

Colton, Marie Watters ^[1]

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Marie Watters Colton of Asheville, Buncombe County, N.C., represented the 51st district in the North Carolina House of Representatives from 1978 to 1994. Colton, a Democrat, was the first female Speaker Pro Tempore of the House, serving in that role from 1991 to 1994.

A lifelong resident of North Carolina, Colton was born in Charlotte to John Piper Watters, a car salesman, and Sarah Thomas (Sadie) Watters, a free-lance writer and homemaker. Marie Colton spent her childhood in Charlotte and Chapel Hill, attending Chapel Hill High School and later Saint Mary's College in Raleigh, N.C. In December 1942, she graduated from the University of North Carolina, majoring in modern languages. During World War II, she worked as a translator for the United States Army Signal Corps.

Colton returned to Chapel Hill with her husband, Henry E. Colton, so he could attend law school at UNC. Ten years later, they moved to Asheville to further Henry's insurance business. Active in church and civic matters, Henry was elected to the Asheville City Council and served from 1969 to 1975. Marie worked on Henry's election campaigns, in addition to her work in the local PTA and on the statewide PTA Board. When Henry decided not to run for state legislature, Marie ran as the Democratic Party candidate for the North Carolina House of Representatives and won in 1978. Throughout her eight terms in office, Colton held many positions of influence, including chair of the Committee on Ethics and vice-chair of the Rules, Appointments, and Calendar Committee. She also served on a variety of House committees, such as Finance, Environment, Human Resources, and Transportation. She was a member of the Joint Legislative Committee of Governmental Operations and the Legislative Research Commission. Colton focused her legislative activities on children and family issues, environmentalism and conservation efforts, historical preservation, and the arts. Known as a children's advocate, Colton sponsored bills geared towards the elimination of corporal punishment in the schools, improved day-care services, protection of abused children, and the reduction of the infant mortality rate.

In her time as a public servant, Colton received many honors, from Legislator of the Year awards from numerous advocacy groups to White House appointments to the Distinguished Alumni Award from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In recognition of her advocacy of women and children's issues and her multilingual skills, Colton was appointed to serve as a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 1994. She also served on the United States State Department observer team to the 1994 UNESCO fall meeting in Paris.

In addition to her bachelor's degree from UNC, Colton pursued post-graduate study at Mars Hill College and the University of North Carolina at Asheville. She served on a number of boards, including the Flat Rock Playhouse, the Brevard Music Center, Western North Carolina Tomorrow, the Board of Visitors of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the North Carolina World Trade Association, and the North Carolina Institute of Medicine. As of 2007, Marie and Henry Colton had four children and seven grandchildren.

Marie Watters Colton was inducted into the North Carolina Women's Hall of Fame in 2009.

References:

Marie Watters Colton Scrapbooks and Audiocassette #5332, Southern Historical Collection, The Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. <https://finding-aids.lib.unc.edu/05332/> ^[2]

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