

1987

MARGARET TAYLOR HARPER

What we now take for granted -- the full and active involvement of women in all aspects of political, civic, corporate, and cultural life -- is in fact of quite recent origin. Margaret Harper is one of the first women in this state to be so involved, and in the extensiveness of her involvement she has moved far beyond a ticking off of statistical firsts to become one of our linchpin citizens.

She has lived almost her whole life in Southport, where she was born and where she returned after graduating from Greensboro College (at which, fifty years ago this month, she was May Queen). Soon after her graduation she married James M. Harper, Jr., editor and later publisher of the weekly newspaper The State Port Pilot (which she edited during his absence on navy service in World War II), based in Southport. There she brought up two sons, and as well owned and managed an insurance agency.

From that ostensibly uneventful and geographically limited base, she has stretched the term public service to its fullest dimensions. Most conspicuous, perhaps, was her candidacy for the Democratic nomination for Lieutenant Governor in 1968 -- the first time in this state that a woman had offered herself for political office at that level -- and again in 1972. Closest to our own concerns was notable service from 1973 to 1981 on our Board of Trustees, for six years as its secretary. She has been a member of the Board of our Arts and Sciences Foundation since its inception eleven years ago, and has also served on three major governing boards and three state commissions, as well as being trustee or president of numerous bodies.

Margaret Harper has brought to each of these activities an energy and faithfulness displayed at the simplest level by her serving every Sunday as organist in her small Southport church. By such service, whether performed in the glare of statewide publicity or in total obscurity, is the common weal most truly furthered; and we are proud to honor the example she has set, as well as the person she is, with this degree of Doctor of Laws.