

TEXAS ARTIFACT SPOTLIGHT

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Mr. Speaker

Impeccable ethics, character marked Rayburn's political career



"You cannot lead people by trying to drive them. Persuasion and reason are the only ways to lead them. In that way the Speaker has influence and power in the House." Sam Rayburn, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives

Few boys grow up to realize their dream, and then surpass it. Sam Rayburn (1882-1961) knew as a young man working on his father's 40-acre cotton farm near Bonham that he wanted to enter politics. After serving as a three-time Texas legislator, his career took a giant step forward after he took the oath of office as a United States Congressman in 1913. He never left the House, rising to the position of Speaker in 1940, a post he held for 17 years.

Despite his powerful role, Rayburn's ethics remained intact. As Speaker of the House he had use of a congressionally funded 1944 Cadillac. When the Republicans gained power in 1947 and Rayburn became the minority leader, he surrendered the car and walked to work. Some of his fellow Democrats offered to buy him a car, but Rayburn told them no — he had a personal rule of never accepting gifts of more than \$25. When Rayburn was informed that every House Democrat wished to chip in \$25, he grudgingly accepted their gift of a new 1947 Cadillac Fleetwood. Later, after he discovered that 50 Republican House members also kicked in \$25 each, Rayburn thanked them and returned their money, fearing it might be viewed as a conflict of interest. It was this type of integrity that enabled him to do his job so effectively. You can see his Cadillac at the Sam Rayburn House Museum in Bonham.

This engraved silver tray was presented to Rayburn in 1959 by the 46 members of the U.S. Senate who had served under him in the House of Representatives. It reads, "To Sam Rayburn Whose Abilities Made Him Speaker of the House and whose Warmth and Concern Made Him Our Friend." Rayburn accepted the gift, probably reluctantly.

Silver tray, March 12, 1959

Courtesy Rayburn (Sam) Papers, The Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

The Bullock Museum is a non-collecting museum and different artifacts are installed daily. This is one of several artifacts recently installed. It can be viewed on the third floor.

DID YOU KNOW?

The Rayburn House Office Building was named for Sam Rayburn and opened in 1965. It provides office space (equaling three rooms per office) for 169 U.S. Representative occupants. The building covers 2,395,914 square feet of real estate southwest of the Capitol building in Washington, D.C.



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