

Lee Slater Overman

(1854–1930)

Born in Salisbury, North Carolina, Lee Slater Overman taught school before turning to law and politics. He established a law practice in Salisbury and later was elected to the North Carolina house of representatives for five terms, serving as Speaker in 1893. A Democratic candidate in 1895 for an uncompleted term in the U.S. Senate, Overman lost to the Republican/Populist candidate. Eight years later, however, he succeeded in a second bid and served in the Senate from 1903 until his death in 1930.

Overman was a tireless advocate for North Carolina interests, particularly for the state's cotton industry. As a senior member of the Judiciary Committee during World War I, he shepherded several administration policies through the Senate, including President Woodrow Wilson's proposals to impose wartime speech and press controls. He also sponsored a measure—popularly known as the Overman bill—to expand presidential power during the war. Over the course of his 27 years in the Senate, Overman served on 16 committees, including Judiciary and Appropriations. In 1913 he led a politically sensitive investigation of President Wilson's charges that lobbyists for special interests were working to undermine the administration's tariff reform agenda. Although it found no evidence of malfeasance, Overman's Judiciary subcommittee exposed extensive lobbying activity, a finding that Wisconsin Senator Robert M. La Follette, Sr., likened to a "bomb that blew the lid off the congressional lobby."¹

Unfailingly polite in demeanor and nonpartisan in his friendships, Overman was widely esteemed by his Senate colleagues. As a final tribute following his death, they conducted his funeral service in the Senate Chamber.

This portrait of Lee Slater Overman, donated by the senator's family in 1996, is unsigned and undated. The painting had been in the family since its completion early in the 20th century, although no information exists regarding its acquisition. Senator Overman had bequeathed the painting to his daughter, Grace Overman Snow, who upon her death left the work to her son, Lee Overman Snow, and his daughter, Catherine Overman Snow. Following formal acceptance of the painting in 1996, it was hung outside the Senate Democratic leader's suite in the Capitol.



Catherine Snow, great-granddaughter of Lee Slater Overman, and family friend Colonel Wharton McGreer, unveil the portrait of the senator, 1998.

(U.S. Senate Photographic Studio)

Lee Slater Overman

Unknown artist

Oil on canvas, date unknown
39 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches (100.6 x 62.2 cm)

Unsigned

Gift of Lee Overman Snow and Catherine Overman Snow (grandson and great-granddaughter of Lee Slater Overman), 1996

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

Cat. no. 32.00032

