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## Pioneering Civil Rights Leader's Story On View at the Bullock Museum

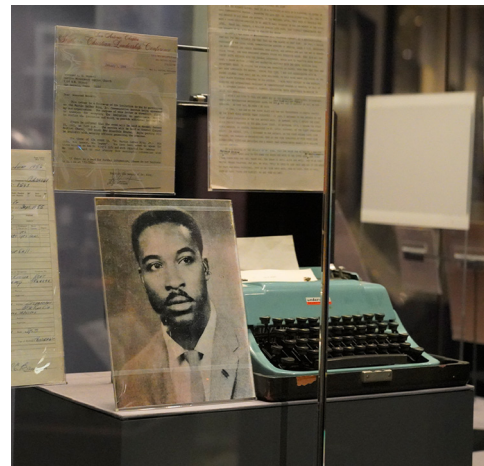
A collection of artifacts tells the story of L.E. Bennett's lifelong fight against segregation

**AUGUST 1, 2023 (AUSTIN, TX)** — Artifacts telling the story of San Antonio civil rights leader Reverend Dr. L.E. Bennett and the desegregation of Southwestern Bell Telephone Company are now on view at the Bullock Texas State History Museum. The artifacts are on loan from Bennett's daughter, Sharon Bennett, and his family.

"In the grand Story of Texas, it is exciting to bring personal stories to light that reflect the positive difference one dedicated and determined individual can make, overcoming the obstacles that might be set in their path," said Margaret Koch, Director of the Bullock Museum. "L.E. Bennett's story is one that we hope continues to inspire us all."

L.E. Bennett joined the Southwestern Bell Telephone Company in 1956 as a house serviceman, the company's term for janitors. This was one of the only types of jobs in the company that were open to people of color. Bennett soon joined the Communication Workers of America Colored People's Union, the segregated arm of the Communication Workers of America. Bennett was elected Chapter President in 1961 and immediately began a campaign to get Southwestern Bell to open more positions to people of color. He wrote hundreds of letters in support of employees applying to better-paying positions that were closed to them because of their race.

Despite hostility from his white counterparts in the C.W.A, Bennett continued to press for desegregation, both within Southwestern Bell and the Communication Workers of America. Bennett wrote numerous letters to national civic leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and then-Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy. Bennett's efforts paid off, and Southwestern Bell finally opened the better-paying jobs to people of color in 1963. Bennett took a job as a lineman that winter, after eight years of being denied a promotion, and became the first Black lineman in Texas. Despite continued discrimination and racism, Bennett rose through the company, retiring in 1986 as a manager overseeing a five-state district.



Bennett continued to serve his community after his retirement. He was ordained in the Baptist Church in 1988 and served as Pastor to the Galilee Missionary Baptist Church in San Antonio for 14 years.

Artifacts from L.E. Bennett's life currently on view include his typewriter, which he nicknamed "Old Faithful." Bennett used it during his letter writing campaigns to Southwestern Bell leadership and national civic leaders and also typed hundreds of letters for Union members seeking better jobs in

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the company. Also on view is a copy of a speech Bennett gave as part of a 1986 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebration hosted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

The artifacts are on display in the Bullock Museum's third-floor Equal Rights gallery, which tells the story of Texans fighting for political, social, and economic equality in the face of immense obstacles. Bennett's daughter, Sharon, hopes the display of the artifacts will bring the story to a wider audience who might not know the story of how her father's work helped to bring about change.

"I know my father would be so pleased and appreciative that the museum felt his actions were worthy of an exhibit to honor him. Our family is proud, and our hearts are deeply touched," said Sharon Bennett, L. E. Bennett's daughter.

L.E. Bennett's typewriter and other artifacts are now on view in the Bullock Museum's third-floor gallery. For more information about the Museum, visit [TheStoryofTexas.com](http://TheStoryofTexas.com).

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Artifacts courtesy of Sharon Bennett and family.

The Bullock Museum, a division of the Texas State Preservation Board, is funded by Museum members, donors, and patrons, the Texas State History Museum Foundation, and the State of Texas.

### **ABOUT THE BULLOCK MUSEUM**

The Bullock Texas State History Museum, a division of the State Preservation Board and an accredited institution of the American Alliance of Museums, illuminates and celebrates Texas history, people, and culture. With dynamic, award-winning exhibitions, educational programming for all ages, and an IMAX® theater with the largest screen in Texas, the Museum collaborates with more than 700 museums, libraries, archives and individuals across the world to bring the Story of Texas to life.

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