

Friends re.

A diverse crowd attends services for John Connally

By Mark Potok
USA TODAY

AUSTIN — To some people, John Connally was a picture of grandfatherly charm.

To others, he was a super-charged politician who should have been president. To most folks, he was smart, charismatic and handsome.

But above all, perhaps, he will be remembered as a Texan.

"He was the John Wayne of Texas politics," said Bob Valles, a former state legislator who was one of hundreds who attended Connally's funeral Thursday. "Whatever role he played, he was a hero or a leader."

People came from across the state and the nation to remember the lanky man who was three times governor of Texas and a Cabinet member in two administrations, one Democratic and one Republican. They crossed political and economic lines. But they seemed to agree on Connally.

"He was always big and strong and tall," said Jerry Sparks, 52, who drove an hour to the funeral. "He had a manly look to him."

Added Henry Murphy, who grew up in Wilson County, as did the Connallys: "I've watched him through the years, all the storms he's weathered, and he's always stood tall and proud. He was the kind of man who made Texans proud to be Texans. If you were painting a picture of a true Texan, he's my model."

Connally, 76, died Tuesday of complications of lung disease. He was once considered a serious contender for the presidency after switching from the Democratic Party to the Republican Party in the early 1970s.

Outside Texas, he was best known for being wounded in the 1963 Dallas assassination of President John F. Kennedy. But inside the state, where he was a kingmaker, he represented most of what Texas like about themselves.

"He was bigger than life, a quintessential Texan," said former U.S. House speaker Jim Wright, who represented a Fort Worth congressional district for many years. "John Connally dominated an entire political era in Texas leadership in a way that no one but Lyndon (Johnson) did."

Connally was a protege of former president Johnson, a friend from their school days. Thursday, Johnson's widow, Lady Bird Johnson, memorialized Connally as "strikingly handsome, magnetic, energetic."

At the Capitol, where Connally's body lay in state for two hours, and at the nearby First United Methodist Church, where the service was held, dignitaries and politicians abounded.

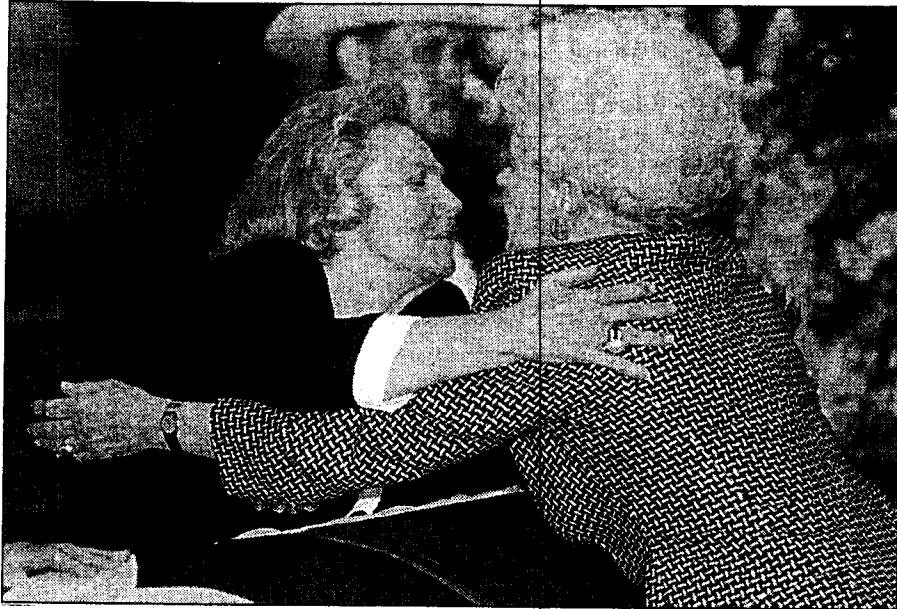
Sometimes the mix was rather strange.

Former president Richard Nixon sat next to Gov. Ann Richards, a Democrat. Some of the state's leading business tycoons — such as Oscar Wyatt, a Houston department store magnate

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NEWSMAKERS

member 'a true Texan'



By Eric Gay, AP
CONDOLENCES: Texas Gov. Ann Richards, right, hugs ex-governor John Connally's widow Nellie over the flag-draped coffin in the House chamber in Austin. Connally, 76, died on Tuesday.

Request for bullet fragments is denied

By Andrea Stone
USA TODAY

A bid to uncover clues in President Kennedy's assassination was buried Thursday as John Connally was laid to rest in Austin.

The former Texas governor, wounded while riding with Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963, took to his grave bullet fragments some say might have revealed a conspiracy to kill the president.

"It's unfortunate that important evidence was not properly analyzed," said Jonathan Meyers of the Assassination Archives and Research Center.

The center wrote to Attorney General Janet Reno asking permission to remove bullet fragments from Connally's wrist and thigh.

But family members Thursday refused an

FBI request to remove the fragments.

Forensic pathologist Cyril Wecht refused to rule out efforts to exhume the remains.

Wecht criticizes the Warren Commission's "single bullet" theory that one bullet passed through both men. Connally also thought he and Kennedy were hit by different bullets.

"If the governor was shot by another bullet, it had to have come from another weapon, another shooter," Wecht says.

But Michael Baden, a medical examiner who headed a congressional assassinations panel in 1978, says no autopsy is needed.

He says fragments removed from Connally's wrist in 1963 support the conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the sole assassin.

"Apart from exciting prurient interest, I don't think there's anything that could be found," says Baden. "It's rather macabre."

who was a pallbearer — lined pews alongside farmers from relatively poor south Texas.

White-hatted Texas Rangers stood quietly as the Rev. Billy Graham delivered the sermon.

Graham says he was at Connally's side when, shortly before his death, Connally raised his hand. "I think he had already glimpsed heaven," Graham said.

The service at the packed church — the same altar where Connally married his wife, Nellie, 30 years ago — grew emotional at times, especially when one of his sons, John Connally III, spoke of

family life.

But Charles Akins, 60, came to celebrate the "dashing, handsome, strong politician" who was brave enough to try to end discrimination in a state that once was a symbol of racial prejudice.

"He ushered in a new spirit," said Akins, who is black.

Said former Texas governor Mark White: "Every governor that follows John has a heritage to live up to." Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen, another Texas Democrat, put it more simply:

"He is a part of our history now."