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> Contact Leslie Mahoney Mahoney's Towing 814 McAfee Medical Circle Beebe, AR 72012 501-882-5183 mahoneystowing@gmail.com







mustory windite John McClellan

By Dr. Ken Bridges - Professor of History, South Arkansas Community College South Arkansas Historical Preservation Society kbridges@southark.edu<mailto:kbridges@southark.edu>

One of the giants of Arkansas History, John McClellan towered over the Senate like no other Arkansan before or since. Working with fellow Arkansas Senator J. William Fulbright and an influential contingent of Arkansas congressmen, McClellan brought many accomplishments to the state and the nation. His rise to power began with a modest law

John Little McClellan was born on his parents' farm just outside Sheridan in February 1896. His father, Isaac McClellan, was an outspoken Democrat and named him for John S. Little of Sebastian County, a popular congressman and a future governor.

Though his father was a farmer, his real passion was with the law. He had opened a small law firm in Sheridan some years before, and the younger McClellan often accompanied his father on his trips into town and learned the law at his father's feet. As Mc-Clellan grew, he attended Sheridan public schools and was an intelligent and successful pupil. He was so inspired by his father's work that he learned as much as he could about the law when not in school or helping out on the farm.

By the time he was 17 in 1913, McClellan went before a judge to prove his legal skills and was admitted to the state bar. At that time in Arkansas, attorneys could still be trained by being apprenticed to other attorneys instead of going to law school. At an age when many youngsters McClellan's age were struggling to finish high school, preparing for college, or entering the workforce, McClellan had become an attorney and beginning a career with the law that would last the next 64 years. Being only 17, he was the youngest

He joined his father as a partner in his law firm. That fall, he married Eula Hicks, also a Sheridan native, and the couple would eventually have two children together.

In 1917, the United States entered World War I. McClellan decided to enlist to serve his country. He entered as a lieutenant in a unique new branch of the U. S. Army Signal Corps, the Air Corps. Though airplanes had only been invented 14 years earlier, McClellan was one of the first Americans to serve as a pilot in combat. After the end of the war and after 18 months in the service, McClellan was honorably discharged and returned to Arkansas.

After his return, he left his father's firm and started his own practice in nearby Malvern. He was popular and successful, and city leaders chose him to be city attorney in 1920. During that time, his marriage broke down, resulting in a divorce in 1921. The next year, he married Lucille Smith of Malvern, with whom he had three children. In 1926, his political fortunes continued to improve with his election as Prosecuting Attorney for the Seventh Judicial District, which included Hot Spring and Grant County.

After two terms as Prosecuting Attorney, McClellan decided to run for Congress in 1934. He defeated incumbent Rep. David D. Glover, also of Sheridan, in the Democratic Primary. McClellan was a strong supporter of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal programs and helped to establish such programs as Social Security and ensured that Works Progress Administration work relief projects came to Arkansas. However, this triumph was mixed with tragedy as his second wife died after a sudden illness in 1935. After two terms, McClellan ran for the U.S. Senate. The 1938 Democratic Primary pitted McClellan and against U. S. Sen. Hattie Caraway. McClellan put all he had into the race against the popular incumbent. In the end, he came up short, scoring only 47% of the

He set up a new law firm in Camden and re-evaluated his career. Sen. John Elvis Miller died in 1941, and Gov. Homer Adkins appointed Lloyd Spencer in the interim. In 1942, Sen. Spencer declined to run for another term in order to serve in the military for World War II. McClellan jumped into a crowded field of four candidates in the Democratic Primary. He finished 400 votes behind Jack Holt in the first primary, but since Holt did not have a majority, the race went to a runoff. He rallied and surged to a win with 61%. He faced no opposition in the general election.

McClellan would go on to serve for 35 years in the Senate and led many important projects and reforms, including the McClellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System in 1963 and the federal anti-racketeering law (RICO) in 1973. He died in office at age 81 in 1977. The Veterans Administration hospital in Little Rock was later named for him.

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