


William B. Bankhead

William Brockman Bankhead	
	
47th Speaker of the United States House of Representatives	
In office June 4, 1936 – September 15, 1940	
President	Franklin D. Roosevelt
Preceded by	Joseph W. Byrns, Sr.
Succeeded by	Sam Rayburn
9th Majority Leader of the United States House of Representatives	
In office 1935–1937	
Preceded by	Joseph Byrns
Succeeded by	Sam Rayburn
Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Alabama's 7th & 10th districts	
In office March 4, 1917 – March 3, 1933 (10th) March 4, 1933 – September 15, 1940 (7th)	
Preceded by	Only representative for the tenth district; Miles C. Allgood
Succeeded by	Zadoc L. Weatherford
Born	Lamar County, Alabama
Died	September 15, 1940 (aged 66) Washington, D.C.
Political party	Democratic
Alma mater	University of Alabama Georgetown University Law School
Profession	Law

William Brockman Bankhead (April 12, 1874 – September 15, 1940) was an American politician from Alabama who served as U.S. Representative and Speaker of the House.^[1] He was a Democrat. Bankhead was a prominent supporter of President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal of pro-labor union legislation, thus clashing with most other southern Democrats in Congress at the time.^[2] Bankhead described himself as proud to be a politician, by which he meant that he did not neglect matters that concerned his district or reelection.^[3] He is the father of noted actress Tallulah Bankhead.

Early life



William Bankhead (#9) with the 1892 Alabama football team

Bankhead was born in Lamar County, Alabama. His father, John H. Bankhead, was a very active politician, who had served in the Alabama legislature, and later served as U.S. Representative and Senator. His mother was Tallulah James Brockman, daughter of South Carolina state Senator Thomas Patterson Brockman and he was raised as a Methodist.^[4] Bankhead's brother, John H. Bankhead II, also served in the Senate.

William Bankhead attended the University of Alabama, where he was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and played on the university's first football team, organized in 1892. He studied law at Georgetown University Law Center in Washington, DC, graduating in 1895.

He was immediately admitted to the bar in Alabama, and practiced law in Huntsville.

Political career

In 1898, he became city attorney of Huntsville, serving until 1902. In 1900, he was elected to the Alabama House of Representatives for one term, serving through 1901.

In 1905, he moved to Jasper, Alabama. In 1910 he was appointed solicitor of the fourteenth judicial circuit of Alabama, serving until 1914.

In 1914, he sought the Democratic nomination for U.S. Representative, but did not get it. In 1916, he was elected Representative from the newly created 10th Congressional District. (Alabama was apportioned a tenth Congressional seat after the 1910 Census, but the seat was filled by at-large election in 1912 and 1914.) Bankhead held the 10th District until it was abolished after the 1930 Census, when Alabama lost a seat. He was the only person ever elected from the 10th District.

After reapportionment and redistricting following the 1930 Census, Bankhead was re-elected Representative from the 7th District in 1932, and was re-elected three times, serving until his death in 1940. In 1934, he was chosen House Majority Leader by his fellow Democrats. On June 4, 1936, he was chosen Speaker of the House to succeed Jo Byrns, who had died that morning. Bankhead served as Speaker until his own death in office on September 15, 1940.

As Speaker, Bankhead held the highest political office of any Alabamian save Vice President William R. King.

A notable family

Bankhead's father John H. Bankhead was a U.S. Representative and Senator. His elder brother John H. Bankhead II was also a U.S. Senator, and his nephew Walter Will Bankhead was a U.S. Representative. His daughter, Tallulah Bankhead, was a noted actress.^[5]

The William B. Bankhead National Forest and sections of old US Highway 78 in northern Alabama are named in his honor. His home in Jasper has been renovated to house the Walker Area Community Foundation's "Bankhead House and Heritage Center", a history museum and arts venue.



Painting of Bankhead as House Speaker.

References

- [1] Obituary *Variety*, September 18, 1940.
- [2] Robert E. Dewhirst, John David Rausch, *Encyclopedia of the United States Congress* (2007), p. 35.
- [3] Walter J. Heacock, "William B. Bankhead and the New Deal", *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 21, No. 3 (Aug., 1955), pp. 347-359.
- [4] http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Tallulah_Bankhead&action=edit§ion=2
- [5] Tallulah Bankhead - A passionate life (<http://home.hiwaay.net/~oliver/tbtaz.htm#adelaide>), on Hiwaay.net

External links

- William B. Bankhead (<http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=B000113>) at the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*
- William B. Bankhead (<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=11739>) at Find a Grave

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