



The Political Career of W. Kerr Scott: The Squire from Haw River (New Directions in Southern History)

Julian M. Pleasants

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When W. Kerr Scott (1896--1958) began his campaign for the North Carolina gubernatorial seat in 1948, his opponents derided his candidacy as a farce. However, the plainspoken dairy farmer quickly gathered loyal supporters and mobilized a grassroots attack on the entrenched interests that had long controlled the state government, winning the race in a historic upset.

In this meticulously researched book, Julian M. Pleasants traces Scott's productive and controversial political career, from his years as North Carolina commissioner of agriculture, through his governorship (1949--1953), to his brief tenure as a U.S. senator (1954--1958). Scott was elected at a time when southern liberals were on the rise in post--World War II America. McCarthyism and civil rights agitation soon overwhelmed progressivism, but the trend lasted long enough for the straight-talking "Squire from Haw River" to enact major reforms and establish a reputation as one of the more interesting and influential southern politicians of the twentieth century.

Scott introduced groundbreaking legislation that placed the Tar Heel State at the forefront of the southern economy, improving roads, schools, and medical facilities while widening access to electric and phone service. Scott was also relatively socially progressive and made significant appointments of women, African Americans, and liberals to positions of influence and power. This long-overdue look at his political career illuminates the spirit that transformed an introspective, segregated society dependent on tobacco and textiles into a vibrant, diversified economy at the center of the industrial, banking, and information revolution in the South.

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