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Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer, ca. 1941. Hessler Studio of Washington, D.C. *Courtesy of Peggy Palmer Archive.*

# Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer: A Portrait of Sam Rayburn's "Lady Friend"

BY ANTHONY CHAMPAGNE AND REED PENNEY\*

SAM RAYBURN OF TEXAS SERVED AS SPEAKER OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF Representatives for seventeen years, longer than anyone in American history. Prior to that, he was House majority leader, and during the early years of the New Deal in the 1930s served as its workhorse in the House as chairman of the Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce. His near-half century in the House of Representatives began with the presidency of Woodrow Wilson and ended with his death early into the administration of John F. Kennedy. He died in 1961 at seventy-nine years old.<sup>1</sup>

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The genesis of this article sprang from the discovery in May 2014 of the papers of Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer held by her great-niece Peggy Palmer, who was named for her great-aunt. Margaret Fallon Palmer's great-niece and her husband, Paul Felder, were incredibly gracious in allowing us access to this gold mine of an archive, which includes original letters, documents, telegrams, photographs, and scrap-books of newspaper articles about her life and times. This article would not have been possible without Peggy and Paul's unequivocal support and enthusiasm. Peggy and her brother, Clint Palmer, were also generous with their thoughts and memories of their great Aunt Peggy as well as Sam Rayburn. We are also indebted to University of Texas at Dallas graduate student Jennifer LaPrade and undergraduate student Cory Sagduyu for their assistance with this research project and to Sue Schwinn, a genealogist from Pearl River, New York, who helped with researching Margaret Fallon Palmer's family tree. We are also indebted to the archivists at five presidential libraries (FDR, Truman, Eisenhower, JFK, and LBJ libraries), Isabelle Fenton at St. John the Baptist Roman Catholic Church in Piermont, New York, for finding the baptism records of Margaret Fallon Palmer as well as her father's, and the librarians at the Silas Bronson Library in Waterbury, Connecticut, for uncovering John Booth Burrall's probate records.

<sup>1</sup> There are five major books on Sam Rayburn. In addition, there is an illuminating chapter on Rayburn in the first volume of Robert Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson; see Robert A. Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: The Path to Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 306–340. The most comprehensive biography of Rayburn is the one written by D.B. Hardeman (a former Rayburn staff member) and Donald

Today he is portrayed as a master of the legislative process, a reputation he shares with his most famous protégé, Lyndon Johnson. But Rayburn's reputation is of a cautious, yet skillful political pragmatist—a far cry from the bluster and ego for which Johnson is known. He is perceived as the quintessential man of the House: a self-described bachelor whose marriage was to the House of Representatives. The standard interpretation of Rayburn is that he was laconic, lonely, and isolated from people outside of the House of Representatives, which allowed Johnson the opportunity to cultivate interactions with Rayburn and become the protégé of a powerful man. LBJ biographer Robert Caro believed Rayburn was so alone that while “men who saw Sam Rayburn only in the halls of Congress feared him, men who also saw him outside those halls pitied him.” Rayburn had felt loneliness as a child, noted Caro, and he dreaded loneliness as a man. When Congress was in session, Rayburn was constantly in demand, but when it was not in session, Rayburn was alone. Randall B. Woods, another LBJ biographer, wrote that, “Rayburn lived alone in his apartment [in Washington, D.C.]. He was at times desperately lonely, venturing out only occasionally on fishing trips with colleagues or to baseball games or dinner with friends. But he was miserable when Congress was not in session.” It was Johnson, noted Woods, who “offered Rayburn the companionship of his family and personal affection.” “If ever anyone needed a protégé,” wrote Woods, “it was Rayburn.”<sup>2</sup>

But Rayburn was not always alone. He was married once in 1927 to Metz Jones, a beautiful woman from Northeast Texas and the sister of one of Rayburn's closest friends. However, less than three months after the wedding they separated, and ten months later they divorced. The cause of their breakup is unknown, and the divorce papers disappeared long ago. Many years after the divorce, Rayburn remarked, “It was so long ago, it doesn't seem as though I was ever married.”<sup>3</sup>

Most people in his district in Northeast Texas and in Washington never realized he had even been married—something that was politically desirable for Rayburn since he lived in an era and in a district when a divorced candidate for political office was anathema to voters. Quoting

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C. Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press, 1987). See also Anthony Champagne, *Congressman Sam Rayburn* (New Brunswick, N.J. Rutgers University Press, 1984); Champagne, *Sam Rayburn: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1988); C. Dwight Dorrough, *Mr. Sam* (New York: Random House, 1962); and Alfred Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn: A Biography* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Caro, *The Path to Power*, 330–331 (first quotation); Randall B. Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York: Free Press, 2006), 130–131 (second and third quotation).

<sup>3</sup> Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 121 (quotation); Sam Rayburn and Metz Jones, marriage record, Oct. 15, 1927, Deed/Marriage/Vital Records (Office of the County Clerk, Cooke County Courthouse, Gainesville, Texas); Sam Rayburn and Metz Jones Rayburn, divorce record Nov. 14, 1928 (District Clerk's Office, Fannin County Courthouse, Bonham, Texas). The divorce judgment is located in the Fannin County Courthouse, although the case file is missing. The fullest account of Rayburn's relationship with Metz Jones is in Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 121–131.



Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer, date unknown. Original painting by Benedict A. Osnis. *Courtesy of Peggy Palmer Archive.*

an unnamed friend of Rayburn's, biographer Alfred Steinberg wrote that the divorce devastated him: "At the time," claimed the friend, "it almost wrecked him." Another biography of Rayburn, co-authored by one of Rayburn's staff members, noted, however, that in spite of the "indelible scar" caused by the divorce, Rayburn had a number of relationships with women and that he "had an eye for beautiful, stylish, well dressed women who were at ease in the Washington political atmosphere and who could talk knowledgably about public affairs." Rayburn was such a private per-

son that almost nothing has been known about the women in Rayburn's life until now.<sup>4</sup>

One of those women who attracted Rayburn's attention seemed to have a special place in his heart and was close to him from around 1936 until his death. That woman was Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer. Hope Ridings Miller, a long-time friend of Rayburn's and for many years a society editor for *the Washington Post*, claimed that in 1940 she suggested to Rayburn that his vice presidential prospects would be enhanced if he married Peggy Palmer, a close friend of Miller. Miller said that Rayburn responded, "Well, it's very nice of you to see just what I need and thank you very much. But I'll tell you, I like her, and I like her very much. She's one of the most charming, one of the most understanding women I've ever known in my life, but marriage is not in the cards for Sam Rayburn." There is no indication other than from some gossip columnists that Rayburn ever seriously considered a second marriage. Peggy herself once responded to rumors of a marriage to Rayburn, "Oh now, now. That's just Washington talk."<sup>5</sup>

Even if Rayburn had thought about marrying her, many things in Peggy's past as well as her life in Washington would have made her politically unacceptable to Rayburn's constituents. She had spent most of her privileged childhood in and near New York City when she was not traveling with her family abroad. She had attended an all-girls' college prep school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. She had Irish Catholic roots on her father's side of the family. Her first marriage had ended in a scandalous divorce. Her father and her first two husbands were Republicans. In Washington Peggy was a socialite with a larger than life personality. Peggy's great-niece and great-nephew described her as an "Auntie Mame" type of a woman. Rayburn, in contrast, came from an impoverished background, one of eleven children of small farmers in Fannin County, Texas. The worlds Mr. Sam and Peggy had come from and their personalities were incredibly dissimilar, yet they liked and enjoyed each other's company.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dwayne Little, "The Political Leadership of Sam Rayburn, 1940-1961" (Ph.D. diss., University of Cincinnati, 1970), 19-21; Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn*, 81 (first quotation); Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 130 (second quotation), 129 (third quotation).

<sup>5</sup> Hope Ridings Miller to Anthony Champagne, Aug. 19, 1986, interview transcript (first quotation; Sam Rayburn Museum, Bonham, Texas); Drew Pearson and Robert S. Allen, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" (typescript), Nov. 16, 1938, American University Digital Research Archive, <[http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A45927?solr\\_nav\[id\]=8b1acfae5b696c81709b&solr\\_nav\[page\]=0&solr\\_nav\[offset\]=4#page/2/mode/1up/search/%22November+16%2C+1938%22](http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A45927?solr_nav[id]=8b1acfae5b696c81709b&solr_nav[page]=0&solr_nav[offset]=4#page/2/mode/1up/search/%22November+16%2C+1938%22)> [Accessed June 28, 2016]; Lee Carson, "Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer is Most Popular and Genuinely Loved Woman in Capitol," *Omaha Evening World-Herald*, undated clipping (second quotation; Peggy Palmer Archive, Easton, Pennsylvania, hereafter cited as PPA); Dorothy Kilgallen, "The Voice of Broadway," *The Record-Argus* (Greenville, Pa.), Jan. 21, 1950.

<sup>6</sup> Margaret Fallon Palmer's great-niece and great-nephew knew very little about their great-aunt's life before 1923. Much of the information about Mrs. Palmer's childhood and life before 1923 has been gathered from census records, vital records, and newspaper articles from various archives as well as docu-

Rayburn was exceptionally sensitive to feelings in his district. He may not have known that Peggy was divorced or that she had Irish Catholic roots, but he certainly knew that she was a socialite with an extravagant lifestyle. Peggy was at ease in the power and social centers of Washington and so was a wonderful companion for Rayburn in the capital, but she would not have fit into the world of Rayburn's Fourth Congressional District, a district of cotton farmers and businessmen in small towns. Mr. Sam's constituents were people who worked hard and were not exposed to great wealth, spectacular parties, or lavish lifestyles. Many were conservative Protestants who would look askance at the people who lived such lives. In 1956 Rayburn himself joined the Primitive Baptist Church in a small town in his district.<sup>7</sup>

Peggy Palmer was the widow of A. Mitchell Palmer, a former Democratic congressman from Pennsylvania, alien property custodian and attorney general of the United States in the Woodrow Wilson administration and a one-time presidential contender.<sup>8</sup> Palmer's sobriquet was "the Fighting Quaker (he was a member of the Religious Society of Friends), and historian William E. Leuchtenburg wrote that Palmer was "regarded by many as the father of women's suffrage and the child labor law." He was also notorious as attorney general for the Palmer Raids that occurred in late 1919 and early 1920 during the Red Scare, where he ordered the arrest and imprisonment of thousands of alleged Communists, anarchists, and radical leftists (many were arrested without warrants) and instigated the deportation of hundreds more. The Palmer Raids provided the impe-

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ments from the Peggy Palmer Archive. One document from the Palmer Archive that was especially helpful in writing about Mrs. Palmer's life was an undated transcript of an interview she gave about her life and times, which apparently occurred in late 1956. Other helpful documents include "Barber-Fallon Wedding," *The New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1909; Violet Sweet Haven, "Society Leader Buys Furnishings—But They're for Uncle Sam's Ships," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), Mar. 8, 1940; Margaret Fallon Palmer to Mr. Morrow, c. 1956, interview transcript, PPA; Margaret Olman Fallon, certificate of baptism, Aug. 30, 1883 (Church of St. John the Baptist, Piermont, New York); Andrew Fallon, church baptism record, Oct. 2, 1824, Irish Family History Foundation (printed copy in Reed Penney's possession); Margaret F. Barber and Walter L. Barber Jr., divorce record, May 15, 1916 (filed May 29, 1916), Records of Second Judicial District Court (Washoe County Courthouse, Reno, Nevada; hereafter cited as Second Judicial District Court, Reno); "Burrall Will Wed Ex-Wife of Dr. Barber," *Waterbury Republican*, May 20, 1916; Dudley Payne Lewis (ed.), *History of the Class of 1903, Yale College* (New Haven: Conn.: Yale University, 1913) 54; William J. Pape (ed.), *History of Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley Connecticut*, vol. 2 (Chicago: The S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1918), 53; Peggy Palmer to Reed Penney, July 28 2014, interview transcript (quotation; printed copy in Penney's possession); Clint Palmer to Reed Penney, May, 5 2014, e-mail (quotation; printed copy in Penney's possession); Harman W. Nichols, "Peggy Palmer Is Famous In Washington For Her Parties," *Lubbock Evening Journal*, Oct. 22, 1952.

<sup>7</sup> Frank X. Tolbert, "About Mr. Sam's Church at Tioga," *Dallas Morning News*, Sept. 16, 1956; "Pastor Hails Rayburn as Humble Man," *Atlanta Constitution*, Nov. 17, 1961. The Primitive Baptist pastor, Elder H.G. Ball, who baptized Rayburn and gave the eulogy at his funeral said, "In his heart [Rayburn] was always a Primitive Baptist and he had never joined any other church."

<sup>8</sup> The standard biography on A. Mitchell Palmer is Stanley Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer: Politician* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963). Margaret Fallon Palmer was interviewed for the book, but there is little about her in her husband's biography.

tus for the creation of the American Civil Liberties Union and also led to the advancement of the career of a young Justice Department employee named J. Edgar Hoover, who later ran the Federal Bureau of Investigation for nearly fifty years. Failing in his bid for the presidency in 1920, Palmer practiced law. In 1932, when Franklin Roosevelt became the Democratic presidential nominee, Palmer helped him draft the party platform. On May 11, 1936, after suffering for years with heart problems, Palmer died shortly after his sixty-fourth birthday. He suffered a heart attack related to an appendicitis operation that he had nearly two weeks earlier. He left a daughter by his first wife and Peggy, his second wife. At one time, Palmer was making an extraordinary sum in his legal practice, \$200,000 a year (about \$3.7 million today), but he suffered from poor health for years, and he and Peggy lived extravagantly. His will in Pennsylvania showed personal property valued at about \$93,000 and real estate valued at \$32,000 for a total of about \$125,000 (about \$2.1 million today). It included three houses and lots and an office building in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania. It did not include a home in Miami Beach, Florida, which was Peggy's. Peggy also got a home and furnishings in Stroudsburg to use during her lifetime, and she received income from a trust fund set up from Palmer's estate for the rest of her life. The problem was that he also had debts of more than \$164,000 (about \$2.8 million today). In other words, when Palmer died, he was broke. That meant Peggy was broke. His illness, the Great Depression, and their high living had wiped out their resources. Peggy needed a job, something she apparently had not had prior to Palmer's death. She was fifty-two years old.<sup>9</sup>

Peggy was born Margaret Oltman Fallon on July 21, 1883, although in job applications that birth date changed to as late as July 21, 1889 (some documents and newspaper articles about Peggy stated that she was as many

<sup>9</sup> William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932* (2nd ed.; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 66-83 (quotation on p. 76); For more on the Red Scare and the Palmer Raids, see Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer*; Robert K. Murray, *Red Scare: A Study in National Hysteria, 1919-1920* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955); Curt Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover: The Man and the Secrets* (New York: W.W. Norton., 1991), 75-105; Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Young J. Edgar: Hoover, the Red Scare, and the Assault on Civil Liberties* (New York, Carroll & Graf Publishers 2007); American Civil Liberties Union, <<https://www.aclu.org/about/aclu-history>> [Accessed July 5, 2016]; "Roosevelt Imparts Ideas on Platform," *Washington Post*, July 21, 1932; "Guards Palmer's Health," *New York Times*, July 29, 1932; "Mitchell Palmer Dies Here at 64," *Washington Evening Star*, May 11, 1936; "Palmer is Dead; Cabinet Officer Under Wilson," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1936; G. Gould Lincoln, "Who's Who for President? II.—A. Mitchell Palmer," *Washington Evening Star*, Feb. 15, 1920; Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014; Probate of the Last Will and Testament of A. Mitchell Palmer, Wills and Related Documents (Monroe County, Pennsylvania, Archives, Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania). J. Edgar Hoover wrote Peggy of his appreciation of Palmer's impact on his career: "You, of course have always known of my great admiration for your husband. He and Mr. [Francis P.] Garvan were the ones who started me in the Government Service and gave me the opportunity of trying to do something worth while." John Edgar Hoover to Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer, Feb. 8, 1944, PPA. In John T. Gibson, "Her Memory's Good - Washington's Is Too," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970, Peggy said she was "flat broke" when Palmer died. For contemporary money amounts we have used the CPI Inflation Calculator at the Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor's Web site, [http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](http://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).



as ten years younger than her actual age). She was about a year and a half younger than Rayburn, and her background was far more privileged than his. Peggy's birth occurred in the small village of Piermont, New York, on the western shore of the Hudson River about twenty miles north of New York City, and her parents had been married about nine months earlier in an interfaith ceremony officiated by a Catholic priest—her father was Catholic—and a Presbyterian minister, representing her mother's faith. The wedding occurred in Jersey City, New Jersey (just across the Hudson River from New York City), at the home of her maternal grandparents. When Peggy was five weeks old, she was baptized a Catholic. Peggy was an only child and came from a family with money. Her paternal grandfather, Andrew Fallon, was an Irish Catholic immigrant who tried his hand at getting rich in the California Gold Rush and then became a prominent lawyer in Piermont. A fellow lawyer wrote in 1902 that he was, "the representative of the very best element of his profession." He twice served as Piermont's president (the equivalent of a mayor), was a trustee for a local college as well as the village's Catholic Church, and was on the board of directors of a railroad company. When Andrew Fallon died in 1909 two of his obituaries claimed he was an "intimate friend" of Horace Greeley, founder and long-time editor/publisher of *The New York Tribune* as well as the Democratic and Liberal Republican presidential candidate in 1872. Not much is known about Peggy's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Fallon (née Hassett), other than that she was born in Ireland. Peggy's maternal grandfather John B. Oltman, the son of German immigrants, worked for Western Union for thirty-two years and then, on the day before his forty-fifth birthday, bought a seat on the New York Stock Exchange for about \$27,000 (over \$600,000 today). For the rest of his life he was a stockbroker. Oltman was also a member of the exclusive New York Athletic Club. When he died in 1900 *The New York Tribune* wrote, "Oltman was a genial man, popular in business and social circles and well known in Wall Street." Peggy's maternal grandmother, Margaret Oltman (née Mundy), was the stepdaughter of Cornelius Vanderbilt's partner in the steamboat business.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> United States Eighth (1860), Ninth (1870), Tenth (1880), and Twelfth (1900) Censuses, Population Schedules, State of New York, Rockland County, Orangetown, Piermont, Andrew Fallon Family; *New York State Vital Records Index—Excludes New York City*, Alphabetical/Soundex Index to New York State Birth Records, 1881–1941 (microfiche: National Archives at New York City); Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer (The National Personnel Records Center, National Archives at St. Louis, Missouri; hereafter cited as NPRC); "Widow of A. Mitchell Palmer Faces Want With Loss of Job," *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 1962; Memorandum to Homer Gruenther, Mar. 13, 1953, Records as President 1953–61, General File (Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library, Abilene, Kansas; hereafter cited as Eisenhower Library); William Hassett Fallon, certificate of baptism, Aug. 28, 1853 (Church of St. John the Baptist, Piermont, New York); "Marriages and Deaths – Fallon-Oltman," *New York Herald*, Oct. 27, 1882; "Personalities," *Daily Graphic* (New York, N.Y.), Oct. 27, 1882 (the *Herald* mentions a Catholic and a Presbyterian officiating Peggy's parents' wedding, but the *Daily Graphic* only lists a Presbyterian minister); "Obituary – The Rev. Charles K. Imbrie," *New York Times*, Nov. 21, 1891; Margaret Oltman Fallon, certificate of baptism, Aug.

Peggy and her parents not only lived in Piermont, but at times they also had homes on Manhattan's Upper West Side and in Midtown. Her father, William Hassett Fallon, was in the merchant shipping business and was also a member of the New York Produce Exchange. His office was near Wall Street, and one newspaper article claimed that "at one time he controlled the destinies of almost every tank steamer afloat on the seven seas." While growing up, Peggy accompanied her father on trips to many ports in Europe and also to Cuba. "I adored him," Peggy said years later. Her father was also a member of leisurely organizations such as the New York Athletic Club, the Piermont Rowing Association, and the Tappan Zee Yacht Club. The yacht that he sailed in competitions was named *Margaret* for his daughter. Peggy received private tutoring and also attended the Veltin School, which was an all-girls' college prep school on the Upper West Side. In 1894 *the New York Times* wrote that the Veltin School was "the largest and most thoroughly-equipped private educational establishment for young ladies in [New York City]."<sup>11</sup>

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30, 1883 (Church of St. John the Baptist, Piermont, New York); Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 14–15; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956; Andrew Fallon Passenger Record, Aug. 28, 1835, <<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:QVPX-TCRQ>> [Accessed Apr. 15, 2015]; Alonzo Wheeler, "Bench and Bar" in *Historical Record to the Close of the Nineteenth Century of Rockland County New York*, ed. Arthur S. Tompkins (Nyack, N.Y.: Van Deusen & Joyce, 1902), 243–244 (first quotation); "Obituary – Andrew Fallon," *New York Sun*, Mar. 6, 1909 (second quotation); "Obituary – Andrew Fallon," *Brooklyn Standard Union*, Mar. 7, 1909 (second quotation); "Obituary Notes – Andrew Fallon," *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1909; David Cole (ed.), *History of Rockland County, New York* (New York: J. B. Beers & Co., 1884; reprint, New City, N.Y.: The Historical Society of Rockland County, 1986), 94, 103, 210, 221, 341; Frank Bertanguie Green, *The History of Rockland County* (New York: A. S. Barnes & Co., 1886; reprint, New City, N.Y.: Historical Society of Rockland County, 1989), 347, 360; *Annual Report of the State Engineer & Surveyor of the State of New York, and of the Tabulations and Deductions From the Reports of the Railroad Corporations for the Year Ending September 30th, 1865* (Albany, N.Y.: Weed, Parsons, & Co., 1866), 564–565; "Exchange and Telegraphic Changes," *New York Daily Tribune*, Feb. 12, 1875; "City & Suburban News," *New York Times*, Mar. 31, 1882; Rev. Ezra F. Mundy (ed.), *Nicholas Mundy and Descendants Who Settled in New Jersey in 1665* (Lawrence, Kans.: Bullock Printing Co., 1907), 68; "John B. Oltman's Death," *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1900; "Clubman Killed by a Fall," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Feb. 16, 1900; "J. B. Oltman's Sudden Death," *New York Tribune*, Feb. 16, 1900 (third quotation). The *Tribune's* obituary lists Margaret Oltman (née Mundy) as the stepdaughter of William Vanderbilt's business partner rather than Cornelius Vanderbilt. John B. Oltman's obituaries state he was born in the U.S., but according to the 1870 census he was born in Prussia (now Germany); see United States Ninth Census (1870), Population Schedules, State of New Jersey, Jersey City, John B. Oltman Family.

<sup>11</sup> United States Twelfth Census (1900), Population Schedules, State of New York, County of New York, Manhattan, William H. Fallon Family; New York State Census, 1892, 1905, Rockland County, Orangetown, Piermont, William H. Fallon Family, <<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MQ9F-TZM>> and <<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:MVBP-BBX>> [Accessed July 5, 2016]; Margaret Oltman Fallon and Walter Lewis Barber Jr., marriage record, October 12, 1909 (Municipal Archives, New York, New York; hereafter cited as NYCMA); "Barber-Fallon Wedding," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1909; "Regattas on the Hudson," *New York Times*, July 5, 1883; "Tappan Zee Yachtsmen," *New York Times*, Apr. 26, 1896; *A History of American Amateur Athletics and Aquatics* (New York: Outing Company, Ltd., 1888), 249; "Obituary Notes – William Fallon," *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1915; "Obituary Notes – William H. Fallon," *The Evening Post* (New York), Oct. 18, 1915; *Report of the New York Produce Exchange from July 1st, 1902 to July 1st, 1903* (New York: Jones Printing Co., 1903), 322; Haven, "Society Leader Buys Furnishings," *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), Mar. 8, 1940 (first quotation); Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, NPRC; "Mlle. Veltin's School for Girls," *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 1894; Albert Nelson Marquis (ed.), *Who's Who in New England* (Chicago: A. N. Marquis & Co., 1909), 1106; "Burrall Will Wed Ex-Wife of Dr. Barber," *Waterbury Republican*, May 20, 1916; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (second quotation).

In October 1909, Peggy, at twenty-six years old, married a twenty-eight-year-old doctor from Waterbury, Connecticut, Walter Lewis Barber Jr.; they had been engaged for years. Barber did his undergraduate work at Yale (he and Peggy met while Barber was a student there), attended medical school at Johns Hopkins, and finally obtained his medical degree from New York University and Bellevue Hospital in 1907. Peggy's wedding was quite opulent and took place at her maternal uncle's home in Midtown Manhattan (like his father he was also a stockbroker). The foyer of the home, according to one newspaper article, was decorated in, "pink chrysanthemums and autumn leaves . . . [and] the dining room was [decorated with] white chrysanthemums and autumn leaves. The French drawing room, which had been formed into a chancel, was banked with pink roses and southern smilax. The music by Fenwick's Orchestra, which included a harp, came softly from behind a screen of palms at the foot of the stairs." Barber was a Congregationalist, but the officiant at their wedding was a Catholic priest (Peggy was still a Catholic, but by the time she became Peggy Palmer she considered herself Presbyterian). About eighty people attended the ceremony, but around four hundred invitations were sent out for the reception that followed. They lived in Waterbury, where Barber practiced medicine with his father, and he was also the attending surgeon at Waterbury Hospital. The marriage failed after about six and a half years. She and Barber had no children. Peggy hardly spoke of this marriage (her great-niece and great-nephew knew very little about it), and most of her press biographies do not mention it.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> See Fallon and Barber, marriage record, NYCMA; "Barber-Fallon Wedding," *New York Times*, Oct. 24, 1909; "Barber-Fallon," *Waterbury Republican*, Oct. 28, 1909; "Barber-Fallon," *Waterbury American*, Oct. 27, 1909 (quotation); "Marriages and Deaths – Fallon-Oltman," *New York Herald*, Oct. 27, 1882; Mundy (ed.), *Nicholas Mundy and Descendants*, 68; "Burrall Will Wed Ex-Wife of Dr. Barber," *Waterbury Republican*, May 20, 1916; "Yale's Annual Prom," *New York Tribune*, Jan. 22, 1902 (Peggy and Barber were not dates at the prom, but they were both listed as attending); "Dr. Barber Funeral Monday," *Waterbury American*, Apr. 11, 1959; "Dr. Barber Dies After Long Illness," *Waterbury Republican*, Apr. 11, 1959; "Henry H. Oltman, A Broker 46 Years," *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1946; Pape (ed.), *History of Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley Connecticut*, vol. 2, 107–108; Lewis (ed.), *History of the Class of 1903, Yale College*, 54; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956; Barber and Barber, divorce record, May 15, 1916, Second Judicial District Court, Reno. According to the newspaper articles about Peggy and Walter L. Barber Jr.'s wedding, they married on October 26, 1909, which also happens to be the same day as Peggy's mother's birthday and Peggy's parents wedding anniversary. However, according to the New York City marriage license the marriage occurred on October 12, 1909. Articles that do not mention Peggy's first marriage include "A. Mitchell Palmer Weds Mrs. Burrall," *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1923; Elizabeth Young, "Washington's Most Beautiful Society Women Discuss Their Ideas of Loveliness," *Washington Post*, Nov. 10, 1933; and Mary Van Rensselaer Thayer, "Flurry in Flag Designing Creates Bright Banners for Forrestal and Symington," *Washington Post*, Nov. 19, 1947. We found three newspaper articles that mention her three marriages: John T. Gibson, "Her Memory's Good – Washington's Is Too," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970; "Palmer-Burrall Wedding of Interest to Waterbury," *Waterbury Republican*, Aug. 30, 1923; "A. Mitchell Palmer Married in Connecticut," *Seranton Republican*, Aug. 30, 1923. Reed Penney spoke with Walter L. Barber Jr.'s daughter (by his second wife), Elizabeth Barber (Betsy) Sanderson, and asked her about her father's marriage to Margaret Fallon Palmer. Mrs. Sanderson said, "I knew my father was married before, but I don't know anything about it, and we didn't talk about it." Sanderson to Penney, April 28, 2014, telephone interview.

On May 15, 1916, Peggy obtained a divorce in Reno, Nevada—seven months after the death of her Catholic father (at the time Nevada had a six-month residency requirement to procure a divorce). She was accompanied to Reno by her mother, Agatha Fallon (née Oltman). Five days after the divorce Peggy married John Booth Burrall, the scion of one of Waterbury's wealthiest families, at the luxurious Biltmore Hotel in New York City. Forty years later she called Burrall her "first husband." He was thirty-six, and Peggy was thirty-two. A 1902 Yale graduate, where he was a member of the secret society Scroll and Key, Burrall was the head of two brass manufacturing companies (Waterbury's nickname is "the Brass City") and also served on the boards of directors of several companies. He was also a member of several clubs such as the Yale Club of New York City, the Graduates Club of New Haven, and the Country Club of Waterbury. For years Burrall had been a patient as well as a close friend of Peggy's first husband, Dr. Walter L. Barber Jr. According to the *Waterbury Republican*, one of Waterbury's newspapers, Peggy's divorce and second marriage had been, "the culmination of an affair which has kept local society talking for months. . . . Some two years ago, Burrall's attentions to [Peggy] became marked and furnished choice gossip for the set. At first it was taken as merely an infatuation which would soon die out but the reverse was true. [Barber] awoke to the situation which was threatening his household and interposed his objections." The *Republican* also reported that several months before the events of May 1916, Peggy and her first husband had separated. In addition, "several times, it is alleged, [Barber] was on the verge of entering suit against [Burrall] for the alienation of [Peggy's] affections. Before any action reached the courts, however, it was reported there was a settlement." Burrall's mother was shocked about her son's relationship with Peggy but eventually accepted their marriage and bought them a home in Waterbury as a wedding gift that cost \$60,000 (about \$1.3 million today).<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Barber and Barber, divorce record, May 15, 1916, Second Judicial District Court, Reno; "Wife of Eastern Physician Gets Divorce," *Reno Evening Gazette*, May 17, 1916. The article mistakenly states that Barber was from Watertown, Massachusetts, but the wedding date cited is the same as in the other newspaper articles. The article also notes Peggy's reason for the divorce from Barber was because of a "failure to provide." Barber did not contest the divorce, but a stipulation was signed wherein Peggy "forfeited all claim to alimony, separate maintenance, counsel fees, or costs." See also "Obituary Notes – William Fallon," *New York Times*, Oct. 18, 1915; "New Divorce Law Makes Reno Gay Again and Prosperity Comes Back With Advent of Mismatched Ones," *Washington Post*, July 18, 1915; "A. Mitchell Palmer Married in Connecticut," *Scranton Republican*, Aug. 30, 1923; "Marriage Announcement 1 – Burrall-Barber," *New York Times*, May 21, 1916; Margaret Fallon Barber and John Booth Burrall, marriage record, May 20, 1916, NYCMA; Pape (ed.), *History of Waterbury and the Naugatuck Valley Connecticut*, vol. 2, 53; *Obituary Record of Yale Graduates, 1919–1920* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University, 1920), 1480–1481; Palmer to Murrow, c. 1956 (first quotation); "Waterbury," <<http://connecticuthistory.org/towns-page/waterbury>>[Accessed July 9, 2016; second quotation]; "Burrall Will Wed Ex-Wife of Dr. Barber," *Waterbury Republican*, May 20, 1916 (third and fourth quotations); "John Booth Burrall And Mrs. W. L. Barber, Jr. Married," *Waterbury Republican*, May 21, 1916; "Obituary – John Booth Burrall," *Waterbury American*, Feb. 9, 1920; "John B. Burrall Dies Suddenly at Palm Beach," *Waterbury Republican*, Feb. 9, 1920; "Manifest List of United States Citizens," S.S.

Peggy and John Booth Burrall's marriage did not last very long. On October 26, 1919, Peggy was told that Burrall had no more than five months to live. Peggy was devastated. Years later she said, "I lost something that day that I've never gotten back." On February 8, 1920, Burrall died of esophageal cancer. He was forty years old. Their marriage had lasted nearly four years, and they had no children. Peggy was now a thirty-six-year-old widow, but she was by no means destitute. She inherited Burrall's personal estate, which in 1921 was valued at \$565,564 (about \$7.6 million today). After Burrall's death Peggy swore she would never marry again. "I wouldn't risk going through the hell like that watching [Burrall] suffer," she said in 1956.<sup>14</sup>

On November 11, 1922, Peggy attended a party at Woodrow Wilson's house in Washington to celebrate Armistice Day. Peggy was a guest of her friend, Undersecretary of the Treasury S. Parker Gilbert Jr. At this party Peggy met her third and final husband, A. Mitchell Palmer. Palmer was a fifty-year-old widower—his first wife Roberta had died earlier in the year leaving him with a twelve-year-old daughter. Peggy was smitten with Palmer and told Gilbert, "I think he's the handsomest man I've ever seen." Soon they were courting, and nine months after they met they were married at Peggy's summer home in Groton, Connecticut. After the wedding, they spent two months in Europe on their honeymoon. Theirs was a life filled with parties and other social engagements in Florida, Washington, D.C., and elsewhere. Years later Peggy said, "We were so intensely happy. We knew how to have fun together and make each day a thrilling, beautiful adventure. . . . We were never away from each other for one single night." For most of 1925 they drove around Europe for Palmer's health and put about 11,000 miles on their car. Life was grand: in addition to the summer home in Groton, Connecticut, she and Palmer had homes in Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania; Miami Beach, Florida; and Washington, D.C.<sup>15</sup>

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*Pastores*, Arriving at Port of New York March 18, 1913, New York, Passenger Lists, 1820–1957, Ancestry.com [July 6, 2016]. The manifest lists Burrall and Barber returning from Jamaica together. Also, the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, Connecticut, has an undated photograph of Barber and Burrall standing side by side (they appear to be on vacation) in their archives.

<sup>14</sup> John Booth Burrall, death record, Feb. 7, 1920 (Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Jacksonville, Florida). The death record states he died on February 7, 1920, but almost all of Burrall's newspaper obituaries list his death as February 8, 1920: "Obituary 5 – Burrall," *New York Times*, Feb. 12, 1920; "Obituary – John Booth Burrall," *Waterbury American*, Feb. 9, 1920; "John B. Burrall Dies Suddenly at Palm Beach," *Waterbury Republican*, Feb. 9, 1920; Probate Court Records of John Booth Burrall, Waterbury Probate Records, 1779–1979 (Silas Bronson Library, Waterbury, Connecticut); Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (first and second quotation). In Peggy's interview she seems to imply that Burrall was an alcoholic. She also claims he gave up drinking when they got married.

<sup>15</sup> Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (first quotation); "Mrs. A. M. Palmer Claimed by Death," *Washington Post*, Jan. 5, 1922; "A. Mitchell Palmer Weds Mrs. Burrall," *New York Times*, Aug. 30, 1923; "Palmer-Burrall Wedding of Interest to Waterbury," *Waterbury Republican*, Aug. 30, 1923; "Society Events," *Washington Post*, Feb. 27, 1924; "Photo Standalone 10," *New York Times*, Aug. 3, 1924; "Notes of Social Activities in New York and Elsewhere," *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1928; "Palmer's Fete Senator Guffey at Dinner Party," *Washington Post*, Jan. 10, 1935; "Socialites on \$50,000,000 Fleet of Yachts Watch Miami Regatta," *Washington Post*, Mar. 3,

Peggy fit well into the Washington social scene. She developed friendships over the years with leaders of Washington society, such as Evalyn Walsh McLean (the last person to own the Hope Diamond), Alice Roosevelt Longworth, and Perle Mesta. Beginning in 1928 and for many years thereafter, Peggy attended every opening session of the Supreme Court. Washington newspaper articles over the years mentioned that Peggy was glamorous with a warm and charming personality. One journalist wrote, "She is one of the few of the fair sex who seems to have been born for nothing else but happiness and making others feel eternal sunshine." Columnist George Dixon wrote that Peggy was "one of the most engaging ladies in the Nation's Capital," while society columnist Betty Beale wrote that she was "one of the most popular women in [Washington]." Peggy was also nominated as "Washington's 'best dressed woman in public life'" and was mentioned as having the "Most Social Grace," the "Merriest Laugh," and the "Most Winning Smile." She claimed news photographers "get good clear pictures of my tonsils because I'm either always talking or laughing."<sup>16</sup>

*The Washington Post* profiled Peggy in 1933, when she was fifty years old, and said she was "cited by National Beauty authorities as one of four Washington Society women who perfectly exemplify the thrilling charm of the Dynamic type of beauty." She was "5 feet 8 inches tall and weighs 140 pounds. She has never found it necessary to diet to maintain the weight which gives perfectly proportioned grace to her tall, supple figure." She claimed, "My entire career, diversion, and ambition is to keep my husband fit and husky."<sup>17</sup>

Palmer, however, was not "fit and husky." He had suffered from heart disease for years and died in 1936. Palmer's daughter, Mary, was twenty-six. Peggy and Mary were not close. Peggy found her to be "completely spoiled," although she did say that they got along better as Mary got older. Twenty years after Palmer's death, Peggy said that after her second husband's death, "[Burrall] left me plenty of money, which I blew by degrees.

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1935; "Miami Beach to See Fashion Show Today," *New York Times*, Feb. 10, 1935; "About the Town With Dudley Harmon," *Washington Post*, Dec. 13, 1939; Inga Arvad, "Did You Happen to See—Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer," *Washington Times-Herald* clipping, c. 1941, PPA (second quotation).

<sup>16</sup> Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956; Arvad, "Did You Happen to See—Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer," *Washington Times-Herald* clipping, c. 1941, PPA (first quotation); George Dixon, "Washington Scene," *Washington Post*, July 28, 1955 (second quotation); Betty Beale, "Exclusively Yours," *Washington Evening Star*, Aug. 3, 1947 (third quotation); undated clipping, PPA (fourth quotation); Austine Cassini, "These Charming People," *Washington Times-Herald*, c. 1946, PPA (fifth quotation); Austine Cassini, "These Charming People," *Washington Times-Herald*, Jan. 2, 1945 (sixth quotation); Igor Cassini, "These Charming People," *Washington Times-Herald*, c. 1940, PPA (seventh quotation); Nichols, "Peggy Palmer Is Famous In Washington For Her Parties," *Lubbock Evening Journal*, Oct. 22, 1952 (eighth quotation); Gibson, "Her Memory's Good - Washington's Is Too," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Young, "Washington's Most Beautiful Society Women Discuss Their Ideas of Loveliness," *Washington Post*, Nov. 10, 1933 (quotations).



Margaret Fallon (Peggy) Palmer, ca. 1924. Harris & Ewing photo studio, Washington, D.C.  
*Courtesy of Peggy Palmer Archive.*

Most of it in '29 and the rest on Mitchell's illness. That wasn't anyone's fault but mine, and I'm not complaining, because I would do it again." Peggy was anxious about life after Palmer's death. "I thought I could not stand it," Peggy said in 1941. "But I can, and do you know why? Because [Palmer] always used to say: 'Peggy can take it.' So I have to prove that I can, and not let him down." Tragedy struck Peggy again in 1937 when her mother died.<sup>18</sup>

Peggy sought to parlay Palmer's and her political connections into a government job. It was not an easy task because as one 1936 White House memo noted about her job-seeking, "She has had no practical business training but that she has a nice personality, etc. and if they could find [*sic*] some place for her as a receptionist, that would be perfectly ok." President Franklin D. Roosevelt personally wrote Secretary of State Cordell Hull and asked if Peggy could be placed as a "Secy. Or Asst. Secy. Of Canadian or Mexican or any other boundary or internat. Commission." He also asked the Secretary of Interior Harold L. Ickes to find Peggy a job, but he failed to find her one. Frustrated, FDR wrote Harry Hopkins, the head of the Works Progress Administration, regarding a job for Peggy, "CAN YOU FIND SOMETHING?" Peggy's search for income did not prevent her from staying at expensive hotels while visiting New York City such as the Waldorf-Astoria, the Biltmore, and the Plaza.<sup>19</sup>

Peggy's first job wound up being with the Democratic Speaker's Bureau. The Bureau assigned prominent Democrats to give campaign speeches during the 1936 election cycle. It may have been there that Peggy first met Sam Rayburn; he was the head of the Speaker's Bureau. Rayburn was chairman of the House Committee on Interstate and Foreign Commerce and was seeking to become House majority leader. The Speaker's Bureau was a good way to support Democratic congressional candidates and gain their support in the upcoming majority leader election—an election that Rayburn did win in 1937. The first report of Peggy and Rayburn going out with one another was in 1937.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. (first quotation); Coben, *A. Mitchell Palmer*, 263; "Palmer is Dead; Cabinet Officer Under Wilson," *Washington Post*, May 12, 1936; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1936 (second and third quotation); "Deaths—Agatha Fallon," *New York Times*, July 13, 1937; Arvad, "Did You Happen to See—Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer," *Washington Times-Herald*, c. 1941, PPA (fourth quotation). A. Mitchell Palmer's grandson Mitchell Palmer Lichtenberg also said that Peggy and his mother, Mary Palmer Lichtenberg, did not really get along with one another. Lichtenberg to Penney, March 3, 2014, telephone interview.

<sup>19</sup> "Notes of Social Activities in New York and Elsewhere," *New York Times*, July 8, 1936, Sept. 13, 1937, and Dec. 15, 1938; Margaret F. Palmer to Harold L. Ickes, Nov. 9, 1936, President's Personal File on A. Mitchell Palmer (PPF 239), Papers of Franklin D. Roosevelt (Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York; hereafter cited as PPF, Palmer); Toi Bachelder to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Nov. 16, 1936, PPF, Palmer (first quotation); Franklin D. Roosevelt to Cordell Hull, Sept. 15, 1936, PPF, Palmer (second quotation); Franklin D. Roosevelt to Harry L. Hopkins, Nov. 9, 1936, PPF, Palmer (third quotation).

<sup>20</sup> Palmer to Ickes, Nov. 9, 1936, PPF, Palmer; Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 206; "Texan to Play Large Part in Democratic Campaign," *Waco News-Tribune*, July 9, 1936; Turner Catledge, "Congress Convenes Today; Neutrality Its First Task," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1937; "After Dark," *Washington Evening Star*,



Earlier that year Peggy became chair of the Pennsylvania Board of Motion Picture Censors. After Pennsylvania's Democratic Governor, George Earle, appointed her to the position, a film industry publication reported that she "has had very little experience with motion pictures in the past, she has seen less than a dozen pictures . . . she has had no previous trade contact in the business." The publication also reported that Will Hays, the country's top film censor, told Peggy, "You have practically nothing to do in your new job as we do all the work in my . . . office." In two years, however, she viewed more than one thousand films—one of which was a film from the Soviet Union, *Baltic Deputy*. The entire board voted to ban it because they considered it communist propaganda. "I don't like Communism. So the picture is not the type I want to see shown in Pennsylvania," Peggy said. With the ban, Peggy began to receive death threats and one man even attacked her with acid, which fell on her clothing and caused no damage to her person. She was assigned a police guard, and A. Mitchell Palmer's protégé, J. Edgar Hoover, now the director of the FBI, offered to speak with her and give his assistance, saying that if any of the threats came within the jurisdiction of the FBI, he would give the matter his personal attention. Hoover arranged for an agent to interview Peggy on at least two occasions and, in a personal and confidential memo to Hoover, the agent confided that, "undoubtedly complaints have been made and Mrs. Palmer has been molested on various occasions by members of the communistic organization of this district. However," wrote the agent, "I cannot help but believe that she has imagined that threats were being made against her when they were not." (A judge later overturned the ban.) Still, she and Hoover remained in touch. Peggy asked Hoover to use his influence to help get air priority during World War II for friends to go from New York to Big Spring, Texas, and air priority was granted. During the McCarthyism of the 1950s, Peggy sought Hoover's assistance because, according to FBI assistant director Louis B. Nichols, she said that Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate Committee had approached her and "offered to hire [Peggy] at most any price." They wanted to get information on Drew Pearson, a famed columnist who had a difficult relationship with McCarthy that on one occasion turned into a brawl. Peggy claimed she was "very fond of Drew Pearson and considers Mrs. Pearson like a member of the family." She said she did not have information on the Pearsons, but "if she did she would not furnish it to the McCarthy Committee." Peggy also expressed her fear that the committee was putting her "under constant surveillance." Hoover immediately ordered that Peggy be added to the "list of persons not to be contacted without prior Bureau authority."

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June 3, 1937. Hope Ridings Miller, a friend of Rayburn's and Peggy Palmer's, believed they began seeing each other in 1936. See Miller to Champagne, Aug. 19, 1986.

While she was a film censor, leaders of Pennsylvania's Democratic Party supported efforts to get Peggy a position in the postmaster general's office in Stroudsburg.<sup>21</sup>

In 1939 Pennsylvania inaugurated a Republican governor, and Peggy lost her job as a film censor. She had been making \$4,800 a year (about \$82,000 today). In late 1938 she begged Marvin McIntyre, a chief Roosevelt aide, for a ten-minute appointment with the president. She also told McIntyre that her tenure as a film censor was a "tough experience." Peggy wrote him, "No woman has ever held this job (an [*sic*] between you and me, no woman should hold it with all the Police Court work, and other disagreeable features), but it has done me no end of good and given me lots of experience, of a kind I never expected to have." In early 1939 McIntyre wrote to President Roosevelt, "Do you want to ask the bachelor Attorney General if he wants Peggy Palmer for official hostess at the [Justice] Department? That would be one way of getting sam [*sic*] Rayburn's goat!" The president responded, "Take up with the Attorney General, in person." There seems to be two clear meanings to the exchange. McIntyre and Roosevelt knew that Rayburn and Peggy were in a relationship. The attorney general at that time was Frank Murphy, who cultivated a reputation as a party-goer and man-about-town who was often seen in the company of attractive women. The implication was that an appointment where Peggy would be Murphy's hostess would irritate Rayburn. At the time, Roosevelt was all for irritating Rayburn. Rayburn's mentor, Vice President John Nance Garner, had openly broken with Roosevelt by this time, and Rayburn was loyal to his old friend. It was just the kind of subtle stroke of vindictiveness that FDR appreciated. Peggy also asked McIntyre if she could be an assistant secretary of the treasury. FDR wrote to McIntyre, "Try to satisfy her but not in the Treasury."<sup>22</sup>

<sup>21</sup> "Mrs. Palmer Named to Board of Censors," *Harrisburg* (Pa.) *Telegraph*, Dec. 7, 1936; "Censors," press clipping, Jan. 15, 1937, MPPDA Digital Archive, <<http://mppda.flinders.edu.au/records/1171>> [Accessed July 5, 2015; first and second quotations]; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956; Jean R. Hailey, "Socialite Margaret Palmer Dies at 89," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1973; "Censor," *Time*, Jan. 17, 1938 (third quotation); "Ban on Soviet Film Brings Acid Attack," *New York Times*, May 24, 1938; "Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer's Life Menaced After Movie Ban," *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pa.), May 24, 1938; John Edgar Hoover to Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer, May 2, 1938, Margaret Fallon Palmer FBI File (Federal Bureau of Investigation, Washington D.C., hereafter cited as FBI); A. B. Leckie to John Edgar Hoover, May 24, 1938, FBI; A. B. Leckie to John Edgar Hoover, Nov. 16, 1938, FBI (fourth quotation); Robert C. Hendon to Clyde Tolson, Mar. 23, 1943, FBI; John Edgar Hoover to Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer, Mar. 24, 1943, FBI; "Sen. McCarthy Either Kicked, Slapped, or Mauled Pearson," *Washington Post*, Dec. 14, 1950; L. B. Nichols to Clyde Tolson, Oct. 17, 1953, FBI (fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth quotations); John Edgar Hoover, memorandum, Oct. 19, 1953, FBI; A. M. Jones to Mr. Nichols, Jun. 7, 1954, FBI (ninth quotation); "Urged for Postal Post," *New York Herald Tribune*, Oct. 12, 1937; "Judge Bok Scores Pa. Censors for Their 'Inexcusable Neglect' in Reversing Russian Film's Ban," *Variety*, March 22, 1938. The *Variety* article quotes Judge Bok as saying that Peggy and the other members of the board were "incompetent and prejudiced." He also said "their testimony showed a lack of intelligence, basis of judgment or any conception of the true nature of censorship."

<sup>22</sup> "Mrs. Carroll is Named Head of Censors' Board," *The Evening News* (Harrisburg, Pa.), Mar. 20, 1939; Margaret F. Palmer to Marvin H. McIntyre, Dec. 28, 1938, PPF, Palmer (first and second quotations);

Roosevelt kept Peggy out of the Treasury Department. Instead, she got a job at the U.S. Maritime Commission in October 1939. Her task was to do interior decorating for merchant ships. According to one newspaper article Peggy said she was going to make the ships “a thing of beauty and a joy forever.” In October 1940 Rayburn (he had become Speaker of the House the month before) spoke to the Women’s National Press Club in Washington. Hope Ridings Miller wrote in the *Washington Post* that Speaker Rayburn “typically turns down any midday fetes that do not take place on Capitol Hill.” A possible explanation for his violation of routine was that Peggy also spoke at the luncheon about her work decorating ships right after Rayburn’s talk.<sup>23</sup>

With U.S. entry into World War II on the horizon, Peggy was reassigned in 1941 to the Maritime Commission’s Division of Maritime Promotion & Information, where she did liaison work with women’s groups, various publications, government agencies, as well as Congress, “which I was perfectly wild about,” she said years later. She claimed that she did much of this work at Sunday night dinners with members of Congress where she would ask them how they would vote on particular bills. *Washington Times-Herald* gossip columnist Igor Cassini wrote about Peggy and Mr. Sam during this period. Writing that Speaker Rayburn “is also known never to be seen out on ‘dates’ . . . that is, with one exception, and she is Peggy ‘The Charmer’ Palmer, clever, bright spirited.” Rayburn and Peggy were dining at Martin’s Tavern in Georgetown “and the Speaker was speaking with heart and soul to pretty Peggy. He looked very serious and she seemed very interested.”<sup>24</sup>

With Harry Truman becoming president upon the death of Franklin Roosevelt in 1945, Evelyn Peyton Gordon, a *Washington Daily News* society columnist, reported that Peggy was under consideration to be the social secretary to the country’s new first lady, Bess Truman. (Peggy later denied the story.) Gordon wrote, “Tho [*sic*] she is chatty, Peggy is not one to give away secrets. Ask her a question and somehow you are always satisfied with Peggy’s answers. Analyze her answers and you’ll find she hasn’t divulged a single thing she should have kept to herself.” This is probably

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Marvin H. McIntyre to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jan. 12, 1939, PPF, Palmer (third quotation); Franklin D. Roosevelt to Marvin H. McIntyre, Jan. 16, 1939, PPF, Palmer (fourth quotation); Gentry, *J. Edgar Hoover*, 214; Marvin H. McIntyre to Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jan. 17, 1939, Papers of Grace Tully (fifth quotation); Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, Hyde Park, New York; Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 230–234.

<sup>23</sup> Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, NPRC; Haven, “Society Leader Buys Furnishings—But They’re for Uncle Sam’s Ships,” *The Evening Independent* (Massillon, Ohio), Mar. 8, 1940 (first quotation); “Rayburn Elected In House Tradition,” *New York Times*, Sept. 17, 1940; Hope Ridings Miller, “October Gets Off to Flying Start With Three Large Luncheons,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 2, 1940 (second quotation); “Press Group Hears Talk by Rayburn,” *Washington Evening Star*, Oct. 2, 1940.

<sup>24</sup> Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, NPRC; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (first quotation); Igor Cassini, “These Charming People,” *Washington Times-Herald*, undated clipping (c. 1940), PPA (second quotation).

one of the key reasons Rayburn liked her and felt so comfortable with her. Rayburn was a very private person and was always concerned about whatever he said to others. President Calvin Coolidge once said to Rayburn, "You didn't have to explain something you hadn't said." Rayburn considered that sage advice. Peggy's great-niece said in an interview, "I think [Rayburn] could trust [Peggy] and just maybe get away from work and have a lighthearted evening with her at some party somewhere." Peggy also worked at being unintimidating while in the company of powerful men like Rayburn. Congresswoman Clare Boothe Luce once asked Peggy, "Wouldn't you like to be as smart as I am?" Peggy told her she would not because then she would, "scare the men away."<sup>25</sup>

In January 1946 the long-time head of the Maritime Commission, Vice Admiral Emory S. Land, resigned, and Peggy was concerned that she would lose her job. Sam Rayburn asked Matthew J. Connelly, an aide to Harry Truman, to help Peggy keep her job. Truman later asked Connelly to secure Peggy's position. Connelly delegated the task to a White House staff member who wrote in a memo: "The record shows that Mrs. Palmer was found incapable of performing [interior decorating of merchant ships], not only from a viewpoint of education and experience, but she was unable physically to withstand the rigors of the work. . . . At one time . . . she was the subject of considerable publicity which rather magnified her importance in the Maritime Commission and caused some embarrassment to those in charge." The memo noted that she "has not performed any work in [the Maritime Commission's Information Division]. . . . She receives \$5,200 per annum (about \$64,000 today), comes and goes as she pleases, and it is known throughout the Maritime Commission that she performs no work." She was actually earning \$5,810 per annum (about \$71,000 today). Peggy was terminated in spite of Rayburn's efforts.<sup>26</sup>

Peggy then briefly worked for the Office of Alien Property Custodian as well as the War Assets Administration. Then she found work as a travel agent, and in late 1948 Peggy turned down a job offer from the Republican National Committee. In late 1949, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Fred Vinson (a bridge-playing friend), columnist Drew Pearson, and Sam Rayburn tried to get her a State Department position working with

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<sup>25</sup> Evelyn Peyton Gordon, "Will Peggy Palmer Be Bess Truman's Social Secretary?," *Washington Daily News*, undated clipping (c. 1945), PPA (first quotation); Betty Hynes, "Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer Refutes Rumor Persistently Placing Her In White House Secretariat," *Washington Times-Herald*, undated clipping (c. 1945), PPA; Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn: A Biography*, 117–118 (second quotation); Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014 (third quotation); Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" (typescript), Oct. 6, 1944, American University Digital Research Archive, <[http://auislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A38378?solr\\_nav\[id\]=fg26b7f504a0bc5216f8&solr\\_nav\[page\]=0&solr\\_nav\[offset\]=0#page/1/mode/1up](http://auislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A38378?solr_nav[id]=fg26b7f504a0bc5216f8&solr_nav[page]=0&solr_nav[offset]=0#page/1/mode/1up)> [Accessed June 29, 2016; fourth quotation].

<sup>26</sup> Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, NPRC; "Vice Admiral Land Will Retire Jan. 15," *New York Times*, Jan. 5, 1946; George J. Schoeneman to Matthew J. Connelly, Mar. 14, 1946, Truman Papers (first and second quotations; Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, Independence, Missouri).

women's clubs. Instead, Peggy finally got a job with the General Services Administration (GSA). She served as "Special and Confidential Assistant" to Jess Larson, who was head of the GSA. Peggy recounted in 1956, "I knew Jess well and he begged me to come and do this liaison work for him, which I loved. It was all on the Hill with Congress. He was a stranger in Washington, would go to the Hill, get perfectly furious and accomplish absolutely nothing. He would have an appointment. No they wouldn't keep it. I being so used to it would take a book with me and wouldn't care when they saw me. The result was that I really had a wonderful time." While she was at the GSA, Drew Pearson tried to get her a job at the Voice of America, and in late 1951 some of Peggy's friends thought she was going to become the assistant treasurer of the United States.<sup>27</sup>

With Republican Dwight Eisenhower's election as president in 1952, Larson soon left the GSA and wrote a recommendation letter on Peggy's behalf. Larson wrote that Peggy "has been of great service to my administration in clarifying my programs with leaders in the Congress and other Governmental agencies. She is a woman of great charm, loyalty, and integrity." However, Peggy was soon after fired. After two Republican members of Pennsylvania's Congressional delegation lobbied for Peggy to keep her job, Peggy claimed the response was, "'No, she's a Democrat, and she's out.' Even though I had done a fairly good job they said I was out." But Larson's successor and former deputy, Russell Forbes, thought differently. He wrote in a memo to an Eisenhower aide that Peggy, "rendered little if any services to the [GSA]," and he claimed she was "kept on the payroll because of political pressure." She was making \$7,040 a year (about \$63,000 today). He wrote that Peggy "had a private office and thus occupied space which we could have utilized to good advantage for productive purposes. She visited her office two or three times per week and on pay days, remaining approximately thirty minutes on each visit. During such visits she made some personal telephone calls. That was her sole activity as far as this administration was concerned."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Employment Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, NPRC; "Mrs. Palmer Represents Travel Agency," *Washington Post*, Nov. 17, 1947; Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" (typescript), Sept. 11, 1948, American University Digital Research Archive, <<http://aislandora-stage.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A42702#page/1/mode/1up>> [Accessed July 9, 2016]; Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014; Tyler Abell (ed.), *Drew Pearson Diaries, 1949-1959* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, & Winston, 1974), 80-81; Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer to Drew Pearson, undated letter, Papers of Drew Pearson (LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, Texas); Jess Larson to "Whom It May Concern," Jan. 29, 1953, PPA (first quotation); Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (second quotation); Betty Beale, "Exclusively Yours," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 5, 1951.

<sup>28</sup> Larson to "Whom It May Concern," Jan. 2, 1953, PPA (first quotation); Homer H. Gruenther to General Wilton B. Persons, Mar. 19, 1953, Eisenhower Library; Congressman Jim Fulton to Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer, Telegram, Western Union, Mar. 13, 1953, PPA; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (second quotation); Russell Forbes to Charles F. Willis Jr., Mar. 19, 1953, Eisenhower Library (third, fourth, and fifth quotations); Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" (typescript), Apr. 4, 1953, American University Digital Research Archive, <[http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A53255?solr\\_nav\[](http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A53255?solr_nav[)

For nearly two years, Peggy was out of work and “really had a very bad time.” Peggy might have been struggling to get by, but in that era she attended a great many parties and social events. Sam Rayburn also attended many of those events. Peggy also helped organize many parties over the years, including one famous party in 1950 that had among its guests President Harry Truman, Vice President Alben Barkley, Chief Justice Fred Vinson, and Speaker Sam Rayburn. Harry Truman claimed it was the first time the heads of the three branches of the U.S. government were at a private party together at the same time. According to one Washington society columnist during the party, “[Rayburn] stood up between Peggy Palmer and [fellow Washington widow] Perle Mesta and said he was having a hard time of it with these two women battling to get him.” In Washington Peggy was known for her glamorous wardrobe including a variety of large hats, which she called her “trademark.” Peggy’s great-niece said, “She always dressed very beautifully, long gloves, flamboyant hats with feathers and plastic cherries and leaves and just terrific hats. When she would go into the Mayflower Hotel [in Washington], which was a very social place at that point, she would go into the dining room and the little orchestra that was there every day would play Peg O’ My Heart when she walked in the door.”<sup>29</sup>

In 1956 Peggy claimed, “Sam Rayburn said the minute the Democrats take over Congress I’d have a job” (Republicans held the House in 1953–54). With the Democrats regaining control of the House in 1955 Rayburn was again elected Speaker, and three days later Peggy had a job with the House Select Committee on Small Business, chaired by Texas Congressman Wright Patman, a close friend of Rayburn’s. Her job title was “research analyst,” and she earned between \$6,400 and \$7,700 a year (about \$57,000 to \$61,000 today). Peggy continued to have money problems, however. She managed money poorly, and it was difficult to be a socialite on such pay. In 1958, the IRS reported that she had an income tax deficiency of \$9,246 (about \$77,000 today) from unpaid income taxes from 1946 and 1947. The IRS agent who handled her case explained that she “was worth a small fortune prior to 1929 and since then has encountered considerable difficulty in living on a smaller income.” The IRS set-

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d]=65cedeb31f84e8d9246b&solr\_nav[page]=0&solr\_nav[offset]=2#page/1/mode/1up> [Accessed July 5, 2016]. The two Republican members of Congress from Pennsylvania who lobbied on Peggy’s behalf were Congressman Jim Fulton and Senator James H. Duff.

<sup>29</sup> Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (first quotation); “Mrs. Robert Entertains Mrs. Palmer,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 1941; “Rep. Rayburn, The Jacksons Dinner Guests,” *Washington Post*, June 7, 1944; “Town Topics,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 11, 1958; Sarah McClendon, “Texans Swarm to Mr. Sam’s Party For His Sisters,” *Waco-News Tribune*, Jan. 30, 1959; Nichols, “Peggy Palmer Is Famous In Washington For Her Parties,” *Lubbock Evening Journal*, Oct. 22, 1952; Abell (ed.), *Drew Pearson Diaries*, 125–126; Betty Beale, “Exclusively Yours,” *Washington Evening Star*, May 21, 1950 (second quotation); Gibson, “Her Memory’s Good – Washington’s Is Too,” *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970 (third quotation); Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014 (fourth quotation).

tled with Peggy for \$700 (about \$5,800 today). It is likely the settlement was because of her meager assets, which amounted to \$102 in a checking account, \$500 in jewelry, \$100 in furniture, and a 1956 Ford automobile. The IRS estimated her total assets in 1958 at \$1,902.50 (about \$15,800 today).<sup>30</sup>

Peggy worked for the Small Business Committee on patent issues and then at some point was “assigned to the Speaker’s Office.” When Peggy’s great-niece and great-nephew visited her in Washington in the late 1950s, they gained the impression that she was on Rayburn’s staff as a secretary—a newspaper profile of her in 1965 claimed she was on Rayburn’s staff, and in 1970 Peggy said she had worked for Rayburn. The great-nephew recalled that Peggy was in an outer office and Rayburn was in an inner office, and that Rayburn and Peggy dined with him and his family in the Speaker’s dining room, after which Rayburn gave them a personal tour of Statuary Hall. He recalled that his parents were close to Peggy and frequently mentioned Rayburn in connection to her. Peggy’s great-niece also remembers her parents telling her that Peggy and Rayburn were “very dear friends.”<sup>31</sup>

According to one of Rayburn’s staff members in the early 1950s, Rayburn and Peggy had a weekly lunch date in the Speaker’s dining room in the Capitol. While they dined the staff member would stand guard at the door to make sure their meal was undisturbed. Washington society journalist Hope Ridings Miller said that Peggy and Rayburn had a weekly dinner date at Pierre’s, the restaurant across the street from the Anchorage Apartments in Washington, where Rayburn lived for almost a third of a century. In 1949, Rayburn received a \$10,000 salary increase as well as a \$10,000 expense account. Drew Pearson reported that Peggy had told him, “When-

<sup>30</sup> Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (first quotation); William S. White, “Democrats Reject A Harsh Approach As Congress Opens,” *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1955; Hardeman and Bacon, *Rayburn*, 284; Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014; Philip Warden, “Widow’s \$700 Settles Tax Bill of \$9,246,” *Chicago Tribune*, Jan. 9, 1958 (third quotation). Peggy’s salary and title while working for the House Select Committee on Small Business were compiled from the *Congressional Record*. Twice a year committee chairmen report to the House of Representatives the names, job titles, and salaries of their employees for the previous six months. See 101 Cong. Rec. 13,088 [1955]; 102 Cong. Rec. 1,610 [1956]; 102 Cong. Rec. 15,311 [1956]; 103 Cong. Rec. 1,790 [1957]; 103 Cong. Rec. 12,776 [1957]; 104 Cong. Rec. 1,118 [1958]; 104 Cong. Rec. 15,197 [1958]; 105 Cong. Rec. 1,240 [1959]; 105 Cong. Rec. 14,380 [1959]; 106 Cong. Rec. 1,358 [1960]; 106 Cong. Rec. 16,735 [1960]; 107 Cong. Rec. 2,311 [1961]; 107 Cong. Rec. 13,130 [1961]; 108 Cong. Rec. 14,809 [1962]; 108 Cong. Rec. 805 [1962]; 109 Cong. Rec. 1,036 [1963]. After numerous inquiries we were told multiple times by the Office of Payroll and Benefits for the U.S. House of Representatives that they had no employment records for Margaret Fallon Palmer.

<sup>31</sup> Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956; “Mrs. Mitchell Palmer Says She Needs Job,” *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 12, 1962 (first quotation); Wauhilla La Hay, “Lack of Income Now Dulls Life,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1965; Gibson, “Her Memory’s Good - Washington’s Is Too,” *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970; Clint Palmer to Reed Penney, Feb. 17, 2015, e-mail (printed copy in coauthor’s possession); Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014 (second quotation). When asked about whether Rayburn and her great-aunt had a romantic relationship Peggy’s great-niece said, “I have no idea if there was a romance between Peggy and Sam Rayburn. I really don’t know. You’d sort of like to think there was because it would be nice for two people to be happy with each other.”

ever I go to dinner with you, Sam, you always have the food sent from Pierre's Restaurant across the street to your apartment. And by the time it gets across the street and the snow is wiped off, it's stone cold. With this new expense account, I'm expecting you to take me out to dinner."<sup>32</sup>

Some on Rayburn's staff knew of their relationship. It was a staff member who mentioned that Peggy and Rayburn had a weekly lunch in the Speaker's dining room. Another staff member reacted with anger when one author of this article asked her about Peggy. The staff member said, "Who told you about her?" It seems likely that Lucinda Rayburn, Sam Rayburn's beloved older sister, also knew about Peggy. In February 1941 Peggy was reported to have lost a diamond wristwatch near the Anchorage Apartments, where she was attending a small party at the Anchorage with the "Speaker . . . and Mrs. Rayburn." The Mrs. Rayburn in the article was very likely Miss Lucinda Rayburn, who made a yearly trip to Washington to visit the Speaker and attend parties during the social season. Lady Bird Johnson knew of Peggy as well. In an oral history from 1980, Lady Bird spoke of events in 1942 where she mentioned a number of women with whom she liked socializing. One of those women was Peggy and, in an offhand remark, Lady Bird described her as "the Speaker's current lady friend, and I was often out with them." When Peggy died, her *Washington Post* obituary noted that Rayburn, "once the Capital's best-catch bachelor" was "a faithful beau of Mrs. Palmer." The gossip columnists also got wind of their relationship. For example in January 1950, two months after Vice President Barkley's second marriage, the weekly magazine *Quick* published a story along with pictures of Rayburn and Peggy Palmer, which stated, "Columnist Irv Kupcinec reported that Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn, a bachelor of 68, may be the next prominent Washingtonian to marry. The woman: Mrs. A. Mitchell (Peggy) Palmer, widow of the Attorney General in the Woodrow Wilson cabinet." Barkley was even quoted weeks earlier about Rayburn's potential change in marital status after his own marriage late in life, "I swear Sam Rayburn can't resist the trend any longer. I hope not." The gossip led to a denial and a comment from *Washington Evening Star* society columnist Betty Beale, "The truth of the matter is that there is absolutely no foundation to the rumor. The Speaker and Mrs. Palmer have no intention of exchanging marriage vows, but their names have been coupled so often during the past years by would-be matchmakers that the story no longer surprises either."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> H. G. Dulaney, personal conversations with Anthony Champagne in the 1980s and 1990s; Miller to Champagne, Aug. 19, 1986; Drew Pearson, "The Washington Merry-Go-Round" (typescript), Jan. 29, 1949, American University Digital Research Archive, <[http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A11980?solr\\_nav\[id\]=2489fd373eabaf3cfd8&solr\\_nav\[page\]=0&solr\\_nav\[offset\]=2#page/2/mode/1up](http://aislandora.wrlc.org/islandora/object/pearson%3A11980?solr_nav[id]=2489fd373eabaf3cfd8&solr_nav[page]=0&solr_nav[offset]=2#page/2/mode/1up)> [Accessed June 29, 2016; quotation].

<sup>33</sup> Prior to conducting a taped interview with Rene Kimbrough, Champagne discussed the matters to be covered in the interview and mentioned Peggy Palmer. Her name immediately elicited a surprised and



Peggy's time with Rayburn could not last forever. In November 1961, Sam Rayburn died in Bonham, Texas, of pancreatic cancer. He was seventy-nine. Peggy was seventy-eight, and she was to outlive him by more than a decade. "Sam," Peggy said in 1965, "thought I'd be taken care of after he died. He said not to worry so I didn't." But six months after Rayburn's death, Wright Patman informed Peggy that he was terminating her job on the House Select Committee on Small Business at the end of 1962. Patman expected to become chair of the House Banking and Currency Committee in 1963, and so he was moving on from the Small Business Committee and not taking Peggy with him. Soon after she was told of her firing, Peggy asked Attorney General Robert Kennedy for a job. She wrote him, "as my many years with Sam Rayburn have come to an end I'm awfully anxious to see and really bother you." Kennedy gave her a hopeful response but never gave her a job. An article on the front page of the *Washington Post* in December 1962 about Peggy's pending unemployment failed to generate a job for her.<sup>34</sup>

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angry reaction from Kimbrough. In the taped interview, Kimbrough made no mention of Peggy Palmer. Rene Kimbrough to Anthony Champagne, Nov. 23, 1980, interview transcript (Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, Austin, Texas). See also "Artifact of the Month," <<https://www.facebook.com/visitsamrayburnhouse/posts/777062189031220>> [Accessed July 5, 2016]; Steinberg, *Sam Rayburn*, 203; "Mrs. Palmer Loses Diamond Watch," *Washington Post*, Feb. 17, 1941 (second quotation); "D.C. Gang Practiced Shoplifting, Prisoner's Diary Reveals," *Washington Evening Star*, Feb. 17, 1941; Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson to Michael L. Gillette, Jan. 29–Feb. 3, 1980 (interview transcript), <[http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral\\_histories/johnson\\_c/CTJ%2016.pdf](http://www.lbjlibrary.net/assets/documents/archives/oral_histories/johnson_c/CTJ%2016.pdf)> [Accessed June 28, 2016], 6 (third quotation); Hailey, "Socialite Margaret Palmer Dies at 89," *Washington Post*, May 3, 1973 (fourth and fifth quotations); "Following Barkley's Trend?," *Quick*, January 30, 1950, 40 (sixth quotation); "Barkley Sees a Trend, Wants Rayburn Married," *New York Times*, Jan. 13, 1950 (seventh quotation); Betty Beale, "Exclusively Yours," *Washington Evening Star*, Feb. 1, 1950 (eighth quotation). In 1977, William "Fishbait" Miller, the former doorkeeper for the U.S. House of Representatives (1949–1953, 1955–1974), published a tell-all autobiography, *Fishbait: The Memoirs of the Congressional Doorkeeper* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977). Miller's book is filled with gossip about the House and its members from his many years there. He included a section about Rayburn's views on women and a relationship he claimed Rayburn had with one woman in particular. He wrote, "There was someone he went to see once or twice a week and he was very secretive about it. But as was his way, he was very loyal to that one woman, whoever she might have been. I never found out who she was and he didn't volunteer to tell me. His chauffeur would be ready and waiting to take him to her, and afterwards the chauffeur would say with a smile, 'Well, he saw his gal again'" (254–55). LBJ biographer Robert Caro wrote in 1982, "Rayburn's other aides do not believe [Miller's story] is correct" (814). Despite the skepticism of Miller's account, the authors of this article believe the woman Miller wrote about was Peggy Palmer, and an item in the Peggy Palmer Archive offers circumstantial evidence that she was the woman in question. In the archive there is a newspaper clipping of a Jack Anderson and Les Whitten column from 1977 that discusses Miller's memoir. One of the parts of the book Anderson and Whitten mention is the section about Rayburn and the woman Miller claimed he visited. Peggy was dead by the time Miller's book was published, and Peggy's great-niece does not know where the newspaper clipping came from or how it got in the archive.

<sup>34</sup> "Rayburn is Dead; Served 17 Years As House Speaker," *New York Times*, Nov. 17, 1961; La Hay, "Lack of Income Now Dulls Life," *Albuquerque Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1965 (first quotation); "Widow of A. Mitchell Palmer Faces Want With Loss of Job," *Washington Post*, Dec. 12, 1962; "Mrs. Mitchell Palmer Says She Needs Job," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 12, 1962; Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer to Robert F. Kennedy, June 18, 1962, Papers of Robert F. Kennedy (second quotation); John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston, Massachusetts); Robert F. Kennedy to Mrs. A. Mitchell Palmer, July 12, 1962, Papers of Robert F. Kennedy. The two articles about Peggy's pending unemployment as well as her obituary in the *Washington Post* in 1973 state she began working for the House Select Committee on Small Business in 1953. We could not find employment records for Peggy on that committee from 1953–54 in the *Congres-*

Peggy claimed that Rayburn while on his deathbed had asked Lyndon Johnson to provide her a job. That request may have been made by Rayburn to Johnson at some point, but when Johnson visited Rayburn in Bonham shortly before Rayburn's death, he was in a coma and was unable to communicate. A relative of Peggy's, Jessica Railey, wrote President Johnson in 1964 saying that Sam Rayburn had "always told [Peggy], and me too that if anything ever happened to him 'Lyndon' would see that she was taken care of." Jessica asked President Johnson to find Peggy a job "answering phones or something. Her great talent for meeting people can still be used to great advantage it seems to me." The letter was referred to the Department of Labor, but no job was forthcoming.<sup>35</sup>

She knew finding a job at her age—when usual retirement was at sixty-five—was difficult. In a 1965 interview, when she was eighty-two, she explained, "I'm not exactly young and I don't have typing or shorthand." Once one of Washington's more sought after dinner guests and socialites, she was now mostly forgotten and ignored. Despite her hardships she still kept up a warm disposition. In the 1965 interview she said, "Oh, but I'm lucky . . . I have so many wonderful memories that I really can't complain." Indeed, she did have great memories. Few people have had the personal connections with so many historical figures. For example, while visiting her friend Evalyn Walsh McLean at old Friendship, the McLean home on Wisconsin Avenue in Washington, in the 1920s, she discovered that President Warren G. Harding was involved with his mistress upstairs. She knew and liked President Franklin Roosevelt and said he was an "attractive and gregarious person who liked fun." In contrast, she did not care for Eleanor Roosevelt, whom she considered boring and someone who "never has been one of my favorites." Of all the presidents she knew, the one she liked the most was Harry Truman. Peggy thought he was "a modest but very forthright man. The Trumans never realized the power they could command." She was also fond of Harry Truman's daughter Margaret. Sometimes Peggy would pick her up at the White House and take her to parties. Peggy found John Kennedy "sweet and thoughtful," although she claimed that she could "never . . . understand Lyndon [John-

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*sional Record*. Peggy also states in the transcript of her interview from 1956 that she began working for the Small Business Committee in 1955; see Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956. In 1962 the chairman of the House Committee on Banking and Currency was Congressman Brent Spence (D-KY); see "Rep. Spence Says He Will Not Run," *Washington Post*, Mar. 30, 1962. Nearly two months before Patman told Peggy she was being fired from the Small Business Committee Spence announced he would not seek reelection.

<sup>35</sup> Gibson, "Her Memory's Good - Washington's Is Too," *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970; D. B. Hardeman to Michael L. Gillette, Jan. 19, 1977 (interview transcript), <[http://www.humanitiestexas.org/sites/default/files/article-attachment/hardeman\\_web\\_lbjlibrary.pdf](http://www.humanitiestexas.org/sites/default/files/article-attachment/hardeman_web_lbjlibrary.pdf)> [Accessed June 29, 2016]; Jessica Railey to Lyndon B. Johnson, Dec. 12, 1964, White House Central Files (LBJ Presidential Library, Austin, Texas) (first and second quotations); "Penlyn," <<http://www.njpalisades.org/penlyn.html>> [Accessed July 5, 2016]; "Railey - Oltman," *New York Times*, Sept. 4, 1932. Jessica Railey was the step-daughter of Peggy's maternal uncle Henry Herbert Oltman.

son].” On the other hand, she found Lady Bird Johnson to be, “Great, a hard worker, and a wonderful woman.” From time to time she did make public appearances—for example, she was photographed with Congressman Hale Boggs, one of Rayburn’s protégés, in 1968 at the dedication of the Sam Rayburn Lounge at the Women’s National Democratic Club in Washington.<sup>36</sup>

Her financial situation was disastrous. In her final years, she primarily lived off annuity checks from her Civil Service Retirement Fund as well as some money from A. Mitchell Palmer’s trust fund. An unknown employee of Palmer’s from his Justice Department days paid the rent on her apartment in Washington and kept her from being evicted. Peggy had a silverware set for twenty-four people she was going to sell until Palmer’s nephew and great-niece gave her \$300 so she would not have to sell it. She also sold many other personal items to help make ends meet. Finally on May 1, 1973, Peggy died alone in her Washington apartment. She was eighty-nine.<sup>37</sup>

Peggy Palmer was not the only woman in Sam Rayburn’s life (another was Alben Barkley’s widow), but at the very least she was one of the most important to him after his divorce from Metze Jones. So if Rayburn and Peggy were so close, why did they never marry? One possible explanation is that Rayburn was already scarred by his one brief marriage and the ensuing divorce. By the time Peggy was Rayburn’s “lady friend,” he was one of the most important American politicians who had never been president. Another marriage—especially to a woman like Peggy—would have brought Rayburn a lot of publicity and focus on his personal life, especially from his constituents, and Rayburn would not have jeopardized his career in that way. Certainly there was much in Peggy’s personal life that would have been unappealing to Rayburn’s constituents. Rayburn did like Peggy and cared about her, but his political capital would have been damaged if Peggy Palmer had become Peggy Rayburn. As for Peggy she might have found living with Rayburn in the bucolic environment of Texas’s Fourth Congressional district plodding and trying, because she

<sup>36</sup> La Hay, “Lack of Income Now Dulls Life,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1965 (first and second quotations); Hailey, “Socialite Margaret Palmer Dies at 89,” *Washington Post*, May 3, 1973; Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956 (fourth quotation); Gibson, “Her Memory’s Good - Washington’s Is Too,” *Washington Evening Star*, Dec. 28, 1970 (third, fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth quotations). The authors of this article believe Peggy was mostly ignored and forgotten by Washington society in the last years of her life. Peggy’s *Washington Post* obituary reported that she had, “lived in comparative solitude since [losing her job in the House].” However, in the last interview of Peggy’s life in 1970, when she was eighty-seven, she said, “People in Washington are kind. They don’t forget.” Her interviewer, *Washington Evening Star* reporter John T. Gibson, went on to write, “The clutter of telephone slips, letters, and invitations on Peggy Palmer’s desk prove it.” For further recollections see generally, Palmer to Morrow, c. 1956.

<sup>37</sup> La Hay, “Lack of Income Now Dulls Life,” *Albuquerque Tribune*, Aug. 18, 1965; Letters, A. Mitchell Palmer’s Trust Fund Bank and Civil Service Retirement Fund (Civil Service Commission), PPA; Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014; Hailey, “Socialite Margaret Palmer Dies at 89,” *Washington Post*, May 3, 1973; “Peggy Palmer, Socialite, Dies,” *Washington Evening Star*, May 3, 1973.

was so accustomed to a more active and bustling East Coast urban lifestyle. Also, she had already been married three times and widowed twice. She may not have wanted to go through another potential emotional roller-coaster with another husband. Peggy's great-niece also said, "I think if anybody questioned her about a potential beau in Washington she would have just laughed it off and said, 'No. My heart will always belong to Mitchell Palmer'. And that's certainly what she told the family."<sup>38</sup>

Rayburn was an intensely private man—remarkably so, given his many years on the national political scene, but his relationship with Peggy Palmer shows that his private life needs rethinking. He was not the recluse that is suggested in the traditional interpretations of his life, where the House of Representatives and interactions with other politicians composed almost his entire Washington existence. In addition, the perception that his social life outside the Capitol mostly consisted of adopting the Lyndon Johnson family as his own or engaging in activities such as fishing that involved limited human contact is incomplete. Robert Caro wrote that after his divorce, "For years thereafter, Rayburn had not a single date. He may, in fact, never have had more than a few scattered dates; no one really knows." But Rayburn's social life was considerably more active than has been previously suggested, and his relationship with Peggy was long-standing.<sup>39</sup>

Peggy Palmer was a fascinating woman, and her life was a genuine riches to rags story. After her estate was settled it was valued at \$5,170.45 (about \$25,200 today). Most of her estate's assets came from a lump sum payment from her Civil Service Retirement Fund. She had \$1,547.96 in a bank account in Washington (about \$8,400 today), and the rent on her apartment had been \$271 a month (about \$1,500 today). Many items bequeathed in her will, like pieces of jewelry, were not found—they were presumably sold long before she died. When her apartment was cleared out there were mementos from her days as a socialite—gowns, evening gloves, and hats—and numerous bills, paid and unpaid, under her mattress.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> "Mr. Sam Just an Old Friend," *Kansas City Times*, Aug. 30, 1957. The article states that when reached for comment about a potential marriage with Rayburn, Alben Barkley's widow said, "There is nothing at all to it. Mr. Rayburn is an old, old friend . . . I enjoy his company immensely. And that's that!" Johnson to Gillette, Jan. 29–Feb. 3, 1980 (first quotation); Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014 (second quotation).

<sup>39</sup> Caro, *The Path to Power*, 331–334 (quotation on p. 331).

<sup>40</sup> Peggy Palmer to Reed Penney, Feb. 12, 2015, e-mail (printed copy in Penney's possession); Palmer to Penney, July 28, 2014; Probate Records of Margaret Fallon Palmer, Probate Division (District of Columbia Superior Court, Washington, D.C.).