

The Founding of the Institute

The visionary founder of the Institute of Government was Albert Coates, a native North Carolinian hailing from Johnston County. Coates graduated from UNC at Chapel Hill and Harvard Law School and immediately joined the faculty of the UNC School of Law, in 1923. From this vantage point, he says in his history of the Institute, he began to recognize “a gap between the law and government as it was taught in my Law School classroom and as it was practiced in the city halls, county courthouses, and the state capitol.”

In the late 1920s, Coates began to organize “schools” for groups of local officials, primarily police officers and sheriffs, to help fill the educational gap he perceived. His experience with these schools revealed a second gap, “between outgoing and incoming officials.” “[E]very two or four years,” he says in his history, they “were coming into the administration of public affairs in the cities, the counties and the State of North Carolina, knowing all too little about their powers and duties at the start; learning as they went along.”

The Institute grew out of those experiences. It marks its birth as 1931, also the first year that *Popular Government* was published.

Coates’s chief collaborator in the creation of the Institute was his wife, Gladys Hall Coates. Together they sacrificed their personal funds and devoted a lifetime to moving their vision of the Institute from a dream to a thriving reality. With the help of generous donors and dues from cities and counties, the Institute operated as a private enterprise for ten years until it became part of the University of North Carolina in 1942. Albert Coates retired from his distinguished service with the Institute and the University in 1962.

—Ann Cary Simpson



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Albert and Gladys Coates in the 1940s; Table of Contents for the first issue of *Popular Government*, 1931; original home of the Institute, at 223 East Franklin Street, still owned by the University and currently housing its Center for International Studies.