

ALLA DELPHIA CLARY:  
THE SPEAKER'S SECRETARY

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## **Alla Delphia Clary: The Speaker's Secretary**

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This biographical study of Alla Clary, who was Texas Congressman Sam Rayburn's secretary for more than forty years, portrays a woman who witnessed major historical events during the first half of the twentieth century. This research examines Clary personal life and her career in Washington, D.C. Her personal diaries as well as materiel from the Rayburn Papers, a collection located at the Center for American History at the University of Texas, helped gain a clearer picture of Alla Clary. The ultimate goal of this thesis is to give visibility to someone whose significance has been generally overlooked in traditional historical investigation.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### GROWING UP IN TEXAS

Like so many other families that migrated to Texas, that of Alla Clary, a native Texan herself, had its origins in North carolina and Tennessee, and like that of their new Texas neighbors, the roots of the Clary family are found in post Civil War developments. Although the war ended the curse of slavery, it also wrought destruction that truly brought the South to its knees. As war weary soldiers returned home, they were often greeted by destitute families who were left with little more than the hope that Johnny would indeed come marching home. In desperation, many began to look towards the setting sun for their future, thus beginning the great post-Civil War westward trek. For more than a generation following the close of this country's bloody debacle, opportunities in Texas offered hope for a new beginning to throngs of emigrants.

Lured by tales of rich, black farmland, Northeast Texas became a popular destination for displaced Southerners. Settlers tended to migrate to areas already populated by friends or family, and this black land became the new Caanan for many pilgrims from Tennessee. In fact, so many people

came from Tennessee that the area from Gainesville east to Texarkana was commonly referred to as the "Tennessee Colony."<sup>1</sup> The Clary family of Bell Buckle County, Tennessee, was among those newcomers who came to the state seeking a new life.

Benjamin Francis Clary served in the 37th North Carolina Infantry, and although wounded near Petersburg, Virginia, survived the war. After his discharge, he moved to Tennessee along with his widowed mother and two sisters in hopes of a brighter future. He met Miss Margaret Jane Norvell of Bell Buckle County, Tennessee, and married her in 1880.<sup>2</sup> Clary was building a successful business as a tanner when Margaret developed a prolonged illness. The affliction prompted a local doctor to suggest a change of climate as the best therapy for Margaret's future health. Following the doctor's advice, Benjamin, Margaret, Uncas (their two-year-old son), Margaret's parents, several sisters, and one brother moved to Gainesville, Texas in 1883.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bob Slagle, interview by Anthony Champagne (17 October 1980), 17, transcript, box 3U102, Transcript, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter cited as Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>2</sup> Alla Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," Unfinished manuscript of history of Clary family, personal papers of Dan Bates, Mart, Texas, 12-13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

Life in Texas was more rugged than the families had expected. Margaret's parents, the Norvells, were unhappy in Gainesville and shortly moved to Missouri, leaving Margaret and her young family behind. There was little time to dwell on the loneliness caused by separation, however, as a daughter, Margaret Virginia, was born in 1884.<sup>4</sup> When wanderlust struck Benjamin Clary again the family moved to McKinney, Texas where a second son, William Franklin, was born in 1888. The following year, on August 26, 1889, Alla Delphia became the newest member of the Clary family. Snuggled in their cozy frame house on South Tennessee Street, the family lived a comfortable life. Since Clary owned a team and a wagon suitable for hauling, he supported the family by working as a drayman. However, there were too many saloons in McKinney to suit the patriarch of the Clary family. As a teetotaling Methodist he disapproved of the consumption of alcohol by others and determined that his children would not be raised in such an environment. Garnering financial aid from a brother and brother-in-law, Clary purchased an eighty acre farm seventeen miles northwest of McKinney near the village of Prosper.<sup>5</sup>

In March 1891, the Clary family moved to their new home on the farm three miles northwest of Prosper. The house

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<sup>4</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 13.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1-2.

that greeted the family was small and unattractive. The gray clapboard consisted of two small rooms downstairs with a loft upstairs. Furniture was sparse and clothes were hung on nails pounded into the walls for just such a purpose. Light was provided by coal oil lamps and there were, of course, no indoor toilet facilities. Outside, the front porch was not covered while the shallow well was so full of minerals that its water was not fit to drink. Water for drinking or cooking had to be hauled from a neighbor's artesian wells.<sup>6</sup>

As elsewhere in Northeast Texas, cotton was the money crop on the Clary farm. However, the family also grew corn, wheat and oats. A large garden supplied fresh produce during the growing season and plenty of preserved foods during the winter months. Although the farm was never able to provide a prosperous existence for the Clary's, the family lived as well as most of their neighbors.<sup>7</sup>

There was joy mixed with grief for the family after the move to the farm. Emma Catherine, known as Kate, was born in 1891, but the following year brought the death of four year old William Franklin. "Little Willie," as the family called him, was stricken with diphtheria and by the time the doctor arrived, it was too late to save him. Alla and Kate

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 5-8.

<sup>7</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 4.

were also ill, but treatment was administered in time for them to recover. Grief over the loss was assuaged somewhat when Daniel Barnard, the final addition to the Clary family, was born in 1894.<sup>8</sup>

Year in and year out, life on the farm followed a familiar routine. In the fall, land was prepared for spring sowing. Crops were planted in the spring that would be harvested in the summer and fall. In late summer it was time to pick cotton. Everyone in the family who was old enough to carry a sack was expected to participate in this backbreaking work. When the Clary crop was gathered, the family worked for some neighbors to earn extra money.<sup>9</sup> Picking cotton in the hot, Texas sun was an unforgettable experience. As they worked their way down seemingly endless fluffy, white rows while enduring a life of sweat, dirt, and blood from pricked fingers, many a young Texan vowed to find other lifetime pursuits.

Uncas Clary was a bright, ambitious young man who wanted much more than a future spent on the farm. He probably was loath to list his occupation as "farm laborer" on the 1900 Federal Census.<sup>10</sup> Shortly thereafter, he took a

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<sup>8</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 10, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>10</sup> United States Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900 Population-Texas, roll # 1621, e.d.19, sheet 8 line 80-86,

Civil Service Examination and soon received an appointment as a mail carrier. The rural delivery route was twenty-six miles long which he traveled by horseback, buggy, or on a bicycle which he had purchased. Apparently realizing his plans for the future could not be realized on a mail carrier's salary, he offered his services to the Continental State Bank which had opened in Prosper. After delivering his mail in the mornings, he worked for no wages at the bank in the afternoons to learn the banking business. In 1906, he resigned his mail carrier position to work full time in the bank.<sup>11</sup>

Although Alla did not start school until she was eight years old, learning was very important to the Clary family. Margaret and Benjamin Clary could both read and write, but their dreams for the future included a good education for their children.<sup>12</sup> Before a country school opened near the farm in 1897, Margaret taught Alla to read. As was typical of the turn-of-the-century rural population, Alla walked the three miles to school every day unless muddy roads made riding horseback a necessity. A railroad built through Prosper sparked more growth in that small town and by 1902,

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enumerated 13 June 1900.

<sup>11</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 18-20.

<sup>12</sup> Twelfth Census of the United States: 1900 Population-Texas, roll # 1621, e.d. 19, sheet 8, line 80-86, enumerated 13 June 1900.



the community had grown large enough to support a public high school which Alla attended.<sup>13</sup>

After Alla's graduation from high school in 1907, her brother Uncas offered to send her to college. Alla was eager for the opportunity to continue her education. In the fall of 1907 she traveled twenty miles to Denton, Texas where she enrolled in North Texas State Normal College, now known as the University of North Texas. She shared a room at Mrs. Spillman's boarding house with a life-long friend from Prosper, Bessie Jo Settle. Mrs. Spillman was Bessie Jo's aunt, so a feeling of family ties kept the girls from being homesick.<sup>14</sup>

Clary enjoyed college and took an active roll in extra-curricular activities. She was a member of the Current Literature Club, the Collin County Club, sang soprano in the Treble Clef Club, and played for the Red Wings, one of the girl's basketball teams.<sup>15</sup> Her interest in organizations, singing, and sports was not limited to her college years; she would enjoy these leisure pastimes her entire life.

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<sup>13</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.

<sup>14</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 25-27.

<sup>15</sup> The Yucca, III, published by the students of North Texas State Normal College, University of North Texas at Denton, 141; The Yucca, V, 115, 124, 135.

Even at the age of nineteen, Alla had an appearance that could best be described as "formidable." She was attractive in a strong, stern sort of way that characterized many women of the era. Photographs of the period reveal a young woman with penetrating eyes and a mouth that slightly drooped at the corners, giving her a serious, determined look. Her college senior portrait shows a young woman dressed in a lovely, formal gown peering out through her spectacles with a steady gaze that seemed to say, "This is who I am, and I am comfortable with that."<sup>16</sup> She was above average in size, by early twentieth-century standards. She stood almost five feet eight inches tall, had a large frame, and wore a size nine shoe. Yet, it was her friendliness, zest for living, and forthright manner which made her truly distinctive. The quotation centered under her picture in the 1908 volume of the college yearbook, The Yucca, is quite descriptive: "None like her, none."<sup>17</sup> Alla Clary was an original.

At the end of the spring term, Alla returned to the farm for the summer. In the fall of 1908, she resumed her studies in Denton. Shortly after her return to college, her brother, Uncas, bought a house in Prosper and moved the entire family to town. After two years of working full-time

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<sup>16</sup> The Yucca, V, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 53.

at the bank, Uncas was beginning to see an improvement in his fortunes.<sup>18</sup>

Alla certainly enjoyed the first Christmas holidays she spent in town. The new house was a big improvement over the cramped quarters on the farm, and, best of all, everything in town was within walking distance, so she could attend the numerous parties and other celebrations scheduled for the Christmas season.<sup>19</sup>

Winter soon turned to spring and with the end of the school term, Alla again returned home to the house in Prosper. Summer passed as Texas summers normally do, with seemingly endless days of torturing heat. Household chores kept Alla busy, but she was also sending applications for employment as a teacher to various school boards. Her younger sister, Kate, had graduated from high school the previous May and was also ready to attend college. Uncas could not afford the financial burden of supporting two sisters in school, so the three siblings decided Alla should teach for a year to help with the cost of her education.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 20, 28. Six years later, Uncas became the provider for the family. In 1914, Benjamin Clary was kicked by a horse and spent the rest of his life as an invalid, unable to walk.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 30.

After numerous disappointments, Alla was finally hired for a teaching position in the small community of Good Hope, five miles west of Prosper. The work was challenging, but Alla enjoyed it. Unfortunately, an ongoing dispute between her and a school trustee led to her resignation before the end of the school year. Alla believed the trustee did not like the fact that she went home to Prosper every week-end, but given her affinity for "plain talking," as she called it, it is probable that the dispute was likely a personality clash.<sup>21</sup>

Alla joined her sister, Kate, at Denton the following September and received her diploma in the spring of 1911.<sup>22</sup> After her graduation from North Texas State Normal College, she applied for a teaching position in Prosper and was awarded a contract to teach fourth grade. Two years later, she moved to Celina, Texas, a small town about six miles north of Prosper, where she taught algebra and physics for the sum of fifty dollars per month. After one year of science and math, Celina held no more mysteries and Alla was ready for a change.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

<sup>22</sup> Alla Clary, interview by Sarah McClendon, (3 July 1949), 1, transcript, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. Hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>23</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 32-34.

By the fall of 1914, she was in Lometa, Texas. Lometa is a small town in Central Texas between Brownwood and Temple. The sixth grade classroom in which she taught was located in a temporary building, which isolated her from everyone else. Alla also felt a sense of isolation just living in Lometa. The terrain surrounding the town was very different from that to which she was accustomed. It was rocky, rugged country where farmers raised sheep and cattle rather than cotton. At the end of the school term, Alla wasted no time in returning to Prosper.<sup>24</sup>

During the summer she heard of a teaching vacancy that interested her. The job was seventy miles from home in Petty, Texas, but it seemed ideal to Alla. Petty was a black land farming community, which gave it a certain familiarity to Alla rather than the altogether foreign soil she had found in Lampassas County. In addition, the position paid sixty dollars a month, a ten dollar raise from her previous salary. Alla readily accepted the position and was off on a new adventure.<sup>25</sup>

Unfortunately, the situation was not as ideal as Alla had at first thought. The previous teacher had been discharged and Alla soon discovered she had landed in the

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 34-36; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 2, Oral History Collection.

vortex of a simmering town dispute. At the end of the term, she was the latest casualty in the community free-for-all. Alla packed her bags and returned to her previous position in Lometa for the fall term of 1916.<sup>26</sup>

That fall passed uneventfully for Alla. Momentous events occurring in Europe must have seemed very far removed from Lometa, Texas. President Woodrow Wilson was re-elected with a campaign slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War," and many people wanted to believe that the United States would not become involved in a foreign conflict. To help pass the time, Alla and her roommate, another teacher, rented a typewriter and practiced touch typing.<sup>27</sup>

German attacks on American shipping finally dissolved the uneasy neutrality which had held this country in its grasp. On April 2, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson addressed a joint session of Congress. He called on Americans to respond to a higher power, "to fight for the ultimate peace of the world," and to make the world "safe for democracy." "America," he said, "is privileged to spend her blood and her might for the principle that gave her birth and happiness and the peace which she has treasured."<sup>28</sup> The war

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<sup>26</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 36.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, IX (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 131-132.

resolution passed in spite of opposition both within and without Congress. The United States had become an active participant in a global war.

As World War I raged, dramatic social changes were occurring within the United States, particularly among women. Continual suffragist agitation for the vote finally resulted in the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment which was ratified in 1920. There were changes in the workplace, as well. More and more women filled vacancies created by men who had entered military service or obtained more lucrative positions in war-related industry. Women entered occupations previously closed to them and also expanded their involvement in more traditional fields of employment. A huge demand for office workers in the War Department and other government bureaus created job opportunities for women in Washington, D.C. The excitement and allure of the nation's capital plus the incentive of "high wages," was a magnet for many young women.<sup>29</sup>

The thought of working in Washington certainly piqued Alla Clary's interest. After eight years, she was as tired of teaching as she was of her fifty dollar a month salary.

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<sup>29</sup> Sara M. Evans, Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America, (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 171; Houston Post, 4 September 1956. The War Department, for example, was paying ninety dollars per month to its clerical employees.

She was ready for a change, so she took the Civil Service Examination.<sup>30</sup> She returned to Prosper at the end of the school term and worked as a bookkeeper at the bank with her brother while she anxiously waited for word about her new career.<sup>31</sup> In reality, she did not have to wait too long; in July, 1918, she received notice of a Civil Service appointment to the War Department in Washington, D.C.<sup>32</sup>

Although she had always been barred from voting because of her gender, Clary had always been interested in politics. Both her father and older brother, Uncas, were involved in the local political scene and were also active supporters of the current representative from the Fourth Congressional District, Sam Rayburn.<sup>33</sup> When Clary received word of her appointment to the War Department, her brother Uncas advised her, "Political influence is not supposed to have anything to do with a Civil Service position, but it would not hurt to know your congressman."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 2, Oral History Collection; McKinney Courier-Gazette, 30 October 1949.

<sup>31</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 38-39. Clary's manuscript states that her brother was now president of the bank in Prosper. Although he did eventually become bank president, The 1920 Texas Census lists him as a cashier at that time.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>33</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 3, Oral History Collection; Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 42.

<sup>34</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 3, Oral History Collection.



After waiting for what seemed like an eternity for the appointment, Alla was suddenly nervous. She was almost twenty-nine years old and wanted a change, but her usual sense of adventure gave way to timidity at the thought of moving so far away. Uncas reassured her by saying she should take advantage of the opportunity to see Washington, stay six months, and then, come home if she was unhappy. With her brother's support and advice to bolster her, Alla decided to take the chance. On July 23, 1918, she boarded a train in Dallas, and was soon on her way to Washington, D.C., and a challenging new life.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 39.

## CHAPTER TWO

### A NEW LIFE

Congressman Sam Rayburn stood in the midst of the crowd at Washington's Union Station waiting for the arrival of the train from St. Louis. Since the beginning of the war, the depot had been congested with throngs of people, and today was no exception. He was there to meet a Miss Alla Clary, the younger sister of a political supporter back home in the Fourth Congressional District. Uncas Clary had sent a telegram asking Rayburn to meet his sister at the train station, as she knew no one in Washington.<sup>1</sup> The Clary family hailed from Collin County, where, in the 1918 primary, Rayburn had garnered an impressive eighty percent of the votes, a trend he would like to continue.<sup>2</sup> Rayburn dutifully accepted this role of official greeter as it

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<sup>1</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 3-4, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection; Alla Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," Unfinished manuscript of history of Clary family, personal papers of Dan Bates, Mart, Texas, 40.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," M.A. thesis, Texas Woman's University (1985), 124.

behooved him, from a political standpoint, to do this small favor for a concerned brother. It would not hurt his reputation in the district when people heard he was never too busy for his constituents. Besides, it would be nice for him to talk to someone from "back home."<sup>3</sup>

That is not to say he was homesick, for there were a number of Texans in Washington. In addition to congressional members, there were several Texans in important positions in the government. Albert Burleson was Postmaster General; Thomas Gregory was Attorney General; David Huston was Secretary of Agriculture; and, of course, the enigmatic Colonel Edward M. House served as Wilson's special advisor.<sup>4</sup> The Lone Star State was well represented.

It was 1918 and Rayburn was assured of winning a fourth term in Congress after soundly trouncing his Democratic opponent in the recent primary.<sup>5</sup> Several members of Congress, including Texans Marvin Jones and Tom Connally, had resigned their seats to join the army. Rayburn, who was thirty-five years old and with no previous military experience, decided to stay where he thought he could do the

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<sup>3</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 3-4, Oral History Collection; Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 40.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1975), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," 124.

most good. He was assigned to the House Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee. Although he did not have the seniority for a chairmanship, he had the trust of chairman William Adamson and later, Thetus Wilrette Sims, who both depended on him for much detail work.<sup>6</sup>

The outbreak of the war created masses of legislation for deliberation. For Rayburn, however, the most important would be the War Risk Insurance Bill. This bill replaced the old system of veteran's pensions and gave benefits to American servicemen or their families for death or disability while serving in the armed forces. Rayburn shepherded the bill through committee and headed the fight for its passage in the House of Representatives. The unanimous passage of the bill on September 13, 1917, was a great personal victory for Rayburn.<sup>7</sup>

The legislative workload caused by the war must have seemed endless and Rayburn's thoughts were probably on pending legislation as he waited in the July heat at the railroad station. The train from St. Louis arrived, but there was no sign of the woman he was supposed to meet.

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<sup>6</sup> Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 55-59.

<sup>7</sup> D.B. Hardeman and Donald Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 93-94; Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 59-60. The War Risk Insurance Bill provided a pattern for the GI insurance program that was adopted during World War II.

After waiting for three hours and meeting several more trains, Rayburn assumed she was not coming to Washington, after all, and so he left the depot.

Later, in another part of Union Station, an excited Alla Clary stepped from a train that had just arrived from Philadelphia. Since she was coming from Dallas, she had to change trains in St. Louis. Instead of getting on the Washington bound train at her stop in St. Louis, she boarded one headed for Philadelphia. Years later, Clary could not remember what had prompted her to do that.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps it was simply a mistake, but given Clary's penchant for traveling in later years, it was likely that she went to Philadelphia simply because she had never seen the city and thought this was a good opportunity.

By the time her train arrived, Clary had made a friend. Her gregarious nature caught the attention of a young woman from Kansas who was also on her way to the capital city. They disembarked in Washington and registered together at the Traveler's Aid room reservation service at Union Station. Since the 1800's, many depots provided a Traveler's Aid Service to assist with general information as well as housing and employment referrals. Although the city

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<sup>8</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 42-43; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 3-4, Oral History Collection.

was crowded and many accommodations were full, the service managed to assist them in securing a room.<sup>9</sup>

On Monday, July 29, Alla Clary reported for work at the War Department. She was assigned to a large office of about one hundred people. For ninety dollars per month, she sat at a desk all day and typed index cards with information pertaining to servicemen.<sup>10</sup>

For the first two weeks, Clary worked from three o'clock in the afternoon until eleven o'clock at night. In the daytime, she would go sightseeing. On one of the outings, she stopped by Sam Rayburn's office to introduce herself, but he was not there when she called on him. After she was assigned to the day shift, her tours of the city were limited to the week-ends.

During her first three months in Washington, Clary moved three times. Her first roommate worked at night, so after one month, Clary decided to room with two women who had a daytime work schedule. Perhaps three women rooming together was not an ideal situation, because the following month, Clary moved in with a woman she had met at work. Miss Flora Ball Saunders from Ypsilanti, Michigan, was about

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<sup>9</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 40; Sara M. Evans, Born For Liberty: A History of Women in America, (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 140-141.

<sup>10</sup> Alla Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 5, Oral History Collection.

the same age as Clary. They were quite compatible, so they rented a room in a house in Northwest Washington.<sup>11</sup>

The summer passed swiftly for Clary and soon it was autumn. She made several futile attempts to contact her representative, but he was always out when she stopped at his office. It was nearly the end of October when Rayburn sent her a letter asking to take her out to dinner.<sup>12</sup>

On the appointed date, Rayburn took Clary downtown to dine at the Washington Hotel. As a special treat, the congressman ordered oysters on the half-shell for his wide-eyed guest. Since Prosper, Texas, was not known for its fresh seafood, Clary's only acquaintance with the delicacy was the canned variety her mother used for oyster stew. Summoning all her courage, she managed to force down the obnoxious appetizers without gagging. She even managed to smile and nod her head. Rayburn thought he was being a charming and sophisticated host and Clary never admitted her true opinion of those oysters.<sup>13</sup>

After dinner, Rayburn suggested that they go for a ride. He said he would like to have been able to take her

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<sup>11</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 43-44.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.G. Dulaney (31 October 1968), transcript, 2, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. Hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 4, Oral History Collection.

to a movie, but the theaters were closed due to the influenza epidemic that was ravaging the country. It was a beautiful evening, and Clary readily accepted the opportunity to see the city by moonlight.<sup>14</sup>

They took a long drive along the river, then went past the White House. As they passed various government buildings, Rayburn explained their purpose. Later, they traveled up Connecticut Avenue and drove by the Chevy Chase Country Club. As they passed that prestigious landmark, Rayburn remarked that someday he wanted a house as big as the clubhouse. When Clary asked why, Rayburn confided that he would like to have a large family and he wanted a big house "to have room for my children to play."<sup>15</sup> The evening ended on a cordial note. Clary thanked Rayburn for the

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<sup>14</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 46; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 4, Oral History Collection; Robert H. Ferrell, Woodrow Wilson and World War I, (New York: Harper & Row, 1985) 187-188. In only eight weeks, from the middle of September until the middle of November, 300,000 people in the United States died from the flu epidemic of 1918. Many cities closed public buildings and banned public gatherings in an attempt to stem the spread of the disease. By the time the epidemic had run its course, the estimate of deaths was 20 million.

<sup>15</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 4-5, Oral History Collection. Rayburn's wish for a large family would never be fulfilled. In October, 1927, he married Metze Jones, the sister of Amarillo Congressman Marvin Jones. The marriage unceremoniously ended less than three months later when Metze returned to Texas. A divorce was quietly granted in September, 1928, the records mysteriously disappeared from the Fannin County Courthouse, and Rayburn lived the rest of his life as a bachelor.



dinner and subsequent tour of the city, and then both parties returned to their respective homes.

Although it was said that Rayburn enjoyed an active sex life in his younger years, there was no indication that a romantic relationship ever developed between him and Clary. They may have seen each other socially a few times that first year, but it was probably just two "folks from home" getting together for a visit. Rayburn biographer D.B. Hardeman offers the opinion that Rayburn viewed women as either pure, like his mother and sister, or immoral. As the years passed, Alla Clary became almost like a member of Rayburn's family. This close relationship with his family suggests that, in Rayburn's mind, she also was included in the first category of chaste women. In addition, Rayburn was known to prefer the company of beautiful women, and although she had many fine qualities, it was doubtful that Clary was ever described as beautiful.<sup>16</sup>

In the following months, Clary enjoyed her free time, but not her work. The city of Washington was exciting to her, however, she felt the routine at the War Department was dull and boring. She did not like the monotony of typing cards all day, and by the summer of 1919 she was ready to give up her less than glamorous Washington job and return to

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<sup>16</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 128-129.

Texas. She resigned her position on July 31, 1919, intending to go home within a few days.<sup>17</sup>

Before leaving the city, Clary decided to visit Sam Rayburn at his office to tell him good-bye. After learning of her intentions, he told her he would try to find her other employment and asked her to give him a few days while he made some inquiries. The week following Clary's visit, Rayburn asked her to come to see him.<sup>18</sup>

When Clary arrived at the congressman's office, Rayburn began asking her questions. He inquired about job requirements, then asked if she would be willing to work in a small office and to learn shorthand so she could take dictation. She answered both questions in the affirmative. Rayburn then told her that he had talked with his secretary, Gober Gibson, and they both decided that they would like to have her come work with them. It impressed Clary that Rayburn had said he wanted her to "work with them," rather than "for him." Clary was also impressed by the one hundred-twenty dollar a month salary she was offered. She accepted the position, contingent on a trip to Texas. It

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<sup>17</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (30 October 1968), 1, Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 48-50.

<sup>18</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 5-6, Oral History Collection; Alla Clary, interview by Sarah McClendon (3 July 1949), transcript, 1, Rayburn Library Collection.

had been over a year since she had left the state and she was homesick. Rayburn agreed to the delay and Clary was soon on a train bound for Dallas.<sup>19</sup>

After a six-week visit with her family in Texas, Clary returned to Washington. She began her employment with Sam Rayburn on October 1, 1919.<sup>20</sup> This restless woman who had never kept a job very long would be Rayburn's secretary for more than four decades. She might have been surprised if someone had predicted such longevity in those early years.

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<sup>19</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 51; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 5-6, Oral History Collection.

<sup>20</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (30 October 1968), 1, Rayburn Library Collection.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE CONGRESSMAN'S NEW SECRETARY

The decade which began in 1920 ushered in many other changes in the United States other than a shift in Clary's job status. Since the end of World War I, the country had been plagued by race riots, strikes, inflation, unemployment, and anti-Bolshevik hysteria. Prohibition was the law of the land and, with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment, women were granted the vote. President Wilson, debilitated by strokes, saw his power wane along with his physical abilities. Many Americans, who felt betrayed by the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, rejected Wilson's dream of a League of Nations and embraced a Republican as the new leader for the postwar years.<sup>1</sup>

As the elections of 1920 loomed and it was obvious that Republicans would have the majority in the next Congress, Sam Rayburn was not concerned about a Republican winning his seat in the Fourth Congressional District. Texas was, after all, a Democratic bastion and had been since Reconstruction

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<sup>1</sup> Robert H. Ferrell, Woodrow Wilson and World War I: 1917-1921 (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 144-147; David Anderson, Woodrow Wilson (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978), 140.

days. Rayburn was, however, concerned about opposition in the upcoming Democratic primary and knew that his political future depended on a campaign trip to Texas. As the primary was scheduled for the last Saturday in July, it was necessary for Rayburn and his secretary, Alla Clary, to return to the district in June.<sup>2</sup>

It was Clary's first campaign and she worked tirelessly. Her principal memory of that election was the seemingly endless stacks of campaign letters she had to address, put in envelopes, and mail to voters in the district. In later years, she recalled that "Monday I started sticking stamps on envelopes, and I finished [on] Saturday."<sup>3</sup>

Rayburn's opposition came from a candidate supported by the Farmer's Union. Fortunately for the congressman, the union was only recently formed and Rayburn's organizational skills were well developed in the Fourth Congressional District.<sup>4</sup> The Primary Election Bill, signed March 26, 1918, gave women the right to vote in Texas.<sup>5</sup> Despite the

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<sup>2</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 16, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 15-17.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Crawford, Ann Fears, and Crystal Sasse Ragsdale, Women in Texas (Austin: State House Press, 1992), 236-237.

fact that Rayburn had opposed suffrage and voted against it in the House of Representatives, women did not unite to vote him out of office. Rayburn won the 1920 primary, beating Ed Westbrook, with about sixty percent of the vote.<sup>6</sup>

Two years later, the primary election presented a greater challenge for Clary as Rayburn had substantial opposition in the primary. The issues of the Ku Klux Klan, Miriam and James Ferguson, and prohibition, the focus of Norman D. Brown in Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug, were not necessarily the concerns of voters in the Fourth Congressional District. True, the Ku Klux Klan was at its zenith, but people were also unhappy for other reasons. Low farm prices as well as violent riots in Denison, which stemmed from a railroad strike, deeply troubled the more provincial of Rayburn's constituents. Although he faced opposition from Ed Westbrook, who had the support of railroad unions, some farmers, and the Klan, Rayburn managed to eke out a victory with a narrow margin of less than thirteen hundred votes.<sup>7</sup> Clary's dedicated work aided her

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<sup>6</sup> Kingston, Mike, Sam Aulesey, and Mary Crawford, The Texas Almanac's Political History of Texas (Austin: Eakin Press, 1992), 31; Dorothy Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," M.A. thesis, Texas Woman's University (1985), 124.

<sup>7</sup> Norman D. Brown, Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug (College Station: Texas A & M Press, 1966), 118-119; Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 111-113; Cecil Dickson, interview by Anthony Champagne (29 June 1980), 1,

boss, just as her brother Uncas' support helped give Rayburn fifty-one per cent of the vote in Collin County. There would not again be such a hotly contested race in the Fourth Congressional District until the early days of the Great Depression.<sup>8</sup>

At the outset of Clary's association with Rayburn, Gober Gibson served as first secretary and Alla Clary was second assistant. In 1920, Gibson resigned to return to Bonham, elevating Clary to the position of first secretary. For the remainder of her career, she jealously guarded her position as the "first lady of Texas Congressional secretaries."<sup>9</sup> In addition to the promotion, Rayburn soon gave Clary a fifty dollar monthly pay raise, making her salary one hundred-seventy dollars a month. She later recalled that she considered that raise "the day I got rich."<sup>10</sup>

Some of Clary's initial tasks in Rayburn's office were addressing envelopes and applying franks to yearbooks and farmer's bulletins. The office sent lists of available

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transcript, box 3U99, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter cited as Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," 124.

<sup>9</sup> Dallas Times Herald, 26 October 1953.

<sup>10</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.G. Dulaney (31 October 1968), transcript, 2, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection.

agricultural bulletins to constituents who marked their preferences and mailed them back to Rayburn. Congressmen also gave away flower and grass seed to people in their district until 1924 when appropriations were cut. Clary mailed hundreds of packets of seeds, and years later ruefully admitted that she had begun to hate the sight of grass seed and was very happy when the practice was discontinued.<sup>11</sup>

During the early years, the volume of mail from the district was rather modest.<sup>12</sup> Such routine correspondence included answering a request from Professor S.H. Whitley of East Texas Normal College for a copy of the Congressional Record and replying to an inquiry by the college president, R.B. Binnion, concerning acquisition of a captured German cannon to adorn the grounds of the campus located at Commerce.<sup>13</sup> Clary did remember answering a great deal of mail relating to World War I. In an interview many years

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; A frank was a mark that indicated mail was to be sent free of charge. Washington Post, 26 March 1956.

<sup>12</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 2, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>13</sup> SR to Whitley, 10 October 1923, letter, box 3R268, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to Binnion, 24 June 1924, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers. Apparently, after World War I, captured German cannons were quite popular for community and institutional decorations. In "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," author Dorothy Hudgeons related that acquiring a cannon was also a burning issue for citizens of Grayson County.



later, she said, "It seems to me that the mail about World War I lasted until World War II."<sup>14</sup>

Not all the mail was mundane. A poignant request from a young serviceman asking for help in securing an army overcoat brought swift action from Rayburn's office. Perhaps Clary thought of another serviceman, her younger brother Daniel, as she wrote to the zone supply officer in San Antonio to ascertain the delay. Whatever the reason, Clary wasted no time in referring the matter through the proper channels.<sup>15</sup>

Clary's brother, Daniel, had volunteered for the navy in 1918. After the armistice, he was assigned to the U.S.S. Idaho, scheduled to cruise the West Coast and then sail to Alaska. Before the Idaho reached its final destination, Daniel became very ill, first with pleurisy and then with appendicitis. The incision for an emergency appendicitis operation never properly healed and resulting infections took the young man's life in 1922.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Clary and Congressman Rayburn both grieved over losses during those years. Clary buried not only her younger brother, but also her father in 1922, followed by

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<sup>14</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 8, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>15</sup> SR to Skipworth, 1 March 1920, letter, box 3U114, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 22-24.

her mother, a few years later in 1927.<sup>17</sup> Rayburn felt profound sorrow for the deaths of a brother and his mother, whom he worshipped. His sadness was further compounded when his brief marriage ended almost as soon as it began.<sup>18</sup>

Sam Rayburn had married twenty-seven year old Metze Jones on October 15, 1927. When Clary first started working for Rayburn he corresponded with Metze Jones, the younger sister of Rayburn's friend, Congressman Marvin Jones of Amarillo. Clary was told these letters were not to be opened as they were of a personal nature. Following Rayburn's return to Washington with his beautiful, much younger bride, Clary indicated that Rayburn looked "very happy with her." Less than three months later, however, Metze went home to Texas and the marriage ended. Clary attributed the demise of the marriage to Rayburn's devotion to the House of Representatives and his sister, Miss Lou Rayburn. If this loyal secretary ever knew other reasons for the divorce, she kept them to herself.<sup>19</sup>

Rayburn's office was located on the fifth floor of the Cannon Building, named after House Speaker Joseph G. Cannon

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., n.p. Information is from a page of the Clary family Bible included with the manuscript.

<sup>18</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 105, 126-128.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 122; Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 5, Rayburn Library Collection.

from Illinois who first asked for appropriations to build it. The office was very small and offered little privacy to the occupants, as a glass partition was all that separated Rayburn from his secretary. They remained in these close quarters until December, 1931, when Rayburn became chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, at which time they moved to larger offices on the second floor. When a new office building was completed in 1933, they moved to a large suite of offices where they remained until 1937. At that time, Rayburn's election as majority leader in the House of Representatives necessitated a move to the Capitol.<sup>20</sup>

The years passed quickly as the work routine settled into a comfortable pattern. Since Rayburn was still relatively unknown, mail generally came only from people in the Fourth Congressional District. When Congress was in session Clary would sort and answer mail, arrange Rayburn's schedule, greet callers, and take telephone messages. When Congress adjourned, she returned to Texas to work at Rayburn's office in Bonham in much the same capacity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Clary, Kamp interview(12 August 1969), 19, Oral History Collection; Clary, Dulaney interview(31 October 1968), 3,9, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>21</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview(31 October 1968), 4-8, Rayburn Library Collection.

During these years Clary also established numerous close contacts in Washington. She joined the Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church where she remained an active member until her death. Because Clary still enjoyed singing as much as she had in her college days, she joined the church choir and prided herself on her regular attendance at choir rehearsals as well as church.<sup>22</sup> In addition to her church affiliation, she joined Washington's Texas State Society. Her affable personality and natural charm soon made her a popular member of the club. This association of displaced Texans, noted for its social functions, elected Clary third vice-president in 1922.<sup>23</sup>

In the early years, the Texas State Society was generally known as the Texas Club. New congressmen from Texas were welcomed to Washington with receptions held in their honor at the Mayflower Hotel. The group held numerous parties and dances throughout the year and San Jacinto Day on April 21, always warranted a big celebration. A list of presidents of the organization through the years came to include such notables as Tom Connally, Lyndon Johnson, and Jim Wright. Alla Clary was in her element at these social events. She remained actively involved in the club and was

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<sup>22</sup> Northern Virginia Sun (Falls Church), 6 June 1961.

<sup>23</sup> Dallas Morning News, 4 February 1945; Texas State Society of Washington, D.C., Directory of Membership, Fall 1991 (Washington: Texas State Society, 1991), 150.

so adept at remembering names and faces, that she was considered the "official hostess" of the Texas State Society.<sup>24</sup>

Early in her career Clary kept her promise to Rayburn to learn shorthand. She enrolled for a course and attended a public school near the Capitol three nights a week. She enjoyed the class and eventually felt knowledgeable in the subject. That new confidence seemed to evaporate when Rayburn began dictating to her. Eventually she overcame her unaccustomed anxiety and claimed to have mastered the writing procedure. However, in an interview in 1965, she admitted that she was the "world's worst stenographer."<sup>25</sup>

Her stenography skills must not have mattered to Rayburn. Clary's true talents were her abilities to meet and greet people along with her phenomenal memory. She used these gifts at work as well as at social functions. Rayburn biographer D.B. Hardeman quotes Marvin Jones that "Sam never cared much for the foppery and make-believe of Washington social life, he'd much rather talk politics with a bunch of men than go to some party."<sup>26</sup> If this was true, it was Alla

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<sup>24</sup> Texas State Society, Directory of Membership, 3-4, 149-150; McKinney Courier-Gazette, 1 July 1943.

<sup>25</sup> Clary, "The Clary Family of Collin County," 53; Dallas Morning News, 6 May 1965.

<sup>26</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 113.

Clary who attended many parties, and as Rayburn's secretary, kept her bosses' name in the limelight.

Clary worked alone in Rayburn's office until 1928 except for a brief period in 1925 when Rayburn hired another woman. Since Rayburn never fired a staff member, it is safe to assume that Claire Cranke, the new secretary who shared the office with Clary, left for other reasons. In later years, some staff members often clashed with Rayburn's first secretary. This may have been the case in 1925. It seems logical to conclude that after only four months of sharing an office with Alla Clary, office tensions made Cranke resign and seek employment elsewhere.<sup>27</sup>

In 1928, Jack Neatherly of Farmersville, Texas, joined Rayburn's staff. He and Clary shared the front one-third of the small office. There was little opportunity for privacy in such confines, and as Neatherly later recalled, "...whenever someone would come see him to talk over some very important business, he would send us on an errand or [he] would ask us if we wanted to take the afternoon off." Neatherly and Clary got along very well although he did admit that she could at times be "kind of hard on people," but she was also "quite a remarkable lady." He remembered that "She guarded Mr. Rayburn like a sentinel and nobody

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<sup>27</sup> H.G. Dulaney, interview by Anthony Champagne (15 August 1980), 6, transcript, box 3U99, Sam Rayburn Papers.

could hurt him, and she knew everybody, too, and she could see through them." Neatherly further added, "Mr. Rayburn was very fond of Miss Clary and no one could have been more dedicated and more faithful to a man than she was."<sup>28</sup>

Correspondence from the congressional office during this time belied the economic cataclysm that was about to strike the country. A letter sent by Clary to Rayburn's old friend, Professor S.H. Whitley, accepting a speaking engagement at East Texas State Teacher's College was a typical example of communication with the home district.<sup>29</sup> His constituents would soon discover there were other matters much more important than speaking engagements. On October 24, 1929, the stock market began to collapse. It was followed five days later by a panic known as Black Tuesday. As the hysteria gathered momentum, it embraced all aspects of the economy. Banks failed, businesses closed, and millions of people were left unemployed. To compound the economic problems, a long term drought led to a catastrophe known as the Dust Bowl for farmers on the Great Plains.

Desperate Americans began to look to their government for relief from the crushing personal disasters. As surely

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<sup>28</sup> Jack Neatherly, interview by H.G. Dulaney (26 August 1976), 2,9, transcript, box 3U101, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>29</sup> SR to Whitley, 4 July 1928, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

as the dry winds were sweeping across the Great Plains of America, there were winds of change blowing in Washington, as well. Those Washington winds signaled a new direction for the country, and that new direction would be led by the Democratic Party.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### WINDS OF CHANGE

A riotous scene greeted visitors to the House of Representatives on March 4, 1931. The distinctive sound of rebel yells could be heard above the clapping and shouting of the assemblage as members celebrated the adjournment of Congress. The United States Marine Band marched in, followed by a men's chorus from the Interstate Commerce Commission to lead the group in singing such favorites as "Old Kentucky Home" and "On the Banks of the Wabash." After Florida Representative Ruth Bryan Owen sang "Pack Up Your Troubles" and encouraged everyone to join in singing the chorus, Nicholas Longworth, Speaker of the House of Representatives, played a piano accompaniment for Virginia Congressman Clifton Woodrum's rendition of "Carry Me Back to Old Virginny."<sup>1</sup> There was wild applause for Longworth, who, despite his heavy drinking and habitual womanizing, was

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<sup>1</sup> Bess Furman, Washington By-Line: The Personal History of a Newspaperwoman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 94-94; Carol Felsenthal, Alice Roosevelt Longworth (New York: G.P. Putnam & Sons, 1988), 163-164; Alla Clary, interview by H.G. Dulaney (31 October 1968), 8, transcript, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. Hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection.

probably the most well liked legislator to ever sit in the speaker's chair.<sup>2</sup> It was, for Longworth, his last performance on Capitol Hill.

Less than six weeks after Congress adjourned, Nicholas Longworth was dead. Washington mourned the loss of one of its own, and in Rayburn's office there was a profound sense of grief. A friendship had developed between Rayburn and Longworth during their years together in Congress. Rayburn was a member of John Nance Garner's inner circle, and in that capacity was granted access to Longworth's famed retreat, the "Board of Education." In that room off the Capitol rotunda, friendships formed while members enjoyed drinks, poker, and lively political discussions. Rayburn's down to earth style and philosophy entertained Longworth and he often quoted some of Rayburn's insightful observations. The relationship must have been mutual, for Rayburn traveled to Cincinnati to serve as honorary pallbearer at Longworth's highly publicized funeral.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Howard Teichmann, Alice: The Life and Times of Alice Roosevelt Longworth (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1979), 96; Felsenthal, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1975), 85-86; Teichmann, Alice, 149, 196. Rayburn's maxims, in later years often called "Rayburnisms" include, "if you want to get along, go along" and "any fellow who will cheat for you, will cheat against you."

In the absence of her boss, Alla Clary continued her regular office routine. Although there was no record of Clary's opinion of Nicholas Longworth, she was extremely fond of his wife, Alice Roosevelt Longworth. Clary thought Alice was quite a "character" with a "keen sense of humor."<sup>4</sup> Alice Longworth, the eldest child of Theodore Roosevelt, was known for her quick wit and often caustic humor. She had particular disdain for people whom she considered snobbish and delighted in degrading them in public. These targets of her scorn were often bewildered by her repartee and unaware that she mocked them with her quips.<sup>5</sup>

In a 1968 interview, Clary offered a first-hand account of an encounter with the trenchant wit of Alice Longworth. "I saw her [Longworth] down at the Corcoran Art Gallery, when some of my neighbors were there. I introduced her to them. I told her Mrs. Bradford in our party was from Massachusetts; that her husband was descended from the first

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<sup>4</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 96, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Teague, Mrs. L: Conversations with Alice Roosevelt Longworth (Garden City: Doubleday, 1987), xiv-xv; Felsenthal, Alice Roosevelt Longworth, 151-183. A darker side of Alice's personality was presented in Felsenthal's book. In that biography, Alice was portrayed as having a vengeful, vindictive nature and many of her cruel barbs were directed at her cousin, Eleanor Roosevelt. Additionally, Felsenthal asserts that Alice's daughter, Paulina, was the product of her affair with Idaho Senator William Borah.

governor of Massachusetts." Apparently trying to overawe the famous Alice Roosevelt Longworth, the hapless Mrs. Bradford added, "Yes, came over on the Mayflower." Obviously unimpressed, Longworth dryly replied, "My family came over steerage."<sup>6</sup>

As the Depression worsened, the mail coming into Rayburn's office changed noticeably. While a veteran's bonus bill was a hotly debated topic in much of the correspondence, other people sought financial relief elsewhere. Desperate, pathetic letters from constituents asking for help to obtain pensions reflected the difficulty of the times and were processed by Clary. Using an Indian Wars pension bill as his justification, a man from Celeste, Texas wanted help to collect money for military service from 1 December 1891 to 1 December 1892.<sup>7</sup> There were requests for pensions from widows of World War I veterans, as well as one from the daughter of a Spanish-American War veteran.<sup>8</sup> After hearing there might be money allotted for American Indians, one woman wrote to ask Rayburn for help to

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<sup>6</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 96, Oral History Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Lon G. Cody to SR, 14 July 1931, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter cited as Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Brame & Brame, Attys. to SR, 1 September 1930, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; Joe Denton to SR, 15 February 1933, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

determine if she had any Indian blood.<sup>9</sup> All these petitions had one thing in common, they all wanted to procure a small government subsidy to help ease their financial situations.

Jobs were also a major concern for people in the Fourth Congressional District. Job aspirants sought postmaster appointments, as well as other positions. Files contain numerous communications to Rayburn's office from Professor S.H. Whitley of East Texas State Teacher's College in Commerce, asking his old friend to find jobs for potential students.<sup>10</sup> One of the more interesting letters was an angry missive seeking Rayburn's help to remove Herbert Ardrey from the position of receiver at the Pecan Gap, Texas, bank. The writer believed the matter needed immediate attention because "all assets will be dissipated". He added that the receiver's "mannerisms are not pleasing" as he "struts about in a braggadocio way and makes himself unpleasant to everyone."<sup>11</sup> There is no record of Rayburn's to this appeal. Regardless of the specific request, the

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<sup>9</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 70, Oral History Collection.

<sup>10</sup> Fred Ridley to SR, 4 December 1931, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to S.H. Whitley, 8 April 1930, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to S.H. Whitley, 29 August 1930, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>11</sup> W.A. Thomas to SR, 11 April 1932, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

letters all had one thing in common in asking Congressman Rayburn for some type of help.

Alla Clary read all of the correspondence and then decided what to bring to Rayburn's attention and what to take care of herself. When her boss was out of town, she replied to the letters, usually explaining that Rayburn was not in Washington, and signing her name as secretary.<sup>12</sup> She was well known in the district and Rayburn's mail often contained greetings such as "hello to Miss Clary," or "when Miss Clary reads this, tell her I send my regards."<sup>13</sup> It was also not unusual for constituents to send communications directly to Clary. Sometimes a direct appeal to her, such as a telephone call or a letter, was the quickest access to Rayburn.<sup>14</sup> Regardless of the approach, Clary made efficient use of her somewhat limited secretarial skills. Correspondence was usually answered within a few days of its arrival. An explanation that "a reply would have been sooner, but secretary has been ill" was appended to a letter

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<sup>12</sup> Joe Denton to SR, 15 February 1933, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to Douglas W. McGregor, 26 May 1932, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>13</sup> Ashley Evans to SR, 7 April 1934, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; Carl R. Nall to SR, 30 January 1934, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>14</sup> Gibbons Poteet to AC, 29 March 1932, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers; AC to SR, 8 September 1934, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

that awaited a thirteen day delay for a response from Rayburn's office.<sup>15</sup>

Although Clary said she did not go out and campaign in the district, she was actually constantly working for Rayburn's re-election. When she went to Texas, she spent much of her time promoting her boss as she called upon friends throughout the area. Once, while visiting an acquaintance whose husband was the superintendent of the Whitewright school system, the woman asked Clary to speak to the students about her work. During her talk, she told them that if they wanted "anything from Mr. Rayburn, don't hesitate, but write to him yourself and ask him." Then she added that he was "the same fine man he was when he chopped and picked cotton on a farm down south of Windom."<sup>16</sup>

Throughout his career, much of Rayburn's appeal in the Fourth Congressional District was his accessibility and Alla Clary helped make that possible. As Judge Bob Slagle of Sherman said, "...I could call Miss Alla or get hold of Sam anytime I wanted."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> SR to Ruth Cummings, 29 February 1932, letter, box 3R269, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>16</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 8, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>17</sup> Bob Slagle, interview by Anthony Champagne (17 October 1980), 8, transcript, box 3U102, Sam Rayburn Papers.

Following the March 1931 adjournment, the hectic pace slowed for Clary. It was not an election year for Rayburn, so Clary did not have to concern herself with the additional work created by a primary. This was fortunate because Jack Neatherly resigned to accept a position with the Foreign Service, leaving Clary to work alone in the office.<sup>18</sup> She would have to make the most of her less demanding schedule as rest and relaxation would be impossible when Congress reconvened in December.

Alla Clary sat in the gallery of the House of Representatives on December 7, 1931. After so many years of Republican rule, she was not going to miss the excitement of seeing the Democratic party gain control. That control was tenuous, however, as the Democrats held a majority with only three members. In a dramatic scene that appeared as if it might have been directed in Hollywood, two members arrived in wheel chairs and one on a stretcher to cast their votes. After twelve years, the Democrats were back in power with John Nance Garner elected Speaker of the House. By the end of that momentous week, five loyal Texans had been named as chairmen of very influential committees. One of those loyal

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<sup>18</sup> Jack Neatherly, interview by H.G. Dulaney (26 August 1976), 18, transcript, box 3U101, Sam Rayburn Papers.



men was Sam Rayburn, who became head of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee.<sup>19</sup>

The new position for Congressman Rayburn meant more work for Clary. More mail, more telephone calls, and more visitors to the office made it imperative that there be another staff member. To solve the problem Rayburn hired Dan English, the twenty-two-year-old son of a longtime Rayburn friend and supporter, to work in the Washington office.<sup>20</sup> Rayburn ran a rather loose organization and never liked to give orders or job descriptions to his staff. This "hands off" management style was not a problem when Clary was the only employee, but as the staff increased in number, Clary assumed that her seniority put her in charge of the office as well as the other secretaries, an assumption that created conflict with some employees. Clary wasted no time in letting English know that she was the number one secretary in the office and that she would give the orders.

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<sup>19</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 26, Oral History Collection; Bascom Timmons, Garner of Texas (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 134. The Texas committee chairmen were Hatton Sumners on the Judiciary Committee, Marvin Jones on the Agriculture Committee, Fritz Lanham on the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds, and Joseph Mansfield on the Rivers and Harbors Committee.

<sup>20</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 2, Rayburn Library Collection.

This revelation irritated English and he told Clary he was hired to work "for Mr. Rayburn," not for her.<sup>21</sup>

The two secretaries never completely resolved the territorial issues between them. Clary often "gave Dan dictation," but then resented what she perceived as his failure to accept his share of the work.<sup>22</sup> Although the two personalities clashed from time to time, they also displayed a great deal of office camaraderie when they did such things as eavesdrop on Rayburn's telephone conversations with the White House. Dan English recalled, "The White House would call...[we] would buzz Mr. Rayburn...[then]we would hold the mouth piece and listen to their conversation...we were sworn to secrecy and it certainly would have been confidential."<sup>23</sup>

Feelings were exacerbated between English and Clary when the young man was assigned to the Legislative Clerk's Office after Rayburn's election to majority leader. As a legislative clerk to the majority leader, English's responsibilities included supplying briefs on bills to members of the House of Representatives. To perform these duties, English had the privilege of going onto the floor of

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<sup>21</sup> Dan English, interview by Anthony Champagne (13 March 1981), 5, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>22</sup> Alla Clary, diary (3 January 1933, 20 January 1934, 8 June 1934), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>23</sup> English, Champagne interview (13 March 1981), 5, Sam Rayburn Papers.

the House, something which was denied to Clary. Inglish believed that Clary's hostility towards him stemmed from her exclusion from the House floor, as this was a privilege given only to "male assistants" to the speaker, majority leader, and minority leader.<sup>24</sup>

As Chairman of the Interstate and Foreign Commerce Committee, Rayburn's name began to appear in Washington newspapers. Although he was regularly mentioned in newspapers in the Fourth Congressional District, Clary was exceedingly proud that the Washington press was finally beginning to recognize her boss. Clary also enjoyed the status that came from her association with Rayburn and was happy to enlighten anyone who was not familiar with his virtues. One unfortunate man received a sample of Clary's "enlightenment" when he recklessly mentioned he had "never heard of him." Incensed at this slight to Rayburn, Clary tartly replied, "It doesn't matter if you didn't hear of him, he was there doing a good job all those eighteen years. You don't have to be on the front page to be a good congressman."<sup>25</sup>

While Rayburn's power and stature grew in Washington, so did Alla Clary's. She had a phenomenal memory that

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (31 October 1968), 2, Rayburn Library papers.

became legendary and she was renowned for her abilities to recognize not only voices on the phone, but also, handwriting on correspondence sent to Rayburn. Described in newspaper articles as possessing a "down to earth enthusiasm" with a "booming and hearty laugh [which] has endeared her to everyone in the Capitol, she was a popular addition to social gatherings."<sup>26</sup>

"Enthusiasm" was certainly a descriptive word to characterize Alla Clary. She approached life with a vigor that would have exhausted most mortals. This human dynamo was always on the go. A typical daily entry in her diary read:

Worked hard today. Came home early in order to have dinner and get to the radio station [for] Mount Vernon radio broadcast...[after broadcast] Miss Cullen and I went to see Irene Dunne in *No Other Woman*.<sup>27</sup>

When the seventy-second session of Congress convened in December, 1931, the Texas delegation had a new member from the Fourteenth Congressional District. Richard Kleberg, an heir to the fabulous King Ranch in South Texas, won the seat in a special election, necessitated by the death of Representative Harry M. Wurzbach. Kleberg preferred polo and poker to politics, however, and soon discovered the tedium of the legislative process was distasteful to him.

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<sup>26</sup> Dallas Times Herald, 1 October 1944.

<sup>27</sup> Clary, diary (1 March 1933), Rayburn Library Papers.

Fortunately, Kleberg possessed a realistic view of his own shortcomings and had been perceptive enough to hire as his secretary, an eager, intense young man, Lyndon B. Johnson.<sup>28</sup>

Most Johnson biographers assume that Lyndon Johnson used his father, Sam Ealy Johnson, to insinuate himself into Congressman Rayburn's company. Although Sam Rayburn and Sam Johnson did serve together in the Texas legislature for a brief time, the two men may not have been the great friends that some biographers claim.<sup>29</sup> Before becoming Kleberg's secretary, Lyndon Johnson was teaching at Sam Houston High School in Houston, Texas. When he resigned to go to Washington, a fellow teacher at Sam Houston High offered to write him a letter of introduction to her old friend, Alla Clary. Clary was delighted to meet the friendly young man with the Texas drawl who stood in the doorway of Rayburn's office one day. In her memory of that first meeting, she described Johnson as "tall, dark, and handsome."<sup>30</sup> It would

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<sup>28</sup> Booth Mooney, The Lyndon Johnson Story (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1956), 27; Robert Dallek, Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 96; Robert Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power (New York: Random House, 1983), 218-219.

<sup>29</sup> Mooney, Lyndon Johnson Story, 29; Alfred Steinberg, Sam Johnson's Boy: A Close-Up of the President From Texas (New York: Macmillan Co., 1968), 69; Caro, Path to Power, 220.

<sup>30</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 98, Oral History Collection; Dallas Morning News, 6 May 1965.

be logical to assume that Clary wanted the young man to meet her boss, and that Sam Johnson's name was mentioned in the ensuing conversation with Rayburn. As a congressional secretary and a novice to Capitol Hill, Lyndon Johnson had much to learn. To learn the ins and outs of working in Washington, he frequently visited other congressional offices, and he was a regular visitor to Rayburn's office where he cultivated the friendship of Alla Clary, who might someday prove to be a useful colleague.<sup>31</sup>

Years before, in 1919, congressional secretaries had founded an organization they named the Little Congress. The Little Congress gave secretaries an opportunity to learn parliamentary procedure, public speaking, and debating skills, as they discussed issues that would soon be up for consideration as bills in the House of Representatives. Clary did not actively participate in the Little Congress debates, but she certainly enjoyed the social aspects of the club, especially the annual banquet held at the Mayflower Hotel. Officers were traditionally elected based on seniority and when newcomer Lyndon Johnson decided to run

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<sup>31</sup> Steinberg, Sam Johnson's Boy, 69; Clary, diary (26 April 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Caro, The Path to Power, 221-224. Caro refers to "elderly spinsters," whom Johnson flattered and cajoled. Clary was one of those long-time secretaries, but she was only in her forties, certainly not elderly.

for "Speaker" of the Little Congress, he enlisted Clary's support. Johnson won by a narrow margin and the following day stopped by Rayburn's office to thank Clary for her vote.<sup>32</sup>

In the 1932 presidential election the country turned to Franklin Delano Roosevelt and his running mate, John Nance Garner. While the nation waited for Roosevelt to officially take command of the country, Congressman Rayburn's office buzzed with activity. When Rayburn traveled to New York to confer with the President-elect, Clary stayed in Washington to handle the dramatic increase in mail and the steady stream of visitors.<sup>33</sup> Parading through Rayburn's office was an interesting assortment of personalities which included such notables as Bernard M. Baruch, United States financier, and Alfred E. Smith, former governor of New York.<sup>34</sup> Despite Rayburn's well-known aversion to lobbyists, another regular visitor to the office was Washington lobbyist Roy Miller, who was a Garner supporter and would later be linked to Lyndon Johnson. These three men had at least one thing in common, they had all opposed Roosevelt, albeit in varying

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<sup>32</sup> Mooney, Lyndon Johnson Story, 30; Dallek, Lone Star Rising, 112; Caro, Path to Power, 261-265; Clary, diary (26 April 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>33</sup> Clary, diary (5 January 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>34</sup> Clary, diary (9 January 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

degrees. Baruch had worked to block Roosevelt's nomination, Smith ran against him at the convention, and Miller simply hated the newly elected President. The visits these men had with Rayburn were, no doubt, very interesting, but because Rayburn seldom kept notes of meetings, there was no record of the discussions that occurred.<sup>35</sup>

While the rest of the country staggered under the weight of the Great Depression, Clary's lifestyle was not particularly altered by the economic realities of the time. Despite the fact that Rayburn delighted in accusing her of having "every penny she ever made", she still spent money on clothing, dining out, and entertainment.<sup>36</sup> In an average week, she would eat dinner at a restaurant three or four times and attend opera, theater, or movies at least twice. She was not however, oblivious to the economic concerns of the times, however. On February 28, just four days prior to Roosevelt's inauguration, Clary learned that the Commercial National Bank in Washington had closed. Dismayed by this news and concerned about the security of her money, she closed her account at Washington's Franklin Bank.<sup>37</sup> The new

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<sup>35</sup> Caro, Path to Power, 220, 270, 408; Clary, diary (28 January 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Ronald Steel, Walter Lippmann and the American Century (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 293.

<sup>36</sup> Neatherly, Dulaney interview (26 August 1976), 19, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>37</sup> Clary, diary (28 February 1933), Rayburn Library



president was going to have to convince Clary, along with the rest of the country, that the nation's banks could be trusted.

As the inauguration of 1933 approached, Clary's busy life acquired an extra aura of excitement. The day that Medibel Bartley and Katherine Thomas, Rayburn's sisters, arrived for the festivities, Clary acted as hostess, taking them first to lunch and then for a drive through the city to view preparations for the celebration. She spent all of the following day greeting visitors who were arriving for the inauguration and all the entertainment that would follow. That night, Alla donned her new, gold evening dress and danced until one o'clock in the morning at the pre-inaugural gala held by the Texas State Society.<sup>38</sup> The following day's inauguration would mark the beginning of a new era in Washington and Clary would be an eyewitness to the historical event.

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Collection.

<sup>38</sup> Clary, diary (2-3 February 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### A NEW ERA

Excitement that was mingled with a sense of urgency must have awakened Clary early on the morning of March 4, 1933. She would have to hurry if she wanted to arrive at the office ahead of the estimated one hundred thousand spectators who would converge on the grounds around the Capitol later that day. Knowing that she would have to contend with impossible traffic, Clary opted to ride the streetcar instead of driving her automobile to the downtown area.<sup>1</sup> A cold wind and overcast sky greeted her as she stepped from her boarding house into the street to hasten toward the streetcar stop. Once settled in her seat on board the streetcar, she observed the sights and sounds of Washington as final preparations for Franklin D. Roosevelt's inauguration were finished. As Clary neared downtown, she noticed machine guns mounted in strategic places along the parade route. It was a chilling sight, but armaments in the

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<sup>1</sup> William Manchester, The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), 76; Alla Clary, diary (4 March 1933), Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. Hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection.

nation's capital were precautionary measures. Frustrated and frightened citizens, who were driven to desperation by the Depression, might suddenly become dangerous rioters and the army wanted to be prepared for such an uprising. Even with the hope that the day offered, no one was certain that the new president could lead the country out of its present misery.<sup>2</sup>

Thanks to her boss, Clary had a ticket to watch the inauguration. She did not want to miss a moment of the day's events, so soon after arriving at her destination she made her way to her seat at the east front of the Capitol.<sup>3</sup> At noon, Franklin Delano Roosevelt took the oath of office, and addressed a beleaguered nation. In ringing, confident tones he promised that the country "will endure as it has endured, will revive and will prosper." He ended his triumphant message of hope by invoking God's help "to protect...us [and] guide me in the days ahead."<sup>4</sup>

After the new president's Roosevelt's stirring speech, Clary left her seat and went to Rayburn's office. There was an excellent vantage point to view the parade from the

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<sup>2</sup> Bess Furman, Washington By-Line: The Personal History of a Newspaperwoman (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 149; Clary, diary (4 March 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Manchester, The Glory and the Dream, 76.

<sup>3</sup> Clary, diary (4 March 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, IX (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), 240.

windows there and from Texas Representative Hatton Sumners' office. Clary alternated between the two windows as she watched the cavalcade wend its way through the streets below. The celebration continued that evening at the inaugural ball. Clary danced to tunes played by Rudy Valle's orchestra while Vice-President and Mrs. John Nance Garner and First lady Eleanor Roosevelt greeted well-wishers. President Roosevelt did not attend the gala. Instead, he worked long into the night with a trusted advisor, Louis McHenry Howe.<sup>5</sup>

On Thursday, March 9, Clary attended the opening session of the Seventy-third Congress. Following the formal rituals, the Democrats presented former speaker, John Nance Garner, with a watch. After several ensuing speeches, legislators were ready to get down to business.<sup>6</sup> Clary watched in amazement as emergency legislation to control the faltering dollar and the nation's banking system was approved in thirty-eight minutes. She also noted with interest the presence of another visitor to the House of

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<sup>5</sup> Clary, diary (4 March 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Manchester, The Glory and the Dream, 45, 77. It was Howe's secretary who made a last minute suggestion to use "Happy Days Are Here Again" as Roosevelt's theme song at the Democratic convention. The tune captured the essence of the party's platform and became a sort of symbolic statement for the New Deal.

<sup>6</sup> Bascom Timmons, Garner of Texas (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 173.

Representatives that day. In another section of the gallery, Eleanor Roosevelt sat quietly, knitting as she observed the proceedings.<sup>7</sup>

Every day was not the opening of Congress or an inauguration day. Despite the momentous events of the First Hundred Days, Clary's life soon settled into the familiar routine of her office work. Her job, however, entailed other work, as well. Without a wife or sister in Washington to attend certain social functions, Rayburn depended on Clary to fulfill some of these ceremonial obligations. One of those duties included a tea given by the Women's Newspaper Club in honor of Mrs. John Nance Garner. At this particular gathering Clary was asked to "pour," and in the course of fulfilling this assignment, a reporter photographed her handing Mrs. Ettie Garner a cup of tea. By virtue of her unique position as Rayburn's secretary, she enjoyed attending certain social events not generally open to congressional secretaries.<sup>8</sup>

Rayburn's relationship with John Nance Garner helped give Clary access to the vice-president and it was not unusual for her to personally escort some of Rayburn's visitors to Garner's office. Ettie Garner had always been

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<sup>7</sup> Clary, diary (9 March 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Manchester, Glory and the Dream, 78-79.

<sup>8</sup> Clary, diary (13 March 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

her husband's secretary, and she continued in this capacity even after he assumed his new role. In her position as a Capitol Hill secretary, she had close contact with Alla Clary and they became genuine friends. Around Washington it was common knowledge that if anyone wanted to see the vice-president, it was necessary to arrive early and be prepared to wait. However, with Ettie's good friend, Alla Clary, providing the introductions, the wait was not always so long.<sup>9</sup>

Capitol Hill bustled with activity in the spring of 1933, and much of that activity was in Rayburn's office. Some of the New Deal legislation, such as a securities bill, went through Rayburn's committee, the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. This increased the workload because the office was often inundated with mail and filled with visitors. Clary frequently had to go to the office on Saturdays and Sundays to finish her tasks. After a month of committee hearings, Rayburn maneuvered passage of the Securities Act of 1933, which required federal supervision of investment securities sold to the public.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Timmons, Garner of Texas, 181; Clary, diary (18 March 1933, 10 May 1933, 15 May 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>10</sup> D.B. Hardeman and Donald Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 149-150; Clary, diary (3-15 May 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Jordan A. Schwarz, The New Dealers: Power and Politics in the Age of

To add to Clary's work, when Rayburn had a message for someone, he quite often sent his secretary to deliver the dispatch. This kept Clary busy, but it also gave her the opportunity to meet new people and to visit with friends in other offices. In one day, for example, she visited the offices of Arkansas senators Hattie W. Caraway and Joseph T. Robinson and then she went to see Mrs. Garner. The purpose of these trips was not clear, but it would be logical to assume it involved some coordination of New Deal legislation.<sup>11</sup>

Apart from national politics, an important issue for the people of the Fourth Congressional District was the Red River Dam Project to benefit the economy of Grayson County and surrounding areas. In July, 1933, initial hearings were held with Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes. During this time, Clary greeted and entertained Rayburn's constituents who came to Washington to champion their cause. With inadequate federal support for the project at the time, it would be years before it finally gained approval. Even then, work did not commence for lack of funds, and there

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Roosevelt (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 253.

<sup>11</sup> Clary, diary (15 May 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 69-70, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.

were skeptics in the district who doubted that Rayburn could ever get the dam built.<sup>12</sup> When an acquaintance of Clary's dared to offer that opinion in her presence, she angrily snapped, "You don't know what you're talking about!"<sup>13</sup>

Despite the workload, Clary found time for a rich social life. After a day of work, her boundless energy propelled her to meetings of such organizations as the Texas State Society, the Little Congress, the Order of the Eastern Star, or the Business and Professional Women's Club. She also regularly attended lectures sponsored by the National Geographic Society where she listened to topics that ranged from "Head Hunters of Formosa" and "Islands of Greece" to many presentations about the country's national parks. These lectures sparked a curiosity and desire to travel that lasted for the rest of her life. Clary was a woman of miscellaneous tastes who managed to find other diversions, as well. As a sports enthusiast, she enjoyed watching the annual Republican-Democrat baseball game almost as much as being a spectator at the opening day of the 1933 baseball season, when the Washington Senators beat Philadelphia.

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<sup>12</sup> Dorothy Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond: Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," M.A. thesis, Texas Woman's University (1985), 124; Clary, diary (17-19 July 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>13</sup> Clary, interview by Kamp (12 August 1969), 9, Oral History Collection.



Clary loved theater, concerts, opera, parties, dancing, singing, and photography, but her favorite pastime was going to the movies.<sup>14</sup>

It was the middle of June when Congress finally adjourned. Dan Inglish soon departed for Texas, leaving Clary to handle the work alone. The office pace eventually slowed and Clary was able to take a much anticipated vacation. Along with several friends from her church, Clary left Washington in early August. The group planned to travel by car to New York City where they would board a cruise ship to sail to Cuba and then on to Jamaica. Clary's excitement soon gave way to exasperation, however, as the driver of the car in which she was riding insisted on traveling at what Clary considered a snail's pace.

The group eventually managed to arrive in New York and Clary could hardly contain herself as she boarded the Verauga for the cruise. In fact, once the ship sailed, Clary could not contain anything as she was terribly seasick for the first two days. By the third day at sea, however, Clary recovered enough to participate in the shipboard activities during the day and dine at the captain's table that night. There was a general strike in Havana when they

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<sup>14</sup> Clary, diary (24 March 1933 - 16 May 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Abilene Reporter-News, 1 September 1953.

arrived, but the group managed to see a few sights before they sailed for Kingston. Clary found the accent of the Jamaicans enchanting and was amazed by the coconut groves and banana trees on the island. Before the ship departed for the return trip to New York, she shopped in Kingston, buying perfume and baskets for souvenirs. When the ship docked in New York, Clary was not ready to end her vacation. She and a friend, Edith Gottwals, decided to spend one more night in the city. They checked into the Governor Clinton Hotel and went to a show at Radio City Music Hall. The next morning, they visited the Statue of Liberty before leaving for Washington.<sup>15</sup>

Once back in Washington, Clary had business to conclude before she could leave for Texas. As Rayburn's workload increased, he gave more duties to Clary. One of those added jobs was the responsibility for making Rayburn's academy appointments to Annapolis and West Point, and on August 21, she made those final decisions. For the following three weeks she was busy answering mail and finishing work at the office.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Clary, diary (2-16 August 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>16</sup> Martha Freeman, interview by Anthony Champagne (6 January 1982), 8, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; Clary, diary (19-24 August 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

On September 11, 1933, Clary and Mary Ellen Whitehurst, a friend and fellow Texan, left for their home state by way of Illinois. The Century of Progress Exposition had opened in Chicago during the summer and Clary wanted to see it. If the purpose of the exposition was to provide the country with a diversion from its economic woes, it was probably deemed a success, although perhaps not for the intended reasons. While Clary visited pavilions celebrating the wonders of the Pantheon, the streets of Paris, and Hollywood, in another section of the exposition, Sally Rand grossed six thousand dollars per week as she shocked and titillated audiences with her "fan dance." After two days of touring the fair and some shopping at Marshall Fields's, the women resumed their journey to Texas.<sup>17</sup>

Clary arrived at her sister's home in Dallas on September 18, and after her usual round of family visitations, drove to Rayburn's office in Bonham to begin work. After so many years of working for Rayburn she had a firm routine established. She rented a room in Bonham, but when she wasn't working, traveled to Dallas to visit her sister, Kate, or to Prosper to visit Uncas or her sister, Virginia. This pattern continued until 1944, when she nearly collapsed from heat exhaustion. After that, Rayburn

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<sup>17</sup> Manchester, The Glory and the Dream, 40; Clary, diary (11-15 September 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

never asked her to work in Texas during those months of excessive heat that often lasted until October.<sup>18</sup>

Although Clary and Rayburn maintained a rather formal office relationship, they were, in reality, good friends. It was not unusual for her to go to Rayburn's home to take dictation and then stay for a meal followed by a game of "forty-two." She was a fierce competitor and quite often, she and Rayburn's sister, Miss Lou, teamed up to soundly trounce their opponents. At other times, Clary and the Rayburns would pack a picnic lunch and go to a nearby state park or spend the afternoon at Sam Rayburn's nearby farm. Rayburn's siblings accepted her and considered her to be a member of the family.<sup>19</sup>

There was no indication that the fact she was a single woman intimidated Clary. By 1933, she had many miles on her old car, so in early November, she decided to buy a new one. She drove to the Chevrolet dealership in Celina, picked out what she wanted, made a deal for the purchase, and arranged to pick up the car the following day. The Jones brothers, with whom she dealt at the dealership, were probably in a

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<sup>18</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 92-93, Oral History Collection; Clary, diary (18-30 September 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>19</sup> Clary, diary (18-25 September 1933), Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 99-100, Oral History Collection.

stupor by the time she finished her transaction with them. Alla Clary was quite capable of taking care of herself, even with car salesmen.<sup>20</sup>

Clary's independence did not, in any way, detract from her love of her family. She was exceptionally fond of her sister Kate's sons, Charles, Clary, and Daniel, and made time in her schedule for activities with them that often included a movie, shopping, or even a visit to their school. After she purchased her new car, she took one nephew on his newspaper route in her shiny, new Chevrolet, and then took the other nephews for a long ride so they wouldn't feel left out. Whenever Clary was in Texas for the Christmas holidays, she spent Christmas Eve at Kate's house in Dallas so she could help prepare for Santa's arrival. Clary's siblings were extremely close-knit and the holiday was considered to be a family time. On Christmas Day, the entire family would gather for a lively celebration.<sup>21</sup>

As 1933 came to a close, Clary packed her car for the return trip to Washington. The next session of Congress would start in early January. There was always plenty of

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<sup>20</sup> Clary, diary (4-5 November 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>21</sup> Clary, diary (5 November 1933 - 25 December 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

work to do after her long absence and she intended to get things organized before everyone else arrived.<sup>22</sup>

On her return trip to Washington, Clary stopped in Atlanta, Georgia, to visit friends, Mr. and Mrs. Shelton. She arrived at their home on December 29, and their son, Arthur Shelton, promptly swept Clary off her feet. By the time she left Atlanta four days later, sensible, independent, forty-four-year-old Alla Clary was gloriously in love. Unfortunately, Arthur apparently did not share her ardor. After two months of correspondence between them, Arthur simply stopped writing, with no explanation. Two years passed before Clary saw Arthur again, and then, he was with his girlfriend.<sup>23</sup> Fortunately for Clary, the hectic pace of Washington afforded little time to indulge a broken heart, and she was soon absorbed in her work and social activities.

One of the most controversial issues of 1934 involved attempts to regulate Wall Street by means of the Stock Exchange Bill. This bill pitted portly, rustic, five-foot-six-inch Sam Rayburn against sinewy, sophisticated, six-foot-two-inch Richard Whitney, head of the New York Stock

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<sup>22</sup> Clary, diary (27 December 1933), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>23</sup> Clary, diary (29 December 1933 - 1 March 1934; 28 December 1935), Rayburn Library Collection.

Exchange.<sup>24</sup> Letters from the Fourth Congressional District opposing the bill flooded Rayburn's office. The letters were answered and mailed to constituents, but postmasters in the district returned them with notes stating that the addressees had died or moved away. Opponents of the proposed legislation had taken old public records from the district to create the illusion of constituent antipathy.<sup>25</sup> Fictitious correspondence was not all that Clary had to contend with that spring. Intent on protecting her boss from persistent lobbyists, a resolute Clary guarded Rayburn's office door like a sentry. Even the pompous Richard Whitney could not escape her uncompromising rules regarding who did, and who did not, get to see Mr. Rayburn.<sup>26</sup>

If Clary was not in the office during working hours or running errands for her boss, she might be busy entertaining guests from the district. That entertainment could include lunch, a visit to Vice-President John Nance Garner's office, or a trip to the White House for a personal tour. She also spent time visiting other government offices to inquire

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<sup>24</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 156.

<sup>25</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.G. Dulaney (31 October 1968), 4, transcript, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas.

<sup>26</sup> Clary, diary (8 March 1934), Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 45, Oral History Collection; McKinney Courier-Gazette, 30 October 1949.

about possible job openings for constituents. After work, she enjoyed her usual social activities, which reached their zenith in May when she donned a new hat to attend a garden party at the White House.<sup>27</sup>

In the summer of 1934, Clary traveled to Texas in July, worked for three weeks in Rayburn's Bonham office, then went on vacation. She left Dallas August 7, with her sister Kate and nephew Daniel, for a month long drive through the western United States. On the first leg of the journey they toured Carlsbad Caverns, the Petrified Forest, the Painted Desert, and the Grand Canyon.<sup>28</sup> Clary's interest in these natural wonders was piqued by her attendances at National Geographic Society lectures, and in later years, she proudly boasted of having seen all of the national parks in the nation, except for three.<sup>29</sup> No lecture could have possibly prepared Clary for the grueling, six hour drive across the Mojave Desert in August, however. By the time the exhausted travelers reached Los Angeles, Kate was very ill. Following a few days of rest and relaxation, Clary put her sister on a train to return to Dallas, then she and her nephew continued

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<sup>27</sup> Clary, diary (30 January 1934 - 18 May 1934), Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), Oral History Collection.

<sup>28</sup> Clary, diary (16 July 1934 - 12 August 1934), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>29</sup> Dallas Times Herald, 1 October 1944.



the trip. After leaving Los Angeles, the two traveled to Sequoia National Park, Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, Salt Lake City, and finally, Estes Park, Colorado. The tourists returned to Dallas in early September and Clary worked in Bonham until the end of October when she returned to Washington.<sup>30</sup>

While Clary was taking her marathon trek through the West, Speaker of the House of Representatives Henry T. Rainey of Illinois died suddenly from a heart attack. Therefore, when Congress reconvened in January, the first order of business would be the election of Rainey's successor.<sup>31</sup> By the time Clary returned to Washington, the race for a new speaker was well underway, and she believed that Rayburn had enough support to win the job that he so desperately wanted. For unknown reasons, however, Rayburn did not mount an aggressive campaign for the position, and he lost to majority leader Joseph W. Byrns of Tennessee. It would be several more years before Rayburn fulfilled his dream of presiding over the House of Representatives.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Clary, diary (12 August 1934 - 27 October 1934), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 163.

<sup>32</sup> Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography (New York : Hawthorne Books, 1975), 123-124; Clary, diary (1 November 1934 - 3 January 1935), Rayburn Library Collection; James T. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 53.

The fight with Wall Street over the Stock Exchange Bill was nothing compared to the fury that was unleashed against the Public Utility Holding Company Act of 1935. Wall Street, investment bankers, and utility companies all directed their wrath at the bill's supporters. At the vortex of the storm was the man who introduced the bill in the House of Representatives, Sam Rayburn. To battle the legislation, utility companies launched a massive propaganda campaign to garner public support for their cause.<sup>33</sup> Once again, phone calls, telegrams, and letters poured into Rayburn's office. In the five or six mail sacks that flooded the office every day, some letters were bogus and some were actually from concerned citizens. It was Clara's duty to ferret out and discard the fabrications. She sifted through the correspondence and answered only letters from the Fourth Congressional District.<sup>34</sup>

In his home state, Rayburn's nemesis in the fight was the president of Texas Power and Light, John W. Carpenter, whom Rayburn called "an errand boy for the holding companies."<sup>35</sup> Errand boy or not, Alla Clara did allow Carpenter to take her to lunch while he was in town to fight

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<sup>33</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 169-199; Schwarz, The New Dealers, 254.

<sup>34</sup> Clara, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 53-54, Oral History Collection.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

Rayburn's bill.<sup>36</sup> By currying favor with this guardian of the enemy camp, Carpenter must have been trying to wheedle information from Clary that might be useful. She loved to talk, and in an unguarded moment she might reveal facts that Carpenter needed. Clary's motives for accepting the invitation are less clear. Although her judgment in this matter might be suspect, her loyalty to Rayburn was never in doubt.<sup>37</sup> The holding company bill eventually passed in the House, but not before John Carpenter swore to avenge his loss by financing Rayburn's defeat in the next election.<sup>38</sup>

Clary's life did not revolve solely around the work generated by the holding company bill. For two years, she had rented a room from Alvin and Lucille Appel, but in February, 1935, she moved into a house with Janette Bateman. When Bateman's husband, John, departed Washington to take a job in Tennessee, the couple had decided that Clary would be great company and the extra income from Clary's rent would also help Janette. Clary liked having full use of the house, readily adapted to her new environment, and was soon planting flowers in the yard and entertaining her friends at the house. Her full social life again included a garden

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<sup>36</sup> Clary, diary (29 April 1935), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>37</sup> Anthony Champagne, Congressman Sam Rayburn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 90.

<sup>38</sup> Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 127.

party at the White House as well as her other usual activities. Her only vacation in the summer of 1935 was a trip to Atlantic City with some of her friends. It was the middle of September when she finally departed to Texas, but, as usual, she returned to Washington for the opening of Congress in early January.<sup>39</sup>

The new year brought more new legislation, such as a rural electrification measure, to provide affordable electricity and loans for installation and appliances to consumers in rural communities. Rayburn was extremely proud of his sponsorship of the bill, because he knew it would help ease the burden of farmers everywhere. He used to say, "I want my people out of the dark," and the passage of the Rural Electrification Act of 1936 was especially important to the agrarian population in Rayburn's district. It was, after all, an election year and Rayburn knew he would face strong opposition from a candidate funded by the utility companies.<sup>40</sup>

True to his threat, John W. Carpenter led the attack by extending to Rayburn's opponent, Jess Morris, an abundance of financial support. Rayburn feared his congressional seat was at stake, so he left Washington to campaign in Texas,

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<sup>39</sup> Clary, diary (28 February 1935 - 14 September 1935, 5-6 January 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>40</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 45, Oral History Collection; Schwarz, The New Dealers, 255-256.

leaving his secretary, Alla Clary to operate the office.<sup>41</sup> While Rayburn was gone, Speaker of the House Joseph Byrns died suddenly, which necessitated Rayburn's return to Washington. Although the House elected majority leader William Bankhead of Alabama as the new speaker, they postponed selecting a new majority leader until the following January. That position was a stepping stone to the speaker's chair, and Rayburn was a contender for the job, if he could just win his primary. After attending the Democratic convention, he returned to Texas as quickly as possible to resume his campaign and Alla Clary soon followed.<sup>42</sup>

While Rayburn attended picnics and political rallies, Clary worked on the campaign from the Bonham office. In one week, the office mailed seven thousand letters to constituents. Strong voter loyalty in the district was boosted by a timely announcement from Roosevelt that there was funding available for the Red River Dam Project. When the primary votes were tallied, Rayburn triumphed, winning sixty-five percent of the vote. Both Rayburn and Clary

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<sup>41</sup> Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond," 58-59; Clary, diary (12 May 1936 - 7 June 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>42</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 206-207; Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 133-134; Clary, diary (1 July 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

exulted in the fact that they still had jobs in Washington.<sup>43</sup>

Following the hectic days of the campaign, Clary took a vacation. She bought a movie camera, once again gathered up her sister Kate and nephew Daniel, and departed Dallas to visit Yellowstone Park in Wyoming. Along the way, the trio visited Santa Fe and Taos, New Mexico, Denver, Colorado, and Cheyenne, Wyoming, before reaching their destination. With her movie camera, Clary recorded the beloved geyser, Old Faithful, as well as numerous bears roaming through the camp, before leaving Yellowstone to travel to the Grand Tetons. From there, the tourists journeyed to see Zion National Park, Las Vegas, Nevada, and Boulder Dam. After a stop in Phoenix, Arizona, they headed east for the return trip to Dallas.<sup>44</sup>

Four weeks later, Clary was again on the road, but this time, she was on her way to Washington. The contest for majority leader between John J. O'Connor of New York and Sam Rayburn was well under way. If Rayburn hoped to achieve a victory, there was much work to do in the capital before the

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<sup>43</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 206; Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond," 124; Clary, diary (1-25 July 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>44</sup> Clary, diary (2-29 September 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

next session of Congress. Clary intended to do all she could to help Rayburn win what she considered "our" race.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 207; Clary, diary (27 October 1936 - 30 November 1936), Rayburn Library Collection.

## CHAPTER SIX

### "A VERY GREAT LADY:" 1937-1940

The race for majority leader that pitted Rayburn against John J. O'Connor of New York ended January 4, 1937, with Rayburn's triumph. The margin of victory was fifty-seven votes, and Clary later recalled that Rayburn was glad that the tally was so close because "it would make for better feelings."<sup>1</sup> While there might have been an outward appearance of cordiality between the two congressmen, Clary indicated that O'Connor was not necessarily a gracious loser and sometimes would sit back and chuckle when Rayburn was having difficulty getting legislation passed. The day following the vote, Sam Rayburn was sworn in as majority leader in the House of Representatives. Soon after the ceremony, someone asked Clary who was going to represent the voters of the Tenth Congressional District now that Rayburn had won the race for floor leader. Irritated by the insolent question, Clary indignantly replied that Rayburn would certainly still represent his constituents and then

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<sup>1</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 57, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.



embellished her statement: "You don't get out of your club when you're elected secretary."<sup>2</sup>

As majority leader, Rayburn carried added responsibilities in the House of Representatives because of the recurring illness of Speaker William B. Bankhead. Rayburn presided over the House during Bankhead's frequent absences, and, in so doing, wielded more power than previous majority leaders historically had enjoyed.<sup>3</sup> Rayburn's new position increasingly demanded more of his attention, and major changes were needed to accommodate the increased workload. In addition to Clary's myriad duties at the office and the responsibility for Rayburn's academy appointments, she also assumed the task of dispensing patronage appointments to constituents seeking Post Office positions.<sup>4</sup> Dan Inglish moved to the legislative office of the majority leader where his responsibilities included supplying House members with briefs on bills. Because this task allowed legislative secretaries the privilege of going

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<sup>2</sup> Alla Clary, diary (5 January 1937), Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas; hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, interview by Kamp (12 August 1969), 27, 58, Oral History Collection.

<sup>3</sup> Randall B. Ripley, Party Leaders in the House of Representatives (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1967), 27, 83.

<sup>4</sup> Martha Freeman, interview by Anthony Champagne (6 January 1982), 8, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter cited as Sam Rayburn Papers.

on to the floor of the House of Representatives, Inglish believed that Clary harbored resentment against him because "she had been there for a long time and she could not go on the floor of the House."<sup>5</sup>

Ted Wright, a Savoy, Texas, native, filled the vacancy created by Inglish's promotion. Wright had played football for the Washington Redskins, and at the end of the 1937 season, decided to end his professional sports career to study law. He stopped by Rayburn's office one day, and the congressman offered the personable young man a position on his staff. Wright readily accepted Clary's role as the congressional office "boss" and therefore, the two got along quite well. Unlike other Rayburn employees who would later disclose that Clary was very difficult to work with, Wright considered her a "very great lady."<sup>6</sup>

During his years in Congress, Rayburn only hired staff members who were connected with his own district. He asked for, and received, loyalty from these employees. He also never fired anyone, although it was common knowledge that he threatened to fire Clary from time to time. Clary's brusque manner often offended people and she could be difficult to work with, but it was her tendency to talk too much that

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<sup>5</sup> Dan Inglish, interview by Anthony Champagne (13 March 1981), 4, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Ted Wright, interview by Anthony Champagne (11 March 1981), 1,4, transcript, box 3U102, Sam Rayburn Papers.

most often angered Rayburn. Facts she revealed would sometimes be printed in the newspaper, which was what happened when a reporter asked Clary about Rayburn's failed marriage. She responded with personal details of the marriage and the divorce.<sup>7</sup> Although congress persons continue to hire staff members from their district, they do not insist on secretaries with district ties. While they do prefer that their receptionists have district connections, most feel the need to balance Capitol Hill experience with an intimate knowledge of the district.<sup>8</sup> Of course, Clary had been on Capitol Hill for so long that she knew almost everyone and readily understood how the political system operated, a desirable combination. In addition, she knew a large number of constituents back home and could identify the handwriting of many by merely looking at the addresses on the envelopes, a valuable talent when sorting mail.<sup>9</sup> A study of congressional staffs reveals some characteristics which were applicable to Rayburn's staff. The survey shows that the staff was often from the home state, and was

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<sup>7</sup> Anthony Champagne, Congressman Sam Rayburn (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984), 89-91; Freeman, Champagne interview (6 January 1982), 12, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison W. Fox, Jr. and Susan Webb Hammond, Congressional Staffs: The Invisible Force in Lawmaking (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 33-35.

<sup>9</sup> Hub Hill, interview by Anthony Champagne (13 November 1984), 9, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers.

composed of well educated young people with strong party preferences.<sup>10</sup>

For Clary, one of her first duties after Rayburn's election as majority leader was to move the office into the Capitol. During the first two weeks in January, 1937, she stayed busy in this endeavor. She had not concluded unpacking in the office when two new employees arrived on the scene.<sup>11</sup> The addition of Mary Anna Hall of Terrell and Beatrice Conlin of Telephone completed Rayburn's office staff. Clary's relationship with these women proved to be friendly. Although Conlin's excessive talking sometimes irritated Clary, she soon included both the young women in Clary's circle of friends, which was more like an extended family.

Clary's friendship with the women involved more than an occasional dinner together or a movie after work. Her relationship with these young people was more like that of an aunt, rather than a co-worker. They welcomed her into their lives and their homes, and she reciprocated with many thoughtful gestures. When Mary Anna Hall announced her impending marriage to Stuart Matthews, for example, Clary hosted a party for the couple. Bea Conlin's daughter, Emily

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<sup>10</sup> Fox and Hammond, Congressional Staffs, 46.

<sup>11</sup> Clary, diary (11-18 January 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.

Ann, delighted Clary, and it was not unusual for her to take the child on special outings, such as going to see "Pinnochio" at the movies or rolling Easter eggs on the White House lawn. In addition to the camaraderie, both Hall and Conlin were good workers and neither challenged Clary's authority, which made the office run smoothly during the years that Rayburn was majority leader.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Washington buzzed with activity that January of 1937, the inaugural activities were not as exciting to Clary as they had been four years earlier. She did not even venture out into the rain to witness President Franklin Roosevelt's second inauguration. Later in the day, however, she did take Mary Anna Hall with her to the Treasury Building where they had an excellent view of the parade route. It wasn't that Clary was bored with the inaugural festivities, but, by 1937, she was familiar with most Washington personalities and was not going to inconvenience herself to see them. That was not the case with Hollywood personalities, however, as she was ecstatic when she met actor Robert Taylor a few days after the inauguration at the President's birthday ball.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Clary, diary (24 March 1940, 25 May 1940, 14 April 1941), Rayburn Library Collection; Wright, Champagne interview (11 March 1981), 4.

<sup>13</sup> Clary, diary (20 January 1937, 30 January 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.

Before the memories of January's celebrations faded, serious ideological rifts began to develop within the Democratic party. A nagging uneasiness concerning the direction of the New Deal turned to suspicion and even hostility among conservative party members after the unveiling of Roosevelt's plan to reorganize the Supreme Court. Amid the hue and cry of the outraged politicians who denounced the plan, Clary noted in her diary that the plan to revamp the Supreme Court was received "variously."<sup>14</sup> Her words were an understatement because it was opposition to this scheme which later formed an anti-New Deal coalition between Republicans and conservative Democrats.<sup>15</sup> Trying to be loyal to Roosevelt on this issue, Rayburn faced opposition from his long time friend, the Texan, Hatton Sumners, chairman of the House Judiciary Committee. Nor could Rayburn rely on the support of his mentor, John Nance Garner. The vice-president exhibited his opposition to the plan by holding his nose and turning "thumbs down" when it was read in the Senate. Soon after this display of his

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<sup>14</sup> James T. Patterson, Congressional Conservatism and the New Deal: The Growth of the Conservative Coalition in Congress, 1933-1939 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 85-95; Clary, diary (10 February 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>15</sup> John Braemen, Robert Bremner, and David Brody, ed., The New Deal: The National Level (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1975), 249.

irritation, Garner departed from Washington for an extended fishing trip.<sup>16</sup>

Rayburn did have Maury Maverick's support on the issue, although, in reality, Maverick, another Texan, preferred provisions which would exempt certain legislation from Supreme Court jurisdiction. Maverick was an outspoken liberal and the purported leader of a group of insurgents in the House of Representatives who often clashed with party leaders and pushed for reform regardless of the political consequences.<sup>17</sup> Maverick won Clary's devotion when he came into Rayburn's office one day, and after seeing her simultaneously dealing with ringing phones, a stack of work on her desk, and a steady stream of people into the office, called to Rayburn and said, "Why don't you double this woman's salary?" Clary undoubtedly thought that this was a great idea, and Maverick's attention and flattery delighted her.<sup>18</sup>

In the midst of the court packing controversy, Clary's twin nephews, Charles and Clary Bates, arrived in Washington

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<sup>16</sup> D. B. Hardeman and Donald Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 222-223; Patterson, Congressional Conservatism, 92.

<sup>17</sup> Richard B. Henderson, Maury Maverick: A Political Biography (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1970), 74-83, 133.

<sup>18</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 74, Oral History Collection.

to visit their aunt. During their eighteen day vacation, Clary showed them the sights of Washington and escorted them on a visit to New York City. The boys were ecstatic about the plane ride, but, unfortunately, there was a great deal of air turbulence and Clary was overcome with airsickness soon after takeoff. Her illness soon subsided after landing in New York, and she was ready to show her nephews a grand time. Well acquainted with entertaining her nephews, and on the day of their arrival she took them to see a hockey game at Madison Square Garden. During the following days they visited the Empire State Building, Radio City Music Hall, and the NBC studios. Clary enjoyed the flight back to Washington as it was much smoother and she did not suffer the same ill effects as she had on the flight to New York. She truly enjoyed their company and when the boys departed for Texas, she felt very lonesome.<sup>19</sup>

Very quickly, however, her life resumed its feverish pace of work and play throughout the spring months. Clary thrived on the activity at the office and her busy social life soon included a week-end trip to New York with members of the Little Congress. Shortly thereafter, evenings were spent at home, because she was busy sewing an evening gown to wear to a press party at the White House. The party was,

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<sup>19</sup> Clary, diary (11 February 1937 - 2 March 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.



indeed, the highlight of the spring for Clary, as she danced all evening and also met President Roosevelt.<sup>20</sup>

By 1937, it seemed to many observers that war would be inevitable in Europe, as well as in Asia. In violation of the Treaty of Versailles, Adolph Hitler, Nazi dictator of Germany, had rearmed his nation, and occupied the demilitarized Rhineland, while Benito Mussolini's Italian army had crushed the poorly equipped troops of Ethiopia's emperor, Haile Selassie. A civil war was raging in Spain, with both Hitler and Mussolini sending aid to General Francisco Franco for his revolt against the duly elected government of the Spanish Republic. Asia fared no better than Europe during the decade. Japanese aggression turned to open warfare with the invasion of southern China in 1937. It was interesting to note that Clary made no mention of these events in her diary, but instead, focused on the disappearance of Amelia Earhart, the United States pioneer aviator in the Pacific.<sup>21</sup>

Another noticeable omission from Clary's diary was mention of the swearing in of the newest representative from

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<sup>20</sup> Clary, diary (25 March 1937 - 28 May 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Goff, Walter Moss, Janice Terry, and Jiu-Hwa Upshur, The Twentieth Century: A Brief Global History (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1990), 238-244; Clary, diary (8-12 July 1937), Rayburn Library Collection.

the Tenth Congressional District in Texas, Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson had won a special election to fill the vacancy left by the death of James P. Buchanan on February 22, 1937. On the day of Johnson's swearing in, he went to Rayburn's office and asked the majority leader to stand beside him for the ceremonial event. Johnson then kissed Rayburn on his bald head, an act that Clary probably felt was demeaning to her boss. Clary may well have said something to Johnson about this unusual behavior, but Johnson perhaps did not heed Clary's admonishments.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, with Rayburn as his sponsor, Johnson no longer needed to cultivate the friendship of Clary, a mere secretary and in turn, she began to suspect Johnson's motives. After wheedling his way into Rayburn's after-hours drinking club, the "Board of Education," Johnson funneled information gathered at these meetings back to the New Dealers at the White House. The lonely Congressman Rayburn probably envied Clary for her Washington "family," and longed for a similar relationship of trust which Lyndon Johnson was eager to provide. As a result, Rayburn probably turned a deaf ear to Clary's dire warnings of there being a

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<sup>22</sup> Robert Dallek, Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 144, 161; Robert A. Caro, The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), 452; Clary, diary (13 May 1937), Rayburn Library Collection;

spy in the ranks, as she attempted to protect her boss from the manipulative young Texan.<sup>23</sup>

Without doubt Clary thought that Johnson could not be trusted. This perception was substantiated when Johnson failed to include her in his plans for a surprise birthday party for Rayburn at the White House. Clary certainly was no stranger to the President's mansion, as she had attended numerous functions there in the past, and this blatant dismissal of her significance by Congressman Johnson undoubtedly deeply provoked Clary's ire.<sup>24</sup> Apparently, the animosities were mutual and Johnson belittled Clary and voiced disapproval of the way she ran Rayburn's office on numerous occasions. During one heated exchange, Clary noted the oppressive conditions that Johnson's office staff had to endure, and emphasized the assertion by adding, "I wouldn't want to work for you." Johnson then retorted, "I wouldn't want you to work for me, either."<sup>25</sup> Once, when Johnson declared that Clary should be fired, Rayburn intervened and told Johnson to mind his own business. Johnson also had no

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<sup>23</sup> Caro, The Path to Power, 453; Jack Neatherly, interview by H.G. Dulaney (26 August 1976), 19, transcript, box 3U101, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>24</sup> Dallek, Lone Star Rising, 166; Clary, diary (1-31 January 1939), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>25</sup> Freeman, Champagne interview (6 January 1982), 20, Sam Rayburn Papers. It was common knowledge that Johnson drove his staff unmercifully, and on Capitol Hill, Johnson's office was known as the ulcer factory.

regard for Clary's position as guardian of Rayburn's door and often barged past her into Rayburn's inner office. She regarded this behavior as the ultimate insult to her authority, especially after Johnson intruded in on a private meeting between Rayburn and Winston Churchill.<sup>26</sup>

The feud continued to simmer and in the summer of 1939, Johnson's actions forced Rayburn to recognize the fact that Johnson's allegiance to him was questionable. At a hearing of the House Labor Committee, John L. Lewis, United States labor leader, fired a strong salvo at Vice-President John Nance Garner, calling him, among other things, "a labor-baiting, poker-playing, whiskey-drinking, evil old man." As soon as the news broke of this insult to a longtime friend and fellow Texan, Rayburn called the Texas delegation to his office to draft a resolution repudiating the allegations. Rayburn wanted all the members of the Texas delegation to sign the statement, but Johnson refused on the grounds that he could not impugn his integrity by approving the document when he knew that Garner played poker, drank heavily, and opposed labor unions. Johnson's refusal greatly weakened Rayburn's position and the Texans ultimately accepted an unconvincing endorsement of Garner authored by Lyndon Johnson. This betrayal of Rayburn's leadership signaled a

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<sup>26</sup> Champagne, Congressman Sam Rayburn, 90; Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn, 238.

subtle split between the two men and, no doubt, gave Clary the satisfaction of knowing she had been correct about Johnson, the ambitious man from the Texas Hill Country.<sup>27</sup>

As 1937 came to a close, the joy of the holiday season dimmed when Japanese planes sank the American gunboat, Panay, on the Yangtze River in China. The nation retreated from a confrontation over the incident when the Japanese government offered monetary compensation, along with an apology, which President Roosevelt accepted. The President's uncharacteristic meekness regarding this incident doubtless stemmed from the fact that domestic problems made him much too vulnerable to risk a struggle over foreign affairs with the strong group of isolationists in the country.<sup>28</sup>

If the Panay incident was a harbinger of perils to come, Clary did not dwell on it as she began 1938. As the seventy-fifth session of Congress opened, Clary again resumed her usual duties, yet it was a troubling time. It seemed almost ludicrous that while Clary watched "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" at the movie theater, Adolph Hitler marched into Austria, as he had promised to do in his book,

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<sup>27</sup> Caro, The Path to Power, 572-574; Hardeman and Bacon, Sam Rayburn, 229-230.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Eliot Morison, Henry Steele Commager, and William E. Leuchtenburg, A Concise History of the American Republic (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 623.

Mein Kampf. Hitler's appetite was not sated with the "Anschluss," just as the Munich Conference, held in September of that same year, would not stop his aggression elsewhere.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Alla Clary's mind was not focused on events occurring in other parts of the world. She was much more concerned with her personal schedule, such as enduring another summer of Texas heat while she worked in the Bonham office and making travel plans for her summer vacation. Instead of visiting national parks in the United States this year, Clary intended to discover the wonders of Mexico. She departed from Dallas with Virginia Cunningham, a friend and fellow adventurer, on 13 August, 1938. The two women felt no trepidation in driving to Mexico City and did not delay their plans. After spending the night in Laredo, Texas, they left early in the morning and arrived in Monterrey, Mexico, where they spent the night at the Colonial Hotel. The following day, they departed Monterrey for a scenic drive through the mountains to Mexico City. Using Mexico City as a base, the pair enjoyed side trips to the communities of Taxco, Cuernavaca, and Pueblo. Clary did not limit her vacation to a process of admiring Spanish colonial

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<sup>29</sup> Clary, diary (13-14 March 1938), Rayburn Library Collection; Goff, Moss, Terry, and Upshur, The Twentieth Century, 244.

and native architecture, but also tasted tequila for the first time and attended a bullfight, which she considered to be very exciting. During her vacation in Mexico, Clary was always on the go, but also found time to accept an invitation to tea at the American Embassy between riding a boat through the gardens of Xochimilco and climbing to the top of the Pyramid of the Sun. After four weeks of enjoyable and non-stop sightseeing, the travelers returned to Texas. Clary then resumed her duties in the Bonham office until the end of December, when she returned to Washington.<sup>30</sup>

By early 1939, many Americans believed that Europe was on the brink of war. Although Clary shared that belief, her life went on as usual as she divided her time between work and social activities. When German tanks rolled into Poland in September, Clary was in Texas working at the Bonham office. Later that month, when President Roosevelt called a special session of Congress to repeal the arms embargo, Clary was on her way to the West Coast for a vacation. She did not return to Washington until New Year's Day, 1940.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Clary. diary (1 August 1938 - 31 December 1938), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>31</sup> Arthur S. Link and William B. Catton, American Epoch: A History of the United States Since 1900 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963), vol. 2, The Age of Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1921-1945, 218-219; Clary, diary (10 April 1939 - 1 January 1940), Rayburn Library Collection.

Because of a backlog of work during the spring and early summer of 1940, Clary did not attend the Democratic party national convention in Chicago to see Rayburn's hopes for the vice-presidential nomination tossed aside in favor of Secretary of Agriculture, Henry A. Wallace. Nor did she return to Texas to work during the primary campaign. Rayburn's opponent in the congressional district, Dr. Bliven Galbraith, posed no real threat, and the incumbent was re-elected with eighty-five percent of the vote.<sup>32</sup> That summer, other matters needed Clary's attention. When the husband of her friend, Neva Ontrich, committed suicide, Clary assisted the stunned widow in making the necessary funeral arrangements. Then, a few weeks later, Clary took Neva, whom she feared was close to having a nervous breakdown, to a friend's vacation cottage in Delaware for a few days of rest and recuperation. Clary also offered her support by taking the Ontrich children on outings and attending their dance recitals, along with other activities.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1975 ), 162-163; Clary, diary (16 May 1940 - 31 August 1940), Rayburn Library Collection; Dorothy Hudgeons, "His Word, His Bond, Sam Rayburn, Southerner, and Grayson County, Texas," M.A. thesis, Texas Woman's University (1985), 124.

<sup>33</sup> Clary, diary (23-24 May 1940, 14-18 July 1940, 23 November 1940), Rayburn Library Collection.



The skies greatly darkened over England that September as the German Luftwaffe attempted to bomb the British people into submission. Isolationists saw support for their position melt away as Americans listened, transfixed, to radio broadcasts describing the Battle of Britain. Reports of heroic Englishmen defending their country against tremendous odds began a ground swell of sympathy for the inhabitants of the beleaguered island. But, England did not rely solely on radio reporters to change American public opinion. The British also actively lobbied for their cause in Washington. In early September, Clary attended a garden party at the British Embassy, which was held to garner congressional support for American aid.<sup>34</sup>

While the Battle of Britain raged in the skies above the island, along the Potomac, attention suddenly was riveted on events at the Capitol. Speaker of the House of Representatives William Bankhead suddenly died on September 15, 1940. By the conclusion of the next day, Rayburn's long cherished dream was fulfilled when he was unanimously elected as Speaker of the House. Totally exhausted by the

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<sup>34</sup> Edward R. Murrow, In Search of Light: The Broadcasts of Edward R. Murrow, 1938-1961 (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 33; Clary, diary (6 September 1940), Rayburn Library Collection.

emotional events of that day, the Speaker's secretary, Alla Clary, went home and crawled into bed.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 164; Clary, diary (15-16 September 1940), Rayburn Library collection.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE SPEAKER'S SECRETARY

On the first day of October, 1940, Alla Clary celebrated her twenty-first year working as a secretary for the Honorable Sam Rayburn, who had recently been elected as the new Speaker of the House of Representatives. To signify the event, Rayburn wrote Clary a short letter.

My dear Miss Clary:

This marks the twenty-first anniversary of our association as a member of Congress and secretary. During all these years you have been faithful and fine and I send this note to acknowledge my gratitude to you and to express the hope that we may continue this association as long as I am privileged to serve as a Representative from Texas. With assurances of my esteem, I am your friend and co-worker, Sam Rayburn.<sup>1</sup>

Clary believed Rayburn when he said he hoped she would continue to work for him and she vowed not to retire before he did.<sup>2</sup> Both Rayburn and Clary might have been shocked if

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<sup>1</sup> Alla Clary, interview by H.W. Kamp (12 August 1969), interview 48, transcript, 82, North Texas State University Oral History Collection, University of North Texas (Denton). Hereafter cited as Oral History Collection.

<sup>2</sup> Alla Clary, scrapbook (1961), 24, Sam Rayburn Library, Bonham, Texas. Hereafter cited as Rayburn Library Collection.

they had known that their association would continue for another twenty-one years.

By the time Rayburn was elected speaker in 1940, Clary was a well known personality on Capitol Hill. During the 1940's, news columnists often made mention of her presence at social functions and features about the speaker's secretary appeared in newspapers. Articles referred to her mastery "in the art of remembering names and faces," that "she seemed to know everyone" at a party, or that her "booming and hearty laugh, and down to earth enthusiasm endeared her to everyone in the Capitol."<sup>3</sup>

Shortly after Rayburn's election as Speaker of the House of Representatives, Alla Clary decided that she was weary of renting and that it was now appropriate for her to buy a home of her own. She found one that suited her tastes in the Washington suburb of Falls Church, Virginia. Living in Falls Church meant a twelve mile commute for Clary to her office, but she did not let that deter her. Clary was not the type of person to procrastinate on a project; therefore, four weeks after signing a purchase agreement, the sale was finalized and Clary moved into her cozy five room residence at 604 Greenwich Street. Her outgoing personality made her

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<sup>3</sup> McKinney Courier-Gazette, 1 October 1940; Washington Post, 21 October 1941; Dallas Times Herald, 1 October 1944.

a popular addition to the area, and neighbors soon included her in gatherings and nicknamed her "Sis" Clary.<sup>4</sup>

When Wilson E. (Bill) Wilcox of Sherman, Texas, came to work for Rayburn in November, 1940, he discovered that Alla Clary had more to offer than an outgoing personality and phenomenal memory. In a 1980 interview, Wilcox recalled some personal memories of Clary:

We used to call her the surrogate Congressman, because she had been up there so long and she knew so many people and so many people respected her that were there. She knew a lot of Congressmen up there on a first name basis. They all respected her and she respected them. Sometimes she would just talk to them like a Dutch aunt. Whatever you did, first of all you wanted to be sure it pleased Mr. Sam. Second, you wanted to be sure that you were on the right side of Miss Clary.<sup>5</sup>

Bill Wilcox roomed at Alla Clary's house for one semester while he attended law school. During that semester he realized that "Miss Clary knew everything that she was talking about."<sup>6</sup>

Every morning at the office Clary opened Rayburn's mail, read it, and sorted it into two stacks, one of which required Rayburn's attention, and one which was routine

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<sup>4</sup> Alla Clary, diary (22 September 1940 - 23 October 1940), Rayburn Library Collection; Greenville Herald-Banner, 21 November 1955.

<sup>5</sup> Bill Wilcox, interview by Anthony Champagne (22 August 1980), 11-12, transcript, box 3U102, Sam Rayburn Papers: 1906-1990, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin. Hereafter cited as Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 12.

correspondence and could be answered by staff members. If the staff members were not sure of what to write, they asked Clary who usually provided the answer.<sup>7</sup> This procedure often gave Clary access to mail that was sometimes personal in nature. She particularly enjoyed pointing out to Rayburn those letters which were from his female admirers. In a 1968 interview, she recalled an amusing incident concerning a particularly bold would-be suitor. "There was one woman from Georgia...she used to send him fruitcakes. She wrote, oh, the most ardent letters to him." One day a fruitcake with a Washington address arrived at the office and Clary informed Rayburn that his "girlfriend from Georgia was in Washington." Rayburn told Clary to contact the woman and invite her to come to the office, which she did. Clary stated that the woman was a schoolteacher who was very nicely dressed, and "talked very sensibly, and didn't talk at all like she wrote." Rayburn, who was always a gentleman, greeted the lady warmly and took the time to personally show her the Capitol. After the tour, he said good-bye and hurried off to preside at a meeting of the House of Representatives. Clary was shocked when the woman suddenly appeared at the office door and stated that she

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<sup>7</sup> Lorraine Kimbrough, interview by Anthony Champagne (23 November 1980), 4, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers; Wilcox, Champagne interview (22 August 1980), 3, Sam Rayburn Papers.

wanted Rayburn to come out of the House chamber to tell her good-bye again. There is no record of the message that Clary sent to Rayburn, but she probably sent word that his "fruitcake" girlfriend wanted him to stop what he was doing so they could properly say good-bye. Needless to say, the Speaker declined the invitation.<sup>8</sup>

In addition to ardent admirers, a steady stream of diverse people came to see Rayburn. In an interview with Sarah McClendon, a prominent newspaper correspondent, Clary offered her formula for dealing with visitors.

Sometimes we have a few cranks. I guess I know from the way they talk or how they present themselves. If they say right off the bat who they are and what they want, then usually they're all right. If they hem and haw and beat around the bush, the chances are they are asking for something out of line.<sup>9</sup>

Visitors never knew what to expect when they entered Speaker Rayburn's office to discover Alla Clary sitting behind the desk in the outer office. Although she seldom held a grudge for very long, her mercurial disposition could change in seconds from being open and friendly to being cold and imperious. After Rayburn became Speaker in 1940, someone casually asked, "How does it feel to be working for a big shot?" Clary snapped in reply, "I've been working for

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<sup>8</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1968), 71, Oral History Collection.

<sup>9</sup> Alla Clary, interview by Sarah McClendon (3 July 1949), transcript, 2, Rayburn Library Collection.

one [Rayburn] for twenty-one years, but you've just found it out!" When someone boasted of having voted for Rayburn for years, Clary countered with, "Oh no you didn't, unless you lived in the Fourth District."<sup>10</sup> Incidents such as this did not embarrass Clary as she was proud of her "plain talking." However, she was probably chagrined by this "plain talking" habit one day when the newly elected representative from Oklahoma, Carl Albert, stopped at the office to pay his respects to Speaker Sam Rayburn. Not realizing who Albert was, she looked at the young congressman and unequivocally stated, "You know the Speaker does not have time for pages." Fortunately, Albert had a good sense of humor, and later regularly teased Clary about the blunder.<sup>11</sup> These were not isolated incidents, and while Clary had always been outspoken, in later years other staff members recalled that they spent a good deal of their time trying to soothe the "ruffled feathers" of visitors who had suffered from her forthright outbursts.<sup>12</sup>

A citizen did not have to appear at Rayburn's door, however, to feel intimidated by Clary. She could be just as

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<sup>10</sup> Houston Post, 4 September 1956; Alla Clary, interview by H.G. Dulaney (30 October 1968), transcript, 9, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>11</sup> Kimbrough, Champagne interview (23 November 1980), 22, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Martha Freeman, interview by Anthony Champagne (6 January 1982), 4, transcript, box 3U100, Sam Rayburn Papers.



daunting on the telephone as she was in person. A typical example of Clary's no nonsense style occurred after World War II when Major Joe E. Hanks requested a favor from Rayburn's office in dealing with the United States Department of Customs. Major Hanks wanted to bring into the country two parakeets that he had "liberated" while he was in the Pacific. He added that the birds were a gift for his son, and it would break the boy's heart if he could not keep them. When Hanks telephoned Clary to determine the status of his request, she told the major that his son would probably survive the disappointment of not having the parakeets as she had made inquiries and discovered that the boy was "less than a year old."<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, earlier, December 7, 1941, Alla Clary was listening to the radio while she did housework. As she ironed clothes, the news of the attack on Pearl Harbor crackled on the radio. Although news of the incident distressed Clary, she did not let it deter her from enjoying herself by dining with friends that evening. The following day, Clary listened intently as President Roosevelt addressed a joint session of Congress, asking for a declaration of war against Japan. By 4:10 that afternoon, in a hastily arranged ceremony at the White House, Roosevelt

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<sup>13</sup> Houston Post, 4 September 1956.

signed the congressional resolution plunging which declared war on Japan. The war would not be limited to the Pacific, however, as three days later, the United States reciprocated to actions by Hitler and Mussolini, and declared war on Germany and Italy.<sup>14</sup>

Like most Americans, Clary altered her lifestyle during World War II. Although a generous gasoline allotment allowed her to continue to commute to the office, tire shortages often limited Clary's mobility. When the two rear tires from her car were stolen, the ration board refused her request for replacements. After that denial, Clary appealed to several political allies who succeeded in securing two tires for her automobile. Although her cross country driving vacations ceased during the war, Clary vowed to reinstate them when the nation was again at peace, because there were three national parks she had not yet seen. For trips back to Texas or other vacation travel, Clary rode the train during the war years. Additionally, her new home had a large yard and Clary planted fruits and vegetables in a victory garden. During the summer months, she often worked all day, then returned home and spent the evening canning

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<sup>14</sup> Clary, diary (7-8 December 1941), Rayburn Library Collection; D. B. Hardeman and Donald Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987), 274-277.

her bountiful garden produce, which she then generously shared with friends.<sup>15</sup>

Clary's beloved nephews, Charles, Clary, and Daniel Bates, did not serve in the military during the war. Daniel was still a schoolboy, and when Clary and Charles graduated from Southern Methodist University, the former was accepted into medical school while the latter accepted a position with the Federal Bureau of Investigation. The FBI appointment meant that Charles would have his training in Washington, and "Aunt Alla" was delighted to have her nephew stay with her.<sup>16</sup> Although her nephews were not in harm's way, many of the young people that Clary knew were drafted or volunteered for military service after the declaration of war, and Clary tried to keep in touch with them. She was especially interested in Rayburn's former staff members and often clipped newspaper articles about them to put in her scrapbook.<sup>17</sup>

The war years passed quickly as the office routine did not differ appreciably from that of other years. Visitors often stopped at the office, as Clary's diary entry

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<sup>15</sup> Clary, diary (21 September 1942 - 1 October 1942, 16-18 August 1943, 29 August 1944 - 1 September 1944), Rayburn Library Collection; Dallas Times Herald, 1 October 1944.

<sup>16</sup> Clary, diary (13 June 1941 - 15 August 1941), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>17</sup> Denison Herald, 4 January 1944.

indicated: "Lots of callers today, but I entertained them and the girls worked." One of the favorite visitors to the office was the singing cowboy, Gene Autry, an old friend of Clary's from Tioga, Texas. Whenever Autry was in town, he usually took time from his busy schedule to have lunch or dinner with her. The women in the office now included Jennie Abernathy, Jane Lagler, and Bernice Newman, who were all from Bonham, Texas, along with Ted Wright's ex-wife, Irene Wade, of Savoy, Texas. Regardless of Clary's reputation for being difficult, the office staff worked well together. Clary could be a very kind person and often did generous favors for friends. When Jennie Abernathy announced her upcoming marriage to John A. Taylor, Clary offered to have the ceremony at her house. On March 7, 1942, John Taylor and Jennie Abernathy were married at Clary's home with Sam Rayburn present to give the bride away.<sup>18</sup>

All in all, the war years were happy times for Clary. Her nephew, Charles Bates, married Connie Aiken, and when their baby daughter, Cheryl, was born, Clary delighted in playing a grandmother's role. Her nephew, Clary Bates, also married during the war, and when he was assigned to Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland, following his graduation from

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<sup>18</sup> Clary, diary (15 June 1944, 20 April 1945, 2 May 1945, 7 March 1942), Rayburn Library Collection.

medical school, he and his wife, the former Dorothy Ann Blessing, moved to Washington. Clary was ecstatic to have her "children" so close, and the group shared many happy occasions together.<sup>19</sup>

Although Clary attempted to maintain her usually hectic pace, during these years she was plagued with various physical ailments. Her fondness for rich foods led to stomach disorders, which were complicated by gall bladder problems. She also often suffered from headaches, irritability, and a general intolerance to heat, which were classic symptoms of menopause. In addition, she endured numerous bouts with bronchitis, sore throats, and colds, which, no doubt, were aggravated by her cigarette smoking. Clary yielded to these complaints and sought bed rest, but she usually did not stay there for very long.<sup>20</sup>

On the afternoon of April 12, 1945, Sam Rayburn telephoned Vice-President Harry Truman to invite him to come to his office for a drink later that day. When the Senate adjourned at 5:00 P.M., Truman hurried through the Capitol corridors to Rayburn's small sanctuary known as the Board of Education. Before the vice-president could quench his

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<sup>19</sup> Clary, diary (25 October 1943 - 21 November 1943, 2 June 1945, 20 March 1946 - 31 August 1946), Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>20</sup> Clary, diary (2 April 1943 - 15 June 1943, 1-31 August 1944 ), Rayburn Library Collection.

thirst, he received word that he was to come to the White House immediately. As Truman was leaving the hideaway, someone called Rayburn on the telephone to inform him of President Roosevelt's death. Recovering from the initial shock, Rayburn dictated a press release to one of Massachusetts Congressman John McCormack's secretaries, as Alla Clary was not there to witness this historical moment. Suffering from laryngitis and other cold symptoms, Clary had stayed at home for the past two days. She was, however, feeling well enough on that fateful April afternoon to attend a tea, where she heard a news flash announcing the President's death.<sup>21</sup> The following Monday, a select group of congressmen waited in Rayburn's office for Truman's arrival. They were there to escort him to the House of Representatives. Clary was at work that day and chose not to sit in the gallery, but went on to the floor of the House to hear the new President's speech, which she later said was "quite good."<sup>22</sup>

With the advent of Truman's presidency, Rayburn was generally considered the second most influential man in the United States. His friendship with Truman gave Rayburn an

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<sup>21</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 308-309; Clary, diary (12 April 1945).

<sup>22</sup> Alfred Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1975), 229; Clary, diary (16 April 1945), Rayburn Library Collection.

informal access to the White House that he had not enjoyed with Franklin D. Roosevelt.<sup>23</sup> For Rayburn, as for all Democrats, the postwar mood of the nation diminished power. Continuing shortages and soaring prices frustrated consumers who vented their displeasure at the polls in the 1946 November elections. Democrats lost fifty-three seats in the House of Representatives, making them the minority party. When Congress opened January 3, 1947, Clary cried as Rayburn's old friend, Massachusetts Republican Joseph W. Martin stood at the rostrum as the new Speaker of the House of Representatives.<sup>24</sup>

During the next few years, Rayburn alternated with Martin as Speaker. Moving in and out of the Speaker's office proved to be such a chore that Rayburn suggested he stay in the Minority Leader's office regardless of which one of them was Speaker. Both Rayburn and Clary were distressed when Representative Charles Halleck of Indiana unseated Martin as Republican leader. Although there was no open hostility between Halleck and Rayburn, Rayburn did not trust Halleck and they did not share the friendship which Rayburn had enjoyed with Martin.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 313.

<sup>24</sup> Steinberg, Sam Rayburn: A Biography, 235-236; Hardeman and Bacon, Rayburn: A Biography, 325.

<sup>25</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (30 October 1968), 7, Rayburn Library Collection.

Additional workers hired to meet the needs of the massive war effort swelled the ranks of the federal bureaucracy and created an influx of people into the capital. Converging on Washington from all sections of the country, people brought new attitudes and ideas with them. New administrative policies included a trend towards trained professional staff members as well as enlarged congressional staffs. Astute observers in wartime Washington might have been aware of subtle changes taking place, but in the postwar years, those changes took root when a desire for better trained and more sophisticated professional staffs pervaded the environment.<sup>26</sup> These transitions proved to be difficult for some, and for a few, impossible. Clary would be counted among the latter, as she had no desire to change her methods. For Clary, the end of the war marked the zenith of her power.

Through the years, Rayburn entrusted many duties to Clary and during the war, she ran the congressional office and made most of the decisions that were not of a legislative nature. In addition to her responsibilities with academy appointments, patronage, mail from the district, and entertaining constituents, she helped write

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<sup>26</sup> Harrison W. Fox, Jr. and Susan Webb Hammond, Congressional Staffs: The Invisible Force in Lawmaking (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 20-23.



and edit campaign speeches for her boss. Clary also had the responsibility for accepting or regretting Rayburn's invitations to social engagements. Although he preferred a quiet dinner with friends, Rayburn attended many embassy parties and was always a sought after guest at political dinners.<sup>27</sup>

When Rayburn was first elected Speaker, a society maven declared that Clary needed to order engraved invitations and notecards for Rayburn's social correspondence. Clary eschewed the suggestion because she believed that Rayburn preferred a less formal style. As a result, Clary used office stationery for Rayburn's invitations and acknowledgments. This informality became an issue in the office and served to undermine Clary's credibility during the post-war years as secretaries with etiquette books and protocol training joined the staff. One of those new employees, Martha Freeman, admitted being "shocked" to discover Clary writing, "The Honorable Sam Rayburn accepts with pleasure..." on office letterhead.<sup>28</sup> This lack of

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<sup>27</sup> Elwyn Raiden, interview by Anthony Champagne (3 October 1989), 2-3, transcript, box 3U101, Sam Rayburn Papers; Freeman, Champagne interview (6 January 1982), 17-18, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to Fiorello LaGuardia, 18 December 1944, letter, box 3R310, Sam Rayburn papers; Lord Halifax to SR, 14 January 1944, letter, box 3R310, Sam Rayburn papers.

<sup>28</sup> New York Times, 16 January 1955; Freeman, Champagne interview (6 January 1982), 2-4, Sam Rayburn Papers.

sophistication was an embarrassment to some members of the staff, but that practice paled by comparison to the humiliation caused by Clary's continued "plain speaking" to constituents.

That "plain speaking" kept the other secretaries exceptionally busy mollifying angry visitors to the office just prior to Dwight D. Eisenhower's inauguration. Clary ardently supported Adlai Stevenson for President, and felt betrayed by her fellow Texans when Republican candidate Eisenhower carried the state.<sup>29</sup> As long time Rayburn supporters arrived in Washington for the ceremony, they naturally came to the congressional office wanting tickets for the festivities. After they made their request, Clary asked them, "Did you vote for Ike?" If the reply was in the affirmative, Clary brusquely responded, "Well go to Ike and get your tickets, then. Go to the Republicans."<sup>30</sup>

Rayburn was aware that Alla Clary could be difficult and was not oblivious to the tension in the office. He began to shift Clary's duties to other staff members until she was responsible only for some mail and accepting or regretting social engagements.<sup>31</sup> Evidence of Clary's

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<sup>29</sup> Clary, Kamp interview (12 August 1969), 91, Oral History Collection.

<sup>30</sup> Freeman, Champagne interview (6 January 1982), 2, Sam Rayburn papers.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

changing status may be gleaned from the correspondence she handled. Instead of writing speeches or making academy appointments, she ordered air mail stamps and license plates for Rayburn's use, and had to make decisions concerning such matters as whether or not Rayburn would send a letter about his hopes for the future to the Crowell Publishing Company in New York to be placed in a time capsule.<sup>32</sup>

Relieving Clary of most of her responsibilities may have solved some of the problems, but it created others. Rene Kimbrough, a very capable young woman, joined the staff in 1947, and soon assumed many of Clary's former duties. As she recalled in a 1980 interview, "Miss Clary had the job and title...and I did the work."<sup>33</sup> Friction between the two women escalated as Kimbrough took over Clary's more prestigious jobs. Staff member H.G. Dulaney recalls, "Miss Clary would come in about ten o'clock, not feeling too well, and before an hour had gone by she and Rene would be in some sort of an argument."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> AC to Livingston, 8 July 1949, letter, box 3R362, Sam Rayburn Papers; Amey to AC, 12 January 1949, letter, box 3R362, Sam Rayburn Papers; Beck to SR, 20 January 1949, letter, box 3R362, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>33</sup> Kimbrough, Champagne interview (23 November 1980), 2, Sam Rayburn Papers.

<sup>34</sup> H.G. Dulaney, interview by Anthony Champagne (15 August 1980), 6, transcript, box 3U99, Sam Rayburn Papers.

To the outside world, however, Clary's importance remained undiminished. In 1956, Washington Post columnist George Dixon featured Clary in one article of a series titled, "The Six Most Fascinating Women in Washington." Dixon wrote, "The most interesting spinster on Capitol Hill has been secretary to the most interesting bachelor. Alla Delphia Clary and Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn make a great maritally undistracted pair."<sup>35</sup> Clary enjoyed giving interviews, and it was not unusual for her name to appear in Washington society news, local newspapers, or newspapers in cities where she traveled.<sup>36</sup>

It was Clary's love of traveling that helped to solve the tense situation at Rayburn's office. With Rayburn's blessing, Clary began taking longer and longer vacations. In 1953 and again in 1957, she traveled to Europe, staying ten to twelve weeks each time.<sup>37</sup> During her 1957 trip abroad, she missed the festivities surrounding the dedication of the Sam Rayburn Library in Bonham, Texas. She did, however, send a telegram from Dublin, Ireland, with her

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<sup>35</sup> Washington Post, 25 March 1956.

<sup>36</sup> Greenville Herald-Banner, 21 November 1955; Washington Star, 26 June 1955; Denton Record-Chronicle 20 May 1953; Buffalo Courier-Express, 29 May 1955; Sherman Democrat, 30 September 1955.

<sup>37</sup> Clary, diary (21 April 1953 - 9 July 1953, 1 September 1957 - 18 November 1957), Rayburn Library Collection; Northern Virginia Sun, 6 June 1961.

best wishes for a successful event.<sup>38</sup> Then, in 1960, Clary took a three month, around-the-world cruise on a twelve passenger freighter, the President Adams. When reporters asked why she was taking a vacation during a congressional session, Clary replied that she had a wonderful boss and he "thought I needed a rest."<sup>39</sup>

In spite of Clary's shortcomings, Rayburn was as devoted to her as she was to him. He made his loyalty quite clear to other staff members when he continued to write appreciative notes to Clary on the anniversaries of their working together. He included in those letters the wish that Clary continue to work for him as long as he remained in public life.<sup>40</sup>

Clary was vacationing in Wyoming when she heard the news on the radio that Rayburn had pancreatic cancer. She knew her boss's health had deteriorated, but had refused to consider anything as serious as cancer. After hearing the news, Clary drove directly to Dallas. For three weeks, she

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<sup>38</sup> H.G. Dulaney, Edward Hake Phillips, and MacPhelan Reese, "Speak, Mr. Speaker" (Bonham: Sam Rayburn Foundation, 1978), 327-330.

<sup>39</sup> San Francisco Chronicle, 20 January 1960; San Francisco Examiner, 19 January 1960.

<sup>40</sup> SR to Clary, 1 October 1956, letter, box 3U114, Sam Rayburn Papers; SR to Clary, 30 September 1959, letter, box 3U114, Sam Rayburn Papers.

visited Rayburn daily at Baylor Medical Center and then followed him to Bonham to continue her vigil.<sup>41</sup>

On the evening of November 15, 1961, Alla Clary stood at the bedside of the dying Sam Rayburn and silent tears ran down her cheeks. She felt a profound sadness as she realized that the end was near. As his personal secretary for more than four decades, she had steadfastly guarded his office door against unwanted intruders, yet even her formidable presence could not dissuade death from keeping an inevitable appointment. At seven o'clock the next morning, Clary answered her telephone and was informed of Rayburn's death. She knew the national spotlight would be on Bonham for the next few days as the country observed the funeral services of the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Her personal mourning would have to wait. There was much work to do and Clary was determined to do it. By eleven o'clock on November 16, the Speaker's secretary, Alla Clary, stood in the entry hall of the Sam Rayburn Library, ready to greet arriving friends, dignitaries, and, of course, reporters.<sup>42</sup>

After the funeral, Clary returned to Washington to close Rayburn's office. When she informed newly elected

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<sup>41</sup> Clary, scrapbook (1961), 26, Rayburn Library Collection.

<sup>42</sup> Clary, diary (15-16 November 1961), Rayburn Library Collection.

Speaker of the House John McCormack that she should be taken off the payroll on January 19, 1962, McCormack asked her if she really wanted to retire, then added that he was sure he could find a position for her on Capitol Hill. Clary replied in the affirmative. She knew that Capitol Hill would not be the same for her without Rayburn's presence, and believed that, at seventy-two years old, she deserved a rest. After a short recuperation from the final, emotion packed months of 1961, she was ready to travel again. One of her first destinations was the Mediterranean for a fifty day cruise in February of 1962. Then, in 1964, Clary accompanied a group of congressional secretaries to Hawaii, where they were entertained at a cocktail one evening in the Waialae Kahala home of Mr. and Mrs. Richard King, heirs to the King Ranch in Kingsville, Texas.<sup>43</sup> She enjoyed her first trip to the Orient immensely and decided to revisit Japan, Taiwan, and Bangkok in 1968. When she was at home during these years, she attended concerts, luncheons, Mount Vernon Place Methodist Church, where she had been a member since coming to Washington. Clary continued her active life until a fractured hip curtailed her mobility. Declining health then forced her to move to Sleepy Hollow Manor

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<sup>43</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (30 October 1968), 10-11, Rayburn Library Collection; Clary, scrapbook (1951- 1960), 59, Rayburn Library Collection.

Nursing Home in Annadale, Virginia, where she died of natural causes May 9, 1977. Alla Delphia Clary, the Speaker's secretary, took one last trip home to Texas. She was buried near Prosper in the Clary family plot at Walnut Grove Cemetery May 12, 1977.<sup>44</sup>

Alla Clary's significance lies in her role as a congressional staff figure during momentous years of American history. One could wish that she had recorded with greater candor and perception a description of the personalities, processes, and events that she witnessed. She chose to leave a document that is more narrative and unrevealing than analytical and discussive. Her diary, nonetheless, tells much about the day-to-day work of a congressional secretary in maintaining an efficient office, sustaining contacts with constituents, and ensuring an employer's success. Like that of so many other congressional secretaries and administrative assistants, Alla Clary's has gone unheralded and unrecognized. Thus, she deserves attention as one of the heroines who helped her congressperson to serve better the people's interest.

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<sup>44</sup> Clary, Dulaney interview (30 October 1968), 10-11, Rayburn Library Collection; Denton Record-Chronicle, 10 May 1977; Dallas Morning News, 11 May 1977.



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