

Gladys Hall Coates

One member of the faculty of the Institute of Government proudly wears the title Albert Coates Professor of Public Law and Government. Mr. Coates '18, of course, founded the Institute, and the named professorship is a living recognition of that recorded contribution to the University.

But there is another faculty member at the Institute who holds an equally great honor. He is the Gladys Hall Coates Professor of Public Law and Government. Mrs. Coates also founded the Institute of Government. The annals of the University may not so clearly record it. But those who know the story of the Institute's beginnings, those who knew Albert Coates, and those who know Gladys Coates know it to be true. Without her, there would have been no Institute of Government.

Mrs. Coates, newly graduated from Randolph Macon, came to Chapel Hill in 1928 as Albert Coates's bride. By that time, law professor Albert had already begun to dream of bringing together the law in books that he knew and the law in practice that governmental officials throughout North Carolina dealt with day to day. Gladys joined him in the dream and over the next 14 years, until the University took the Institute in, they pinched and scrapped and sacrificed to make the dream real, looking for funding where they could find it and using their own meager resources.

Albert later recalled: "When salaries were cut during the Depression, my wife and I moved out of a house and lived for three years in a rented room. . . . As Institute revenues ran lower, I pieced them out with my salary. As salary frazzled out, I resorted to credits. When light bills reached beyond the limit and the lights were cut off, we resorted to tallow candles. When grocery bills ran to shaky heights, two friends who ran a restaurant invited us to eat for months on a credit which never ran out. For a long time I wondered whether we were priming the pump or filling the well."

They were engaged in the relentless pursuit of a vision. They made it real.

Much of Gladys's work was behind the scenes. She took care of many small things — stuffing envelopes, getting Albert's magazine *Popular Government* out, cooking meals for the endless stream of officials and dignitaries Albert brought to Chapel Hill. More substantively, she was Albert's editor, mercilessly cutting his purple prose and reigning his tendency to exaggerate back toward the hardcore truth. "She cut my prose to pieces," Albert later said, "and added insult to injury by proving, even to my satisfaction, that she had improved it." And in her own right she became a scholar of University history, patiently scouring the driest of the old records to piece together a history of Carolina from the students' perspective, published as "The Story of Student Government in the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill."

As early as 1939, one newspaper reported: "Persons in the know assert that a valuable staff member without portfolio is Mrs. Albert Coates. The Director's wife has participated actively in the work of the Institute particularly in plans for the new building and the selection of its furnishings."

In 1962, Senator Sam Ervin '17 said that Gladys Coates "married the man and the Institute along with him. In the Institute itself, she was invaluable, working daily without pay."

And in 1982, John Sanders '50, Albert's successor as director of the Institute, said of Gladys Coates: "Her name is writ large on every page of history of the Institute of Government from its conception forward."