

Jamie Lloyd Whitten

Mississippi '33

Oxford Cup Roll N° 015

The term “career public servant” is a most appropriate label for the Honorable Jamie L. Whitten, who served a record 53 years in the United States House of Representatives. In the latter years of his tenure he was known as “the Dean of the House.”

One obituary characterized him as having exerted “quiet but powerful control over the nation’s purse strings.” At one time, Betas had key appropriations positions in both Chambers: Whitten as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee was responsible for every funding bill that came out of the House, and Senator Mark Hatfield, *Willamette* '43, was chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

When Whitten obtained his law degree from the University of Mississippi, he was admitted to the state bar with the highest average in 1932.

He was a 20-year-old public school principal when he was first elected to public office as a member of the Mississippi House of Representatives in 1931, at age 21. He next was elected district attorney at 23 and continued in that office for three terms until elected to Congress in 1941. He represented the First Mississippi District continuously from the 77th through the 103rd Congresses, and he was chairman of the appropriations committee’s subcommittee for agricultural affairs for all except the last term in that series.

Born in Cascilla, Mississippi, April 18, 1910, he maintained a home in Charleston, Mississippi, through those years. He authored a book, *That We May Live*, written after he sponsored an official investigation into chemicals and chemical pesticides. He retired in 1994, having served under 11 Presidents.

A Mason and a Democrat, he also holds membership in Phi Alpha Delta, unique in that it is the only law fraternity whose roots were nurtured in a legal controversy. That fraternity names each of its chapters after some distinguished legal figure. Its University of Mississippi chapter, established in his junior year, was named for a Beta Supreme Court Justice, Joseph Rucker Lamar, *Bethany* 1877 and *Washington and Lee* 1878. Lamar had been General Secretary of Beta Theta Pi as a student in 1877-78.

Whitten was one of the members of an honorary cabinet chosen for the Beta Sesquicentennial Campaign in 1989.

He died September 9, 1995, in Jackson, Mississippi, at age 85 from complications of chronic cardiac and renal disease.

Robert T. Howard, DePauw '37, Historian