

# Campus Namesake Information



Pat Neff, Governor of Texas and President of Baylor University, was born in Coryell County, Texas, on Nov. 26, 1871, the son of Noah and Isabella (Shepherd) Neff. He attended McGregor High School in neighboring McLennan County and earned an A.B. degree at Baylor University, Waco, in 1894. After teaching school two years in Magnolia, Arkansas, he earned an LL.B. degree at the University of Texas in 1897. He began his law practice in Waco and received an A.M. degree at Baylor in 1898.

Neff, a talented orator, launched his political career by serving in the Texas House of Representatives from 1899 to 1905, the last two years as speaker, the youngest in Texas history to that time. He afterward resumed legal practice in Waco and was elected county attorney in 1906, a post he held until 1912. A brilliant, merciless prosecutor, he tried 422 defendants and won convictions in all but 16 cases. During this time he was twice offered the position of assistant attorney general but chose to remain in McLennan County.

He served as Governor from 1921 to 1925. His agenda included reforms in education, prisons, public health, law enforcement, and taxation, as well as proposals to reduce the number of state agencies and establish a state park system. He succeeded in increasing funding to rural and vocational schools and establishing Texas Technological College and Texas State Teachers College. He also achieved a reorganization of the Highway Commission and establishment of the park system, which he believed was one of his most important endeavors.

After his two terms as Governor, Neff headed a Texas Education Survey Commission in 1925–26 and was president of the Texas Watersheds Association in 1939. In 1927 he was appointed to the United States Board of Mediation by President Calvin Coolidge. Governor Daniel J. Moody named him to the Railroad Commission in 1929, a position he held until 1932.

Neff resigned from the commission in 1932 to become President of Baylor University at age 60. A strict educator and careful financial administrator, he brought Baylor out of debt in the 1930s into a period of growth in the 1940s. During his tenure as President, enrollment at the university jumped from 1,200 to 4,000, the area of campus was doubled, and the university's endowment was increased. Despite these successes, Neff was viewed by many Baylor supporters as too rigid a disciplinarian who lacked a modern approach to education. In 1947, when he was 76, Neff resigned to become President Emeritus.

Neff was President of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 1926–28; President of the Southern Baptist Convention, 1942–45; and Grand Master of the Masonic Grand Lodge of Texas in 1946. He married Myrtle Mainer, a former Baylor classmate, on May 31, 1899; they had a daughter and a son. Mrs. Neff died in Waco on July 19, 1953. Neff died in Waco on Jan. 20, 1952, and was buried there in Oakwood Cemetery. His papers and personal mementos are a major part of the Texas Collection at Baylor, which he helped start. The university's main administration building is named for him.

Source: Thomas E. Turner, "Pat Morris Neff" in The Handbook of Texas Online, accessed June 30, 2009

