

Pulling Up Roots



JEFF WILLHELM/Staff

Sen. Sam Ervin Jr.'s private library is lined floor to ceiling with books — as is a hallway beyond.

But Ervin Library Will Still Be In Morganton

By JOHN HECHINGER
Staff Writer

MORGANTON — The heart of Sen. Sam Ervin Jr.'s home will soon be removed.

For now, though, little has changed here since the senator died more than three years ago.

In the elegant halls of the deep-red brick house, Burke County's most famous son might only be out for a stroll — about to return to his library, where he'd sit and scribble notes on a yellow legal pad.

Like the reminiscences of an old friend, the home reveals the man who served in the U.S. Senate for 20 years and became nationally known as chairman of the Senate Watergate hearings.

The 3,500 square feet of oriental rugs, vases and floral wallpaper offer a welcome as genial as the deep-jowled Democrat, who liked to call himself "just a country lawyer."

But there is also a sense of seriousness, appropriate for the Harvard-educated Morganton native whose love of the Constitution helped drive President Richard Nixon from office.

Ervin, who retired in 1974, died in 1985.

He was 88 years old.



Ervin

ganton.

There, students will be able to look through Ervin's lifetime repository of knowledge in a replica of the library, which will be dedicated early next year as part of the new Phifer Learning Resources Center.

Originally, local officials and family members had hoped to turn the entire four-bedroom house into a museum, but the plan fell through last fall when a special appropriations bill of \$25,000 failed to pass the N.C. General Assembly.

"His home speaks so much," Superior Court Judge Claude Sitton of the 25th Judi-

"The library was the heart of the house, the place our father loved and where he spent so much time," said U.S. Circuit Court Judge Sam Ervin III, 62, one of the senator's three children.

With its 7,500 books, furniture and political cartoons, the library will be dismantled and moved to Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton.

cial District said at the time. "It's so warm. It's obvious a person of distinction lived there, but it's so homey. It's a good place to live It will be nice for children to come by and see for themselves the history."

Now, the house Sam Ervin built on Lenoir Street in the 1920s — where he lived with his wife, Margaret, across from the sprawling white home where he was born — will stay in the family.

One of Ervin's grandchildren, Robert, 28, a Morganton lawyer, and his wife, Mary Cameron, 26, are starting to move in this week.

Robert Ervin said he will feel comfortable living in the house of his famous grandfather.

"I wouldn't say there was a feeling of awe," he said. "It was more the feeling of admiration of what he meant to me as an individual and as a part of history."

Indeed, in the house, a plastic trophy to the "World's Greatest Grandfather" does not seem out of place amid awards from Congress.

Past a semicircular driveway and through four regal pillars is a hallway flanked by books of the poetry of John Milton and Robert Frost and the biographies of Thomas

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Jefferson, John Adams and Abraham Lincoln.

Turn left past Ervin's Civil War history collection into the library proper; law books and the Congressional Record dominate.

There also are rows of books on current events, political science and Constitutional law; it seems most are autographed by their authors.

On one shelf sit 16 Bibles and the Jewish holy book, the Torah.

On Ervin's desk are framed political cartoons; in one, the late senator wears a

sheriff's badge and straps on six-guns before a wanted poster of Richard Nixon.

In the den, walls hang with more than 60 awards and keys to cities such as San Francisco and High Point. He had even been made an honorary member of an Indian Village — and had a ceremonial head dress and 15-syllable name to prove it.

Still, Ervin remained proudly a Burke County boy. Tucked away on a shelf near his bedroom are clippings — not from the Washington Post or Time magazine — but several copies of The News Herald of Morganton proclaiming him the victor in the 1954 Senate race.

"He frequently talked about Burke County," Judge Ervin said. "It always impressed me, the number of people who serve in public office and then never go home."

Maybe the most fitting epitaph is the verse carved by a friend on a slab of wood hanging outside the den: a tribute to "Senator Sam," as he was often known:

"Among the rolling hills/ Of Western Carolina/ Lives 'Senator Sam,'/ The Greatest Statesman/ There's never been one finer."

Staff Writer Bill Chapman contributed to this article.