

1965

Wednesday, January 6th

The Speaker's birthday was a busy day for me, like some of the busiest of last year. At ten o'clock there was the dedication of the Sam Rayburn statue in the new Rayburn House Office Building. It was by Felix de Weldon and is a gift of the Texas State Society. The outcome of the long, long conversations and investigations of artists for portraits and so forth in the committee of which I have been the chairman, before that November 22nd.

I left the White House with Liz and Perle Mesta -- she too was a great friend and admirer of the Speaker's and it's nice to have her along. We found ourselves in a small rotunda where the larger-than-life statue is on a pedestal, and groups of friends and relatives of Mr. Sam's, mostly Texans, were gathered around, filling the staircase on each side. It was a brief, colorful, nostalgic ceremony, with Wright Patman as Master of Ceremonies. The presentation of colors, the National Anthem, the Chaplain of the House making the Invocation. Felix de Weldon's remarks -- this is his gift, a very generous thing. And then Bob Bartley actually unveiled the statue. I think it's good ^{enough} ~~though~~ bronze -- in fact, no statuary ~~is~~ ^{is} my medium. Color brings to life -- a portrait does -- more readily to my heart and eyes the man that it portrays. And then I gave my little bitty dedication speech. This one was easy. "The first moment Sam Rayburn set eyes on this Hill was

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a day in March 1913. He arrived from Texas' old Fourth District and stepped out of Union Station to see before him the breathtaking beauty of the glistening white Capitol Dome. It was love at first sight," and so on, to the end. "The House of Representatives was his great love. He was at once its master and its servant. There wasn't anyone in the United States who couldn't see the Speaker, if they were willing to "sit a spell." To the dismay of his staff, he made his own appointments, often on the back of an old envelope in his hip pocket, and he read his own mail. " Much of this was a quote from a speech that Lyndon had made in the Speaker's honor two months after his death, but it couldn't have been said better, nor could I have quoted anyone who loved him more and profited more from his years of companionship with him. And then, of course, there was the oft-repeated line, "I'm a Democrat, without suffix, prefix, or apology." But the end is what I liked best. "All of us are just a little way from Flag Springs," said Speaker Rayburn. "You know, I just missed being a tenant farmer by a gnat's heel." And then I dedicated the statue to all the new Members of the 89th Congress and to all future Congresses in the hope they would, like Sam Rayburn, serve under the great white dome with the same faith in the people.

And I had a surprise visitor. Just before time for me to speak, in walked Lyndon. Of course, from then on all eyes were on him. Afterwards

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Everett Hutchinson presented the statue -- he is President of the Texas State Society -- to the Government. John McCormack accepted it in a warm and graceful speech. And then, inevitably, "The Eyes of Texas" and the benediction. It was an hour well spent, and I must say the next day when I saw the press, I never got so much from so small an effort. Small, I guess, because I had lived all those years in his vicinity and loved him, and it was quite natural.

Enroute back to the White House we stopped by the Inaugural Committee -- Perle and Scooter and I -- and I thanked all the people who were working so hard on these three tough days that are coming up.

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(Second part of January 6, 1965)

I spent the rest of the day working on the Inauguration, checking my card file of kinfolks, old friends that might easily be forgotten, staff, people that have helped us through the years out of just friendship or patriotism — in writing, such as John Steinbeck, Lady Barbara Jackson, or Neustadt, or John Galbraith--in personal medical problems such as Dr. John Gould, dear Willis Hurst and Jim Cain and Dr. Isen and all of the real old "rocks"--the standbys-- such as A. W., Melvin, and the Wests, the Cliffords and the Fortases and many, many more in the hope that we won't forget the most obvious. It is a tedious task and a thankless one because there isn't ^{room} enough to go around and probably the best thing that could have happened to us was the twenty inch snow because anybody would blame the weather then for the confusion rather than the Johnsons and their inefficient organization.

This is my first day on black coffee and a hard boiled egg and red meat diet. I have to take off about four pounds before the 18th. My total response to it is "ouch," but it can be done.

Late in the evening I visited with Dr. Gould and then I began to look around for my houseguests, the Watsons, whom I haven't seen since Sunday. I discovered that they were still here-- never get in our way, just househunt all day and so unobstrusive so I Shanghaied them and brought them down to dinner and we had

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a delightful time, Just the four of us, with Lynda and Luci going in and out with their merry, racy, strong-willed amusing ideas and personalities, making the place feel so wholesome and good. Luci blithely informs me that she has "worked it out" so that Pattie McGuirk can come up for Inauguration! That will make four little girls in one room. One can be on a cot in Luci's little sitting room, which is really just a hallway, and they will all be using the bath at the same time. Pandemonium. We should have had a recording of it. No memory could have been spontaneous enough, but it sounded like the uninhibited average American home, and it was my "spoonful of sugar" that goes a long, long way.