Jenkins Garrett(1914 - 2010)

Jess Jenkins Garrett, 95, distinguished Fort Worth attorney and philanthropist, passed away Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010.

Funeral: 3 p.m. Monday at Rosen Heights Baptist Church. Interment: Private. Visitation: 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday at Greenwood Funeral Home.

Memorials: In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Jenkins Garrett Scholarship Award at the Department of History, the University of Texas at Arlington, 817-272-2861.

Jesse Jenkins Garrett, called Jenks or Jenkins by his friends and family, was born Dec. 14, 1914, in Caldwell, the son of Jesse and Sudie Garrett. Jesse Garrett was an up-by-your-bootstraps attorney in Caldwell who was later called to the Baptist ministry at Rosen Heights Baptist Church in Fort Worth, while Sudie Garrett was a Baylor music graduate who was the Rev. Garrett's partner every step of the way.

Jenkins Garrett was formative years were spent in Fort Worth. He attended San Rossen Elementary School, North Side Junior High, and North Side High School, where he graduated in 1931 at the age of 16. Two years before he graduated from high school, the Leonard Brothers Store hired him as an office boy. His pay was $5 a week and a bicycle. His dedication and enthusiasm for his work was noticed by J. Marvin "Mr. Marvin" and Obadiah Paul "Mr. Obie" Leonard, the store's owners, and they soon developed a personal relationship with him. From this point on, his life and career became closely interwoven with the Leonard family.

Garrett entered the University of Texas in September 1931. His career goal was to become an attorney like his father had been, so he enrolled in a six-year program where he could earn an undergraduate degree and a law degree. At the university he became work was noticed by J. Marvin "Mr. Marvin" and Obadiah Paul "Mr. Obie" Leonard, the store's owners, and they soon developed a personal relationship with him. From this point on, his life and career became closely interwoven with the Leonard family.

Garrett entered the University of Texas in September 1931. His career goal was to become an attorney like his father had been, so he enrolled in a six-year program where he could earn an undergraduate degree and a law degree. At the university he became interested in history. This happened during a U.S. history survey course taught by noted historian Walter Prescott Webb, whose ideas inspired him to begin reading more about Texas and the American past. From UT Garrett entered Harvard Law School, graduating with a master's in legal letters in 1939. He practiced law with the Fort Worth firm of Walker, Smith, and Shannon until U.S. entry into World War II looked imminent in 1941. In 1941 he resigned his position with the firm and entered the FBI. While with the FBI, he worked on the West Coast and married Virginia Williams of Fort Worth on Nov. 26, 1941, in San Francisco, Calif., just days before the bombing of Pearl Harbor. He had met Virginia at Rosen Heights Baptist Church. Garrett spent the war years working with the FBI in California and later as regional counsel for the War Production Board in Dallas.

After the war, he joined the Leonards as their house counsel, a position he held until 1965, when he and Robert Stahala opened their own practice. The small two-person office allowed Garrett the freedom to not only practice law but also to pursue personal interests and public service. He became of counsel with the Fort Worth firm of Harris, Finely, and Bogle in 1992.

He pursued no interests with more vigor and zeal than collecting. He began collecting historical material in earnest in the late 1950s and was "infected," his word, with the collecting disease for the rest of his life. His collecting "compulsion," again, his word, motivated him to build one of the finest private libraries focusing on Texas and the U.S. War with Mexico, 1846-48, in the 20th century according to Harry Ransom, former chancellor of the University of Texas System and an inveterate collector himself.

Garrett admitted that his primary reward as a collector was to see his work of many years used and appreciated by students, scholars and the general public. To this end, he and his wife donated his Texas and Mexican War collections to University of Texas at Arlington in 1973-74, where they became the impetus for the university to build an outstanding department of special collections on the sixth floor of the central library.

At the time of the initial donation to UTA, the Garrett collection consisted of more than 10,000 items, including books, broadsides, newspapers, graphics, manuscripts, sheet music, currency, and historical materials in other formats. He and Virginia didn't stop there. They continued to support the library by donating literally thousands of other historical resources to UTA during the decades following the original gift. Not only that, but Garrett also helped the library raise funds, cultivate other donors, and promote the collection.

In addition to his accomplishments for UTA, Garrett left an indelible mark on his city, state, and nation. He is perhaps best known for his service to higher education in Texas. For example, he served on the board of trustees, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1960-1968, Governor John Connally's Committee on Education Beyond the High School Level, 1963, founding chairman, board of trustees, Tarrant County Junior College District, 1965-1971, and the University of Texas System Board of Regents, 1969-1975. The University of Texas at Arlington named him a Distinguished Alumnus in 1995 and University of Texas at Austin named him a Distinguished Alumnus in 1995.

Garrett also received numerous awards for his collecting pursuits and philanthropy, including the Philanthropic Award of the Texas Library Association, 1991; the William E. Jary, Jr. Award presented by the Tarrant County Historical Commission, 1991; American History Medal of the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1994; Sir Thomas More Medal of the University of San Francisco's Gleeson Library, 1998; and the Award of Excellence in Preserving History sponsored by the Texas Historical Commission, 2003.

Garrett was well known in Fort Worth for his civic activities and his work as an attorney, and has been recognized for his many accomplishments. Among the awards he has received are the Association of Texas Colleges and Universities' Mirabeau B. Lamar Award, 1981; Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary's B. H. Carroll Award, 1985; North Fort Worth Society's Tat Lucas Life Achievement Award, 1987; Tarrant County Bar Association's Blackstone Award, 1988; Golden Deeds Award of the Fort Worth Exchange Club, 1990; and the Good Scout Award presented by the Boy Scouts' Longhorn Council, 1996.

Garrett was an active member in numerous professional, historical, social, and civic organizations, and served in leadership positions in each one. Among these are the Tarrant County Bar Association, Texas State Historical Association, Fort Worth Historical Society, Philosophical Society of Texas, Texas Map Society, Society for the History of Discoveries, Exchange Club, Fort Worth Club, Shady Oaks Country Club, Ridglea Country Club, Fort Worth Rotary Club, and Philip Lee Phillips Society.

Garrett made significant contributions in writing and publishing, with perhaps his most important work being his massive bibliography entitled "The Mexican American War of 1846-1848: A Bibliography of the Holdings of the Libraries, The University of Texas at Arlington," published by Texas A&M University Press in 1995. This work has become a "must-have" for librarians, scholars, and collectors interested in the Mexican War.

Jenkins was preceded in death by his parents, Jesse and Sudie Garrett, and sister, Mary Elizabeth Whitney.
Survivors: Wife of 68 years, Virginia Garrett; children, Donna Garrett, Dianne Powell and husband, Boone, and Jenkins Garrett Jr. and wife, Marcia; grandchildren, Vanessa Vaughan, Holt Vaughan,

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