

Philip A. Bennett 1939

PROBABLY CORRECT PERSON

Philip Allen Bennett (1881-1942), son of Marion F. Bennett (Co I, 16th MO Cavalry Volunteers) t and Mary Jane (O'Bannon), was born at the family home on the O'Bannon Prairie in Dallas County, March 5, 1881. He was named after an uncle and his grandfather. Phil, as he was known, was the eighth of fourteen children.

Phil graduated from the Buffalo, Missouri, High School and in 1902 from the Springfield, Missouri, Normal and Business College. The latter is now Southwest Missouri State College. Thereafter, he taught school for two years, worked briefly as a stenographer for a Frisco Railroad official in St. Louis and then in 1904 bought the *Buffalo Reflex*, a weekly newspaper in Dallas County, Missouri. He owned, edited and published this paper for 17 years.

The county records show that on September 1, 1909, Philip A. Bennett for a consideration of \$3,500 purchased the real estate occupied by the *Reflex* offices and printing plant from J. P. O'Bannon and his wife. J.P., or "Uncle Jim" as he was known, was the brother of Phil's mother and the founder of the O'Bannon Bank which is still the leading bank in Dallas County. Uncle Jim loaned the ambitious, young editor money with which to buy the *Reflex*. He took a personal promissory note which was soon repaid for the paper prospered and eventually enjoyed a monopoly in the publishing field in the county.

As an editor, Phil was progressive and campaigned for better schools, better roads, better government, and an improvement of the community generally. He was President of the Ozark Press Association and of the Missouri Republican Editorial Association. He bought the first linotype used by a newspaper in the county, the first cylinder press, and in 1911 became the owner of the first automobile in the county. He founded the first motion picture theatre, The Bijou, in the county.

His interest in the automobile, combined with his interest in politics, led him to run for the Missouri State Senate in 1920 on a campaign pledge to "Get Missouri out of the Mud." He was elected to represent the 19th Senatorial District and served in the Senate from 1921-1925. During this period, he was the author of Missouri's first or so-called Centennial Road Law, which laid the foundation for its modern highway system. Phil was a strong believer in good government and in the Republican Party as an instrument to that end. He served 16 years as Republican County Chairman in Dallas and for a while as Congressional District Chairman and on the State Committee. In 1912, he was a delegate to the Republican National Convention in Chicago. He was nominated by the Republican Party for Lieutenant Governor of Missouri and was elected, serving from 1925-1929. So competent and respected was his work of presiding over the Senate, in which he had previously served, that during his four years as President of the

Senate he never had a ruling overruled by the body, although a majority of its members were of the other political party. At the end of his term in the Senate, the senators presented him with an expensive and engraved green gold pocket watch, which is in the possession of his son, along with the gavel he used and the cut glass pitcher which sat on the rostrum. His picture hangs in the corridor of the State Capitol near the Lieutenant Governor's office.

The occasion of Phil's inauguration as Lieutenant Governor of Missouri brought many delegations of his friends and relatives to Jefferson City from Dallas County. The oath of office was administered to Governor Bennett in the Senate Chamber on the afternoon of Monday, January 12, 1925. A newspaper account of his address on that occasion stated:

"Lt. Governor Bennett pledged his every effort toward doing everything needed to make Missouri a still better place in which to live. He scored class hatreds and pledged himself toward united action for the good of all, regardless of situation in life. He said that as president of the Senate he would be absolutely fair at all times. He said that Missouri does not need many new laws. Particularly he urged undivided support of all for the benefit of the farmers, industries, good roads, education and health work."

On behalf of his home county of Dallas, the Reverend Virgil R. Walker, a well-known orator and Christian Church minister, delivered a touching tribute and presented a gift. His address was reprinted in the *Buffalo Reflex* on January 15, 1925. He stated in part:

"... For these folks back home I speak. Dallas County sends no word of admonition. She offers no advice to her favorite son. She knows the blood that flows in his veins. She remembers the honesty, integrity and industry of his forebears. She has watched that son all the way from the district school to the high position he assumes today and remembering his inheritance, his early environment and habits of life and sensing the inspiration to high and holy endeavor constantly coming to him from the pure Christian who is his wife, she fears no evil. We utter no warnings nor urgent admonition. Rather we bring loving admiration and tell of great expectation.

"Governor Bennett, we have watched you when you followed the plow down the rows of corn, when you played and studied in the school house on the hill, when you attended high school in our little county seat, as you went away to college, when you came back and gave yourself to the arduous work of a country editor. With pride we saw you enter these legislative halls and in our hearts applauded as you acquitted yourself with distinction. In every trust we have found you true. Now we sincerely, gladly and unanimously congratulate you as you take the solemn obligations to this high office.

"Just this word I bring from the folks back home. We know not what the future may hold for you. Our hearts beat fast. Our hopes run high. We dream dreams and see visions that reach outward--far outward and onward and upward. But, whatever position you may attain, whatever high trust may be committed to your hand, just remember that back in the hills the hearts of the home folks are following you in love and admiration and for you are ascending unto heaven their sincere prayers.

In the meantime, on June 11, 1923, Phil had sold the *Reflex* to two of his employees who had leased it the two previous years and moved to Springfield, Missouri, purchasing two residences on the west side of North Jefferson Street just south of Central Avenue. One of these houses he rented and the other he occupied with his wife and two children, referred to hereafter. Later he bought property at 644 E. Lombard in Springfield and was living there when defeated for the Republican nomination for Governor of Missouri in 1928. In this campaign he carried over half of the 114 counties of the State but could not overcome the machine vote in Kansas City where the notorious Pendergast Democratic organization, in league with a corrupt local Republican organization, counted the votes. The machine offered to throw the Jackson County votes to Phil if he would agree as Governor to let the machine select the police and election commissioners for the county. This refusal, which he knew would result in his defeat, is typical of the political courage and honor which marked his career.

Although disappointed by the outcome of the primary election, Phil then devoted his energies to private enterprise, founding the Springfield Missouri Packing Company, the Home Owners Loan and Investment Company and engaging in the real estate business. He was active in civic affairs in Springfield as a member of the Chamber of Commerce. He was a Mason, Odd Fellow, Knight Templar, and Shiner. For many years he taught the Men's Class at South Street Christian Church. He served until his death as an elder of this church and as a member of its official board.

In 1938, Phil was the Republican nominee for Congress in the Sixth Missouri Congressional District, losing by the narrow margin of 615 votes. It was a spectacular campaign. His opponent had held the office for several terms, was State president of the Missouri Federation of Labor and strongly supported by the Pendergast machine then dominant throughout the State. In 1940, in a campaign against the same incumbent, Phil was elected by a 10,844-vote majority to the 77th Congress. His slogan was that he would be "A Congressman for All of the People." He was the first Republican in the history of the State to represent this District.

In the 1942 campaign, the clouds of World War II overshadowed all issues. Phil had been against getting into the war if it could be avoided but was for national defense and supported the war effort. He was elected to the 78th Congress by a large majority over a Democratic nominee who was then serving as Missouri State Democratic Chairman. Phil felt his policies had been vindicated. He had revenged his defeat in 1928. He had, for the second time in State history, captured the strongly Democratic Sixth Congressional District for the GOP. But he did not live long to enjoy the fruits of victory. Worn out from the rigors of campaigning and service in the U.S. House of Representatives with its long wartime sessions, he suffered an unexpected, sudden and fatal heart attack on December 6, 1942, in Washington, D.C. He died on December 7, 1942, in the Bethesda Naval Hospital. He is buried in Hazelwood Cemetery in Springfield, Missouri.

The House of Representatives, after hearing eulogies by its Members, adjourned on December 7, 1942, out of respect to the memory of the Congressman, as did the U.S. Senate. A Senate Resolution was passed expressing sorrow. Pursuant thereto the Vice President

appointed Senator Bennett Champ Clark and Senator Harry S. Truman of Missouri to represent the Senate at the funeral. All of the flags in the National Capital flew at half-mast. The tributes paid to Phil A. Bennett on the Floor of Congress by 26 of his colleagues of both political parties were bound into a book pursuant to Resolution of Congress and for his family are a treasured memento of his service to his country and of the esteem in which he was held by those who knew him in the high councils of the Nation. An official delegation of Senators and Representatives came from Washington, D.C., to attend the funeral in Springfield. Over 1,000 people were present at the services.

Phil's strength in time of need was his beloved wife, Mary Bertha (Tinsley), born October 30, 1891, whom he married in Buffalo on May 16, 1912. He bought a home in Buffalo on February 16, 1912, in anticipation of the marriage. Here their two children, Marion Tinsley (June 6, 1914) and Mary Edith (January 16, 1916), were born. This property was sold on August 11, 1924, after the family moved to Springfield. It still stands in the south part of Buffalo and is occupied.

After Phil's death, the family home--then at 507 South Main in Springfield--was sold and his widow moved to a smaller house she purchased at 731 South Pickwick Street, Springfield.

Bertha, born in Dallas County, Missouri, was the daughter of John Henry Tinsley and Mary Elizabeth (Hendrickson) Tinsley of Dallas County. After graduating from the Buffalo High School, she attended Southwest Missouri State College in Springfield (then called the Normal School) and taught school in Buffalo before marriage.

She has always been deeply interested in the Christian Church, in which two of her brothers are ministers, and in the schools her children attended. Bertha was President of the Boyd Elementary School, Jarret Jr. High School and Central High School P.T.A.'s in Springfield. She is a charter member of the Springfield Area Girl Scout Council, a member of the Sorosis Club, Women's Republican Club and the Auxiliary of Burge Hospital. For twelve years, she was a Sunday School teacher at South Street Christian Church in Springfield and later at National Avenue Christian Church. She is a charter member of the latter church and served as a member of its building committee before construction of its building in 1955. Employed as Girl's Counselor at Southwest Missouri State College in recent years, she retired from the position on September 1, 1959.

Philip Allen Bennett and wife Bertha (Tinsley) had two children, Marion Tinsley and Mary Edith, both born in Buffalo, Missouri. Marion married June Young of Hurley, Missouri, on April 27, 1941. They live in Chevy Chase, Maryland, a suburb of Washington, D.C., and are the parents of Ann and William Philip.

BENNETT

IN MEMORY OF
PHILIP ALLEN BENNETT

A LOVING FATHER AND CHRISTIAN STATESMAN
BORN MARCH 5, 1881 DIED DECEMBER 7, 1942
MISSOURI STATE SENATOR 1921 — 1925
LT. GOVERNOR OF MISSOURI 1925 — 1929
MEMBER OF THE 77TH UNITED STATES CONGRESS
1941-1942, MEMBER-ELECT OF 78TH CONGRESS