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RARE LETTER WRITTEN BY FORMER HOUSE SPEAKER SAM RAYBURN FOUND

Documentary producer announces the discovery of the only letter known to exist from the longest serving Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives to the only woman he ever married.

New York, NY, August 14, 2014— A rare letter written by former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives Sam Rayburn was shared earlier this year with Reed Penney the producer of a documentary about Rayburn's life and career called *Rayburn: Mr. Speaker*. What makes the letter so unique is Rayburn, who was a bachelor most of his life, wrote it to the only woman he ever married.

From 1913 to 1961, nearly fifty years, Sam Rayburn served as a Congressman from northeast Texas. For seventeen of those years he was Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives (1940-1947, 1949-1953, 1955-1961), longer than anyone else in history.

"I think from 1931 to 1961 Sam Rayburn was the most important American politician who was never President. His fingerprints are on some of the most important legislation of the 20th century." - Reed Penney (Rayburn: Mr. Speaker producer)

At the peak of his life and career many people around the country thought of Rayburn as a lifelong bachelor. When he died in 1961 he left no widow or children, but once in his life Rayburn was briefly married. In October 1927 Rayburn married Metze (pronounced Meets) Jones the younger sister of a fellow Congressman from Texas. Nearly three months after they married they separated. In November 1928 they divorced, and throughout their lives never spoke about why their marriage failed. For Rayburn, it was the only marriage in his life, but Metze went on to marry again and had a family of her own. She died in 1982.

For many years there was no record of any written correspondence between them. Until now. Earlier this year one of Metze's grandchildren shared with documentary producer Reed Penney a letter Rayburn wrote to Metze. There is no specific date on the letter, but it appears to have been written a little over a year before Rayburn and Metze married. Sam Rayburn biographer Dr. Anthony Champagne says it is the only letter known to exist from Rayburn to Metze.

"Ordinarily, Sam Rayburn is very cautious and restrained in his letters. This letter, however, is different. It is a caring, thoughtful, loving letter of concern regarding Metze's loss of her father and shares with her his concern over his mother's health." -

Dr. Anthony Champagne (Rayburn biographer & Professor of Political Science at the University of Texas-Dallas)

In June 1926 Metze's father died from complications following gall bladder surgery. Soon after his death Rayburn wrote her a condolence letter. The following is a brief excerpt...

"My Dearest Metze. On the saddest day of your life when you look at death at close hand of one so fine, so brave, so dear as father. I must write you a word. But what shall I say? Ah! How shallow words, how paltry to convey a deep feeling. But let me say that in your sorrow unseen hands are extended toward you and would, if possible, brush away the clouds that are about you." – Sam Rayburn to Metze Jones

Before Rayburn concluded the letter with a postscript describing his own mother's failing health he wrote this...

"My heart is sad with you. My love too. Sam Rayburn" – Sam Rayburn to Metze Jones

"I think it is really the only love letter that I have ever seen from Sam Rayburn to Metze or to any other woman. There's so little known about Sam Rayburn's personal life because he really kept that very confidential." - Dr. Anthony Champagne (Rayburn biographer & Professor of Political Science at the University of Texas-Dallas)

The letter doesn't shed any light about why Rayburn and Metze's marriage failed, but documentary producer Reed Penney says it's still an important artifact.

"It's not rosebud, but it is a rare jewel of a letter. Rayburn hardly ever writes in this way to someone outside of his own family, and in his own handwriting. He always thought handwritten letters were more important to read instead of typed letters." - Reed Penney (Rayburn: Mr. Speaker producer)

Even though Rayburn and Metze never spoke about why their marriage failed hints of possible reasons did slip out over the years. They were both headstrong individuals. Rayburn was very set in his ways. They quarreled over their Washington home and its furnishings. Rayburn was a workaholic who kept long hours at the Capitol. Their marriage occurred while Prohibition was the law of the land, and Rayburn was very much a consumer of alcohol while Metze was a teetotaler. One time she very publicly criticized his drinking at a party in Washington in front of his friends. Also, when Rayburn married Metze he was 45 years old, and his much younger bride was 30. All of these details point to a relationship that didn't work.

But earlier this year documentary producer Reed Penney made a discovery that adds fuel to another possible reason for the collapse of their marriage. In 1978 Metze gave an oral history to Texas Tech University located in Lubbock.

“It’s an oral history that appears to have been hiding in plain sight for years. I think part of the reason why no Rayburn biographer had known about this oral history was because Metze was credited under her second husband’s name Mrs. Jeff M. Neely” – Reed Penney (Rayburn: Mr. Speaker producer)

In the oral history she doesn’t talk about her marriage to Rayburn, but she does discuss Jeff Neely, the man she married after she divorced Sam Rayburn. Metze married her second husband in April 1932, almost three and a half years after her divorce from Rayburn. In the oral history Metze made the following statement about her second husband...

“I laughed and said that it took me about eight years to run him down.” – Metze Jones Neely (May 25th, 1978; Texas Tech University Oral History)

Rayburn biographer Dr. Anthony Champagne says that is very interesting.

“Because there has been a story circulating that after Sam Rayburn and Metze Jones married, Sam Rayburn discovered that she was in love with another man and told her, ‘If you feel that way, leave’. And she left. This oral history suggests, well, there may be something to that.” – Dr. Anthony Champagne (Rayburn biographer & Professor of Political Science at the University of Texas-Dallas)

“It’s not proof beyond a reasonable doubt that this is why the marriage failed, but it is an interesting comment that suggests Metze had romantic feelings for her second husband before she married Sam Rayburn.” – Reed Penney (Rayburn: Mr. Speaker producer)

We may never know exactly why Rayburn and Metze’s marriage failed, but we do have more details about the only marriage of one of the most important American politicians of the 20th century.

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If you would like more information about this topic, please contact Reed Penney at 917-376-8014 or email at reed@onecentproductions.com.

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