

Secretary of Commerce Dan Roper Reared on Marlboro County Farm

Home Place Still Stands, Near Tatum, Occupied by His Half-Sister—Pupil of T. B. Stackhouse at Red Bluff—Taught at Pine Grove, Where Fletcher Memorial School Now Is, and at Tatum—Entered Public Life as Member of Legislature—Onward and Upward Ever Since.

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BY JOHN M. GIBSON.

In the opinion of most South Carolinians, by far the most important announcement regarding the cabinet of the new president of the United States was that telling of the selection of Daniel Calthoun Roper of Marlboro county for the portfolio of secretary of commerce. Bearing as his middle name the surname of another South Carolinian who rose to eminence as a cabinet member and vice president, Mr. Roper enters the Roosevelt official family with a record of unusual achievement and with memories—sentimental memories, his friends say—of a boyhood spent on a South Carolina farm, an early education obtained in a South Carolina

of fame he attains, he will always be known simply as Dan Roper. Old Home Intact. The Roper home place, where the new secretary of commerce was born, is still known by that name, and he owns considerable farming land near the house. The house itself has been extensively remodeled but it still largely unchanged in general appearance. During his early childhood, as now, the building was of the old-fashioned country home type, consisting of a story and a half, with wide rooms and halls and generous porch space, and a front yard large enough to accommodate a baseball game. The greatest change brought with the remodeling came with the addition of rooms to give the house



The house and yard where Daniel C. Roper, the new secretary of commerce, was born, near Tatum, S. C.

rural school, two years as a student at Wofford, two years as a South Carolina school teacher and two years as a member of the South Carolina house of representatives.

"Knew Him When—"
Hundreds of older residents of Marlboro county recall with considerable pride that they once were his pupils or knew him during his boyhood on the family place near Tatum. These and many others who know him only through their elders have followed with eager interest his rapid rise to eminence at Washington, culminating in his selection for a place among the official advisers to the president. To these people—the Moores, the Gibsons, the Adamases, the Fletchers, the McLaurins and others whose names are to be found conspicuously in the telephone directories of McColl, Bennettsville, Clio and Tatum—he is known; and by them is spoken of, very much as any other popular young man of the community might be, with an informality that goes with neighborliness, just as he was while getting a start as a young country school teacher in 1888, 1889 and 1890 and during the years he spent as a Marlboro county farmer. To these people, no matter what heights

two regular stories. It is now the home of Mr. Roper's half-sister, Mrs. H. C. McColl. It is situated just a short distance from the town of Tatum on the Tatum-Clio highway. In the large front yard is a huge oak tree which, neighbors say, has changed comparatively little in appearance since the new secretary of commerce played under it as a child. Almost directly in front of the house is a patch of land where, as a young farmer, he planted and gathered his first crop—of cotton, presumably. Adjoining it is another stretch where his father, John Wesley Roper, one of the leading farmers in a county famed for its farmers, made one year 50 bales of cotton with a single mule. Local residents still speak of that agricultural achievement with pride, along with that of a young Marlboro county farmer of a later period who broke the world's record for the yield of corn on a single acre. Daniel Roper's mother before her marriage was Henrietta McLaurin, a member of the family for which the town of Laurinburg, N. C., was named. About the time Mr. Roper was born his father sent a friend of his to

another community to find an old Negro woman who would help his mother with the housework. This friend found her, but she told him she could not go to the Roper home and leave her small child, whereupon she was told to take the child with her. She did so, and the child became so attached to the Roper family, especially young Dan, that when her mother was ready to go back she did not want to go and was permitted to remain, staying for several years. She finally did leave, however, and went to live near Maxton, N. C. She made a visit to see her old friends at the Roper home just about the time her childhood playmate was being mentioned in newspapers all over the country as the next secretary of commerce.

Taught by Stackhouse.

Mr. Roper was born on April 1, 1867, and began his education as a pupil under T. B. Stackhouse, a famous schoolmaster of his day—now living in Columbia—teaching in an old-fashioned frame building not far from the Roper home, at a place known as Red Bluff. He later became a pupil of William Graham Quackenbush, who operated at Laurinburg, N. C., one of the leading private schools of the day and who is remembered as the only school teacher in North Carolina, and one of the very few in the whole world, to be honored by the erection of a monument to his memory. The Quackenbush school, as it was known, consisted at that time, as always, of a single frame building erected about 1854. The building was divided into three large classrooms, one 35 feet square and two 25 feet square. Boarding pupils, some of

whom were from places as far away as Goldsboro, Wilmington and Charleston, were housed in a series of single rooms built behind the school proper.

In the fall of 1884 Mr. Roper entered Wofford college with the expectation of remaining for the full four-year course. However, at the end of his sophomore year he suffered a severe attack of fever from which he soon recovered completely but which caused him to fear a recurrence should he return in the fall. For reasons of his health, therefore, and with great regret at giving up his studies under Dr. James H. Carlisle, whom he greatly admired, he entered what is known as Old Trinity college, in Randolph county, North Carolina, which some time later was moved to Durham and is now Duke university. After making an exceptional academic record there, he was graduated from this institution in 1888.

As County Teacher.

During the academic year 1888-89 he taught at Pine Grove, a rural school about four or five miles from McColl, and about seven or eight from Bennettsville. This was a small academy and was housed in a crude frame building. Like so many other country schools of that time, it was closely identified with the religious life of the community. Directly across the sandy road from the school itself was Pine Grove church, where people used to gather for miles around for worship.

Both the Pine Grove church and the Pine Grove school that the older people of the community knew at the time Mr. Roper taught there have ceased to exist, but they have been succeeded by others, and the place is still the center of the community's educational and religious activities. A number of years ago the people became dissatisfied with the rather shabby church edifice and had it moved away so that a modern building might be erected on the site. The passing of the old school building where Mr. Roper earned his first money as a teacher was associated with an unusual act of generosity by two wealthy members of the community and a tragedy of the World war. A young man of unusual promise,

Robert Fletcher, grew up in the Pine Grove community, a member of one of its wealthiest and most prominent families. His father and bachelor uncle planned to combine their wealth, the accumulation of many years as successful farmers, at their deaths and make young Robert a millionaire. But the United States entered the European war, and this young man enlisted in the army for overseas service. Just a short time before the armistice he was killed in action, and his devoted father and uncle were robbed by a German bullet of the realization of their dream.

The next best thing to having Robert Fletcher inherit their combined fortunes, they decided, would be to perpetuate his memory and provide educational advantages for the children of the community by giving it a modern school building bearing his name. So the old frame building where the future secretary of commerce had taught his pupils several decades before was dragged off into the woods, and the Robert Fletcher Memorial school began rising on the site, one of the most beautiful rural schools in the South and as well equipped as many small colleges. Part of the old building was burned several months ago, but the undamaged part is now used as a dwelling.

After his first year as a teacher at Pine Grove, Mr. Roper taught for a year at Tatum and on Christmas day of that year—that is to say, 1889—married Miss Lou McKenzie of Scotland county, just across the North Carolina line.

His Public Career.

Mr. Roper was a member of the South Carolina house of representatives from 1892 until 1894. Then he went to Washington as private secretary to Senator M. C. Butler, a famous Confederate soldier and statesman. He became in turn a clerk of the United States senate committee on interstate commerce (1894-97); special expert of the United States census bureau (1900-10); clerk of the ways and means committee of the house of representatives (1910-13); first assistant postmaster general at the beginning of Woodrow Wilson's first term in 1913; chairman of the organization bureau of the Woodrow Wilson presidential campaign in 1916; vice chairman of the United States tariff commission for several months in 1917, and commissioner of internal revenue in the second Wilson administration, being responsible for the collection of billions of dollars in taxes for the support of the federal government and the prosecution of the war. While

associated with the census bureau, he developed a plan for collecting cotton production statistics by a count at frequent intervals during the harvest season of the number of bales turned out by the ginneries of the country. While associated with the ways and means committee of the house of representatives, he helped the late Senator (then Representative) Oscar W. Underwood frame the famous Underwood-Simmons tariff act. He is said to have been personally selected as commissioner of internal revenue by the then secretary of the treasury, William Gibbs McAdoo, who is also said to have been largely responsible for his selection as a member of the Roosevelt cabinet.

Soon after going to Washington he entered the National university for study of law and received his LL.B. degree in 1901. He is a member of the law firm of Roper, Hurrey and Dudley.

In 1927 he received the honorary degree of LL.D. from Tusculum college. He has served as a member of the District of Columbia board of education, a trustee of American university and Duke university, and a member of the general conference of the Methodist Episcopal church, South, and the Sixth Ecumenical conference. He is a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon social fraternity and the Phi Beta Kappa scholarship society. He is the author of "The United States

Postoffice," which was issued by a prominent publisher during Mr. Roper's term as first assistant postmaster general.

Several years ago Mr. Roper was seriously injured in a traffic accident in Washington, and it was feared for a time that his injuries would prove permanent. However, after a prolonged period of treatment, he apparently recovered completely.

Mr. Roper is known to his friends in South Carolina, as well as those in Washington and elsewhere, as an unusually hard worker, paying little attention to conventional office hours and often sticking at his desk until late at night. During the war, when his duties as collector of internal revenue proved especially trying, his friends in the South expressed great concern lest he sacrifice his health, but it apparently did not suffer.

His Family.

His own visits to Scotland and Marlboro counties have become rather infrequent within recent years because of his heavy responsibilities, but members of his family often spend several weeks there during the summer. He has two daughters, one of whom married David R. Coker of Hartsville, S. C., and five sons. Among the latter are graduates of the service academies at West Point and Annapolis. One of the sons married a member of a prominent French family while in France during the war.

Mr. Roper's father was married twice, he being the only child by the first marriage. He has two half-brothers, Thomas Wesley Roper, now Marlboro and Dillon county representative of the seed loan production of-

fice, and John McKenzie Roper, now holding a responsible position as a draftsman in the navy department in Washington. He also has two half-sisters, Mrs. H. G. McColl and Mrs. J. B. McColl, both living in Marlboro county. Mrs. Roper is a sister of Mrs. W. N. McKenzie of Gibson, N. C., and Mrs. E. F. Fletcher, living near McColl, S. C.

South Carolina friends and relatives of the new secretary of commerce characterize him as a worthy product of the South that followed the Confederate war. He is and always has been, they say, a loyal Southerner. They often refer to his affection for his home community, his entire lack of pose and affection, and his friendliness to every one, which makes him and his family special favorites with the older and more humble people of the community, whom less thoughtful men who have won fame often ignore. It is these qualities that they know best in the man, and they rejoice that two presidents of the United States, the only presidents of his political faith the country has had since he became old enough to aspire to high office, have taken notice of his unusual ability and selected him for important posts in the federal government. His selection for the position of secretary of commerce, carrying the highest honor he has ever achieved, is especially gratifying to those of all social and educational ranks who know and speak of him still cabinet job or no cabinet job, as plain Dan Roper.