

Collection: William P. SAUNDERS Papers
1952-1983

P.C.1951.1-4
OVERSIZE PC.1951
Mf.P.337.1-2

Physical Description: 4 fibredex boxes containing original and xerox copies of letters, articles of incorporation, memoranda, contracts, typescripts, printed brochures and directories, commissions and citations, and newspaper clippings. (Five large scrapbooks have been microfilmed.) A 12-inch 78 rpm disc recording has been transferred to the Audio-Visual Collection.

Acquisition: Gift, Mrs. Elizabeth S. Barnhardt, Pinehurst, N.C., 1998, 2005; Mrs. R. O. Southwell, Holden Beach, N.C., 2005.

North Carolina State Archives
Raleigh, North Carolina

Description: William Preston Saunders (1897-1983), a native of Dallas, N.C., was educated in Plumtree Academy (Spruce Pine, N.C.), Morganton High School, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The son of a textile man, Saunders chose a career in textiles, serving in 1931 as manager of Pinehurst Silk Mills at Hemp (now Robbins) in Moore County, N.C. Shortly thereafter, Saunders was appointed president of Robbins Mills and held that title until his retirement in 1954 upon merger of Robbins Mills with the American Woolen Company. On November 4, 1955, Governor Hodges commissioned Saunders director of the Department of Conservation and Development, an office he held until he resigned his commission on December 31, 1960. It was during Saunders' tenure as departmental director that the Research Triangle Park was conceptualized and brought to fruition. In some regards, the role Saunders played as a private citizen in the creation of the Research Triangle might have been more crucial than the role he played as a state official. Saunders was called upon once more, this time by Governor Moore, to serve as director of the Department of Conservation and Development from January 11 until July 23, 1965, while the governor cast around for a director who could execute the office for a term of years.

Long active in local politics and in the Democratic Party, Saunders maintained a keen interest in Moore County affairs and institutions. In 1962 he stood for election to the state senate and was elected to the General Assembly that convened on February 6, 1963. He did not stand for re-election in 1964 on account of a piece of political sleight of hand by a party rival, but two years later he re-entered the race and was returned as state senator in the General Assemblies of 1969, 1971, and 1973/74.

There are representative papers in this collection that relate to Saunders' term as director of the Department of Conservation and Development, to matters handled by him during his four terms in the state senate, and to his membership in the Democratic Party. The greater and most substantive part of the papers (2.5 fibredex boxes), however, relate to Research Triangle Park and especially to the role played by Romeo Holland Guest (1906-1987) in its creation.

Guest, a Greensboro construction contractor, envisioned an industrial center to be located in a roughly triangular tract of land made up of a few thousand contiguous acres lying in the countryside more or less equidistant from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University at Durham, and North Carolina State University at Raleigh. With state support, and with cooperative participation by the three universities, Guest felt a research park would attract industry and industrial research facilities into the state.

Early in 1955 Governor Hodges embraced the idea of a research park and appointed a Research Triangle Committee to organize cooperative effort among the three universities, the executive office, and business and industrial leadership in the state. Governor Hodges caused the committee to be incorporated the following year as a non-stock, non-profit, benevolent and educational corporation. By 1957 it was apparent that economic conditions made it unlikely that money could be found in North Carolina to purchase the necessary land and develop the concept. At this point, Saunders proposed that the governor meet and discuss the idea with his longtime friend and founder of Robbins Mills, Karl Robbins. When they met, Robbins immediately agreed to put up to a million dollars into the project, and engaged Guest to handle acquisition of the land. As a result the Pinelands Company, Inc., was chartered in September 1957 with Romeo Guest as president, and Karl Robbins sole stockholder.

Within two months the Pinelands Company, Inc., had purchased almost 500 acres and had contracted options to purchase another 3,500 acres. Six of the options would expire in December 1957 and January 1958, and for reasons not immediately apparent there was serious question as to whether the company would have the purchase money in hand prior to expiration of the options, or not. Saunders stepped into the breach again. On December 1, 1957, he lent his personal savings, \$100,000, to the Pinelands Company, Inc., so that the option money would not be lost and the full purchase of the tracts could be completed. By the latter end of 1958 purchase of all parcels that constitute Research Triangle Park had been completed by the Pinelands Company, Inc., and the company had, in turn, transferred title to the land (in exchange for the original purchase price plus 5%) to the Research Triangle Committee. Three weeks later, on December 23, 1958, the name of the committee was altered to Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina, and its membership enlarged from 12 to 25. The 2.5 fibredex boxes of papers in this collection relating to these events is made up of documentation meant to reveal Guest's role in the conception and origin of the Research Triangle: copies of correspondence, memoranda, programs, articles of incorporation, contracts, minutes of the directors of the Pinelands Company, Inc., newspaper clippings, informal typescript histories of the Research Triangle, printed brochures, and similar documentation.

A much smaller proportion of the collection contains papers more nearly relating to Saunders, including two folders of biographical data relating to Saunders and some of his commissions and citations. This group also contains papers dating from 1958 to 1979 relating to Saunders' Democratic Party activities. (Saunders' copy of a 12-inch 78-rpm disc recording having on one side "Excerpts from a Speech by Maj. Gen. John R. Deane, Denver, Colorado, June 16, 1956, 'With Harriman in Moscow'", and on the other "A Message to _____ from Averell Harriman", designed to rally party spirit on the eve of the 1956 Democratic National Convention, has been transferred to the Audio-Visual Collection in the Archives.) Saunders' file as chairman of the 1963 Moore County School Bond Steering Committee and the successful effort to secure local approval for a bond issue to build and maintain Sandhills Community College falls within this small group, as do his 1963 and 1974 state senate file relating to appropriations for Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve, another senate file relating to a 1971 appropriation for restoration and maintenance of the House in the Horseshoe, and one more senate file concerning passage during the 1973 session of the state's "Occupational Safety and Health Act."

There are two series of materials arising from Saunder's tenure as director of the Department of Conservation and Development. One is a fibredex box of letters of invitation written to Saunders between 1958 and 1960 and his response to them. They are separated into "Invitations Accepted" and "Invitations Declined", and include invitations to the openings of industrial plants in the state, to civic functions, to conventions, to sporting events, and to social functions. The second series is made up of five unindexed microfilmed scrapbooks of newspaper clippings arranged chronologically. The clippings are of news stories of industries moving into (or proposing to move into) North Carolina or about industrial research. Many of the articles are about state parks, the state's mineral resources, forestry, and commercial fisheries. A consistent theme is the plight of the state's oyster industry and measures to rehabilitate it. The microfilmed scrapbooks are identified by the shelf mark P.337.1 and P.337.2 and housed in the microfilm reading room.

INVENTORY

- PC.1951.1. Research Triangle
Correspondence, etc., 1952-1979
- PC.1951.2. Research Triangle
Correspondence, etc., 1980-1983
Newspaper Clippings
Typescript Histories
- PC.1951.3. Research Triangle and Personal
Research Triangle--Brochures
Research Triangle Institute--Brochures
Research Triangle Park--Brochures
Research Triangle Park--Directories, 1974-1981

INVENTORY, continued

- PC.1951.3. Research Triangle and Personal, continued
Personal (Biographical)
*Personal (Commissions, Citations, etc.), 1959-1982
Politics (Democratic Party), 1958-1979
House in the Horseshoe, 1971
Occupational Safety, 1973-1974
Sandhills Community College, 1963
Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve, 1963-1975
*Three personal citations are filed with oversize PC material.
- PC.1951.4. Conservation and Development
Invitations Accepted, 1958-1960 (5 folders)
Invitations Declined, 1958-1960 (3 folders)
Retirement Letters, 1960-1961
- Microfilm Conservation and Development Scrapbooks (on microfilm)
P.337.1-2 Dec. 15, 1955 - Dec. 31, 1956 (127 leaves)
Jan.1 - Dec. 31, 1957 (90 leaves)
Jan.1 - Dec. 31, 1958 (76 leaves)
Jan.1 - Dec. 31, 1959 (94 leaves)
Jan.1 - Dec. 31, 1960 (56 leaves)

Main entry card

Subject cards

Community colleges
Democratic Party of North Carolina
Fisheries
Forestry reserves
Guest, Romeo Holland (1906-1987)
House in the Horseshoe (Moore County, N.C.)
Industrial safety
Industries (2)
Natural areas
North Carolina Department of Conservation and Development
Oyster fisheries
Parks
Pinelands Company, Inc.
Research Triangle Committee. see Research Triangle Foundation of N.C.
Research Triangle Foundation of North Carolina
Research Triangle Institute (N.C.)
Research Triangle Park (N.C.)
Robbins, Karl (1892-1960)
Sandhills Community College (Pinehurst, N.C.)
Weymouth Woods-Sandhills Nature Preserve (N.C.)

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Geographic card
Moore County (N.C.)

Arranged and described by G. Stevenson, 31 Aug 2005