

# Richard Brevard Russell, Jr.

(1897-1971)

Richard Brevard Russell, Jr., one of the leading statesmen and senators of the 20th century, was born in Winder, Georgia. Russell entered the United States Naval Reserve and later practiced law with his father. In 1920 he was elected as a Democrat to the state house of representatives, where he rose quickly to become its Speaker. At the age of 33, he was elected governor of Georgia, and in 1932 he successfully ran for the U.S. Senate. For 38 years Russell served in the Senate, where he developed a reputation for intelligence, independence, and loyalty.

Russell first gained national prominence when the Senate chose him to preside over hearings on President Harry S. Truman's dismissal of General Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War. Russell's even-handed management of the hearings helped diffuse a national crisis. During his Senate years, Russell held key committee posts, influencing major policy decisions for the nation. He was on the Appropriations Committee during his first term and later served on the Armed Services Committee, of which he was chairman for 16 years. Russell became the Senate's leading authority on military matters, advocating a strong national defense. He also focused on national issues, such as school lunch programs and farm assistance. He was, however, at odds with mainstream America on the issue of civil rights; Russell actively defended the Southern position on segregation and argued that states' rights should prevail in the matter of race relations.

A master parliamentarian who was well versed in Senate rules and practices, Russell preferred to work behind the scenes to influence legislation. In 1963 a reporter for *Newsweek* magazine described him as: "Modest, even shy, in manner, devastatingly skilled in debate, he has a brilliant mind, encyclopedic learning, unrivaled access to pressure points of senatorial power and a gift for using them. He is a senator's senator, the head of the Senate establishment, the most influential member of the United States Senate."<sup>1</sup>

In 1972 the oldest of the Senate office buildings, designed by the architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings and completed in 1909, was officially named in honor of Richard Brevard Russell, Jr. Twenty years later the Richard B. Russell Foundation in Atlanta, Georgia, sought Senate approval to commission and place a seven-foot marble statue of the former senator in the rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building. In seeking this approval, Senator Sam Nunn of Georgia wrote, "It would be a fitting tribute to one of the great personalities in U.S. Senate history."

Artist Frederick Hart of Hume, Virginia, was selected to memorialize Russell. The sculptor worked from photographs of the late senator supplied by his family and the Russell Foundation. In sculpting the work, Hart tried to reflect the strong personality of Senator Russell. The artist stated, "Richard Brevard Russell, Jr. exemplified a tradition in American politics, particularly in the South, of the classical model of gentleman and public servant." Hart added, "In the same spirit, the statue of Richard B. Russell, Jr. is meant to convey both his personable and gracious courtliness as well as evoke the dignified aura of a distinguished public servant."<sup>1</sup>

Vincent Palumbo, master stone carver at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., translated Hart's model into Carrara marble. The piece was unveiled at ceremonies held in the Russell Rotunda on January 24, 1996, with speeches by Vice President Al Gore, Governor Zell Miller of Georgia, and Senators Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, Ted Stevens of Alaska, and Sam Nunn.



Frederick Hart works on the full-size clay model of the Richard Russell statue at his studio in Hume, Virginia, 1995.

(© 1996 Chesley)

*Richard B. Russell Memorial Statue*

**Frederick E. Hart (1943-1999)**

Marble, 1995

84 x 35 $\frac{3}{4}$  x 19 $\frac{1}{4}$  inches (213.4 x 90.8 x 48.9 cm)

Signed (on side of base below subject's left foot): FREDERICK E. HART sc

Carver's mark (on back of base below subject's left foot): VP PALUMBO ca

Gift of the Richard B. Russell Foundation, Inc., 1996

Accepted by the U.S. Senate Commission on Art, 1996

Cat. no. 21.00021



When Lyndon Johnson was majority leader, he observed that in a Senate composed of “whales” and “minnows,” Russell was “the principal whale.”<sup>2</sup> During his career, Russell advised six presidents, especially on issues of national security. His health began to decline in the mid-1960s, though he remained in the Senate until his death in 1971.

Frederick Hart is known for his monumental public commissions and his graceful, figurative sculptures. Born in Atlanta, the artist studied at the University of South Carolina, and the Corcoran School of Art and American University in Washington, D.C. Hart began to learn the skill of stonecutting in 1967 at the National Cathedral. By 1974 he had won an international competition to create a series of sculptures for the main entrance of the cathedral. The works, three life-size statues and three relief panels, later came to be known as the *Creation Sculptures*. In 1984 Hart’s bronze figurative sculpture entitled *Three Soldiers* was dedicated as part of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. Other notable works by the artist include *The Cross of the Millennium*, a clear acrylic resin sculpture simultaneously representing the birth, death, and resurrection of Christ; the *James Earl Carter Presidential Statue*, a larger-than-life bronze on the grounds of the Georgia State Capitol in Atlanta; the Fauquier County Veterans Memorial in Virginia; and a bronze portrait bust of James Webb at the Smithsonian Institution’s National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C. The artist is further represented in

the Senate by a bronze bust of Senator Strom Thurmond of South Carolina (p. 366). Although Hart was awarded a third Senate commission for a marble bust of former Vice President Dan Quayle (p. 312), he died in 1999 before he could complete the sculpture.



The Armed Forces Color Guard at the unveiling ceremony for the *Richard B. Russell Memorial Statue*, 1996.

(U.S. Senate Photographic Studio)

**Right:**

The rotunda of the Russell Senate Office Building provides a majestic setting for the *Richard B. Russell Memorial Statue*.

(2000 photograph)



RICHARD B. RUSSELL, JR.  
SENATOR FROM GEORGIA  
1933 — 1971