

Will Clayton 1880-1966 Atlantic Union Pioneer

by Clarence Streit
March 1966, Freedom & Union

Will Clayton lives with us now only in spirit and in the words of wisdom he wrote, the seeds of creation-to-come he planted, the far-reaching gifts he made. Born Feb. 7, 1880, he died Feb. 8 from a heart attack he had suffered in his home in Houston, Texas. The end came suddenly—after he had celebrated his 86th birthday quietly the day before and done some work in his office in Anderson, Clayton & Co., the worldwide cotton firm he co-founded when 24.

His death is an incalculable loss to Atlantic Unionists. Through the past 18 years he has been a prime mover toward their goal. He became a supporter of Federal Union, Inc., the publisher of this magazine, in 1948 soon after retiring as Under-Secretary of State. When the Atlantic Union Committee was formed in early 1949 he became its Vice President until its dissolution in 1961. Elected that year to the Board of Federal Union, Inc., he remained on it until his death. In 1963 he became a member of the Honorary Council of the International Movement for Atlantic Union; Federal Union is its U. S. co-founder affiliate.

When the Atlantic Council of the United States was formed in 1962, he was made chairman of its Executive Committee. Previously, he had joined the sponsoring group of the Declaration of Atlantic Unity and the Board of the Atlantic Institute. Until his death Will Clayton wore all these various hats, and with them went to town—to many a town. No matter how distant the meeting, he attended it. He was in Paris last December for the meeting of the Board of the Atlantic Institute and the biennial General Meeting of the International Movement for Atlantic Union. At the latter, I last saw him.

The end came "in harness," as he would have wished it. He had returned Feb. 4 from Washington, D. C. where he had attended a meeting of the Public Advisory Committee of the Special Representative for Trade Negotiations, former Secretary of State Christian Herter, his close friend. The two had been co-chairmen of the U. S. Citizens Commission on Nato which Congress in 1960 authorized to organize the Atlantic Convention, held in Paris in January 1962.*

William Lockhart Clayton combined the finer qualities of both those ancient rivals, the English and the French. His father, James Monroe Clayton, came from 17th century Virginia stock. His mother, Fletcher Burdine, was descended from French Huguenots who fled to South Carolina soon after Louis XIV revoked in 1680 the Edict of Nantes. One of her ancestors, "according to family tradition, was . . . Sir Christopher Wren," Will Clayton's daughter, Ellen (Mrs. St. John) Garwood, wrote in her biography of her father.** Those who know what a builder Will Clayton was, in every field, may well believe this tradition.

When Will Clayton was born in Tupelo, Miss., his father, failing as a cotton farmer, moved to Jackson, Tenn., when his son was six, to start anew as a railroad contractor. The 1893 depression led to Will's leaving school when 13 and starting work at \$10 a month to help support the family.

Working for the county clerk, he soon became the "fastest shorthand writer and typist in Jackson."



Among those whose speeches the boy typed was William Jennings Bryan— whose speech blaming the ills of cotton farmers on the tariff inspired the typist with his lifelong passion for free trade. Meanwhile the Shakespeare Circle at the library fired him with desire for a college education. But by this time the family fortunes were so low that Will, in addition to his courthouse job, was keeping books and collecting washing for his father's latest forlorn venture— a laundry. Even high school was out of the question, and so the boy began educating himself. He thus acquired a much better education than most college graduates. His command of language grew to be such that any professional writer could not but admire it. As Beverly Smith wrote in *The American Magazine* in 1938: "Even his casual remarks have a structure that fits them for the written page."

At 15 Will's business career began: He left home to work for a cotton factor in St. Louis, and moved with him the next year to New York City. Eight years later he was his own boss, and within 12 years Anderson, Clayton & Co. had opened their first branch abroad—in Le Havre, France. At 60, when most business executives are about to retire, this millionaire left business for government, and in his last quarter-century made an even greater career in public service.

Starting in 1940 as Deputy Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs under a much younger man, now Governor Nelson A. Rockefeller, he held such posts as Assistant Secretary of Commerce, Surplus War Property Administrator, head of the Economic Delegation to the San Francisco

U.N. Charter Conference, consultant to President Truman at the Potsdam Conference, and Alternate Governor of the International Monetary Fund.

In 1946 he became Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs, served as Acting Secretary of State, and was mentioned to succeed General Marshall in 1948 when there were rumors the General would resign as Secretary of State. How different history would have been had the rumors proved true! Though the General deserves full credit for the Plan that bears his name, the idea behind it came from Will Clayton who, as his work for Atlantic Federal Union thereafter showed, was ready for a far vaster undertaking.

How much more constructive-minded he was than the brilliant lawyer, Dean Acheson, who succeeded General Marshall in 1949, I had occasion to witness through a memorable hour. During it an Atlantic Union delegation headed by Justice Roberts and Will Clayton vainly urged the Secretary of State to withdraw his veto of the Kefauver Atlantic Union resolution. President Truman had told Justice Roberts that he was for the resolution but, on afterthought, had added that he must first consult Secretary Acheson. That proved the end of Union then, and thereafter.

Had Will Clayton been Secretary, I do not doubt that the Marshall Plan would have been followed by Atlantic Federal Union in 1950. Instead, the U. S. took the course that sought to win for freedom by "waiting for the dust to settle" and depending on the errors of the other side and the crutch of alliance ... a course that has been marked thus far by the rise of Red China, the Korean War, the advent of Sputnik, continued Communist leadership in Space, the Berlin Wall, the Cuban brink, the quicksand of Vietnam, and the ever-growing danger of another world monetary crash and Communist-breeding Depression.

To all who would learn more fully the inspiring life of Will Clayton—how much one of the 400,000,000 free men and women he sought to federate did with his own freedom in his 86 years— I warmly recommend the biography of him by his eldest daughter, Ellen. He is survived by three other daughters: Susan (Mrs. S. M. Mc-Ashan), Burdine (Mrs. John M. Johnson), and Julia (Mrs. Benjamin Baker) and their children (nine grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren), and by his brother, Benjamin, and a sister, Mrs. Frank Anderson.

On the way to his funeral, Theodore Achilles, co-editor of *The Atlantic Community Quarterly* and member of the Federal Union Board, and I said to each other: "Here was a Man—when comes there such another?" We saw no successor in sight . . . but we had faith. That faith was put in these eloquent words by the Rev. Charles L. Allen at the funeral in the thronged First Methodist Church: "When you think of William Clayton, you are certain of immortality. The God who created him could not let him die."

We Atlantic Unionists can be thankful that we gave Will Clayton before he died our first Atlantic Union Pioneer Award at our 25th Anniversary Convocation in Philadelphia in November 1964. A cold kept him away then, and I promised to go to Houston and present it to him. I carried out that promise last March at a family dinner in his home. I spent several days as his house guest, talking of our common cause, taking long walks in a neighboring park, listening (as we walked) to his judgments of men and events, his conclusions from the past, his hopes for the future.

I left thankful that the Atlantic Union Pioneer Award had given me the opportunity not merely to know a friend better but to express while he lived my admiration of him. I cannot improve on what I said at that presentation, and so I conclude by reprinting it here from our December 1964 issue.

"When the full story of the genesis of the Marshall Plan is told, it will become evident that the inspiration was Will Clayton; which means he will have a firm niche in history, for this, if for nothing else."—John Dalgleish, in *Everybody's Weekly* (London) August 30, 1947.

*For a full report of the Convention and how it came about, see the January and February 1962 issues of *Freedom & Union*.

**See *Will Clayton, A Short Biography*, by Ellen Clayton Garwood, University of Texas Press, 1959. It was serialized by *Freedom & Union* in 1959-60.