B. Carroll Reece

Brazilla Carroll Reece (December 22, 1889–March 19, 1961) was an American politician from Tennessee. He served in the United States House of Representatives for all but six years from 1921 to 1961.

1 Early life

Reece was born on a farm near Butler, Tennessee as one of thirteen children of John Isaac and Sarah Maples Reece. He was named for Brazilla Carroll McBride, an ancestor who served in the War of 1812, but never used his first name.[1] His brother, Raleigh Valentine Reece, was a reporter for the Nashville Tennessean and the teacher who replaced John Thomas Scopes at Rhea County High School in Dayton, Tennessee following the infamous “Monkey Trial.”

He attended Watauga Academy in Butler, and Carson-Newman College in Jefferson City, Tennessee.[2] At Carson-Newman he played basketball and football. After graduating from Carson-Newman in 1914 as class valedictorian, he worked as a high school principal for one year, then enrolled in New York University, where he earned a master’s degree in economics and finance in 1916.[1] He also studied at the University of London.

2 Career

He was an assistant secretary and instructor at New York University in 1916 and 1917.

In April, 1917 Reece enlisted for World War I and attended officer training in Plattsburg, New York. During the war he served initially with the 166th Infantry Regiment, a unit of the 42nd Infantry Division.[3] He later transferred to 102nd Infantry Regiment, 26th Infantry Division. He commanded a company, then commanded the regiment’s 3rd Battalion, and attained the rank of Captain.[4][5] He was discharged in 1919, and was decorated with the Distinguished Service Cross, Distinguished Service Medal, Purple Heart, and French Croix de Guerre with Palm.[6][7]

He was director of the School of Business Administration of New York University in 1919 and 1920, and also studied law there.

He then passed the bar exam and opened a successful law practice in Johnson City, where he was also a banker and publisher.

He was married to Louise Goff, daughter of United States Senator Guy Despard Goff of West Virginia.

3 Congressional service

In 1920, Reece won the Republican nomination for Tennessee’s 1st Congressional District, based in the Tri-Cities region in the northeastern part of the state. The region had voted not to secede at the state convention in 1861. This region was heavily Republican—in fact, Republicans had represented this district for all but four years since 1859, and was one of the few regions in the former Confederacy where Republicans won on a regular basis. He won handily in November and was reelected four more times before being defeated for renomination in 1930 by Oscar Lovette. However, he defeated Lovette in 1932 and returned to Congress, serving until 1947, when he stepped down to devote his full energies to serving as chairman of the Republican National Committee, a position he had held since 1946. A member of the conservative “Old Guard” faction of the Republican Party, Reece was a strong supporter of Ohio Senator Robert A. Taft, the leader of the GOP’s conservative wing. In 1948 and 1952 Reece was a leading supporter of Taft’s candidacy for the Republican presidential nomination; however, Taft lost the nomination both times to moderate Republicans from New York.

Reece served as a delegate to the Republican National Conventions in 1928, 1932, 1936, 1940, 1940, and 1948. He was a member of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian Institution in 1945 and 1946.

Reece was the Republican nominee for an open Senate seat in 1948, but lost to Democratic Congressman Estes Kefauver, who had unseated incumbent Democrat Tom Stewart in the party primary. Kefauver carried the support of the influential editor Edward J. Meeman of the since defunct Memphis Press-Scimitar, who had for years fought to topple the Edward “Boss” Crump political machine in Memphis. Crump supported Stewart.[8]

In 1950, Reece ran against the man who succeeded him in the House, Dayton Phillips, and defeated him in the Republican primary. This all but assured him of a return to Congress in the heavily Republican district. He was reelected five more times. When the Republicans gained control of the House after the 1952 elections, Reece served as chairman of the Special Committee on Tax Exempt Foundations, losing this post after the Democrats
regained control in 1955. During his time in Congress, he was a social and fiscal conservative who supported isolationism and civil rights legislation. He was a rarity in politics at the time—a truly senior Republican congressman from a former Confederate state.

4 International controversy

During the Cold War, Reece’s statement that “The citizens of Danzig are German as they always had been” caused a reply from Jędrzej Giertych, a leading Polish emigrant in London and writer, publicist, and publisher of National Democratic background.[9]

5 Reece Committee

Main article: Reece Committee

Reece led the House Special Committee to Investigate Tax-Exempt Foundations and Comparable Organizations which investigated the use of funds by tax-exempt nonprofit organizations, and in particular foundations, to determine if they were using their funds to support communism in educational institutions.[10] Reece selected attorney Norman Dodd to lead the investigation, which lasted eighteen months. Reece would later declare that “The evidence that has been gathered by the staff pointed to one simple underlying situation, namely that the major foundations, by subsidizing collectivistic-minded educators, had financed a socialist trend in American government.”[11]

In the wake of the fall of red-baiting Senator Joseph McCarthy, activities such as these smacked of McCarthyism and failed to attract much attention. When they did attract attention, it was often negative, with a recurring criticism that such investigations were chilling free thought.

6 Death and legacy

Reece died of lung cancer on March 19, 1961 in Bethesda, Maryland, just two months after being sworn in for his 18th term.[12] He served in the House longer than anyone else in Tennessee history (though Jimmy Quillen, who eventually succeeded him as the 1st District’s congressman, holds the record for the longest unbroken tenure in the House for a Tennessee congressman), and only Kenneth McKellar served in both houses longer. Reece’s wife, Louise, was elected to serve the remainder of his unexpired term in Congress. Both are buried at Monte Vista Memorial Park in Johnson City, Tennessee.

He received several honorary degrees, including LL.D.s from Cumberland University and Tusculum College, and an L.H.D. from Lincoln Memorial University.[13]

7 References


8 External links

- B. Carroll Reece Archives
- B. Carroll Reece Gravesite
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9.1 Text


9.2 Images

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