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GERTRUDE DILLS MCKEE:
A BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

by

Joan Wright Ferguson

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School
of
Western Carolina University
in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Arts

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To Jim and Rachel

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Abstract

GERTRUDE DILLS MCKEE: A BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Joan Wright Ferguson, M.A.

Western Carolina University, May 1988

Director: Dr. Gordon B. McKinney

This thesis describes the life and accomplishments of Gertrude Dills McKee, one of the most influential leaders of western North Carolina. Her lifetime between 1885 and 1948 spanned a period of social, political, and economic changes for women. She was one of the pioneer women in North Carolina in politics and social legislation. She was the first woman elected to the North Carolina Senate.

Mrs. McKee was active in women's clubs, serving terms as president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs, the Southeastern Council of Federated Women's Clubs, and the North Carolina Division of the United Daughters of the Confederacy.

Mrs. McKee was appointed to the North Carolina Educational Commission, the Commission for the Consolidation of the University of North Carolina, the Board of Inquiry for the investigation of Morganton Hospital, and the State Board of Education. She served terms as a trustee of Peace College, Brevard College, the University of North Carolina,

and Western Carolina Teachers' College (now Western Carolina University). The Gertrude Dills McKee Building at Western Carolina University is named for her. She received an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from Woman's College of the University of North Carolina.

Mrs. McKee was married to Ernest Lyndon McKee. Together they developed the resort of High Hampton Inn.

When Mrs. McKee died in 1948, she was eulogized as an able public servant and a great lady, a woman who early had dedicated her unusual gifts of intellect, personality, and leadership to service for the people of her state.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION AND CHILDHOOD, 1885 - 1903

At first glance Gertrude Dills McKee might seem to be a typical middle-class woman in a small town who joined women's clubs, raised money for charities, attended church regularly, participated in school and community organizations, took an interest in the activities of her children, and hosted social affairs. But she was not typical. She left club meetings early because she was running for office, saying: "I have to go out and kiss babies."[1] She was elected to the state senate; she sat on boards and commissions by appointment of the governor; she received an honorary law degree; she had a model statute and a college building named for her; she had contest medals and awards given in her name; she was a gifted speaker, equally at ease before a political convention, a graduating class, a woman's club convention, or a fraternal organization meeting. She could lunch with Eleanor Roosevelt one day, dine with the governor another, and still be just one of the girls at the bridge table.[2]

Only her husband called her Gertrude. To the people of Jackson County, she was just Gert, or Miss Gert, or Aunt Gert. She was a woman of boundless energy and enthusiasm.

She possessed an extraordinary personality and a talent for leadership and public speaking which she gave of unselfishly all of her life. She has rightfully been called "a renaissance woman."[3]

Gertrude Dills was born on July 8, 1885, in Dillsboro, North Carolina. She was the second of three daughters. Her sister Minnie was seven years older; her sister Beulah, fourteen months younger. Her parents were Alice Enloe and William Allen Dills. The house she was born in was a simple A-frame called the white house. It was a plank house, rather than the more common log house, perched on a hill overlooking Scott's Creek and the Tuckaseigee River. It was the first house built in Dillsboro. When Gert was a year old, the family moved across the creek to a larger dwelling which has remained in the Dills family until recently.[4]

In 1885 the town of Dillsboro in Jackson County was a small mountain town. Located on the Murphy branch of the Western North Carolina Railroad, it was expanding rapidly with the establishment of mills, mines, and general businesses. Its nearest rival was Sylva, two miles east. Dillsboro was named for Gert's father, who donated the land for the town. At one time it was said that he could walk from his front door five miles in any direction and still be on his own property. That was probably not much of an exaggeration. W. A. Dills was certainly the leading citizen

of Dillsboro. In addition to his land holdings, he established the Mount Beulah Hotel (now the Jarrett House), served in the state legislature and as mayor of Dillsboro.[5]

Dills fought for the Confederate Army and was wounded and captured. As a prisoner in Camp Douglas, Missouri, he spent his time reading books on geometry and trigonometry. As a result of this reading, he taught himself the principles of surveying. After his release from prison, he remained in Missouri teaching school. When he returned to North Carolina, he was appointed district surveyor for Jackson County. One of his surveying jobs took him to the Enloe home on the Oconaluftee River which he had visited seventeen years earlier on his way to the battlefront. There he found that the baby girl Alice, whom he had first seen in 1861, had grown into a lovely young woman. Following a short courtship, they married.[6]

Gert's mother was primarily concerned with raising her family and homemaking chores; however, she did serve for a short time as postmistress of the Dillsboro Post Office in 1888 and 1889. On the death of her husband in 1899, Mrs. Dills assumed responsibility for managing the family estate. She successfully handled business matters until the 1920s when she turned over these duties to her daughter Beulah's husband, A. H. Weaver. Mrs. Dills was also active

in her church and the community, doing charity work with the Indians. Mrs. Dills was regarded as an excellent cook and often provided "wholesome" and "delicious" meals for visitors to Mount Beulah Hotel. In 1909 she was a judge in the culinary department of the Jackson County Fair. Mrs. Dills lived in the family home until her death in 1943.[7]

During the years that Gert was growing up, Dillsboro was bustling with activity, ambitiously trying to rival Sylva as the central place of trade and general business in Jackson County. Gert's father had sold more land for new homes and commercial buildings. A post office was established, and the town incorporated in 1889. The first manufacturing plant in the new town was a saw mill; in 1889 a lumber mill was built. Two years later the Harris Clay Company took over the mining and shipping of kaolin from Dillsboro and the surrounding area. Capt. William A. Enloe (kin to Mrs. Dills) moved from Webster, opened a general store, and became one of the town's leading merchants.[8]

The citizens of Dillsboro took pride in their town. In 1893 a broad and substantial sidewalk with the necessary crossings was provided for pedestrians along the principal street. This was done with money contributed by every citizen, all of whom would benefit when the streets inevitably turned to mud in the winter. Dillsboro was a town with pride and sufficient public spirit to have a

regard for appearances, conveniences, and comfort.[9]

Along with the commercial development of the town came an increased interest in social and cultural activities. Literary, dramatic, and improvement clubs were organized with both male and female members. A chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union was established in 1890, and it attracted considerable interest by means of declamation contests with medals for the winners. These groups and other organizations sponsored debates, plays, musicales, oyster suppers, ice cream socials, recitations, and lectures for the amusement and intellectual development of the townspeople. These events were usually well attended not only by the local citizens but by people from neighboring towns. Sports, particularly baseball, were another interest. Teams from Dillsboro competed with teams from Sylva, and there was great enthusiasm among the fans. At first there were only boys teams; but as baseball fever spread, girls teams were formed.[10]

Gert most likely attended a great many of these functions even though very young. Her sister Minnie often sang, and her mother would have been involved in the church socials and fundraisers. At one fundraising supper, Minnie's cake was bought for the second highest amount of money. Gert's father participated in at least one debate, taking the negative side of the question: Should Women Be

Allowed the Right of Elective Franchise?[11]

Education and educational facilities were a concern to the early Dillsboro settlers. A report by the Committee of Education of the Jackson County Farmers' Alliance noted that the condition of the people was far below what it might be which was attributed in part to careless home culture and the lack of suitable school buildings. Soon after that report, several citizens subscribed money for the erection of a two-story building which was to be used jointly for school and church purposes--open to all denominations. The second story was to be reserved for the exclusive use of the local Masonic Lodge. Gert's early education was augmented through lessons given by people who stayed at the hotel. If they knew anything about arithmetic, or literature, or any other academic subject, Gert would go over to the lobby in the evening, and they would give her a lesson on first one subject and then another. Gert would later attribute the good grades she received at Peace to these special tutoring sessions.[12]

Religion and participation in church activities were important to the Dills family. They were members of the Presbyterian church in Dillsboro, although in a town as small as Dillsboro, the lines between the sects were not rigid. The Baptists and Methodists held joint revival meetings; women from all denominations, including eventually

the four Dills women, joined the Methodist Missionary Society. Gert's deep faith and lifelong devotion to her God and church had their roots in this Christian home with its "God-loving" and "God-fearing" father.[13]

Politics was a major interest of the Dills family. Gert's grandfather Wesley Enloe had been the first chairman of the Swain County Board of Commissioners. Her uncle J. Ramsey Dills had served in the North Carolina General Assembly in 1856-57. At the time Dillsboro was incorporated, Gert's father was serving as a legislator. He also served a term as mayor of Dillsboro and was an interested participant in local Democratic politics. Several times he was a delegate to the State Democratic Convention. In 1892 a Democratic Club was organized in Dillsboro with thirty-five charter members.[14]

By all accounts it appears that Gert's childhood was a happy one. There were visits to Grandfather Enloe's home on the Oconaluftee and sliding down the hay in the barn loft. All three sisters were extroverts, ready to participate and to have a good time. For Gert this carried over into adulthood with her fondness for joining clubs. Minnie being so much older than Gert had a different relationship with her than Gert did with Beulah. Only fourteen months apart, the two younger sisters were playmates; for a time their mother even dressed them alike and treated them as if they

were twins. Gert took great delight in leading her sister on adventures. One time there was a railroad accident in which a train ran over a man cutting him in half. This was exciting, albeit somewhat gruesome, news in a small town where not too much went on, and the drama of the situation must have appealed to Gert. She and Beulah were quick to make the rounds of the town, knocking on people's doors to tell them what had happened. When the younger and plumper Beulah got tired and wanted to stop, Gert insisted they continue, saying, "Don't the people's eyes stick out when we tell them."[15]

If there were something to do, or somewhere to go, Gert was for it. Later she might question the value of what she was doing, but she usually did not stop to think beforehand. Gert's eagerness to have fun was coupled with an intense desire to learn. She was interested in almost everything and would read whatever was available. In this way she was able to overcome the narrowness, or confining aspects, of living in a small town off the beaten track. Gert particularly loved the study of English and grammar and knew the definition of every word one could imagine.[16]

Beulah was said to be her mother's favorite child; Gert was her father's favorite. He enjoyed and took pride in Gert's enquiring mind and was both amused and pleased with her attempts to get all kinds of information. Gert

certainly seemed to be the one who followed most closely in her father's footsteps. There is no available data about his attitude towards his oldest daughter Minnie. It is entirely possible that he tried first to interest her in his pursuits. On the other hand, he may also have thought he would have more children, one of whom might be a boy who would more naturally inherit his father's mantle. But when two girls and no boys were born after Minnie, Dills treated Gert as he would have treated a son and groomed her to assume a role in politics and/or the business world. He may have had a hand in insisting that she study, although evidence suggests that learning was not boring to her. It has been said that while other neighbor girls were outside playing, Gert was inside with her mother reading English and American history, the Shakespeare plays, and practicing declamations. Despite her love for social activity, she was an avid reader of any and all material she could lay her hands on. In this way she came to be knowledgeable on a wide range of subjects.[17]

Minnie and Beulah were beautiful girls; Gert developed into a beautiful woman. She once described Minnie as elegant in manner and attractive; Beulah as cuddly with a dozen beaux. She described herself as painfully thin. Later she would laughingly say, "When it was the style to be fat, I was thin; and when it [was] the style to be thin, I

[was] fat."[18] Gert was also nearsighted and had to wear glasses; she considered herself homely. However, all three girls were popular and had many friends. When they were young, they learned to sew; Beulah learned to cook as well, but Gert never did. They learned to play the piano well, and they were all excellent singers.[19]

From the available evidence, it appears that the Dills household was a traditional one. Mrs. Dills was mainly concerned with household tasks and raising her children although there were servants to help with these duties. She made occasional trips to Sylva to shop or to see friends. On at least one occasion she went with her husband to Raleigh.[20] She followed her husband in the postmaster's job, and it is likely that she did so because he had to be away in Raleigh for the legislative session. Perhaps more unusual was her assuming the management of the estate when her husband died. Dills died intestate. As a result the property would have been divided equally between his wife and three children if they had not agreed to keep it intact for the time being.[21]

Dills was a landholder, businessman, and entrepreneur. At various times he had been a soldier, legislator, railroad agent, postmaster, mayor, superintendent of public education, teacher, innkeeper, and surveyor. As an educator he achieved a merited reputation as a thorough instructor

and successful disciplinarian. He has been described as a "man of engaging personality, public-spirited to a fault, deservedly popular, and worthy of being held in honor and grateful remembrance because of his character and public services."[22] He was called a "friend to man--not only among the well to do but among those in the humblest walks of life and a friend to both white and colored." At the time of his death in 1899, he was a member of both the State Board of Education and the State Board of Agriculture and Conservation.[23]

Gert admired both of her parents. Her mother's business acumen in managing the family lands and collecting rents and her organizational skills manifested in her charitable work with the Indians were sources of pride to Gert. In her father she admired his intelligence and his good looks. She took pride in his being voted the most handsome man in the legislature and being given a decorative cane in recognition of this. It is impossible to assess how deeply Gert was affected by her father's death when she was only fourteen years old. She must have missed his guiding hand and encouragement, but she was not a person to look back or to dwell on misfortunes. She tended to accept what was, not what might have been, to shrug her shoulders and go on from there. Dills' death did not alter the family's circumstances; they continued to live in the same house with

an income great enough to maintain the same standard of living.[24]

Thus the foundations of Gertrude's personality and character were laid. The close-knit community of Dillsboro gave her a sense of security and belonging; her family's position as leaders and participants in the community taught her a sense of duty to one's fellow man; and her family's commitment to Christianity gave her a deep faith and moral values which shaped and defined many of her actions. The genetic traits which she had inherited from her parents were enhanced by her environment. She seems to have taken the best from whatever was offered and prepared herself for whatever challenges the future held.

CHAPTER II

COLLEGE AND THE SINGLE LIFE, 1903 - 1913

In 1903 Gert left Dillsboro for Raleigh to attend Peace Institute. Very possibly this was her first trip away from the mountains, and one can only wonder at the sense of adventure she must have felt. To travel across the state by train, to be going even to college, these were not ordinary occurrences for young southern ladies. While the number of educational facilities in the South was slowly increasing, particularly normal and industrial schools, higher education for women was not considered necessary. Not only were career opportunities limited, but women were expected to stop working when they got married. And marriage was still considered the only alternative for women of all classes. Higher education was seen as a way to increase one's circle of friends--to meet the sisters of brothers who could become husbands.[1]

Gert's decision to go to Peace probably had as much to do with her thirst for knowledge and a desire to teach as it did with Mrs. Dills' desire for her daughter to acquire "character training." Twenty-five years after she graduated from Peace, Gert would say, "parents...have learned...that true education is a preparation for life and that [the] girl

is best educated whose heart and emotions are trained as well as her intellect." She then went on to say, "I believe with all my heart that Peace Institute stands out pre-eminently in character training, and I am grateful to my mother for having selected this school for the training of her daughters."[2] Mrs. Dills may also have chosen Peace because of its location in the capital city and its affiliation with the Presbyterians of North Carolina.[3]

Peace Institute had reopened its doors in September 1872, after its start in 1859 was interrupted by the Civil War. Early catalogues listed among the requirements, "Lady-like conduct on all occasions." That headed the list of rules of conduct. The Peace curriculum was not only on a par with other female institutes and colleges of that time, it had led the way with the first college department of home economics in the South. It also had the first kindergarten which became the spearhead of a new movement in education in the state. By the time Gert arrived in 1903, the school offered the following subjects of study: philosophy and mathematics; literature and language; French; science; elocution and physical culture; business; piano theory and harmony and musical history; voice training; violin; and art.[4]

The energetic, enthusiastic, and high-spirited Gert seems to have made the most of her two years at Peace. She

was president of the Class of 1905 and secretary of the Sigma Phi Kappa Society. She sang in the chorus, played on the tennis team, and was second baseman on the baseball team. Gert concentrated her studies on literature and science, graduating with First Honors which required a student to have a ninety-five average on each course of study during her two-year program.[5]

The rules of behavior were very strict, and the girls were carefully chaperoned. When they went to church on Sunday, the headmaster would walk along with them, making sure that they went straight there and then straight home. The girls were allowed to go uptown once a week but always with a teacher trailing along. They would usually buy candy or other minor items with their few pennies allowance. Unbeknown to the other girls and the faculty chaperone, Gert saved her money until she had enough to buy flypaper. One night when the college president, Dr. James Dinwiddie, was away, Gert took her flypaper and laid it on all the steps leading from the dormitory and the several other campus buildings. Then she rang the fire alarm and all the girls in their long nightgowns and barefeet ran out and stepped, of course, on the sticky paper. This prank met with severe disapproval. On his return Dr. Dinwiddie demanded to know who had done it, intending to expel the culprit. But no one confessed and the matter had to be dropped. At some point

Gert must have let it be known that she was the prankster because in 1931 at a meeting of the Peace Alumnae Association a reference to it was made in the form of a question: "Why did Mrs. McKee ring a fire alarm at 5 A.M. on an April morning?"[6]

Gert was described in the 1905 yearbook as a "mountain monkey. Her greatest trouble is setting an example for her younger sister which unfortunately is not followed. By questioning, has found out that everybody loves her. Has her own ideas and sticks to them. Goes off like a fire-cracker on some occasions." Yet Beulah, who had enrolled at Peace in 1904, later said that she had had a better time at Peace than Gert because Gert was more conscientious and strait-laced.[7]

Gert's experience at the school exposed her to gifted teachers who gave her a solid academic background as well as reinforcing her moral values. Over half the faculty were women as well as one principal which could have been an inspiration to ambitious as well as impressionable young ladies. Gert was not the only graduate of Peace to make a mark in public life. Some other Peace graduates who attained prominence were: Mrs. Josephus Daniels, who became the first woman member of the Peace Board of Trustees; Mrs. Jane S. McKimmon, who founded the 4-H clubs and Home Demonstration Clubs in North Carolina; Mrs. B. Frank Mebane,

who was twice elected to the State House of Representatives; Judge Kerr Morehead Harris, who became the first woman judge of the Juvenile Court in Virginia; and Mrs. John D. Robinson, who served as president of the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs.[8]

Graduation from Peace marked the end of Gert's formal education. It is not certain whether this was her intention; many southern girls with ambition went on to northern schools. A comment in the 1905 Lotus suggests Gert might have thought about doing that. The Prophet said, "And Gertrude, bless her bones, I wonder what she will do! I know she is going to Cornell, for she is so ambitious. But she will surely marry a Yankee or somebody to get out of taking her final exams." But whatever dreams Gert might have had for additional schooling they were not fulfilled. She went back to the family home in Dillsboro and began a career as a teacher.[9]

In the early twentieth century, teaching was one of the few professions open to women of Gert's education and social standing. It would seem to have been a natural choice for Gert. She herself was enthusiastic about learning and read whatever she could get her hands on. She was not shy about what she knew nor hesitant to pass on her knowledge. Gert began teaching in the lower elementary grades at the Dillsboro Graded School. The Jackson County Journal

commented that, "Miss Gertrude Dills is teaching a good school." Two years later the same paper noted that the "Dillsboro school is doing fine....The display of work done in the school, gotten up with much patience by Miss Gertrude Dills...would do credit to the very best schools in the State....[It is our hope that] the county superintendent will take the time to review it and give Miss Dills [the] mention due her." And the following year it was reported that, "Miss Gertrude Dills is still running her school and it is remarkable how the school keeps up its average so late in the season."[10] From these comments it is evident that Gert was a very successful teacher and that the community appreciated her efforts.

The length of the school year for Jackson County schools varied from four to six months. The Dillsboro Graded School appears to have had a six-months term. Thus Gert would have had plenty of free time to enjoy other pursuits. She and her family participated in the Jackson County Fair as contributors, attendants, and judges in the Woman's Department; in 1911 Gert won a prize for a historical exhibit; the Dillsboro Graded School students won the prize for their school exhibit which Gert had probably helped with.[11]

Church-sponsored activities were another interest. As mentioned in Chapter I, the four Dills women attended

meetings of the Dillsboro Home Mission Society of the Methodist Church. These meetings were as much elegant social affairs as they were do-gooding. A newspaper account of one meeting with Mrs. Dills noted that the "hostess with her charming daughters spared no plans [sic] to make the afternoon enjoyable for all, by splendid music, social chats and all, after which delightful refreshments were served...." Newspaper accounts of other meetings contained similar references to the conversation, entertainment, and refreshments. In 1909 it was noted that the "Society seem[ed] to have taken on new life and [was] doing great work." Several fundraisers were very successful: a recital and play one evening; an ice cream supper another night. The young people in Dillsboro were commended for being public-spirited.[12]

Gert and her two sisters were very popular with many friends, although Gert would say later that while her sisters had dozens of beaux she never had any until Lyndon McKee courted her.[13] In any event the Dills household must have been lively with the comings and goings of three busy girls. Beulah had followed Gert into the teaching profession. At first Beulah also taught in the Dillsboro Graded School. Later she organized an elocution class at the Sylva Collegiate Institute, a private school. According to the Jackson County Journal, she was an accomplished

elocutionist, and the paper congratulated the school for "securing her services." Then in January 1908, Minnie married Buford E. Gray and soon after moved to Zwolle, Louisiana, where Gray's lumber business was located.[14]

Gert and Beulah often took trips to Sylva and Asheville to visit friends, to shop, and to attend cultural events. Gert spent one summer with friends in Maine. In the summer of 1912, she went on a trip to Seattle while Beulah went to Denver. Both reported having "a fine time, and [being] much pleased with what they saw."[15]

The 1912-13 school year was Gert's last as a teacher. She was quietly courted by Lyndon McKee, a prominent Sylva businessman fourteen years her senior. A news item in March 1913 took notice of the romance by mentioning that McKee was a frequent visitor to Dillsboro. And Gert's trips to Sylva increased. Their courtship culminated in their marriage on August 19, 1913. It was a quiet affair held in the Dills home with only the members of the immediate families present. Gert wore a blue traveling suit rather than a traditional wedding gown. After a honeymoon trip to Asheville and Lake Toxaway, the couple settled in the McKee house on Main Street in Sylva.[16]

Gert was twenty-eight years old when she married Lyndon McKee. It is interesting to note that all three Dills girls married at a relatively late age. Minnie was around thirty

when she married Gray in 1908; Beulah was almost thirty-six when she married A. H. Weaver in 1922. The late marriages of the Dills sisters may be a reflection of their independent natures and their financial security. Their father had left them well off, and they had been coping very well by themselves since his death. With no urgent reason to rush into marriage, they could wait for the right man. Like Minnie, Gert left Dillsboro after she was married. Beulah continued to live with their mother in the family home even after her marriage. The family, however, remained close. Minnie returned to Dillsboro almost every summer to spend a few months. And throughout the years there was always a great deal of visiting back and forth between Sylva and Dillsboro.[17]

CHAPTER III

EARLY MARRIED LIFE, 1913 - 1930

Gert's husband, Ernest Lyndon McKee, was born in Sandy Mush, North Carolina, on September 11, 1871. He was the youngest of seven children. He grew up in Webster, which until 1913 was the county seat of Jackson. His formal education ended at age fourteen when he went to work as a clerk in his father's store. At the same time he apprenticed himself to the telegrapher of the Sylva Depot. A year later he was appointed telegrapher at the Cherokee Depot, becoming the youngest railway station agent and telegrapher in the Southern Railway System. He remained at Cherokee for a number of years and later served as depot agent at Whittier and Sylva Stations. His progress as an agent was noted in the local newspaper, and he was recognized early as a man it would "do to tie to." In 1897 Lyndon married his first wife, Mattie Moody, who died in 1912. They had one son Harold Lyndon.[1]

In 1899 Lyndon became involved with the mercantile and lumber manufacturing business. In 1903 he and his brother James established the Sylva Supply Company. In 1907 he left the management of this enterprise to James and took over the management of the C. J. Harris Tannery Company. This

company was taken over by the Armour Packing Company of Chicago in 1915 and renamed the Sylva Tanning Company. Lyndon remained as manager and in 1916 was named president. By the 1920s Lyndon had become a well-known figure in the leather industry. During the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he represented the leather industry on the Wages and Hours Commission in Washington, D. C.[2]

Over the course of his lifetime, Lyndon was associated with a number of other enterprises in Jackson County. With Colonel Charles J. Harris, Lyndon worked as a building contractor. Among their projects were educational buildings at the present Western Carolina University and on the Cherokee Indian Reservation, and they erected the Sylva Courthouse in 1913--the year Sylva was voted the county seat over Webster. Lyndon contributed materially to the progress of Jackson County, bringing the first telephone service to the southern part of the county, playing a prominent role in providing modern highways for the area, and encouraging the growth of a tourist industry.[3]

Lyndon was also involved in local Democratic politics which would come to be an important factor in Gert's decision to become actively involved in politics herself. Although Lyndon served terms as alderman and mayor of Sylva, his primary interest was not elective office; instead he enjoyed being behind the scenes running the party machinery,

first as a precinct organizer and then as chairman of the Jackson County Democratic Executive Committee. This latter position he held for twenty years from 1928 to 1948--the same period which encompassed Gert's entry into the political arena and her terms as state senator.[4]

Thus Lyndon was well established as a businessman, industrialist, and civic leader when Gert married him. Together they would form a highly successful partnership in business, politics, and community affairs. With her marriage and ensuing motherhood, Gert's life took on a new purpose and direction.

Although there is little information available about Gert's daily life during those early married years, her later references to her home and to her sons, William and Lyndon, indicate how important they were to her; she said that however much she was involved in outside activities, her family and home were first in her mind and heart. Bringing up "two fine little mountain boys" and making a "pleasant, comfortable home for them and their father, is the one thing that swells my heart with pride," she told an interviewer in 1930. For Gert there was no contradiction between calling herself primarily a homemaker and committing herself to activities which frequently took her away from home. She viewed her work in every phase of town life as an extension of her domestic duties and responsibilities as

well as the fulfillment of her Christian duty to be of service to mankind. "Woman's sphere," she declared, "has never changed and will never change. Her chief interest is and always will be the home...."[5]

Gert became a member of the Sylva Methodist Church to which Lyndon belonged. She sang alto in the church choir and held at one time or another all of the important offices in the religious work of the church. She attended meetings and services with devout regularity and took seriously the Methodist injunctions against drinking liquor and gambling. Although as a general rule she did not impose her personal morality on others, she did use her influence to help defeat proposed gambling and liquor bills when she served in the state legislature.[6]

As the wife of one of Sylva's leading citizens, Gert would be expected to provide a certain amount of social leadership. Her natural friendliness and desire to help people found a perfect outlet in this role. The McKee house on Main Street was centrally located, and the latch string was always out. Children were welcome to play in their large backyard; for many years McKee Park, as it was known, was a gathering place for her sons and their friends. It was indicative of Gert's pleasure to give pleasure that she cared less that her formal boxwood and rose garden might be damaged than that the children should have a large, safe

place to play.[7]

Gert did have household help which relieved her of much of the burden of taking care of a large home. The McKees were generally conservative in their household expenditures. The one exception was lots of servants. Zelia Wells, who had been nursemaid to the Dills girls, came to help Gert with her baby boys. Janie May Stillwell was the family cook. As such she not only prepared the family meals and the more elaborate luncheons and dinners when guests were invited, she helped take care of the house and children, too. Gert was fortunate to have these two "institutions in the community" working for her, and she depended on them a great deal.[8]

In addition to the inside help, there were usually a gardener and chauffeur in their employ. The McKees were not the first people in Jackson County to own an automobile--that honor fell to sister Beulah--but when they did buy a car, a chauffeur was necessary because Gert never did learn to drive. However, she became a skilled backseat driver, and it never bothered her that her directions might be ill-advised. One time in Asheville she insisted the chauffeur go the wrong way down a one-way street. When a policeman stopped the car, she successfully pleaded the inability of her driver to read and her own bad eyesight as reasons not to be given a ticket. That was not the only

time she was caught going the wrong way. Driving with friends in Nashville, Tennessee, she had the audacity to tell the policeman who stopped them that she usually had a police escort when she came to town. Whereupon, the policeman said, "Well, lady, I'll take you off this street." Another ticket successfully avoided.[9]

In the first few years of her marriage, Gert's activities outside the home were probably limited by her pregnancies. One job she accepted in September 1913 was to be in charge of the Departments of Fine Arts and General Exhibits for the Jackson County Fair. She also joined the Woman's Missionary Society (later called the Woman's Society for Christian Service) of the Sylva Methodist Church. These monthly meetings consisted of a business session followed by a social program of book discussions, games, or musical selections, and refreshments. Contests seemed to be a popular form of entertainment at ladies' club meetings in the early decades of the twentieth century. At one meeting in February 1914, Gert got a little picture for winning a cloth contest; another guest won for correctly guessing the kind of groceries contained in a number of little canvas bags; and a third guest answered the most Bible questions correctly. The ladies rotated hostess duty. In September 1914, three months after the birth of the eldest McKee son, William, it was Gert's turn to be hostess. It was reported

that an unusually large number of members attended with several visitors also present. This was probably not coincidental, but rather an early indication of Gert's ability to attract a crowd. She had a "happy and gracious manner" which put guests at their ease, and an afternoon spent in the home of one of Sylva's leading citizens was an event not to be missed.[10]

The McKee's second son, Ernest Lyndon, was born in August 1915. Even with two small children to claim her attention, there was probably a more relaxed and leisurely pace to Gert's life than there would be in the 1920s and later as the demands on her time increased with her greater involvement in public activities. But for now there were visits with Mama Dills; Sunday dinners with Mother McKee at her house in Webster; trips to Asheville to shop or attend plays; meetings with her friends in the Embroidery Club and with Beulah and her friends in the Girls' Club as well as the meetings of the Woman's Missionary Society mentioned above.[11]

The United States' entry into World War I in April 1917 had an immediate effect on Jackson County. The military hospitals were in desperate need of surgical dressings, hospital linens, and shirts while the men in the trenches needed wool garments such as sweaters, helmets, and mitts. The American Red Cross was the coordinating agency for

contributions of money and materiel. There was already a small, informal Red Cross Society in Sylva. One afternoon in October 1917, a group of women met at Gert's home for the purpose of organizing a permanent Red Cross Society. Gert was elected vice-chairman, and she was also put on the Cutting Committee. Another committee secured a rent-free meeting room from Dr. D. D. Hooper over his drug store, and the Red Cross workroom opened on October 31. Its first task was making laundry bags for "Radio Company," a local military unit. Subsequently, the ladies made bed shirts and rolled bandages. Appeals were made to the county at large for donations of money or cloth for sewing. The women were not the only ones asked to join the Red Cross. It was expected that the Red Cross should represent all the stongest elements in a community; therefore, businessmen were asked to enroll as well. There was a minor fee of $1.00 used to purchase supplies.[12]

By January 1918 the Sylva Branch of the Red Cross had sufficient members to become a full-fledged chapter. It was to be known as the Jackson County Chapter with responsibility for directing the newly formed Cullowhee Auxiliary. (A month earlier several Dillsboro women had formed an auxiliary there under the sponsorship of the Asheville Chapter; Gert's mother had been elected vice-chairman, and Beulah was put in charge of the

membership committee.) The Jackson County Chapter was formally invested on February 19, 1918, by a Red Cross Representative from Johnson City, Tennessee. Officers of the chapter were elected, all of them male as were the members comprising the Executive Committee. Lyndon was one of those elected to the committee. While the administration of the chapter was in the hands of the men, responsibility for running the workroom continued under the direction of a woman, Mrs. Mary Carter Brinson, who was credited with the success of the chapter to that point. It is somewhat ironic--although not surprising given that women's rights were still limited--that women were considered competent enough to organize and manage Red Cross auxiliaries, but they could not remain in charge once the group became a formal chapter.[13]

In addition to their Red Cross activities, both Gert and Lyndon became involved with the Liberty Loan campaigns. Lyndon was county chairman of the Liberty Loan Committee; Gert was county chairman of the Women's Division. She selected other women to be chairmen in the fifteen communities in Jackson County, and within a month, her "little band" had sold more than $1,000 worth of bonds over their allotment. Gert had also organized the girls of Sylva into a Thrift Stamp Society. Even as an unorganized group, the girls had sold more than $13,000 worth of thrift and war

stamps; they were expecting to do even better now, having divided the town into sections with two girls assigned to canvass each section once a week. About the same time, Gert seems to have helped Beulah organize a War Savings Society in Dillsboro with a membership of ten young ladies to canvass their town every week. The comment was made that, "Mrs. McKee seems to be one of the busiest ladies in town these days selling Liberty Bonds." At the conclusion of the third loan drive, Lyndon thanked all of the workers, reserving special praise for the women: "As usual, in every good work, the women of the county have been in the lead and without their help we would not have raised half our allotment."[14]

Jackson County's allotment in the fourth Liberty Loan Campaign in October 1918 was a hefty $260,000. However, taking the view that this amount was only $20 per capita, both Gert and Lyndon did their best to inspire patriotic fervor to meet the county goal. In an open letter to the ladies, Gert stated, "Our task is set. No matter how appalling the job, it must be done." She then compared their job to the soldiers' job against the Germans. "Picture our allotment as the Huns," she said, "and determine to meet it head on. With this view, no allotment is impossible." Lyndon exhorted his workers to be "two-fisted fighters." In this and in every Liberty Loan

campaign, Jackson County met or exceeded its quota.[15]

Jackson County also had one of the highest rates of volunteer enlistments among North Carolina counties. The local boys formed a unit known as "Radio Company" which camped near Sylva. Their morale was kept up by visits from members of the Girls' Club. In appreciation "Radio Company" sent two silver loving cups to Gert, who called the girls together to surprise them with the cups. Afterwards the cups were put on display in the Sylva Pharmacy for all of the county to see.[16]

The success of Jackson County in meeting its share of the money needed for the war effort was in no small way attributable to the fundraising abilities of Gert. In succeeding years she was often called upon to head up one drive or another to raise money for worthy causes. In 1919 she directed the local Salvation Army Drive to raise money for its home service fund. Jackson County oversubscribed its quota--only a few other counties even met their quota--and Gert was congratulated for the success of the drive. In 1922 she collected funds for a war memorial to the Jackson County boys who participated in the First World War. When the World War Veterans Fountain, built at the foot of the courthouse hill, was dedicated on July 4, 1923, thanks were directed to "Mr. and Mrs. E. L. McKee and other progressive citizens" for their efforts. In 1922 and 1923

Gert was named county chairman for Near East Relief, arranging for Armenian speakers and organizing a field day to raise money for this cause.[17]

Fundraising was just one of many activities which kept Gert busy after the war. There were pleasure trips and business trips with Lyndon to such places as Hartford, Tennessee; Washington, D. C.; Florida; New Orleans and Alexandria, Louisiana (where sister Minnie now lived); Atlanta; Raleigh; and, of course, Asheville. In 1919 Gert, Lyndon, and their two sons were among the local people who attended the Ringling Brothers Circus in Asheville; Gert also continued to make frequent trips to Asheville with her women friends. She had a very busy social life, too, both as hostess and guest. There always seemed to be something going on: parties complimentary to a forthcoming marriage or to honor a houseguest; luncheons followed by bridge or mahjongg; tea parties, birthday or anniversary parties, and dinner parties. The members of the Embroidery Club continued to meet. And there were so many other activities and groups in which Gert participated. Some of them are discussed in the following paragraphs.[18]

Singing was one of Gert's great joys. As previously mentioned she was a member of the choir at the Methodist church. She also sang at weddings and funerals, usually as one of a group of four or five women. She enjoyed attending

concerts and other musical events. In the fall of 1922, a choral club was organized to develop music appreciation through public concerts, first in Sylva, then in nearby towns. Gert and two other women were named to the committee on programs. Weekly meetings were held with the first concert scheduled for December. The forty club members rehearsed enthusiastically for the program of readings, violin solos, and choruses of both classical and popular songs. Newspaper accounts described the group as "filled with a spirit of 'pep' which with the musical ability of its personnel betokens that it will have a permanent and important place in the musical life of Sylva." Unfortunately, despite high hopes, the first concert had to be called off because of early school closings for the Christmas holidays, and no new date was scheduled. However, the idea of a community songfest resurfaced the following year with a proposal to have a Community Christmas Tree. A central committee was formed under Dan Tompkins, editor of the Jackson County Journal. Gert was put in charge of the music committee to prepare a program of Christmas carols and prayers. Choir members from local churches and any other interested singers were asked to participate. The event was apparently enjoyed by a large number of people and the feeling was that it should be an annual event.[19]

The Civil War was living history to many people in

Jackson County. When Gert was born in 1885, it had only been twenty years since the surrender at Appomattox Courthouse. Many of the older male citizens (including Gert's father) were Confederate veterans. In 1889 the United Confederate Veterans organization was founded to preserve the friendships formed during the war and to help the Civil War veterans, their widows, and their orphans. Then in 1894 an organization called the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) was founded. Members were women directly descended from members of the army and navy of the Confederacy. From their original purpose to honor the memory of the Confederacy and to help needy Confederate veterans and their families, the group assumed educational and philanthropic activities and preservation of the records and data of the Confederacy. There were two local chapters of the UDC: the W. A. Enloe chapter in Dillsboro; and the Benjamin H. Cathey chapter in Sylva of which Gert was a member. Her activities with this group prior to 1918 could not be ascertained. However, in 1918, her name begins to appear in newspaper accounts of chapter meetings in Sylva and district, state, and national meetings in other cities. By 1920 she was director of the First District, UDC. That same year when the national convention was held in Asheville, Gert was included at a dinner honoring the President-general of the UDC. Through the office of

district director, Gert became acquainted with the leaders of UDC Chapters all across the state. Her own leadership abililty was recognized in 1928 when she was elected president of the North Carolina Division and reelected in 1929.[20]

The monthly meetings of the Cathey chapter consisted of a business session followed by a program and refreshments. The members took turns preparing the programs which might be readings of works by southern authors, musical selections of southern origin, or reports about local participation in the Civil War and other topics concerning the South. Every year on January 19, the daughters were expected to meet and commemorate the birthdays of Robert E. Lee and Stonewall Jackson. In 1921 Gert was the hostess for this occasion which was attended by thirty-five members plus several honorary members and other guests; there were appropriate readings and musical renditions. Some years there were public programs; in time, it became the annual custom to observe the birthdays of Lee and Jackson in the schools. A typical program would be a talk--Gert was often the one to do this--readings by UDC members and southern songs sung by the schoolchildren and faculty.[21]

The activities of the daughters were supportive of the Confederate veterans. They would help out at the veterans' reunions, such as Gert did in 1923 when she was appointed a

chaperone on the staff of sponsors of the Fourth Brigade for the reunion being held in New Orleans. To make it easier for veterans to attend, Gert and two other daughters requested that the County Commissioners make an appropriation to partially pay the railroad fare of any county veteran. Their request was granted and set a precedent in subsequent years for other reunions. The local chapters put on dinners to honor the veterans, their wives, widows, and children. And they remembered the veterans with memorial services on Confederate Memorial Day.[22]

In 1922 plans were made for the organization of a children's chapter of the UDC in Sylva. A great-niece of Lyndon's remembers how kind and generous Gert was to them, donating a gavel for their meetings and letting them assist with the school celebrations on Lee/Jackson Day.[23]

Historical markers commemorating important people or incidents in southern history were another project of UDC chapters. In 1923 Gert attended ceremonies unveiling a marker in Waynesville at the scene of the last Civil War battle. In 1930 Gert made a speech at the unveiling of a tablet to William Henry Hardy which was placed at the Buncombe County Courthouse. In 1935 a marker in memory of the Cherokee Indians who had served North Carolina in the Confederate Army was unveiled in front of the Council House at Cherokee. As principal speaker that day, Gert stressed

the need for southern history to be perpetuated and eulogized the Indian soldiers.[24]

Perhaps the most significant historical commemoration in which Gert had a part was the unveiling of the North Carolina monument on the battlefield at Gettysburg in 1929. The state daughters had tried for seventeen years to have a memorial placed there. They were finally successful when they persuaded Governor Angus W. McLean to ask the 1927 General Assembly for an appropriation to commission a statue. Although the actual monument was a gift from the people of North Carolina, the state UDC placed a dedicatory marker along the path leading to it. On July 3, 1929, the completed North Carolina monument was dedicated at Gettysburg. Governor O. Max Gardner directed the presentation exercises; but, according to a reporter, "it was one woman--Mrs. E. L. McKee--who best captured the meaning of the day."[25]

What was the meaning of the North Carolina monument at Gettysburg? "The sublime willingness to sacrifice all in a cause," was Gert's answer given in a brief speech. She spoke of this event "being the realization of a long-cherished dream--the culmination of a hope [which we have clung to for seventeen years] with a tenacity of purpose that has never wavered nor turned aside." She was gratified that the present national administration had

caught the vision of [their] purpose and had sent its representatives to join in "paying tribute to our Southern heroes, who, after all, were American heroes, and, true to their American ideals and traditions, fought and sacrificed all here at Gettysburg in the defense of their cause. How we do honor and glorify the broad vision and deep understanding of this government of ours. It seems to me that never have I loved my country so tenderly as I do today."[26]

Although Gert's was actually a speech of introduction for Mrs. Marshall Williams, past president of the State Division and the leading spirit of the movement, her words best stirred the crowd. "There are cynics who say oratory is dead, [but] here was genuine oratory," the reporter recorded. "There, upon hallowed ground, Mrs. McKee put into words what all were thinking."[27]

Gert's participation in the UDC allowed her to promote educational opportunities for both boys and girls and to present southern history as she felt it ought to be presented. She was offended at the way the South was portrayed in history books prepared by eastern publishers. In one of her talks to schoolchildren on Lee/Jackson Day, she informed them of the facts regarding the war, admonished them to remember that "the South fought for what it knew was right," and told them "to always be proud of their Southern

birth and Southern breeding." To Gert the Civil War was not about slavery--most of the people in the mountains did not own slaves--the issue was states' rights. She encouraged the students to keep alive the facts of southern history without bias or prejudice. One year she offered a prize of $5 to each of the two Sylva high schools (Central and Sylva Collegiate Institute) for the best paper on an "event of historical importance transpiring in North Carolina during the War Between the States." It may or may not be a coincidence that the year after Gert was elected second vice-president of the North Carolina Division, which duties included the chairmanship of the Educational Committee, the number of scholarships offered by the organization increased.[28]

During the 1920s when the McKee boys were in the local public schools, Gert was one of the mothers interested in doing whatever was necessary to support the schools. In 1925 she was one of three mothers and three professors named to a committee at the Sylva Graded School to solicit funds in order to upgrade the school. To be put on the standard list of graded schools, the school needed 347 more supplementary readers, 15 maps, 2 globes, and individual record cards which together cost $250. It was reported that the "spirit of cooperation [was] fine. Many have helped; others will." It was common practice at that time to print

the list of contributors and the amounts given on the front page of the local newspaper. In this instance the McKees had given ten dollars; they were always among the largest contributors which was characteristic of their generous natures and their feelings of Christian and civic responsibility.[29]

When a local unit of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was formed, it quickly proved its value by sponsoring a library drive that resulted in a total collection of over 600 books in the elementary school library. The PTA had initiated a plan for grade mothers who would monitor the progress of each child as he moved from grade to grade. In 1926 Gert was the grade mother for both the fifth and seventh grades. When the principal outlined some of the most urgent small needs of the school, Gert donated curtains for the seventh grade room. To encourage participation in the PTA, Gert's woman's club offered a picture to the grade having the most parents present at one meeting. Long after her own boys had graduated from the local schools, Gert's association with the PTA continued as a part of her commitment to ensure quality public education in North Carolina. This is more fully discussed in Chapter IX.[30]

Gert's role as mother also drew her into the Boy Scout movement. Both of the McKee boys had joined when a Boy Scout troop was organized in Sylva in 1928. From the

beginning Gert was an active parent. At Parents' Night in May 1928, there was an exhibition of scout work followed by brief talks by Gert and local businessman Hugh E. Monteith on "Scouting from a Parent's Point of View." In the fall of that same year, when the troop celebrated Columbus Day with a special program, Gert was among those giving "snappy talks." In 1930 she was the principal speaker at the second annual Boy Scout banquet. As with the PTA, Gert's support did not end when her sons were no longer troop members. As evidence of the high esteem with which she was regarded, the troop asked her to present the Silver Palm Award to Jimmy Bales. It was the highest scouting award to be won by a Sylva scout up to that time. When Bales went on to earn the Gold Palm Award nine months later, Gert was again asked to present it to him at the Court of Honor.[31]

This busy life that Gert was leading had the full support of her husband. He encouraged her in every way but especially with her public speaking. Gert seemed to have an innate gift for putting the right words together in any situation, and an ease of manner and wit with which to deliver them. Her speeches were typically described as "interesting," "witty," "informative," "brilliant," and "done in her usual charming manner." She had a direct and positive delivery which held her listeners spellbound. Her willingness to speak out in public was a considerable asset

to her success in the public sphere. She had the courage of her convictions and the oratorical skills to win others to her point of view which were especially valuable in her political career. Gert was in great demand as the principal speaker or master-of-ceremonies at all kinds of functions. For example, in May 1924 there was a two-day meeting of the Western Carolina Press Association and the Intermont Education Council held at Western Carolina Teachers' College. At the evening banquet for those attending the meeting, Gert was toastmistress. Her remarks were not only commented upon in local and regional newspapers, but the Morganton News Herald added that she was "one of the most brilliant women in North Carolina."[32]

As the 1920s progressed, Gert came increasingly to be recognized as a consequential person in her own right. In 1913 when she married Lyndon, she automatically acquired a certain amount of status and influence as the wife of one of Sylva's prominent citizens. By birth she had been one of the elite of Dillsboro; now she was one of the elite of Sylva. Through Lyndon she met leaders throughout the state whom she might otherwise not have come to know. But it had to be Gert herself who could take these initial advantages and develop them into a persona of her own. In 1923 Gert was appointed by Governor Cameron Morrison to the Board of Trustees of Western Carolina Teachers' College, the first

woman to sit on that board. This appointment was probably as much a reflection of Lyndon's prominence and perhaps Governor Morrison's desire to select a woman in recognition of women's recent enfranchisement as it was a measure of Gert's own qualifications. The following chapters detail Gert's participation in the federated women's clubs, her entry into politics and her accomplishments as a state senator, her commitment to improve public education and public health and welfare, and her many other activities in the public sphere for which she came to be so greatly admired. There was very little going on in North Carolina in which Gert was not somehow involved. If she were not pushing herself, she was pushing others. To do all that she did in a relatively short timespan, bespeaks a woman of tremendous energy and organization, of intelligence and commonsense, of faith and a sense of duty, and a love for mankind that put others before herself. When all of her activities are considered together, it becomes apparent that here indeed was a very remarkable woman.

CHAPTER IV

FEDERATED WOMEN'S CLUBS, 1919 - 1948

"Say the word club, and Aunt Gert was in it" is an accurate description of Gert's lifelong propensity for joining all kinds of organizations.[1] In most of these groups her leadership skills were quickly recognized, and she was chosen to fill an elective office or to take charge of some specific activity in which the group was involved. Nowhere were her abilities more extensively utilized or appreciated than in the organizations which collectively comprise the General Federation of Women's Clubs.

Women's clubs were a relatively new phenomenon; the first woman's club was formed in 1868 in New York City. It was named Sorosis, the botanical meaning of "a collective fruit formed by the union of many flowers." Soon groups were forming in other cities, and in 1889 Sorosis invited these groups to send representatives to a meeting in New York City. This was the genesis of the General Federation of Women's Clubs. In 1890 a constitution was adopted and the first president elected.[2]

In these early days the General Federation was a national organization of individual clubs. As the number of clubs increased, it became apparent that some other type of

membership arrangement was needed to coordinate effectively their activities. In time the individual clubs combined into state organizations which then became the member organizations in the General Federation. The North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs (NCFWC) was established in 1902 at Winston-Salem with an initial membership of seven clubs.[3]

The state federations were much more than old-fashioned ladies' aid societies. They had definite educational, legislative, civic, and patriotic programs which would be implemented by uniting "the power and the influence of the women...for the betterment of individuals, families, clubs and communities." Through effective and efficient organization women would become "well-informed individually and powerful collectively" which were chief factors in the successful advance of women politically, economically, and socially.[4]

The NCFWC grew rapidly. By the third annual convention in Goldsboro in May 1905, there were 29 clubs with 550 members. Drawing strength from all parts of the state, its continued existence was no longer in doubt. Writing later of the early days of the NCFWC, pioneer clubwoman Sallie Southall Cotten noted:

> Many things in the State needed woman's cooperation ....[that] greater seriousness began to mark the meetings and the spirit of altruism was predominating over the love of pleasure and the selfish desire for

> personal literary culture. Women were gaining the courage of their convictions, and could second a motion without feeling as if they had committed a crime against womanly modesty. They no longer trembled at the sound of their own voices but discussed issues in a sane and sensible way.[5]

During World War I the developing leadership skills of clubwomen contributed greatly to the war effort. They were among the comparatively few women at that time who were trained in organizing groups, conducting meetings, and speaking in public. By 1919 an editorial writer could comment that "the day has passed when men could joke about women's clubs for the study of literature and art...these women represent those things in our national life which are most enduring and most worth striving for." And it was to these clubs that Gert would later attribute the development of her own leadership abilities.[6]

On November 27, 1919, the Embroidery Club of which Gert was a member met and decided to affiliate with the NCFWC. It changed its name to the Woman's Club of Sylva. In 1925 another federated club was organized in Sylva. Called the Twentieth Century Club, its purpose was similar to the Sylva Woman's Club. Although Gert was not a charter member of the Twentieth Century Club, she did become a regular member in the 1930s and served as president from 1945 to 1947. Gert also joined the Asheville Woman's Club in 1920 and later served on its Executive Board.[7]

The Sylva Woman's Club usually met one or two afternoons a month in a member's home. The meetings consisted of a business session followed by a cultural enrichment program, such as readings, book reviews, biographical sketches of famous people, or occasionally a speaker. Sometimes there would be musical selections sung by one or more of the members, or games would be played. During the business session, the members would discuss the specific objectives of the NCFWC for that year and decide how they could support or fulfill these objectives at the local level.[8]

In 1921 clubwomen were particularly concerned with learning about good government and their own political responsibilities. At one meeting in Sylva, a local attorney gave a lecture on North Carolina election laws. At another meeting a member read a "challenge to women that the measure of good government will be the measure of good citizenship." It read in part, "Training ourselves in the profession of citizenship and service...is a prerequisite to the ballot; and the ballot is frequently an effective means of creating public sentiment and bringing about measures necessary for social welfare....[It is] recognized that the greatest service achieved by an individual is service to society...." The challenge continued that "women's study of government and [their] active participation in active

citizenship [would] be companionable with men." Now that women had been formally declared citizens with franchise, it brought a duty to participate in government. "[We] should be willing to undertake the difficult as well as the easy tasks of citizenship. Our motives should be love of country, a desire to build a more prosperous country and a better place in which to live."[9]

Clubwomen exchanged ideas not only at their monthly meetings, but at the annual district and state conventions. Gert attended many of these meetings. In this way she came to the attention of clubwomen throughout the state. This familiarity was recognized in May 1923 when she was elected recording secretary of the NCFWC at the state convention in Winston-Salem. In August of that same year, Gert hosted a luncheon in Asheville for ten prominent clubwomen of the state and district. The affair honored Mrs. T. Palmer Jerman, president of the NCFWC. The women exchanged many opinions and ideas regarding the work of the Federation which would benefit clubwomen throughout the state during that year. Contacts such as these were also of personal benefit to Gert. Many of these women she was meeting and getting to know would come to hold important positions in the state government or the Democratic party, both of which would be useful to Gert's political career.[10]

Gert was elected president of the State Federation in

May 1925. An editorial proclaimed it an honor and a distinction that Gert had won "by her work and her pleasing personality, an honor well merited. Sylva [could] be justifiably proud" of her.[11]

Gert's two-year term as president of the NCFWC was highlighted by the opening of a state headquarters office in Raleigh, the establishment of club institutes, and the inauguration of the Junior Club movement. "Forward" was the keyword and business efficiency the major objective because membership and projects were expanding so widely that a more centralized and systematic organization were deemed essential. Gert called the opening of a headquarters office on January 26, 1927, with a paid executive secretary in charge, "a significant step toward greater efficiency." A permanent headquarters provided a focal point for the coordination of information and service, and strengthened the bond between the Federation and the various clubs of the state.[12]

The increasing size of the state organization made better business habits a must. As one member said, "Our work is getting too big to just drift or to be directed by no knowledge or the impulse of the moment." Towards this end, club institutes were started for the instruction of officers and members in club organization and management and in parliamentary procedure. It was a practical, helpful

program for learning how to secure maximum efficiency with minimum effort and friction.[13]

The establishment of Junior clubs was a major step in expanding the opportunity for club work to a larger segment of the female population. There were not many organized activities for young women in the 1920s; Junior clubs gave them a chance to be of service to their community while training them in leadership skills. Gert saw the Junior clubs as a way of linking the women's clubs with the upcoming generation of members. When Gert spoke to young women, she extolled the benefits of club work not only to the community but to the women themselves. She encouraged excellence by awarding a five dollar gold piece to the Junior club which prepared the best annual report. In 1931 this prize was won by the Junior Study Club of Sylva, which Gert had helped organize in 1927. Gert was so supportive of Junior clubwomen that they affectionately called her "Mother McKee."[14]

During Gert's term of office, there was a new demand for a survey of women in industry. It received added impetus at sessions of the Fourth District meeting in Forest City in October 1926. Gert addressed the meeting and urged women to exercise their right to vote and to wear more cotton. This was economic recognition of the importance of the cotton textile industry to women workers and how the

clubwomen could support this industry. At the 1927 state convention in Durham, there was a cotton dress contest to symbolize the movement to use more cotton. Gert presided in a "cotton frock of such charm and publicity [sic] as to court the envy of 'best dressed women.'"[15]

Gert had a firm belief in the important role of women in the state. In her last address as president of the NCFWC, she encouraged her fellow clubwomen with these words:

> To women there has ... been entrusted the clearer vision of spiritual values, and now, more than ever before, in our wider field of activity, we have the power to apply our understanding of spiritual things to the needs of our state....Let us seek a better understanding of the state's problems concerning her women and children in the home, the factory, the school, ever upholding progressive legislation directed toward the solving of these problems....
> ...North Carolina women whatever we do, let us put first things first, seizing the golden opportunity of stamping this day and generation with our federation ideal,--"Service to each other and to all humanity."[16]

These were words in which Gert fervently believed. She had dedicated her administration to "the task of awakening every clubwoman in the State to the fact that in her grip she [held] the potential power to achieve whatsoever she [would]." She urged them, "Give of yourself, your energy, your enthusiasm to the highest work of which you are capable....Lofty ideals, hard work and rigid honesty have never known failure."[17]

In November 1926 while Gert was still serving as president of the NCFWC, she was unanimously elected

president of the Southeastern Council of Federated Women's Clubs at their biannual convention in Charleston, South Carolina. The chairmanship of the Council was second only to the presidency of the General Federation. Gert's election was a special honor for another reason: For the first time in the history of the state the same person was serving as president of the state's two largest women's organizations. Mrs. Eugene Davis of Wilson, North Carolina, said, "If North Carolina Club women could have seen Mrs. McKee and heard her at the closing session when she was presented in her new role, they would have thrilled with pride as the two North Carolina representatives did." That afternoon following the election, Gert and the retiring Council president, Mrs. L. H. Jennings, were invited to review the troops at Fort Moultrie, an honor never before extended to anyone other than the president of the United States, members of his cabinet, or representatives of foreign governments. Gert's reaction? "I know one thing, I was thrilled." And once again the Jackson County Journal remarked on "the signal honor Mrs. McKee [had] won and one in which the whole of Sylva and Jackson County [had] a right to take great pride."[18]

Even before she was president of the Southeastern Council, Gert had taken a leading role. A year earlier when the Council had met in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Gert had

introduced a resolution which had been unanimously adopted favoring the establishment of a national park in the Great Smoky Mountains. This put the clubwomen of the South directly and actively behind the movement and their support was considered instrumental to the success of the park movement. As one newspaper put it: "Since Mrs. McKee has interested the organized women of the Southeast in the park, it is assured. What the ladies want they get."[19]

As president of the State Federation and the Southeastern Council, Gert traveled a great deal both within and outside the state. She attended General Federation meetings in Grand Rapids, Michigan; Atlantic City, New Jersey; Charleston, South Carolina; Newport News, Virginia; and Washington, D. C. These trips provided an opportunity to meet women from different parts of the country and to find out what was being done nationally to improve the lives of women. The high caliber of speakers who addressed the delegates at these meetings reinforced Gert's belief in the political importance of women's clubs. In May 1926 in Atlantic City, fifteen thousand delegates heard a number of national leaders, including then Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover; Governor Gifford Pinchot of Pennsylvania; and William Green, President of the American Federation of Labor. When the General Federation Board had met earlier in January 1926, in Washington, D. C., President Calvin

Coolidge had received the entire board at a dinner given by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Later that same week the Colonial Dames had entertained Gert and several other board members at a bridge tea where congressmen's wives were also present.[20]

Traveling within North Carolina afforded Gert an opportunity to listen to the problems and concerns of North Carolina women. She advocated club work as the best way to improve their lives. Gert firmly believed that every woman should belong to a woman's club. She believed that the federated clubs "stood for everything that was worthwhile, [were] a benefit to the community, [and fostered] a better community feeling and wholesome fellowship among women." In the fall of 1925, during her first year as NCFWC president, Gert attended all fourteen district meetings from Elizabeth City and Wilmington to Waynesville. In addition to talking about club interests, she used this opportunity to promote a cause dear to her heart--the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. In each address she devoted nearly half of her time to stressing the benefits that would come from establishing a national park and conserving the mighty spruce forests. After hearing Gert's plea, at each of the fourteen meetings resolutions endorsing the park movement were introduced and unanimously passed. And following Gert's suggestion, the women planned a special study of the park booklet prepared

by Horace Kephart in order to inform themselves about the park as well as for the literary value of the work.[21]

Then in the winter of 1926 Gert spent a week visiting federated clubs in Morganton, High Point, and Raleigh. She spoke to various groups on club activities, and her speeches were widely commented on by the newspapers in the state. While in Raleigh Gert was the guest of Mrs. Josephus Daniels, who honored her and the governor's wife at a reception at the Woman's Club of Raleigh. On her return to the mountains, Gert was entertained by the community club of Waynesville.[22]

The Sylva clubwomen were proud, too, that one of their own had been elected president of the State Federation. At one meeting of the Woman's Study Club (formerly the Sylva Women's Club) each member present recited an original couplet in honor of Gert. The couplets reflected the love and pride of their authors for their state president. Gert's response was very touching, and each member of the club was fully repaid for the effort she had made. In May 1926 the Study Club elected Gert a lifetime honorary member. Two months later at another meeting the program for the afternoon concluded with a special paraphrasing of As You Like It. Mrs. Clarence A. Bales gave a character sketch of Gert's life and then the club members showered her with gifts in honor of her July 8 birthday. A surprised Gert

responded in her "usual charming manner," thanking the club members for their thoughtfulness.[23]

The Twentieth Century Club also honored Gert at a luncheon shortly after her election as state president. They named her an honorary member, and they were happy to have her participate in their activities. (It was still several years before she became a regular member.) At this particular luncheon, the club presented Gert with a handpainted vase filled with roses. In her "charming" response, she gave a very helpful talk on club work which was greatly appreciated.[24]

The two Sylva federated clubs were part of a new First District, which had been reformed at the state convention in May 1925 because of the growth in the number of clubs in the western end of the state. The First District comprised the territory from Canton to Murphy. Within this district there were a number of towns without a woman's club; it was the hope of the First District to organize clubs in those towns and make the First District one of the best in the state. A meeting of First District club presidents was held at Gert's home in September 1925. Mrs. Charles Quinlan, First District president, outlined plans for the year. Gert offered several helpful suggestions. The First District was Gert's home district, so the members felt that she belonged to them in a very special way. That year the First District

had not only the state president as one of their members, but the state corresponding secretary, Mrs. Rufus Siler, was a member as were several state committee chairmen.[25]

At the First District meeting in Franklin in October 1926, Gert was the principal speaker. She reviewed briefly the history of club work in North Carolina, and "paid a tribute to the women who were pioneers in club work when it took real courage to belong to a woman's club, but who [had] made possible the splendid club work that [was] being done today." She showed how "closely related club work [was] with the work for the home and the community and how great a factor women's clubs [had] been in developing not only a local but a state conscience." Gert closed her remarks with seven suggestions to all club members, but especially to club presidents:

> 1st. Vote yourself at the coming election and see that every woman in your community votes. 2nd. Work with might and main for the Legislative program. 3rd. Stand fearlessly behind the State Board of Public Charity and Welfare. 4th. Use your influence to secure an eight months school for the entire state. 5th. Add the new division of Law Observance to your program. 6th. Interest yourself in Junior Clubs. 7th. Use freely the various departments and committees in the organization.[26]

The federated clubs in Sylva followed the agenda set by the State Federation regarding legislative programs, educational aims, and community projects. The legislative program of the Federation was a major focus of the women.

For instance, at a March 1926 meeting of the Woman's Study Club, Mrs. Quinlan spoke on the issues for which North Carolina women were fighting. She, like Gert on other occasions, impressed her listeners with the power of the ballot in women's hands, and the power of women's influence in bringing about legislative reform. Of specific interest in 1926 was a farm colony for female offenders of the law and a better child labor law. It is interesting to note that child labor legislation was being advocated as early as 1926. Gert was a strong champion of such laws; she had the opportunity to work for them from the inside when she was serving as state senator in 1931 and 1937. Hard effort finally paid off in 1937 with the passage of the McKee Child Labor Law; it was considered a model statute and was copied by several other states.[27]

The individual clubs at the local level were expected to support the state legislative program as needed, such as in letter-writing campaigns or attendance at public hearings. Every two years when the General Assembly met in Raleigh, the legislators received a list of those things the women wanted to see passed for the benefit of the people of North Carolina. In this way over the years, club support was behind the establishment of a state institution for delinquent girls at Samarcand; child labor laws; protective labor laws for women; state-supported school terms and

enforcement of attendance laws; and other social legislation. When Gert was serving her three terms as senator, she diligently supported the legislative programs of the clubwomen through sponsorship of bills, her committee memberships, addresses to local groups, and general lobbying efforts. She was a very effective spokeswoman because of the respect in which she was held as well as for the merit of NCFWC programs.[28]

In 1931 the General Federation Council adopted a resolution reaffirming its faith in the Eighteenth Amendment (Prohibition) along with other resolutions endorsing the principles involved in legislation supporting infancy, maternity, and county health units; a continuation of the policy of restricted immigration, and support for legislation to give women overseas war workers relief under the World War Veterans Act.[29] While Gert was generally in favor of the Federation's involvement in politics and legislative programs, she thought it should be a non-partisan involvement, that the clubs should not take sides in party politics. This was the reason why at the NCFWC convention in Charlotte in April 1937 Gert was instrumental in having tabled two resolutions aimed at two different points in the Democratic party organization at both the state and national levels. One resolution had come down from the General Federation condemning President

Roosevelt for attempting to revamp the federal judiciary. Gert stated that the "Federation was supposed to be non-sectarian and non-political and that she was opposed to the General Federation trying to cram any such resolution down the throats of the State Federations." The resolution was tabled, but her motion to "bind the State delegation to the General Federation meeting to vote against the resolution when it was presented there carried and the North Carolina women [went] to that meeting with those instructions." The other resolution presented severely condemned the North Carolina Election Laws and demanded reform by legislation. That too was tabled when Gert said that "if there were any considerable amount of fraud in elections, the remedy [was] in enforcing the present laws and seeing they [were] not violated instead of enacting additional election laws which also [could] be violated unless people [were] alert to see violations punished."[30]

In line with the State Federation's emphasis on education, the Sylva clubs were strong supporters of the county schools and the students and faculty. In 1922 they had favored the consolidation of the three high schools (Sylva, Dillsboro, and Beta) into one central high school and had offered their assistance if needed to the county superintendent. The clubwomen, most of whom were parents themselves, were the backbone of the Parent-Teachers

Association (PTA) and worked closely with that group in providing the schools with many needed supplies and repairs, such as books for the schools' libraries or money for equipment for the home economics and science departments at Sylva High School. In 1926 the Twentieth Century Club contracted for the paving of the driveway leading from the highway to the high school building and engaged a local nursery to landscape the school grounds. At about the same time the Study Club had paid $450 for stage fittings, curtains, and lights for the school auditorium. They had continued to pay overhead expenses for the electricity, fuel, and cleaning required when a private group used the school facilities for a profit-making program. This got to be a considerable expense; finally the club asked the school committee to charge the users a fee to cover this type of expenditure.[31]

Another important club undertaking was a project to reduce adult illiteracy in the county. Gert, three other women from the Sylva Woman's Club, and Dan Tompkins, the newspaper editor, were selected to confer with the Junior Study Club and the Twentieth Century Club to come up with a workable plan.[32]

Club support for education was not all work; the women's clubs also enjoyed entertaining. There were occasional banquets for the teachers in appreciation for

their good work in the schools. And the local students were entertained at various times. On one occasion the students were invited by the Sylva Woman's Club to a member's home for an afternoon affair which consisted of a talk by one of the Cullowhee college professors on the advantage of higher education and a reading by a club member. The students also constructed a picture booklet covering their school days by using clippings from magazines. Miniature diplomas were then presented and refreshments served. Another time the Twentieth Century Club prepared and served the dinner when the junior class at Western Carolina Teachers' College (WCTC) was host to the senior class at the Annual Junior-Senior Banquet held at the Sylva Community House. Two students gave the complimentary toasts; one club member sang a solo; and Gert delivered the main address.[33]

Another educational service of the federated clubs was providing loans and scholarships. At the state level, the Sallie Southall Cotten Scholarship Loan Fund was available to help young women secure an education; two annual scholarships were given to the Social Welfare School at the University of North Carolina; and another scholarship was established for nurses. At the local level, the Twentieth Century Club established a student loan fund at WCTC in 1942 in memory of one of their members, Ruth Allison Morris, to provide for a loan of twenty-five dollars per quarter to a

worthy student without interest and payable two years after graduation. It was later given in the form of a prize to a student in the WCTC Arts Department for the most outstanding object of art which then became the property of WCTC.[34]

One of the most important contributions the local clubs made to improve Jackson County was starting a public library. The establishment of local libraries had been an objective of the Federation from its inception. Now in late 1927 the time seemed ripe for a library project to succeed. The clubwomen obtained a promise from local businessman, Col. C. J. Harris, to erect a suitable building for a Sylva library as soon as a sufficent number of books had been collected and an interest shown which would justify a permanent location. The Woman's Study Club and the Twentieth-Century Club cooperated to form the Sylva Library Association. This was dissolved in 1930 and the Twentieth Century Club took charge of the library. This not only helped the town but gave fresh impetus to the life of the club with this important and definite work to perform. The spirit behind the library movement was Mrs. Lillian Buchanan, president of the Twentieth Century Club and volunteer librarian for over five years. When she left in the mid-1930s to take the job as librarian at WCTC, no one else volunteered her services. The library had to close its doors temporarily, and the books were given to the local

schools. However, it was not long before the Woman's Study Club revived the library. A committee was appointed to devise ways to raise funds to carry on the library work. Gert served on several library committees and was one of the library's strongest supporters from the beginning. Club support for the library has continued to the present.[35]

Another major project which began in the 1920s was planning for a clubhouse for their meetings and other community events. A committee was appointed to confer with the county commissioners about securing a suitable lot and a local architect donated plans for the building. Their dream was finally realized in 1936 when, with the help of WPA money, a community clubhouse was built.[36]

Some other projects which the federated clubs undertook at different times were public concerts and musical programs, selling Christmas seals for the Tuberculosis Foundation, supplying vitamins and sponsoring health clinics for children, preparing Christmas stockings for the boys at Oteen, and selling the club's quota of Poems From the Old North State.[37]

Included in the federated club objective "to assist individuals, institutions and the community at large" was personal growth through intellectual stimulation. So that no matter what community projects a club was involved in at any one time, each meeting also contained a program designed

to inform the members along musical, literary, or artistic lines, or on some current event which might have an impact on their lives. A brief look at some of the programs presented at meetings over the years shows a wide range of subject matter. Gert, of course, took her turn at preparing programs of one sort or another, and as a member she was usually in attendance at the monthly meetings to hear what others had to say. In 1928 the Literary Department adopted a yearly program on immigration with a planned study of The Strangers Within Our Gates. The American Homes Department offered programs on moving pictures and their relation to the home. Other programs were on the Egyptian pyramids, county health work, interior decorating, flower arranging, and wild flowers. Book reviews were popular; two that Gert gave were on The Apostle and Inside America. Interest in international affairs heightened during World War II and led to programs on "The Peace and Post-war Problems," and the United Nations. The role of women was the topic of "A Challenge to Women," which stressed the need of seasoned womanhood to take its place in the world to make society what it should be, and again in "Youth is the present day challenge to all women." Another topic of interest was a program given by Mrs. H. T. Hunter, the wife of the president of WCTC, on "Agencies in Jackson County for Making Better Homes," i.e. churches and associated groups, schools

and groups such as the PTA, libraries, radio, home and farm demonstration agents.[38]

As has been mentioned in earlier paragraphs, one of the objectives of the federated women's clubs was to expand membership and enlist women of the country and the small towns in club work. Junior clubs were one way to interest women at an earlier age; another way was to establish community clubs with separate departments--Literary, American Home, and Civics--for those women who wanted to concentrate on just one area.

In January 1927, Gert helped organize a Junior Study Circle under the sponsorship of the Woman's Study Club. There were nine charter members, young ladies who were already members of an informal social club called the P. D. K. By formalizing their status as a Junior federated club, these young women prepared themselves to participate in community affairs. The Junior Club held a special place in Gert's affections and the feeling was reciprocated. As an honorary member, Gert was a frequent guest at their meetings, many of which were held in her home. In 1929 she was elected honorary president. Being with young people was a constant delight to Gert; she guided the younger women in federated club work, parliamentary procedure, and civic projects. Gert was proud to be their friend and mentor.[39]

Later that same year Gert and several other Sylva

clubwomen held organizational meetings for a Community Club. They hoped to appeal to a broader spectrum and engage the entire community in club work. The meetings were well attended, so obviously there was a need to expand opportunities for women to work together.[40]

By 1934 Gert was regularly attending meetings of all three federated clubs in Sylva: the Sylva Woman's Club (back to its original name), the Twentieth Century Club, and the Junior Woman's Club. Her keen interest in every good cause and her consuming desire to better what needed to be bettered were considerable assets in helping to carry out the club objectives. Throughout her years of membership in these clubs, Gert always took her turn at being hostess or planning the programs, or heading up one committee or another. (However, with the exception of her two years as president of the Twentieth Century Club, she was never a local club officer.) Even during those years when she held state and regional offices, she was never too busy to give one hundred percent of herself. Gert "believed in a policy of immediate action and never a postponement until the future. A great many club projects were launched with Gert's 'Now girls lets--.'"[41]

During World War II the federated clubs turned their organizational strength towards defense efforts. Even before the United States was officially in the war, the

Twentieth Century Club had agreed to act as a committee to solicit money for the Old North State Fund to buy and furnish an ambulance airplane as a gift from the people of North Carolina to the people of Great Britain. Jackson County's quota was $150. Other defense efforts which the clubs engaged in were contributing time to the Red Cross to fold surgical dressings, saving gas by walking to meetings or holding club business meetings at the same time they sewed bandages; they also collected nylon and silk stockings, sold war bonds, and sent books and magazines to the army hospitals. The Twentieth Century Club raised money for recreational facilities on a Navy ship. The enthusisam of the clubwomen to do as much as they could to support the U. S. war effort was so great that they were called upon in 1943 to evaluate the objectives for which the country was at war, lest they become too conscious of the military effort and forget the peace aim. After the war the women contributed to efforts for relief of children in Europe.[42]

Over the years the several federated clubs in Jackson County sometimes met together or put on joint programs of benefit to the community. One of the reasons the clubs cooperated so well was that their objectives were mutual. In fact, in 1931 the First District president actually stressed the point that the clubs should carry out the same objectives as nearly as possible. Suggested projects were

caring for an undernourished child, placing books in rural schools, and/or planting trees along the streets and highways. As member clubs of the same district, they worked together when the district meetings were held in Sylva although each club took its turn as designated hostess. Joint meetings were infrequent until 1946. Gert was serving as president of the Twentieth Century Club at that time, and she may have been the initiator of the joint meetings. Belonging to three Sylva clubs herself, she may have wanted the groups to become closer. The Cullowhee Woman's Club was also invited to participate. Gert arranged the program for the first joint meeting in March 1946. This was a talk by an attorney from Franklin who spoke on the postwar world and women's position in it, saying: "Peace must start in the home. Women can do more toward furtherance of a united world than any other known organization."[43]

A month later at a second joint meeting, a Methodist minister was invited to speak. At the third joint meeting the following month, Gert spoke briefly on the good fellowship fostered by the joint meetings which would seem to indicate that these meetings had been started with that idea in her mind. The joint meetings were usually evening meetings which included dinner.[44]

In addition to civic projects and cultural programs, the clubs often scheduled special events. Gert had the club

members to High Hampton for the day on a number of occasions to enjoy the recreational facilities and the beautiful scenery. Other affairs planned by the group which Gert took part in were progressive dinners, fashion shows, dinner and theatre parties, holiday dinners, putting on plays, and attending concerts. Although most of these events were for the women only, there were times men were invited. An annual banquet was one way of showing their appreciation for their husbands' support of their club activities during the preceding year.[45]

Gert was a very popular speaker at club meetings. She delivered the principal address at NCFWC conventions in 1931 and 1933. At other state conventions, she would be asked to respond to greetings, or to announce winners in the various competitions and to present the prizes. She was a favorite speaker at district meetings and club meetings in other towns, particularly in the mountain areas. Her themes were constant: spirituality in home life; the duties of the clubwoman; the importance of being full citizens; women's legislative influence; and education. She spoke with warmth, humor, and enthusiasm; attendance was usually larger when she was scheduled to speak.[46]

In the thirty years of Gert's membership in federated clubs, she tried to attend every scheduled district and state convention. With her membership in several Sylva

clubs, Gert was usually selected as a delegate to represent one or another of them. She would then report back to her clubs what had gone on at those meetings. The last district meeting Gert attended was in Murphy in September 1948. She was also one of the speakers on the program for that meeting.[47]

With Gert's death on November 28, 1948, the clubwomen had lost a friend they both loved and trusted. She had given generously of her time and abilities to club work and her efforts had helped to put and keep the General Federation of Women's Clubs in the forefront of North Carolina progress. But as much as she had done for them, she had never ceased to credit the organization with having given her opportunities for training and service which were reflected in her membership in the General Assembly for three terms, on important boards and commissions, and throughout her career of public service. The members of the Twentieth Century Club remembered Gert with a memorial service at their regular meeting on December 9, and in January 1949 they commissioned a portrait to be hung at Federation Headquarters in Raleigh. Other tributes to Gert were written for publication in <u>The North Carolina Clubwoman</u> and provide a permanent expression of the high esteem in which she was held.[48]

CHAPTER V

POLITICS IN GENERAL, 1920 - 1948

In the spring of 1920 the proposed Nineteenth Amendment to the U. S. Constitution was in the process of being ratified by various state legislatures. There was a feeling in North Carolina that the General Assembly would finally approve the enfranchisement of women when they met in an extraordinary session in August to vote on ratification. In Jackson County the smell of victory for woman suffrage was already in the air. For the first time women were recognized as "partners in politics" at the County Democratic Convention. Gert was one of two women elected as delegates to the State Democratic Convention to be held in Raleigh on April 8. Two other women were selected as alternate delegates. In addition, the local convention went on record as favoring the Suffrage Amendment by instructing its delegates to vote with its advocates on all matters that might come before the state convention concerning woman suffrage. The local Democratic party also instructed their district senator and representatives in the General Assembly to vote for ratification in the special session.[1]

At the State Democratic Convention woman suffrage was the big issue as expected. There was some resistance to the

seating of the women delegates by antisuffragists, particularly those from east of Raleigh. An editorial in the Raleigh News and Observer noted that, "women participating in the convention was considered a step so advanced and so radical that it seemed almost an impossibility. But it was a fact." The women had changed their tactics and arguments, having "thrown away all sentiment in the matter of woman suffrage, only making claim of the square deal for women as well as men. The elements of simple justice [were] on their side and that is what they [called] for, but they [did] insist on that."[2]

It was a "convention of historic importance which ushered in a new era."[3] Gert shared the occasion with Lyndon, who was also a delegate. Although the record does not show any account of what individual women did at the convention, it was probably sufficient that their right to be there was vindicated by the keynote speaker, Clyde R. Hoey, who supported suffrage and a prosuffrage plank in the platform.[4]

As it turned out, the optimism of the convention was misplaced: The members of the General Assembly could not leap the final hurdle to accept women as full citizens. Those wishing to dodge the issue and those who opposed it were sufficient in number to push through a resolution putting the question off until the next regular session of

the Assembly in January 1921. However, their action was academic. Tennessee became the thirty-sixth state to ratify the amendment, thus achieving the place in history books which should have fallen to North Carolina. In spite of the North Carolina legislature, the women of North Carolina were enfranchised.[5]

Although Jackson County "had little to say, one way or the other," about woman suffrage, the members of the General Assembly from Jackson County, Senator O. B. Coward and Representative J. N. Wilson, were personally favorable to progress inherent in the Nineteenth Amendment. They were not living in the past, but were progressive, forward-looking men. The attitude of these and other like-minded people in Jackson County paved the way for women to assume their rightful places in the political sphere.[6] For a person such as Gert, this was an atmosphere in which she could grow and exercise her personal ambition to lead and to serve.

The election of 1920 was the first chance for women to exercise their right to vote. In Jackson County the Chairman of the Board of Elections opened the voter registration books from September 30 to October 23 and requested that all registrars "be especially courteous and alert in letting the good women of the county have an opportunity to register." Throughout the 1920s this

friendly attitude towards women participating in county political affairs continued. Women were urged to take part in the party councils and to attend the local precinct and county conventions.[7]

Gert was one of the women ready to exercise her full political rights. At the Sylva precinct meeting on April 8, 1922, she was chosen to be on the township executive committee which consisted of a chairman, five committeemen and five committeewomen. At the county convention held a week later, Gert was again chosen to be a delegate to the State Democratic Convention in Raleigh.[8]

Although there is no newspaper record of actions or activities in which Gert specifically had a hand, there was an editorial comment about a political blunder made by Mrs. T. Palmer Jerman, who later became a friend of Gert's. At this stage women in politics were still considered something akin to the new boy on the block who would do well to be seen and not heard while those more experienced handled the business of the convention. Mrs. Jerman did not see things that way, however, and while making her scheduled speech "took it upon herself to speak for all the women in North Carolina and practically demanded that the convention give the women equal representation on the Executive Committee." She had spoken before the committee on resolutions and platform had made its report, thus putting the convention

into a situation of being forced to do what was right and just, what it would have been only too happy to do on its own accord. It was noted "that a seasoned politician would have waited to hear the committee report. Then if representation had not been reported favorably that would be the time to address the convention as a whole." The editorial writer rather patronizingly forgave Mrs. Jerman. "Women [were] young in politics in North Carolina," he said, "and any slips they [made were] pardonable on the grounds of youthful enthusiasm. It was an error, but if the lady from Wake and the other ladies of the State will live up to our expectations in bringing purity into politics, we are willing to forgive the slight youthful mistakes."[9]

The first woman in Jackson County to run for public office was Miss Jessie McCall, who entered the Democratic primary race in the spring of 1924 as a candidate for Register of Deeds. In her announcement of her candidacy, she made a direct appeal to the women to take part in the primary as this was first time "woman suffrage [had] asked to be represented in this county." Although she did not win the primary, she made a respectable showing of third place out of five candidates.[10]

Gert's credentials as a Democratic party faithful were established early through her participation at precinct meetings, and county and state conventions. She was a

member of the South Sylva precinct executive committee and was a delegate to every county and state Democratic convention during the 1920s. In 1928 she was considered for the position of Democratic national committeewoman. An editorial in the Greensboro Daily News noted that she would "aid mightily" as a committeewoman according to delegates from the west. The paper went on to say that the woman who now held the position, Miss Mary Owen Graham of Charlotte, had had this honor bestowed on her in 1918 by Governor Angus W. McLean, who was then the Democratic national committeeman. McLean had made everlasting friends of the women by selecting a suffragist in spite of being told by a pair of senators that the women of the state were opposed to suffrage and that an antisuffragist should be named. The national Democratic organization had been making women members in order to appeal to suffrage sentiment, but the national Democrats "had never pretended to understand the North Carolina brand." McLean had gone ahead and chosen a suffragist, but now her health was deteriorating and somebody else was needed to fill that position. The newspaper pointed out that Gert could qualify "gloriously" for Governor McLean again. He was said to have "unbounded, undisguised admiration" for her (which he had proven by naming her to his Educational Commission), but then so did everybody else. The editorialist concluded: "She seems to

have all the sense in the world. Nobody ever found her unready. She can play the church organ and does; can sing in the choir and does; can make as good a speech as anybody in the State and does. If the west with its hugh voting power decides to crown her, she will get a great vote." The Jackson County Journal also editorialized that if the rumored honor fell to Gert, "all western North Carolina will be proud of the honor coming to the brilliant Sylva woman, and will endorse her gladly." Although Gert was not selected as a national committeewoman in 1928, the encomiums reflect the degree of her acceptance as a respected politician within the Democratic party and presaged her successful political career over the next twenty years.[11]

In the 1928 presidential election Gert supported Governor Al Smith. She was proposed for delegate-at-large with seven other Smith supporters to attend the Democratic National Convention in Houston. However, another slate won and the North Carolina delegates went to that convention uninstructed. When Smith got the nomination despite the North Carolina delegation, Gert went on the campaign trail to urge support of the Democratic ticket from "constable to president (because) everything North Carolina is and has accomplished that is worthwhile has been brought to the State through the money of the Democratic party." She was enlisted as one of the speakers for the Democratic State

Executive Committee and made speeches for the Democratic ticket in a number of towns including Burnsville, Waynesville, Bryson City, and Asheville. She also made a radio address over Raleigh station WPTF after which she returned to Sylva with the Smith party on their special train. In Jackson County Gert made several campaign appearances. She introduced Robert H. Reynolds at one rally at the Sylva courthouse; at another rally in Glenville, she and Congressman Zeb Weaver were the chief speakers. She was enthusiastically received. She also spoke at the Cullowhee school with a large crowd in attendance.[12]

Despite the strenuous efforts of Gert and others, the results on election day were mixed. On the national level, North Carolina had gone to Herbert Hoover by a slight margin; on the state level, O. Max Gardner and the entire Democratic ticket were elected; on the local level, the Republicans won as they had for a good many years. However, even though the local Democrats had gone down in defeat, the election had been very close and showed that tremendous gains had been made from two years before. Lyndon, who had been elected county chairman back in March, was congratulated for the splendid fight. The Democrats had come out of the election a solid party little harmed by the strife affecting it in other sections of the state. Furthermore, the 1928 election was the first time a woman

was on the ballot for a Jackson County office. Even though Jane Coward lost her bid to be Register of Deeds, her primary win over a male opponent had to be counted a success for women in politics. Thus, the stage was set for Gert's run for the state senate in 1930.[13]

In January 1930 the Jackson County Journal suggested that Gert could be the most viable candidate to unseat Republican U. S. Congressman George Pritchard and redeem the district for the Democrats. The paper boosted Gert without consulting her, noting: "Mrs. McKee has the ability...and could reflect credit upon any constituency in the house. She is popular and is known all over the district, as well as throughout the State and the South. She can get the support of all factions of the party throughout the district and can defeat Pritchard."[14]

At that time the Thirty-second District was comprised of three counties, Jackson, Haywood, and Transylvania. Among the Democrats there was a rotation agreement which meant that every two years it would be the turn of one of the counties to nominate the candidates for the General Assembly. The rotation system had its detractors. An editorial in the Jackson County Journal, written by Dan Tompkins in 1927, called for an end to the system as outmoded. He thought the practice hurt, rather than helped, the county. He suggested instead that the district find

"one good man" for the position and keep him in the Senate in order to build up seniority, thereby acquiring prestige and leadership positions which would benefit the western region. The rotation agreement was again seen as a liability in 1941 when the Thirty-second District was redistricted to include Henderson and Polk counties and given two senate seats. At that time the Democratic executive committees of the five counties signed an agreement that Jackson would alternate with Polk and Transylvania while Haywood and Henderson would alternate. Although this did not affect Jackson County--it would still put up a candidate every six years--Tompkins felt that the affairs of the county would be ignored those years when both senators were from the two eastern counties of the district (Henderson and Polk). However, the fact that the system was kept when the counties were redistricted meant that most people thought it was advantageous. It was certainly to Gert's advantage. She might not have had the chance to run if there had been a "career senator." On the other hand, with her abilities, she herself might have become the career senator. But that is all speculation. What did happen was that in 1930 it was Jackson County's turn to select the candidates, and more and more frequently Gert's name was mentioned in that connection, not only in Jackson County but also in Haywood and Translyvania. She was perhaps better

known in the other counties than almost any other one person in Jackson. She had already served the state in various appointive capacities and had served with capability and distinction.[15]

On March 13, 1930, Gert announced her intention to run:

> For more than a year many Democrats of Jackson County, also of Haywood and Transylvania counties have urged me to become a candidate for the Democratic nomination for State Senate from the Thirty-second Senate District. After much thought and considerable hesitation I have decided to allow my name to go before the Democratic primary in June. Many of my friends have been aware of my indecision and genuine reluctance to enter the political field, and here, in justice to those who have advocated my candidacy, I feel that I should make this definite statement: If nominated and elected it will be my earnest purpose to represent and serve my district to the best of my ability.[16]

Gert was unopposed in the Democratic primary which was held in June. As the first woman to be nominated for the North Carolina Senate--and one of the very few in the United States to run for public office--this was a notable feature of her candidacy and it created a great deal of favorable publicity for Jackson County. Her candidacy not only drew comments from within North Carolina, but from various parts of the country. More than usual interest was attached to her election race because of her prominence in the work of the federated women's clubs and the UDC. In September The Charlotte Observer endorsed the idea of her candidacy: "'It can be done,'--a successful role as a mother and yet a woman

in public life, as is illustrated everyday by Mrs. E. L. McKee...." The paper noted that she deserved this honor, having earned the necessary qualifications through her many years of service in various appointive offices in the state which had "given her a foundation of practical knowledge of the workings of State Government," and that she was as "capable mentally as any man in North Carolina to have a hand in the State's business."[17]

Closer to home, the Asheville Citizen-Times gave Gert a good chance of beating her Republican opponent with both parties having the strongest tickets available. Gert's campaign had been launched at a rally and barbeque in Franklin in August which was also attended by Josiah W. Bailey, the Democratic candidate for the U. S. Senate, and several other candidates. Then in October when former Governor Cameron Morrison addressed county voters at the courthouse, Gert introduced him. She also made other speeches in the district on behalf of her candidacy.[18]

Election day in 1930 was on November 4. Gert carried all three counties, defeating her opponent James F. Barrett, a Brevard editor, by 3,652 votes. She carried her own precinct of South Sylva by 2 votes. Her childhood hometown of Dillsboro, which usually went Republican, gave her a majority of 47 votes over Barrett. In addition to carrying her own county by 625 votes, she carried Barrett's home

county, Transylvania, by 349 votes. The usually Democratic county of Haywood gave her the largest majority, 2,675 votes. It was the country people of her district who had persuaded her to run, and they had elected her. It was a most gratifying victory. It was also a victory for Lyndon as chairman of the County Democratic Executive Committee. He had been reelected to that positon in 1930 and would continue to be reelected every two years until April 1948 when he resigned.[19]

Altogether Gert was elected to the North Carolina Senate four times. She only served three terms, death preventing her from serving her fourth term. Her activities and accomplishments in the General Assembly during her three terms are detailed in the following chapters. In the intervening years, she worked unsparingly for other Democratic candidates and remained a stalwart party leader.

In June 1932 when Gert attended the State Democratic Convention in Raleigh, she was elected one of North Carolina's delegates-at-large to the National Democratic Convention to be held in Chicago in July. The Depression had had no apparent effect upon the crop of candidates wanting to go to Chicago even though the delegates had to pay their own way. Interest in attending was especially keen that year because it was expected that the Democrats would regain the White House. It had been customary to name

eight delegates-at-large (four men and four women) with a half vote each. The women at the convention were prepared to insist that this custom be adhered to again this year and were determined to reject such a move as a six man/two woman division. Eventually ten delegates-at-large were named. As one of the four women chosen, Gert briefly addressed the convention. Gert supported Franklin Delano Roosevelt, although she was an ardent dry, because she thought he would be the most likely candidate to win the election. In fact, the entire North Carolina delegation was instructed to vote for him.[20]

Reports from the convention in Raleigh noted that there had been many women delegates there who had added "color and beauty" to the gathering. The women seemed to have made a deeper impression at the National Convention. According to Bess Furman, they (the women) "were really counting--on the floor, in the committee rooms, and in the boxes. There wasn't a factional fight or a vociferous parade on the floor that didn't have its 'feminist angle.'" It can be supposed that Gert was among those who counted and that she did all she could to get her man nominated. Gert had the distinction of being a delegate at all four national conventions nominating Roosevelt. This was a distinction few, especially a woman, could boast.[21]

The 1932 political campaign found Gert back on the

trail as a speaker on behalf of both the North Carolina and the National Democratic ticket. She criscrossed the state as well as attending rallies and barbeques in Jackson County. In one such speech in the Savannah community she directed her remarks to the women. She called attention to the "vital connection between home and government" and related the "story of good government in North Carolina." She told of how "we have greater progress along educational, health, highways, and good government generally that any state in the Union." She contrasted "the record of this State with the Hoover administration's policies" which she blamed for the Depression "which [had] cut the family budget and put millions of heads of American families out of work and unable to supply their wives and children with necessities and comforts of life." She further stated that "prohibition [was] not an issue in this campaign" and urged her hearers "not to be deceived by propaganda seeking to inject it into the campaign which would be hurtful to the campaign and also to [the] cause of temperance and sobriety." The Democrats once again swept Jackson County.[22]

In 1934 the position of Democratic National Committeewoman again became available, and Gert was among the western North Carolina women being spoken of for the post. The Greensboro Daily News commented that if the

appointment came to the west, "Mrs. McKee would have to be reckoned with." But another woman, Beatrice Cobb, the Morganton newspaper publisher, was picked for the job.[23]

In the 1934 primary Gert had first filed for renomination to the Jackson County Board of Education and had then withdrawn her name. In her statement of withdrawal she said, "At the request of many citizens of the county, I filed my name with the Board of Elections for reappointment to the County Board of Education. Since that time a number of other citizens have filed, and after careful consideration I have decided to withdraw my name as an applicant for the position." She expressed her grateful thanks to those who had "signified a desire that I should seek another term." Even so, Gert, who withdrew too late for her name to be removed from the ballot, received 631 votes, one-third as many as the highest candidate received.[24]

In mid-April 1936 Gert announced her intention to run for a second term as state senator. She said, "My service in the 1931 session of the General Assembly is a matter of record and I would deem it an honor to serve this district again in the coming General Assembly." This time Gert was opposed in the primary by Adam Moses, a Webster school teacher. Gert narrowly won the primary by a vote of 1629 to 1587. She had carried her home precinct of South Sylva, but

had lost in North Sylva and Dillsboro. In the November election, however, she won handily by a margin of almost two to one over her Republican opponent. The entire county Democratic ticket had been elected by the largest majority in the history of the county.[25]

The Women's Division of the Democratic National Committee held its first National Institute of Government in Washington, D. C., in May 1940. All interested North Carolina Democratic women were invited, according to an announcement by R. Gregg Cherry, Chairman of the State Democratic Executive Committee. He named Gert to North Carolina's Arrangements Committee. President Roosevelt was scheduled to address the Institute; Mrs. Roosevelt, to entertain the delegates at tea at the White House. All Democratic county vice-chairmen were urged to attend and take a delegation of women from their counties.[26]

On March 5, 1942, Gert announced for a third senate term. She was unopposed in the primary although it had been rumored that Dan Tompkins, editor of the Jackson County Journal and a former representative to the General Assembly, would also file for the primary. Tompkins apparently decided not to make the race for the Senate in the interest of party harmony and the war effort (and perhaps also because of his longtime friendship with the McKees), but instead would run again for state representative. Both won

their respective seats in the November election.[27]

On February 12, 1948, Gert announced her candidacy for the senate nomination for the fourth and last time. In her statement which appeared on the front page of The Sylva Herald along with her picture, she said:

> In making my decision to enter the primary, I have been influenced largely by many Democrats who are aware of the critical problems confronting the coming session of the General Assembly and who believe my experience has fitted me to make a definite contribution to the solution of those problems.
>
> I present myself to the voters...on the basis of my record over a period of years. I have three times served as chairman of the Public Welfare Committee of the State Senate and have also served as a member of the most important committees of that body: Education, Finance, Appropriations, Roads, etc.
>
> Legislation for the relief of our school situation I regard as imperative. In the past few years there has been unprecedented growth in our school population, and as a result of this and other contributing factors our educational problems are the gravest this State has ever faced. It will be my purpose, if elected, to work untiringly for the improvement of school facilities, including buildings and equipment, and for a substantial increase in teachers' salaries.
>
> I shall use every effort to secure legislative relief of our road situation, especially school bus routes and rural roads.
>
> I will work for expansion of our public welfare program, particularly with regard to the aged and dependent children.
>
> To these and other matters, perhaps equally urgent I shall give my best efforts. I pledge... my earnest and prayerful endeavor, my time and such influence and ability as I may possess for the upbuilding of Jackson County and the entire district.[28]

It is interesting to note that all of the issues Gert mentioned in her statement were the same issues which had concerned the General Assembly to one degree or another

since she had first served there.

Gert was opposed in the primary by W. H. (Gudger) Crawford. There were cross currents entering into the primary campaign that year; Judge Dan K. Moore had urged party unity at the county convention in May, and an unusually large turnout was expected due to wide-spread interest. Although Gert seems to have made just the one February statement of her position on the issues, her opponent ran several paid political ads in the paper in the weeks preceding the primary which stated his position on roads and teachers' salaries. In the primary held May 29th, Gert won by one vote. It was the closest race ever recorded, and she was declared the winner over Crawford's protest. It was later said that he had not voted for himself and that that had made the difference.[29]

Once the primary was over, there did not seem to be as much campaign activity as in past years. W. Kerr Scott, the Democratic nominee for governor, spoke in Sylva and Cullowhee in September. U. S. Congressman Monroe M. Redden and Judge Felix W. Alley were the principal speakers introduced by Gert at a barbeque and rally in October. In the election held November 3, Gert won one of the two senate seats for her district. Unfortunately, she never served her fourth term because of her death on November 28.[30]

To politics as to every field she served, she had

brought an unselfish interest and an earnest helpfulness. To her public office was a public trust. Mrs. W. T. Bost wrote in a memorial tribute to Gert that, "from the very earliest days she had seen no reason for women to be shy when it came to politics, which, after all, [was] simply the science of government. She had believed that the woman who [was] not informed and interested in politics [was] neither an intelligent nor a patriotic citizen." Mrs. Bost went on to say that, "Gert had seen no conflict between government and the great work of teaching and bearing children. Without lifting in the slightest the emphasis from home duties, she...had become a public servant of great usefulness."[31]

CHAPTER VI

FIRST SENATE TERM, 1931

Gert was the first woman elected to the North Carolina Senate. Governor O. Max Gardner recognized this historic achievement in his inaugural address to the General Assembly on January 9, 1931. During his closing remarks he digressed "especially to express [his] own and the public's appreciation of that spirit of service that [brought] to this General Assembly the first woman ever elected by the people to the Senate of North Carolina." He went on to predict that both Gert and Mrs. B. Frank Mebane (the Representative from Rockingham and the only other woman elected to the 1931 General Assembly) would "write large across the pages of achievement of this body." These prophetic remarks were certainly accurate as far as Gert's contribution to the legislative deliberations over the next five months. The Asheville Citizen-Times noted several weeks into the session that, "despite the handicap of political tradition that only a man should have a seat in the upper branch of the State Legislature, [Gert had] stamped herself as one of the outstanding leaders of [that] body. She [had] demonstrated ability and leadership that rightfully entitled her to a place among the more dominating

characters of the group."[1]

The arrival of the first woman senator in Raleigh created a lot of excitement. There was speculation that the Rules Committee would be deciding how to address her, as if the title "Senator" were exclusively reserved for men. She was given Seat No. 1 in the senate chamber in recognition of the historic importance of her election. If anyone thought that Gert would feel out of place in this male bastion, they were mistaken. While things might have been new and perhaps a bit strange to her, she "took to the day's first shout session like the veterans of the opposite sex," eagerly following the proceedings. "I know Im going to like it," she said. She added that "she was [there] to give the best she had through hard work for the interest of men and women of the State." Although so-called women's issues were important to her, Gert did not intend to be a spokesman for those interests to the exclusion of others. In the first few days she refused to be pinned down too closely on measures she would support. One issue was the reorganization of the state government which had been studied by the Brookings Institute. Their recommendations had been reported to the governor but had not been released to the public. Gert had read the report and thought it contained some splendid recommendations: "But of course I shall want to give each matter more careful consideration as

they come up."[2]

The male members of the Senate were said to look upon Gert as "equal to any of the forty-nine of them in solving matters of State importance." However, no matter how much Gert might have wanted to be accepted and treated like any other senator, there was no escaping the fact that she was treated differently, especially by the press. Ladies in the legislature were a novelty; the first woman senator was even more newsworthy. One reporter noted that the ladies were "going to bring up the general average of both House and Senate as far as looks [were] concerned." It was also reported that on the first day of the session, Gert was "smartly attired in black and white; that on her desk was a large bouquet of roses and snapdragons from the State Federation of Women's Clubs...and a potted plant from the State Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs." The same report noted her past accomplishments as president of the State Federation of Women's Clubs and of the North Carolina Division/UDC, her active part in church work and other organizations. It also described her swearing-in ceremony, printing the names of her friends who were present which was not done for any other legislator.[3]

Personal comments on the dress and habits of the legislators were not normally reported in the press. The fuss made over Gert and Mrs. Mebane was finally too much for

columnist Carl Goerch. Writing in the Raleigh News and Observer, he complained that "for more than a hundred years the General Assembly of North Carolina [had] been meeting regularly [and] distinguished statesmen...have been included in its membership. Not a single one...ever had his apparel described in the public prints." Goerch said that he did not care whether "women were legislators, judges, dogcatchers, governors and constables," but that they were not "entitled to special privileges and discriminations....What's fair for one is fair for all."[4]

In 1931 there were approximately 150 women serving as legislators in over 40 states. They were women from all walks of life--ranch owners, river pilots, physicians, playwrights, journalists, attorneys, scientists, orators, and just plain mothers and grandmothers. They were women who had achieved many goals and had already successfully competed in traditional male roles. These women were well qualified for the challenge facing state legislatures. Gert and Mrs. Mebane were no exception. Although Gert listed her occupation as "home-maker" and Mrs. Mebane called herself a "manufacturer," there was no doubt that North Carolina could not have found two people better equipped to handle the problems facing the legislature that session.[5]

The 1931 General Assembly was convening under difficult conditions: world depression and a situation of hard times;

large debts of state, county, and local governments; and high rates of taxation. The people of North Carolina were looking to their leaders for economic relief as well as a reduction in the high cost of government without a reduction in the areas of education, public roads, public health, and public welfare. Gert was more than equal to the challenging tasks ahead. Education and social welfare had long been strong interests. She was convinced of the necessity to lengthen and standardize the school term across the state; one of her chief goals was to see that a state-supported school term of at least six months was approved. That she would have the opportunity to influence a wide variety of legislation was implied by her appointment to all of the major senate committees: Appropriations, Education, Finance, Public Health, Public Roads, and Public Welfare. She was also appointed to several other committees: Conservation and Development, Election Laws, Internal Improvements, and Printing. She was named Chairman of the Public Welfare Committee.[6]

In his message to the General Assembly, Governor Gardner recommended an eight-month school term for all school children in the state based on the proposal by the Educational Commission; protective legislation for women based on proposals of the Legislative Council for North Carolina Women; and consolidation of the University of North

Carolina, North Carolina State, and the North Carolina College for Women based on a report from the Consolidation Commission. According to Gert, "the governor's message was one of the most constructive and comprehensive documents that any governor ever presented to a General Assembly in North Carolina." She went on to say that "she'd been inclined to feel very sympathetic toward Governor Gardner the past year or more on account of problems resulting from financial depression and labor disturbances he'd had to contend with." But now she felt "it [was] not so personally unfortunate for him since [it had] given him the oppportunity to prove to people...his genuine statesmanship."[7]

One of the most important issues to be decided this session was the length of the state-supported school term which was more a tax issue than it was an educational one. The eight-month term had much support including Gert's, but two weeks into the session it became apparent that there would be difficulties with financing. Therefore, proponents decided to focus on a six-month wholly state-supported public school system as a more realistic goal. This at least would be a step in the right direction towards a reduction in taxes on real property as well as towards increasing educational opportunities for children. To ensure that the House and Senate would work together on a

school bill acceptable to both houses, a joint committee was formed. Gert was appointed to this committee and her presence was decisive to favorable committee action.[8]

The joint committee heard a number of speeches for and against the proposed bill. Gert was one of three legislators to speak in what was later considered to be her maiden speech. She reminded the legislators of the "widespread campaign promises for tax relief, and...that regardless of what else [was] done the schools [represented] three-fourths of [the] tax burden." At the same time Gert assailed present conditions that jeopardized the state's position of home-ownership. She said, "We hear on all sides that it is cheaper to rent than to own--and my friends that is a terrible thing." That remark was greeted by a full minute of applause. Gert closed her remarks dramatically, noting that "up my way we often settle matters at the points of guns." She could not imagine how any member of the Assembly who had given his pledge to the people back home to work for tax relief could go back and explain a negative vote on the school bill.[9]

Gert's speech was described in the newspaper as an inspired one. Although she had made many speeches before, they had usually been before an audience of women; this time her speech was before a crowd of men--"men picked back in their counties as the best qualified to represent them in

the battle for relief at Raleigh. And men, even picked men, are inclined to be just a bit contemptuous of women when it comes to views on finance and basic policy....[Stepping] before a crowd already showing signs of being wearied with too much speaking...in five minutes of spontaneous expression [she] removed the last shadow of doubt as to the success of the bill." Gert was known to virtually everyone in the hall as the state's only woman senator. "It was her simple power of expression that was the revelation."[10]

It was later reported that Gert "had no idea of, or that she was, uttering a classic." She had seemed surprised when applause had drowned out her words the first time and she had pleaded with the audience to let her proceed lest she forget her lines. But the crowd could not resist the "infection of her enthusiasm." Finally in the "tumult that greeted her conclusion," she talked straight "from the heart in words of regret that 'E. L.' wasn't there to share in the compliment." That was all it took; the issue had been won. Everyone knew that all Angus D. MacLean (the chairman of the joint committee) had to do was to call the question, tally the vote, and send it on the full House and Senate for approval.[11]

On January 27, 1931, the House passed the six-month school bill with funding to be worked out. Action by the Senate was not so quick. Strong lobbying efforts by power

industries and tobacco companies made it seem as if the school bill were an attack on industry. There was also resistance to increasing ad valorem taxes. Once again a speech by Gert proved to be a turning point. She began with an aside saying, "I am consumed with admiration for my fellow Senators....They can do more talking than any group I ever saw." She then went on to say that "on the subject of schools she believed she was as well informed as any member of the Senate, for she [had] spent two years on the Education Commission. It was a mistake...to say that the bill was aimed at industry." She reminded the Senate that "she was the wife of a manufacturer, that her home was supported by industry. 'But I believe in fairness to all.'" Reviewing the land tax situation she warned that "not only were lands being sold for taxes but that tax certificates were being bought by out-of-State banks....'If we don't look out we will find the property of North Carolina owned by outsiders.'"[12]

The final bill passed by the Senate required a state-supported six-month school term to be funded from sources other than increasing ad valorem taxation on land. Its passage was the culmination of a nine-hour oratorical fight on the floor in addition to weeks of war in hotels and lobbies. In retrospect, getting the bills passed was a mere dress rehearsal to the battles which followed trying to work

out the funding. The lack of agreement delayed adjournment until May 27. The argument was over three possible revenue sources: a general sales tax, a luxury tax, or an increase in the equalization fund through ad valorem taxation.[13]

Gert continued to play a key role in these deliberations. She was named to the joint committee on finance which was set up to work out the school funding. She was later appointed to the second arbitration committee to iron out the differences between the House and Senate in order to come to an agreement acceptable to both houses. Gert's frustration at this time-consuming process became apparent when by April 9 the Senate had defeated both a general sales tax bill and a luxury tax bill passed by the House. Although Gert had only voted "present" on the sales tax bill, she did vote in favor of the luxury tax, saying that all members had agreed that property needed relief. In answer to the statement that the luxury tax was a method of "robbing Peter to pay Paul," she said, "I am in favor of robbing Paul awhile; Peter has been robbed enough." Gert pointed out that the luxury tax was a voluntary tax and that those who did not want to pay it did not have to buy the non-essentials it did tax. Gert was adamantly opposed to an increase in the equalization fund (the current method of state school support) because it did not equalize. The more it was raised, the more the larger, wealthier counties

wanted and the proportionate increase of the smaller counties decreased. Gert submitted figures to prove her point about equalization. And she said, "You can't put this sort of thing over on North Carolina any longer."[14]

To Gert, the six-month school term promised by the State Constitution was a simple matter of justice---nothing more and nothing less. However, a majority of the other members did not see things quite so simply as the Senate continued to defeat the various funding bills put before it. Finally, though, on May 27, a revenue bill was approved by both houses. Gert was among the "last guard" who held out against it because it involved an ad valorem tax as well as a franchise tax on power and telephone companies and an addition to corporation taxes. But with the final acceptance of a revenue bill, the General Assembly adjourned on the 141st day of the session, making it the longest session up to that time in the history of the North Carolina Legislature. Addressing the General Assembly in the closing minutes, Governor Gardner prophesied that "this session would go down in history as one of the most constructive assemblies in history, and not merely as the longest session."[15]

Another issue for senate consideration in which Gert played a key role was protective legislation for women and children based on proposals of the Legislative Council for

North Carolina Women. The Council was an umbrella organization formed by various women's organizations in North Carolina for the purpose of sponsoring legislation which would benefit women and children. By presenting a united front and speaking with one voice, the women could more effectively lobby the legislators. While the General Assembly was in session, the women put pressure on the legislators through speeches, newspaper articles, letter campaigns, and appearances before the committees considering their bills. There is little doubt that Gert's presence in the 1931 Senate was seen as a boon to the women's program. She had long been known to encourage women to be politically active. Furthermore, she was interested in public welfare programs and education which would advance the status of women and children. Now, as chairman of the Public Welfare Committee, which handled social welfare legislation, she could be instrumental to the success of their program.[16]

Specifically, in 1931 the Legislative Council was proposing five bills to improve the welfare of women: (1) completion of the sixth grade of those under sixteen years before they go to work; (2) an eight-hour day, forty-eight hour work week for children under sixteen and prohibiting employment in hazardous occupations for children under sixteen years; (3) elimination of night work for girls under eighteen; (4) a fifty-five-hour work week for women in all

industries and prohibit women and children from night work between sixteen and eighteen years of age; and (5) a study of property and inheritance laws relating to husband and wife.[17]

On the face of it, most of these so-called women's bills for the protection of women and children would seem to be very straightforward, certainly not of such nature as to arouse lengthy, or acrimonious debate. However, what was often at stake were the industries fighting for the right to employ whomever they wanted; racism was also a factor in some debates. Several times Gert found herself addressing her comrades at a turning point in the debate, her no-nonsense approach going right to the heart of the matter. She was not always successful in making her point, but many of her comments were the deciding factor for or against passage. For example, during the debate on the compulsory school attendance bill, Gert's knowledge of what the bill was about, along with a dose of humor and sarcasm, secured its passage just when it had seemed doomed to postponement, if not defeat. The bill provided that children between the ages of fourteen and sixteen must continue school through the sixth grade unless they or their families were in need of their possible earnings, or unless they were physically or mentally incapable of profiting by further education. This bill, mainly aimed at eliminating

street loafing by boys under sixteen, stated that regardless of how many grades they had finished, they had to return to school if they did not find a job. The present law allowed children of fourteen who had finished the fourth grade to stop school. When the debate on this bill dragged on interminably, with some senators questioning that it would deprive children from working at "wholesome labor" or would handicap the children of farmers, Gert's patience gave out. She scolded her colleagues: "I said at the beginning of the session that I would not talk about anything I didn't know about. And I want to say that I know more about boys and girls than all of you put together." Then, as if explaining the matter to these same boys and girls, Gert carefully explained just what the bill provided, concluding: "I am surprised at all this controversy over this bill. It is so flexible that I don't think it can do much good but certainly it can do no harm. It applies to those children who are now not at work and not in the schools. I am not in favor of re-referring it. Why all this delay? We are acting like children." Whereupon, she moved the previous question which was carried, and the bill passed by a substantial margin. Unfortunately, her influence did not extend to the House. It was defeated there when an old obstacle--race--was encountered. The fact that this bill would also apply to Negroes was sufficient to ensure its

defeat.[18]

That was not the only time Gert successfully chided her colleagues into passing a social welfare measure. When a bill was presented making it a misdemeanor for mothers to abandon their children under fifteen years of age, there was considerable argument. One senator thought it was unnecessary; another, that it should be re-referred to committee for further consideration. A motion had been made to that effect when Gert, who had introduced the bill, took the floor to say: "We are consuming a great deal of time on a very simple matter. This bill was introduced at the request of the Child Welfare Commission, whose secretary tells me there is a great deal of trouble from this source. It was introduced in good faith and is simple and easy to understand." The Senate then voted down the motion to re-refer and passed the bill.[19]

North Carolina women had been particularly legislation-minded that year. They had come to realize the power which lay in their hands when they worked together and the potential for achieving their aims which could come through every member doing her part. Whenever Gert had the opportunity to speak before a group, she would mention the progress of the measures women were interested in, and urge them to become individually involved.[20]

Success in the Senate was not only measured in bills

passed; sometimes, it was measured in bills not passed. The defeat of a parimutuel betting bill for Buncombe County was one such success for Gert. In the usual way of the General Assembly, local bills were shepherded through by the appropriate district representative and were not generally contested or debated by the other members. That was the feeling about the Buncombe betting bill--a local measure which would not be interfered with by the other members. However, Gert saw things differently, and at the very last minute her intervention prevented its passage. During the first two readings of the bill, Gert had either been absent or abstained. (There was a dispute later that this had been prearranged.) However, when the bill came up for its third reading, Gert moved that it be re-referred to the judiciary committee on the ground that there "was doubt as to its constitutionality." "I haven't appealed to you as a woman before," said Gert, "but I am asking you now to help me on account of my ignorance." She stated that she had not known the bill was coming up when it did, and that the only possible argument for it was revenue. "It [had been] advocated on the theory that only a hair of the dog would cure the bite...[and] I never have believed in that theory," Gert said. She continued: "Asheville got into trouble by gambling and can't get out that way." To Gert, betting involved the honor of the people of North Carolina. With

passage of the motion to return the bill to committee, the subsequent public hearings held by the committee were sufficient to defeat it. Gert was given the credit for defeating the bill although both sides claimed that she had reneged on a promise to stay out of the fight.[21]

There were two attempts later in the session to have gambling bills passed which also failed. Those times Gert was not asleep at the switch; both bills after finding smooth sailing in the House were defeated on motions to re-refer to committee. The Senate had gotten "moraler and moraler," and "Gert had learned all she wanted to know about what stand a woman should take on horse-racing bills."[22]

Another "successful defeat" for Gert was a bill to prohibit employment of women whose husbands earned as much as $200 per month. One senator called it a bad bill because "these ladies [were] employed because they [had] merit and [were] capable and whether or not they [were] married [was] beside the point." Gert voted against the bill although as an elected official she would not have been affected. But then Gert was always quick to speak up when there was an issue concerning the abilities of women. There was a move by the representatives from Currituck County to legislate out of office their woman county school superintendent even though such a move might displease a New York philanthropist who had already donated considerable amounts of money to the

county. Gert's reaction to the local squabble was for them to get on with it and settle their differences. She said of the philanthropist: "...if Mr. Knapp wanted to come up to Jackson County and contribute to its schools, he would be very welcome with the lady too." Another time a senator proposed an amendment designating one of the five members of a new State Commission of Personnel (which had the final say in the employment and salaries of all state employees) be a state employee. Gert countered with an amendment of her own that one out of the five members be a women. Although neither amendment passed before adjournment, Gert had made her point.[23]

As the elected official from the Thirty-second District, Gert was expected to use her influence to promote the interests of Jackson County. One issue in particular which had long concerned Jackson County was roads. From the earliest days, good roads were seen as an economic necessity to link the mountain region with other areas. In 1931 the resurfacing of Highway 106 from Sylva to Cullowhee and grading the road from Glenville to Cashiers Valley were seen as absolute priorities. While she was in Raleigh, Gert took the problem directly to the newly appointed highway commissioners and won assurance that Highway 106 would be given immediate and careful consideration. She continued to press this issue during her term of office.[24]

The botanical resources of Jackson County interested Gert, and she sought to protect them through legislation. She introduced a bill to regulate through licensing the collection and shipment of ornamental shrubs. As simple as it may have appeared, there was a great deal of opposition. The senator from Polk County "tearfully" protested that the $10 licensing fee would deprive the poor mountain people of his district of one of their few means of livlihood, gathering galax leaves where and when they could. To appease opponents, the final bill contained multiple amendments restricting the license requirement and exempting thirteen counties entirely from its provisions. Even then Gert only won passage after she had called for and won a suspension of rules over the objections of the opponents of the bill.[25]

In some respects the ornamental shrub bill was a curious issue for Gert to take up. She also represented a mountain district, and if the mountain people in Polk would be hurt by licensing fees, then one could assume the same for Jackson folk. Gert's concern for people's welfare was widely known; it would be unusual for her to push for a bill which would harm anyone. Thus, her motivation for sponsoring this bill and ensuring its passage through a suspension of rules was probably dual. Along with her concern for "endangered species," there was the matter of

despoiling mountain acreage. The McKees owned approximately 2,300 acres of mostly uncultivated, forested land in Jackson County. In order to preserve the natural environment of their land, they might have wanted to regulate what shrubs were removed. It is also possible that Lyndon suggested the bill to maintain some control over who came on his property. This bill would certainly seem to have had some personal advantage for the McKees; but, in its final form, the bill could not have benefitted them to any great extent.[26]

Another Jackson County interest which Gert helped in Raleigh was Western Carolina Teachers' College (WCTC). Her presence on the Appropriations Committee guaranteed the college a "friend at court" when budget recommendations were being considered. In 1931 Gert pleaded for an increase in the amount designated for WCTC, saying that the present appropriation would mean students had to be fed on six cents a day.[27]

One other important measure passed during this session was the bill to consolidate the University of North Carolina, North Carolina State University, and the North Carolina College for Women. The bill provided for a commission of twelve members to be appointed by the governor to work out the mechanics and recommend procedures for accomplishing consolidation. Gert was the only woman to be

appointed. (The activities of this commission are described in Chapter IX.)[28]

Gert was fortunate Lyndon was able to stay with her in Raleigh for most of the legislative session because his business interests in Sylva did not require his day-to-day presence there. It is also likely that he used some of his time in Raleigh to do his own unofficial lobbying. Gert valued the support and advice she received from him. During a meeting she had with Governor Gardner, Gert began a number of sentences with the phrase, "My husband says." Gardner is said to have remarked teasingly, "I believe the smartest thing about you is your husband." Then, too, like the time Gert made her maiden speech, she voiced regret that Lyndon could not be there to share the compliment.[29]

Legislative duties did not occupy all of Gert's time. Raleigh society took on added color and importance when the General Assembly was in session. Despite the economic problems, the year 1931 was no exception and the presence of a woman senator gave the feminine contingent of the state's capital a more personal interest. In addition to the numerous receptions honoring the legislators and their wives (which included Senator McKee--it would be awhile yet before someone thought it more accurate to use the term spouses) Gert herself was the honored guest at various teas, luncheons, and receptions given by the women's clubs and

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Peace College as well as by her personal friends.[30]

One of the more unusual organizations in Raleigh was the Sir Walter Cabinet. This was a group of women, mostly the wives of legislators and state officials, who met weekly during the time the General Assembly was in session. Their purpose was to keep abreast of the political issues and concerns of state which were facing their husbands. The cabinet, originally called the Yarborough Cabinet, had begun meeting in 1913 for the "mental advancement of women and the betterment of social order as well as for wholesome pleasure." The wife of the Speaker of the House was ordinarily named president of the cabinet; in 1931 this was Mrs. Willis Smith. Gert and Mrs. Mebane were invited to join the cabinet even though they themselves were legislators. Both accepted although they were not always free to attend the meetings because of legislative duties. Through the years the group had grown in importance and was contesting for the right to be called the "third house."[31]

For their meetings the cabinet generally invited a guest speaker knowledgeable in some field of interest to them. In March Gert was the guest speaker at one of the best-attended meetings. Gert began by paying tribute to the gentlemen of the General Assembly, expressing appreciation for their "courtesy and cooperation and stressing the high type of citizenship which they [represented]." She thanked

the "ladies of the Cabinet and others throughout the State who by letter [had] offered her encouragement in her undertakings as member of the Senate." She talked about the chances of the bills in which women were most interested, including "the six-month school bill, the road bill, and the smaller bills which [were] dependent on the enforcement of these." She outlined other legislation which she was sponsoring. Gert then expressed herself as "a firm believer in law and law enforcement" and stated that "good citizenship [started] with early training." She urged mothers "not to leave this valuable training entirely to schools and churches." She concluded by briefly touching on the "attainments among law-making bodies of the State in recent years and declared that the most important thing which they [had] yet done [was] to place North Carolina on a business basis."[32]

Gert was invited to address other groups too. She spoke at the annual convention of the League of Women Voters held in March. She was also the principal speaker at the annual meeting of the State Federation of Women's Clubs in Greensboro in April. To that group Gert spoke of her experiences as a legislator. She told the convention "something of the joys and perplexities and problems of being a member of the Legislature that must reduce taxes and run the State's business at the same time."[33]

And there were other activities. Gert was named the State Chairman of the Woman's Golden Rule Committee, which was a part of the International Golden Rule Foundation. This group administered funds through existing agencies to aid destitute mothers and underprivileged children. About the Foundation Gert said: "The Golden Rule Foundation with its able leaders and scientific surveys and the latitude it gives to the givers to express how and to what organization their gift should go appeals to me very much. I feel sure that North Carolina will do its share to cooperate...."[34]

Gert was one of the presenters on a new radio show, a course called Radio School, which was inaugurated by the State Department of Public Institutions over Station WPTF, Raleigh. The program ran for one half hour daily for twelve weeks. Gert spoke about many interesting things concerning the opportunities in present-day life for boys and girls in public schools. Station WPTF also featured a daily broadcast on the "Doings of the Legislature." One day in Louisiana Minnie caught a portion of the show. She later wrote Gert "what a thrill it [had given] her to hear that the high spot of that day was a speech given by Senator McKee."[35]

All during the months the General Assembly was in session, Gert continued to attract media attention. Constantly identified as the "only woman Senator," she was

often quoted or written up in the column "Under the Dome" in the Raleigh News and Observer. In this way the public learned that newness did not always cancel out boredom and that even Gert could doze off during senate proceedings. And that exasperation at the wrangling over funding the school bill would lead her to describe "the exhibition as being 'due to something else besides being tired.'" And that she expressed a desire another time to take some of her quibbling colleagues "over her knees and administer the usual dosage given recalcitrant children." From time to time the members of the legislature would be caricatured in the local papers. At one point the nine current senate conferees were "likened to a baseball team as compared to the original eleven football team of both Senate and House members." Gert was "designated both catcher and umpire." In another "Under the Dome" column poking fun at the length of the session, the columnist decided to help out the recording angel by submitting a special roll call and judgment. For Gert, it was said that "when you considered she belonged to woman's clubs and that he was a manufacturer you really couldn't kick."[36]

In a summation of individual senators and their contributions to this session, Gert was described as "the first woman Senator in the history of the State. Quite conscious of her peculiar position and aware of how to use

it to best advantage. She seemed to get a lot of pleasure out of maternal treatment of 'her boys.' She made mistakes but seldom repeated them. She introduced nine bills." She was also called one of the "clearest-headed, right-thinking, and wise-voting members of the Senate who did honor to her district.[37]

In the opening days of the 1931 session, Gert had promised to speak only on those issues of which she had knowledge. For the first two and a half weeks, she "remained silent, only answering roll call in a subdued tone, until her spirited defense of the six-months school bill broke her self-imposed silence." Later characterized as "a member whom nobody could silence," Gert obviously found that her knowledge extended to a great many subjects, and she did not hesitate to speak up. If she thought her colleagues were not acting responsibly, she did not hesitate to tell them so. Exchanges between senators were common. Gert was not reluctant to dispute or retort to another senator's remarks which she thought were wrong or objectionable. On the other hand, she was quick to pick up on injustice. When a colleague was unfairly criticized in a newspaper editorial, Gert rose to his defense.[38]

Governor Gardner's remarks made in his opening address concerning the effect Senator McKee would have on the 1931 legislature were borne out. Gert had made her presence felt

through persuasive oratory, wit, and humor, and a no-nonsense approach that could cut through the extraneous to the heart of a matter. Gert's terms of office in the 1937 and 1943 Senate were equally effective.

CHAPTER VII

SECOND SENATE TERM, 1937

Many of the issues facing the 1937 General Assembly concerned the economic and social problems created by the Depression. On December 10, 1936, a month before the regular session was scheduled to open, outgoing Governor J. C. B. Ehringhaus called an extraordinary session of the General Assembly. This session was necessary for the state to enact legislation acceptable to the Federal Social Security Board prior to January 1, 1937, in order to make North Carolina eligible under the unemployment insurance section of the Federal Social Security Act. Gert, the newly elected senator from the Thirty-second District, was sworn in on the first day. She was appointed to the Committee on Enrolled Bills and was co-presenter of a senate resolution expressing the appreciation of the Senate to its presiding officer, Lieutenant Governor A. H. Graham. The extraordinary session accomplished its mission in six days and adjourned on December 16.[1]

The regular session of the 1937 General Assembly opened on January 6, 1937, with the inauguration of the new governor, Clyde R. Hoey. In his inaugural message to the General Assembly, Hoey identified those areas of concern to

him, such as quality education, road safety, protective labor regulations, and humanitarian needs; though not a fanatic on the liquor question, he did regard liquor as Public Enemy Number One. He declared that "those who would serve...must have a civic conscience," and he concluded that "there [was] room in North Carolina for all shades of opinion and all schools of thought and for a free and full expression of views." Hoey's message must have struck a responsive chord in Gert; he voiced the ideals she had been working for over two decades. The 1937 session promised to be a golden opportunity for social welfare legislation. And Gert, as chairman of the Committee on Public Welfare, would be responsible for sponsoring those bills. Ordinarily the chairmanship of this committee was not considered a very important assignment. But with Governor Hoey's humanitarian program and President Roosevelt's New Deal programs, the committee took on importance. In fact, in anticipation of a larger amount of paperwork, Gert was authorized to employ a clerk and a stenographer. In addition to her chairmanship of the Public Welfare Committee, Gert was appointed by Lieutenant Governor Wilkins P. Horton to fourteen other committees: Appropriations; Education; Insane Asylums; Library; Public Health; Counties, Cities, and Towns; Claims; Commercial Fisheries; Distribution of Governor's Message; Federal Relations; Internal Improvements; Printing; Pensions

and Soldiers; and Trustees of the University.[2]

In contrast to the hoopla surrounding Gert in 1931--when even the dress she wore to her swearing-in was a topic for the newspapers--little notice was taken of her arrival in Raleigh in 1937. The attention instead was focused on the new Hoey administration. This time in the Senate, Gert was given Seat No. 19. While it may not have been as prestigious as Seat No. 1, it was still along the front row and easily accessible, there now being only one man for her "to stumble over" as she went in and out.[3]

One of the first bills considered by the Senate was an appropriation of $600,000 to replace outworn school buses and to avert a threatened school transportation strike. Although it was approved by both the House and Senate Appropriations committees, Gert wanted to know what guarantee the committee might impose that "the money [would] be spent elsewhere than in those counties shrewd enough to close their schools" to obtain new buses. The answer was that there was no control, that it would be left up to the State School Commission, which said that "the money would be spent throughout the state on a percentage basis. Each school would get replacements on the basis of the number it [operated]." The representative from Forsyth County said in response to Gert's insinuations that his county's schools were closed because of an order issued by the Forsyth Grand

Jury and not "from any motive of shrewdness." Gert replied that she had not meant to impugn the motives of the Forsyth authorities, but she continued, saying: "I was worried as to whether if Forsyth gets thirteen replacements, the money we're appropriating [might not] get up as far as Jackson and Cherokee. I wish we had been as quick on the trigger as the authorities in Forsyth."[4]

On January 22, 1937, Gert introduced in the Senate "A Model Bill" under the sponsorship of the North Carolina Department of Labor for state regulation of the kind of work and the working hours of children. This was the bill which, when it was passed into law, became known as the McKee Model Child Labor Law. It was copied by a number of other states and drew favorable comments from Washington and other eastern newspapers.[5]

For all of its merit, Gert's child labor bill needed "her natural eloquence and engaging manner" when she introduced it. The bill's provisions to regulate the employment of those under sixteen and the hours of work of those under eighteen contained several provisos concerning work permits, after school and vacation jobs, and minors engaged in domestic and farm work under parental supervision. The McKee bill was an alternative to Roosevelt's Federal Child Labor Amendment, which had been introduced in the House for ratification. One

representative expressed the opposition of the State Grange to the federal amendment, but added "we are right behind this here bill introduced by the good lady over yonder in the Senate." He and others feared the federal amendment would open the American home to the dictation of Washington. But some were just as strong for the federal amendment, saying that Congress had not and would not be unfair in child labor laws. Frank P. Graham, president of the University of North Carolina, believed that the amendment would make the home, the farm, the school, and the American child "safe." Josephus Daniels, Raleigh newspaper publisher and newly appointed Ambassador to Mexico, urged ratification of the federal amendment after a luncheon meeting with Roosevelt, who had expressed interest in North Carolina's deliberations. Governor Hoey preferred Gert's bill.[6]

Several senators tried unsuccessfully to amend the McKee bill. One would have allowed telegraph messengers to work later hours; another would have allowed newspaper boys to begin working at age twelve. Gert pointed out that no other state had a law which permitted children to work at such an early age. Nor did everyone think women needed special protection, including Representative Ted Ledbetter from Gert's own district. He had voted against her bill saying he had "been to a lot of funerals, but [he'd] never

been to one yet where a lady died from overwork." Nevertheless a majority favored the ideas and ideals incorporated in Gert's measure. Its passage was hailed by the press in metropolitan areas as being a model and modern piece of humanitarian legislation.[7]

Another major piece of legislation debated that session which came under the jurisdiction of Gert's committee was the Social Security, or Old Age Assistance Bill. It provided for the establishment of county welfare boards with three members and funding by the county, state, and federal governments. One opponent maintained he was against "any bill that required the county to put up a dollar." Gert disagreed, noting: "When the state and federal governments contribute all the moneys, they are going to run it." She wanted them to pay a "fair share," but she did not want to see them come into Jackson County and administer the law. Most committee members agreed with Gert that the counties should pay a large enough share to guarantee control. But it was still a sticking point to some who argued that requiring counties to shoulder part of the cost was an indirect way of putting a tax on land for state purposes. Amendments to reduce the amount of a county's share or eliminate it altogether were voted down.[8]

Counties now had no alternative except to shoulder the burden which meant they must levy a tax on land for that

purpose, or find some other source of revenue, such as voting in ABC stores. The Social Security bill passed the Senate by a vote of 43 to 1. There were 22,000 aged persons and 21,000 dependent children it would help. The federal government would pay one-half the cost, the state and counties each one-fourth for old age assistance; the three agencies would each pay one-third the cost of child aid. This law was followed by the passage of a similar law for assistance to the blind. That, too, implied an increase in land taxes for that part of the money which had to come from the counties. The welfare boards in each county were expected to investigate each applicant and to submit the list of eligibles to the county commissioners for approval.[9]

Gert, a member of the Jackson County Welfare Board, would now be carrying out the provisions of the law in her own county. She was conscious of the fact that an increase in the ad valorem tax might not be popular or the reason for an increase completely understood. She explained in the local Jackson County Journal that she had agreed to county participation in the burden of old age aid, even though taxes would have to be increased, for two reasons. The bill provided that the state and federal governments must match every dollar that the counties put up in a ratio of three to one; and in light of the experience some of the counties had

had with the school equalization fund, she was fearful that if the bill had been enacted with only state and federal funding, that the largest counties would have swallowed up the entire fund and the smaller counties would have gotten little benefit from it. As it was, the county commissioners and the County Board of Welfare would decide who was eligible for the benefits, and then the state and federal governments must pay their three-fourths of the pensions. Gert was of the opinion that the actual tax rate would rise only slightly and that the benefits that would accrue to the people eligible to participate under the bill should offset any resentment about paying more taxes.[10]

North Carolina had been officially dry since January 1908 and had voted against repeal of Prohibition in 1933. Now the 1937 General Assembly had voted to go back to local option. The newspapers noted that one of the greatest demonstrations of oratory that the present General Assembly had ever seen was that displayed when the liquor control bill was being considered in the Senate. Gert and her fellow prohibitionists had put up a fight although every one of them knew that not a single vote would be changed by the speechmaking. Two amendments offered were voted down. One would have made the bill operative only after a referendum had been submitted to the people of the state; the other one which Gert proposed would have required that all alcoholic

beverages above 3.2 per cent be sold only in liquor stores. But Gert was nothing if not a realist; she knew the reception that amendment would get. All she asked when she sent it up was that when the senators voted it down, they "don't holler too loud."[11]

Some amendments to the liquor bill were approved, such as prohibiting drink at football games or other public gatherings; uniform liquor prices statewide; prohibiting any township voting dry (except a county seat) from having a liquor store; requiring written reports from sheriffs at regular intervals on the status of controls; and requiring supervision of county liquor purchases by the State Board of Alcohol Control. When Gert spoke against the liquor bill, she referred to the provision which specified that not more than one gallon of liquor could be sold to one person in one day. "Is that the temperate use of liquor?" she asked.[12]

Although she accepted defeat on the liquor bill, Gert was determined to keep western North Carolina dry. Thus, when Representative J. F. Cabe of Haywood sponsored a bill to allow the townships of Waynesville and Canton to establish liquor stores if they voted wet, regardless of how the county voted, Gert saw to it that the bill was put on the unfavorable calendar when it reached the Senate. When an attempt was made to revive it, it was tabled. There Gert was confident that it had been left when the General

Assembly adjourned on March 23. But in the closing hours of the session, another senator had moved to revive "a local bill"; and the unsuspecting Senate had voted its approval. Gert got the shock of her life when she opened her newspaper on March 24 and read that the Haywood liquor bill had passed. She went straight to the telephone and told a few people a thing or two. But it was too late for Gert to do anything at that point--the bill was now law. What pressure Gert might have put on people back home is not recorded. But the Cabe Act was declared unconstitutional by Judge Felix E. Alley in July 1938. So Gert had the last word after all and "her mountains" remained dry.[13]

There were several other bills which concerned Gert. One was the issue of free text books debated in the education committee. There was a $1.5 million bond issue for free text books for elementary schools which Hoey had advocated in his campaign. Although the bill passed, Senator John S. Hill condemned it, feeling it would lead North Carolina along the road to state socialism. He said he feared that all these free things would discourage "character" in children, that a rental system would teach them thrift. Gert favored the bill, "not so much because I want to follow the Governor--although I do--but because I have a better reason. Half a dozen children without books in a classroom can drag down the educational standards of a

school tremendously." In rebuttal to Senator Hill's statement that children should have some opportunity to earn their books, Gert said that in her county, "the boys and girls, isolated on mountain farms, had no cash earning capacity." Once again Gert had demonstrated her ability to go right to the heart of a issue: What counted was that all schoolchildren have textbooks; nothing else mattered.[14]

Another bill was of more personal concern. Gert did not approve of fireworks and successfully sponsored a bill making it unlawful to buy, sell, transport, possess, or fire off pyrotechnics in Jackson County. Similar legislation enacted in 1927 had been repealed in 1933. Now Gert had once again made fireworks contraband in Jackson County. It was said that one time Gert had had a firecracker explode at her feet and it had made her angry enough to do something about it.[15]

The 1937 legislative session was the shortest in eight years; it was also the most costly in terms of legislative programs approved. But its job was not quite over. In the summer of 1938 Governor Hoey called a special session in order that the state might participate in the huge grants of PWA money. The governor looked on this as an unparalleled opportunity to expand various of the state's institutions at enormous savings. As discussed in a later chapter, Western Carolina Teachers' College received over three-quarters of a

million dollars for its building program and it named two of its six new buildings for Gert and Hoey.[16]

As in 1931, legislative duties did not require all of Gert's time; there were many outside activities in which she took part. However, the attention of Raleigh society centered on Mrs. Hoey and her daughter Miss Isabel Hoey. Mrs. Hoey was the sister of former Governor O. Max Gardner, and she and her family were familiar figures in Raleigh political and social circles. This is not to say that Gert was ignored. But whereas in 1931 hostesses were vying to honor the first woman senator, they now wanted to honor the governor's wife and daughter. Gert was a frequent guest at these social functions and was often one of those asked to receive along with the hostess and honored guests.[17]

The Sir Walter Cabinet, too, was "back in session," holding its first meeting on January 19th in its usual location, the Manteo Room of the Hotel Sir Walter. Gert attended this meeting and was among eight women presented for recognition. She was also elected an honorary member of the cabinet. Following the meeting a lunchon was given by Mrs. J. B. Spilman (vice-chairman, State Democratic Executive Committee and member, North Carolina Unemployment Compensation Commission) for members of her End of the Month Book Club of Greenville and several members of the cabinet. Gert, who was one of the invited guests, offered this

toast: "It is very apparent Mrs. Spilman holds the hearts of her fellow townswomen, and we wish them to know that she holds equally as warm a place in the hearts of those who are in Raleigh. To Mrs. Spilman, I propose this toast, 'Faithful, gentle, good, wearing the rose of true womanhood.'"[18]

As had been done in previous years, the members of the Sir Walter Cabinet invited guest speakers to address their group. Some of the speakers and their subjects that year were Governor Hoey, on the dignity of the laborer who works with his hands; Clyde A. Erwin, Superintendent of Public Instruction, on education and the importance of fitting the school to the needs of the child rather than vice-versa; and Lt. Governor W. P. Horton, on reasonable taxation. When Dr. Carl V. Reynolds, Secretary of the State Board of Health, spoke on social legislation, he urged the women to use their influence in having legislation passed to eradicate social diseases so prevalent in North Carolina. During the discussion which followed his talk, Mrs. B. H. Griffin, the founder of the cabinet, suggested requiring health certificates for domestic servants. At a meeting several weeks later, Mrs. Griffin made a motion that all of the cabinet members promise to require health certificates on all domestic servants they hired because "Senator McKee was going to introduce a bill to that effect into the

Legislature."[19]

Although Gert did not speak at any cabinet meetings in 1937, she was invited to address the annual meeting of the YWCA on January 27. In that speech she urged those in attendance to "spiritualize and individualize what you do; give not only of your time and your money, but of yourself." The week before she had attended the Lee/Jackson Day ceremonies sponsored by the local Johnston-Pettigrew Chapter of the UDC. The birthday exercises were held in the Hall of the House and a number of legislators were present. Gert also attended regular meetings of the UDC chapter as well as meetings of the local women's clubs.[20]

Lyndon was again able to stay with Gert in Raleigh. Like many legislators, they took rooms at the Hotel Sir Walter. One of their pleasures was dining with friends on Sunday evenings in a private dining room or suite at the hotel.[21]

About ten days before the General Assembly adjourned, the members had gone by train to Edenton, the old colonial capital of North Carolina. They had been invited by town officials to hold a meeting there, the first legislature to do so since the capital had been moved to Raleigh. It was a historic occasion. But not to be outdone, the town fathers of New Bern invited the members of the Sir Walter Cabinet to visit the historic sites there the following week. Gert,

with a foot in each camp, participated in both events.[22]

The McKee Child Labor Law and the Social Security Act were major pieces of legislation Gert could be proud to have had a hand in shaping. She had served the people of Jackson County and North Carolina well in this senate term.

CHAPTER VIII

THIRD SENATE TERM, 1943

Gert's third term in the Senate, like her first and second terms, occurred during a time of great national travail. Earlier it had been the Depression; now it was the Second World War. Indications were that it would be a short session although there were several important issues to be resolved. Gert was still the only woman senator, but her longtime friend, Mrs. Giles W. Cover, had been elected to the House of Representatives. Women legislators were still relatively rare, and the Raleigh News and Observer printed a picture of the two of them together in its 10 January edition. There was speculation before the session opened that Gert might be in line for an important chairmanship. In fact, she was again appointed chairman of the Committee on Public Welfare. Among the major tasks facing the legislators in 1943 were the nine-months school term and raising teachers' salaries. There was also the general feeling that this Assembly "[would] do something to improve conditions--for both patients and workers--in the state's hospitals for the insane." Governor J. Melville Broughton was sponsoring a bill to provide improvements, and it was expected to have wide support as a result of the findings

and recommendations of the special Board of Inquiry, which had investigated conditions at the Morganton Hospital in 1942. Gert had been one of those on the Board of Inquiry; now as a senator she would have the chance to see that the board's recommendations were carried out through appropriate legislation.[1]

On the second day of the session, a bill was introduced in the House to provide for state support of schools for a nine-month term, one more month than at present. The bill was referred to the joint education committee of which Gert was a member. There were three arguments for a nine-month term: (1) it was a forward step in North Carolina's educational system which the war should not dampen; (2) it was the best way to wipe out inequalities in the state's public school system; and (3) most other states had nine-months terms. An editorial in the Raleigh News and Observer commented that for once the "enemies of better schools" could not base their opposition on lack of funds because the state had a hugh surplus in its general fund. The chief argument heard against nine months was that the farmers needed their children to work on the farms more than ever and could hardly afford the present eight-months term.[2]

Gert was wholeheartedly for the bill. Some, though, who were for the bill wanted its effective date delayed to

July 1, 1945. Gert urged immediate adoption saying the people of the state as a whole, and certainly those of western North Carolina, were overwhelmingly for it. And it was Gert who cleared the way for a final vote by moving for the adoption of two amendments. One of them fixed the cost at approximately $3.5 million for each year of the biennium; the other placed the allotment of teachers on the basis of attendance for a six-month period rather than the full term. Proponents of the nine-month school term were surprised at the speed with which the Education Commitee approved it. Only the day before the man who had appointed the committee, Lt. Governor R. L. Harris, had shattered precedent to appear before the committee to vigorously oppose the bill. The committee's quick action had followed a poll taken by Gert, who satisfied herself there were votes to spare both for the bill and against the Harris amendment to postpone the effective date until 1945. Gert urged--and obtained--immediate action. Her poll had proved accurate in both instances.[3]

The measure then moved on to the joint appropriations committee and finally to the Senate floor where it passed its third reading on February 23. Many people had thought the nine-month proposal would fail because the presiding officers of both houses and other influential members opposed it. Obviously, Gert and the bill's supporters were

the more influential in the end. The bill was called "an act of justice for the state's children" because it gave three-fourths of them their first opportunity to have the same school term already enjoyed by one-fourth of North Carolina's children and by all of the children in forty-two of the other forty-seven states.[4]

Gert was also on the joint committee which held hearings on the recommendations made by the Morganton Board of Inquiry. On completion of the hearings, the committee proposed a bill providing for the appointment of a sixteen-member board of directors for the state's hospitals for the insane at Morganton, Raleigh, and Goldsboro, and Caswell Training School. Putting the hospitals under the administrative control of one board was expected to improve conditions through better management of money, supplies, and personnel.[5]

One of the most controversial issues this session was whether members of the General Assembly should be eligible for membership on the Board of Trustees for the University of North Carolina. The practice of electing board members from its own ranks had been going on since 1789 when the first board was set up. In 1943 16 of the 106 board members were current legislators. The intention of this bill was to get rid of political swapping, but its opponents said that if it passed, the board would be deprived of its best

members. Gert, a member of the board, opposed the bill. She went even further and said that the number of women should not be limited either. "Valuable women like me should be appointed to the board," she said. "Women who can serve well, and I can, ought to be reappointed." At that point Representative Ben E. Fountain of Edgecombe gallantly rose to his feet and said that if one hundred women like Mrs. McKee could be found, they should all be elected to the board. Gert responded, "I'll see you later, sir." (She probably already had one hundred names in mind.) The debate resulted in the committee voting down the bill which would have barred Assembly members from the UNC Board. Gert was one of a total of twenty-seven people reelected to the board. She was one of three women whose terms had expired that year and was one of four elected.[6]

In February the Senate passed a routine bill to abolish the State School Commission, the State Textbook Commission, the State Board of Vocational Education, and the State Board of Commercial Education and to transfer their responsibilities to the new State Board of Education. The board had been created by the "Educational Amendment" to the North Carolina Constitution approved by the voters the previous November. Governor Broughton named Gert to a four-year term as one of the twelve board members. This made Gert the first woman constitutional officer. Although

the General Assembly had already adjourned when the board took up its duties, her term as senator officially ran until the next election. Therefore, Gert was required to resign her Senate seat on April 8 when she was sworn in as a board member in compliance with Section 14 of the Constitution, prohibiting dual office holding. The 1943 General Assembly, however, had made some revisions to the organizational structure of the board so that the board appointed by Broughton was to be replaced in 1945 by another board composed of a member from each of eight educational districts, two members-at-large, and three ex-officio members (the Lt.-Governor, State Treasurer, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction). Gert was not reappointed to the board in 1945.[7]

There were two bills in particular which Gert was pleased to have a hand in getting passed because both had been objectives of the Legislative Council for North Carolina Women. One bill established a school for delinquent Negro girls; for over twenty years the North Carolina Federation of Negro Women's Clubs (NCFNWC), with the support of their white counterparts, had worked for this. Broughton had been in favor of it and had appointed a commission to study the advisability of such a school. It had had the backing of over 40,000 women, both black and white, in North Carolina. In a telegram to the General

Assembly, the president of the NCFNWC Executive Board expressed the appreciation of the entire Negro population of North Carolina for getting the bill passed.[8]

The other bill concerned an allotment to aid the State Symphony Society and put it under the patronage and control of the legislature. Not everyone could see the advantage of a State Symphony. One representative questioned whether he was representing "the old woman working in a mill because her main support was off fighting on Guadalcanal, the woman plowing her mule in a field, or the entirely different class of woman who [had] come to Raleigh to wine, dine, and lobby the legislature." Despite opposition such as this, the legislature approved a $2,000 allotment. The money allowed the Symphony to travel around the state presenting musical programs, including concerts for schoolchildren. Regions remote from Raleigh, such as the far reaches of western North Carolina, were greatly enhanced by this kind of cultural event. The use of school buses was authorized on occasion to transport the children to concerts.[9]

Gert sponsored or co-sponsored several minor bills during the session. One was aimed at the furtherance of public safety education "as it may be related to post-war travel." The bill set up a special commission to be appointed by the governor to study this problem. Another bill provided for funds to be allocated from the contingency

and emergency funds for the purchase of land in Swain County to be added to the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Gert opposed a measure which permitted persons previously judged insane to receive a marriage license when they had been adjudged sane by one or more psychiatrists without being subject to the state's sterilization laws. Gert said that such marriages would result in loading the state's insane and correctional institutions. The bill did pass though.[10]

Gert was still the only woman who had ever been elected to the Senate, though women had been elected to the House of Representatives almost every two years since 1920. In 1943 Gert must have been pleased to have her friend Mrs. Cover in the House. They saw a great deal of each other and worked together on some of the bills in which they were both interested. Mrs. Cover was listed as a co-sponsor of the House bill for the nine-months school term and she pushed for the Symphony bill on the House side.[11]

The two women were also honorary members of the Sir Walter Cabinet, which was as active as ever in 1943. Over fifty members were present at the first meeting in January. Gert was the guest speaker and gave a report of the findings of the Morganton investigative board. She urged members of the cabinet to take an active interest in the forthcoming legislation pertaining to the amelioration of conditions

there and at other state institutions. Gert declared that she "is interested in every piece of legislation to come before the Senate, particularly public welfare legislation, aid to the blind, and aid for the schools." As in past years, the cabinet went on record regarding various bills pending before the legislature. They favored the Symphony Appropriation bill, legislative sponsorship of art in the state, and the home for delinquent Negro girls. Mrs. Griffin suggested that formal notice of their endorsement be sent to the General Assembly, reminding the women that "that [was] how we got the law providing health cards for servants."[12]

Broughton spoke at the second meeting and itemized all of the impending legislation. He pointed out that "when this legislature adjourns, it will have done more for the public schools than any in recent years." He praised the work of the Morganton committee and said that its findings had "resulted in more adequate care for the insane." Broughton also paid tribute to the part North Carolina women had played in constructive legislation in the past, even before suffrage, through a "tremendous influence in working for what they were intereted in, particularly legislation condcerning education." He complimented the cabinet for its interest and influence since its formation. After Broughton's address, the women unanimously passed a blanket

resolution endorsing all of the legislation outlined by him.[13]

The cabinet heard other speakers, too. Miss Gertrude Carraway, a newspaper woman from New Bern, spoke on "North Carolina Women at War." She pointed out that almost every community had its own heroines of past wars although only seven historical markers had been erected to women in the state. She said that helping to finance the war through purchase of war stamps and bonds was essentially women's duty to war. She went on to say that women's primary duty now, as in other wars, was "Good Citizenship," to keep themselves well-informed so that they could use the ballot intelligently and support the best types of legislation.[14]

Josephus Daniels of the Raleigh News and Observer spoke on the accomplishments of women since suffrage. He said suffrage should not be considered a failure because all evils had not been eliminated. He noted:

> Women were at first timid in wading into the political stream and even now are somewhat afraid of getting their skirts wet. However, though they have not brought great changes and few have held positions where they could be effective, the increased compensation of women in industry, the better social and health legislation and administration, and better schools and reforms have felt the impulse of woman's leadership.

Daniels went on to point out that, of the seven women who had been elected to the North Carolina General Assembly since 1920, not one had been elected from any county east of

Rockingham. "What [did] this prove," he asked..."that the women of western North Carolina were regarded as more capable, or that the voters of the eastern part of the State [were] too slow to take advantage of the ability and capacity of the forward-looking women to represent them in office." If Daniels had been referring to any one woman in politics, it must surely have been Gert. They were longtime, close friends and mutually respected the other's career accomplishments.[15]

Gert would probably have enjoyed Daniels' address the most of any presented to the cabinet, but she was unable to attend. She had been called home because her mother was seriously ill and not expected to live much longer. Alice Dills died on February 23, 1943, at the age of eighty-four. A few days after the funeral, Gert returned to Raleigh for the final week of the session.[16]

Besides the Sir Walter Cabinet, Gert was involved in other outside activities as she had been in 1931 and 1937. She was in demand as a speaker by various groups and she used these opportunities to talk about the state legislative program. If she were appearing before a woman's group--as she often did--she would urge the women to become involved and to use their influence to get what they wanted from the legislature. She went to many of the local federated club meetings. Of course, many of the outside affairs she was

invited to were purely social occasions. There were receptions, luncheons, teas, and dinners. Gert and other women legislators were often in the peculiar position of being invited to functions for legislators because they were legislators, and to other functions for the wives of legislators because they were women. Although it had been more than twenty years since the first woman legislator went to Raleigh, the newspapers still printed guest lists under the phrase "legislators and their wives."[17]

During this session as was the case in her first two terms, Gert was fortunate to have Lyndon with her in Raleigh for most of the time. They stayed at the Hotel Sir Walter where it was said that "laws [were] really made" because so many legislators stayed there. And with so many legislators around, one probably had to be careful of what might be overheard. Perhaps with that in mind, Gert used to tell a story about herself and Lyndon. One evening after being down in the lobby of the hotel, they had gotten on the elevator to go up to their room. There was already a group of people on the elevator and Gert wanted Lyndon to stop talking about whatever he was talking about. So Gert shook her head at him. But Lyndon went right on with what he was saying. When they got to their room, Gert reported she said, "Now Lyndon, when I shake my head at you, you must stop talking right then and not tell whatever you started to

tell." And he said, "Gertrude, if I shook my head at you everytime you said something I thought you ought not to say, I'd shake my damn head off."[18]

It was the custom of the president of the Senate to turn his gavel over to one of the senators if he had to leave the Senate chamber. It was considered an honor to occupy temporarily the president's chair. On March 8, two days before the General Assembly adjourned, Gert occupied that chair, the first time a woman had presided over the Senate. It was a fitting tribute to Gert in what was to be her last term in the Senate.[19]

When the General Assembly adjourned on March 10, 1943, Gert made her farewells and she and Lyndon drove back home to Sylva. It had been the shortest session in recent years, but still longer than expected when it had convened in January. It would be best remembered for approving the nine-months school term, improving the state hospitals, and funding the North Carolina Symphony. These were major accomplishments in which Gert had played an important part. She could be justly proud that she had been there as the Senator from Jackson.[20]

CHAPTER IX

EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WELFARE INTERESTS

There were two areas of special interest to Gert, education and public health and welfare. She could be called one of the architects of the state education system. In both an official capacity and personally, Gert was determined that a good public school education should be available to all children. She believed in the tenets and objectives of the North Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers and adopted them as her own. They were:

> To promote the welfare of children and youth in home, school, church, and community; to raise the standards of home life; to secure adequate laws for the care and protection of children and youth; to bring into closer relation the home and the school that parents and teachers may co-operate intelligently in the training of the child; to develop between educators and the general public such united efforts as will secure for every child the highest advantages in physical, mental, social, and spiritual education.[1]

These objectives were philosophically compatible with Gert's background and training, and they were ideals which shaped her own actions in both her personal life and public life. Gert's interest in education was manifested in her involvement with public schools and colleges, in organizations, boards, and committees at the state and local levels, in her speeches, and in politics. There was hardly

an area in this field in which she did not have some say or influence. The following pages detail some of her contributions to the advancement of education in North Carolina.

In 1923 when Gert was appointed to the Board of Trustees of what is now Western Carolina University, she was continuing an association with the school which had begun with her father. The school, first called the Cullowhee Academy, had begun operating in 1889 under the leadership of Robert L. Madison with the support and encouragement of several leading citizens of the Cullowhee community. Madison's purpose for the school was to prepare teachers for rural county schools. From an initial enrollment of eighteen students, the first year closed with an enrollment of one hundred students. The fledgling school quickly made an impact. At the 1890 commencement, the theme was "Education;" Gert's father was one of those who spoke. It was reported in the newspaper that all of the speeches testified "to the deep interest and enthusiasm which [had] been awakened in the great subject of education." There was seen a "determination to go forward in the progress of the work so auspiciously begun...new buildings [would] be erected and additional teachers employed and the Cullowhee High School [would] be a permanent institute going on to degrees of larger usefulness til the limits of its

usefulness no man can imagine." These turned out to be prophetic words, although the existence of the school in its early years was tenuous. The state legislature had granted the school a charter in 1891, but financial support was limited. From 1895 to 1921, there were many hard fights in Raleigh to keep the institution where it was. Finally, in 1921 and 1923 under the administration of Governor Cameron Morrison, the permanency of the school was assured with an aggregate appropriation of nearly half a million dollars.[2]

The name changes the school underwent reflect its institutional growth. In 1905 its name was changed from Cullowhee High School to Cullowhee Normal and Industrial School. Beginning about 1912, the status of the school was gradually raised to that of a two-year normal school or junior college. In 1925 with state support increasing and work at the secondary level discontinued, its name was changed to Cullowhee State Normal School. In 1929 under a new charter authorizing the school to extend its work to the four-year level and to grant degrees, the name Western Carolina Teachers' College (WCTC) was adopted. This remained the name of the school until five years after Gert's death when further demands in the liberal arts and for programs in other areas of learning led to an extension of the school's offerings and a name change to Western Carolina College. In 1967 the institute was designated a

regional university by the General Assembly, and its name was changed to its present name, Western Carolina University. On July 1, 1972, the university became a constitutent institution of the University of North Carolina.[3]

Gert must have been delighted with the growth of the Cullowhee school and the role she could play in helping its growth. During her two years as a trustee from 1923 to 1925, nearby property was acquired which allowed for expansion of the school; the faculty was strengthened; new buildings were erected; a new water system installed; the grounds beautified; and a new president's home completed. In June 1923, the board had elected Hiram T. Hunter president, and he and his family were the first to occupy that home. The opening of the 1923 school year also marked the largest enrollment to that date as well as the opening of Cullowhee High School, which had taken over the high school work that Normal had been doing.[4]

Although Gert's first term as trustee ended in 1925, her ties to the school continued. In 1926 for the first time, two history prizes of a ten dollar gold piece each were offered. One was offered by Gert for the best essay on some neglected phase of North Carolina history; the other, by Holmes Bryson (president of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce and later mayor) on some vital subject relating to

western North Carolina. The school undertook to furnish from its library all essential literature relating to the two subjects. Thus, offering these history prizes not only stimulated interest in North Carolina history and resources but encouraged the acquisition of books and other material for the college library. The prizes awarded at the 1926 commencement were won by two Jackson County boys. The subject of the essay for Gert's prize was "Health and Scenery of Western North Carolina; for Bryson's prize, "Recent Educational Advancement in Western North Carolina." In 1927 the topics dealt with the proposed Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the life of a person identified with western North Carolina, such as Zebulon Vance or Governor David L. Swain. It is not known how long Gert continued to offer a history prize. However, in 1938 the Alumni Association initiated plans for an annual award to either a young man or a young woman selected as one "who has made the most distinctive contribution to college life" or who for other reasons seemed most deserving of "special recognition." For more than twenty years, the "Student Distinguished Service Award" was annually conferred; the awards were first provided by Gert, and following her death by her son William.[5]

Gert had personal ties to the Cullowhee college. She was best friends with Mrs. Lillian Buchanan, the school's

librarian. They were also in club work together as was Mrs. H. T. Hunter, the wife of the school's president. Gert also worked on various committees with President Hunter. In 1928 he asked her to address the women students at chapel. Gert took that opportunity to congratulate them on being "modern college students" in "our own great state of North Carolina." She wanted them to understand their "privileges and responsibilities as teachers in the making." She discussed the "problem of moral and character education." In conclusion, she offered the example of Jesus Christ as the perfect teacher.[6]

The building program at the college received a boost from the General Assembly in 1937, and again in 1938, the years of Gert's second term as state senator. The final appropriation of $135,000 for WCTC in 1937 was partially intended for a new building for the training school and to make the present training school building into a classroom building for the college students. The budget committee recommended an appropriation of $75,000 which the House raised the amount to $110,000; the Senate further raised it to $135,000. Gert's role is not documented; but, based on other instances of her legislative support for WCTC, it could be correctly assumed that she spoke favorably for the maximum appropriation. Then in the 1938 special session called to appropriate Public Works Administration (PWA)

grants, WCTC was given over three-quarters of a million dollars for its building program. The money was used to build or renovate six buildings.[7]

In May 1940 the Board of Trustees met to discuss names for the new buildings under the guidelines they had adopted the previous year. It had been decided that names given to new buildings, as a rule, be restricted to men and women who have made outstanding contributions to the welfare of the State of North Carolina, preferably in the field of education; that buildings should not be named for living persons except for extraordinary reasons; and that names of buildings not necessarily be limited to those of persons. They then selected the name Gertrude Dills McKee for the Training School Building. Other buildings named were Madison Hall in honor of founder Robert L. Madison; Graham Infirmary in honor of Frank P. Graham, the president of the University of North Carolina; Hoey Auditorium in honor of then Governor Clyde R. Hoey; and the William E. Breese Physical Education Building in memory of the past chairman of the Board of Trustees. In October 1941 at the annual homecoming celebration, the buildings were dedicated in a ceremony honoring the four living persons for whom the buildings were named. It was reported that those who had watched the recent growth of the college knew that its expansion in every direction [had] been little short of

phenomenal. The college was rapidly assuming a significant place in the educational leadership of western North Carolina.[8]

Gert was again appointed to the WCTC Board of Trustees in August 1941, serving for almost two years. Her first few months on the board coincided with her third senate term. She acted as a friend at court when President Hunter came before the joint legislative committee on appropriations. Gert was particularly anxious that the committee members hear the request for an increase over the amount recommended by the Advisory Budget Commission because it included an amount for the state purchase of over 400 acres of land adjoining the college campus for use as a college farm. Unfortunately at the same time Hunter was making his presentation, members began leaving to attend the all-important hearing by the education committee on the nine-month school proposal. Of course, this was of interest to Gert, too, but at that moment the WCTC appropriation took priority. So she left her seat and virtually held the door shut to keep appropriation members from leaving. After Hunter was finished, Gert graciously thanked the committee members for staying and allowed them to leave for the other hearing.[9]

Gert knew that for many of the local farm youth the Cullowhee college represented the only place they could

realistically attend to prepare themselves for a life other than farming. For the farm girls, a teacher's certificate from the college gave them a chance for some independence before they married. For some farm boys the Cullowhee college was their only hope for a college education. Gert was particularly sensitive when it concerned youths who wanted to continue their education past high school, but who did not have the means to do so. Based on the kind of help Gert obtained for John Denton, a Jackson County farm boy, it is most likely that his was not an isolated case. However, she did ask him to keep her help "our little secret." Gert was not after public recognition of her private benevolence, and it is indicative of her modesty that she sought to downplay her help.[10]

The plight of Denton was brought to Gert's attention by her son Lyndon, who was Denton's high school classmate in 1932. Denton desperately wanted to attend college, but there was no family money to send him in those early Depression years. Gert called Denton over to her home and talked with him about his efforts and his ambitions. Denton recalls that "this country boy" went up there "probably scared to death," but that as usual, Gert was very charming and put him at his ease. Denton does not remember much about the interview except that Gert said she would look into various opportunities for scholarships and try to find

a place for him at some school, which she did at Western Carolina.[11]

It was already three weeks into the semester when Gert and Denton attended the special board meeting called to discuss accepting him. Gert sat in on the meeting where it was decided that he could enter late, but that he would have to make up the work he had missed. In return for free tuition, Denton was to work three days on the college farm. Gert also arranged living accommodations for him in the community because there was no room in the boys' dormitory. Denton remembers that Gert would be driving by, perhaps on her way to High Hampton, and she would look across the fields; if she saw him working there, she would wave. In other ways, too, Gert kept up with his progress. Sometimes Denton would be stopped on campus by President Hunter, or Dean William E. Bird, or others who would comment that "someone asked about you last night at the meeting." Although Denton left Jackson County after his graduation in 1936 and spent his working years elsewhere, he did see Gert several times in later years on visits home; there was always instant recognition when he appeared at her door. She seemed proud of the success he had made of his life. Denton believes he was just one of many she helped by providing opportunities for people to help themselves. And because she helped out of the kindness of her heart, and not

for public reward, the extent of her generosity is not documented. Family members have said, though, that any boy whom Gert thought wanted an education and was capable of studying, she would help as much as possible.[12]

To support the public schools in North Carolina generally, and the Jackson County public schools specifically, was a lifelong commitment of Gert's. In the early years funding for schools was on a local basis, and the smaller, more rural counties such as Jackson were often at a disadvantage in providing good facilities. The degree of involvement by local people could make a big difference in the quality of the local school; Gert was one of those in the most involved through her membership in the Parent-Teacher's Association (PTA), the women's clubs, the Democratic party, and in her capacity as state senator.

Public education in North Carolina was a continuing concern of governors and the legislature. In 1918 the voters had approved a State Constitutional Amendment to secure to every child in North Carolina the opportunity to attend public school for at least six months of the year. In 1919 Governor Thomas W. Bickett recommended that the General Assembly make the six-months school law operative in every county of the state, provide for compulsory school attendance during the entire term, and make it unlawful for any mill or factory to employ a child between the ages of

eight and fourteen during the school term. However, the problem for many counties in providing a six-months, or longer, school term--no matter how desirable--was money. As long as local governments were responsible for funding public education there would be inequities between what the more wealthy counties and the poorer counties could provide.[13]

In March 1926 Gert was appointed by Governor Angus W. McLean to the State Education Commission, to conduct an extended survey of public school needs with the idea of determining the cost as well as the duty of the state in the operation of its educational system. There was considerable speculation as to the character of the inquiry, particularly its possible relation to the proposal for a state-wide eight-month school term. The twelve-member commission had the legislative authority to go into every phase of public school finances, but there had been no indication as to whether it would confine its efforts to the study of financial problems of the existing six months school, or whether it would also consider ways and means of financing an eight-months term. Dr. Fred Morrison, the commission chairman, was said to be a staunch advocate of the longer term; so was Gert. The work of the commission was expected to look closely at the equalizing fund. The state was appropriating $1.5 million annually to aid the so-called

weaker counties in operating their schools for six months. There had been wide advocacy of a substantially larger fund as a means of more equitably distributing the burden of supporting the public schools among the counties. It was regarded as certain that the commission will seek ways and means of "raising and equalizing the burden." But whether it would focus its efforts to improving the financial structure of the six-months school or propose a method of equitable financing for the eight-months school was uncertain in the absence of any definite statement from commission members.[14]

County meetings were held in November 1926 to feel out public sentiment regarding an eight-months school term and other school matters. In both Jackson and Macon counties, the sentiment was practically unanimous for eight months, which was announced by Gert for Jackson County and by Superintendent M. C. Billings for Macon County. Billings declared that if the question of an eight-month school term were submitted to the voters, not more than 100 would vote against the longer term; Gert reported similar support. Following the meeting Dr. Morrison wrote a letter commending Jackson County.[15]

The issues of the length of the school term and how to fund public education continued to be debated biennially in the General Assembly; they were still major issues in 1931

when Gert arrived for her first senate term. It sometimes seemed incomprehensible to Gert that, with such an important matter at stake as the education of the children of North Carolina, her fellow legislators could be so short-sighted. The 1933 General Assembly finally approved an eight-month state-supported school term financed by a sales tax, a sticking point in 1931. However, that was not the end of the problems of public education. Compulsory attendance, child labor, roads, textbooks, and school buses continued to be debated in the legislature and to one degree or another were concerns in 1937 and 1943 when Gert returned to Raleigh for her second and third senate terms. Gert's participation and efforts on behalf of these issues are more fully described in the previous chapters. Outside the political arena, but still at the state level, Gert became involved in several activities. In 1931 Governor Gardner appointed Gert to two commissions. One was the State Commission of Adult Education. At that time North Carolina stood near the top in adult illiteracy, and its social, economic, and political problems were aggravated because of this condition. The other was the Consolidation Commission.[16]

The task of the Consolidation Commission was to study the reorganization of, and to make recommendations for, consolidating the three state institutions of higher

learning--North Carolina State College at Raleigh, North Carolina College for Women at Greensboro, and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill--into one university system with unified administrative control. The commission studied the duplication of programs and the necessity for maintaining three separate schools. Among their final recommendations was the provision to have an engineering school only at State College. This had been opposed by Gert, who felt that an engineering school should be maintained at Chapel Hill, but she compromised on this in order to get some other (unspecified) recommendations of her own accepted. In June 1932, the Consolidation Commission met with Gardner. The outcome of the meeting was the unanimous adoption of a definite program to proceed with merging the three institutions. The effect of consolidation was mainly administrative; the three institutions were to retain their physical separateness with only a few changes in degree programs. Each would have its own board of trustees, but a one-hundred member Greater University Board of Trustees would oversee the total operation. Gert was one of the ten women to be appointed to this board. The results of the commission were far-reaching in that they paved the way for cooperation among the institutions of higher learning in North Carolina and fostered the idea that a state system of higher education was necessary to assure

quality education with adequate financial resources.[17]

In addition to her election to the Greater University Board of Trustees, Gert was also named to the boards of trustees of Peace College and Brevard College in 1931 and 1933 respectively. Then, in 1941 she was reappointed to the Board of Trustees of Western Carolina Teachers' College. At that point, Gert would later tell family members, an editorial in a Greensboro newspaper commented that four trusteeships seemed a bit much, but that "if anybody could carry it off, it was Mrs. E. L. McKee."[18]

Gert was elected vice-chairman of the WCTC Board, chairman of the Budget and Curriculum Committee, and a member of the Building Committee. One of the major decisions made by the board during Gert's term was to authorize the faculty to set up curricula leading to a B.A. degree for non-professionals; the professional, or teaching degree awarded would still be a B.S. degree. The board's duties also included reappointing staff and setting salaries. Then, in April 1943 Gert resigned from the WCTC Board citing her "many added public responsibilities." The minutes of the board meeting held May 24, 1943, include a statement regarding Gert's service. The resolution reads in part: "...Mrs. McKee has rendered outstanding service to the college through her influence, interest, and untiring efforts over a period of years; and...has made a lasting

impression upon this institution...." A copy of the resolution was sent to Gert.[19]

In November 1942 a constitutional amendment providing for a twelve-member State Board of Education had been approved. Governor J. Melville Broughton appointed Gert as the only woman member to this board. When she took office on April 8, 1943, she became the state's first woman constitutional officer. On the same date her resignation from the Senate took effect under the law prohibiting dual office holding. The members of the board claimed to have made North Carolina history as the first Board of Education to have a woman member and as the first board of which the governor was not a member. The board named her as its representative to the State Nursing Council. Gert was appointed for a four-year term. However, the 1943 General Assembly had drafted a second amendment (to correct weaknesses in the orginal amendment) which the voters had approved in the November 1944 election. That meant that the present board had to be replaced in 1945. Gert was disappointed when newly elected Governor R. Gregg Cherry did not reappoint her to the new board in 1945. However, appointments to the board were to a large extent political spoils, and Governor Cherry probably did not owe Gert any favors or otherwise feel obligated to reward her.[20]

On the local level--in Sylva and Jackson County--Gert

also worked in the educational field to improve the quality and opportunities for public education. In the June 1932 Democratic primary Gert ran for the Jackson County Board of Education. As one of the top five receiving the most votes, the 1933 General Assembly confirmed her selection. At the first board meeting in May 1933, the members elected Gert as their chairman. The tasks facing the board were redistricting the county for school purposes (which had to be approved by the State Board of Education) and resolving financial problems. In 1934 Gert first refiled for nomination to the school board, but then withdrew her name from consideration. In her statement of withdrawal she referred to the difficult and strenuous task of reorganizing the school system and to the fact that the board had wiped out a $2,000 deficit and had begun making needed repairs and improving the equipment in a number of schools.[21]

Gert was a very active member of the PTA. As previously mentioned, she first joined this organization when her own two sons were in school. But even after 1932 when they were no longer in the local schools, she continued to be a leader in the work of this group. In 1932 she was appointed by the president of the Western District, PTA, to be field secretary of the same district. This district comprised eighteen counties and one of her responsibilities was to lecture to the associations in these counties. This

kind of position fully utilized her talent for public speaking, providing her with a forum to present those principles of education which she thought were important. For example, the report on the talk she gave before the Willets (community) PTA in April 1932, noted that she laid before the group the "serious reponsibility of parents in regard to spiritual and educational training for their children." The report went on to say that Gert "never [failed] to stress the necessity of religious practice, upholding the church as a watchtower for guidance." Spoken in a "fashion of speech [both] agreeable and pleasant," Gert expanded on a theme stated two years earlier by the president of the North Carolina Education Asociation that "education raises living standards and, with the church, holds society together."[22]

At the September 1932 meeting of the Sylva PTA, Gert was one of the speakers on the topic, "What the Parent Expects of the Teacher." Gert was also program chairman of the Sylva PTA for the 1932-1933 school year, and study leader in 1934 and 1935. After one program in December 1932 consisting of a lecture and group singing, the Sylva group was called "one of the most wide-awake organizations in Jackson County." The following year when the general topic was "What Makes a Successful PTA," Gert gave a five-minute talk on "Parent Education." She spoke again on this subject

at a meeting celebrating the 38th anniversary of the PTA held in February 1935. The second of her series of talks was on "Foods." She stated that "variety [was] necessary in the diet of growing children--not necessarily costly or expensive foods, but variety in selection and preparation."[23]

In 1932 there had been a meeting of PTA members to discuss the formation of a county council to coordinate the activities of the individual community school PTAs. As a member of the state PTA board, Gert was one of those attending the meeting called for this purpose. However, it was not until December 1935 that a formal council was formed; at that time Gert was elected vice-chairman of the council.[24]

During the 1930s and 1940s Gert was always an interested participant at District PTA meetings as well as the conventions and Summer Institutes of the State Congress of Parents and Teachers. In 1933 she was a member of the Congress's strong legislative committee which worked for the state-wide school term of eight months, raises in teachers' salaries, and better transportation for school children. In 1938 she was chairman of this committee. Their legislative aims for passage by the 1939 General Assembly were the addition of the twelfth grade in every public high school; measures to increase school attendance; better school buses

and more adequate highway safety laws; and state aid to increase library facilities. The 1937 General Assembly had approved the PTA's plan for state aid to local libraries, but it had not substantiated its endorsement with an appropriation.[25]

With a state-supported school term of nine months having been approved by the 1943 General Assembly, the focus of educational organizations turned to juvenile delinquency and recreational facilities for children. In March 1944 the Sylva PTA held their annual study course on the causes and remedies of juvenile delinquency. Gert was one of those appearing on the program. The previous month she had appeared on the Founder's Day programs of three local PTAs, Sylva, Qualla, and Savannah. In 1946 the Sylva PTA's study course was a five-point program on "Together We Build Good Citizenship." Gert spoke from the standpoint of the parents; other points were the church, Sunday School, elementary school, and the home. In 1947 she spoke at a joint meeting of the Savannah/Webster PTAs on the duties of parents and teachers in relation to the child and of the need for close cooperation between the two.[26]

In February 1948 at the Qualla PTA meeting, Gert was the guest speaker. She gave a talk on the condition of schools in America, especially in North Carolina. She listed some of the needs of children which a teacher had a

right to expect of them, including "a warm breakfast, training in morals, and good physical condition." Gert believed a child should be taught "self-control, truthfulness, honesty, and unselfishness by both parents." The Sylva PTA study course in 1948 was a four-point program on school education, health, world understanding, and parent and family life education. Gert summarized the day's program and gave a number of statistics on education in North Carolina. At the last Sylva PTA meeting she attended before she died, Gert gave a report on the twentieth annual conference of District 7 of the North Carolina Congress of Parents and Teachers whose theme had been "United for Youth." She had then intoduced Mrs. H. T. Hunter, who spoke on "What Does the PTA Mean To You?"[27]

Gert also was active in several organizations for teachers and professional educators: the Jackson County Teachers Association, the Schoolmasters' Club, and the North Carolina Education Association (NCEA). Here, as with the PTA, she was a popular speaker and was frequently asked to be the principal speaker or toastmaster at dinner meetings and annual banquets. Gert served as a lay leader at a three-day NCEA work conference in 1945 which focused on the improvement of teaching and educational facilities in schools. In 1947, when federal aid to school lunchrooms was cut off, Gert went before the teachers of the local unit to

describe the efforts being made to raise an emergency fund to help tide over the county lunchrooms in this critical period. An amount of $500 had already been raised which Gert hoped would become $1,000 in a few days.[28]

Gert seemed to enjoy sponsoring student contests, perhaps as a way of making learning fun. In 1922 and for five years thereafter, she offered a medal for the best declamation at the Sylva High School commencement exercises. The medal was given in memory of Lyndon's brother James W. McKee, a promoter and one of the chief benefactors of the school. Then, in 1934 she offered through the UDC a medal for the best recitation or declamation by a high school student. It was called the Gertrude Dills McKee medal. Gert would also offer gold pieces of various denominations as prizes in essay contests. She also offered books to the classroom averaging the best attendance each month at the elementary school PTA meetings.[29]

Since 1866 the schools in Jackson County had been segregated. The Consolidated Colored School served the fewer than one hundred Negro children in the county. In 1926 North Carolina law made schools legally separate and segregated. Although Gert never spoke publicly against segregation, she was sensitive to the fact that the Negro schools needed the support of the white establishment. Gert

is mentioned several times over the years in connection with the Consolidated School which suggests she may have been more involved than has been reported in the newspapers. In March 1929 Gert presented the diplomas at the graduation exercises of the Consolidated School; in 1932 in cooperation with a Milk-for-Health campaign in the county, Gert offered a prize of a five dollar gold piece to the black boy or girl writing the best essay on "Milk as a Health Food." In March 1934, she spoke on a Sunday morning on the "The Home and Its Relation to the Public School" as part of the school's closing exercises. In 1944 the school sent Gert a resolution thanking "Senator McKee" for her help in securing an additional teacher so that they could offer high school courses to black children of Jackson County. The school called her "progressive-minded."[30]

Gert was a popular speaker at school commencements. At one time or another she delivered commencement addresses at Jackson County elementary and high schools and at Peace College. She used these occasions to restate her belief that the basic objective of education was character training and that the advancement of the people of North Carolina depended on improving the educational opportunities for everyone in the state. In June 1947 at the commencement exercises of Peace College, Gert shared the podium with Congresswoman Helen Gahagan Douglas. Gert gave advice to

the graduating seniors on how to go out into the world. "I know you have been told many things to remember," she said; but "I want to leave you with three things to forget: Forget your fears, forget your failures and forget your successes."[31]

On May 18, 1945, Gert was awarded an honorary doctor of law degree from the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina. The Asheville-Citizen commented:

> In bestowing honorary degrees yesterday on Mrs. Crosby Adams of Montreat and Mrs. E. L. McKee of Sylva, the [college] has given richly deserved recognition to two of the truly outstanding women of this State.
>
> Mrs. McKee has been particularly active in the political and cultural life of the State. Her interests have been particularly in the field of education and her contributions to a richer North Carolina, educationally speaking, have been notable....[32]

The Asheville-Citizen went on to commend the Woman's College for its recent disposition to restrict its honorary degrees to citizens of North Carolina, noting, "This [was] a policy whose wisdom [was] fully vindicated in the awards to Mrs. Adams and Mrs. McKee."[33]

Dr. Frank P. Graham, president of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill presented the degree to Gert. He was also a long-time friend of hers, and most appropriately began the citation with a quotation from Psalm 121: "I will life up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help...." This award to Gert put her among the fewer than a dozen women to have received honorary degrees

in the history of the University. Mrs. Franklin D. Roosevelt and Mrs. Josephus Daniels were among those previously honored. Other newspaper comments applauded Gert's award as justified and as due recognition for one of North Carolina's leading woman citizens.[34]

At the same time that Gert was making her many noteworthy contributions to the field of education, she was working to improve public health and welfare, particularly for women and children through protective legislation, programs of the federated clubs, health campaigns and fund drives, and through official positions on boards, committees, and commissions.

One of Gert's first appointments in this field was in 1928 to the Jackson County Board of Charities and Public Welfare. The duties of the county board were to advise and assist the State Board in the work of the county and to act in a general advisory capacity to county and municipal authorities in dealing with questions of dependency and delinquency, distribution of the poor funds, and social conditions generally. In 1937 the board assumed responsibility for approving all applications for old age assistance, aid to dependent children, and grants-in-aid for the blind. It appears that Gert served continuously on this board through the 1930s and 40s and was its chairman for several terms. In 1941 under new legislation enacted by the

General Assembly, the three year terms were reduced to two years with a limit of no more than three terms or six consecutive years. The local welfare boards were composed of three members: one to be appointed by the state board; one by county officials; and the third by the other two members. Gert was the member appointed by the State Board. Gert attended scheduled regional meetings of welfare officers, presiding at one meeting in Brevard in 1938; at another meeting in Asheville in 1942, she presided at the luncheon meeting at which former Governor Clyde R. Hoey was the principal speaker. In a 1944 Asheville meeting, she spoke on the responsibility of the county welfare boards in developing the welfare program.[35]

As the effects of the Depression were felt in Jackson County, the communities developed programs to help those in need. In 1933 a committee of seven members was formed to enroll and clasify all unemployed labor in the county with preference given to veterans and their families. Gert was the only woman member on the committee. Enrolling was expected to benefit the unemployed because of the upcoming labor requirement for the Great Smoky Mountains National Park and the Tennessee Valley Authority projects.[36]

Jackson County benefitted from another New Deal program for recreation projects. Gert was one of six people to attend a meeting in June 1937 to discuss the work of the

recreation project with the state recreation consultant from Raleigh. A Recreation Day Committee was formed with Gert as chairman. This group of twenty-one local citizens was to serve in an advisory capacity to the County Supervisor of Recreation under WPA. The Jackson County program was experimental. Through the cooperation of President Hunter, a training program for training WPA recreational leaders was conducted at WCTC on a scale not attempted elsewhere in the state. Recreation leaders attended classes in physical education, sociology, art, and music at the college in the morning. A modern recreation center to be operated by NYA leaders was to open near the college campus in the fall of 1937. The Jackson County experiment was being closely watched with a great deal of interest believing it would provide a recreation program based on the community cultural patterns that would more adequately meet the needs of the community.[37]

Gert's interest and concern for public welfare was further recognized by gubernatorial appointments and the social welfare legislation she sponsored during her senate terms. She was chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Welfare for all three of her Senate terms--1931, 1937, and 1943. In the 1931 General Assembly, Gert had supported child labor legislation to reduce the hours of work for children under sixteen years, to prohibit employment of

children under sixteen in hazardous occupations, and to prohibit employment of children between sixteen and eighteen years in night work in mills, factories, or workshops. Subsequent legislative sessions continued to discuss, but not approve, restrictions on child labor until 1937. That year Gert was back in the Senate, and she sponsored a child labor bill which was enacted as the McKee Child Labor Law. It was considered a model statute and was used as a standard for child labor laws in several other states. Ironically, several years later the McKee Child Labor Law was cited to Gert's son William concerning the employment of youth under fourteen years at the High Hampton Resort. A social worker inspecting business establishments to ensure compliance with this law noted that even the employment of younger boys to caddy was prohibited. When William protested that this could deprive some young folk of needed income, the social worker replied, "Well, it's your mother's name on the bill!"[38]

The 1937 General Assembly also dealt with the new federal social security laws, which have been discussed in Chapter VIII. That this kind of legislation might be unsettling to people was not unforeseen. Gert was asked to explain the different phases of the social legislation enacted by the General Assembly to various civic organizations. For this work she received many

complimentary letters, including one from Frances Perkins, the Secretary of Labor, and one from Justice Heriot Clarkson of the North Carolina Supreme Court.[39]

The letter from Perkins was not Gert's first contact with her. On September 31, 1935, Perkins had been the chief speaker at the annual banquet of the International Association of Industrial Accident Boards and Commissions. She spoke on the Social Security program to about 600 persons at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville. She had been introduced by Gert, who got many laughs with her "barbed defense of women voters against the charge that they had not set the world on fire in their first dozen years of enfranchisement." Then, in February 1938 Gert received another letter from Perkins inviting her to a regional labor standards conference in New Orleans. Representatives from eleven southern states were expected to attend the three-day meeting. In her letter Perkins said, "I hope very much that you will find it possible to meet with us and give us the benefit of your knowledge and experience in the discussion[s]." Unfortunately, Gert had to decline the invitation because of an attack of neuralgia, but it is indicative of the recognition Gert was receiving for her leadership in the field of industrial and welfare legislation.[40]

A natural outgrowth of Gert's proficiency and

experience in the public health and welfare field was her appointment by Governor Broughton to the Board of Inquiry to investigate Morganton Hospital and other state institutions for the insane. The inquiry had been authorized by the 1941 General Assembly in answer to a series of articles written by Charlotte newspaper reporter Tom P. Jimison. Jimison had been a patient at Morganton for a short time, and the conditions he had found there were an appalling indictment of the state's treatment of its mentally ill citizens. The five-member commission was authorized to hold public hearings beginning in March 1942 and to report their findings with recommendations to the governor. The investigation began at Morganton with an inspection of the facilities on the first day and testimony from witnesses on the second day; Jimison was the first witness. Other hearings were scheduled at Charlotte and Winston-Salem. The chairman, former Superior Court Judge Marshall T. Spears, said that the commission would hear anyone "who can offer any information on the subject."[41]

Gert, too, publicly asked for any information that former patients might have that would help the investigation "find the true situation and management of the institutions." The investigation revealed conflicting information as some spoke against the various mental institutions with horror stories of negligence and

indifference; others testified in defense of the institutions, including several psychiatrists who had previously worked at the hospitals and who recommended abolition of "outside interference," improvement in sanitation and expansion of staff and training; still others accused Broughton of making Morganton a political football.[42]

There was apparent disagreement among the board members when the time came to evaluate the information from the hearings and report their recommendations to the governor. Dr. Wingate Johnson of Winston-Salem, the only physician on the commission, wanted to give physicians every benefit of the doubt. No matter how cruel they seemed to be to their patients, he apparently did not want to be put in the position of criticizing his colleagues. Gert was at the other extreme, terribly distressed by the human suffering she saw patients subjected to in the institutions. The feelings of the other three members fell somewhere in between. When it looked like the report might be a whitewash, Gert is reported to have said that unless they modified it, and made stronger recommendations, she would be compelled to write a minority report. That was something neither the other commission members nor the governor wanted because it would have caused even more controversy. Gert stood her ground, however, and the recommendations she felt

should be made were included in the final report sent to the governor in September 1942.[43]

Some of the recommendations were implemented immediately. Others required legislative approval for the necessary appropriations. The Morganton report was one of the major issues of the 1943 General Assembly. Gert, serving her third Senate term, worked from within the legislature to ensure that the necessary corrective steps were taken. She was assigned to the joint committee on Mental Institutions, which heard additional testimony from workers at these institutions. Gert was one of three senators to sponsor the bill providing for a sixteen-member Board of Control to supervise the administration and conditions of the institutions. In several speeches Gert made to women's groups, she spoke on the findings of the commission and the progress of impending legislation as well as the needs of the insane, the feebleminded, and the delinquent. She urged women to interest themselves in public affairs and to use their influence to improve bad conditions among the state's ill and unfortunates.[44]

The Morganton investigation was called a "blessing in disguise" because it brought the state institutions before the public and made the people realize their responsibility in caring for the mentally ill. There were calls for investigations into other related-institutions, such as the

School for Delinquent Girls at Samarcand; Goldsboro State Hospital cases of feebleminded Negroes and the need to expand facilities for them; and the Caswell Training School for feebleminded children. There was also a need for some solution to the problem of "cured" patients whose families did not want them to return home. Morganton Hospital was later renamed Broughton Hospital.[45]

Gert became involved with the annual infantile paralysis campaigns in 1943. That year she was named county chairman of the tenth annual infantile paralysis campaign held under the auspices of the committees for the celebration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's birthday. The county chairmen were expected to name chairmen for each community within their county and map out campaign plans. The quota for Jackson County was $214. The fund drive must have been successful because Gert was named county chairman for the next four years. Each year Jackson County's quota was increased; each year the county surpassed its quota by several hundrd dollars. Half of the money raised was kept within the county for work among those crippled by polio. Gert was very pleased with the generosity shown by the county citizens. Although she thanked all of those who gave to the cause, she singled out the schools for going "all-out" to make the drive a success. In the January 1945 campaign, she reminded the people that 1944 had seen the

second worst outbreak in the disease's history and she emphasized the "need to reinforce our lines of defense against this insidious enemy of childhood." She went on to say that "since no one knows where, or how hard, polio may strike in 1945, we must again be ready to meet the attack wherever it may come."[46]

Part of Gert's ability as a successful fundraiser was her belief in the causes she asked money for and her ability to state in very simple terms the importance of the cause and the use to which the money would be put. "All people have come to know that the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis is a necessary and invaluable force in our national life...how effective it has been in epidemics of polio providing medical care and treatment...regardless of age, race, creed, or color....I am sure that everyone will contribute more generously this year than ever before," she said in 1946. Then, after the money had been collected, she asked that parents and interested citizens throughout the county give her names and addresses of cripples in need of treatment or financial aid in securing braces, wheel chairs, or other things. She also asked for the help of all in the wise expenditure of the money.[47]

In 1947 the need for funds had never been greater because the nation had just emerged from the worst epidemic of polio. Once again Gert in her position as county

chairman noted that the "people of Jackson County have been most generous in the past [and] indications are that they will be even more generous this year because they know that this fight is their fight...until final victory is won and infantile paralysis joins other great scourges of mankind unmasked and disarmed by knowledge...." In the summer of 1948, the polio situation became critical, and the county was asked to contribute one thousand dollars. Gert, "as a committee of one, went out and raised the money in one morning." Over the years Gert had earned the trust of the citizens of the county and her backing of any enterprise was an invaluable part of its success.[48]

Cancer was another health problem. For years the North Carolina Federation of Women's Clubs had supported the work of the Women's Field Army of the American Society for Control of Cancer. In 1945 Gert was asked to serve on the advisory board of the North Carolina Division of the American Cancer Society by Mrs. George C. Marshall, the State Commander. The aim of the society was to have active units in all one hundred counties and additional units in larger towns and cities. As one of North Carolina's leading citizens, Gert could be instrumental in drawing support for the programs of the Cancer Society.[49]

Gert's interest in health and welfare never wavered. Conscious of her own good health and high standard of

living, she looked for ways to support civic betterment so that others, especially children, might have every opportunity for a decent life.

CHAPTER X

OTHER INTERESTS AND ACTIVITIES, 1922 - 1948

Gert devoted many hours to her work in the fields of politics, education, and public health and welfare; yet, there were also many other activities which claimed her time and attention during the 1930s and 1940s. She and Lyndon together worked to attract visitors and build up the Jackson County tourist industry through their High Hampton resort, road improvements, and their support of federal parks and recreation areas. In addition to her membership in the federated women's clubs, Gert continued to be an active member in the Sylva chapter of the UDC and in other organizations. She also remained devoted to her church work, giving her time and talents to committees, fundraising, choir, and the women's circles. During the Second World War she supported defense efforts through Liberty Bond Drives, Red Cross work, and patriotic speechmaking. Gert had a wide circle of friends and family and there were numerous social functions that she was invited to attend. These were the years which saw her recognized as one of North Carolina's most brilliant and influential women.

Roads--good paved roads--had long been a major concern

of the people of Jackson County. Roads were a vital link to the outside world and to the more inaccessible areas within the region. Money for constructing and paving roads came from the state legislature, and it often seemed as if Jackson County were on the short end of the stick. One road in particular which the county had long desired to have completed was the highway which ran from Sylva to Cullowhee, then on through Cashiers to the South Carolina border. It was important for two reasons: one, it led past Western Carolina Teachers' College; and two, it was the major southern route into the county for tourists. Gert and Lyndon also had a personal interest in having this road paved because it was the north/south route through Cashiers where their High Hampton Inn was located. Thus, the highway was important for their business as well as for the economic growth of Jackson County. The mountains had long attracted visitors, but tourism as an industry was only just beginning to be recognized as a valuable natural resource which could be developed for the benefit of area residents.[1]

Gert and Lyndon had met several times with highway officials in Raleigh trying to convince them of the importance of resurfacing Highway 106. They had received many asssurances that it would be done soon, but it was the late 1930s before the project was completed. By that time Lyndon was the regional highway commissioner for western

North Carolina, and through his official position, he got the job done.[2]

Despite the difficulties over roads, the McKees and other citizens worked to develop the tourist potential of the area. The resort of High Hampton was Lyndon's pet project, although Gert shared in its development as a major tourist attraction in Jackson County. Lyndon had fallen in love with the property when he had first driven by it in 1922. Owned by the family of Confederate General Wade Hampton, High Hampton was considered one of the most beautiful spots in all of western North Carolina. It was the showplace of the entire region for many years. In 1923 when it came on the market for sale, Lyndon headed a group of local investors who purchased it with the idea of developing it into a resort. The estate comprised approximately 2,300 acres, and its purchase was regarded as an example of Lyndon's "canny business acumen" and of "wide-awake citizens recognizing the value of natural assets." A golf course was laid out although only eleven holes were actually built; electric lights and other modern conveniences were put in along with additional accommodations for guests.[3]

In June 1924 the Inn opened for guests, offering golf, tennis, swimming, horseback riding, and a children's park with playground equipment. The following year the

newspapers were noted that the "resort section of upper Jackson County including Lake Fairfield, High Hampton, and other resorts [were] beginning the biggest tourist business in history...taxing the resorts to their capacity to house and feed them."[4] Gert and Lyndon, often accompanied by their sons, spent many weekends at High Hampton themselves. They frequently invited friends and business and political acquaintances to be their guests; Gert would have the women of her clubs up there, too, for the day. Civic organizations found it a convenient and pleasant place to hold their annual banquets or other events.[5]

In May 1932 the original buildings burned down in a late night fire of unknown origin. It was considered a great loss for tourists and for its historical associations. In September Lyndon bought out the other stockholders and reorganized the new High Hampton Inn Corporation with himself as president, his son Hal as vice-president, and Gert as secretary-treasurer. A new two-story inn was built as were a number of outlying cottages; Lyndon and Gert had a cottage on the grounds for their own use. High Hampton Inn prospered, and by 1945 it was called the south's "finest tourist resort" with the McKees known "far and wide as the perfect host and hostess in their summer retreat."[6]

Although Gert remained aloof from management decisions

despite her official position on the board of directors, she had a great deal of influence on its growth. Lyndon, fourteen years Gert's senior, had expected her to inherit High Hampton and then pass it on to their sons William and Lyndon. When instead Gert predeceased him, Lyndon decided to leave the arrangement as it would have been if she had outlived him. The property remains in the McKee family to the present time. High Hampton Inn and Country Club continues to be a major asset to the tourist industry of Jackson County and is a tribute to the far-sightedness of both Gert and Lyndon.[7]

As previously mentioned in connection with her federated club work, Gert had long been an enthusiastic proponent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Both she and Lyndon had worked hard to raise money for the purchase of park lands and to generate congressional support for the park. In 1940 when President Roosevelt dedicated the new national park, Gert was responsible for Mrs. Roosevelt's party. This was a personal thrill for Gert, who had long admired Eleanor. In telling about the day later, Gert would say that when Mrs. Roosevelt was chilly, she (Gert) had lent her her sweater; and that when Mrs. Roosevelt was thirsty, Gert had gotten her a glass of water. Gert vowed to wash neither sweater nor glass, nor the hand which had shaken Mrs. Roosevelt's. That was

probably as close as Gert ever came to hero-worshipping another human being.[8]

In the fall of 1937 Sylva and Jackson County were hosts to tour editors and tour executives from leading travel agencies and travel departments of daily newspapers all over the United States. Coleman Roberts, the chairman of the Governor's Hospitality Committee, headed the tour which began in Asheville. The group was then met in Waynesville by Sylva Mayor H. Gibson and Gert, who escorted the party into Jackson County. After a luncheon for them at the Community House, the group continued their tour on to Cherokee, the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, Bryson City, Franklin, and Highlands. The following day in Cashiers they were the luncheon guests of the McKees at High Hampton. Gert remained a member of the Governor's Hospitality Committee for Jackson County for several years and was a forceful advocate of the natural beauty and wonders of western North Carolina.[9]

On a radio program from Asheville, Gert described the resources of Jackson County, telling of its history and future hopes and possibilities. She concluded her address with these words: "No doubt, my hearers, you have discovered from my remarks that I think highly of my native county. Well, so I do. I invite you to come and see for yourself." She concluded her remarks as follows:

Here's to the land of the mountains tall
To her forests, streams, and waterfalls
Where the sun doth shine and soft breezes sigh
Here's to home, The Land of the Sky.[10]

In previous chapters Gert's activities with the federated women's clubs have been described as well as some of her activities with other organizations. During the 1930s and 1940s, she continued her association with these groups and others. Gert was faithful in attending the monthly meetings of the B. H. Cathey Chapter of the UDC, taking her turn as hostess, and preparing programs on various aspects of southern history. Some of the programs she presented over the years were on Memorial Day, Raphael Semmes, poems to mark the Lee/Jackson birthdays, chapter history, southern songs, the first settlement and other important happenings in North Carolina history, the poem "After the Battle," and the book, Inside America. At the January meeting in 1933, Gert gave a short talk on loyalty to the chapter, urging members to greater endeavor for the year just beginning. This speech must have been taken to heart because the Cathey Chapter won the State UDC prize of ten dollars for the chapter showing the greatest percentage increase in membership during that year. Another time Gert had the group up to High Hampton for lunch followed by a business meeting at the McKee cottage; once she had the officers over for a breakfast meeting to hear her report on

a First District meeting.[11]

In line with the historical objectives of the UDC, it was the custom of the local chapter to observe Lee/Jackson Day in the public schools with a program of stories, readings, songs, and speeches. Gert was a favorite speaker on these occasions and had no problem expounding on the "beauty of sterling character as exemplified in the lives of [the] Southern Chieftains."[12]

In 1934 Gert offered a medal through the chapter for a school contest. The Historical Committee named it the "Gertrude Dills McKee Medal" to be presented to a high school student for some outstanding accomplishment to be determined. It was later decided that the medal, actually two medals, would be presented to a boy and a girl for the best recitation or declamation. The first competition was held in 1935 as part of the closing exercises at Sylva High School. Eleven students competed for what were called "beautiful medals secured through the generosity of Mrs. McKee and named for her by the B. H. Cathey chapter." The recitation/declamation contest became an annual event at the Sylva High School commencement. When Gert was in town, she herself would present the medals to the contest winners. In 1945 the contest was widened to include students from all four county high schools. The contest was held at Hoey Auditorium on the WCTC campus and Gert presented the medals

to the winners. The recitation/declamation contest continued to be an annual county-wide event even after Gert's death in 1948. In time, however, the number of contestants dwindled as recitation and declamation contests became less popular until finally the awards were discontinued about 1960.[13]

During World War II UDC members were urged not to neglect their usual programs of historical, benevolent, memorial, educational, and social objectives. At the same time, members were expected to contribute to the war effort in such ways as buying defense bonds and stamps, sending magazines to USO centers, cooperating with local committees to entertain servicemen, and giving every hour possible to the Red Cross bandage and sewing rooms. The Cathey chapter did its part with the purchase of a war bond, knitting for the Red Cross, and selling war savings stamps. They also agreed to entertain in their homes any servicemen who might pass through town.[14]

Gert was a frequent delegate to the annual district and state UDC conventions; on several occasions she was principal speaker at the district meetings. She also held various offices in the UDC. As noted earlier, Gert had been president of the State Division from 1928 to 1930. In 1931 she was named director general responsible for raising North Carolina's quota of $50,000 as a donation to the Lee

Memorial Foundation for the restoration of Lee's home in Virginia. She also served a term as president of her local chapter and on different committees within the chapter. Gert had been a well-loved member of the Cathey chapter and her death was a shock to them as it was to so many others. They held a memorial service for her at their regular December meeting.[15]

Church work was another area which Gert continued to support and serve throughout her life. Her religious faith was deep and her Christian beliefs and values permeated all other aspects of her life. In so many of her speeches she would directly or indirctly attribute being a success in life to having followed "the method of preparation advocated by the Master 2000 years ago, of faithfulness in little things...."[16]

The backyard of Gert's home in Sylva was across the street from the Sylva Methodist church. Gert may have been grateful for this proximity because it has been said that when the church doors opened, Gert was there. She sang in the choir; she played the piano; she served on committees; was a member of the woman's society and a Sunday School class; and did whatever else she was called on to do, such as attending zone and district conferences. Many times after a meeting at the church, refreshments would be served at the McKee house.[17]

When Gert joined the Sylva Methodist Church after her marriage, she began attending the monthly meetings of the Woman's Missionary Society. Like many of her other woman's club meetings, the society had its business sessions followed by a program and refreshments. In 1940 with the unification of the North and South branches of the Methodist Churches of America, the Missionary Society was succeeded by the Woman's Society for Christian Service. At the charter meeting held on September 11, 1940, forty women subscribed their names to the roll. Gert was installed as vice-president of the new society. She had previously served terms as both president and vice-president of the old group. Gert had also served on a number of different committees of these societies. She had been Superintendent of Study and Publicity, Secretary of Student Work, Secretary of Missionary Education and Mission Service, and a member of the Status of Women Committee, Program Committee, Study and Action Committee, and Parsonage Committee.[18]

The woman's society was divided into circles and guilds. Gert was a member of the Annie Cowan Circle. In addition to their regular program meetings, the circles sponsored benefits to raise money for their mission and charity projects. A popular fundraiser was to put on plays. Gert appeared in several of these, one time playing the part of a bride; another time the part of a peacemaker.

Gert also took her turn presenting the programs or lessons. Some of her topics were "The Gospel Message to the Home Field," the "Harvest Day " observance, the "Kingdom of God Movement in Japan," "Facing the Future in (American) Indian Missions," "The Forces at Work in Japan," "Christianity and Industry in America," "Latin America," and "Duty to the Church and to Each Other."[19]

In addition to the regular programs, there would be special study classes on selected topics. Gert would often hold these classes at her home as well as be the study leader. The subjects were usually mission studies using books such as Japanese Women Speak, The Church Takes Hold in India, and The Cross Over Africa. One general study was on "Rebuilding Rural America."[34] At one meeting in 1933 Gert proposed that a Needlework Guild be formed in Sylva and that members of the society should join it. The object was to contribute two garments per person each year for underprivileged children.[20]

For the church as a whole, Gert served on the finance committee for building programs in 1928 and 1941-1942. The latter resulted in the completion of the Charles L. Allison Education Building, which had been planned, constructed, and paid for by the church members. At the dedication service, the pastor praised the committee for its "exceptional piece of work" and singled out Gert for her "very splendid work."

Other gifts to the church dedicated at this service were seven stained glass windows for the sanctuary, including one given by the McKees in memory of Lyndon's brother, James Wells McKee.[21]

Gert followed with interest the activities of the Epworth League, as the youth group was called. She was asked to speak to the group and she took part in the service marking "Childhood and Youth Week." Gert made sure her own sons attended church, of course. Even when they were grown, she would end letters to them with the admonishment, "be sure to go to church."[22]

Gert was usually the one asked to speak at almost any occasion which required a speech. If it were a farewell party for the pastor's wife or a departing circle member, or a birthday or anniversary, Gert would present the gift with some words of appreciation. If it were a program for a meeting, Gert would be glad to talk on "Membership" or "Stewardship" or the "Requisites of a Good Official." Whether it were opening or closing remarks, Gert had the right words; if it were witnessing, she would be moved to her feet. She was named a visiting speaker for the "Crusade for Christ" in the Western North Carolina Conference.[23]

In 1952 Lyndon donated an organ to the Sylva Methodist Church in memory of Gert. The plaque on the sanctuary wall reads:

> The church organ is dedicated to the glory of God and to the memory of Gertrude Dills McKee.
>
> July 8, 1885 - November 27, 1948
> "to her were given the vision of life in its larger meaning, with an understanding heart she wrought for a greater future for mankind. All who love and labor for this cause rise up and call her blessed."

Gert loved music and she loved to sing. There could not have been a more fitting memorial.[24]

In 1940 the fighting in Europe was brought home to Jackson County with the request to donate to the Finnish Relief Fund. Jackson County folks were "always liberal, extremely patriotic, and usually found on the side of the underdog." Gert was general chairman of the fund drive which raised over $250. Then in 1941 a Freedom Rally was held at WCTC for faculty, students, and all citizens of Jackson County. Approximately one thousand people attended the mass meeting held at Hoey Auditoritum on the Cullowhee campus. Gert gave one of the three speeches whose general theme was the "The Battle of Freedom." She talked on "The Battle of the American Home." Some specific points she made were that "the home produces the individual and trains and prepares [him] for living in a democracy....[He] learns to respect the property rights of others....And after the lesson of ownership...is the lesson of....cooperation or learning to get along with people [which] is one of the most important lessons in life." She

went on to say that "in the home we learn the value of authority...[and that] the health of the nation starts in the home." And finally, she said, "Increase your faith and place your trust in God and America. If you do that, our families have nothing to worry about." Following the speeches resolutions endorsing the stand of the Roosevelt Administration on foreign affairs, condemning strikes and other un-American activities that might hinder the preparedness effort, and urging all-out aid to Britain "as she stands upon the ramparts of civilization" were adopted to be forwarded to Roosevelt and other national leaders.[25]

Following the formal declaration of war in December 1941, Gert became involved in a number of defense efforts. The first was her chairmanship of the Community Christmas Tree committee in charge of sending Christmas presents to every man from Jackson County serving in the armed forces. All cash, and other donations, such as cigarettes, toothpaste, handkerchiefs, and sweets were to be turned over to Gert and her committee. The women of the community made surgical dressings for military hospitals. And once again bond drives were the order of the day. Lyndon noted the records made by Jackson County folk during the First World War. They had raised a volunteer company in a few days during July 1917; they had exceeded their quota in every Liberty Loan campaign; they had had the largest number of

people buying bonds during the war of any county in North Carolina; and they had raised more money for the Salvation Army than any district in the southeastern states. "The danger to our country is far greater now than it was then," he said.[26]

Gert made herself available as a promotional speaker for any community in Jackson County putting on a special rally; she and the several other speakers involved had agreed to go to any part of the county. Several months earlier in May 1943, Gert had been one of the "distinguished guests" present at a luncheon in Raleigh to hear movie star Constance Bennett speak on selling bonds. Gert had strong feelings about lack of participation in bond drives. At the unveiling of the Honor Roll Shield, sponsored by the William E. Dillard Post of the American Legion in Sylva, Gert made an appeal to the civilians to "carry on" for the men in service. "A person who had money and would not buy bonds was as much a slacker as a draft dodger," she declared. In the final drive for funds for the United War Relief agencies, Gert was supervisor for the Cashiers area.[27]

Gert participated in other ways. When the International Relations Club of WCTC sponsored a forum to discuss policies of the allied nations toward Germany in the postwar period, Gert was one of the speakers. Her involvement with the Jackson County Red Cross was a

continuing activity. She was elected vice-chairman for 1945 and was reelected for the same position the next three years. Gert also seems to have become a member of the American Legion Auxiliary in the early 1940s. In 1942 she had been a sponsor for the Auxiliary's third annual Tar Heel Girls' State at Greensboro. Sponsors selected representatives for Girls' State from the curent 10th through 12th grade students of their local high schools. After the war Gert was put on a committee to ascertain the cost of completing the war memorial fountain for veterans of the First World War.[28]

One of the few club programs Gert did not become involved in (although her sisters were) was the Home Demonstration Clubs. Yet, when these clubs sponsored the Jackson County Curb Market in August 1948, Gert was the one called upon to make an opening day speech. She praised the club members for work in getting the market started and presented Dan Allison with a gift as a token of appreciation for his interest in helping the project in providing the lot on which it was located. In her greetings to the women, Gert stated that the Curb Market was worth more than dollars and cents in that it would create community spirit and lead to greater friendships between county and town people.[29]

Gert had so many talents and such a wide range of knowledge and experience, and was so willing to share them,

it is little wonder that she was the person people thought of when they needed a supporter, a speaker, a fundraiser, or just an all-around helper. For example, when judges were needed in a contest to select the best paper on "Why It Pays To Trade With Sylva Home Merchants," Gert agreed, along with the president of WCTC and the president of the Sylva Chamber of Commerce, to grade the papers and award the prizes. Then in 1930 when faculty and students at WCTC conceived of the idea of a Live-At-Home organization, Gert was asked to be one of the speakers. The two-day conference attracted leading men from all businesses and professions in the state. The keynote of the conference was that North Carolina industries were not cultivating North Carolina markets. Gert spoke on the live-at-home idea from the standpoint of the homemakers, the mothers. The following year Gert was included among the "prominent leaders" invited to attend to discuss western North Carolina's economic problems.[13] In 1945 Governor R. Gregg Cherry appointed Gert to the commission having charge of plans for restoring Tryon Palace in New Bern as a state historic attraction. Gert could also be counted on for a good rousing speech in aid of a current concern. In 1939 she was still urging women to take an interest in politics and government; in 1946 it was food conservation, and how to arouse interest among citizens for a rational plan for saving grains and fat

for shipment to devastated parts of the world. There just did not seem to be any topic or any task that Gert was incapable of handling.[30]

Gert had a wide circle of family and friends with whom she enjoyed social and leisure activities. Her tastes were eclectic. She could enjoy a Jousting Tournament in Tryon, or a piano concert in Asheville. She was a skilled bridge player, but she was firm in her refusal to play for money. Her partners anteed her share and took her share if there were winnings--and she was frequently high scorer. Trips to Asheville became even more frequent after her son Lyndon and his family were living there; in 1945 Gert's first grandchild was born. Gert had such enthusiasm and a zest for life which made being with her fun.[31]

No one appreciated this quality of Gert's more than her husband Lyndon. Those who knew them have spoken of their shared wit and humor and the complementary natures of their personalities. Lyndon was extremely proud of Gert's achievements; yet he could poke gentle fun at them too. On the occasion of her receiving her honorary degree, he remarked that "the next thing you know, they'll be making you a doctor of veterinary science." "And that one," Gert is said to have retorted, "would be deserved. After all, I've been living with a jackass for over thirty years."[32]

Gert's many commitments required her to travel

frequently within the state. She also accompanied Lyndon on business trips whenever possible. Most of the trips were of only a few days duration. There was only one time that Gert and Lyndon seemed to have taken an uncharacteristically long vacation. That was to Florida for six weeks in the winter of 1945. Lyndon had not been feeling well and his doctor had suggested that a warmer climate might help. Gert's health was excellent. It was Lyndon's failing health which continued to concern the two of them. Therefore, it was, all the more shocking when Gert was the one to die first, of a heart attack, on November 27, 1948.[33]

CHAPTER XI

DEATH AND CONCLUSION

The Second Annual Tobacco Harvest Festival in Waynesville was in its final day on Saturday, November 27, 1948. Gert, state senator-elect, was scheduled to speak at a meeting of the Farm Bureau. She first attended a luncheon given by the festival sponsors in honor of all the beauty queen contestants, tobacco warehousemen, members of the North Carolina Mountain Burley Warehouse Association, and other dignitaries. That afternoon Gert spoke for what was to be her last time in front of an audience. Her talk, though brief, contained all of the elements--humor, praise for the present, and challenge for the future--which made her such a popular speaker. She got the crowd laughing, relating several incidents that she had had while serving that district in the state senate; she commended the festival sponsors for marking another "notable step" for Haywood County; and she challenged the county to be a leader and mouthpiece for the other counties in western North Carolina. She then returned home to Sylva. As was her custom, she retired to her bedroom to relax on the chaise lounge and discuss the day with Lyndon. On this occasion Gert is said to have told him that she had just made the

best speech of her life. Shortly after, she suffered a fatal heart attack.[1]

Gert's sudden death was a profound shock to her family, her friends, and the community. She had been an exceptional person. As the Sylva Herald noted, "there just wasn't another Mrs. McKee in Jackson County, or [in] any other Western North Carolina county."[2] Gert had understood and loved people, and she had given herself unreservedly to whatever task was at hand. She had been warm and charming and unselfishly interested in the welfare of friends and acquaintances. She had received many honors for her achievements in the public sphere; yet, she believed that there was no greater honor than that of being a homemaker. All across the state editorial eulogies praised her as a substantial leader who had been loyal and earnest in service.[3]

Gert had died at "the peak of her devotion and usefulness." Recently elected to her fourth senate term, she had looked forward with pride to going to the 1949 General Assembly. Problems in education, health, and welfare needed solutions. In the Senate she would have the chance to do what she had done three times before, influence legislation in the best interests of the people of North Carolina.[4]

Gert was firm in her convictions and stood by her

principles. Yet, like a true politician, she knew the value of compromise. It seemed to be more important to Gert to achieve a worthwhile end than to have every "i" dotted along the way. She could accept the need to balance the ideal with practical reality. For example, she had no difficulty reconciling the "dry" position of the Methodist Church, the Federation of Women's Clubs, and her own personal abstinence with her support of Smith, Roosevelt, and a party platform calling for the repeal of Prohibition. To Gert, the Democratic party and these two men were what she thought best for the country and that was that. Another example of compromise was on the matter of the length of the state-supported school term. Realizing that approval for a six-month term stood a much better chance than for an eight-month term, Gert worked hard for the shorter term to assure that that at least would become law.

Gert was born at a time when women were just beginning to recognize their collective power and influence in the public sphere. She was one of North Carolina's pioneers in politics and social legislation. It was said that "woman's place is in the home." Gert correctly interpreted home to mean her community and her state. She never challenged the male power structure; rather, she learned how to use power and used it effectively. She was representative of a small number of women in the vanguard, leaders of vision and

inspiration who believed that "opportunities for women were limited only by their own qualifications and ambitions."[5]

Gert was fortunate to have had a father who encouraged her to excel even at a time when opportunities for women were limited. Twenty years before women could vote, he could certainly never have imagined that she would follow in his footsteps to the legislature, let alone accomplish all that she did. And Gert was fortunate, too, to have a mother who thought it was important for her daughter to go to college at a time when southern girls were not expected to need much education. Gert's character was also shaped by the region in which she lived. Appalachian women had a tradition of independence. They thought of themselves as "hard working, honest, loyal, strong, family-oriented and God-fearing." Gert had an abiding love for and identity with the mountains. "I will life up mine eyes unto these hills..." was a favorite quotation. Gert was proud of her roots; she never forgot who she was, or where she came from."[6]

The influence of Lyndon on Gert's life cannot be overlooked. His wealth and his position in business, in the community, and in politics provided her with certain advantages not available to other women. Although she would say later that she had not entered politics until her boys were grown, women's club business and other activities had

frequently required her to be away from home when her children were young. She was fortunate to have had servants and many family members living nearby to step in when needed. Gert is said to have received a great deal of support and encouragement from Lyndon. He especially encouraged her in public speaking. Because he was so much older than she and because he was already well established when they married, he never felt threatened or dominated by her activities and ambitions. Rather, he took pleasure in her successful role in the public sphere and helped her wherever he could.[7]

The circle was small, but there were other women who, like Gert, began in the federated clubs and worked their way up to prominent positions at the state level. These women formed an informal network of friendship, mutual support, and cooperation. There were five women whom Gert invited to attend her swearing-in ceremony for her first senate term who exemplify the women in this network. They were: Mrs. T. Palmer Jerman, former NCFWC president (preceding Gert's term) and member of the State Democratic Executive Committee; Mrs. Sidney Cooper, former NCFWC president who proved club work need not interfere with motherhood by presiding at the state convention with her baby in her arms; Miss Elsie Riddick, honorary president and former president of the North Carolina Federation of Business and

Professional Women's Clubs; Mrs. W. T Bost, Commissioner of Public Welfare (appointed Gert to the Jackson County Board of Welfare) and Raleigh clubwoman; and Mrs. Josephus Daniels, first woman trustee on the Peace College Board of Trustees, Peace College alumna, and Raleigh clubwoman.[8]

One of the facets of Gert's personality that made her so outstanding and a legend in Jackson County was her ability to shift gears to whatever the situation required. Thus, she could join in a backyard ballgame one day and introduce Eleanor Roosevelt the next; she could sell war bonds in Sylva and dedicate a monument at Gettysburg; she could bake a cake for a church dinner and talk down a senator in Raleigh. She always comported herself with dignity, yet if the moment seemed right for levity, she was quick with a retort. She was self-assured and confident of her capabilities. So much so that she could tell a senate colleague that not only did she know more about boys than he did, but she knew more about men, too. She was a woman who was called the "smartest man in the senate."[9]

As a legislator Gert has to her credit "some of the most constructive and far-reaching legislation ever enacted" in North Carolina. As an educator, her "interest in the public schools never wavered." She believed "greatly in her country and for that reason most militantly in the schools as absolutely essential to the maintenance of her country's

republican institutions. To deny, or in the slightest way to abridge the right to educate our citizens would have been to her a denial of the right of our democracy to live." Gert's generosity, her loyalty, her kindness, and a "keen, informed sense of social responsibility were heavily invested in the progress of North Carolina." Her accomplishments and her achievements have become a forgotten legacy to those who should most appreciate the doors she opened and the paths she broke in a lifetime of dedicated service--the people of North Carolina.[10]

Gert was a remarkable woman who saw what life had to offer and went after it. In 1930 she said:

> Opportunity never just happens. The magic chance comes but seldom, if ever. Material, intellectual and spiritual possessions are the fruits of efforts. It is only by constant and painstaking effort that one is enabled to grasp the golden opportunity....So does success come only by effort and sacrifice. It must be sought persistently, and like the pearl loses its luster and dies when not in use. Hence, success must be a continuous process. No one can afford to rest on his laurels.[11]

Gertrude Dills McKee lived the words she spoke.

NOTES

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]Mrs. Margaret Hall Dowdle, interview by author, tape recording, Asheville, North Carolina, 6 June 1987.

[2]At the Wallace (North Carolina) Strawberry Festival in June 1937, festival chairman Mrs. John D. Robinson hosted a luncheon for Eleanor Roosevelt. And following the afternoon program, the Wallace Woman's Club hosted a tea for Mrs. Roosevelt which was held in the gardens of the Robinson home. Raleigh News and Observer, 10 June 1937, 12 June 1937. The McKees and Governor and Mrs. Hoey were among fourteen guests at a dinner party hosted by Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Ferrell. Raleigh News and Observer, 22 March 1937. "[Gert] always stayed part of the group. Never acted high and mighty." Mrs. Kate Rhinehart, interview by author, Webster, North Carolina, 7 June 1987.

[3]"Only my father called her Gertrude." Alice, Gert's niece, said "Aunt Gert," of course, and "others in town who were not peers called her "Miss Gert." William D. McKee and Alice Dills Weaver Turner, joint interview by author, tape Recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. "...a woman for all seasons and all times. She was ahead of her time in many respects." Mrs. Jeanelle C. Moore, interview by author, tape recording, Asheville, North Carolina, 19 October 1987.

[4]Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Minnie Dills Gray, A History of Dillsboro North Carolina, (Asheville: The Stephens Press, 1959), 13.

[5]Tuckaseige Democrat, 5 January 1889, 24 August 1889. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[6]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, 24 February 1987. Gray, History of Dillsboro, 13.

[7]Max R. Williams, ed., The History of Jackson County, (The Delmar Company, 1987), 584. William D. McKee,

interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, 29 September 1987. Raleigh News and Observer, 25 February 1943. Tuckaseige Democrat, 31 August 1892. Jackson County Journal, 10 September 1909.

[8]Tuckaseige Democrat, 5 January 1889. "Jackson Centennial Edition," Sylva Herald and Ruralite (hereinafter referred to as Sylva Herald), 30 August 1951. Robert L. Madison, "Experiences of A Pedagogue In The Carolina Highlands," Asheville Citizen, 15 May 1938. Gray, History of Dillsboro, 17-23. Mrs. Dills and Capt. Enloe appear to be half brother and sister although that could not be proved by this author. However, they seem to have had the same father, Scroop Wesley Enloe; they most likely had different mothers considering the more than twenty-five years difference in their ages. Both Mrs. Dills and Capt. Enloe claimed the same grandfather, Abraham Enloe, who was reputed to be the real father of Abraham Lincoln. Mrs. Dills repeated the story to her children and grandchildren, but it was not much discussed within the family. William D. McKee and Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, joint interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Also "Enloe Market Place," an advertising brochure. Also James H. Cathey, The Genesis of Lincoln, 4th ed., (Canton: B. H. Cathey, 1939).

[9]Tuckaseige Democrat, 5 January 1889.

[10]Tuckaseige Democrat, 12 January 1889, 15 January 1890, 5 April 1890, 16 July 1890, 7 January 1891, 11 March 1891, 8 July 1891, 22 July 1891, 16 September 1891, 23 September 1891, 16 March 1892, 23 March 1892, 4 May 1892, 3 August 1892, 24 August 1892, 31 August 1892, 14 December 1892, 8 March 1893, 22 March 1893, 24 May 1893, 31 May 1893, 26 July 1893, 2 August 1893, 15 November 1893, 10 January 1894, 23 May 1894, 30 May 1894, 6 June 1894, 27 June 1894, 25 July 1894.

[11]Tuckaseige Democrat, 23 September 1891, 22 March 1893, 15 January 1890.

[12]Farmer's Alliance Report, Tuckaseige Democrat, 9 July 1890. Article on the Dillsboro Masonic Lodge. Mr. Dills was a Mason. Sylva Herald, 3 October 1945. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, 20 October 1987.

[13]Tuckaseige Democrat, 24 February 1892, 25 February 1943. Gray, History of Dillsboro, 25. T. F. Dietz, "In

Memory of William Allen Dills At Easter Memorial Service," Sylva Herald, 1 April 1948.

[14]Raleigh News and Observer, 25 February 1943. Williams, History of Jackson County, 569. Tuckaseige Democrat, 5 January 1889, 27 April 1892, 24 August 1892. 18 July 1894, 1 August 1894, 30 April 1896.

[15]Minnie Dills Gray, "First White Settlers In County Of Scott [sic] Origin, Established Homes In Tuckasegee [sic] Basin," publication and date unknown. Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987.

[16]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987.

[17]Gert said she felt she was her father's favorite. Gert was like her father, too, in that they both disliked puttering around the house. It was a source of annoyance to Mrs. Dills because Dills would not do simple things like bringing in the wood. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987. Mrs. Kate Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 7 June 1987. Joe Parker Rhinehart, "N. C.'s First Woman Senator," Historic Webster 7, no. 3 (Summer, 1979): 4.

[18]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[19]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987 and Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[20]Aunt Zelia Wells, who married Major Wells when she was thirteen, worked for Mrs. Dills, who married at age seventeen. It is said they learned together to keep house and do laundry. Zelia was also the baby maid. William D. McKee and Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, joint interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Visiting friends in Sylva. Tuckaseige Democrat, 18 March 1891, 8 February 1893, 20 September 1893, 30 May 1894. Mr. and Mrs. Dills and Mr. Thomas J. Love attended the Exposition in Raleigh. Mr. Dills later reported it was a success except that the size of the crowds was small and

that Jackson County's exhibit had not yet arrived. Tuckaseige Democrat, 28 October 1891, 11 November 1891.

[21]The estate was kept intact until about 1940. At that point it was divided among Mrs. Dills and her three duaghters. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 14 September 1987.

[22]Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Tuckaseige Democrat, 7 January 1891. Jackson County Journal, 22 March 1912. Madison, "Experiences of a Pedagogue," Asheville Citizen, 23 April, 1938.

[23]Dietz, "In Memory of William Allen Dills," Sylva Herald, 1 April 1948.

[24]Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987.

CHAPTER II

[1]Anne Firor Scott, The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 113-4. William Stephenson, Sallie Southall Cotten, A Woman's Life in North Carolina, (Greenville, North Carolina: Pamlico Press, 1987), 9.

[2]Gert delivered the principal address at the fifty-eighth commencement of Peace College. Raleigh News and Observer, 28 May 1930.

[3]Peace College was named for Wiliam Peace, an elder of the First Presbyterian Church of Raleigh who headed list of original contribuors with a gift of $10,000. Raleigh News and Observer, 75th Anniversary Special Edition, 18 May 1940.

[4]Raleigh News and Observer, 75th Anniversary Special Edition, 18 May 1940.

[5]Catalogue of Peace Institute (1905-1906). "Program on Class Day," 22 May, 1905. Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 19 May 1987.

[6]Beulah told the story of how the girls were

strictly chaperoned. Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Referring to the flypaper story, "Gert was always pulling pranks like that." Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 19 May 1987. "Peace Alumnae Name Officers. Women Legislators Are Made Trustees," Raleigh News and Observer, 27 May 1931.

[7]The Lotus, 1905. Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[8]Raleigh News and Observer, 26 April 1942, Sec. D, p. 3.

[9]Scott, The Southern Lady, 114. "The Prophet's Soliloquy," The Lotus, 1905.

[10]Scott, The Southern Lady, 111. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carlina, 20 October 1987. William D. McKee and Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, joint interview, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. Jackson County Journal, 10 March 1908, 21 October 1910, 2 June 1911.

[11]Jackson County Journal, 10 September 1909, 10 March 1911.

[12] "Jackson County Journal, 23 April 1909, 16 March 1909, 18 June 1909, 22 October 1909, 1 July 1910.

[13]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[14]It is unclear whether Beulah held her elocution class at SCI while she still taught at Dillsboro, but the record shows that she taught at Dillsboro both in the years before 1909 and after. Jackson County Journal, 1 September 1911, 22 October 1909, 10 January 1908.

[15]Trips to Sylva and Asheville. Jackson County Journal, 1 October 1909, 22 April 1910, 16 June 1911, 8 December 1911, 12 April 1912. Trips to Maine, Seattle and Denver. Jackson County Journal, 28 July 1912, 6 September 1912, 13 September 1912.

[16]Jackson County Journal, 21 March 1913. Gert was sick with the "Grip" the first few weeks in January, but later her trips to Sylva increased. Jackson County Journal,

10 January 1913, 17 January 1913, 21 March 1913, 4 April 1913, 18 July 1913. "McKee-Dills." Called "a wedding that is of interest on account of the prominence and popularity of both the bride and groom....The bride is one of Jackson county's [sic] most charming and accomplished young ladies...while the groom is one of Sylva's most prominent and influential businessmen...." Jackson County Journal, 22 August 1913.

[17]Beulah marries Capt. A. H. Weaver. Jackson County Journal, 11 August 1922. Minnie returns to Sylva for summer visits, Jackson County Journal, 18 June 1909, 18 October 1912, 22 August 1913, 9 July 1920, 31 August 1923, 15 September 1926.

CHAPTER III

[1]Lyndon was born with a heart condition and not expected to live long. Yet, he lived the longest (81 years) of any of his brothers. And other biographic data. Mrs. Hannah Lou Rowlson, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987. The newspaper endorsed Lyndon's transfer to Bryson City. Jackson County Journal, 20 August 1890.

[2]Obituary of E. L. McKee. Sylva Herald, 9 October 1952.

[3]Obituary of E. L. McKee. Sylva Herald, 9 October 1952.

[4]Town election resulted in E. L. McKee selection as alderman. "41 Years Ago," Jackson County Journal, 11 March 1937. Mrs. Hannah Lou Rowlson, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987.

[5]Harriet H. Walker, "Role Of Mother Doesn't Keep Sylva Woman Out Of Politics, Jackson County Journal, 9 October 1930. Mrs. W. T. Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader," "In Memoriam," The North Carolina Clubwoman, publication date unknown. "'Woman's Sphere Has Not Changed,' Says Mrs. McKee," Jackson County Journal, 8 July 1925. Four years later, addressing the Rotary Club, Gert reasserted: "...first and highest interest of every good woman is in her home...." Jackson County Journal, 14 November 1929.

[6]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape Recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[7]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape Recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987, 20 October 1987. Mrs. Margaret Hall Dowdle, interview by author, tape recording, Asheville, North Carolina, 6 June 1987. Marcellus Buchanan III, "I Remember When...Sylva...Webster," Sylva Herald, 16 October 1986.

[8]Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987, 8 May 1987. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987.

[9]Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987. "Mrs. McKee knew nothing about driving a car..had far too much on her mind to pay attention to driving and no sense about it." Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987. Mrs. Jane Cover Orr, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987.

[10]Jackson County Journal, 19 September 1913, 13 March 1914, 18 September 1914.

[11]Jackson County Journal, 3 October 1913, 17 October 1913, 19 December 1913, 23 October 1914, 29 January 1915, 21 July 1916, 8 December 1916, 15 June 1917, 15 February 1918.

[12]Jackson County Journal, 19 October 1917. 2 November 1917.

[13]Jackson County Journal, 7 December 1917, 22 February 1918, 29 March 1918.

[14]Jackson County Journal, 15 February 1918, 22 February 1918, 12 April 1918, 26 April 1918, 10 May 1918.

[15]Jackson County Journal, 11 October 1918.

[16]Jackson County Journal, 2 November 1917, 19 April 1918.

[17]Jackson County Journal, 30 May 1919, 13 October 1922, 15 June 1923, 6 July 1923, 12 October 1923.

[18]Between 1917 and 1928 there were numerous references in the newspaper to the travels of the McKees. "Mrs. E. L. McKee was in Asheville the first of the week,"

or "Mr. and Mrs. E. L. McKee were in Atlanta this week." The short trips and the long trips among the prominent people of Sylva were frequently reported in the local society column. A typical entry, such as those above, can be found on these dates. Jackson County Journal, 21 December 1917, 8 February 1918, 7 June 1918, 20 December 1918, 27 June 1919, 29 October 1920, 12 January 1923, 28 March 1924, 18 August 1926, 12 July 1928. The luncheons, teas, and meetings of the sewing circles were also news items for the society column. The guests who were present would be listed, sometimes also comments regarding decorations or type of refreshments served. A typical entry concerning some of the social functions Gert attended can be found on these dates. Jackson County Journal, 30 November 1917, 3 January 1919, 23 May 1920, 1 July 1921, 15 June 1923, 21 November 1924, 10 April 1925, 24 February 1926, 3 May 1928.

[19]Jackson County Journal, 20 June 1919, 27 August 1920, 26 November 1920, 15 July 1921, 17 August 1921, 3 November 1922, 15 December 1922, 5 October 1923, 12 October 1923, 14 December 1923, 21 December 1923, 28 December 1923.

[20]Jackson County Journal, 15 March 1918, 29 August 1919, 20 February 1920, 12 March 1920, 9 April 1920, 13 August 1920, 5 November 1920, 12 November 1920, 18 February 1921, 1 July 1921, 28 October 1921, 13 October 1922, 10 November 1922, 8 December 1922, 18 May 1927, 13 October 1927, 18 October 1928, 15 November 1928. Asheville Citizen, 12 November 1920, 8 December 1926.

[21]Jackson County Journal, 12 April 1918, 14 January 1921, 28 January 1921, 18 February 1921, 4 March 1921, 22 April 1921, 6 May 1921, 1 July 1921, 6 January 1922, 9 February 1923, 25 January 1924, 16 June 1926.

[22]Jackson County Journal, 16 March 1923, 6 April 1923, 9 May 1924, 16 May 1924, 23 May 1924.

[23]Jackson County Journal, 6 January 1922, 27 January 1926. Mrs. Margaret Hall Dowdle, interview by author, tape recording, Asheville, North Carolina, 6 June 1987.

[24]Jackson County Journal, 12 October 1923, 26 September 1935. Asheville Citizen, 30 September 1935. "15 Years Ago," Sylva Herald, 15 February 1945.

[25]Raleigh News and Observer, 4 July 1929. Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 19 May 1987.

[26]Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 19 May 1987.

[27]Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster North Carolina, 19 May 1987.

[28]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 1 June 1987. Jackson County Journal, 19 January 1927. 26 January 1928, 4 February 1926.

[29]Jackson County Journal, 27 February 1925, 13 March 1925, 14 October 1921.

[30]Jackson County Journal, 27 January 1926, 3 March 1926.

[31]Wiliam McKee, "The History of Scouting in Sylva," Jackson County Journal, 22 November 1928. Jackson County Journal, 10 May 1928, 11 October 1928, 12 December 1929. Sylva Herald, 15 April 1945, 17 July 1947.

[32]Reprint of article from Morganton News Herald in Jackson County Journal, 13 June 1924. Jackson County Journal, 23 May 1924, 6 June 1924, 13 March 1930, 12 January 1932, 14 January 1932, 12 June 1932.

CHAPTER IV

[1]Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[2]Gertrude S. Carraway, Carolina Crusaders, (New Bern: Owen G. Dunn Company, 1941), 8-9.

[3]Ibid., 10-11, 13.

[4]Ibid., 8-11.

[5]Ibid., 14-15, 24.

[6]Ibid., 50. Asheville Citizen, 26 May 1919.

[7]Jackson County Journal, 28 November 1919, 14 January 1921. Mrs. Emma Allison, "History of Twentieth Century Club," Twentieth Century Club papers, Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina.

[8]Jackson County Journal, 4 February 1921, 25 February 1921, 18 March 1921, 1 April 1921, 15 April 1921.

[9]Jackson County Journal, 6 May 1923, 23 December 1923.

[10]Jackson County Journal, 4 May 1923, 18 May 1923, 17 August 1923, 9 May 1924.

[11]Jackson County Journal, 8 May 1925.

[12]Carraway, "Business Efficiency," Carolina Crusaders, 65. Mrs. E. L. Mckee, "A Club Year Rich In Achievement," Yearbook 1926-1927, N. C. Federation of Women's Clubs, 25.

[13]McKee, "Year Rich In Achievement," 25.

[14]Ibid., 25. Raleigh News and Observer, 18 April 1931. Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader."

[15]Jackson County Journal, 27 October 1926. Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader."

[16]McKee, "Year Rich In Achievement," 28-27.

[17]Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader."

[18]Joe Parker Rhinehart, "N. C.'s First Woman Senator," Historic Webster 7, no. 3 (Summer, 1979): 4. Jackson County Journal, 10 November 1926, 17 November 1926.

[19]Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader." Jackson County Journal, 23 September 1925.

[20]Jackson County Journal, 20 January 1926, 26 May 1926, 1 June 1927, 20 October 1927, 10 January 1929.

[21]Jackson County Journal, 11 November 1925, 22 December 1926.

[22]Jackson County Journal, 11 February 1926, 18 February 1926.

[23]Jackson County Journal, 15 May 1925, 26 May 1926, 14 July 1926.

[24]Jackson County Journal, 1 July 1925.

[25]Jackson County Journal, 30 September 1925, 3 March

1926.

[26]Jackson County Journal, 20 October 1926.

[27]Jackson County Journal, 24 March 1926. Carraway, Carolina Crusaders, 66.

[28]Mrs. W. T. Bost, "Clubwomen and Their Work," Jackson County Journal, 24 February 1922. Raleigh News and Observer, 15 April 1931, 16 April 1931, 7 March 1943, Society Sec., p. 3.

[29]Raleigh News and Observer, 2 May 1931.

[30]Jackson County Journal, 15 April 1937.

[31]Jackson County Journal, 10 February 1922, 29 September 1926, 6 October 1926. Sylva Herald, 18 September 1947. Allison, "History of Twentieth Century Club."

[32]Jackson County Journal, 30 January 1930.

[33]Jackson County Journal, 26 May 1922, 18 November 1925, 13 January 1926, 15 May 1941. Sylva Herald, 23 January 1946.

[34]At the annual NCFWC convention in New Bern in 1913, the delegates voted to establish a loan fund to be named for pioneer clubwoman Sallie Southall Cotten. From an initial contribution of $250, the fund had been raised to $1000 by the end of the convention, such was the enthusiasm for the project. Carraway, Carolina Crusaders, 37. Bost, "Clubwomen and Their Work," Jackson County Journal, 24 February 1922. Raleigh News and Observer, 30 April 1943. Jackson County Journal, 17 December 1942.

[35]Jackson County Journal, 18 November 1925, 1 December 1927, 30 January 1930, 20 February 1920, 7 May 1931, 11 January 1940. Sylva Herald, 26 January 1944. Williams, History of Jackson County, 346.

[36]Jackson County Journal, 28 October 1925, 18 February 1926, 21 January 1937.

[37]Jackson County Journal, 15 May 1925, 16 December 1925, 19 January 1927. Allison, "History of Twentieth Century Club," Special Collections, Hunter Library.

[38]"The Constitution of the Twentieth Century Club," Twentieth Century Club Scrapbook, Special Collections,

Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina. Jackson County Journal, 28 October 1925, 18 November 1925, 4 February 1926, 3 March 1926, 17 March 1926, 19 January 1928, 14 January 1932, 11 January 1940, 13 June 1940, 2 October 1941. Sylva Herald, 26 April 1944, 31 May 1944, 22 November 1944, 17 April 1946, 20 March 1947, 17 April 1947, 20 November 1947, 29 April 1948.

[39]"Who's Who in the Junior Club" gave a brief description of Mrs. McKee as follows: "In the minds of most Carolinians, she is the most distinguished woman in the State. Our club mother was the first woman in North Carolina to represent the women of the State in the Senate of North Carolina. We are truly proud of her. 'Miss Gert' is truly our club mother." Jackson County Journal, 30 March 1933. Other Journal articles, 27 January 1927, 23 May 1929, 26 September 1929, 14 January 1932. 25 May 1933, 20 July 1933. Sylva Herald, 24 April 1947.

[40]Jackson County Journal, 27 October 1927, 3 November 1927.

[41]Mrs. C. E. Thompson, "Mrs. McKee, Sylva Clubwoman and Citizen," "In Memoriam," The North Carolina Clubwoman, publication date unknown.

[42]Jackson County Journal, 17 July 1941. Sylva Herald, 27 October 1943, 26 January 1944, 22 March 1944, 17 January 1945. Raleigh News and Observer, 3 January 1943, 20 January 1943, 21 February 1943.

[43]Jackson County Journal, 17 September 1931. Sylva Herald, 6 October 1943. 6 March 1946, 13 March 1946, 20 March 1946.

[44]Sylva Herald, 10 April 1946, 23 May 1946.

[45]Jackson County Journal, 5 January 1933, 30 March 1933, 14 February 1935, 20 March 1941. Sylva Herald, 29 November 1944, 19 December 1945, 20 February 1947, 26 February 1948.

[46]Gert addresses First District meeting on "Duties of the Clay Laywoman," Jackson County Journal, 6 October 1927. At NCFWC convention Gert speaks on "My Experiences as a Legislator," Raleigh News and Observer, 15 April 1931. Jackson County Journal, 16 October 1941.

[47]Jackson County Journal, 3 May 1928, 2 May 1932, 13 October 1932, 11 May 1933, 26 October 1933, 1 May 1941, 2

October 1941. Sylva Herald, 6 October 1943, 19 April 1944, 27 September 1944, 3 October 1945, 20 May 1948, 18 September 1948.

[48]Sylva Herald, 2 December 1948.

CHAPTER V

[1]Jackson County Journal, 9 April 1920, 30 April 1920.

[2]Raleigh News and Observer, 8 April 1920.

[3]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 April 1920.

[4]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 April 1920.

[5]Jackson County Journal, 20 August 1920.

[6]Jackson County Journal, 27 August 1920.

[7]Jackson County Journal, 1 October 1920.

[8]Jackson County Journal, 14 April 1922, 21 April 1922.

[9]Jackson County Journal, 28 April 1922.

[10]Jackson County Journal, 16 May 1924, 23 May 1924, 13 June 1924.

[11]Jackson County Journal, 29 February 1924, 14 March 1924, 18 April 1924, 25 April 1924, 28 April 1926, 29 March 1928, 31 May 1928. Reprint of Greensboro Daily News editorial in Jackson County Journal, 9 February 1928.

[12]Jackson County Journal, 31 May 1928, 14 June 1928, 4 October 1928, 11 October 1928, 18 October 1928, 1 November 1928.

[13]Jackson County Journal, 29 March 1928, 5 April 1928, 24 May 1928, 3 June 1922, 8 November 1928, 15 November 1928.

[14]Jackson County Journal, 16 January 1930.

[15]Jackson County Journal, 12 January 1927, 6 February 1930, 25 January 1940, 6 March 1941, 13 March 1941, 4 December 1941.

[16]Jackson County Journal, 13 March 1930.

[17]Jackson County Journal, 3 July 1930. Reprint from Charlotte Observer in Jackson County Journal, 9 October 1930.

[18]Asheville Citizen, 1 November 1930. Jackson County Journal, 7 August 1930, 2 October 1930, 30 October 1930.

[19]Jackson County Journal, 21 July 1930, 11 September 1930. Asheville Citizen, 9 November 1930. Sylva Herald, 22 April 1948. Joe Parker Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 7 June 1987.

[20]Raleigh News and Observer, 15 June 1932, 16 June 1932, 17 June 1932. Jackson County Journal, 23 June 1932.

[21]Raleigh News and Observer, 17 June 1932, 29 June 1932, Sylva Herald, 3 May 1944.

[22]Jackson County Journal, 13 October 1932, 27 October 1932, 9 November 1932.

[23]Jackson County Journal, 5 July 1934.

[24]Jackson County Journal, 17 May 1934, 24 May 1934, 7 June 1934.

[25]Jackson County Journal, 23 April 1936, 14 May 1936, 11 June 1936, 3 November 1936, 5 November 1936.

[26]Jackson County Journal, 11 April 1940.

[27]Jackson County Journal, 5 March 1942, 12 March 1942, 19 March 1942, 23 April 1942, 29 October 1942, 12 November 1942.

[28]Sylva Herald, 12 February 1948.

[29]Sylva Herald, 20 May 1948, 27 May 1948, 3 June 1948, 1 July 1948. Kent Coward, interview by Gordon B. McKinney, Sylva, 1987.

[30]Sylva Herald, 23 September 1948, 21 October 1948, 4 November 1948, 9 December 1948.

[31]Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader."

CHAPTER VI

[1]Raleigh News and Observer, 10 January 1931. Asheville Citizen, 15 February 1931.

[2]The Rules Committee will be asked to decide whether she is to be called "Senator," "Senatrix," or "Senatorina." Raleigh News and Observer, 7 January 1931, 8 January 1931. Asheville Citizen, 8 January 1931.

[3]Asheville Citizen, 8 January 1931. Raleigh News and Observer, 8 January 1931.

[4]Raleigh News and Observer, 11 January 1931.

[5]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 January 1931, 19 January 1931, 12 April 1931.

[6]Raleigh News and Observer, 8 January 1931, 14 January 1931. Senate Journal 1931, 35-38.

[7]Raleigh News and Observer, 10 January 1931.

[8]Raleigh News and Observer, 15 January 1931, 18 January 1931.

[9]Raleigh News and Observer, 23 January 1931.

[10]"Under the Dome," Raleigh News and Observer, 26 January 1931.

[11]Ibid.

[12]Raleigh News and Observer, 28 January 1931, 30 January 1931.

[13]Raleigh News and Observer, 30 January 1931.

[14]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 April 1931, 10 April 1931, 12 April 1931.

[15]Raleigh News and Observer, 15 May 1931, 28 May 1931.

[16]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 January 1931, 11 January 1931, 3 March 1931, 16 April 1931.

[17]Raleigh News and Observer, 29 March 1931.

[18]Raleigh News and Observer, 11 February 1931, 25 February 1931.

[19]Raleigh News and Observer, 20 February 1931.

[20]"Clubwomen Active For Legislative Matters," Raleigh News and Observer, 11 January 1931, Second Sec., p. 1. Raleigh News and Observer, 4 March 1931.

[21]Raleigh News and Observer, 13 March 1931, 14 March 1931, 15 March 1931. Asheville Citizen, 14 March 1931.

[22]Raleigh News and Observer, 31 May 1931.

[23]Raleigh News and Observer, 18 February 1931, 19 February 1931, 19 March 1931, 29 April 1931.

[24]Jackson County Journal, 14 May 1931.

[25]Raleigh News and Observer, 12 March 1931.

[26]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987, 1 June 1987.

[27]Raleigh News and Observer, 23 January 1931.

[28]Raleigh News and Observer, 26 March 1931, 29 March 1931, 11 April 1931.

[29]Raleigh News and Observer, 10 January 1931. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[30]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 January 1931, 11 January 1931, 14 January 9131, 15 January 1931, 16 January 1931, 17 January 1931, 18 January 1931, 28 January 1931, 31 January 1931, 1 February 1931, 8 February 1931, 3 March 1931, 10 March 1931, 20 March 1931, 25 April 1931, 2 May 1931, 20 May 1931.

[31]Raleigh News and Observer, 8 January 1931, 11 January 1931, 14 January 1931, 25 January 1931.

[32]Raleigh News and Observer, 21 January 1931, 26 January 1931, 4 February 1931, 11 February 1931, 18 February 1931, 4 March 1931, 11 March 1931.

[33]Raleigh News and Observer, 29 March 1931, 15 April 1931.

[34]Raleigh News and Observer, 27 March 1931, 12 April 1931, 10 May 1931.

[35]Raleigh News and Observer, 10 February 1931, 15 February 1931, 23 February 1931.

[36]Raleigh News and Observer, 20 February 1931, 26 February 1931, 4 April 1931. "Under the Dome," 15 May 1931. "Under the Dome," 22 May 1931.

[37]Raleigh News and Observer, 31 May 1931.

[38]Jackson County Journal, 4 June 1931. Raleigh News and Observer, 24 March 1931.

CHAPTER VII

[1]"Extra Session 1936," Senate Journal 1937, 5, 7, 15, 17. Raleigh News and Observer, 6 December 1936, 11 December 1936, 15 December 1936.

[2]Senate Journal 1937, 23, 27-42. North Carolina Manual 1937, 29-32. Raleigh News and Observer, 14 January 1937. "Two major peices of legislation which will probably be enacted into law are indelibly linked with the name of Mrs. E. L. McKee. They are...Old Age Assistance Bill and the Child Labor Bill...her efforts have attracted a great deal of favorable comment not only in State press but in metropolitan press of the East." Jackson County Journal, 18 February 1937.

[3]Raleigh News and Observer, 8 December 1936.

[4]Raleigh News and Observer, 20 January 1937.

[5]Raleigh News and Observer, 22 January 1937.

[6]Raleigh News and Observer, 12 January 1937. The specific provisos are: (1) Minors between 14 and 16 may work after school and during vacation except in factories or certain dangerous occupations; (2) Boys 14 or over may be employed outside school in distributing magazines or newspapers subject to Dept. of Labor regulation; (3) Minors under 18 should not work more than 6 days/week, 40 hours/week, or 8 hours/day; (4) Minors under 16 should not be permitted to work earlier than 7 A.M. nor later than 6 P.M. Between ages 16 and 18, work after 6 A.M. and not later than 10 P.M. with certain exceptions; (5) Minors under 18 must have a certificate to work. Raleigh News and Observer, 22 January 1937.

[7]Raleigh News and Observer, 2 March 1937, 18 March 1937.

[8]Raleigh News and Observer, 5 February 1937. Jackson County Journal, 4 March 1937, 11 March 1937. "McKee, Gravely, and Gregory, whose names appear on the bill will go down in history as the 'parents of Old Age Assistance in North Carolina.'" Jackson County Journal, 18 March 1937.

[9]Raleigh News and Observer, 11 February 1937. Jackson County Journal, 4 March 1937, 11 March 1937, 18 March 1937.

[10]Jackson County Journal, 18 March 1937.

[11]Raleigh News and Observer, 17 February 1937, 18 February 1937. Jackson County Journal, 25 February 1937.

[12]Raleigh News and Observer, 17 February 1937.

[13]Raleigh News and Observer, 18 March 1937, 25 March 1937. Jackson County Journal, 21 July 1938.

[14]Raleigh News and Observer, 3 March 1937.

[15]Jackson County Journal, 4 March 1937. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987.

[16]Jackson County Journal, 4 August 1938.

[17]Raleigh News and Observer, 13 January 1937, 23 January 1937, 26 January 1937, 27 January 1937, 28 January 1937, 29 January 1937, 4 February 1937, 5 February 1937, 7 February 1937, 8 February 1937, 10 February 1937, 12 February 1937, 14 February 1937, 11 March 1937, 13 March 1937.

[18]Raleigh News and Observer, 17 January 1937, 20 January 1937, 27 January 1937.

[19]Raleigh News and Observer, 27 January 1937, 3 February 1937, 10 February 1937, 23 February 1937, 2 March 1937.

[20]Raleigh News and Observer, 17 January 1937, 24 January 1937, 28 January 1937.

[21]Jackson County Journal, 4 February 1937. Raleigh News and Observer, 23 February 1937, 9 March 1937, 11 March

1937, 22 March 1937.

[22]Raleigh News and Observer, 12 March 1937, 18 March 1937.

CHAPTER VIII

[1]Raleigh News and Observer, 3 January 1943, 5 January 1943, 10 January 1943, 21 January 1943.

[2]Raleigh News and Observer, 7 January 1943, 19 January 1943, 23 January 1943, 25 January 1943.

[3]Raleigh News and Observer, 4 February 1943, 24 February 1943.

[4]Raleigh News and Observer, 20 February 1943, 23 February 1943, 11 March 1943.

[5]Raleigh News and Observer, 20 January 1943, 21 January 1943, 22 January 1943, 6 February 1943, 10 February 1943, 13 February 1943.

[6]Raleigh News and Observer, 19 February 1943, 3 March 1943, 4 March 1943, 6 March 1943.

[7]Raleigh News and Observer, 26 February 1943, 6 March 1943. John L. Sanders, Constitution of North Carolina: A Literal Print of the Text of the Constitution As It Read on January 1, 1969, (Chapel Hill: Institute of Government, 1969), 86.

[8]Raleigh News and Observer, 3 March 1943, 4 March 1943, 7 March 1943.

[9]Mrs. Jane Cover Orr, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987. Raleigh News and Observer, 10 February 1943, 10 March 1943.

[10]Gert's opposition to this bill was consistent with her conservatism and her support of protective legislation for women and children. In this case, it would seem to be society as a whole whom she would protect from those who had been mentally ill. Raleigh News and Observer, 13 February 1943, 5 March 1943, 6 March 1943.

[11]Mrs. Jane Cover Orr, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987.

[12]Mrs. Jane Cover Orr, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987. Raleigh News and Observer, 13 January 1943, 20 January 1943, 27 January 1943, 3 February 1943, 9 February 1943, 10 February 1943, 17 February 1943, 28 February 1943.

[13]Raleigh News and Observer, 3 February 1943.

[14]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 February 1943.

[15]Raleigh News and Observer, 25 February 1943.

[16]Raleigh News and Observer, 24 February 1943, 25 February 1943.

[17]Raleigh News and Observer, 14 January 1943, 16 January 1943, 19 January 1943, 20 January 1943, 22 January 1943, 24 January 1943, 27 January 1943, 29 January 1943, 30 January 1943, 31 January 1943, 11 February 1943, 12 February 1943, 17 February 1943, 19 February 1943, 20 February 1943.

[18]Mrs. Jane Cover Orr, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987.

[19]"Under the Dome," Raleigh News and Observer, 8 March 1943.

[20]Raleigh News and Observer, 10 March 1943, 11 March 1943.

CHAPTER IX

[1]Thad Stem, Jr., PTA Impact: 50 Years In North Carolina 1919-1969, (Charlotte: Heritage Printers, Inc., 1969), 59-60. Sylva Herald, 2 December 1948.

[2]Special series on 1890 commencement, Jackson County Journal, 16 July 1909, 23 July 1909. "Story of Genesis and Progress of Western Carolina Teachers' College," 1939 Catamount, Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, pp. 6, 8, 10.

[3]"Genesis and Progress," 1939 Catamount, 10-13. The Record, 1987-1988 General Catalog Issue, Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, p. 137.

[4]William Ernest Bird, A History of Western Carolina

College, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1963), Appendix A, Trustees (1889-1961), 116, 273. Jackson County Journal, 29 June 1923, 13 July 1923, 31 August 1923, 26 October 1923.

[5]Bird, History of Western Carolina College, 215-216. Jackson County Journal, 21 April 1926, 26 May 1926, 23 February 1927. Sylva Herald, 16 June 1946, 29 May 1947. This award is no longer conferred. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[6]"They fussed and fumed at each other, but were like sisters." Mrs. Margaret Hall Dowdle, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 1 June 1987. Jackson County Journal, 9 February 1928.

[7]Jackson County Journal, 18 March 1937, 28 July 1938, 4 August 1938.

[8]"Minutes of Committee on Recommendations for Naming New Buildings on the College Campus," Board of Trustees, Western Carolina Teachers' College, 20 November 1939. "Minutes," Board of Trustees, 28 May 1940. Jackson County Journal, 23 October 1941.

[9]Under the Dome," Raleigh News and Observer, 28 January 1943.

[10]Alice McGuire Hamilton, Blue Ridge Mountain Memories, (Atlanta: The Conger Printing and Publishing Company, 1977), 59, 69. John Denton, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987.

[11]John Denton, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987.

[12]John Denton, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 20 October 1987. William D. McKee and Mrs. Alice Dills Weaver Turner, joint interview by author, tape recording, Dillsboro, 11 March 1987.

[13]Jackson County Journal, 1 November 1918, 17 January 1919.

[14]Jackson County Journal, 3 March 1926, 11 August 1926, 18 August 1926, 19 January 1927.

[15]Jackson County Journal, 24 November 1926, 1 December 1926.

[16]Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader." Jackson County Journal, 6 February 1930. Raleigh News and Observer, 25 January 1931.

[17]Raleigh News and Observer, 25 May 1932, 7 June 1932, 15 June 1932. Jackson County Journal, 8 October 1931. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[18]Raleigh News and Observer, 11 April 1931, 27 May 1931. Jackson County Journal, 25 January 1934. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[19]Jackson County Journal, 21 August 1941. "Minutes of the Board of Trustees of Western Carolina Teachers' College," Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina, 30 August 1941, 24 February 1942, 21 March 1942, 8 June 1942, 24 May 1943.

[20]Raleigh News and Observer, 6 March 1943, 8 April 1943, 9 April 1943. Sylva Herald, 22 September 1943, 2 December 1948. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[21]Jackson County Journal, 4 May 1933, 11 May 1933, 18 May 1933, 8 June 1933, 17 May 1934, 24 May 1934, 7 June 1934.

[22]Stem, PTA, 58. Jackson County Journal, 14 January 1932, 21 April 1932.

[23]Jackson County Journal, 8 September 1932, 8 December 1932, 31 August 1933, 14 September 1933, 15 March 1934, 12 April 1934, 20 September 1934, 7 February 1935, 4 September 1935.

[24]Jackson County Journal, 22 September 1931, 19 December 1935.

[25]Jackson County Journal, 4 October 1934, 18 April 1935, 10 October 1935. Greensboro Daily News, 29 January 1939. Stem, PTA, 106.

[26]Sylva Herald, 3 November 1943, 9 February 1944, 22 March 1944, 20 February 1946, 13 February 1947.

[27]Sylva Herald, 26 February 1948, 4 March 1948, 11 March 1948, 7 October 1948, 4 November 1948.

[28]Jackson County Journal, 17 December 1931, 7 April 1932. Sylva Herald, 25 July 1945, 20 March 1947.

[29]Jackson County Journal, 9 April 1931, 26 May 1922, 1 November 1934, 13 December 1934.

[30]Williams, History of Jackson County, 310. Jackson County Journal, 28 March 1929, 22 March 1934. Sylva Herald, 19 January 1944. "15 Years Ago," Sylva Herald, 20 March 1947.

[31]Jackson County Journal, 14 April 1932, 20 April 1933. "15 Years Ago," Sylva Herald, 17 April 1947. Raleigh News and Observer, 28 May 1930, 4 June 1937.

[32]Asheville Citizen, 29 May 1945.

[33]Asheville Citizen, 29 May 1945.

[34]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987. Sylva Herald, 6 June 1945.

[35]Jackson County Journal, 27 September 1928, 10 June 1937, 17 November 1938, 27 March 1941, 10 April 1941. Asheville Citizen, 2 April 1942. Sylva Herald, 1 November 1944.

[36]Jackson County Journal, 31 August 1933.

[37]Jackson County Journal, 24 June 1937, 10 August 1937.

[38]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987. Raleigh News and Observer, 17 February 1937.

[39]Jackson County Journal, 15 August 1937.

[40]Asheville Citizen, 1 October 1935. Jackson County Journal, 10 February 1938.

[41]Raleigh News and Observer, 12 March 1942, 18 March 1942, 19 March 1942, 20 March 1942, 21 March 1942, 26 March 1942, 27 March 1942.

[42]Jackson County Journal, 19 March 1942. Raleigh News and Observer, 26 March 1942, 28 March 1942.

[43]William D. McKee, interview by author, Tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 11 March 1987.

[44]Raleigh News and Observer, 3 January 1942, 8 January 1943, 20 January 1943, 21 January 1943, 6 February 1943, 10 February 1943, 13 February 1943.

[45]Raleigh News and Observer, 21 January 1943, 22 January 1943.

[46]Raleigh News and Observer, 9 January 1943. Sylva Herald, 12 January 1944, 19 January 1944, 26 January 1944, 2 February 1944, 10 January 1945, 17 January 1945, 21 March 1945.

[47]Sylva Herald, 9 January 1946, 16 January 1946, 30 January 1946, 13 February 1946.

[48]Sylva Herald, 16 January 1947, 2 December 1948.

[49]Sylva Herald, 21 March 1945.

CHAPTER X

[1]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 11 march 1987. Jackson County Journal, 6 August 1920, 17 May 1928, 29 April 1937. Williams, History of Jackson County, 192-199.

[2]Jackson County Journal, 21 January 1932. Lyndon appointed highway commissioner for Tenth District, comprising fourteen counties. He stated that "revival of interest in tourist business incident to establishment of Great Smoky Mountains National Park [had] made it imperative that State give consideration to the highways in the mountains as rapidly as money [was] available for their construction and improvement." Jackson County Journal, 29 April 1937. Lyndon was accused of impropriety. Senator "Jimmy" Howell of Buncombe, speaking before the committee on roads in Raleigh, left the impression that thousands of dollars in state money had been spent on "relatively unimportant" roads in Jackson County to the neglect of bridges and roads in Buncombe. Howell intimated that the roads "unnecessarily constructed" were all around or leading to High Hampton Inn, the property of the highway commissioner. Lyndon defended himself, pointing out that when he took over, Jackson County had more mileage of unsurfaced state highways than all of the other thirteen counties in the district combined and still had. A Journal

editorial also stated Howell's charge was unwarranted, giving the history of Rt. 106/107. Jackson County Journal, 30 January 1941, 6 February 1941, 6 March 1941, 16 April 1920.

[3]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 1 June 1987, 14 September 1987. Jackson County Journal, 22 December 1922, 1 June 1923, 2 November 1923, 23 November 1923, 30 November 1923, 14 December 1923, 25 January 1924.

[4]Jackson County Journal, 20 June 1924, 12 June 1925, 8 July 1925.

[5]The McKees frequently went to High Hampton. Some of those occasions were reported in the newspaper. "Mr. and Mrs. E. L. McKee, sons William and Lyndon spent a few days...." Some guests of the McKees at various times were: Senator Lee S. Overman; Col. Fred A. Olds; Mr. and Mrs. David M. Hall, Sr. and family; Mr. (later Senator) and Mrs. Josiah W. Bailey and children; Senator (later governor) Cameron Morrison; Mr. and Mrs. Sidney Cooper; Governor O. Max Gardner and wife; Governor and Mrs. Clyde R. Hoey and Miss Isabel Hoey; Governor J. M. Broughton and Miss Alice Broughton. At other times Gert would be hostess to women friends. Jackson County Journal, 11 July 1924, 15 August 1924, 20 March 1925, 8 July 1925, 22 September 1926, 14 August 1930, 20 August 1931, 3 September 1930, 25 July 1940, 16 October 1941. Other organizations, such as Rotary, held meetings there. Sylva Herald, 26 June 1947.

[6]Jackson County Journal, 12 May 1932, 22 September 1932. Raleigh News and Observer, 19 June 1932. Sylva Herald, 26 September 1945.

[7]William D. McKee, interviews by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987, 11 March 1987.

[8]Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987.

[9]Jackson County Journal, 14 October 1937, 24 February 1938.

[10]Joe Parker Rhinehart, "Gertrude D. McKee Served County With Skill," Historic Webster 7, no. 2 (Summer, 1981): 3.

[11]Jackson County Journal, 19 January 1933, 7

September 1933, 11 January 1934, 27 September 1934, 1 November 1934, 14 November 1935, 11 June 1936, 30 May 1940. Sylva Herald, 15 April 1948, 20 May 1948.

[12]Jackson County Journal, 18 January 1934. Sylva Herald, 26 January 1944. "15 Years Ago," Sylva Herald, 23 January 1947.

[13]Jackson County Journal, 1 November 1934, 13 December 1934, 2 May 1935, 9 May 1935, 22 April 1937, 28 April 1938, 27 April 1939, 4 April 1940, 15 May 1941. Sylva Herald, 23 May 1945, 23 May 1946, 8 May 1947, 29 April 1948.

[14]Raleigh News and Observer, 31 March 1942. Jackson County Journal, 22 July 1942, 3 September 1942.

[15]Jackson County Journal, 24 May 1934, 11 October 1934, 14 November 1935, 26 May 1938, 5 September 1940, 1 May 1941, 9 April 1942, 3 September 1942. Sylva Herald, 3 May 1944, 22 May 1947, 13 May 1948, 2 December 1948.

[16]Raleigh News and Observer, 28 May 1930.

[17]William D. McKee, interview by author, Tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987. Jackson County Journal, 20 April 1933, 29 June 1933, 16 November 1933, 1 March 1934, 20 June 1935, 12 March 1936, 21 October 1937, 6 October 1938, 25 January 1940, 14 March 1940, 8 May 1941. Sylva Herald, 20 October 1943, 3 October 1945, 23 May 1946.

[18]Jackson County Journal, 23 November 1932, 17 November 1938, 15 August 1940, 12 September 1940, 15 January 1942. Sylva Herald, 22 December 1943, 30 August 1944, 21 November 1945, 20 February 1946, 23 January 1947, 15 January 1948.

[19]Jackson County Journal, 12 December 1929, 14 August 1930, 13 October 1932, 14 September 1933, 14 December 1933. Sylva Herald, 22 January 1948.

[20]Jackson County Journal, 14 September 1933, 18 October 1934, 13 October 1938, 2 March 1939. Sylva Herald, 20 March 1946.

[21]Jackson County Journal, 16 July 1942.

[22]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987. Jackson County Journal, 16 October 1930.

[23]Jackson County Journal, 12 November 1931, 17 November 1932, 12 July 1934, 7 March 1935, 11 May 1939, 4 June 1942. Sylva Herald, 20 October 1943, 26 January 1944, 11 October 1944, 6 December 1944, 27 December 1944, 13 February 1946, 27 March 1947, 11 March 1948.

[24]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Sylva, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[25]Jackson County Journal, 25 January 1940, 15 February 1940, 8 May 1941, 15 May 1941. Speech, File on Defense Committee, Special Collections, Hunter Library, Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, North Carolina.

[26]Jackson County Journal, 11 December 1941, 30 April 1942, 23 July 1942.

[27]Sylva Herald, 9 September 1943, 22 September 1943, 29 September 1943, 19 January 1944, 3 October 1945. Raleigh News and Observer, 25 May 1943.

[28]Raleigh News and Observer, 14 April 1942. Sylva Herald, 8 November 1944, 20 December 1944, 6 March 1946, 26 February 1948.

[29]Sylva Herald, 2 September 1948.

[30]Jackson County Journal, 3 November 1927, 16 October 1930, 15 October 1931, 27 April 1939. Sylva Herald, 18 July 1945, 31 October 1945, 3 April 1946.

[31]Jackson County Journal, 11 June 1931, 20 April 1933, 27 November 1941. The following dates are representative of the many social affairs Gert attended: Sylva Herald, 4 August 1943, 8 September 1943, 15 September 1943, 13 October 1943, 3 January 1945, 10 January 1945, 17 January 1945, 31 January 1945, 27 February 1946, 6 March 1946, 27 March 1946, 17 April 1946. Mrs. Jeanelle C. Moore, interview by author, tape recording, Asheville, North Carolina, 19 October 1987. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[32]Mrs. Hannah Lou Rowlson, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North

Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[33]Jackson County Journal, 20 December 1934, 27 January 1938, 9 January 1941. Sylva Herald, 6 January 1945, 31 January 1945, 14 March 1945, 17 April 1946.

CHAPTER XI

[1]Waynesville Mountaineer, 30 November 1948. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987.

[2]Sylva Herald, 2 December 1948.

[3]Waynesville Mountaineer, 30 November 1948. Durham Morning Herald, 30 November 1948. Raleigh News and Observer, 28 November 1948. Asheville Citizen, 29 November 1948.

[4]Asheville Citizen, 29 November 1948.

[5]Charlotte News, 30 November 1948. Raleigh News and Observer, 28 May 1930.

[6]Mrs. Kate Rhinehart, interview by author, notes, Webster, North Carolina, 19 May 1987. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 February 1987.

[7]William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 8 May 1987. Mrs. Ernestine Pope, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 29 September 1987.

[8]Susan Ware, Beyond Suffrage: Women In The New Deal, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 2, 7. Raleigh News and Observer, 8 January 1931.

[9]Rhinehart, unpublished manuscript, 27 May 1961. William D. McKee, interview by author, tape recording, Cashiers, North Carolina, 24 March 1987. "Under the Dome," Raleigh News and Observer, 6 May 1931.

[10]Bost, "Mrs. McKee, Federation Leader."

[11]Raleigh News and Observer, 28 May 1930.

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