



Seriously Funny

BOB NEWTON IS TURNING AN INHERITED EDITORIAL CARTOON COLLECTION INTO A LEGACY FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS.

BY LAURA SAMUEL MEYN

PHOTOS BY ROSS HAILEY

Bob Newton's home office in Granbury has room for only a small portion of his mother's collection of original editorial cartoons

It's quite a collection: 700 original political cartoons from national and international newspapers dating back to 1938, including 60 Pulitzer Prize winners. These are relics of the newsrooms of yesteryear — there are notes scrawled on the backs and in the margins, telltale splotches of Wite-Out, and sometimes, a piece of paper has been pasted on so the cartoonist could redraw a portion or change a punch line.

About 70 framed cartoons hang in the Granbury home office of Bob Newton — it's all he has room for to showcase the incredible collection he inherited from his late mother, Helen Newton.

The collection began in 1953 when Helen, then a freelance writer, went to a banquet in Nashville to receive an award. She was seated next to Pulitzer Prize-winning political cartoonist Tom Little, who began doodling on a program. Impressed, she asked if she could keep the program; he obliged, and invited her to come by to see him at *The Tennessean* the next day. She did, and there he gave her an original cartoon, a sketch of President Dwight D. Eisenhower looking for a needle in a haystack.

Over the next 40 years, Helen would use her writing skills and charm to pen letters and make phone calls requesting works directly from cartoonists, ultimately collecting hundreds of originals simply by asking.

After that first acquisition, Helen's letters brought many manila envelopes to the Newton mailbox containing political cartoons — some autographed to her. She continued to collect them into the early 1990s, pursuing particular Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoons and asking the illustrators to dig into their archives — hence a 1939 cartoon depicting Hitler that found its way to her collection.

As an administrative assistant at NASA from 1960 to 1973, Helen also pursued cartoons depicting the space program; once the original was in hand, she would keep it on her desk until each related astronaut — such as the crew of Apollo 14 — walked by and signed it.

Helen never paid for a single cartoon — all were gifts from the artists themselves. Their worth now? Bob declines to venture a guess. He explains that in Helen's day, original political cartoons weren't much valued — they usually wound up stacked in the corner of the cartoonist's office after publication, slowly making their way toward the trash.



Helen Newton, shown while she worked for NASA, collected her first original political cartoon in 1953.

When Helen passed away in 1999, she already had entrusted the collection to Bob. He didn't fully realize how unusual and important it was until about four years ago, when he invited Etta Hulme, the longtime Fort Worth Star-Telegram political cartoonist, to visit. She planned a 30-minute stop-in to look at the collection, but wound up staying 4 1/2 hours, ultimately telling Bob that he had a national treasure on his hands.

Her opinion has been echoed by archivists from a handful of universities who have approached Bob about the collection. He has even gotten some advice from Baylor archivist Ben Rogers on how to better preserve the cartoons, prompting him to reframe some with acid-free paper and UV-protective glass.

While Bob has loaned the cartoons for display at charity events and at universities — and he has given presentations to local schools — he anticipates finding the collection a permanent home at a university within the next five years. His goal: to have the cartoons displayed, not stored.

He believes there are lessons to be learned from these glimpses back in time. "So many political issues happen over and over," he says, pointing to a 1958 cartoon by Vaughn Shoemaker (then of the New York Herald Tribune), with the hopeful caption: "Prosperity Just Around the Corner."

Laura Samuel Meyn likes cartoons better than politics.



NASA-themed cartoons take up a corner of Newton's office. Newton's mother, who worked for the space agency, got astronauts to sign the cartoons.