

Texas' Fourth District Has 3 Certainties: Death, Taxes and Re-election of Rayburn

BY BESS STEPHENSON.

BONHAM, Jan. 31.—One of Texas' major contributions to Washington in this time of crisis is a man who went to Congress in 1913 and has kept going back so regularly that some of the children around here mistake him for their uncle, with no blood connection to go on.

He's Sam Rayburn of Bonham, Speaker of the House. You can see why children, in their early years of political consciousness, sometimes get confused. They hear a great deal about "Uncle Sam." They hear more about Sam Rayburn.

One child in Bonham is said to have given a fairly wierd, but wholly natural, answer when teacher asked who was the father of this country. The child said it was her Uncle Sam and that daddy voted for him.

The habit of voting for Sam Rayburn has been strong in this district for 30 years and strong in Fannin County since 1906. Rayburn was 23 years old in 1906 and that's when he made up his mind to become exactly what he is today —Speaker of the House.

Began in Logical Way.

He began in the logical way. He ran for the State Legislature. He won the race handily. Since then, Fannin County has been one up on the rest of the world. It's known that three things were certain — death, taxes and Sam Rayburn's election.

His almost 30 years in Congress have brought quiet pride to Rayburn's home town. They have been without those embarrassing elements that jar the constituents of more flamboyant Congressmen.

Rayburn has never been flamboyant or picturesque or even colorful. He's been sane and sensible. He is the type of Congressman referred to as "a valued wheel horse" and "the great harmonizer."

He is so orthodox in appearance (not Congressional orthodox, but everyday man-in-business) that it is difficult to describe him. He is short, stocky, bald, conservative in speech and dress. He makes a good, business-like talk, but without pyrotechnics.

Years ago, his friends were complaining that Rayburn was such a steady, dependable, unspectacular Congressman he did himself an injustice. They said he had no notions how to make a name for himself. He was doing a swell job, they said, yet the people of Texas (outside his own district) never heard or saw his name in the papers.

An All-American.

Well Rayburn finally did make a name for himself and a very good name. It's what you might call all-American. It came as no surprise to his home town generally, but did to some of his friends.

Bonham has been prepared for Rayburn's success, has always expected him to rise to power and authority. He was annoyingly good at history and government when he still wore knee pants and he had determined on his career before other kids his age knew a Congressman from a seed catalog.

They speak of him now as they always have. They say he is valuable in Washington, but is still a "good, plain man."

When he comes home (and he does every chance he gets) they show their friendliness by leaving him free to rest and relax in cowboy boots on his farm or in house slippers at the old Rayburn home.

Rayburn has two sisters and two brothers who live in Bonham, a sister and brother in Dallas and another brother who lives at Dodd City, near Bonham.

Headquarters for the whole affectionate close-knit family is the

Editor's Note — Texans are playing leading roles in the Nation's war councils as well as on the Nation's battle fields, whether at sea on the ground or in the air. This is the first of a series, telling who those Texans are. Illustrations for this particular article appear in the rotogravure section of this issue.

Rayburn farm home two miles west of Bonham on the Sherman Road. It's the farm their parents, the late Mr. and Mrs. William Rayburn, bought in 1913, the year Sam went to Congress for the first time.

Born in Tennessee Log House.

The house is a big, comfortable, white-columned house, shaded by giant liveoaks and a pear tree, but hanging on the wall of the family living room is a picture of a log house in Tennessee.

Sam Rayburn was born in a Tennessee log house. It was fairly elaborate for a log cabin, having five rooms and a closed-in porch for the washtub on Saturday night, but only the main middle room is still standing. That's what the Rayburns took a picture of on a Tennessee vacation trip 12 years ago.

The picture shows it positively humble and presidential-looking.

The Rayburns moved to Texas when the children were quite small. Sam (eighth in a brood of 11) grew up near Windham and went to school there. He got his diploma and went to Mayo College at Commerce (forerunner of East Texas State Teachers College).

After two years of college he taught school four years.

At 23 he ran for the Legislature and won his first political campaign. At 28 he was speaker of the House at Austin. He won the speakership in a memorable contest and was acclaimed as the youngest Speaker Texas ever had.

Has Added Two Counties.

Rayburn spent six years in the Legislature, took advantage of his opportunity to get a law degree at the University of Texas while he worked. His law shingle was still fresh wood, though, when he ran for office again.

He bought himself a Model T (his first car) to stump through Fannin, Grayson, Rains, Hunt and Collins Counties and ran for Congress. His district does now, but didn't then, include Rockwall and Kaufman Counties.

Rayburn won the race for Congress over eight opponents. He has been having opponents and winning more and more handily ever since. At the end of this year, he will have been 30 years in Congress and that is almost exactly half his lifetime. He was 60 early in January.

As Speaker he is a far more important Congressman now than he was 15 or 20 years ago. He is, as a matter of fact, the most potent voice in the lower House.

His habits of life haven't changed much, though. In Washington, he still occupies the kitchenless bachelor quarters at Anchorage Apartments where he has lived for 15 years. His three-room apartment is on Connecticut Avenue, three miles from the Capitol.

No Left Over Problems.

He rises at 7 o'clock every morning, has breakfast sent over from a restaurant across the street. He gets to his office about 9 every day, has a rule for himself which doesn't always work out. The rule is "get your work done between sunup and sundown."

The rule is said to work better for Rayburn than it does for many less harried men in Washington, who take their work more fretfully. He seldom has left-over problems to

take home with him in the evening. He rarely misses his Sunday outings.

Rayburn's Sunday outings consist of driving at random through the Virginia countryside. He chats with farmers, with anyone who seems to have a nice farm or good stock on the place. Sometimes he goes fishing.

At home in Bonham, the Speaker is a happy farmer-cattleman. It's hard to tell which Rayburn owns what, because they all seem to work for one another, but the Congressman's chief interests the first day home from Washington are the barn and the 750-acre farm northeast of Bonham.

On the 150-acre farm at the home place and a rented farm up the road the Rayburns raise cotton, corn, oats, chickens, turkeys and registered Jerseys. On the ranch, they have registered polled Herefords.

Interested in All of It.

Sam Rayburn is interested in all the farm and ranch enterprises. Before Congress went on a 12-month basis, the Speaker was Squire Rayburn to his neighbors.

More by chance than by earnest endeavor, Rayburn is a collector of watches and of Robert E. Lee books and photographs. Robert E. Lee is his favorite history book hero, with Thomas Jefferson second. An autographed photograph of Franklin D. Roosevelt (his favorite current day hero) shares the wall of Rayburn's home place study with three Lee photographs.

Rayburn has collected watches since high school graduation. The one he carries is the one he got from his colleagues at Austin when he became the precocious Speaker of the Texas House. Most of the big moments in his life since have been marked by the gift of a new watch.

At Bonham, brothers Tom and Will run the farms, and Miss Lou Rayburn (according to her approving brothers) runs the family. Tom Rayburn was married a few months ago and lives on the place adjoining the home farm.

Other brothers and sisters are Jim Rayburn, retired mail clerk at Dodd City; Dick Rayburn, with an oil company in Dallas; Mrs. S. E. Bartley of Bonham, and Mrs. W. A. Thomas, wife of the collector of internal revenue at Dallas.

Third Best at Forty-two.

Thomas, the Speaker's brother-in-law, is able to appraise Rayburn's one parlor game—forty-two. W. A. Thomas invented the game and Will Rayburn (the inventor says) is the second best player in the world. He thinks Sam is only fair, possibly the third best player in the world.

Once, his sister confides, Sam Rayburn had a full and formal name with a middle in it. He dropped the Samuel (?) for plain Sam when he ran for office the first time. It's in the family code not to give him away now. The abandoned middle name is a secret.

Rayburn's Congressional record in recent years is the stuff of which history is made. His name is attached to the securities act, the stock exchange and the utilities holding company act, three of the most controversial pieces of legislation the New Deal administration has put through. They were enacted before he became the House leader.

Since war overshadowed domestic issues, he has been what Congress needed most and what he has always been, "the valued wheel-horse" and "the great harmonizer."

He has succeeded far more often than he has failed throughout public life. He was puzzled when a Saturday Evening Post article about him said "he was 'successful, though not brilliant in Congress.'" He wondered what more you could ask of a man than success.