

Hightower Legacy Benefits Baylor Students

By Hayley Gibson

Without a doubt, Judge Jack Hightower is a living legend among Baylor University Alumni. As a public servant for over 50 years, Hightower has not only made history, but also has been a proponent of historical preservation for future generations. In honor of his service to both the State of Texas and the United States of America, the W. R. Poage Legislative Library constructed the Judge Jack E. Hightower Book Vault.

Hightower cannot remember a time in his life when he did not desire books. “I remember writing to Santa Clause and asking for books. I have a collection of a lifetime,” he said.

His avid knowledge of and love for books grew to something more in the late 1940s when Hightower asked former Texas Governor and current Baylor president, Pat Neff, to sign a book, inciting one of his most passionate hobbies to this day: collecting signed books.

Today, Hightower’s collection has grown to thousands, over 3,000 of which he has donated to the W. R. Poage Legislative Library at Baylor University. The library constructed the Jack Hightower Book Vault to accommodate the Judge’s immense collection of books signed by presidents and other important figures.

A prominent figure and Baylor graduate himself, Hightower has lived a life of service to his country. Hightower is a World War II veteran, former member of the Texas House of Representatives, Texas Senate, U.S. House of Representatives and Supreme Court of Texas. In 1999, President Clinton appointed Hightower to serve on the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science.

“That was exactly where I wanted to go and I appreciated the opportunity to have a roader field of interest as far as books are concerned,” said Hightower of the appointment by Clinton.

A large percentage of Hightower’s collection is now on display, ready for the youth of Baylor to delve into the history that Judge Hightower has so meticulously preserved.

Hightower’s collection ranges from recent, signed novels, to books dating back to 647. He also collected historic memorabilia, such as land grants, that help tell the story of early Texas.

The collection also features a large number of books signed by senators from both the U.S. and Texas chambers, as well as books signed by Queen Victoria, Neil Armstrong, Bob Hope, Andrew Carnegie, Winston Churchill, Louis Armstrong, Harper Lee, and Mary Lincoln, to name a few.

Possibly one of the most impressive and noteworthy sections of the book vault remains the collection of books signed by U.S. presidents. Hightower has obtained books signed from five U.S. presidents before Lincoln, and every president after Lincoln.

Although he does not own a book signed by Lincoln, due to the steep price, Hightower estimates having almost 400 books on Lincoln — a tribute to his favorite president.

“Everything about Lincoln is very interesting. I probably have more books on Lincoln than anything else,” he said.

Hightower recalls with pride his 3rd grade teacher who called Hightower her “favorite history student.” At 84 years old, Hightower still possesses the same youthful hunger to learn more, anxious to absorb information and read as many books as possible.

Hightower has built a legacy he is entrusting to Baylor and her students. His collection preserves history in a way that no textbook can, provides research opportunities and allows students to truly “touch history.” All Hightower books are searchable in BearCat, and may be viewed in the Poage Library.

In hopes of continuing the Judge’s legacy, the W. R. Poage Legislative Library established the Jack Hightower Book Fund in the summer of 2010. The funds collected will purchase books signed by future U.S. presidents and other politicians.

Once the book fund reaches \$25,000, it will be converted into a permanent endowment, which will provide income to purchase signed books for the growing Hightower Signed Book Collection.

“We hope to reach our goal by the Judge’s 85th birthday in 2011,” Director Ben Rogers of the Poage Library, said.

Those who wish to contribute to the Jack Hightower Book Fund may do so by sending a check made payable to “Baylor University” to the W. R. Poage Legislative Library, One Bear Place #97153, Waco, Texas, 76798-7153. Please include “Hightower Book Fund” on the memo portion of the check. For those who wish to make gifts by credit card, contributions can be made online at www.baylor.edu/lib/poage/hightower/books.