

## **News from U.S. Rep. John Spratt (D-SC)**

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### **A Tribute to Joe Rainey**

**By Congressman John Spratt**

Sometime last week, Joe Rainey slipped quietly away, dying in the wing chair by his kitchen window, alone at his home in Sharon. Joe was young, only 51, but for a while, before falling into poor health and personal problems, his star shone brightly. Among his life's achievements is a project called Historic Brattonsville.

Brattonsville, by the 1970s, was becoming a ghost town. The old structures clustered around the village were at the tipping point, almost beyond repair. The architect who restored the Hezekiah Alexander house in Charlotte came to look at the Homestead in Brattonsville, and recommended that it be razed or posted as a hazard to the public. In his judgment, it was too far gone to save.

Two individuals defied that fate and kept Brattonsville from self-destructing. One was Sam Mendenhall; the other, Joe Rainey. An avid student of South Carolina history, and a Bratton descendant, Joe was finishing Wofford just as Sam Mendenhall was becoming focused on saving Brattonsville. Sam was a state representative and later senator at a time when the legislative delegation wrote the county's budget in an annual "supply bill." Each year, Sam was able to slip something for Brattonsville into the supply bill. One year, it was tin to replace the roofing; the next, glazing to replace the windows. Sam found that the oversight of these projects was more than he could handle, so he inserted funds in the supply bill for a director---modest funds, but enough to hire a young college graduate named Joseph H. Rainey.

Joe had more than a touch of flamboyance, but he understood Brattonsville's potential. It could be a true restoration, built around original structures, and not a glamorized re-creation, but to be genuine and win grants, there had to be painstaking archeology and hard evidence. Joe diligently produced it, and on a shoestring budget, he carried out the restoration of Colonel William Bratton's old log house, of Revolutionary vintage, and the homestead later built by his son, John S. Bratton and Harriet Rainey Bratton, Joe Rainey's forebear.

Brattonsville had a meager budget, but it was augmented by supporters like Ed Allen, who was then York County Supervisor. Carpenters were needed, and when Ed Allen spotted one at the York County Prison Camp, he offered him the chance to avoid road

work and do carpentry at Brattonsville instead. The porch on the homestead was falling in and needed replacement with strong, weather-resistant materials. Ed Allen found them among the red oak the county used to build bridges. The porch of the homestead still stands, built of these sturdy boards.

Improvising in this manner, Joe brought Brattonsville back to life; and as the project took shape, people saw its potential and the visitors increased. No one was more ardent about Brattonsville or Joe Rainey than my mother, Jane Bratton Spratt, and no one treated her more kindly than Joe. In December 1980, her eye was bandaged and she was all but bed-ridden, but she told me emphatically that she wanted to see the Christmas decorations at Brattonsville. That night, Joe met us at the door, resplendent in his swallowed coat and silk vest. He took mother by one arm, and I took the other, and we walked her through the homestead and the Revolutionary house together. Within a month, she died of cancer, but I have always felt she had her last wish.

The county council that took office following home rule was not as enthusiastic about funding Brattonsville as Sam Mendenhall had been, but the council found that people throughout the county were supportive, and Brattonsville won a niche in the county's budget.

In 1981, Joe Rainey moved on. His successor, Wade Fairey, finished the restoration and made Brattonsville what it is today. But Joe Rainey and Sam Mendenhall saved Brattonsville from self-destruction and moved the project to the take-off stage.

Joe Rainey went from Brattonsville to the set of *Chiefs*, a television mini-series being filmed in Chester. He turned out to be a natural for art production and set design work. *Chiefs* led to other assignments and eventually his own set production firm in Hollywood. Over the next ten years, Joe did *Go Tell It on the Mountains* and *The Days and Nights of Molly Dodd*, both of which were nominated for Emmies. He was assistant art director for the original "Terminator," starring Arnold Schwarzenegger. He did *Spooner* for Disney and "*Bayou Country*" with Burt Reynolds, and a special on Elvis Presley's early years. He had a script written and held the hope one day of doing a thriller based in Sharon, the Rafe King murder trial.

Joe was an only child, born to doting parents, Margaret and Joe Hunter Rainey, and he was equally as devoted to them. When first his father and then his mother became ill, he flew home frequently and let his business slide. He returned to Sharon for longer and longer stays, partly to recover from medical problems of his own, and his latter years became painful, both for him and for his friends.

We dwell on those years only to wish that we could have helped him more, but we remember his energy and enthusiasm, and all he did that was productive and positive. Joe Rainey died long before his time; but he lived a full life, and lives on in all of us, as one of those rare individuals we were privileged to know and will never forget.

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