31

                Sept.

**Box 3**



Oct.:  
    1-15  
    16-30  
Nov.-Dec.  
    c.1966  
Opposition Research:  
    General  
    COPE (AFL/CIO) Research:  
        84th Congress  
        85th Congress  
        89th Congress  
    Senate Democratic Policy Committee  
    Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee  
  
    1968  
    1970  
    1990  
    n.d.  
Family:  
    1947-1963  
    1964-1966  
    Biographical Material  
    The Citadel, 1949-1966  
    Antarctic Trip, 1960  
Clippings:  
    1941-1984  
    n.d.  
Audiovisual:  
    Photographs:  
        General  
        Events  
        Groups  
        Portraits  
    Audiotapes:  
        Jones, Bob, Sr. 1959  
        Culbertson, John Bolt, 1966