

## **Jane “Jennie” Buttolph Rayburn (1858-1942)**

Jane “Jennie” Buttolph Rayburn was born on May 11, 1858, in Middlebury, Vermont, to William Wallace and Mary Ann Buttolph. William worked for the railroad, and in 1859, he moved the family to Bloomington, Illinois, where he worked for the Chicago and Alton Railroad. The family lived on East Grove Street, and Jennie stayed there for the rest of her life. Her life was typical for a middle-class woman in the Midwest: she got married, had children, joined clubs, became a widow, and spent her later years in the quiet town she grew up in.

In 1870, Illinois Wesleyan University became one of the first schools in the area to admit women. Jennie started attending the university in 1874, and it’s likely that she met her future husband, Calvin Rayburn, there. The couple married in 1877 when Jennie was 19 and Calvin was 29. Calvin worked as a school administrator, then became a lawyer. They bought a home on East Grove Street around 1884, and their first son, William, was born in 1885. In 1889, their second son, Donald, was born, but sadly, he passed away in 1891. Jennie remembered him every year and wondered what kind of man he would have become. In 1892, they had another son, Allan.

In 1890, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) was founded, and in 1894, the Letitia Green Stevenson Chapter was formed in Bloomington. Jennie joined in 1896 and became an active member. She later served as the Chapter’s Historian and Registrar. Jennie’s great-grandfather Buttolph had served in the Revolutionary War, which made her eligible for the DAR.

When the United States entered World War I in 1917, Jennie and Calvin were deeply affected, especially since their son Allan was a Lieutenant in Aviation at Love Field in Texas. Calvin passed away in September 1924, and Jennie lived as a widow from 1925 until her death in 1942. During these years, she kept a diary, recording her life as a widow. She was not alone, though, as her sister Isadora had lived with the family and continued to stay with Jennie after Calvin's death.

Jennie’s days were full of simple activities like reading the newspaper, sewing, shopping, visiting friends, and taking care of her home. In 1928, she became a grandmother with the birth of Willa, her granddaughter. She would go on to have five grandchildren, and her diaries show that she was a proud and loving grandmother.

In 1928, Jennie faced a heartbreaking event when her sister Isadora was hit and killed by a car while crossing the street. Jennie mourned deeply and was left to live alone. She wrote in her diary, “I am the last of my family of my generation.”

During the Great Depression, Jennie saw how hard times affected everyone. People would often come to her door looking for work, food, or asking for help. She recorded in her diary that she counted the offers of help at \$1.00 a day, and people came at least three times a day. Even her son Allan had to ask her for financial help.

In 1931, Jennie had a purse stolen, but the thief only got away with a small amount of money. It took two months for her to get her belongings back, and she shared the story with her DAR group and friends.

Jennie passed away on August 3, 1942, after being ill for two weeks. She was buried at Evergreen Memorial Cemetery in Bloomington, Illinois, in the Rayburn family plot.